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Neither Here nor There: Exile, Obligation and Identity in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*

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Abstract

This essay analyzes Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* through a postcolonial and deconstructive lens, focusing on how the novel challenges binary oppositions such as home/exile and freedom/obligation in the protagonist's process of identity formation. The research questions that this essay builds upon are: *How does Lucy explore the protagonist's identity formation through the lens of deconstruction and the Bildungsroman, particularly by complicating binaries like home/exile and freedom/obligation?* and *How do the paratextual elements of Lucy shape readers' expectations, and how can analyzing these in a classroom setting help students question traditional narratives of home, exile and self?* Drawing on critical concepts such as *full play*, *bound motion*, and the female *Bildungsroman*, this essay argues that Lucy's development is marked by circularity, and fragmentation rather than resolution or integration. Furthermore, the analysis explores how *Lucy* both aligns with and subverts the *Bildungsroman* genre by portraying a female protagonist who challenges societal expectations and resists narrative closure. This essay also investigates the function of paratextual elements in the novel, considering how intertitles and other thresholds guide readers' interpretation and can be used as effective pedagogical tools in classroom settings to promote critical thinking.

Key Words: Jamaica Kincaid, Lucy, identity, deconstruction, binaries, paratext, Bildungsroman, postcolonial freedom, and exile.

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1. Introduction

Jamaica Kincaid is an Antiguan American author known for her lyrical, autobiographical style and focus on themes like colonialism, identity, and mother-daughter relationships. *Lucy* (1990) is a coming-of-age novel about a young Caribbean woman who moves to the United States and struggles with identity, exile, and personal freedom. Told through the voice of the eponymous protagonist, who has recently arrived in the United States to work as an au pair for a white upper middle-class family, the novel explores the emotional dislocation and psychological fragmentation that accompany migration and cultural estrangement. Lucy's reflection on her past, her complicated relationship with her mother, and her growing awareness of race, class, and gender dynamics in her new environment are features that all contribute to a portrait of identity in flux.

The novel has frequently been studied from postcolonial perspectives. While we acknowledge that these studies have been important, we primarily use a deconstructive interpretation of Lucy's sense of self that is shaped by the lingering presence of colonial ideologies and the struggle to define herself outside of them. Nevertheless, we will implement some terms often associated with postcolonial theory to strengthen our analysis. This essay will examine how the tension between Lucy's Caribbean past and her North American present contributes to her evolving sense of self, and how her internal struggle between inherited expectation and personal autonomy reflects a broader postcolonial condition. The novel explores the binary oppositions of home and exile as well as freedom and obligations through the protagonist's process of identity formation. The binary pairs were chosen after a close reading of the novel, where interest was sparked by Lucy's constant struggle with desire for freedom and external expectations.

Furthermore, the essay will explore the connection between the *Bildungsroman* genre and deconstructive theory, showcasing how deconstructing and analyzing the binaries included in the novel helps to understand how *Lucy* fits into one of the many varieties of the Bildungsroman. Moreover, following Gérard Genette's ideas about paratexts as thresholds, this essay expands its discussion to show how the paratextual aspects of *Lucy* can further contribute to deconstructive readings of the novel. By deconstructing the paratextual elements, considering their various possible meanings and discussing how these can help encourage critical thinking about the text, the essay will present ideas on how to implement this work in

a pedagogical setting. The research questions that this essay aims to answer are: *How does Lucy explore the protagonist's identity formation through the lens of deconstruction and the Bildungsroman, particularly by complicating binaries like home/exile and freedom/obligation?* and *How do the paratextual elements of Lucy shape readers' expectations, and how can analyzing these in a classroom setting help students question traditional narratives of home, exile and self?*

This paper summarizes relevant previous research, and key critical concepts are defined. This presentation is followed by the theoretical framework of deconstructive theory and paratextual elements. In the discussion, these concepts and theories are applied to *Lucy*. We conclude the discussion by showing how Jamaica Kincaid's novel troubles the binary oppositions of home vs exile and freedom vs obligation to portray the protagonist's circular process of identity formation. Finally, we apply a didactic perspective to show how the paratextual elements of the novel can be used in a teaching environment. With a paratextual focus, the students will be asked to work with predictions, deconstruction and critical thinking to deepen their understanding of the novel. Lastly, we summarize the major findings of the study and propose ideas for further research.

2. Background

Lucy (1990) is a semi-autobiographical novel written by Jamaica Kincaid. The novel mirrors Kincaid's own experiences and depicts a young woman, Lucy, who moves from Antigua to the United States to work as an au pair in the 1960s. Lucy experiences disidentification, most likely as a result of the loss of heritage due to colonialism, and the novel depicts how Lucy seems to be on a journey towards self-discovery and reinventing herself. Having associated her dilemmas with Antigua, Lucy quickly realizes that her trauma and identity crisis have followed her despite her geographical relocation. Instead, she realizes that the relationship between herself and her new world highlights her persistent colonial and familial trauma.

Moreover, Lucy's mental and physical journey unravels the instability of dichotomous binary opposites. Lucy experiences a shift in what is considered home and what is exile, and

the two oppositions soon become mixed. The same goes for freedom and obligation, where Lucy balances her own will with the expectations from her homeland and her new environment.

3. Previous Research

As mentioned previously, Kincaid's work is often associated with and researched through postcolonial perspectives. These works often highlight how Kincaid problematizes colonialism, racism and the Eurocentrism that it is affiliated with, and show how this impedes the natives of the colonialized countries from connecting with their own history and culture. However, we argue that there are more aspects to be examined in her work, particularly *Lucy*. By focusing foremost on a deconstructive approach rather than a postcolonial one, we do not deny that colonialism is apparent throughout the novel; however, we found themes that could be explored beyond this and could be deepened with an added perspective.

3.1. Narratives and Identity Formation in *Lucy*

Maria Helena Lima's article "Imaginary Homelands in Jamaica Kincaid's Narratives of Development" explores how Jamaica Kincaid provides a new perspective of the traditional narrative of development, focusing especially on the Bildungsroman in a postcolonial context. Lima claims that the binary of home and exile is deeply intertwined with the themes of identity, memory and colonial legacy in Kincaid's work. Furthermore, Lima emphasizes how in Kincaid's work, exile is both a physical and a psychological state. Characters such as Lucy leave the Caribbean in pursuit of freedom, autonomy or reinvention. However, Lima argues that this does not resolve their identity crisis; it merely relocates it. Lucy carries with her a sort of ambivalence: a longing for home mixed with resentment against it, and a sense of displacement that does not disappear with geographical distance.

Moreover, Lima describes how Lucy compensates for her homesickness by Lucy's deliberate use of "flourishing words and phrases" to "show how lovely everything was" (Kincaid 10), perhaps in an attempt to fool herself into romanticizing her surroundings. Lima also states that despite her homesickness, Lucy refuses to answer her mother's letters, further showcasing the mixed emotions regarding the home she both despises and longs for. Additionally, Lima compares *Lucy* to the Bildungsroman. While Lucy is very vocal about her

opinions throughout the book, the reader still does not know where she is heading at the end of the novel. Lucy, alongside the reader, seems to only know what she will *not* belong to, rather than what she *will* belong to. Lima summarizes this position in the statement: "Lucy seems to have learnt nothing" (863). Lima then explains how Lucy's disidentification can stem from her unwillingness to belong to the world she knows. Lima's article is important for this essay since she discusses *Lucy* from a Bildungsroman perspective, as well as highlighting the home vs exile binary.

