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Reading Antonia's Caribbean Garden: Doing Victorian Studies Differently in a Changing Climate

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<1>If "undisciplining" Victorian Studies means acknowledging the extent to which the Victorian period is still with us, then reading the character Antonia Romelia, a free woman gardener of color in the anonymous Trinidadian novella *Adolphus: A Tale* (1853), schools us in historical hybridity (Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong 370). Published serially alongside the work of Dickens, Stowe, and Douglass in *The Trinidadian*, an anti-colonial newspaper, *Adolphus* is a diasporic love story with Antonia's garden at its heart. Entering that historical space as a reader, one is struck by the degree to which our time shares with Antonia the vulnerability of Black life and plant life against the backdrop of old and new forms of the plantation. As temperatures rise and white supremacy escalates, both access to texts like *Adolphus* and knowledge of the historical gardening practices of the Caribbean women of color that the text describes become vulnerable. Indeed, in sharp contrast to its canonical companions, *Adolphus, a Tale*is subject to violent erasure, material and ideological, through contemporary assemblages: the universal impact of climate change that makes archives physically vulnerable, shrinking humanities budgets for the maintenance and expansion of archives and universities, and new regional legislation meant to silence or impede the diversification of teaching and research at many American universities where Victorianists such as myself practice. As a rare undigitized text, the historical newspaper *The Trinidadian,* held in the national archives of Trinidad and Tobago*,* is vulnerable to the former while I, as of October 2024, will be working under new legislation that forbids discussion of "divisive concepts" (SB 129 2). For this Victorianist, then, standing – safely for now – under a clock which ticks backwards, reading, teaching, and researching Antonia's garden becomes a way of speaking back to the ongoing plantationocene and its most recent

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iterations. In particular, I discuss what is at stake for Antonia in planting a garden that generously extends the definition of life to both plants and people even while they are located amidst a "politics of nonlife" (Yussof "Inhumanities"). Along the way, I revisit the text and context of *Adolphus*, examining the gendered, raced, and classed discourses informing Antonia's gardening, and utilizing both classic and new feminist criticism alongside critical approaches to plants that make assertions against the plantationocene.(1)

Text and Garden in the Plantationocene

<2>Serialized in the anti-colonial newspaper *The Trinidadian* alongside the work of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Charles Dickens amongst others, *Adolphus,* as Christopher Taylor and R.J. Boutelle have argued, explores extraction culture, the historical criminalizing of people of color, the foundations of the police in the New World in the plantation system, and the limits of the liberal subject in the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement. The novel was serialized anonymously; however it is widely assumed that it is the work of *The Trinidadian*'s editor, George Numa Des Sources. Set in the early 1800s before abolition and written from still-British occupied Trinidad in the 1850s, the novel ends abruptly, perhaps coinciding with Des Sources's own move to "found a utopian socialist [agricultural] colony (Numancia) for Afro-Trinidadians in eastern Venezuela" (Boutelle 182). Clearly influenced by mid-nineteenth century "back to the land" movements at work in the United States and the United Kingdom, Des Source reveals a plantsman's eye and a strong vegetal ethos in *Adolphus*. The novel then places service to love and service to freedom in the balance at its received end. As it takes place before the promise of freedom in Trinidad was subverted by the terms of British abolition, it is poised to map and critique the possibilities of free Black futurity via the liberal subject in service to Enlightenment ideals of the Age of Revolution in spaces that seek to overturn anti-Black geographies.(2) This essay then places the text and its representation of Antonia's garden within the context of the Plantationocene, discusses the garden as a material response to anti-Black geographies, and explores the garden and its transplanted plant life in terms of R.J. Boutelle's concept of the novel's human "genealogy and nonhistory" (Boutelle 183). I will consider the garden, finally from the perspective of Michael Marder's concept of "vegetal movement" as a political strategy and discuss the importance of reading *Adolphus* for the wider project of "undisciplining" Victorian novel studies today (Marder "Future" 69; Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong 370).

<3>For those who have not read *Adolphus*, its plot traces the struggle of the titular character who is the son of an enslaved woman named for a flower, Rosa. Raped by

a white slave owner, she seeks refuge in a densely forested maroon community where she dies in childbirth. Raised by a Spanish-Trinidadian priest, the mixed-race Adolphus grows into a classically educated member of the island's free Black or "Brown middle class" (Boutelle 183). Although he holds a prestigious position as a clerk, he is one of the free Afro-Trinidadian community subjected to white supremacy and the threat of enslavement, criminalization, and incarceration under British rule. Soon after Adolphus falls in love with Antonia, a free black woman who is the daughter of immigrants of "African descent" who were lured to Trinidad with the promise of prosperity and equality, she is abducted by a mixed-race villain, De Guerinon, who is passing as white (*Adolphus* 6). Although he rescues Antonia from the villain by the novel's end, Adolphus mistakenly implicates her father in the shooting of De Guerinon. Now a fugitive in Trinidad, he escapes to Venezuela without Antonia. The novel ends abruptly with Adolphus considering making a return to Trinidad after receiving a letter from Antonia, while his companion, Ernest, marries and plans to resettle in Venezuela to serve Bolivar, the historical liberator of Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador who eventually turned to authoritarianism. Ernest cannot countenance the thought of his friend returning to Trinidad, in the face of the dangers and compromises it forces upon people of color.

<4>Indeed, in becoming the owners of a small cocoa plantation, the Romelias make the "best of a bad affair" in which they were lured to Trinidad with the promise of complete equality with white Europeans (*Adolphus* 7). Placing their plantation very much off the beaten path, "on one of those lonely spots on the left of the road leading to the village," they take the historical path to wealth and "freedom" that some Trinidadians of color took by participating in that system which had begun on the island in 1783 and was to continue after the abolition of slavery" (*Adolphus* 7; Bekele 2). Several years before *Adolphus* is set, a Crown Lands Utilization Program distributed land at low cost (2). Free people of color "occupied these lands" (Bekele 2). A "large class of small farmers who farmed marginal cacoa lands thus emerged….Many small and medium businesses mushroomed with the expanding cocoa trade. New villages were established, and some measure of prosperity was enjoyed by a fairly large section of the society" (2). "The cocoa industry was moderately propsperous between 1840-1866," paving the way for the "Golden Age of Cocoa," a "tremendous boom between 1866-1920" which ended with a catastrophic blight impacting the dominant hybrid of cacoa planted in Trinidad (Bekele 3). Popularly known as Witches Broom, "the fungal pathogen, *Crinipellis perniciosa*" destroyed the "Golden Age of Cocoa" on Trinidad (Bekele 4). In *Adolphus*, neither the cacoa plants nor the human labor used to tend them on the Romelia plantation is described in detail although we witness Antonia caring for a

very ill and impoverished cottager. The setting is deeply discomforting and marked by shared human and vegetal silences.

