

**Multiplying Perspectives through Text and Time:
Jamaica Kincaid's Writing of the Collective**

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ABSTRACT: Throughout Jamaica Kincaid's fictional works, the literary technique of narrative repetition and revision multiplies narrative perspectives both with regard to singular events as well as through generations and thereby through history, pointing back to the year 1492. This article demonstrates how Kincaid thus inscribes a multitude of perspectives into what has hitherto been largely read as autobiographical fiction and, in this way, engages collective Caribbean experience as profoundly affected by the history of colonialism and slavery.

KEYWORDS: repetition and revision, autobiography, Caribbean collective history, historiopoiesis

At first glance, the autobiographical interpretation of Kincaid's works appears evident. The author seems to be interested in conveying her own life story in the early novels *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990), and subsequently to present those of her family members in *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1995), *My Brother* (1997), a nonfictional memoir, *Mr. Potter* (2002), seemingly a fictional account of Kincaid's biological father's life, and, eventually, *See Now Then* (2013), frequently read as a roman à clef concerned with Kincaid's own adult life and the ending of her marriage. This arc, that seems to span the author's and her immediate relatives' lives, prompted Susheila Nasta to call Kincaid's works a "family album" (2009). Moreover, the author herself corroborates an autobiographical reading when she emphasizes that she writes about her own experience (foremost in her early career, cf. Perry 507; Bonetti 125) or with statements such as "When you think of me, think of my life" (Vorda 10). However, in this article I propose that while they are inspired by the author's autobiographical experience, her novels are not primarily concerned with rendering Kincaid's or her family members' personal lives in autobiographical fiction, but seek to engage more universal concerns, i.e. her novels voice a collective experience of the Caribbean that speaks to many. In contrast to her earlier affirmations of autobiographical readings of her work, Kincaid states as early as 1992 that she is (or even has been) in fact not (only) concerned with the autobiographical, but that for instance the central mother-daughter relationships in *Annie John* and *Lucy* carry the wider implications of the relations of colonizer and colonized: "In my

first two books [*Annie John* and *Lucy*], I used to think I was writing about my mother and me. Later I began to see that I was writing about the relationship between the powerful and the powerless” (Ferguson 176). Kincaid claims to have “outgrown the domestic implications” and “exhausted the domestic colouring” (Dilger 23). Developing this aspiration throughout her oeuvre, Kincaid maintains that in her writing, she is rather concerned with “a universal situation” (Alleyne n.p.) and that she is trying to say “something larger” (Chang n.p.).

Throughout her fictional works, in particular Kincaid’s abundant use of the literary technique of repetition and revision evidences the expression of more than just the personal. Repetition and revision multiplies perspectives and turns the standard individual narrating voice of the autobiographical genre into a multitude of voices. On this basis, I claim that Kincaid’s writing does not present the reader with singular personal truths, but with the imaginative writing of collective experiences that are largely affected by the history of colonialism and slavery. Kincaid’s insistence on fiction – after all the texts that I am discussing here are all labeled ‘novel’ on their front covers – turns her work into a historiopoetic project, i.e. her texts creatively engage history through imaginative writing and are decidedly disinterested in the canonized facts of history. The use of fiction as a means of rediscovering the past is itself not new. Toni Morrison for instance uses imagination “to yield up a kind of truth” (192). However, the imagination is based on “some information” and “remains [that] were left behind” (192), and it is employed “to reconstruct what these remains imply” (192). Similarly, Édouard Glissant suspects that the “historical approach” may prove insufficient and instead proposes a “creative approach” (*Discourse* 61). He thus seeks to accomplish a “recovery of the near or distant past” and to “renew acquaintance with one’s history” (*Toussaint* 15-16). In contrast, Kincaid does not attempt to excavate hidden or buried facts or truths, but sets out to write her very own versions thereof in fiction. Scholarly investigation as a means to get reacquainted with history is flatly dismissed by Kincaid: “No, no research [...] I don’t believe in that. Then I would actually write one of those conventional things” (Jones n.p.). In comparison to previous engagements with the traumatic past of imperialism, Kincaid thus displays a fresh attitude towards history. This attitude towards the traumatic history of slavery and colonialism is described by Ilka Saal as historiopoiesis, which does not “counter and revise canonized history,” but centers on “purposeful creation, ‘making up’ of history through the deployment of specific narrative structures and poetic forms” (3, emphasis in original). The

