

*Out of the Pre-texts of Imperialism into  
“a future they must learn”:  
Decolonizing the Allegorical Subject*

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All these bits and pieces in which my history is fragmented, my culture piecemeal, my identifications fantasmatic and displaced; these splittings of wounds of my body are also a form of revolt. And they speak a terrible truth. In their ellipses and silences they dismantle your authority: the vanity of your mimetic narratives and your monumental history; the metaphoric emblems in which you inscribe The Great Book of Life. My revolt is to face the life of literature and history with the scraps and fragments that constitute its double, which is living as surviving, meaning as melancholia.

HOMI BHABHA, “Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt”

THE COLONIAL MISSION has been understood as a subject-constituting project, and both the archives of imperial policy and colonial governance, and the imaginative literatures of postcolonial writers, testify to the fact that education played a formative role in the project of colonial subject-constitution (or subjection), the classroom representing a kind of primal scene. The “English book,” as Homi Bhabha expresses it in his essays on colonial authority, has been both central to the subject-forming project, and to its postcolonial interrogation. Stephen Slemon refers to “the formation of the identified colonial subject . . . which has been fashioned *in the first instance* as the effect of colonialist education as it circulates and regulates the valency of literary meaning” (“Teaching” 286). Nevertheless, while pointing to the “insistent” argument of much postcolonial writing, that “a pedagogy of the book plays a necessary and material role in the strategic production of willing sub-

jects of empire” (286), his essay shifts from this conventional focus on literature as “colonialist cultural control,” to a closer examination of the processes by which such authority may be revealed in its partiality and disjunctiveness to be open to disarticulation. Thus his essay departs from the kind of postcolonial analysis which is “often tainted by an . . . obsolete variety of social reproduction theory, where an unbroken chain of ideological replication unfailingly results in the production of what we might call ‘clonials’” (Murray 52). Heather Murray is critical of the emphasis of postcolonial theory on “literary texts while assuming that English studies functioned as a conduit for their transmission or imposition,” and argues that “What is needed is a more detailed attention to the operations and oppositions of the colonial classroom. . . . [T]he picture will be very different when we try to see what colonized people did to and with English, rather than what English ‘did’ to them” (73). Postcolonial texts can be read not simply as indices of the imposition of English, but also to show the uses of English against its own imperial mission.

In arguing here that postcolonial literary texts can themselves both thematize the “operations” and perform the “oppositions” of the colonial classroom, I present a reading of two Caribbean novels, George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* and Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*, in which it is the *writing* of imperial authority which constitutes the site of (post)colonial intervention. Their strategies include the intervention of disruptive questions, as well as of other knowledges, which despite official suppression emerge in unauthorized forms. They enact less the production of an alternative authority than a questioning of the forms of authority itself when its monologic address is interrupted by other knowledges, other memories that enter on it. In pointing to the ruptures in authority and control that the colonialist site of reading institutes, I invoke Homi Bhabha’s account of an “affectivity [which] exceeds the linearity of the written or spoken transference” of textual authority, and find in his reference to “the disjunctive, fragmented, displaced agency of those who have suffered the sentence of history — subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement — that forces one to

think outside the certainty of the sententious" ("Postcolonial Authority" 56), a productive way of reading these Caribbean novels. The discourses of postcoloniality (pre)figured in these novels problematize the possibility of faith in a grand narrative of decolonization in the revolutionary mode. Instead they negotiate complexities of complicity and critique, an intimate inhabiting of that which they seek to decolonize,<sup>1</sup> and a necessary cross-cultural address which may be characterized as "hybridity." Both novels invoke and instantiate multiple temporalities and spatialities: the English reference of the texts of imperial authority, and their colonial re-iteration; the colonized Caribbean split across England, more latterly America, and the Africa of ancestral memory. Both exemplify the spatialized narrative forms of nonlinearity, resonance, and inconclusion, invoking only to refuse the familiar colonialist trope of the "coherent teleology of progressivist arrival" (Slemon, "Teaching" 289). Nevertheless there is another crucial moment in my argument regarding the novels' revelation and strategic uses of the ambivalence of the imperial "civilizing" mission, their interruption of the "transmission" of its authority in the enunciative moment, in the temporality of the performative, the space of the body, and the "other" location which displaces origins. Gendering is both pivotal to the formation of the (colonial) subject, as well as to the complicity of patriarchy and colonialism; yet I argue that in the equivocations which characterize the western classical-derived and *gendered* story of Oedipus as it was transformed into a model or allegory of subjectivity *per se*, lies the basis for the postcolonial interrogation of its (im)possibilities, and for the prefiguring of a postcolonial space and temporality of agency beyond "the subject."

Colonial education sought to produce allegorized subjects — subjects interpellated by western geography and history, and by the texts which transmitted colonial authority: the Bible for the Christianized subject of morals and values, and literature for the literate subject of "taste." A number of postcolonial texts have thematized the process of this subjection, this disciplinary régime: as Diana Brydon has noted, it is dramatized in Jean Rhys's autobiographical *Smile Please*, when

the nurse Meta warns the child against reading so much: "Your eyes will drop out and they will look at you from the page." Brydon points out that "Meta's image is a precise evocation of colonial textual interpellation. . . . The colonial does not read the text, the text reads/constructs her" (*Decolonizing* 106).<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, Caribbean writer John Hearne asked, in his review of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a "prequel" to *Jane Eyre* from Bertha Mason's point of view, "Are we not still, in so many of our responses, creatures of books and inventions fashioned by others . . . as figments of their imagination?" (cited in Brydon and Tiffin 107). Echoing Gayatri Spivak's formulation of the "worlding" of the "Third World," Hearne's point suggests the production of colonial territory and its populations as products of Western literature, as allegorical repetitions, occupying a "dynastic relation" to imperial pretexts. Even the act of renaming territories, assimilating the "unfamiliar" New World to the familiar Old is, as Slemon argues, "essentially an extension of allegorical consciousness in that it 'reads' the territory of the 'other' by reference to an anterior set of signs already situated in a cultural thematics, and by this process the 'new' world is made contingent upon the 'old'" ("Post-Colonial Allegory" 161).

