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Garden Rememory in *My Garden (Book)* by Jamaica Kincaid

A Thesis in Literary Studies

by

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Positionality

Memories of Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden (Book)*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and the work of Virginia Hamilton[1] resonate as I create this work. A stew of their voices populates my thinking, and I attempt to collect them in this moment of writing; I work from memory. My research ideas are a collection of notes, highlighted text, margin annotations, word documents, loose pages, post-it notes, and bookmarks. Much of this will be shuffled and framed to fill a hopeful number of evidentiary pages, yet here, as I begin, I work from memory to gather the fragments of what I have learned.

Also present in this moment is the exponential past, both individual and collective; it percolates from my consciousness, forms my ideology, and affixes a positionality to my perspective. My memory is dappled with pops of mannerisms, privilege, stoic mimicry, southern idioms, wealth, bible verses, rhetorical structures, trailer parks, poverty, alcoholism, poetry, criminality, neglect, abandonment, Jade plants, phone etiquette, empty cupboards, recipes for cornbread and fried chicken, and a half dozen ways to say goodnight like, "sweet dreams," and "Schlaf gut." Are these my memories? Yes, but they are also the combined stories, thoughtless mannerisms, and habits passed on by my friends, partners, parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents; they are the relics of surviving, not simply through this life but all the lives that lead up to mine. My memories also become the manners, stories, and needful things I pass on to my children.

So, what distinguishes my memories from those of my grandparents or those who lived before me? If my great-grandmother taught my grandfather to make cornbread, or my great-great-grandmother was a poet like me, how do their life experiences reflect my own? This

accumulation of stories, lessons, concepts, and strategies from my parents' and grandparents' cultural experiences and their ancestors' is a collective memory construction. As a living, fluid, reinventing faculty of survival, collective memory is the worn path of our collective life experiences. But memory is vast; it is not undefinable, but it is not simple. It contains the capacity for human knowledge— individually, collectively, and culturally. In this instance, memory allows me to a summarize what I hear in *My Garden (Book*) and provides the tools to communicate what I experience in Jamaica Kincaid's creative process. By doing so, I employ symbols, syntax, and context to form and communicate my ideas. These ideas provide the frame and fuel for this work and a positionality that shapes the project.

Kincaid and I are from different generations—although not by much. We have vastly different life experiences, yet remarkably, having never lived in the same town or eaten at the same table, we are similar. She is an Afro-Caribbean woman born and raised on the island of Antigua who, at 17, moved to Scarsdale, New York. As an adult, Kincaid lived and worked in New York and later settled in Vermont. I am a freckle-faced southern woman born and raised on the Gulf Coast of Florida; later in life, at 30, I settled in New England in the northern suburbs of Boston. Kincaid and I shared the experience of forced independence at 17, a disrupted formal education, and we are both familiar with the influence of regional duality. American society assigns value to individuals based on their educational achievements. Yet, Kincaid writes and thrives from perspective and experience; I have survived from the same. Yet, we are a composition of opposites— Kincaid is African-Caribbean, and a New Englander, and I am a southerner and "Yankee" to my southern family. Dual regionalism is the ever-present sense of a distant home; in our case, home is quite the opposite of our place of residence, making our home a novelty to those around us. Even though St. John's, Antigua, and Clearwater, Florida, are

geographically thousands of miles apart, I recognize Kincaid's descriptions of childhood. In her essays, I can hear the rolling sea and smell the salty air; I am a silhouette roaming the yard beside her, our bare feet in the dusty earth, where we ponder the same hibiscus and bougainvillea and eat on the step outside of our grandmother's back door. I imagine us sheltering from the same hurricanes and being made to sit under the same fruit tree as punishment. I also recognize Kincaid's view from New England, rotting leaves, mounds of snow, colonial homes, the sounds of children and even the footsteps of former homeowners that crackle on brittle old pine floors; I smell the woodstove, see the crisp arctic day and then suddenly the lilacs.

We differ, however, not in how the young dream or how women live but in the cultural specificities and complexities assigned to us before our birth. Kincaid lived as a girl in colonial Antigua (pre-independence 1981) and as a Black Caribbean woman gardening, teaching, writing, and living in the northeast US. Unlike my memories, Kincaid's collection of memories is inherited from familial bonds that, along with the sea, reach across the Atlantic to Africa, thunder on the shores of Antigua, and even travel north along the Gulf Stream to New England. As a Caribbean diasporic writer, Kincaid's personal experiences and collective memory influence the creative construction of her storytelling. Her memories reveal themselves in stories, how she tells the story, and the narratives she chooses to share.

History as a construction of my collective memory was cohesive. I do not assert that something is forgotten (although perhaps I should) or that pieces of my history are scattered. This sense of togetherness is the result of being taught by my family and in my education that all history is my history; there were no counter-stories, no missing pieces, and the dominant colonial model of history became my own. I did not learn parallel contradictory narratives. I did not learn ancestorial stories of enslavement and dispossession. However, I do not insist that Kincaid writes

with a determination to rewrite or undo history, but instead writes of herself, her personal experience, and collective memory simply as a matter of Afro-Caribbean creative expression.

In *My Garden (Book),* Kincaid exposes other stories, views of history, and ways of accessing memory that reconstruct history. Kincaid achieves this by conveying stories that encompass her love for all things garden related: garden reading, catalog shopping, seed collecting, digging, planting, transplanting, caring for, and pruning. For Kincaid, even the simplest acts of survival in the garden are bound to memory and storytelling. As she interacts with the garden, she expands the historical record, sharing untold narratives and the counter-stories that reflect how colonization influences Antigua and the Caribbean Islands. I am here to listen.

Introduction

My Garden (Book) by Jamaica Kincaid is a collection of literary essays that depict her well-known passion for gardening. As a collection, the book is rich in personal experience and connections between the physical act of gardening and the lesser-known influences that shape the modern western garden. The author ventures past the typical anecdotes of the horticulturist experience to highlight the European and African pathways that converge on the native Caribbean and New England landscape. Kincaid gently excavates the layers of British influence on the garden, binding her Vermont flower garden and her childhood memories to the creolized gardens of the Caribbean. Her essays reveal a gardening hobby that reconnects her with her motherland Antigua.

Kincaid negotiates the brutal truths of how colonization erased, altered, and recreated land and culture in Antigua. Using her knowledge and memory of the past, she highlights the garden pathways and simultaneously shares counter-narratives. Rememory, coined by American novelist Toni Morrison and children's novelist Virginia Hamilton helps us understand how Kincaid constructs her essays and *My Garden (Book)*. Rememory is a term that evolves from the more familiar concept of memory. Rememory however is a reoccurring fluid connection to a collective past; it exists in the present, in Kincaid's Garden, and it confronts recorded history by recognizing both personal and collective memory of those born in the African diaspora. Even though Kincaid's writing offers many avenues to explore rememory, for this limited research, I will focus on rememory as it appears in *My Garden (Book).*

As you might guess, *My Garden (Book)* is not a "how-to" guide for gardeners. Readers who might expect land plot designs, proper plant height, and species placement, will be disappointed. Kincaid does not convey practicalities and does not regulate the physical acts of

the garden; instead, she expresses a collective understanding of the contemporary western garden by connecting it to her personal and ancestral rememory of the Caribbean. Her matter-of-fact delivery confronts overlooked history and offers less recognized counter-narratives of the invasive English garden model.

For Kincaid, the theme of garden writing is vast and extends far past *My Garden (Book)*, appearing in numerous New Yorker articles such as "A Disturbance in the Garden" and "Flowers of Evil." Gardening is also central to her travel journal *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalayas*, and garden themes add detail to Kincaid's novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, and make an appearance as an okra growing lesson in her short story, "Girl." The essays in *My Garden (Book)*, as well as each essay's context within the collection, makes it fertile ground to explore how rememory operates.

In My Garden (Book) rememory is part of the storytelling and the overall narrative structure. Rememory appears as a recursive happening that allows Kincaid space to return to the historical record to offer recovery. Rememory is present in Kincaid's connection to Antiguan botany and a past that flourishes in the modern present; it exists as a bridge upon which much of the western African diaspora flows. Rememory is also present in the narrative structure of *My Garden (Book).* Kincaid shakes up the expectations of a narrative form; she breaks sentence structure with thought interruptions, jumps through time and place, inserts lists, and letters, and disrupts categorization and order, such as chapter titles. Rememory becomes an active agent in the narrative storytelling of the garden, excavates otherwise forgotten narratives, and demands a change in thinking, form, and the historical record.

My Garden (Book) is structured as a collection of literary essays individually suitable for publication but thought-provoking placed and published together. This essay collection opens

with a brief and untitled section that serves as an introduction to the work; the remainder of the book consists of three main "Parts," each containing seven essays. I refer to each essay, by their given name. Although the title *My Garden (Book)* and most of the essays are in the first-person narrative voice, the book is not a published auto-biographical work. However, by appearances, the work parallels much of Kincaid's personal life, including referencing a childhood in Antigua and an adult life in North Bennington, Vermont. It also refers to times the speaker worked at *The New Yorker* magazine. In an online interview published for *Salon,* Kincaid addresses the auto-biographical mood stating, "people draw on their life all the time" (Loh, *Salon*). With this in mind, I approach this discussion with the connection between Jamaica Kincaid, the writer, and the work.

In *My Garden (Book)* it is clear Kincaid draws on her knowledge and personal experiences to connect the past and the present. There are frequent fluid movements of time and place between contemporary Vermont and colonial Antigua. Kincaid depicts a troublesome connection to colonialism, yet she describes herself and her garden as a product of British cultural imperialism. In these essays, Kincaid refers to herself at the intersection of the colonized and the colonizer. The physical garden is the space where Kincaid grapples with these complexities; rememory, as it appears in her garden writing, highlights the duality of her existence by continuously comparing her life in Vermont to her former life in Antigua.

A brief biographical background reveals how the process of rememory becomes relevant to Kincaid's identity and writing. As a child, Kincaid grew up in colonial Antigua's social, cultural, and religious structures. While Antigua has a different racial demographic than the US (91% Black population of Antigua[2], compared to 12% in the US[3]), like the US, the colonial Antiguan social systems were dominated English and Judo-Christian ideologies. Even as the

colonizing forces of Antigua influenced the larger social structures like government, religion, and education, in Kincaid's home, she learned African diasporic traditions of Obeah[4] and storytelling from her mother and maternal grandmother (Paravisini-Gebert 3).

Jamaica Kincaid was born Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson in St. John's, Antigua, in 1948 to a family of self-described "poor ordinary people" (Paravisini-Gebert 1). Kincaid was taken out of the colonial Antiguan government school to care for her younger brothers at thirteen. By age 17, Kincaid's mother had forcibly relocated her to Scarsdale, New York, to work as a nanny. In 1978, after securing a high school diploma and briefly attending college in New Hampshire, she settled in New York, and became a successful columnist. She eventually married into a wealthy publishing family. Improved social status, wealth, and career success only emphasized the dual nature of Kincaid's Afro-Caribbean New England identity.

