



*Mother-Daughter Bond (Un)Bound In Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John:
Women's Mothering Reproduced*

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Abstract	Article info
<p><i>This paper explores the protagonist's journey in forming her identity in Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John. It utilizes Freud's psychosexual development and Chodorow's mother-daughter relationship theories to analyze Annie's dynamics with her parents. Despite her efforts to distance herself from her mother, a yearning for reunion persists, leading to the replication of maternal attitudes in her relationships with girls. The study explains Annie's rebellious phases, her resistance to separating from her mother, and her rejection of traditional gender roles. It investigates her identity formation in relation to her parents, her interactions with both genders and her unconventional attachment to her mother.</i></p>	<p>Received December 25 ;2023</p> <p>Accepted April 04 ;2024</p> <p>Keyword:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Mother-daughter relationship✓ identity construction✓ psychosexual development✓ father-daughter relationship✓ reproduced mothering

1. Introduction

One recurring issue in literature has been the analysis of the relationship between mothers and daughters. As a result, literary analysis has diligently scrutinized this topic through multiple theoretical frameworks, illuminating its intricate nuances and implications. Girls' heterosexuality, behaviour, identity construction and reconstruction have been studied in such literary works through the lenses of feminism and of psychoanalysis. To decipher a woman's identity and its development, critics have usually focused on the relationship between the girl and her mother utilizing mainly Freud's psychoanalytic accounts, which mostly prove to be deficient.

Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1985) tells the story of a young girl's coming of age in Antigua. The ideal life for 10-year-old Annie John with her mother begins to unravel as she reaches puberty. The novel's protagonist stands out among all the story's female characters in many ways. One of them is her name, which contains her dead uncle's name. Additionally, her relationship with her mother is special, as is her relationship with her father. Contrary to most girls, Annie does not want to get married nor does she want to get separated from her mother at all. Her decision to separate herself from her mother reflected in her direct opposition to her in various situations is made only after her mother expresses her open desire to do so. Notwithstanding this fact, Annie John has a deep-seated desire to reunite with her mother, a longing that has persisted since her childhood and preadolescent years.

To examine Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*'s text that narrates the journey of identity construction that Annie John undergoes, I am using in addition to Freud's theories on the psychosexual stages of a girl's development Nancy Chodorow's arguments on how the relationship between a daughter and her mother is constant and never-ending and shapes her identity formation just as much as her father's. Furthermore, her belief that one must trace back the early stages of an infant's life and its mother's mothering attitudes to understand its development may well apply to this investigation. So despite Annie's attempts at separation through her opposition to her mother, her love for her continues. Furthermore, Annie John proves to be a repetition or merely another version of her own mother reproducing what her mother does to her when dealing with different peer girls. The aim is to explain the rebellious attitudes of Annie John during different stages of her development as a woman-to-be. Additionally, the objective is to demonstrate how Annie John, in her attempt to separate from her mother seeking an independent identity, reproduces her mother's mothering attitudes. My aim is to follow the girl's coming of age to understand Annie John's inexplicable refusal to separate from her mother and her stand toward marriage and her father and men, in general.

Historical, societal, class, ethnic, and gender factors can all be considered in such an examination. However, this research rather focuses on gender development in the specific context of Annie John, her parents, and her circle of influence. It diverges from the prevailing viewpoint

held by most critics, who perceive the child-mother blending in Annie John's context as a healthy event. Rather, it considers this blending to be problematic, aligning with Chodorow's emphasis on recognizing the complexities and individualities of each person's narrative. The basic queries this analysis is making of this text are then as follows: How is the identity of the protagonist of the novel constructed in relation not only to her mother but to her father, as well? How does she negotiate her relationship with boys and girls throughout her childhood, pre-adolescence, and adolescence stages? Why does she refuse to get separated from her mother? What is the reason behind Annie John's unconventional attachment and love for her mother? And why does she refuse to get married?

The key event guiding Annie's growing up is the loss of her bond with her mother. Because Annie John and her mother share everything, even their names, the daughter is taken aback when her mother urges that she forge her own identity now that she is becoming a young woman. The way Annie's mother mothers her then changes as she grows up. Nancy Chodorow contends that mothering is a psychological process that is influenced by societal structures. Neither biology nor purposeful role training produced it. She argues that women's mothering reproduces itself cyclically by using the psychoanalytic description of how male and female personalities develop. However, while the traditional psychoanalytic account focuses on a girl's heterosexual orientation and how she attains it through the cathexis towards her father, Chodorow highlights in her

writings the fact that a girl's relation to her mother continues throughout the oedipal period even after the preoedipal stage ends. Chodorow believes that in order to understand the relationship between mother and daughter, psychoanalysts have to go back to the early stages of the girl's development and her mother's mothering attitudes. In this study, attention is given to the mother's strategies in handling her daughter and her daughter's reactions toward them despite the fact that Annie is the sole source of information about her mother in the story. During the first stages of the infant's psychological development, the social and emotional relationship between mother and infant, "both in the world and within the infantile psyche," is built. Thus, a human newborn does not have any adaptive ego capacities that enable older humans to act instrumentally. The infant is rather: "totally dependent on the parental care of their mother, who acts: "in Margaret Mahler's term, as an infant's "external ego,"³ serving to both mediate and provide its total environment". Dependence, then, is pivotal in infancy and crucial in the process of a person's development. It is the reason why infants employ various techniques to prevent or deny their mother's departure or separateness. However, its maturation is also related to the extent to which the parent's (usually the mother's) care is consistent and free from arbitrariness. When there is no threat of separateness from the mother, Chodorow argues, its total dependence transforms itself into: "an unproblematic feeling on the part of the infant that this is of course how things should be". However, if the separation between the two occurs, the infant is

helpless and feels: “[a] loss of (incipient) self-disintegration” .