The linking of the allegorical mode with colonized worlds has had a controversial trajectory. It recalls, for instance, the infamous specification by Fredric Jameson of the "Third World Text," and the ensuing debate, most notably with Aijaz Ahmad. Jameson argued: "one of the determinants of capitalist culture, that is, the culture of the western realist and modernist novel, is a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power." He continues, "Third world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture or society*" (69). Ahmad's critique of Jameson's contention is too

lengthy to rehearse here, but those points which bear most closely on the current argument include the problematic acceptance by Jameson of the "Three Worlds" theory, and the constitution of the Third World and "its" textual products as internally coherent and consistent objects of knowledge; and Jameson's failure to acknowledge, indeed his disavowal of, his own ideological positioning in the constitution of that which he purports merely to describe. There is also his uncritical assumption that "nation" is both the collectivity of primary concern to colonized cultures, and the representation of the form of decolonization as such.

No single reading practice can exhaust the diversity among postcolonial imaginative works any more than any other text or body of texts is susceptible to the closure of definitive reading. At the same time, there are postcolonial writers whose work either explicitly or implicitly endorses Jameson's argument. Its theoretical formulation is implicit in the words of Frantz Fanon, who has argued that "There are strong connections between the structure of the family and the structure of the nation. . . . In Europe, and *in every country characterized as civilized or civilizing*, the family is the miniature of the nation" (141-42; emphasis added); and its artistic endorsement is found in Lamming, who has described the "work" of the postcolonial writer as a "shaping of the national consciousness" (Hulme 135). I suggest, therefore, that Jameson's mistake was the confusion of a metonymy with a synecdoche, and that it would be unproductive to reject all the possibilities that present themselves in his problematically formulated proposal.

Nevertheless, a further problem with Jameson's argument is the acceptance of a fundamental opposition between the public and the private domains, or collective and individual formations, conceiving of these as a binary with an implicit trajectory from the (Third World) former to the (First World) latter. The works of Lamming and Kincaid contest this as a choice or opposition, so that to the extent that their texts deploy the private as an allegory of the public, this is to disrupt the binary opposition itself. As each term interrupts the other, it is a more interventionist and deconstructive strategy, concomitant with the

specific postcolonial transformation of allegory itself. Although the Romantic and New Critical positions rejected traditional allegory as a mechanical, determining mode (see Slemon, "Post-Colonial Allegory" 157), much postcolonial writing conversely questions an aesthetic of the interiorized individual, and the related attempt to resolve contending impulses or voices into a singular expressive vision.

We might say that the "properly libidinal economy" which Jameson associates with the capitalist First World is itself the product of an allegory: the Oedipalized subject — the individuated subject of a capitalist economy of exchange — is no more original to itself than the subject of an—"other" collective formation. It is both part of the colonialist desire, and partly the precondition of its frustration, that this subject of the economy of exchange should be the product of a classical western allegorical text, whose imperfect translation into colonial territory creates the potential for palimpsestic disruption, the Other as hybrid text. Freud described the ultimately murderous equivocation in the drama of the oedipal scenario: "[The super-ego's] relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: 'You *ought to be* this (like your father).' It also comprises the prohibition: 'You *may not be* like this (like your father) — that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative'" (19:34). There is a suggestive parallel between this fatal paradox haunting the oedipalized masculine subject, and that which characterizes what Homi Bhabha describes as the subject of colonial mimicry: this mimicry represents "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*" (*Location* 86). The subject of colonial mimicry is "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (87). In pointing to the necessity and the menace represented in the "not quite" — the need to mark the colonized as different while treating that difference as threat — Bhabha specifies the ambivalence of colonial authority, the space inhabited by the irreducible difference of the Other. Bhabha suggests that "What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a writing, a mode of representation, that . . . quite simply mocks [history's] power to be a

model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable. Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*" (87-88). The invocation of an oedipal relation to authority might suggest the imprisonment of postcolonial textuality by the authority of European master texts, where even rebellious "writings back" serve merely as filial confirmations of the dynastic continuity of European textual authority. Both creative and critical postcolonial writing has engaged with what have been termed "thematic ancestors." However as Brydon suggests, "[thematic] ancestry need not imply mimicry or even continuity. The relation of the postcolonial text to its thematic ancestors is often parodic," establishing "dialogue where first there was only monologue" (Brydon and Tiffin 89). Brydon argues the impossibility of simply stepping outside of the effects of the history of subjection. It must be critically engaged, dismantled from within.

The very existence of such textual activity testifies to the ambivalent authority of colonial discourse. The imperial mission was, in part, a futurist attempt to create a "New World." At the same time, the contingency of that New World on the Old World is the moment that renders the project susceptible to deconstruction; it is the temporal or historical equivocation that projects the failure of the mission at its origins. For example, Spivak has argued that "imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the representation of England to the English." She attaches to this claim the further one that "The role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored" ("Three Women's Texts" 243). It is this bifocal mission, this directional equivocation (the need to teach England to the English, as well as colonial subjection to the colonized), that Bhabha extends into an analysis of the ambivalence of colonial authority. This is also the point that opens to the postcolonial rereading of the archives, and to the interrogation of the role of English literatures, the literatures that "read" the colonial subjects, to enable a rewriting of that history of "textual capture and containment" (Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures" 22). It points to the postcolonial project of dismantling those imprisoning discourses, dismantling the authority of those texts definitively to

name the experience or the reality of the native as the colonized Other, and to teach colonial subjects to see themselves as Other.

