

Subject of Desire: the Portrait of White Female in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*

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Abstract

The role of female figures in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* has called a lot of attention and much ink has been spilled upon it. Mariah, the hostess of the family Lucy works for in North America, occupies a significant place in Lucy's constitution of gender identity. As a white female, Mariah is both the Mistress for Lucy, a girl from the third world, and a victim under the male gaze beneath the social condition of her own society. The gender relationships, Mariah confronts and the strategies she takes, reflect the cultural specificity of Western society. This paper aims to demonstrate the gender relationships confronted by Mariah and how she is influenced by cultural factors and how women in the West can be oppressed without even themselves noticing it.

Keywords: Gender asymmetry, Caribbean, gender identification, cultural specificity

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試論《露西》一書中白人女性角色之描繪

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摘要

加勒比海裔女作家牙買加·金凱德以在第三世界成長的經驗，審視西方認為理所當然的現象並重新省思。在其自傳性小說《露西》一書中，對西方世界中的女性多所描繪。書中的瑪俐亞一角，在主角露西之性別認同建構中，佔有舉足輕重的地位。對第三世界女性而言，表面上瑪俐亞似乎得天獨厚，享有西方文明賦予的地位與特權；但同時，在西方特有的文化結構下，瑪俐亞亦不由自主以男性角度權衡自身之價值，從而淪為兩性關係中的犧牲者。本文旨在藉由「性別認同」與「文化特殊性」之角度，透過對瑪俐亞此一兼具女主人與被犧牲者雙重身份的白人女性的分析，重新定義被殖民者眼中的西方社會。

關鍵字：性別失衡、加勒比海、性別認同、文化特殊性

1. Introduction

Being a writer from the Caribbean society, Jamaica Kincaid portrayed her childhood in an autobiographical novel, *Lucy*. Many critics have called our attention to the issue of mother-daughter relationship in this novel and much ink has been spilled upon it. The role of maternal figure, that it is often argued, is due to gender inequality marked by the sexual privilege of men in this region. Apparently, such a view draws on feminist critiques of Western patriarchy and is not sufficient for cross-cultural reading. To have a better understanding of this novel, researchers need to put the settings into consideration. *Lucy* appropriates the setting of the West Indies when the narrator recalls her experiences in Antigua and a Western locus in present. As a narrator from the third world, Kincaid portrayed white female from a new perspective. Mariah, hostess of the family Lucy works for in North America, occupies a significant place in Lucy's constitution of gender identity. The gender relationships, Mariah confronts and the strategies she takes, reflect the cultural specificity of Western society. For Lucy, Mariah illustrates the ambivalent position of white women: at the same time the oppressor and the oppressed. Her situation can help us have a better comprehension of female status and the society that has made her so. As di Leonardo declares, "how women and men are thought to be like and unlike one another as human beings, what they can and can not do, are rarely givens, but historically and culturally contingent" (29). This paper aims to demonstrate the gender relationships confronted by Mariah and how she is influenced by cultural factors. Through the investigation of the gender relationship in *Lucy*, I hope to shed new lights on Kincaid's work.

2. The Mistress

Being a Western woman, Mariah has all the privileges of a good life and a rich and comfortable living environment. All these are established along with the destruction of the environment and the exploitation of cheap labors in the third world. As a member of the colonizer, she is anxious to bring into effect the environmental protection, and yet fails to link her prosperity with the destruction of the living milieu.

Like her country men and women, Mariah makes "no connection between their comforts and the decline of the world that lay before them" (72). What she and her

wealthy friends do is a preservation of their living style. They already have beautiful houses in the city and want to enjoy clean air and a beautiful view of nature in the suburbs. In blaming others they forget their own faults and the serious effects they inflict on nature.

Her position as a colonizer is also reflected in her relationship with Lucy. Lucy works for her and, though she is kind to the girl, the relationship between them is still that one of master and servant. When Lucy tells her about a poem of daffodils, a poem she was forced to memorize in childhood but she was never able to see the flowers, Mariah brings her to a garden filled with daffodils and expects her to be excited by seeing such beautiful flowers.