<5>If, as Kathryn Yusoff explains, the plantation transforms people of color into matter while dividing the ontological category of the "human" from all other forms of life, the novella's heroine is placed in a precarious position as a "free" woman of color ironically cultivating her liberty, femininity, and humanity alongside a dehumanizing association with the "scorned Earth" (*Adolphus* 23). Her economic freedom is likely made possible by exploited labor and within both the gendered European discourse of the garden and a colonial geography that depends upon inequity. For example, Antonia, whose name means "priceless" in Latin, is threatened with becoming an object or possession as a woman of color whose "value" can be assessed, extracted, and reproduced. As a mobile, free woman of color, she is nonetheless vulnerable to becoming a mere resource, taken by force and extracted from her home by the white villain DeGuerinon and likely forced to bear his children. Her embodiment may be used as "fossil energy (the enslaved) to transform the ecological and energetic organization of the world as a global geography" through forced childbirth (Yussof *Inhumanities*). Her transformation into a sexual object for De Guerinon makes her association with the garden equally troubling given the frequent abjecting of women of color in particular through associating them with the earth, flora, and fauna.

<6>Such an association plays out in complex ways in the intersection of gardens with geo- and biopower in the nineteenth century. Frederick Douglass, whose work was also serialized in *The Trinidadian*, writes movingly in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), of the barring of enslaved people from the slaveowner Colonel Lloyd's walled garden, the fruits of which, both aesthetic and edible, were available only to white people. While the latter frequently were invited to tour the garden, any Black person who entered to eat from the garden would be identified by the garden bell and marked by its tarred fence as a thief. Clearly, the plantation garden is associated in Douglass and elsewhere with white privilege, Black hunger, and pain. It epitomizes the ecological burden and environmental injustice that Kimberly Ruffin describes as the pain of being "Black on Earth" (1). In the British Empire, moreover, those who may be "lover[s] of flowers" are often represented or regulated as the beneficiaries of class privilege, wealth, and power. The Attorney General of Trinidad in power during the publication of *Adolphus*, Charles William Warner, for example, was a notorious Anglicizer of the island who was especially known for his love of flowers, his "lovely garden," and "aggressive and authoritarian attitude" (*Trinidad Path to Freedom* 131-132). Gardens such as the Royal Botanic Garden of Trinidad bear the

colonizer's name and today are often patronized by mobile and wealthy white European and American tourists, continuing the praxis of Black ecological exclusion and erasure. At the same time, the gardens of Caribbean people of color in the nineteenth century have often been cast by tourists like Charles Kingsley as exclusively utilitarian and disorderly; how flowers mingled with food is rarely recorded (141). The stories of skilled gardeners of color who cultivated major Caribbean gardens such as the Saint Vincent Botanical Garden are only now being recovered.(3)

<7>Antonia's garden in Adolphus is then doubly valuable, for it reflects and constructs a pleasure garden created by and for free people of color, rounding the dimensions of historical Black gardening in nineteenth-century Trinidad. Although the Romelias do not describe how they earned their freedom, as free Black planters they may represent a common historical expertise in cultivation that often led to surplus crops in the provisional plots of enslaved people. Once sold at market, such crops were a way to sustain families and prosper, making manumission possible. As Beth Fowkes Tobin points out, many eighteenth and nineteenth-century European travel texts describe the productive plots of enslaved Caribbean people, noting their lushness but discounting skill by assuming that "the soil….is very fertile,--producing amazing crops with hardly any labour" (Carmichael in Tobin 75). Antonia's skill as a garden designer takes on more importance as it is antidotal to this historical discourse while it points to a gap in our knowledge of the garden designs of free people of color, those historical people of color in the mid-nineteenth century who were establishing free households and making gardens for their own pleasure, health, and creative expression. While in Victorian Studies we understand how "plants entered British gardens from abroad" and how "the horticultural press began to weave its musings on plant collecting into larger narratives about empire, consumption, and colonial commodities," we have little understanding of how the horticultural press was absorbed by a new Caribbean middle class of color and what complex meanings Caribbean women planted in their gardens cultivated with European flowers, herbs, and vines as well as native plants (Wells).

<8>For example, unlike white British "lady gardeners" who are synonymous with Flora and or "the women of England," nationalizing femininity, humanness, and whiteness (Loudon 1; Ruskin 132), Antonia's identification with Flora and Venus makes her vulnerable to objectification in anti-Black discourse.(4) Lightly brown-skinned Antonia cannot escape her "African descent" or her Blackness when she is abducted by the mixed-race De Guerinon who is passing as white. However, in a distinct move to align a Black futurity with a gardening ethic of care, *Adolphus* aligns whiteness with its reverse and identifies the villain's garden

as a space ravaged by white violence. De Guerinon's luxurious house pointedly refuses its connection to the earth. It is surrounded by a dead and neglected garden while he is represented as a distinctly uncaring and neglectful plantsman. Identifying flower gardens in particular as "useless trash," De Guerinon epitomizes extraction culture (49). His youthful transplanting to Europe, and his experience passing in a smooth wig on the Grand Tour, reveal his contempt for the Caribbean from which he merely wishes to extract resources, including Antonia. He ironically comes to nought, however, when he loses all of his money and is jailed for debt, suggesting that his time, Anti-Black Time, on Trinidad, is dying like his garden and like the large-scale plantation system. Consistently represented as opposed to both Blackness and vegetal life, the villain DeGuerinon,enslaves his own mother and denigrates "the pleasures of nursing a tender plant, the reflections, the sublime thoughts which spontaneously rise from the heart at the contemplation of a flower garden" (49). As the novel weaves plants and people together and breaks them apart, it contemplates how the ontological lines between them enable the subjugation of both and deny the dependence of one upon the other.

