

## The Erotics of Resistance and Postcolonial Self-Fashioning in *Annie John*

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“good behaviour is the proper posture of the weak, of children.”

Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

“Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable.”

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

It is usual in reading to bring our repertoire of explanatory schemas to what we read in order to make it cohere with our familiar world. When we have difficulty in producing such coherence, we resist what remains irreducibly strange or seek a schema that might account for the strangeness without making it familiar. In teaching *Annie John* I usually find the book readily assimilated by women readers to their own experience of growing up, while a similar normalizing effect is produced by the protocols of scholarly writing that place the particularity of its narrative within the generalizing narratives of developmental psychology, sociology, and literary history.<sup>1</sup> My own initial response to the novel, however, was a sense of strangeness and excess similar to the effect Freud has studied in “The Uncanny,” especially what is suggested in his observation that the German *heimlich* contains in it the double sense of the familiar and the concealed that enables it to function as a synonym for its opposite, *unheimlich* (“The Uncanny” 156), since the familiar in the novel is always turning into the inexplicable under the pressure of something that remains hidden.<sup>2</sup> Alison Donnell and Giovanna Covi have recovered the strangeness of Kincaid’s writing by exploring the way Kincaid writes against conventional expectations. In this paper I wish to recognize my sense of the uncanny as the necessary effect of *Annie John*’s treatment of repressed and taboo material in a marvelously crafted voice of innocence narrating a significantly atypical account of a child’s

negotiation of her crises. I find Kleinian psychoanalysis to be the most useful tool for opening the hidden aspect of the book, though I use Lacan as a key to see things on the surface that would otherwise remain invisible. I also find that by identifying with Satan, Annie aligns herself to the romantic reclamation of Milton initiated by Blake that enables a revaluation of values and shapes her psychological drama as an anti-colonial performance.<sup>3</sup> I wish to trace the psychological foundation of resistance in the novel and to indicate the theoretical status of its political erotics.<sup>4</sup>

In her influential argument against the academic hegemony of theory as silencing the emergent voices of historically oppressed people, Barbara Christian has claimed that “people of colour have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. [...] My folk [...] have always been a race for theory—though more in the form of the hieroglyph, a written figure which is both sensual and abstract” (52). Kincaid’s fiction could certainly be read as exemplifying Christian’s notion of a theoretical hieroglyph, being specific in its enactment of the decolonizing process of a female sexed subject originating in the Caribbean, but as such it participates in the potentiality of all fiction as a mode of theoretical exploration. This potentiality has been strongly affirmed by psychoanalytic theory, which has often found its basic concepts embodied in fiction. There are numerous examples of such discovery (Lacan has pointed out that Freud insisted on literary training as “the prime requisite in the formation of analysts” [*Écrits* 147]), of which Lacan’s recognition of his theory in Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” and Melanie Klein’s similar self-recognition in Colette’s libretto for the Ravel opera, “The Magic Word” (“Infantile Anxiety Situations”), are perhaps the most interesting.<sup>5</sup> I find Klein’s work particularly useful for enabling a reading of *Annie John* as an embodiment of a potential (but deviant) line of development within the psychological process theorized by her. Through her replay of adolescence, Annie John textualizes the violent processes that are initiated in early infancy but are repressed and remain unconscious. Returning to the foundational drama of the withdrawal of the breast, Annie’s text weaves an overdetermined mesh of the psychological and the political in which the colonial infant’s rage at loss (which

also produces the sexed subject of language and her subjection to patriarchy) is repeated through the metonymy of self-fashioning erotic substitutions and resistance and culminates in a metaphoric self-rebirthing. In other words, Annie's text demonstrates how the normalizing production of the colonial subject may be sabotaged by routing the energy of the love-hate ambivalence through a process of resistance that produces the postcolonial subject.<sup>6</sup>

One might say of Klein's theory as distinguished from Freud's, that if in Freud's father-centred theory society, morality and religion are founded on the killing and eating of the father by the sons, in Klein's mother-centred theory the foundational act of psychic and social life is matricide and the devouring of the maternal body in fantasy by every infant. The fundamental ambivalence of emotions that Freud roots in the son's simultaneous death wish toward and admiration for the powerful and prohibiting father is grounded by Klein in every infant's overwhelming relation to the maternal breast, which is the primary object of love when it satisfies the infant's need and appears in response to desire as well as being the target of hate and destructive wishes when it denies satisfaction. Klein summarizes as follows:

The baby's first object of love and hate—his mother—is both desired and hated with all the intensity and strength that is characteristic of the early urges of the baby. In the very beginning he loves his mother at the time she is satisfying his needs [...] and giving him the sensual pleasure which he experiences when his mouth is stimulated by sucking at her breast. This gratification is an essential part of the child's sexuality, and is indeed its initial expression. But when the baby is hungry and his desires are not gratified [...] Hatred and aggressive feelings are aroused and he becomes dominated by the impulse to destroy the very person who is the object of all he desires [...] hatred and aggressive feelings give rise [...] to most painful states, such as choking [...] which are destructive to his own body, thus aggression, unhappiness and fears are again increased. [...] Love and hate are struggling together in the baby's

mind; and this struggle to a certain extent persists throughout life. (*Love, Hate* 58–60)

In the earliest emotional phase of oral-sadism the baby wishes to bite and tear up her mother, though in the later urethral-sadist and anal-sadist phases she uses urine and feces for similar destruction. Since for the infant there is no separation of internal and external reality, its wishes have magical efficacy: what is desired is effected (as Annie's death wish against her mother gives her an excruciating headache).<sup>7</sup> This produces both guilt for killing the beloved and fear of being destroyed by her retaliation. What the child wishes to reconstitute by its love and its desire for reparation is, however, also effectively remade.