There was such joy in her voice as she [Mariah] said this, such a music, how could I explain to her the feeling I had about daffodils . . . but my heart and my thoughts were racing so that every time I tried to talk I stammered and by accident bit my own tongue. (29)

Lucy's response doesn't meet Mariah's expectations, but she cannot figure out what happens. The fact is, as Lucy tells, "where she [Mariah] saw beautiful flowers I [Lucy] saw sorrow and bitterness" (30). Behind these flowers Lucy sees an education decided by the colonial authority where the local takes no place. Daffodils become a part of colonial oppression Lucy bore but is now eager to get rid of it. Mariah does what she thinks to be good to Lucy and cannot understand Lucy's feeling. When she finally figures out the situation, Mariah only sinks her eyes "back in her head as if they were protecting themselves, as if they were taking a rest after some unexpected hard work" (30). The whole thing goes beyond her expectation. From her point of view, daffodils are beautiful flowers and Lucy will be excited to see these blossoms, as Lucy has read the poem about them but never has the chance to see them. She cannot understand the feeling of being forced to memorize a poem about a flower which does not exist in one's country and the only reason one has to read it is that it belongs to the colonizer's literature and the colonizer has the power to decide what the colonized has to read. As Lucy asks Mariah, "Mariah, do you realize that at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen?" (ibid) The colonizer ignores the fact that the colonized have their own literature, their own history and their own way of living. Though Mariah provides

Lucy an opportunity for work so that she can support her family, it was Mariah's kinsmen, the white, who colonized the West Indies for many years and forced people of Lucy's ancestry to be transported to this new world.

As Dathorne has claimed, "[t]he European, the victor, and the African, the victim, are the new players in the social milieu" (101). Both of them are immigrants in this new world. The Europeans came as masters and imported the Africans as slaves. The Africans were forced to leave their homeland because they were caught by the Europeans and then treated as laborers. The white came to the West Indies out of his free will but the black was forced to. Though most of the nations in the West Indies are independent in a political sense today, they are still under the control of the Western world in economy. So Lucy has to go to North America as au pair girl to support her family. Mariah is kind to Lucy, but she fails to make the connection that as a result of her nation's economical control, Lucy is forced to leave her homeland to a foreign land. Caribbean people are, like their ancestors, forced to leave their native land. In the past, the colonizer forced the colonized to work for them and benefited from such free labor. Now the poverty of the third world forces people there to immigrate to work for the Westerner again. No matter how kindly or friendly she treats Lucy, Mariah is still the master.

After Lewis, the husband, moves out from his family, Lucy informs Mariah of her leaving. "When I told Mariah that I was leaving, she had said, 'It's not a year yet. You are supposed to stay for at least a year.' Her voice was full of anger, but I ignored it" (141). Mariah wants to be the mistress of Lucy since she is not the master of her own life anymore. She has the power to demand her employee and she wants to use it. Underneath her anger there is a feeling of hollowness, for she is now a woman whose husband has left her. As Lucy tells us, "[t]he reality of her [Mariah's] situation was now clear to her: she was a woman whose husband had betrayed her" (ibid). It is not till now that Mariah recognizes her own situation. The feeling of helplessness which comes from being lonely in life forces her to reassure herself that she has some power over somebody else. By insisting that she is the master and Lucy the servant Mariah desires to reassure her power to possess and dominate. Her position as a colonizer has been stressed and clearly represented from such an action.

3. Victim of the Conquest

But she is also a victim of the conquest. Mariah, who is a sentimental woman, can even feel miserable when the weather changes. When a big snow storm comes, her response reveals her fragility. As Lucy tells us,

 Mariah looked at me and shrugged her shoulders. "How typical," she said, giving the impression that she had just experienced a personal betrayal. I laughed at her, but I was really wondering: How do you get to be a person who is made miserable because the weather changed its mind, because the weather doesn't live up to your expectation? How do you get to be that way?
(20)

On the surface, Mariah seems to have everything Lucy does not have. But she does not know that and when something doesn't meet up to her expectation, she would be inflicted. From this point of view, she is swayed by society and has no way to escape. Life for her is "without doubt on the one hand or confidence on the other" (26). She has no doubt of life because she owns so many concrete things: well-off life, four lovely girls, and a handsome husband. However, she has no confidence in herself because her life relies on other people -- her husband's job provides her well. Life seems easy and bright for her. What she has to do is take care of her children and manage the house with the help of a maid and au pair girl. Her connection to the society is to have picnics held in honor of some endangered marshlands. Her life is decided by other people and that's why the departure of her husband makes her so frustrated that she cannot recover from it for a long time. When she has no one to turn to, her world falls apart.

