Rhythmicity and Broken Narrative as a Means of Portraying Identity Crisis in Erna Brodber’s *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*

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Language and Culture in Europe

Spring term, 2012

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Maria Strääf for her invaluable assistance and inspiration which I received when working on the present essay. I would like to thank the teachers of the Dept. of Culture and Communication of Linköping University for their contribution to my widened thinking and deepened knowledge in the areas of modern literature and linguistics.

Special thanks go to my family for their support and encouragement.
I would like to devote the present master thesis to my life-long friend Tanya Gaidamaka who died suddenly on December 6, 2011.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 4
Epigraphs and motto .............................................................................................................. 5

Chapter I  Introduction ............................................................................................................ 6

1.2 Erna Brodber: a sociologist and a writer........................................................................... 8
1.3 Theoretical Framework ...................................................................................................... 8
1.4 Review of the Research on the Broken Narrative and Rhythmicity ................................. 9
1.5 Method. ............................................................................................................................ 11
1.6 Material .......................................................................................................................... 12
1.7 Summary of *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* .................................................. 13
1.8 Review of the earlier research of *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*.................. 16
1.9 Aim of the present thesis ................................................................................................. 20

Chapter II  Analysis ................................................................................................................. 21

2.2 Broken narrative and rhythmicity in *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*.  
Connection to the ring game ................................................................................................ 21
2.3 Identity crisis: foregrounding through the broken narrative and the rhythmicity ............. 37

Chapter III  Conclusions and Discussion .............................................................................. 45

Works Cited ............................................................................................................................ 48

Appendix

The Family Tree: the Whitings and the Richmonds .............................................................. 51
She [Brodber] has earned so eminent a reputation in numerous fields that it is indeed hard to characterize this talented lady. She has trekked through Jamaica interviewing elderly Jamaicans, the second generation of free men; she has combed through archives in England; she has sifted through centuries of old newspapers and other periodicals in the Caribbean; she has dug up whatever untapped source, seeking to discover ... ‘the half that has never been told’. She has told that half in some of the most dramatic, groundbreaking, eloquent, and imaginative sociological tracts, historical studies, psychological treatises, essays, novels, and short stories of our time.

Daryl Cumber Dance, 2009.


Her [Brodber’s] discourse [in Jane and Louisa], strongly cadenced in the oral tradition, uses metafictional, allusive, poetic, highly imaginary autobiographical narrative tethered to a subtext rich in historical knowledge, to give the writing the weight of social commentary and cultural critique.

June E Roberts, Reading Erna Brodber: Uniting the Black Diaspora through Folk Culture and Religion (2006)
Chapter I. Introduction

Erna Brodber’s novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980) is a most unusual literary work. It has a pronounced organizational rhythm, colorfulness, a highly complicated structure and focalization, which makes it unconventional and challenging. Brodber’s novel overcomes the traditional distinction of literary genres, merging fiction and non-fiction. Seemingly arranged as a bildungsroman, this literary work goes beyond the genre limitations, presenting the postcolonial female subject as the one capable of initiating her own recovery of the trauma of the past and re-writing her story. Together with other Caribbean women writers like Jamaica Kincaid, Merle Hodge and Paule Marshall to name just a few, Erna Brodber challenges the conventions of the traditional male-dominated postcolonial discourse and offers an account of Jamaica’s tumultuous past through the prism of women’s sexuality and search of the self. Brodber offers a recipe of “coming home”, of re-remembering one’s past and shaping the future with the account of ancestral past and awareness of folk roots, which pertains to all, but specifically to women. This underlies the subversive intent of Brodber’s merging fiction and non-fiction, which resulted among other things in *Jane and Louisa* – a project with a clear political and nationalistic message.

Having received significant critical acclaim, *Jane and Louisa* has been analyzed from several postcolonial perspectives. The novel’s portrayal of identity reconstruction, attempts of coping with the colonialism-induced trauma and slavery past, as well as the depicted political and social instability of the newly independent Jamaica, were studied in the works of such critics as Jean-Pierre Durix, Evelyn O’Callaghan, Rhonda Cobham, Daryl Cumber Dance, June E Roberts, and some others. The critics acknowledge that the novel depicts the woes, accompanying the birth of the new Jamaican nation, such as the low level of self-confidence, rambling over different roles in the society, attempts at leading the masses. Brodber’s innovation of using female sexuality as a tool of breaking the traditions of male-dominated postcolonial discourse is recognized in works of Rhonda Cobham (1993), and in the collection of essays *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* edited by Selwyn Cudjoe (1990). Jean-Pierre Durix names *Jane and Louisa* as a prose-poem which merges the form of a bildungsroman with the content which is highly poetic and metaphorical (1982:77).
The earlier research recognizes the identity fragmentation, return to folk roots and re-remembered ancestral past, suppressed sexuality, shame and self-alienation of the female body. The novel’s highly complicated narrative line has been recognized as aimed at portraying the difficulties accompanying the protagonist’s childhood and maturity under the circumstances of colonial legacy (Durix, 1982:78).

However, nothing has so far been mentioned about the novel’s underlying feature, its rhythmicity, or, to be more concrete, organizational rhythmicity. By organizational rhythmicity I mean the interplay between sections of the novel which creates several angles of interpretation of the events in the diegesis. The rhythmicity reveals itself in a number of ways, from the novel’s direct connection to the ring game to the rhythm in the diegesis between sections, chapters and subchapters. In this essay, I am going to study this organizational rhythmicity, as well as prove its tight connection to another prominent feature of the novel – the broken narrative. These two features are irreplaceable and function in a unity which delivers the protagonist’s fragmented identity particularly vividly.

The relevance of my study resides in the fact that once acknowledged, the rhythmicity and the broken narrative of the novel will facilitate a better understanding of the novel’s complicated structure, illustrate the system which underlies numerous flash-backs and the polyphony of voices, as well as establish links to children’s games and folk tales, deeply rooted in the Jamaican oral culture. The features under analysis will explain the complexities of lack of chronology and order, changing focalization and frequent repetitions.

Before I proceed with the Introduction, I would like to give an account of the reasons why this part of my essay is rather voluminous. First, the angle of rhythmicity and broken narrative had not been earlier applied to Jane and Louisa; moreover, it had not been frequently used in postcolonial literary analysis. This necessitated the research of these two features, among other things, in the Caribbean rhythm studies and psychotherapy (“Review of the Earlier Research on the Broken Narrative and Rhythmicity”). Second, the complexities of the novel’s plot and organization lead to the introduction of the section “Material” and a longer Summary part, which in fact is analytical work due to the extreme complexity of the novel’s diegesis. Finally, the Introduction part includes a short biography of Erna Brodber since the peculiarities of the author’s academic career and her reasons for writing Jane and Louisa are indispensable in
recognizing the merge of fiction and non-fiction which is critically recognized to have been achieved through the novel.

1.2 Erna Brodber: a sociologist and a writer

Erna Brodber was born in 1940 in the village of Woodside, St. Mary, Jamaica. She gained a Bachelor of Arts in history in 1963 from the University of West Indies at Mona (UWI), Jamaica. Following that, Brodber studied child psychology on a pre-doctoral scholarship at the University of Washington in 1967. Upon her return to Jamaica in 1968, she gained her Master’s of Science in sociology and joined the Department of Sociology at UWI. Brodber embarked on a writer’s path in the 1970s, a venture necessitated by the need to clarify her thoughts on the “Black power and women’s liberation” (Dance, 1986:72). Working at the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), Brodber in 1974 started a large project *A History of the Second Generation of Freemen in Jamaica, 1907-1944*, a field study of Afro-Jamaicans over the age of seventy which also became a basis for her Ph.D. thesis. Her other sociological works include *Abandonment of Children in Jamaica* (1974), *Yards in the City of Kingston* (1975), *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes* (1982), and *Afro-Jamaican Women at the Turn of the Century* (1986). Brodber’s novels include *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), *Myal* (1988), which was honored by the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize, *Louisiana* (1994) and most recently *Rainmaker’s Mistake* (2007).

Erna Brodber admits that her fiction writing is a part of her sociological method aimed at collecting and transmitting findings of the lives of the second-generation free Jamaicans to their children to help them in forging closer unity within the diaspora (Dance, 1990:164). As for *Jane and Louisa*, Brodber acknowledges that the novel was designed as an aid to her university students studying dissociative disorder. Another reason for writing the novel was the author’s lack of comfort in the tumultuous 1970s in Jamaica, which resulted in her writing as a means of ordering her thoughts and feelings brought about by the changes in the society (Dance, 1990:165). This fact, as well as some others, accounts for the autobiographical patterns of the novel (See p. 37 of the essay).

1.3 Theoretical Framework

I will start with defining what I mean by “broken narrative” and “rhythmicity”. By broken narrative I mean a non-linear interactive narrative, which does not follow a straight
(chronological) order and uses such techniques as flashbacks, flashforwards, and repetitions. As I am going to prove in my essay, the organizational structure of *Jane and Louisa* is taken from the children’s ring game of the same name played throughout the Caribbean. By “rhythmicity” (or “organizational rhythmicity”) I mean the peculiar structure of the text, which creates a certain relationship between its structural units. The term is coined by me. The rhythmicity of *Jane and Louisa* is evident from the interplay between subchapters, chapters and sections of the novel, which presents different aspects of the protagonist’s life and unites them in a “question-answer” and “utterance-clarification” system. By the “question-answer” system I mean the pattern in which the narrator is asking a question in one chapter or section and receives her answer in another one. By the “utterance-clarification” system I mean the pattern in which a statement made by one character is explained or clarified by the other character in another section of the novel. Both narrative patterns are recurrent. These two patterns are the features of organizational rhythmicity which create a multiple angle of the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings in that they view her from different positions. For the detailed analysis of organizational rhythmicity see page 27 of the essay.

Apart from the organizational rhythmicity, I employ two other rhythmicity-related terms: “rhythm in the diegesis” and the “Caribbean rhythm”, which are coined by me, too. “Rhythm in the diegesis” is the rhythm created by the peculiarities of telling the story (such as frequent repetitions, lines from prayers and songs, and codeswitches from Standard English to Jamaican patois). The “Caribbean rhythm” is the collective name of various sonorities (drumbeats, the sounds of dancing, working, and others) interwoven in the diegesis. It is critically acknowledged that these musical sonorities are employed in renegotiating identity and disrupting the colonizer’s authority (Huntington, 2009; Arnold et al., 1994).

1.4 Review of the research on the broken narrative and rhythmicity

There is not much research on broken narrative as a means of creating identity crisis in literature. In the analysis of *Winter in the Blood* by James Welch, Kathleen M Sands informs of the broken narrative as a means of creating the sense of dislocation and alienation. The author shows how the episodic nature of the narrative exposes the American Indian’s loss of tribal identification and personal identity caused by the insufficient knowledge of the tribal memory
(Sands, 1978:97). Only after the character re-remembers the stories of his past, does he become able to find his position in the community.

