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Ecological Memory and Poetic Resistance in the Contemporary Caribbean Landscapes of Miller and Paisant

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Abstract

This paper examines how ecological memory and poetic resistance operate in the poetry of Kei Miller's *In Nearby Bushes* and Jason Allen-Paisant's*Thinking with Trees*. While acknowledging that postcolonial theory is also relevant to the concerns of the study, the paper adopts ecocritical theory for its analysis because it offers a more focused approach for examining the dynamic relationship between literature, environment, and memory. Ecocriticism is employed to this study, to read landscapes not as passive backdrops but as active, remembering agents shaped by histories of slavery, colonial extraction, racial exclusion, and environmental violence in both the Caribbean and the diasporic spaces. Through close textual analysis, the study demonstrates how Miller and Allen-Paisant transform natural environments into living archives that preserve marginalised histories, indigenous ecological knowledge, and black experiences. While postcolonial insights inform the discussion, ecocritical theory enables the paper to foreground how ecological memory functions through plants, forests, soil, and seasonal change, and how poetic resistance emerges through the reimagining of human–nature relations. The paper concludes that ecological memory in the above poetry becomes a source for cultural survival, while poetic resistance operates as a decolonising environmental practice. Ultimately, the study shows that ecocriticism provides an effective framework for understanding how contemporary Caribbean poetry mobilises the natural world as a site of testimony, healing, and ethical re-engagement with the environment.

Keywords: Poetry, Ecology, Resistance, Miller and Paisant.

Introduction

The Caribbean environment holds a deep reservoir of historical, cultural, and ecological narratives shaped by plantation slavery, colonial extraction, migration, and contemporary environmental crises. The region's forests, rivers, bushes, and soils still bear the marks of thisviolence, making the landscape not merely scenery but an embodied witness to history. Contemporary poets like the ones under study, have responded to this condition by re-imagining Caribbean nature as a space of memory, agency, and resistance. According to Hannah Regis, "Caribbean poetry increasingly expressesa reparative writing that seeks to heal the fractures between Caribbean peoples and their natural surroundings" (2).Within this evolving poetic movement, Kei Miller and Jason Allen-Paisant occupy significant positions.

Allen-Paisant, a Jamaican poet and scholar in diaspora, interrogates how black bodies navigate landscapes historically coded as white. His award-winning collection *Thinking with Trees* reframes nature writing by grounding ecological reflection in racial history. Critics like Jade Cuttle note that his work *"*rethink[s] our relationship with both nature and history, past andpresent*"*(4) by centering black presence in the woods. While Kei Miller's *In Nearby Bushes* similarly explores the bush as a site of hiding, memory, danger, refuge, and cultural knowledge. His poems confront Jamaican social realities by revealing the bush as a living archive of both trauma and resilience.

To clarify the focus of this research,the paper looks at the following five poems under Kei Miller's *In Nearby Bushes*:*"*A Psalm for Gay Boys*,"* *"*The Understory*,"* *"*Hush,*"* *"*Translation ofJamaican Curse," and "Here Where Is the Cure"also the following five under Jason Allen-Paisant's*Thinking with Tress:* *"*Crossing the Threshold", "Naming","Black Holes", "An Evening Walk When Spring Is Already Old", and "On the First Day of Autumn."These poems are selected because they reveal how ecological memory and poetic resistance manifest in different cultural contexts: Miller for instance, grounds ecological memory in Jamaica's social and botanical landscapes, while Allen-Paisant extends it to diasporic terrains marked by racial exclusion. Their poems, collectively, provides a balanced comparative ground for investigating how nature mediates memory and resistance across the Caribbean and diasporic spaces.

This study therefore investigates how their poetry navigates ecological memory and advances poetic resistance, contributing original insights to the Caribbean ecocritical scholarship.

Ecological Memory

Ecological memory refers to the ways in which landscapes, ecosystems, and environments retain traces of historical, cultural, and social experiences, influencing the present and shaping the future. Though rooted in environmental and ecological studies, its relevance extends to literary analysis, especially in contexts where landscapes are deeply intertwined with human history. C. Dawson defines ecological memory as "the capacity of an ecosystem to preserve knowledge of past states, interactions, and disturbances, including human impacts, which continues to influence present and future functioning" (11). In the

Caribbean, this concept carries particular weight, as landscapes bear the visible and invisible legacies of slavery, colonial extraction, plantation economies, and forced displacement.

In literary studies, ecological memory becomes a lens through which poets articulate the persistent influence of history on people and place. That is why Hannah Regis observes earlier that, Caribbean writers engage in "reparative writing that seeks to heal the fractures between Caribbean peoples and their natural surroundings" (Regis 2). This suggests that, ecological memory is not merely a recording of past trauma but an active, dynamic medium that informs cultural identity and ethical engagement with the natural world. In Kei Miller's *In Nearby Bushes*for instance, the Jamaican bush functions as a repository of cultural and ecological memory, encoding histories of negro communities, herbal medicine, and hidden queer lives. His constant poetic imagery of the "stifled earthquake" metaphorically represents collective trauma embedded in the landscape. Similarly, Jason Allen-Paisant's*Thinking with Trees* illustrates how English woodlands carry the residual traces of colonial exploitation and racial exclusion, highlighting the ways ecological memory shapes diasporic consciousness.

Ecological memory, therefore, operates in Caribbean poetry as both a medium of historical testimony and a resource for cultural preservation. It enables poets to foreground the natural world not merely as a backdrop but as an active participant in the processes of memory, identity formation, and cultural survival.

