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Narratives of Rage and Rehabilitation: Hyper Marginality and the Strategies of Resistance in Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother* and *Mr. Potter*

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to read two novels of Afro-Caribbean-American writer, Jamaica Kincaid, to illustrate her concern with hyper marginality and the strategies of resistance. The paper would fall in two parts. The first part will discuss the symptoms of hyper marginality as reflected in the works of Jamaica Kincaid with a spotlight on rage as the chief narrative manifestation. The second part would highlight the thematic and narrative strategies which are mobilized by Kincaid to resist the forces of oppression which an Afro-Caribbean female subject has to face. This section would also illustrate how Kincaid's narratives at once become sites of rage and rehabilitation.

The paper is also an attempt to locate a distinct voice from marginality of American fiction post the 1980s – the voice of a double hyphenated, black female writer. It would also offer a preview of how Kincaid generates a new literary context with her reworking of genres like biography and memoir, and by giving story-telling a new function of rehabilitation.

Key words: Jamaica Kincaid, hyper marginality, resistance, Afro-Caribbean, black female writing.

Jamaica Kincaid, a reputed Afro Caribbean American novelist, has asserted her identity and space in American

Fiction. She represents a voice of the marginalized subject and her works reflect the issues of Afro Caribbean American female subject. Kincaid also locates herself in a double hyphenated subject position which itself creates a new literary context. She has also reworked popular literary genres like biography and memoir to capture the moods and strategies of a hypermarginalized subject. This paper is an attempt to analyse the narrative devices and the forms of her two significant works – *My Brother* and *Mr. Potter* to show how Kincaid enriches and empowers story telling by making it an agency for the cathartic expression of rage and social rehabilitation.

Like most of Kincaid's earlier works such as *Annie John* and *Lucy*, *My Brother* and *Mr. Potter* reveal the crisis and symptoms of a hypermarginalized subject. They also mirror her own life and experiences. Kincaid centers these works in Antigua which is largely the setting in most of her novels. These novels also deal with childhood memories, abandonment, male vanity and journey.

Kincaid understands clearly that the colonial legacy of Antigua has handicapped a community forever. She grew up within the structure of British educational system that was imposed upon Antiguans. She grew to detest everything about England except the literature. Her protagonists detest neocolonial practices which are found in Antigua.

Like many other works of Kincaid, *My Brother* and *Mr Potter* too reveal visible symptoms of Hyper marginalization. Hyper segmentation, deprival syndrome, maternal abandonment, uncertain family ties, doubleness, perpetual sense of otherness, haunting nightmares and rage are the clear symptoms. *My Brother* and *Mr. Potter* can be read as Kincaid's expression of rage against colonial practices and domestic situations. These novels indicate that colonial practices and domination percolate into Afro Caribbean families. She expresses a preview of this rage in her non-fiction, *A Small Place*:

> But nothing can erase my rage for this wrong can never be made right and only the impossible can make me still; can a way be found to make what happened not have happened.(Kincaid 1988, 32)

Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother* and *Mr. Potter* are narratives of rage and they manifest the characteristic rage and frustration of an Afro Caribbean female narrator who is called upon to tell the life stories of two helpless and vain characters – Devon and Mr. Potter. These novels also mark Kincaid's engagement with her ire for the patriarchal practices and self-destructive male ego. They also show how story telling enables one to cleanse the feelings of helplessness and rage.

Kincaid's poignant autobiographical memoir *My Brother,* published in 1997, depicts a lifetime tragic experience of her own brother Devon Drew. This novel has two parts, the first written while he was alive and sick and the second, after his death on January 19, 1996. Since she distinctly remembers his birth as a thirteen-year-old girl fetching a midwife for him, she is equally distressed seeing him lying in the hospital bed critically ill, battling AIDS.

My Brother cannot be read simply as an autobiographical narrative that records Kincaid's observations of Devon's battle against AIDS. A close reading of the text reveals the subtle strategy employed by Kincaid to blend the autobiographical material to intensify the fictionalized narrative. Kincaid also unveils before the readers an array of insights into all the unresolved complexities surrounding the island before and after colonization. It is only then the readers can understand her rage and resentment for the neglect of Antigua.