"Radical Dependence"

<9>As she resists her transformation into extractable matter by cultivating a garden that shows her taste and skill, Antonia also ironically allies Blackness with the vibrancy of more-than-human plant life. The novel's analysis of the materiality of decolonization through an exploration of Caribbean women's gardening challenges ideals of autonomy and mastery with a politics of "radical dependence" upon an earth "which sages scorn and stern philosophy rejects with contempt" (Marder *PT* 68; *Adolphus* 23). This deep engagement with Antonia's garden space is a risky endeavor, as "early geographic imaginaries posited space as 'outside human existence'" (Lethabo King 1029). As Lethabo King argues, traditionally, "black bodies one with nature, take on the coordinates of space within Western thought. Black bodies mark the outsides of humanness" (Lethabo King 1029). If, as Kathryn Yusoff explains, the plantation transforms people of color into matter while dividing the ontological category of the "human" from all other forms of life, the novella's heroine Antonia Romelia cultivates an alternative subjectivity alongside the lives of plants. Her garden occupies space within her lover Adolphus's abolition story, bringing the ontological qualities of plants, the material tradition of Caribbean women's gardening, the cultural discourses of the nineteenth-century British "Gardening for Ladies" and the "language of flowers," and the Black experience of multiple forced transplantations within the African diaspora to bear upon the imagining of a free people of color (Loudon; Phillips). In a leap between species, plants in Antonia's garden "witness" and "testify" to a Black futurity in which plant

life enriches Black life in a companionate and hence, ontological, sense (*Adolphus* 23). In this way, the garden actively participates in critiquing both the idealizing of the free, non-animal or non-vegetal, exclusive "human" and the abjecting of the enslaved "inhuman" Black subject defined "as both matter and as a subjective racial category of colonial geographies and its extractive afterlives" (Yusoff). Indeed, in *Adolphus*, "vegetal afterlives," the daily "material resurrections" of plants from the decomposition of past lives, expand their vital roots into human thought and into thoughts about humanity (Marder *Plant Thinking* 67).

<10>In identifying Antonia's garden with the abjected side of binaries "scorned" under the Enlightenment's philosophical apology for the plantationocene, the novel draws the sentimental language of flowers into a discourse of resistance that occupies a spectrum of garden care. Alternatively, using the language of flowers in their garden courtship scene, Antonia and Adolphus are entangled within both Black and garden pleasure, human and ecological care. The evergreen myrtle, emblem of everlasting love, crown for both rulers and the dead, takes a central role in Antonia's plot. It is "her favorite. I care it very much" (21). This archaic usage suggests that the speaker both "cares for and takes care of" the plant (Winer *Adolphus* 84).(5) Establishing the practice of caring between plants and people, the narrative of *Adolphus* creates a sense of mutual "tender[ness]" or shared vulnerability between human and plant bodies, a cross-species alliance between the vegetal realm and human subjectivity that is informed and signified by an ethic of care that fosters Black life, here held by myrtle branches that mirror the lovers' human arms (*Adolphus* 49).(6) Such care, as Saidya Hartman states is "the antidote to violence," ("*In the Wake*: A Salon in Honor of Christina Sharpe").

<11>Indeed, in deploying such a language of plants, *Adolphus* "pivots the center" of Enlightenment philosophy and the nineteenth-century British novel to enter Antonia's "everyday" practice as a carer and a plantswoman of color into epistemology, effectively "[shedding] a whitened center in conception and design" of the discourse (Aptheker 12). Bettina Aptheker's classic feminist 1989 theorizing of the everyday as epistemology is useful in considering how everyday practices such as Caribbean women's gardening form knowledge which disciplines such as Victorian Studies must pivot to see. Aligning the idea of everyday knowledge as established by early feminist writers and scholars such as historian Aptheker and Elsa Barkley Brown alongside the call of more recent works such as Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), aids in dismantling "disciplinary norms" that "continually disavow and distort knowledge," particularly "the kinds of knowledge gained from and of the everyday, from what Dionne Brand calls 'sitting in the room with history'" (Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong 370). As

Brown argues, only by sharing that room in our teaching and research may we begin to ask how "our students overcome years of notions of what is normative," why we read this book and not that, examine this garden, and not the other (921). Centering Antonia's garden allows us to consider what is lost when we only read and assign nineteenth-century "British" texts that speak about the Caribbean rather than from the Caribbean. Likewise, as very few Victorian novels represent women gardeners and their gardens, *Adolphus* fills a gap that intimately connects plants to people and particularly questions what it means for a woman gardener of color to step into the role of Flora.

<12>Referencing popular gendered ideals of the nineteenth-century middle-class woman gardener, *Adolphus* constructs the garden as a "freer space than the home" in an entirely concrete and immediate fashion (Bilston). Men assist Antonia rather than vice versa. As Bilston notes of the classed and gendered Victorian gardening discourse: "flowers *sanctify* and women *act"* in their gardens (Bilston). Hence, like myriad domestic and colonial women gardeners, Antonia can see "the impact of [her[] actions legibly, daily, in [her] own soil" (Bilston). As Jamaica Kincaid writes in *My Garden Book*, it is the gardener's prerogative and her pleasure to make her garden's plants meaningful, to align them with her everyday use and experience, and hence, materialize memory. Such a practice pushes back against the division of the seedbank from the archive, effectively undisciplining the division between people and plants (226). The novella's representation of vegetal life consistently models dependence and care, often through an imaginative anthropomorphism. In the valley of St. Ann's, for example, cattle stand under "the protecting shade of some motherly tree," while the topography itself displays an ethic of care towards plants: "the bold hills of Maraval and those of St. Ann's stand as it were like ramparts fitted up to protect the verdant plain from the rude intrusion of fitful weather" (49). Indoors and out, the Romelias' house and garden are sheltered and "comfort[ed]" by the shade of a a wild plant, a massive grenadilla vine, "one of the indispensable comforts of rural life" (7). This entanglement is intensified in the garden setting.

