



COMPARISON OF *KAMIKAZE* AND *CHECKING OUT ME HISOTRY*

100% Essay Sample

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Both John Agard and Beatrice Garland tackle the struggles of loss of identity but from two different perspectives. Agard emphasises a personal responsibility to 'carve out' his own identity after concluding that his real identity has been intentionally hidden from him, while Garland explores the complicated relationship between national identity, familial identity, honour, and life and death.

Agard begins with the use of anaphora in 'Dem tell me / Dem tell me / Dem tell me', which emphasises a number of key ideas; the first is the establishment of a 'dem' and 'me' narrative structure which he uses to criticise his European education and the lack of black history in his schooling; it also reflects the repetitive manner in which he was taught history which was biased towards the colonialists' agenda and has the effect of ridiculing this agenda; another effect is the establishment of rhyme and rhythm which are also major features of the poem - the rhythmical characteristic appears to reflect the musical nature of the Caribbean people and forms part of the identity that Agard wishes to recover and 'carve out' in this poem.

In contrast, Garland begins with the juxtaposition of one ambiguous identity against another, apparently more assured identity; on first reading, it appears as though the speaker is creating a sense of vagueness and even distance by referring to 'her father', yet there is a contrast with the subject of the poem, who appears to identify himself clearly with his 'samurai sword... a shaven head' and a 'one-way / journey into history'. As we find out later on in the poem, the juxtaposition of the two identities is a method of highlighting the conflict between these two identities; the 'samurai sword... a shaven head' and a 'one-way / journey into history' are all part of the national identity, which is at odds with the domestic identity, represented by the third person narrative, 'her father'.

In terms of language, *Checking Out Me History* is written in dialectical non-standard English where the poet has tried to capture the natural sounds and phrases of an unspecified Caribbean dialect. This is important because one of the major themes of the poem is that of personal identity, of which language and dialect is a crucial component. Every community on earth has words, phrases, accents and dialects which help to attach people to a particular place. For Agard this is particularly important since his poem 'checking out me history' relates how the speaker has been taught all about English and European history but not his own African history and his use of a Caribbean dialect is another way of expressing his individuality and cultural heritage.

However, *Kamikaze's* language is predominantly expressed in a matter-of-fact tone, particularly in the first five stanzas, which works together with the third person narrative perspective to establish a sense of distance and disownment from the subject of the poem, the father. However, the last two stanzas reflect a complete change in world view for the speaker which is illustrated in the change from a distant third person to a much more intimate first person narrative perspective as the speaker begins to explain why she initially disowned her father; she 'learned to be silent', which suggests that society taught children to shame men who failed to complete their kamikaze mission.

Agard chooses a free form, lyric style of poetry to express his desire to 'carve out his identity'; just as he rejects any standard form of English that he had been taught under colonial rule - as made evident in his use of anaphora with 'dem tell me' and a complete rejection of punctuation -, the poem's form gives it a unique identity because it, too, rejects other established forms of poetry, particularly with its dual structure which ridicules the childish stories of 'Dick Whittington and he cat' and contrasts it with black heroes such as 'Toussaint / a slave'. Even the rhythmical structure is unique; instead of conventional styles such as ABAB or AABB, he uses an AAA structure, a CCDDDED structure, an FFFF structure and so on to establish a celebratory rhythm, but without conforming to any prescribed structures and forms.





On the other hand, Garland chooses a traditional dramatic monologue form, but she too gives it a unique sense of identity because it is split between the third person and first person narrative perspectives. Traditionally, dramatic monologues have been used as a method for exploring the lives of people who have a different world view to that of the author; although this poem appears to be about the father, by the end of the poem it becomes apparent that it is really an appeal by the speaker for understanding as to why she initially disowned her father; as is conventional for dramatic monologues, she has an epiphany when she remembers her 'grandfather's boat' and how it symbolised real fatherhood, which is for a father to be present for his family and to provide for them; her epiphany changes her worldview because she realises that by abandoning the kamikaze mission and returning to his family, he made an honourable choice, even though her society refused to see it that way.

Finally, the poems conclude in opposing styles; *Checking Out Me History* ends in celebration and determination that the speaker is 'carving out me identity', however, *Kamikaze* ends with regret and ambiguity; the speaker's epiphany has left her riddled with guilt about the way she treated her father because the final line 'which had been the better way to die' suggests that by the time she came to this realisation, he may have died physically and so she has no way to right her wrongs. Ultimately, both poems teach the reader about the importance of taking ownership of identity, while being weary of the difference between propagandised ideas of honour and real honour.

