

**A Feminist Narratological Study of Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother***

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**Abstract:** *Feminist narratology has become a rich field in the study of language and literature. Gerald Prince states that it explores the implications of sex, gender and/or sexuality for understanding the nature, form, and functioning of narrative (1987: 65). The aim of this research paper is to examine the term 'feminist narratology' and its essential characteristics in gender construction. This interdisciplinary approach which combines the analysis of the narrative form with gender politics will be applied to Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) with a special reference to the use of language in the narrative discourse as a powerful tool in subverting the colonizer's power.*

**Key words:** Feminist narratology, Female plots, Free Indirect Discourse, Jamaica Kincaid, *The Autobiography of My Mother*

The aim of this research paper is to examine the term “feminist narratology” and its essential characteristics in gender construction. Feminist narratology has become a rich field in the study of language and literature. Gerald Prince maintains that it explores the implications of sex, gender and/or sexuality for understanding the nature, form and functioning of narrative (1987: 65). It is an interdisciplinary approach that combines the analysis of the narrative form with gender politics. This approach will be applied to Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) with a special reference to the use of language in the narrative discourse as a powerful tool to subvert the colonizer's power. Kincaid deals directly with feminist narratology to show how a woman writes her past experience in life. The paper attempts to display how gender dictates narration. The novel under study serves as an ideal example within the Afro-Caribbean cultural context to examine the authenticity of the feminist narratological aspects. Kincaid expertly handles the first person narrator to create an intimacy and empathy with the reader. She uses frequent analepses (flashbacks) to reveal the innards of the personal life of a woman. The study includes the analysis of the

text in terms of Free Indirect Discourse and the handling of “Female Plot” and its effect on linearity, closure and repetition. Moreover, the features of the “feminine narrative” will be examined in the text. Narrativity will be tackled through the examination of “core entries” and “satellite” ones. Thus the narrative text will be analyzed from the perspective of narratology and gender.

In her article “For Feminist Narratology” Susan Knuston differentiates between narratology and feminist narratology as follows:

Narratology, the structuralist analysis of narrative, can specify in formal terms the ideological commitment, conscious or not, of a narrative text. Feminist narratology can identify gender-determined forms in traditional narrative and analyze feminist revision of narrative grammar. Ultimately, feminist narratology may help correct the ethnocentrism of narratology itself by clarifying that a certain dominant sense of story is culturally determined (1989:10).

Narratology refers to the structuralist study of the narrative text and how the themes and events are arranged. It deals with time, characterization, voice and focalization of this narrative text. The role of the narrator and the narratee are also among the essential aspects. Feminist narratology, on the other hand, deals with a gender-determined narrative text written by a female author. Gender and power relationships are tackled in the narrative text in which the events are focused through a character focalizer who experiences the events of the story. Susan Knuston stresses that feminist narratology makes it possible to systematize what is meant by narrative ‘in the feminine’ (1989: 13).

Kathy Mezei maintains that “one of the contexts currently receiving close attention is gender, particularly as expressed through feminist perspectives. Indeed bringing feminist theory and perspectives into narratology has reoriented narratology” (1996 b: 4). The term feminist narratology is concerned with the ways in which various narratological concepts, categories, methods and

distinctions advance or obscure the exploration of gender and sexuality as signifying aspects of narrative (Lanser 2013: 1). Similarly, Robyn Warhol describes feminist narratology as the study of narrative structures and strategies in the context of the cultural constructions of gender (1996: 21).

The study of gender and narrative began in 1986 with Susan Lanser's "Toward a Feminist Narratology" that called for a gender-conscious narrative poetics (1986: 342). She maintains: "feminist criticism, and particularly the study of narratives by women, might benefit from the methods and insights of narratology and...narratology, in turn, might be altered by the understandings of feminist criticism and the experience of women's texts (1986: 342). Kathy Mezei also thinks that feminist narratology is "a mix of interrogations about gender and its narratorial representation (1996 b: 6).

Susan Lanser confirms the importance of considering gender a narratologically essential element. In "Sexing the Narrative" she states:

My point is that gender, sexuality and sex constitute narratologically, significant elements. Sex is a "technical feature" of narrative...surely if...narrative meaning "sometimes depends" on decisions about elements of narrative as the narrator's reliability, narrative meaning also sometimes depends on decisions about a narrator's sex (1995:90).

