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Université Paris 8 and Université Paris Sorbonne, in collaboration with  
l'Université Toulouse 2 Jean Jaurès and the Institut des Amériques, May  
19 and 20, 2017 Université de Lorraine

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# The Art and Craft of Grafting in Jamaica Kincaid's Work

Université Paris 8 and Université Paris Sorbonne, in collaboration with l'Université Toulouse 2 Jean Jaurès and the Institut des Amériques, May 19 and 20, 2017 Université de Lorraine

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## The Art and Craft of Grafting in Jamaica Kincaid's Work

Colloque international  
L'art de la greffe dans l'œuvre de Jamaica Kincaid/The Art and Craft of Grafting in Jamaica Kincaid's Work

### Programme

#### JEUDI 18 MAI 2017

• Amphithéâtre Michelet 46 rue Saint Jacques Paris V •

18h-20h CONFÉRENCE INAUGURALE DE MARC JEANSON  
➤ Les jardins de Kincaid : un regard botanique

#### VENREDI 19 MAI 2017

• Université Paris 8 Saint Denis Bâtiment D salle 143 •

09h30 Allocation d'ouverture : NADIA SETTI (Paris 8)  
10h00 CHAIR : ANDRÉE-ANNE KEKEH-DIKA (Paris 8)  
KEY-NOTE SPEAKER : CAROLE BOYCE DAVIES (Cornell University, USA)  
11h30 CHAIR : KATHIE BIRAT (Université de Lorraine)  
GIOVANNA CONI (Université de Trento, Italie)  
➤ Grafting as Joining Together, Grafting as Persistently Flirting: Jamaica Kincaid's Creolization of Cultures, Narrative and Kinship  
JAMIE HERO (Paris 8)  
➤ Rootstock or Scion: Grafting Radical Difference in Jamaica Kincaid's *See Now Then*  
12h30 Déjeuner  
14h00 CHAIR : KERRY-JANE WALLART (Paris Sorbonne)  
ANTONIA PURK (Université de Erfurt, Allemagne)  
➤ Texts: The Handcrafting of the Past in Jamaica Kincaid's *See Now Then*  
KATHLEEN GRISSELS (Université d'Antwerp, Belgique)  
➤ About Kincaid's Kins. The Black-Jew Craftswomanship in Caribbean Literature  
15h00 CHAIR : CLAIRE JOUBERT (Paris 8)  
KAMILA BOUCHEMAL (Paris 8)  
➤ Le nom comme une greffe dans les textes de Jamaica Kincaid  
JOSETTE SPARTACUS (chercheuse indépendante)  
➤ Grafting and Graphing: Jamaica Kincaid's Dialogic Garden Memoirs  
PAULINE AMY DE LA BRIÈTÈCHE (Paris Sorbonne)  
➤ Greffe et Bouture: botanique de la créolisation  
16h30 Lectures de textes en anglais par le groupe « Lectures féministes »  
Lectures d'extraits de textes traduits par Théophile Choquet, comédien  
18h30 fin de la première journée

#### SAMEDI 20 MAI 2017

• Amphithéâtre Michelet 46 rue Saint Jacques Paris V •

09h00 CHAIR : CORINNE BIGOT (Toulouse2 Jean Jaurès)  
KAJANA GLOVER (Barnard College, Columbia University, USA)  
➤ Caliban's 'Woman' and the Procreative Trap: Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*  
NATASCHA D'ORLANDO (Paris 8)  
➤ Le greffon et le parasite: corps avorté, corps décolonisé dans *The Autobiography of my Mother*  
SIMONE ALEXANDER (Seton Hall University, New Jersey, USA)  
➤ Postcolonial Hauntings: Ghostly Presence in *The Autobiography of My Mother*  
11h00 CHAIR : GIOVANNA CONI (Université de Trento, Italie)  
KEY-NOTE SPEAKER : DARYL DANCE (University of Richmond, VA)  
➤ In Search of Annie Drew  
12h00 Déjeuner  
13h30 CHAIR : FRANÇOISE SIMASOTCH (Paris 8)  
DARLINE ALEXIS (ENS Haïti)  
➤ Recouvrir et révéler: la nature dans *Mr. Potter* de Jamaica Kincaid  
ELEONOR BYRNE (Université de Manchester)  
➤ After the Plantation: Tropical Gothic and the Globalised Garden  
PAOLA BOI (Université de Cagliari, Italie)  
➤ From the other side: James Baldwin, Jamaica Kincaid and the extravagance of double-consciousness  
15h00 Pause  
15h30 CHAIR : FRANÇOISE KHAL (Université de Caen, Basse Normandie)  
PATRICIA DONATIEN (Université des Antilles)  
➤ Terres rapportées: greffes de langues, greffes de genre dans *My brother* de Jamaica Kincaid  
MYRIAM MOISE (Université des Antilles)  
➤ Jamaica Kincaid and Olive Senior: Gardening Through History, Cultivating New Female Subjectivities  
18h00 Conclusion du colloque