Pathway of Analysis

In recognizing Kincaid, as an Afro-Caribbean woman, with connections to colonial Antigua, is my intention to analyze *My Garden (Book)* and show how the process of rememory appears in the text and in the narrative construction. In this thesis, I first establish the theoretical frame of rememory by diving into how and why rememory exists as a quality of Afro-Caribbean literature. I do so by considering the differences between memory and history to reflect the importance of rememory as a narrative process. In addition, I will listen to other Caribbean writers, such as Derek Walcott, to understand how the Afro-Caribbean diasporic memory is influential to narrative expression in Caribbean literature. Walcott explains that "memory… yearns to join the centre, a limb remembering the body from which it has been severed" (Walcott). This visual metaphor speaks to the power of collective memory and the violence

associated with Caribbean history. Walcott is helpful to this discussion because he explains memory from the position of an Afro-Caribbean author. Still, I will look closer at remembering and collective memory to explore how rememory is a particularly nuanced aspect of memory.

Next, I expand into why rememory operates within the African diasporic collective memory and consider how traumatic memory passes down through generations. I explain how the traumatic past of the African diasporic experience is not dealt with in Euro-centered definitions of collective memory and how rememory is a self-defined creative process of collective memory. It accounts for past trauma— the Middle Passage, forced relocation, enslavement, and family separation—and the racialized present but also serves as an inventive form of storytelling. Judith Herman furthers this discussion of trauma and storytelling while considering the possibility of healing through reconstructing the personal narrative. In Kincaid's work, we see an expansion of this idea as rememory rebuilds the historic counter-narrative of stated Antiguan history and consequently motivates a healing process.

The cultural and even traumatic realities of the African diasporic lens are critical to the perspectives of *My Garden (Book). The* scholarly work of Georgene Bess Montgomery supports that Euro-centered views only sometimes provide the appropriate lens to evaluate African diasporic literature. Montgomery posits that "any theoretical construct examining African diasporic literature must consider the cultural specificities" (Montgomery 227). Thus, I turn my attention to the work of Virginia Hamilton and Toni Morrison and rememory. Morrison and Hamilton reveal how rememory expresses what James Tar Tsaaior refers to as the "Caribbean condition" (Tsaaior 125).

For my research, I lean on African diasporic novelist Virginia Hamilton and Toni Morrison for definitions of rememory and creative insight into how they apply it to narrative

construction. Both novelists use the term 'rememory' in their work, and separately, in interviews, discuss the importance of rememory to the narrative process. I will engage with Morrison and Hamilton to develop a transparent working model of rememory, allowing me to explore that model in the *My Garden (Book)* essays.

I approach rememory as a narrative process. Since the research surrounding rememory is scattered, I define it and show how to identify it in *My Garden (Book).* Due to the foundations of rememory originating from collective memory and the African diaspora, I do not assert that Kincaid uses rememory with intention or that it is an unconscious process, just that it is *occurring*. I prefer rememory as a *happening* or a *reckoning*. Still, I stay fixed on identifying it in the text through translucent boundaries of time and place and breaks of order/form. Furthermore, through my westernized lens, at many times in my research, I search for parallels and look for patterns, bookends, and structures in Kincaid's storytelling. Since I believe that Kincaid resists form, my efforts to assign form become an operation of my own understanding and exploration. Her voice remains layered and recursive and offers fluid freedom to storytelling that defies the westernized narrative framework even as I consider them.

Using the theoretical framework of rememory, in Chapters 2-4, I explore and engage with excerpts from each of the three parts of the essay collection. I will analyze and expose how rememory appears early in the essay composition and how it evolves through the book's three main parts. In the first group of essays, I will show how to identify rememory through movements of time and place and how it breaks westernized narrative form and order. In the second group of essays, or part II of *My Garden (Book),* I will display how the shifts in time, notable to rememory, explore and expose the colonialized garden and the counter-narratives in the collective memory of Antiguan and Afro-Caribbean people. These narrative experiences

disrupt dominant westernized narratives and reveal unconsidered shifts in perspective. Finally, I explore moments in part III of *My Garden (Book),* which show transformations and healing in the contemporary garden.

Chapter 1

Theory

"I have been gardening for years, and memory, ephemeral, subject to things I hope to understand, is for me an anchor. Walking around the garden, then, I am full of thoughts of doom, I am full of thoughts of life beyond my own imagining" —Kincaid, My Garden (Book)

Rememory first appears in the writings of American children's book author Virginia Hamilton and American novelist Toni Morrison. Hamilton and Morrison use rememory to indicate shifts in time and place, and I argue that rememory is a narrative process important to African diasporic writers. Literary studies research associates rememory with Morrison and the book *Beloved.* James Tar Tsaaior expands rememory to address Caribbean history, and Lewis Wallace writes an essay titled "Recall, Response & Rememory," explaining that Hamilton uses rememory as "something we do to make stories our own" (135). Other scholars, like Karla Holloway, consider rememory as a "basic element of the inner forms" of African American women writers. Holloway offers the most complementary theoretical ground to explore *My Garden (Book*), but her theory does not decode rememory or explore how and why it occurs in African diasporic literature. Therefore, I intend to use this section to set a foundation for rememory as a narrative process in storytelling and lean on scholars like Tsaaior and Holloway, among others, to define the elements which constitute and create rememory. This will include showing how and why we distinguish memory from history, how rememory conjures counter-stories to recorded history, and how rememory, as a product of cultural memory and trauma, appears in the garden. I begin by establishing history, memory, and collective memory in association with the Caribbean, but I will also reveal that these foundational concepts cannot individually define rememory.

History and Memory

As we negotiate Kincaid's use of rememory in *My Garden (Book),* it is critical to establish the definitions of memory and history and consider their differences. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines *memory* as "recalling with the mind"; or a "faculty or the bodily process" of remembering, while it defines history as "a chronological record" ("memory" "history"). Other accounts explain history as the "imagined and revised past" (*What the Difference?)* Imagining the ability to revise the past is crucial because, in Caribbean history, the "revised past" differs from the memory of the colonized. Indigenous and African Caribbean histories become silenced, and the record of the past instead becomes a product of the dominant class. The history of western civilization, written by colonial power structures, excludes Indigenous and African experiences of colonization. The colonized maintain a history of oral tradition, with ancestorial folk tales and myth, as well as familial and personal experiences of invasion and colonization. Even though these stories survive, westernized historical records exclude them. Instead, African, and Indigenous histories are relegated to the margins, identified as fictional, and often disregarded entirely.

The Caribbean Island Antigua, the birthplace and childhood home of Jamaica Kincaid, is a complex intersection of history. Antigua abounds with memory, folklore, myth, and cultural influences of the Indigenous Carib[5], Spanish, British, European, and Africans. In 1493 Christopher Columbus was the first European (on behalf of the Spanish) to contact the island of Waladli[6] and the Carib people. In 1632, the island, renamed Antigua by Columbus, was colonized by the British, who brought disease, enslavement, and plantation agriculture. Antigua did not achieve independence until 1981, almost 350 years later[7]. During this 500-plus-year

history, the dominant narrative of Spanish conquest and British colonization remains fraught with misleading yet familiar terminology of a "new land," "discovered," "found," and "settled." Many dominant narratives told by the colonizers place themselves at the center of Caribbean history and fail to recognize the survival and continued existence of Indigenous and African people. Thus, the prevailing narratives of the oppressors become an extension of oppression. Historically, the colonizers portray Indigenous people and Africans and their descendants as Others and as "savage," "heathen," and "uncivilized". However, washing the historical record does not erase the personal and collective memory of the Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean people but highlights the location of memory within a culture that preserves it. The memory of one's family, history, culture, foods, customs, stories, and traditions become an act of survival, and even though the history of westernized power dominates the historical narratives, memory is not erased.

As an Afro-Caribbean writer, Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott writes about how it is impossible to separate the African diasporic collective memory from the creative process of writing. In his 1992 Nobel Lecture, Walcott beautifully asserts how collective memory becomes especially relevant to Caribbean peoples and replicates in the art of poetics. "All of the Antilles, every island, is an effort of memory; every mind, every racial biography culminating in amnesia and fog. Pieces of sunlight through the fog and sudden rainbows, arcs-en-ciel. That is the effort, the labour of the Antillean imagination, rebuilding its gods from bamboo frames, phrase by phrase" (Walcott). Walcott's act of rebuilding in "phrase" constitutes a common theme among post-colonial writers. Like the division of the islands by sea, and like the argument presented by Tsaaior, the history of the violence inflicted upon the Caribbean people through land dispossession, enslavement, forced relocation, agricultural land use, and assault on the religious

and folk traditions is fractured. With some dissent, the work of many post-colonial writers like Walcott and Kincaid serves to reconstruct and relocate the Caribbean in history. Walcott and Kincaid use the medium of storytelling to reassert the individual and collective memory arising from Caribbean land and sea. For Kincaid, this manifestation of rememory is processed into words motivated by the physical space of the garden. The process of rememory reveals the transparent boundaries between time and place and contributes to the overall structure of her writing.

For Antigua, like most of the Caribbean, the Atlantic slave trade continues to influence the populations, both in collective memory and the physical landscape. Not only do most Antiguans have family stories of African descendants brought to the island ports by European enslavers, but they also interact with a physical landscape modified by the arrival of the British. The outward and inner manifestation of harm problematizes Antiguan history and permeates the consciousness of all islanders. In the article, "Reading Black Through the Looking Glass: Decoding the Encoding in African Diasporic Literature," Georgene Bess Montgomery clarifies how the familial and physical connections to the African diaspora manifest in the collective memory of people living in Caribbean islands like Antigua. "During the transatlantic Middle Passage, words were shared, customs exchanged, and dreams of freedom planted. There, and in the Americas, these ethnic people became the first African, and then African American [and Afro Caribbean], that is they came to see and think of themselves, in relational terms, as members of a larger collective" (228). Not only does Montgomery cue us to the familial and cultural memory shared within the African diaspora, but she also reveals the connectedness of the African continent, the Caribbean, and the Americas as pathways of the African diasporic collective memory.

Exposing the unity of memory and experience inside a diaspora, Montgomery posits that the shared experience of trauma and cultural fusion creates a lens common to all decedents and "essential cultural specificities to fully decode the encoding" of diasporic text (235). Montgomery contends this lens must be grounded in the past because the "centrality of history" reveals a way to see the world (227). Essentially ancestorial connection to Africa through the routes of the Middle Passage creates a shared collective memory and a lens of survival.

James Tar Tsaaior supports the assertion of the historical relevance of and notes how violence and exclusion influence the African diasporic collective memory. In the article "History, (Re)Memory and Cultural Self-Presencing: The Politics of Postcolonial Becoming in the Caribbean Novel," Tsaaior examines the processes of memory active inside Caribbean history. Tsaaior reminds the reader that the dominant western historical narrative of discovery and empire-building dispossesses Caribbean people from their history (123). Forced to negotiate with an imposed history of violence and near annihilation, for Caribbean people, memory becomes an authentic reoccurring lived experience. Tsaaior states: "Memory is the very sieve of history and its preservation" (124). If we consider the connection of history and collective memory made by Montgomery and Tsaaior, we can consider the African diasporic memory as the collection of and accounting for the stories lost to Euro-centered history.

