

From Grammar to Sovereignty: The Environmental Praxis of Black Women's Literature

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My next book project theorizes a Black maternal ecolinguistic method, arguing that Black women's literature offers foundational—not derivative—ecological insights. Rather than framing Black environmental thought as reactive to dominant—white, masculine, colonial—ecological epistemes, the project insists that it enacts sovereign grammars of relation that reorder conceptions of land, language, and time. At the center of this grammar is mothering: not as a biological category, but as a political and aesthetic praxis of intergenerational memory, care, refusal, and survival.

During my four-month Rachel Carson Center research stay, I will focus on Jamaica Kincaid's work and the colonial garden. This chapter is pivotal to my book's conceptual structure. It functions as a hinge between critique and creation—moving from the diagnostic comparative analysis of Part I into the affirmative poetics of Part II. Kincaid's work disassembles colonial ecological aesthetics and offers a grammar of sovereign grief and maternal refusal.

Drawing primarily from *A Small Place* and *My Garden (Book)*, this chapter argues that Kincaid exposes the colonial garden—an emblem of botanical control, violence, and European rationality—as a site of ecological mourning and discursive subversion. Kincaid's repetition, irony, and layered address perform a refusal to “make beautiful” the damage wrought by colonialism. Her writing mourns not only dispossession, but also the epistemic violence of having been taught to see beauty in that dispossession. Through syntax, tone, and form, Kincaid enacts an ecolinguistic intervention in which the maternal—as memory, fury, and interruption—remakes the relationship between land and language.

This chapter is thus essential to my book's main argument. It makes visible the transition from comparative critique to Black maternal literary sovereignty. By analyzing how Kincaid's language refuses the redemptive aesthetic of garden literature, I elaborate what a Black maternal ecolinguistic method looks like in practice: not a sentimentality of nurture, but a ferocious mourning that refuses closure.