Feminist film theory such as Laura Mulvey's can provide us a better perspective about Mariah's situation. Her article on visual pleasure and narrative cinema portrays "the relationship between the image of women on the screen and the 'masculinization' of the spectator position, regardless of the actual sex (or possible deviance) of any real movie goer" ("Afterthoughts" 139). Mulvey suggests that pleasure for females in the audience is developed through "narcissism and the constitution of the ego, [and] comes from identification with the image seen" ("VP" 435). To follow Mulvey, Mariah adopts a masculinized view unconsciously and makes herself the "object of desire."

"[A]s desire is given cultural materiality in a text," Mulvey points out, "for women (from childhood onwards) trans-sex identification is a habit that very easily becomes second Nature" ("Afterthoughts" 144). In this sense, Mariah transforms herself into the position of a male and examines herself under this standard. In her early years, Gus has been the main support of her life since she was a child.

When we got to our destination, a man Mariah had known all her life . . . was waiting for us. His name was Gus, and the way Mariah spoke his name it was as if he belonged to her deeply, like a memory. And, of course, he was a part of her past, her childhood: he was there, apparently, when she took her first step; she had caught her first fish in a boat with him; they had been in a storm on the lake and their survival was a miracle, and so on. (33)

It seems that the man Gus assumes a father or brother figure to Mariah. Consequently, she takes his existence for granted. Though Lucy thinks Mariah speaks his name in a way that makes him belong to her, it is more possible that Mariah relies on Gus so much that she treats him as part of her. Her relationship with Gus is a friendly and harmless one, unlike that between her and other men, her lovers or her husband, for instance. It is the comfortable and warm memory of days with Gus that brings her back to the past she cherished. What is revealed by the memory is that Mariah has relied on Gus to guide her and protect her from danger since the time of her childhood. She accepts men's judgment as her own and relies on him whether it is Gus, her lovers, or her husband. She does not develop her own vision and constantly draws upon the male value system.

According to Schwenger, the masculine mode is "an attempt to render a certain maleness of experience" (102). In other words, it is an attempt to impose a male point of view, to give judgments from a male stance. By using this method, all things are judged and valued under male standards and the female is unconsciously controlled by social construction. It is obvious that under the "maleness of experience, women would soon be represented in the way as being reflectors of masculine sexuality" (Schwenger 109). Not only men adopt this mode but women also do. Women, in viewing themselves as represented by either "reflector of masculine sexuality" or "object of desire," give this standard a legitimate status and make themselves the victim.

4. Object of Desire

Mariah's early affair with the old man (her parent's friend) reveals the beginning of her adoption of a masculinized view. Their sexual interaction was not consummated and Mariah thought it was her fault. As she tells Lucy, "His erection would grow limp whenever he tried to enter me" (114), and thought at that time "there was something wrong with her or that she was doing something wrong together" (ibid). She accused herself of being a failure as an object of desire and thought it was her duty to make a man desire her so he could complete this action. Her response after this event was to find "a new lover to forget herself completely" (ibid). She saw herself from the male's point of view and thus became an object of desire.

This impotent man and his accusation left a traumatic mark in Mariah's mind. She was too young to understand that the man "was an old, impotent man and that he found it easier to blame a young girl for his condition than to face the possibility that in this area he was all washed up" (ibid). Mizruchi has claimed that in the nineteenth Century Western world, when the society failed to preserve feminine innocence the failure was often "attributed to feminine nature rather than to social experience" (101). When something went wrong in this seduction, they accused the female of being degenerate in nature. The old man could not face the fact that he had been washed out but found it easier to blame a young girl. He put his fault on Mariah, just as people did in preserving feminine innocence.

Later on, she marries Lewis, a good looking and successful lawyer, and has four daughters. She lives hence a rich, comfortable life and devotes herself to the family enthusiastically: collecting all of the photographs since the time she and Lewis first met, decorating their house with furniture collected from all over the world and spending lots of time with her children. Lewis is rich, handsome and full of energy. He fits into what the Western world recognizes as a successful businessman. Their marriage seems to be perfect. The fact that Mariah is a little shorter than Lewis meets to our expectation that the female is inferior to the male, even in height. Even her daughters feel they have a good family and think their parents love each other very much. Under the surface of a well-established family, there are lots of problems. The domestic life of Mariah and Lewis has problems long before Mariah knows it.