In the classical psychoanalytic account of the feminine Oedipus complex, a girl turns to her father while totally rejecting her mother considering her as: “a sexual rival” after she discovers that her mother is unable to give her a penis . However, Chodorow argues that although this view is only theoretically useful in distinguishing between feminine and masculine Oedipus complexes, it cannot “encompass even Freud’s own work”. In fact, it does not help us understand the case of Annie John either. Moreover, Chodorow underscores the fact (proven by many psychoanalytic accounts of girls) that: “a girl’s “rejection” of her mother, and her oedipal attachment to her father do not mean the termination of the girl’s affective relationship to her mother” . During the stages of early adolescence and adolescence, a girl’s or a boy’s main concern, as Peter Bios claims, is “object relinquishment and object finding” . This means that the child: “must give up its incestuous love objects (parents, siblings, parent substitutes) in favour of other primary objects in order to go out into the non-familial relational world” . Freud anticipates that this stage of the child’s alienation from his parents can be described as: “the family romances of neurotics” . During it, the child is then preoccupied with the task of disassociating from his parents developing a negative perception of them, and seeking to replace them with individuals who often occupy higher positions within the social hierarchy, such as: “an acquaintanceship with the lord of the manor or some landowner in the country, or with some aristocrat in the

city” . Then the later stage of the family romance becomes sexual since the child starts picturing various erotic situations and relationships in which his mother is involved .

In the conventional psychoanalytic understanding of the feminine Oedipus complex, it is believed then that a girl completely rejects her mother and redirects her affections toward her father. However, when examining Annie John, we encounter two major concerns. Firstly, Annie appears to have traversed an almost non-existent Oedipal phase. This can be related to Chodorow's new interpretation of the feminine Oedipus complex, which suggests that it is as much about the mother-daughter relationship as it is about the father-daughter relationship . Secondly, she adamantly resists the idea of separating from her mother during puberty and rejects the idea of marrying in the future. Chodorow's account proves to be significantly more suitable than the classical psychoanalytic account of girls’ development for the comprehension of Annie John’s actions and reactions. To truly grasp the dynamics at play, Chodorow suggests redirecting our attention to the relationship between Annie and her father, rather than solely fixating on her relationship with her mother as traditional psychoanalysts tend to do. Chodorow argues that the quality of the father's interaction with his daughter, along with the mother-father relationship and the mother-daughter relationship, also play a crucial role in shaping a girl's development . Additionally, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding, it becomes imperative to thoroughly examine

the mother's mothering attitudes while also taking into consideration the girl's early stages of development.

2. The Unbreakable Bond: Annie John's Intense Connection with her Mother

This section explores the intense attachment between Annie John and her mother examining the dynamics of their relationship and Annie's reluctance to separate. From a young age, Annie's world revolves around her mother with every aspect of her life intertwined with her mother's presence. The bond between them is characterized by unwavering devotion, physical closeness, and a lack of recognition of their individuality. Annie's mother's overprotective tendencies and fear of separation contribute to their enmeshed relationship. Additionally, Annie's mother serves as a symbol of strength and pride in her society, further reinforcing their deep connection. However, as Annie approaches adolescence, her mother's sudden demand for her to develop her own distinct personality triggers feelings of abandonment and resistance. To fully comprehend why Annie is resistant to this request, it is crucial to delve into four pivotal factors: her mother's mothering attitudes, her early childhood fear of separation, the intricate dynamics between Annie and her father, and her relationships with males. By meticulously exploring each of these facets, we unlock a profound comprehension of Annie's character and uncover the source of her apprehension toward her mother's request.

2.1 Unveiling the Depths: Annie John's Intense Attachment to her Mother

Despite the inherently problematic nature of Annie John's intense attachment to her mother, it is striking that neither ten-year-old Annie nor her mother acknowledge or perceive it as an issue. This stark lack of recognition is exemplified by the unwavering devotion and unconditional overcare that Annie's mother consistently provides for her daughter, while Annie herself perceives her mother as her entire universe further exacerbating the difficulty of separating from her and straining their connection. We are introduced to ten-year-old Annie John who is still connected to her mother in an unusual way during the latency stage of Freud's psychosexual development. While this phase typically involves the suppression and redirection of sexual impulses towards friendships, hobbies, and academic pursuits¹, Annie's experience deviates significantly. Instead, her world revolves entirely around her mother. Indeed, Caton believes that there is: "an intuitive, almost mystical aura around Annie and her mother"². Right from the first opening page of the novel, Annie's narrative is intertwined with her mother's presence. Every aspect of her recollections, every thought, and every interaction is intricately linked to her mother. Moreover, at ten years old, Annie remains deeply emotionally and physically bonded to her mother to the extent that they still bathe together:

My mother and I often took a bath together. Sometimes it was just a plain bath, which didn't take very long. Other times, it was a special bath in which the barks and flowers of many different trees, together with all sorts of oils, were boiled in the same large caldron. We would then sit in this bath in a

darkened room with a strange-smelling candle burning away. As we sat in this bath, my mother would bathe different parts of my body; then she would do the same to herself.³

Her mother continues to treat Annie like a helpless baby fostering a sense of dependence and reliance, and Annie John enjoys her mother's continuous provision of this type of care. The interactions between Annie and her mother, and other girlfriends, are all marked by a compelling and vivid "sensuous dimension"⁴. Because of their close relationship, every aspect of Annie's life is influenced by her mother's opinions and preferences. Each story she recounts becomes inextricably intertwined with her mother's thoughts, likes, dislikes, and approvals, painting a vivid picture of their inseparable bond: "It was one of the few things I liked to eat, and, to boot, it pleased my mother to see me eat something that was so good for me, and she would tell me in great detail the effect the raw liver would have on my red blood corpuscles"⁵. Her separate self/ego is conspicuously absent leaving us with only her mother's preferences and desires, devoid of Annie's own individuality. At the age of ten, it becomes apparent that Annie lacks a distinct sense of self apart from her mother. Indeed, everything she does is accompanied, monitored, and taught by her mother, blurring the boundaries between their identities. When tasting something for its seasoning, she recounts to us that her mother would ask her what she thought of the taste: "Not that she really wanted to know what I thought, for she had told me many times that my taste buds were not quite developed yet, but it was just to

include me in everything"⁶. Although Annie's mother might be preparing her for independence, her daughter does not seem to understand it. Instead, she emphasizes that she has to learn chores for the sole reason of spending time with her mother. Watering the clothes, she tells us: "On my holidays, I did this for my mother"⁷.