In "Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* and the aesthetics of disidentification," Veronica Majerol examines how Lucy's friendship with her employer Mariah exists due to, rather than despite, its infusion of ambivalence and contradiction. Majerol suggests that Mariah's attempts to make Lucy assimilate wake memories within Lucy that highlight a feeling of marginalization, and a sense of "skin-doesn't-fit-ness" (18). Majerol describes how Mariah, despite acting out of benevolence, fails to realize how Lucy's past will affect her interpretation of reality in a way that is different from Mariah. Majerol states that Mariah's efforts to narrate a story of immigrant inclusion foil her own intention; the mere fact that inclusion is needed makes Lucy aware of the exclusion that she has been, and still is, a victim of.

Majerol claims that the moments of exclusion and contradiction act as a catalyst for Lucy's use of aesthetic expression to represent herself. A sort of self-inflicted exclusion is also present throughout Lucy's journey towards self-discovery. Though she is drawn to art and expresses herself through artistic mannerisms, she does not see herself as an artist when in the company of other artists. As Majerol points out, Lucy's viewpoint changes towards the end of the novel, when she describes herself as inventing herself, like a painter. This showcases how Lucy ultimately allows herself to be included in social constructs, and that she no longer forces herself to be an outsider. Lucy's resistance towards the beginning of the novel is, according to Majerol, a result of Mariah's attempts to push a narrative that does not fit. As a countermove, Lucy forms her own narrative in which she is an "artist who lacks 'position'" (23). This article contributes to our examination of the contradictory nature of Lucy's relationships.

In "'I would Rather Be Dead': Nostalgia and Narrative in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (2002), " Katherine Sugg analyzes the novel's main themes of nostalgia, exile, and gender. She argues that the novel challenges the dominant postcolonial narrative that often romanticizes the return to the homeland after a period of exile. Instead of depicting exile as a path to healing through return, *Lucy* challenges this expectation by refusing that cliché; instead, she embraces

the painful stance of non-reconciliation. Lucy chooses a life of emotional and physical separation from her mother and homeland, both of which she associates with oppression, colonialism, and patriarchal control. Her narrative is filled with anger and despair, emotions that mark her identity and voice in exile. The past haunts her, but she resists the idea that reconciliation with it is necessary or even desirable. Her "cold heart" and desire to avoid forming new attachments are not signs of emotional failure but rather acts of self-preservation in a world where love, especially maternal love, is experienced as burdensome and manipulative. Sugg's article is interesting for our study since it examines the aspects of nostalgia and exile in the novel as a whole, which will be useful when discussing the complexity of Lucy's exile from her homeland.

In "The Broken Clock: Time, Identity, and Autobiography in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*," Nancy Chick argues that *Lucy* deals with the protagonist's struggle to separate from her past and define herself anew. The image of a broken clock symbolizes Lucy's misguided belief in linear time, her desire to leave the past behind and start fresh. Chick argues that time in the novel is cyclical, since Lucy's past inevitably ends up shaping her present. She tries to erase her West Indian childhood, particularly her complicated relationship with her mother, whom she sees as embodying her past. She views her mother's expectations as limited by gender, and her reaction is to dissociate and reject her mother's influence. Lucy replaces her mother with Mariah, a more liberal maternal figure. However, Chick notes that Lucy does not fully grasp Mariah's feminist ideals and ultimately finds them irrelevant to her own experience. Lucy's rejection of both her mother and Mariah shows that she is not yet capable of understanding the collective struggle of women, instead focusing only on personal rebellion. Chick interprets Lucy's actions, such as her casual sexual affairs, changing her name, and moving out, as attempts to claim power and erase her past. However, her actions do not lead to real fulfillment. Even her act of writing at the end, which is intended to mark the birth of a new identity, fails to fully free her from her past. Chick points to Lucy's first sentence in her notebook "I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it" (Kincaid 164), as evidence that she remains emotionally tied to her mother, by drawing the parallel to Lucy's epiphany. "Thus, these first words represent the unresolved past, which she has struggled to erase. She acknowledges in this epiphany that she cannot, after all, create a new identity independent of her childhood" (Chick 99).

Chick goes on to argue that Lucy's effort to live independently from her past is unsuccessful. Her recurring memories, physical symptoms, and visits from people connected to her past prove that the past is inescapable. Lucy's freedom is essential to her identity; she wants to live without obligations to others, especially her mother. However, this desire leaves her isolated and incomplete, as is shown when she fails to find happiness even after achieving independence. True freedom requires Lucy to confront and integrate her past, not erase it. Chick's article contributes to our argument that Lucy is stuck in limbo, straining between binaries and constantly found in cyclical structures.

3.2. The Bildungsroman Genre

In the chapter "The Postcolonial Bildungsroman" featured in *A History of the Bildungsroman*, Ericka A. Hoagland explains how the *Bildungsroman* has been adapted by postcolonial authors as a tool for enabling ethical and socio-political critique of the colonial legacy. Hoagland refers to both Maria Helena Lima and José Santiago Fernández Vásquez, who have established theories on why postcolonial writers have turned to the Bildungsroman, a genre associated with colonialism and Eurocentrism. Although the Bildungsroman is historically associated with a colonialist worldview, Hoagland highlights Vasquez's belief in the genre's inherent potential for subversion. The Bildungsroman has traditionally been marked by a self-reflexive attitude that often questions or critiques social orders, usually dominant ones. This is evident even in works in which the protagonist ultimately conforms to the status quo. However, Lima believes that the usage of the Bildungsroman could be seen as a paradox: it aids the reproduction of the cultural imperialism that separates the intellectual in colonized countries from his or her birthplace community and culture.

Moreover, Hoagland argues that the postcolonial Bildungsroman differs from the traditional Bildungsroman in some respects. The traditions of depicting a complicated maturation process and ethical critique of the society that the protagonist seeks to be integrated into are both evidence that the postcolonial Bildungsroman does not exist in a vacuum but is inevitably mixed with socio-historical forces. Lastly, Hoagland agrees with using the tree metaphor by Franco Moretti, a famous Bildungsroman scholar, as a viewpoint when discussing the Bildungsroman. This means that the Bildungsroman cannot be expected to follow a straight line but rather that it takes the form of a tree with different branches, allowing genres to depart from each other. Hoagland's analysis of the Bildungsroman is of importance for this essay since it helps us consider *Lucy* as different from the traditional genre.