4.1 Conflicts in Gender Relationships

One time as they visit the Lake to enjoy their vacation, the divergences and coldness between Mariah and Lewis are revealed. Mariah loves nature and is engaged in rescuing the marshlands while Lewis is only interested in financial business. As Lucy notices, Lewis is quite bored during their holidays: "Lewis really had nothing to do when he was here; he read papers he had sent from the office, and all sorts of books, but being here in a house that overlooked a lake was not his idea" (73). He prefers to lead a life with business: "[H]e carried in his hand a large newspaper, the pages parted to the financial section; either he had just gotten off the telephone after having a chat with his stockbroker or he would soon do so" (47). From Lucy's point of view, this couple looks like "two beings from different planets" (78).

The significant turning point is the rabbit event. The rabbits are the pets of Mariah and their daughters. One day, they come into the house and eat Lewis' plants. This event causes a quarrel between the couple which reveals the gaps between their minds. The next day Lewis gets his revenge by running over and killing the rabbit. Though Mariah tells the children it is an accident, she does not believe what she says. This is the first time we see a quarrel and distrust between the couple. However, this is only a manifest distrust which has been nourished between them for a long time, not until that time does it float to the surface.

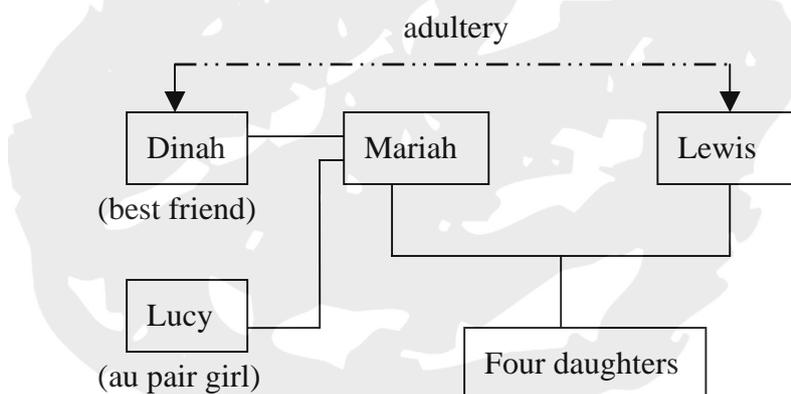
As an observer, Lucy senses untruths in her mistress' family from this event: "Mariah and Lewis told the children that the car had run over the rabbit by accident, and they said it in such a way that I could only think they wanted the children to believe the car was driving itself" (77). With her keen observation, Lucy further points out the suspicion between this couple: "But when the children were out of the room Mariah would accuse Lewis of running over the rabbit on purpose, and Lewis would say it really had been an accident" (77-78). They cannot come to an agreement and Mariah insists on treating Lewis as a murderer by asking: "But you aren't sorry that you did it?" (78) The feeling of distrust between this couple makes it difficult for them to have a successful marriage.

4.2 Betrayals

Moreover, there are some changes between Mariah's best friend, Dinah, and Lewis which Mariah is not aware of. As Lucy notices, these two has grown an intimacy during the vacation.

Lewis and Dinah started to laugh at the same things, and their peals of laughter would fly up into the air wrapped around each other like a toffee twist. Mariah could not see this and tried to join in, but every time she started a sentence about one thing, they started on another, completely different subject. (79)

The following diagram shows the relationships between the characters around Mariah.



Relationships between the characters

Mariah is blind when examining her marriage. Critic Mendelsohn has claimed that *Lucy* is a "mournful book filled with betrayals" (21). This statement is proper to describe Mariah's marriage. In her life with Lewis, especially when their marriage begins to have problems, it is filled with betrayals by both husband and intimate friend. It is doubtful that Mariah cannot see the symptoms of betrayals. One of the reasons might be that she believes her friend and husband since she loves them, so she cannot accept that they are going to cheat her. But another interpretation is more powerful and logical. Mariah does not see the inequality between male and female; she is not even aware of it because she is in the position of a masculinized spectator in evaluating her career. What this reveals is her problem of self-consciousness. From the time of her youth she is taught to blame herself in her affair with the old man, to put the burden on

herself though it is very possibly due to the man's impotence. She has reduced herself to the "object of desire" of the male spectator and causes her own tragedy. She needs love from other people, especially from her husband. The betrayal of her husband and best friend destroys her and she cannot accept the truth for quite a long time.

Lewis, the father-husband, takes a decisive role in shaping the atmosphere of the family. When he decides to be an "amusing and adorable" (88) father, the family seems to be a happy one. "All of them, mother and father and four children, looked healthy, robust everything about them solid, authentic" (ibid). It seems that when Lewis wants to be a good father, the family is a well-established one; but when he is in a low mood, the cheery atmosphere is completely ruined.