poetic technique mainly used by Jamaica Kincaid to this end is that of repetition with a difference. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. investigates the practice as ‘Signifyin(g)’ in his seminal *The Signifying Monkey*. His inquiry traces repetition and revision and what he calls a “black double-voicedness” (51) on the levels of syntax, narrative mode, and tropology, as well as intertextuality and genre crossovers. According to Gates, “[b]lack formal revision always repeats with a difference, a black difference that manifests itself in specific language use” (xxii-xxiii). This difference, which is established via play with language and references, redirects attention from the level of semantics to the level of rhetorics (58) and in this way creates a space for new meanings. As I demonstrate in the following, in Kincaid’s novels it is foremost narrative repetition that engages the author’s own previous writing within one text as well as throughout the body of her work. First, I examine how narrative repetition multiplies perspectives intratextually in Kincaid’s novel *Mr. Potter*. In a second step I demonstrate how characters and their circumstances are repeated throughout genealogies and thereby through time both in *Mr. Potter* and in *The Autobiography of My Mother*. Next, I show that the repetition of characters also operates on the intertextual level within Kincaid’s body of work, most saliently in *Annie John* and *Lucy*. In a last section of this article, I seek to show how Kincaid’s writing references and rewrites previous engagements with colonial history, most prominently in *See Now Then*, when the relationship of this text’s protagonist couple features central characteristics of the central pair of protagonists in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* as well as in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. In all of these cases, collective concerns regarding colonial history are addressed through narrative repetition which, in the sense of Gates’s Signifyin(g), directs attention from the concrete events of individual narrations to the underlying repetitious structure thereof, and in this manner establishes the narrations of seemingly merely personal experience as paradigmatic of shared collective experience.

Kincaid’s 2002 novel *Mr. Potter* contains a salient case of intratextual repetition and revision: The novel conveys the narrator’s imagination of the eponymous Mr. Potter’s life, the narrator’s absentee father whom she has never met. However, she writes and rewrites the memory of a singular meeting, when she was about four years of age. This memory must at

its core be fictional and was transmitted to her by her mother's telling her about this incident.¹ The episode consists of the narrator-daughter approaching Mr. Potter at a garage where he works as a chauffeur, to ask him for money for school supplies. It is retold in five variations over the course of the novel. In the first instance, Mr. Potter stands in front of the garage, the girl waves at him, sent by her mother to ask for a "sixpence to buy a tablet of lined writing paper" (*Potter* 126). Mr. Potter's reaction is disregard and an indifferent rolling of his shoulders (124-126). In the second version, the narrator is waiting for Mr. Potter to arrive by car, this time he waves the girl away like "an abandoned dog blocking his path" (146). In the third retelling of the episode, the girl sees Mr. Potter from across the street and asks him for money to buy (school) books (154) without approaching the garage directly. In the fourth variation, the narrator again asks for writing paper and Mr. Potter slams a door in her face (157-158). The fifth repetition of this episode combines scattered details from all previous versions. Here the narrator relates: "I have only a vague memory of him ignoring me as I passed him in the street, of him slamming a door in my face when I was sent to ask him for money I needed to purchase my writing paper" (160-161). One could attribute the divergences in the variations to the general unreliability of memory, but at the same time, the disparity of details point to an insignificance of singular truth here. Ultimately, it is not essential whether the narrator and Mr. Potter met in front of the garage or across the street, what she asked for precisely, or how exactly he expressed his rejection of her. The narrative variations of the episode convey the intensity of paternal rejection, which through the re-narrations is experienced multiple times and thus cannot be perceived as a singular event.

In accordance with Henry Louis Gates's concept of Signifyin(g), author Suzan-Lori Parks describes repetition and revision as a practice through which "[c]haracters refigure their words and through a figuration of language show us that they are experiencing the situation anew" (9). In the same manner, Kincaid's narrator revises and re-experiences the event by re-narrating it in variations. Parks moreover adds that repetition and revision are "key to examining something larger than one moment. Rep & Rev create space for metaphor etc."

¹ Cf. the following passages: "I remember this incident of waving to him because my mother has told me about it and through my mother's words, I have come to see myself waving to Mr. Potter" (*Potter* 126); "And all this my mother has told me, all of this my mother has told me, my entire life as I live it is all my mother told me" (127); "I do not remember any of this, it is only that my mother has told me so and my mother's tongue and the words that flow from it cannot be relied upon" (154).