In the initial non-separation of itself and the world, the infant exists in a state of "primary narcissism" and omnipotence. Beginning with seeing mother as only a partial object, the good breast (though she is also the prototype of the bad object, the breast that fails), the child develops a love toward mother as a person, a complete good object with which it identifies, desires to "devour" with "greedy love," introjects, and anxiously protects against internal and external threats (*Contributions* 282–84). Since loving and devouring are closely related at this stage, the child's identification of the self and the good object puts both in danger from her love and violent fantasies. That is why Klein concludes, "although psychology and pedagogy have always maintained [...] that a child is a happy being [...] and [...] that the sufferings of adults are the result of the burdens and hardships of reality [...] *just the opposite is true.* [...] all the sufferings of later life are for the most part repetitions of these early ones, and [...] every child in the first years of its life goes through an immeasurable degree of suffering" (*Contributions* 188–89).

With the development of the child's ego, the good and bad objects which existed in inseparable ambivalence, are more clearly differentiated, enabling the direction of hate toward one and love and reparation at the other. But this process is never secure; the child is always threatened with the loss of the loved mother and fears that the real mother should die. This inability of the subject to "secure his *good, internalized* object," produces a depressive state that is the foundation of all subse-



quent mourning (287), and that climaxes “just before, during and after weaning” (312). In this condition the child mourns the mother’s breast and all it has come to stand for: “namely, love, goodness and security. All these are felt by the baby to be lost and lost as result of his own uncontrollable greedy and destructive fantasies” (312). D. W. Winnicott adds that because the baby’s own anger has spoiled what was formerly good, “in the baby’s dreams the breasts are no longer good [...] they are felt to be bad, even dangerous. That is why there is a place for the wicked woman in the fairy stories who gives poisoned apples” (*The Child* 84).

Annie John narrates the story of her adolescence as a second weaning in which the repressed conflicts of infancy are revived and brought to the surface of her text though not to her consciousness. Significantly, although she casts her experience in the mythic form of a loss of paradise, her narrative begins not with paradise but with the presence of death as always already there, its insistence marked by denial in the process of coming into consciousness: “For a short while [...] I thought only people I did not know died. [...] Until then, I had not known that children died” (3–4).<sup>8</sup> The unconscious presence of death shows itself with greater symptomatic force in the representation of its infectious power and the defensive production of taboo: “My mother would come back from the dead girl’s house smelling of bay rum—a scent that for a long time afterward would make me feel ill. [...] I could not bear to have my mother caress me or touch my food [...] I especially couldn’t bear the sight of her hands lying still” (6). Freud indicated that in many societies the contact with the dead is surrounded by taboo customs focussing on hands, especially the touching of food (69–72), and suggested that the ascription of infectious power and hostility to the dead comes from projecting on them the death wish that we have toward our beloved persons. In this light the transformation of the mother’s hands into taboo objects indicates not only that her death (symbolized by her hands “lying still”) is feared as a consequence of the child’s wish toward her but that they have, through projection, become embodiments of danger for the child in any contact with her body and food. The same death wish and fear of retaliation seem to underlie Annie’s abandonment of a love object, Sonia, when the latter’s mother, “who had been with child,”

dies. The pregnancy of Sonia's mother is easy to overlook since it has no bearing on Annie's story, but that makes it all the more significant: it indicates a displaced anxiety about Annie's own mother's pregnancy and the wish to destroy both the mother and everything inside her that Klein has found in children. But such a wish is tormentedly ambivalent, producing loss, fear of abandonment and guilt, for which the child's word is "shame": "She seemed such a shameful thing, a girl whose mother had died and left her alone in the world" (8). As Sonia's mother is a displacement for Annie's mother, the Sonia Annie abandons is a loved object with which she identifies, and which can be ejected so that Annie and her mother can be safe. Annie's repressed death wish can, however, show itself openly when it finds legitimation in the adolescent revival of the primal scene (significantly marked by denial: "It didn't interest me what they were doing"). Annie's mother's hand, very much alive in caressing her father in lovemaking, is seen by Annie as "white and bony, as if it had long been dead and had been left out in the elements" (30). At this Oedipal moment Annie's mother splits into an internalized good object with which Annie will continue to identify, which will be the primary object of her love and from which she will find the strength to fight her battles, and the externalized bad object against which she will be engaged in mortal combat.