## PROGRAM OF THE CONFERENCE

- The International Conference devoted to Jamaica Kincaid and “the art and craft of grafting” was an occasion for scholars from both sides of the Atlantic to explore the

idea of grafting as a fruitful link between Kincaid's persistent interest in the natural world, plants and gardening and the ways in which her writing makes it possible to see "creolization," a concept often used to theorize the integrative capacity of Caribbean culture, as a form of grafting. Through the multiplicity of domains evoked—including botany, history, colonization, slavery, weaving, knitting and gardening—the participants in the conference proposed perspectives for viewing the writer's unique and occasionally abrasive approach to the heritage of colonialism, with its obsession for classifying and giving names. They looked at grafting as an act of resistance to the limits imposed by slavery, colonialism and gender-biased visions of the world, but also as an ingenious interweaving of practice and reflection in Kincaid's works on gardening and plant gathering, as well as a crossing of generic boundaries.

- 2 In her opening remarks, Professor Nadia Setti sketched a framework for a reflection on the "art and craft of grafting" in the writing of Jamaica Kincaid.
- 3 She began by evoking the many different connotations that the word "grafting" can assume in relation to art. Grafting, coming from a Germanic root meaning "to dig," can be seen as both "incision and inscription" and thus as a metaphor for writing. Given Kincaid's interest in gardening, it also invites us to think of the tools she evokes in *My Garden (Book)*:—the hoe, the rake, the spade, the fork—but also Gertrude Jekyll's gardening boots, to which she refers, a reminder that art is a way of being rooted in the world.
- 4 The notion of grafting also provides a framework for evoking questions of identity and filiation as represented in Kincaid's writing, as can be seen in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, in which Xuela's problematic relation to the circumstances of her birth becomes a way of talking about the dilemma of the Caribbean people and their search for a lost origin. The colonial system itself can be seen as a process of tearing up and transplanting, the botanical garden encapsulating the very idea of colonialism. The way in which Kincaid evokes the idea of a "wild garden" in *My Garden (Book)*: reflects Kincaid's stance as an artist, her "constant state of discomfort" and what Ms. Setti calls her "art intranquille" which constantly solicits the reader's participation.
- 5 The first keynote speech, entitled "Jamaica Kincaid: Caribbean Space and Living Dislocations," was given by Carole Boyce Davies, Professor of Africana Studies and English at Cornell University (USA).
- 6 Carol Boyce Davies' talk revolved around the ideas of migration and dislocation and the ways in which artists and intellectuals like Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall have responded to displacement. Highlighting Kincaid's often quoted remark about discomfort ("I am in a constant state of discomfort"), she evoked the ways in which Kincaid has rejected spatial confinement, a stance that she likened to Zora Neale Hurston's "fighting back." Rather than waiting for herself to appear, Kincaid was able to seize space, an impulse captured in *Annie John* by the narrator's remark, "I'm looking at the world and I want to go there." Kincaid's desire was for an expanding space, although her experience in the United States in the 1970s confronted her with American racism and the activist challenges to it.
- 7 Looking at Kincaid through the prism of migration, Davies addressed Kincaid's "discourses of subjectivity" as migrations of the subject, migrations which included "creative uses of anger," but also the exploration of sexuality, as in the narrator's relation to the "Red Girl" in *Annie John*. Kincaid also practiced a kind of "reverse

anthropology,” as in her study of the Brooklyn carnival, and generally speaking, in the observations of American life found in pieces published in the *New Yorker*. Her sense of herself as a Caribbean subject can be seen in her description of Manhattan: “I now live in Manhattan. The only thing it has in common with the island where I grew up is a geographical definition.”

