



Psychoanalytical Tensions of Problematic Mother-Daughter Relationship in Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*

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Abstract

Reading and analyzing Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother* through the lens of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection theory, a psychoanalytical theory, this paper provides a study which concentrates on the problematic relationship of Kincaid and her mother as the result of a mutual abjection between them. In this study Kincaid, the protagonist and her mother abject each other. Kincaid's mother abjection comes as a result of getting pregnant for the second time and her failure in aborting the baby and Kincaid's abjection initially stems from being abandoned by her mother after she gives birth to the Kincaid's first step brother. This study presents a reading which attempts to explain why the relationship between Kincaid and her mother is problematic, what the effects of the abjection in their lives are, and what the overall consequences of this problematic relationship are. The paper concludes that the problematic relationship between Kincaid and her mother remains unresolved. They try but never succeed in establishing a healthy set of relationships with each other. Kincaid tries to cure herself from the symptoms of the problematic relationships with her mother by immigrating to USA and writing but she is not successful.

Key words: Jamaica Kincaid; Psychoanalysis; Abjection theory; Julia Kristeva; *My Brother*

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, Kincaid's novel entitled *My Brother* is examined through the lens of abjection theory of psychoanalysis. Applying the aforementioned theory through the perspective of Julia Kristeva in the text, the researcher seeks to investigate the roots of the problematic relationship between the protagonist and her mother. Kincaid's *My Brother* deals with a scenario involving Jamaica Kincaid and her mother Annie Richardson Drew. *My brother* is ostensibly about the narrator's brother. It's the story of his death from AIDS, and beyond that it's about Jamaica Kincaid herself and also the powerfully disappointing family dynamics that she experiences. She really destroys her relationships with her mother, her brother, and beyond that her relationship with the island of Antigua itself. This is a recurring theme in her work.

Literature, in Kristeva's view, "helps the author and the reader work through some of the maladies that afflict their souls" (2004, p.50). The term "soul" here McAfee utilizes in a non-religious way, something more akin to mind or psyche than to spirit. These afflictions involve abjection, depression, also known as melancholia, and a variety of neuroses and psychoses. McAfee claims that in Kristeva's view point, "Literature offers a way to help work through what afflicts us. In addition to displaying the symptoms of some kind of malady of the soul, literature can be cathartic" (50). It is definitely true for abjection. As Kristeva speaks of abjection and literature:

By suggesting that literature is [abjection's] privileged signifier, I wish to point out that, far from being a minor, marginal activity in our culture, as a general consensus seems to have it, this kind of literature, or even literature as such, represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses. Hence its nocturnal power (1982, p.208).

In nearly all of her writings, even the most psychoanalytic ones, she constantly turns to literary texts, both as a literary critic seeking to understand the "nocturnal power" of writing and as an analyst endeavoring to

comprehend the author as a subject who is working through, his or her crises. Literature, she states, “may also involve not an ultimate resistance to but an unveiling of the abject: an elaboration, a discharge, and a hollowing out of abjection through the Crisis of the Word” (ibid). In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva, after graphically describing the process of abjection, turns to two literary examples to portray how abjection works in literature, abjection’s “privileged signifier”: the Bible, and the work of the twentieth-century writer known as Céline. The researcher also applies Kristeva’s theory of abjection to approach Jamaica Kincaid’s *My Brother*:

Kristeva’s notion of the abject, firstly, needs to be fully explicated as it will be applied to my objective to place it in a literary context. My reading is centered on Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection; it is a central topic in her theoretical work, *Powers of Horror*. Kristeva begins her essay “Approaching Abjection” through defining abjection as “an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it [the abject] literally beside himself” (p.1). She continues to define the abject as one who occupies the space between subject and object (pp.1-2). Those who are considered the abject often occupy the margins of society – the poor, prostitutes, minorities. The state of abjection centers on those abjects that are expelled from society. But there exists a gray area that surrounds the abject; the abject remains, paradoxically, both heavily desired and deeply reviled. Kristeva continues to describe the tangential feelings that accompany abjection:

[Abjection is] one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It [abjection] lies there, quite close but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced [...] desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects [...] simultaneously [...] that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned (1).