My Brother is loaded with Kincaid's memories, and her observation of societal indifference to AIDS. She also points out the lack of political will to sort out a serious issue as AIDS. The novel begins by reminding the readers that, of the four children born to Kincaid's mother, Devon was the one born at home. She

also reminiscences as to how the whole family had to make adjustments to welcome the newborn. All the children were upset for being sent to their neighbor's house that day. Her mother also couldn't give enough attention to the fourth as she had other children. Kincaid, at this point of time, remembers an instance where everyone else in the family forgot, except herself that an army of red ants would have attacked and killed him while Devon was fast asleep. When she reminds her mother of it, her mother suspiciously fumes "what a memory you have" (p-6). The jolt not as yet assuaged, Kincaid deliberates seriously as if possessing a sharp memory was a crime at all. All composed, she instinctively responds consoling herself that whether it is the red ants from outside or the virus from within the body killing her brother, only a mind like hers can think of the consequences and here she cannot be wrong.

Even as her brother is lying in the hospital bed dying of the disease, Kincaid immediately reads into the color and race of her brother and compares it with her color and feels that she is a shade lighter outside but still racially acknowledged as black. She expresses her displeasure at this kind of marginalization in America. She connects her state of being a racial outsider to her brother's isolation due to AIDS. She also throws a hint at the intraracial discrimination:

> His skin was a deep black color, I noticed that, and I thought perhaps I noticed that because I live in a place where no one is of his complexion, except for me, and I am not really of his complexion in the way of race. (Kincaid 1997, 9)

Kincaid is equally vocal about her vulnerability in supporting her family. When she heard her brother was sick and dying, her love for her brother overpowered her fear of his death. She minces no words in expressing it openly:

> I felt myself being swallowed up in a large vapor of sadness, but I did not try to escape it. I became afraid that he would die before I saw him again; then I became obsessed with the fear he would die before I saw him again. It surprised me that I

> loved him; I could see that was what I was feeling, love for him, and it surprised me because I did not know him at all. (Kincaid 1997, 20)

In the hospital, Kincaid discovers she and Devon loved each other and they express so. She is disturbed to find her brother dumped like a commodity in an isolation ward meant for AIDS patients. The state of the hospital, dingy, dirty, dislodged with dust could prove fatal to the already fragile Devon. Anticipating breathlessness as the next stage of his sickness, she feels sorry that he couldn't afford a better accommodation. It should be seen that Devon's marginalization is not the dilemma of the individual alone, nor is Kincaid feeling the intense pain because it is her brother. She represents through Devon an issue concerning the island.

As a sister, Kincaid is left to bear the hospital expenses. At that point she recalls that even her father had died leaving her mother in distress and that her mother had to borrow money to bury him. Here, Kincaid in her usual veiled attack doesn't spare the male members who, she feels, have been irresponsible. By reflecting on the male insensitive attitude, Kincaid feels that this predicament is as much as an island's problem as much as with a gardener in the Caribbean society. Interestingly she tries to unveil the disguised tone of frustrating helplessness in the relationship she shares with her mother: "perhaps all love is self-serving. I do not know. She loves and understands us when we are weak and helpless and need her" (1997, 16-17).

Though Kincaid's contradictory self haunts her time and again, she remains rooted in her Antiguan ancestral past. She thinks Antigua must be represented and its historical truth must be unraveled. The only way she could serve the community is by addressing the problems within the community and the island. With the invocative powers of re-telling, she unearths the evils of infested contemporary Antigua. She still feels that the country depends for all its

resources on America right from mechanical repairs to medicines. She also comes to know from her mother that Devon was trapped in bad company, crime, robbery, murder, and corruption and jailed, which her mother feels are the effects of neocolonization which a Third World country like Antigua is facing in the present.

