

Women, Coming-of-Age and Secret in Kincaid's *Annie John*

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Abstract

In the process of growing up, humans are always fascinated by the mysterious and the unspeakable secrets of life. Therefore, they try hard to fathom the mystery at every stage of their life. The quest for one's identity in bildungsroman is often coupled with the protagonist's attempt to decode a range of secrets such as life/death and child/parent enigmas. Jamaica Kincaid's fiction *Annie John* is a case in point. In a sense, the female protagonist's maturity and character development are made possible only through her persistent efforts to decode the secret of life. This demythifying effort is foreshadowed in the little girl's unusual interest in figuring out the secret of mortality in the beginning chapter, and is followed by Annie's endeavor to disentangle the unintelligible mother-daughter relationship, the abnormal romance with Gwen and the Red Girl, her refusal to be acculturated and assimilated by the British colonizer, her failure to decode the overwhelming, long-lasting conflict with her mother, and her final attempt to probe into the secret of life, love, and death. In this paper, I am interested in discussing how Annie's story in a series of adventures in which the secrets of life are stitched and how the female coming-of-age mystery can be unstitched.

Keywords: women, coming-of-age, secret, Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John*