

Girl by Jamaica Kincaid

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Introduction

The Girl short story forms the first published piece of Kincaid's work. Antigua creates the setting of the book. Kincaid is of African descent and explores issues of gender, class, and race in most of her work. The book offers a guide on the desirable behavioral traits for a person to live right. The narrative consists of two sections of guidance the mother gives the daughter; domesticity and social manners. In Girl, the mother instills morals and discipline in her pre-adolescent daughter. The significant themes in the story include the mother and daughter dispute, female sexuality dangers, domesticity, and sexual reputation. Characterization in Girl's short story helps deepen the short story's themes.

Discussion

Mother and daughter form the two main characters in The Girl. The mother-daughter relationship in The Girl seems to be an all-overriding connection. The mother is the primary speaker in the story. She commands absolute control over her daughter, and there is no room for negotiations or consultations (Kincaid p.69). The daughter has no room to discuss issues about female respect and retrogressive cultural behaviors with her mother. The mother's dominance disconnects her from her daughter, which raises tension and separation common between mothers and their teenage daughters.

Also, the tension mounts because of the mother's contradicting value systems, which include a mixture of European and Caribbean norms. Ironically, the mother chooses to downplay the Caribbean cultural norms such as myths, traditional herbal medicine, and superstitions. She instead upholds European cultural behaviors that encourage the rise of values in the average class to higher social status. (Kincaid p. 45) The mother seemingly advocates for Christian teaching sessions such as Sunday school, good sexual conduct, and proper female etiquette.

However, the fact that she takes her time to teach words of wisdom to the girl shows a more significant concern and care for her daughter. Further, the mother thinks that she is the only savior of the girl to prevent her from living a reckless sexual life. She assumes that the girl is heading in the wrong direction because she is singing Antiguan folk songs and because of the way she sits and walks around (Kincaid p.35). For this reason, she imparts knowledge to the child. Also, the mother is knowledgeable and wise. She knows how to prepare meals, clean, and keep the household compound tidy. She also understands social norms, etiquette, dignity, and how to interact and behave when around diverse groups of people.

The mother believes that domestic knowledge and learning to relate to people earn a person respect and happiness from family members and society. (Kincaid p. 23) However, the mother speaks with bitterness in her voice. She vents her frustration and anger on the girl. She presumes that despite instilling wisdom in her daughter, she will not change because she has resolved to a life of bad reputation. Repeatedly, the mother suggests that the daughter aspires to a promiscuous life and being a “slut.” This conveys a more profound fear about the unwarranted nature of womanhood in the Antiguan traditional belief system. The girl is barely an adolescent, yet the mother worries a lot about her behavior. She believes that a woman’s respectability and reputation ultimately decide the woman’s quality of life in a given society.

According to the mother, sexuality demands uncompromising protection for one to remain respectable in the community. (Kincaid p.118). Subsequently, the mother connects several tangible objects and obligations to the topic of sexuality. For example, press commercial bread before you buy it. Moreover, much of the mother’s teachings revolve around upholding respectability. The mother constantly emphasizes the dangers of a female. This shows that the mother wants the girl to recognize that she is not a boy, and thus, her actions must reflect good morals to attract respect from the local society. Furthermore, the mother makes concoctions to induce abortion. Therefore, this implies that the mother previously had bad sexual encounters with men or somehow has the knowledge and understands the occurrence of such scenarios sometimes.

The girl in the story listens to her mother’s advice and accusations. She says almost nothing in the whole story. In fact, she speaks twice. She speaks when she tries to defend herself against her mother’s claims and assertions. For instance, when her mother says she will become a “slut” someday. At the end of the story, she asks her mother a question for clarification. The mother replies to her with a rhetorical question (Kincaid p.124). This concludes that the mother thought that the girl did not understand all of her teachings especially how to behave. The girl’s disclosures reveal resentment in life.

Conclusion

In *Girl*, the author uses the two main characters to explore themes in the story. The dominating theme in the story is a mother-daughter relationship, which often faces many constraints. Imperatives fail to deliver on upholding social norms and customs. Mother and teenage relationships can only be smooth if there is room for consultation and advice made without creating tension.

Works Cited

Kincaid, Jamaica. *Girl*. San Francisco Examiner, 1991.