The works by Lamming and Kincaid to which I refer represent the project of a re-formation of postcolonial subjectivity through creative intervention into the genres and discourses of authority, with their imprisoning tropes of selfhood. This begs the question of how a textual relation such as allegory, which was central to the epistemic energies of empire, could be a tool for decolonization:

what is unique to the allegorical representations of colonial and post-colonial history . . . is [their] displace[ment of] the matter of history into a secondary level of the text accessible only through the mediation of the primary fictional level. This mode of representation foregrounds the fact that fiction, or writing, mediates history; that both history and fiction are discursive practices, subject to questions of authorship, and that history, like fiction, requires an act of reading before it can have meaning. (Slemon, "Post-Colonial Allegory" 160)

Similarly, if the ambivalence of colonial mimicry is located in the temporal space opened up by repetition, and if the ambivalence of colonial authority is traceable to an equivocation over the direction of address (the representation of England to the English), so that Englishness is "determined by its belatedness," (Bhabha, *Location* 107), the product of a *différance* effected by the colonial scene of difference, a repetition at the heart of identity, then postcolonial allegory works *homeopathically* on that ambivalence, for an "awareness of the passage of time is at the heart of allegory" (Slemon, "Post-Colonial Allegory" 158). There is thus an opening onto multiple temporalities which imply a spatial relation, a space of interruption and of displacement from origins, indeed where "time" itself may be imaged in terms of the Middle Passage whose traversal constructed the contemporary Caribbean.

Both novels interrogate, centrally through family and classroom scenarios, the production of colonial subjectivity as allegorical repetition of European pretexts.<sup>3</sup> Both, in different ways, signify in their titles the intimate personal address associated with the "capitalist" First World novel of Jameson's argu-



ment. Yet neither simply constitutes the epitome of interiorized subjectivism and individualism apparently projected. At the same time as inscribing these, each novel also represents a collective voice and a collective address, while critically interrogating both the "individual" and the "collective" as terms, ultimately dismantling the binary opposition, along with the contingent oppositions of private/public and personal/political. All of this is mutually implicated in the problematization of the past/present opposition effected by what Slemmon has characterized as the transformative power of postcolonial allegory.

*In the Castle of My Skin* combines the fictionalized autobiographical account of a childhood with the more objective, depersonalized presentation of the wider community. The lack of an articulated relation between the "autobiographical" and the "community" sections dramatizes the protagonist's experience of an isolation termed an "island self," his dwelling "in the castle of [his] skin." Even his designation solely by the initial G. alludes both to the identification of the autobiographical writer and to the essential absence of presence in his colonially-formed subjectivity. The novel opens with an overdetermined image-event, the coincidence of G.'s ninth birthday with devastating floods in his home village on the island of Barbados, or Little England as it is known. The boy laments "that the floods had chosen to follow me in the celebration of all my years, evoking the image of those legendary waters which had once arisen to set a curse on the course of man" (9-10). The image of the flood suggests both devastation and cleansing. It suggests chaos, engulfment, and drowning, but also birth and life. Further, the "legendary waters" and the "curse on the course of man" might refer to either or both of two available pre-texts of imperial history: the Biblical great flood of G.'s Sunday-school instruction, or the Middle Passage crossing of the ancestral history his colonial schooling has suppressed. Yet this past constantly returns through the text to haunt moments of authority with ambivalent significance. For example, the use of imagery allows the narrator to say constantly what is officially silenced, especially in relation to the experience and understanding of the relation of selfhood to the past. Early in the novel, G.

describes his memory as “a blank. It sank with its cargo of episodes like a crew preferring scuttle to the consequences of survival” (11). The unidentified narrator of the “community” sections describes a school assembly: “There were nine squads comprising about a thousand boys. The squads were packed close, and seen from the school porch the spectacle was that of an enormous ship whose cargo had been packed in boxes and set on the deck” (36). This repeated imagery of maritime cargo alludes clearly to the dehumanizing horror of the Middle Passage.<sup>4</sup> Yet the school actively fails to teach their ancestral history, while suppressing its unauthorized “returns.” The boys are taught about William the Conqueror and the Battle of Hastings, while slavery is pushed back before this, too far back to be taught as history (58). Nevertheless, other knowledges — those of the very old and those of the children themselves — persist in surfacing and disrupting the authority of the schoolroom. Pa, the oldest man in the village, recounts in a dreaming sleep-narrative their African and slave history, and although the school teachers dismiss such stories as evidence of the dotage of the elderly, they exert a pressure against which the teachers’ refutations become increasingly brittle. At the same time, the boys continually expose the fragility of colonial authority even as they try to make sense of it. Their comical speculations about how the king’s face got on to so many pennies, and their accounts of how the king is by definition never seen but always represented by his shadow (54), constitute what could only be described, following Bhabha, as “uncanny questions of authority.” Similarly, when the boys play King Canute on the beach, intoning “Sea Come No Further” (118-19), the rolling waves that soak their feet reduce their text to “joke history.” However, the sea is also the medium that connects one coastline with another, and eventually signals for G. the possibility of liberation from the “island self.” Years later, on the eve of his departure to take up a teaching post in Trinidad, his schooldays’ companion Trumper returns from America bringing news of the revelation of “race allegiance” (297).