Carol Lazzaro-Weis further critiques the genre from a gender perspective in “The Female ‘Bildungsroman’: Calling It into Question.” By examining how the Bildungsroman often excludes or limits the female experience, Lazzaro-Weis argues that the classical form of the Bildungsroman assumes a male protagonist whose journey towards self-discovery involves integration into society, access to education, and increasing personal freedom. However, this model is not as easily applicable for women in patriarchal societies. Lazzaro-Weis points out how these traditional narratives of development rely on forms of freedom often denied to women, such as the freedom to move, to choose careers or partners, or to define one’s identity detached from domestic roles. By contrast, the female protagonist often faces a sort of tension between personal development and social expectations. Moreover, Lazarro-Weis claims that even though a female character seems to develop within the traditional Bildungsroman, she may in fact be internalizing oppression rather than achieving true freedom or self-discovery. Instead, Lazzaro-Weis suggests that traditional Bildungsroman structures, which often culminate in the protagonist’s reconciliation with society, may be inadequate for capturing women's experiences. She argues that female narratives often need to reject, resist or reshape this genre to reflect alternative paths to autonomy marked by estrangement, defiance, or self-definition beyond normative expectations. This perspective is especially relevant to the present study, as it broadens the analytical lens for examining how gender influences narrative form and personal development.

Building on this rethinking of the Bildungsroman, Stella Bolaki, in *Unsettling the Bildungsroman : Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction*, examines Jamaica Kincaid’s collection of short stories *At the Bottom of the River* and *Lucy*, focusing on how trauma and mobility intersect in the development of the female identity. Bolaki introduces the concept of *bound motion* to describe the complex relationship between trauma and movement. The author argues that traditional Bildungsroman narratives often portray trauma as an obstacle to personal growth and closure. However, in Kincaid’s works, trauma does not prevent movement; instead, it complicates and enriches the protagonist’s story. Bound motion encapsulates this dynamic, suggesting that while movement is possible, it is closely linked to the remaining effects of trauma. This concept of restricted movement challenges the orthodox concept of undisturbed progress usually found in the Bildungsroman, and instead promotes a model where development is non-linear and influenced by past experiences. By introducing the concept of bound motion, Bolaki offers a framework for understanding how both Western and

non-Western women can reconstruct the Bildungsroman genre, an idea that can be applied to the discussion of this essay, particularly through a deconstructive perspective.

3.3. Working with Binary Opposites in the Classroom

In "Coming in from the (Binary) Code: Deconstruction in the Composition Classroom," Nancy Effiger Wilson demonstrates the use of deconstruction as a pedagogical tool in composition courses. Wilson reflects on how her experiences with school desegregation in 1970s Oklahoma helped her recognize white supremacy as a social construct rooted in poverty and fear. This early understanding led her to value experiential learning and later incorporate it into her teaching. However, she observed that many students struggle to move beyond personal stories to broader analyses of systematic privilege and oppression. To address this, Wilson introduced deconstruction as a method for analyzing binary oppositions, such as male/female, white/non-white, or rich/poor, that reinforce social hierarchies. She teaches students to identify, question, and reflect on these binaries, using multiple examples to show how these oppositions are maintained in culture and media. Wilson emphasizes the aspect of intersectionality knowing that identities are complex and involve both privilege and oppression. Her classroom activities aimed to help students see beyond either/or thinking and recognize the harm caused by fixed categories. This article is mainly used to introduce the idea of working with binary opposites for didactic purposes and directly relates to our handling of binary opposites in *Lucy*.

3.4. Paratext, Peritext & Critical Thinking

Melissa Gross and Don Latham discuss the peritextual framework in "The Peritextual Literacy Framework: Using the Functions of Peritext to Support Critical Thinking" as a tool to enhance critical thinking through the analysis of peritextual elements such as prefaces, indexes, and source notes that frame but are not part of the main text. Paratext refers to all the material surrounding a text, such as titles, blurb and preface. Peritext is a subset of paratext that appears within the book, like the cover, foreword and chapter titles. In contrast, epitexts include external materials, like reviews, that exist outside the book. This will be explored further in the next section of this essay. Building on Gérard Genette's theory of the paratextual dimension, the authors focus specifically on peritext, arguing that despite the relevance of paratext in areas like bibliometrics and readers' advisory, its role in Library and Information Science (LIS) instruction has been underexplored. The Peritextual Literacy Framework (PLF) categorizes

peritext into six functional types: Production, Promotional, Navigational, Intratextual, Supplemental, and Documentary to guide users in evaluating, navigating, and understanding media. Each peritext type serves a distinct purpose. Production elements identify a work, while promotional elements market it to audiences. Navigational elements organize content, intratextual elements reveal the author's intent, supplemental elements deepen content understanding, and documentary elements link to external sources, supporting credibility assessments. The authors also connect the PLF to critical thinking, especially by referring to Ennis's (1962) definition of critical thinking as the ability to accurately evaluate statements. According to the authors, the PLF helps readers develop this skill by prompting them to critically assess a text's structure, credibility, and visual presentation, using clues from elements like cover, title, layout or other peritextual elements.

The article emphasizes that peritextual elements should be actively used by readers to better understand, navigate, and critically evaluate texts. By paying attention to features like titles, prefaces, indexes, and source notes, readers can make informed judgements about a work's credibility, structure, and purpose without having to rely solely on the main content. The PLF encourages readers to use peritext to evaluate how information is presented, how the author conveys knowledge, and how supplemental and documentary elements enhance understanding. Actively engaging with the peritext prepares readers to critically assess not just the information in the text, but also the intentions behind it, supporting deeper literacy, stronger critical thinking, and a more meaningful interaction with any media. Gross and Latham contribute to and develop what has previously been established by Genette, creating an opportunity to analyze the peritextual elements within *Luc*y and to explore their didactic possibilities.

This can be related to Swartz and McGuinness's "Developing and Assessing Thinking Skills", where critical thinking is introduced as an important skill in school settings. Critical thinking can be taught and assessed in school by teaching specific skills, encouraging metacognition, developing thinking strategies, and integrating these practices into regular subjects. This approach helps students to become better readers and thoughtful, independent learners. It goes beyond simply understanding a certain word on a page. When students think critically while reading, they question what the author is saying, look for evidence, and consider different viewpoints. This leads to a deeper understanding of texts. In short, critical thinking turns reading into an active process. It helps students not just absorb information, but truly

understand, question, and apply it. The critical thinking that Swartz and McGuinness describe includes multiple similarities with deconstruction, where the reader decodes and unravels the substance of certain words, phrases or underlying meanings. For this reason, we argue that a deconstructive approach can help students develop their critical thinking skills. This perspective is supported by Wilson, as well as Deborah Appleman, who supports this view of deconstruction in *Critical Encounters in Secondary English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents*. She explains that while deconstruction is one of the most difficult theories, its core focuses on decoding the actual written meaning and thinking beyond that, which is a strategy often used with critical thinking (112-114). She discusses varying ways to deconstruct a written text that ultimately aligns with critical thinking strategies, like questioning what is written and why it was written (112). This method of analyzing written text will be explained in depth in the following chapter *Deconstruction*.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. Deconstruction

In *Critical Theory Today: A User-friendly Guide*, Lois Tyson introduces and unpacks deconstructive criticism, which originated by Jaques Derrida in the late 1960s, and challenges the traditional view of language as a stable and transparent medium of communication. Deconstructive critics argue that language is inherently unstable, unclear, and ideologically charged. In addition, it is essentially unpredictable, with meaning being continually deferred through an endless chain of signifiers, a concept Derrida terms *différance* (236-239). While structuralists see language as consisting of signs composed of a signifier (the word) and signified (the concept), deconstruction argues that signifieds are themselves made up of further signifiers so that there is no stable concept at the end of the chain. Therefore, language becomes an endless system of transfers without anchorage; it is this process that is encapsulated in Derrida's term *différance*, a pun in French that means both to defer and to differ.