Lanser's argument can be applied to Kincaid's novel in which the narrative meaning is determined by the narrator's sex. There are many textual indicators that indicate the narrator as a female. This is clear when Xuela speaks about her sexuality with Monsieur Jacques LaBatte. Her exploration of her sexuality began during her teenage years when she was fifteen years old. She first had an intercourse with him after being offered by his wife, Lise, for his interest. Xuela narrates: "LaBatte sees himself as the patriarch (and king) of this place, and his penetration of Xuela is an exertion of his power as well as a manifestation of his desire to conceive an heir who will inherit his estate" (Edwards 2007: 126).

In her reminiscence about this sexual incident, she discovers her power as a woman. She mastered the art of subjecting men to the service of her pleasure. "Her sexuality is powerful and frightening. She therefore acts against the social standards regarding women's sexuality" (Linder 2011:11). Her fascination with sexuality transferred into self-interest. She states: "My own face was a comfort to me, my own body was a comfort to me, and no matter how swept away I would become by anyone or anything, in the end I allowed nothing to replace my own being in my own mind" (100). Xuela succeeded in reducing the male to be a source of her sexual pleasure; she subverts traditional concepts that promote female sexual objectification. Xuela's power is clear when she insists on abortion from LaBatte's child. She thinks that motherhood and pregnancy are signs of female powerlessness and vulnerability. She links death with pregnancy because she "had vomited up everything (she) had ever eaten (her) entire life and felt (she) would die" (81). Her abortion guarantees her self-autonomy and independence in a male-dominated society. After recovering from the abortion of Jack LaBatte's baby, she sets off on a mystical journey in a dream in which she retraces the history of the island, from Rousseau to Massacre and beyond. She points out:

I walked through my inheritance, an island of villages and rivers and mountains and people who began and ended with murder and theft and not very much love. I claimed it in a dream. Exhausted from the agony of expelling from my body, a child I couldn't love and so didn't want, I dreamed of all the things that were mine (88-89).

Moreover, Xuela entertains a sense of self-worth in her marital relationship with her English husband, Philip. She uses her sexuality as a destructive weapon against him. In her sexual encounter with Philip, Xuela becomes quite dominant in her submission. She ordered him to do whatever she liked. She takes off his belt, ties her own hands with it, and then makes him service her in several sexual positions. In this respect, the narrator's sex shapes the narrative meaning as follows:

I made him stand behind me, I made him lie on top of me, my face beneath his; I made him lie on top of me, my back beneath his chest; I made him lie in back of me and place his hand in my mouth and I bit his hand in a moment of confusion, a moment when I could not tell if I was in agony or pleasure; I made him kiss my entire body, starting with my feet and ending with the top of my head...he was silent when he was in such a state; no words came from him...only sometimes he would murmur my name as if it held something, a meaning, a memory that perhaps he could not let go. He fell into a sleep, not the sleep of the contented, the sleep of the satisfied, but the sleep of the drunk; I did not mean peace to him; I could not mean peace to him,...the temptation to see him die I would have found overwhelming, I would not have been able to resist it (155).

The above quotation proves how Xuela excels in subverting the colonizer's power and in sexualizing the history of the Caribbean in the West Indies. The cultural memories of slavery and the mass rapes of the Caribbean natives are remembered. Xuela feels victorious after this encounter with Philip who is defeated by his sexual desire and her revenge. She gains pleasure by controlling him and by refusing to become the object of his pleasure. She subverts the relation of passivity to activity and dominance in which she has the upper hand. She narrates: "I do not know how long I stood like that, it could have only been a moment, but I became eternally fascinated with how I felt then" (153). Xuela is actively looking for her pleasure rather than being the object of someone's desire. As a colonized woman, she uses her sexuality as a weapon to degrade her white husband. She is an active director in this sexual relationship.

Among the most important aspects of the study of feminist narratology is the role played by the female narrator. It is the most important part in analyzing narrative texts. Through the identity of the narrator, the reader can be able to recognize the characteristics of the text. Mieke Bal defines the narrator as follows:

The linguistic subject, a function and not a person, which expresses itself in the language that constitutes the text. It hardly needs mentioning that this agent is not the (biographical) author of the narrative...In order to keep this distinction in mind, I shall here and there refer to the narrator as “it”, however odd this may seem (1985: 16).