In relation to that struggle, there is another “pre-text” sweeping the country in Paul Robeson’s rendition of the spiritual “Let

My People Go." The words of the spiritual carried on the voice of Robeson effect an appropriation of a biblical text, finding in it an anti-imperialist rallying call. There is both memory and promise held in the possibility of identification with Moses's demand of Pharaoh holding the Israelites captive in Egypt. Trumper argues that while the people of Barbados are subject to the administrative "know-how" of the British, they will never understand that the blacks there are "my people" too (295):

take the clubs for example. There be clubs which you an' me can't go to, an' none o' my people here, no matter who they be, but they don't tell us we can't. They put up a sign, "Members Only," knowin' full well you ain't got no chance o' becomin' a member. An' although we know from the start why we can't go, we got the consolation we can't 'cause we ain't members. In America they don't worry with that kind o' beatin' 'bout the bush. (296)

Although he maintains G. cannot understand this while he remains in Barbados/Little England, he suggests that "the day you leave, and perhaps if you go further than Trinidad you'll learn" (296). The novel ends inconclusively with regard to G., particularly in relation to the future. Certainly as he leaves for Trinidad, the possibilities of cross-cultural identification and alliance are projected. The terms are prefigured in which he may find the "castle of [his] skin" more a prison than a home, a deceptive refuge in its echo of his favourite Biblical passage from John 14, "In my father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you," which itself must be reread through Trumper's argument about the clubs and the signs (a metaphor for colonialism's white "castles" or "mansions" more generally). It is true that the future to which Trumper points is grounded in a recognition of a common past as well as a shared present. It is also clear that Trumper has been inspired to share in an appropriation of a Biblical text which is being read against the very cultural authority it was deployed to establish. To this extent it is hybridized by the intervention of the voices of the contemporary oppressed. However the text is from what could be seen as the Testament of the patriarchs, and just as Moses's call to Pharaoh constitutes a struggle between patriarchal Law-givers, so is there a sense in which the struggle with which

Trumper identifies is one conceived within the (masculine) terms idealized in the subjective morphology underwriting the authority of colonialism. It is here that the novel opens onto an unarticulated problematic. While a number of the allegorical pre-texts of colonialism are hybridized through the intervention of the boys' questions, or more generally the voices of the colonized, the novel does not address the gendered terms of the oedipal allegory which has represented such a powerful technology for the production of colonial subjects.

Like the oedipal scenario, paternalistic colonial rule demands the identification of colonial subjects with its Law, while denying them the full measure of what that identification promises. G. describes himself as "impotent to wrest what my fortunes had forced me into" (220). This Law projects the ideal of the masculine subject, and this ideal is attained through the repression of (desire for) the mother, and of her reminder of the bodily materiality which threatens the subject's position in the sociosymbolic order. That the children in the novel are exclusively boys, and the adult authority figures (landlord, overseer, headmaster, schoolteachers, as well as Pa and the other villagers) are male, suggests a progress for the colonial child to (post-)colonial adult as one from boyhood to manhood.

Mary Donnelly has convincingly argued the oedipal structure of colonialism in the novel's *Little England*; however she stops short of questioning the appropriateness of this pre-text of colonial subjection as a model of postcolonial selfhood. Her argument more successfully demonstrates the pattern of repetition through which colonial relations perpetuate themselves into postcoloniality (and become the burden of numerous later texts of "postcolonial disillusionment"). For example, she shows that "Just as the schoolboys plot to stone the unjust head teacher, the adult men plot to kill Mr. Creighton, the landlord" (15), and argues that although "Both plans come to nothing. . . . the schoolboys and the villagers are both experiencing the clumsy pangs of individuation" (15). In differentiating the boys' growing into colonial consciousness from the villagers' growing out of it, she implies that the latter are emerging into a postcolonial condition. I would rather argue that they are act-

ing out the same problem I find with Trumper's revolutionary discourse. Specifically, the murderous struggle to wrest "phallic" power belongs to the itinerary of the passage from "engulfing mother" to "father-liberator," which is the oedipal narrative as *grand récit*. Not only does this constitute a repetition of the model of power and subjectivity that underwrite imperialism, one which "at best" offers the (masculine) colonized the position of partial subject of mimicry, but it projects no place for women as postcolonial subjects.

Few women figure in the novel, and those that do are invariably mother figures. Mothers are problematic for the village boys, resentfully identified with "lack" in relation to the authority of (even absent) fathers: "Mothers stupid, that's why most of us without fathers. P'raps it's because mothers stupid that fathers don't turn up sometimes to see what's happening. 'Tis a bad thing to be stupid" (38). As G.'s sole parent, the mother is a problematic, ambivalent figure for him. From his perspective, she represents nurturance and the Law, and her unpredictable mood and behaviour give rise to what he experiences as incomprehensible outbursts of violent anger. She is the agent of often Biblically-inspired discipline, and of his future progress (supporting his attendance beyond the village school and into the high school). She *believes* in his success; yet she is also troubled by his leaving his home of Barbados for Trinidad. As an agent of the Law (of selfhood, of the Symbolic) she is concerned that "they" in Trinidad do not have decent moral standards, that her son will be prey to "their" dangerous wildlife and even, in an act of identification with that Law's horror of the woman's body, warns him "Everything in a skirt ain't clean" (271). At the same time, partly in response to her conviction that "they" cannot cook proper food, and perhaps in recognition of this as a moment of definitive separation, she prepares a final meal for him. This meal signifies more than an insistence on Barbadian culinary and cultural superiority. In a maternal act of nurturance, she fills his body with her substance(s), a reminder of his "debt" to her. Even then, something in relation to its preparation precipitates one of her outbursts of anger. She tries to attack G. with a stick, reminding him that he is and always will be her son,

and demanding that he remember to respect her. G. is left uncertain whether the respect she demands would be best proffered by listening to her words (while the food gets cold), or eating the food (and seeming not to be listening to her) (267). Eventually G. wrests the stick away from her, and although the fight has turned into a joking game, the culmination in his possession of the phallic object firmly sets the seal on his subjective separation from her. She fades almost unnoticed out of the narrative conclusion as the two young men leave her house to pursue the discussion Trumper has initiated, and the novel draws to a close with G.'s bidding farewell to the past as represented by Pa.