A significant part of research on broken narrative has been done in psychotherapy. They studied broken narratives produced by patients suffering or recuperating from physical traumas and mental illnesses. The identities, constructed by patients in such illness narratives, have also been the aims of research. In their research, Stanley Krippner and Susan Marie Powers study the narratives produced by patients with dissociative disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, as well as near-death narratives (Broken Images, Broken Selves: Dissociative Narratives in Clinical Practice, 1997). Limits of narrative coherence on the account of illnesses, traumatic political experience, and drug use are studied by Matti Hyvärinen et al. in Beyond Narrative Coherence, 2010. Hyvärinen et al. study, among other things, the relationships between the identity and the narrative which become highlighted during illnesses, and the trauma- and disease-induced challenges of taken-for-granted everyday identities (Hyvärinen et al, 2010:36).

The rhythm in Caribbean literature has been studied with a greater thoroughness. Julie Anne Huntington analyzes the techniques of some Francophone Caribbean authors of incorporation of rhythmic and musical phenomena into their frames of narratives (Sounding Off: Rhythm, Music and Identity in West African and Caribbean Francophone Novels, 2009). The authors under consideration include Ousmane Sembene, Ahamdou Kourouma, Aminata Saw, Maryse Condé and some others. The author maintains that through the infusion of the sonorities of footsteps, heartbeats, drumbeats, sounds of dancing and working, the writers create texted representations of music and establish narrative spaces for many-sided considerations of identity (Huntington, 2009:24). According to Huntington, the Francophone authors disrupt the binary opposition between the oral and the written, allowing music to occupy the domain in between, which denies concrete definitions and clearly delineated boundaries (Huntington, 2009:29).

Special attention in Huntington’s work is devoted to the role of drums in West African and Caribbean texts. Huntington informs of the views of some researchers who agree on the importance of the musical aspect of drums throughout the literary texts. Placere regards drums as a communicative device through which aesthetic, historical and socio-cultural information can be transmitted and shared (Huntington, 2009:35). Kamanda maintains that drums is a powerful symbolic device, the point of correspondence between physical and spiritual domains, a medium for accessing realms of unknown possibilities (Huntington, 2009:36).
In the views of Sembene and Kourouma, rhythmic and musical representations of the text serve as subversive mechanisms for displacement of the colonizer’s authority (Huntington, 2009:66). Sembene views textual rhythmicity as a way of merging the reader and the author through the promotion of collectively experienced oral traditions and music (Huntington, 2009:82). Huntington even coins the term “instrumentaliture” or “performance literature” which signifies rich varieties of sounding rhythmic, musical and instrumental phenomena which writers transpose in written texts (Huntington, 2009:100).

Antonio Benítez-Rojo claims the existence of the Caribbean polyrhythm, a coexistence of varied European, African and Asian rhythms, which have become syncretic and decentered (Arnold, Rodríguez, Dash:82). The author informs that the Caribbean rhythm can be arrived at through any system of signs, dance, music, language, text or body language.

Martin Munro discusses the fundamental role of rhythm in the poetics of Negritude in Different Drummers: Rhythm and Race in the Americas (Munro, 2010:134). The author discusses Leopold Senghor’s poetry, in which the characters rediscover the “original rhythm” of love and use it as a central element in their quest for reconnection with Africa. Munro draws on the final stanza of Senghor’s poem Congo in which the rhythm accelerates and swings, leading the character into a trance-like state in which he is finally saved from alienation and returns back to his African consciousness (Munro, 2010:134). In Senghor’s other poems, rhythm is said to be portrayed as the source of nourishment of the exiled black men, who are cut from the natural connection to authentic African rhythms (Munro, 2010:135).

The abovementioned research establishes rhythm as an acknowledged means of African identity restoration. One of the aims of the present essay is the analysis of the rhythmicity, derived from the Caribbean ring game, and the rhythm in the diegesis of the novel, which entails musical rhythms native to the Jamaican culture.

1.5 Method
The starting point of my analysis was the question “What is happening?”. The extreme complexity of the novel’s narration, which inhibits the comprehension of the plot, shows from the very beginning of the novel. As I felt that coherence and order cannot be restored rather than through close reading, I made close reading the main method of my research. Close reading and the attention to narrative details enables to see the novel’s organization and detect rhythmicity...
and broken narrative, as well as to reconstruct chronology. A jigsaw puzzle method is a part of the close reading and serves as a tool for reconstructing the plot.

1.6 Material

*Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* is a novel with a highly complicated structure. It has four sections, named *MY DEAR WILL YOU ALLOW ME, TO WALTZ WITH YOU, INTO THIS BEAUTIFUL GARDEN, JANE AND LOUISA WILL SOON COME HOME*, respectively. The second and the fourth sections include chapters, whereas the Section I includes both chapters and subchapters, which makes it the most organizationally complex unit of the novel. Section I *My dear will you allow me* comprises four chapters: “Voices”, “The Tail of the Snail in the Kumbla”, “Still Life”, “Miniatures”. Each of the chapters has subchapters, which are consecutively numbered *One, Two, Three*, etc and includes from four to six subchapters. The first section does not follow any chronological order or a clear plot line, which makes it hard to understand due to the numerous flashbacks, the changing focalization, the voices and echoes from the protagonist’s past. It tells the story of Nellie Richmond’s childhood and accounts for the rumors and anecdotes of women’s lives in the community. The next two sections display more narrative coherence and order, even though the flashbacks still occur. The section *TO WALTZ WITH YOU* informs of Nellie’s life in the government yard and her participation in the radical Marxist group founded by her childhood friends. In *INTO THIS BEAUTIFUL GARDEN* (which is the most organizationally simple section, since it does not have chapters or subchapters), Nellie explores her family’s past with its mysteries and unanswered questions. The last section of the novel presents a clear story of the family’s past, narrated by an adult Nellie. The dominant feature of the novel, its broken narrative, is illustrated on pp. 23-26 of the essay, where I summarize the events described in sections, chapters and subchapters to show the lack of order and straight narrative line in the novel.

The narrative time covers the time span of around four decades – from Nellie’s childhood in the 1940s to her life as a woman in her mid-thirties. There are very few, almost no hints of the years in which the actions in the novel take place. The reader is informed that Nellie was born and spent her childhood and early adolescence in Jamaica, before she received a scholarship for

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1 For the detailed information of the novel’s organization see pages 23-26 of the essay.
her studies in the United States at the age of 16. After some years in the U.S., Nellie returned to Jamaica to join her childhood friends in their radical Marxist group. Nellie has spent a couple of years living in the government house with them. She was later helped by her other childhood friend, Baba, to establish the connection to her folk roots, and by her great aunt Alice to understand her ancestral past, and thus go out of her “kumbla”\(^2\). The novel mentions occasionally that Nellie married a man named Sam and moved with him to “his country”, presumably the U.S., where she worked as a medical doctor. It remains a question whether this happened before or after her return to Jamaica, and if this event marks the chronological end of the novel. No research approaches this problem. I suggest two possible interpretations of the novel’s end which I present on p. 41 of the essay.

As the title of my essay suggests, I will look closely at two features of the novel – its rhythmicity and its broken narrative. These features illustrate Nellie’s identity crisis and are revealed on all structural levels of the novel: in sections, chapters, subchapters, as well on syntactical levels within subchapters. The core analysis of these phenomena follows in Chapter II of the essay.

1.7 Summary of *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*

Below is a short summary of *Jane and Louisa* which focuses on the life of the protagonist Nellie Richmond. It features a chronologically reconstructed plot line, which facilitates the comprehension of the plot. In the summary, the details of the family lineage are omitted for they do not present a significant aid to the overall understanding of the protagonist’s search for identity. Detailed family relationships can be found in the Appendix (p. 41).

The novel is set in a Jamaican community of the mid 1940s. At the age of six, Nellie’s intellectual abilities are evaluated as those corresponding to the children who are 5 years her senior. This makes her father, sawyer Alexander Richmond, very pleased.

In her childhood, Nellie used to play in their “mossy coverts, dim and cool” with her cousins Jane and Louisa (Brodber, p. 9). Jane and Louisa are twins of the same age as Nellie. Their parents died and left their children to Granny Tucker, their grandmother on the maternal

\(^2\) “Kumbla” is the family’s metaphorical protective device. Detailed description of the kumbla follows on pages 20 and 21.
side. At the age of 8, Nellie receives two gifts for her birthday, since that year her birthday falls on Easter. Nellie’s feeling of having received too much is only aggravated as she receives yet a third present, a yellow straw bag with butterflies made by her Aunt Becca.

The story of Aunt Becca’s life remains an intriguing mystery for Nellie, Jane and Louisa. The girls know that in their small community everyone is related, but still the connection between Aunt Becca and Mass Tanny is not clear. Jane and Louisa soon share with Nellie that they discovered that Aunt Becca aborted her child from Mass Tanny in order to be able to marry a high-status parish teacher.

As an 11-year-old girl, Nellie feels strange and experiences a sense of “rotting” as her puberty begins. This happens to be the reason of her alienation from the boys she earlier used to play with and from her friend and neighbor Mass Stanley, to whom she has a close attachment.

At the age of 13, Nellie successfully passes her training college exams and receives a scholarship. She continues to excel at school, at the age of 16 becoming a “prefect at school and a patrol leader” (Brodber, p. 16). Having finished school, Nellie receives a scholarship for studies in the United States (although the name of the country is not mentioned, textual hints about sexual liberation, and a “jeans wearing culture” suggest the U. S.). Having arrived at college, Nellie begins her sexual life and, although persuading herself that sex is a way to find herself as a woman, she feels disgust during sexual intercourse.

Nellie speaks of her young and ambitious husband Robin who reads philosophical literature and prepares to lead the people of Jamaica into a new era. He has got “the black spirit [which is] riding him hard” (Brodber, p. 46). Together with Robin and Nellie’s friends Barry, Errol, Egbert and Beatrice they live in a government house. They all work in an underground political group. Robin dies, having mysteriously “burnt to grease like beef suet caught in a dutchie pot” (Brodber, p. 52); the rational reasons of his death remain unknown. Nellie suffers but attempts to get over Robin’s death and continue with her life on the compound and her participation in the political group. Nellie begins to feel that it was her personal and other group members’ fault that Robin died, that he “had reached the highest stage of [their] evolution” and had become “a dried up bird who could only crumble into dust” (Brodber, p. 53).

The political group receives a new recruit, whom Nellie later acknowledges to be Harris (Baba) Ruddock, her childhood friend whom she had not seen for twenty years. He attends their meetings but remains silent. At his last meeting with the group, Baba places into Nellie’s lap a
figure of a baby whittled out of avocado seeds, which immediately crumbled into pieces. According to Nellie, in this way Baba signaled that the political group had to escape underground and speak up about themselves, otherwise they would crumble the way the figure of a baby did3 (Brodber, p. 61).

