

EN2240 Final Research Essay

FW2019-20

Length: 7 – 8 pages

Due date: 11:59pm,

Weight: 25% of final grade (5% Annotated Bibliography, 20% final essay)

The major research paper in this course should demonstrate two key elements of literary scholarship: 1) that you can develop a unique and interesting argument about a text, and 2) that you can carry out literary research. To do well on this assignment, simply follow these steps!

1. **Choose your text:** Choose a course text from the winter term. Choose a text you read in its entirety or at least have a solid grasp on.
 - a. **Texts for the final paper:**
 - i. *My Beautiful Laundrette*
 - ii. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*
 - iii. Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*
 - iv. M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*
 - v. Gwen Benaway, "Holy Wild"
 - vi. Billy-Ray Belcourt, "NDN Brothers," "Cree Girl Blows Up the Necropolis of Ottawa," "Leonardo DiCaprio"
 - vii. Lee Maracle, "Goodbye Snauq"
 - viii. Jordan Abel, "Whitest"
 - ix. Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*
 - x. Canisia Lubrin, *Voodoo Hypothesis*
 - xi. *Monsoon Wedding*
2. **Do some research:** Use the York Library resources to find a minimum of three (and no more than five) appropriate, academic, and reliable sources (books or book chapters, anthology or critical edition introductions, journal articles or records of conference papers) that directly discuss your chosen text or topic of analysis.
 - a. These resources should be reliable, credible, and up-to-date (published within the last ten years, twenty max.)
3. **Create an annotated bibliography:** Submit in the appropriate assignment drop on the Moodle a brief annotated bibliography of your chosen sources by **24 February 2020**. This assignment is worth 5% of your final grade, but will get feedback to help with the final construction of your paper. This bibliography will only be about a page or two long, and in it you should include, for *each* secondary source, the following:
 - a. The full MLA (8th edition) citation of the source.
 - b. Two or three sentences summarizing the major argument.
 - c. One or two sentences on how it will be useful to your paper.

4. Develop a thesis: Use the information you found in your research to develop a good, interesting thesis about the text you are studying. Use this thesis to create an outline, if you'd like (this doesn't need to be submitted), and to gather appropriate textual evidence from your primary and secondary texts.
 - a. If you'd like, you may submit your working thesis and outline to your professor via email or hard copy in office hours for feedback.
5. Write an essay: Simply organize the information from your research/thesis/outline into a proper essay format. Don't forget to include a Works Cited page (this time without annotations) and to organize your first page according to MLA. Submit your essay on the appropriate Moodle drop box by **16 March 2020**.

Your assignment should be written in full sentences and paragraphs and should conform to the guidelines of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (Eighth Edition)*. All sources must be cited properly. If you require a dictionary, use the *Oxford English Dictionary*, available as an electronic resource through York libraries.

AP/EN 2240 6.0 A

23 Mar. 2020

Language as Neocolonial Resistance in Kincaid's *A Small Place*

There are many ways to interpret Jamaica Kincaid's novel *A Small Place*. For example, Jane King argues that the work is "destructively angry" and "denigrating" of Antigua (899). In contrast, Suzanne Gauch argues that *A Small Place* "undermines the authority of its own narrator" and leaves readers with a conclusion that is "simple," "reductive," and without a "final representation of Antigua and its people" (912). However, I disagree with such critics and would argue that such interpretations fail to recognize the unique role of the narrator throughout the work and how such a role contributes to *A Small Place* as a form of resistance to neocolonialism. Through various literary techniques, such as parenthesis, metaphor, repetition, diction, and shifting subject pronouns, Kincaid is able to recognize tourism as an oppressive neocolonial structure that others, exploits and inhibits, while also being able to interrupt such oppression by dismantling binaries and reversing the tourist gaze. Ultimately, readers are shown how Kincaid both recognizes and resists the oppression of neocolonial activities, like tourism, by using language to disrupt and deconstruct the same colonial relationship that such activities seek to maintain.

As I have previously stated, *A Small Place* can be understood as a form of resistance to neocolonial activities like tourism. Thus, in order to analyze the work effectively one must first have an understanding of neocolonialism. Neocolonialism can be defined as "the newest form of control and domination" (Wijesinghe et al. 1263), where former colonies remain "subjected to unequal power relations despite the end of formal political control" (1265). There are many ways in which these new forms of control and domination materialize themselves. For example, neocolonial control of developed countries over developing nations often occurs through capitalism, privatization, cultural imperialism, and globalization (Wijesinghe et al. 1265). It is important to note that neocolonial control is often "subtle and

not visible or direct like that of colonization” (Wijesinghe et al. 1265). In this way, neocolonialism is often much more insidious and difficult to identify. However, one example of neocolonialism that exists in the 21st century is the tourism industry. According to Cywiński, tourism “should be seen as a practice for the privileged—the practice of using the ‘other’, the ‘weaker’, and the ‘poorer’” (qtd. in Wijesinghe et al. 1266). Upon understanding tourism in this way, it becomes clear how the industry acts as an oppressive form of neocolonialism that takes advantage of developing nations and seeks to maintain the same unequal power relationship founded on colonialism. Through *A Small Place*, Kincaid both recognizes and resists this oppression.