<13>Flowers in Antonia's garden are humanized, open, and vulnerable, dynamic and intimately entangled with and interdependent upon each other, other species, and the elements. "Dahlias, like blushing beauties dressed in a hundred colors" hang "down their heads before the coxcomb breezes, which insolently attempted to ruffle their petals" (8). The "butterfly flower almost seemed to invite its living brother to frolic in the air," while "the roses, with open faces, proudly held up their graceful heads as if claiming admiration as queens of the fields" (8). Long held as a strike against its ontological status, plants' dependency upon and mirroring of the movement of the sun is celebrated in *Adolphus*: "The sunflower, with its many rays

expanding around, reflected with great lustre the brilliancy of the orb of day" (8). In return for the comfort the garden provides, Antonia and Adolphus care for the garden. They place the myrtle, a plant used in ancient Greece to crown both rulers and the dead, at the center of the garden, "evergreen, ever unfaded, sweet emblem of eternal love" (8). As Antonia and Adolphus's human hands clasp myrtle branches to signify their love, they materialize their fealty and their intimacy with vegetal life. While the garden embodies "the beauty of simplicity, the home of retirement, of comfort and of love," rather than "extravagance," gendering and classing Antonia as an example of angelic middle-class Victorian womanhood, the garden plants share that human status as "queens of the field" (Ruskin; *Adolphus* 8). A biodiverse and life sustaining assemblage themselves, Antonia's plants model an alternative form of existence to the plantationocene. They contest the supremacy of one's "own interests" (80). Embodying vulnerability, generosity, and porosity, crossing species lines, the garden idealizes a state of mutual dependence rather than mastery, in contrast to the autonomy and atomization of the liberal subject under the philosophies feeding the plantation.

<14>As Antonia draws Adolphus to the garden and away from political discussion with her father, she forces him to rethink deeply rooted assumptions of Enlightenment philosophy that underscore democracy, atomism, and utilitarian instrumentalism. In the garden, Adolphus has an epiphany: "earth," he muses, "this world which sages scorn and stern philosophy rejects with contempt; let them preach, let them remonstrate, to me 'tis the seat of bliss" (23). In the garden, flowers and shrubs are endowed with the sentience to "bear record" and "witness" the couple's new "first promises" (23). Both holding branches of evergreen myrtle "firmly grasped," the lovers are ironically ontologically unmoored. Adolphus asks: "life…life..what is life?" (22). In this way, they engage in "plant-thinking" (Marder 10). That is, their encounter with plants alters their human thinking which is "to some extent, de-humanized and rendered plant-like, altered by its encounter with the vegetal world" (Marder 10). The lovers' vows made over branches of myrtle link them to the plant's regenerative powers, vulnerability, alterity, and mobility while its dependence on their constant care extends the plant's "tenderness" or fragility to their lives and love.

<15>In this way, the garden actively participates in critiquing the limits of both the free, non-animal or non-vegetal, exclusively alive "human," and the limits of the enslaved "inhuman" Black subject (Yusoff "Inhumanities"). As the latter is defined "as both matter and as a subjective racial category of colonial geographies and its extractive afterlives," the lives of people of color don't matter or rank as life at all in the plantationocene (Yusoff). If her gardening feminizes Antonia in the historical

European tradition of Flora as well as in the sentimental language of flowers and in the tradition of Victorian women's garden writing, it also then marks her and Adolphus as vulnerable lives and grows a future rooted in transplantation and regeneration made possible in the absence of the characters' known ancestral and national histories (Boutelle 183). Meeting in her garden, Antonia and Adolphus plan their future against history and Enlightenment philosophy. Amongst the vibrancy of companionate plants they create new ontological intimacies represented as an origin or source of life Adolphus, as an orphan, has never known, a dilemma painfully underscored by his dead mother's floral name: Rosa. As Boutelle notes, Des Source deploys gothic and sentimental conventions of antislavery fiction to theorize a Brown middle class identity (Boutelle 183). In such traditions, free Black homes and gardens such as Antonia's are havens of domestic love and order, removed from anti-Black colonial public life. However, Antonia's garden also creates the conditions for thinking materially about decolonization while in it, the earth and plants become material allies rallied against a "politics of nonlife" (Yussof *Inhumanities*).

<16>The vital futurity of Antonia's garden, in fact, gains considerably in contrast to the "white" villain De Guerinon's distaste for green life forms. He is unable to feel the pains and pleasures of dependence and mutual aid by "nursing a tender plant" and his inability to be intellectually and emotionally moved by a garden reveals his inability to think like or for a plant (49). This marks him as, ironically, less than human. At the same time, his villainy and scandalous dismissal of flowers and plants as "useless trash" embody his sheerly utilitarian ethos and stress, through his poor example, the importance of plant thinking in the novel, of porosity and mutualism in caring for the beings which enable life on earth (49). Antonia's garden is the ground upon which such presumptions are questioned, and the trauma of transplantation is made both material and achingly meaningful. Each plant in Antonia's garden, gathered from somewhere else in the Southern hemisphere, epitomizes "Glissant's contention that Caribbean history is characterised by 'ruptures' and 'brutal dislocation', where 'historical consciousness could not be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment'" (De Loughrey 305). The narrative result is not only a "tormented chronology of time' and space, but suggests that the (subjugated) past, suppressed in dominant historiography, becomes 'obsessively present'" (De Loughrey 305). Antonia's garden plot branches out in the text and into the vegetal afterlives of the twenty-first century, troubling the relationship between the abstraction of freedom in the Enlightenment tradition and the material process of decolonization.

