

Defense Mechanisms and Relationships in Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy

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Abstract:

This paper deals with Jamaica Kincaid's third fictional experience, *Lucy* (1990). It examines the types of defense mechanisms used by the titular character, Lucy, to coexist with the American society and to detach herself from the familial ties. It examines the psychological mood of the main characters in the novel.

The second part of this paper examines the relationships found in the novel whether on the familial level or the outer ones on the level of work and friendship.

Much focus is given to the negative family dynamics, mother-daughter relationships and the ties with the American family are of paramount significance.

Key Words:

Jamaica Kincaid – *Lucy* – Defense Mechanisms - Relationships

المخلص العربي :

يتناول هذا البحث التجربة القصصية الثالثة للكاتبة جامايكا كينكيد

(لوسي) 1990.

ففي الجزء الأول يتناول البحث أنواع آليات الدفاع التي تستخدمها

الشخصية الرئيسية في كل من: التعايش في المجتمع الأمريكي، والانفصال عن

الروابط الأسرية.

ويتناول الجزء الثاني من البحث العلاقات الموجودة في الرواية سواء

كانت داخل محيط الأسرة أو خارجها علي المستوى العملي ومستوى الصداقة.

ويركز البحث أكثر على ديناميات الأسرة السلبية وعلاقة الأم بابنتها

وعلاقتها بالأسرة الأمريكية ذات الأهمية البالغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية :

جامايكا كينكيد - لوسي - آليات الدفاع - العلاقات .

Lucy (1990) is one of Kincaid's most outstanding novels that won great readership. It is the sequel to *Annie John* (1985). Richard Locke, a reviewer for the Wall Street Journal, describes *Lucy* as "a bildungsroman that picks up where Annie leaves off" (24). It tells the story of a nineteen-year-old Caribbean girl who travels to America to work as an au pair for a well-to-do family in the United States. An au pair, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary, is a young foreign person who cares for children and does domestic work for a family in return for a room, board, and an opportunity to learn the family's language ("Au pair").

The actions of the novel are centered on Lucy's life and her sufferings during the year she spent in America. It is of primary importance that the novella has many ecological portrayals. Kincaid compares the ecological side of the island of Antigua, her homeland, with the ecological side of the United States of America. Reading this novella ecocritically helps the reader get a better understanding.

In America, the eponymous character searches for a better future away from the tight circumstances of a former British Caribbean island. Unfortunately, she suffers from homesickness and faces many problems after getting her freedom from parental fetters. She goes through different

sexual experiences with many American men and witnesses the family dynamics of Mariah and her husband. Therefore, reading *Lucy* from a psychological lens will help the reader get a lot of what Kincaid wants to convey.

Defense Mechanisms and Relationships in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*

Kincaid's proficiency in *Lucy* is multifaceted. She manages to enhance the psychological dimensions of the novella through the relationships built and destroyed within the novel. Moreover, the negative family dynamics serve as an instance of these relationships. James Arnold states that "Both *Annie John* and *Lucy* are semi-autobiographical first-person narratives exploring a female subjectivity underpinned by a love / hate relationship with the mother metonymic of the bond between the colonized and the colonial mother country, of the relationship between the powerless and the powerful" (198). The first part of this paper focuses on defense mechanisms found in *Lucy*.

Defense Mechanisms:

Defense mechanisms is a central concept in psychoanalysis. A defense mechanism, according to *the Cambridge Dictionary*, is “an automatic way of behaving or thinking that you use to protect yourself from something, particularly unpleasant feelings” (Defense Mechanism). Numerous defense mechanisms have been identified, but some are more frequently used. Denial, avoidance, repression, projection, displacement, regression, and rationalization are all defense mechanisms that are frequently employed in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic readings of literary genres. Tyson asserts that defenses are “the processes by which our unconscious contents are retained in our unconscious. In other words, they are the mechanisms by which we keep the suppressed in order to avoid learning what we believe we are incapable of learning (15).

