

Introduction

“[F]or me history was not a large stage filled with commemoration, bands, cheers, ribbons, medals, the sound of fine glass clinking and raised high in the air; in other words, the sounds of victory. For me history was not only the past: it was the past and it was also the present. I did not mind my defeat, I only minded that it had to last so long,” muses Xuela, the narrator and protagonist of Jamaica Kincaid’s 1996 novel *The Autobiography of My Mother* (138–139). Xuela Claudette Richardson is the descendant of a Carib mother and an Afro-Scottish father; her narrative is set in Dominica in the early twentieth century. In sketching out the events of her life, the text presents Xuela as grappling with the history of colonialism in the Caribbean as it affects her in her everyday life.

Xuela’s estimation of history immediately calls attention to the power imbalances of history. On the one hand, this pertains to the historical subjugation of one group by another. On the other hand, “history” as a particular way of perceiving the past is firmly tied here to the side of the victors. Looking from the outside in, Xuela determines that “history” is being *done* in the present. In this, it is not solely to be understood as a reference to the past, but also to contemporary engagements with past events. History in this case is located in its performance on a stage of commemoration, in material products, such as ribbons or medals, and in the enactments that produce a sense of celebration, including the playing of music or the clinking of glasses. As such, history is constituted in the present.

The nexus of entangled temporalities, (re)enactments, and mediality that Xuela here identifies as the defining characteristic of history are at the center of this study of Kincaid’s writings. Asking what constitutes history and how literature intervenes in historical consciousness, I examine the media text, image, and the human body and their poetic and performative engagements with history in Kincaid’s fictional works.

Xuela differentiates between “history” and “past” on a temporal scale. History is not equated with past, but it continues into the present, muddling temporal levels through a pervasive simultaneity. Her own history that affects Xuela’s present differs from the history of the victors because of this temporal entanglement, which signifies an incompleteness when the effects of “victory” persist. She thus criticizes less what may have happened in the past than the continuation of defeat through the victors’ version of history as it is perpetually mediated in the present. Xuela’s critique points to a plurality of history – or rather histories – depending on the perspective.

Based on my reading of the above passage (among many others from Kincaid’s works), I understand the “past” as something that has happened in an earlier time

and to which we only have access through a range of media. This mediation can come as the commemoration made by the clinking of glasses or through written texts, or it can be sexual practices performed with human bodies. In each case, it is this medial fashioning that then turns the past into “history.” This is what makes the past available in the present, and which might thereby also repeat and perpetuate past power structures in the present. As I use it, the term “history” thus refers both to a consciousness of the past and to the various medial forms in which it is articulated, and which produce this consciousness. History is a representation of the past, always already filtered by the ideals and standards of those who produce such representations. Xuela sees the victors, i.e., the colonizers, as those who determine representations of the past.

Speaking for a collective that is faced with defeat, Xuela points to the exclusion of these voices from history.¹ However, in laying bare the medial entanglements and the possible plurality of histories, and by inserting her own voice into this negotiation, Xuela questions the colonial victory over discourses of history. Here, *she* is the one speaking about her own and her ancestors’ past, thus turning it into a form of history. And this is where the productive potential of Kincaid’s writings of history lies: such a postmodern understanding of history and historiography exposes the intentional production of historical discourse, i.e., its “made-ness.”² As such, it is fair game for anyone’s interventions – including those of Kincaid’s protagonists and narrators, such as Xuela, who are thus enabled to put forth their own versions of history, with their own perspectives and their own voices.

Towards the end of *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela determines that “[t]he past is a fixed point, the future is open-ended; for me the future must remain capable of casting a light on the past such that in my defeat lies the seed of my great victory, in my defeat lies the beginning of my great revenge” (215–216). While the past may appear fixed to Xuela, I argue that in Kincaid’s texts it is not. By looking at the past from a future that is yet to come, perspectives change, as Xuela suggests. A view that looks retrospectively from the future can see the possibility of victory and revenge in defeat. In this way, a back-and-forth motion in perspective destabilizes the fixity of the past – and even more so that of history – and decenters colonialism’s victory over discourse.