This splitting of Annie's mother is preceded by a series of episodes marking the deflection of Annie's anger away from the mother. Expelled from the condition of being merged with her mother (wearing the same clothes, being contained in her mother's trunk and her mother's story), Annie, in her own words, is "never able to wear my own dress or see my mother in hers without feeling bitterness and hatred, directed not so much toward my mother as toward, I suppose, life in general" (26). Annie attacks the manners teacher by a return to anal-sadism, making farting noises, and the piano teacher through oral-sadism, eating the plums kept for decoration, in both cases using an arsenal originally deployed against mother toward substitutes that embody the bad object. But after her return to the primal scene, Annie splits her mother with the finality of a mourning, recalling the memories "through which the libido was attached to the lost object" (Freud quoted in Klein,

*Contributions* 311), in order to detach herself from the good-breast-gone-bad. Annie's memories are oral: mother had chewed beef in her own mouth before feeding her; she had transformed the "hated carrots" into palatable food (32). After this parting Annie directs her "overpowering" (33) love toward girls, through each of whom she carries on her affair with her good mother.

Annie has three intense erotic relations apart from her mother, each of which re-enacts her original relation with her mother. In the earliest, Annie registers the connection between her love and oral-sadist relation to mother: "I loved very much—and so used to torment" (7). This is purely physical: Sonia is a "real dunce" who forgets the spelling of her own name and whose beauty for Annie lies in the profusion of her lovingly described body hair. Annie feeds Sonia with an appropriately named sweet called "frozen joy" (substitute for mother's breast), bought with money stolen from her mother's purse, thus placing Sonia in the position of the child who sucks and herself in the position of the mother giving suck, more specifically her own mother, since stealing from a mother's purse expresses a child's identity with her mother (Winnicott, *The Child* 162). But the position is reversed as the game turns into an *s/m* ritual with Annie pulling the hair on Sonia's arms and legs till the latter cries, because the pulling of the body hair is an equivalent of biting, the oral-sadistic counterpart of the sucking that Sonia does. So that, one might say, that in this love game Annie moves fluidly between the position of the mother and the daughter and enjoys all the erotic possibilities of the non-separation of the mother and child. It is precisely because Sonia is so identified with herself that Annie has to eject her forcefully when her mother dies.

Annie turns to Gwen after the ambivalence visible in the earlier game had led to splitting and the loss of the good object, which Annie is able to find again in her new friend. The love between the two girls, beginning with Gwen's gift of a black rock (breast substitute) and Annie's immediately putting it to her nose to find the lavender smell of Gwen's handkerchief, replicates Annie's relation with her mother. It is probably not necessary to point out that a baby's first contact with her mother is through her mouth and nose, but more specifically, Annie is linked to

her mother through smell: "I would occasionally sniff at her neck, or behind her ears [...] She smelled sometimes of lemons, sometimes of sage, sometimes of roses [...] I would no longer hear what she was saying; I just liked to look at her mouth as it opened and closed" (22). (This scene of dropping out of language will be repeated with inversion at the end of the book in relation to the mother as bad object.) The disappearance of speech in erotic ecstasy is precisely repeated between Annie and Gwen. Annie recalls that she "would [...] kiss her on the neck, sending her into a fit of shivers [...] Sometimes when she spoke to me, so overcome with feeling would I be that I was no longer able to hear what she said, I could only make out her mouth as it moved up and down" (50–51). In this relationship, it is the identification of Gwen with Annie's mother that motivates Annie to turn away from her, though not perhaps from the fear of the death of the loved person that Klein sees as the underlying motive for such turns. Rather, with the splitting of Annie's mother, a transvaluation takes place which marks the intersection of the political and the psychological in the book, and Gwen, initially ideal because of her duality as both sly and maternally approved becomes increasingly identified with mother as bad object (Annie treats Gwen in the same manner in relation to the Red Girl as she treats her mother). In other words, Annie's infidelity is not the quest to prove independence from, and avert the loss of, the threatened love object by finding a series of substitutes that Klein sees in the Don Juan syndrome (*Love, Hate* 86), but a profound political turn enabled by Annie's internalization (introjection) of a politically valenced good mother.

Annie's revaluation of values begins when her puberty occasions her mother's shift into the institutional role of socializing her as a subject of colonial patriarchy. Annie negotiates the loss and anger generated by this fork in mothering by displacing her hostility on the teachers who are her mother's colleagues in this institutional role, so that Annie's anger against her mother is deflected onto colonial institutions while her ambivalence toward mother is maintained. With Annie's splitting of her mother, the two mothers become politically antithetical, the cast-out bad object being identified with the colonial patriarchal power and norms and the introjected good object being identified with opposi-

tion and resistance. This becomes most clearly articulated in the chapter “Columbus in Chains” but is already operative in “Gwen” and explicit in “The Red Girl.”

