

THESIS

FINDING THE OPPRESSOR OUT: CONSTRUCTIONS OF COLONIAL
CLASSROOMS IN JAMAICA KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN* AND PATRICK
CHAMOISEAU'S *SCHOOL DAYS*

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ABSTRACT

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Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and Patrick Chamoiseau's *School Days* critique the colonial education system as well as construct many ways in which the protagonists interact with that system at the psychological level. The colonial school acts as a physical and cultural manifestation of Empire, a catalyst for the protagonist's development, and a site for mediating relationships with peers and family members. The texts simultaneously construct the colonial education system and challenge its imperial foundation. The first two chapters of this thesis aim to study how the emerging narrative voices of Annie John and the little boy develop in relation to, and in resistance of, the colonial school system. The final chapter discusses the different approaches Kincaid and Chamoiseau utilize to appropriate the language and literature of the colonizers.

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INTRODUCTION

FINDING THE OPPRESSOR OUT: CONSTRUCTIONS OF COLONIAL CLASSROOMS IN JAMAICA KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN* AND PATRICK CHAMOISEAU'S *SCHOOL DAYS*

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. Their discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis.
(Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*)

Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and Patrick Chamoiseau's *School Days* are both postcolonial narratives telling the story of young children coming of age in the Caribbean. *Annie John* takes place on the island of Antigua, a former British colony, and *School Days* takes place in Martinique, an overseas department of France. As such, Kincaid represents a voice of the Anglo-Caribbean, and Chamoiseau represents a voice of the Franco-Caribbean. In both narratives the young child's encounter with the colonial school system provides interesting places in which to study how the child's development is impacted and influenced by the school experience. More importantly, both texts reveal two protagonists who "find the oppressor out," and by extension these texts engage in critical dialogue with the imperial ideologies manifested in the colonial classroom setting and experience.

Both *Annie John* and *School Days* can be classified as postcolonial *Bildungsromans* which are interested in critiquing colonial education systems. A *Bildungsroman* can be defined as a coming of age story which profiles a protagonist who goes through a process of acculturation and attains harmony with the surrounding society (Karafilis 63). Karafilis states that, as critics, “. . . we are interested in how texts negotiate the development/education of their protagonists, and how these protagonists negotiate themselves in a larger context” (63). In this thesis, the role of the colonial classroom will be studied for the manner in which it educates these protagonists as well as the way it impacts their ability, or lack thereof, to find their place in a larger society. Coming of age texts vary broadly by culture, but for comparison reasons, it may be useful to generalize a few areas of development that can be readily found including: achieving new and mature relations with peers, accepting one’s body and use of body, achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults, forming a system of ethics and set of values, desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior, preparing for marriage and family life, preparing for an adult vocation, and achieving a masculine or feminine social role. This list is not exhaustive or entirely inclusive, however, these are examples of developmental tasks which are ritualized and socially constructed behaviors and activities. These coming of age developmental tasks intersect with postcolonial concerns such as stereotyping, identity development, hybridity, language appropriation, mimicry, borderline conditions, and the psychological impact of encountering the colonizer.

The colonial school systems constructed in *Annie John* and *School Days* represent an apparatus of colonial discourse and imperial ideologies. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the way in which colonized subjects are taught reveals that

“Education is thus a conquest of another kind of territory – it is the foundation of colonialist power and consolidates this power through legal and administrative apparatuses” (*Post-Colonial* 425). The colonial school system is an arm of the governing nation and is established to perpetuate the power structures of that colonizing relationship, promote its educational agenda and curriculum, and enforce allegiance to the mother country (Smith 347). Furthermore, much is at stake when the colonial education system seeks to promote the colonizer’s welfare. Altbach argues, “Colonial powers seldom set up adequate education facilities in their colonies and immediately limited educational opportunity, and, in a sense, hindered modernization” (453). According to Altbach, these limited educational opportunities served as the foundation for providing an administrative cadre for the colonizer rather than promoting a socially aware and/or technically educated population in the colony (453). The result is an education system which does not fulfill the needs of the colonized subject. This misalignment in the education system, then, further perpetuates the colonizing relationship to the benefit of the colonizer and at the cost of the colonized.

In positioning a Western focused education system in the colonies, the colonizer simultaneously displaces native education. Kincaid writes in *A Small Place*,

. . . [you colonizers] might feel that you had understood the meaning of the Age of Enlightenment . . . you loved knowledge, and wherever you went you made sure to build a school, a library (yes, and in both these places you distorted or erased my history and glorified your own). (36)

Frantz Fanon also addresses this displacement of native knowledge in writing, “[The Negro’s] metaphysics . . . his customs and the sources on which they were based, were

wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him” (110). In both Kincaid and Fanon’s point of view, native knowledge is not properly acknowledged or accredited when the Western education system displaces, misunderstands, and alters it. Freire also addresses such a move as this when he explains that education is “. . . a certain theory of knowledge going into practice, a political and aesthetic act” (Shor and Freire 119). Education, then, is knowledge acting as politics. In the case of the colonial education system, Western knowledge acts as colonial discourse.

Frantz Fanon’s work *Black Skin White Masks* provides a useful framework for understanding the psychological impact of a colonized subject encountering the colonial school. Fanon writes of the initial encounter, “A normal Negro child having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world” (143). This concept of becoming abnormal on contact with the white world stems from the trauma of the colonized subject encountering the entire European culture and model of civilization which becomes the new “normal” for the child and supplants his family system. By extension, encountering the Western education system has the effect of making the colonized subject feel abnormal. In addition, through accessing literature and various forms of media, Fanon describes the way in which the colonized subject learns that all things evil and bad are “. . . always symbolized by Negroes or Indians . . .” (146). The colonized subject, then, learns that he is in danger of these Negroes or Indians. Taken one step further, “. . . the Antillean man does not think of himself as an Antillean. The Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man” (Fanon 148). In the colonial school system, then, the child

rejects his identity in order to become like a white man, for “The goal of his behavior will be The Other . . . for the Other alone can give him worth” (154).

Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* and Patrick Chamoiseau’s *School Days* critique the colonial education system as well as construct many ways in which the protagonists interact with that system at the psychological level. The colonial school acts as a physical and cultural manifestation of Empire, a catalyst for the protagonist’s development, and a site for mediating relationships with peers and family members. The texts simultaneously construct the colonial education system and challenge its imperial foundation. Although both texts foreground similar education related themes, Kincaid and Chamoiseau operate in two very different modes in order to conduct this challenge. Kincaid’s text and narrative strategies aim to dismantle authority and fixed, stable meanings. Chamoiseau, on the other hand, creates binaries between French and Creole at the narrative level while attempting to construct Creoleness at the aesthetic level. The first two chapters of this thesis aim to study how the emerging narrative voices of Annie John and the little boy develop in relation to, and in resistance of, the colonial school system. The final chapter will discuss the different approaches Kincaid and Chamoiseau utilize to appropriate the language and literature of the colonizers. Freire writes, “In problem posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (*Pedagogy* 83). By depicting this “reality in transformation” in their texts, Kincaid and Chamoiseau prevail as voices whom the colonial education system could not suppress.

AN EMERGING NARRATIVE VOICE AND THE COLONIAL CLASSROOM:

JAMAICA KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN*

“One reason I changed my name is because when I started to write I didn't want anyone I knew to know I was writing, because I knew – and I was not wrong – that they would laugh at me, they would say that I was a daughter of a vain woman attempting doing this terrible thing.” (Interview with Jamaica Kincaid, *Writing Across Worlds* 85)

Annie John by Jamaica Kincaid is the story of a young girl coming of age in Antigua. Developing an identity and understanding her relationship with her mother are significant aspects of Annie John's maturation as she continues her schooling and establishes friendships. *Annie John* can also be read as an autobiographical narrative of Kincaid's emergence as a writer out of a colonial classroom setting. When read in this manner, the text offers interesting places in which Kincaid utilizes the point of view of her character Annie John, or her childhood self, to construct an emerging and developing autobiographical narrative voice. By exploring Annie John's, or Kincaid's, emergence as a story teller and narrative voice in the colonial classroom, this chapter aims to examine Kincaid's autobiographical poetics and the ways in which these interact with the depiction of a colonial school and Annie John's development into a young adult. Notably, this development is both contextualized and influenced by her experiences in the British colonial classroom on a multitude of levels including the ways in which the school acts as physical extension of British imperial ideologies, a catalyst for internal

changes in *Annie John*, a barrier between Annie John and her mother, and a gathering ground for Annie John's peer group.

In order to navigate the study of autobiography and postcolonial theorizing, the critical work of Sandra Pouchet Paquet, Nancy Miller, and Homi Bhabha are helpful in constructing a framework for understanding how *Annie John*, being read as both an autobiographical narrative and example of a postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, challenges fixed meanings. The ideas presented here will also be utilized in the next chapter when Chamoiseau's autobiographical poetics are discussed; therefore, I will reference how both texts relate to these ideas before focusing on *Annie John* for the remainder of this chapter. In *Caribbean Autobiography*, Paquet discusses the relationship between the individual voice and a larger community such as the Caribbean. While Paquet's work focuses primarily on Anglo-Caribbean autobiography, some of the concepts can be considered in regard to *School Days*. For example, Paquet states "Autobiography constructs multiple spaces where the private and the personal collapse into projections of a public space, where the individual is represented within the context of mutuality and commonality" (4-5). In the case of autobiographical voices emerging in a classroom this is certainly the case. These voices are developing in a public classroom space as well as performing in a classroom community made up of peers and teachers. However, rather than a collapsing of public and private, I would argue that the passages in *Annie John* foreground the dynamic relationship between individual autobiographic voice, text, and community as will be evidenced in a reading of Annie John's autobiographical essay. Paquet's study also makes the effort to "... determine how an individual autobiographical act is approached and evaluated as a culture building exercise that

engages self and collective identities” (5). How Kincaid and Chamoiseau write the self in relation to the surrounding culture is arguably a place where the writers diverge significantly as will be discussed. Kincaid prefers to maintain that her writing acts are simply her own while Chamoiseau aligns his work with the *Creolité* movement. Regardless, both writers produce autobiographical texts which mark cultural differences and engage in acting as a voice of the Caribbean community.

In *Getting Personal*, Nancy Miller moves beyond the relationship between voice and community by attempting to define and discuss personal criticism and its role in literary theory, or more specifically autobiography as cultural criticism. Miller states, “. . . getting personal in criticism typically involves a deliberate move towards self-figuration,” but she also warns of the dangers of identity politics and the crisis over representativity (1). Miller writes, “Indeed, one of the reasons for the current proliferation of autobiographical criticism may well be the effects of a crisis over that representativity: an anxiety over speaking *as* and speaking *for*, doubling the postmodern crisis of representation that has been so repetitively diagnosed” (20). In Kincaid and Chamoiseau’s work one can see how the authors handle this question of representation differently. While Miller draws heavily on feminist discourse and texts to argue her points, her statement that “. . . the personal is also the theoretical: the personal is part of theory’s material” has potential impact in any area of cultural studies including postcolonial studies (21). Miller’s work helps to navigate the nebulous boundaries between theory and autobiographical narratives.

In addition to Miller and Paquet, Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* also addresses the relationship between the poetics of the self in relation to postcolonial theory

and themes embedded in transnational literature. Bhabha writes, “. . . [cultures of postcolonial *contra-modernity*] also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to ‘translate,’ and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity” (“Locations of Culture” 6). As postcolonial writers, Kincaid and Chamoiseau are both a part of this move towards reinscribing the social imaginary, and in utilizing Miller’s lens, this reinscription is conducted in the process of self-figuring found in these autobiographical narratives. Bhabha also utilizes the phrase “being in the ‘beyond’” to describe “. . . a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*” (“Locations of Culture” 7). Autobiographical work especially constructs this space of “being in the ‘beyond’” via a “revisionary time” in the way that time is conflated. The past is in the present for the author and the reader, and our “presence” is by its own nature a part of the future or the revisionary time and space. Bhabha goes on to describe this as “‘presencing’ . . . because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of the extra-territorial and crosscultural initiations” (“Locations of Culture” 9). Bridging past, present, and future in autobiography is only one element of the power of the genre in a postcolonial context. Bhabha quotes the work of Emmanuel Levinas in seeing “the ‘art-magic’ of the contemporary novel lies in its way of ‘seeing inwardness from the outside’” (“Locations of Culture” 16). In relationship to contemporary autobiographical narratives, this concept can be seen as the “art-magic” of seeing an author constructing the self in a way that allows for seeing the self’s inwardness from the outside. This aesthetic positioning of autobiographical poetics in the realm of

postcolonial politics and theorizing can be powerful when constructing the self and its inwardness is also a way of constructing an act of writing back to empire as evidenced in *Annie John* and *School Days*.

Kincaid's body of writing as a whole defies broad categorization, and this includes the categorization of her work as autobiographical narrative or fiction. Although *Annie John* was published as a work of fiction, here I will discuss the evidence existing for the ways in which the text can be read as an autobiographical narrative. Lang-Peralta states, "[Kincaid] crosses borders to move to the US, and she crosses traditional boundaries of genres to describe her experiences: autobiography blends into fiction, but she admits that all her fiction is based on reality, yet changed. She rejects realism and opts for experimental literature that expresses her unique perspective" (8). Kincaid's autobiographical narratives, then, reflect her experiences crossing multiple national borders. To further complicate the genre of fiction or autobiography, Kincaid responds to a question regarding the autobiographical nature of *Annie John*, in an oft cited interview with Selwyn R. Cudjoe, "The feelings in it are autobiographical, yes. I didn't want to say it was autobiographical because I felt that that would be somehow admitting something about myself, but it is, and so that's that" (220). Here, Kincaid admits to the autobiographical nature of *Annie John* while exposing her reservations for admitting too much about herself. Interestingly, Kincaid points to the truth behind Annie John's feelings rather than actual events. This is important to consider when Annie John's feelings regarding her experiences are exposed in the text, especially in response to her classroom interactions. It follows, then, that how Annie John feels in the classroom is representative of how Kincaid felt during her own youth. In Kincaid's most admittedly

autobiographical novel, *My Brother*, she flaunts the tension between truth and fiction. Kincaid's brother asks if he is the child that the mother figure in one of Kincaid's novels is attempting to abort, and Kincaid's response is ". . . I laughed a great big Ha! Ha! And then said no, the book he read is a 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 my reply" (174). This response discloses how autobiographical work straddles both fiction and nonfiction spheres, draws on both elements, and exposes both categories and the unstable ideas they present to the reader. Most importantly, Kincaid's words taken together reveal an author who is highly aware of the porous and malleable nature of autobiographical writing and utilizes this in her work. Interestingly, Kincaid's full disclosure in *My Brother* is very different from her reservations regarding *Annie John*. This exposes an autobiographical narrator who is suspect and challenges the very foundation that *Annie John*, or any text, can or even should construct fixed meanings. The result is that the text itself is ambiguous and contradictory in the manner it disrupts the notion that any stable meanings can be found in the narrative. Furthermore, not only should Kincaid be questioned, so should her narrator Annie John as we will discuss.

As seen in the previous example with *My Brother*, the manner in which Kincaid utilizes autobiographical poetics must be read across texts. Louise Bernard details this element in her work, "Countermemory and Return: Reclamation of the (Postmodern) Self in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *My Brother*." Bernard writes, "Kincaid's trademark emphasis on textuality, the writing and rewriting of tropic events drawn from her own experience, seems to culminate in a bold move to disrupt and thus strip away any simple definitions of generic categories" (2). The rewriting of events

across different texts acts as a map for the reader to determine which autobiographical events in Kincaid's life were narrated in her novels. For example, in *My Brother* Kincaid writes of a neighbor named Charlotte dying in her mother's arms. This same story is told in the opening chapter of *Annie John*, and the neighbor in this text is also named Charlotte. In *My Brother*, Kincaid addresses her grandparent's heritage, ". . . [my grandmother], a Carib Indian of Dominica . . . [my grandfather], part Scot, Part African, of Antigua a policeman who emigrated to Dominica" which informs the plot of *Autobiography of My Mother* and represents the grandmother figure who visits Annie John during her illness (72). *My Brother* also tells the story of Kincaid stealing novels from the library which her narrator Annie John also does. Bernard states, "It is the taxonomic ordering of this self inventory and the connections that emerge between her fictional and non-fictional voices that Kincaid pushes against the boundaries of autobiography of memoir" (3). Bernard draws the conclusion that this piecing together, or intertextuality, allows for what Holquist defines *countermemory* as – "an interrogation of 'the gaps that always exist between what is told and the telling of it'" (3). In Kincaid's body of work, the telling of any one narrative is retold, reformulated, rewritten, and recontextualized as seen in the stories of the attempted abortion and Charlotte's death being placed in multiple narratives. Kincaid's use of the pronoun "I" and first person narration in her many texts collapses multiple voices, characters, and personalities across these texts. The voice of Annie John is linked to her mother, the narrator of Mr. Potter, Xuela, Lucy and so on. "In proposing a narrative of ambiguity (a destabilization of historical truth) [Kincaid] must emphasize the constructed [reality or strategic truth-telling

of the autobiographical-self-representational project,” Bernard writes (5). This destabilization is echoed throughout *Annie John* as well.