My analyses of medial engagements with history seek to highlight the poetics of impermanence that produce such change in Kincaid’s works. Through textual

1 For instance, about her lover Roland, an Afro-Caribbean stevedore in Dominica, she says, “[h]e did not have a history; he was a small event in somebody else’s history” (*The Autobiography of My Mother* 167).

2 In my use of the term “historiography,” I draw on Hayden White’s thoughts on historical representation in *Metahistory* and Frank Ankersmit’s *Historical Representation*.

strategies of ambivalence, referential redirection, repetition with a difference, and cyclical motions of narrative, the texts enact aspects of Caribbean colonial history in a way that creates multiplicities of perspectives, voices, and histories. In short, through poetic form they create presences where previously the eclipsing sounds of the victors had drowned out the voices of the defeated.

With the goal of describing and presenting Jamaica Kincaid's poetics as a discourse that performs impermanence through text, this study considers the author's major fictional works in addition to select shorter and nonfictional texts. The main part of my analyses focuses on the five novels *Annie John* (1985), *Lucy* (1990), *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), *Mr. Potter* (2002), and *See Now Then* (2013).³ Susheila Nasta fittingly describes Kincaid's oeuvre as a family album, with each book attending to individual members of an assumed family unit. The earlier texts *Annie John* and *Lucy* – as well as the shorter texts in *At the Bottom of the River* (1978) and the uncollected text "Biography of a Dress" (1992) – detail the lives of girls growing up and away from their nuclear families. *The Autobiography of My Mother* focuses on a mother figure and female genealogy,⁴ while *Mr. Potter* is interested in a father figure and explores a possible paternal genealogy. Finally, *See Now Then* details family life from a parental perspective.⁵ What all of these texts have in common is their presentation of colonial history and ideology as pervading all aspects of life. All of the novels are set in the twentieth century and highlight the intense entanglement of collective history with matters that are intensely personal as well as mundane – be it family life in *See Now Then*, menstruation in *Annie John*, or the hobby of photography in *Lucy*.⁶

These texts centrally negotiate the relationships of past, present, and history. They simultaneously demonstrate the absence of representations of the past that

3 From here on, I will use the following abbreviations when quoting from Kincaid's works: *AJ* for *Annie John*, *ABM* for *The Autobiography of My Mother*, *MP* for *Mr. Potter*, and *SNT* for *See Now Then*.

4 Chronologically, in 1997 follows *My Brother*; Jamaica Kincaid's non-fictional account of the loss of her brother to AIDS.

5 If read autobiographically, as some scholars do, this family album could be assumed to portray Jamaica Kincaid's own family. However, as these texts are fictional, I am interested in reading them as interconnected parts of a body of works, but not as direct continuations of each other. Nonetheless, see for instance Leigh Gilmore's informative thoughts on seriality in Kincaid's works (*The Limits of Autobiography*).

6 A second topical strand in the body of Kincaid's works is her travel and garden writing, including her monographs *A Small Place* (1988), *My Garden (Book)*: (1999), and *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya* (2005). These nonfictional texts (including *My Brother* (1997)) are hardly less complex in literary form, but as my main objective is to investigate the techniques of the fictional text in its engagements with history, my analyses refer to Kincaid's nonfictional works only on occasion.

would adequately relate to the various frameworks of the present in which the characters exist, and that critique the overbearing presence of representations that continuously frame the characters as inferior subjects to colonial ideals.⁷ In this, the texts grapple with history as a discursive construct that limits contemporary lives. In their resistances to overbearing colonial history, Kincaid's works dispute representational sovereignties over the past. Édouard Glissant describes the eclipsing presence of colonial history as a History "with a capital H. It is a totality that excludes other histories that do not fit into that of the West" (*Caribbean Discourse* 75). With "totality" Glissant here denotes "the unprecedented ambition of creating man in the image of the Western ideal" (*Caribbean Discourse* 75), i.e., Western discourse's claims to universality, which negate all other voices. Totality for Glissant is characterized by the superimposition of fixity and immobility (Glissant, *Poetics* 14, 171) on others. In contrast, he explains that the