(9). Similarly, by refiguring her account of paternal rejection, the narrator of *Mr. Potter* creates the space to express an experience that is not isolated and individual, but one that is continuously repeated and may equally pertain to a multitude of people. Moreover, *Mr. Potter* and *The Autobiography of My Mother* establish such intricacies of familial relationships as the effects of the collective history of colonialism and slavery, as I will show in the following section.

In a different form of intratextual repetition and revision, Kincaid multiplies perspectives not only through the re-examination of similar events as e.g. in *Mr. Potter*, but she also demonstrates how similar experiences occur repeatedly over an extended period of time. This is exemplified in the genealogies rendered in *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) as well as in *Mr. Potter*. In *Mr. Potter*, the genealogies explicitly reach back to the year 1492, i.e. to Columbus's "discovery" of the Americas and with that to the beginning of European colonization of the Caribbean. Affected by the aftermath of colonization and imperialism, the family members who are thus tied to each other genealogically act according to the same patterns and thus repeat each other at the same time that they illustrate how history repeats itself.

The Autobiography of My Mother concerns three generations: The text engages past and future from the present position of the narrator and protagonist Xuela Claudette Richardson, framing Xuela's life with her parents' experiences and a (possibly nonexistent) future generation. Throughout the generations, the characters are informed by distrust and a lack of love. When Xuela intimates that "[i]n a place like this, brutality is the only real inheritance, and cruelty is sometimes the only thing freely given" (*Mother* 5), she attributes the characters' inability to love to the effects of colonialism. The inheritance, i.e. that which is passed on through generations, consists of the violence that has its origin in the beginning of colonialism as the following passage illustrates. Here, the narrator describes her "inheritance" as "an island of villages and rivers and mountains and people who began and ended with murder and and theft and not very much love" (89). The reference is both to Dominica's native inhabitants, the Caribs who were "defeated and then exterminated" (15), and to the people of African descent who were kidnapped from their homelands to be shipped to the

Caribbean islands as slaves. For none of them, as Xuela notes, there is “very much love.” Xuela further explains that “[e]verything about us is held in doubt and we the defeated define all that is unreal, all that is not human, all that is without love, all that is without mercy” (37). Notably, the defeated are not defined by reference to their alleged characteristics in a passive construction, and the active sentence structure gives it a double meaning: First, the defeated are used as reference points to exemplify the unreal, the not human, etc. And second, they actively define said characteristics themselves. This double meaning demonstrates the shift from external attributions of the colonizers’ (i.e. the victors’) opinions and values to their internalization by the defeated. The internalization then leads to self-hate, as Xuela points out: “to people like us, despising anything that was most like ourselves was almost a law of nature” (52). Corrupted by this internalization of the colonizers’ supremacist notions of race, “people who looked so very much like each other, who shared a common history of suffering and humiliation and enslavement” regard each other as “the other” who cannot be trusted and so friendships are out of the order (47-48). Such a social climate, defined by distrust and isolation, leaves no room for affectionate relationships, as exemplified by the Richardson family: Xuela’s father is unable to feel or express love (90, 113); his wife, Xuela’s stepmother, is similarly incapable of loving feelings, even towards her own (biological) children (53). Because Xuela’s own mother died while giving birth to her, Xuela grew up without parental love and ultimately became both unwilling and unable to love herself or others (e.g. 99). In *The Autobiography of My Mother* the absence of parental love makes it impossible for the characters to form lasting affectionate attachments, both with regard to familial bonds as well as to relationships with domestic partners. The denial of affection becomes a legacy that is transmitted through the generations, illustrated by Xuela’s decision to terminate a pregnancy precisely for her reluctance to be this closely attached to another human being: she “expel[s] from [her] body a child [she] could not love and so did not want” (89). Ultimately, Xuela resolves: “I had never had a mother, I had just recently refused to become one, and I knew then that this refusal would be complete. I would never become a mother, but that would not be the same as not bearing children. I would bear children, but I would never be a mother to them” (96-97), which demonstrates her refusal to provide love and care in addition to the biological side of motherhood to a future generation.