If Kincaid’s writing is indeed autobiographical and personal, several discourses become interesting in the manner in which they intersect and reflect one another. In Kincaid’s interview with Cudjoe, he asks if Kincaid fits into the mold of feminist discourse explaining, “. . . the nature of feminist discourse is intensely personal, a very interior kind of writing, and your writing does seem to fit into that mold” (222). Kincaid’s admits to the bridge in thought, but expounds that her writing is personal and grounded in her mother “. . . because the fertile soil of my creative life is my mother” (Cudjoe 222). Kincaid’s writing about the mother-daughter relationship is then also a narrative of her poetics. As Rose-Myriam Rejouis states, “the portrayal of the mother [in Kincaid and Chamoiseau’s work] is a manifesto: because of who my mother was, I am who I am and write the way I write” (216). Furthermore, not only is *Annie John* and Kincaid’s work intensely personal, it is the intensely personal which allows for the writing and the criticism which Miller discusses. The interaction between the intensely personal autobiographical poetics and the intensely political become significant. For example, Adams writes, “In most of Kincaid’s fiction, the Caribbean mother interacts with her daughter in the manner that the mother country historically interacts with the colonial Caribbean” (3). Although I disagree with this blanket statement about the mother-daughter-mother-country relationship found in *Annie John*, it does point to an important idea. Kincaid’s mother-daughter relationship, the fertile soil of her creative life, and her autobiographical poetics, then, are also lodged in the politics of postcolonial discourse. These elements interact and reflect off of one another when Kincaid depicts

Annie John's development as a story teller and describes an act of self-writing in the colonial classroom.

The theme of storytelling emerges in the first line of the text, "For a short while, during the year I was ten, I thought only people I did not know died" (*Annie John* 3). Indeed, the first person narrative of *Annie John* hinges on what the young character senses, feels, and believes as told through the voice of an older, reflective Annie John. This opening line also demonstrates, though, that what Annie John sees, feels, and believes has changed over time and this change is documented within the narrative. For instance, Annie John observes funerals from a distance without realizing what the figures in the distance are doing. Annie John's mother informs her what the distant figures are, clarifying that funerals in the morning are usually burials of children to which Annie John responds, "Until then, I had not known that children died" (*Annie John* 4). Annie John must merge her observations of the world around her with her mother's explanations in order to make sense of life events. Later in the first chapter, Annie John emerges as a storyteller in response to the death of a girl named Nalda, ". . . I told all my friends about this death. I would take them aside individually, so I could repeat the details over and over again" (*Annie John* 6). Annie John's story creates a ripple, and her friends relay to her their own experiences with death. The story of death becomes communal, and Annie John's understanding is connected with this community of storytellers. However, Annie John desires the physical confrontation with a dead person after she realizes that she cannot imagine Miss Charlotte, someone whom she knows well, as anything but alive. Annie John attends the funeral of a young girl whom she had seen once before, and organizes her interpretation of her dead body in response to, "I once had heard someone

say about another dead person that it was as if the dead person was asleep" (*Annie John* 11). This idea is dismissed and replaced by the idea that looking at the dead girl was more like looking through the View Master she had recently received from her parents, but it "wasn't working properly" (*Annie John* 11). Viewing the body of the dead girl propels Annie John into a fantasy of her own death. The fantasy is told in the imagined scene of her father becoming overwhelmed with grief and becoming unable to build a coffin. Annie John's attempt to understand death is intrinsically intertwined with her mother's information, the piecing together of different scraps of stories, the viewing of a dead girl's body, and ultimately in her creation of a fantasy. Annie John is telling the story of her own emerging narrative voice and the opening chapter sets up the tension that follows between the mother's authority as a storyteller and Annie John's materialization as one as well.

Annie John's development as a story teller is strongly influenced by her mother's presence as well as her school experiences. While on school holidays, Annie John "spent the day following my mother around and observing the way she did everything" (*Annie John* 15). Annie John goes to the grocers and looks at loaves of bread, is taken to the market where she learns about crabs and christophine, and, at home, helps her mother prepare foods and wash laundry. Annie John's world is grounded in the physical when she is with her mother who hardly ever stays still. The mother figure as the creator of narrative is best displayed by the unpacking of a trunk containing relics of Annie John's life. ". . . as she held each thing in her hand she would tell me a story about myself. Sometimes I knew the story first hand . . . sometimes what she told me had happened when I was too young to know anything; and sometimes it happened before I was even

born" (*Annie John* 21). These stories contextualize Annie John's life, and she is even able to predict "exactly what [my mother] would say" because they had been repeated so often (*Annie John* 22). These bouts of storytelling take place in the home while Annie John leans against her mother and sniffs at her neck, before Annie John learns to become a young lady according to her mother's wishes which are heavily influenced by British cultural standards.

When Annie John attends a new school, Kincaid constructs interesting passages in which Annie John composes an autobiographical essay. These passages provide an interesting look at Kincaid's ambiguous yet critical analysis of the British colonial education she received. On Annie John's first day, her teacher assigns the task of spending ". . . the morning in contemplation and reflection and writing something she described as an 'autobiographical essay'" (*Annie John* 38). The newness of the school is so profound to Annie John that she internalizes it as "Everything about me was so new . . . and I must have put my feet down as if I weren't sure the ground was solid" (*Annie John* 34-35). This new school is beginning to shape a new identity for Annie John, a place in which even the physics of walking on the ground become uncertain. In addition, the girls of Annie John's school all wear the same uniform and this uniformity, and conformity, makes her doubt if she will ever be able to discern one from another (*Annie John* 35). The British colonial school is so strange that Annie John feels dizzy and disoriented from the experience, "My palms were wet, and quite a few times the ground felt as if it were seesawing under my feet . . ." (*Annie John* 36). What becomes quite evident is the manner in which the indoctrination into a new school acts as a catalyst for change in Annie John's psychology. Annie John is revealing a physical response to the stress of

this abrupt change. While sitting in this unfamiliar space and in this uncertain psychological and physiological state, Annie John will formulate her autobiographical essay.

Annie John's disorientation, however, is not so overwhelming that she is unable to take a look around to point out the English headmistress and teachers. After naming teachers she can identify, Annie John states of the unfamiliar ones, "Since they were teachers, I was sure it wouldn't be long before, because of some misunderstanding, they would be thorns in my side" (*Annie John* 37). This statement of inevitable conflict contrasts strongly with Annie John's description of the teacher who assigns her the autobiographical essay, Miss Nelson. Of Miss Nelson, Annie John states, "I knew [writing the autobiographical essay] would please Miss Nelson, and, my own selfish interest aside, I liked so much the way she wore her ironed hair and long-sleeved blouse and box-pleated skirt that I wanted to please her" (39). In this contrast Kincaid has deliberately juxtaposed oppositional ideas regarding Annie John in the classroom. Annie John is eager to please, but simultaneously knows she will make enemies of her teachers. This classroom, the place where Annie John will write her essay, is a place for both conflict and the desire to please.

The assignment from Miss Nelson is loaded with colonial ideologies, which Kincaid draws attention to with the language of contemplation and reflection. "Of course, in most books all the good people were always contemplating and reflecting before they did anything. Perhaps in [Miss Nelson's] mind's eye she could see our futures, and against, all predictions, we turned out to be good people" (*Annie John* 38-39). In referring to most books, Kincaid is referring to British literature and the

definitions of good found within British ideologies. This goodness contrasts with the prediction, or stereotype that the girls are more likely to prove themselves as “bad.” The portrayal of this assignment represents what Peter Hulme describes as *stereotypical dualism* in which a stereotype is split into two opposing elements (Hall 215-216). “The world is first divided, symbolically, into good-bad, us-them . . . All the other, many differences between and within these two halves are collapsed, simplified – i.e. stereotyped” (Hall 216). The characters found in British books are “good” while the ‘Others’, Annie John and her classmates, are “bad”, or more importantly, in need of colonial education. This splitting is an important element to consider when Annie John performs the writing of her assignment with the intent of pleasing her teacher and simultaneously hoping to align herself with the symbolic order of “good.” Annie John is unable to accept herself as whole, for she has internalized the dualism.

Before Kincaid presents Annie John’s essay to readers, the text incorporates multiple layers of British cultural artifacts. First, while the girls are misbehaving and pinching one another’s bottoms, Miss Nelson is spied reading “an elaborately illustrated edition of *The Tempest*” (*Annie John* 39). Annie John describes her joy in writing in a new notebook that no longer possesses the image “. . . of a wrinkled-up old woman wearing a crown on her head and a neckful and armfuls of diamonds and pearls” (*Annie John* 40). In addition, each girl must read her composition aloud to the class. The compositions preceding Annie John’s essay list British cultural markers such as Lady Baden-Powell, Girl Guides, Canada, and Redonda. As a result, while writing in the classroom, Annie John’s surroundings are saturated with British cultural artifacts in the literary texts around her, the very notebook with which she composes, and in the writing

of her peers. These powerful signs of colonial indoctrination precede Annie John's autobiographical essay and inform a close analysis of her writing.

Yet again, however, we are interrupted from reading about Annie John's essay when Kincaid first inserts the response from Annie John's audience in the narrative. Initially, Annie John begins to read her essay with a shaky voice before the sound of her own voice acts as "a calming potion" to her (*Annie John* 41). Annie John describes the response from the group in the following way,

I thought I was imagining the upturned faces on which were looks of adoration, but I was not; I thought I was imagining, too, some eyes brimming over with tears, but again I was not. Miss Nelson said that she would like to borrow what I had written to read for herself, and that it would be placed on the shelf with the books that made up our own class library, so that it would be available to any girl who wanted to read it. (*Annie John* 41)

It is important to pay close attention to how Annie John has pleased her classmates and her teacher. Annie John's essay has fallen on the "good" side of the stereotypical dualism. Annie John has performed in a way that earns her a place in the library. This feat is accomplished by supposedly contemplating and reflecting appropriately and according to the expectations of the assignment. In addition, this success inspires rather emotional responses to her work. Annie John's classmates adore her and are brought to tears because of her "goodness." In returning to Paquet's ideas of community, Annie John has become a part of this community but the community building act of writing is based on the expectations of the teacher, not on Annie John's individual, unique voice. The autobiographical essay has matched the expectations of the classroom assignment

with one major deviation of which we will learn when Kincaid finally inserts the autobiographical essay.

The autobiography retells the story of Annie John's trip to Rat Island with her mother where she bathes nude in order to treat a medical condition. Annie John describes the fear of swimming she has as well as her anxiety in thinking her mother has disappeared. Annie John has recurring nightmares about this separation and describes her mother's response to them as, "My mother became instantly distressed; tears came to her eyes, and, taking me in her arms, she told me all the same things she had told me on the day at the sea and this time the memory of the dark time when I felt I would never see her again did not come back to haunt me" (*Annie John* 44-45). On close examination of the form, this autobiographical essay follows a traditional narrative arc. The audience is introduced to the main characters and setting at the outset. Conflict is introduced with the disappearance of the mother. The conflict is appropriately, and sentimentally, resolved at the end of the essay. This portrayal of a traditional narrative arc appears glaringly against the fragmented, non-linear narrative of the text *Annie John*. At this point, Bhabha's notions of *unhomeliness* and reinscribing the social imaginary become evident. Kincaid sets up Annie John's essay in a manner which disrupts and rejects any fixed meaning in both Annie John's essay and the text as a whole by disclosing Annie John's unreliability. Annie John is manipulative and so is the narrative. This rejection of fixed meanings projects the estranging sense which Bhabha discusses, a sense that something is not quite right with the narrative. While Annie John is willing to please and manipulate, Kincaid exposes Annie John's internal motivation and dismantles the idea that a static reality exists.

Annie John's essay also contains multiple signs of internalizing the 'Other' at work, or more specifically, internalizing how to see the 'Other'. For example, Annie John's relationship with her mother is depicted as paradisiacal and idealized. Annie John writes,

When we swam around in this way, I would think how much we were like the pictures of sea mammals I had seen, my mother and I, naked in the sea water . . . I would place my ear against her neck, and it was as if I were listening to a giant shell, for all the sounds around me – the sea, the winds, the birds screeching – would seem as if they came from inside her . . .” (*Annie John* 42-43)

This passage contains several key themes of the idealization of the 'Other' which marks the discourse of “the West and the Rest” including an Earthly Paradise, the simple life, and “people living in a pure state of Nature” (Hall 209). Annie John's self writing exhibits the gaze of the Westerner. However, Kincaid also exhibits elements of the reversals of this idealization. This reversal is described by Hall: “It as as if everything which Europeans represented as enticing and enticing about the natives could also be used to represent the exact opposite their barbarous and depraved character” (Hall 213). Annie John and her mother's nudity is one such example of this. Although the trip is meant to be medicinal and therefore justifies the nudity, this nakedness also represents the interpretation of barbarous sexuality and lack of civil code which the Western gaze utilizes against non-Westerners. In contrast, Miss Nelson sits in her classroom with her proper ironed hair, blouse, and skirt. Miss Nelson exhibits the image which Annie John admires.

Kincaid's critique perhaps becomes most evident when Annie John confesses to altering the end of her essay. Annie John explains,

I didn't exactly tell a lie about the last part. That was just what would have happened in the old days. But actually the past year saw me launched into young-ladyness, and when I told my mother of my dream – my nightmare really – I was greeted with a turned back and a warning against eating certain kinds of fruit in an unripe state just before going to bed. I placed the old days' version before my classmates because, I thought, I couldn't bear to show my mother in a bad light before people who hardly knew her. But the real truth was that I couldn't bear to have anyone see how deep in disfavor I was with my mother. (*Annie John* 45)

This paragraph reveals a multitude of issues. Most notable are the unfixed and unstable notions of truth and reality. According to Annie John, her happy ending is not necessarily a lie. Instead, it is a recreation of what could have been, might have been, or should have been in Annie John's mind. Interestingly, Kincaid inserts the "truth" with the real version of Annie John's experience of her mother turning her back on her. The reader is exposed to two versions of a narrative as well as Kincaid's poetics of disrupting one with the other. Towards the end of this same paragraph we are exposed to what Annie John believes to be the truth behind her motivation, because "she thought" she couldn't show her mother in a bad light. Again, Kincaid interjects with another statement, "But the real truth was," describing the selfish motivation of Annie John not wanting her classmates to see her in disfavor with her mother. Quickly, we move from two versions of a narrative to multiple beliefs about these versions of the narrative. Kincaid draws attention to the project of self-writing. Instead of representing the act of

“contemplation and reflection,” the autobiographical essay in *Annie John* constructs multi-faceted and questionable “truth” telling in an autobiographical narrative. The genre itself is open and exposed as a fabrication of truth telling and selective admissions and omissions. Annie John chooses to select material to please her teacher and her classmates. Meanwhile, Kincaid exposes Annie John’s internal grappling over how to write about her own experience. The two motivations, however, are suspect in much the same way Annie John’s manipulation of events is suspect. The suspicion of truth is the ultimate breakdown of the relationship between reader and text. Textuality becomes unstable and unreliable. For the reader this is a crucial moment in the text, for it simultaneously represents Annie John as a colonized subject composing in a colonial classroom as well as how Kincaid, the adult autobiographical writer, creatively and imaginatively writes the scene as a form of resistance and a dismantling of fixed meanings.

Interestingly, Annie John’s essay serves as a very important transition point in the text now that her status as a story teller and narrator are fully formed, though questionably unreliable. The power of this storytelling status is explained by Yeoh’s statement, “Colonial reality can be revised through the new associations that are constantly forming through Annie’s imagination” (104). More importantly, the revision of colonial reality takes place as Annie John continues to mature into a young woman and interacts with the colonial school. As such, Annie John’s developing identity is intertwined and influenced by her experience with a colonial classroom. Also of interest to this discussion are the ways in which the text operates as an antithesis of the *Bildungsroman* as argued by Karafilis in “Revisions of the ‘Bildungsroman’ in Sandra

Cisneros's 'The House on Mango Street' and Jamaica Kincaid's 'Annie John.'" In many ways, *Annie John* depicts a young girl who resists acculturation, and instead of attaining harmony with her surrounding society, must flee her community in order to achieve adulthood. Kincaid constructs many passages involving the classroom which progressively show Annie John's developing narrative voice and attempts at understanding the world she finds herself in.