Caribbean is the site of a history characterized by ruptures and that began with a brutal dislocation, the slave trade. Our historical consciousness could not be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment, as it were, as happened with those peoples who have frequently produced a totalitarian philosophy of history, for instance European peoples, but came together in the context of shock, contradiction, painful negation, and explosive forces. The dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of collective consciousness to absorb it all, characterize what I call a nonhistory. The negative effect of this nonhistory is therefore the erasure of collective memory. (*Caribbean Discourse* 61–62)

Glissant then calls on writers to face the shock of nonhistory. While literature has similarly functioned as an instrument of Western totality in that it equally epitomized the legitimacy of the West,⁸ it also bears the possibility for change: "[T]he writer must contribute to its [the Caribbean's] tormented chronology [...]. Literature for us will not be divided into genres but will implicate all perspectives of the human science. These inherited categories must not in this matter be an obstacle to a daring new methodology where it responds to the needs of our situation" (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 65). Glissant sees literature as capable of surmounting the impediment of nonhistory, the totality of established literary form, and the limits of scholarly fields. With the goal to speak to current needs, Glissant maintains, literature may produce new approaches to Caribbean past, present, and

⁷ Michael Dash concisely summarizes this problem in colonial contexts: "History ultimately emerges as a fantasy peculiar to the Western imagination in its pursuit of a discourse that legitimizes its power and condemns other cultures to the periphery" ("Introduction" xxix).

⁸ Glissant here refers to and generalizes the significance of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which elevates Prospero and neglects Caliban. See esp. 71–77 in *Caribbean Discourse* on the longstanding relations of history and literature, which Glissant identifies in their common projection of Western totality.

the precarious relationship of the temporalities.⁹ “The production of texts must also produce history, not in its capacity to facilitate some happening, but in its ability to raise a concealed world to the level of consciousness” (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 107).¹⁰ In this study, I show how Jamaica Kincaid’s works seemingly respond to this call to the pen in creatively engaging with history and producing Caribbean voices and perspectives previously absent from history.

In a literary writing of history, Glissant calls for a poetics that breaks with linearity and fixity of Western discourse. With his chaos theory, he offers a counterstrategy to fixation. For Glissant, chaos as a positive force means “the breakdown of systems of standardization and uniformity, of ‘l’universel généralisant’ that is produced by imperialistic ideologies. If chaos means the alternative to this homogenizing force, it does not signify incomprehensible turbulence,” as Michael Dash explains (*Édouard Glissant* 177).¹¹ Glissant advocates a “poetics that is latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with anything possible” (*Poetics* 32).¹² I read and further explore such openness in Kincaid’s texts with Henry Louis Gates’s concept of “Signifyin(g),” which explicates the rhetorical strategies of “repetition with a signal difference” and “black double-voicedness” (Gates, *Signifying Monkey* 51). Gates starts out with examining the construction of the linguistic sign as it is disrupted by Signifyin(g): as a sign that empties “the signifier [...] of its received concepts and fill[s] this empty signifier with [its] own concepts. By doing so, by supplanting the received standard English concept associated by (white) convention with this particular signifier, [it] (un)wittingly disrupt[s] the nature of the sign=*signified/signifier* equation itself” (Gates, *Signifying Monkey* 46, em-

9 See the following chapter on structures of time for a discussion of how Glissant proposes literature may take up historical discourse. There, I develop this notion in more detail and with regard to Kincaid’s *See Now Then*.

10 With what she calls “critical fabulation,” Saidiya Hartman proposes a similar approach to filling the gaps of history. However, Hartman is more reliant on historical archives, which Glissant is not interested in at all. See my discussion of Hartman in chapter 2.1. Birgit Neumann’s “fictions of memory” might also insert themselves in this field of absences in that they produce “imaginative (re)construction of the past in response to current needs” (334). However, I am not foremost interested in personal (or cultural) memory work per se, but in engagements with representations of history. The reflection of the workings of memory, which are part of Neumann’s concept, are thus not of central interest to my study.