<17>As they fight to occupy space and resist the spatialization of racism on their island home, Adolphus and Antonia experience both the loss of the integrity of home and the loss of the thing itself. Antonia's home is invaded by white police, "real Yankee slavecatchers" who abuse the corpse of her mother in an atrocious disregard for her humanity (58). Mr. Romelia, as well, is criminalized and taken to jail, not allowed a moment with the body of his wife (58). Adolphus is exiled from Trinidad when he rescues Antonia. At these deeply traumatic moments in the plot, both of the lovers grasp a tree for support, monumentalizing their radical dependence upon rooted beings. In such a moment of interspecies support, as Batraville says, a praxis rooted in "an ethics of intentional porosity between self and other … can be expanded to the scale of the small island and anywhere where the self meets the other" (Batraville). The lovers' arboreal claspings recall their physical and emotional leaning on Antonia's garden and their grasping of myrtle branches there, key moments of the protagonists' dependency upon that which enables life from endings and that which may regenerate life from broken limbs. As each embrace recalls the branches they held in Antonia's garden, the lovers touch what generously supports them, asking nothing in return. These embraces, moments of sheer, radical or rooted dependence and connection with plants allow the reader "to re-encounter touch and relinquish borders" (Batraville). They effectively remind the reader of what the words "support" and "uprooting" mean. At moments when the lovers are profoundly physically and spiritually threatened, these embraces ground them, calling upon human dependence upon plants to support life from death.

<18>Reading such radical dependency between people and plants incorporates and advances scholarly understandings of the role of the "plot" in Caribbean literature and culture as well as speaking back to the cost of the extraction and transplantings of people and plants wrought by British imperialism and often only marginally mentioned in the canonical nineteenth-century British novel (Wynter 101). Clearly, Antonia's gardening falls into the category of the Caribbean garden "plot," a haven within the plantation usually belonging to enslaved people and used for utilitarian purposes, to provide food for survival. As the plantation is what Sylvia Wynter terms "a system, owned and dominated by external forces," and the Caribbean person of color's garden is "what we shall call the plot system, the indigenous, autochtonous system," Antonia's garden intensifies the linking of the plot to the making of culture (Wynter 100). Its decorous arrangement of floral life and its practice of care challenges the idea of the plantation as "the very core and seat of the structure of 'civilized values" (98). In contemporary Caribbean novels, Wynter argues, "the basic confrontation is between the plantation and the plot, and the structure of values which each represents" (99). As Wynter notes "from early on, the planters gave the slaves plots of land on which to grow food to feed themselves in order to maximize

profits. We suggest that this plot system, was, like the novel form in literature terms, the focus of resistance to the market system and market values." African peasants made the plot a site of folk culture – the basis of a social order – in three hundred years (99). "This culture recreated traditional values – use values. This folk culture became a source of cultural guerilla resistance to the plantation system" (100). Antonia's gardening is not a provisional garden, yet its very ornamentality challenges extraction, instrumentalism, and monoculture. Gardening neither for a profit nor for utility, she gardens for love. The presence of flowers in the Caribbean plot of both enslaved people and free people of color is a historical practice that should be investigated further, shaping aesthetics, pleasure, and the making of meaning through everyday use in the same way that quilting and gardening, as Alice Walker notes, has always been a complex form of resistance in African American culture. Antonia's garden shares the plants Walker's mother planted, sunflowers, roses, dahlias, as she shares her skill to make a garden "original in its design and "magnificent with life and creativity" (Walker 241).

<19>Stepping into the Western role of Flora, Antonia certainly gardens within a raced, classed, and gendered domestic ideology aided by the British "lady" gardener's "peculiarly appropriate associations. . . with love, beauty, nature, and leisure" as well as with a perceived feminine capacity for "sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision" in the garden that is distinct from hard labor (Waters 241). Thus, nineteenth-century "garden writers (of both sexes) never tire of asserting that women have an 'instinctive' love of gardens and a 'native' affinity with the plants they nurture" (Waters 241). As a liminal space neither fully inside nor outside, "both home and not-home" (Bilston), in nineteenth-century garden discourse the garden "was England, it was society, it was the civilized world" ruled by a queen (Bilston). As Weltman argues, women's occupation of the garden in cultural discourse to be found in texts such as those by Dickens or Stowe which *Adolphus* was published alongside, thus invites broad and potentially culturally challenging interpretations. Ruskin, who wrote "Of Queen's Gardens" a few years after the publication of *Adolphus*, picks up on an impulse present earlier in the period and evidenced by such movements as Owenism and the "Back to the Land" movement in the United States and England.(7) Ruskin was not alone then when he urged "women not to immure themselves behind their garden walls, but rather to redefine those gardens to include all of England, Victoria's demiparadise and sceptered isle" (Weltman 119). Engaging this discourse in the Caribbean novel challenges the British Empire's tendency to exclude all of its subjects from its idea of nation.

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<20>If in England the garden queen's "intoxicating" vision of "power and a wide venue in which to apply it" was offered to "those to whom the radical possibilities proffered by women's rights were out of the question," in the Caribbean this discourse could extend from British women to those women whose human rights were out of the question on the basis of their association with the Earth itself (Weltman 119). The pains, pleasures, and unevenly experienced promise of that discourse materialize in Antonia's garden and the key scenes of planting and uprooting which are set there. An idealized figure, Antonia represents that "degree of taste and artistical feeling" distinctive of "ladies," in Jane Loudon's term, "which is very seldom to be found among some gardeners to a sufficient extent; and which, indeed, can hardly be expected in many of them" (311). Her work suggests a new "class of [female] amateurs which, in England, numbers many and zealous devotees, even among the highest ranks: It is to be hoped, that the dissemination in this country of works like the present volume, may increase, among our own fair countrywomen, the taste for these delightful occupations in the open air. which are so conducive to their own health, and to the beauty and interest of our homes" (Loudon 17). This greening of women's classed and domesticated practices offers a character such as Antonia an experiment in attaching meaning and value to the material and human world.