After reading her autobiographical essay to her class and receiving accolades for that performance, Annie John's position in the classroom changes drastically and becomes "... just the opposite of [her] first morning" (*Annie John* 48). Annie John is given the responsibility of supervising the class in the teacher's absence and becomes quite popular. However, with her new position of leadership, Annie John's manipulative and contradictory traits become even more evident. When dealing with her classmates, Annie John states, "... seeing my old, frail self in a girl, I would defend her; sometimes, seeing my old frail self in a girl, I would be heartless and cruel. It all went over quite well, and I became very popular" (*Annie John* 49). Annie John utilizes her popularity and responsibility for the class as a means of maintaining her leadership position. Smith describes this leadership as indoctrinating Annie John "... into participating in a system of benefits and punishments because of the reward of power" that draws her into the colonial apparatus (350). However, Kincaid's trademark ambiguous style, reveals an Annie John who does not fully enter into this apparatus. For example, Annie John describes her own notoriety for "doing forbidden things" as well as the setting of some "invisible standard" in determining popularity (*Annie John* 49). Annie John's leadership is based on her ability to both please her teachers academically and utilize her resistant

and manipulative social behavior for her own benefit. Again, Kincaid has constructed a situation in which Annie John is both pleasing to and threatening to her teachers which enacts Bhabha's notion of *menacing*.

Along with academic and social development, Annie John and her peers are developing physically. Towards the end of chapter three, Annie John and her friends distance themselves from the school yard and sit among old trees and tombstones discussing their changing bodies. Away from the school, Annie John thinks, "What perfection we found in each other, sitting on these tombstones of long-dead people who had been the masters of our ancestors!" (*Annie John* 50). This setting is notable for many reasons. First, the need for the girls to identify with one another's changing bodies away from the colonial school is significant. The girls are physically separating themselves from the school which encourages and acknowledges only scholastic development. The tombstones, however, embody the historical trauma of slavery. The girls are reaching adolescence and physically transitioning into adulthood within a physical and ideological space dominated by British imperial ideologies. The girls seek out a peripheral space, or borderland, in order to escape the oppressive British discourse and embrace their changing bodies. Another example of this use of a borderland at work occurs when Annie John begins to menstruate. She is sent to school by her mother who "... brushed aside [Annie John's] complaints and said that it was all to be expected" (*Annie John* 51). The symbolic event signifying Annie John's entrance into young womanhood is overshadowed by her mother's wishes that she go to school. During class, however, Annie John faints after bringing the image of herself sitting in her own blood to mind. The power of Annie John's imagination is once more at work. Physically, Annie John's

body resists the classroom setting when she involuntarily faints. Annie John, however, returns to the tombstones with her friends to describe her menstruating experience. The friends rally to Annie John, “. . . offering shoulders on which to lean, laps in which to rest my weary aching head, and kisses that really did soothe” (*Annie John* 52). Annie John’s menstruation, and symbolic entry into womanhood as a colonized subject, is contextualized by the mother’s lack of interest and the attempt to simply return to the colonial school as though nothing about Annie John has changed. In Kincaid’s rendering of the scene, however, and the plot that follows, everything has changed. Annie John’s entrance into womanhood changes the way she sees herself as a colonized subject as well as how she sees her relationship with her mother as evidenced when Annie John is sent home after fainting. Kincaid writes, “When I got home, my mother came toward me . . . concern written on her face. My whole mouth filled up with a bitter taste, for I could not understand how she could be so beautiful even though I no longer loved her” (*Annie John* 53).

At this point in the text, Kincaid inserts the narrative about Annie John’s friendship with the Red Girl which actually precedes the beginning of Annie John’s menstruation. What is noteworthy about this rupture of the linear pattern Kincaid has thus far created is the manner in which Kincaid foregrounds Annie John’s ability to lie. The Red Girl embodies everything unladylike and unhygienic which Annie John’s mother despises, “She took a bath only once a week . . . she didn’t like to bathe, and her mother didn’t force her. She changed her dress once a week for the same reason. She preferred to wear a dress until it just couldn’t be worn anymore . . . She didn’t like to comb her hair . . .” (*Annie John* 57). Clearly, Annie John’s friendship with the Red Girl

is an act of resistance to her own mother. In addition, this friendship acts as a catalyst for Annie John's "... new series of betrayals of people and things I would have sworn only minutes before to die for" (*Annie John* 59). In order to deceive her mother to find time for her friendship with the Red Girl, Annie John falsifies her school responsibilities and lies.

I now quite regularly had to observe a field or something for drawing class; collect specimens of leaves, flowers, or whole plants for botany class; gather specimens of rocks for geography class. In other words, my untruthfulness apparatus was now in full gear. My mother, keeping the usual close tabs, marveled at my industriousness and ambition. (*Annie John* 63)

Annie John's fabrications are based on the manipulation of her mother's support of her education, "The question was framed in just the way I knew it would appeal to her, so eager was she to contribute to my scholarship" (*Annie John* 62). Annie John manipulates the ideological hold the British education system has over her mother in order to fulfill her own act of resistance against her domineering mother. At a textual level, however, Annie John's reliability as a narrator is again suspect. Annie John and the text's "untruthfulness apparatus" are now also in full gear. However, Annie John's mother learns of the deceit and soon Annie John never sees the Red Girl again. Ultimately, Annie John is able to summon her "own warm, soft, and newly acquired treacherous voice" in responding to her mother who utilizes the same tone (*Annie John* 70). This journey into deceit and treachery continues as the undertone of the voice of the narrator. Unlike the manipulation found in Annie John's autobiography which serves to please her

teachers and classmates, this new version of deceitfulness reveals an internal rebellion against the mother and British cultural influences.

In the opening of chapter five, Annie John is on the brink of her most overt resistance to her status as a colonized subject in the British education system; however, Antiguan life outside of the classroom seems to be going on quite peacefully. Although I will discuss Annie John's caustic re-writing of the history text in the final chapter of this thesis, there are other noteworthy elements at work in this chapter. Once again, Annie John has been rewarded for her book learning and is made prefect of her class. According to Annie John, "What a mistake the prefect part had been, for I was among the worst-behaved in my class and did not at all believe in setting myself up as a good example" (*Annie John* 73). Annie John describes the usual morning dramas preceding the day's history lesson. Everything is normal, that is, until Annie John's mind begins to wander. The teacher, Miss Edward, is presiding over the class with the dunce cap in clear sight. The presence of the dunce cap marks mixed messages coming from the colonial classroom, "When the sun shone on it, the dunce cap was all aglitter, almost as if you were being tricked into thinking it a desirable thing to wear" (*Annie John* 75). The dominant role of the teacher in the front of the room manifests the dominance of the British education system over the native inhabitants of Antigua. The use of the dunce cap as an instrument of coercion and punishment is by extension an arm of British ideological domination. Miss Edward's utilization of a system of repetition and humiliation in teaching her students is described by Annie John, "It was Miss Edward's way to ask one of us a question the answer to which she was sure the girl did not know and then put the same question to another girl who she was sure would know the answer" (*Annie John*

75). Such a question and answer system merely reinforces the British colonial school mode of operation which insists that there is only one answer. In this chapter, Kincaid aims to dismantle this oppressive control of free thought.

In the midst of the history lesson, Annie John ponders the life of Ruth, the blonde daughter of a British missionary. Ruth usually wears the dunce cap, but “with her short yellow hair, when the dunce cap was sitting on her head she looked like a girl attending a birthday party in *The Schoolgirl’s Own Annual*” (*Annie John* 75). Here Kincaid has dismantled the stereotype that the British girl would normally preside over the Antiguan inhabitants by virtue of her colonial status and intellectual abilities. Annie John considers how Ruth might prefer to live in England “. . . where no one would remind her constantly of the terrible things her ancestors had done; perhaps she had felt even worse when her father was a missionary in Africa” (*Annie John* 76). Kincaid is challenging the notion that Ruth has any intrinsic privilege or morality based on her British heritage. Instead, Annie John imagines the burden of responsibility sitting on Ruth’s shoulders for the history of British imperialism. Kincaid writes this inversion of British imperial history:

Of course, sometimes, what with our teachers and our books, it was hard to tell on which side we really now belonged – with the masters or the slaves – for it was all history, it was all in the past, and everyone behaved differently now . . . But we, the descendants of the slaves, knew quite well what had really happened, and I was sure that if the tables had been turned we would have acted differently; I was sure that if our ancestors had gone from Africa to Europe and come upon the people living there, they would have taken a proper interest in the Europeans on

first seeing them, and said, ‘How nice,’ and then gone home to tell their friends about it. (*Annie John* 76)

In Kincaid’s reconfiguration of history through Annie John’s point of view, some interesting ideas are invoked. First, Kincaid is foregrounding the confusion Annie John feels as a colonized subject. Clearly, Annie John is still experiencing the binary of being ‘Othered’ when she acknowledges that there are two sides of this story – the British version of the masters, and the version of the enslaved native inhabitants of Antigua. More importantly, not only are there two versions of the story, Annie John recognizes that there are two historical, cultural communities with which to belong. In addition, Kincaid posits the notion that British colonization was not inherently normal, moral, or acceptable behavior. In Annie John’s point of view, her ancestors would have modeled such appropriate behavior by not colonizing Africa or Europe and simply going home. Annie John’s act of resistance to this story is to write an attack against Christopher Columbus in her history book. Annie John’s written act of resistance will be further discussed in chapter three of this thesis, but for this chapter it is important to link this written act with the incident causing Miss Edward’s extreme dislike of Annie John.

Annie John’s resistance during the history lesson is preceded by another example of behavior which upsets Miss Edward. The girls are supposed to spend Friday afternoon recesses in “. . . ladylike recreation – walks, chats about novels and poems we were reading, showing each other the new embroidery stitches we had learned to master . . .” (*Annie John* 79). Instead, most of the girls go to the edge of the school grounds and dance and sing calypso songs with bad language in it. By the end of these recesses the girls are disheveled and sweaty. At the end of such a Friday afternoon, Annie John and

her friends return to the tombstones, that familiar place for their escape from the school's academic and behavioral expectations. Sitting on the tombstones, the girls would "... sing bad songs, use forbidden words, and of course, show each other various parts of our bodies" (*Annie John* 80). Again, the girls' use of their bodies acts as a resistant force against the expectations of the teachers and classrooms. On one specific Friday afternoon, however, Miss Edward catches the girls showing off "underpants trimmed with lace and satin frills" rather than the usual bloomers (*Annie John* 81). Annie John narrates, "... there [Miss Edward] suddenly was, saying, 'What is the meaning of this?' – just the very thing someone like her would say if she came unexpectedly on something like us" (*Annie John* 81). The language of this passage is very interesting in the way Kincaid juxtaposes "someone like her" with "something like us." Miss Edward's maintains her humanness in this depiction. However, the girls become objectified and are transformed into things rather than beings. Kincaid's tone, though, is acerbic in that she adopts Miss Edward's point of view in describing "something like us." The result is a sharp look at Miss Edward's psychology of dehumanizing the girls utilizing her own domineering Western gaze. Miss Edward does not get the final word, however, when Annie John writes in her history book. Furthermore, Kincaid has the final say in the manner in which she layers resistance and disruption into these school ground scenes.

However, while Annie John can resist her colonial education, resisting her powerful mother is an entirely different matter. Annie John goes home after the *Columbus in Chains* episode believing that seeing her mother would be a relief. Instead, Annie John's mother is completely unaware of her misery. Annie John narrates "I could not believe that she couldn't see how miserable I was and so reach out a hand to comfort

me and caress my cheek, the way she usually did when she sensed that something was amiss with me” (*Annie John* 83). What is significant regarding Annie John’s frustration is that she turns to her mother for support after challenging the colonial classroom and coping with the consequences of that transgression. However, the mother’s lack of awareness reveals an emotional disconnect between the two which is in part created and magnified by Annie John’s trials at school. The mother repeatedly sends Annie John the message that school is of the utmost importance. For example, Annie John describes her mother bursting into tears when reading about Annie John’s misbehavior at school in a report card. At the end of this chapter, Annie John’s mother lies to her and feeds her breadfruit, Annie John’s least favorite food. Annie John’s mother laughs over this deceit and Annie John describes her, “When she laughed, her mouth opened to show off big, shiny, sharp, white teeth. It was as if my mother had suddenly turned into a crocodile” (*Annie John* 84). Now, we see the mother’s use of deceit against Annie John, the figure usually wielding this resistant power.

The *Columbus in Chains* episode could be read as Annie John’s greatest resistance to her colonial classroom experience. Sadly, what follows this event in chapter six is the submersion into a deep melancholy and depression when Annie John is fifteen. Annie John describes these feelings, “My unhappiness was something deep inside me, and when I closed my eyes I could even see it. It sat somewhere – maybe in my belly, maybe in my heart; I could not exactly tell – and it took the shape of a small black ball, all wrapped up in cobwebs” (*Annie John* 85). I would argue that Annie John’s depression has its roots in her frustrated ability to fully develop her identity in light of her colonized subjectivity. Annie John’s resistance to her colonial identity has been squelched at

school by her teachers as well as at home by her mother. Annie John's relationship with her mother has further deteriorated to the point that Annie John says to herself, "My mother would kill me if she got the chance. I would kill my mother if I had the courage'" (*Annie John* 89). In addition to this struggling relationship, Annie John has also advanced several levels at school and is now in class with girls two and three years older than her. Unlike the popularity Annie John flaunts in prior years at school, Annie John is now disconnected from her peers, "These girls didn't offer the camaraderie of my friends in the second form" (*Annie John* 90). Annie John's view of these girls is based on the ways in which they practice walking and swinging their hips from side to side, smooth their hair, or push their chests out. From a distance, Annie John envies these girls but soon dismisses them "For what a dull bunch they were! They had no different ideas of how to be in the world; they certainly didn't think that the world was a strange place to be caught living in" (*Annie John* 90). This last statement is very intriguing because of the way it points to how Annie John sees herself in the world. Annie John has different ideas of how to be in the world and believes that the world is a strange place to be caught in. However, Annie John expresses this in her derision of these older girls. Kincaid constructs Annie John's depression in relation to how Annie John is attempting to reconfigure her place in the world. Again, returning to Karafilis's argument of how *Annie John* is an example of an anti-*Bildungsroman* is useful. Annie John's inability to find her place in the world is evident, and as a result she pulls away from her community of peers. The desire to find a place in the world is developed at the very end of this chapter when Annie John sits on her bed swinging her feet and bumps against her mother's trunk. At this moment Annie John decides she needs her own trunk. This trunk

is a symbol of her internal desire for a move towards liberation and independence. Furthermore, with her own trunk, Annie John will be able to narrate her own story as opposed to echoing her mother's stories as established earlier in the text. When Annie John makes the request for her own trunk, her mother casts a shadow on the wall that frightens her, "For I could not be sure whether for the rest of my life I would be able to tell when it was really my mother and when it was really her shadow standing between me and the rest of the world" (*Annie John* 107). Again, the domineering figure of the mother dominates over Annie John's ability to see and be in the world.

In the following chapter, Annie John's depression and health worsen to the point that she is unable to attend school. Annie John narrates, "Days before it was decided I was not well enough to go to school, I walked around feeling weak, as if at any moment I would collapse in a heap" (*Annie John* 108). Annie John is reduced to staying in bed, and her father determines ". . . that it was all the studying I had been doing at school, that I had moved along from form to form too fast and it had taken a heavy toll" (*Annie John* 109). The doctor from England finds nothing wrong with Annie John and states that Annie John ". . . might be a little run down" (*Annie John* 110). Annie John's illness is a continuation of the psychological disconnect she is feeling from her relationships with peers, her mother, and her place in the world which was put into motion by her trials at school. As a result, Annie John's time at the colonial school has made her sick. When Annie John resurfaces from this depression and illness she does so realizing she wants to escape.

I was feeling how much I never wanted to see a boy climb a coconut tree again,
how much I never wanted to see the sun shine day in, day out again, how much I

never wanted to see my mother bent over a pot cooking me something that she felt would do me good when I ate it, how much I never wanted to feel her long, bony fingers against my cheek again, how much I never wanted to hear her voice in my ear again, how much I longed to be in a place where nobody knew a thing about me and liked me for just that reason, how much the whole world into which I was born had become an unbearable burden and I wished I could reduce it to some small thing that I could hold underwater until it died. (*Annie John* 127-128)

Annie John's self-created solution is a desire for escape from the physical, maternal, and sociopolitical world she has grown up in. Annie John's desire is to relieve herself of the "unbearable" burden of her life. This is an example of what Karafilis interprets as erasure, "Annie John practices erasure – first attempting to erase her British influences and then attempting to erase her West Indian influences" (73). Interestingly, Annie John manifests this desire in a physical manner when she returns to school. Annie John needs a new wardrobe and has a skirt cut long and wears a large hat. She exaggerates the curve of her back and stoops. "I created such a picture that apparently everyone talked about me," Annie John narrates (*Annie John* 129). In addition to her changed physical appearance, Annie John adopts a strange accent and other mannerisms such as raising her eyebrow at someone disapprovingly. The result of these changes is an Annie John who has the physical appearance and mannerisms of an old lady but is in fact a young woman with a young woman's body. This disjointed appearance reflects an identity which is neither fully formed, as in Annie John is not a mature old lady, nor fully socially conforming. Annie John's appearance creates a buzz, and Annie John describes this victory in "I could see that everything about me aroused envy and discontent, and that

made me happy – the only happiness I knew then” (*Annie John* 129). Here, Annie John is no longer a part of her peer group. As a result, Annie John finds pleasure in soliciting negative feelings from fellow classmates as she establishes her own position in the community.