Kincaid is also convinced that she is running into more debt in saving Devon's life. She rewinds her life and sexuality and compares them with his and feels a man like him had a strong urge to satisfy himself alone. Kincaid finds it ridiculous the way Devon is irresponsible in handling his own life. With disappointment she articulates:

> This compulsion to express himself through his penis, his imagination passing between his legs, not through his hands, is something I am not qualified to understand. (Kincaid 1997, 70)

Kincaid's *Mr. Potter* (2002) is in many ways similar to *My Brother*. Both *My Brother* and *Mr. Potter* evoke strongly the images of death and they are thus narratives of loss and mourning. Further, both have a male figure as the focal character of the narrative. Though they are often perceived and described through the point of view and sensibility of a female narrator, both the narratives have a tinge of confession, which depicts an uneasy relation between the female narrator and the male protagonist in focus. *My Brother* and *Mr. Potter* also depict the struggles of Afro Caribbean male figures against the backdrop of corruption and degeneration. They also bring out vanity and black male ego, which make the male characters pathetically funny. Further these novels, like other works of Jamaica Kincaid, are deeply rooted in memories of helplessness, domination and tragic decay. Bitter, scathing irony becomes the marker of rage in these narratives.

Mr. Potter carries many phrases and sentences, which are consciously repeated. For instance, the narrator says, "Mr. Potter was my father, and my father's name was Mr. Potter".

This sentence is repeated as a constant refrain throughout the book. This repetition indicates how stories have to be told and then retold in order to assert and mark the insignificant life it carries.

Mr. Potter is narrated largely in the first person with intermittent free indirect discourse. By mixing two perspectives in the narrator's voice, Kincaid swings between first person perspective and cosmological perspective. Further, the degree of distance that the external narrator gains in this work enable Kincaid to tackle and describe the condition of Antigua, which are harsh and beyond a subjective narrative. She also implies through her narrative style that like the consciousness of Mr. Potter, which is largely unconcerned of everything about it, goodness is also a luxury in the island society.

Kincaid's Mr. Potter is an impoverished marginalized figure who feels that he is quite better off than a wandering dog and a blind beggar – the common images of Antiguan realities. Even as he feels that he is above the lives of Antigua, he doesn't realize that underneath his white uniform of a chauffeur he is not more than a sophisticated slave. Ironically this hapless, apparently powerless man fathers dozens of girls – the narrator being one among them. He also sleeps with many women in houses which have only one room before leaving those impoverished women and his daughters to fend for themselves. Thus he becomes responsible for the day-to-day struggles for a good number of females. Kincaid exposes in Mr. Potter's careless affairs, the face of the colonizer within the colonized.

Though the narrator makes no significant moral judgments on Mr. Potter, her rage for her father bursts out at times in the form of corrosive irony and bitterness. These tones are most evident in schematic repetition of an expression, "Mr. Potter could not read" which stands as an ironic contrast to his foolish sense of confidence and sexual escapades. Kincaid also brings out another side of double marginalized life: she implies in this novel that hyper marginalized subjects like Mr. Potter

and his helpless wives and children are trapped by a lack of self-awareness. She believes that they are the victims of the rigid and unforgiving environment. What is finally left for such individuals are some forms of escape as Elfrida Robinson, Mr. Potter's mother, does by abandoning him and by ending her life in the sea. Others like Mr. Potter himself escape by performing the daily rituals over and over without any sense of identity or happiness. Mr. Potter is trapped in his job as a chauffeur, driving people from the Jetty and back to Jetty with a predictable monotony.

The narrator who is yet another double marginalized subject finds another kind of escape. Her escape seems to be more meaningful and creative, as it also helps her to devise a strategy of resistance against entrapment within the life's painful journey towards death. Readers begin to realize that the narrator works towards a kind of transcendence by telling this tale. She also gains her agency and subject position through the act of writing. Juxtaposed to the tone of helplessness in the expression "Mr. Potter could not read," is the assertion and self-awareness in the expression "And from Mr. Potter I was made, and I can read and write and even love doing so"(2002, 55).

Mr. Potter who is smart to beget eleven children by eight different women is nothing more than a naïve chauffeur who patterns his life blindly on his Lebanese employer Mr. Shoul.

Dr. and Mrs. Weizenger, a Czech couple fleeing World War II, arrive Antigua. Mr. Potter looks at them as symbols of all the sufferings and loss of the world as they keep repeating their loss of paradise to their natives of their new surroundings. In this context Kincaid implies that the Weizengers, despite losing their land, are not truly marginalized compared to people like Mr. Potter because they still have the ability to express their loss. Kincaid also implies that they don't realize that they are addressing an Afro Caribbean subject who is a result of what has gone wrong in the world for almost five hundred years

– racial discrimination. Silence of Mr. Potter about his own life is contrasted with the eloquent rhetoric of loss that Weizengers have. By placing a historically conditioned silence alongside with the war-triggered expressions of loss, Kincaid yet again shows how colonization and marginalization have made Afro Caribbean subjects mute.

