Introduction

The first chapter showed how literary representations of islands consistently depict colonized space as picturesque without any acknowledgement of individual experience. Jamaica Kincaid’s writing places the aesthetic within an historical and cultural perspective linking the realities of labour to the picturesque. The correlation of gardening and imperial conquest in her work disrupts the concept of paradise which is engaged in colonial discourse.

Kincaid’s non-fiction texts *A Small Place* and *My Garden (book)*: reveal a link between the two locations of Antigua and North America indicative of Kincaid’s origins and subsequent diasporic position. While her novels focus on mother/daughter relationships, these non-fictional texts, by contrast, are concerned with identities and locations. Consideration of these books will be followed by a discussion of her latest book, *Among Flowers*, a travel narrative. The three texts refer to different stages of Kincaid’s life. *A Small Place* relates her view of her homeland, Antigua, nearly twenty years after leaving and is a critique which controversially dismantles the paradisal image of the island in the context of postcolonial tourism. *My Garden (book)*: addresses issues of the powerful

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and the powerless as Kincaid links the garden to prosperity and conquest while discussing the creation of her Vermont garden. Kincaid explains that it dawned on her that the garden she was making resembled a map of the Caribbean; that the garden is for her an exercise in memory. She creates her garden as a way of getting back to her past, to retrieve her childhood space, and yet it is also an assertion of her own identity. Her search for plant seeds to create an ideal garden space is also to ‘rescue’ wild plants and can be related to her sense of displacement and desire to settle and create stability. Among Flowers describes her travels to collect plants in the Himalayas. The three texts convey her changing identity in a diasporic environment and also dismantle the myth of island paradise.

Kincaid states that Eden is the garden to which all gardens must refer. She reworks this myth in a postcolonial context, focusing on economic and power relationships and the slave labour that created ‘paradisal’ islands. Kincaid stresses the significance of the relationship between people and the garden:

Nothing is ever said about Eden once Adam and Eve leave. There’s no one to tend it […] it has an aesthetic value, as it also has a necessary value. It has food in it, but it also has a design. It is not only the tree of life; it has beauty in it. But the garden will vanish when you are not there.

The texts reveal how identities are culturally constructed and show how Kincaid composes a new history outside the framework of colonialism in a postcolonial environment.

Kincaid’s ambivalence towards her early life in Antigua is negotiated in distinct ways in My Garden (book): and A Small Place, partly by

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4 Kincaid, My Garden (book):, xiv.


6 Kincaid, My Garden (book):, 172.