Schooling once again propels Annie John into another major life change in the final chapter of the novel. Annie John is leaving Antigua to study to be a nurse in England. Annie John’s perspective is, “I did not want to go to England, I did not want to be a nurse, but I would have chosen going off to live in a cavern and keeping house for seven unruly men rather than go on with my life as it stood” (*Annie John* 130). Studying nursing in England becomes the apparatus for leaving home and the life and relationships Annie John has known. This idea is reflected on by Annie John who states,

The bitter thing about it is that [my parents] are just the same and it is I who have changed, so all the things I used to be and all the things I used to feel are as false as the teeth in my father’s head. Why, I wonder, didn’t I see the hypocrite in my mother when, over the years, she said that she loved me and could hardly live without me, while at the same time proposing and arranging separation after separation, including this one, which unbeknownst to her, *I* have arranged to be permanent? (*Annie John* 133)

Two very important beliefs come out of this passage. First, Annie John is fully aware that she has changed over the course of the narrative. With that change, Annie John has developed her ability to perceive her parents. Yet again, however, Annie John lashes out at her mother for arranging “separation after separation.” The reader must decide what these separations are. Over the course of the narrative, Annie John’s entrance into taking

classes for ladylike behavior and attending school have all been priorities for her mother and the British cultural values she subscribes to. Annie John decides to wield this power to utilize her education as the ultimate division between herself, her mother, and homeland. We are reminded that Annie John's point of view is dubious with her words, ". . . all the things I used to be and all the things I used to feel are as false as the teeth in my father's head" (*Annie John* 133). These words recast the entire narrative and once more cast a suspicious light on Annie John's perspective.

By layering multiple classroom scenes in *Annie John*, Kincaid creates a text which represents the impact the British colonial school system has on an adolescent girl in Antigua. As discussed, the school acts as a physical extension of British imperial ideologies, a catalyst for the internal changes Annie John goes through, a barrier between Annie John and her mother, and a gathering place for Annie John's peer group. While *Annie John* criticizes authority, and colonial authority in particular, it is important to pause and clarify that Kincaid is herself uncomfortable with writing in the representative manner Miller describes. The tension between authorial intent, self figuration, and criticism leads to the question of why, then, write in this autobiographical manner. Kincaid describes the response of Antiguan to her critical stance in *A Small Place*, ". . . and the people in Antigua who read [*A Small Place*] would say to my mother, 'It's true, but did she have to say it' . . . [Antiguans] think you shouldn't mention the unpleasant truth, and then maybe it will go away" (Nasta 91). In *Annie John*, the question is also pertinent, Did Kincaid have to say it? Miller quotes Mary Russe's words in "Female Grotesques," "There is a phrase . . . that still resonates from childhood . . . It is a harsh matronizing phrase, and it is directed toward the behavior of other women: 'She' [the

other woman] is making a spectacle of herself” (23). Annie John, and Kincaid in constructing her fictional self, is similarly “making a spectacle of herself” by exposing her inwardness and her critique of colonial discourse. However, as Miller continues to discuss, the writing itself is worth the risk, for “. . . by turning its authorial voice into spectacle, personal writing theorizes the stakes of its own performance: a personal materialism” (24). Annie John, a self constructed fictional version of Kincaid, meets the adult Kincaid in *Annie John*. Kincaid’s exposure of Annie John’s inwardness exposes her own. Past meets present and constructs a revisionary time and place in the manner in which Kincaid’s self exposure parallels, intersects, and interacts with her fictional self who is attempting to achieve maturity in a British colonial school setting.

AN EMERGING NARRATIVE VOICE AND THE COLONIAL CLASSROOM:

PATRICK CHAMOISEAU'S *SCHOOL DAYS*

“We went to school to shed bad manners: rowdy manners, nigger manners, Creole manners – all the same thing.” (*School Days* 120)

Unlike Jamaica Kincaid's slippery use of autobiographical poetics in *Annie John*, Patrick Chamoiseau openly writes an autobiographical narrative representing his poetics, politics and self. Chamoiseau's *School Days* is based on Chamoiseau's childhood in Fort-de-France Martinique. The story focuses on an unnamed little black boy's first experiences with a Creole preschool followed by his immersion into his first year at a French colonial school. Réjouis states, “[Chamoiseau] suggests reading these texts as an articulation of his poetics, since they ‘are about the things that structure my imagination [*mon imaginaire*], my way of seeing things, shaped my sensibility and which swarm [*grouillent*] in my writing tricks’” (225). *School Days* contains many direct addresses to memory, a principle concern of autobiography. In addition to the autobiographical mode, the text contains several crucial places when the little black boy conducts his own personal writing within and outside of the colonial classroom. Similar to Kincaid's use of the personal essay in *Annie John*, the little black boy's use of self-writing acts as an expression of Chamoiseau's emerging narrative voice which is contextualized and influenced by the colonial education system. The school system again acts as a catalyst for major developmental changes in the boy's life. The work of Sandra Pouchet Paquet,

Nancy Miller, and Homi Bhabha will also be utilized for discussing the genre of autobiography and its intersection with postcolonial themes.

In *School Days*, Chamoiseau writes in a style which calls attention to the project of self-configuration in an autobiographical work. Primarily, the use of direct addresses to memory in the text reveals Chamoiseau's thoughts regarding self-writing. For example, in one lengthy passage Chamoiseau writes:

... and now see, memory, how I confront you no longer, I inhale your shimmering spindrift hanging motionless in flight . . . O silent tumult of a life going by . . .

Did you laugh to see me attempt an embrace, like some mooncalf drooping over his own shadow?

. . . the idea is to remain anchored in oneself, in that esteem first praised by the poet, attentive not to one's self but to its incessant movement . . . always imperceptible . . .

In that esteem . . .

. . . faint hails . . . O sedimentary sensations . . . awakenings to the world that are mere feelings now . . . heaps of tears and fears . . . sculptors of body and soul . . . you who have crafted a human memory in the living flesh . . . see, he summons you, still at a loss, as bereft as ever, hardly more stalwart before you than in those tender years of wonder . . . Here is my command: Answer me! (*School Days* 19-20)

Interestingly, Chamoiseau's address to memory breaks into a more lyrical style which avoids complete sentences and constructs layers of phrases. In addition, Chamoiseau utilizes ellipses to visually signify unfinished and incomplete thoughts. This passage

addresses Chamoiseau's difficulty in grasping at memory and his awareness of the self as a flighty unfixated being comprised of incessant movements and thoughts across time and space. In the last lines, Chamoiseau evokes the physical manifestations of the self, "a human memory in the living flesh" and the specter of the little boy seems to float before Chamoiseau, the autobiographer, and the reader's mind, ". . . see he summons you . . ." McCusker explains, "[Chamoiseau's] autobiographies stress the depletion of childhood memory, the inadequacy of language, and the extent to which the intensity and plentitude of early experience has necessarily been tarnished in the process of growing up. And yet, for Chamoiseau, this period . . . demands active rediscovery" (47). Chamoiseau attempts to work with memory using of a variety of writing styles and techniques which call attention to the difficulty of such a task.

An example of this layering of writing styles and techniques can be found in the opening pages of *School Days*. Chamoiseau begins with an address to his readers "My brothers and sisters O! I have something to tell you: the little black boy made the mistake of begging for school" (*School Days* 11). This seemingly simple opening contains a very quick introduction to several crucial features of the text. First, the narrative utilizes a direct address to the reader in a reoccurring manner. The effect of this direct address, carried out with the utilization of the second person, "you," breaks from the traditional novel structure. Second person point of view is the least used position in fiction as most fiction attempts to create a world that is separate from the reader and avoids informal interactions between the text itself and the reader. Furthermore, the "I" addressing the reader is presumably the self-reflective autobiographer Patrick Chamoiseau. The adult narrator interrupts the text in numerous ways by calling attention to himself and by

placing evaluative comments in the narrative. For example, in the first line of the text, the boy does not merely beg for school, he makes a mistake, unbeknownst to him but clearly pointed out by the narrator which calls attention to the evaluative position. In addition to direct addresses to the reader and the self-reflective narration of Chamoiseau, the text contains the voices of *Répondeurs*. These *Répondeurs* are part Greek chorus part cheeky back talkers who call out in song-like fashion. This chorus style addition to the narrative is reminiscent of Greek tragedies and brings an element of orality to the narrative. In structure alone, and within the first four pages of the text, *School Days* has juxtaposed dialogue with a reader, elements of the autobiographical novel, and orality. This juxtaposition allows for the narrative forms to interact with one another by calling attention to a fabricated structure that utilizes multiple narrative strategies on the path to meaning making. The end result is a text simultaneously revealing its constitutive nature and its autobiographical project. The text is then able to tell a story about the development of a little boy while paralleling the construction of a text with the construction of the little boy's Creole identity.

One of the ways Chamoiseau makes peace with the inadequacy of memory is by utilizing the *Répondeurs* in the text. According to McCusker,

If the writer or *marqueur* is, by definition, at a remove from the past, the *répondeurs* represent the elemental or primal . . . aspects of the self, and are therefore harbingers of an authentic, primordial and originary memory, untainted by the veneer of socialization and of written language. (61)

The voice of these *Répondeurs* ranges from childish as in, "In the kitchen courtyard/
Three silences stand guard/ You conk them all about/ But silence wins out/ Oh so clever/

Bored as ever” (*School Days* 15) to insightful and cryptic as in, “Time/ brings us different times/ and leaves other times behind . . .” (*School Days* 24). The combination of the direct addresses to memory and the use of the *Répondeurs* interrupts the narrative in a manner that foregrounds the understanding that the text is a crafted autobiographical work. Again, Bhabha’s concept of “presencing” is useful. As the text continues to call attention to memory, Chamoiseau makes it clear that he is highly aware of an estrangement from his past. The use of the *Répondeurs* both acknowledges and transcends this gap in time in the manner in which it represents originary memory. This transcendence of time signifies what Bhabha calls “. . . the condition of the extra-territorial and crosscultural initiations” meaning that this initiation allows for communication beyond the gaps in memory and time (“Locations of Culture” 9).

While Kincaid resists being categorized or labeled under the discourses of feminism or postcolonial studies, Chamoiseau actively writes in the political vein of postcolonial thought as evidenced with his work in the *Creolité* movement. This emphasis and concern with politics is expressed in an introductory letter found preceding the narrative. The letter addresses Youngsters “of all national territories” who have “had to face a colonial school, yes, you who in other ways are still confronting one today, and you who will face this challenge tomorrow in some other guise” (*School days* no page number). These words stage the text of *School Days* as an address to all these individuals, past, present and future who are coping with experiences in colonial classrooms all over the world. The text is not a self-contained autobiographical account, therefore, but rather an active document reaching out to and influencing these Youngsters. Chamoiseau continues in his letter, “This voice of bitter laughter at the One

and Only – a firmly centered voice challenging all centers, a voice beyond all home countries and peacefully diversal in opposition to the universal – is raised in your name” (*School Days* no page number). This passage calls attention to Chamoiseau’s humorous, yet critical tone utilized throughout the text. In addition, this also represents Chamoiseau’s mode of operating within a binary sustained throughout the narrative. This text, Chamoiseau decrees, is a postcolonial narrative challenging the Universal, the Western gaze, and the colonizer. The result is the perpetuation of the binary between the colonized and the colonizer at the narrative level. However, as will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis, Chamoiseau’s construction of Creoleness is an attempt to transcend this binary. Chamoiseau’s autobiographical narrative also goes beyond an accounting of a life and intentionally reaches towards the act of community building Paquet refers to as well as creating a collective group of youth who have experienced colonial classrooms. Chamoiseau’s narrative voice is intentionally raised in the name of others and enacts the representativity Miller questions when he writes “as a.” In fact, leaving the boy unnamed has the effect of creating a generic figure with whom many youth can stand in for. Furthermore, this generic figure allows Chamoiseau the ability to write about himself in the service of others by disconnecting the authorial voice from the boy’s experiences. Chamoiseau is able to simultaneously critique and narrate. Where Kincaid avoids categorization, Chamoiseau embraces his role as a voice embarking on a journey of liberation from colonial discourse and invites others, the Youngsters, with him.

In *School Days* there are two primary places in which the little boy engages in self-writing. These passages are significantly different in that one precedes the little

boy's experiences in the colonial classroom and the other is a product of those experiences. An analysis of both acts of self-writing reveals Chamoiseau's reflections on the role of the imagination and the role of colonial education in his personal manifestation as a writer. Perhaps more importantly, these reflections also reveal the colonial discourse at work in these areas as well as places where the text reveals tensions between the narration and colonial education. For example, Chamoiseau constructs passages that reveal various acts of resistance to the colonial education system, the impact the school has on familial relationships, and the ways in which the simple act of going to school can be read as a migration into a new culture.

In the first example of self writing, the little boy discovers that he can write on walls with chalk. This discovery is described in the language of pre-civilization as "the age of petroglyphs" (*School Days* 18). The boy is labeled a "prehominid" (*School Days* 18) and his imagination "was ignorant of tomorrow and all time to come" (*School Days* 19). This self writing takes the form of scribbling that the boy alone can understand for he has yet to learn the alphabet. However, the little boy soon becomes aware that his older brothers and sisters are able to write something.

And this somefin' seemed decipherable. It could be *said*. His own scribblings inspired sounds, feelings, sensations, that he expressed however he pleased but always differently; their interpretation depended on his mood and the ambiance of the moment. The marks the Big Kids made, however, seemed to contain some intangible meaning . . . (*School Days* 20)

This passage is significant, for it marks the moment that the boy realizes that his writing, or scribblings, can go beyond his own personal interpretation and actually extend into

interpretation by others. The boy has learned that writing is part of a process of meaning making and part of a community of readers.

This lesson is quickly followed by another important one when Jojo the Math Whiz, one of the boy's brothers, writes the boy's name and states, "That there is your first name . . . an' you're inside it!" (*School Days* 21). The boy becomes afraid and "saw himself there, captured whole within a chalk mark. *Which meant he could be erased from the world!*" (*School Days* 21). The boy begins to copy his name a thousand times ". . . in order to proliferate and avoid a genocide" (*School Days* 21). Writing for the boy, notably that of his own name, becomes a symbolic act of self preservation. To be in the world, the boy must be written into it. To be a part of the symbolic order of meaning, one's name must be written. The act of writing, therefore, becomes the marker of existence and identity. In this passage this knowledge evokes fear. However, Chamoiseau, the author, evokes this awareness and reclaims the self in writing this autobiographical narrative.

In addition to writing his own name and scribbling, the boy also begins to learn specific signs and symbols for other objects which is described as ". . . trapping reality inside his chalk marks" (*School Days* 21). However, the boy relies on his older siblings to teach him these new signs before realizing that "This ability to capture pieces of the world seemed to come from school. No one had confirmed this, but the chalk, the satchel, the morning departure toward this unknown place seemed linked to a ritual of power into which he longed to be initiated" (*School Days* 22). The boy recognizes that the power of writing is distributed through the authority of the colonial school. The childish scrawls which produce sensation and reproduce the self are replaced by the signs

which can only be acquired through the school and therefore colonial discourse. Said's discussion of intellectual authority is useful in interpreting the boy's transitional thinking regarding writing and schooling. In his book *Orientalism*, Said describes authority as being

. . . formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. (874)

The school, which transfers the power of meaning making through writing in the boy's mind, has become an apparatus for this authority. The older kids have relayed this discourse of power to their little brother which exemplifies the pervasiveness of the authority of the colonial school system. The boy will therefore enter school with the state of mind that school is the ultimate authority. More importantly, as the title of this section of the text, "Longing," reveals, the boy desires initiation into this system and is eager to go to school like his older brothers and sisters. Choosing to model his behavior after his older siblings is another way in which the power of the colonial school system is disseminated.

Before the little boy enters the official French education system, the text moves to the forefront a critique of what it means to learn. The boy goes to a nursery school where his teacher Mam Saliniere, "a plump mulatto" (*School Days* 25), ". . . showed him strange images of snow and sang lilting ditties from Brittany or Provence" (*School Days* 26). These strange images reappear in the little boy's creations, and the voice of the little boy's father announces, "Whoa this kid is drawing apples in the middle of mango

season” (*School Days* 33). The creative energy of the little boy is spent reproducing the strange and foreign imitations of apples that are presented to him by his teacher.