Nellie starts visiting Baba at his place and after that finds it impossible to return to her room in the compound. Nellie then becomes ill and discovers that she has diabetes. She falls into diabetic coma and is admitted to the hospital where she remains for six weeks. After Nellie’s awakening from the coma, Baba welcomes her and says that she, too, now knows what resurrection is like (p. 67). Baba takes care of Nellie during her illness and “nurses” her return to normal life. The atmosphere between them becomes tense when Nellie offers her body to Baba but he refuses, saying: “You offer yourself because you don’t want you” (p. 71) and that he “only wants to meet her” (p. 69). This results in Nellie’s rage, her calling Baba an “obeah man of an anancy”, a “hungry man from nowhere”, a reaction which Baba accepts as Nellie’s success in finding her language and making a step of integrating into the community (p. 71). Nellie asks Baba to take her to a dance held at the tenement yard, which he refuses. Nellie goes there alone and, having crossed the hall of the dance floor, feels to have made as her first steps outside the “kumbla” (p. 70).

Baba helps Nellie to understand the events of her childhood, as well as some messages which her family members and ancestors have been adamantly trying to explain to her. Nellie admits that Baba has helped her return to the community (p. 77).

In the novel, Nellie is also helped by her Aunt Alice to go out of her kumbla. The kumbla is explained as an “egg shell”, a “transparent umbrella”, a “glassy marble”, something that “protects without caring” (p. 123). In the final chapter of the novel, the reader is told that the kumbla is the protective family talisman based on the assumed superiority of white skin. The kumbla was metaphorically “woven” by Nellie’s black great grandmother Tia Maria who gave birth to six children from the white man William Alexander Whiting. Since William Alexander

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3 Proceeding from the metaphorical equation Baby = Political project. 

Dance suggests that this action also symbolizes Baba’s message to Nellie that she must escape the group, where she is shaped by others (Dance, 2006:30).
never legally married Tia Maria, their common children failed to receive a fortune from their white father. In an attempt to give them at least something, she created a protective cocoon with which she was sure her children would have a secured place under the sun.

When living in the United States, Nellie works as a medical doctor. Accepted as an African due to her skin color, Nellie faces outbursts of racism from white Americans who make unambiguous hints to her: “Negroes [...] were ungrateful considering that our people were the first to let them fit clothes in department stores” (p. 32). Nellie’s feelings change from angry readiness to fight a “brand new nigger war” to some conciliation brought about by the union with other black people coming from the Caribbean (p. 33). However, she understands that she is still the other and outsider in that community.

In the sequential end of the novel, Nellie dreams of giving birth to a fish, which is however unsuccessful. In spite of this, Nellie feels “neither sadness, nor frustration, nor even pain” at her failed attempts, “for after all [she] could still see it” (p. 147). Nellie then says goodbye to her ancestors and prepares for a journey: “Goodbye great grandfather Will, Tia, Granny Tucker, Corpie, aunts and uncles and cousins. Goodbye Aunt Becca. We are getting ready” (p. 147).

1.8 Review of the earlier research of Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home

The history of the novel’s critical acclaim began with an anonymous review in the Sunday Gleamer in 1981, a rather general one recognizing the fusion of Brodber’s talents as a poet, sociologist and writer, and naming the novel a “prose-poem”. Jean-Pierre Durix was the first to come up with a more substantial review and analysis of Jane and Louisa (The Afram Newsletter, 1982:77). His words “Probably no one else in the West Indies, apart from Wilson Harris, has revolutionized the art of fiction as much as Erna Brodber” appear on the 1993 New Beacon edition of the book. Durix maintains that Brodber managed to transcend the distinction of genres and acknowledges the musical texture of the novel as one of the reasons of its complexity and difficulty for reading. He suggests that the work’s stylistic and structural polyphony is an accurate medium for the depiction of characters’ strive for meaning under the circumstances of contradictory and unexplainable facts (cited in Dance, 1986:79). Evelyn O’Callaghan presents an in-depth analysis of the novel and, among other things, points out the
protagonist’s “therapeutic process of psychic reconstruction”, the role of dead ancestors which provide “continual growth” and influence the living (O’Callaghan, 1986:74).

Rhonda Cobham and Daryl Cumber Dance agree that Nellie’s alienation and disintegration are caused by a coherent pattern of forces and a malaise of the events of her family and community life (Getting Out of the Kumbla, 1981:34; Go Eena Kumbla, 1990:174). The authors in question also recognize the protagonist’s psychic collapse, the movement from childhood to maturity, the process of piecing together her ancestral past and self-understanding, acquired as a result of this.

Nellie Richmond’s attempts to “define herself, escape herself and give meaning to her life” through adopting different roles (such as achieving academic excellence, starting sexual life, being career-oriented and participating in political groups) are acknowledged in O’Callaghan, Dance and Cobham (O’Callaghan, 1986:80; Dance, 1990:175; Cobham, 1993:49). Cobham additionally accentuates the protagonist’s achievement going beyond personal wisdom, whereas O’Callaghan contributes to this by her suggestions of the need to repossess the past through psychic reintegration to the community, the society and individual (O’Callaghan, 1986:80). Carolyn Cooper examines Afro-Jamaican folk tradition in *Jane and Louisa* (in Balutansky, 1990:541).

Rhonda Cobham analyses the narrative structure of *Jane and Louisa* and the novel’s connection to the ring game played throughout the West Indies (*Revisioning Our Kumblas: Transforming Feminist and Nationalist Agendas in Three Caribbean Women’s Texts*, 1993). Players gather in a circle around one girl and sing:

\[
\text{Jane and Louisa will soon come home} \\
\text{Soon come home, soon come home} \\
\text{Jane and Louisa will soon come home} \\
\text{Into this beautiful garden}
\]

The player in the middle picks a partner from the ring, at the same time singing the next verse: “My dear will you allow me to pluck a rose”. When signing the third verse, “My dear will you allow me to waltz with you”, the two partners perform a dance which must be imitated by the rest of the circle. The fourth verse repeats the first verse and completes the cycle, whereas the first player reenters the ring and a new partner joins the remaining player in the centre (Cobham, 1993:48). Remarkably enough, there is a song entitled *Jane and Louisa* by the famous Jamaican
folk singer Louise Bennett recorded in 1957 in the album *Children’s Jamaican Songs and Games* (http://www.folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=1273).

The novel’s central element and metaphor, the kumbla, has received significant critical attention. (The analysis of the kumbla as the talisman of the Whiting-Richmond dynasty follows on p. 38 of the essay). Jean-Pierre Durix defines the kumbla as a “safe, imaginary place where one’s integrity is not threatened by the encroachments of other people” (1986). Caroline Cooper foregrounds the seductive power of the kumbla as a protective device that women in the novel use to shield themselves from "the stark sunlight of adult knowledge and its concomitant responsibilities" (“Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature”, 1990:284). Cobham informs of the kumbla as a symbol for the strategies by which “black women throughout the ages have ensured their own survival and that of the race” (“Revisioning Our Kumblas”, 1993:7). Maria Helena Lima suggests that Nellie’s kumbla of refuge is the “world of book-learning” (“Beyond Miranda’s Meanings”, 1995:121). Cobham and Dance recognize that the image of the kumbla is derived from a popular Anancy story in which Anancy tricks Dryhead, the King of water, into believing that he sacrifices his five sons in the exchange for a safe return back home (Cobham, 1993; Dance, 1990). In fact, Anancy makes his only son Tucuma disguise himself, go to Dryhead’s cellar only to re-appear as the next son. Anancy says to Tucuma “Go eena kumbla” which Dryhead understands as harsh words (“You are despicable – get out of my sight!”) uttered by Anancy in grief, but to Tucuma it means “Find yourself a camouflage and get back to the storehouse”. As a result, Anancy manages to keep his only son Tucuma and safely return home.

June E. Roberts’ acknowledges the Manichean nature and duality of the kumbla: at the same time it can be a pit and a shelter (Roberts, 2006:96). As a pit, the kumbla leads to decline and therefore must be destroyed (the kumbla of white superiority), but as a shelter, it is a spirit refuge which must be preserved (the kumbla of community). Roberts maintains that in *Jane and Louisa*, the protagonist Nellie Richmond breaks out of one kumbla and enters another. She leaves the kumbla of the grandfather Will’s white skin and Aunt Becca’s bourgeois pretensions, social caste and superiority, and enters the kumbla of safety and security of the folk community, and of afrocentric values (Roberts, 2006:129).

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4 Anancy is an important character in the West Indies folktales. He is a quick-witted and intelligent trickster and a spider-man who manages to escape unscathed from all imaginable and unimaginable situations. Anancy symbolizes hope and survival for Black Caribbean people.
Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home became a landmark within the studies of the Caribbean women writers and their influence on postcolonial discourse. Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature (Davies & Fido, 1990), one of the most important studies in the area, takes its name from the kumbla in Jane and Louisa. In the review essay of this work, Kathleen M. Balutansky notes the emergence of the surrealistic style as a result of the departure from traditional narrative structures in the works of such authors as Contreras, Kincaid, Brodber and Rosario Ferré (Balutansky, 1990:544).

Daryl Cumber Dance approaches the issue of Nellie’s revolutionist husband Robin, for whose mysterious death there is no clear explanation (see p. 14 of the essay). Dance substantiates her view onto the fictional nature of Robin’s character, who is a product of Nellie’s disturbed mind and a symbol of the dead part of her. Dance studies the connection between Brodber’s Cock Robin in Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home and Ralph Ellison’s Poor Robin in the Invisible Man (Dance, 2006:32).

The most profound research on Brodber’s Jane and Louisa has been done by June E Roberts (Reading Erna Brodber: Uniting the Black Diaspora through Folk Culture and Religion, 2006). In her research, Roberts adopts a pronounced political and nationalistic angle. Roberts maintains that through Nellie’s disorientation and madness, Brodber shows the necessity of breaking out of the system of Western hierarchizing binaries, by replacing them by indigenously Jamaican folk ones (Roberts, 2006:119). The author informs of Nellie’s split subjectivity which resulted from the colonial identity formation, and of Manichean orders of a dominant-subaltern opposition which reveals itself in many aspects of life of decolonized Jamaica (Roberts, 2006:97). Roberts acknowledges the subversive intent of Brodber’s writing, which challenges the dominant colonial ideology (Roberts, 2006:111).