This ambivalence is proven in many instances in the novel. Kincaid’s feelings towards her mother are ambiguous, and remain as such even as the novel ends. Even though Kincaid implies that she wishes to reunite with her family and also with her motherland, she is unable to do it. She is unable to clarify her feelings which are divided into two opposite directions. Kincaid says about her family: “they mean everything to me and they mean nothing, and even so, I do not really know what I mean when I say this” (Kincaid, p.194). In America, after speaking with her mother on the phone she confesses:

I missed the warm sun and I missed my brother, being with him, being in the presence of his suffering and the feeling that somewhere in it was the possibility of redemption of some kind, though what form it could take I did not know and did not care, only that redemption of some kind would be possible and that we would all

emerge from it better in some way and would love each other more (50).

This ambivalence is shown in other parts of the story: “I love the people I am from and I don’t love the people I am from, and I don’t really know what it means to say so, only that such a thing as no love now and much love now these feelings are not permanent, or possibly not permanent.” (149).

Abjection is a significant element of Kristeva’s theory of identity formation. It is often described within the context of mother-child relationships. Kristeva’s theory contends that a child must abject itself from its mother, eschew her; put her aside, as an important step within identity formation. This act of abjection never fully expels a mother’s heavy influence in her child’s life. But the act of abjecting the mother allows the space needed for the child to become its own individual. This reading of Kristeva’s theory of abjection inverts this illuminating contingent of the abject as well. The researcher is trying to show that there is a mutual abjection between protagonist and her mother. It will be portrayed that the maternal character, investigated in this paper, abjects her very own daughter. She eschews her as baby in order to prioritize her own identity formation. Thus, the daughter becomes that which has been abjected, the abject.

The word abject is used in many various modes within Kristeva’s theory and through subsequent discussions and adaptations of it. Subsequently, the researcher adopts Kristeva’s different practices of the word abject in this analysis of Kincaid’s *My Brother*. Abject is used as both a verb and a noun. One is able to abject someone or something; to physically and emotionally distance itself from that which is horrific and unwanted. The abject is that which has been rejected. It is a “jettisoned object” that is “radically excluded” and proceeds to ceaselessly “challenge its master” from “its place of banishment [...] where meaning collapses” (2). The abject is most often associated with something that is improper or unclean, but its most interesting characteristic is its innate ability to unsettle its master or deject in a manner extremely different from “the uncanny.” It fluctuates in its ability to attract and repel the deject. The Kristevan psychological tug of war, the bond between mother and child cast into the contradiction of abjection-desire is again evident here:

I once didn’t see my mother for twenty years, even though I thought of her first thing in the morning and last thing at night, and almost all my thoughts of her were full of intense hatred, but she was alive and not in my sight and I could so well remember her hatred toward me- I will not add a qualifier to that, her hatred toward me, or modify it, this was just so: my mother hates her children. But that my mother might become dead, I had never imagined this (155).

Kristeva’s descriptions of abjection in relation to food and death proves the most illuminating in her intent for the theory. Kristeva believes food loathing to be the most elemental form of abjection. Kincaid, on her part, also subconsciously abjects her mother, as shown in the way

she distances herself from food both in childhood and adolescence:

And so I stopped eating my mother's food, inspired by the act of two of my three brothers, who were much younger than I (by eleven and thirteen years). in my case of not eating the food my mother provided for me, this act was full of something. I do not know what, but this occurred to me long after I was in the midst of doing this: that just I was deciding not to eat my mother's food anymore, and thinking (and feeling) that this decision was really a decision to rid myself of a profoundly childish attachment to her, I was only reliving a memory, for when I was a child I would not eat the food my mother cooked. When I was a very small child I would eat food only if she chewed it first; then I must have outgrown that, because I remember the difficulty I had with eating was in eating anything she cooked for me as a sign of distancing myself from her was a form of behavior I had used a long time ago, when I felt most close to and dependent on her (118).