G.'s mother has also posed something of a problem for critics. Read in solely characterological terms, she is generally judged in terms of her "strong and ultimately debilitating influence on [G.]" (Sunitha 295). However, while G.'s confusion is articulated in the narrative, his mother's subjection to the contradictory demands of an impossible identification with the patriarchal-colonial Law remains obscured. As a woman she signals a limit point to those discourses of resistance which find liberation within the terms of the oedipal allegory of the imperial family (or the imperial allegory of the oedipal family). Indeed she represents a problematization of the very morphology of the subject of political resistance. As Slemon has argued, an acknowledgment of the constructedness of the subject would require a theory of resistance which is "grounded in the *multiple* and *contradictory* structures of ideological interpellation or subject-formation — which would call down the notion that resistance can *ever* be "purely" intended or "purely" expressed" but rather "is always *necessarily* complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress" ("Unsettling the Empire" 36-37).<sup>5</sup> G.'s mother's association with the materiality of the subject constitutes an uncomfortable reminder of the instability of its place within the symbolic order, but also of the terms in which the colonized will always be the subject of a discriminatory régime: the basis of such discrimination will be "found" in the "persistence" of the signs of that materiality. Just as the morphology of the subject is founded on the identification of woman as "lacking," only able

to attain “second hand” access to the symbolic through her association with men, so the project of imperialism identifies the colonial as the subject of a mimicry which offers only second-hand and partial access to the (pre-)texts of authority. However, as the impotence of the history lessons at school to dispel other memories has shown, the spatiotemporal gap opened up by the second hand position is also a potential ground of intervention. Such intervention could disrupt the ultimately disabling production of the (post)colonial subject as allegorical repetition. The ambivalence of G.’s mother (as represented and as representation) gestures toward a questioning of the self/other opposition which prefigures the oedipalized subject. This problematic is at the heart of Jamaica Kincaid’s work.

While my argument will be developed principally with reference to Kincaid’s novel *Lucy*, all her works bring together the thematics raised in Lamming’s novel, and similarly end poised for change rather than having realized it. However, Kincaid’s texts are situated within the formation that could be called the repressed other of Lamming’s characters’ struggles; they occupy the ground that he marginalizes, even as he signals that marginalization. Specifically, in rehearsing the problematic of the mother-daughter relation — in subjective terms a veritable life and death struggle for each — the (post-)colonial daughter’s relation to her mother is shown to be situated in a mutually overdetermining discursive relation between the colony and the imperial metropolis. The texts suggest the need to decolonize that relationship, to release mother and daughter from their imperialist allegorical inscriptions, to project an altogether different mode of agency.

As it was for Lamming’s G., an early scene of Lucy’s colonial subjectification is the classroom, and the process of reading herself within the colonial pre-text is most vividly represented in the traumatic event of being compelled to recite “I wandered lonely as a cloud” to the assembled school pupils, teachers, and parents. This compulsion to misrecognize and publically identify herself as the “I,” the interiorized, contemplative subject of the epitome of Romantic Englishness, nevertheless constitutes an impossible identification for the colonial Antiguan girl

whose very name evokes the persistence of this burden.<sup>6</sup> Despite the learning “by heart,” and the perfection of her articulation such that the poet “would have been proud to hear his words ringing out of [her] mouth” (18), she would never in reality see daffodils dancing in the breeze of her native Antigua.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, when Lucy is finally shown daffodils by her employer in the US, and she tries to explain why she is unappreciative of what Mariah understands to be self-evident beauty, it is Lucy who feels guilty: “I felt sorry that I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes” (30). If discriminated embodiment is shown to be the source and the site of her subjection, it is also the source of disruption of imperial authority. In her recitation, she has offered “a language of performativity to contest the pedagogical . . . [a] language lined with flesh . . . [an] articulation of the body” (Bhabha, “Postcolonial Authority” 56), and in doing so, registers the “wound” of its (b)lack, its colonial location. This performative location *revalues* the poem, writes another history for it, as it embodies the limit point to the subjective promise of the Law. This is again dramatized in the classroom, where Lucy had refused to sing “Rule, Britannia!” at choir practice, pointing out that she was not a Briton, and that until not so long ago she would have been a slave (135). Lucy’s refusal was treated by the choir mistress as “only to be expected,” as giving pause to wonder whether “all their efforts to civilize [her] would come to nothing in the end” (135), thus marking the anxiety for colonial authority produced by partial colonial mimicry: Lucy is “almost the same but not quite. . . . almost the same but not white” (Bhabha, *Location* 89).<sup>8</sup> An authority dependent on the circumscription of strategic limits to its efficacy is fragile and contingent. Lucy’s refusal to sing confronts the choir mistress with nothing short of a reflection of the collapse of that authority, its disarticulation. She has learned her lessons too well — a familiar colonial farce — and discovered the hollow basis of their assertions in the disruptive effects of the “other” body and the “other” location, whose unauthorized memories and knowledges dismantle what Bhabha



might refer to as the sententious linearity of their progressive transmission.

Lucy's refusal to sing is couched in terms of two explanations: the first, which she attributes to later understanding, names the political lie she had been called to inhabit and articulate. She recalls the history of slavery which interrupts numerous moments in the text with its inappropriate return, and which is too thinly masked for colonized space by the masculinist historicist triumphalism of ruling the waves, revealing the equivocation in the name "Briton." The second explanation, accounting for her feelings at the time of the refusal, she claims to have been a matter of "taste": the "stony-face, sour-mouth woman" (136) held little sway to allegiance compared to the "prettier," happier French. The two explanations are linked in Lucy's recognition that neither the words of the anthem, nor those on the French postage stamps, apply to her. The correspondence with her pen-pal from a neighbouring island, a French colony, although mediated by the respective ruling countries, crosses the vertical transmission of colonial authority with the horizontal lines of sight (Lucy could see her pen-pal's island from her own) and language that pass between two colonial daughters. This comparative perspective interrupts the self-evidence of Britain's rule.