Tsaaior furthers this notion by also focusing on the lived experience of colonialism as it interacts with memory and history and influences the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. Tsaaior considers the direct consequence of the violent Middle Passage and enslavement: "Memory in the Caribbean case evokes a painful History of colonial and imperial suzerainty, brutal conquest, economic exploitation, cultural deracination, and racial oppression" (124). The brutalization of colonial conquest on the Caribbean people and African people displaced to the Caribbean creates

a vast conflicting history, as history itself, sanitized by colonial recording, is incongruent with the traumatic memories shared through a generational exchange. African-Caribbean traumatic histories, weeded from the dominant historical records, survive in the living remembrance of Afro-Caribbean people and are present in post-colonial Caribbean literature.

We can explore Kincaid as an example of the struggle between a counter-narrative and recorded history. In *My Garden (Book)*, Kincaid describes resistance to the dominant colonial narrative. She directly confronts the narrative of Columbus and the *discovery* of Antigua and uses rhetorical questioning to consider how to locate herself within a fractured Caribbean history, using a similarly fragmented block of text:

> What to call the thing that happened to me and those who look like me?
>
> Should I call it history?
>
> If so, what should history mean to someone like me?
>
> Should it be an idea, should it be an open wound with each breath I take in expel healing and opening the wound again and again, over and over, and is this healing and opening a moment that began in 1492 and has yet to come to an end? Is it a collection of facts, all true and precise details, and if so, when I come across the true and precise details, what should I do, how should I feel, and where should I place myself? (153)

Kincaid draws on the forces of history to locate herself and the garden in relation to the violent reality of colonial history. If excluded from history, how does one resolve what is said to be a factual, true history? This questioning forces the consideration: Are these *facts* the dominant narratives of the British recorded history of Antigua, or are these *facts* the personal and collective experiences of Kincaid? This inner dialogue is the collective experience of an Afro-Caribbean

woman considering, "What can I call the thing that happened to me…. should I call it history?" (153). Kincaid identifies that memory and personal experience are not the same as history.

Kincaid further exposes the unhealing trauma of memory. She asks, does the trauma of the Caribbean history remain an "open wound"? This injured position indicates the unresolved nature of oppressed counter-stories, lost narratives, and having a place in history essential to culture reclamation or healing. Furthermore, if Kincaid's memory, collective memory, and history are not the "precise facts and details," then how might she, as an Afro-Caribbean woman, find healing? Moreover, as Kincaid states, "does it come to an end"? It is thanks to Kincaid's willingness to engage with memory and history that the reader must also consider this question and engage with the impact of what might be called history in the Caribbean.

In fact, Tssaior reasserts what Kincaid considered 12 years earlier, Caribbean history, as it exists in memory, is a stubborn wound resistant to healing, or not allowed to heal, but here he unities the injury with the collective memory. He states, "These historic realities that define the Caribbean condition have turned memory into a wound which is taking long to heal" (124). This very metaphor underlines the deep traumas born from the violence inflicted through colonial legacies of dispossession, as well as the displacement and relocation of Africans during the Atlantic slave trade. Tsaaior draws on the intersection of history and memory and faces the trauma that remains the undercurrent of 'the Caribbean condition' (Tsaaior 125). What Tsaaior and Kincaid emote is the eruption of painful trauma that operates in the memory of Afro-Caribbean people. Tsaaior, however, unites that pain with a Caribbean condition moving from the personal and into a larger group, community, and culture of the Caribbean people.

Collective Memory

In western scholarship, collective memory frames do not exclude the African diasporic experience but do not define the distinctions of collective memory as it occurs within the African diasporic experience. For example, in the article "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," German Egyptologist Jan Assmann states that "through its cultural heritage, a society becomes visible to itself and others. Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitutions and tendencies of a society" (133). While Assmann acknowledges the defining nature of collective memory and how that memory forms the "past," he concludes that memory is a matter of "heritage and values.". This definition does not consider a past that emerges from violence, victimization, and dispossession. Acts, such as colonialism and conquest of the Caribbean, exist outside of the control of Caribbean people and yet still become aspects of the collective cultural memory. These acts and victimizations do not reflect "values and heritage" and, by definition, reveal why the western lens is not the ideal theoretical lens for the Afro-Caribbean experience.

In addition, in the article "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," Assmann conveys that collective memory does not have defined margins but rather intersects among "collective self-images" (Assmann 127). He states these self-images may include "family, neighborhood, political party, etc., up to and including race, gender, nation, and religious affiliation," but again, excludes acts of trauma like war, genocide, enslavement, and dispossession (Assmann 126). Assmann furthers this by stating that intersections occur as "every individual belongs to numerous such groups and therefore entertains numerous collective self-images and memory collections" (Assmann 127). While Assmann does not directly cite the scholarship of Kimberlé Crenshaw[8] on intersectionality, he alludes to how collective memory is influenced by the

intersecting of numerous identities. Complex intersections of race, gender, class, and Caribbean history establish variations that influence the nature of memory and collective memory. Therefore, we might consider how intersectionality also includes pathways of trauma, such as the Middle Passage and Indigenous land dispossession, since collective acts of trauma occur within the frame of the African and Afro-Caribbean diasporic "collective self-image and memory collection" (127). From this exclusion in the field of collective memory, we begin to identify the location of rememory as the African Diasporic collective memory full of cultural specificities and traumatic histories excluded by western scholars.

Trauma

In the book "Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror," Judith Herman posits that to facilitate healing from the "unspeakable" acts of trauma, which can be repressed or repeated, humans must reconstruct the narrative of the trauma. Herman considers that "remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of social order and for the healing of individual victims" (1). By reconstructing stories, "survivors can begin their recovery" (1). Based on extensive studies of trauma patients, Herman concludes that a connection exists between storytelling, the reconstruction of lost narratives, and the reconstruction of memory as necessary faculty in healing and recovery. I argue that by engaging with the complex and often violent counter-stories of colonization and enslavement, Afro-Caribbean authors, such as Kincaid, become healers in the narrative tradition. They narratively reclaim history and use collective memory in the form of rememory to reconstruct the past.

Of course, Afro-Caribbean narratives are not only born from the trauma of colonialism and the Middle Passage but from what Montgomery describes as "the linkage of people" (228). It is this "linkage" that creates shared culture, including storytelling traditions, foods, dress, folklore, plant cultivation, and of course, the shared experiences of collective memory. Even though trauma coexists with collective memory, what remains most apparent is survival through, and with trauma. The narrative use of rememory offers a place to heal through storytelling thus fostering survival. In her introduction to the research of traumatic experience, Herman cites that "folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told" (1). It is the folk wisdom of African diasporic writers like Toni Morrison, Virginia Hamilton, and Jamaica Kincaid that embrace storytelling and history while acknowledging the persistence of trauma in collective memory.

Rememory

In the novel *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison considers the complexities of trauma, identity, and cultural memory using rememory as a narrative process. Rememory allows Morrison to shift time and place during storytelling. This shift creates a movement between the physical world and the spiritual world and develops the past evoking it as critical to the present moment. Ultimately, rememory allows a retelling or recollection, often accompanying trauma. In *Beloved*, Sethe briefly describes how rememory accomplishes this:

> I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my

> rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (Morrison 43)

This moment explains how rememory is used and allows us to conceptualize rememory as a present and re-experienced space, a re-surfacing of past or repressed experience. While rememory is often related to traumatic memory, such as the Middle Passage, rememory is not limited to experiences of trauma. It is a means to access the past in the present.

In the 1976 children's novel *Arilla Sun Down,* American children's book author Virginia Hamilton developed a less referenced but slightly earlier model of rememory. In a corresponding essay titled "Ah, Sweet Rememory!" published in *The Horn Book Magazine,* Hamilton discusses the foundation of rememory and the African American experience. She states the origin of the word rememory as occurring in a childhood conversation. When she later learned that rememory was not in the dictionary, Hamilton stated that she constructed a definition. "I take it upon myself to define the reword for the sake of *réchauffé* (i.e., rehash, or a warmed-over dish): *Rememory*: An exquisitely textured recollection, real or imagined, which is otherwise indescribable" (Hamilton 94). Hamilton also expands on rememory as a process that interacts with time and place.

Hamilton develops the relationship between time and place as more of an emotional location brought about by rememory. Of personal experience, she states: "is it the memory of my life or my mother's memory of her life as told to me, revised by me toward rememory; or is it that of her mother's and her grandmother's and old friends. Time and place are bound together, a solid sensation in the present and past of that which has been accomplished" (95)—indicating

that collective memory from her mother and grandmother have an active influence on the present moment.

Consequently, Hamilton explains how the translucency between time and place influences the process of storytelling. "Time and place become almost mythical. I suffer through them as I imagine, historically, others have suffered through them" (95). "Ah! Sweet Rememory!" includes numerous stories which reflect how both Hamilton, and her mother retell and bring forth the survival story of 'Grandpa' Levi Perry, who journeyed to escape slavery. These stories recognize the oral traditions and collective memory of Hamilton's mother. As she shares their family history, Hamilton writes, "There were cadences and inflections that had been similar to my father's speech peculiarities when he first told about the incredible journey that took him north across the Ohio River to freedom. She definitely didn't sound like my Mother" (94). Hamilton describes the positions of her mother and grandfather meddling as one storyteller. As her mother interacts with the process of rememory, the past and the present intertwine. Ultimately in this essay, Hamilton conveys how rememory shifts the significance of time and place, bringing both ancestors and the past to the present moment.

Rememory Subverts Form and Order

Morrison and Hamilton clarify how rememory eliminates the barriers of time/place; in *My Garden (Book),* rememory also subverts a westernized narrative order. The scholarly research of Caribbean diasporic and African American literature expands our understanding of how violence impacts human memory and the narrative form. Andrew Armstrong and Karla Holloway reveal how the fragmented narrative form is bound to the African diasporic experience. Tsaaior relates this to the "fragmentariness and incoherencies of [Caribbean]

historical experience" (Tsaaior 127). Understanding the fragmented narrative style clarifies western misconceptions of Afro-Caribbean writers.

In numerous literary reviews, western critics express confusion over Kincaid's style in the broad range of her work, specifically in response to *My Garden (Book)*. Dwight Garner of *The New York Times* calls Jamaica Kincaid's writing "bipolar" (Garner). Jeff Zaleski and Paul Gediman of *Publishers Weekly* refer to *My Garden (Book)* as "somewhat rambling" (Zaleski). Sheila Reed of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* calls it "both winsome and tedious…. a little clunky, cluttered with Kincaid's stream-of-consciousness musings" (Reed). Other writers, like Susan Sontag, praise Kincaid's style as complex and truthful (Garis). Most noticeable in the critical reviews is the commentary on her style rather than her stories. The broad critique of Kincaid's style indicates either a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of her style or a fixed expectation of a narrative style. With the broken sentence structures, intervening thoughts, and recursive jumps in time, we notice that Kincaid is not "rambling" but communicating the process of rememory.

Andrew Armstrong presents research to explain why African diasporic writers create in fragmentary narrative forms. In the article "Narrative and the re-co[r]ding of cultural memory in Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles* and *Snakepit*," published in *The Journal of African Cultural Studies* (2009), Armstrong wrestles with the questions of how the trauma located in memory (i.e., rememory) appears in the African narrative. Armstrong asks, "How does language in narrative, with its insistence on order and sequence, 'capture' the de-structuring nature of violence?" (Armstrong 128). While dealing with the specific history of Uganda written by Isegawa, Armstrong works to decipher *how* and *if* disorderly traumatic experiences like genocide and war are articulated in an orderly narrative form. Armstrong summarizes that the recording of

trauma, even in a fragmented form related to violence, informs, and is informed by cultural memory. This is crucial to what he deems *recoding*. By translating trauma "through the tropes of language," the traumatic events are not just made "narratable," but they relocate memory and "shape the future" (Armstrong 128). Armstrong gives examples of how trauma and violence operate in literature and do not conform to conventional narrative structures but illustrate how fragmentary movements in time and place reframe the past as the present. Like Judith Herman, Armstrong asserts that the reconstruction of trauma, even if fragmented, shapes the future. The traumatic histories in the African diasporic rememory influence non-linear recursive text that western critics deem repetitive or rambling because they subvert expected order and sequence.