Meanwhile, what is failed to be reproduced are those items immediately surrounding the little boy in the Caribbean - mangos. The image of an apple has determined reality for the little boy, at least as inferred through his creative endeavors, more so than the mango he can reach out to touch or eat. Murdoch states, “Such culturally foreign impositions insistently displace the familiar elements of the *négrillons* world and progressively replace them with a growing number of referents from the world of fir and apple trees” (29). The encounter with foreign references is tantamount to a border crossing into the world of France. While this encounter is introduced in the nursery school it will be further developed with the boy’s entrance into the primary school. Furthermore, the boy is acting out Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry when he “*repeats* rather than *re-presents*” the drawing of an apple in place of a mango (“Of Mimicry and Man” 88).

When the little boy finally attends primary school, the first day of school can be read very much like a border crossing or migration into a new country. The little boy walks to school clutching his mother’s hand. When the boy is called forward to line up with other children outside the school Chamoiseau describes the moment of transition, or border crossing in the present tense: “The world falls to pieces” (*School Days* 34). Again, Chamoiseau is interrupting as the narrator to describe this overwhelming change. Indeed, the world does seem to fall to pieces for the boy. The teacher is far less gentle than Mam Salinière, and the classroom looms overwhelmingly before the boy, “The room was huge. The blackboard, enormous. The atmosphere was frightening, severe, echoing anonymous . . . Nothing and nobody would coddle them here” (*School Days* 35). The

boy's encounter with the school is reminiscent of Annie John's experience with her new school. Both are physically and psychologically disoriented, nervous, and uncomfortable. The boy notices that the other children in the class are also extremely anxious, and when the teacher first opens his mouth to speak Chamoiseau writes, "Everybody felt positively sick" (*School Days* 35). As the teacher begins roll call the boy ". . . was devoting all his energy to clenching his whole body into one bundle of nerves and helplessly amplifying his anguish at being abandoned by Mam Ninotte. *O traitress!* Besides his knees were knocking" (*School Days* 36). The classroom experience causes physical and psychological symptoms of stress in the boy who also feels abandoned. This feeling of abandonment is the epitome of the crisis of estrangement from everything that he knows, including his most important support system up to this point – his mother. What follows are continuing feelings of alienation and culture shock in his new school.

For the first few passages describing the new school, the teacher's presence has solely been presented as a voice calling from the front of the room. However, Chamoiseau takes a moment to describe this first teacher in "You were quite dark-skinned; very thin, too; hair smoothed flat with Vaseline; a huge Adam's apple that bobbed up and down" (*School Days* 39). Interestingly, this is the only depiction of the boy's teacher. For the remainder of the text he will be imagined as a free floating voice of authority in the classroom. The capitalization of the first letter in the word teacher is another physical manifestation of this notion. The 'Teacher' is the all-knowing and all controlling narrator of the classroom filling his students with French words. This calls attention to the role of language in the text. As the boy soon discovers, the teacher speaks French, and French is required for discussion in the classroom while Creole

becomes damned as an uncivil and undesirable language. This element of French language will be focused on in the next chapter of this thesis. However, it is important to note here, that the migration into the classroom is a migration into French assimilation and Frenchness. Furthermore, physical manifestations of the authority maintained by the teacher are revealed in the text with, “the Teacher ran absolutely everything” including when to sit and stand, when to speak, where to look, when to go to the bathroom, etc. (*School Days* 41). With these physical manifestations of control come more abstract mechanisms of control. For example, the boy is exposed to the traditional calendar and realizes that he had “never considered the world from that angle” (*School Days* 40). The boy's own natural manner of organizing his days was based on church days, wash days, and rainy days. The shift in angle for the little boy is that in accepting this new traditional calendar, he allows for a new order of thinking, or reality, which has the power to organize his life in the physical world.

Another concrete location for seeing this intellectual authority takes place in the narrative occurs when the little boy is first introduced to an inkwell and notebooks for writing during his first year of school. The boy is enamored with the ink as evidenced in “Suddenly, through all this staring into the inkwell, he tumbled into a blackish tempest battering flotillas of struggling boats. The waves were ink. The wind was ink” (*School Days* 57). The inkwell has moved the boy's imagination into action when suddenly the creative reverie is rudely interrupted when “*Tak!* The Teacher's voice broke the spell . . .” (*School Days* 58). The spell is broken and the boy learns that he may only touch the inkwell, pen, and notebook with the teacher's permission, and these objects are never allowed to leave the school. These new wondrous items are “within reach yet

inaccessible” because of the authority of the teacher and the school (*School Days* 58). Unlike the freely used and accessible chalk at home, the boy requires permission for composing at school. School as a mode of control is in full effect, limiting use of a communicative tool and requiring that those items be used just so, at just the proper time, and in order to communicate properly as seen fit by the teacher. The boy’s imagination and writing is cut off by these machinations and contained and ordained by the classroom.

Interestingly, while the school promotes intellectual and cerebral activities, the presence of the boy’s bodies in the classroom becomes foregrounded on several occasions. For example, Chamoiseau describes the government’s use of powdered Nestlé milk as a battle against the children’s native diet and supposed malnutrition. Chamoiseau writes, “This deficiency, in the experts’ opinion, was the root cause of a cartload of learning problems, incorrigible drowsiness, and the Creole crust that encumbered our minds” (*School Days* 107). The children, in an act of resistance towards this foreign milk, make up stories about Creole horrors being found in it, “. . . *molocye*, tortoise sweat, bamboo hairs like ground glass, crud from a he-mule’s ears . . .” (*School Days* 108). Another example takes place when the boy must receive a medical examination at school. The children are mortified by the physical exposure of having to take off shoes, going shirtless, and even having to drop their pants in front of a doctor. Chamoiseau writes, “Showing your willy reduced everyone to the overwhelming fragility of childhood” (*School Days* 110). This passage reveals the physical, as well as mental, control the school and state have over the children. Furthermore, the children are reduced to an infantile state in which the adults around them have the physical ability to poke and

prod at their bodies while the children remain helpless. Towards the end of the narrative, Chamoiseau reminds us once again that these are children's bodies sitting in the classroom:

Our bodies played tricks on us. We'd learned to keep them seated on a bench, but they escaped us in many ways. One boy would find himself surprised by a flood of peepee right in the middle of class . . . Another boy, who'd been lethargic all morning long, would suddenly sit up straight, enveloped in the most hateful perfume . . . The shit-pants would sit glued to his seat by the pestiferous porridge oozing out beneath him . . . To the Teacher, these symptoms must have seemed the somatization of his enemy, ignorance. (*School Days* 136-137)

The bodies of the children involuntarily resist their place in the classroom and the unnatural expectations made of them. The teacher interprets these uncontrolled bodies as further evidence of the need for civilizing these children. However, the reality is that the education system places inappropriate expectations on how the children's bodies are able to handle the classroom. Expecting children to have complete and utter self-control over the body echoes the Western system's ideology that the mind could and should govern the body at all times.

Chamoiseau constructs one figure, Big Bellybutton, who by his very core nature seems to resist assimilation into the French colonial school. The figure of big Bellybutton represents an essentialism of Creole identity. Big Bellybutton is introduced on the first day of school while the teacher is taking roll. Unlike the other children in the classroom, Big Bellybutton does not respond to his proper name because he goes by his

Creole nickname, Big Bellybutton, at home. While the little boy becomes known to us through his reflective nature, Big Bellybutton appears quite the opposite:

Big Bellybutton, now, he wasn't a daydreamer. He had to be working his hands: he'd scrape at his desk, scratch his feet, rub his nose, twist onto one buttock, then the other, as though his constrained body required a swarm of tactile sensations to participate in the world. (*School Days* 76)

Big Bellybutton becomes associated with the physical body while contained in a classroom which awards only the mind's activities and accomplishments. The teacher frequently uses Big Bellybutton "... to illustrate the evils of ignorance" (*School Days* 76). However, Big Bellybutton surprises everyone with his prowess at math and calculations. This math ability represents Chamoiseau's attempt at debunking the Western education system's belief that logic can only be accessed through the education system. Due in part to the attacks made on Big Bellybutton during class time, Big Bellybutton is also singled out and harassed by classmates on the playground. Murdoch argues that

... the ongoing and developing conflicts, oppositions and strife that are a universal part of growing up are transmuted into patterns of bullying and victimization that become symbolic re-presentations of the department's historical, economic, and geopolitical subordination to the metropole. (28-29)

According to Murdoch, then, Big Bellybutton's experience of bullying represents the Creole subject's bullying by the department. This bullying and victimization continues on until Big Bellybutton flashes a snake's head at a gang of bullies.

The snake's head incident has two major repercussions. First, it is important to note that Big Bellybutton's behavior caused a huge scene in the boy's world at school and does not go unpunished. The morning after the event, Big Bellybutton's father accompanies him to school and whips him in front of the entire class. Chamoiseau describes the beating using his bitter humorous tone:

. . . seized with a sudden burst of surely millennial rage, the papa laid hold of Big Bellybutton, extracted from his bag a switch of *ti-baume* wood, and inflicted upon the unfortunate child a thrashing that we were to talk about for eons. The papa laid on with a will . . . Let's say he was smack-and-whacking, slice-and-dicing, lash-and-bashing. Let's add that he was trouncing-bouncing, leathering-lathering, basting-pasting. Now and then he'd sneak a sidelong look at the Teacher or Monsieur le Directeur to check on the sanctifying effect of this rawhiding, and sparked by the fire in their eyes, he'd thrash with fresh vigor. (*School Days* 84)

Sadly, what is reenacted in this scene is not simply a father disciplining his son, but rather a father whipping his son in order to perpetuate the authority of the French colonial school. This domination by physical force relives the historical trauma of slavery and institutionalized victimization at the hands of the metropole. McCusker argues that *School Days* “. . . reveals on closer examination an oblique undertow of reference to large-scale, upper-case History. The story of slavery, in particular, is indelibly present, albeit in an unassimilated and fragmentary form” (66). The whipping of Big Bellybutton certainly evokes the historical heritage of slavery. Interestingly, while the adults witness this punishment as a means to enforce power structures, the students respond differently. The children now look at Big Bellybutton as “. . . the Master of Nasty Things from the

Creole Wildwood, which distinction granted him a special immunity steeped in an aura of silence that was worse, to tell the truth, than any persecution” (*School Days* 85).

Chamoiseau has constructed the figure of Big Bellybutton to both resist the French education system as well as embody Creoleness. As such, Big Bellybutton represents one side of Chamoiseau’s constructed binary while the teacher and other adults who uphold French assimilation policy represent the other. Interestingly, Big Bellybutton will be at different times embraced or persecuted by his peers for his representation of Creoleness. Big Bellybutton’s role in the classroom regarding French language instruction will also be addressed in the final chapter of the thesis.

In addition to constructing Big Bellybutton as a figure of resistance, Chamoiseau also writes several passages depicting the role the school plays in creating a divide between the boy, his mother, and his home. Beginning with his first day of school, the boy walks home happily “. . . as though it were the only place unscathed in a world turned upside-down” (*School Days* 49). Once again, this feeling of a world turned upside-down occurs during the boy’s first morning spent at school. However, when the boy returns home he sees it with new eyes. Chamoiseau writes, “He takes stock of his familiar world in other ways. He discovers a thousand details. Now he’s looking at things he never noticed before” (*School Days* 50). This awareness of a new gaze is similar to Salman Rushdie’s discussion in his essay “Imaginary Homelands” that in looking back “. . . that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost, that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages but invisible ones, imaginary homelands . . .” (10). The boy is essentially looking back on different terms than Rushdie, for his separation is an event intertwined with his new school experience.

However, Chamoiseau is also looking back as an autobiographical narrator and also creating the fiction of the imaginary homeland. Specifically in this scene, the boy is mesmerized by two pieces of art, a fairy-tale scene with cherubs and a scene of country folk working the land with haystacks in the distance. The little boy is seeing with his new eyes two examples of French cultural artifacts. This scene evokes the boy's changing perceptions of himself and his home. When it is time to return to school after his lunch, the boy is incapable of telling his mother how unwilling he is to return. This passage is also Chamoiseau looking back at this time in his life and examining the foreign artwork hanging in his home. His new gaze is aware of the imposition of these artifacts in his Caribbean homeland paralleling the imposition of the French colonial school system.

Later in the text, the boy is punished at school by Monsieur le Directeur and cannot wait to return to his mother in order to feel better, much in the same way Annie John returns home after her punishment at school seeking her mother's support. On the other hand, the boy realizes he has been keeping secrets from Mam Ninotte. Chamoiseau writes,

He'd begun hiding from her all his unavowable fears, his ignominious anxieties, those sorrows unlikely to earn him an extra dollop of affection. He kept his failures secret, along with the scoldings and the wallops, because Mam Ninotte seemed to confer supreme authority upon the school. (*School Days* 74)

Once more, we find a maternal figure placing great emphasis on the importance of school. This dynamic between the mother, child, and the authority of the school disrupts relationships at home by further alienating the child from home life prior to the event of

entering the school system. This is once again echoed towards the end of the text when Chamoiseau writes, “The little boy had become a walking secret . . . Although Mam Ninotte asked him about school, he told her nothing, as though not wanting to sadden her” (*School Days* 131). This separation is most stark when contrasted with the little boy’s relationship with his mother earlier in the book. In those passages, the boy is inseparable from his mother. For example, Chamoiseau writes, “Let’s say [the little boy] plagued Mam Ninotte’s existence, dogged her every footstep like her own personal misfortune, tripped up her broom, interrupted her laundry songs, transformed her ironing into a nightmare in slow motion” (*School Days* 22).

Chamoiseau also depicts the colonial school system’s opposition to the surrounding Creole world. “The vibrant spirit of learning and our Creole beings seemed to be in insurmountable contradiction. The Teacher had not only us to contend with but also the entire country” (*School Days* 121). The “vibrant spirit of learning”, however, sets out to only teach a French curriculum with its social, historical, and cultural values. In the hands of the teacher, this French, Western system becomes what Chamoiseau describes as the Universal. Chamoiseau writes, “The Universal was a buckler, a disinfectant, a religion, a hope, an act of supreme poetry. The Universal created order” (*School Days* 121). Once again, Chamoiseau is continuing to construct the binary between Creoleness and Frenchness in the narrative. This idea is further evidenced in Chamoiseau’s descriptions of history lessons:

In those days, Europeans were the founders of History. The world, once shrouded in darkness, began with them. Our islands had been veiled in a fog of nonexistence – crossed by phantom Caribs or Arawaks themselves lost in the

obscurity of a cannibal nonhistory. And then, when the colonists arrived, there was light. Civilization. History. The humanization of the teeming Earth. (*School Days 121*)

Chamoiseau is reconstructing the manner in which the boy would interpret these history lessons and also refers to the “nonhistory” the native inhabitants of the Caribbean are granted by the Western worldview. The boy is required to learn the Eurocentric version of history because his own is both discounted and erased by the presence of the colonial curriculum. Chamoiseau continues his opposition to the curriculum by revealing how the boy actually loves his history lessons and the way in which they parallel his movie going experiences, “. . . the American Indians of Buffalo Bill, the Zulus of Tarzan, the Chinese of Marco Polo, the Moors ambushing noble knights . . . [These savages] represented darkness confronted by the light” (*School Days 122*). This passage is evocative of Fanon’s work. Fanon writes,

In the magazines the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage are always symbolized by Negroes or Indians; since there is always identification with the victor, the little Negro, quite as easily as the little white boy, becomes an explorer, and adventurer, a missionary . . . (146)

Eurocentric history lessons create boys of color who lose their own identities by means of adopting caucasian, European ones. Chamoiseau’s invocation of Fanon in this passage once again suggests his configuration of this text as a political one. The narrative embodies the political arguments made by a leader of the 20th century anti-colonial movement. Furthermore, Oscherwitz argues,

. . . like Glissant, [Chamoiseau] believes the seemingly integrated nature of Western History and identity . . . to be nothing more than an invention used as a tool for oppression. What [Chamoiseau] advocates, both in his theoretical and in his fictional texts, is the retrieval and valorization of fragmentation, of the rupture and subsequent *métissage*, that have marked Caribbean experience. (145)

Although Chamoiseau does not construct this *métissage* here in his representation of Western history, he does so in his depiction of the boy's love of reading.