In addition to doing various things for her mother and with her, the latter also serves as her source of pride and value. She recalls: "How important it was to be with my mother. For many people, their wares and provisions laid out in front of them, would brighten up when they saw her coming and would try hard to get her attention"⁸. She is fascinated by her mother, who seems special in her society. This is due to the fact that for her, her mother is a symbol of strength, achievement, and perseverance. When her mother works on something, Annie informs us that: "I would sit in a corner of our yard and watch her. She never stood still. Her powerful legs carried her from one part of the yard to the other, and in and out of the house"⁹. In Annie's narrative thus far, the absence of her father's presence looms conspicuously, while her mother effortlessly handles a multitude of responsibilities within the household and beyond. On another occasion, at five years old, instead of powdering her with her baby-smelling talcum powder, her mother once let her use her own talcum powder, which smelled quite perfumy, she expresses her happiness by stating: "How it pleased me to walk out the door and bend my head down to sniff at myself and see that I smelled just like my mother"¹⁰. This is indicative that Annie looks up to her mother as a role model and

wants to imitate her in every way possible which foreshadows her reproduction of her mother's attitude during her adolescence. This indicates that Annie looks up to her mother as a role model and wants to imitate her in every possible way, foreshadowing her adoption of her mother's attitudes during her pre-adolescence and adolescence years.

Annie John's attitude toward her mother is, then, one of intense attachment and complete reliance, as evidenced by Annie's lack of a distinct sense of self apart from her mother. The story reaches its climactic point when Annie's mother abruptly demands that her daughter develop her own distinct personality, which Annie interprets as a signal of abandonment. Now, the focus of the analysis should be on exploring the mother's parenting style and its impact on Annie's resistance to separation in order to uncover the underlying reasons for their intertwined relationship.

2.2 Maternal Influence and Reluctance to Separate: The Dynamics of Annie John's Relationship with her Mother

Annie's mother's mothering attitudes serve as early indicators of her strong attachment to her daughter, thereby highlighting Annie's profound reluctance toward separation. As demonstrated earlier, ten-year-old Annie still receives dedicated care from her mother. To examine her mother's maternal tendencies, the focus now shifts to Annie's early childhood memories. Despite being too young to help, Annie would constantly be by her mother's side even during cleaning time. Annie's statement that: "If I was at home when [my mother] happened to do this, I was at her side, as

usual"¹¹ perfectly encapsulates their intimacy and their strong bond. Furthermore, when her mother would take out Annie's childhood belongings from *the trunk* [my emphasis], the same one in which her mother used to keep her own childhood possessions, she would weave stories about each item leaving Annie with a seemingly never-ending sense of joy, as she recalls that: "it was a tremendous pleasure"¹² for her when each time her mother does this. The contents of the trunk are arranged, Murdoch believes: "as a symbolic depiction of Annie herself, and thus of the mother's enclosure, containment, limitation, possession and direction of her daughter's life and identity"¹³. Moreover, it is also interesting that her mother regales her daughter with these tales, never showing herself any signs of fatigue or weariness in doing so. As such, the mutual delight that Annie and her mother take in these stories is indicative of the strong bond between them and would later inform Annie's reluctance to separate from her mother, aligning with Chodorow's belief that if individuals have been intensely and exclusively cared for by their mother, they are likely to develop a strong attachment to her¹⁴.

Through careful analysis of Annie's stories regarding her mother and childhood, it becomes evident that there are two primary reasons that have led to her mother's excessive doting on her throughout her entire twelve years of age. The first one is related to Annie's being the only child of her mother. Annie has experienced an exceptional level of attention and care throughout her twelve years always remaining at the center of her mother's

undivided focus and affection. Annie vividly recalls how her mother would frequently narrate her memories from her childhood while tenderly kissing the scars on her elbows. Annie adds that: "No small part of my life was so unimportant that she hadn't made a note of it, and now she would tell it to me over and over again"¹⁵. The second reason stems from her mother's fear that her father's involvement with multiple women may pose a potential threat to her daughter's well-being. This observation aligns with Chodorow's ideas suggesting that when a young child experiences the threat of separation, the anticipated separation at puberty may not be a smooth process. As a result, she has overly overprotected Annie. Furthermore, upon further reflection, a third reason emerges that could significantly contribute to the situation. It appears that her mother's relationship with her father may also play a significant role. Although physically present, he remains emotionally detached, further exacerbated by his involvement with multiple women. Compounding matters, the significant age difference between him and Annie's mother prevents her from wholeheartedly investing her attention and focus in the relationship resulting in her directing all her time and energy towards her daughter. Annie recounts more than one occurrence from her early childhood, particularly those related to the threats posed by her father's women. To give one example, "-one of the many women my father had loved, had never married, but with whom he had had children was trying to harm my mother and me by setting bad spirits on us"¹⁶. This is a reflection of patriarchal norms that frequently support men having several

sexual partners while restricting the sexual agency of women. It also serves as a poignant testament to the risks and fears of separation that both Annie's mother and daughter grapple with during the formative years of her childhood. In another incident, Annie narrates: "When I was much smaller, quite a few times while I was walking with my mother she would suddenly grab me and wrap me up in her skirt and drag me along with her as if in a great hurry"¹⁷. This incident also stands as a poignant example of Annie's early childhood encounter with separation, as her father's numerous women have posed repeated threats to the well-being of both her and her mother but never to her father¹⁸. The image of Annie the child being wrapped up in her mother's skirt can be interpreted as a confirmation that the mother is the primary caregiver and protector responsible for shielding her child from harm and danger that is caused by her father's relations.