Kincaid proves yet again in this novel that history of subjugation has silenced Afro Caribbean males and females. The single most achievement of the narrator is her ability to speak. With an enthusiasm of a neo-literate she speaks and admires her own ability to speak. This enthusiasm to speak is found in the narrator's foregrounding of the act of telling which is manifested in the word "and". "And" is the most common connector used in story telling and it also implies the normal repetitive register of oral communication. "And" is the predominant word used in the entire narrative. Interestingly in the first chapter, the first sentence begins with "And" even though readers are not given any background before that. Except one, every single chapter of *Mr. Potter* begins with "and". There are paragraphs which begin with "and" and one chapter ends with "and…". Even a casual reading of *Mr. Potter* leaves the reader with the impression of heavy repetition of the word "and". A deeper reading would reveal that "and" is not just a connector but a trope. Kincaid places the word "and" not only as a marker of orality but also as a marker of memory which enables the narrator to search constantly for the materials from the past. It also indicates urgency – a need to tell the story before the end of the life. "And" also connects the lives of the marginalized Mr. Potter and the narrator to the continuum of Afro Caribbean legacy. "And" is also a literary device, which is not used as a coordinator but as open-ended connector – a device that indicates the necessity to understand the past, to understand the present better. It stands for the part of history of Antigua that one needs to evoke to understand the life of Mr. Potter better.

Kincaid also captures in *Mr. Potter* the typical uncertainties of the voice of a double marginalized subject. The narrator at one point realizes that the narrative, the life of Mr. Potter and the other lives related to him are badly entangled. Through a subtle statement on the problem of narrative voice Kincaid implies that Mr. Potter's life and his consciousness do not provide any material for a conventional narrative. In a characteristic postmodern reflexivity, the narrator interrogates the hierarchies of race that exist in the genre of narrative:

> This sentence should begin with Dr. Weizenger emerging, getting off the launch that has brought him from his ship which is lying in the deep part of the harbor, but this is Mr. Potter's life and so Dr. Weizenger must never begin a sentence; I am not making an authorial decision, or a narrative decision, I only say this because it is so true: Mr. Potter's life is his own and no one else should take precedence. (Kincaid 2002, 8-9)

Mr. Potter is also Kincaid's search for her absentee father. The narrator realizes within the framework of her father's autobiography that she has to create her father's image and life largely from her imagination. She has very little of details with her apart from the knowledge that Roderick Potter was an Antiguan chauffeur. This information is hardly enough to make Mr. Potter the protagonist of a narrative – a protagonist who implies action, autonomy and agency. Subsequently Mr. Potter is made to defend his role as a protagonist with his uneventful unaccounted life. This character fails to hold the narrative together and the images of narrator's mother and herself come up to fill the gaps in the narrative.

The narrator juxtaposes certain facts of Mr. Potter's life with certain disgraceful episodes such as begetting many daughters and raping one of them. The narrator also brings out the irony of Mr. Potter's vain life; the monuments which he

leaves behind are perishable – a sum of money, a mound of earth as a tomb and a trail of women as mourners.

For the narrator, Mr. Potter the father, is nothing more than "a line drawn through her", an Antiguan phrase which indicates that there is no father's name in her birth certificate. Her journey into her father's past is an attempt to judge him. Though she displays some amount of sympathy for Mr. Potter, she reminds the reader that he is one of the degraded Antiguan subjects.