As a method of psychoanalysis, defense mechanisms will be used to analyze the characters in the novels under study. Defense mechanisms are more likely to be examined in the protagonists and supporting characters. Almost all of the main characters are round, and as a result, they go through many transformations. Because of this, they are susceptible to

a wide range of psychological techniques. Through their actions in the novels, some of the main characters and protagonists will be examined for their defense mechanisms.

Avoidance (escaping from a particular event) is the first defense mechanism used by Lucy, as understood from the beginning of the sequel. The title character travels to America to be away from her parents, who took care of the other baby boys on her account. She escapes the bitterness of this reality and abstains from being in direct contact with her parents. Another example of avoidance is that of neglecting the letters sent by her mother when she is in diaspora. Some critics consider it as a state of avoidance between Lucy and her mother while others see it as a girl who “battles the absent mother and amplifies the homesickness by refusing to read Annie’s (her mother) letters” (Sondgrass36).

Another example of avoidance can be seen in the betrayal of Lewis to his wife. Lucy evades trouble by not revealing the love scene between her master and the best friend of Mariah, his wife. She avoids being in direct confrontation with Lewis, the family man for whom she worked as an au pair.

Kincaid humanizes fictional experiences by analyzing her characters’ deepest misgivings. One of these deepest

misgivings is the fear that dominates her characters in *Lucy*. The feeling of fear seizes Lucy's mother when she mails her daughter to stop taking the New York subway, where a young girl was murdered. Lucy herself, reflecting on an Antiguan girl accosted by a malevolent spirit, speaks on the distinction between superstitious anti-female terror on the island and the criminal elements in America. One of the aspects of psychoanalysis is the fear of falling in love and suffering from being neglected and deserted.

In the third chapter of *Lucy*, "The Tongue", the title character refuses being in love. This is a sort of defense mechanism. She does not want to fall in love with Hugh, Dinah's brother. She states that openly, "But I was not in love with Hugh. I could tell that being in love would complicate my life just now. I was only half a year free of some almost unbreakable bonds, and it was not in my heart to make new ones" (71).

Another example of fear is that of daffodils and their yellow color, which turned into a nightmarish possession that seeps into a number of Lucy's own dreams. Lucy recounts that she dreams of "being chased down a narrow cobbled street by bunches and bunches of those same daffodils that I had vowed to forget, and when finally I fell down from exhaustion they

all piled on top of me, until I was buried deep underneath them and was never seen again” (18).

The last defense mechanism in *Lucy* is repression. Repression is the unconscious blocking of unpleasant emotions, impulses, memories, and thoughts from your conscious mind. Introduced by Sigmund Freud, the purpose of this defense mechanism is to try to minimize feelings of guilt and anxiety. At the end of the novel, Lucy's tears are unexpected, but they are resultant of some repressed feelings that date back at least one year in the States. Lucy expressed this repression in the following quotation, “I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it...and I wept so much that the tears fell on the page and caused all the words to become one great big blur”(164).

Relationships

The multiplicity of relationships in *Lucy* contributes to the psychoanalytic reading of the novella. This section deals with some of these relationships: the relationship between Lucy, her mother, and her dad; the relationship with the American family she worked for as an au pair; the relationship with Hugh, Mariah's brother; the relationship with nature,

which is of great significance in this respect; and other relationships related to her sexuality and lesbian experiences.

Mother-daughter Relationship (Uber-mothering)

The mother-daughter relationship is recurrent throughout Kincaid's works. In *Annie, John, Lucy, and The Autobiography of My Mother*, the theme of a daughter with a dominating mother is repeated. Sondgrass, in her book *Jamaica Kincaid: A Literary Companion* states, "The standoff of towering mother and adolescent daughter dominates Kincaid's powerful coming of age novellas, *Annie John and Lucy*" (95). In Kincaid's interview with Moira Ferguson in 1994, she reflected upon this very issue: "In my first two books (*Annie John* and *Lucy*), I used to think I was writing about my mother and myself. Later I began to see that I was writing about the relationship between the powerful and the powerless"(13). This asserts Kincaid's towering motherhood in her novels, especially the first two.