The bond between Annie and her mother transcends mere storytelling and shared daily chores; it encompasses a profound physical connection as well. However, Annie appears oblivious to the fact that she and her mother are separate entities. As she reminisces about her mother:

As she told me the stories, I sometimes sat at her side, leaning against her, or I would crouch on my knees behind her back and lean over her shoulder. As I did this, I would occasionally sniff at her neck, or behind her ears, or at her hair. She smelled sometimes of lemons, sometimes of sage, sometimes of roses, sometimes of bay leaf. At times I would no longer hear what it was she was saying; I just liked to look at her mouth as it opened and closed over words,

or as she laughed. How terrible it must be for all the people who had no one to love them so and no one whom they loved so, I thought. My father, for instance. When he was a little boy, his parents, after kissing him goodbye and leaving him with his grandmother, boarded a boat and sailed to South America. He never saw them again.¹⁹

The dynamic between the mother and her daughter is thus distinguished by a unique blend of emotional, spiritual, and physical bonds that bind them together in a lifetime relationship. This would diminish the likelihood of Annie developing her own distinct personality. She is too attached to her mother that she cannot imagine ever being separated from her. In recalling her life prior to the age of twelve, Annie fondly recounts the moments when she assisted her mother, and in return, received affectionate rewards: "Sometimes when I gave her the herbs, she might stoop down and kiss me on my lips and then on my neck. It was in such a paradise that I lived"²⁰. This physical aspect of their relationship is evident once again, and Annie John savours it, reluctant to relinquish it. Another poignant memory is when Annie accompanied her mother to Rat Island on Sundays after church. There, as recommended, she could bathe in the sea to strengthen her weak kidneys²¹.

The bond between Annie and her mother is so strong that they appear to be a single entity, devoid of the usual separation that often occurs between a mother and a daughter. As her mother was "a superior swimmer"²², she made every effort to teach Annie how to swim, but to no avail. This can be interpreted as a reflection of Annie's complete dependence on her mother, as she

is convinced that her mother will always be there for her. As a result, she doesn't feel the need to learn how to swim. In her first autobiographical essay, which she later shares with her class, Annie recounts her swimming experience with her mother stating that:

The only way I could go into the water was if I was on my mother's back, my arms clasped tightly around her neck, and she would then swim around not too far from the shore. It was only then that I could forget how big the sea was, how far down the bottom could be, and how filled up it was with things that couldn't understand a nice hallo. When we swam around in this way, I would think how much we were like the pictures of sea mammals I had seen, my mother and I, naked in the seawater, my mother sometimes singing to me a song in a French patois I did not yet understand, or sometimes not saying anything at all. I would place my ear against her neck, and it was as if I were listening to a giant shell, for all the sounds around me—the sea, the wind, the birds screeching—would seem as if they came from inside her, the way the sounds of the sea are in a seashell. Afterward, my mother would take me back to the shore, and I would lie there just beyond the farthest reach of a big wave and watch my mother as she swam and dove.²³

Through these accounts, the significance of Annie's mother in her life becomes unmistakable, as she appears to be Annie's entire world. The swimming scene, thus, serves as a crucial indicator of Annie's personality and foreshadows her future character development and her reluctance to be parted from her mother.

The quotation that follows illustrates a warm, loving bond between Annie and her mother, who shows her daughter nothing but love, affirmation, and support. When Annie is able to go grocery shopping alone for the first time at the age of five, she recounts her mother's reaction stating that: "[My mother's] eyes filled with tears and she swooped me up and held me high in the air and said that I was wonderful and good and that there would never be anybody better. If I had just conquered Persia, she couldn't have been more proud of me"²⁴. The mother's emotional reaction suggests that Annie is her mother's source of great joy and pride in her life emphasising the depth of her affection and admiration for her child.

Annie's mother's exceptional dedication to her daughter's well-being is further exemplified by her unwavering commitment to providing fresh carrot juice to school during every recess, even after receiving repeated assurances from the doctor that her eight-year-old daughter would not require glasses and that the juice would be sufficient to strengthen her eyes²⁵. This behaviour reveals the mother's obsession with her daughter's well-being to the extent that she disregards medical advice and daily goes all the way to the school gate to make her daughter drink fresh juice. Even if the mother has the best of intentions, her overbearing manner can be suffocating for most children (but never for Annie, apparently) and may eventually limit Annie's capacity for independent thought and self-care in her future. And this is another evidence of her unwillingness to live independently of her mother and abandon the haven of care she has been

enjoying, which aligns with Chodorow's belief that if the mother fails to support the infant's emerging ego or excessively controls their environment, the infant's capacities to handle anxiety may be hindered²⁶. In this case, it can be observed that the mother has been overbearing and controlling impeding Annie's development of independence and self-care skills. Her constant presence and reluctance to allow Annie to take on certain functions hinder her ability to separate and foster a sense of dependency on her mother.

2.3 Fear of Abandonment: Annie John's Struggle with Independence and Separation Anxiety

At the outset of the novel, Annie divulges a lot of information only about her mother. However, it is the topic of death that marks the first instance of Annie revealing something about herself to the reader. She specifically mentions that although she has not personally experienced death, her mother had, including the loss of her own brother²⁷. This early allusion to death serves as a portent for its thematic significance throughout the narrative. One of the significant keys to understanding Annie's reluctance toward embracing her own individuality lies in the idea of death. Freud's theory sheds light on this as he explains that the terrifying impression of helplessness experienced during childhood awakens a deep need for protection, particularly protection provided by love²⁸. In Annie's case, although she herself has not directly encountered the anguish of losing a cherished person, her mother's story about her perished uncle John, whom she greatly admired to the extent that she bestowed his name upon her, has made her

acutely aware of the fragility of life. It seems that both mother and daughter are concerned about losing one another because Annie's mother has previously experienced the pain of losing her brother. This justifies Annie's mother's excessively protective behaviour as well as the irrational fear that consumes Annie that she could be abandoned because of her mother's possible death. Indeed, Annie believes that people should stay under their mother's care who shouldn't pass away and leave them alone, as evidenced by the fact that she stops communicating with her classmate Sonia for a period of two years. She perceives Sonia as: "a shameful thing, a girl whose mother had died and left her alone in the world"²⁹. In Annie's estimation, people need maternal attention and presence to feel safe and supported, and losing this can result in feelings of embarrassment and desertion.