Poetic Resistance

Poetic resistance as a concept, describes the use of poetry to contest, challenge, or subvert dominant social, political, or ecological narratives. El Nagah defines it as "the use of creative language to oppose social, political, or ecological oppression, producing new modalities of consciousness and engagement" (Nagah 14). Within Caribbean literature, resistance often intersects with postcolonial critique, racial consciousness, and environmental justice, offering poets a means to counter historical erasures and assert marginalised voices.

In the works of Miller and Allen-Paisant, poetic resistance is inseparable from ecological consciousness. By placing focus on landscapes as repositories of memory, both poets intervene in the narratives of dispossession and exploitation. In one of Miller's poems, "Here Where Is the Cure" (Miller 25) for instance, cataloging of traditional bush medicine exemplifies what M. Thompson terms "botanical resistance," because it shows where the survival of indigenous ecological knowledge directly challenges the loses produced by colonial histories. Allen-Paisant's poetry similarly enacts resistance by placing black bodies in historically exclusionary English woodlands, revealing how race and history continue to structure access and belonging in natural spaces (Booker 1). His work questions the universality of Western nature writing and highlights the capacity of ecological poetry to claim space both literally and metaphorically.

Together, ecological memory and poetic resistance operate in tandem on this paper; ecological memory anchors poetry in place, history, and culture, while poetic resistance transforms the natural world into a site of critique, reclamation, and imaginative reconstruction. As FionaMoore notes that, Allen-Paisant's ecological consciousness "reaches toward a

compassionate engagement with the non-human world, intertwining ethical reflection, historical awareness, and cultural affirmation" (Moore 4). In the Caribbean literary context, this combination allows poetry to function not just as aesthetic expression but as an instrument of cultural survival, environmental advocacy, and social critique.

Literature Review

Caribbean literature has long attracted critical attention for its explorations of identity, displacement, memory, and the lingering legacies of colonialism. Scholars have consistently noted that poetry, in particular, functions as a space where landscape, history, and cultural survival converge. Foundational studies, such as those on Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris,AiméCésaire, among others,establish the Caribbean as a region where nature and history are inseparable. For example, critics analysing Walcott's "Seascapes" describe the sea not as symbolic decoration but as an "active, driving force with its own agency," (Lamming,12) demonstrating how nature becomes a historical witness. Similarly, studies on Brathwaite's*Tidalectics* have emphasised that the landscape retains cultural memory and participates in the reconstruction of Caribbean identity.

Scholars such as Eric Doumerc have mapped the evolution of nature poetry in the Caribbean from mere imitation of European landscapes to a politically charged reclamation of ecological space. Doumerc argues that by the 1970s, nature poetry had become intertwined with anti-colonial resistance, suggesting that environmental imagery was always central to Caribbean expressive traditions. Contemporary critics have also extended this trajectory as Doris Hambuch's geo-critical readings of Walcott, studies of Caribbean - "nature-witnessing," and analyses of Césaire's ecological consciousness all point to a growing interest in environmental interpretation. These studies demonstrate that Caribbean poetry has historically engaged with the environment in complex, political, and identity-forming ways.

Yet, even as this body of scholarship is valuable, much of it remains tied to older canonical poets and broad themes of postcolonial identity. While scholars have examined memory, trauma, and resistance, only a handful explicitly theoriseecological memory which is how landscapes carry, preserve, and transmit cultural and historical knowledge. Most studies treat memory metaphorically, not as part of an environmentally embedded process. Ezekiel Solomon Akuso's studies on Caribbean Literature for instance, even though basically on poetry, still focuses on the older poets like Brathwaite, Guillen and Walcott where he looks at the place of Africa in the imagination of the three Caribbean poets. He submits that, "the choice of Caribbean poetry is necessitated by the fact that this is the genre of literature that scholars, particularly in Africa, have shown the least interest in studying over the years" (xi).

Recent ecocritical scholarship attempts to deviate from this by shifting towards environmental awareness. Global ecocritical frameworks describe how literature reveals "the uneven entanglements of earthly living," urging for the reconsiderationof politically charged relationship between humans and land. However, postcolonial ecocriticism is also a reminder that such analysis must account for histories of plantation violence, extractive economies, and forced displacement as conditions unique to the Caribbean. Scholars such as Hannah

Regisagain highlight how Caribbean landscapes function as counter-archives, holding suppressed histories, yet even these works; this paper considers not enough in terms of naming or systematically examining ecological memory as a critical category.

It is within this emerging ecocritical space that works of contemporary poets like Kei Miller and Jason Allen-Paisant come into play. Allen-Paisant's*Thinking with Trees* has elicited commentary for its engagement with Black presence in the woods, its rethinking of ecological belonging, and its poetic interrogation of capitalist destruction of the environment. Critics like Bauch, E, note that Allen-Paisant "weaponises language to reveal oppressive spatial and racial boundaries, and his poems invite readers to imagine alternate eco-social futures. Some essays even highlight his use of trees as ancestral witnesses"(9). However, these discussions often remain thematic or biographical, focusing on identity politics and race without synthesizing how ecology, memory, and resistance operate simultaneously in his work.

Similarly, scholarship on Kei Miller,according to Aliyu, acknowledges his "language of complexity and his interest in hidden histories, migration, and the Caribbean landscape"(13). A chapter on Miller's essay,"Ecopoetics of Relation, Resistance and Grief" signals a new direction in Miller studies, foregrounding environmental concerns alongside cultural trauma. Yet,many criticisms are on his themes of grief, violence and sexuality alone, rather than exploring how ecological memory structures his poetics. His works are rarely placed in direct conversation with ecocritical theory or with contemporary discourses of environmental resistance which is what this paper sets to achieve.