11 See more on Glissant’s poetics of chaos in the following chapter on “Time.”

12 In this interest in non-linear writing, Glissant of course is not alone. For instance, Caribbean thinkers Kamau Brathwaite (Tidalectics), Derek Walcott (the sea and its multidirectional movements as metaphor for history), and Antonio Benítez-Rojo (The Repeating Island) have postulated similar poetics. See Eddie Baugh, “Literary Theory and the Caribbean.” Glissant, however, is especially useful in the context of my own study, as he lays bare the connection of literary form and colonial history.

phasis in original). In this, the signifier remains the same, but the signified is supplanted with the rhetorical strategies themselves (Gates, *Signifying Monkey* 47). Thus, “[d]irecting, or redirecting, attention from the semantic to the rhetorical level [...] allows us to bring repressed meanings of a word, the meanings that lie in wait on the paradigmatic axis of discourse to bear on the syntagmatic axis” (Gates, *Signifying Monkey* 58). Gates observes this on a tropological level as well as in intertextual relations.

As a fundamental thought concept, Signifyin(g) guides me in thinking about Kincaid’s repetitions with differences, when her texts negotiate received representations of the past that are changed to bring to light repressed versions. With Gates, I am particularly interested in formal revisions of text and image that then produce revisions of their significations. Through repetition and redirection, I argue, Kincaid’s works dissipate representational fixity – especially in binary structures, which Glissant identifies as a key feature of Western totality. Hence, my general theoretical approach draws on both Gates’s and Glissant’s work to understand how formal revision constitutes resistances to the History with a capital *H* in Kincaid’s works.¹³

To describe Kincaid’s poetics, I use the term “impermanence.” Glissant emphasizes a resistance to fixity, which I also find in Kincaid’s works in various textual movements that effect impermanence. I take the term “impermanence” from a 2020 essay by Kincaid, in which she employs the image of a snow dome to laud the possibility of change through impermanence. Shaking everything up makes it possible for slightly changed views on the landscape within the dome to emerge.¹⁴ The present study shows how Kincaid’s writings of history shake up perspectives on the past, again and again, by changing representations and reenacting the past in different ways. Text, images, and performative acts shake up history, just as the plastic snowflakes in the snow dome are given a good shake from time to time. With the “poetics of impermanence,” I thus seek to describe the techniques that Kincaid’s texts use to approximate and appropriate history. Kincaid’s

13 Beyond this framework, in my individual analyses I operate with further theoretical angles as they pertain to the topics at hand. Among others Saidiya Hartman on critical fabulation (ch. 2.1), Renate Lachmann on intertextuality (ch. 2.2), Homi Bhabha on colonial mimicry (ch. 2.2), Bakhtin on heteroglossia (ch. 2.3), Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Harvey Young on photography (ch. 3), Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva on the grotesque (ch. 4.1), Judith Butler on performativity (ch. 4.2), Anne McClintock on S/M (ch. 4.2). My discussions of these and other theoretical positions take place in my analytical chapters, where theory is directly applied to the results of my close readings. What all of these theoretical approaches have in common is their deconstruction of binarities through multiplication or transgression, which reflects my general interests in this study.

14 See the epilogue of this study for a detailed discussion of Kincaid’s “Inside the American Snow Dome.”

poetics of impermanence encompass a range of literary techniques and textual motions that operate similarly. Foremost, repetition with a difference in Gates's sense allows new meanings to emerge of what has already been written and read. Repetitions and reiterations create a back and forth between old and new meanings; nevertheless, this is no pendular movement between two fixed poles, as binaries are dismantled when the back-and-forth moves past starting points, re-examining and removing them in the process. This poetics thus redirects perspectives to previously unnoticed aspects. It performs and reenacts with differences or different actors to create presences in a history that previously was marked by absences. In these movements, the texts stage approximations and distancing towards individual topics and ideas that can at times remain arrested in the in-between. Yet in-betweenness here never signals stasis, but rather a refusal to decide. In a similar way, the lack of movement that can be found in some moments of the texts points paradoxically to the perpetual motions of Kincaid's poetics. Ultimately, all of the poetic motions I describe throughout this study perform a radical opposition to History with a capital *H* and the fixity of Western discourse as Glissant describes it. Kincaid's poetics of impermanence, I contend, decenters the stasis and totality of history and opens renditions of the past to ambiguity and multiplicity, by which different notions and perspectives on history are produced.