Because language shapes our thoughts and perceptions, deconstruction suggests that our identities, beliefs, and experiences are also unstable and ideologically constructed. The self is not a unified whole but a fragmented mix of conflicting ideologies, absorbed through the language and culture in which we live. In literary criticism, deconstruction involves identifying

contradictions within a text and exposing the instability of their ideology. Critics seek either to demonstrate a text's undecidability (its capacity to support multiple conflicting interpretations), or to reveal how the text undermines its own ideological assumptions, particularly by interrogating binary oppositions such as reason/emotion or male/female (239-240, 244-250). Rather than seeking definitive interpretations, deconstruction encourages readers to question apparent truths and to consider the deeper ideological implications of language.

In the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the discourse of the Human Sciences: Writing and Difference" Derrida identifies a historical "event" in thought, the decentering of structure. Traditionally, structures have relied on a center, a fixed point that organizes and limits the "play" of elements (279). The center gives coherence but paradoxically escapes structure; it is both inside and outside the structure, anchoring meaning while resisting transformation. This center has historically been seen as a presence that stops the infinite substitution of signs. Derrida, however, argues that this metaphysical centering has been disrupted, leading to a recognition that the center is not a fixed origin but a function within a field. He continues by stating that while structures traditionally rely on a center to provide meaning and order, this center paradoxically lies outside the structure itself and functions as a "transcendental signified," a fixed point of reference that resists further interpretation. Without such a transcendental signified to half the chain of signification, meaning cannot be securely fixed, a point that directly connects to Tyson's discussion of *différance* as the endless deferral of meaning though language. Without a transcendental signified, all meaning is caught in a chain of differences; structure becomes play (280). When Derrida speaks of play, he means the movement and instability within a system of signs, the way meaning is never fixed but constantly deferred through substitutions. *Full play* becomes possible only when the center is no longer thought of as a fixed origin or presence that limits movement. Full play is the unbounded movement of meaning made possible when the illusion of a stable center is abandoned. It is precisely this condition that deconstruction exploits in literary criticism, since the exposure of unable binaries and construction reveals the absence of any fixed center of meaning within texts. It is not about disorder, but about accepting that meaning arises from relations, not foundations. This idea of decentering is particularly relevant to *Lucy*, where the protagonist repeatedly rejects stable points of origin, such as home, mother and nation, in favor of a fragmented, shifting self. Just as Derrida's play resists anchoring meaning in a fixed center, Lucy resists fixed identities, allowing meaning and selfhood to emerge from movement, distance and contradiction.

In “Derrida and Indian Thought: Prospects for an East/West Dialogue?”, a chapter in *Deconstruction After All: Reflections and Conversations*, Alison Scott-Baumann and Christopher Norris discuss the extent to which Derrida’s philosophy can be meaningfully compared with Indian philosophical traditions. Derrida’s work, according to Norris, is deeply rooted in Western metaphysical concerns inherited from thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Heidegger, particularly around binary oppositions such as substance and attributes, and reality and appearance (207-208). Although Derrida aims at a systematic deconstruction of binaries, Norris emphasizes that Derrida cannot avoid using them. Norris argues that binary thinking may be fundamental to human cognition itself, and that Derrida’s project, far from abandoning logic, demands the highest degree of conceptual precision. While later Derrida engages more explicitly with ethics, alterity, and religious thoughts, Norris stresses that Derrida’s early commitments to logical rigor persist throughout his career (222-224).

In conclusion, Norris sees Derrida not as seeking an escape from dualistic structures but rather as exposing their instabilities while remaining inside Western philosophical discourse. Despite suggestive parallels with Indian thought, particularly regarding the critique of binary thinking, the differences are significant. Therefore, the conclusion is that Derrida remains fundamentally Western in critical spirit and method (224-229).While deconstruction remains within a Western paradigm, it can serve to critique that paradigm and thus challenge the binaries of self and other in colonialist ideology. Norris’ viewpoint that Derrida’s refusal to resolve oppositions could be compared to Lucy’s refusal of categorization. Furthermore, Derrida’s deconstruction can be compared to how Kincaid complicates binary frameworks without offering simple resolutions.

4.2 Paratext: Peritext and Epitext

Gérard Genette explains the phenomenon “paratext” in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997). Genette explains paratext is text that surrounds the main text, often associated with books. The central idea is that the text does not exist in a vacuum: it is also accompanied by a paratext. While both peritexts and epitexts focus on the text surrounding the main text, there is a difference that could classify them as opposites. While the peritext includes, for example, titles, chapter titles and footnotes, epitexts usually includes interviews with the author, reviews, and public statements. Thus, the main difference between the two is

between the inside and the outside aspects of the paratext. As implied in the title of his book, Genette illustrates the paratextual dimension through the threshold metaphor. He suggests that paratexts create thresholds that the reader needs to enter the main text. These thresholds start the process of shaping the meaning of the text before it even begins, creating an undefined space without a clear separation between inside and outside.

According to Genette, paratexts play a crucial role in how a reader enters and understands a literary work. Paratexts guide interpretation, set expectations, and frames the reading experience. Moreover, Genette suggests that titles are not neutral. They tell the reader how to read the book by giving an order to read in or giving a hint about what to expect from the chapter. Similarly, chapter titles can play different roles in how the reader interprets the work. Moving forward, we will mostly refer to chapter titles as intertitles, as Genette does in his work. The author brings up three different types of intertitles. Firstly, there are informative titles, which are straightforward in their meaning, leaving little room for alternative interpretation or imagination. Secondly, there are intriguing titles that are cryptic or metaphorical, and, lastly, there are structural titles serving a purely organizational role. However, Genette notes that modern novels have mostly eliminated intertitles and resorted to only numbers or no title at all, as a way of destabilizing the readers' experience.

Moreover, Genette writes about the "please-insert". Originally, the please-insert was a summary of the book which was manually inserted into copies addressed to critics and gave the author the possibility to summarize the book in his or her own words. Over time, this paper was instead inserted into all copies and gave civil readers the same opportunity to read the summary before (or after) reading the book. Due to financial aspects, the manual insertion of a paper in each book was substituted with printing the please-insert on the actual cover of the book, thus taking the form of the blurb as we know it today. To summarize, while the please-insert originally was meant to address critics that had not read the book, it eventually turned into the present blurb, which addresses potential readers that have not yet read the book either. This is evident in *Lucy*, where the blurb is a summary of the story, and gives potential readers an insight into what the book will contain. A more thorough analysis of the blurb, alongside the intertitles, will be conducted later in the essay. This evolution is particularly important to *Lucy*, as the blurb not only frames the narrative for new readers, but also subtly guides their expectations about identity, migration and transformation, themes that are highly relevant to

the novel's exploration of self-hood. This will be further explored through a pedagogical viewpoint in the discussion, to highlight the many approaches one can work with the novel.