Kristeva also describes abjection in the form of her visceral reaction to the filmy skin old milk develops: "I experience a gagging sensation [...] spasms in the stomach [...] [it] provokes tears and bile, increase[s] heartbeat, sight-clouding dizziness [...] nausea" (Powers of Horror 3). Still her reaction to this, which she denies so violently, reaches beyond the physical. There exist deep currents of emotional and psychological abjection in her reactions. The refusal to take the milk inside one's being "separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire [...] 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it" (3). A rejection of the desires of the mother and father prove essential in the identity formation that is key to abjection:

I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself [...] "I" am in the process of becoming another at the expense of my own death. During that course in which "I" become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit [emphasis in the original] (Kristeva 3).

Hence, individual identity is formed through the process of abjection that involves a rejection of the parents; an expelling of those unwanted parts of the self within an experience acknowledges the border of death. The visceral nature of her reaction to the abject parallels the visceral response of the mothers who abject their daughters. As McAfee states, the abject hovers at the periphery of one's existence, constantly challenging one's own tenuous borders of selfhood (McAfee, 46). In other words, abjection is a companion throughout one's life.

1. MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN MY BROTHER

My Brother by Jamaica Kincaid is the story of a problematic relationship between Kincaid and her mother. As will be discussed later, there is mutual abjection between Kincaid and her mother. The first part of this analysis is about Kincaid mother abjection and the second part is Kincaid's.

1.1 The Mother

Kristeva insists that confrontation with death, ultimately through a corpse, is the most necessary element of abjection: "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life [...] It is something rejected from which one does not part" (4). But Kinitra Dechaun Brooks in her thesis disagrees with this main tenet of Kristeva's theory: "I disagree. It is ultimately through the experience of parturition, not the corpse, that the border of death must be confronted. The corpse cannot remain the most fundamental way to confront the border of death within abjection" (59).

Brooks is of the opinion that "the process of abjection begins with pregnancy" (60). It is a reaction to the foreign other within the body. A parasite has taken over. Symptoms of pregnancy include extreme fatigue, early lactation, bleeding gums, nosebleeds, vivid dreams and disturbing thoughts (WebMD). During pregnancy, a woman's body is no longer her own. Symptoms of pregnancy are meant to slow a woman down and prepare her for the coming difficulties associated with motherhood (WebMD).

Individuality becomes moot, for the woman is now an incubator for a foreign life form. Parturition is when these women experience their most violent reaction within the birthing process. It is here that these women occupy the border of death as they simultaneously bring life into the world. Parturition has the potential to be the most physically dangerous time of a woman's life (60).

One third of a pregnant woman's blood is diverted to her uterus, which severely increases the probability of death from uterine haemorrhaging. The health dangers facing a pregnant woman are numerous: preeclampsia, or maternal high blood pressure, and maternal diabetes remain prominent even in these advanced times. And the period between the birth of her child and the appearance of the afterbirth remains one of the most physically vulnerable times in a new mother's life. Birth is not a beautiful, loving process for Kincaid's mother in this chapter. It is a time for the expelling, the abjecting of this foreign object, one's child. As Kristeva illuminates with the spitting of the milk, these women expel themselves, their children that are a part of them. They reject the milk of the familial and community's maternal expectations. "Yet through this process, they also recognize and solidify that which is unique: the Self, and choose that path over the patterns of self-sacrifice that plague womanhood" (60). Exploration of *My Brother* continues to analyze how Kincaid's mother forms her identity through the abjection of her daughter.

My Brother is the autobiography of Jamaica Kincaid. Although she depicts the three final years of her brother's life who died of AIDS but truly Kincaid tells about the problematic relationship between herself and her mother.

This problematic relationship is the recurring theme in her writing. Even Kincaid's personal interviews centers around her problematic relationship with her mother.

Kincaid's mother abjection starts from her fourth pregnancy and she tries to abort the baby. It appears that Kincaid mother in her fourth pregnancy chooses the path of abjection early on. She is unable to cope with possession of her body by someone other than herself. Because of this, she remains listless in her role as a potential mother:

He had read in a novel written by me about a mother who had tried and tried and failed and failed to abort the third and last of her three male children. And when he was dying he asked me if that mother was his mother and if that child was himself (ah me de trow' way pickney); in reply, I laughed a great big Ha! Ha! and then said no, the book he read is novel, a novel is a work of fiction: he did not tell me that he did not believe my reply and I did not tell him that he should not believe me reply (174).