Scholars beyond the Caribbean, including African voices such as NiyiOsundare, further demonstrate how ecology and memory can converge in poetry. *The Eye of the Earth*of Osundare for instance, shows how nature is central to cultural, ethical, and political life. But while Osundare and others suggest broader transnational patterns in eco-memory writing, their analyses do not fill the critical voice regarding Caribbean-specific ecological memory or how new Caribbean poets mobilise nature as resistance.

It is therefore in the light of the above arguments that this paper deems it necessary to fill in this gap. Although earlier scholars have made significant contributions of tracing nature imagery, environmental consciousness, and cultural memory, the paper considers their studies not sufficient for understanding the emerging ecological sensibilities in contemporary Caribbean poetry. Perhaps due to their absence of a focused dissection of ecological memory in Caribbean poetics and the demonstration of how ecological memory becomes a mode of poetic resistance, particularly among younger poets navigating postcolonial and diasporic realities. This is why the paper brings in an integrated comparative reading of Miller and Allen-Paisant, whose works push Caribbean ecology beyond earlier nationalist or symbolic discourse.

Therefore, this paper builds on previous scholarship but moves beyond its limits to argue that the works of earlier poets and researchers on the Caribbean region did not fully theorise the ecological dimensions of memory. Likewise, existing criticism on Miller and Allen-Paisant has no adequate connection to ecological memory with resistance. This study fills that gap by showing how these two contemporary poets transform Caribbean landscapes into living,

remembering, resisting entities, thereby enriching both Caribbean literary studies and global discussions of ecopoetics.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts ecocriticism as a theoretical framework to examine the interconnections between literature and the physical environment, often with an emphasis on addressing environmental crises and revaluing nature in cultural discourse. However, when applied to the Caribbean context, ecocriticism is modified to account for the region's specific history of colonial exploitation and ecological transformation. A postcolonial scholar, Alison Donnell argues that the Caribbean landscape has been systematically reshaped by plantation economies that prioritised monoculture export crops over biodiverse ecosystems, creating what she terms, "landscapes of extraction that continue to influence contemporary ecological relations" (3). In this context, ecocriticism becomes not merely a lens for analysing representations of nature but a tool for decolonizing the Caribbean's environmental imagination.

The poetry of Miller and Allen-Paisant exemplifies what Hannah Regis again identifies as a "Caribbean poetics of spirit that challenges Western dichotomies between nature and culture, human and non-human, material and spiritual" (2). In her scholarly work, Regis explores how Caribbean writers engage with what she called, "spectrality, counter-archival engagements, reparative writing, theories of embodiment, and cultural memory"(3), which all echo deeply with the ecocritical works of both Miller and Allen-Paisant. This approach aligns with what environmental historian Candy G. describes as "more-than-human histories of the region", which acknowledges the agency of the natural world in shaping the Caribbean cultural and historical development.

Allen-Paisant's work particularly engages with what he terms the "colonial epistemology of nature" that continues to influence Caribbean relationships with the environment. In his prose writing, he observes that "the fracture that we experience between ourselves and nature, the desire and obsession to put distance between ourselves and the natural world, is rooted in slavery and colonialism" (ii). This insight informs his poetic practice, which seeks to heal this fracture by reestablishing connections between Caribbean people and their ecological heritage. Similarly, Miller's poetry explores what scholar M. Thompson describes as "botanical resistance", because of its engagement with indigenous plants and healing traditions as forms of cultural preservation against the losses of colonialism.

The ecocritical concern of this paper draws on these Caribbean-centered approaches to nature and culture by emphasising what anthropologist C. Dawson terms "ecological memory as a form of cultural resilience". A concept which refers to the preservation of environmental knowledge and practices despite systematic attempts to disrupt them during slavery and colonialism. Both Miller and Allen-Paisant engage this concept through their attention to traditional ecological knowledge, such as herbal medicine and agricultural practices, which has persisted through generations of Caribbean people. Their work demonstrates how poetry can serve as a vehicle for transmitting this ecological memory and adapting it to contemporary concerns.

While the paper acknowledges shortage of scholarship on ecocritical studies of the Caribbean poets under study, Akuso also observes on a general note that, “indeed, very few works have been done on the poetry of the Caribbean particularly in this part of the world, probably due to the dearth of materials or the myth about poetry being difficult” (xi). This is another gap this paper seeks to fill.

Memory and Resistance in the Jamaican Landscapeof Kei Miller

The selected poems from Kei Miller's *In Nearby Bushes*that this paper intends to discuss under the above sub-heading includes the following: "A Psalm For Gay Boys," "The Understory," "Hush," "Translation Of Jamaican Curse," and "Here Where Is The Cure". These poemscollectively reveal how the Jamaican landscape functions as a complex site of memory, danger, and refuge. These poems are necessary for this analysis because they illustrate the multifaceted ways marginalised Jamaicans, particularly queer individuals; navigate the paradoxical nature of the bush as both a protective cloak and a potential threat, engaging with what Miller himself calls "the unplotted plot" of subaltern histories in one of his poems.

In “A Psalm for Gay Boys”, for instance, Miller displays queer experience and communal violence into the island’s living landscape so that the environment itself becomes a carrier ofmemory. From the opening epigraph, "When mi leave, mi haffi go through the bushes, cause if mi did take the road, demwoulda kill me!” the poem locates queer survival in the “bushes” and “shadows”, places that physically hold and repeat the consequences of exclusion. The repeated anaphora **“**where…” For example, the repetitive structure, “where the married men roam/…at night…/where we hide…/where theshadows being our refuge & strength/(lines 2-5) transforms these natural spaces into archives. They become sites where acts of desire, threat, and refuge accumulate as lived traces. Revealing what R. Phillips terms a "queer ecology that challenges normative relationships between nature and sexuality” (6).