*Lucy* presents the problematic mother-daughter relationship in terms of its biological and social significance, and at the same time in terms of the deployment of this discourse to characterize — and mystify — historical and political relations of empire (as colonizing motherland) and (daughter) colonies. Thus as well as the "literal" mother-daughter pair of her mother and Lucy, there are the figurative pairs of England and Antigua, the US and Antigua, her American employer Mariah and Lucy. As the terms of these pairs substitute one for the other while retaining a fundamental determining relation of power, Lucy/Antigua must negotiate a complex of cursed legacies and familiar comforts, an inheritance of choric riches<sup>9</sup> and an imprisonment in narratives of subjection. Resonating across — and thus linking — the familial-affective and the colonial-political-pedagogical thematics are the motifs of supervision and surveil-

lance, the echo, and the ambivalence of separation. These in turn are linked by and to the gendered narrative of oedipal subject-formation. Just as the English stamp on colonial correspondence represents the surveillance of potentially wayward “daughters,” Lucy’s mother’s messages to her daughter, verbal and in letters, seek to monitor and delimit the freedom of Lucy’s movement and her sexuality. Her mother’s conviction that Lucy will become a “slut” is reminiscent of the despair of the choir mistress in wondering whether efforts to “civilize” her will come to nothing in the end. Similarly, in this instance and in that of the recitation of Wordsworth’s poem, the demand of Lucy is that she *echo* the words of an other subject position; and not only does she register resentment that her prospects for a secret sexual rendezvous are thwarted by her tendency to echo “her mother’s forty-year-old voice” (107), she declares more generally and explicitly that “I had come to feel that my mother’s love for me was designed solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn’t know why, but I felt that I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone” (36). This is one of the novel’s most overt invocations of the imperial-colonial dynamic in the mother-daughter relationship.

Like Lamming’s novels, Kincaid’s texts are framed or occasioned by journeys. *Annie John* concludes with Annie’s departure for England; *Lucy* begins with Lucy’s arrival in the United States; and *A Small Place* is addressed to the tourist arriving in Antigua. However, these literal journeys also invoke that subjective-cultural eviction from Paradise, which in the case of Kincaid’s works in particular is imaged as being cast out of the mother’s love. The pain and the relief are the burden of each of these texts: Annie John’s departure is imaged in terms of a birth, the sound of the waves lapping around the ship suggesting that “a vessel filled with liquid had been placed on its side and now was slowly emptying out” (*Annie* 148); Lucy’s leaving Antigua signifies a rejection of the island, but also of the world represented in and by her mother, both being understood to have betrayed her. Yet her efforts to escape the longing she still feels for her mother simply result in the substitution of an alternative mother figure, Mariah. Like those of her own mother,

Mariah's roles in relation to Lucy come to include teaching and guidance — she introduces Lucy to daffodils, among other things; and supervision or surveillance — she offers Lucy contraceptive advice. Expecting her arrival in the US to be as that to the Promised Land, expecting that the new land would produce a new self, Lucy's "new" self uncannily returns her to the ancestral identity that impinges most painfully on her consciousness. As an *au pair*, she is only distinguished as a matter of degree from her inherited slave history, and Mariah's disavowal of the nature of their relationship and its history — for example in her increasing insistence that Lucy regard her as a "friend" — only serves to mystify the contemporary key in which their encounter has been played.<sup>10</sup> As if to underline the persistence of her unspeakable history, its insistence on "speaking through," Lucy's perception of her "new home" is cast in that same vein of imagery used to describe Lamming's assembled schoolboys: "I was used to a small room, but this was a different sort of small room. The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to the ceiling, enclosing the room like a box — a box in which cargo travelling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid's room" (7).

In the US, Lucy is able to transform her disillusionment with the "New World" into a space of intervention into the (self-)deception of its narratives of "freedom," "opportunity" and "discovery." Consistent with her history of disruptive questions,<sup>11</sup> another question echoes through the novel to effect both an interruption to the self-evidence of the (neo-)imperial subject and to dramatize Lucy's appropriation of the point of view. This question, "How do you get to be the sort of person who. . . ?" is most revealingly posed at the point when Mariah, having "confessed" her "Indian blood," leaves Lucy to reflect that "she says it as if she were announcing her possession of a trophy" (40), and to wonder "How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?" (41). Thus she effects a return of the colonial gaze, a reversal of its pedagogical project, exposing the ambivalence of colonial authority. However, this does not yet extend to a critical intervention into the imperial

narrative that has inscribed her relationship with her mother, containing them both within an economy of abject conflict.

Lucy has continued to resist the contact attempted by her mother through letters. She has distanced her through her own participation in the deceptive myths of life in America, writing soon after her arrival “to say how lovely everything was . . . as if [she] were living life in a greeting card” (10), and soon she ceases all communication at all. But the distance she seeks is also from her location in history. On receipt of one letter she reflects, “I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which the letter had come, and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter, would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face?” (31) It would not be quite right to see Lucy’s predicament as *both* personal *and* political; the political is lived personally and viscerally, while the personal signifies and resonates politically. Even at home Lucy has been taught to understand herself as the pre-written object, or to misrecognize herself as the partial subject, of European texts: having pestered her mother for the reason she was named Lucy, she is told, “I named you after Satan himself. Lucy, short for Lucifer” (152). Recalling the earlier points in the novel in which Lucy struggles with a persistent sense of guilt, “like Lucifer, doomed to build wrong upon wrong” (139), this explanation by her mother causes Lucy to remember having been taught to read from *Paradise Lost*, and to conclude, “The stories of the Fallen were well known to me. . . . That my mother would have found me devil-like did not surprise me, for I often thought of her as god-like, and are not the children of gods devils?” (152-53). This identification with Lucifer informs the narrative thread associated with the angel cast out of Paradise:<sup>12</sup> the loss of primal plenitude, or fullness of being, on “both” subjective and collective cultural levels.