It seems for Kincaid's mother pregnancy is annoyance and interferes with her life's smoothness. Thus she tries to get rid of this annoyance: "Her impulse is not to unheard-of, the desire to eradicate all the things an annoyance, all the things that interfere with smooth running of your day, a day should be produce for you a feeling of complete satisfaction, a kind of happiness even; such a desire appears quite normal, it even has historical precedence." (126) When she gives birth to Devon:

At the moment in my mother's life, when her youngest child, my brother who was dying, was born, my mothers' life (a life she might have had in mind, or a life that had become a nightmare; how could I, how can I know) collapsed (I could feel that then, I can see it now). Her husband (the man who was not really my father, my brother's real father) was old and sickly and they could not support the family they had made. (128)

Kincaid describes her mother's "spectacular' love for her to the extent of chewing her food for her if the daughter is tired of chewing. Also, the daughter remembers that her mother used to draw the mucus out of her child 'stuffed nose with her mouth (16). Kincaid's mother protects her when she was in danger: "one day my mother, wondering why I was so late from school, came looking for me, saw from a distance a group of girls huddled over something lying on the ground, got closer, realized it was me, and gave the girl she found beating me and even worse beating (77). When Kincaid was a child, her mother praised her for her strong memory would: I would hear her recount events that we both had witnessed and she would leave out small details; when I filled the, she would look at me with wonder and pleasure and praise me for my extraordinary memory...as I grow up, my mother came to hate this about me, because I would remember things that she wanted everybody to forget. (75) Kincaid was happy in childhood but this happiness ends with her brothers' birth:

It had seemed big to me when I was a child, I lived in it with my mother....., and I was very happy in it when I was a small child, and then I was unhappy in that house when I was growing

out of my childhood, and my unhappiness in that house in that house coincided with his birth and the birth of two other boys (111).

She had a good relationship with Kincaid until her fourth child was born. She was admired by her daughter for her intelligence, her beauty, her excellent cooking and her devotion to her children. Later on Kincaid would reminisce about her mother who used to "read biographies of Florence Nightingale and Louis Pasteur, who knew all the symptoms of all the known tropical diseases, who knew about vitamin deficiencies and what foods could alleviate them" (Kincaid, 78).

However, when Kincaid's youngest stepbrother was born – despite her mother's attempts to abort the child – something changed for good between Kincaid and her mother. Kincaid's loving and caring mother became "bitter, sharp; she and I quarreled all the time" she and I quarreled with everyone all the time. Her features collapsed, she was beautiful in the face before, really beautiful, everyone thought so, really thought so, even she did, but that was not true anymore after my brother was born (71).

Before her fourth pregnancy Kincaid's mother even loves plants, she passes down this to Kincaid (11) but after she gave birth to her son she does not like neither plants nor animals anymore. The narrator writes that the only reminder of her dying brother-a lemon tree planted in the house's yard-is cut by her mother simply to make room for the addition (13) another proof is that her mother burns the sourop tree because of the parasitic insets that multiplied inside it and gradually invaded the whole house (126).

It is also important to note that Kincaid's mother shows motherly affection towards her children only when they are in situations of total dependence on her: My mother loves her children; I want to say, in her way! And this is very true; she loves us in her way. It is her way. It never occurred to her that her way of loving us might not be best thing for us. And why should it? Perhaps all love is self-serving. I do not know. She loves and understands us when we are weak and helpless and need her (16).

This dependence on her and the feeling of power compensate everything she has lost by giving birth to her children: "my erasure now, my absence now, my permanent absence now, my death now, before her own, would make her feel regal, triumphant that she had outlived all her inferiors: her inferiors are her offspring."