In *Mr. Potter*, the cross-generational perpetuation of the inability to love is even more pronounced. The protagonist Roderick Potter, his parents, and their respective peers are all incapable of forming familial bonds, once again as a consequence of the absence of parental affection. Nathaniel Potter, the protagonist's father, has no conception of love and affection at all: "So unloved he was, but he did not know it and could not miss love, for it had never been part of his very being" (*Potter* 43). Indifferently, he rejects his son Roderick at birth and stays absent from his life. Roderick Potter's mother, Elfrida Robinson, does not take any interest in her son either. The narrator comments: The newborn "needed love but that was out of the order of things, neither of them knew that he needed love, between two people such as they were, a mother and a son and in a situation like that: essential to life but without meaning to them in particular" (69). Just like Nathaniel Potter, Elfrida Robinson does not have the capacity to love or even an interest in forging a lasting familial relationship for she never experienced it herself. Elfrida grew up motherless, and "her mother before her [was] motherless and that mother, too, motherless, and on and on reaching back not so much into eternity but into a sentence that would begin with the year fourteen hundred and ninety-two" (71-72). The year 1492 is thus identified as the beginning of a genealogy of motherlessness, linking the characters' psychological limitations to the historical date of Columbus' "discovery" of the Americas and thus the beginning of transatlantic colonialism. The conjunction of these events identifies colonialism (and implicitly the transatlantic slave trade) as the root cause for the characters' inability to establish lasting familial bonds or to develop affectionate feelings for one another. "Inability" should thus on the one hand be read as not being in a position to form these relationships because the institution of slavery prohibited Mr. Potter's (distant) ancestors from forming social structures based on family relations and affection. On the other hand, "inability" also refers to the incapability to perform affectionate and trusting acts as exemplified in Elfrida and Nathaniel, which illustrates the effect of perpetuated disruption of family structures on the characters' psyches. The genealogies constructed in *Mr. Potter* and the lives of Nathaniel Potter, Elfrida Robinson, and Roderick Potter, who do *not* form a nuclear family, thus exemplify the long-term effects of slavery. The Potters' family structure, or its absence, recalls Hortense Spillers's

examination of the enslaved African diasporic family in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”² With regard to parental attachment, Spillers contends that “even though the enslaved female produced other enslaved persons, we do not read ‘birth’ in this instance as a reproduction of mothering precisely because the female, like the male, has been robbed of parental right, the parental function” (77-78). Since Roderick Potter was born in 1922 (*Potter* 177), his parents Elfrida and Nathaniel could not have been slaves. However, the text also emphasizes that “Mr. Potter’s lifetime began in the year fourteen hundred and ninety-two” (177) and thus establishes a continuum of colonialism’s effects which still affect Roderick Potter in the twentieth century. History thus repeats itself in the characters of both *Mr. Potter* and *The Autobiography of My Mother* who repeat and replicate their parents’ and forebears’ patterns of social interaction.³

Connected across generations and linked genealogically, the characters in both novels are marked by the inability to love, a central characteristic which they moreover share with the majority of the other characters in the texts: Xuela’s step-siblings, her first foster parent Ma Eunice and her children, Mr. Potter’s foster parents (his mother Elfrida soon committed suicide because she was tired of the demands her infant son made on her) and their children, and the orphan boys with whom Roderick Potter goes to school. With regard to the inability (or unwillingness) to form lasting and affectionate relationships, all characters in the two novels closely resemble each other. I therefore read their collective being as exemplifying the all-encompassing effects of colonial history. I furthermore propose to read them as repetitions of each other, especially the characters who are linked genealogically. In the closing passages of *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela reflects on the life stories that converge in her person: “This account of my life has been an account of my mother’s life as much as it has been an account of mine, and even so, again it is the account of the life of the children I did not have, as it is their account of me” (227). Xuela thus merges individual lives into one, in a sense sharing identity with those who came before her and those who will follow after. This suggests to read the different characters as one. The cross-generational

² Though Spillers studies African-American captive persons, her analysis of family formations in slavery are equally applicable to captive persons in the Caribbean.

³ For a more detailed analysis of the engagement with history in *Mr. Potter*, see Antonia Purk, “Writing Possibilities of the Past: Jamaica Kincaid’s *Mr. Potter*.”

trajectory that links her mother's life to Xuela's own and to the life of a future generation emphasizes how the characters – albeit members of different generations – are used by Kincaid to illustrate the very same conditions. Therefore I regard them as multiplications of each other.