Although Lucy’s relationship to her mother seems to be that of having been cast out of the Paradise of her love, it has always already been mediated by colonialism and patriarchy. Indeed the novel posits the difficulty of unravelling these from each

other in the postcolonial moment. It argues their mutual support, rather than asserting an “authenticity” that would precede them, a point of particular importance on Caribbean soil, where the “origin” has been violently displaced by historical imposition. Her mother’s complicity with the Law of the Father is manifested in her transmission of those messages of danger and limitation to Lucy as her daughter, and in her betrayal in supporting the preferential treatment of the male children, while seeing nursing as the ideal occupation for Lucy (92-93); at the same time Lucy also sees this as her mother’s self-betrayal (127), for at this early age she had thought of herself and her mother as identical (130). In this, her mother represents Lucy’s *lack* of uniqueness, individuality, autonomy: her struggles to individuate are thwarted by the times she is identified as “just like” her mother. She despairs,

My past was my mother; I could hear her voice, and she spoke to me not in English or the French patois that she sometimes spoke, or in any language that needed help from the tongue; she spoke to me in language that any female could understand. And I was undeniably that — female. Oh, it was a laugh, for I had spent so much time saying I did not want to be like my mother that I missed the whole story: I was not like my mother — I was my mother. And I could see now why, to the few feeble attempts I made to draw a line between us, her reply always was “You can run away, but you can’t escape the fact that I am your mother, my blood runs in you, I carried you for nine months inside me.” How else was I to take such a statement but as a sentence for life in a prison whose bars were stronger than any iron imaginable? (90-91)

For Lucy, who has learned her “English” lessons too well, identity is predicated on separation from her mother. But as a daughter, she faces the difficulty of completion of this process. She resists what she feels to be the controlling gaze of her mother by not opening the letters that continue to arrive, and when eventually one comes marked URGENT (115), Lucy simply places it with the others and that day buys herself a camera, signifying her seizure of the point of view, her (mis)appropriation of the “I” of imperialist morphology that marks her separation from the mother. However just as the words of the anthem and the poem had not applied to her,

there is the problem of her accession, as a colonial daughter, fully to a subject position within the imperial-Symbolic order. While experiencing it as a prison sentence, she has intuited, as the passage above illustrates, the experience of communication outside of the symbolic order of language, and the ineffectualness of attempts to *inscribe* the separation between herself and her mother. The purchase of the camera, and most of the ensuing photographs she takes, belong to the “reversal” paradigm preceding the displacement of the self-(m)other opposition which could figure a postcolonial subjectivity, and is perhaps *pre*-figured in her photographing of her own small, intimate belongings in her bedroom, collapsing the subject-object relation. Similarly, in her mother’s words lies the basis for dismantling its imperial-patriarchal cultural inscription as they articulate their mutual corporeal inhabitation: her blood flows inside Lucy, and Lucy was carried for nine months inside her. Translating to the imperial-colonial relation, Antigua has been part of Britain, while Britain’s influence is constitutive of contemporary Antigua. Lucy’s narrative, Kincaid’s novel, belong not to the order of “abolitionism” (Murray 54), but of an intimate inhabiting, a dismantling from within.

The mother-daughter relationship is both a problematic of western cultural subjectivity and a mode of rethinking that subjectivity.<sup>13</sup> It serves as the reminder of the instability and the ambivalence of the separation that brings it into being. Similarly, the ambivalence of colonial authority is what renders it always susceptible to an-“other” reading, one which will disrupt the stability of its address, and the authority of the narrative which suppresses this relationship is itself disrupted in Kincaid’s novel. Just as “other memories” entered on the texts of the past to which Lamming’s boys were subject, so too does Lucy remember “other”-wise. Both her mother and her island home of Antigua are associated with memories of the primal sensations of warmth and food (5-7). Just as Antigua is the landscape of her history, her mother’s body is the landscape of her childhood; yet her mother’s accession to the imperial-Symbolic has been gendered as only partial. Just as Antigua as location revalues the lessons of imperial culture, Lucy’s mother has

access to and the ability to transmit, knowledges outside the "English" curriculum, those often specifically Caribbean (and) female knowledges: to the dual curses of the "slut" and the "nun" are opposed the "calypso about a girl who ran away to Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and had a good time, with no regrets" (12). To the insistent contraceptive advice of Mariah (67) is contrasted the silent know-how of Lucy's mother (69-70). To the white middle-class American aesthetics of Mariah, her friends, her home and furnishings, are contrasted Lucy's judgement that "it looks better when a woman is a little taller than her husband" (47), and that curtains which look "vulgar" in the New York climate would look just fine in Antigua (144).

Lucy's is not a narrative of "liberation," a teleology in which identity is triumphantly achieved; to be her-self means neither engulfment by, nor total separation from, her mother(land). As she wryly observes, in her experience of a drought (of happiness) and her lack of a "sunny disposition," she is both like and unlike, part of and distinct from, Antigua (86). As a daughter, she needs to separate but cannot entirely forego the connection with her mother. She notes that "The times that I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. The times that I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother" (58); correspondingly, her ambivalence is represented in her leaving the letters from her mother unopened, the seal unbroken, and carrying them inside her clothing, next to her heart, where their corners prick her skin.

Nevertheless, it is Mariah's gift of the diary — its red covers and white pages signifying the blood-and-milk reminders of her corporeal connection to her mother — that offers the space for a new writing — not for a rejection of subjectivity in a nostalgic retreat to the silent maternal chora, but for a new subjective morphology. If Lucy had once declared she would rather die than be an echo of someone, the first entry in her diary begun at the end of the novel is "I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it" (164). The flood of tears that this releases fall to the page, causing "all the words to become one great big blur" (164), and this final image collapses all the oppositions I have addressed. As the thematization of the mother-

daughter relationship points to a refigured relation to history — so that past and present are finally mutually implicated — the “I” that Lucy so defensively maintained would seem to give way in her final words to the possibility of a reconstituted and truly decolonized agency.