The emotional abjection cements itself when Kincaid's mother leaves her son in the charge of Kincaid and she reads books instead of changing her brother's diaper:

When my mother saw his unchanged diaper, it was the realization of this that released in her a fury toward me, a fury so fierce that I believed (and this was then, but even now many years later I am not convinced otherwise) that she wanted me dead, though not in a way that would lead to the complications of taking in my actual existence and then its erasure, for she was my mother, my own real mother, and my erasure in her own hands would have cost her something then; my erasure now, my absence now, my permanent absence now, my death now, before her own, would make her feel regal, triumphant that she had outlived all her inferiors: her inferiors are her offspring. (132)

Kincaid's mother believes she is acting in her daughter's best interests. She never asks what Kincaid wants. The mother denies her daughters' autonomous existence. In this way she exercises power over her daughter. Kincaid doesn't like her mother's plans for her life. She likes to read books and go university but her mother doesn't think so: I would read books then, at this whole scene of me lying in bed and reading books would drive my mother to fits of anger, for she was sure it meant I was doomed to a life of slothfulness (Kincaid, 44). She tries to make Kincaid the character she likes by burning her books:

In a fit of anger that I can remember so well, as if it had been a natural disaster, as if it had been a hurricane or an erupting volcano, or just simply the end of world, my mother found my books, all the books I had read, some of the books I had bought, though with money I had stolen, some of them books I had simply stolenbut there was a moment when in a fury at me for not taking care of her mistakes (....her mistake in marrying a man so lacking, so lacking) she looked in every crevice of our yard, under our house, under my bed, in all those places she found my books, the thing that had come between me and the smooth flow of her life.....she gathered all the books of mine she could find and placing them on her stone heap, she doused them with kerosene and then set fire on them (132 - 134).

Kincaid mother even plans the Kincaid's kind of life in future and control her relationship with other people especially boys:

A boy named Lindsay used to come to our house and ask if he could borrow some of my books. This boy only pretended to love books; what she believed he wanted was to seduce me and eventually become one of the ten fathers of my ten children I would have had. One day, she said, when she grew tired of his ruse, she said to him that I had no books, that I was not a library, didn't he know. The person to whom my mother had told this story only repeated it to me when she thought my judgment of my mother had grown too harsh, had only repeated it to me to demonstrate that my mother had done the best she could and was only acting in this way to prevent me from experiencing a harsh life, to make it possible for me to have the life I had when my mother was then visiting me (135-136).

Kincaid's mother remains individualistic. Not only can't she make a proper relationship with Kincaid but she is also emotionally isolated from her sons, husband and Kincaid's real father:

She and the grown-up men children who live with her quarrel all the time. At any given moment there is a small war of words going on between her and one of them. The middle grown up male child no longer speaks to her; it has been years since he has spoken to her in even so much as the tone of voice he would use for giving directions to someone he has never seen before. If he is forced to speak to her, his voice is full of hatred and despair. He has told me he does not recognize the sound of his own voice when he speaks to her. He calls up he is sorry he never sympathized with me when I told him how awful she had been to me. He says to me, mom is evil, you know, as if he had never said it to me before, but he says it to me every time we speak, as if it is a new discovery to him (54).

She remains at the margins, on her own in all she does; she is a mother who never truly engages in the role and a

beloved who never plays her role also:

I did not wish him dead; I only wished that he had never been born, because it was his birth that plunged our family into financial despair, his birth and his father's illness; and then, just around that time his father and his and my mother, who were married, no longer liked each other ("in love is not something I can imagine about my mother and so, too, out of love") but did not anything about it, for he (the father) was too old and she (my mother) is at her most intelligent when she is in a fret. Her life is a long fret (141).

She also doesn't have a good relationship with Kincaid's real father:

From about the time my mother was seven months pregnant with me, she and my father quarreled and they never spoke again, except in court, except when I was grown up woman and he complained to her about something I had written (140).

Kincaid mother tries to fix the problematic relationship between Kincaid and herself. She travels to USA to meet her but their meeting is disastrous:

But after my mother left, I was sick for three months. I had something near to a nervous breakdown, I suffered from anxiety and had to take medicine to treat it ;I got small chicken pox which is a disease of childhood and a disease I had already had when I was a child. Not long after she left I had to see a psychiatrist (27-28).

She treats Kincaid's children well and her children like her: "they loved her; my children loved my mother, especially my daughter. My daughter asked her to come and eat with us, to come swimming with us, to come and sleep with us...they eat whatever she cooked for them" (63) but for Kincaid this love of her children for her mother is "something common, like standing in the open anywhere in the world and looking up and seeing the sky." (64) She is even grateful to Kincaid for the medicine she brings Devon: "my mother came and sat next to me, and as we were sitting on the sand watching my children, my mother told me that god would bless me richly for bringing my brother the AZT" (72) but their problems remain unresolved because it is Kincaid who cannot forgive her mother: I have never been able to forgive her for any of the things she did not know she is was doing when she did them to me (74).