Perhaps most critical to our foundational framing of rememory is the work of Karla Holloway. In the article, "Revision and (Re)membrance: A Theory of Literary Structures in Literature by African-American Woman Writers," Holloway narrows Armstrong's perspective to specifically address how African American woman writers employ rememory or (re)membrance as figurative and symbolic processes to build a "multiplied text" (766). Holloway terms this multiplicity *plurisignation* to illustrate the "multiple and layered texts of writers of this [African Diasporic writers] tradition" (766). Plurisignant traits include the polyphonic text; translucence (between past and present); inner and outer monologue; poetic and musical prose, and "events…settings and symbolic systems [which] are multiple and layered rather than individual and one-dimensional" (766). Holloway asserts that these traits, among others, appear in the writing style of African diasporic women writers as an "activation in the face of stasis, a restoration of fluidity, translucence, and movement to the traditions of memory" (776). She considers fragmented histories and the "shattering effects of the diaspora" an "outward sign of internal displacement," yet she notes the importance of African ideologies where "the tellers, the

mode of telling, the complications and sometimes obfuscations of telling become critical not only to 'folklore' tradition but to the larger narrative traditions as well" (775). The recursive narrative structures of African diasporic writers like rememory build stories into a formidable alternative to the ridged structural Eurocentric narratives explaining why many critics deem *My Garden (Book)* repetitive, rambling, and confusing.

In *My Garden (Book)*, the process of rememory appears as a translucency of the boundaries of time and place and a fragmented narrative order, but the garden also precipitates rememory. Why the garden? If we consider the foundations of rememory—trauma, African diasporic collective memory, and underrepresented histories of Antigua—then the garden associated with the land, nature, and survival becomes symbolic of the ideological differences between the colonizing forces in Antigua and the African and Indigenous worldview. While the Indigenous people survived harvesting and farming, the British imposed an agriculture model for profit; while the colonizers collected, named, and exported unknown Antiguan plants, the Carib and African people used those same plants for medicine. With a focus on the garden in *My Garden (Book),* Kincaid confronts order, unearths history, and cultivates counter stories.

Rememory and The Garden: Colonial Influence

In much of *My Garden (Book),* the British colonial influence on the garden pathways is critical to rememory. Kincaid speaks of an undefended garden, or a land unspoken for, that exists in a space influenced and changed by colonialism. For Kincaid, this garden is more than soil, flora, and fauna; it is a connection to Antiguan land and Antiguan people; it is a rememory of her past. Along with the forced migration of African people and culture to the Caribbean, colonialism imposed new plant species, religious doctrine, and agricultural ethos onto Antigua.

However, even under the oppressive occupation of colonialism, Indigenous Carib culture and African diasporic culture survive.

The ecological divisions between the African diasporic worldview and the British colonial perspective explain why rememory appears in the narrative process of garden writing and points out why the Indigenous and African worldview of the garden persists. Many African and Indigenous traditions incorporate nature into religion, myth, often medicine, and folklore traditions, while European beliefs lean toward an environmental determinism, affording that human advancement is either facilitated or inhibited by the state of the natural world (Blaut 69). Even though determinism is not in and of itself religious, like Christianity, environmental determinism is a by-product of Eurocentrism in the New World. Although not without variations, many African and Indigenous religious traditions share commonalities which include an interconnectedness with the environment. In the *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction*, Jacob K. Olupona notes that, like Indigenous cultures, African cosmologies "portray the universe as fluid, active and impressionable, with agents from each realm [earth and sky/ human and gods] constantly interacting with one another. This integrated worldview leads many practitioners of African religions to speak about the visible in tandem with the invisible. Each living thing and inanimate object is potentially sacred on some level" (4). Thus, the survival of the self, the natural world, and the divine are interdependent. This cosmology supports a sense of collective obligation to the self, the divine, and the natural world as a community. Therefore, disruptions of the whole—land grabs, agricultural modification, and transplantation of plant and animal species—experienced during colonization are also disruptive to the individual.

By contrast, the invading European Judo-Christian theology is considerably more individualistic. It is not a cosmological interdependence of all living things. Instead, one exists in

the natural world but does not operate as though that environment is sacred or sentient. Instead, colonizing Judo-Christian theology asserts the right of man over nature. In the Judo-Christian creation story *Genesis*, God informs, "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered." (King James 9:2). This perspective not only states that nature is a given to humankind but asserts a manifest destiny by implying humans should, "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (1:26) and "And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you, it shall be for meat" (1:29). With Judo-Christian theology as a footing of western expansion and factor of colonization, this hierarchy of humankind over nature assumed by Judo-Christian theological perspective mimics a linear highest to the lowest order of plants and beings whereas African Indigenous communities are more likely to observe a non-linear interdependence between living things.

In the article "Caribbean Eco-Poetics: The Categorial Imperative and Indifference in the Caribbean Environment," Keja L.Valens reveals how this ideological division of western and African Indigenous perspectives plays out in the imposition of order and categorization on the natural world. Valens defines the imposing colonial order as a *categorial imperative* or "a long history of Western separation of human and nature in the Enlightenment/colonial mandate to categorize, to identify/discriminate and systemically organize, to collect and enclose, to divide and conquer" (371). In Jamaica Kincaid's essays "To Name is to Possess" and "The Glasshouse," Valens notes that Kincaid considers the categorial imperative in relation to the biological

classification system and collection of Caribbean native plants as an example of colonial impositions on the natural world of Antigua. Not only is Kincaid calling out injustice, but we see how she identifies order as a structure she associates with "our dominators" (Kincaid 143).

Kincaid builds counter-narratives and asserts how imposing order on the natural world (and the storyteller) erases aspects of Caribbean culture. For Kincaid, the botanical or natural world reflects a history of colonization but also reveals the survival of the African and Indigenous ideologies that predate colonization. Valens considers the ecological engagement by Jamaica Kincaid a direct response to the "decimation of the Caribbean environment from the early colonial period to the present" (Valens 371). She also speaks to the post-colonial literary reaction as a return to "the colonial archive to examine the naturalization of the categorial imperative and to recuperate its victims" and employs Kincaid as an example of Caribbean authors resisting the categorial imperative in post-colonial literature (372). Valens explores how Caribbean literature and, more specifically, eco-poetics[9], or ecologically driven poetics of the Caribbean, recover garden narratives to shift the rigid demarcations of categorial imperatives (371). It is precisely this reckoning with the ecological past that conjures rememory in the garden and in the garden writing of Jamaica Kincaid.

Kincaid provides a gift in her creative expression because the essays of *My Garden (Book)* display how the process of rememory interacts with the text. With the help of scholars, its characteristics become identifiable and expand engagement with Kincaid’s writing. Prior research allows me to build a comprehensive model of rememory to consider in my reading of *My Garden (Book).* As noted by Karla Holloway, rememory is a figurative and symbolic process that appears in the writing of African diasporic writers. Apparent in narrative style, we know that rememory develops from the common shared experience found in collective memory,

yet it interacts with storytelling to rebuild the traumatic past, as discussed by Judith Herman. Rebuilding stories of Afro-Caribbean collective memory serve to restore fractured or lost histories that have been misplaced or disregarded during colonization. Rememory influences the style of diasporic writers through familial and cultural associations with African ideology and, by doing so, become a fluid part of the polyvocal, recursive movement which subverts Euro-centric traditions of narrative form. Rememory is an act of survival that engages with the past and the present concurrently, forming what Holloway describes as translucent text without visible perimeters of time and place. In *My Garden (Book)* essays, rememory is active in the figurative and symbolic process of language, and the garden is its provocation.

In the remainder of this thesis, I will expose specific examples of the figurative and symbolic processes that occur as layers of rememory. I will parallel ideas established by Morrison, Hamilton, and Holloway to navigate the translucent boundaries of time and place in *My Garden (Book)* and expose how rememory reveals an Afro-Caribbean narrative style and simultaneously subverts the orderly western narrative.

Chapter 2

The Introduction and Part I of *My Garden (Book)*: Past and Present

"Nothing behaves, nothing can be counted on to do so"

--Jamaica Kincaid, *My Garden (Book)*

In the unlabeled introduction of *My Garden (Book),* Kincaid reveals that she is negotiating with Caribbean history and rememory at a deeper level than mere horticulturist instructions. Kincaid states, "I wanted a garden that looked like something I had in my mind's eye, but exactly what that might be I did not know and even now do not know. And this must be why: the garden for me is so bound up with words about the garden, with words themselves, that any set idea of the garden, and set picture, is a provocation to me" (7). Establishing the garden as an undefinable abstract concept bound up in words, hinting at a literary form, is the first clue that Kincaid sees more in the garden than the object garden form. While it is not immediately apparent that the abstract conceptualization of the garden is a process of rememory, it is reasonable to posit that personal or collective memory may consciously or unconsciously motivate this abstraction. For Kincaid, the abstract garden and the physical garden instigates rememory and contribute to a reconstruction of the past. When Kincaid imagines cultivating the garden from this abstraction in the "mind's eye," this "provocation" is attuned with rememory when she states the garden cannot be dealt with without engaging "words" and perhaps the storytelling it provokes (7). Kincaid informs readers that the garden will render a deeper process than anecdotal writing.

In *My Garden (Book)*, rememory motivated by colonial garden history also creates narrative movements in time and place. Often simple cues like past, present, and future tenses reveal an interactive timeline rather than time which concretely separates the past from the present. This activation of the present moment in partnership with the past and the future forces

us to consider history as living and influential, as an active agent changing the world around us. In the untitled introduction, Kincaid associates her early gardening experience in Vermont as a return to the past, to Antigua.

> When it dawned on me that the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it, I did not tell the gardeners who had asked me to explain the thing I was doing, or to explain what I was trying to do; I only marveled at the way the garden is for me an exercise in memory, a way of remembering my immediate past, a way of getting to the past that is my own (the Caribbean sea) and the past as it is indirectly related to me (the conquest of Mexico and its surroundings). (8)

This passage is not only reflecting self-awareness but how Kincaid conveys time. Kincaid begins in the past tense in "the garden I *was* making" (8). She immediately modifies that act to include the garden she is "*still* making [emphasis added] " before returning to the immediate past, relating what she "*was* trying to do" [in her garden] (8). In this excerpt, the process of rememory is apparent in the transparency between the past, present, and future; and it percolates from Kincaid's interaction with her garden design. Kincaid intertwines history and the present-day using language and tense to establish the long memory of the garden; in her past, "I was making," in her present, "am still making," and in her future, "will always be making" (8). Kincaid even establishes that this fluid process is a way of "getting to the past that is my own" (8).