Lewis . . . made his hands into two fists, lifted them up in the air, and brought them down on the table with such force that everything on the table . . . rattled and shook as if in an earthquake . . . [I]t made Mariah force both her hands into her mouth as if desperate to keep something from coming out. (75)

From these two anecdotes, it is clear that Mariah relies on Lewis too much and takes his love for granted without seeing their differences and finding ways to make it up. She puts her energy into her husband and children. Finding that Lewis no longer loves her only makes her burst into tears. In the eyes of Lucy, Mariah cannot compete with her mother. When Lucy finds Mariah does nothing except crying after Lewis' unreasonable anger, she comments, "Mariah was, after all, not my mother, for anyone who made my mother cry so much she would have seen to that person's demise immediately" (112-3). Mariah has no ability for survival compared with a third world woman. She has been well-protected, obeyed all patriarchal doctrines, and hence cannot escape from male standards to establish her own point of views. She cannot even know what Lewis really is.

[Lewis] was the sort of person, a cultivated man, usually who cannot speak his mind. It wasn't that speaking frankly had been bred out of him; it was just that a man in his position always knew exactly what he wanted, and so everything was done for him. (119)

What's "his position"? He is a white, well-educated, rich and handsome man. Things have to go his way and he will make sure of it. The relationship between him and Mariah is hence that between the oppressor and the oppressed.

4.3 Gender Asymmetry and Inequality

Though she is superior to Lucy and Lucy's mother in both political and economical stances, Mariah is inferior to white males. Her relationships with men are not successful and she is always in the victim's position. When Lewis leaves her, he makes Mariah think it is her fault. Lewis hides his intention and forces Mariah to ask him to go so that he can free himself from blame for leaving his children and wife. Lewis' irresponsibility reflects in a more clever way. He makes people believe it is not his fault. As a husband and father with a wife and four daughters, he falls in love with his wife's best friend and finally leaves his family. Gender oppression in this part is hidden under a subtle disguise. Mariah's ability to survive is far less than women in the West Indies for she lacks of self-awareness. Sylvie, a friend of Lucy's mother, for example, fights with another woman for a man's sake. She knows what she really wants and does not hesitate in getting it, even at the expense of going to jail. What is really sad about Mariah is that she does not know her own situation and unconsciously makes herself the victim. Though she thinks it is she who decides to end their marriage, it hurts her so much that she cannot face life for a period of time. However, the divorce forces her to confront everyday realities, that is, her husband no longer loves her as he now falls in love with her best friend. Her blindness is not only reflected in the male-female relationship but also in the woman-to-woman relationship. Her friendship with Dinah comes to an end and she finally knows the truth when her marriage comes to an end. In examining Mariah, we can find that in the Western world, how easy it can be to make woman the sacrificed without even herself noticing it.

On the surface, Mariah knows well about the importance of women who occupy in human civilization. For instance, when Lucy is upset by the memory of gender discrimination in her family, Mariah reacts rationally. "Mariah wanted to rescue me. She spoke of women in society, women in history, women in culture, women everywhere" (131). She tells Lucy the responsibilities women have to take and the roles they play in human civilization, but she forgets the most important part: how to be an independent woman? Her problem is that she puts herself under the control of men. She never thinks of the need for a woman to lead her own life. In self-regard, she

draws on the male's standard. She is a woman so constituted in her social formation that she tends to see things from a masculine point of view. From the eyes of Lucy, Mariah is a fragile and blessed woman.

The yellow light from the sun came in through a window and fell on the pale-yellow linoleum tiles of the floor . . . and Mariah, with her pale-yellow skin and yellow hair, stood still in this almost celestial light, and she looked blessed, no blemish or mark of any kind on her cheek or anywhere else" (27)

This long sentence above provides a vivid description of Mariah. The yellow light surrounding her reinforces the point that she is blessed. But it is also a contrast to the bright yellow sun in the Caribbean. Even her skin is "pale-yellow." This soon gives us an impression that she is tender and fragile. Being a blessed woman, she will never get on her cheek a scar resulting from a fight with another woman for a man's sake. Mariah would never have to worry about that.

But from another dimension, Mariah is not brave enough to fight for something she is eager for, or, she does not even know her own needs. This is what happens to her when her marriage comes to an end. Her best friend and her husband betray her by falling in love with each other and what Mariah does is only to accept this astonishing news and to pretend that she takes the initiative in asking Lewis to leave. She does not fight for her rights. Things come to her naturally and she accepts them. When things around her go wrong, she receives it sadly but does not try to change it. She lives in a stable and rich environment and thinks everything around her will be all right. She does not need to worry about money or anything else. The nation she lives in has the ability to protect its people and moreover, to have influence over other nations. It is true that Mariah has many privileges but it is also true that she fails to react to changes.