The conceptual approaches by Gates and Glissant and a focus on formal aspects have so far found little resonance in major studies of Kincaid, although scholarly attention to her works has certainly not been lacking since the 1980s. Since the mid-1990s, a dozen book-length publications have published on Jamaica Kincaid's works. Early studies (Simmons, *Jamaica Kincaid*, 1994; Ferguson, *Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body*, 1994) accomplish important foundational work in opening up Kincaid's texts to an academic audience.¹⁵ They largely explore the texts from the perspective of content and broadly sketch out important themes and fields of interest that were later taken up by other scholars, such as the mother-daughter relationships, treatments of colonial history, migration, feminism. My work draws from these broad-ranging scholarly foundations to focus in more closely on individual analyses based on detailed readings paired with select theoretical approaches in order to attend to the Kincaid's poetics.

Generally, book-length studies of Kincaid's works up to date explore two interlocking academic interests – the recurring and complicated mother-daughter rela-

15 See also Paravisini-Gebert, *Jamaica Kincaid: A Critical Companion* (1999), Edwards, *Understanding Jamaica Kincaid* (2007), or Snodgrass, *Jamaica Kincaid: A Literary Companion* (2008).

tionships pervading most of Kincaid's texts,¹⁶ and their (auto)biographical aspects. This is also the case for the vast majority of shorter academic investigations of Kincaid's oeuvre. Indeed, many scholars read Kincaid's novels as thinly veiled autobiographies, and some even equate their protagonists with the real-life author.¹⁷ Particularly Leigh Gilmore's and Jana Evans Braziel's work on autobiographical aspects is noteworthy in this context. Both scholars develop their observations on (auto)biographical features in Kincaid's texts into fruitful reflections on genre, and both propose to think about new categories of autobiographical writing. Braziel suggests "alterbiography" as a form of life writing that expresses collective concerns, while Gilmore challenges the idea of autobiographical completeness with her notion of "serial autobiography."¹⁸ My own study differs from this body of secondary literature in that I am not interested in examining Kincaid's works for traces of the author's life or in ascribing the texts with existing or new genre categories.¹⁹ Instead, I draw on questions of generic form only to interrogate the textual strategies in Kincaid's texts that perform subjectivities and thus withstand colonial silencing within the texts.²⁰ My focus is on what the texts *do*, not on what they *are* in terms of categorization. Nor am I interested in extensive readings of Kincaid's mother figures for their own sake. As mentioned, other scholars have sufficiently covered this area of research. Although I cannot and do not leave the mother(s) unmentioned in my own inquiries into treatments of colonial history

16 For instance Bouson, *Jamaica Kincaid: Writing Memory, Writing Back to the Mother* (2005), Brancato, *Mother and Motherland in Jamaica Kincaid* (2005), Dance, *In Search of Annie Drew: Jamaica Kincaid's Mother and Muse* (2016). Dance's monograph is especially noteworthy here. While other readings rather focus on the mother within Kincaid's works – often reading her allegorically for a mother-country (see for instance Paravisini-Gebert, Brancato, Ferguson), Dance sets out to recover the actual Ms. Annie Drew, i.e., the mother of the author, who evidently inspired the texts' fictional mother figures. Based on her meticulous research and interviews (esp. in Antigua), Dance paints a picture of Annie Drew and thus seeks to exonerate her from the less than charitable representations in Kincaid's fictional works. Dance's biographical project moreover exemplifies the typically colluded readings of (auto)biography and fiction in Kincaid's works in which the mother figure all too frequently is 'decoded' as the author's real mother.

17 For specific attentions to possible autobiographical aspects, see for instance Ferguson, Bouson, Donnell, Coppola, Cousineau, or Paquet.

18 See chapter 2.3 on genre in Kincaid's works for a detailed discussion of Gilmore's and Braziel's approaches to life writing.

19 Hence, a description of the author's life is not included with this introduction. As elements of Kincaid's biography are, however, relevant to her situatedness in literary canons, a contextualization of Kincaid's person and work is part of chapter 2.2 on intertextuality.