It might seem paradoxical to claim that the Red Girl, who is in every respect an antithesis of Annie’s mother, is identified with Annie’s introjected good mother, but that is precisely the consequence of Annie’s revision of values. The Red Girl appears to Annie while she is subjected to the disciplinary procedures of home and school, under the strict surveillance of mother and developing expertise in resistance, as the embodiment of multiple transgressive power. She is a tomboy who climbs trees and plays marbles as well as any boy. She is dirty, smelly, uncombed, ragged and fat—in every respect the antithesis of the lady Annie’s mother is trying to make Annie:

What a beautiful thing I saw standing before me. Her face was big and round and red like a moon—a red moon. She had big, broad, flat feet, and they were naked to the bare ground; her dress was dirty, the skirt and blouse tearing away from each other at one side; the red hair [...] was matted and tangled; her hands were big and fat, and her fingernails held at least ten ant-hills of dirt under them. And on top of that, she had such an unbelievable, wonderful smell, as if she had never taken a bath in her whole life. (57)

Gendered by mothering, Annie finds in the Red Girl an alternative mother who enables her to cross-gender herself, transforming the feminine, aesthetic marbles that her mother had given her (“What a nice colour! Amber!” 55) into the signifiers of gender transgression and homage to her new lover: “I took winning as a sign of the perfection of my union with the Red Girl” (60). Katherine Millersdaughter’s comments on the construction of her “femme” identity help to bring out the significance of Annie’s transgression: “feminine,” Millersdaughter says,

signified my worthlessness and marked my self as sexy only in my powerlessness. I learned early on that my world’s inter-

est in making a 'lady' out of me meant midnights [...] under my father's body [...] I turned my back on that feminine body and forged a space/self in between 'boy' and 'girl' that others named 'tomboy.' [...] I would [...] insist on calling it 'femme, tomboy femme,'" a position that enables the whittling away of the available languages of gender and sexuality (121). It is also useful to note that the bad girl self-image is adopted by femmes as a means of empowering themselves through their transgressive pleasure (Harris and Crocker 101), since bodily pleasure is what Annie most strongly affirms against disciplinary power. Annie's earlier oral- and anal-sadistic resistance against her mother's attempt to position her as a colonial feminine subject finds powerful assistance from the Red Girl as both model and object, taking the resistance to the broader plane of undoing the regulation of gender and sexuality.

The Red Girl carries on her body numerous marks of the colonial pariah. Her big, broad, flat, and bare feet, tattered clothes, and slovenliness are colonial markers of degeneracy that were used in the nineteenth century to signify the barbarity of the Irish, Jews, prostitutes, the working class, and domestic workers and were seen as the equivalent of a dark skin within the prevailing racist ideology (McClintock 52–56). The Red Girl's assumption of the marks of the pariah because "she didn't like to bathe [...] preferred to wear a dress until it just couldn't be worn anymore [...] didn't like to comb her hair" (57), and Annie's adoration of her positions them both as engaged in an erotic-political transgression and revaluation of colonial norms. Moreover, dirt has a particularly significant place in colonial discourse and iconography. Anne McClintock has noted soap's vanguard status in Britain's civilizing mission during the Victorian era: "the emergent middle class values—monogamy ('clean' sex [...]), industrial capital ('clean' money [...]), Christianity ('being washed in the blood of the lamb'), class control ('cleansing the great unwashed') and the imperial civilizing mission ('washing and clothing the savage')—could all be marvelously embodied in a single household commodity" (208). It is not surprising, therefore, that "'dirt' became

deeply integrated in the policing and transgression of social boundary” (quoted in Nadeau 228). Placed in this context Annie’s celebration of dirt (and a smell far different from what she had celebrated earlier) is also revealed as the challenge of a transgressive erotics against the authority of the colonial norm. If smell is a primary connection between Annie and her mother, then in the Red Girl Annie has found her lost good object as a counter-colonial mother.

Annie’s relation to the Red Girl repeats the *s/m* relation she had with Sonia but with a reversal of the domina/bottom roles, Annie playing the bottom to the Red Girl.<sup>9</sup> The positions, however, remain fluid, settling neither into equality nor into gendered hierarchy, thus staying out of the traditional fixed positioning of *s/m*. Though pinching is strictly speaking what Klein calls a muscular-sadist action, it is also the equivalent of biting, the oral-sadist counterpart to kissing/sucking. The Red Girl as domina performs this alternate activity of destruction and reconstruction, of hate and love, making her the child and Annie the mother. (It is Annie’s delay in her expected return—failing as a good breast—that provokes the Red Girl/child into her oral-sadist attack.) At the same time, Annie brings the Red Girl exorbitant gifts—combs studded with rhinestones, artificial rosebuds suitable for wearing with a nice dress—only to have her put them into her pockets without acknowledgement. The interaction establishes the dominant position of the Red Girl (basic to *s/m* games) but at the same time empowers Annie (contrary to the traditional humiliation of the bottom), who buys these gifts by skillfully robbing her parents’ safe. No longer stealing from her mother’s purse (identification), Annie now robs for the pleasure of challenging the parents’ power: “it was a pleasure to see that they didn’t know everything” (64). But if we accept Winnicott’s suggestion that the child who steals is not looking for the object that he takes but for his lost object, his mother (*The Child* 162), then the perfectly useless gifts Annie buys with stolen money can be understood as pure symbols standing for her mother. This would explain why they are so naturally absorbed in the Red Girl’s person—the Red Girl herself being the good object—and Annie’s only concern, the giving. It would seem that in bringing these various parts of mother (stolen gifts) from the bad mother (of power) to the good

erotic mother (Red Girl), Annie is engaged in the act of reparation, of rebuilding the dismembered mother, that Klein sees as the foundation of morality and art.