Kincaid also acknowledges and calls this experience an “exercise in memory” as the physical garden interacts with the Antiguan history of conquest and colonization (8). Her history as an Afro-Caribbean woman, with knowledge of Caribbean botanical history and the British

colonial influence on that history, projects her sense of what a garden *is* (8). This block of prose not only expresses time as fluid, existing between Kincaid's physical moment in the garden and her future in the garden but also in the past, one occurring hundreds of years before her birth. This factor of time bending in the introductory essay indicates the process of rememory operating in the storytelling process and in the physical garden.

This excerpt asserts that places such as the Caribbean Sea are also created in Kincaid's Vermont garden. Why might the Caribbean islands and sea be relevant to her garden plot? How does Kincaid visualize the Caribbean in her garden? A landscape design interpretation might assert a certain shape and design drawn using the physical borders, such as where her garden beds begin and end, a visual model of the borders of the Caribbean islands, much as a satellite image would render. However, rememory indicates something more deeply rooted. As Hamilton suggests in the "Ah! Sweet Rememory" article, rememory "is like a self-sown seed come forth unbidden" (93). Perhaps Kincaid is instead noting the natural response of the African diasporic gardener (and writer) to fold collective memory into the creative space. In the creative space of the garden and garden writing, Kincaid reconstructs a painful past. At the very northeastern point of the US, in North Bennington, Vermont, in a near opposite climate, soil, and culture, but one also born from colonialist conquest, Kincaid hints that rememory involves tilling, planting, and cultivating the earth and the past simultaneously.

"The Garden in Winter"

It is the dark, short days of a New England winter when nothing will grow that the pathway of garden rememory reveals the figurative and symbolic language considered by Karla Holloway and further evidence of the movements of the time. "The Garden in Winter" alludes to

things buried as Kincaid reflects on the vast differences between a New England and a Caribbean landscape. As if floating above recent memories, Kincaid tells the story of racial and racist encounters in her hometown in Vermont. In both stories, the racism directed at Kincaid is conveyed by a friend and a gardener who consider it imperative to reveal the deeply racist behavior of their parents. Although Kincaid maintains clarity in a tone indicating the absolute nonsense of both encounters, she abruptly moves from the past (summertime) and jarringly arrives back in the present moment, "it is winter, and so my garden does not exist" (69). This drastic leap from summer garden scenes, that a infused with racism, to empty winter garden reflect the power of rememory in storytelling. The setting also expresses that the process of rememory is associated with what should be an utterly forgettable conversation. Nevertheless, the micro-aggression and racism associated with the conversations affix them to memory. In this case, the process of rememory snaps back to a bleak winter white landscape, one in which Kincaid struggles to find pleasure.

Kincaid's movement through time is an act of awakening the reader. Rememory creates discomfort. This idea follows the convention of rememory as asserted by Toni Morrison who considers how the unexpected use of time in narrative construction has a powerful influence on the reader. In the Foreword of *Beloved,* Morrison discusses the circumstance and inspiration for her Pulitzer Prize-winning book in ways that connect storytelling and rememory. She indicates how, in her writing, the fluidity of time and place is linked to the African diaspora: "I wanted the reader to be kidnapped, thrown ruthlessly into an alien environment as the first step into a shared experience with the book's population—just as the characters were snatched from one place to another, from any place to any other, without preparation or defense" (xii). She conveys how the process of moving time and place influence the larger story form. Morrison states that shifting

time creates "a sense of things being both under control and out of control" as a needed literary device to depict enslavement (xiii). She also explains how racist encounters like those Kincaid expresses in "The Winter Garden" are the process of rememory and the process of survival, stating, "the herculean effort to forget would be threatened by memory desperate to stay alive" (xiii). It is from rememory that Kincaid relates painful stories of racialized encounters and disrupts the listener by radically leaping between time and place.

In "The Winter Garden," rememory also operates as a symbolic process in Kincaid's descriptions of the buried world and winter despair. Kincaid describes the winter garden as concealed and buried beneath "mounds of white" (69). In a state of discontent, she tries to reconstruct the summer garden in her mind by remembering "a clump of lovage with its tall, thick stalks of celery-like leaves (with celery like taste) did stand next to the hedge of rhubarb" (69). Kincaid also communicates the contrasting winter garden as nonexistent or hidden; it is made of things gone or invisible, and she sees this as a graveyard:

> In its place [the garden] are these mounds of white, the raised beds covered with snow, like a graveyard, but not a graveyard in New England, with its orderliness and neatness and sense of that's-that, but more like a graveyard in a place I am from, a warm place, where the grave is topped off with huge mounds of dirt, because death is just another way of being, and the dead will not stay put, and sometimes their actions are more significant, more profound than when they were alive. (69)

By recognizing the symbolic nature of rememory, we can consider the association of the north and the snow that buries the earth like a forgetfulness; a literal blanket of white that conceals the dead with "orderliness and neatness" (69). At numerous points in *My Garden (Book)*, Kincaid reaffirms this point, the colonized Caribbean garden and the English garden are aesthetic and

ordered. The English landscape is “tamed, framed, captured, kind, decent, good, pretty,” noting that it has a “quality of character that leads to obsessive order and shape” (132). In this same excerpt, Kincaid alludes to the “orderliness and neatness” of her Vermont garden (69). She reveals that the surface of the buried winter white garden has become symbolic of the English colonial landscape. The activity of rememory creates parallels between colonizing history and ideology and Antiguan ideology.

The fixed narrative of the colonizers is similarly present as Kincaid refers to a “sense of that’s-that” (69). This phrase expresses a sense of what is done is done, and a past that is fixed and unchangeable aligns with the Anglo-centered narrative of history (69). The fixed-ordered nature used to describe the New England winter or the “white mounds…. like a graveyard” contrasts how Kincaid describes the Antiguan mounds of dirt where the dead “will not stay put” (69). If we consider that Euro-centered societies such as the English colonizers of Antigua and New England colonists, perceive graves, death, and history as finite, then we must consider that Caribbean cultures perceive death as an ‘action,’ —in some ways even “more profound” than life, as Kincaid states (69). We might then ask: what does Kincaid wish to unearth? We understand that she longs for her summer garden, but the garden she perceives is in the Caribbean. In this passage, rememory shifts place, from New England to Antigua, as Kincaid negotiates with a bleak gardenscape, but it also precipitates the ideological extremes of death and the afterlife as she associates the garden with a graveyard. The process of rememory also constructs a worldview that does not conform to the colonized constructions of history and categorial order or finality.

Interestingly, the subsection “The Garden in Winter” and the metaphoric unearthing of rememory appears near the end of the first of the three “parts” that divide *My Garden*

(Book). Part I is made up of seven essays that reveal how Kincaid developed an interest in gardening. It is composed of questioning, vexation, and "disturbances" of the garden, the significance of the home and garden in the shadow of a former family, the reluctance and surprise of garden planning, a review of the dominant gardening canon, and the must-have gifts for gardener's woven with frequent returns to an Antiguan childhood (23).

Admittedly the range and interest displayed across this first section are diverse and varied, but oddly, these sub-sections are built and conclude in the below-zero temperature of depths of mid-winter New England. Kincaid insists that "spring will never come" and I shall spend the rest of my life reading seed and plant catalogs and books about gardens and the people involved with them" (96). It is at this point, as we consider what should be unearthed that the book changes direction.

Chapter 3

Part II: Surviving Winter -Renaming and Reclaiming the Narrative

> "This is the evidence I have for my feelings, but my own history contradicts this: I come from the south (far south, I come from the West Indies) of where I live now, and I love the event called spring and I accept that it comes after winter and that it cannot come without winter"
>
> — Jamaica Kincaid, My Garden (Book)

In Part I of *My Garden (Book),* rememory appears with drastic jumps in time and space, disrupting form, but how does the process of moving through time and space create a space for retelling the past? In the seven essays that comprise Part II, I find rememory functioning as a process of narrative recovery. Part II begins with modern garden disruptions, but as the essays progress, Kincaid delves deeper into winter and the history and colonization of Antigua. In this process, rememory provides a parallel view of recorded history. I consider how rememory facilitates this happening until, by the end of Part II, it culminates into self-renaming and even restating the colonizer's record.

Antiguan history only subtly appears in the first and third parts of *My Garden (Book),* but counter-stories abound in Part II. In this middle section, rememory as storytelling challenges a Euro-centered history. Kincaid considers the possession of plant species parallel to the possession of African and Indigenous people. She notes the colonizer's agriculture model and considers the effect of colonial renaming imposed on native plant species. She also notes British efforts to objectify and collect native plant species, and she disavows the premise of the European "discovery" story. In Part II, Kincaid is in a winter state of mind; her attachments to the garden primarily exist in planning for spring and in remembering the past. Rememory, as a

process, recurrently dips into the recorded past and, more importantly, the unrecorded past to reckon with Euro-centered narratives and reclaim the untold histories of African Caribbean people.

"An Order to a Fruit Nursey Through the Mail"

In Part II, Kincaid reckons with British colonial influences on the landscape of Antigua from the position of contemporary Vermont. In the first brief two-page essay, "An Order to a Fruit Nursey Through the Mail," Kincaid alludes to themes of categorization, transplantation, and survival through the perspective of hard fruit tree cultivation. She explains her repeated and failing attempts to grow fruit trees, like apples, in her Vermont yard. In the opening lines, Kincaid communicates the relationship between gardening and categorization. She compiles a neat list of fruit trees with product identification codes, species names, quantity, and price. The first page of the essay reads:

> Please mail to:
>
> Jamaica Kincaid
>
> (DF 127 B) Northern Spy (1)
>
> (DF 114 B) Red Rome (1)
>
> (DF 123 B) Red Stayman Winesap (1) 3 Trees @$15.25 each= $45.75
>
> (DF 604 B) Colette (1)
>
> (DF 610 Red Anjou (1) (Kincaid 99)

This list continues for nine more entries. Kincaid's purchase order is both a visual model of how gardeners participate in colonial order and an example of cataloging nature. It also offers a self-

aware perspective of her participation in that system. Kincaid notes the specifics of each tree, the label, and the name attributed to the tree and adds the individual prices culminating in a total cost, at the end of the order. Although nondescript at this point in the essay collection, this list forces a contemporary visual consideration of the categorical imperatives of colonization as asserted by Valens.

In the second half of this brief essay, Kincaid expresses disappointment with tree cultivation, comparing her arborist hardships with the successes of her fellow gardeners. She concedes that even the mature fruit trees, inherited from the former homeowner Woodworth, are now distorted 'as if someone would have assaulted them on purpose when they were tiny' (100). Kincaid personifies the trees by using the word "assault," indicating a more profound symbolism tied to rememory and abuses connected to the African diaspora (100). Must the reader consider the history of these well-rooted fruit trees? Kincaid imagines that their current state is due to abuse, a severe environment, or both. In the process of rememory, the trees mirror Afro-Caribbean survivors; they endure the hardship of transplantation from one place to another, and they survive. Kincaid describes the tree as "distorted" as a physical manifestation of their past injury (100). They are smaller than expected, need to be sweeter, and do not appear like the exceptional apples that Kincaid's fellow gardeners have grown. It is worth noting that even with signs of past "assault," the trees, like the African diasporic people, survive and remain fruitful (100). With signs of injury, the apples do not fit the ideological perspective of perfect, but they have survived and maintained their potential. In much of this essay, Kincaid considers the climate and location with their current state of being, "it isn't easy to grow hard fruits in the garden in my climate" (100).