The profound anxiety Annie experiences regarding the possibility of being separated from her mother complicates their strong bond. Despite the apparent closeness between them, Annie remains unsettled and consistently anxious about the prospect of losing her mother. This deep-seated fear of death reemerges, as Annie now worries about her own mortality and the potential of meeting a fate similar to that of her uncle John, although she does not explicitly mention him. Hence, Annie conscientiously contemplates the emotional response her parents would exhibit if she were to pass away³⁰. This apprehension regarding separation persists as a recurring theme throughout Annie's narrative prompting her to recall numerous occasions where she expresses this

concern. At one point, Annie is so anxious about losing her mother and expresses this fear directly to her mother: "But then [my mother] took me in her arms and kissed me, and she said that I needn't worry about such a thing as her sailing off or dying and leaving me all alone in the world"³¹. Nonetheless, despite her mother's efforts, Annie's dread of separation continues to haunt her influencing her future reactions and behaviours. Additionally, there exists an unconscious fear within Annie that her mother might, once again, leave her as she did with her family in the past when she chose to separate from them and marry Annie's father in a distant place.

Annie observes that her mother's efforts to turn her into a "young lady" prove futile, as she is sent off to learn various things "instead of days spent in perfect harmony with my mother, I trailing in her footsteps, she showering down on me her caresses, affection and attention"³². However, her mother's disapproval arises when Annie fails to take her enrolled classes seriously. Perplexed, Annie dares to question her mother's unwavering insistence on this new path, to which her mother responds by suggesting that one day Annie might desire a different home of her own³³. Annie thinks that: "That the day might actually come when we would live apart I had never believed. My throat hurt from the tears I held bottled up tight inside. Sometimes we would both forget the new order of things and would slip into our old ways. But that didn't last very long"³⁴. This quoted passage emphasises Annie's suffering and melancholy as she faces her mother's parting from her. She expresses disbelief that such a day would ever come indicating

a deep attachment to her mother. The physical sensation of a sore throat serves as a tangible metaphor for the mental agony she is going through. The repression of tears further points to the intense feelings of sadness and grief that Annie is trying to contain within herself. The idea of going back to their previous habits suggests a yearning for the past, a desire to preserve the strong relationship they once had, and a determination to never leave her mother's safe haven. Curiously, even her mother shares this desire with her but the new reality of separation should be irreversible. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is possible that Annie's fear of separation from her mother stems from her attachment style, which has clearly been influenced by her mother's mothering attitudes and her early experiences with her.

The story of Annie includes a poignant incident in which she finds herself ashore, unable to locate her mother while she was swimming. The inability to determine her mother's whereabouts evokes a sense of panic and distress. This episode serves as a powerful testament to the separation anxiety present in this bond. Annie's account becomes truly touching when her mother reappears within her sight:

[My mother] wasn't paying any attention to me, for she didn't know that I had missed her. I was glad to see her and started jumping up and down and waving to her. Still she didn't see me, and then I started to cry, for it dawned on me that, with all that water between us and I being unable to swim, my mother could stay there forever and the only way I would be able to wrap my arms around her again was if it pleased

her or if I took a boat. I cried until I wore myself out.³⁵

From a psychoanalytic perspective, this incident serves as further evidence of Annie's innate anxiety surrounding separation from her mother, a common concern in the early stages of development³⁶. Her fear that her mother might "no longer be near" her and her subsequent panic when she cannot see her mother swimming can be seen as a manifestation of this underlying anxiety. Annie's emotional response upon her mother's reassurance, where she admits her inability to erase the lingering feeling of distress when she couldn't find her mother, emphasizes the enduring impact of such experiences³⁷. Moreover, this incident aligns with Nancy Chodorow's argument regarding the significance of a mother's emotional presence and reassurance in fostering a child's sense of security and overall well-being. Chodorow suggests that if there is a risk of potential separation between the child and their caregiver, the normal process of separation may not occur as expected.

It is possible to interpret Annie's recurrent dream about her mother sitting on a rock and not returning³⁸ as a representation of her fear of separation and abandonment. In Freudian theory, dreams are an expression of the unconscious mind and can disclose repressed desires and thoughts, conflicts, and unresolved emotions³⁹. At times, Annie would dream of both her mother and father sitting on a rock, sharing laughter and joy. This can be interpreted as a manifestation of her underlying fear that her father might take her mother away from her. Annie remained silent about her recurring dream,

but as it persists, she eventually finds the courage to confide in her mother, stating: “I finally told my mother”⁴⁰. The mother's consistent response, where she reassures her daughter with the same comforting words each time Annie expresses her apprehension about potential separation, highlights the crucial role of the mother as the emotional caregiver and protector within the family dynamic.

3. Navigating Love and Distance: Exploring Annie's Complicated Bond with her Father

Annie's admiration for her father is apparent, yet her affection for him does not surpass that of her mother, who fulfils every aspect of her needs and embodies societal expectations regarding women's roles as nurturers and caregivers. Although Annie doesn't provide extensive information about her father, the anecdotes she does share make it evident that she cares for him. A poignant example of their emotional connection is when Annie joins her father in shedding tears while he recounts a heartfelt story from his own childhood—having been raised by his grandmother after being abandoned by his parents⁴¹. Indeed, the knowledge of such a story likely amplifies her anxieties and reinforces the idea that separation and abandonment are possible in their community. This, in turn, fuels her fears about the possibility of losing her mother. Furthermore, Annie's perception of her father differs significantly from the way she regards her mother. She asserts that: “When my eyes rested on my father, I didn't think very much of the way he looked. But when my eyes rested on my mother, I found her beautiful”⁴². This

candid statement highlights Annie's initial indifference toward her father's appearance and hints at a lack of emotional connection. Conversely, her profound admiration for her mother's beauty suggests a stronger bond between them in comparison to her father. This striking contrast serves to illustrate the profound impact our emotions and relationships can have on our perception of physical attractiveness.