The newest research on Jane and Louisa includes Stephanie Fullerton-Cooper’s work on continuity of genres in Erna Brodber’s fiction. As well as the earlier criticism, Fullerton-Cooper acknowledges Brodber’s merit of blurring the lines between fiction and non-fiction and accentuates that the past must be revisited in order to realize the promises of a bright future (Fullerton-Cooper, 2011:108). Fullerton-Cooper draws on Brodber’s blended activity as a fiction and non-fiction writer and states that her fictional events are used to illustrate her non-fiction findings. The author thus concludes that such a fusing of genres results in the fact that fiction and non-fiction can be read as a continuum (Fullerton-Cooper, 2011:113).
1.9 Aim of the present thesis

In the present analysis I have to neglect the analysis of the numerous themes in the novel which include growing up and maturity, racial prejudice, influence of the Anglican church in Jamaica, “othering” of women, fear and consequences of unwanted pregnancy, suppressed black women’s sexuality, self-erasure of the black female body, coping with the colonial and slavery past, and some other.

In my research, I will concentrate on broken narrative and rhythmicity which portray the protagonist’s identity crisis. This subject has not been researched before but is in dire need of analysis. It is therefore the project of the present essay to study the rhythmicity of the novel – the feature which recurrently occurs at all organizational levels of the novel. I will explain the nature and functions of rhythmicity, rhythm in the diegesis and how it contributes to the portrayal of the protagonist’s identity crisis. I will prove my main statement that the novel’s rhythmicity acts reciprocally with the broken narrative, creating a unity of two parts in which any of the two cannot function independently from the other. I will prove that the unity of organizational rhythmicity, rhythm in the diegesis and the broken narrative is the main factor portraying the disorientation and identity crisis of the protagonist.

In my essay, I will link the rules of the ring game and its organizational rhythmicity with that of the novel, and explain it as a way of creating order in the otherwise fragmented narrative.

The Analysis part of my essay will account for the ways in which broken narrative and rhythmicity reveal themselves in the complicated structure of the novel, as well as for their organization and functions (Paragraph 2.2). I will analyze the novel’s connection to the ring game played in the Caribbean, and show how it shapes the form and content of the novel. I will further proceed with the close study of the identity crisis, experienced by the novel’s protagonist Nellie Richmond (Paragraph 2.3). I will show how it is revealed to the reader, and how brokenness and rhythmicity contribute to its foregrounding. Further, I will discuss the nature of the balance which Nellie achieves, and who helps her in this process. In Conclusion and Discussion, I will sum up the major findings of my research and link them to the previous research. Finally, I will suggest the possible areas of future research of the novel.
Chapter II. Analysis

As I have shown in the Introduction of the essay, *Jane and Louisa* is quite a “problematic” novel in that, among other things, the reader encounters considerable difficulties when reading it. Nellie Richmond’s search for identity in the pattern of a jigsaw puzzle which she admits she is trying to lay (Brodber, p. 97) is consonant with the pattern of the close reading which the reader has to do. The reader’s close reading aimed at straightening out the plot has a pattern of jigsaw puzzle, too. At the same time, in the process of close reading the research of the two features of the novel, the broken narrative and the rhythmicity, takes place.

The present chapter of my essay is devoted to the core analysis of *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* from the standpoints of rhythmicity and broken narrative which convey the protagonist’s identity crisis.

The first part of my analysis, Paragraph 2.2, is aimed at the analysis of broken narrative and rhythmicity. I explain my use of the terms “broken narrative”, “rhythmicity”, “rhythm in the diegesis” and the “Caribbean rhythm”. I discuss the features, organization and functions of the broken narrative. Last, I draw on the intertextual relationship between the ring game and the structure of the novel and introduce the metaphor of the dance-journey. The second part of the analysis, Paragraph 2.3, is the study of the ways in which Nellie Richmond’s identity crisis becomes apparent. The factors which exhibit Nellie’s distorted identity are her fear of sexual intercourse with men (imposed on her by her aunt Becca), the lack of understanding of her family history, the lack of support from the community, and her restless attempts of finding her place in the society. To proceed, I study how Nellie finally manages to restore her identity and what kind of balance she reaches. Finally, I present two alternative interpretations of the novel’s end and two versions of identity restoration attached to each of the possible interpretations.

2.2 Broken narrative and rhythmicity in *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*. Connection to the ring game

Broken narrative and rhythmicity are revealed in the numerous peculiarities which cannot be ignored when reading *Jane and Louisa*. By broken narrative I mean the non-linear interactive narrative which does not follow chronology or a clear plot line. Broken narrative in *Jane and Louisa* has its distinctive features, organization, and functions. The features of the broken
narrative include a so-called “problematic focalization”, i.e. focalization from an unknown source, which drowns in the magnitude of voices uttered by unidentified characters representing the community. A recurrent feature is external focalization, which dominates in subchapters of *MY DEAR WILL YOU ALLOW ME*. Other features of the broken narrative include flashbacks, ramblings over different periods of time, deviations, occasional cases of stream of consciousness (p. 19), repetitions, utterances and dialogues often not attached to the narrative discourse (p. 8), mysterious characters which are mentioned only once and are not further introduced in the novel (“Dearie”, “Sister”, “Sweet Boy”, “Girlie” p. 11). Altogether, this contributes to the overall fragmentation of the text and generates in the eyes of the reader a lack of coherence. These features are most conspicuous throughout the Section I *My Dear Will You Allow Me*, the section with the most complicated diegesis.

The most important formal aspect of the broken narrative’s organization is the fact that it is observed on all syntactic levels, from the most general level of text as a unity to the most specific of subchapters. On the level of the novel, brokenness is displayed in the relationships between sections. Each section is a series of flashbacks, in which one or several aspects of the family history, anecdotes of the lives of women in the community, Jamaica’s slavery past, Nellie’s life and many others are revealed. There is no internal chronology between the novel’s four sections. Sections, in their turns, include chapters, some of them in their turn including subchapters numbered in a consecutive order *One, Two, Three*, etc (Sections I and IV). These chapters are arranged in the broken order because – again – they do not follow any chronology or sequence. Even the smallest structural units of the novel, subchapters, most frequently fail to deliver accurate order and are therefore broken as well. They lack a single narrative line and include time switches, unexplainable facts or unknown voices. (For a detailed illustration of the broken narrative see Table I below).

The most important function of the broken narrative line is that it creates and accentuates the sense of fragmentation and disorientation which manifests the protagonist’s alienation and distorted identity. Just as the novel’s sections and chapters ramble from one point to another, Nellie is rambling and groping for meaning and ways to connect to the community.

The table below is the schematic representation of the broken narrative in *Jane and Louisa*. The table consists of a summary of the events at each organizational level, i.e, sections, chapters and subchapters (if any).
Table 1. Broken narrative and focalization in *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational level</th>
<th>Focalization, Narrative and Plot Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Section I) My Dear Will You Allow Me</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 Voices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Focalization: a 13-year-old Nellie who successfully passes her training college exams and receives a scholarship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Focalization: Nellie on behalf of herself, Jane and Louisa. A flashback to childhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Fragments of conversations between unknown characters discussing rumors of the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Nellie as a child remembers past stories, among others the story of her Aunt Dorcas’s death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>External focalization, the sound of cedar trees cutting, many-voiced repetition of “Go eena kumbla”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Focalizer: a 16-year-old Nellie asks Aunt Becca to allow her to go out with Baba Ruddock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2 The Tail of the Snail in the Kumbla</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Focalization: adult Nellie who lives on the government yard in Jamaica and suffers a mental breakdown after the strange death of her husband Robin. Others on the compound consider her mad for not being able “to keep her man”. Aunt Alice urges Nellie to hurry up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Focalization: adult Nellie looking at herself as a child. A marked flashback to the childhood in which Nellie as an 11-year-old feels strange and rotting at her beginning puberty and clueless of why her friends stop playing with her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Focalization: adult Nellie. Flashback to childhood at the age of 8, the story of the straw bag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>External focalization: Nellie as a foreign student in the U.S. External focalization onto Nellie’s sexual life and sexuality regarded by her as a means of gaining normality and becoming a woman.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 Still Life</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>One</strong></td>
<td>Focalization: Nellie an adult narrator telling about her family members’ lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two</strong></td>
<td>Focalization: adult Nellie who lives in the U.S. with her husband Sam and works as a doctor. She is a victim of racism. Initially determined to fight, Nellie’s anger changes for recognition of the reason why she is different. She is introduced to the circle of other black diaspora members but still feels “not at home”. Chronological end of the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three</strong></td>
<td>Nellie’s rejection of Anancy and of the kumbla. Nellie views her identity through the spying glass and through a moving camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Four</strong></td>
<td>Focalization: Nellie as an adult. A flashback to childhood at the age of 6. Chronological beginning of the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Five</strong></td>
<td>Focalization: Nellie as an adult and Alice. Alice tells Nellie the stories of the past.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4 Miniatures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nellie is being able to understand Aunt Alice: “I read you Aunt Alice” (Brodber:40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Four</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Five</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Section II) To Waltz With You*

<p>| <strong>One</strong>  | Focalizer: a 36-year-old Nellie lives in the government house in Jamaica and participates in the radical Marxism group together with her |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Focalizer: Nellie who is coping with the death of her husband.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Focalizer: Nellie who describes Baba’s introduction into their group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Baba delivers his message to Nellie that she must escape the political group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Focalizer: adult Nellie visiting Baba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Focalizer: adult Nellie. She suffers from diabetes and collapses into diabetic coma. Baba takes care of her and welcomes her upon her “resurrection”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Nellie recovers during six weeks. Baba helps her to re-remember her childhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>Focalizer: adult Nellie. Nellie goes to the dance at the tenement yard which she considers the first step outside her kumbla.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Nellie’s journeys to the past with Alice, during which she meets her ancestors. She establishes contact and reunites with them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**(Section III) Into This Beautiful Garden**

Rational narration\(^5\) focalized through an adult Nellie who looks at herself as an 8 year-old. She reveals her family lineage. Nellie finds out the story of Aunt Becca who raised socially upon marrying the parish teacher. “Irrational narration”\(^6\) through Nellie as a child who hears the sound of bamboo sax and Mass Stanley dancing with his wife Elsada. The story of Becca’s affair with Mass Tanny and then his brother Stanley (from whom she got pregnant) is revealed. Nellie finds out about the banishment of Stanley’s and Elsada’s son David who disrupted the balance in the family, and later their upbringing of their grandson, Baba Ruddock.

**(Section IV) Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home**

\(^{5}\) By the “rational” narration I imply the clear presence of the protagonist as a narrator and focalizer. Narration is coherent and logical.

\(^{6}\) “Irrational” narration implies the lack of protagonist as a narrator and a focalizer.
The one-sided drum  | Focalization: Nellie as a child. “Irrational narration”. Nellie is 11, feeling as if she is rotting and strange in her puberty. Aunt Becca persists that Nellie must be cleansed.
---|---
The Kumbla  | The story of Anancy, the spinner of white kumblas, who through tricks saved his son Tucuma. Nellie admits that Baba and Alice helped her out of her kumbla.
The Spyng Glass  | Nellie is in her mid thirties. Alice reveals that Becca lost her soul after the abortion of Stanley’s child.
The Moving Camera  | Straight and chronological narrative, focalized through Nellie. The story of the family is revealed.
The Pill  | Straight narrative line, focalized through Nellie. The nature and properties of the kumbla are described.
The Fish  | Straight narrative line focalized through Nellie. Jane and Louisa are said to be able to come home soon. Nellie says goodbye to her ancestors and prepares for a journey.