Based on the multiplication and repetition of these characters, I argue that they do not present the personal family history of the author Jamaica Kincaid,⁴ but that they are representative of a collective that is affected by their common history of colonialism and slavery. Through the fictional genealogies of different but strikingly similar characters, the novels examine the historical development of current social conditions. The difficulties of forming lasting familial bonds are in this way directly related to the collective colonial history which began in 1492.

Not only does Kincaid create manifold perspectives on events within single works of hers, as discussed above, but she also repeats and revises her narratives throughout her body of work. Both characters and some of their circumstances are repeated and revised throughout Kincaid's oeuvre. Their sometimes too obvious similarities tempt to read them as one, as in the case of *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990). In some respects *Lucy* picks up where *Annie John* left off, since the protagonist seems to travel from one text to the other when at the end of *Annie John* she leaves Antigua and arrives at 'her' destination at the beginning of *Lucy*. Despite the continuity, I emphasize that the two are different characters: Lucy repeats and revises Annie and thereby removes the singularity from the life narrative of growing up in Antigua.

Annie John traces its eponymous protagonist's development and transition to young adulthood in colonial Antigua. In doing so, the text critically examines colonial education and its influence on Antiguan culture. Lucy, the protagonist of the later novel, grew up in Antigua under similar circumstances. The text opens just after her arrival in the United States where she will work as an au-pair for a wealthy American family of European descent. The change of location provides Lucy with the opportunity to compare her worldview to that of white

⁴ See e.g. Jana Evans Braziel or Julin Everett for such readings of the genealogies.

Americans. Again, the texts share details beyond the parallelisms in their protagonists' lives: Both Annie and Lucy are emotionally entangled with their mothers in a love-hate relationship; moreover, in both narratives, the mothers attempt to teach their daughters skills which they deem essential for young women (*Annie*, e.g. 26-28 and *Lucy* 36), and in both texts, the fathers played cricket (*Annie* 22 and *Lucy* 83).

But then again, despite all of their similarities, name and place already differentiate these two characters. Annie John leaves Antigua for England, while Lucy Josephine Potter arrives in the U.S. Moreover, while they are both nicknamed "Little Miss," Annie is called so by her parents as a term of endearment (*Annie* 105) and Lucy is addressed in this manner incidentally by a fisherman (*Lucy* 106). And while Lucy expresses her disappointment at having to stand back both in terms of parental attention and educational opportunity to the advantage of her three brothers (*Lucy* 130), Annie loses her mother's affection during puberty (*Annie* e.g. 103) without any sibling rivalry. Hence, even though Lucy bears great similarities to Annie, the revisions of the character in the later novel show that Kincaid is not writing one life or the experiences of one character, but that instead she offers up several ones and thus, through fiction, multiplies the voices and narratives of characters who share the same history and are similarly affected by its aftermath. In Annie's and Lucy's case this implies coping with colonial education in Antigua (Annie) and reflecting on it in comparison with life in the U.S. (Lucy).

Apart from rewriting her own work, Kincaid uses intertextual references to engage in conversations with previous texts⁵ in order to critically discuss them⁶ or to thus place her own narrations in wider contexts, as for instance in her latest book *See Now Then* (2013). As the title suggests, the relationship of past and present is at the center of the text which examines the life of a nuclear family in a small town in Vermont in a non-linear narration. The novel conveys its narrator-protagonist's reflections on her life as a mother as well as on the failure

⁵ Henry Louis Gates calls this the "talking" of texts to other texts (xxvi).

⁶ As e.g. denouncing colonial indoctrination in academic education in Antigua, using the image of daffodils from William Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" in *Lucy*.