As mentioned in the previous quotation, Mieke Bal refers to the narrator as “it” which is rejected by many critics like Susan Lanser who prefers to use a pronoun that refers to the author’s sex. In “Sexing the Narrative” Lanser confirms that “while the narrator’s sex is normally unmarked in heterodiegetic texts, sex is an explicit element of most homodiegetic, and virtually all autodiegetic, narratives of length (Lanser 1995: 87). According to Lanser the term ‘heterodiegetic’ refers to the narrator who is a third-person and who does not belong to the world of characters. As for the ‘autodiegetic’ narrator, he is a first-person whose voice is a participant in the narrative. He is mainly the story’s protagonist. Finally, the ‘homodiegetic’ narrator is one of the characters in the narrative but not the protagonist. Examining the role of the narrator in Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother*, it is obvious that it is an example of autodiegetic narration i.e. a first-person narration where the narrator is the protagonist herself. She is the only focalizer in the narrative. Mieke Bal clarifies the term ‘focalizer’ by referring to the point of view or narrative perspective of the narrator (*Narratology*, 1985:142). In the novel, *Xuela*, the protagonist, is the main agent whose perception and point of view direct the narrative.

Seymour Chatman classifies narrators into external and internal ones. He points out that when first-person narrators belong to the story as characters, they are called character-narrators who usually tell stories retrospectively. He adds that “the *narrator-I* speaks during the discourse-time, “now”,...whereas the *character-I* experienced the story-events “back then” (1993: 91). In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, the focalization is internal because the focalizer is a character who participates as an actor in

the narrative. Xuela claims the validity of her right to interpret her personal experience in a colonized society.

As an autodiegetic narrator, Xuela, stresses that she is a Dominican woman of mixed origin (her father is Scottish African and her mother is Carib). She is seventy years old when she begins narrating her experience under colonization and racial exploitation in the West Indies. Kincaid mingles power and race to reflect the subjugation of the British colonial rule that shapes people's identity. The narrative begins by the actual and symbolic death of Xuela's mother when she was born to signify her mother's non-presence. She narrates: "My mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind" (3).

Gerard Genette thinks that the basic role of the (female) narrator is the act of telling her story. However, there are other functions that could be determined according to certain aspects of the narrative; for instance, the story, the narrative text, the narrating situation, the attestation or testimonial and the ideological function (1980: 256). In applying this to Kincaid's novel, it is clear that her narrator's additional function is attestation or testimonial because Xuela records in this female narrative text all the bad deeds and oppression that had been done to her and to her mother's ancestors under colonization. She maintains how far she is precise in revealing her past memories and the feelings aroused in remembering them. As a female narrator, Xuela uses the present tense in her confirmation of being part of the defeated and vanquished people. This indicates her wish to give voice to her ancestors and to her lost mother for her mother's voice is her voice. She is "the designated crier" who gives voice to her defeated people. She maintains:

This account of my life has been an account of my mother's life as much as it has been an account of mine, and even so, again it is an account of the life of the children I did not have, as it is their account of me. In me is the voice I never

heard, the face I never saw, the being I came from (227-228).

Amy Levin maintains that the novel is not only an autobiography of Xuela's mother but also of Xuela herself who attempts to create a self in a world controlled by patriarchy and colonization (2003: 95). All through the novel the reader is reminded repeatedly that Xuela's birth occurred with the concurrent death of her mother. Hence the novel gives a desolate vision that will remain till the end of the narrative.

As narration is linked to the female self who "can narrate herself into existence and can live her life by telling her story" (Humans 1994: 7), the novel focuses on Xuela's suffering from racism and colonization and her exposure through a series of analepses (flashbacks) and background of her familial relationships and the impact of other characters on her life. Being the only focalizer, "Xuela seats herself at the center of the world, constructing codes of ethics and morality that originate in her own self-conceived and self-validated paradigms (West 2003: 8). Xuela struggles to establish a self out of the "bleak, black wind" of her mother's absence. Thus she always suffers from despair and loneliness: "My entire life so far, all seventy years of it, I had dreaded the moment when I would be alone" (223). Moreover, Xuela always feels rejected by her father especially when she was a small child. She narrates:

When my mother died, leaving me a small child vulnerable to all the world, my father took me and placed me in the care of the same woman he paid to wash his clothes. It is possible that he emphasized to her the difference between the two bundles: one was his child, not his only child in the world but the only child he had with the only woman he had married so far; the other was his soiled clothes. He would have handled one more gently than the other, he would have given more careful instructions for the care of one over the other, he would have expected better care for one than the other, but which one I do not know, because he was a very vain man, his appearance was very important to him (4).