Kincaid also manages to abandon her father in her narrative who had abandoned her in her childhood. She abandons him by not allowing him any imaginative faculty as a character. She also abandons him by evacuating his agency, will and identity. Following is one of the many examples wherein one can find the narrator down-sizing the character deliberately:

> See Mr. Potter, a small boy, his spirit in harmony with his own action, his actions in harmony with his spirit; see Mr. Potter boundless and joyful, as he traverses a very small corner of the world, see him in this way when he was a child, for this is so rare in his life, a joyfulness that was without boundaries. See him as a small boy, for he was Drickie then, he was not Mr. Potter yet, he was not even Roderick, he was Drickie, a small boy, and his mother had walked into the sea, and his father had died after cursing the small share he received of the fruits of the sea, and he was living with people who could not love him, who could not love anything at all, and neither could he, Drickie who was not yet Mr. Potter. (Kincaid 2002, 80-81)

Thus using corrosive irony, Kincaid carries out a literary fratricide in *My Brother* and a literary patricide in *Mr. Potter.*

II

It is possible to consider story telling as a social activity. It is also possible to consider story telling as a medium of social

rehabilitation. It is almost accepted in every local culture that story telling has a regenerative value. Rehabilitative narrative is a kind of narrative wherein the purpose of a narrative is as much to revitalize the narratee as much is it to tell a story. Narrative rehabilitation works on a unique narrator/narratee relationship. At the surface level this kind of narrative might look very intimidating for the narratee. However, story telling in such a narrative is also a form of enactment wherein the reader is very much a part of the scheme of things. This narrative often places the reader in a position to confront the past of a nation or a community. In the process the narrative uses the past as a source of regeneration in the present. Reading such a narrative is essentially a different experience as much as the act of story telling is. The narrator and the narratee create a community as that of a tribe in which story telling is supposed to have the potential for social rehabilitation. This kind of story telling is found in the indigenous cultures of Africans, African Americans, Native Americans, and Afro Caribbeans.

In a rehabilitative narrative, the impulse behind story telling could be an issue in the present. However this issue would be counterbalanced or juxtaposed with the legacy of suffering and endurance – the elements of past. In the process, the present struggles are neutralized or nullified. However the negotiation of the present crises is not done by escaping from them but by making the readers confront them along with the legacy of crisis management of the community.

It is possible to consider Jamaica Kincaid's novels, *My Brother* and *Mr. Potter* in the light of the above-mentioned rehabilitative agenda of a narrative. It is also possible to look into the objective of the narratives and also to analyze the narrator-narratee context of the novels to see how Kincaid effects a social rehabilitation in her narratives about a dying AIDS patient, Devon and an Antiguan chauffeur, Mr. Potter.

Throughout *My Brother* Kincaid brings in images of physical degeneration which are associated with AIDS and the realities of postcolonial Antigua. By doing so, the narrator places the readers in the context of contemporary Antigua, which is plagued by AIDS, vanity and hyper consumerism. The maimed parts of the body of the AIDS patients that she describes are very much the parts of Antigua. Devon becomes a representative figure and the focal character of the narrative. The narrated event is the gradual death of Devon. Kincaid the sister is the narrator whose grasp over the present crises in Antigua is often distorted by her experiences in living in Vermont, U.S.A. Living in Vermont and thinking about Devon who lives in Antigua, the narrator finds it difficult to conceive the crises as a whole. What she can record in her narrative about her brother from a distance is not his present but her memories about him and her motherland.

By the end of the narrative, Devon's subaltern, degenerative body becomes bereft of life, after being ostracized and disowned by the Antiguan community. Kincaid's narrative owns up Devon, the AIDS victim. By doing so she connects to thousands of such desolate HIV patients who need human attention, if not anything else. This narrative about AIDS patient brings into discussion the plight of the patient as well as his family, especially in a conservative society. By voicing this plight, Kincaid creates a social platform and a rehabilitative ground in her narrative. The narrative makes the readers stare AIDS at its devilish face to negotiate its fear, to accept it as a reality and to get on with life. Such a narrative also offers discussion forum for the rehabilitation of young Afro Caribbeans who mindlessly trade their youth in unprotected sex, drug abuse homosexuality and the company of Rastafarian music.