In this context it seems remarkable that Annie should drop the Red Girl so easily. But the explanation for the absence of any frustration in this regard seems to lie in the extraordinarily satisfying dream of fulfillment with which Annie concludes this affair:

I dreamed that the boat on which she had been travelling suddenly splintered in the middle of the sea, causing all the passengers to drown except for her, whom I rescued in a small boat. I took her to an island, where we lived together forever [...] At night, we would sit on the sand and watch ships filled with people on a cruise steam by. We sent confusing signals to the ships, causing them to crash on some nearby rocks. How we laughed as their cries of joy turned to cries of sorrow. (70–71)

If Annie's separation from Sonia is compelled by the threat to the maternal body and to Annie herself as a result of her emotional ambivalence, and that from Gwen is brought about by the split in the mother and Annie's revaluation of values, the fading of the Red Girl is a product of the fulfillment of her function as the vehicle of the revalued and reconstituted good mother. The boat in which the Red Girl is travelling is the same that Annie's mother took out of Dominica. It, too, "splinters" as the other had done (19, 70), but with the difference that while in the mother's story two or three passengers had perished, in Annie's incorporation and revision of it all perish except the Red Girl/mother, whom Annie rescues. The "small boat" in which mother had set out (19) becomes the "small boat" in which Annie performs her rescue (71). In other words, Annie is identified with her mother and engaged in a rescue operation, an act of reparation, which will enable her to live with her mother securely installed within her. (The fantasy of the Red Girl on the island is very similar to that of the "red-skin woman" whom the girl wants to marry in *At the Bottom of the River*, who tells stories beginning 'Before you were born,' and with whom the girl throws hardened cow dung at people they don't like [12].) The Red Girl/mother and Annie



are further merged in the dream with the maroons, who lived in the wilderness and maintained an unconquered resistance in the Caribbean, an identification that takes the childish fantasy of the earlier book to the political level of an anti-colonial attack on tourists in cruise ships.<sup>10</sup> With destructive hostility now clearly directed at the legitimate target of neo-colonial masters, mother and daughter, united in love and resistance, can laugh together at the retribution they bring about for colonial domination. Through the mediation of the Red Girl, Annie regains her lost unity with mother, translated now to a political level.

This constitution of the introjected good mother as anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial rebel enables Annie's most overt act of political resistance, the defacement of the picture of Columbus with the citation of her mother's mocking words against her father, translating the words from their private anti-patriarchal context into a political slogan of the impotence of colonial power: "The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go" (78). Yet, as one might expect within the narrative I have been tracing, this is the point at which the split of the mother becomes visible and absolute: Annie returns home to a mother indifferent to her, wholly subservient to her father ("My father could hardly get a few words out of his mouth before she was a jellyfish of laughter" 83), who deceives her into eating the "much hated breadfruit" (83), whose symbolic significance is that it is the food of plantation slavery.<sup>11</sup> In other words, Annie's external mother serves her the bad milk of slavery, as a consequence of which she is visibly split and revealed as the evil witch: "her body was in the shade [...] but her head was in the sun. 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" (84).

Annie enters her final combat with her external mother on the field of patriarchy. Having implicitly performed a satanic-romantic reversal of values ("evil be thou my good") through her own erotic dynamic,<sup>12</sup> and been punitively compelled to identify with Satan for her sacrilege against Columbus, Annie is captured by her alienated image in the window ("I didn't know that it was I," 94), black with "a lot of soot," a double of the picture of "*The Young Lucifer*," "standing on a black rock all alone and naked" (94). This captivating and sad identification through lay-

ered images is perhaps best unpacked through Lacan's theory of the formation of the ego in "The Mirror Stage," in which Lacan argues that the ego is formed through the child's *méconnaissance* (misrecognition) of the reflected mirror image as a stable and whole identity. The mirror stage is a drama in which a child, seeing its image, is led to believe in a wholeness and mastery that it does not actually have: the mirror stage "manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body image to a form of [...] totality [...] and [...] to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire development" (4). Seeing the ego (what he elsewhere calls the "*moi*") as an armoured illusion of stability based on the *méconnaissance* of the image for the "I" ("*je*"), which as subject is decentred and mobile, Lacan opposes ego psychology and therapies that attempt to strengthen and adapt the ego to "reality," proposing instead the goal of psychoanalysis as bringing the subject to the brink of genuine self-recognition. Annie's situation displays the particular colonial relevance of Lacan's negative notion of the stable ego because as a black colonial female in rebellion Annie is trapped in her identification through the images of her blackness and her guilt (what one might call "the colonial imaginary"). Annie will free herself from the prison of her colonial mirrors and be on the path toward the "cipher" of her "moral destiny" ("The Mirror Stage" 7) by reconstructing her subjectivity and resemanticizing "soot" and Lucifer, but she has to battle patriarchy before that.