When Annie narrates a scene in which her parents were engaged in an intimate act, she is more concerned with the sensation of her mother's hand on the small of her father's back than with what her parents are doing⁴³. Annie's description of her mother's white and bony hand is vivid and detailed suggesting a sense of decay or death, which contrasts with the intimacy of the moment. This symbolizes the demise and ultimate termination of the once profound bond Annie has shared with her mother. Annie's assertion that she cannot erase the image of her mother's hand in that particular state may indicate a sense of longing or nostalgia for a time when she felt more secure and connected to her mother. Once again, Annie proves to be struggling with some unresolved emotional issues related to mortality and attachment. After this incident, she refuses to hold her father's hand during their customary Sunday afternoon walk, an act the three of them have always engaged in, but this time her mother is absent⁴⁴. Her reluctance to hold her father's hand serves as a reflection of the psychological distance between them emblematic of their strained relationship, particularly since Annie perceives her father to be the reason her mother is leaving her. Thus, the circling hand incident

coupled with her mother's decision that she should forge her own identity have changed everything for her. Subsequently, Annie starts experiencing a sense of isolation, neglect, and misery. In a mealtime encounter with her parents, Annie feels ignored and unimportant within her family:

She went back to talking to my father. My father could hardly get a few words out of his mouth before she was a jellyfish of laughter. I sat there, putting my food in my mouth. I could not believe that she couldn't see how miserable I was and so reach out a hand to comfort me and caress my cheek, the way she usually did when she sensed that something was amiss with me. I could not believe how she laughed at everything he said, and how bitter it made me feel to see how much she liked him. I ate my meal.⁴⁵

Her mother's distracted peck on the cheek and preoccupation with her father's stories become sources of distress for her. The sight of her mother's laughter and displays of affection towards her father stirs bitterness within Annie, hinting at her desire to monopolize love exclusively for herself and exposing a touch of envy towards her father.

In Annie's room, every object bears the mark of her father's craftsmanship. The repetition of "made for me by my father from pitch pine"⁴⁶ underscores the meticulous care and attention he dedicates to each piece for his daughter. Annie's attachment to these objects may stem from a yearning for security and familiarity in a world that feels uncertain and capricious after she has lost ties with her mother. The reason that makes her think: "but I could

only sit on my bed and wonder what would become of me now"⁴⁷. With each surprise gift he presents, she narrates: "[A]nd then we would embrace, I kissing him on the cheek and he kissing me on the forehead"⁴⁸. This intimate portrayal showcases, in addition to their mutual affection, also the father's active involvement in his daughter's life, extending even to the minutiae of furnishing her room. Furthermore, her fondness for a particular fisherman at the market, reminiscent of her father, serves as further evidence of Annie's love for her father⁴⁹. This solidifies the notion that her affection extends to him as well. However, her ambivalent position toward her father cannot be compared to her strong attachment to her mother. Despite the remarkable kindness shown by her father, it pales in comparison to the extraordinary compassion displayed by her mother. Her father's efforts, though genuine, cannot compete with the profound impact her mother has on her. At every level, her mother's captivating presence far exceeds what her father can provide, leaving an indelible impression on her heart and character.

4. Gendered Interactions and Societal Barriers: Annie's Experiences with Boys

Annie's interactions with boys and the societal implications of gender roles are significant aspects to consider. Despite having a predominantly female circle of friends, Annie shares anecdotes about boys from her childhood and early adolescence. These stories shed light on the unequal treatment of girls and boys within her society. She astutely observes how her father receives attentive care from her mother⁵⁰ and is looked after by his

grandmother highlighting the differential treatment based on gender. Moreover, her accounts of her maternal grandmother, aunt, and mother worshiping her uncle John underscore the societal expectation for women to submit to men and prioritize their needs over their own. Annie's experiences align with the discrimination she faces based on her gender emphasizing how patriarchal practices are deeply embedded in her community. Annie liked to play with Mineu, the son of her mother's best friend when she was very young. Since playing with a boy was viewed as more desirable or prestigious⁵¹, the fact that it pleased her may mean that it gave her a sense of power or status. However, Annie comments that: "Of course, in all the games we played I was always given the lesser part" (74). This disparity in roles highlights the discrimination and inequality Annie endured as a girl when engaging in activities with boys. This reflects the societal norms and gender stereotypes that were common during the time in which the novel is set and which undervalue the abilities of girls portraying them as less intelligent than boys.

As Annie grows older, her experiences with boys do not improve. During adolescence, after a long period without seeing Mineu, she encounters him and his friends on the street. However, Mineu treats her disrespectfully by whispering remarks to his friends behind her back⁵². This interaction exemplifies how societal expectations surrounding gender roles and age can influence social interactions. Annie's expressed wish to transform them into cinder blocks⁵³ reveals her frustration and desire for control over those who made

her feel insignificant and powerless. It appears that Annie seeks to establish such control within her relationships with other girls instead. Also, her society enforces a strict gender divide deeming certain activities and games appropriate only for girls or boys. In Annie's case during adolescence, she is not allowed to play marbles, which is considered a boys' game, and the idea of her playing with Skerritt boys is not even considered⁵⁴. Annie recounts the final time she played with Mineu, wherein he wronged her and his mother failed to acknowledge it⁵⁵. These events likely left a lasting impact on Annie shaping her perceptions of boys and men as a whole. Furthermore, they shed light on the discrimination and violence experienced by women and girls from a young age. Thus, in games with Mineu, Annie was always relegated to the lesser part, and now, as a young woman, she is met with ridicule and derision from his friends. These experiences contribute to Annie's attitude toward men and her preference for the company of girls.

