

Gender relations and mother-daughter relationship in annie john by jamaica kincai...

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Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* focuses on gender relations and it's the pattern throughout the novel. Gender relations also affect the mother-daughter relationship. Outside of the actual plot and the main characters, *Annie John* displays these gender relations specifically and clearly. With gender relations being an independent theme versus the mother-daughter relationship the two themes tie in through the characters and the effect the characters have on each other. To begin the mother-daughter relationship does indeed drive the plot, but not only does it drive the plot it also serves as the primary theme of *Annie John*.

The way the two themes tie in is through gender relations having an absolute negative effect on the overall mother-daughter relationship that consistently exists and is highlighted throughout the novel. Although Annie's father seems presentable like a good man he is a part of the overall unequal gender relations that exist in Antigua. The first very outstanding and almost shocking correlation readers see of gender relations is the fact that Annie's mother is 30 years younger than her father. In Antigua, much like general society, women are unequally treated compared to men. Men can be more open and promiscuous, but women are expected to be conservative. Before meeting Annie's mother her father had been involved in many different sexual affairs.

The significance of gender relations doesn't necessarily stem from the text but certain situations embedded in the text. With *Annie John* being the narrator readers don't have to ponder about her thoughts, situations, and feelings because she presents all three through text. The novel frequently

focuses on the mother-daughter relationship as well as gender issues. Annie John is frequently scolded and feels detached at times from her mother. She is frequently misjudged just by the unsymmetrical weight of gender relations.

This caused her to have tension towards her mother which boils over into a love/hate relationship. This love-hate relationship is carried throughout the plot and is blatantly displayed in various situations within the plot. In her youth, Annie John oftentimes becomes overwhelmed with the anxiety associated with being separated from her mother. Gender relations plays a part in Annie's overall development because she makes it clear through her actions that she is not interested in what the colonizers, as well as her mother, wants her to become. She begins this rebellion that allows her to sprout and grow into who she wants to be.

In a hostile colonial environment, she develops a rebellious and free spirit, in hopes she will one day break away from her reality. She also clearly sees the gender inequality and counteracts that with her rebellious and feisty spirit. The novel begins to monitor her transitions and character traits. She becomes more belligerent and rebellious leading the mother and daughter relationship to additionally involve complexity. The origins of this deterioration of the mother-daughter relationship stem from Annie John being slapped in the face by the reality of eventual separation from her mother.

Originally her mother's goal is to mold her into an independent lady. This fails when Annie enrolls in a different school and is separated from her mother. Within this new school, Annie is a new face, in which that new face is required to prove itself in a colonized and intellectual environment. The point in which the plot reincorporates gender relations is when Annie John falls in love with a girl by the name of Gwen. Gwen becomes Annie's focal point as she seems to transition into a lover of women in general.

This is proven by her interest in a character she refers to as "Red girl". This red girl seems to live the lifestyle that Annie John strives to live. The red girl is a free spirit who climbs trees exceptionally well, is strategic at marbles, wears dirty attire, and normally bathed once a week. The red girl is a representation of spiritual freedom for Annie John. One day, I was throwing stones at a guava tree, trying to knock down ripe guava, when the Red Girl came along and said, ' Which one do you want?' After I pointed it out, she climbed up the tree, picked the one I wanted off its branch, climbed down, and presented it to me. How my eyes did widen and my mouth forms an ' o' at this. I had never seen a girl do this before. All the boys climbed trees for the fruit they wanted, and all the girls threw stones to knock the fruit off the trees. But look at the way she climbed that tree: better than any boy" (Kincaid, pg 44).

Annie John was mesmerized not by the red girl, but by the lifestyle that the red girl represented. This caused her character transition to begin the process of alienating and separating herself from the people, environments, and colonial power that all would've played a part in her molding into what

others wanted her to be vs what she wanted for herself. Once Annie John moves to an upper class because of her intelligence she gets separated from Gwen, which contributes to her alienation. This alienation eventually becomes routinely common leading her to make her final decision towards the end of the novel. On top of the colonial power she is subjected to and her emotional responses, she develops a state of depression.

In this depression, she cocoons herself in separation from her family and her friends. The novel at times is difficult to dissect due to Kincaid's writing form. Her writing form is not in the traditional sense but instead focuses on the run-on sentences as well as paragraphs that end in fragments. Once the plot focuses on Annie's separation readers can also see relationships Annie John once cherished become under-appreciated. These relationships are presented in a different light due to the verbiage Abbie John selects. " Or so I was told by Gwen, formerly the love of my life, now reduced to an annoying acquaintance. (Kincaid, pg 72). This shows readers that Annie John not only discards her once cherished relationships but that she is even somewhat annoyed with the fact that those relationships continue to exist. In her moments of isolation within the plot, readers can precisely point out the element of deerskin within Annie's dialogue and decisions. All of these things are based on the deterioration of the mother-daughter relationship and also gender relations, and the complexity of them.

Gender relations continue to push the plot towards a point of focusing solely on Annie and what she's currently feeling. This allows for readers to depict her in the light of her choice because she manipulates the text due to the

fact she has the power and luxury of being the narrator. This power and luxury also come with an extensive restless ration of her thoughts and feelings. With these additional thoughts and feelings, readers get a glimpse of how it feels and what she's experiencing as she's living within her reality. The red girl is a representation of what she aspired her lifestyle to be and also her defense in her fight against gender relations and the issues associated with them.

Jamaica Kincaid allows for readers to not stray away from the overall message but to indulge in it further. In a novel such as this one that possesses many different themes it's challenging to find a distinct pattern and even though this is difficult there are streams of patterns intertwined within the plot. These patterns are all controlled and manipulated by Annie John so that readers can understand clearly why she makes the decisions she makes throughout life and the novel. By the conclusion of the novel, readers can easily see the two themes of focus combine and results in the ending of the novel.

By the end of the novel, Jamaica Kincaid gives readers an overview of colonial life not only in Antigua but also as a young girl with a struggling mother with her relationship and a colonialist society pressuring her to become someone and something she's not. By the conclusion of the novel, Annie John becomes so depressed, frustrated, and isolated she distances herself from anything and everyone she has established a relationship with in life. She eventually extends that isolation by choosing to leave home for nursing school in England. Jamaica Kincaid is not only a historical black

writer, but she's also a preserved of feminism and displays her bold characteristics through her characters and her work.