Kincaid's mother never apologizes for everything wrong which has done to her because her mother does not believe she has done anything wrong at all:

A few years ago, when she was visiting me in Vermont, we had an enormous quarrel and I then asked her if she could at all say that she was sorry for some of the pain I believe she caused me, whether she meant to or not. And she said then, I am never wrong, I have nothing to apologize for, everything I did at the time, I did for a good reason. Even now, years later, I am still surprised by this, because I spend a good part of my day on knees in apology to my own children. that time when my mother was visiting me and we had the enormous quarrel, she told a friend of mine, a woman who she knew was very devoted to me, that the reason I did not like her was that when I was a girl she had been very strict with me and if she had not been I would have ended up with ten children by ten different men (28).

1.2 The Daughter

In this part, the researcher will attempt to show Kincaid's abjection of her mother. Kristeva says, "[...] from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master"(2). Kincaid's abjection comes about as a result of being abandoned by her mother in childhood. Her problematic relationship with her mother in *My Brother* is all based on the initial problem of abandonment. Kincaid experiences a metaphorical abandonment. She had a good relationship with her mother until the age of twelve. She had admired her mother for her intelligence, her beauty, her excellent cooking and her devotion to her children. Later on Kincaid would reminisce about her mother who used to "read biographies of Florence Nightingale and Louis Pasteur, who knew all the symptoms of all the known tropical diseases, who knew about vitamin deficiencies and what foods could alleviate them"(Kincaid, 78). However, when Kincaid's youngest stepbrother was born – despite her mother's attempts to abort the child – something changed for good between Kincaid and her mother. Kincaid's loving and caring mother became "bitter, sharp; she and I quarreled all the time" (Kincaid, 71). A long distance grew between them and Kincaid felt abandoned, she felt she lost the mother she had had before. Kincaid's mother saw in her only daughter a life she could now never have and it released in her a fury towards Kincaid. Kincaid felt her mother blamed her for "not taking care of her [mother's] mistakes", for not being able to "help her out of it" (Kincaid, 132, 133). Kincaid felt powerless in relation to her powerful mother, which is evident in how she describes her feelings during that period of her life:

I remember this passage of my life as being filled with fear, and I remember feeling already disappointed and already defeated, already hopeless, thinking and feeling that I was standing in a fragile edge and in any moment I might fall off into a narrow black hole that would amount my entire earthly existence: and I felt I hated my mother, and even worse, I felt she hated me, too (Kincaid, 140-141).

The feelings of love and appreciation towards the mother are transformed into feelings of fear, defeat and hate as the child realizes her subordinate position in relation to the controlling mother. The problematic relationship between Kincaid and her mother gets worse when Kincaid's mother tries to oppress her daughter's arising sexuality. The distance which exists between the mother and the daughter only widens when the daughter start to show interest towards a boy named Lindsay who come to Kincaid to borrow her books. Kincaid's mother views her daughters' burgeoning sexuality as sinful and threatening and something that will lead to shame and ruin, unless oppressed: My own life, from a sexual standpoint, can be described as a monument to boring conventionality (41). Kincaid's mother believes she is acting in her daughters' best interest in protecting her from the dangers of sexuality. In doing so she is unaware of

the long-lasting damage she is causing on her daughters' self image as women. Alexander notes that the daughters are forced to "view female sexuality as a woman's worst enemy because of the stigma likened to it" (2001, p.64). Kincaid's mother justifies her strictness when it comes to the upbringing of her daughter by stating that otherwise Kincaid "would have ended up with ten children by ten different men" (Kincaid, 28). In her mother's eyes, Kincaid should only be grateful to her for saving her from such a fate and thus making it possible for Kincaid to have the life she now has. Kincaid, however, does not see her mother's actions in such a light. She explains: "I grew up alienated from my own sexuality and, as far as I can tell, am still, to this day, not at all comfortable with the idea of myself and sex" (Kincaid, 69). Kincaid's mother's actions in oppressing her daughter's sexuality are limited to verbal abuse and the fact that she restricts Kincaid's dealings with the opposite sex:

There was a boy who used to come around looking for me, and to hide his true intentions, when he saw her we would say that he had come to borrow some books; she grew sick of listening to this excuse for his coming around to see me and one day she told him not to come to her house anymore because it was not a library (28).