In a particular passage, Annie expresses a profound aversion towards Gwen's father, going as far as wishing for him to become a leper. The reason for this dislike is his refusal to allow Gwen to attend the choir rehearsals at a distant church, citing concerns for her safety when returning home alone at night⁵⁶. While his worries are reasonable from a father's perspective, Annie perceives them as an unreasonable justification, perceiving Gwen's father as a barrier to their friendship. This further underscores Annie's uneasy rapport with men at large, especially those who stand against her connection with the girls she

prefers to be in their company since she feels more comfortable and in control.

5. Like Mother like Daughter: Maternal Replications and Annie's Search for Mother Figures in Female Friendships

Annie's relationships with girls serve as a reflection of her emotional displacement from her mother to her female friends, while also mirroring her mother's mothering attitudes. In her interactions with girls, it becomes apparent that Annie seeks a substitute for her mother and even replicates her mother's parenting style with her friends. She perceives Sonia, like her beautiful mother, in a similar light, confessing, "I loved very much—and so used to torment until she cried—a girl named Sonia"⁵⁷. The tormenting of her friend can be seen as a means of redirecting her anger towards her mother onto Sonia. Despite her genuine affection for Sonia, she torments her to express her own desires and emotions, which have been suppressed and silenced due to her mother's insistence on separation in their new situation. Thus, Annie views her new school as an opportunity to present herself differently and escape her mother's decision to separate. She yearns for a fresh start where everyone would be new and unfamiliar, allowing her to adopt a new persona and conceal the shame she feels about the separation. She confesses, "I could put on a new set of airs; I could say I was something that I was not, and no one would ever know the difference"⁵⁸. Annie regards this separation as a secret burden she feels

compelled to conceal from Sonia and others.

On the first day of the new school, Annie exhibits a strong desire to make a good impression on her older classmates, reminiscent of her previous yearning for validation and admiration from her mother. Within her class, Annie is drawn to two different girls, eventually developing a profound affection for Gweneth⁵⁹. However, she chooses not to mention this encounter with her mother at home highlighting the interpretation that her new friend serves as a replacement for her mother. This is evidenced by the statement, "Gwen and I were soon inseparable. If you saw one, you saw the other" (38), which echoes the familiar image from her childhood and pre-adolescence where Annie and her mother were always seen together. Subsequently, Annie and Gwen cultivate a deep bond by engaging in intimate conversations where they openly share their innermost thoughts, feelings, fears, and dreams. However, Annie withholds one specific secret from her friend, namely her altered feelings towards her mother. She refrains from confiding in Gwen because, as she explains, "I could see in what high regard Gwen held me, and I couldn't bear for her to see the great thing I had had once and then lost without an explanation"⁶⁰. This demonstrates Annie's ongoing sense of shame and embarrassment regarding her mother's changed emotions toward her suggesting that she fears potential rejection or criticism if she were to reveal her true feelings to Gwen.

Aside from her friendship with Gwen, Annie finds herself surrounded by classmates who admire her. These newfound connections serve as satisfying replacements for her mother and help fill the void left by her absence. Annie expresses her contentment, confiding that: "I looked at these girls surrounding me, my heart filled with just-sprung-up love, and I wished then and there to spend the rest of my life only with them"⁶¹. This quote not only emphasizes the significance of female friendships and solidarity in a patriarchal society but also underscores Annie's quest for a substitute for her mother. Furthermore, it can be interpreted as a rejection of the prevalent social narrative that prioritizes romantic relationships over platonic ones. It is worth noting that although Annie finds solace and satisfaction in her friendship with Gwen, her emotions toward her mother are still multifaceted and ambivalent. While discussing her mother with Gwen, Annie deliberately portrays a sense of scorn by turning the corners of her mouth down. She confesses: "I told her that when I was younger I had been afraid of my mother's dying, but that since I had met Gwen this didn't matter so much"⁶². Nevertheless, throughout the novel, Annie experiences moments of longing and nostalgia when reminiscing about her mother, particularly regarding her childhood. This indicates that Annie's feelings towards her mother are more nuanced than mere disdain or dislike, despite her search for a substitute in her friendship with Gwen.

Indeed, Annie's new school environment brings about changes in her perception of her own body and her growing self-

assurance. The fact that her "so recently much-hated body" is now seen as a "plus"⁶³ indicates that she has overcome some previous negative feelings toward herself. Through her participation in volleyball and gaining recognition from most girls, Annie's body becomes a source of achievement and validation, replacing the attention she once sought from her mother. Additionally, the statement "I had become notorious to them for doing forbidden things"⁶⁴ suggests that Annie has become more rebellious and independent challenging societal and maternal norms. This rebellion can be seen as a manifestation of her emerging identity and a response to her mother's imposed separation. It reflects Annie's growing sense of self and her 'forced' desire for autonomy, even if it is influenced by external factors.

From Sonia to Gwen, Annie's shifting friendships demonstrate that no girl can truly replace her mother. This highlights the unique bond and connection she shares with her mother making it difficult for any friendship to completely fill that void. This also suggests that the initial separation from her mother paves the way for subsequent separations, making them comparatively easier to handle. However, these friendships serve as substitutes and provide temporary comfort. Valens posits that Annie John's emotional attachment to Gwen serves as a seamless continuation of her previous attachment to Sonia, while concurrently serving as a means to supplant the void left by the absence of a "perfect harmony" with her mother⁶⁵. The introduction of the Red Girl further emphasizes Annie's fascination with girls

who defy gender norms and societal expectations. The Red Girl's skill in climbing trees, traditionally seen as a boys' activity, impresses Annie and reinforces her admiration for girls who exhibit strength and prowess comparable to boys⁶⁶. This echoes the qualities she admires in her mother. Annie describes how the Red Girl's mother allows her to have autonomy over certain activities she dislikes, such as bathing, wearing the same dress for a week, and combing her hair. The Red Girl's mother also respects her preferences by not forcing her to attend Sunday school⁶⁷. The Red Girl's mother, then, displays a contrasting parenting style compared to Annie's own mother. While some may interpret the Red Girl's upbringing as lacking proper guidance and neglecting basic hygiene, Annie appreciates the freedom her friend's mother grants her. In Annie's perspective, this leniency creates a sense of bliss for the Red Girl, as she perceives it as living in "heaven"⁶⁸.