Kincaid's narrative takes up a responsibility, which the Antiguan society fails to serve. Antiguans being a conservative, hypocritical lot can never get to discuss AIDS. In this situation

rehabilitation of AIDS patient is far more a remote possibility though ironically AIDS is no longer a remote disease. Kincaid takes up the responsibility of telling her readers the effects of AIDS in terms of its shocking images. Kincaid anticipates and breaks down the resistance and revulsion of reader's sensibility in the following pieces of narrative:

> There were penises that looked like lady's fingers left in the oven too long and with a bite taken out of them that revealed a jam filled center. There were labias covered with thick blue crusts, or black crusts that were iridescent. There were breasts with large parts missing, eaten away not from a large bite taken at once but nibbled, as if by an animal in a state of high enjoyment, each morsel savored for maximum pleasure. There were pictures of people emaciated by disease, who looked very different from people emaciated from starvation; they did not have that parched look of flesh and blood evaporated, leaving a wreck of skin and bones; they looked like the remains of a black hole, something that had once burned brightly and then collapsed in on itself. These images of suffering and death were the result of sexual activity, and at the end of Dr. Ramsey's talk, I felt I would never have sex again, not even with myself. (Kincaid 1997, 37-38)

The narrator-narrate context is not less intimidating in this passage. The narrator bombards the reader with a series of repulsive images which would demystify human sexuality. By doing so she makes them give concrete shapes to the invisible killer virus. She knows that HIV virus is an intangible reality for the Antiguans and the only way to rub in its reality is to embody it in terms of series of shocking images. This narrative thus is nothing less than an awareness campaign.

The true purpose of a rehabilitative narrative is to help the narrator and the narratee to get over the present crises and to get going with life. Kincaid's narrative also has similar function. She evokes a bit of her past to connect herself to the continuity of life and to establish her self-regenerative identity

of a writer. For her, writing is the only act of saving herself from dying and for readers, reading about it:

> 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. (Kincaid 1997, 195-196)

Kincaid, the narrator, uses memories and snapshots from the past as modes of compensating the present disaster. The narrator knows that Devon's death is inevitable but she doesn't want to make her life miserable or the readers feel miserable by reminding only of the grim pictures of dying Devon. Instead, she goes back into past to polish up once again the snapshots in her memory – the snapshots that would help her and her readers get over the last images of Devon. This backward leap of the narrative is truly rehabilitative. She writes:

> There is a photograph of my brother in a book (an album) full of photographs collected by my husband. They are family photographs and they are in this book because my husband wanted to give our daughter a snapshot view of the first five years of her life. The photograph of my brother that is in this album shows a young man, beautiful and perfect in the way of young people, for young people are always perfect and beautiful until they are not, until the moment they just are not. In this photograph his skin is smooth; his skin looks as if it were a piece of precious fabric covering a soft surface (the structure that was his face), and if this fabric were to be forcefully pressed with the ball of a finger, it would eventually return to its smooth and shiny surface looking untouched by experience of any kind, internal or external. He was beautiful then. He did unspeakable things then; at least he could not

> speak of them and I could not really speak of them to him. (Kincaid 1997, 92-93)

Kincaid's story telling is also a form of enactment. For instance, the narrators reference to the past itself is a journey into the past. Similarly, the narration is an act of telling wherein the narratee is suffused in the act itself. By taking story telling to the level of enactment, Kincaid opens the discourse of fiction for public participation. What the narrator speaks about her memory is very much an act of land marking the memory – not only for herself but also for her readers. For the narrator, it is also an act of penance to cleanse her guilt of having neglected her brother and for the readers is an act of listening and learning. By the end of the narrative the narrator also smudges the difference between the narrator and narratee:

> It was because I had neglected my brother when he was two years old and instead read a book that my mother gathered up all the books I owned and put them on a pile on her stone heap, sprinkling them with kerosene and then setting them alight; I cannot remember the titles of these books, I cannot remember what they were about (they would have been novels, at fifteen I read only novels), but it would not be so 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 had the 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 unscathed books; the source of the books has not died, it only comes alive again and again in different and other segments. (Kincaid 1997, 197-198)

A rehabilitative narrative emphasizes the potential for social rehabilitation in both the fictional world and the readers' contemporary world. Kincaid's *My Brother* reveals a series of stylistic, narratological and thematic features which highlight the social significance of story telling. Her novel also reveals a wide range of narrative therapies. These therapies include the

act of story telling itself, which emphasizes the individual's reclamation of her own voice and the ability to have narrative control of one's own story. This control is important as it indicates the narrator's control over her past experience. Another technique is a manipulation of the unnarrated occasion that frames the rest of the narrative. For instance, how Devon contracts HIV is an unnarrated occasion, which frames the rest of the narrative for Kincaid. By offsetting this occasion from the narrative she enables her own subject to reclaim a voice and control over the past.