From the very beginning of *Lucy*, the title character is not on good terms with her mother. She feels excessive happiness from the first moment in America and for being away from her family. *Lucy*, according to Sondgrass, is "a movement from tight parental control (Uber-mothering) to

unfettered womanhood” (36). Kincaid is “haunted by the mother figure who couldn’t or wouldn’t love her, Kincaid grew strong-willed and defiant of outside authority, whether parental or governmental” (Sondgrass7). This means that all of her novels' depictions of towering motherhood are based on her own family dynamics.

What adds fuel to fire is not Lucy’s mother towering personality, but her indifference towards her only daughter. Lucy’s mother prefers her three sons to her only daughter. Besides, she sends her letters to ask only for money when Lucy was in diaspora. Motherhood in these situations is dysfunctional. Instead of motherly protection, Lucy suffers from oppression and negligence. The absence of the typical mother figure in Lucy’s life can interpret the conflict between Lucy and her mother throughout the novella. She considers that an act of selfishness that should not come from the side of her mother.

There is another mother-daughter relationship in *Lucy* that goes on the opposite route: the relationship between Mariah and her four daughters. This relationship is free of dysfunctional behavior from the side of the mother or from the four daughters. The reason behind this kind of stability can be attributed to the age group of Mariah’s daughters. The four of

them do not reach puberty, and they are not fighting with their mother.

The Trio: Lucy, her Mother, and her Father

Kincaid portrays Lucy's parents as irresponsible. Lucy has always adored the ocean, which acts as a barrier between her and her family members from the beginning of the story. The reasons behind her hatred for her family members are mentioned in the last chapter of the novella, which creates some sort of suspense for the reader: Lucy's parents were busy with her brothers and did not care about her and they probed her for money many times during the year; she spent in America as an au pair.

Kincaid is seen as an author who "speaks for physically and spiritually displaced people" (Sondgrass77). The sense of displacement dominates Lucy's first days in America. Psychologically speaking, the new experience in a remote part of the world, her family's attitude towards her, and the ugliness of the new place make her suffer so much from the beginning of the novella. Sondgrass states her belief that *Lucy* is "setting the neophyte in a new land" (34). Lucy, the title character, suffers from being away from her family's focus of

attention and being the only girl with three boys taking all the family's attention:

I was an only child until I was nine years old, and then in the space of five years my mother had three male children; each time a new child was born, my mother and father announced to each other with great seriousness that the new child would go to university in England and study to become a doctor or a lawyer or someone who would occupy an important and influential position in society. (130)

Lucy, *Annie John's* sequel, has the very same dysfunctional psychological behavior of a girl who does not want to follow the footsteps of her mother or to be a copy of her. In *Annie John*, Annie does not like the idea of being an echo of her mother. The very same attitude of Annie towards her mother is repeated in *Lucy*. Lucy hates to be an echo of her mother, "... but I felt that I would rather be dead than just become an echo of someone" (36).

Siblings Rivalry

Lucy is the only novel by Kincaid that has this type of psychological problem called siblings rivalry. The leading character starts to feel this psychological problem when her family members do not contact her for a while and when they called only to send them money to help bring up her three brothers. It could be the feeling of homesickness and the pressures of life in America that put her in a situation of sibling rivalry with her three brothers.

Relationship with Mariah's Family

One of the most effective relationships in Lucy's life is her relationship with Mariah, her husband and the four little girls. Kincaid's mastery of structuring the relationships among her characters makes the reader feel that the greatness of Lucy's relationship with Mariah and her husband is not an ordinary one of an au pair with a family she works for. It is full of parental affection and caring. This is noticed in many confessional sessions between Lucy and Mariah. Lucy herself stresses in many situations that Mariah treats her like a daughter. She supports her body and soul. A party is given by both Mariah and her husband to help Lucy overcome loneliness. Many people were there to help Lucy and give her some moral backup. When Mariah knows that Lucy's mother

is in need of money, she gives her two folds of what she needs. Once, Mariah confesses to Lucy that she had had bad sex with her husband that is considered one of the top familial issues that should not be told to an au pair. Furthermore, Mariah's husband treats Lucy very well and so do the four girls.