As mentioned before, rejection of the desires of the mother and father prove essential in the identity formation that is key to abjection: I no longer got in her way, I had removed myself from getting in her way, I was in a position in my own life that did not allow for getting in my mother's way, she could not curse me, I no longer needed her (115). In *My Brother* this rejection happens many times. First in Kincaid's dissatisfaction with taking care of her little brother, she likes to read books instead of helping her mother and babysitting:

The man she had married was sick and could not really build houses anymore, he could not really make furniture anymore; she might have loved him for a moment, she might have loved him for many moments I never knew, but there was a child almost two years old, there was a child almost four years old, there was a child almost six years old. There were all his children. I was not his child, I was not a part of the real debacle of her life, and then again, worst of all, I could not help her out of it. I insisted on reading books (132).

The other case is leaving Antigua. When Kincaid starts to show that she has a will of her own and a desire to be independent and strong, the close relationship she had with her mother is inevitably lost. Since Kincaid experiences a disconnection with her mother, it is only natural that she feels disconnected also with the motherland. When Kincaid is unable to bond with her mother, it reflects upon her ability to form a connection with her place of origin. The mother becomes "the other" – representing the mother country and thus the motherland also becomes the other's land which makes it strange and alien, not trustworthy. In search for connectedness with land the Kincaid distances herself from the motherland. Nico Israel

notes that the word 'exile' contains these two possibilities. On one hand, 'exile' denotes banishment from a particular place in an act of force". On the other hand "it also expresses a sense of 'leaping out' toward something or somewhere, implying a matter of will" (2000, p.1). Kincaid sees Antigua as a place moulded by its colonial history. Instead of being able to draw strength from her land of origin, she describes Antigua as a place "leaving in its wake humiliation and inferiority" (Kincaid, 186). This paradise island "had been made vulgar and ugly" (Kincaid, 101) and is led by a corrupt government (Kincaid, 50). Kincaid's disappointment with her motherland coincides with the disruption in her relationship with her mother. The abandonment on the part of her mother reflects on her feelings towards Antigua:

This part of Antigua was considered the country then, and I was terrified of the darkness, it was so unrelieved by light even from other houses; also from the house where I lived I could see the St. John's city graveyard, it seems to me that almost every day I could see people attending funeral. It was then I decided that people in Antigua died (26).

In an attempt to rid herself from her mother's influence Kincaid decides to leave both her mother and her motherland and she moves to the United States. To Kincaid this exile is due to her own decision, being thus a voluntary exile. Kincaid herself, however, feels that it was the only possible solution at the time. If she had stayed in Antigua, Kincaid believes she "would have died" or "would have gone insane" (Kincaid, 90). Kincaid was wrong, however, in thinking that removing herself from the motherland would enable her to remove herself also from the influence of her mother. She lives an apparently independent life but still remains dependent on her mother. Kincaid thinks about her mother every day and remains very vulnerable to her. She describes how "the taste of this awfulness, this bitterness, is in [her] mouth every day" (Kincaid, 62).

If she can prove herself to be a better mother she has gained freedom from the suffering caused by her own mother. Similarly Kincaid tries to avoid her mother's mistakes. Kincaid's mother has never apologized for anything she has done to her daughter and Kincaid's counter-reaction can be seen in her comment: "I spend a good part of my day on my knees in apology to my own children" (Kincaid, 27). Kincaid repeats many times how much she loves her children, in contrast to her own mother's hatred towards her. But despite her efforts, it can be seen that Kincaid is unconsciously showing qualities similar to her mother's. Kincaid's daughter likes to sing, but Kincaid discourages her daughter's passion and instead wants her to study mathematics. Without realizing it herself, Kincaid is actually discouraging her daughter's singing just like her mother once discouraged Kincaid's reading. This demonstrates the difficulty of changing the course of history. The daughters cannot fully escape the fact that

a part of their mothers' personalities live in them. Thus, in order for them to understand themselves, they must understand also their mothers.