Annie is verbally assaulted by a gang of four boys across the street who mock her by citing an obsolete colonial code of gentlemanly address to ladies ("Ah, the sun, it shines and shines only on you"), which, being a citation, leaves no place for response. Displaying the paradigmatic stance of the sadist as described by Deleuze, the boys are positioned in a group and use the institutional code of colonial society and patriarchy to affirm superiority and practise cruelty against the individual.<sup>13</sup> But Annie refuses to accept the victim position required by this sadistic game and breaks down the mastery by walking across to talk to one of the boys she recognizes and demanding recognition. The "rebellion" temporarily defuses the violence and enables her to walk away with dig-

nity, though she sees the boys' laughter and resists their cruelty with the only weapon she has, the "magical" wish to burn them to cinders.

This sadist encounter is associated for Annie with her games with Mineu that are saturated with patriarchal power and violence, with Mineu playing the dominant role in all of them. Mineu is always the active male and Annie always the passive female. In one elaborate game the children enact the notorious murder of a woman by her boyfriend, the subsequent trial and the execution, with Mineu playing all the speaking roles and reserving for Annie the roles of the silent girlfriend and the mother who weeps over the hanged man at the end. This oft-repeated game comes to an end when, on one occasion, Mineu accidentally hangs himself and Annie continues to play the passivity and silence given to her, thus using her very disempowerment to let the paradigm of patriarchy self-destruct. This may perhaps be seen as Annie's own equivalent of her mother's words regarding the "great man."

The games come to an end with an extraordinarily cruel one of genital violence in which the older boy makes the little girl take off her clothes and sit unknowingly on an anthill. When the ants attack, "stinging me in my private parts," the boy falls to the ground with laughter, "his feet kicking the air with happiness" (100). Placing these incidents of patriarchal sadism beside the games of erotic pain that Annie plays with her female lovers becomes illustrative of Deleuze's theory of the fundamental difference between sadism and masochism: that masochism is based on a contract between individuals for a deferral of pleasure and a determined termination of pain (as in the case of the girls stopping the torment when the bottom cries), whereas sadism is based on institutional power and uses cruelty in order to maintain superiority, authority, and power. Deleuze also suggests that while sadism is grounded in an inflation of the father and negation of the mother, masochism idealizes the mother and invalidates the father. This context is necessary to recognize the full enormity (and the normality) of Annie's mother's refusal to empathize with her daughter's resistance and calling her a slut for talking to the boys. By this action the mother fully aligns herself with the institutional power we have seen used in sadistic behaviour, the power

that she maintains by disciplining Annie within the patriarchal binary of lady/slut.

Annie's earlier skirmishes with her mother had led to the recognition of her impossible wish for her mother's death, "if my mother died I would have to die, too" (88), and the mutuality of destructive wish, "my mother would kill me if she got the chance. I would kill my mother if I had the courage" 89. This develops into open combat after Annie's experience of being drowned in her mother's bad (patriarchal) womb: "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" (102). Annie affirms her equality to produce "a deep and wide split" between herself and her mother (103) and begins the process of her rebirth with the recognition that her entire relation to the world would be dominated by her mother's doubleness, unless she learn consciously to separate the two halves: "I became frightened. 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" (107).

Annie's sickness recreates the ritualistic journey through the liminal during which she returns to infancy to revise herself, becoming helpless in the process of assuming autonomy (Van Gennep; Turner). She steps backward from language to dissolve the subject constructed in the colonial-parental word and to remove herself from the field of the Other, going to a uterine space elsewhere: "the whole thing made me feel far away and weightless" (111). She disarticulates speech to inarticulate sound, reducing voice to the signifier as grapheme, but erasing difference, so that desemanticized, it becomes dead letter: "I could see the words leave their mouths. The words travelled through the air toward me, but just as they reached my ears they would fall to the floor, suddenly dead" (109); "When the words reached me, the 'So' was bigger than the 'Little' [...] and the 'Hmmm' was bigger than all the other words rolled into one. Then all the sound rocked back and forth in my ears, and [...] looked like a large wave constantly dashing up against a wall" (111). (This disempowering of language has a different value from

the erasure of language in erotic ecstasy earlier in the book.) Returning to oral-sadism Annie devours her mother, drinking up the amniotic-sea/mother in “huge great gulps [...] until all that was left was the bare dry seabed,” in response to the rage coming from the back of her skull and splitting it open to “spew out huge red flames” (112). But the destruction of the mother also destroys the child, so that the child’s desire to devour and destroy the mother’s body returns as urethral sadism directed against the child’s own body, as Annie’s body cracks and bursts open. The mother’s body is restored, “the water ran back and made up the sea again,” and Annie herself is in tatters, but after this destruction–restoration she is “walking through the warm soot” (the Luciferian condition reclaimed as the home of her new identity, 94–95) “and not going anywhere in particular” (112). Alternatively, and perhaps with greater plausibility, one might read this as indicating that the ejection of the bad object leaves the united mother–child body in tatters but gives birth to the child’s new body. The absence of any specific direction in Annie’s walk becomes significant: in opposition to her vision of her past self as a “small toy Brownie” “on the big road” “going to and from Brownie meetings” where “we swore allegiance to our country, by which was meant England” (114–16). Seen against this allegory of hegemony, with its predetermined “big” disciplinary road laid out for the colonial subject constructed in powerlessness (“toy Brownie,” “all alone”), the new-born Annie’s aimless walk in the warm soot of her fallen state appears as the beginning of a mobile and open-ended subject.<sup>14</sup>