Lucy analyzes the dysfunctional behaviors of the marital life of Mariah and her husband. She noticed the mutual betrayal of the wife and her husband. She does not charge Mariah directly with betrayal. Lewis is charged with betrayal over his wife, Mariah. She manages to shed light on the fragile marital bond inside the family she works for. Although Lewis treated Lucy as his daughter, Lucy did not tolerate his relationship with Dinah. Lucy became Kincaid's eyewitness to betrayal and sexuality in America. Her book titled *Jamaica Kincaid: A Literary Companion*, Sondgrass stressed her view of the repeated scenes of betrayal and Kincaid's view of betrayal whether for married people or unmarried ones. In the sequel, *Lucy* (1990), Kincaid's title figure views betrayal as a

Soap opera. with a voyeur's subjectivity, 19-year-old Lucy Josephine Potter, an au pair arriving in New York from the West Indies,

disparages her employer Lewis for his empty gesture of love and respect for his wife Mariah. Before the wife suspects philandering, Lucy surmises Lewis's attraction to Mariah's friend Dinah. The nanny's condemnation strays from the husbandly fault to an assault of all males for their disloyalty to monogamy. (57)

Not only sexuality and betrayal are seen by Lucy in America, but the racial attitude of Dinah, Mariah's best friend, towards her as well. The racism of Dinah, according to Claudia Marquis, is seen clearly when she asks Lucy about the place, where she came from:

“So you are from the islands?” I don't know why but the way she said it made a fury rise up in me. I was about to respond to her in this way: “What islands exactly do you mean? The Hawaiian Islands? The islands that make up Indonesia, or what?” And I was going to say it in a voice that I hope would make her feel like a piece of nothing, which was the way she had made me feel in the first place. (Kincaid, *Lucy* 56)

Sexual Relationships

Part of the psychological experiences created by Kincaid is freeing her title character, Lucy, sexually. She has sex with Tanner, Hugh, Paul, and Roland. They all have been with her for a portion of time. Psychologically speaking, Lucy has many sexual experiences with partners but she does not fall in love with any of them. She suffered from fear of intimacy. Fear of intimacy can be defined as “emotional involvement with another human being and the chronic and overpowering feeling that emotional closeness will seriously hurt or destroy us and that we can remain emotionally safe only by remaining at an emotional distance from others at all times”(Tyson 16). The reason behind her coupling with different sexual partners is fear of intimacy. The title character thinks that having many sexual partners protects her from getting closer to anyone of them. Using fear of intimacy as one of the common defense mechanism changes Lucy from a human being who has feelings and has emotional tendencies to the other sex into a girl of an animalistic lustful drives.

The relationships with Hugh, Tanner, and the photographer are of great significance to the reader. All those men had sex with Lucy and explored her femininity after

puberty. This type of relationship is meant by Kincaid to reveal the hidden part of Lucy's character. She manages to depict the coming-of-age experience well. She makes all those people active participants in her life after puberty. Lucy does not want to fall in love with Hugh. She is afraid of being neglected and left. She preferred to take him as a sex partner, not as a lover. She said:

I could tell that being in love would complicate my life just now. I was only half year free of some almost unbreakable bonds, and it was not in my heart to make new ones. I could take in all of this very easily. Just thinking about his hands and his mouth could make me feel like as if I were made up of an extravagant piece of silk... (71)

Kincaid depicts the changes that occurred to Lucy as part of the coming-of-age experience: the physical and psychological ones. The physical changes are so many. Kincaid jots down some of these physical changes like the hair under Lucy's armpits and other signs of the puberty stage. The reader knows the minor details of how she changes from a little girl to a mature woman. There are other things in this respect, like feeling her sexual members and other stuff.

The physical changes related to puberty are not everything in the coming-of-age experience. The changes in one's behavior and psychological tendencies, etc. are part of the coming-of-age experience as well. The first psychological change that is noted is the freedom from family fetters to have an open life as an adult in a land away from her birthplace and to live with a family as a servant who is not controlled by anyone but herself. The family shackles aided her acceptance of her new life in America. She was happy to escape her family's fetters. She escaped the greater burdens of the family, especially her mother, who is very strict.