Despite Chamoiseau's repetitive construction of the binary splitting Creoleness and Frenchness, his construction of the boy's love of reading, and more specifically listening to his teacher read aloud, reveals a departure from this pattern. Chamoiseau writes, "While he was reading to us, the Teacher himself would quickly become carried away; forgetting the world around him, he would embrace his text with an enthusiasm tempered by vigilance" (*School Days* 114). What the Teacher models for his students is an embrace of and challenge to the Universal order. In one moment the Teacher becomes carried away with the pleasures of reading French aloud while in another he ". . . took exception to things in Hugo and Lamartine" (*School Days* 114-115). Perhaps the most interesting intersection of the Western literary tradition with the Creole experience takes place when the teacher reads to the class a story about Petit Pierre and asks Big Bellybutton to compare his life with the character's. What results is Big Bellybutton's unveiling of the ". . . nitty-gritty of his life" (*School Days* 117). Big Bellybutton sleeps on a pallet of dried grass without sheets, does homework by a kerosene lamp, and fetches water, and waters goats. The children laugh and howl at Big Bellybutton's life while the teacher's

. . . world of idyllic farms, windmills, shepherds, charming autumnal scenes beside peaceful ponds – came crashing down on the spot. The age-old barbarity of the cane fields . . . the poverty of the shacks . . . the dark night of Creole niggerdom: it all seemed to have traveled through time to come crowding around the gates of Downtown. (*School Days* 118)

Chamoiseau interrupts the school's representation of only Western, idyllic scenes with the reality of the Creole experience from the past and present. The strength of the juxtaposition in a passage such as the one describing Big Bellybutton in contrast with Petit Pierre lies with its startling marking of difference. While the boy has come to love the teacher's reading voice, Chamoiseau constructs the binary between Western literary traditions and Big Bellybutton's experience. Sadly, the laughing children now identify more closely with the figures found in Western stories rather than the experiences of Big Bellybutton.

However, Chamoiseau further develops the relationship between the boy and literature, or rather himself and literature. Chamoiseau breaks from the narrative in a direct address to his former teacher, "To you, dear Teacher, I owe my loving regard for books" (*School Days* 128). Later, Chamoiseau returns to this reverence in the boy's behavior, ". . . book in hand, imitating the Teacher's slow, respectful gestures: opening it delicately, holding it lovingly, putting on that affected look over the first sentence, flipping through the pages as though searching for something vital" (*School Days* 141). The result of this adoration of these books is the leap the boy takes from consuming the material to using them as a point of imaginative departure, "The little boy rewrote the books according to the pictures, inventing stories he then tried to find in the printed (and

still indecipherable) text” (*School Days* 143). The significance of reading for the little boy, and for Chamoiseau, becomes most important because it leads him towards his own desire for writing.

By this point at the end of the novel, Chamoiseau foregrounds again the importance of writing and the development of his poetics in the classroom. The reader has learned that at home the boy mimics his teacher’s passion for books but also extends that love into writing and imaginative play. For example, “His initial dabble in make-believe . . . became a pleasant necessity that nurtured his adventurous mind” (*School Days* 143). This imaginative play in writing within the safety of the home setting contrasts sharply against the writing lessons the boy endures at school, “His handwriting wasn’t very good; his upstrokes and downstrokes were never perfect . . . The Teacher yelled, threatened, crammed the margins of his pages with exclamation points, but the little boy remained unfazed” (*School Days* 144). Despite the newly acquired lethargy the boy has regarding school by this point in the narrative, writing has become a delight “for [the little boy’s] own pleasure” (*School Days* 144).

The closing lines of the novel reinforce the boy’s reclamation of the act of writing. Chamoiseau writes, “. . . in this sacking of their native world, in this crippling inner ruination – the little boy bent over his notebook was tracing, without fully realizing it, an inky lifeline of survival . . .” (*School Days* 144). This line acts as a synthesis of Chamoiseau’s narrative of his autobiographical poetics. The boy, with his appropriation of French and writing constructs his, Chamoiseau’s, lifeline. In the phrase “lifeline,” “life” takes on particular significance when reconnected with the earlier passages about petroglyphs and name writing. What was once feared, the ability to be erased from the

world, has been claimed by the boy as he utilizes his classroom writing lessons. Life and text become synonymous. To write is to live and survive. To write is to “reinscribe the social imaginary,” and liberate one from colonial discourse according to Bhabha (“Locations of Culture” 6). Bhabha’s discussion of *mimicry* and *menacing* also provides a useful framework for contemplating this idea found in the text. This is the true lifeline of Chamoiseau’s poetics. The act of writing *menaces* the colonial discourse which threatened Chamoiseau’s imagination, creativity, and Creole heritage. Writing about his life *menaces* the same authoritative discourse which simply attempted to quiet his mind, or control his inkwell, pen, and notebook.

In both *Annie John* and *School Days*, the narrative of the emerging voice begins to form a theorizing of autobiographical poetics and the influence of the colonial classroom on that voice. By theorizing, I am referring to Miller’s discussion of personal criticism and personal materialism. In Kincaid and Chamoiseau’s work, one can see the relationship found between the teacher’s expectations of writing and the actual performance of the student. Annie John wishes to please her classroom community and manipulates material in order to do so. Kincaid, however, exposes this motivation and critiques Annie John’s self figuration in her essay as well as classroom expectations. The little boy’s teacher demands perfect handwriting, but the boy engages in creative and imaginative play freely at home. Learning to write and being prompted to write takes place in the school, but Kincaid and Chamoiseau embrace these lessons and make them their own resulting in narratives which “reinscribe the social imaginary” in the manner Bhabha describes (“Locations of Culture” 6). The colonial school system has heavily influenced Kincaid and Chamoiseau, or Annie John and the little boy, but both have

written back to that system by exposing its machinations in the autobiographical narratives *Annie John* and *School Days*.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE CRIMINAL: LANGUAGE APPROPRIATION AND
ABROGATION IN *ANNIE JOHN* AND *SCHOOL DAYS*

“But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: not motherland, no father-land, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, no excess of love . . . and worst and most painful of all, no tongue. (For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean?”

Kincaid, *A Small Place* ((31-32)

Both Jamaica Kincaid and Patrick Chamoiseau face the challenge of writing and speaking with the “language of the criminal” in their work. Likewise, both authors embrace the act of reading and immersing themselves in stories. *Annie John* and *School Days* address the conflicting position of the authors who are simultaneously challenging colonial discourse while also utilizing the language of the colonizers. In *Annie John*, the text engages in critical dialogue through the re-reading and re-writing of several British texts. In *School Days*, the critical dialogue takes form when Chamoiseau addresses French language assimilation in the narrative while also attempting to construct Creoleness at the aesthetic level. Interestingly, while both texts enter into critical dialogue from very different angles, both Kincaid and Chamoiseau are forced to confront the Western literary tradition and the language of that tradition to manifest their own voices.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Annie John is emerging as a storyteller in the narrative, and in addition, she is also continuously immersing herself in British texts. *The Tempest*, the work of Enid Blyton, *Roman Britain, A History of the West Indies*, *The Schoolgirl's Own Annual*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Jane Eyre* are all works represented in the novel by Kincaid. As such, Annie John's understanding of herself can be seen as being both textually mediated and composed of her experiences as a colonized subject. Annie John's identity is entangled in the discourses of the British Empire whose endurance relied on getting "colonised people to see their world and themselves in particular ways, internalising the language of Empire as representing the natural and true order" (McLeod 19). The various representations of texts found in *Annie John* constitute a re-reading and re-writing of English literary and historical works. This chapter aims to conduct a close study of several of these allusions to English literature and history made by the narrator Annie John in order to explore how the text enters into a critical dialogue with these British works and how the source texts are used as a "point of inspiration and departure" (McLeod 168). Most importantly, this critical dialogue reveals the ways in which Kincaid complicates the relationship between the text and colonized subjects by using Annie John's shifting perspective as a young adult.

In *Beginning Postcolonialism*, John McLeod offers a useful framework for understanding how postcolonial writers re-write canonical works. McLeod states, "A re-writing often exists to *resist* or *challenge* colonialist representations of colonised peoples and cultures perceived in the source-text and popular readings of it" and, further, "A re-writing often implicates the reader as an *active agent* in determining the meanings made possible by the dialogue between the source-text and its re-writing" (168). The reader, or

active agent, is responsible for understanding the source-text as well as the multiple ways in which resistance operates in the re-writing. McLeod adds that while the interrogation of the 'classic' text allows postcolonial writers to enter into a critical dialogue, the 'classic' text can also act as an important imaginative resource (160-161). The 'classic' texts may be simultaneously read critically and used as a departure point for further postcolonial imaginative writing. In addition to McLeod's discussion, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin also supply a useful theoretical lens for understanding the re-writing, or in their words the re-placing, of the source text, in postcolonial literature. In *The Empire Writes Back*, these authors introduce the concepts of abrogation and appropriation. Abrogation is defined as "a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in the words" (*Empire* 38). Appropriation is "the process by which the language is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience . . . Language is adopted as a tool and utilized in various ways to express widely differing cultural experiences" (*Empire* 38-39). All of these concepts offer various ways of interpreting the re-writing of English literature and historical texts found in *Annie John*. In particular, by studying how Kincaid uses the source texts as points of imaginative departure, one finds the manner in which the novel *Annie John* acts as an example of both abrogation and appropriation.

It is important to note that prior to accessing British texts through the colonial education system, Annie John was privy to her own life story as retold repetitiously by her mother. These bouts of oratorical storytelling, as discussed in chapter one of this thesis, take place in the home while Annie John learns to become a young lady according

to her mother's wishes which are heavily influenced by British cultural standards (*Annie John* 22). In contrast to these domestic scenes, the British educational system acts as a mechanism of imperial ideology. According to McLeod, "The teaching of English literature in the colonies must be understood as part of the many ways in which Western colonial powers such as Britain asserted their cultural and moral superiority while at the same time devaluing indigenous cultural products" (140). The mother's oratorical stories are both displaced and diminished by the presence of the British education system and the literature it institutes. The institutionalization of literature in the British education system is discussed by Gauri Viswanathan in "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India." The essential point made by Viswanathan is that the institution of British literary studies is rooted in Britain's political goal of ruling its colonies. Furthermore, Viswanathan argues that "The first stage in this process was an assertion of structural congruence between Christianity and English literature" (435). It follows, then that British literary studies are heavily influenced by lessons of morality and ethics stemming from Christianity. At the narrative level in *Annie John*, the mother's stories and lessons are replaced by British literary texts and the morals and lessons found therein. Kincaid emphasizes this loss by revisiting the mother's stories throughout the text as Annie John grows and changes. The mother's stories about her own life and Annie John's become a subplot in the narrative. However, the novel itself operates as an example of what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin discuss in terms of seizing the means of communication, in this instance written form, as a feature "of the process of self-assertion and of the ability to reconstruct the world as an unfolding historical process" (*Empire* 82). By

emphasizing the mother's stories in the text, Kincaid offers a historical and cultural alternative to the British canonical works Annie John will consume.

At twelve years old, Annie John attends a new school which is markedly British. The headmistress is described as most certainly being new to Antigua from England " . . . for she looked like a prune left out of its jar for a long time and she sounded as if she had borrowed her voice from an owl" (*Annie John* 36). As discussed in the first chapter, Annie John spends her first morning in this new school "in contemplation and reflection and writing something [Miss Nelson] described as an 'autobiographical essay' " (*Annie John* 38). While the students are writing this essay the girls pass notes to one another and pinch each other's bottoms. Miss Nelson is absorbed in "an elaborately illustrated edition of *The Tempest*" (*Annie John* 39). Interestingly, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* contains only one native inhabitant, named Caliban, on an isolated island in the Caribbean. Caliban is portrayed as a deformed monster who assaults a young woman named Miranda. This figure, and the play at large, provides the textual framing within which the autobiographies of Annie John's class will be read. In essence, the teacher subsumes the real inhabitants of Antigua into a Shakespearean narrative saturated with 17th century colonialist ideologies. Notably, Kincaid's re-writing of *The Tempest* is part of a long history of Caribbean revisions of the play that took place in the 1960s and 1970s during the era of political decolonization. In many of these revisions the authors utilize Caliban as a heroic figure (Yeoh 111). However, Kincaid's revision is a departure from this masculine lineage of re-writings.

In the afternoon, the girls read their essays to the class, and Annie John's essay moves some girls to tears and receives great approval from her classmates and the

teacher. Although this essay was discussed in chapter one of this thesis, what is significant for this chapter is the way in which Annie John's version of reality operates as an abrogation of the genre of autobiographical writing pressed on her by her British teacher. Annie John has broken the cardinal rule of autobiography by intentionally misrepresenting events. One might make the argument that in appropriating the written language, Annie John is utilizing the autobiography to her own ends by successfully being added to the classroom library. This tension between 'truth' and 'fiction' in the case of the autobiographical essay reveals the larger ideological tension between the colonized and the colonizer. More importantly, Kincaid utilizes this tension to show that there are in fact multiple stories and histories which exist and confronts the notion that there is any one 'true' story.

As a critical reader, or *active agent*, reading this scene which highlights the presence of *The Tempest* and ends with Annie John's victorious essay, several other layers of resistance towards colonial discourse are available. By viewing this revision in light of its historical context of other Caribbean revisions, the ways in which Kincaid departs from and adds to this literary heritage become noteworthy. Caribbean writers Aimé Césaire and George Lamming have read the play in a postcolonial light by comparing Prospero and Caliban's relationship with the relationship found between a colonizer and colonized. The teacher, clearly the authority figure in the classroom, presides over the girls in a similar way Prospero presides over Caliban. In addition, Homi Bhabha discusses the frequency with which colonial discourse depicts terrifying stereotypes in his essay, "The Other Question," such as the not quite human Caliban whose very name is an anagram of the word cannibal. The girls writing their

autobiographical essays, however, represent civilized colonized subjects. The scene therefore, depicts Bhabha's notion of ambivalence, for the girls, like other colonized subjects, represent a split: "The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food)" ("The Other Question" 82). The girls are both domesticated and at the same time wild. Gilbert Yeoh reads the entire novel as a revision of *The Tempest* and points to Kincaid's major departure from earlier revisions being her evocation of the maternal figure of Sycorax who was previously ignored. According to Yeoh, Sycorax is depicted in Annie's mother, Ma Jolle, and Ma Chess (112). Certainly, Annie John's description of her mother's swimming ability and relationship to her physical environment discussed in the previous chapter resurrects the supernatural figure of Sycorax. Ultimately, however, Annie John the narrator denies the formidable powers of Sycorax in her mother by domesticating her to win her class's approval. When Annie John's mother refuses to coddle her, she is in fact the antithesis of the gentle, well behaved mother of British standards and is instead a powerful maternal figure in Annie John's life. Annie John does not narrate this powerful version of her mother. Instead, she chooses to present a loving, domesticated mother. Kincaid, furthermore, presents all sides of this dynamic – an eager to please twelve year old and an evocation of Sycorax. Where Annie John the narrator is not strong enough to resist her need to please her class, Kincaid uses this uncertainty to mark the insecure psychological state of a young girl attempting to forge her identity in a colonial classroom setting and in relation to the powerful figure of her mother.

Kincaid's use of source texts for imaginative departure continues when Annie John is sitting in her history class at the age of thirteen or fourteen. Annie John is far

ahead of the other students in their books *A History of the West Indies* when her mind begins to wander to the topic of Ruth, the blonde, British daughter of a minister, in her class. Annie John narrates:

Her ancestors had been the masters, while ours had been the slaves. She had such a lot to be ashamed of, and by being with us every day she was always being reminded. We could look everyone in the eye, for our ancestors had done nothing wrong except just sit somewhere, defenseless. (*Annie John* 76)

Kincaid has inverted the heroic narrative of the colonizer by marking the colonizer's shameful acts through Annie John's thoughts about Ruth. While Annie John continues her musing she writes under a full colored picture of "Columbus in Chains", one of only five colored photographs in the textbook, the words "The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go" in Old English lettering. Annie John's words are taken from her mother's response to the immobile physical condition of Annie John's grandfather. In this case, Annie John's appropriation has refused the authority of the source-text and serves to undermine the powerful historical icon Christopher Columbus. Kincaid writes, "How [Annie John] loved this picture - to see the usually triumphant Columbus, brought so low, seated at the bottom of a boat just watching things go by" (*Annie John* 78). Miss Edward, the history teacher, is infuriated and begins bellowing when she becomes aware that Annie John's mind is wandering during the lesson, but even more importantly, Miss Edward is rendered speechless when she spots the caption Annie John has created. Kincaid writes, "In fact, everything stopped. Her eyes stopped, her bottom stopped, her pimples stopped" (*Annie John* 82). Both the caption and the teacher's speechlessness can be understood as a crack in the imperial order, for Annie John has exposed the weakness

of an iconic historical figure upon whom the history of colonization rests, "I had gone too far this time, defaming one of the great men in history, Christopher Columbus, discoverer of the island that was my home" (*Annie John* 82). The silence Kincaid constructs between Annie John and the teacher is a reversal of the silence placed on colonized subjects and depicts what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin describe as ". . . that profound silence between cultures which finally cannot be traversed by understanding" (*Empire* 86). The teacher is unable to understand Annie John's anger and belief that Ruth's ancestors, and imperialists in general, should be ashamed of their bad deeds. As Kincaid writes, Columbus's supposed discovery is in fact Annie John's home. This moment of silence also provides Annie John with a moment for assessing her classroom resistance, "And now look at me. I was not even hanging my head in remorse. Had my peers ever seen anyone so arrogant, so blasphemous" (*Annie John* 82). Annie John is fully aware of her role as someone able to challenge the British historical account found in her textbook. According to Craig Tapping who writes about history and children in Caribbean novels, "the Caribbean child is subjected to the lessons of history . . .so each child learns how to appropriate, alter and subvert the very history which would deny him or her personal identity and power . . . [history] must be confronted, written against, and written over" (52). In this scene history is suspect, and Kincaid constructs an adolescent who has guiltlessly written her caustic version over the words found in the textbook.