It is obvious that the work of distinguishing the plotline turns out to be a challenge, especially in Section I.

As one can see from the table, the chapter Voices of the subsection My Dear Will You Allow Me is further divided into four subchapters, most of which do not follow any logical narrative line, but on the contrary represent snatches of conversations, rumors, threats and warnings Nellie hears in her childhood and early adolescence. They become conspicuous through ramblings over different periods of time, occasional streams of consciousness, repetitions, disjunct dialogues, non-focalized utterances and judgments and spontaneously occurring and not introduced characters. Altogether, this creates a feeling of incoherence and disorients the reader.

However, it would be a mistake to claim that the lack of coherence is a constant feature of the novel. Even in the most confusing section, Section I, there are chapters with rather clear and orderly narration (e.g., The Tail of the Snail in the Kumbla and Still Life). Sections II and III tell about Nellie’s mental breakdown, followed by the casting away of her kumbla (To Waltz With You), and re-remembering and connection with her ancestors (Into this Beautiful Garden).
These are coherent chapters. The last section, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*, starts with the account of Nellie’s early adolescence and her feeling of shame at her arriving puberty. In the next chapters, the reader receives answers to many questions that occur to him/her when reading the novel. The nature of the kumbla is explained, mysteries of the ancestors’ past are revealed and questions answered. However, *Jane and Louisa* is not a novel that provides all the answers and ends without any question marks. Many questions remain, and even more appear at the end. It is still a mystery what kind of “pill” is implied, and what kind of “cleansing” Nellie went through when Aunt Becca took her to the doctor in town. A possible idea is that Nellie was sterilized, because her being prepared by the nurse (apparently for some medical treatment) is mentioned in the novel (Brodber, p. 147). Another idea could be an abortion, but this is not very likely, since Nellie was a teenager at the time. No secondary research accounts for this fact.

As it has been mentioned, by the novel’s rhythmicity I mean the interplay between subchapters, chapters and sections of the novel, which presents different aspects of the protagonist’s life and unites them in the “question-answer” and “utterance-clarification” system (see p. 9 of the essay). Rhythmicity reveals itself repeatedly throughout the novel. First, it is evident in that some questions or statements, uttered by one character, remain ambiguous until answered or clarified by some other character in another part of the novel. Thus, for instance, the meaning of the mysterious utterance “Woman luck de a dungle heap” in Section I (p. 17) is explained by Baba saying that love is “no gift”, but “something you throw on a scrap-heap” (p.71), which only follows in Section IV. The reader also finds out the answer to the recurrent questions of why Aunt Becca is praying in a thatch church (Section I). Nellie, Jane and Louisa find out that Becca sacrificed her child from Tanny in order to marry the high-status parish teacher and move up the social ladder (p. 92, 96). The price Becca paid was mental breakdown, repentance and inability to find “a way to put the body, heart and womb together without risking complete annihilation” (p. 144). This information is only unveiled in Section IV (p. 133).

Second, the whole novel presents a series of events making a full turning. The novel opens with Nellie as a young girl, and after the entangled account of her growing-up and maturity, it also finishes with Nellie as a youngster, but narrated by Nellie as an adult. For the detail information, see p. 34 of the essay.
Another feature to be analyzed is “rhythm in the diegesis”, which I define as a rhythm created by the peculiarities of telling the story. The first and most striking feature of the rhythm in the diegesis is a myriad of repetitions which appear on all structural levels throughout the novel. They acquire new meanings depending on who utters them. Thus, one of the numerous recurrent utterances is “Paul may sow and Apollos may water but the increase comes from God”, frequently mentioned by Nellie’s grandmother and later by Nellie’s father (p.8 and p.21). From Granny Tucker’s are also taken the utterances “Lord take the case” (p. 8 and p. 89) and “Lord take his tongue” (p. 87 and p. 91). The words “Go eena kumbla” from the Anancy stories (p. 15, p. 122, p. 128), are repeated by Nellie as she is confined within her kumbla (p.122). Utterances which Nellie has frequently heard since her childhood, often devoid of any sense, reverberate as Nellie grows up: “Mass Nega mi smell you dinner but mi no want more” (p. 12, p. 147). Nellie is wondering why Aunt Becca is praying for Mass Tanny in Mass Mehiah’s thatch church, and the question is repeated recurrently throughout the diegesis (p. 92, p. 96, p. 133). It is not only utterances or sentences that are repeated, but even whole passages: “Ever see a fowl sitting on eggs in the cold December rain? We knew the warmth and security of those eggs in the dark of her bottom […]” (p. 9 and p. 146, Section I and Section IV, respectively).

Second, the rhythm in the diegesis is evident in the games which Nellie, Jane and Louisa play in their childhood. Nellie admits that these games often include nonsensical chanting of lines from songs or words heard from adults discussing newspapers articles: “...a song: ‘Mospan, Two Gun Rhygin’; the newspaper headlines: Match factory on strike ... Headless corpse found [...] the Colon Secretary. I will play the Colon Secretary (Brodber, p. 10).

Nellie claims that these “muted tones” (p. 10) was the only means of getting to know the world beyond their remote Jamaican community, which was protected from the outside intrusion by mountains and banana leaves.

The third feature of rhythm in the diegesis is language codeswitching. Narration in the novel features mainly Standard English, occasionally lapsing into patois when referring to the language used by some family members and to the Anancy stories. Thus, Nellie’s mother’s says “Hog pickney ask him mek him mout so long. Hog say “you a grow you wi see” followed by Nellie’s interpretation “… which meant that we would never hear a word of it from her” (Brodber, 1980:91). The Anancy stories feature in the originally folk Creole, which is a traditional medium of Anancy tales: “You no hear mi sey when mi dip splash, you fi dip tip?” (p.
The Anancy stories have their own rhythm, which lies in some kind of minimized narration, often lacking the description of setting, but most notably, containing a quick exchange of lines. Stream-of-consciousness is a frequent occurrence following the Anancy stories, featuring a pronounced rhythm in the diegesis derived from the Anancy tale:

*Nancy kill Tumletud oh. Nancy spinning around in the woods. Say Nancy kill Tumletud oh. Oooooooh. Oooooh. Say Nancy kill Tumletud oh. Me or Nancy spinning around in the woods ...*  
Brodber, p. 38

The example of chatting above particularly strikingly illustrates the role of rhythm in the narration of Nellie’s identity crisis. The rhythm of her childhood folk songs and traditions is her constant companion throughout her life. Its influence is so strong that the protagonist even feels and defines it through the rhythm, equates herself with Anancy who is trapped spinning around in the woods: “Twirling madly in still life. Poor Nancy. Poor me” (p. 38).

The novel’s beginning features a song which is smoothly interwoven in the narration and expresses children’s naivety regarding the power of a song: “with conviction that having sung, there would be no more [...] soil erosion and that we had built anew” (p. 9). The power of song, this time more perceptive, is described in Baba’s singing of *Jesus Saviour Pilot Me* in the church: “Everyone in church that day felt the full measure of his saving power [...] There was only silence. You cannot clap in the Anglican Church, but you can cry. Big men had tears rolling down their cheeks” (p. 116).

Interwoven in the text are sounds of cedar trees being cut down, delivered through onomatopoeia (p. 15), bamboo sax songs “Cum awf a Mattie belly...” (p. 97-99), the sounds of men calling to each other from afar (p. 35, 37). They create musical or instrumental representations of rhythm, allow the “voices” to penetrate “through bamboo poles” and in this way to bring the “news of outside” (p. 10). “*Go Eena kumbla*”\(^7\), one of Anancy’s linguistic tricks which is central in the novel, is repeated by three different characters at the same time, thus giving account of the manifold of voices in Nellie’s head from which she fails to break free: “Go eena kumbla – Brer Anancy begged his son Tucuma. Go eena kumbla – Polonium advised. Go eena kumbla lest Dry Head eat you” (Brodber, p. 15)

\(^7\) “Go eena kumbla” is Anancy’s trick based on double linguistic meaning: “You are despicable, get out of my sight” and “Find yourself a camouflage and get back to the storehouse” (Brodber, p. 128).
In the abovementioned cases, rhythm is revealed on a structural, semiotic level. However, rhythm and musicality are present on the diegetic level as well, and shape the content of the novel.

The connection between the novel’s rhythm in the diegesis and the protagonist’s search of identity is seen through the musicality which marks Nellie’s unity with her ancestors. From the “conductor-less orchestra” of nonsensical chorus of the contralto, soprano, bass, she starts hearing the harmony of the kettle drum beat and the blow of the bamboo sax, which accompany Nellie’s growing connection with her ancestors (p. 80). She hears the mezzo-soprano voices of relatives which altogether merge into “music, shape, production, performance, color scheme, blending of colors, a pageant” (p. 79). The author’s choice of musicality as a tool of portraying the important moment of the protagonists’s reunion with the ancestors testifies to the importance of the rhythm in the diegesis in depicting identity crisis.

Besides the “organizational” rhythmicity which becomes obvious through the relationship between the novel’s structural units (e.g. Section IV provides answers to questions posed in Section I), there is also another kind of rhythmicity created by the intertextual connection to the ring game. As it will be proved, the structure of the ring game shapes the structure and form of the novel.

As it has earlier been noted, in the ring game in question players gather in a circle around one girl and sing the first verse “Jane and Louisa will soon come home, soon come home, soon come home. Jane and Louisa will soon come home, into this beautiful garden”. The girl in the center of the ring then picks another player from the ring and sings the second verse: “My dear will you allow me to pluck a rose”. The two players in the center sing the next verse (“My dear will you allow me to waltz with you”) and perform a dance which has to be imitated by the rest of the circle. Finally, once the circle is completed by the fourth verse which is identical to the first one, the first player returns to the circle and the game continues as a new partner enters the center of the ring and dances with the remaining one.