In "An Order to a Fruit Nursey Through the Mail," Kincaid makes no direct connections to transplantation, yet, reveals that even though she is unsuccessful in cultivating fruit trees in her garden, she feels compelled to place a new catalog order. Buying, transporting, and transplanting trees to a new location is standard horticultural practice and is associated with colonization. Identifying Kincaid again at the cross of colonizer and colonized. She enjoys the garden and the fruits of the garden while recognizing that her participation in the transplantation of living things mirrors the colonizing transplantation of living things. This conflict is apparent at the essay conclusion when Kincaid asks for help, "I am looking at this very same nursey's catalogue, and I am making up an order. Oh, please, someone, Help Me!" (101).

For Kincaid, rememory instigates a conflict between the experience of colonized and the colonizer by revealing the counter-narratives present in her garden. Kincaid seems to recognize that if she sends out a new order, she participates in the movement and transplantation of living things. The process of rememory operates from the lens of the colonized. Therefore, Kincaid views the nursey order, by nature of categorial imperative, relocation, and transplantation, as synonymous with the acts of the colonizer. Kincaid appears aware that her lens as a colonized individual contributes to her view of the order and thus states the imperative, "Help Me!" to express this contrasting position (101). Here, rememory may operate from African religious traditions, like those shared by Jacob K. Olupona, who explains the transplantation of a tree to a new climate and soil is disruptive to the interdependence of living things. Since rememory also operates from trauma, Kincaid might recognize the tree order as participation in the transplantation of plants, like the forced relocation of plants and humans during colonialization. In recognizing similarities between the transplantation of hard fruit trees with the colonial

transplanting of living things from one place to another and African religious traditions, the process of rememory disrupting an otherwise simple fruit tree order.

The placement of "An Order to a Fruit Nursey Through the Mail" in Part II of *My Garden (Book)* prompts new considerations. What does it mean to insist something transplanted from another place must survive where placed? Is Kincaid considering the effect of an African Caribbean woman transplanted to a New England climate? Is she considering the survival of African ancestors transplanted to Antigua? Why is Kincaid sharing this story as a gateway to essays that directly rebuke the impositions of colonial order on Antigua? These questions provoked by this brief transitional essay stir rememory and thus the counter-narratives that develop the remainder of the essays in Part II of My Garden (Book).

"To Name is to Possess" and "The Glasshouse"

In the essays "To Name is to Possess" and "The Glasshouse," Kincaid descends back in time and revisits colonial assertions of ownership, and possession, which include classifying native plant species by renaming, collecting, and ordering. In "The Glasshouse," Kincaid expands on plant collection, transportation, and transplantation. Kincaid notes that the collection and transplantation of living things are acts of conquest associated with colonial figures like George Clifford[10] and Carolus Linnaeus[11]. Here Kincaid reveals how botanical gardens expose the British Empire's pursuit to "isolate, name, objectify, possess various parts, people and things of the world" (143). To highlight the farce of a colonizer's history, Kincaid states, "new plants from far away, like the people from far away, had no histories, no names, and so they could be given names" (122). Of course, Kincaid is framing the colonial narrative as ridiculous. Since

thriving Carib societies inhabited the pre-colonial Caribbean, Kincaid dramatizes their erasure by stating the opposite, the impossible, that people had no history and no identity until Europeans found them.

Recovering narratives through rememory is linked to recovering the language used to identify the land, people, and plants. When referring to the garden, Kincaid often refers to "proper" terminology of British nomenclature or "common" names when considering pre-colonial terms. Kincaid weighs the damage of these changes and negotiates to reclaim the names of the land and people. She verbalizes the role of rememory in renaming and reclaiming. Kincaid states:

> This naming of things is so crucial to possession –a spiritual padlock with the key thrown irretrievably away—that it is a murder, an erasing. It is not a surprise that when people have felt themselves prey to it (conquest), among their first acts of liberation is to change their names (Rhodesia[12] to Zimbabwe, LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka[13]). That the great mystery and much smaller joy of existence remain unchanged no matter what anything is called never checks the impulse to reach back and reclaim a loss, to try and make what happened look as if it had not happened at all. (122)

Here, Kincaid rescripts the trauma of colonial possession, in relationship to botany but simultaneously in connection to human and land possession, by identifying naming as "murder" or annihilation; she considers the loss of the self and the land. Her word choice reinforces the trauma and violence notable to rememory but also suggests that the process of rememory is corrective (122). Kincaid calls rememory "The impulse to reach back and reclaim a loss," and thus renaming becomes an act of liberation (122). In this example, renaming acts to recover physical locations, like Zimbabwe, but also reaffirms the land of Zimbabwe is part of Africa

rather than an object or possession of the British Empire. Similarly, self-selected renaming has the potential to reconnect a person with their identity. Kincaid refers to poet and writer Amiri Baraka, who (like Kincaid) renamed themselves. As Kincaid considers the colonizer's role in possessing the land and plants of Africa and the Caribbean, we must consider what it means to create one's name as a reclamation of what is lost to colonized history. The end of this passage is the most complex as Kincaid deals with rememory in the presence of erasure. As she considers the liberation of renaming, she simultaneously addresses the "great mystery" of colonial forgetting, which disregards African diasporic trauma. So "reaching back to reclaim a loss" might now be read as an absence of colonizer memory, "no matter what anything is called [they] never. . . reach back and reclaim a loss," but instead, they try to "make what happened look as if it had not happened at all" (122). Understanding this duality of perspective becomes increasingly crucial in the collection.

Rememory always conjures the past as a reference point and reasserts past meaning into the present moment. Rememory is the reckoning of the colonized existing in the colonizer's world. This duality becomes clear as Kincaid mulls about her Vermont garden and imagines her physical appearance in contrast to Antigua.

> There was a day not long ago when I realized with a certain amount of bitterness that I was in my garden, a flower garden, a garden planted only because I wished to have such a thing, and that I knew how I wanted it to look and knew the name, proper and common, of each thing growing in it. In the place I am from, I would have been the picture of shame: a woman covered with dirt, smelling of manure, her hair flecked with white dust (powdered lime), her body a cauldron of smells pleasing to her and her back crooked with pain from bending over. (121)

Kincaid presents the complications of colonial Antigua propriety and reveals the conditions of shame and social expectations of colonial Antigua, stating, "in the place I am from, I would have been the picture of shame" (121). Cognizant that she should appear "proper" rather than "common" mirrors post-colonial proper naming and orderliness. Like "proper" plant names, proper appearance is a colonial construction. Kincaid should conform to a proper and socially acceptable appearance and behavior. She asserts that the woman she is today, a woman covered with dirt, lime, and manure, does not conform to this ideal. Yet, this image and remnant of colonial Antiguan social expectation appear in her thinking, writing, and rememory.

Similarly, evoking "common" plant names opposes "proper" colonial labels. Kincaid's knowledge and recognition of both *common* and *proper* plant names indicate a pre-colonial knowing and a post-colonial knowing which locates her in the position of the colonized and the colonizer. Kincaid depicts the dual aspects of propriety and botany, but she also describes her physical self in a flower garden, symbolic of wealth and privilege. According to Kincaid, owning and cultivating a flower garden is an admission to the frivolity of her habit because the garden does not produce food.

In "To Name is to Possess," Kincaid furthers the idea of frivolity and utility in the garden as she confronts how rememory as a colonized person, and her comforts living in the colonized world collide. Kincaid speaks from the position of the colonizer as she admires the beautiful *astilbe* and *ranunculus* leaves in her garden. She considers the cost of her hobby and confides, "I have joined the conquering class: who else could afford this garden—a garden in which I grow things that would be much cheaper to buy at the store? My feet are (so to speak) in two worlds" (123). Kincaid interprets life in her beautiful Vermont garden as assimilation into a privileged class (123). Her hobby, which she describes as "thrilling" and something pleasurable,

contrasts Antiguan gardens, which she describes as practical, consisting of trees that provide wood for the fire or soursop trees and squash vines that provide food (44). The process of rememory is evident in these contrasting versions of the garden; Kincaid's sense of a lavish Vermont garden interacts with her sense of Antiguan garden utility (123).

In the essay "What Joseph Banks Wrought," Kincaid expresses how flower gardening reveals social class in colonial Antigua. Here rememory functions symbolically in the flower garden as Kincaid associates garden rememory with sustenance and survival rather than frivolous flowers, which as a symbol of excess, causes her "bitterness" (120).

> The ones [ordinary Antiguans that are descendants of enslaved Africans] who had some money and so could live in a house with more than one room, had gardens in which only flowers were grown, and this would make even more clear that they have some money, because all their outside space was not devoted to only feeding their families but also to the sheer beauty of things. (133)

Once again, Kincaid identifies how aspects of her Caribbean identity interact with her adult life in New England. Kincaid enjoys planting and cultivating her garden for pleasure. Rememory aligns the flower garden with wealth and privilege, the aesthetics of gardening with the colonizer. Rememory imposes ideas of colonial Antiguan garden constructions into Kincaid's present, but Kincaid is the colonized, cultivating the aesthetic garden for pleasure rather than survival. Kincaid begins to shift the narrative.

"In History"

Kincaid concludes Part II of the *My Garden (Book)* with the essay "In History," which both opens and closes with rhetorical questioning. In the opening, Kincaid asks: "What to call the

thing that happened to me and all who look like me? Should I call it history? If so, what should history mean to someone who looks like me?" (153). Yet now, Kincaid interprets "history" from rememory, and we see evidence of recovery, Kincaid reclaims her position in recreating history. First, she addresses the imposition of the categorial imperative, and then she retells the story.

> The invention of this system [Linnaean taxonomy] has been a good thing. Its narrative would begin in this way: In the beginning, the vegetable kingdom was chaos; people everywhere called the same things by a name that made sense to them, not by a name arrived at by an objective standard. But who has an interest in an objective standard? Who needs one? It makes me ask again, What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me? Should I call it history? And if so, what should history mean to someone who looks like me? Should it be an idea; should it be an open wound, each breath I take in and expel healing and opening the wound again, over and over, or is it a long moment that begins anew each day since 1492? (166)

Reasserting a position of power by retelling the story, Kincaid restates the absurdity of the colonial narrative. Kincaid does a few things here; first, she again draws attention to the order and form imposed by Linnaean taxonomy, but then, she constructs a narrative of her own. She writes, "its narrative would begin in this way" (166). This setup of the new telling brings the story back into existence. Kincaid clears the history of Linnaeus and retells the story with the absurdity implied by the colonial narrative that Antigua needed this order. Kincaid also reformulates the tale as a Judo-Christian narrative. Mirroring the first lines of the book of *Genesis*, "In the beginning, there was light," Kincaid writes, "In the beginning, the vegetable kingdom was chaos" (166). Kincaid then shifts to a serious tone stating that "objective standards" are not the same as the "names that make sense" (166). She rejects the categorial imperatives of

imperialism, "but who has an interest in an objective standard? Who needs one?" (166). Kincaid rejects colonial imposed order, but as with the dual aspects of her identity, she is also aware that colonial order is ever-present and influences contemporary Vermont and present-day Antigua.