Annie renegotiates Oedipus by directing her sexual attachment to her father. As her father holds her in his lap after she has wet herself, she discovers her sexual attraction toward him: “as I moved my own legs back and forth against his” (a sexual action, Klein would point out), “the hair on his legs made a swoosh, swoosh sound, like a brush being rubbed against wood. A funny feeling went through me that I liked and was frightened of at the same time [...] It dawned on me that my father [...] slept in no clothes at all” (113). The point is further clarified with a denial: “I do not know why that lodged in my mind.”

Following this transfer of libido, Annie performs her urethral-sadist attack on the family photographs (water in the book is either mater-

nal-amniotic or urethral-sadist), erasing all the images except the upper body of her parents (desexualizing and disempowering them) and her own face and rebellious communion shoes, with which she signs her identity. In Lacanian terms one could read this as Annie's freeing herself from the captivity of imaginary wholeness toward a subjectivity constituted in the signifier. She completes the deflection of her libido away from her father (begun in the erasure of his sexuality in the reconstituted photographs) by engaging in symbolic coitus with Mr. Nigel, whom she declares to be "just like Mr. John," and actually throwing herself on him: "his laugh then filled up the whole room, and it sucked up all the air, so that I had no air to breathe, only Mr. Nigel's laugh, and it filled up my nostrils, my throat, my lungs, and it went all the way down until every empty space in me was just filled up" (121). By this negotiation of her Oedipus Annie orients herself as a heterosexual subject, though the opposition of Mr. Nigel's erotic laughter to the sadistic laughter of the boys (patriarchal institutional power) and mother's contrastive filling up of Annie with the poisonous binary of patriarchal discourse, assures Annie's formation as a resistant subject of patriarchy within heterosexuality. It is not surprising, therefore, that Annie should find Gwen's and her mother's sense of compulsory matrimonial heterosexuality contemptible.

Nor, after such self-fashioning, should it be surprising that her farewell to her past should be a parody of mourning as described by Freud, recollecting "Each single one of the memories and hopes which bound the libido to the object" (*Contributions* 311) not, indeed, to free herself from attachment by the verdict of reality but to affirm the joy of leaving it all behind for ever: "my heart could have burst open with joy at the thought of never having to see any of it again" (132). Departure for Annie is the casting out of the bad object. The good object, the rebel mother whose path she is following, is within her, as is the anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial Obeah woman, Ma Chess, who mothered them both. The ambivalence of emotion is, however, inescapable, and Annie's catalogue of things she is happy to lose is accompanied by the mournful sound of a tolling bell through the repetition of the phrases,

“I did not want,” “I never wanted,” “away from,” and “for the last time” (130–34).

Is there any discursive space within which the third-world woman as sexed subject can find utterance, Gayatri Spivak had asked in her most influential (and controversial) article? The answer I hear from *Annie John* is, “certainly, at least for the Caribbean woman.” Institutions, disciplinary practices and discourses do not just construct the subject but also offer within them possibilities of resistance and reclamation, grounded both in the ambivalence of the child’s relation to her mother and the crack within the socially pivotal institution of mothering itself (Chodorow)<sup>15</sup>, caused by the potential duality of the mother as resistant sexed subject and as instrument of patriarchy. If Kristeva is searching for agency for a subject always already patriarchally constructed in language, and locating it in the pre-Oedipal subject-in-process/on trial that leaves its trace in the semiotic disruption of the symbolic, Kincaid discovers the roots of agency in the foundational ambivalence of the infant’s relation to her mother and her negotiations of her individuating process. *Annie John* displays the erotic as the ground of resistance to disciplinary power. It also shows that the subject can fashion itself in resistance even if its subaltern condition leaves it only the option of refusing consent and the vestigial, but inalienable, weapon of the magical death wish (used not only against the mother and the boys, but also withering the colonial icon 40, shriveling the headmistress 36 and disintegrating Miss Edwards 81–82). It dramatizes the possibility of resisting hegemony by adopting against the duplicity of the dominant power a counter-duplicity, an “untruthfulness apparatus” (63) opposed to the ideological apparatuses of the family and the school, a slyness of the subaltern that Homi Bhabha has theorized in “Sly Civility.”

## Notes

- 1 See Murdoch, Natov, Perry, Timothy, and Caton. Brydon has criticized readings of the novel as a traditional *bildungsroman* consolidating a unified subject as exemplifying the embedding of the evolutionary model in Western culture (193).
- 2 Freud argues that the uncanny effect is produced by the surfacing of repressed archaic material from the unconscious. My reading is a confirmation of Freud’s insight.