In Kincaid's novel, the mother's death and absence is contrasted with the father's patriarchal authority and power. As a female narrator, Xuela recognizes that her father is wearing the uniform of a jailor when he comes and fetches her from school. This arises from Xuela's ability to recognize that her father is a powerful patriarch who may affect her female subjectivity.

Voice or Focalization is among the aspects that has been closely connected to the narrator. Manfred Jahn stresses that there are three functions for the narratological voice in a discourse: an addressee-oriented function which involves and assures a contact with the addressee, an appellative function which aims at persuading the reader to believe something and the expressive function which is mainly concerned with the subjectivity of the narrator (1992: 50-53). The narratological voice in *The Autobiography of My Mother* is characterized by having a mixture of the two functions –the addressee-oriented function and the appellative one. In this novel, the narrator, Xuela, is narrating her past life experience under the British colonization. She is knowing all the incidents and events and proves this to the reader in an attempt to address the reader and comment on the events. The narratological voice also tries to persuade the reader of her relationship with her English husband, Philip Bailey, whom she tries to subdue and dominate in every possible way. Bailey represents the patriarchal authority of the colonizer.

According to Joanne Gass, Philip imposes his civilization upon those he conquers at the same time as he longs to return from the 'barbaric' colonies to 'civilized' England; and paradoxically he desires the exotic, sexually intriguing 'savage' colonial woman at the same time as he hated her for her unbridled sexuality, but most of all for not being English. Philip is a 'legitimate' son of England and sees himself as the inheritor of the legacy of the conquerors (2006:70). Xuela's relationship with Philip reflects the complicated relationship within the dominant British culture in the West Indies. Xuela understands how power is linked to language and historical events. Thus Xuela manages to manipulate her English husband, Philip, to achieve victory over

the whole race by denying him any sort of identification with her. She inverts the traditional hierarchy in which the white male colonist holds the seat of power (see Edwards 2007: 131). When they move out of Roseau to a rural area of Dominica, she uses patois, not English in speaking to him to marginalize him. She even refuses to laugh or smile when he wants that sort of recognition from her. Xuela narrates:

He spoke to me in English, I spoke to him in patois. We understood each other much better that way, speaking to each other in the language of our thoughts.... He made me speak but he couldn't make me laugh, not for him would I open my mouth in laughter (219).

In this respect, Xuela humiliates Philip by reducing him “to the status of the colonized child when she refuses these seemingly unimportant things. She turns him into the abandoned child she herself was when she entered her father’s house for the first time and felt the vitriolic hatred and oppression emanating from her new stepmother”(Gass, 2006: 72). Xuela usurps from Philip the power of language. Philip’s defeat occurs due to Xuela’s revenge upon him. She takes him to live in an alien land among her mother’s people, The Caribs, who are traces of a dying race. In that land, he stumbles; he cannot speak the language - Xuela must translate for him - and in doing so she deliberately mistranslates; thus she deceives him and he is lost. Xuela confirms: “He now lived in a world in which he could not speak the language. I mediated for him, I translated for him. I did not always tell him the truth, I did not always tell him everything. I blocked his entrance to the world in which he lived” (224).

The relationship between Xuela and Philip is determined by colonization. She has the upper hand in this relation according to her interests. She focuses on her pleasures rather than his and subverts the traditional female role in marriage.

Apart from the narrator, there is an essential participant in the transmission process of narrative known as the narratee. In the story world, the narrator establishes contact with his narratee/addressee in order to involve him in the reading process. Gerald Prince states that in any narrative “there is at least one narrator as well as one narratee”. He adds: “In a fiction-

narration...the narrator is a fictive creation as his narratee” (1996: 226). He suggests that there are different types of narratee. Among them is the zero-degree narratee who is capable of understanding the language of the narrator and of recognizing relations of casuality in the narrative. He appears without personality for there aren't any characteristics to describe him. In Kincaid's novel, the narratee's character is inferred through real or pseudo-questions posed by the narrator. This is clear in the novel when Xuela asks the implicit narratee about her husband Philip: “Could he be blamed for believing that the successful actions of his ancestors bestowed on him the right to act in an unprecedented, all-powerful way, and without consequences?” (225). The importance of the study of the narratee helps in better understanding the narrative and in clarifying its narratological aspects.