20 See chapter 2.3 "Writing between and across Genres." See also my analysis of the text-image relations in a play with authenticity in chapter 3.3 "Photographic Product(ion)s of History."

(especially for their representations of colonial ideals), I do see them as only one part of the power structures I expose in my analyses.

The two collections of articles edited by Harold Bloom and Linda Lang-Peralta, respectively, offer a representative overview of the range of topics generally covered by shorter analyses of Kincaid's works (besides the foci on mother figures and autobiographical dimensions), such as the texts' use of language in their resistances to imperialism, intertextuality, visuality, gender and feminism, identity and self-making, diaspora and migration, death and mourning, orphanhood, childhood, colonial history, and garden and travel writing.²¹ Many journal articles and book chapters written about Kincaid are notable for their detailed analyses of less popular aspects of her works. Yet the limited space for their arguments means that their claims mostly remain uncontextualized within Kincaid's large body of work.²²

Of the monographs on Kincaid, Jana Evans Braziel's is the only thematically specific book to date, and one can say that it transcends the mapping of the field that earlier monographs so usefully undertook. Braziel's *Caribbean Genesis: Jamaica Kincaid and the Writing of New World* (2009) explores the topics of genesis, genealogy, and genocide and their entanglements in world making in Kincaid's texts through the intertextual lens of the Bible (particularly the books Genesis and Revelations). In this, transformations of autobiographical elements are at the heart of Braziel's approach. Her work seeks to understand "the process of writing autobiographical truth from historical lies and colonial legacies. The writing of autobiography, then, is not a seamless, transparent process but rather an ambivalent venture into efforts at autogenesis and against the forces of historical genocide" (Brazel, *Caribbean Genesis* 7). Interested in a similar range of topics in Kincaid's oeuvre, I too explore the ambivalences Braziel finds in Kincaid's autobiographical negotiations of the annihilating forces of history. I understand what Braziel terms "genesis" and compellingly reads as a biblical speaking into being as the enactment of presences that I observe in the engagements with history performed in various media. In this, genre is but one area in which literary strategy and textual move-

21 See for instance the following articles on specific topics: Castro, Matos, or Réjouis on resistance through specific language use; Chansky, Bickford, Gervasio, Rodríguez, or Lima on intertextuality; Vasquez, Lyle, Nasta, Emery, or Hirsch on visuality; Narain, Mardorossian, or Mahlis on gender and feminism; McCormick, Adams, or Anker on identity; Forbes, Nichols, or Murdoch on migration; Brophy, Soto-Crespo, or West on death; Ball, Arbino, Mårdberg, or Everett on orphanhood; Braziel, Simmons, or Rampaul on childhood; Marquis, Journey, or Jay on colonial history; Pečić, Knepper, Azima, or Tiffin on gardening.

22 Particularly noteworthy for their innovative topics are for instance the analyses of cloth and clothing by Matos or Sharrad.

ment creates ambivalences, destabilizes colonial legacies, and produces new meanings.

Brazier observes the nexus of genre, genealogy, and genocide by chronologically attending to each of Kincaid's major works on its own, as do all other monographs on Kincaid. My own study, by contrast, is structured around thematic foci, namely the media text, image, and body through which Kincaid's works engage with colonial history. Reading the Kincaid's individual texts *with* each other rather than separately, my analyses thus take a more comprehensive perspective on the texts' literary techniques and Kincaid's poetics of impermanence.²³

I observe such techniques of impermanence in three different media that engage with history in Kincaid's works. Accordingly, my analyses ask how each medium – text, image, and body – participates in the revision of renditions of the past that structures the main questions of the present study. Chapter 1 on "Time" directly follows up on the issues sketched out in this introduction. Demonstrating the entanglements of temporalities, the chapter presents the notion of temporal impermanence which is at the heart of the textual engagement with history in Kincaid's two most recent novels *Mr. Potter* and *See Now Then*. My analyses show how history plays a role in the present and how media – especially texts – constitute representations of the past. The intersection of representations and temporalities projects a sense of impermanence on the formal aspects of text. With this focus, the first chapter lays the foundations for my further thoughts in the following chapters on the representative and constitutive capabilities of media.