Miller’s image of being “kissed by the same lips that curse us”(line4) insists on the landscape as testimonial ground of intimacy and persecution are not simply personal events but ecological events whose reverberations, the bush and moonlit contours keep: “the moonreveals the shapes of shoulders floating…a landscape of strange lynchings.”(line13). In this way, the poem enacts ecological memory, where the land remembers and reproduces social histories (violence, secrecy, survival) so that the environment itself testifies to what official records often omit.

At the same time the poem is an act of poetic resistance because R. Philip again believes,“refuses erasure by naming, by sacralising the margins, and by insurgently reworking liturgical diction. The poem closes with the lines: “Hear my cry/O Lord/ My Lord/ My God/ Attend now to my needs”(line 14)reclaims religious language that has often been deployed to condemn queer lives and instead address it as a plea for protection, recognition, and moral redress. Phrases such as “the shadows being our refuge & strength” and the paradox “where wehide/ where we are never hidden” resist simple narratives of shame; they insist on a persistent, visible interiority within the hidden landscape. Several reviewers including R Philips have observed this dual project as Miller’s deliberate use of dialect and epigraphic

testimony to make the “nearby bushes” witness to acts of violence and to expose the island’s social fractures, while others underline how the poem’s form its halting punctuation, anaphora, and psalmiccadence, turns the poem into both a sanctuary and a courtroom for queer experience.

In **“**The Understory**”,** Kei Miller transforms the forest floor into a living archive that embodies ecological memory, suggesting that landscapes preserve the layered narratives of Jamaica’s cultural and historical past. The poem’s repeated emphasis on the many stories hidden in the environment, “the intriguing twist of vines,/the messy dialogue,/ and the complication of roots/ (stanza1 lines 1-3) are imageries which implies that the land remembers everything that has happened to it and to the people who have moved through it across time. By describing the forest as containing “two hundred, or two thousand” stories in stanza 3 line 2, rather than the simplified “two sides”(stanza 2 line 3), Miller presents the Caribbean landscape as a repository for suppressed, forgotten, or competing histories. The reference to a “web of Nansi story” hanging thick between the trees” draws on African ancestral memory, showing how folklore, survival, and resistance remain inscribed in the Caribbean environment. These natural imageries function as memory keepers, holding “the original accounts of witnesses”(stanza4 lines 1-2) and their transformations, suggesting that ecological spaces preserve the truths that official histories often distort or erase. This poem embodies what environmental historian D. Wallace identifies as "maroon epistemologies", which are ways of knowing development in resistance to plantation surveillance by suggesting that vital ecological memory persists in overlooked spaces.

The poem enacts poetic resistance by challenging dominant narratives and reclaiming the authority of the marginalised, local, and oral histories. Miller resists colonial simplification by insisting that the land carries “the long story that will not be cut short,” (stanza 5 line2) making it impossible for outsiders or institutions to reduce Jamaica’s reality to stereotypes or single explanations. The figurative expression “in the dirtiness of dirt”(stanza7line1) reclaims the earth itself as a source of knowledge and truth that contradicts sanitised colonial versions of Jamaican identity. Even stories dismissed as “a whole other story” (stanza 6, line 3)or pushed aside now return through the landscape, demonstrating resistance to cultural silencing. The poem asserts in the last stanza that, the “stories underneath”,(stanza7 line 3)those buried, ignored, or misrepresented are the ones that matter, and they persist in the land despite attempts to overlook themIn this way, Miller uses poetry to resist historical erasure by restoring the environment as a space where hidden memories and complex Caribbean identities continue to survive, assert themselves, and demand to be heard.

"Hush”, is another poem by Miller that connects Jamaica's geological reality with its psychological landscape. The poem stages the island itself as a keeper of subterranean histories; an image of ecological memory in which the land retains and repeats human and non-human traumas. The opening line turns geological data into lived fact: “Jamaica experiences**,** on average, 3 earth movements per month,” but Miller immediately domesticates that statistic by saying, “Theseare mostly never felt.” That apparent invisibility suggests a parallel between buried seismic events and buried social injuries: both pass “through the

valleys/ in waves, a thing like grief,/ or groaning that can't be uttered./ the breadfruitleaf/ that "shivers without wind/ (lines 1-6) makes visible the land's remembrance of its tensions; the leaf's trembling is also an index of memory stored below the surface. By giving the landscape a language of feeling, "this quiet that is not quiet, / this peace that is not peace/(line 7-9), the poem argues that ecological features archive emotional and historical disturbances, so that even when events are not recorded in official histories, the environment itself continues to register and repeat them.

The poem works as poetic resistance by naming and making audible what systems of power are preferred to remain unspoken. The imagery of "the stifled earthquake underneath" refusing silence, insists that, what is hidden will not vanish simply because people ignore it. Illustrating what C. Sharpe terms the "wake work of living with the afterlives of slavery"(1).Suggesting that beneath the calm surface of everyday life lie deep vibrations of grief, fear, trauma or cultural memory that cannot be fully expressed, much more like an earthquake that cannot find its full rupture. By likening seismic tremors to "grief, or groaning that can't be uttered," the poem links geological motion with social suffering, colonial histories, dispossession, and ongoing violence that official narratives often normalise or overlook. The act of close observation, "Observe the breadfruit leaf"(line 5) is itself an insurgent move, where the speaker turns attention on small, natural signs as evidence and testimony. In this way the poem resists erasure and denial by turning the landscape into witness and witness into language; the earth's subtle movementsbecomesa proof against forgetting, and the poet's naming restores a voice to the "underneath" that had been muffled.