<21>Antonia takes the opportunity to "pivot the center" in her garden so that it reveals lives that matter on her plot where she shapes her relationship to the living matter of the material world, both human and vegetal (Aptheker). Aptheker, argues in *Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience*, such "everyday" knowledge, rooted here in Antonia's gardening praxis, counts women's everyday practice as epistemology. This approach was famously adopted by Black feminist historian Elsa Barkley Brown in order to oppose the claim of neutrality in the discipline of history. Ecocritics and Victorianists however may deploy this classic theoretical position to identify practices such as Caribbean gardening which increase and expand our ability to identify resistance to the intersection of a disembodied Enlightenment philosophy and the plantationocene's politics of nonlife. If I pivot from centuries of work that discounts plants, for example, I can consider how people cultivated a future in the joint absence of known ancestral and national/natural histories (Boutelle 182). Certainly, meeting in her garden, Antonia and Adolphus plan their future against history and, amongst the vibrancy of companionate plants, create new intimacies. Anchored by myrtle, a plant which honors both the dead and the ruling elite, which must be carefully tended and constantly watered, the lovers are represented as both tender and quick, vulnerable and ephemeral, subject to death and regeneration.(8) The violent sacrifice of the precious myrtle for the couple's ritualistic holding, brings them into close

proximity with the lives of plants and materializes their new consciousness, an epistemology which denies human exceptionalism. This knowledge, based on an everyday practice, challenges the novel's Enlightenment "scorn" for the earth and for its subjugated beings, plants and women of color.

Garden "Nonhistories"

<22>Indeed, a gender critique which merely seeks to restore Antonia to the status of human through her refined acts of feminine cultivation would overlook the novel's interest in the renegotiation of the ontological separation of people from the Earth and other forms of life and the complicated ecological and gender burdens which the woman Caribbean gardener has and does face. Indeed, in addition to the risks taken with Antonia's alliance with her garden, the novel reveals that her work takes liberties itself with diasporic plants and ontological categories in a "discomforting" way familiar to Caribbean gardeners of our own time (Kincaid 229). Jamaica Kincaid, acknowledging the power of the gardener over her plants, asks "What does a gardener want? A gardener wants the garden to behave in the way she says" (229). Like God over Eden, she argues, gardeners are "possessive, generous, temperamental, steadfast, single-minded, patient, quick to toss out" and more (224). Subjecting the garden to her will, the gardener covets plants from elsewhere to include in her own space. As Kincaid notes, nineteenth-century British gardener William Robinson, the creator of the "Wild Garden" aesthetic, perfected the process of naturalizing "hardy exotic" plants from elsewhere. His preferred plant list however is now so common as to be thought native to Britain and Europe: "marsh mallow, thalictrum, daylily, hens and chicks" (229). Witnessing "hardy exotic" plants from elsewhere on a garden tour of his estate, Gravetye, and others, Kincaid references the violence of these transplantings and is "struck with the desire to behead all" of her fellow tourists at dinner (229). Such garden Edens, she writes, "are like that, so rich in comfort, it tempts me to discomfort. I am in a state of constant discomfort and I like this state so much I would like to share it" (229). This discomfort is ever-present for the postcolonial gardener, for "botanists are from the same part of the world as" Christopher Columbus (160). They "emptied worlds of their names; they emptied the world of things animal, vegetable, and mineral" and replaced their "names with names pleasing to them; these" Latin "names are pleasing to them because they are reasonable; reason is a pleasure to them" (160). With her own Latinate name, Antonia Romelia takes on the qualities of the reasonable, Enlightenment botanist in her garden, establishing careful order in her neatly gravel-pathed garden with plants assembled from the global South in her own "Flora's temple," a kind of Eden or "seat of bliss." Her garden plot however has at its center

not the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, but a sign of emotion opposed to reason, the evergreen myrtle, emblem of perpetual love.

<23>Planted with jasmine and roses from China and the Middle East, Central American dahlias, tuberoses originating in Mexico, butterfly flower, the local fruit granadilla, and Mediterranean myrtle, the garden intervenes in the very idea of a stable natural history. Antonia's garden, instead, shares a material "nonhistory" with the novel's human characters who seed a future made both painful and possible in the absence of origins (Boutelle 182). The novel's deployment of imported and local plants, called by their vernacular names, points to her own transplantation. As Batraville writes, plants offer and have historically offered Caribbean women "a praxis rooted in movement, growth, adaptability, multiplicity, and an ethics of intentional porosity between self and other that can be expanded to the scale of the small island and anywhere where the self meets the other" (Batraville). These meetings, often discomforting, speak less to the importance of the value of "native" plants or the threat of "invasives," a word which Trinidadian gardener Marchelle Farrell finds "lands on" her with a "nauseating thud of recognition" and resonates in her own "scarred DNA" as an unwelcome immigrant in England, than to the importance of the gardener's experience as a model for resistance (*Uprootings*).

<24>As Antonia remains on Trinidad at the novel's end, rooted in place like her garden, she poses a question to the hero's mobility. Her plot demonstrates, in contrast to his movement, a living with the trouble of Trinidad, a mutual rooting to the island framed by her love for it and its dependence upon her care. Such dependence upon Trinidad strikes Adolphus's friend Ernest as all wrong. When he describes Antonia and Adolphus as "blind…and as often deaf to your own interests," he expresses an Enlightenment "abhorrence" of the dependent condition in contrast to the autonomous or autolectic animal or human in Western philosophy (*Adolphus* 80; Marder 68). As Antonia seeks to bring Adolphus back to Trinidad, she brings him back to her plot, a story and a place "scorned" by "stern philosophers" who acknowledge neither her woman's story nor her everyday labor as valuable (23). The narrative's valuing of plants' dependence upon her, upon the sun, upon soil and weather, critiques the very quality of plants which has historically made them seem less autonomous than people and animals. That is particularly their reproductive reliance, whether on human care, the sun, soil, or other exterior conditions. As Adolphus seeks to return to Trinidad, Ernest will marry and have children in Venezuela, uprooted and independent of island contingencies. He will join Bolivar's political movement and never return to Trinidad.