Concerning narrativity and plots, there are differences in narrative form on the basis of gender using a feminist approach to plot structure (Brooks 1984: 39). Brooks maintains that female plots are significant with some characteristics like repetition, resistance to closure and non-linearity (1984:39). This is obvious in Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* where repetition is manifested in the recurrent statement “My mother died at the moment I was born” which reflects Xuela's loss and longing for her mother. The repetition indicates the fact that Xuela's ancestors had suffered extinction at the hands of the British colonizers. The death of Xuela's Carib mother is employed as a subtext for the death of the Caribs, the Amerindians (Alexander 2001: 92). Repetition is also clear in the sexual encounter between Xuela and her husband, Philip, when she narrates: “I made him stand behind me, I made him lie on top of me... I made him lie in back of me... I made him kiss my entire body” (154-155). This repetition refers to Xuela's power and determination to repel and entail him with her sexuality. Hence the repetition indicates the state of revenge the protagonist experiences as a response to the “legacy of defeat” she was born into. She always states:

I am of the vanquished, I am of the defeated. The past is a fixed point, the future is open-ended; for me the future must remain capable of casting a light on the past such that in my defeat lies the seed of my great victory, in my defeat lies the beginning of my great revenge. My impulse is to the good, my good is to serve myself (215-216).

Typical of Brook's concept of the "female plot" is Kincaid's narrative which resists closure in order to overcome the colonizer's hold through its untraditional form. Kincaid uses circular structure in ending her novel. The book begins and ends with Xuela repeating that this narration is an account of her life and her mother. She ends her novel alone after taking revenge from her male counterparts. She says: "To reverse the past would bring me happiness. Such an event-for it would be that, an event-would make my word stand on its feet; it does so now and has for a long time stood on its head" (226).

Ruth Page argues that the narrator's attempt to maintain her existence is very significant and marks the plot structure as a "female one". The narrator rejects closure because she tries to assert her female identity. In "Feminist Narratology" she maintains:

The going beyond boundaries and the cyclical and arbitrary ordering which defeats "the death drive" of the (male) plot dynamics have less to do with a feminist emancipation of a narrative form and more to do with the specific content of this text, which if reached its final conclusion would express the point of final (mortal) absence that the narrator states she wishes to avoid (2003: 51).

The third aspect of the "female plot" structure is the rejection of linearity. Women writings try to avoid linear narrative. Most women authors and among them Jamaica Kincaid reject linearity which characterizes patriarchal structures. According to Honor Mckitrick Wallace, tying women's experience to transcendence establishes a form of knowing independent of the temporal, linear, hence patriarchal structures to which women have so long been denied access" (2009: 179).

Rejecting linearity is clearly displayed in Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* through the frequent use of analepses (flashbacks) which is merged with the present time of the narrative. Xuela's memories of her past life in which she suffers from colonization and patriarchal oppression constitute most of the analepses of the narrative. She narrates her life looking back over seventy years, although the reader can feel that the narrator's life is being lived in the present. Xuela is wondering of her feeling lonely and emotionally detached after all these years. The novel recounts how Xuela, now seventy years old woman, was raised by a foster mother, a washer woman, and then by an abusive stepmother. Intermingled with Xuela's immediate story is the story of the Caribbean island of Dominica that once lived under the British Colonial rule.

Rejecting linearity is greatly manifested in the use of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva refers to intertextuality as the literal and effective presence in a text of another text (Allen 2000). Alison Lee also maintains: "The novel's intertextuality complicates linear narrative and linear time because readers have to read on many different levels at once (1996: 41). In Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*, there is a reference to Rosellen Brown's 1976 novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, in which Brown's version is set in New York City in the 1970s and explores the relationship between Gerda Stein and her daughter Renata. Both of the daughter and the mother are locked in a painful relationship. They are bound together in many significant ways. Kincaid borrows the title and the theme of Brown's novel. It is reminiscent of Brown's text for Xuela's life is determined by the life and death of her mother (see Edwards 2007: 116). The use of intertextuality is an attempt to defeat linearity.