The process of rememory forms repeating parallels between the colonizer and the colonized, the Lesser Antilles and New England, and it influences Kincaid's writing. The identifying characteristics of movements in time and place reveal Kincaid's complex roots in colonial Antiguan history and her cultural ties to the African diaspora. Rememory becomes a reckoning to engage with the power of liberation through renaming and retelling, forcing the reader to consider that colonialism is not the only model of history, not the only model of storytelling, and not the only way to engage with the garden. Kincaid rejects the colonizer's view of history and asserts that new names and narratives must be present for recovery. She states, "In almost every account of an event that has taken place sometime in the last five hundred years, there is always a moment when I feel like placing an asterisk somewhere in the text and at the end of the official story making my own addition" (164).

At the end of Part II of My Garden (Book), Kincaid closes the historical lens of rememory, but there is a hint of forward momentum. Part I concluded in a stark winter landscape. Part II expresses winter survival as Kincaid excavates fallacies of colonizing history by cultivating counter stories, giving voice to the colonized. At the same time, Part III denotes the arrival of spring, which signifies recovery and co-existence.

Chapter 4

Part III: Spring- Rememory and Recovery

"A Letter to Dan Hinkley and Robert Jones, the Proprietors of Heronswood Nursery" is the first of seven final essays in Part III of *My Garden (Book).* The essay is a letter from Kincaid to friends Dan and Robert, who share Kincaid's passion for gardening. Before I briefly dive into the letter's content, it is essential to note this is the first time a letter appears in the collection. The form of the letter is the second break from the essay style in *My Garden (Book)*; the first is the fruit tree order in "An Order to a Fruit Tree Nursey Through the Mail," which itemized a list of fruit trees with pricing and inventory numbers. "An Order to a Fruit Tree Nursey Through the Mail" marks the opening of Part II, and "A Letter to Dan Hinkley and Robert Jones, the Proprietors of Heronswood Nursey" marks the beginning of Part III.

While both opening essays denote a break in the essay form, they also represent shifts in time. In "An Order to a Fruit Tree Nursey Through the Mail," Kincaid dates the order to January 1994 and states she wrote the order six years earlier. "A Letter to Dan Hinkley and Robert Jones, the Proprietors of Heronswood Nursery" is dated March 6, 1996. These dates display a narrative jump in time and relocate the reader. The reader moves to the moment the fruit tree list is composed and later to the moment Kincaid corresponds with her friends Robert and Dan. In "A Letter to Dan Hinkley and Robert Jones, the Proprietors of Heronswood Nursey," Kincaid asserts this shift in time to relocate the reader instantly. The form of the letter announces the time, while rememory interacts with time fluidly without boundaries.

Kincaid appears to use the letter to communicate where she has been. She tells her friends, "I am back home from a million-mile tour. If there was any justice to these things, I would get so rich that I would never have to do it again. But there is no justice, and there never

will be, so there" (169). This allows Kincaid to describe the long journey. Is the "million-mile tour" Kincaid refers to a book tour? Is she referring to her trip to China, revealed later in "Plant-Hunting in China"? Instead of a physical journey, Kincaid may return from the millions of miles traveled through time and place in the process of rememory as she reconstructed Antiguan history. "I am back home from my million-mile tour" is the first line after the salutation (169). If we consider Kincaid's statement associated with the work of rememory, then a "million-mile tour" becomes the journey in Part II. The form of the letter allows Kincaid to explain to the reader where they have been together without a didactic tone and affirms rememory functions to shift space/location in storytelling.

The letter also expresses Kincaid's experience of the journey, or "million-mile tour" (169). In many ways, Kincaid is returning from a long trek and gasping for air, but sadly, it is the same stale air in the same place, unchanged in justice and environment. She states, "there is no justice, and there never will be" (169). Her historical narrative exploration and winter survival has remained the same, the systems of colonialism are still in place. Although defeating, this reveals the para-colonial position of the author; she is conscious and attuned to modern colonial systems; those systems dominate not just the narrative past but the present, and they fail to administer justice upon themselves today and "never will" in the future" (169).

Yet there is a movement toward something new; at the end of this letter, Kincaid grounds the reader in her physical location and the season, which, she has reminded us, is precious to the gardener. She asks her friends, "Is it March where you both are? It is March here," which urges the reader to consider that the receipt of Kincaid's letter may not correspond to the time she sent it. Unlike the letter shifting time, this association with time is an act of rememory because Kincaid is conscious of the past and future as intertwined and existing simultaneously. Her

recipients, Dan and Robert, might read this letter at any point in the future, and much like rememory, it brings winter along with it.

Furthering the winter season, Kincaid likens herself and the emotional journey of the Part II section to a long dark winter. She compares herself to winter, indicating the journey through the counter-stories of Part II was cold and dark. "[W]inter is behaving like me when I am somewhere I like to be and can sense that I am making all my companions miserable by not behaving and not knowing it is time to leave. I shall go now" (170). In a relatable metaphor, Kincaid acknowledges that the narrative upheaval of history may have made the reader uncomfortable. She spent the long winter season reconstructing a painful past creating misery for her audience. Kincaid understands that her reader may be uncomfortable with the narratives stirred by rememory. Although she is aware of the discomfort, like Morrison, who advocates for throwing "the reader into an alien environment," Kincaid seems to acknowledge the intention of her position (Morrison *Beloved* xii). She expands on this autonomy by stating, "I shall go now" (170). This movement allows Kincaid to shift forward from winter and the reconstruction of counter-stories into her springtime garden.

"Spring"

> "The winter was unbearable, as usual, but this one just past seemed an exaggeration. The sky was always too low, too gray, the ground was too high (it was the snow), and too white. The days were too short, the nights were too long and darker still. Then one day by the calendar it was spring; not too long after that, an actual spring-like day appeared"
>
> —Jamaica Kincaid, *My Garden (Book)*

"And on that day when it was really spring, it was all about us, everything that was still alive was in bud, and the sun was warm, we were sitting in it and had to take off our jackets, it was possible to see some of what had survived."

—Jamaica Kincaid, *My Garden (Book)*

In the following essay, "Spring," Kincaid returns to a familiar landscape, which in many ways mirrors Part I of the book, children in the yard, rabbits upsetting her vegetables, slugs taking up residence, and fantasies of eradicating both the furry vegetable thieves and the slimy invaders. Rememory is less of a transportive process in "Spring" but reappears in symbolic connections between Kincaid's gardenscape and implications of belonging or not belonging in that garden. In her North Bennington garden, she acknowledges and resists the co-existence of all beings. The process of rememory operates from the position of para-colonialism. Kincaid exists in the new spring season, identifying with the colonized and the colonizer.

With the onset of spring, Kincaid wants to protect her garden by ridding it of the pests which invade, eat, and destroy the plants. The spring rabbits threaten her vegetable garden, and Kincaid expresses her thinking, "How I wish I could transform myself into an enormous, vividly striped animal that with a few bounds could approach the cavorting rabbits and, with a playful sway of a large paw, grab them playfully and toss them into the air. The joy I would get from hearing the snap-snap of their little necks breaking in mid-air" (171). In this excerpt, Kincaid expresses an escalating and brutal response to preserving her garden. She also reveals how protective she is over her space. It is worth noting that Kincaid does not consider other ways to keep the pests out, such as fencing or poison, but rather imagines a large predator to expel her unwanted visitors. The predator image might reveal a natural order to the garden, a way to deal with invasive species or invaders, or as the colonizer attacking the native inhabitants, the rabbits.

The process of rememory creates this complex reaction forcing the reader to shift positions to protect the garden, or perhaps side with the native inhabitants.

Existing in a para-colonial state creates tension in Kincaid's garden; there are animals to keep out and weeds to remove, plants to cultivate, and new varieties to buy. Kincaid spends time and energy determining what plants and animals are beneficial to her garden and which plants and animals are harmful. Soon, Kincaid turns her attention to herself as an inhabitant of the garden.

> I was standing….under an extremely tall hemlock, I heard the angry screech of a bird; I recognized the sound of a mother feeling the beings she loves are in danger, and so I look up and found the nest just above my head….I felt much sympathy and tried to tell her that even though I did not like her eating the sweet-peas when I had just planted them and hunting down my earthworms, she was in no danger from me, she and all who look like her were in no danger from me. (174-175).

Here rememory is a collaborative background process occurring as Kincaid associates what one "looks like" with a sense of being in danger. After Kincaid expresses sympathy for frightening the bird, she reiterates the opening and closing language from the Part II essay "In History," which reads, "What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me?" (166). Here Kincaid attempts to reassure the bird that "all who look like her [are] in no danger" (175). The process of rememory acts from known experience; Kincaid has sensed danger based on "looks." Kincaid affirms that being in danger results from looking a certain way. Even though this understanding is born from the perspective of the colonized, Kincaid also responds from the invader's position; she feels the urgency to declare her benign intent to the animal because she is aware that with invasion, there is a danger for those who are different. Here, even in a simple

garden experience, the wounds of racial violence inflicted on African diasporic people reemerge. Racialized violence stirs rememory; Kincaid relates her position in the garden as both the colonized and colonizer. She expresses her benevolence to this creature to communicate that she understands the bird's fear; she recognizes her position of power and the bird's powerlessness.

Kincaid reveals her absolute rule of the garden does not favor all creatures. At the end of the essay "Spring," a moment of revenge results from a sense of injustice. Kincaid reacts harshly to the ongoing effects of colonialism. Kincaid learns the story of a garden hand, Eric Smith, who was fascinated with breeding hostas. The wealthy garden owner fired Smith for not doing his work. Smith died shortly after that. The unnamed hostas Smith bred were found in the compost and became known as "The Tardiana of Eric Smith" (177). After telling the story, Kincaid notes that a British publication belittles this given name and goes about "distancing Eric Smith from the real world of hostas" (178). Kincaid, aggrieved by this imperialist rejection of Smith's name and work, goes out into her garden and collects a jar full of slugs "with an impassioned sense of grievance against them (they had eaten the delphiniums…)" (178). In the company of her children, she then dehydrates the slugs with a teaspoon of salt on a marble slab. Kincaid positions herself as the colonizer collecting and destroying the slugs. Like the rabbits, the slugs may be native to her garden, but they also destroy the plants, so Kincaid saves what she claims is her space and simultaneously kills native inhabitants. Her reaction occurs from a sense of injustice concerning the common naming of plants. Belittling the common name of the "The Tardiana of Eric Smith" and declaring the given name "illegitimate" imposes an outer sense of possession by the British publication *The Genus Hosta* by W. George Schmid. Kincaid resists Schmid's right to possess or reclassify Smith's hosta and the slugs for their transgressions.

"Spring" reflects how Kincaid responds to living inside an ecosystem and a hegemonic colonial system intertwined. In a physical and symbolic sense of belonging and exclusion, the garden becomes the ecological borderlands of the colonizer and the colonized. Kincaid still exists and thrives amidst all of it. She often recognizes the systems, and even with the onset of strong emotions and physical reactions (like the rabbits and slugs), she appears to seek a balance between recognizing colonialism and rejecting it. She has now colonized her little plot of land and must decide what stays and what goes, and although the new and great power that she wields is a sense of self-sovereignty, it is not without her consideration and comparisons to the Antiguan past.