- 3 Diane Simmons has noted Annie's ability to turn the colonial use of Milton to her own ends, but my reading is somewhat different from hers.
- 4 The Blakean reading of Milton, expanded by Shelley, finds its most developed statement in Empson.
- 5 Winnicot has also acknowledged that A. A. Milne and Schulz have depicted the phenomenon of transitional objects that he had "specifically referred to and named" (*Playing* 40).
- 6 I am conflating Klein and Lacan, between whom there are differences as well similarities. (Lacan makes several positive references to Klein's work.) While Klein is concerned with the archaic pre-verbal structures (Benvenuto and Kennedy 131), Lacan's concern is with the subject determined in language (the symbolic order, governed by the function of Law that Lacan calls the Name-of-the-Father). Language, desire, and the subject are founded for Lacan not in presence but in an originary lack, signified by various figures representing the lost object that Lacan names *objet a*. "The breast," says Lacan, "as equivocal, as [...] the placenta [...] certainly represents that part of himself that the individual loses at birth, and which may serve to symbolize the most profound lost object" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 198). The subject, coming into being in language, is constituted in a secondary lack in "that the subject depends on the signifier and [...] the signifier is first of all in the field of the Other" (205). We might add that the colonial subject in the Caribbean, as Kincaid has noted in *A Small Place*, is founded in another layer of lack in that the field of the Other is the field of the colonial master.

Benvenuto and Kennedy point to a significant difference between Lacan and Klein in regard to the adaptive function of therapy. Lacan criticized any notion of "rectifying the subject's relation to the object, or the individual's adaptation to the environment. This was totally opposed to the spirit of Freud's thought [...] which emphasized the nostalgia binding the subject to the lost object (e.g., breast and mother), and marking the impossibility of his repetitive attempts to find the lost object." As Benvenuto and Kennedy note, Lacan stressed Freud's notion of "the profoundly conflictual relationship of the subject to the world" and criticized theories, including Klein's, that "could be made into a justification for social conformism" (128). I am suggesting that although she writes a very Kleinian text, Annie performs a non-adaptive Lacanian therapy on herself.

- 7 Freud includes such situations in his list of those producing an uncanny effect.
- 8 Lacan sees death as originating in sexual reproduction. Sex and death come into being together in the originary, "real lack": "The real lack is what the living being loses, that part of himself *qua* living being, in reproducing himself through the way of sex. This lack is real because it relates to something real, namely that the living being by being subject to sex, has fallen under the blow of individual death" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 205).



- 9 I am citing the terminology of *s/m* employed by Nadeau.
- 10 This theme becomes explicit in *A Small Place*.
- 11 Captain Bligh of *H. M. S. Bounty*, who became known as “Bread-fruit Bligh,” was engaged in carrying the breadfruit to the West Indies at the time of the mutiny. He finally carried the plant to Jamaica from Tahiti in 1793. Captain Cook described the taste of the breadfruit as “insipid with a slight sweetness somewhat resembling that of the crumb of wheaten bread mixed with a Jerusalem artichoke” (quoted in Mackaness 47). Although the plant was brought over to feed slaves, “the Jamaican slaves refused to eat the breadfruit because it did not resemble any food plant they had been accustomed to eat in Africa [...] So [...] for fifty years breadfruit was fed to pigs” (Black 115). That would seem to me a strong example of resistance to the master.
- 12 Annie’s luciferian quest for pre-eminence among her peers, both in and out of rule, sets her outside the gendered difference empirically observed and modelled in Carol Gilligan’s account of the adolescence of girls. Gilligan sees boys as centrally concerned with individuality and competition and girls as similarly concerned with relationships. Girls, according to Gilligan, feel most threatened by anything that puts their relationships and connection with a group at risk. For this reason girls do not seek achievement or play down their achievement. Within relationships they are either silenced or silence themselves rather than risking disagreement.
- 13 Deleuze argues that sadism and masochism are “contrasting processes” (35), with sadism as a predominantly paternal and patriarchal (59) victimization of the mother (60). Sadism is fundamentally institutional—as contrasted to masochism’s contract for pleasure between individuals—conspiratorial, and coercively imposed by a group on an individual (77).
- 14 I am suggesting that Annie’s therapeutic illness performs a reconstruction of the subject that is similar to the end of psychoanalysis as envisioned by Lacan: “In the recourse of subject to subject that we preserve, psychoanalysis may accompany the patient to the ecstatic limit of the ‘*Thou art that*,’ in which is revealed to him the cipher of his moral destiny, but it is not in our mere power as practitioners to bring him to that point where the real journey begins” (“The Mirror Stage” 7).
- 15 Chodorow sees mothering as playing a pivotal role in “social reproduction”: “Women’s mothering determines women’s primary location in the domestic sphere and creates the basis for the structural differentiation of domestic and public spheres” (10). It is the site of the “reproduction of sexual inequality, and [...] of particular forms of labour power” (11).

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