Another means of rejecting linearity is the use of Free Indirect Discourse. It is described as a technique of presenting a character's voice mediated by the voice of the author (Stevenson 1992: 32). There is a stream of consciousness technique manifested all through the narrative which results in the use of Free Indirect Discourse. Grammatically this form of narrative is

characterized by “absence of reporting verb of saying/thinking, backshifts of tenses, conversion of personal and possessive pronouns” (McHale 1978: 264). This is obvious in the novel when Xuela asks herself:

Who are the Carib people? Or more accurately, who were the Carib people? For they were no more, they were extinct, a few hundred of them still living, my mother had been one of them, they were the last survivors. They were like living fossils; they belonged in a museum, on a shelf, enclosed in a glass case (198).

This quotation does not have any reporting verbs of saying or thinking. It does not have direct speech quotations or reporting verbs. This style of writing helps the narrator/protagonist to achieve independence and gains power in a male-dominated society. Edwards maintains that the narrative consists of a 228 pages of a monologue rendered in unconventional, haunting prose. It is devoid of direct speech, and there is not a single quotation or a line of dialogue. Instead the reader hears the voice of the seventy-year old Xuela who looks back on her life and narrates her hardships with verve and emotion (2007: 115).

Among the most influential aspects of Free Indirect Discourse is “narrative empathy”. It is “the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imaging narratives of another’s situation and condition” (Keen 2013: 1). Kathy Mezei maintains that the “narrative empathy” occurs when the reader feels for the character/focalizer and gets more engaged with the narrative (1996c: 69). This case is clear in Kincaid’s novel because all the Free Indirect Speech parts are all the memories of pleasure and pain of the protagonist which helps the reader to empathize and get engaged in the reading process. This results in what is known as “the affective impact” that differentiates between “feminine” and “masculine” writing. The affective impact of the novel is produced through the use of focalization and address (Warhol 2001: 182).

*The Autobiography of My Mother* is considered a good example of what Robyn Warhol calls “feminine narrative” as it

“enforces and reinforces the physical experience of an emotion the culture marks as specifically feminine. The ‘femininity’ of the text is not linked to the presumed readers’ bodies: it is a narrative effect” (Warhol 2001: 186). The narrative in the novel under study reflects the protagonist’s feelings towards her father and her stepmother when she was a child. Xuela’s stepmother wants to get rid of her through a poisonous necklace. Xuela, perceiving her stepmother’s intention, puts it instead on the stepmother’s favorite dog and “within twenty-four hours he went mad and died” (34-35). Moreover, the stepmother humiliates Xuela by speaking to her in a degraded dialect when her father is absent. Xuela’s stepmother uses language as an assertion of superiority. Her speech is an attempt to marginalize and degrade her to the position of the Caribs who are socially dead and vanquished. She narrates:

My father’s wife came to say good night ....She spoke to me then in French patois; in his presence she had spoken to me in English. She would do this to me through all the time we knew each other, but that first time, in the sanctuary of my room, at seven years old, I recognized this to be an attempt on her part to make an illegitimate of me, to associate me with the made-up language of people regarded as not real—the shadow people, the forever humiliated, the forever low (30).

In *Feminist Stylistics* Sara Mills believes that “the female sentence is often seen to be one where the writer simply pours her feelings into the text; women’s writing is often characterized as the outpouring of the soul, without the mediation of a structure or plan” (1995: 53). Kincaid’s feelings are poured through Xuela’s voice in many parts of the narrative; for instance, when she describes her feelings towards MaEunice, the woman who brought her up:

MaEunice was not unkind: she treated me just the way she treated her own children—but this is not to say she was kind to her own children. In a place like this, brutality is the only real inheritance and cruelty is sometimes the only thing freely given. I did not like her (5).

Concerning the gendered sentence, Sara Mills maintains that women writers are known for their use of short sentences than men (1995: 51). This is illustrated in Kincaid's novel when the narrator states:

I had only fainted. I opened my eyes soon after to see the face of my father's wife....She had the face of evil. I had no other face to compare it with....She did not like me. I could see that she did not love me (28).

Sara Mills also maintains that women writers are also known for their frequent use of parenthetical statements (1995:51). This is clear when Xuela describes her father:

He never ate eggs after that (not all the time I knew him); he never ate chicken after that (not all the time I knew him), only collecting the bright red copper of money and polishing it so that it shone and giving it to his mother (194).