Kincaid highlights, for example, the ways in which tourism reinforces otherness. One way she does this is through the use of parenthesis. When the narrator states that a tourist is a person who marvels at “the harmony...and the union of these other people (and they are other people)” (Kincaid 16), Kincaid uses parenthesis to insert a second, more critical voice into the narration. The words “other people” are repeated twice to call attention to “the typical tourist psyche of objectifying Otherness” (Osagie & Buzinde 221). Ultimately, Kincaid’s choice of the word “other” implies that tourists view the natives as inherently different, thus paralleling the same ideology that colonizers use to justify colonialism—that being the idea that the colonized are inherently different and inferior to the colonizer. Kincaid also shows how tourism reinforces otherness through her mention of the tourist gaze, which refers to “the way tourists look at different destinations” as inherently “distinctive” and “opposite [to] the place where [they] come from” (Gorp & Béneker 294). For example, when the narrator states that a tourist pauses “here and there to gaze” (17), Kincaid is referring directly to this tourist gaze that seeks to other the locals and maintain a clear distinction between tourist and native. Furthermore, Kincaid’s choice of the words “here and there,” instead of “everywhere” or “at every moment,” is significant in that it suggests a power that the tourist possesses to choose exactly where and what they gaze upon. Thus, through diction, Kincaid portrays the tourist

not as completely enamored or consumed by the numerous sights and people in places like Antigua, but instead, as ultimately dominant over what they choose to view and claim as the “other” with their polarizing gaze.

In addition to Kincaid’s portrayal of tourism as othering, she also highlights the exploitative nature of such a neocolonial activity. When the narrator states to the tourist that the natives “envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself” (Kincaid 19), readers are directly shown the exploitative nature of tourism. Here, tourists are portrayed by Kincaid as taking advantage of and exploiting the unhappiness and dullness of the native in order to provide themselves, and themselves only, with happiness. There is an imbalance that is being made evident. Kincaid juxtaposes the “banality and boredom” of the native with the subsequent “pleasure” of the tourist in the same sentence so as to emphasize this imbalance and the inequalities perpetuated by tourism—an oppressive, neocolonial industry benefitting the tourist but leaving the native in a state of “envy” and “banality.” In addition, Kincaid repeats the phrase “they envy” three times on page nineteen, which similarly draws attention to the negative emotions of the native in contrast to the ultimate “pleasure” and positive emotions of the tourist. As a result, the unfair, exploitative nature of tourism is revealed.

Furthermore, Kincaid in *A Small Place*, demonstrates through the metaphor of the library how tourism is ultimately inhibitive of the development of the nations it takes place within. The library, that is described to have been damaged by an earthquake in 1974, has a sign that reads, “REPAIRS ARE PENDING” (Kincaid 42). The term “pending” suggests that the library remains in a state of incompleteness, uncertainty, and stagnation. In this way, the damaged library “functions as a metaphor of the postcolonial state” (McLeod 83) that similarly remains in this uncertain and “pending” condition. However, more importantly to this metaphor is what Kincaid portrays as being one of the reasons for why the library remains unrestored. This reason is that, as opposed to repairing the building, the area is

instead “going to be developed, turned into little shops—boutiques—so that when tourists [turn] up they [can] buy all those awful things that tourists always buy” (Kincaid 48). Here, the “pending” state of the library’s repairs becomes directly linked to tourism. In other words, Kincaid is ultimately portraying tourist developments, like the building of gift shops, as directly inhibitive of the development of the library and, by metaphorical extension, of the entire development of nations like Antigua that continue to be oppressed by such neocolonial practices. Thus, throughout *A Small Place*, Kincaid is recognizing how neocolonial practices like tourism ultimately seek to reinforce and maintain the same colonial relationship of power inequality and oppression.

However, not only does Kincaid recognize this neocolonial oppression, but, through language, she simultaneously resists it. For example, through her choice of subject pronouns within *A Small Place*, Kincaid disrupts the “you” versus “they” binary and introduces a third category—the “I”. When the narrator states, for instance, “if it were not for you, they would not have Government House” (10), Kincaid is making clear to her readers that this “you” versus “they” language permeates the oppressive, and arrogant thoughts and speech of tourists. And it is this type of language and dualistic thinking that maintains the unequal power relationship between native and tourist. Therefore, when the narrator refers to herself as “I,” such as with the line, “[t]he Antigua that I knew” (Kincaid 23), this dualistic thinking is being disrupted. It becomes clear that the role the narrator plays, the “I”, is somewhat distinct from the “you” and the “they.” In this way, Kincaid uses subject pronouns to emphasize that the narrator does not fit into the native-tourist binary. As Corinna McLeod writes, the narrator in *A Small Place*, is neither a native nor a tourist, but is instead, a “native informant” who plays “the dual role of insider and outsider” (80). Ultimately, it is this dual role of the narrator—this third category of the “I”—that Kincaid uses to dismantle, disrupt, and resist the “you” versus “they” binary that seeks to maintain colonial power inequalities and keep nations like Antigua in a state of subjugation through neocolonialism.