Kincaid also develops a unique narrative context in *My Brother,* that is, the narrator-reader relationship. Much of the rehabilitation is built upon this context. The narrator confides in readers and takes the readers for granted right from the beginning. The abruptness of the beginning and the inexplicitness of the utterance show the informal mode of confessional writing. The novel begins:

> When I saw my brother again after a long while, he was lying in a bed in the Holberton hospital in the Gwenth O'Reilly ward, and he was said to be dying of AIDS. (Kincaid 1997, 3)

Kincaid's narrative also marks a personal rehabilitation for Kincaid. What urges her to write *My Brother* is largely her personal guilt of having left Devon and her motherland unattended. Her narrative indicates her personal battle with this guilt and subsequently she gets cleansed by vocalizing that. Throughout the narrative she keeps reminding herself and her readers that she had been trying to caution Devon of the HIV. This memory of having tried to caution him eventually sets her free from the guilt:

> Once, a few years ago when I was visiting my family – that is, the family I grew up in – I sat on his bed in the house he lived in alone, a house which was two arm's length away from our mother's house, where she lived with another son, a grown man, I told him to use condoms when having sex with anyone; I told him to protect himself from the HIV virus and he

> laughed at me and said that he would never get such a stupid thing ("Me no get dat chupidness, man"). (Kincaid 1997, 8)

She also uses confessional intensity to cleanse herself of the guilt:

> I am so vulnerable to my family's needs and influence that from time to time I remove myself from them. I do not write to them. I do not pay visits to them. I do not lie, I do not deny, I only remove myself. (Kincaid 1997, 20)

Though *My Brother* is largely about disease, death and loss, Kincaid takes her readers to a journey through the contemporary realities of Antigua. By doing so, she enables them to realize and to confront the bitter realities of life. Though the narrative is about death, the death is stated at the beginning of the narrative itself. The rest of the narrative shows how the narrator makes peace with Devon's death. The narrative also reveals her personal strategies that enable her to accept the truth and to keep her dead brother in her memory. Kincaid performs a homicide of Devon, the AIDS patient in the narrative but not before bringing alive a positive image of Devon, the gardener. Remembering the dead for their goodness is the best that the living can do for them. Kincaid's narrative does the same for her own good and for the sensibility of the readers. Juxtaposed with the imagery of decay and death is the imagery of wanton growth of the plants:

> Some of my brother's plants had borne fruit and were dying and were sending up new shoots. The plantsman in my brother will never be, and all the other things that he might have in his life have died; but inside his body a death lives, flowering upon flowering with voraciousness that nothing seems able to satisfy and stop. (Kincaid 1997, 19-20)

Kincaid's narrative in *Mr. Potter* is one without mercy and it bursts out an overwhelming anger. This rage in writing has a transcendental significance. Kincaid devises a kind of literary debunking of Mr. Potter, to settle her scores with him.

By doing so, she manages to keep her real life peaceful as the literary world provides her a rehabilitative battleground.

The narrator starts with characteristic indifference and rage towards her focal character. But subsequently she understands Mr. Potter's indifference to women in terms of the maternal abandonment that he had suffered as a boy. The narrator finds the painful vacuum of Mr. Potter's childhood created by Mr. Potter's mother, Elfrida Robinson who left the child and drowned herself. Mr. Potter as the protagonist cannot even assess the magnitude of his own tragic life. All that he can recollect is a smell of his mother who reminded him of onions. Thus the narrator implies that there was very little mothering in the life of Mr. Potter and hence his attitude towards women naturally has no respect or affection in it.