Interestingly, Annie John's punishment for her crime against the text is to copy Books I and II of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. Books I and II of *Paradise Lost* introduce Satan's fall from Heaven and his claim of dominion over Hell. Satan is depicted as a powerful and persuasive tragic figure who argues against God's monarchical

authority. These books echo Annie John's resistance to British monarchical authority. Annie John is empathetic towards Satan, as described in a later passage responding to the painting *The Young Lucifer*. The painting creates the image of Satan just recently thrown out of heaven, similar to Book I of *Paradise Lost*. Annie John narrates "At heart you could see, [Lucifer] was really lonely and miserable at the way things had turned out" (*Annie John* 95). Like Lucifer, Annie John resists her colonial identity, as seen in the *Columbus in Chains* episode, and consequently suffers for her resistance. Instead of reading the moral lesson to be gathered from Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*, Annie John is following in the romantic tradition of reading Satan as a heroic rebel. By casting Annie John as empathetic towards Satan, Kincaid is following a similar reading of Annie John's resistance as a heroic endeavor. However, comparable to Satan in *Paradise Lost*, this heroic depiction is short lived in *Annie John* when Kincaid moves from a proudly resistant Annie John to an adolescent in crisis.

The introduction of the text *Jane Eyre* into Annie John's narrative is heavily contextualized by a crisis of identity she is experiencing as a now fifteen year old. For example, Annie John states, "It was as if I had grown a new skin over the old skin and the new skin had a completely different set of nerve endings" (*Annie John* 91). In the midst of this identity crisis, Annie John frequently fantasizes about living alone in Belgium, a place chosen because Charlotte Brontë, the author of Annie John's favorite novel, *Jane Eyre*, had lived there for a year. Annie John also notes that Belgium is an ideal choice ". . . because I imagined that it would be a place my mother would find difficult to travel to . . ." (*Annie John* 92). What is particularly noteworthy is the manner in which Annie John utilizes a canonical British text and writer in order to create a divide between herself

and her mother. Furthermore, Annie John feigns the identity of a young Victorian lady in describing her daydream, "I was walking down a street in Belgium, wearing a skirt that came down to my ankles and carrying a bag of books that at last I could understand . . ." (*Annie John* 92). This daydream reenacts Frantz Fanon's ideas of the trauma associated with internalization of the self as 'other' which is in part mediated textually. Fanon writes,

. . . the black school boy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about 'our ancestors, the Gauls, identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages – an all white truth. There is identification – that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude. (147)

In this passage, Annie John has internalized white, British ideals as she masquerades as a Victorian lady.

This daydream inspired by Brontë is dramatically paralleled with a real scene in Annie John's life that is also representative of a search for identity. This scene is an example of a re-writing which uses the source-text as a departure for imaginative postcolonial writing and resistance. Annie John is walking down Market Street looking at herself in the shop windows and describes, "I saw myself just hanging there among bolts of cloth, among Sunday hats and shoes, among pots and pans . . ." (*Annie John* 94). Annie John's reflection is juxtaposed with familiar images and symbols of her Caribbean identity, even while she is unable to recognize her changing adolescent self, ". . . I didn't know that it was I, for I had got so strange" (*Annie John* 94). Annie John is about to sit down and cry when she sees four boys across the street who adopt ". . . an exaggerated

tone of voice, pretending to be grown up gentlemen living in Victorian times" (*Annie John* 95). Annie John's fantasy of being a Victorian woman is crudely reproduced in the mockery of the Antiguan boys. Annie John, however, continues with her Victorian fantasy by responding to one of the boys she recognizes "in [her] best, most polite young-lady voice" which is also ridiculed (*Annie John* 99). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that

[The postcolonial text] presents one of the clearest examples of the distance traversed when authors write and readers read in order to engage in communication . . . It reminds us that all writing comes into being at the difficult meeting point between the acts of production and consumption . . ." (187)

The distance in time, space, and culture between Annie John and Charlotte Brontë is brought to light in the re-writing created in the scene with the boys - Annie John is not Victorian, the boys are not Victorian, and they live in the real setting of Antigua not fictionalized England.

Similar to discussions regarding *The Tempest*, the representation of *Jane Eyre* in the novel also allows the critical reader, or *active agent*, to investigate other postcolonial forms of resistance within the text. Interestingly, Annie John does not identify the character Bertha Mason, the Creole woman in *Jane Eyre* described as a dark, animal-like lunatic. Instead, the novel has imposed Antiguan views of 'reality' over the fiction of *Jane Eyre* as shown while Annie John walks along shop windows and deals with young men mistreating her. The Victorian fantasy is overwritten by Antiguan reality in the text's use of *Jane Eyre* as a departing point and source for further imagination. This becomes most evident when Annie John returns home after her encounter with the young

men. Annie John's mother questions her whereabouts in a highly polished and polite manner with the words, " "You are late. It would please me to hear an excuse from you' She was using that tone of voice: it was as if I were not only a stranger but a stranger that she did not wish to know" (*Annie John* 101). This language again, evokes the Victorian setting of *Jane Eyre*. However, this is quickly shattered when Annie John's mother says she witnessed Annie John's encounter with the boys and calls Annie John a slut in French-patois. Kincaid writes,

The word 'slut' (in patois) was repeated over and over, until suddenly I felt as if I were drowning in a well but instead of the well being filled with water it was filled with the word 'slut' and it was pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils, my mouth. As if to save myself, I turned to her and said, 'Well, like father like son, like mother like daughter.' " (*Annie John* 102)

Again, Kincaid's use of this scene calls attention to the false, Victorian mannerisms Annie John, and here, her mother, have adopted when the force of their colonized reality presents itself. The mother's use of the French-patois word for slut is significant in the way Kincaid emphasizes the power of the word over Annie John. This feeling of drowning echoes the earlier feelings of an identity crisis described as well as the long depression to come in the chapter *The Long Rain*. Kincaid has now constructed a version of Annie John who is unable to resist or escape her colonized identity which has been both textually mediated and maternally enforced.

The impact of these texts on Annie John can also be better understood in many ways by reading Kincaid's essay "On Seeing England for the First Time". Kincaid writes, ". . . the naming of the kings, their deeds, their disappointments [in classrooms] - was the

vivid view, the forceful view. There were other ones, subtler ones, softer, almost not there - but these softer views were the ones that made the most lasting impression on me, the ones that made me really feel like nothing" ("On Seeing" 159). Kincaid describes familiar phrases such as "When morning touched the sky" and "Evening approaches" as concepts that simply did not exist in her Antiguan setting. These phrases and stories were representations of England according to Kincaid, out of which comes a more serious concept: "The space between the idea of something and its reality is always wide and deep and dark. The longer they are kept apart . . . the wider the width, the deeper the depth, the thicker the darkness" ("On Seeing" 160). Unlike stories repeated by a mother whom Annie John can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell, these representations of England are abstractions carried in the pages of texts and reinforced by white, British educators. The space is very wide, deep, and thick, however, Kincaid is able to expose that space to light by portraying the textuality of British literary and historical fictions for cogs in imperial discourse and ideology that perpetuated the British Empire. During an interview in *Callaloo*, Kincaid describes her almost obsessive reading and rereading of British and Caribbean history ". . . because I keep thinking that someone will say it happened differently" (223). Kincaid's words echo Annie John's experience with confronting colonial history and suggest a yearning for the re-writing of that history in the manner that the novel portrays.

Annie John interrogates British literary and historical texts and allows for further postcolonial readings by critical readers. By utilizing source-texts, *Annie John* has engaged in critical dialogue by exploring the abrogation and appropriation of language and literature. The source-texts are also used as departure points for further imaginative

writing that lead to forms of resistance. Furthermore, the novel has emerged as an instance of seizing the power of communication and an example of "the ability to reconstruct the world as an unfolding historical process" (*Empire* 82). All of these components challenge the British literary and historical canon's agency and ability to fix meanings (McLeod 147). While *Annie John* engages in critical dialogue at the literary level, *School Days* does so at the linguistic level.

In Chamoiseau's depiction of the colonial classroom in Martinique, language becomes the primary battleground between French assimilation policy and the Creole identity of the young boy. The battle between French and Creole languages is paramount to the battle between Frenchness and Creoleness in the text. In Chamoiseau's co-written essay with Jean Bernabé and Raphaël Confiant *In Praise of Creoleness*, the authors define Creoleness as "the interactional or transnational; aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian and Levantine cultural elements united on the same soil by the same yolk of history" (891). *In Praise of Creoleness* goes on to explain what is at stake in the classroom when French is privileged over Creole:

Every time a mother, thinking she is favoring the learning of the French language, represses Creole in a child's throat, is in fact bearing a blow to the latter's imagination, repressing his creativity. School teachers of the great period of French assimilation were the slave traders of our artistic impulse. So that today, it would be an impoverishment not to reinvest this language. Its usage is one of the ways of the submersion in our Creoleness. (899)

What the authors are driving at is the idea that the suppression of Creole in the classroom and the maternal support of that suppression create a cultural loss of language and artistic

production. Reasserting Creole and Creoleness is the way out of this cultural loss according to the authors as language becomes the instrument for change. Chamoiseau's *School Days* reconstructs the teaching of the French language and the suppression of Creole as one of the aims of French assimilation. However, Chamoiseau assembles multiple places in the text which challenge French language instruction as well as passages depicting resistance to this language assimilation. In addition, Chamoiseau attempts to construct the novel in a manner representing the arguments made in *In Praise of Creoleness* as a move away from the binary splitting between French and Creole configured in the plot.

Although one of Chamoiseau's chief projects in writing *School Days* is to challenge French language instruction and Frenchness, one must acknowledge that the medium of this challenge is conducted in the French language itself. However, given that this study is based on an English translation of the work originally composed in French, some of the nuances of language play and abrogation are regrettably not given the attention one might find in a study conducted with the original text. The translator of *School Days*, Linda Coverdale, explains in her preface that "Chamoiseau does not believe in glossaries, preferring that his readers open themselves to the 'subterranean magic' of strange words . . . The author's Creole expressions have been retained, sometimes with English translations provided in footnotes" (ix). As a result, the English translation still exposes the reader to the Creole language and its sounds. While many of the footnotes and the glossary are used as a tool for translation, there are places in which the author himself chooses to utilize footnotes or passages which present Creole and French in close proximity with one another as will be seen in following readings of the text. Ashcroft,

Griffiths, and Tiffin describe these editorial intrusions as places in which the postcolonial writer acts as the first interpreter, “Situated outside the text [editorial intrusions] represent a reading rather than a writing . . .” (*Empire* 61). In addition to addressing the dynamics of the multilingual elements at work in this English translation of *School Days*, the places in which Chamoiseau utilizes these textual disruptions will be identified and discussed in relation to the construction of Creoleness.

As seen in the previous discussion of literary abrogation found in *Annie John*, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s discussion of language abrogation is useful. The authors write,

The most interesting feature of [language] use in post-colonial literature may be the way in which it also constructs difference, separation, and absence from the cultural norm. But the ground on which such construction is based is an abrogation of the essentialist assumptions of that norm and a dismantling of its imperialist centralism. (*Empire* 44)

Therefore, in utilizing the Creole language as a place of difference, albeit alongside and in French, Chamoiseau’s text configures a move towards dismantling French centrality with the construction of Creoleness. Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant write in *In Praise of Creoleness*,

We did conquer it, this French language. If Creole is our legitimate language, we gradually (or at once) were given and captured, legitimated and adopted the French language (the language of the Creole white class). Creoleness left its indelible mark on the French language, as did other cultural entities elsewhere. We made the French language ours. We extended the meaning of some of its

words, deviated others. And changed many. We enriched the French language, its vocabulary as well as its syntax. We preserved many of its words which were no longer used. In short, we inhabited it. It was alive in us. In it we built our own language, this language which was chased by cultural kapos and viewed as a profanation of the idolized French language. Our literature must bear witness of this conquest. (900)

In *School Days* Chamoiseau represents this conquering of the French language in the figure of the little boy enduring French language instruction. The majority of the text reenacts the appropriation of French language with glimpses of movement towards the desire for abrogation. The narrative then, of a boy moving towards language abrogation, is in contrast with the text which is engaged in this abrogation. This complication of the movement towards the desire for abrogation and the actual act found in the text make both more highly visible. The effect of this contrast reveals that conquering the French language is no simple conquest. In fact, one might argue that the language conquest is a continual process paralleling the lifelong development of a youth moving towards mature adulthood. As the boy find his place in the world, adapts, and grows, so does he continue to find his place in language. Furthermore, this embodies Bhabha's claim that "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation, that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" ("Locations of Culture" 2). The continuous conquest of language represents the on-going negotiation attempting to authorize cultural hybridities through language and literature.

H. Adlai Murdoch provides more insight on how to interpret Chamoiseau's depiction of the French colonial education system and language politics. Murdoch writes,

As part of his evocation of his Martinican childhood, Chamoiseau will insist on inscribing this cultural creolization through the unique and ubiquitous sounds of the creole language, but in the end, locating the Africa-driven blackness of the *négrillon* amid this cultural profusion will become his primary task. (21)

Interestingly, Murdoch points to Chamoiseau's desire to inscribe Creole as being secondary to the work of locating the boy's blackness and African diasporic character. However, I would argue that these desires do not require separation or hierarchical ordering. Inscribing Creole and Creoleness is necessary for locating the little boy and the world he inhabits. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, "The 'world' as it exists 'in' language is an unfolding reality which owes its relationship to language to the fact that language interprets the world in practice, not to some imputed referentiality" (*Empire* 44). As such, inscribing the language of Creole is the practice of interpreting the world and inscribing a mode of being in the world as a Creole individual. Glissant writes in his essay "Creole" that "the writer's function is perhaps to propose language as shock, language as antidote, a nonneutral one, through which the problems of the community can be restated" (190). In *School Days* this is conducted with the figure of the little boy as he confronts French language instruction and the tension found in this confrontation exposes the power of harnessing the Creole language in identity construction. In addition, Murdoch points out that

The tension here is between a forced suppression of the indigenous legacies of a slave based history in favor of the inculcation of the unfamiliar, yet overvalued metropolitan values and practices that function through a hierarchical educational system bent upon excluding the local; ultimately, it is not so much the absorption of unfamiliar or foreign cultural references, but doing so to the absolute exclusion of reading about comparable or contrasting components from the reader's indigenous world. (34)

Murdoch has summed up the intermingled relationship between French assimilation policy, French language instruction and the education system. The school system does not simply teach French language, culture, or history. Instead the system uproots and disposes of any indigenous history, language, or cultural system in order to create, disseminate, and reproduce its own authority. Again, this is where Chamoiseau's inscription of Creole within the text is so important. The text creates the dynamic space where both Creole and French exist because Creole use is both an appropriation and abrogation of the French language. This also represents Glissant's call for teaching Creole alongside, but separate from French: "It is not by wishing to make Creole distinct from French at all costs that we will best preserve the specific linguistic nature of Creole" ("Creole," 186). While the classroom scenes embody the binary splitting of French and Creole, the text itself presents both languages to the reader.