5. Material and Method

The study employs a qualitative method, specifically in the close reading of Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*. The study uses a deconstructive lens to explore the protagonist's identity in relation to how she navigates the trauma that evidently stems from binary oppositions of her postcolonial past. To identify relevant secondary sources and scholarly material for this essay, various combinations of keywords were used, such as: "Jamaica Kincaid," "*Lucy*," "identity," "deconstruction," "binaries," "paratext," "Bildungsroman," "postcolonial freedom," and "exile." A substantial body of secondary material was collected and analyzed. While *Lucy* presents a wide range of potential areas for analysis, this study focuses on the intersection of deconstructive theory, in particular the dismantling of binary oppositions it entails, and the role of postcolonial trauma in shaping identity. It is also worth noting that "binaries" was intentionally used as a keyword during the process of finding relevant secondary material, because using more specific terms, such as "home," risked yielding overly broad results.

6. Discussion

6.1. Home vs Exile

The binary home vs exile is destabilized throughout the novel. We note that Sugg explores how "home" is not a space of safety or authenticity for Lucy, but rather one of confinement, while "exile" becomes a space of freedom, not fully liberating, but still necessary for survival (167). We believe that Sugg's idea can be related to a passage from *Lucy* where she reflects on her trip to America, and how it was not the life-changing development she thought it would be:

> What a surprise this was to me, that I longed to be back in the place that I came from, that I longed to sleep in a bed I had outgrown, that I longed to be with the people whose smallest, most natural gesture would call up in me such a rage that I longed to see them

> all dead at my feet. Oh, I had imagined that with my one swift act – leaving home and coming to this new place–I could leave behind me, as if it were an old garment never to be worn again, my sad thoughts, my sad feelings, and my discontent with life in general as it presented itself to me. In the past, the thought of being in my present situation had been a comfort, but now I did not even have this to look forward to. (Kincaid 6-7)

This quote reflects Lucy's feeling of confinement in both social contexts. She continuously expresses resentment towards her homeland Antigua and the constraint she feels that it has on her personal freedom. When she finally achieves what she believes to be her prosperity, she recognizes that the constraints lie within. She realizes that all the things she despises about Antigua are embedded in her identity. As a result, throughout the novel Lucy remains in a state of limbo, constantly oscillating between the poles of home and exile.

Her self-limitation is not just geographic but also psychological and emotional. While she physically leaves Antigua in search of liberation and self-definition, she finds that the emotional and cultural imprints of her homeland continue to shape her thoughts, desires, and reactions. Lucy is caught between rejecting her past and being unable to fully escape it; her memories, her upbringing, and even her language portray a lingering connection to Antigua: "I was still feeding Miriam and had just told her that her bowl of stewed fruit and yogurt was really a "potage," and she seemed to like the word as much as I did when at five years old I first found it on a bottle of Marmite" (Kincaid 49). At the same time, she feels alienated in her new environment, unable to fully assimilate or find a sense of belonging. She is never truly at home in either place. She struggles to assert autonomy, and this is complicated by the realization that the very structures she fled from are internalized, making her exile feel incomplete.

Throughout the novel, Lucy disconnects from other females in her life, which can mainly be established from her flawed relationship with her mother. This can be related to Sugg's questioning of feminist criticism that insists on reconnection for the protagonist, particularly with the mother, as essential to a woman's subjectivity. Such narratives rely on tropes of integration, unity and healing that do not account for characters like Lucy, whose relationship to the maternal and cultural past are primarily broken (160-161). In conclusion, we agree with Sugg that Kincaid's *Lucy* resists closure. By rejecting the traditional resolution

of homecoming and embracing the instability of exile, Lucy critiques the colonial, patriarchal, and even feminist narratives that demand unity, belonging, and return (170-171).

Throughout the novel, it is noticeable that Lucy's internal conflicts affect her relationships with the women in her life. Lucy's relationship with her mother has been consistently tinted by anger, disappointment and differences creating an environment where the feelings swell over and are carried on to other relationships. This is mainly evident in her relationship with Mariah, where Lucy constantly seeks similarities and differences between her mother and Mariah, which is depicted in the following quote where Lucy explains that "The times I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. The times that I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother" (Kincaid 58). Lucy's habit of nitpicking traits that she likes and dislikes about people can be connected to how her own mother criticized her, making it an inherited mannerism.

Moreover, Lucy's attendant denial of female solidarity is clearly a behavioral pattern, which can be visible through her female surroundings where she feels betrayed by her demand to satisfy her need for male validation and egocentric priorities. We see that this is evident in the scene where Myrna, a young girl and acquaintance from Antigua, confides in Lucy about the sexual assault she has experienced, where Lucy confesses to thinking: "Why had such an extraordinary thing happened to her and not me? Why had Mr. Thomas chosen Myrna as the girl he would meet in secret and place his middle finger up inside her and not me? … I was screaming inside '*This should have happened to me! This should have been me!*'" (105, 108). Similarly, this behavior is also exemplified when Lucy interacts with her close friend, Peggy (100-101). In this scene, Peggy confides in Lucy that Paul is not to be trusted. This could be seen as information that two women share between each other as a natural part of womanhood. However, Lucy disregards her friend's advice, and continues to interact with the man, and excuses her behavior with "But I like him," (100). Her prominent avoidant behavior is rooted in her oppositional defiant mindset, showcasing how Lucy repeatedly disregards solidarity with other women, and puts herself and her personal needs first in most of her relationships. Viewing womanhood as a form of home in her new unfamiliar environment, we conclude that Lucy continues to put herself in a position of exile, a position that is more familiar to her. Lucy remains in a state of unresolved contradiction, and this refusal becomes a pronounced act of narrative and political rebelliousness. The binary home vs exile is thus not only blurred, but also rewritten; exile is not absence, but presence on one's own terms.

6.2 Freedom vs Obligation

The binary of freedom vs obligation is central to the protagonist's emotional and inevitable cultural journey. Lucy successfully escapes her Caribbean homeland to work as an au pair in New York, seeking personal freedom and independence. However, Lucy quickly realizes that her new life comes with its own set of obligations as a domestic worker and in navigating racial, social and gendered expectations. Lucy struggles to balance her desire for self-definition and independence against duties imposed by her job, her past, and the expectations of others, particularly her mother. This persistent tension shapes her identity and highlights the complexity of true freedom, which is eventually never achieved.

Chick contends that *Lucy* centers on the protagonist's effort to break away from her past and redefine her identity. Chick demonstrates this by analyzing the image of a broken clock. She believes that it reflects Lucy's flawed perception of time as linear and her wish to discard the past and begin anew. One can observe how in Lucy's attempt to distance herself from her past, it is impossible to escape her past traumas, which is described by Bolaki as bound motion. This indicates that despite Lucy's anger and resentment towards her past, she is still bound to it through her emigration. One could argue that Lucy is at first unaware of this restriction, expressing that she believed her move to the United States would allow her to cut herself loose from previous feelings, experiences and trauma. We believe this is evident in the quote discussed in the previous section, where Lucy yearns to be back to a place where she belongs (Kincaid 6-7). Through a deconstructive approach, it is apparent that Lucy's bound motion is her reliving her trauma. Lucy constantly draws parallels between her new life and her old one, not allowing herself to move on. While she expresses the desire to move on completely from her previous experiences, her actions do not complement this desire. When allowing herself to think about her past, she also hinders herself from moving beyond it.