My hypothesis is that the structure of the novel is based on that of the game. I assume that there is some relationship between the steps at each stage of the game and the events in the
novel. Below is the comparison of the moves done at each of the four stages of the ring game and of the events in each of the four sections of the novel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps in the ring game</th>
<th>Sections in the novel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step I: Players gather in a circle around one girl and sing the first verse.</td>
<td>Section I “My Dear Will You Allow Me”, consisting of four chapters. Chapter 1, <em>Voices</em>, presents the dissociated echoes from Nellie’s childhood which reverberate in her head. Chapter 2, <em>The Tale of the Snail in the Kumbla</em>, informs of the adult Nellie’s life on a compound and her political activity, and of her adolescence as a foreign student in the United States. Chapter 3, <em>Still Life</em>, is devoted to Nellie’s childhood memories and to her experience of living in the U.S. with her husband Sam and suffering racist oppression. Chapter 4, <em>Miniatures</em>, shows Nellie’s “coming home”, i.e., her awareness of the reasons of her alienation from the society. External focalization dominates, and the common trait of the sections’ chapters is the fact that it is not Nellie who shapes her life, but rather the voices of her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step II: The player in the center picks a partner from the ring when singing the second verse.</td>
<td>Section II <em>To Waltz With You</em>. Unlike the previous section, here Nellie’s actions on shaping/re-remembering her childhood past are obvious from homodiegetic focalization (adult Nellie). Nellie picks her partner in the game, this partner being Baba and later Alice, who are to release her from the confinement of the kumbla. These “partners” help her to re-establish contact with the community and find her “self”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step III: The partners in the center sing verse three and perform a dance which must be imitated by the ring.</td>
<td>Section III <em>Into This Beautiful Garden</em>. Nellie re-remembers/re-creates her own and the family’s past, by putting the missing parts into</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the jigsaw puzzle of long intriguing riddles of her relatives’ and neighbors’ past. Rational narration dominates.

| Step IV: The participants sing the fourth verse which is identical to the first one, and the first partner reenters the ring, whereas a new partner prepares to join the game. | Section IV *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*. Six subchapters which due to their frequent diegetic and chronological dissociation resemble the ones of Section I. This is however substituted by the rational narration focalized through the adult Nellie. At the end of the novel, Nellie signals her own readiness for a journey, as well as the prospects of such readiness/ journey for Jane and Louisa. |

Apparently, each step of the ring game is transferred to the structure of the novel. In the first section of the novel (“My Dear Will You Allow Me”), numerous voices overwhelm Nellie and bring about the lack of logic and independence in her thinking and the incoherence of her judgments. The protagonist is unable to shape herself, since these voices are too loud and inhibiting. This corresponds to the first step of the game, in which these are the players in the ring, but not the central player, who sing the verse. Further, in the novel’s second section, “To Waltz With You”, Nellie is capable of a partially logical account of her childhood; the narration, although still occasionally incoherent, mainly follows a clear line. It is exactly the feature of the second stage of the game, the one of picking a partner, which intertextually predetermines Nellie’s reunion with her childhood friend Baba, who assists her in the dance/journey of finding herself. Nellie has “picked out” Baba as a player to lead her to her self-recovery. Nellie’s second partner is her great grand aunt Alice, who helped Nellie in her progress out of the kumbila. The third stage of the game, when partners perform a dance which has to be imitated by the rest of the ring, corresponds to the third section of the novel, “Into This Beautiful Garden”. Metaphorically, all Caribbean Black women have to imitate Nellie Richmond’s dance in which she had been able to re-remember her ancestral past and re-write her childhood and adolescence. Having done so, the women will secure their reintegration into the community, just like Nellie Richmond did. The novel’s final section, “Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home”, features Nellie’s full understanding of her family’s past and her awareness of the journey which lies in front of her and for which she is ready. Nellie the narrator signals that her cousins Jane and
Louisa “will soon come home”, i.e, find their selves (Dance, 2006:145). Jane and Louisa, the embodiment of Black Caribbean women, are exactly those new players who will be in the center of the ring after Nellie has finished her dance.

Thus, one can clearly see the intertextuality between the ring game and Brodber’s novel. Additionally, the connection to the ring game lies in the fact that, both in the novel and in the game, the events take a full circle. In the novel, Nellie re-writes her childhood and returns to where she has started. This is seen in the similarities of diegesis in the first and the fourth sections, where the “new Nellie” who has found her self, describes her childhood in the same way as the “old Nellie” did when she still was in her kumbla, but with visibly changed perception of her future. Thus, in Section I Nellie tells:

\textit{We lived in a mossy covert, dim and cool and very dark. And we could make it darker still when we played dolly house in our sink hole searching for treasures which the sea washed up or when we stared in the iridescent black ink that made our dark night. Our moon-lights you would love: nothing can beat moonlight upon oceans of banana leaves ...}

Brodber, p. 9

In Section IV, the adult Nellie reproduces what seemingly is the same as above, but with a comment which makes all the difference:

\textit{We lived in a mossy covert dim and dark and we could make it even darker when we played dolly house in our sink hole searching for treasures or when we stared in the iridescent black ink that made our dark night. We were familiar with the dark, very familiar. Tia Maria had burnt her skin and bones and left us a thick felt hat of darkness, her negatives and her strong sense of smell. We didn’t need light. She had given us the whites of great grandfather Will’s eyes.}

Brodber, p. 146, emphasis mine

The difference between the two passages lies in the fact that in the second one, Nellie had already become aware of the kumbla of white superiority to which she had been confined but managed to escape. Tia Maria’s smell refers to the smell of coffee powder which she had been using instead of perfume. Nellie’s acquired understanding of her past is contrasted to the Edenic existence of her childhood amid moonlight and oceans of banana leaves.
Therefore, the results of the analysis above prove my initial assumption of the correspondence between the structure of the game and the structure of the novel.

Further, proceeding from the title of the novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*, it becomes clear that the structure of the ring game has not been transferred to the novel without any changes. If the order of verses in the ring game had been preserved, then the chapters in the novel would have been titled as follows: JANE AND LOUISA WILL SOON COME HOME, MY DEAR WILL YOU ALLOW ME TO PLUCK A ROSE, MY DEAR WILL YOU ALLOW ME TO WALTZ WITH YOU, JANE AND LOUISA WILL SOON COME HOME. However, the sections in the novel follow in a different consequence and have the following titles: MY DEAR WILL YOU ALLOW ME, TO WALTZ WITH YOU, INTO THIS BEAUTIFUL GARDEN, JANE AND LOUISA WILL SOON COME HOME. Thus, we can see that Section I and II of the novel bear the name of the opening line in verse III in the game; Section III – the concluding line of verse I; Section IV – the opening line of verse IV (which is identical to verse I):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse in the ring game</th>
<th>Title of the section in the novel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse III “My dear will you allow me to waltz with you”</td>
<td>Section I “My dear will you allow me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section II “To waltz with you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse I, “[Jane and Louisa will soon come home] into this beautiful garden”</td>
<td>Section III “Into this beautiful garden”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse IV which repeats verse I “Jane and Louisa will soon come home”</td>
<td>Section IV “Jane and Louisa will soon come home”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If to assume the metaphorical equation “*Journey is a dance*”, and the protagonist’s journey is her search for identity, then we obtain that the dance she has to make is not pre-determined by the ring game, but distorted. This distortion is evident not only from the changed titles of the sections in the novel, but also from the changed order of verses, transferred from the ring game. It means that the dance Nellie has to perform is a new dance, with a new sequence of steps and a new order. Proceeding from this I introduce a new metaphor, the one of a “*distorted dance*”
which Nellie has to complete. On the diegetic level the distorted dance becomes obvious through the broken narrative.

If to contemplate on the nature of such a distortion, some questions arise. Who distorts this dance? What is the nature of this distortion? To which standard is this distortion measured? Due to the abstractness of these questions, it is rather hard to come up with any clear answers. In the line of my reasoning, however, the distortion of Nellie’s dance-journey is caused by the necessity of finding new measures of breaking through the traditional colonizer-colonized paradigm. Those measures must pertain specifically to the marginalized group of Black Caribbean women and enable them to re-write their past. Fortunately, it is exactly what Brodber’s novel does: it “supplies” the Black Caribbean women with the new opportunities of returning to their selves through re-remembering and acknowledging their ancestral past.

Now let us return to the analysis of the peculiarities of the novel’s diegesis and its connection to the ring game. In such a complex novel as *Jane and Louisa*, the endeavors of revealing order and chronology become quite a challenge. Hard as it may seem, it is still possible to “straighten out” the plot and overcome the fragmentation of the narrative line. I have tried doing so in rearranging the sequence of events to what seems to be a chronological version. This is done for a better understanding of the novel.

The table below includes the most significant points in the diegesis of Nellie’s growing up and adulthood. A number of less significant events are excluded from the table for the eased comprehension of the plot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronological order</th>
<th>Section, chapter, subchapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I, <em>Still Life</em>, “Four”. Nellie as a 6 year old showing good results at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I, <em>Voices</em>, “Four”. Nellie as a child remembering the story of the death of Aunt Dorcas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I, <em>The Tail of the Snail in the Kumbla</em>, “Three”. Nellie at the age of 8 remembers the straw bag, a present from her aunt Becca.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I, <em>The Tail of the Snail in the Kumbla</em>, “Two”. Nellie is 11, feeling odd at her beginning puberty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV, <em>The one-sided drum</em>. Nellie is 11, ashamed of her puberty. Aunt Becca thinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Nellie has to be “cleansed”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I, <em>Voices</em>, “One”. Nellie is 13, successfully passed her exams and received a scholarship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I, <em>Voices</em>, “Six”. Nellie is 16, “a prefect at school and a patrol leader”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I, <em>The Tail of the Snail in the Kumbla</em>, “Four”. Nellie is a foreign student in the U.S., her sexual life begins, influenced by the sexual liberation of the 1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>II, Nellie is a young woman who has got a “young husband” Robin who is politically and socially active and preparing to lead the people of Jamaica.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>II, Nellie is 36, living on a government yard in Jamaica and taking part in the activity of a radical Marxism group together with her childhood friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>II, Nellie is trying to cope after the death of her husband Robin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>II, Baba is introduced to the political group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>II, Baba delivers his message to Nellie: she has to escape the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>II, Nellie visits Baba at his place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>II, Nellie suffers from diabetic coma, Baba takes care of her and greets her upon her “resurrection”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>II, During Nellie’s recuperation Baba helps her to recover both physically and mentally, and explains to her the events of her childhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>II, Nellie alone goes to the public dance held at the tenement yard, which she understands as the first steps outside her kumbla.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>II, Nellie remembers her visits to family gardens with Aunt Alice. Nellie admits having been “settled with her people” thanks to Baba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>II, Nellie’s journeys in the past with Aunt Alice, during which she manages to get connected to her ancestral spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>III, Nellie reveals her family lineage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I” refers to Section I “My Dear Will You Allow Me”, “II” – to Section II “To Waltz With You”; “III” – to Section III “Into This Beautiful Garden”, and finally “IV” refers to Section IV “Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home”.

Proceeding from the table, we can see that in the “rough” analysis of the events of Nellie’s life, the order and sequence do not seem to display much incoherence or violation of chronology. The only violation of chronology is the mingling of events from Section IV with the line of events in Section I (item 4 in the Table). This leads to a conclusion that the broken narrative, which is accountable for the lack of coherence, shows predominantly in the narration of chapters and subchapters, rather than sections. Therefore, the “core” broken narratives lie in chapters and subchapters. A possible reason of this authorial intent is depicting disorientation and the lack of meaning the protagonist experiences at some points of her life, which is contrasted to the coherence and balance Nellie will achieve once she has casted away her kumbla and remembered the ancestral past. In other words, the novel’s chapters and subchapters are local indicators of Nellie’s state of mind, whereas the novel’s sections (and the relations between them) provide the ground for an overall judgment of the protagonist’s progress out of the identity crisis.