The concern of these texts then, despite their various encounters with discourses of the past (personal, communal, cultural, historical), is centrally the postcolonial present still captive to the legacies of colonial subjection. In seeking to enable a re-formation of consciousness, to project the performative writing for a creative future, both point to the need to dismantle the present/past, public/private, political/personal, self/other oppositions. The project of imperialism was founded on the allegorical production of the colonial subject, and in these novels the classroom was represented as a crucial site of colonial textual subjection. Yet the repetition which defined that subject opened up the temporal and spatial hesitation or uncertainty in its allegorical structure, and has itself been subject to the postcolonial writer’s re-entry, questioning its authority and through intervention producing the text of hybridity. Neither novel ends definitively; however, while Lamming’s concludes with an uncertainty which points to the unarticulated problematic, Kincaid’s places at its centre the separations and oppositions which fragment Lamming’s text, and finds in the problem of the mother-daughter relationship the terms which would serve to project a postcolonial performative space. The narrative of Kincaid’s Lucy instantiates Bhabha’s argument regarding the enunciative process, as it “track[s] the processes of displacement and realignment that are already at work, constructing something different and hybrid from the encounter: a third space that does not simply revise or invert the dualities, but *revalues* the ideological bases of division and difference” (“Postcolonial Authority” 58). In both cases however, this remains “a future they must learn.”



## NOTES

- 1 This formulation runs consistently through the work of Gayatri Spivak, but for one instance of its use; see *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (60), where she cites another of her essays, "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*" (172).
- 2 See also Zimbabwean Tsitsi Dangaremba's novel *Nervous Conditions* which is centrally preoccupied with the attractions and dangers to its characters of "English" education, the dangers given eloquent expression in the various bodily and psychic symptoms encompassed by the title.
- 3 Lamming's *Natives of My Person* is undoubtedly more overtly allegorical than *In the Castle of My Skin*, and certainly more structurally intertextual as it invokes, among other pretexts, Hakluyt's *Voyages*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Further, it is more clearly a "voyage of reclamation," as it presents the fictional sixteenth-century voyage of the ship *Reconnaissance* and its crew of men from the Kingdom of Lime Stone around the West African coastal slaving route to the Caribbean. Finally, the novel provides me with a phrase for my title. When the novel concludes with the Captain's mistress's words to the other women waiting in vain for the men's safe landfall, "We are a future they must learn," it directs the reader to the fatal separation the men had tried to effect between the imperial and the domestic, the public and the private, the personal and the political. However, I have chosen to "stretch" the notions of allegory and intertextuality to account for the apparently very different novels under discussion in order to demonstrate the centrality of both in the persistence of colonial subjection and the possibilities of postcolonial intervention.
- 4 It is in relation to such passages that I disagree with Neil ten Kortenaar's contention that "The novel seems to mean less than it says. . . . Readers of *In the Castle of My Skin* do not have the . . . sense that they are missing something that another reading might deliver" (50). I must also disagree with ten Kortenaar's argument that names such as Mr. Slime, Boy Blue and Trumper are "merely names, with no deeper significance." Indeed I believe he contradicts his own argument when he continues that "Lamming's colonial society is full of imported signs that do not operate as signs do elsewhere" (51). This is surely the basis of a reading which discovers "deeper significance" (of the potentially disruptive failure of "fit" of imperial pre-texts onto colonial ground) in the apparent arbitrariness of the names.
- 5 Slemmon differentiates this notion of resistance from that found in the works of, for example, Barbara Harlow and Selwyn Cudjoe, which locate it within "a structure of pure intentionality" as "gestures of pure availability." ("Unsettling" 36).
- 6 Bénédicte Ledent suggests that despite her resistance to the "Daffodils," Lucy's sharing of her name with the subject of other Wordsworth poems means that "Lucy cannot really escape colonial tutelage and in some way also belongs to Wordsworth's world, whether she wants to or not" (60). Moira Fergusson summarizes the Lucy poems, finding a range of significant allusions (241-42).
- 7 See Tiffin "Cold Hearts" for a most effective discussion of the demand that the colonial internalize the discourses of imperialism in order to manifest them in bodily performance.
- 8 At another moment in which the putatively innocent aesthetic response is displaced by "another scene," Mariah points enthusiastically through a train window to the sight of freshly plowed fields; Lucy — aware of a degree of cruelty in her words — says, "Well, thank God I didn't have to do that" (33). Moments such as these are best understood in relation to Alison Donnell's point (argued in relation to the daffodils) about the "colonial apparatus' promotion of an aesthetic which is ideologically motivated in its very essence of seeming to be devoid of ideology" (50).

- 9 While the chora has come to refer in French feminist theory to the space-time before the infant's separation from the mother's body, the state of being at one with the mother, this understanding of Lucy's "inheritances" is also intended to suggest the persistence of *cultural* knowledges and memories which belong outside of the colonizing sociosymbolic order.
- 10 A further thread to the "Paradise" theme draws on the politics of contemporary tourism (even as they relate to the colonial history of travel). Subjected to clichéd touristic preconceptions about tropical island paradises and their inhabitants, Lucy disrupts the imperialist romance of virgin territory only to find herself caught up in neo-imperialist fantasies of tourism as sexual licence.
- 11 See, for example, the questions regarding the exact method of cooking used for the fish of the "loaves and fishes miracle" in a narrative episode which links this childhood moment to Mariah's thoughtless reference to feeding the minions, and which recalls the disturbing questions of authority posed by the natives under the tree in Delhi in 1817 of Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonders" (*Location* 102-22).
- 12 Although the biblical reference is more correctly to Lucifer's being cast out of Heaven rather than Paradise, whose associations are generally understood to be "earthly," and specifically with the garden of Eden, this conflation allows for the historical and cultural invocation of the lost African "primal garden."
- 13 The work of French feminist Luce Irigaray is perhaps best known in this regard. However, the implications of her emphasis on the materiality of the subject would include the need to acknowledge the historical and cultural specificity of such relationships.

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