However, Chick suggests that time in the novel functions cyclically, as Lucy's history continually informs and affects her present (90). Lucy attempts to distance herself from her West Indian upbringing, especially her complicated bond with her mother, whom she mostly associates with her former life. She perceives her mother's expectations as shaped by restrictive gender roles, prompting Lucy to reject her mother's influence in pursuit of independence:

> My father did not know me at all; I did not expect him to imagine a life for me filled with excitement and triumph. But my mother knew me well, as well as she knew

> herself: I, at the time, even thought of us as identical; and whenever I saw her eyes fill up with tears at the thought how proud she would be at some deed her sons had accomplished, I felt a sword go through my heart, for there was no accompanying scenario in which she saw me, her only identical offspring, in a remotely similar situation. (Kincaid 130)

Here Lucy reflects on the deep yet complicated connection she has with her mother. She claims her father did not know her at all, implying a distant or unresolved relationship. In contrast, her mother did know her, so well, in fact, that Lucy saw them as identical. The changing relationship demonstrates a struggle between connection and autonomy, especially for women in postcolonial settings. Lucy does not just want to break from her family; she wants to break from the obligations from a generational pattern of limitation and self-denial. This emotional rift, represented by the metaphor of the sword, is tied to Lucy's pursuit of freedom and self-definition.

Chick interprets Lucy's qualities and actions, like her sexual assertiveness, changing her name, and moving out, as attempts to reclaim power and erase her past. However, we believe that her actions do not lead to real fulfillment. Even her final act of writing at the end of the novel, which is intended to mark the birth of a new identity, fails to help her escape her past. Chick points to Lucy's first sentence in her notebook, "I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it" (Kincaid 164), as evidence that she remains emotionally tied to her childhood and is unable to move beyond it. This leads to Chick's observation true freedom requires Lucy to confront and integrate her past, not erase it (103).

Moreover, Majerol's claim that Mariah's attempts to help Lucy assimilate into a different social context can deepen the understanding of Lucy's behavior. The fact that inclusion is needed puts Lucy in the fixed role of an immigrant, yet another constraint. Lucy expresses that she is aware of this in the scene where she, Mariah and the girls are on the train to Mariah's childhood home (Kincaid 32). Mariah is excited for Lucy to experience a train ride and dining onboard; however, Lucy immediately recognizes that Mariah and the other guests have something in common; instead, Lucy realizes she has more in common with the people waiting on them. Mariah's attempt at inclusivity fails because Lucy herself recognizes that she is not one of them. Lucy reacts strongly to this status of being excluded, which Lima describes as a possible consequence of Lucy's unwillingness to belong to anything (863). One might interpret this moment as Lucy's refusal to belong to, and be conquered by, the obligations she

repeatedly faces from different actors in her surroundings, even as she is still burdened by a desire for belonging.

We believe that her refusal to be a part of her surroundings can be connected to Derrida's concept of full play. Lucy continuously finds herself in fixed roles; she is a fixed outsider, in opposition to her inside/outside binary. Thus, it becomes evident that she cannot abandon the fixed marginalization, which is needed to obtain full play. She needs to move past her fixed origin since it limits her movements and therefore her freedom. To fully accomplish full play, Lucy needs to accept that meaning arises from relationships, not foundations, which seems to be hard for her to realize. Lucy tends to place herself outside of social constellations, seeing herself as a constant outsider, particularly in regard to people like Mariah, Lewis, and Dinah. However, when her behavior is mirrored by these characters, Lucy is offended. This reaction is present in the scene where Lucy meets Dinah, a friend of Mariah, who refers to Lucy as coming from "the islands". Lucy continues to emphasize the difference in their insider/outsider roles by portraying Dinah as a person who would think of her as "the girl" and, therefore, of lesser importance. Lucy's attempt to escape her history and its obligations only reinforces how deeply it shapes her. Her journey reveals that freedom requires confronting, not erasing, the forces that define identity.

6.3 Lucy as a Female Bildungsroman

The Bildungsroman and deconstructive theory are deeply connected through their engagement with binary oppositions. While the Bildungsroman traditionally charts a young protagonist's journey toward maturity through conflicts, such as self vs society or freedom vs obligation, it does so by structuring identity around competing binaries. Similarly, deconstruction, particularly through Derrida's theory of binary oppositions, reveals how meaning and identity are constructed through engagement with such oppositional frameworks. Both approaches highlight how identity emerges from tension between opposing forces at the same time as they question stability of those very forces (Tyson 295-296). Thus, it can be argued that the Bildungsroman genre and deconstructive theory both rely on, and ultimately unsettle, the binaries they engage with by suggesting that identity is not fixed but shaped by ongoing negotiation within unstable structures.

By examining *Lucy* and comparing it to a traditional Bildungsroman, it is easy to identify similarities as well as differences. The most obvious similarity lies in the genre's core

expectations: the protagonist undergoes a transformational journey, both physically and psychologically. Lucy embarks on an internal journey of identity and self-discovery, much like the stereotypical protagonist of a Bildungsroman. However, we find that Lucy deviates from the conventional form by following a circular narrative structure, rather than the typical linear progression. This is mainly apparent in Lucy's constant bound motion. Lucy is constantly brought back to the previous life experiences and traumas that hinder her attempts to move past them. For example, Lucy repeatedly correlates her employer Mariah to her mother (58). Lucy's repeated action of putting new characters into categories and looking for similarities to already established characters in her life might be her way of coming to terms with her new surroundings, and perhaps a way of making them feel more familiar. However, in Lucy's case, this only results in her reliving her traumas and never moving past them, providing evidence of the bound motion that is present throughout her journey.

Hoagland states that the Bildungsroman has traditionally been marked by a self-reflexive attitude that often questions or critiques social order, usually dominant ones (219). She explains how the postcolonial Bildungsroman is heavily influenced by the depiction of a complicated maturation process and the protagonist's critique of the society into which they are expected or desire to integrate. These traits further prove how the postcolonial Bildungsroman never can exist in a vacuum and will always be influenced by socio-historical critique. Moreover, Lucy's departure from the traditional Bildungsroman protagonist can also be explained through consideration of the bound motion that she experiences.

It is also important to note that Lucy is a female protagonist, which in itself sets the novel apart from many novels within the traditional Bildungsroman genre, which often focus on male development. According to Lazzaro-Weis, since *Lucy* departs from the closure aspect that is expected in a traditional Bildungsroman, as well as emphasizes the protagonist's resistant and alienated behavior, some of the elements that make the novel depart from the traditional Bildungsroman contribute to foregrounding it as a female Bildungsroman. While the traditional Bildungsroman also moves in a cyclical fashion with a literal or metaphorical return, it traditionally involves personal growth and maturity, Lucy and other novels in the female Bildungsroman category does not fit this narrative. Lucy attempts to move forward but is continuously pulled back by her traumas, creating a circularity without emotional or personal growth, not usually associated with the Bildungsroman structure. By combining our analysis, Lazarro-Weis's thoughts regarding traits of the female Bildungsroman and Bolaki's concept of

bound motion, this essay argues that the trauma in Lucy contributes to it being a female Bildungsroman.