2.3 Identity crisis: foregrounding through the broken narrative and the rhythmicity

Before I start the detailed discussion of how the protagonist’s identity crisis is foregrounded through the broken narrative and rhythmicity, I would like to note another effect of these two features onto the interpretation of the novel. This effect is seen in the difficulties in locating the chronological time period of the novel, brought about by the lack of chronology and a clear plot line. That is why, it has been necessary for me to make an analysis aimed at placing the novel’s events according to a time line. Such an analysis was based on the scarce narrative details available from the novel’s text. The first narrative detail used was Nellie’s desire to go to the cinema and watch Jack the Ripper (chapter Voices, Section I). The quick search of the production dates of movies entitled Jack the Ripper suggests that most likely the movie from 1960 was implied. If we assume so, then Nellie must have been born in around 1940, since by the time she wanted to see the movie she was 16. Thus, I suggest that chronologically Nellie’s story in the novel began in the late 1940s, since the first account of Nellie is given at the age of 5. Further, she went to study in the U.S. after she finished school at the age of 16. This fits well with the time period of sexual liberation in the U.S, which was active between the 1960s and the
1980s, and which influenced Nellie’s life in the U.S. The time of her participation in the radical political group with her friends was around 15 years later, because by the time she meets her friend Baba 20 years after she had last seen him at school, she admits that she had been with the group for some years (Brodber, p. 55). A simple calculation of Nellie’s age suggests that she was 36 when Baba and Alice helped her to cast away her kumbla (Brodber, p. 58).

Another discourse hint, which helps to establish the narrative time, is the fact that Nellie’s grandfather fought in the Boer war (Brodber, p. 30). Most probably, the Second Boer War is implied (1899-1902). With rough approximations made, Nellie’s grandfather was born in or around the 1880s. The next generation, the one of Nellie’s father Alexander Richmond, was born in or around the 1920s. This confirms the assumption that Nellie’s generation were born in the 1940s. This corresponds to the frequently stated remark that Jane and Louisa is in many ways an autobiographic novel. Bearing in mind that Erna Brodber was born in 1940, my approximations of Nellie’s age seem to be correct.

Further, to secure a clear understanding of the reasons of Nellie’s identity crisis, as well as to clarify the plot, it is necessary to consider the nature and symbolism of the kumbla. It is hard to underestimate the role of this talisman and metaphorical protective device. In its literal meaning, the kumbla is the egg of the August worm. Metaphorically, the kumbla symbolizes protection granted to a person under the condition that he thinks and behaves in a certain, “protective” way. As mentioned in the novel’s summary, the black-skinned Tia Maria “weaved” the protective kumbla out of her common law husband’s white skin as an attempt to provide some legacy for her children (Brodber, 1980:142). This talisman of imposed cultural whiteness gave an impact and encouragement to her descendants to come up with their own kumblas. Thus, Aunt Becca “weaved” the cocoon of respectability and haughtiness to be able to withstand the dangers of contamination (of the womb by the wrong man) which each black woman finds it hard to escape. Nellie admits that it was Aunt Becca encouraged her to “wear [her] kumbla” (p. 142). Nellie’s kumbla was the one of academic excellence at the expense of socialization and sexual intimacy with men. In this way, Aunt Becca played a crucial role in Nellie’s childhood identity formation, which in the future would aggravate into identity crisis caused, among other things, by her sexual

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8 Other autobiographic features in Jane and Louisa include the treatment of Rastafari ideas and folk magic (Dance, 1986:73) and the protagonist’s necessity to re-settle in her native country after studies abroad.
self-distancing. The ways in which Nellie’s kumbla has proved to be the reason of her future identity fragmentation are to be discussed below.

Now that we have acknowledged the above-mentioned, we are ready to proceed with the core discussion of Nellie’s identity.

When reading the novel, it is impossible not to notice the explicit displays of the brokenness of the protagonist’s identity. It reveals itself in several ways: her insecurity, her doubt, the lack of social support she finds in the community, her inability to find her place and role in the society, her distrust to the Anglican Church. The community-imposed fear of sexual intimacy reverberates in Nellie’s head as she grows up and meets her early puberty. This fear reveals itself in constant warnings from Nellie’s relatives (especially from Aunt Becca) who tell her that “the world is waiting to drag her down” (p. 17). These warnings of unwanted pregnancy begin when Nellie is only 11 years old. Aunt Becca is trying to prevent Nellie from sexual contacts because “it only takes two seconds [to get her] life stopped part way”. Aunt Becca encourages Nellie to “use the chance to make something of [her] life”, which in Becca’s opinion is not possible if the girl starts being sexually active. From her years of early puberty, Nellie has learnt that sexual intercourse is contamination, because “to touch is to contaminate” (p. 23). Nellie’s already strong fear of sexual intercourse was nourished by numerous unlucky stories of young single mothers, some of them even having chosen to kill their babies because they could not provide a living for them or withstand the pressure of the community. A young Jamaican woman who happens to be in such a situation is both condemned and pitied by the community (p. 8). This cocoon, created by Nellie in her young adolescence, was her dwelling for “more than a quarter of a century” and thus prevented her timely understanding of her self and her community.

Nellie’s jumping over different roles in the society – becoming an educated lady, “enlightening” the Jamaicans on the virtues of Marxism, fighting those who do not want to be enlightened, etc symbolize the lack of awareness of her social position and goals.

Further, the girl’s childhood and young adolescence anxiety becomes evident in the multitude of questions which remain unanswered. Repeatedly throughout the novel Nellie is trying to make use of once heard pieces of anecdotes and events and to incorporate them into the jigsaw puzzle of her family’s past. From this point of view, the structure of the novel
corresponds to the character’s main work – to understand and make connections to her past as a means of becoming whole, of finishing the jigsaw puzzle of her family history. The same task of laying a jigsaw puzzle of comprehension concerns the reader who, throughout the novel, is trying to make out the line of coherence and order. There are many riddles left uncovered since Nellie’s childhood. For example, the girl is restless to find out what is this unforgivable thing that Aunt Becca did in her life that makes her pray in the thatch church for children rather than in the “big people’s” church with other adults? Why does she pray that “Mass Tanny’s soul may rest in peace?” (p. 96). These mysteries are only unveiled at the end of the novel. The girl does not understand why her puberty is treated by her friends with such mockery and contempt which aggravate into alienation. Even Egbert, the most good-natured and friendly of all her friends, asks her to stop visiting him. Nellie is sad and perplexed, she thinks she “must have some dirty un-named thing in [her] that could make even Egbert dirty” (p. 122). Only to complicate the situation even more, Nellie’s parents seem to regard their daughter’s puberty and menstruation as something strange: “You are eleven now and soon something strange will happen to you. When it does, go and tell your Aunt [Becca]. I needed cleansing” (p. 119).

Such an attitude to menstruation is rather surprising, bearing in mind the normality of the phenomenon. It remains unclear what is the source of such “strangeness” and the fear of physical changes in the body brought about with puberty. The nature of the “cleansing”, too, remains a mystery. Research on the novel does not provide any analysis of this. The “aporia” of Nellie’s cleansing cannot be uncovered textually, since as it is common in Jane and Louisa, there are almost no textual clues. Apart from the idea of sterilization as a way of “cleansing”, another alternative could be an attempt to reach cultural whiteness, i.e. superiority, since Nellie says: “All that washing and never finding their whiteness. Poor Aunt Becca!” (p. 132).

The fear of “contamination”, which is how sexual contacts are viewed, and her fear of puberty do not seem to be the only problems Nellie experiences in her adolescence. Had it been so, then she would have gotten rid of this community-imposed stereotype during her student years in the United States which fell on the period of sexual liberation of 1960s-1970s. This however did not happen. Self-persuasions of being “normal” once sexually active and of having paid the price for “wearing [her] label called woman”, do not eliminate her nausea and the urge to run away (p. 28). As the protagonist grows up, her fears are replaced by the anxiety of having neither a husband nor faith in God (p. 45). When Nellie mourns her man (whether or not he
 existed within the diegesis), she is labeled as mad because “she cannot keep her man” (Brodber, 1980:20). At this point one encounters the social construct of madness, imposed on the women who are not able to keep up with the social roles assigned to them by the community.

However, Nellie Richmond did achieve a balance with her own self. This balance becomes possible after her return to the Jamaican community and her connection with the ancestral spirit. In achieving the first, Nellie was helped by Baba, her childhood friend, whereas her great aunt Alice helped her with the second. Nellie’s return to her community is metaphorically expressed through the image of her crossing the hall of the public dance held at the tenement yard. Connection to the ancestral spirit, achieved during one of the journeys to the past with Alice, is presented in the form of an orchestra in which her ancestors play a pleasant tune, combined of the sounds of drums and bamboo sax. From “a conductor-less orchestra” which symbolizes Nellie’s lack of connection with her ancestors, Nellie travels to the point in which “it all fit[s] in”, and Tia Maria’s beating the kettle drum made perfect melody with her cousin’s blowing the bamboo sax (p. 80). The sound of the kettle drum is an acknowledged symbol of the black identity, as well as the reference to the Sawyer’s profession which Nellie’s father and other ancestors shared. Additionally, the musicality of the identity crisis resolution in Jane and Louisa supports the idea of the decisive role of drums as the communicative device for the transmission and sharing of the historical and socio-cultural information, suggested in Huntington (2009:35).

Nellie admits that she no longer is alone and Baba “had settled [her] in with [her] people” (p. 77). In the novel, Baba enters Nellie’s life precisely at the point of her devastation, caused by the lack of contact with the community and self, combined with the loss of her husband and illness. Critics suggest that the diabetic coma in which Nellie plunges might be induced by Baba, since in her narration, Nellie repeatedly acknowledges his connection to obeah and Rastafari practices (p. 60). From her coma Nellie emerges “resurrected” (p. 67), ready to re-enter her community, devoid of her kumbla.

It is remarkable that the balance in diegesis, her finding of her place in the community, matches with the balance in form, i.e., the order and coherence in narration. The novel’s final section features orderly narration of the family story and the story of the kumbla invention. Nellie’s connection to the community and her recovery of the self is contrasted to the lack of comfort she feels when introduced to the circle where she does not belong.
In the novel, Nellie meets Sam, presumably her American husband, and moves to the United States with him. Living and working there, Nellie is clearly aware of herself as being other, a stranger in the society in which racial harassment of Blacks is still present. Due to her appearance, Nellie is regarded as a Negro and was subject to racist remarks on this account (p. 32). This causes her anger and decisiveness to fight what she regards a “brand new nigger war” (most probably, the “war” for respect and equal rights that the Black people fight) which is gradually replaced by the awareness that anger is self-destructive and must therefore be dissolved, “frozen with the potage of ice” (p. 31). Nellie did manage to dissolve her anger: “Submerged in my people [...] the lump in my throat dissolved, thawed into four hours of tears on my bathroom floor and I emerged [...] black, taken now for a negro, a nigger [...] to find that I am not at home” (Brodber, p. 33).