Although Sara Mills' concept of the "gendered sentence" is reflected in the above examples, it is worth noting that Kincaid uses short sentences to confirm the protagonist's feelings towards the woman who brought her up and the hatred towards her. She uses definite short words to convey her feelings clearly. As for Kincaid's use of parenthetical sentences, it is obvious that they reflect her desire to inform her readers of her father's materialistic attitude in life. Hence, it is the context which largely affects sentence structure.

Among the critics who claim that "female plots" exhibit weak narrativity as opposed to the high narrativity of the "male plots" is Ruth Page. She states that any given text may be considered as having weaker or stronger narrativity than another. She adds by saying: "there seems to be a correlation between degrees of narrativity and the stereotypical gendering of plot where the "male" and "female" plots exhibit strong and weak narrativity respectively" (2003:45). This is due to the fact that some unconventional structure of "feminine" writings lack coherence. However, this results from the modernist style of writings and is not related to gender.

In “Feminist Narratology?” Ruth Page discusses narrativity and tackles core entries versus satellite ones and their relations to high narrativity versus weak narrativity respectively. She believes:

Those containing a dense concentration of narrativity might be thought of as core entries that establish narrative coherence, while those that are weak are like satellites that are loosely tied to the reconstructed narrative frame. This distinction between core and satellite entries once more destabilizes the degree of narrativity where movement towards a narrative pattern in the core entries is interrupted by the satellites (2003:49).

In the *Autobiography of my Mother*, Kincaid’s recurrent search for her mother’s history is considered as “satellites” interrupting the coherent narrative of her past life when she was a child until she became an old woman of seventy. Xuela’s life story is considered “core entries”. For example, when Xuela was recounting her experience at Monsieur LaBatte’s house when his wife, Lisa, is offering her as a gift to please him and to give birth to a child. Xuela states:

She had wanted a child, had wanted children; I could hear her say that.... She wanted something again from me, she wanted a child I might have; I did not let her know that I heard that, and the vision she would have, of a child inside me, eventually in her arms, hung in the air like a ghost (1996:77).

Xuela’s past memory of her relationship with Monsieur LaBatte is interrupted by “satellites” of her continual search for knowledge about the history and origin of her mother who belongs to the Carib. This example of “satellite entry” interrupts the narrative and makes it lack coherence. She narrates:

In the night I would awake to find him counting his money over and over, as if he did not know how much he really had, or as if counting would make a difference....I did not want to spend the rest of my life with the person who owned such a room....

This education I was receiving had never offered me the satisfaction I was told it would; it only filled me with questions that were not answered, it only filled me with anger....And your name, whatever it might be, eventually was not the gateway to who you really were, and you could not ever say to yourself, "My name is Xuela Claudette Desvarieux" this was my mother's name, but I cannot say it was her real name? My own name is her name, Xuela Claudette and in the place of Desvarieux is Richardson, which is my father's name; but who are these people, Claudette, Desvarieux, and Richardson? To look into it, to look at it, could only fill you with despair (79).

This pattern of using the "core and satellite entries" helps to create coherence in the text. After that interruption, Xuela regains the narrative of her experience with Monsieur LaBatte when she gets pregnant. Edwards claims that the narrative of Kincaid's novel is told in the first person voice of Xuela. She recalls the story of her childhood perceptions, her experience of being seduced as a school girl, her passionate affair with a stevedore, and her marriage to an English doctor. At the center of the events is Xuela's continual search for knowledge about the history of her mother who is a part of a dying race- the race of the Carib people whose culture and language are facing extinction. Xuela's search of her mother is also a search for herself for this autobiography is a way for her to find out her identity and her ancestors (2007: 114).

To conclude, the above analysis of Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* follows Kathy Mezei's words which state that feminist narratology helps us understand our responses to the narratives we read and to the role that gender plays in our reading (1996b, 11). The analysis through feminist narratological approach helps to clarify certain terms and functions concerning the roles played by the narrator and the narratee in the female narrative text. It also helps in recognizing certain aspects of women's writing like repetition, resistance to closure, non-linearity and the affective impact of feminine writing that results

from using Free Indirect Discourse. Kincaid's novel serves as a good example that reflects the feminist narratological aspects in Afro-Caribbean literature. Through the character of Xuela, Kincaid clarifies that the strong determination and the power of will help women to choose the life they want and to subvert the traditional roles imposed on them by society. The analysis of the novel proves Kincaid's meticulous use of a complex narrative perspective that enables her to understand the reality of women's situation in the Afro-Caribbean society.

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