In short, while *Lucy* shares some defining features of a Bildungsroman, it ultimately diverges from key conventions that traditionally define the genre. However, it is important to note that the genre is quite broad and is in flux, as mentioned by Hoagland when referring to Moretti's tree. By visualizing the genre as a tree, Moretti presents it as being both rooted in the traditional Bildungsroman structure and as allowing it to branch out and develop outside of its traditional frame. Even though *Lucy* departs from the traditional Bildungsroman it is evident that the lingering similarities like a young protagonist on a journey, a journey of self-discovery, rebellion against tradition, and alienation and displacement, to name a few, are strong enough to make the novel fit into the genre. Lucy's rejection of tradition can be seen on page 93, where she refuses the future that the people around her expect of her. "But among the last things my mother had said to me, just before I left, was 'Oh, I can just see you in your nurse's uniform. I shall be very proud of you.'" (93). Lucy then wonders if the uniform in question is made out of constraints or actual clothing. On the previous page, Lucy questions how anyone could expect her to be a nurse, since she does not view herself as someone who takes orders. This defiance of conformity shows Lucy's struggle for autonomy but plays an important part in her self-discovery, highlighting once again a correlation to the Bildungsroman. In summary, *Lucy* is a Bildungsroman because she develops a self-defined sense of identity by consciously breaking from both her native and adopted cultures, even if her journey is not a linear one.

6.4 Paratext in Classroom Settings

Lucy's nonlinear journey and bound motion can be further explored by examining the novel's paratextual elements. As previously described, a paratext can both be interwoven in the main text of a work but also exist outside of the novel's content. During the reading of *Lucy,* the reader is introduced to a variety of paratexts, such as the blurb, intertitles like "The Tongue" "Poor Visitor" as well as "Cold Heart". Kincaid seems to use intriguing yet somewhat informative intertitles to serve a purpose within the reading process. The first chapter in the book, named "Poor Visitor," can provoke readers into questioning what role the word "poor" has in this context, as well as who the visitor is. In this case, the word "Poor" could be analyzed in several different ways, for example poor as someone who is seen as inferior or pitiable, or as someone in an economic struggle. These varying possibilities open up for discussion and critical thinking strategies that are actively used in deconstruction.

As Genette writes, the paratext works as a threshold, which implies that this is one of the first thresholds in the form of an intertitle that the reader passes. Using this metaphor, the reader does not yet have much information about the content of the chapter and is, therefore, forced to use critical thinking to assess what they encounter. Having read the blurb, another paratext, the reader can guess that Lucy might be the visitor since it is mentioned that she travels to North America, thus making her a visitor, though in what sense she is "poor" remains to be seen.

The chapters named "Lucy" and "Mariah" can be evaluated in the same sense, seeing as these characters are also introduced in the blurb. The reader has now crossed a threshold and can therefore use the information gathered from the previous chapter to analyze the following intertitle. Having Mariah's name as the second chapter suggests that she will become an important character throughout the novel, and that the reader will get to know her better in her chapter. Similarly, having Lucy as the last chapter also creates suggestions about what will happen. In the beginning of the novel, the reader meets a disoriented girl who has just moved to a new country and left everything behind. Seeing her name as the last chapter can suggest that she discovers her identity and reinvents herself and introduces the reader to the new Lucy. Building on what we know of the traditional Bildungsroman, the reader might assume that Lucy's story will end with her resolving all her doubt about herself and her belonging. However, the last chapter only contains parts of reconciliation. Lucy has created a reality where she no longer works for Mariah, and has moved in with Peggy, showing a progress in how she forms relations with the women around her. Nonetheless, there are still questions to be answered about her future, and the reader gets no real closure about how Lucy will continue her journey. The reader is therefore left with a half-discovered Lucy, where some parts of her identity are starting to take form, while others are still unexplored. This does not align with the traditional Bildungsroman but shows that the genre allows works to depart from the stereotype. Additionally, since the last intertitle is the same as the book title, it can be suggested that the novel starts anew. The book continues to move circularly, and instead of ending with a complete, integrated Lucy, the traditional Bildungsroman story is challenged and disrupted. One could say that this deconstructs the binary of beginning and conclusion.

Intertitles like "The Tongue" and "Cold Heart" can be intriguing since they are abstract and do not signal a clear message to the reader. According to Oxford English Dictionary, "Tongue" can have a variety of definitions. It can be a physical tongue, or a linguistic tongue,

which could mean a native language that is spoken, or a type of jargon or tone that is spoken. A physical tongue is most apparent during the chapter, since it includes Lucy's previous experiences with kissing men (43). However, a linguistic tongue is also explored on page 56, where Dinah asks Lucy a blunt question "So you are from the Islands?", highlighting her sharp tongue. "Heart" can also be defined as the organ, or as a source or central aspect for something, "heart of nature". Furthermore, by exploring the OED's different definitions, the intertitles could be interpreted in an array of ways. "Cold Heart" could be interpreted as referring someone who is cold hearted, not emotional and frigid; it could also be understood as a death, with a literal interpretation of a physically cold heart, which happens in *Lucy*. On page 122, Lucy's father dies of a heart-related illness, which the reader later finds out about, after the assumption of the intertitle has been made. Lucy being cold hearted is not something that is new to the reader, but having such a striking intertitle suggests that this should be noticeable in the chapter. On page 115, Lucy disregards her mother's letter that is marked "Urgent", she throws it in a pile with all her mother's unopened letters. It is later explained that the letter includes the news that Lucy's father has passed away. However, this does not seem important to Lucy, she instead finds buying a new camera to be more interesting than hearing from her loved ones. The intertitle is usually not enough to make an informed assumption; therefore, critical thinking is essential for readers to try to understand the information that is about to be processed.

Swartz and McGuinness claim that incorporating critical thinking into school tasks is essential for developing students' ability to engage deeply with content, make informed decisions, and become independent learners. They continue by explaining that effective critical thinking instruction goes beyond passive exposure to complex problems. Instead, it requires explicit teaching of thinking strategies, such as structured questioning, predictions, and decision making. These strategies help students move from superficial engagement to skillful and reflective thinking (24). Applying such strategies to intertitles in *Lucy* not only deepens students' understanding of the text but also helps them to approach literature as something open to interpretation rather than fixed, encouraging intellectual curiosity and ownership of meaning. By working with intertitles, students are allowed to make assumptions about what is to come in the following chapter without having to be bound to their interpretation. A task like this opens to development by continuously reading and gathering new information that either changes or strengthens the reader's viewpoint. This teaches the students that there is no wrong way of interpreting something, as long as interpretations are kept open to new information.

To encourage a learning process that empowers reading, like critical thinking, students would be expected to read the blurb of *Lucy* and then discuss what information has been given, as well as what expectations they have of what is to come. The blurb contains information about Lucy, as well as her employers, Lewis and Mariah. The reader is informed of a journey taking place "Gradually a new person unfolds: passionate, forthright, and disarmingly honest." What type of journey is not expressed, but one could assume that Lucy is beginning to question her surroundings. The reader is introduced to the unfolding of her sexuality, which might suggest a process of self-expression and possibly a newfound revelation. This type of task helps students to discuss assumptions that arise during the reading of the blurb.