"Translation Of Jamaican Curse" examines cultural attitudes toward nature embedded in Jamaican linguistic traditions. While the curse invokes the bush as a site of death, Miller's translation complicates this dichotomy, suggesting that spaces of darkness contain their own forms of knowledge. The poem reveals what anthropologist K. O. Jones calls the "ecological unconsciousness of the Caribbean societies, where colonial associations between darkness, nature, and danger continue to influence environmental perceptions"(2). The poem converts a violent, everyday curse, "Guh dead ah bush**!**", into an ecological scene of condemnation and decay, showing how language and landscape together store social memory. The threat is not abstract but tied to the "undergrowth, the understory,"(line 2)which refers to a luminal place where bodies and stories are buried or left to dissolve. By imagining the cursed person "drag[ging] yourself there, like a wounded dog towards the hem of hedges"(lines2-3), the poem records a physical flow into the earth that mirrors social exclusion: the hedges, fallen leaves, and "furnace of worms" (line, 4) become natural imageries that ingest and remember human cruelty. The final line, "May you feel the earth's rhythm and weather and wear; may you think 'of all places I have ended here'"(lines7-8), compresses time and memory, so that the land itself keeps the sense of having been ended and a testimony written for the soil and decay.

At the same time, the poem works as poetic resistance by refusing to let the curse in the expression, **"**Guh dead ah bush**!"** simply pass as an everyday insult. Instead of allowing the phrase to remain a throwaway expression of hatred, the poem slows it down and makes the

landscape itself answer back. By transforming the wish to die "in the undergrowth" into a vivid ecological picture, the poem forces readers to see how such violence leaves emotional and cultural marks on the land, which marks the poem's refusal to let society forget.

The contrast between the "buzzing, colourless thing" (line,6) and the intimate "earth's rhythm and weather and wear" (line 7)in the poem shows that real memory is held in the depths of the environment, not in the surface noise of everyday life and by translating the raw, cruel curse into rich, charged description, the poem both preserves the harshness of the original speech act and reshapes it into a record kept in the soil, roots, and decay. This act of re-inscription, is the poem's resistance because it refuses silence, refuses forgetting, and turns a violent utterance into a testimony, making the poem, a guardian of communal memory and moral truth.

Finally, the paper looks at "Here Where Is The Cure",another poem from Miller's *In Nearby Bushes* thatplaces folk medicine and local speech at the centre of ecological memory by insisting that knowledge and history are embodied in the island's plants, sounds, and vernacular. The catalogue of remedies from "collect rain water in a calabash" (line 14)and beating it "with a wooden pestle,"(line 15) to boiling "Donkey Weed with Colic Mint"(line 27) and naming herbs like "Standing Buddy"(line 30) and "Scorn-the-Earth"(34), treats the landscape as a storehouse of practical knowledge and communal remembering what M. Balickidentifies as "biocultural diversity and the inextricable link between biological and cultural diversity in traditional healing"(1). Miller's playful instruction to "make adjustment/for the greener sound of things:/Blocked Tubes? Black Chube? Same ting/ in stanza four(4), shows how language shifts with place and how local terms encode bodily with social histories; the speaker's refusal to sterilize this language; "I dare not write these remedies down" in line 42, also signals how ecological knowledge resists formal archival practices and instead survives in oral, embodied registers. By insisting that these cures and their ingredients "grow here amongst the orchids"(lines 44-45) and by linking plants to intimate human need (fertility, speech, sexual potency), the poem makes visible an ecological memory in which the land itself remembers practices, cares, and community remedies that official histories often ignore.

At the same time, the poem becomes an act of poetic resistance as it lifts up local knowledge against the way colonial science and English-speaking authorities looks down on or replace native expressions. The teasing but belittling exchange in lines like:"Is born you born stupid,/ or is University turn youfool?"(line 6-7), suggests institutional voices denigrating popular knowledge, while the poem answers by demonstrating the efficacy and rootedness of those remedies. Critics of *In Nearby Bushes* have noted Miller's ongoing project of naming place, language, and vernacular as a way to recover buried histories and resist simplification; reviewers like Balickdescribe the collection as gathering "the original accounts of witnesses" in landscape forms and as showing how the "nearby bushes" keep contested cultural memories alive. By recording these remedies in the poem, even while admitting "I dare not write these remedies down"(lines 42-43), Miller both preserves and protects communal knowledge and

the poem itself becomes a corrective way of silencing a literary site where ecological memory is stored and where vernacular knowledge resists loss and substitutes outside authorities.

Ecological Memory and Poetic Resistance on Diasporic Belonging of Jason Allen-Paisant

The selected poems from Jason Allen-Paisant's*Thinking with Trees*for discussion here are: *"*Crossing The Threshold," "Naming," "Black Holes," "An Evening Walk When Spring Is Already Old," and "On The First Day Of Autumn" as theycollectively explore the diasporic subject's negotiation of racialised natural spaces. These poems are essential for understanding how Allen-Paisant transforms the simple act of walking into a philosophical practice that challenges what he identifies as the "colonial epistemology of nature," using movement through landscape to meditate on displacement, memory, and reclamation.

"Crossing The Threshold" establishes the collection's central motif of walking as both bodily movement and historical consciousness. The poem shifts between Jamaican and English landscapes, demonstrating how ecological memory connects disparate places. Allen-Paisant portrays the "steep bones singing...through the woodland," (lines 38-42) evoking what he describes as the "haunted quality" of landscapes shaped by slavery and colonialism. As critic Jade Cuttle observes, Allen-Paisant's work witnesses how "peace of mind is not an equally accessible resource in natural spaces historically coded as white" (2).