Annie has a negative experience with girls who were two or three years older than her. She found them to be "vain", in strict competition for good marks and their teachers' affection, and insulting to each other⁶⁹. She contrasts them with her friends in the second form who offered camaraderie and friendly interactions. Annie finds these older girls to be dull and lacking in any unique ideas of how to be in the world⁷⁰. I suspect that these older girls may symbolize her mother, and therefore, she disagrees with them just as she does with her mother. Since Annie could not find a replacement for her mother, she now assumes the role of a mother of the girls she befriends. The significant role that mothers

play in shaping their daughters' identities and behaviors is manifested when Annie states that: "The gesture was an exact copy, of course, of what we had seen our mothers do"⁷¹. After a conflict with her father, Annie's mother left her father's house in Dominica and moved to Antigua at the age of sixteen, abandoning their home⁷². Annie's fear of separation may arise from the parallel between her own potential departure and her mother's past actions. Almost similar to her mother, Annie's relationship with her father is also strained. The wooden trunk that her mother used to pack her belongings while leaving her father's house is still present in Annie's life twenty-four years later, symbolizing a continued connection to her mother and their shared past⁷³. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this can be analyzed through object relations theory, which proposes that individuals form attachments to internalized representations of significant others based on early caregiving experiences. These internalized representations are projected onto external objects, which come to symbolize the significant other. In this case, the wooden trunk serves as an external object that carries the emotional significance of Annie's family history and her attachment to her mother. Its placement under Annie's bed indicates its importance and the emotional value it holds. Furthermore, the repetition of history in this passage aligns with the concept of repetition compulsion in psychoanalysis. Repetition compulsion suggests that individuals unconsciously repeat patterns of behavior or experiences from their past in an attempt to master or resolve them. Annie's use of her mother's trunk and its contents can be seen as a

repetition of her mother's act of leaving home and starting anew, indicating an unconscious desire to understand and incorporate her family history into her own identity.

Annie is transforming into a reflection of her accomplished and well-liked mother within her community. Upon joining her new school, Annie becomes the center of attention and receives admiration from her peers, especially girls who eagerly seek her friendship and wish to become better acquainted with her⁷⁴. Playing a mother's role with the Red Girl, Annie projects her fears and anxieties onto her and envisions dangerous scenarios where she can rescue and protect her⁷⁵. Karafilis argues that in Annie John's relationships with girls, there are always power imbalances⁷⁶. While Karafilis relates the dynamic of dominance and submission that Annie replicates in her interpersonal relationships to the systems of mastery and patterns of power that characterize the system of colonialism, I relate it to the replication of her relationship with her mother. This behavior reflects Annie's emulation of her own mother and her desire to exert control and power over someone else. The Red Girl's willingness to follow Annie and tolerate mistreatment⁷⁷ mirrors Annie's own experiences with her mother, as she assumes a maternal and nurturing role, possibly seeking to recreate the concept of motherhood.

Experiencing the separation from her mother has greatly influenced Annie's perception of trust and her willingness to betray those who were once significant to her. The ease with which she now betrays people and things that held importance

reveals the impact of her mother's departure. Annie acknowledges this shift, confessing that:

And now I started a new series of betrayals of people and things I would have sworn only minutes before to die for. There was Gweneth, whom I loved so, and who was my dearest friend in spite of the fact that she met with my mother's complete approval, but she had such slyness and so many pleasing, to me, ways that my mother could never have imagined.⁷⁸

This pattern of betrayal, including those closest to her, reflects Annie's imitation of her mother's broken promise of never leaving, perpetuating a cycle of abandonment in her relationships with these girls. The selection of Gwen as a target of betrayal, though unwillingly⁷⁹, may indeed indicate Annie's desire to reject the girl whom her mother explicitly approved as a friend. It can be seen as another act of rebellion against her mother's influence and an attempt to assert her own autonomy.

Annie's ability to perceive the emotions of others, similar to how her mother understood hers based on her facial expressions, is evident in her interaction with Ruth. Annie describes this connection by stating that: "I could see how Ruth felt from looking at her face"⁸⁰. This highlights Annie's development of a mothering attitude towards her friends, mirroring the empathetic understanding she received from her own mother. She now seeks to extend this understanding and empathy to her friends, demonstrating a repetition of the nurturing behaviors she experienced from her mother.

6. CONCLUSION

This article thoroughly explores the intricate and emotionally charged relationship between Annie John and her mother, shedding light on the profound impact it has on Annie's quest for autonomy and self-discovery. The analysis highlights how Annie's fear of abandonment and separation anxiety stems from her mother's past experiences leading to a deeply attached and dependent bond that hinders her ability to embrace her individuality. The study underscores the significance of early experiences and family history in shaping emotional development and the complexities of their relationship. Annie's emotional landscape is further illuminated through contrasting feelings towards her parents, with her mother's presence playing a pivotal role in shaping her emotional well-being and self-perception. Her interactions with boys also reveal deeply ingrained patriarchal practices in her society prompting negative attitudes and unequal treatment based on gender.

The paper also delves into Annie's relationships with her female friends demonstrating her emotional displacement from her mother to seek substitutes in her friendships. While finding solace in these connections, Annie replicates her mothering attitudes leading to ambivalent emotions as no friend can fully replace her mother. This emotional separation significantly influences her perception of trust, resulting in patterns of betrayal in her life. By exploring Annie John's story, we

gain valuable insights into the intricacies of human emotions, the uniqueness of each personal narrative, and the lasting effects of early experiences on one's sense of self and connections with the world.

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