Nellie admits that her tight contacts with the African-American community are caused by the fact that different groups of non-white people from ex-colonies in Africa (and perhaps the Caribbean) were oppressed, so the union of the groups of people who look like each other was a way to remain strong: “Strange how a common enemy tightens bonds [...]” (p. 33).

In the United States, Nellie reaches a balance through the understanding of her limits, of her being “other” and a stranger in both communities – in the Jamaican community of her childhood and in the African-American community in the United States. Nellie converges with the people who look “most like her” because the latter consider her “their own” and are proud that she had achieved the high social status of a medical doctor. However, Nellie feels that she does not belong to this new community either, she is “not at home” (p. 33).

One can hardly argue that the novel presents a clear and unambiguous end of Nellie’s journey. As it has been mentioned, there are two alternative interpretations of the novel’s end. According to the first one, the chronological end of the novel is Nellie’s marriage to Sam. From this point-of-view, Nellie’s search for identity ends with her understanding of her limits and the reasons of her being other in the U.S. According to the second reading, however, the resolution of Nellie’s identity crisis takes place in her native Jamaica, where she reconstructs her family history, returns to her community and the self. The latter reading seems to bear more logic, since the protagonist’s reconnection to the roots takes place not only mentally and ideologically, but
geographically as well (in her native Jamaica). Additionally, such an end is intensified by Nellie’s hopes that “Jane and Louisa will soon come home”, i.e. that the women of Jamaica will soon find themselves (Brodber, Notes, May 6, 1988), too. Finally, Nellie’s farewell to her ancestors and her preparations for a journey follow on the last page of the novel, which further substantiates the hypothesis that it is the chronological end.

Further, I would like to make a hypothesis about the character of Sam, presumably Nellie’s American husband. In my review of the earlier research of Jane and Louisa, it is mentioned that, according to Daryl Cumber Dance, Nellie’s revolutionist husband Robin is a figure of Nellie’s imagination. Robin symbolizes Nellie’s dead part which is inhibiting her rebirth and dragging her back, and it needs to be conquered before Nellie sets on a journey of finding her own self (Dance, 2006:26). If to continue in this line, we could assume that Sam, too, is a product of Nellie’s imagination. There are no hints on whether or not Sam exists in the diegesis; he is mentioned only as the reason of Nellie’s migration to the United States, and also that he is “beautiful and firm” and that Nellie can “feel” him (p. 32). I therefore suggest the “Robin-Sam” opposition, in which Sam symbolizes Nellie’ revived spirit, her movement forward (both spiritually and geographically) and hopes for balance, contrasted with the impediment to Nellie’s self-recovery in the figure of Robin.

However, if to assume that Sam is also a symbol, it does not seem to be of a great importance when considering Nellie’s acquired identity. Nellie’s marriage to “Sam” could just as well be the embodiment of the fresh opportunities presented to her as a person who managed to restore her inner balance and start anew.

To continue, I would like to establish the connection between the theme of identity loss in Jane and Louisa and the current research in psychotherapy, described in the Theoretical Framework part. I earlier mentioned the research by Hyvärinen et al. who study, among other things, how identities are revealed and negotiated in the “illness narratives”, induced by traumas or diseases (p.10 and 11 of the essay). If to establish the metaphor Identity crisis = Illness, then the whole diegesis of the novel can possibly be viewed as an illness narrative, which is expressed through the broken narrative. This hypothesis is substantiated by the fact that Jane and Louisa was initially designed as a dissociative disorder case study Brodber produced for her students.
Therefore, this phenomenon is yet another proof for Erna Brodber’s creative achievement in merging fiction and non-fiction, described in the Introduction of the essay. Her literary talent, combined with the knowledge in history, sociology and child psychology, resulted in the work which is at the same time fictional, interdisciplinary and scientific.

I would like to conclude this part of my research by highlighting the subversive intent of Brodber’s *Jane and Louisa*. Roberts claims that Brodber challenges the traditional colonizer-colonized opposition through the introduction of the new categories (among other things, of the women’s ability to re-write their past). At the same time, such authors as Sembene and Kourouma claim that texted representations of music (the sonorities of drumbeats, dancing, etc) are accountable for the disruption of the opposition between the oral and the written and the displacement of the colonizer’s authority.

This is the basis of the hypothesis that Brodber’s venture of writing *Jane and Louisa* has features of a political project with a clear aim: disruption of the colonizer’s authority and providing the method of re-writing the past. Bearing this in mind, the subversive intent becomes more understandable.
Chapter III. Conclusions and Discussion

The present thesis is devoted to the analysis of broken narrative and rhythmicity in Erna Brodber’s novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980). The angle of my research has been chosen since the topic, although never researched before, is important for the deepened understanding of the influence of Jamaican folk culture on Brodber’s fiction writing.

The central statement of my thesis is the significance of the role of broken narrative, organizational rhythmicity and rhythm in the diegesis in portraying the protagonist’s identity crisis. This identity crisis becomes evident as the protagonist gets lost in the myriad of voices from her past which dominate and perplex her. Her attempts at restored balance and return to the community are futile unless she escapes her protective cocoon of self-distancing and connects to her ancestral past.

My essay begins with the review of standpoints from which the work has previously been analyzed. I explain the aim of the present research, which is the analysis of the organizational rhythmicity, rhythm in the diegesis (terms coined by me) and the broken narrative. I demonstrate that the research of these features of *Jane and Louisa* are necessary for a deeper and more profound understanding of the complex structure and the diegesis of the novel. I show that the broken narrative is revealed in the lack of chronology and a clear plot line, fragmented and external focalization, recurrent flashbacks, which create an untrustworthy narrator and confuse the reader. The novels’ rhythm in the diegesis is derived from the rhythm of Caribbean dances and music, which is most obviously delivered through the sounds of drums, woodcutting, and folk songs interweaving in the narration. The narration is heavily influenced by the Jamaican folk orature, among them stories about Anancy the trickster who escapes death through lies and cunning.

I proceed with a brief academic biography of Erna Brodber and her reasons of writing *Jane and Louisa*. I present the theoretical framework, method and material of my research. I briefly discuss the earlier research done of the novel and present the novel’s summary. The Introduction part of my essay ends with the statement of the aim.

The core analysis of *Jane and Louisa* follows in Analysis. I illustrate and analyze the novel’s intertextual connections to the ring game of the same name, “Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come
Home”. The rhythmicity of the novel is created through the peculiar organization of its sections, chapters and subchapters, which follows a “question-answer” and an “utterance-clarification” pattern. I analyze the interconnection between the structure of the game and the structure of the novel. I explain how I receive the proof of my assumption that the novel’s structure, at times foregrounding and at times marginalizing the protagonist, is shaped by that of the ring game. Since the ring game implies a dance, I suggest the metaphor of the “dance-journey” of the protagonist Nellie Richmond in which she re-writes her past and leaves her “kumbla”.

I suggest the broken nature of the dance, which is performed by the protagonist in her search of self, and explain it in terms of the violated structure of the ring game to which it is so tightly connected. I note that Nellie Richmond’s restored balance coincides with the restored coherence of narration. Thus, in the final section of the novel, form and content straighten out. This marks the completion of the jigsaw puzzle of the reader’s work on the novel’s plotline.

The ways in which the broken narrative and rhythm depict the identity crisis are subject to detailed discussion, too. The brokenness of narration and the frequently misleading rhythm in the diegesis creates a sense of loss and fragmentation of consciousness, resulting from a prolonged stay in the kumbla of the academic excellence and social remoteness. The peculiarities of recovered identity and balanced reached by the protagonist, are analyzed. They are characterized by the central role of the return to the ancestral past and folk roots as the means of returning to one’s self and the community.

In the present essay, a new angle on Brodber’s work is employed, which foregrounds the novel’s rhythmical patters. Such an angle has not been earlier applied to the work. It is my conviction that the account of rhythmicity and the broken narrative facilitates a better understanding of the connection between Caribbean literature, music and folk oral culture.

It is important to acknowledge the extent to which Erna Brodber argued for the importance of remembering folk roots and the ancestral past, how she viewed Rastafari and folk magic. I think that one of the aims of writing Jane and Louisa, to facilitate a better understanding of the self in diapora, was achieved mainly through this connection.

I discuss the metaphor of “dance-journey”, which Nellie has to complete to reach the balance. However, besides the organizational function of the dance (i.e., shaping the narrative through the steps of the ring game), it also has significant symbolism. In the Jamaican (and
Caribbean) culture, dances occupy an important place. Together with songs and other expressions of oral culture, dance is something which cannot be taken away from the colonized people, unlike political independence and native languages. A dance symbolizes the connection to the folk culture and draws a contrast between the indigenous and the “official”, the imposed, colonizer’s. The symbol of the dance, employed in Brodber’s novel, is used to accentuate the shift of the legacy of colonialism, of the traditional Western values, social hierarchy, and other impositions.

*Jane and Louisa* poses many questions, the most important of them being the nature of the kumbla. Is this metaphorical protective device good or bad? Erna Brodber does not answer this question, and nor does she pose it openly. What can clearly be derived, though, is that the particular kumblas of the Whiting-Richmond family (Becca’s kumbla of decency and Nellie’s kumbla of academic success and social remoteness) have proved to have disastrous effects. Other kinds of kumblas, such as Granny Tucker’s kumbla of praying, are not criticized; however, the conspicuous irony toward it is clearly present (p. 89). Some research on the novel suggests that the fact of the kumbla’s existence does not present any danger if the kumbla is chosen carefully. Thus, Roberts suggests that Nellie left her kumbla of “bourgeois pretensions, social caste and superiority” and entered the one of security of folk community and of afrocentric values (Roberts, 2006:129).

Finally, I would like to mention the areas of future research of the novel. They include, among other things, an in-depth study of suppressed sexuality of women and a communally imposed feeling of shame of being a woman. Possible studies of the form and content of the novel are the analysis of the reasons and organization of complex focalization, the foregrounding of women characters, the marginalization of the role of the mother and the shift in family responsibilities.
Works Cited

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


**Online sources**


Appendix

The Family Tree: the Whitings and the Richmonds

Albert Whiting <------------------------> Elizabeth Whiting

William Alexander Whiting <----------> Tia Maria
                   Nine other children

Kitty <-----> Puppa Richmond

Alice

Four other children

Alexander Richmond <------> Sarah Richmond

Rebecca
Lester
Dorcas
Others

Nellie
Leaford
Alfred
Gladys Maud
Joseph Obediah
William Alexander
Rupie