Chamoiseau calls attention to the significance of French language instruction on the little boy's first day of school when he first encounters French. Sitting in class, the children have spent the morning listening to the teacher speaking when ". . . the little boy realized something obvious: *the Teacher spoke French*" (*School Days* 47). This

realization is followed by the boy reflecting on when and how members of his family utilize French and brings forth the awareness that a “division of speech” exists in his father’s ceremonious French, the older siblings’ use of Creole, and the formalities utilized when speaking with adults (*School Days* 47). The teacher’s French, however, represents a change in articulation, sentence structure, rhythm and intonation, “Words that were more or less familiar began to sound different. They seemed to come from a distant horizon and no longer had any affinity with Creole . . . The Teacher spoke French like the people on the radio . . .” (*School Days* 47). Interestingly, the teacher’s French parallels the French on the radio which acts as a voice of the official French culture. The French speaking teacher quickly transforms in the boy’s mind to “*Oh, the Teacher was French!*” (*School Days* 48). These passages depict a place where language becomes a part of the material. The little boy conceives that a French speaking teacher is French. This distinction becomes increasingly important because the opposite is also applicable; being non-French speaking is the equivalent to being non-French. Language is a defining characteristic of identity and place in society, and in this passage represents national identity. What quickly follows in this passage is an interruption from the *Répondeurs* calling out “if the weather changes . . . gird your loins/ get a grip on your French” and the boy’s bafflement over not knowing the French language (*School Days* 48). Chamoiseau’s use of the *Répondeurs* at this point calls attention to what the narrator knows – that the encounter with French will become a battle. The boy, on the other hand, is familiar and comfortable with his “home-language, his mama-language” of Creole (*School Days* 48). Murdoch describes such a convergence in the classroom as an encounter with

. . . departmentalization's recurring phenomena of Frenchness; essentially the French language, French culture, and the bureaucracy all conspire to make him a seeming stranger in his own land, unable to traverse the codes of doubling and displacement that act as barriers to his mastery of the complex cultural and historical framework within which he exists. (23)

Encountering the French language in the classroom is in fact an encounter with the discourse of Frenchness and the metropole. This encounter with French is, however, also useful in setting in motion the boy's awareness and understanding of language usage. This new understanding reveals a boy who is already adept at code switching and sparks his ability to think abstractly about language. Essentially, in this passage, the encounter and sense of estrangement sets in motion how and why the boy, and ultimately the text, will move out of this sense of bafflement and towards language appropriation and abrogation. Bhabha's concept of *unhomeliness* is helpful here. The estranging sense of the boy encountering this new version of French language creates ". . . the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural [initiation] . . ." ("Locations of Culture" 9). This condition of *unhomeliness* for the boy will therefore create the condition for his adaptation and cross cultural initiation.

Chamoiseau goes on to create passages in which French language instruction is inseparable from lessons in ethics and morality when the teacher attempts to discuss the moral of a story only to bump against a linguistic barrier. The teacher tells the story of a man who steals apples. The teacher asks the question in his flowery French, "In picking these apples, has this perrson, in your opinion, perrformed a good deed?" (*School Days* 56). The answer, clearly, is expected to be no, and the students dutifully respond

accordingly. However, when the teacher asks what the man should be called the response is, “He’s a chicken t’ief, *mêssié* . . .” which utilizes the Creole vocabulary that any thief is called a chicken thief regardless of what is stolen (56). The moral lesson is quickly displaced by the collision of Creole and French languages when the teacher insists that “A chicken thief steals chickens, an apple thief steals apples” (*School Days* 56). The following day, the teacher attempts to review his lesson in ethics and asks Big Bellybutton if he has ever picked anything without permission. Big Bellybutton responds, “ ‘*Twasn’t apples, mêssié, ’twas mangoes, not apples! ’t isn’t stealing, ’t isn’t stealing! . . . ’Cause it was mangoes, mêssié!*” These passages reveal how the lesson in ethics becomes distorted because of the variations in vocabulary and word usage. More importantly, this distortion reveals how literary texts and narratives were also utilized as lessons in ‘civilized’ behavior and were coded through Western language and material experience as evident in the use of the apple as an example. This concept was previously referred to in the analysis of *Annie John* and Viswanathan’s work. However, Big Bellybutton’s response is not evidence of a lack of morality but rather evidence of a misunderstanding of the Western language codes and logic of ethics. According to Oscherwitz,

. . . the attempt to impose a linear, logical frame to open analogical experience results in the death of the Creole and of Creole experience. In this way, Chamoiseau not only affirms destabilization, rupture and fragmentation in contrast to the false stability of European hegemony, he presents the two as mutually exclusive. (148)

This passage certainly presents such destabilization, in the creation of the miscommunication in the classroom lesson. The presentation of the Creole language and logic found with Big Bellybutton is contrasted strongly with the teacher's story and lesson in ethics. This contrast marks a cultural difference and challenges French centralism.

Immediately following the lesson in ethics, Chamoiseau illustrates the teacher's attempts to instill French pronunciation in his pupils. Upon holding up a pineapple, telling the students the fruit begins with the letter *a*, the teacher is horrified when in unison the students call the fruit *zanana* rather than *ananas*. In a footnote, the reader finds the words, "In Creole, *ananas* (pineapple) is pronounced *zanana*. (Note from the Omniscient One.)" Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin also address the use of untranslated words within the text such as this and describe the effect as "[signifying] a certain cultural experience which they cannot hope to reproduce but whose difference is validated by the new situation" (53). Chamoiseau takes this a step further by utilizing a footnote to draw attention to the linguistic difference while both the French and Creole words remain present. The validation, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin discuss, occurs in the actual presence of the footnote. The words *zanana* and *ananas* refer to the same object, but language politics signify the difference as evidenced by the teacher's horror. This short passage is followed by multiple examples of the teacher's reaction to his task of teaching the students French pronunciation including, "*Zounds! . . . However do you expect to travel along the path to wisdom with a language like that! This po'-nigger talk gums up your mind with its worthless pap!*" (*School Days* 61). Pronunciation lessons are clearly more than an exercise in linguistics and transform into an exercise in cultural

assimilation. Bhabha's discussion of *mimicry* is applicable. The students are “*almost the same but not quite*” (“Of Mimicry and Man” 89). The teacher moves between feelings of compassion for the students to hopelessness and exasperation at their shortcomings.

Chamoiseau switches perspective from the teacher's dramatic reactions to a description of the students' speech, “When the children spoke, they had a natural tendency to change every *u* to an *i*. *Juste* became *jiste*; *refuse* degenerated into *refisé*. The sound *eur* slipped into *ére*, *docteur* wound up *doctére*, *fleur* became *flére*, *inspecteur* slid into *inspectére*” (*School Days* 61) What is described as the Herculean task of the teacher is undermined by the reality that this pronunciation is the “natural tendency” of the students. Murdoch discusses this idea as

. . . the pupil's resistance to imposed French pronunciation patterns appears both incontestable and involuntary; their insistence on their creole patterns of speech bespeaks the cultural triumph of their indigenous identity over an alien, ‘foreign’ way of being whose aim is to displace and replace the former and to be internalized and articulated without question. No amount of force or repetition appears adequate to this task of cultural conversion. (32)

What Chamoiseau constructs, then, is a place where the students essentially cannot help but resist French language, and therefore, Frenchness as a whole. The teacher's overbearing attempts appear more outrageous due to their inefficacy and more frightening because of their intent to assimilate the students regardless of their innate resistance.

The cultural and political ramifications of language become even more highlighted with the introduction of the “fresh-from-France boys.” One of these boys is

described as having arrived recently on the ship *Colombie* and is “Ignorant of all things Creole, he displayed a Parisian refinement of behavior, vocabulary and accent that sent the Teacher into raptures” (*School Days* 62). The other two boys are described as having been sheltered by their parents from the world and culture of Creole surrounding their homes. The result is that these students are “. . . more talented than any of us at adapting to the cultural orthopedics deployed by the Teacher” (*School Days* 62). Soon, the body of students begins adopting and adapting to the teacher’s methods of rewarding French pronunciation and punishing those who slip into Creole. The students are forced to become highly aware and conscientious of the Creole in their minds and of the need to translate thoughts into French. Chamoiseau writes, “What I’m saying is, speech became a heroic feat. You were chancing not only a tongue-lashing from the Teacher but also hot pursuit out on the playground by a pack of fiends, even though they weren’t any better at French than the rest of us” (*School Days* 63). Where the teacher’s attempt to convert the students fails, the pressure on the playground by peers picks up. The adaptation to this linguistic oppression is silence, “Silences deepened as you tiptoed through letters, sounds, words. Each one of us felt worthless” (*School Days* 63). This retreat into silence is another response to French, similar to the errors made in pronunciation. When the students cannot speak without punishment, they choose to not speak at all. This is a silence, however, which blankets both Creole and French. Developmentally, the children are unable to appropriate the French language and silence is one linguistic option available to them. Interestingly, Chamoiseau utilizes self-reflexivity in this passage to highlight this predicament with the phrase, “What I’m saying is . . .” Where once there was silence as a child, there is now a speaking narrator in the form of Chamoiseau stating

clearly “I’m saying.” The silence has been given a voice in the text in the form of the editorial intrusion.

As the narrative continues, the students struggle with their classroom experiences, yet, thanks to Big Bellybutton who was discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, the power of Creole is wielded to forcibly resist the teacher and his French language instruction. This attempt is most notably found when the students decide to tie up the teacher which “. . . meant tying up a person’s vital energy, rendering him helpless before an onslaught of ailments” (*School Days* 124). Interestingly, tying up the teacher is done through language and “This whisper had to be like an order given to the world, delivered with all possible conviction and radiating outward like a blast of heat. In those days, life could be affected by the power of words” (*School Days* 125). In this situation, the students wield the power of the Creole language in order to resist their suppression by the French language instruction. Chamoiseau’s self-reflective style becomes evident once again when he comments on the tying up process works in “. . . you’re not hearing this from me” (*School Days* 125). Clearly, the reader is hearing this from Chamoiseau, the adult autobiographical narrator, and the façade of secrecy mimics the secrecy of the students engaging in their subtle form of resistance. Immediately following, the *Répondeurs* chime in with “I admit/ I am still in thrall to/ the most ancient memory/ and the perfect cipher” (125-126). Both the self-reflexivity and use of the *Répondeurs* act again as an editorial intrusion or first reading. The message here is that this example of children wielding the power of the Creole language engages with the historical and cultural roots of Creole. The children, then, are wielding Creoleness to challenge and

resist the French colonial system in this passage, and Chamoiseau calls attention to the power of the Creole language.

In addition to the scenes in which French language instruction is oppressive, *School Days* contains passages in which adults and authority figures in the school setting break from French and slip into Creole themselves. For example, Chamoiseau writes, “In his frustration, the Teacher himself might relapse into Creole. He would also, in the occasional moment of fatigue, skimp on his *rs* or lose his *us*” (*School Days* 63). Interestingly, the teacher slips into Creole at the same time that his ability for self-control is undone during the act of teaching the French language. This is another example of Bhabha’s concept of “*almost the same but not quite*” at work (“Locations of culture” 89). The teacher is unable to sustain his French language usage when he becomes frustrated or exhausted and slides into Creole language use instead. This slippage, as can be imagined, is quickly restrained when

His wary self-command would then become intense, unremitting, strained to the highest pitch. His flickering language would grow even more painstaking, guarded, distrustful of itself, threading its way among sounds while anticipating hazardous pitfalls where the dreaded Creole lurked near at hand. (*School Days* 63)

The teacher, then, becomes a figure who tries very hard to enforce and reproduce French Universalism while simultaneously representing fissures and ruptures from that centrality. These ruptures are an example of Bhabha’s *ambivalence* at work in colonial discourse. In order to garner support for his efforts in teaching French, the teacher calls upon the parents “. . . to protect their progeny from the contamination of this cane-fields pidgin by demanding that we speak French . . .” (*School Days* 64). As a result, we return

to the ideas of *In Praise of Creoleness* when mothers are brought into the process of French assimilation and the suppression of Creole and Creoleness. Glissant also offers insight into what is lost when an entire community suppresses Creole. Glissant writes, “. . . it has been demonstrated that the mother tongue is indispensable in all cases to psychological, intellectual, and emotional equilibrium among members of a community” (“Creole” 183). By asking parents to suppress Creole at home, the equilibrium which Glissant references is lost to all members of the community.

Chamoiseau offers another break into Creole from this linguistic assimilation upheld on the school grounds. At the height of the most dramatic scene in the text, when Big Bellybutton is in the middle of his fight with boss bully, the caretaker arrives and attempts to separate the boys:

In his bafflement, [the caretaker] tried a scolding in French, something about listening to reason. Hopping around the fray, he resorted to barking like a mad dog, then let out the shrill wheeeeeeeeeee of a fire-engine siren. Finally, he exploded in the most unbelievable blast of Creole abuse we had absolutely ever heard. The mob was dumbfounded.

Big Bellybutton and the bad guy, still entangled, froze in fascination. The caretaker seemed possessed by a pack of zombies. This Creole eruption was accompanied by a hypnotizing vibration of his paunch. He was swelling with wrath, as though he'd popped out one of those rigid carapaces that weigh so heavily on tired tortoises. After one last tremor, he recovered his composure . . .

(School Days 92)

What is noteworthy in this passage is the way in which Creole seems to forcefully escape from the caretaker both verbally and physically. After attempting French, the caretaker resorts to the sound of an animal and inanimate object before engaging in Creole such is the suppression of Creole so profound. The students respond to the caretaker with fascination. The man is cursing and his entire body is involved in his lapse into Creole with vibrations, swelling, and tremors. Interestingly, the passage reads, “The caretaker seemed possessed by a pack of zombies.” This idea of the language possessing the caretaker like a zombie demonstrates the Afro-Caribbean heritage of voodoo. Furthermore, the caretaker is simultaneously taken over by the language in this moment as though its internal presence manifests itself in the caretaker’s body. Suddenly, the Creole lapse is over after the final tremor, the children disperse and the boy notes, “A quiet such as the little boy had never known now enveloped the entire school” (*School Days* 93). This quiet is the peace after the dramatic fight and the unexpected, and ultimately more dramatic, eruption of the caretaker into Creole. The caretaker, moved by the energy of the fight, draws on his native language of Creole in much the same way as the teacher draws on Creole from frustration. Again, the involuntary and internal resistance to French exposes itself even amongst the adults of the colonial school and reveals Bhabha’s idea of *ambivalence* at work.

What emerges from the layering of these passages at the narrative level is the figure of the young boy encountering French and Frenchness within the classroom. However, Chamoiseau is no longer in this place. As the adult autobiographical narrator, he is able to look back, construct the text of *School Days*, and add his political commentary in the form of editorial intrusions such as the use of untranslated passages,

self-reflexivity, footnotes, and the *Répondeurs*. *In Praise of Creoleness* precedes the original French version of the text by a mere five years and the language politics discussed in that manifesto clearly influence the narrative. However, at the aesthetic level, *School Days* also acts as an example of the artistic impulse and creative endeavor which the authors of *In Praise of Creoleness* call for. Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant write,

Our submersion into our Creoleness, by means of Art, is one of the most extraordinary and fairest ways of entering in relation with the world. Expressing Creoleness will be expressing the very beings of the world. What we felt, our emotional experience, our pains, our uncertainties, the strange curiosity of what was thought to be our defects, will help in our achieved expression to build in diversity the harmonious Being of the world. (903)

One of the ways Chamoiseau constructs Creoleness on an aesthetic level is by constructing orality in his written work. Coverdale, the English translator of *School Days* states, “[Chamoiseau] writes in a French that is highly polished and extravagantly unconventional: antic, lyrical, sarcastic, at times oneiric, even opaque, and above all *vocal*” (viii). This vocal quality is found in examples of onomatopoeia and sound words. Examples of this are found sprinkled throughout *School Days*: “*Ayayayayayae*” (25), “*Whack! Whack!*” (58), “*Tak!*”, and “*wheeeeeeeee*” (92). Also, the call and response mode of the *Répondeurs* is also very vocal. According to Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant, “Creole orality, even repressed in its aesthetic expression, contains a whole system of countervalues, a counterculture; it witnesses ordinary genius applied to resistance, devoted to survival” (895). In “Cross cultural Poetics” Glissant also addresses

the need for orality in literature in stating, “. . . [we writers] should perhaps not forget that we have a role to play in the complex reuniting of writing and speech” (108). Orality and Creoleness operate in the manner in which Bhabha describes as reinscribing the social imaginary (“Locations of Culture” 6). This orality is a linguistic representation of the borderline condition. Tagirova writes that Chamoiseau “. . . situates his writing between the Creole storyteller and the Western writer and creates a dialectic between orality and writing” (271). While I agree with this dialectic positioning, Tcheuyap argues that “. . . the Creolist exercise, by trying to base writing upon speech is an admission of impotence. Now the word is evanescent by nature, difficult to tame” (51). Tcheuyap makes a strong argument that orality has limitations when the author is attempting to move between semiotic systems. However, I would argue that in attempting orality, Chamoiseau makes a stronger move towards reinscribing the social imaginary while juxtaposing French and Creole.

In closing, Chamoiseau has created a narrative challenging the authority of French language assimilation while also attempting to construct Creoleness in a text. Chamoiseau’s French language appropriation and abrogation occurs at multiple aesthetic levels. The result is a layering of linguistic and political statements regarding language and Creoleness. Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant claim that “The world is evolving into a state of Creoleness” (902). Although utilizing Creoleness as an essentialist mode of being in the world has its limits in terms of reinforcing binaries, it does attempt to produce what Bhabha describes as dwelling “in the beyond” “. . . to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality” (“Locations of Culture” 7). Interestingly,

Kincaid and Chamoiseau respond to the “language of the criminal” in very different ways. Kincaid re-writes British literary and historical texts while Chamoiseau confronts French language assimilation. The end results are similar, however, in that both *Annie John* and *School Days* engage in language appropriation and abrogation in order to challenge and disrupt the language of the colonizer.

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