Lucy has been with two different men, Paul and Ronald, in one day. She is a sex addict. The repression in her life before coming to America was perfectly fulfilled. The letter she wrote to her mother was a cold letter coming from a cold heart, as the title of the chapter tells us. This letter reflects her wish to get rid of her mother, which was interpreted by some writers as the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

The relationship with Peggy is another part of her sexuality (quasi-lesbian practice). This experience with Peggy has a great effect on her life in America. "From the moment we met," says Lucy, "we had recognized in each other the

same restlessness, the same dissatisfaction with our surroundings, the same skin-doesn't-fit-ness" (Kincaid, *Lucy* 145). This is the description of the first stage of her relationship with her friend Peggy. It is some sort of complete freedom from the fetters of the family she worked for. The lesbian experience came as a great part of the coming-of-age experience.

Independence and autonomy represent, in my viewpoint, the best parts of the coming-of-age experience. Earning her own money and spending it on her education is a great thing. Being away from her mother is the independence that she found in America. She is no longer controlled or supervised by her family. She is the decision maker of all the important decisions in her life.

Misogyny or Hatred for Women:

Kincaid characterizes Lucy, the title character, at odds with some women and girls. Some of the relationships with girls her age are destroyed quickly. It can be said that most of these relations are based on pragmatism. She expresses her hatred for her mother from the first page of the novella. She hates Dinah for her betrayal of Mariah, her best friend. She hates Peggy because she is, to some extent, dirty and had no

personal cleanliness. She hates Mariah's ignorance of the betrayal of both her husband and her best friend.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that there are many defense mechanisms found in *Lucy*. Avoidance, fear and repression serve as examples of these mechanisms. The first example of avoidance is when the title character, travels to America to be away from her parents, who take care of the other baby boys on her account. She escapes the bitterness of reality and eludes dealing directly with her parents. Another example of avoidance is keeping the letters coming from her family away without reading them. The last avoidance experience in Lucy's life is associated with the scene of betrayal. She shuns telling Mariah about the disloyalty of her husband and that she has seen him with her best friend, Dinah. It is obvious that avoidance in Lucy starts from the beginning of the novel, unlike Annie John, in which avoidance experiences come after good relationships between the main character and others. The second defense mechanism explained in this paper is fear. The feeling of fear seizes Lucy's mother when she mails her daughter to abandon taking the New York's subway, where a young girl was murdered. Lucy herself, reflecting on an

Antiguan girl accosted by a malevolent spirit, reveals the distinction between superstitious anti-female terror on the island and the criminal elements in America. Another example of fear is that of daffodils and their yellow color, which turned into a nightmarish possession that seeps into a number of Lucy's own dreams. The third and last defense mechanism is repression. At the end of the novel, Lucy's tears are unexpected, but they are resultant of some repressed feelings that date back at least one year in the States. Repression is detected when being away from love as well. The main character, Lucy, remains without falling in love willingly. This, in respect of psychoanalysis, is seen as some sort of repression. She does not want to fall in love with Hugh, Dinah's brother.

The most important relationship is that of mother-daughter; it is the most controlling one in the novel. The titular character, and her mother, with a slight difference—Lucy is away from her mother, and so there is only some kind of psychological pain. In Lucy, the mother-daughter connection is full of everyday life details and has many vicissitudes. Kincaid creates her title character in a state of fluctuation between being closer to her mother and being at loggerheads with her. The second type of relationship found in the four

novel is that of friendship. In *Lucy*, friendship is not of great importance to the title character. Kincaid makes Lucy, the title character, at odds with women and girls. She starts to express her hatred for her mother from the first page of the novel. She hates Dinah for her betrayal of Mariah, her best friend. She hates Mariah's excessive confidence in her husband. She hates Peggy because she is, to some extent, dirty and has no personal cleanliness. However, friendship with some American girls is the only replacement for an Antiguan girl's family warmth and love. Friends of Lucy play a central role in her life in the diaspora. The relationship with Peggy is a vivid example that has a great effect on Lucy's life in America.

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