Political Animals and Vegetal Movements

<25>"Aristotle," Michael Marder explains "defined the human as a political animal. Even if we think of protest movements, for instance we imagine demonstrations, masses of people moving through the streets, roaming the streets as packs of animals would" (Marder "The Future is Vegetal" 69). Hence, in a novel so concerned with mobility and political movements, it is striking that Antonia's garden and its growth through the daily death, composting, and regeneration of plants and soil, seed dissemination, and plant mobility through growth that must be constantly reordered, politicizes plants. As a point of return that lures Adolphus towards home at the tale's end, Antonia's garden acts as a foil to the limits of the political mythology of the human and its common analogue, the animal, and critiques the limits of such mobilities. These ideas are at stake, in fact, as Adolphus himself is in a liminal space, on the ocean between Trinidad and Venzuela. During this middle passage, the narrative branches out into a fanciful tale about a shark. A sailor, wrongly thrown overboard for a crime he did not commit, lands on the back of a shark and rides it ashore. His story elevates the power, speed, and autonomy of the fierce shark in order to elevate the same, but fiercer, qualities of the man that "masters" the shark. Constructing the sailor's freedom through his dominance of the animal, Bob the Sailor's tale epitomizes what Val Plumwood describes as the Enlightenment's "culture of mastery" in which freedom is defined as dominance, fierce autonomy, mobility, speed, self-reliance, and the instrumentalization of "natural resources" for human advancement (30). The episode is the epitome of a political culture in which men master others and in which radical dependence on other beings is denied in a glorification of mastery of a wild animal.

<26>Tales of animal dominance have often been seen as epic or imaginative metaphors for political movements, however, even Aristotle also recognized "three other kinds of movement, which are growth, decay and metamorphosis. Which means that plants participate in three out of four significations of movement" (Marder "Plant Intentionality"). A vegetal politics then that "recodif[ies] the notion of political movement," is "more consistent with movements of plants and not necessarily with the human and animal locomotion" (Marder "Our Future is Vegetal" 69). In his final deliberation over his return to Trinidad and his desire to return to Antonia and abandonment of the future authoritarian Bolivar, Adolphus constructs an alternative form of rebellion. A return to the island is out of the question for his companion Ernest who will stay and serve the liberator. Antonia and Adolphus's rebellion however seems likely to be to occupy Trinidad, remaining, like a garden without a single command center, but linked in with alternatives to other ways of resistance. The idea of putting down roots in Trinidad opens a vital new political discourse which may provide the opportunity "at which new links might emerge or which might remain dormant, a little bit like the meristem parts of plants,

where new growth might happen, given optimal environmental conditions from the outside" (Marder "Future" 69). It is unclear at the end of Adolphus whether he will return to Trinidad. Ernest sees the idea of returning entirely unacceptable. He will remain in Venezuela to purse his "own interests," including marriage and children. Adolphus's place between places and choices, however, is far more interesting and reflects his experience of love and dependence. He is emotionally rooted in place to the point where he does not prioritize his "own interests."

<27>While to speak a language of flowers and plants has long been seen as a naïve and sentimental endeavor in nineteenth-century literature and particularly retrograde for women, that language too has been deployed by movements like the peace movement. The language of flowers and plants is also a language of vegetal alterity and inhumanity; to speak it is to widen the spectrum of lives that matter. Antonia's garden then – problematic in so many ways – "is also a site of possibility," a space in which a politics of nonlife is actively "always being transgressed" (Yussof "Inhumanities"). "Other relations [are] being instigated that [speak] to the possibility of other relations to the earth." This as Sylvia Wynter argues, is nowhere more evident than in what she termed "the slave plot, where the enslaved grew food and cultivated other relations of temporality and belonging" (99). As Yussof argues "anticolonial critique is not simply a critique of the inadequacies of the human or a better humanism but a counter imaginary that opens up a fullness in the register of the world" (Yussof "Inhumanities"). Joining posthumanist perspectives from the field of Critical Plant Studies to Yussof's critique of Anthropocene criticism then may be a particularly fruitful way of reimagining the "subjectivity and relation" of Caribbean women of color in the context of their gardens which sustained them (Yussof "Inhumanities").

<28>As plants – and garden plots – seek out cracks in industrialized capitalism in which to sprout, so do plants and people occupy seams within the plantationocene in which to establish life. Both species may practice species survival and mutual dependence without hierarchichal leadership. Both may grow modularly, become regenerative, perennial, and adaptable. When plants and people intersect to create life, they may initiate a persistent, vital temporality that dwarfs the span of an individual life. Our species cannot live without these long-time vegetal companions which may live without us, constantly working to escape our garden enclosures or disrupt our tendencies to monoculture which date back to the publication date of *Adolphus*. Plants, plant philosopher Michael Marder argues, suffer the "massive objectification of vegetal life," now "proceeding at an accelerated pace" in modernity (*Plant Thinking* 35). Our own tendency to deny plants a right to exist, to classify plants as "resources" or "raw material" for people shares an assumption with

the Victorians that places many forms of life near the bottom of the chain of being. From Aristotle to Hegel, Western philosophers have classified plants as "superficial" with no inner life; they are part of a distinctly non-human "environment," rather than, like people, autonomous from it (Marder *PT* 34). They are in fact, ranked as less alive in Western culture where they may be killed with impunity. "Resources," in Western enlightenment culture, Marder writes, plants are something else awaiting transformation,"the woods are wood awaiting its elevation" (*PT* 31). This attitude encapsulates the extractive ecology of the Victorian period and our own time, epitomized perhaps by the mining of finite amounts of coal, gems, or minerals from the earth, the wholesale slaughter of animals to the point of extinction, the copious use of water to power its own pollution, and the deforestation of islands such as Trinidad leaving the afterlives of extraction ecologies ever present now. As Elizabeth Miller argues in *Extraction Ecologies: Literature of the Long Exhaustion*, extraction ecologies are represented in novels of the long nineteenth century through the anxious plots of non-reproduction in which people, like minerals, gems, and metals, cannot reproduce themselves (Miller 72).

<29>With their dynamic ability to turn death into life, plants, however, have their own modes of resistance and infinite methods of reproduction. Ecocritics and students of an abolitionist text centering vegetative life as Adolphus does might ask then what it means to resist white supremacy like a plant? As Antonia tends her garden, she cares for "vegetal beings" in whom, Marder points out, "life is de-centered—not, as some might think, concentrated in the vital "organ," the root, but dispersed and disseminated throughout the body of plant communities. This displacement of the origin, its dissemination and decimation, is in touch with the logic of plant life, where the seed is not the first cause but an infinitely deferred point of recommencement, the chance of a new beginning" ("Resist Like a Plant," 29). Antonia's garden, spreading luxuriantly from transplanted and native plants, makes this promise ironically from within the space of the cocoa plantation that surrounds it. Written just at the onset of the "golden age" of cocoa production in Trinidad, *Adolphus*bears the author's knowledge of the impact of its beginnings on Trinidad. Antonia's biodiverse "varied" garden is by contrast, full of "interest" is, like her, resistant to the logic and politics of atomization, mobility, monetization, and extraction. A vegetal record of the mastery and motility of plants and people under colonization in the Caribbean, Antonia's garden witnesses and testifies to the historical presence of the nineteenth- century gardener of color in Trinidad. The representation of her garden reminds us to follow Yussof's direction to study the conjoined historic geographics of racialization and ecological transformation through the study of land use, within the context of colonial and settler extractions.