Kincaid uses writing as a means of resistance. In *My Brother* Kincaid clearly demonstrates how writing is the act of saving:

I became a writer out of desperation, so when I first heard my brother was dying I was familiar with the act of saving myself. I would write about him. I would write about his dying. When I was young, younger than I am now, I started to write about my own life and I came to see that this act saved my life. When I heard about my brother's illness and his dying, I knew instinctively, that to understand it, or to make an attempt at understanding his dying, and not to die with him, I would write about it (196).

For Kincaid, writing is the only way in which she can make sense of her past and understand it. If she did not process her brother's death, she would be so imprisoned by it that she could actually say she would die with him – thus repeating the past. Similarly, in order to break free from her mother's grasp she would have to write about her. One of the most significant events in the relationship between the powerful and powerless – Kincaid's mother and Kincaid herself – had been the burning of Kincaid's books. This event gave life to the writer Kincaid was to become. She would not let her mother control her life's course and, consequently, she needs to rewrite the past in her present life, so that she can bring back what was once deprived of her:

but it would not be strange if I spent the rest of my life trying to bring those books back to my life by writing them again and again until they were perfect, unscathed by fire of any kind. for a very long time I had the perfect reader for what I would write and place in the unscathed books; the source of the books has not died, it only comes alive again and again in different forms and other segments (198).

Kincaid is not trying to deny or forget this past, rather she draws strength from it and claims control of the way the past affects her. It is crucial in the daughters' struggle for independence that they reconnect with the motherland. Because of the strong link between mother and mother's land, Kincaid's mother plays a significant role in Kincaid's quest for a home. Kincaid can only succeed in constructing her autonomous identity after she has reunited with her ancestral past and her place of origin. In this section I will show how Kincaid try to unite with her motherland and how it contributes to her struggle for independence. In *My Brother*, one explanation could lie in the causes which bring Kincaid back to Antigua. Kincaid's return does not come from her own initiative, she returns because her brother is dying. These circumstances are not favorable for a reconnection with the motherland. One of the reasons Kincaid had left Antigua was that she associated her motherland with death. Now she would return only to confirm her fears. When she visits her brother in the hospital she realizes that "people with

his own complexion did not care whether he or other people like him lived or died" (Kincaid, 50). Rather than connecting again with her motherland Antigua, Kincaid repeats on several occasions her wish to return to her home in America: "What am I doing here, I want to go home. I missed my children and my husband. I missed the life I had come to know" (Kincaid, 23). Kincaid does not have a sense of belonging to Antigua. She has been away for so long that she no longer speaks the kind of English as her family and cannot easily understand them. Despite this disconnectedness that Kincaid continues to experience, there is still something that draws her to the motherland and to her family. She still calls Antigua 'home'. Even though she describes how content she is about her new life in America, she cannot help returning time and again to help her family in Antigua. In America, after speaking with her mother on the phone she confesses:

I missed the warm sun and I missed my brother, being with him, being in the presence of his suffering and the feeling that somewhere in it was the possibility of redemption of some kind, though what form it could take I did not know and did not care, only that redemption of some kind would be possible and that we would all emerge from it better in some way and would love each other more (50).

The word "redemption" suggests the importance of Kincaid's motherland and family in her struggle for independence. It shows that Kincaid does long to be reunited with her past and the people she comes from—and she connects them with the idea of freedom. Her feelings towards her family are very ambiguous, and remain as such even as the novel ends. Even though Kincaid implies that she wishes to reunite with her family and thus also with her motherland, she is unable to do it.

She is unable to clarify her feelings which are divided into two opposite directions. Kincaid says about her family: "they mean everything to me and they mean nothing, and even so, I do not really know what I mean when I say this" (Kincaid, 194). Thus Kincaid is not able to reach the closure in the end of the novel.

In addition to writing and getting back to motherland, Kincaid also her memory her struggle for independence. Through a profound understanding of her relationship with the past Kincaid is able to rewrite the past and find freedom in her present live. The difficulties she faces demonstrate the difficulty of constructing her identity in relation to her mother.

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