Chapter 2 on "Text: Narrative Encounters with History" explores how Kincaid's poetics of impermanence productively approaches history in text. Three subchapters attend to this on different textual levels. Chapter 2.1, "Writing Personal and Collective Memory," approaches repetition with a reading of *Mr. Potter*: Through repetitions of words or sentences, or the narrations of small events, the text changes referents and meanings and thereby creates possibilities of the past that had hitherto not existed. Chapter 2.2, "Writing with and through Other Texts," is interested in the same technique but applies it to the relationships of Kin-

23 Derek Walcott's famous dictum that in Kincaid's writing the sentence "heads towards its own contradiction" (Walcott in Garis 80) is often quoted, but rarely explored, which is where my own study sets in. See the mentions of the quote in the introductions of monographs by Bouson, Simmons, Dance. Here, it points to the complexity of Kincaid's writing, which baffles, but is rarely analyzed in detail. Similarly, Covi comments on Kincaid's strategy of repetition ("Jamaica Kincaid" 348–349), Simmons is interested in rhythm (*Jamaica Kincaid*), and Ferguson calls Kincaid's writing an "innovative format" (*Jamaica Kincaid* 2) that "presents discursive alternatives to a Western linear modality" (*Jamaica Kincaid* 163). I, here, follow up with an analysis of *how* Kincaid's textual strategies work.

caid's texts with other texts. This chapter shows how Kincaid's works intertextually engage with colonial thought and literary motifs. Through their rewritings, they challenge established meanings and the validity of colonial textual renditions of the past in general. The third chapter, 2.3, on "Writing between and across Genres" focuses on genre as a form of colonial fixation of text, particularly in categories of life writing. Here, I examine how Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother* and "Biography of a Dress" revise generic conventions and ask who can speak for whom in a postcolonial context. In this, as I will show, the narrators and characters displace colonizing discourse and establish their own voices.

Based on my considerations of Kincaid's poetics of impermanence in chapter 2, the subsequent chapter focuses on visibility and history. Throughout the author's oeuvre, images occur in different ways. Within the narratives, the characters Annie John and Lucy destroy and produce photographs, which changes representations of them and their surroundings from colonial framings to self-determined portrayals, as I show in chapter 3.1 on "Making and Unmaking Representations." The textual representation of visibility is heightened in Kincaid's use of ekphrases, which I analyze in chapter 3.2 on *My Garden (Book)*; which I read as a photo album of history. The interaction of the two modes of representation leads the text to critically representative capacities of media in general. Finally, in chapter 3.3, "Photographic Product(ion)s of History," I focus on the portraits that are included with two of Kincaid's novels, *Mr. Potter* and *The Autobiography of My Mother*, to explore how the books toy with common conceptions of photography in their intersections with fictional text and how the images thus lend their purported authenticity to Kincaid's fictional versions of the past.

Chapter 4 on "Bodies: Embodied Enactments of History" reads the human body as a medium of history. The chapter builds on my previous explorations of how text and image engage with colonial history, as the human body here is largely determined by colonial discourse and gazes that categorize and fixate. I examine how bodies are externally ascribed with meaning, and how they also performatively free themselves from colonial attributions and engage in self-making through bodily practices. The first subchapter, "Transgressions of Gender," reads female bodies as subverting expectations through grotesquerie (especially in *Annie John*) and through smelliness that upsets colonial order. It also explores sexuality as scripted in *Lucy* and *The Autobiography of My Mother*. In chapter 4.2, "Scripted Sexualities," I thus focus on concrete sexual practices through which female bodies negotiate colonial history. Through abortive practices, *The Autobiography of My Mother* emphasizes the historical exploitation of female reproductivity during slavery. Yet the text also highlights the knowledge of abortifacients, thereby countering the objectification of the female body. I moreover read explicit sexual acts as stag-

ings and subversions of colonial fantasy in S/M play. Reenactment here entails the reversal of received roles.

Ultimately, the entirety of my readings traces the enactments of self-determined presences in the representations of colonial history through these various media. Kincaid's works produce these representations by evaluating the representative capacities of media, thereby decentering established representations of history, and by asserting their own versions through ambiguity and the multiplication of perspectives.