Doing so we create the conditions for thinking materially about decolonization and the radical possibilities of dependence.

Coda
***Adolphus* and Victorian Studies**

<30>Reading a practice such as Caribbean women's gardening in Victorian Studies research and teaching reveals evermore how we can read the wake of the slave ship in the weather today, how the "Golden Age of Cocoa" fostered "a climate of anti-Blackness that extends well beyond the wake of the slave ship and continues to structure" Black "lives and symbolic economies" now (Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong 370). As "taking up Sharpe's 'undisciplining' is both material and metaphorical…scholars of Victorian literature and culture are, in fact, scholars of Atlantic slavery, even if to date we have largely taken up that study through evasion or non-recognition," (Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong 370). As such, we should take up books that pivot the center and write back to the texts that absent them. Serialized alongside British and American literature, *Adolphus* centers spaces and people held at a distance in canonical domestic imperialist texts such as *Mansfield Park*, *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre*. Providing a "counterhistory to the modernity" inscribed by such texts in general (Baker 6), nineteenth-century Caribbean fiction by people of color in particular reminds readers through Black and Brown voices that monolithic terms such as the "British novel" represent, like metaphors of Englishness such as "the island Race," a nation "always united against" Black stories and metaphors of blackness in order to coalesce a "*United*Kingdom" (Gilroy in Baker 4). *Adolphus* then writes back to domestic imperialist nineteenth-century novels in which Caribbean plants are more familiar than Caribbean people and to period British garden texts which characterize gardening as a white middle-class woman's vocation. In plant or garden studies, centering Antonia's garden changes the view.

<31>*Adolphus* counters the evasions and mythologies of the British novels of its time directly: "Ought England not to blush! She that pretends to be the greatest and most magnanimous of Nations, to tolerate" slavery, racism, and police brutality "in any part of her dominions?" (74). Its focus on Antonia's gardening, in particular, expands our understanding of how gendered discourses might be remade by nineteenth-century Caribbean fiction to represent the experience of women's response to their uprootings and transplantations on a larger global scale. The text may also historicize the tradition of Caribbean women's garden writing in texts such as Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden Book* or more recent meditations such as Trinidadian Marchelle Farrell's *Uprooting: From the Caribbean to the Countryside*

– *Finding Home in and English Coutnry Garden* (2024). Reading Antonia's garden demands crossing temporal and national borders, pivoting centers, and doing things differently in Victorian Studies. We should do this while we can, as the clock is ticking.

Notes

(1)I am grateful to my colleagues Kate Simpkins whose digital exhibit The Makandal Text Network helped ground my interest in Caribbean texts and plants and Janelle Rodriques who was kind enough to invite me to a discussion on Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden Book* that led me to new books and new ideas on Caribbean women's gardens. (^)

(2)As Yussof writes, following Catherine Hall, Blackness, in Enlightenment "modern liberalism," is named as a property of "natal alienation" which is "also genealogical and geographic isolation" (Yussof *A Billion Black Anthropocenes* 3; Hall, 28; Yussof *ABBAN* 69). Whiteness, in Enlightenment liberal thought "became established as a *right* to geography, to *take*place, to *traverse* the globe and to *extract* from cultural, corporeal, and material registers" (69).(^)

(3)See the exhibition curated by Christina Welch and others, "Unearthing Indigenous and Enslaved African Horticultural Knowledge in St Vincent Botanical Garden (1785-1811). Kew Gardens Research Repository 2023-09-21.(^)

(4)During the same decade in which *Adolphus* is set, in an excruciating reversal of the white European Flora discourse, Khoikhoi tribeswoman Sarah Baartman was mercilessly burdened as a parody of white goddess and queenship through the nomenclature the "Hottentot Venus." She was often represented alongside flora and fauna to assert her link to the nonhuman. In 1815, Baartman was sketched and examined for three days in in the royal Jardin du Plantes, the headquarters of the *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle*. While, as Crais details, Baartman could have had many stories to tell of her "childhood, of work, of romantic" and "terror," these "were not the stories Parisians wanted to hear from her," but rather, they reduced her to a body with stories to tell "about humankind's history of the relationships between, animals and plants," animals and humans, "stories of the natural world" (Crais 130). Such objectification, the transformation of a woman into the flora and fauna of the natural world is a burden that Antonia bears in the garden.(^)

(5)The *Oxford English Dictionary* records this expression in use in 1881: "If you care your things..it is surprising how long they may be made to serve." *Mrs. P. O'Donoghue, Ladies on Horseback vi. 84.*(^)

(6)The expression "a tender plant" has literal and figurative meanings. In gardening discourse, the expression references a plant that is "delicate, easily injured by severe weather or unfavourable conditions; not hardy; needing protection." In the figurative sense, it describes "something needing careful nurture if it is to survive and develop "Tender, *Adj.*, Sense II.3.b." *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, December 2023.(^)

(7)It's clear that Owenism had spread from England to Spain and perhaps from there to Trinidad, Castellano, Fernando López, and José Manuel Menudo Pachón. "Robert Owen's Quest for the 'New Moral World' in a Non-Industrialized Country." *History of European Ideas*, vol. 47, no. 2, Mar. 2021, pp. 359–73. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2020.1798629 Likewise, utopian back to the land experiments such as Brook Farm (1848) in Massachusetts were well documented in the press.(^)

(8)In plant lore, "quick" references what is "living, endowed with life, animate" "Quick, V. (1), Sense 1." *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4289572352.(^)

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