Building on their first encounters with paratextual thresholds, students will be better prepared to productively discuss how the text portrays issues such as gender roles, family expectations, and the constraints of societal norms within a particular historical and cultural context. For example, they could explore how personal relationships are shaped by power dynamics, or how expressions of sexuality are either repressed or challenged by the characters' environment. To further engage students in a meaningful reading process, a series of didactic tasks can be introduced that revolve around the function of paratexts and their interpretive power. One task could be to analyze the intertitles before reading the actual chapters. Students could work in groups to discuss the possible implications of titles like "Cold Heart" or "The Tongue," considering what emotions, themes, or narrative developments these might hint at. This encourages students to make predictions and form hypotheses, which can later be evaluated and discussed once the chapters are read. It would also be beneficial to encourage students to draw from previous personal experiences, as Wilson recommends (38). Taking other students' interpretations into consideration may spark discussions regarding fluidity in intertitles, creating an environment where literature becomes personal, and students dare to express their thoughts and opinions without fear of failure or judgement.

To further build on this work, another assignment could include comparing students' initial expectations from the blurb with their understanding after reading the novel. This reflection actively allows them to track how their interpretation evolves and how the paratexts guided or misled their assumptions. It can foster critical thinking by highlighting how authors and publishers use paratexts to frame a reader's approach. This would be one key method for achieving the use of comparisons to organize thought. These tools help make students' thought process visible, slow down impulsive thinking, and allow for reflection and revision. As the

report from Swartz and McGuinness explains, this approach enhances understanding and supports assessment (26).

Furthermore, students could analyze how the intertitles reflect Lucy's emotional and psychological journey. For instance, tracking the shift from "Poor Visitor" to "Lucy" could be used as a starting point for a discussion or writing assignment on identity development, cultural displacement, and self-discovery. This can also be connected to personal reflection, as students may be asked to write about a time when they experienced transition or transformation, thus bridging literature and life experiences. Wilson concludes that combining personal experience with theoretical tools like deconstruction enables students to think critically and challenge injustice in a meaningful way (48-49). This aligns with Swartz and McGuinness, who explain that one effective strategy for students is the infusion approach, where critical thinking is taught by promoting the transfer of skills to real-world and academic situations, encouraging deeper learning (17). Furthermore, in alignment with Wilson, they explain that fostering metacognition, students' awareness and regulation of their own thinking, leads to better academic outcomes and supports long-term intellectual growth since it connects to information they already know in their personal lives (11). As a result of emphasizing paratexts as thresholds, teachers can guide students to see reading as an interpretive act that goes beyond words in the page, where every textual element, from an intertitle to the back cover blurb, plays a role in constructing meaning. The back cover blurb can be used as a clear example for this, "seemingly happy" and "vivid realities" are some words that are used to describe important characters and settings of the book. The students can be asked why they think these words were chosen, and if they make a difference in how the book is perceived. This can be related to Appleman's discussion of deconstruction in the classroom. Appleman focuses mainly on reading beyond what is given to the reader on face value. The reader should move beyond that by unraveling the text and try to answer questions such as "Who made this? In what context? With what values? In whose interest? To what effect?" (Boomer 1988, quoted in Appleman 116). Through scaffolded discussions, analytical writing, and creative tasks, students can develop critical strategies that encourage them to engage more deeply with literature.

The curriculum for English in Swedish upper secondary school, Gy25 (Skolverket 2025) is divided into three levels. Looking at what has previously been suggested about working with paratexts, connections can be made to all three of the levels, as well as the curriculum, which states the overall goals of upper secondary education in English. From level

one all throughout level three, students are entitled to being introduced to and read different types of literature. They must also learn strategies for perceiving details and drawing conclusions about content and message. Skolverket mentions that this can be done through association, anticipating content and asking questions. Reaching levels two and three, students must also be able to identify implied and implicit meanings. Having used the ideas regarding Wilson´s thoughts about combining personal experiences with theoretical tools, as an aid to achieve critical thinking, the students have been given a foundation to achieve these goals. Skolverket also states that the Swedish educational system has a curriculum to fulfill. In the curriculum designated for upper secondary education, it is stated that the school ought to be open to different opinions and encourage them to be expressed. Furthermore, the students are to be given tools to seek out fiction and other cultural content as sources of knowledge, self-insight and joy. Lastly, students should have achieved the ability to critically examine and assess what they see, hear and read in order to be able to discuss and take a position in various existential questions and questions of values. It is important to note that the tasks mentioned previously are hypothetical. However, they have been constructed to meet both the curriculum and syllabus of the relevant courses in the Swedish educational system.

This chapter builds on pedagogical tasks that are made to be used in alliance with the Swedish curriculum. By incorporating this approach to literary works like *Lucy*, the student is encouraged to develop their ability to understand implicit meanings, gather different thinking strategies that align with critical thinking and deconstruction, and be open to differing opinions and interpretations. We believe that *Lucy* is an appropriate tool for achieving these curriculum goals. *Lucy* acts as a foundation to discuss challenging topics and identity formation and gives the students space to develop critical thinking skills, grounded in deconstructing what has been read in class.

7. Conclusion

In *Lucy*, Jamaica Kincaid constructs a narrative that interrogates and problematizes the binaries of home vs exile and freedom vs obligation, while also subverting the conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman. Throughout the novel, Lucy remains suspended in a state of bound motion and limitation, caught between places, identities, and relational roles. Her rejection of Antigua as “home” and her inability to fully embrace her new life in America reveal

that exile is not merely a physical dislocation, but an emotional and psychological disagreement that resists resolution. Lucy's journey highlights how the supposed safety of home can be tainted by confinement, and how exile, although unstable, can allow for the articulation of identity free from colonial, patriarchal, and even feminist expectations of unity and return, a type of freedom that comes with the price of alienation.

In addition to the narrative complexity and problematizing of binary opposites in the text itself, *Lucy* invites readers to engage critically through its paratextual elements, such as chapter titles and the blurb, which serve as interpretive thresholds. These features guide expectation, prompt reflection and reinforce the novel's resistance to fixed meaning or resolution. Just as Lucy herself remains in a state of flux, the paratext resists offering closure, instead creating ambiguity and encouraging active, interpretive reading. This further aligns with the novel's deconstructive approach to identity and genre, extending the Bildungsroman beyond its traditional boundaries and into the reader's experience. The essay discusses for a variety of pedagogical tasks in which *Lucy* can be utilized as a tool for incorporating relevant goals from the English curriculum in Swedish upper secondary school. The tasks are made to help students develop and work on thinking skills that allow them to deconstruct and critically analyze texts.

Finally, further research could explore *Lucy* through a psychoanalytic lens, particularly examining how Lucy's unresolved relationship with her mother influences her sense of self and shapes her emotional response to exile and belonging. While this has been worked on in previous works, building on this could offer a deeper insight into the role of trauma in postcolonial identity formation, especially in relation to the women in her life, which we found to be most interesting. Additionally, continuing to work with the novel through a feminist perspective could further highlight how Lucy departs from womanhood, that has been endorsed through this essay. Therefore, further studies illustrate how Lucy resists and is shaped by overlapping structures of race, gender and class and how she negotiates these in the face of cultural and historical difference.

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