Allen-Paisant's "Crossing the Threshold" transforms the forest into a living archive of ecological memory, where the speaker's sensory experience awakens histories carried by land and body. From the opening, walking becomes a mode of remembering, as the speaker moves "with patience for the breeze" (line 4), allowing nature to lead him into its layered past. The quiet stream "hides things under its mirror" (line 15), suggesting buried histories resurfacing through ecological encounters. When he emerges "with shadows I did not know" (line 12), the landscape reveals ancestral and bodily histories carried unconsciously. Scholars such as Fred D'Aguiar and André Carrington note that Allen-Paisant's eco-poetics works through "sensory excavations," in which the Caribbean memory of land, Banana Ground, Coffee Grove, Damn Head, coexists with European woodland spaces, forming a diasporic ecological memory. The forest's animate presence in "my eye looking at me from everywhere" (line 33) and "the forest refusing to quiet" (line 35), supports Sarah Gifford's observation that Allen-Paisant perceives landscape as a "thinking partner," where nature retains the power to "speak back," urging the speaker toward deeper historical and bodily awareness.

The poem's reflection of poetic resistance, confronts racial vulnerability, historical surveillance, and the dangers that follow Black bodies into so-called "natural" refuges. The wooded space is never innocent: "history keeps following me around" (line 47), resisting any fantasy of escape into nature. The intrusion of threat, "muscle boys with pit bulls and knives" (line 41), echoes Allen-Paisant's broader critique as noted by Janae Davis of how Black bodies remain precarious even in pastoral spaces idealised by European Romanticism. The speaker resists this loss by insisting his presence in, "you will keep on seeing me" (line 48), turning his walk into a form of embodied defiance. The metaphor of growth becomes a resistant factor in lines like, "believe you are a sprout of grass" (line 51) which also reframes fragility as

resilience, asserting that life; Black life, can flourish even where danger lurks. Critics such as Rachel Mann argue that *Thinking with Trees* reclaims the forest as a site where "Black ecological thought can challenge exclusionary environmental narratives"(2). The final transformation of a tree barks "tinted green and hyacinth" (lines 53–54), suggests renewal and possibility, reinforcing that ecological attention itself becomes an act of political, historical, and poetic resistance.

In "Naming," Jason Allen-Paisant explores the linguistic dimensions of ecological belonging, examining how naming practices relate to colonial claims of ownership. The speaker's urge "to give things names but says everything is already named, which reveals the power dynamics embedded in ecological knowledge. The transformation of "birchbark becoming vesses-de-loup" illustrates the linguistic hybridity that characterizes a diasporic ecological consciousness, creating what Allen-Paisant himself identifies as alternative knowledge practices that resist colonial frameworks(x).

Allen-Paisant's poem, "Naming**"** explores ecological memory through the speaker's struggle to recognise and belong to the natural world he encounters daily. The poem opens with a longing to know the land through its language, "I hear the beautiful call of bird I do notknow" (line 1) revealing the speaker's displacement from the ecological vocabulary of his ancestral Caribbean environment. Naming becomes a form of possession and reassurance: "a name isreassurance / a comfort in the flesh" (lines 10–11), suggesting that proper recognition roots one into place. Yet the speaker remains caught between desire and limitation, able only to grasp "warble / trill / bell / fluting? / something nearly right" (lines 16–20). This incomplete vocabulary symbolises a fractured ecological memory shaped by migration and colonial education. Scholars such as Rachel Mann argue that Allen-Paisant's poetry "uncovers the ache of naming as a colonial inheritance where knowing European taxonomies becomes tied to exclusion from ancestral lands"(3). The poem's movement into part II affirms this tension as it reads: "everything is alreadynamed" (line 21) which exposes how naming is historically saturated with power, reinforcing Sarah Gifford's reading that Allen-Paisant views language itself as a site where ecological and colonial histories collide.

The poem also performs poetic resistance by rejecting Eurocentric relationships to land and reclaiming embodied, ancestral, and Caribbean forms of ecological knowledge. The speaker resists the colonial impulse to dominate the landscape through classification, admitting "to name things would be perverse" (line 26), because naming can sever the spiritual and ancestral resonance of place. Instead, ecological memory emerges through transformations in: "nothing is itself / everything turns to something else" (lines 35–36), suggesting an animistic Caribbean cosmology that contradicts Western fixity. This resistance reaches full political clarity in part III, where the speaker contrasts British pastoral landscapes for instance in: "this land of Karrimor jackets" (line 47) with memories of his grandmother "planting negro yams /shaping the land" (lines 50–51). This contrast recalls Janae Davis's argument that Black ecological experience "resists white wilderness fantasies by foregrounding labour, ancestry, and embodied land-relations"(2). The final line, "All I can handle is the landscape within me" (line 52), reclaims identity through internal ecological memory rather than institutional or colonial

criteria of belonging. Thus, the poem transforms naming itself into an act of resistance, refusing imposed definitions and asserting a Caribbean ecological imagination rooted in history, inheritance, and embodied knowledge.