of her marriage. The relationship of the narrator, who immigrated to the US from the Caribbean, and her American husband, references Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). This intertext is set in the Caribbean in the first half of the nineteenth century and is concerned with the relationship of the Creole Antoinette Cosway and a unnamed Englishman. In order to fulfill his social aspirations, the young Englishman intends to marry rich and to that end travels to Jamaica. Antoinette, the daughter of former slave and plantation owners, is presented as a suitable bride, his entry ticket to the English upper class. To his dismay, he realizes that her social status in white Caribbean society is ambiguous and that she might not be as purely English as he thought. The first indication are her eyes "which are too large and can be disconcerting. [...] Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (Rhys 37). In *See Now Then*, the motif of the dark and impenetrable eyes of a woman reoccurs (19). Initially, the American husband Mr. Sweet delighted in his wife's eyes, "for he thought of discovering something not yet known to him, something that lay in Mrs. Sweet's eyes and that would make him free, free, free from all that bound him" (19), just as the Englishman in Jean Rhys's text thought that his union with Antoinette would cure him of his problems. Yet Mrs. Sweet's eyes then evoke repulsion in her husband "and he cursed her dark eyes, for they offered him nothing and in any case his own eyes were blue" (19). Foregrounding the blue color of Mr. Sweet's eyes, i.e. his European descent, shows how ultimately Mr. Sweet perceives his marriage problems as connected to the perceived racial difference between him and his Caribbean-born wife, just as the Englishman in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is troubled by his wife's possible racial otherness. Werner Sollors has identified the description of eyes as dark and unreadable as a marker to identify characters of African descent in Lydia Maria Child's "The Quadroons" (1842/46), which returns in William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853) and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and turns into a "familiar descriptive convention of the eye" (Sollors 213). Accordingly, *See Now Then* not only refers to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but to a popular motif used in interracial literature to identify racial otherness. Mrs. Sweet's dark eyes thus refer to a convention of racial distinction, which qualifies her husband's perception as part of a larger practice of othering, rather than a singular occurrence particular to this relationship. Drawing on the "convention of the eye" thus places *See Now Then* in historical contexts of interracial relationships.

Kincaid's novel invokes *Wide Sargasso Sea* a second time when Mr. Sweet thinks that his wife "is strange and should live in the attic of a house that burns down" (159).⁷ Mr. Sweet's thoughts furthermore repeat the pattern of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). *See Now Then* thus echoes the fate of Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester's Creole wife in *Jane Eyre*, and its rewriting in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Hence, in intertextually repeating motifs and events from earlier texts, the characters of *See Now Then* are again placed in colonial contexts. The structure of racial and marital relations as presented in the contemporary text is thus presented as a repetition of those of the colonial nineteenth century. Mr. and Mrs. Sweet's relationship is thus not unique, but exemplifies a constellation that repeats itself through time and history until today. In this way, *See Now Then* is not only concerned with this couple's marriage, but by their example engages with a collective experience.

In conclusion, as I have shown, narrative repetition and revision is employed throughout Kincaid's oeuvre of fictional works on both intra- and intertextual levels. In all cases, it works towards an opening of the texts to addressing a collective beyond the individual characters who are concerned. On the intratextual level, the multiple narrations of seemingly single events exemplify the repetitiveness of the experiences (such as the paternal rejection in *Mr. Potter*). Also, characters as well as their experiences and similar circumstances in life are multiplied, e.g. by cross-generational repetition in *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *Mr. Potter*. The repetitious reoccurrence of these similar characters through generations (i.e. through time) here indicates the continuing effects of colonialism and slavery through history up until the present day. The repetition of characters on an intertextual level, i.e. throughout Kincaid's different novels, works towards the same end: The author engages life-writing to demonstrate shared, collective experience. The intertextual signifying on other literary works moreover places Kincaid's texts in larger contexts. By reference to earlier literary conventions, they showcase the continuous presence of racial conflicts in present-day society patterned on colonial history. Repetition in all these cases suggests that the characters and their lives and

⁷ At the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is confined to the attic of her husband's mansion in England and dreams of setting it on fire, which the text suggests she does at the end of the novel (cf. Rhys 123).

experiences are not out of the order but rather common. Moreover, in most cases of narrative repetition colonial history is at the center of the collective experience conveyed in the texts, which illustrates the continuing aftermath of the experience of slavery. Taking a step beyond the account of the individual characters, narrative repetition and revision in Jamaica Kincaid's novels thus opens the texts to the representation of collective Caribbean experience.

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Biographical Note

Antonia Purk is a PhD student at the Department of American Literature of the University of Erfurt. She has earned her master's degree in Comparative and American Literature at the University of Erfurt in 2012 and has since then worked on her PhD project, which is concerned with the imaginative engagement of history in the literary works of Jamaica Kincaid. In her analyses she puts a special emphasis on text, image, and body as media of historiopoiesis.