The contents of the book Mariah lends to Lucy illustrate her idea about gender relations.

Mariah left the room and came back with a large book and opened it to the first chapter. She gave it to me. I read the first sentence. "Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary: she is a female, this word is sufficient to define her. (132)

Both womb and ovary signify not only an enclosed space but also reproduction. On

the one hand, woman is defined in a domestic area and separated from the outside world. On the other hand, this definition points out the potential and ability of extension woman possesses. By childbearing woman extends the amount of human race. Yet the word "female" stresses a biological perspective. Though Mariah talks about women in history, society, and culture, undoubtedly her recognition of her own sex still rests on the biological level. She ignores that what she thought to be the duties of women are social constructions. Showalter has pointed out clearly that "gender is not only a question of difference, which assumes that sexes are separated and equal; but of power, since in looking at the history of gender relations, we find sexual asymmetry, inequality, and male dominance in every known society" (4). Mariah ignores the power relationship society has imposed on gender demarcation. She believes in the superficial layer that gender is separated in a natural sense, and both sexes are equal. The greatest obstacle to her is herself. Though she knows Lewis is nasty to the rabbit, she still cannot find there is great problem between her and her husband. As a man without sympathy who always thinks about himself, Lewis is not worth Mariah's lamentation for him and accusation of herself. He forgets his duties to his family and uses love as an excuse. Falling in love with his wife's best friend is a serious betrayal, yet he makes Mariah believe it is her fault because she can no longer make him love her. In that sense, Lewis is like the old impotent man Mariah met in her youth. They put the blame on the weaker sex and make both sexes believe it. The power of gender is represented here. Since both Mariah and the men she has met believe it is the female's duty to make herself a desirable object. When the male no longer has any feeling or desire towards her, it is the female's fault.

Lucy accuses her mother in the following words while she hears about the news of her father's death leaving her mother a pauper. "She should not have married my father. She should not have had children. She should not have thrown away her intelligence" (123). The problem of Lucy's mother is that she throws away her intelligence after marriage and has devoted herself to her family. She has neither time nor energy to develop her own intelligence. But the problem with Mariah is more serious; she is not even aware of what she has been deprived. Her bad faith in her husband and Dinah finally shatters and leaves her helpless. She makes herself rely on other people and is destroyed by them. Her best friend is "a woman in love with

another woman's life, not in a way that inspires imitation but in a way that inspires envy" (59). Apparently, the blame should be put on Dinah and Lewis, but Mariah put it on herself.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, Mariah is, as I have stated many times, "a victim within the conqueror" (AV 23). Being a member of the conquerors she fails to see the connection between her comfortable life and the destruction of the living milieu. Besides, in her relationship with Lucy, her position as the superior has been clearly represented. But among her kin she becomes the conquered. The gender relation she confronts with is a typical one of Western patriarchy. She tended to rely on Gus as a girl child and still cherishes him in her memory. Such an experience of depending on men has lasted for a very long period in her life. Gus was in the place of a father in her childhood and it is natural that she continues to obey the male rule, believing what Gus taught her to be right and proper. Gus protected her from danger and produced so many wonderful memories for her. As a consequence, when she grows up to become a lady, she still trusts men's judgment. Her early experience with a man as a young woman left a mark on her mind and influenced her from that time on. Her view has been masculinized without considering her own sex. Therefore, gender relation for her is operated in an imbalanced and unequal way. She treats herself as an "object of desire" and values herself from this point of view. The mark left by her early sexual experience seems to be erased in her comfortable life with Lewis. But when she finds the marriage is broken, the traumatic mark submerges and emerges to haunt her for the rest of her life. Not till self-awareness come is she able to face the reality. The final departure of Lewis gives her a chance to establish an independent new life. Mariah is a nice and kind woman who is not aware of the fact that she is oppressed or oppressing others. She represents all the privileges the third world woman cannot have, but she symbolizes a failure in gender relations because she has been masculinized in identity and unconsciously bring about her own defeat. Lacking self-awareness is Mariah's biggest problem and eventually turns her into a victim of gender traffic. Through Mariah, Kincaid successfully portrays the situation of the white female: subject of desire and thus a victim among the conquerors.

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