In "Black Holes," Jason Allen-Paisant invokes the dying off of floral life and the stillness of a wintering or decaying field to evoke a sense of ecological memory, a remembrance not only of seasonal change, but of deeper cycles of loss, neglect, and forgetting. The opening image, "Now the dandelions have mostly gone" (line 1), marks the disappearance of bright wildflowers that once "starred" the field; this vanishing acts as a metaphor for erased histories and lifeways once rooted in land. The transformation from a "starry expanse/ in April to a drained, dark field/ (lines 2-3) suggests a movement from vitality to emptiness, "a slow dying/ the blood flow is slowing down" (line 4) meaning, in the surface life, the field becomes an archive of absence and the ravens "sit on the glaucomatous eye of the field" (line 5) representing a haunting image that personifies the land as sightless, wounded and in need of vision. The field becomes a body with an injured eye, bearing memory through its suffering. In this way, the poem inscribes memory into the land that was once vibrant, alive, and full of generative force but is now reduced to somnolent memory, preserved in the decayed watch of scavengers. The landscape in this poem, holds what has been lost not only in plants butin the cultural lives, histories and hopes that once bloomed the region.

Poetic resistance here therefore**,** indicates the erasure in its refusing to romanticise nature as a pastoral blank slate. Rather than celebrating pastoral tranquillity, Allen-Paisant draws attention to death, decline, and the ghosts of ecological and historical violence. This resistance echoes a broader critique found throughout *Thinking with Trees*, where Allen-Paisantmaps the ecological landscape onto childhood, memory and locational anxieties interrogating who has access to leisure, to space and to belonging. In a review of the collection, critic Jade Cuttle argues that Allen-Paisant's poems "racialisecontemporary ecological poetics by embedding Black bodies and histories into landscapes that tend to be narrated as white, universal, and neutral" (2). "Black Holes," with its silence, absence, and injured field, extends this project as it refuses the comforting myths of nature's purity by instead, revealing the land as a site of trauma, decay, memory, and ultimate resistance, a "black hole" of loss, yes, but also a space where memory lingers and refuses to be forgottenaccording to Cuttle.

In "An Evening Walk When Spring is Already Old," Jason Allen-Paisant illustrates ecological memory by displaying how the landscape preserves and communicates temporal and ancestral histories. The speaker's re-entry into the woods, "On the third of June I re-enter thewoods" (line 1), signals a conscious engagement with a remembered space, where seasonal cycles embody the persistence of life and historical continuity. The metaphor in "The trees' souls have bloomed into canopies / There is volume not just skeletons" (lines 2–3) conveys how the forest retains vitality and depth beyond mere physical structure, evoking layers of memory embedded in living organisms. Breeze and air are described as entering "the placenta of thiswomb" (line 4), suggesting that the land is generative, nourishing, and protective, sustaining life and memory in a relational, almost maternal ecology. Critics such as Sarah Gifford argue that Allen-Paisant's eco-poetics intentionally blurs the line between human

embodiment and the environment, framing the forest as a repository of ancestral and ecological memory where the speaker's body becomes a site of environmental and cultural inheritance (4).

The poem also functions as an act of poetic resistance, challenging conventional or colonial narratives of landscape as empty or neutral. By portraying the trees and leaves as a protective, intimate space in - "There is hiding place in the trees and the birds sing differently" (line 5). Allen-Paisant asserts that the forest holds agency and provides sanctuary, particularly for Black bodies historically excluded or endangered in public and natural spaces. The final line, "the leaves have become a sea in my body" (line 7), enacts an embodied resistance where the speaker internalises the landscape, making the forest inseparable from identity, memory, and survival. Scholars such as Janae Davis and Rachel Mann have emphasised that Allen-Paisant's poetry foregrounds Black ecological thought, where witnessing, inhabiting, and internalising the land is both a preservation of ecological memory and an assertion of diverse presence in spaces historically coded as inaccessible or hostile. Through this intimate merging of humanity and forest, the poem affirms a form of resistance that honours both environmental and cultural continuity.

"On the First Day of Autumn" is the last poem of Jason Allen-Paisant selected for discussion on this paper.This poem demonstrates ecological memory by emphasising the interrelation between human consciousness and the temporal, physical, and ancestral history of the land. From the outset, the speaker allows nature "to have a different look and a different sound" (lines 2–3), emphasising attentiveness to the forest as a living archive rather than a static backdrop. The speaker notes the flow of the stream "running over stones" and the movement of squirrels "that run above my head" (lines 3, 5), attuning himself to the rhythms and micro-histories embedded in the ecosystem. The uprooted tree, which "has sent some of its roots back down into the ground" (line 7), becomes a symbol of resilience and continuity, as the land retains traces of disturbance while regenerating, reflecting ecological memory that carries forward both trauma and renewal. Scholars like Rachel Mann have argued that Allen-Paisant's work situates human consciousness within a network of ecological memory, where the observer's body becomes a site of remembering ancestral, environmental, and seasonal processes simultaneously.

The poem is also a work of poetic resistance, asserting control over perception and movement in spaces historically coded as hostile to Black bodies. The speaker negotiates the danger and anxiety of the outside world, contrasting the soundscape of "angry dogs and knives" (line 22) with the restorative tactile and auditory engagement with leaves and mulch. By "walking on a tree / hanging my mind from the tussling odours of mulch bark and rain" (lines 10–11), Allen-Paisantinternalises the landscape, reclaiming space and asserting agency over the land as a site of memory and renewal. Janae Davis notes that, in his eco-poetics, Allen-Paisant foregrounds Black embodiment in natural spaces, using attentive, embodied engagement as a form of resistance against historical and social erasure(3). The speaker's repeated return to sensory interaction with the land, hearing, smelling and touching, reinforces that ecological awareness

is inseparable from its acts of resistance and the cultivation of rootedness, where the land itself becomes an ally in the preservation of cultural and environmental memory.