"The Garden in Eden"

The final essay of *My Garden (Book)*, "The Garden in Eden," offers an omniscient perspective of the garden but expands to consider what exists outside the garden's borders and the permeability of the boundaries between Eden and the wild. Kincaid zooms out from the immediate landscape and connects the Judo-Christian theological origin story of Adam and Eve with the order imposed by colonization. Kincaid uses the example of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge to indicate the cultivated and organized nature of the garden Eden as a model for all future gardens (222).

In this essay, rememory works to unite the wild/uncultivated spaces with cultivars and organized spaces. The Garden of Eden has a perimeter between what is cultivated and orderly and what is banished and wild. Kincaid is far from home, on a seed-collecting tour in China. Feeling foreign and familiar, she compares the rugged wild landscape to her garden in Vermont and the garden of Eden. "Everything I saw before me was in a state of banishment as was I . . .

and so I thought (again) of the garden I had left at home, which was orderly, and meant to be orderly, then I was reminded of the garden Eden, the garden to which all gardens must refer" (223). Here Kincaid recognizes Eden as orderly, the model garden of all gardens, and yet she also acknowledges that everything outside that model is in a state of banishment, including herself. Then Kincaid begins to consider the unity of all things outside of Eden with the garden of Eden, "if I was in the original garden (or part of it, always part of it) Eden, or something like it, only this time turned inside out" (226).

Kincaid fuses the garden Eden and the wild by recognizing that cultivars and weeds co-exist. As she walks along the mountainside, she names familiar plant varieties and unrecognized weeds and considers what was once familiar is now wild and that cultivars exist in the wild.

> Walking up and down the mountains, walking into forests mostly of rhododendrons, and then sometimes a small crop of paris or hydrangeas or enkianthus or maples or, coming out of the forest, on the edge of it, finding some apples or something so unfamiliar I would have to call Ron Pembroke (he is the person who removes or places trees in my part of Vermont) to remove things that looked to me like weeds. (222)

Thousands of miles away from her Vermont garden and the childhood landscape of Antigua, Kincaid recognizes familiar cultivars in the wild terrain of China. She identifies these species by name, "paris," "hydrangeas," "enkianthus," and "maple"; she has purchased them in the past. She also acknowledges that among these species, there are "things that [look] like weeds," admitting that their unfamiliar character makes them the target of expulsion in an orderly landscape (222).

Like the Garden of Eden, the garden's orderly, colonized, and cultivated space indicates a border, an end, a wall, another side, an otherness, a wild to which Adam and Eve are banished. This line of demarcation divides the orderly colonial model from the wild other. In the

book *Gardenland*, Jennifer Wren Atkinson considers that "The Garden of Eden story through exclusion and expulsion…. human, nonhuman, Indigenous and immigrant, those who are rooted in native soil and those transplanted from other lands" (Atkinson 200). Similarly, in a 1998 interview, Toni Morrison reckons that "the nature of Paradise: it's really defined by who is *not* there as well as who is" (Morrison "This Side"). In Kincaid's home garden, she has already negotiated belonging and not-belonging. She does not deny the inclusionary or exclusionary borders but reveals their permeability.

> The garden [Eden] was in a state of banishment; I was in the wild, the garden had become the wild and I was in it (even though all the time I was really in China). I tried to bring everything back in, for I had (have) come to see that a garden, to make a garden, is partly an attempt to do that, to bring in from the wild as many things as can be appreciated, as many things as it is possible for a gardener to give meaning to, as many things as it is possible for a gardener to understand. (Kincaid 226)

Kincaid recognizes her efforts in the garden are a measure of bringing together a collection of things that have meaning. The borders of the Edenic garden and the wild is dissolving, but similarly, the boundary between colonization and all things interacting with colonization is dissolving. The breach comes from the self-created garden constructed of all things Edenic and wild, cultivar and weed, ordered and unarranged. "To bring things in from the wild" is to dilute colonized spaces, to create and cultivate spaces of "banished" things, and to assign meaning (perhaps names) to those things. Kincaid speaks here as if liberating the garden by reconnecting the orderly garden to the wild. Still, even in this context and realization, she cannot escape colonialism's influences, which ground much of the arguments for global expansion on similar

notions of collection and assigning names and meaning. Kincaid may speak to the inevitability of colonialism, or she may speak more broadly to the nature of human beings.

Kincaid sees the interconnectedness of the colonizer's Eden and the wild landscape. Still, this metaphor extends to a more significant acceptance of her position as both the colonized and the colonizer. Kincaid is not affixing self-identifying labels but is accepting the workings of rememory as a fluid; as time and space alter history, reconstruct it, and shift form, she evolves to a similar state of fluidity. Here rememory allows permeation of the borders between the Edenic garden and the wild, but also the colonizer and the Afro-Caribbean self.

Conclusion

"Why is custom so customary, so unrelenting, so without deviations?"

—Jamaica Kincaid, "America"

In *My Garden (Book),* Jamaica Kincaid uses a passion for gardening and storytelling skills to cultivate healing while rebuilding silenced Antiguan narratives. Throughout Kincaid's essays, the process of rememory repeatedly appears, it moves through the text breaking down the borders of time and place, history and memory, and the colonial order that defines the garden and its perimeter. As rememory moves the influential past into the present, it disrupts the linear westernized model of time and narrative form. This disruption is apparent in the collection's macro-organization and the micro-organization of grammar.

Kincaid is not tethered by standards of grammar and form. As you may have noted in the examined passages, on the micro-level, she frequently uses sentence fragments, skips expected punctuation, and includes recursive, paralleled, or wandering thought patterns in interruptive parenthesis. On the macro level, she mixes lists and letters, ignores chapter titles, and fractures and unifies the story thread through the collection. Arguably all processes, both small and large, are an extension of the disruptive act of rememory.

From the first-person perspective, Kincaid speaks as the authority through the essay and directly conveys her experience and knowledge of gardens and history to the reader. Although I sense a reluctance toward didacticism, *My Garden (Book)* offers many beautiful lessons from Kincaid's personal experience. In the book *In Search of Rivers*, Jacqueline Jones Royster considers how the essay form offers the experiential narrative of Womanist writers and the opportunity for healing.

> The essay has tremendous flexibility across a range of rhetorical, ideological, experiential, and aesthetic choices. It is capable of serving multiple purposes, including

> informative and persuasive purposes, which can also include using the essay as an instrument of healing, that is, for purposes that are cathartic, purgative, and affirmative; that release and direct energy; that cleanse the heart, spirit, and the physical body in order to harmonize the self; that speak "truth," in saying to oneself and others what needs to be said in the interest of sanity, harmony, and balance. (Royster 23)

Royster, like Judith Herman, asserts a healing value to narrative reconstruction. Kincaid's essay collection offers recovery and healing for African diasporic people and a natural world that is similarly changed, shaped, and altered by colonialism.

Kincaid may favor the essay to convey healing ideas because the form resists American literature tropes that perpetuate colonization's traumas rather than offer healing. Kincaid expresses resistance to the Anglo-centered writing model in the essay "America," published *Universitätsverlag WINTER Heidelberg*. Kincaid is critical of the work of Zora Neale Hurston. She acknowledges Hurston's talent and credits her as essential to all African diasporic writers but states, "I have never liked her work" (601). Kincaid explains that Hurston operates inside the familiar, unchanging Master and Slave narrative, noting that the tropes are dependent on one another and therefore perpetuate a dependent existence. Kincaid sees this as "small-minded" yet familiar in American literature (600). She does not disparage Hurston's writing; in fact, she states, "so much good writing exists in it . . . It's just that sometimes, it seems so unworthy to go on this way" (600). Kincaid asserts that maintaining westernized narrative frames is American, not African American. She deems Hurston an "American" and states, "I always feel, why doesn't she resist this? Why must the weight of history feel like a prison cell that is situated at the greatest depth of the ocean? Why is custom so customary, so unrelenting, so without deviations?" (600). Kincaid is not deconstructing the western narrative for Anglo-

Europeans, but rather the use of the Anglo-European model by African diasporic writers. Her critical perspective is not about the quality of Hurston's writing or her ability to tell a story but how Hurston's stories model those of the colonizer. Through the example of Hurston, she asserts that African diasporic writers cannot grow and heal if constructing stories with the tropes and forms born from colonization. Kincaid asks, what "makes you, you, makes you part of a group, yet makes you something that no invented condition can contain?" (600). She asks if the African diasporic experience of being, the experience of rememory, deserves another type of narrative model.

As I listen to Kincaid speak in this essay, I return to Audre Lorde's speech "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in which Lorde proposes, "It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support" (102). Lorde's speech calls on all women to consider new ways to counter dominant systems of oppression. In "America," Kincaid's concern is that if African diasporic writers silently participate in these systems, they also silently maintain them. It seems that Kincaid asserts this narrative resistance in *My Garden (Book).*

Kincaid's authority as an Afro-Caribbean woman speaking through essays, combines with rememory and the disrupted text to oppose westernized systems of grammar, tropes and narrative structure. Kincaid also uses her voice and style in *My Garden (Book)* to display the parallel histories of colonized Antigua. She invents her narrative conditions and uses rememory to explore history and herself.

I am grateful for Kincaid's strong position in *My Garden (Book).* As a woman from the south—but not quite as far south as Jamaica Kincaid—Kincaid's narrative style makes me appreciate and seek stories on the periphery; those that resist and upset the Euro-centered narrative to express the authentic self, like those stirred from rememory. I close my conversation with Kincaid’s work, with her words, which I imagine she speaks directly to me, with me.

> And so in a conversation with such a person (a gardener), a sentence, a thought that goes something like this—' You know, when I was such and such an age, I went to the market for a reason that is no longer of any particular interest to me, but it was there I saw for the first time something I have never and can never forget'—float's out into the clear air, and the person from who these words or thought emanates is standing in front of you all bare and trembly, full of feeling, full of memory. Memory is a gardener’s real palette; memory as it summons up the past; memory as it shapes the present; memory as it dictates the future. (Kincaid 218)

Notes

1 Virginia Esther Hamilton (1936-2002), African- American children's book author who, along with Toni Morrison, defines rememory and its use.
2 Based on data from NATIONAL CENSUS REPORT ANTIGUA & BARBUDA 2016 (pp.25).
3 Based on data from Bureau, United States Census 2020.
4 Obeah is an African diasporic spiritual practice still present in the Caribbean.
5 The Carib people are Indigenous to the Lesser Antilles islands.
6 Waladli or Wadadli is the Indigenous name for Antigua.
7 "History of Antigua" sourced Embassy.ag
8. Kimberlé Crenshaw. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1991).
9 Ecopoetics draws on "connections between human activity—specifically the making of poems—and the environment that produces it; ecopoetics rose out of the late 20th-century awareness of ecology and concerns over environmental disaster. A multidisciplinary approach that includes thinking and writing on poetics, science, and theory and emphasizing innovative approaches common to conceptual poetry, ecopoetics is not quite nature poetry". *Poetry Foundation* "Glossary of Poetic Terms."
10 George Clifford- (1685-1760) A wealthy Dutch bank, director of the Dutch East India Company, who owned a botanical garden at Hartekamp in Heemsetde. Clifford employed Linnaeus and sponsored his research.
11 Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), A Swedish physician and botanist famous for formalizing binomial, a formal system for naming species of living things.
12 Rhodesia was the British name imposed during the colonization of modern-day Zimbabwe from 1965 to 1979.
13 Amiri Baraka (1934-2014) was an acclaimed African-American writer.

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