

How does grace  
nichols express her  
relationship



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Grace Nichols was born in a place in South America called Guyana but now she lives in London. Themes and images that keep recurring in her poems are of homesickness, emotions, her split culture, perception of self and nature. Grace Nichols shows this through images of food, senses, landscape, nature and colours. In her poems Nichols expresses her relationship with the two cultures through physical issues of travel and journey. The poem that expresses this best is Island Man. Island Man is narrated by a voice that we can assume is Nichols playing a character because it is written in a third person narrative.

This poem is written from the point of view of a man. This is an effective technique because it shows us that it is not only Grace Nichols who feels this way but hundreds of people in London feel longing for their homeland and it also reveals the depth of the poet's love for her homeland. In Island Man the central theme is of longing for home. The poem reveals this message through the use of nature and the sea. These images are representatives of Guyana, with images of artificialness and ugliness which represents London for her.

For example in Guyana there are "wild seagulls" and when talking about London she says "wild metallic soar". The central theme in Like A Beacon is also longing for home, and this can be compared to Island Man because they both have the same theme. The central images in this poem are food and the beacon which can represent many things such as warmth, hope, light at the end of a tunnel revealing that the poet feels warmth towards her homeland and she refers to London as "cold" which shows negativity to where she now lives.

The beginning of each poem could be said to be similar because they both open up to people in London who are feeling homesick for their home land. In " Like A Beacon" it says " in London every now and then I get this craving for my mother's food". I think Nichols uses a metaphor of her mother's food to talk about Guyana. In " Island Man" the first line is " morning" and it is about " a man in London who still wakes up to the sound of the sea". The closing image in " Island Man" of the island man having to " heave" himself out of bed for " another London day" leaves the reader feeling sorry sad and sorry for him.

The final line in " Like A Beacon" also leaves the reader feeling sad and sorry for her, but also happy for her as she has found something that connects her to her homeland and it is like a " beacon" for her I feel the most successful image in Island Man is when he says " small emerald island", this metaphor of his island being an emerald reveals that the poet has an image of lush of greenery and since an emerald is a precious jewel that the poet feels her homeland is precious. I feel the most successful image in " Like A Beacon" is of her bag being " like a beacon against the cold".

I think the beacon was an excellent symbol to use as it could symbolize so many things for example light, beam, hope, and guide. Although the images in both poems are not exactly the same, they both convey the feeling of homesickness and longing for a connection with home. In " Island man" the connection is the sea and in " like a beacon" the connection is through native foods such as " plantains salt fish/sweet potatoes" The choice of vocabulary in each poem is also similar. Both the poems are written in precise, simple vocabulary.

I think this is because we can concentrate on the poem fully and not be confused by long words. The poems are written in colloquial style but she has written other poems which are much more obviously colloquial such as “where ever I hang” and “inspite of me”. Both “Island Man” and “Like A Beacon” have very little punctuation. Instead both poems especially “like a beacon” is very spaced out with gaps. I think this is because Nichols wanted the reader to have time to think about what she is reading. Another poem of Grace Nichols which is on the subject of split culture is “where ever I hang”.

I think the narrator in this poem is Grace Nichols. In this poem she contradicts what she has said in “Like A Beacon” and “Island Man”. In these she says her home is where she feels in her heart but at the end of this poem she seems to accept that where she is physically is what she will call home “wherever I hang my knickers that’s my home” I think that Nichols wrote this poem a long time after “Island Man” and “Like A Beacon” and in this poem although she still feels home sick for Guyana and the ways of Guyana, she is slowly starting to accept that London is also her home.

I feel that Nichols expresses her sense of longing and home sickness for Guyana while living in London most successfully in the poem “Like A Beacon” because she uses words like “craving” and she repeats “I need” and it shows the poet does not have control over her want for her home land. The overall mood of the poem is one of slight desperation whereas the mood in “Island Man” is one of sadness. But the poem that expresses Grace Nichols relationship with her two cultures best is “Wherever I Hang”. In this poem she acknowledges her two different cultures and accepts them. “I get accustom to de English life but I still miss back home side”.