Kincaid also reveals through the character of Mr. Potter the distorted sense of self and possession that a double marginalized subject carries. Mr. Potter is easily gulled by Mr. Shoul, his employer. Mr. Shoul refers to the blue Hillman, which Mr. Potter drives as Potter's car. This remark fills Potter with great pride and ironically he doesn't know he is entrapped in the car and the monotonous job. The narrator expresses Mr. Potter's vain attitude towards his profession, a typical response of a colonized subject. Kincaid reminds that even as Mr. Potter feels that he is the owner of the car, he is owned by the car. This is a typical colonial irony:

> And when Mr. Potter sat at the wheel of this car, the navy blue Hillman with brown leather seats, he felt himself one with the car, he felt he possessed the car and that the car possessed him, and the car had no feelings, because a car can never do such a thing, have feelings of any kind, and the car really did belong to Mr. Shoul, and when Mr. Potter felt at one with Mr.Shoul's car, he placed himself with blissful ignorance in Mr. Shoul's possession. (Kincaid 2002, 124)

Kincaid implies that lack of awareness of one's own agency is a characteristic feature of a double marginalized

subject. Compared to Mr. Potter, his daughter, the narrator, gains more self-awareness as she progressively moves towards self-expression through literacy and writing.

Kincaid doesn't spare Mr. Potter for his callousness towards women. She feels that an Afro Caribbean male like Mr. Potter would never understand the problems of an Afro Caribbean female. In a characteristic sarcasm she questions the gendered privileges of Mr. Potter:

> And Mr. Potter did not have a uterus that shuddered in agony, for he was a man, and he did not have a menstrual cycle, for he was man, and he did not have ovaries that when discharging an egg which had not been fertilized caused him to feel pain in the area below his waist and above his pelvis, for Mr. Potter was a man and not a woman. (Kincaid 2002, 160)

Kincaid also presents a typical narrative irony as the narrator who has never touched her father or who doesn't know how he smelled. She is made to tell his life story. The narrator has a vague memory of Mr. Potter ignoring her whenever she passed him in the street or of him slamming a door in her face. It is with this bitterness, distance and anger that she begins the narration. The father for her is not indicated by his presence but by his conspicuous absence. Hence she has to narrate the story of an absentee, a non-figure. The irony reaches its climax when the narrator finally realizes that her father had been nothing more than a name for her:

> My father's absence will forever hang over my present, and my present, at any given moment, will echo his absence, but my own existence, as far as I can understand, modified him not at all. And Mr. Potter grew old and I remained a child and my mother remained my mother and these three things, my father, me, my mother, remain the same into eternity, remain the same now, which is a definition of eternity. (Kincaid 2002, 192)

The narrative ends with a subtle assertion: "Mr. Potter was my father, my father's name was Mr. Potter" (2002, 195).

This assertion draws the finalities of the relation between the narrator and Mr. Potter. After visiting the graveyard, the narrator realizes that not even the grave of Mr. Potter remains now and all that she can claim or can retrieve is her father's name. The statement also indicates that she can never relate to her father as a person and she should rather be happy with his identity as name and nothing more than that. This realization brings peace, a distance with which the narrator walks her way back to her own life. This act of telling a life-story of one's father and deriving a healthy distance from a life narrated, establishes the agony and subject position of the narrator. This act is also truly rehabilitative as it thrashes out the guilt and bitterness of the narrator towards her father.

Both in *My Brother* and *Mr. Potter*, Kincaid implies that in order to gain one's life one has to separate oneself from the lives of family members. These narratives also depict how Afro Caribbean males are often the victims of mental and verbal scorn. By telling their stories, Kincaid breaks their silence and eventually cleanses her own mind of personal grudge towards them. These narratives are rehabilitative at one more trajectory. By narrating her uneasy relation with Devon and Mr. Potter, Kincaid achieves her agency cognitively. By placing the narrator as an insider in the family drama, she also achieves agency physically.

My Brother and *Mr. Potter* also carry observations, which reflect chilling accuracy of life experiences. This accuracy challenges and deflects the colonial gaze, which falls in Antigua and its subjects. Further, Kincaid elevates herself to the role of chronicler who has the difficult business of sketching the history of the nation by recording her family lore. Devon and Mr. Potter become representative figures who articulate and fail to articulate at once their own inability to gain self awareness as they are the victims of the legacy of colonization.

Kincaid also gives us a comic undertone in portraying the characters of Devon and Mr. Potter. This comic tone

indicates the narrator's urge to become liberal and individualistic. It also marks her efforts to come to terms with her rage – the rage against the conditions in Antigua, which create lives like that of Devon and Mr. Potter. It also provides a mask for her to cover the ironic barbs, which she uses to expose their insensitivity, ignorance, and irresponsibility along with their helplessness.

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