In addition, within *A Small Place*, Kincaid uses diction to actively resist and “redirect the tourist gaze” (Osagie & Buzinde 218) that seeks to other and subjugate the native. For example, when Kincaid writes, “behind their closed doors they laugh at your strangeness” (17), she is inverting who her readers see and understand as the Other. By using the term “strangeness” to refer to the tourists, the narrator reverses the polarizing gaze, and by extension, reverses the colonial power relationship. Ultimately, the laughter becomes a form of resistance—a symbol of power that the native now yields at the expense of the tourist. In other words, through Kincaid’s reversal of the gaze, readers are shown how the native is able to exploit the tourist for a source of pleasure. This stands in sharp contrast to Kincaid’s portrayal of the tourist’s ability to turn the native’s “banality and boredom into a source of pleasure” for themselves (Kincaid 19), that I have previously mentioned. In this way, Kincaid’s diction succeeds in creating a clear reversal of who is being gazed at and othered. Moreover, by stating that the laughter occurs behind “closed doors,” it becomes evident that Kincaid’s narrator is unapologetically publicizing a form of native resistance to neocolonial oppression that is confined to private spaces. Essentially, by using language to make known what is forced into secrecy—by reversing the gaze and showing her readers what is often made invisible—the colonial power relationship is once again disrupted and resisted.

Kincaid also resists the native-tourist binary by ultimately emphasizing the similarity between native and tourist, and thus the socially constructed nature of such a binary. For example, when the narrator states that “[e]very native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere” (18), Kincaid is disrupting the idea that tourist and native are innate categories. Instead, she is highlighting how such categories are socially constructed and therefore, indefinite. Furthermore, the repetition of the determiner “every” three times in this sentence, highlights the notion of collectivity, as well as showcases the confidence and ultimate certainty of the narrator who is adamant that no person, neither native nor tourist, is an exception to the variable nature of such categories. In addition,

Kincaid continues to state that the native and the tourist possess the same desire to escape the banality of their lives, and yet, what is stopping most natives from becoming tourists is simply that “[t]hey are too poor” to go anywhere (18). Once again, this statement allows readers to understand the native-tourist binary as not inherent, but as socially determined based exclusively on material factors. In this way, Kincaid is ultimately dismantling such oppressive, neocolonial binaries that attempt to subjugate the native and keep them trapped within the unequal colonial power relationship.

In addition to disrupting the native-tourist binary, Kincaid similarly disrupts the master-slave binary when she draws attention to the notion that, ultimately, both are human. And it is this notion that Kincaid uses to connect these two seemingly opposing categories, and highlight their arbitrary and constructed nature, in the final paragraph of *A Small Place*:

Of course, the whole thing is, once you cease to be a master, once you throw off your master’s yoke, you are no longer human rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up to. So, too, with the slaves. Once they are no longer slaves, once they are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human beings. (Kincaid 81)

Kincaid reduces the master and slave to a common denominator—humanity—which is emphasized through the use of juxtaposition in the passage. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “yoke” refers to “a frame or collar placed around the neck of an animal.” As a result, Kincaid’s use of the term serves to evoke animal imagery that is then juxtaposed to the image of the “human being” (81). Through this juxtaposition, the “master’s yoke” (Kincaid 81) becomes symbolic of the oppressive, socially constructed categories of “master” and “slave” that seek to subjugate and dehumanize the “slave,” while subsequently humanizing the “master” by comparison. Essentially, Kincaid is suggesting that when individuals are confined to this binary, it is easy to animalize one side of the binary and humanize the other. However, when the “master” and “slave” labels are destroyed and the

yoke is thrown off, the distinction, as well as the inequalities and oppression linked to it, disappear, and all that remains are human beings. Thus, it becomes clear that in this final passage of the text, Kincaid exposes the “constructed nature of the colonial enterprise” (Osagie & Buzinde 223) entirely through language. By exposing the colonial enterprise in this way, she once again resists and deconstructs the colonial power relationship that is perpetuated by neocolonialism.

Thus, through *A Small Place*, Kincaid uses language to both recognize and resist the oppressive colonial power relationship. Through various literary techniques of metaphor, repetition, and parenthesis, Kincaid establishes tourism as a neocolonial activity that seeks to maintain this colonial power relationship through the othering, exploitation, and inhibition of postcolonial nations. However, not only does Kincaid recognize such neocolonial oppression throughout the text, but she also simultaneously resists and disrupts the oppression. With the aid of various literary techniques, the author reverses the tourist gaze and deconstructs the polarizing binaries of native-tourist and master-slave that maintain an unequal power relationship. While I have shown how *A Small Place* can be understood as a form of resistance, this theme can be applied to many other postcolonial works of literature. Ultimately, as Kincaid proves, language is an extremely effective tool for resistance.

Works Cited

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