Synthesis of Ecological Memory and Poetic Resistance in the Poetry of Miller and Allen-Paisant

The examination of Kei Miller and Jason Allen-Paisant'spoetry, reveals a profound interplay between ecological memory and poetic resistance, demonstrating how the Caribbean landscapes, both local and diasporic, serve as a living repositories of history, culture, and identity. Miller's *In Nearby Bushes* and Allen-Paisant's*Thinking with Trees* illustrate that natural spaces are never passive backdrops; they actively preserve the legacies of colonialism, displacement, and ecological disruption, while simultaneously offering possibilities for renewal and reclamation. In Miller, the Jamaican bush functions as a site of refuge, cultural continuity, and hidden knowledge, whether in the preservation of herbal medicine as in "Here Where Is theCure", the layered narratives of "The Understory", or the protective secrecy of queer desire in "A Psalm for Gay Boys". These poetic engagements exemplify the principle that landscapes are repositories of collective memory, where past traumas are embedded yet generative of resilience and cultural survival. Similarly, Allen-Paisant's poems, such as "Crossing the Threshold", "Naming", and "On the First Day of Autumn", extends ecological memory on diasporic spaces, by illustrating how Black subjects navigate landscapes historically coded as white and contested by colonial histories. His work shows that ecological memory encompasses both the physical environment and the socio-cultural imprints that govern access, belonging, and perception.

The convergence of both poets' works lies in their shared commitment to demonstrating that landscape histories that shape identity and cultural continuity. Both Miller and Allen-Paisantthe paper considers foregrounding the voices of the marginalised communities, revealing how knowledge, be it traditional healing practices, folk wisdom, or embodied experience, is preserved in environmental forms. Again, the paper considers each poet's attention to the human world through the subtle sounds, movements, and presences of plants and trees, aligns with contemporary ecocritical approaches, reinforcing what D. Abram describes as a "more-than-human language that challenges anthropocentric perspectives" (15). These similarities reveal a coordinated effort to reclaim ecological spaces as sites of testimony, healing, and cultural affirmation, emphasising the active participation of nature in shaping memory and social consciousness.

Divergences between the two poets emerge primarily in the spatial and cultural contexts of their works.Miller's poetry is rooted in the local, Caribbean environment, exploring the Jamaican bush as a space where intimate, communal, and cultural practices unfolds. His work focuses on the interrelation between natural landscapes and social marginalisation, highlighting how environmental and human ecologies intersect within specific historical and cultural frameworks. Allen-Paisant, in contrast, negotiates diasporic landscapes, exploring the challenges of belonging and ecological engagement in foreign, historically exclusionary environments. His attention to English woodlands, seasonal change, and linguistic naming

practices reflects the complex dynamics of displacement, cultural hybridity, and racialised spatiality. Despite these differences, both poets are united in their utilisation of ecological memory to resist oppressive histories, demonstrating how landscapes are instrumental in the processes of cultural reclamation, social critique, and imaginative renewal.

The significance of this convergence and divergence lies in the holistic implications it has on theCaribbean poetry and ecocritical concern. By integrating ecological memory with poetic resistance, Miller and Allen-Paisant exemplify a decolonialecopoetics that situates the natural world at the heart of cultural, historical, and ethical reflection recorded Abram (12). Their work, this paper agree, underscore that poetry can serve as a tool not only for remembering but for actively negotiating legacies of oppression, envisioning inclusive relationships with the environment, and asserting the agency of both human and non-human actors in shaping the present. In this sense, the Jamaican bush and the English woodland emerge as sites of potentialities, where memory and resistance unite to foster cultural resilience, ethical engagement, and transformative imaginative practice. Their poetry demonstrates that landscapes are simultaneously archives, actors, and collaborators in the ongoing process of narrating Caribbean histories and futures, offering innovative avenues for understanding the entanglement of nature, culture, and power in contemporary the Caribbean literary discourse.

Conclusion

This study has explored the interconnections between ecological memory and poetic resistance in the contemporary Caribbean landscapes as represented in some poems of Kei Miller's *In Nearby Bushes* and Jason Allen-Paisant's*Thinking with Trees*. The discourse demonstrates that, both poets engage the landscapes not as neutral backdrops but as active sites where history, culture, and identity intersect. Ecological memory in their works preserves the traces of colonial exploitation, displacement, and social marginalisation while transmitting indigenous knowledge of folk wisdom, and ancestral ecological practices. Miller's poetry emphasises the Jamaican bush as a space of refuge, cultural continuity, and queer possibility, while Allen-Paisant's engagement with diasporic English woodlands reveals the challenges of historical exclusion, racialised access, and the reconstruction of belonging in the foreign landscapes.

Poetic resistance,on the other hand,emerges as a complementary mechanism, allowing both poets to contest dominant narratives of nature, history, and social hierarchy. By bringing to the fore the agency of natural spaces and focus on the marginalised voices, they demonstrate that landscapes can be tools of critique, reclamation, and imaginative renewal. While Miller focuses on local ecological memory embedded in cultural practices and intimate spaces, Allen-Paisant extends these ideas to diasporic and racialised contexts, showing that ecological consciousness and resistance transcend geographic boundaries.

This paper concludes that together, these poet's works offer a Caribbean nature or landscape poetry that integrates memory and resistance, illustrating how poetry can reclaim cultural heritage, contest colonial and social oppression, and reimagine relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. This study contributes to literary scholarship by emphasising

that ecological memory and poetic resistance are not abstract concepts but lived, embodied, and imaginative practices, central to understanding the Caribbean identity, history, and ethical engagement with the environment. Their poetry underscores the transformative potential of literature to document, preserve, and creatively intervene in the historical and ecological processes that shape the contemporary Caribbean life.

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