- 8 Davies linked Kincaid’s “migration” as a subject to other expressions of dislocation and displacement by writers from the Caribbean: Stuart Hall’s evocation of Caribbean people as “the forerunners,” Dionne Brand’s list of “forgotten locations,” C.L.R. James’s reference to the Caribbean people as the first to experience dislocation, Brathwaite’s “tidalectics.” Kincaid’s gardening, bringing colour to Vermont, springs from the same awareness and the same impulse. However, she also pointed out the ambiguous nature of Kincaid’s travelling, the way in which it placed her simultaneously in a colonial role and in the position of a migrating subject.
- 9 Finally, she pointed to the difficulty related to the use of the term “grafting,” which she sees as essentially a colonial metaphor and a reflection of the way that Caribbean subjects were moved around.
- 10 The first two panels brought together scholars talking about Kincaid’s novel *See Now Then*. The first presentation, “Grafting as Joining Together, Grafting as Persistently Flirting: Jamaica Kincaid’s Creolization of Cultures, Narrative and Kinship” was given by Giovanna Covi, Professor of American Literature and Gender Studies at the University of Trento. The second paper, presented by Jamie Herd, who is preparing a PhD at Paris 8, was entitled “Rootstock or Scion: Grafting Radical Difference in Jamaica Kincaid’s *See Then Now*.” The paper read by Antonia Purk (a doctoral student from the University of Erfurt, Germany), was entitled “Texere: The Handcrafting of the Past in Jamaica Kincaid’s *See Then Now*.” The second panel was concluded by Kathleen Gyssels, Professor at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, who presented a paper focusing on *Mr. Potter* entitled “About Jamaica Kincaid’s *Kin*. The Black-Jew Craftswomanship in Caribbean Literature.” Giovanna Covi insisted on the idea of grafting as both reactive and proactive in the writing of Kincaid. In her talk she developed Kincaid’s vision of kinship as an elastic concept, a deconstruction of the binary concepts of “I” and “other,” calling upon numerous theoreticians like Judith Butler, Walter Benjamin, and Edouard Glissant to demonstrate the idea of grafting as produced by plurality. According to Covi, Kincaid’s paratactic style reflects her refusal of a hierarchical view of relations. She drew particular attention to Kincaid’s use of the image of Medusa, reminding the audience that the severed head of Medusa produced coral, an image of both life and death. Jamie Herd’s focus was mainly on the notion of anger as a creative force in the novel. Starting from a common vision of the novel as “thinly disguised vengeance for divorce,” Jamie Herd pointed out that critics have missed the point of Kincaid’s anger in linking the novel directly to her life. Herd concentrated on Kincaid’s use of intertextuality as a form of grafting, allowing the author to “graft her own tales onto old rootstock.” She looked at her use of music, “grafting popular music on literary rootstock,” the importance of cultivating food and making garments as images of her craft, as a way of “weaving threads into the garment that was her life.” Her doubles are thus Arachne, the trickster, Medusa, the fates. To the question “Can one lead a good life in a bad life?” Kincaid answers through her art that the good life must also embody a critique of one’s life. Kincaid’s writing can finally also be seen as a form of knitting: the author re-knits the order of things, re-ordering the relationship between narrator and

character. Antonia Purk also looked at *See Now Then* from the point of view of knitting as a metaphor of creation. Adopting a feminist point of view, and underlining the fact that in Freud's view the only female invention was "that of plaiting and weaving," Purk showed how Kincaid presents Mrs. Sweet as making her own life by writing, revealing "how she came to be herself" by interweaving the strands of her life differently. She also called upon Barthes's idea of the text as related to textile to show how the text for Kincaid produces a non-hierarchical conception of the relation of self and other, in this respect echoing the remarks made by Giovanna Covi concerning Kincaid's vision of human relations as open, horizontal and non-hierarchical. This idea emerged over the course of the conference as an important leitmotif of Kincaid's writing. Kathleen Gyssels talked about the Jewish diaspora as "the hidden diaspora under the visible one." Focussing on *Mr. Potter*, she looked at the ways in which the different characters presented in the book (the doctor Mr. Weizenger, the owner of the garage, Mr. Schoul) represent Caribbean culture as a crossroads where the African diaspora is confronted with other diasporas, in particular the Jewish one. Like Simone Schwarz-Bart (who was married to André Schwarz-Bart), Jamaica Kincaid, who converted to Judaism and whose second husband was Jewish, is aware of the complex and sometimes problematic consequences of this form of cultural contact.

- 11 The following session included three scholars focussing on Kincaid's literary treatment of the garden. Kamila Bouchemal, who obtained a PhD in Gender Studies and Comparative Literature from Paris 8, spoke about "The Name as Graft in the texts of Jamaica Kincaid." Josette Spartacus, independent researcher, entitled her paper: "Grafting and Graphing: Jamaica Kincaid's Dialogic Garden Memoirs." Pauline Amy de la Bretèque, a doctoral student at Paris IV, talked about "Grafting and Cutting: a Botany of Creation." Kamila Bouchemal looked at naming, an important theme in Caribbean literature, representing the presence of public History in personal histories, as a form of grafting. It is the sign both of an uprooting, an imposing of names inherited from colonialism, and a re-conquering through renaming. This can be seen in the author's own renaming of herself as Jamaica Kincaid, a way for her of both remembering and re-inventing herself. In the same way, Kincaid reinvents the names inherited from colonialism in her works as a way of repossessing the Caribbean space. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela bears the same name as her mother, who died giving birth to her. The repeating of the name Xuela thus represents a form of survival in the face of the extermination represented by colonialism. Josette Spartacus likewise looked at the relation between grafting and writing as one that takes into account both the situation of the conquered and the possibility of becoming a conqueror through "flowers that represent a network of conquests, conquest of memory and memory of conquest." According to her Kincaid dialogizes the garden, thus rejecting the machine of the plantation described by Benítez-Rojo in favour of a planting which "graphs" the history of her people onto a larger history. However, there is also a form of discomfort created by the very in-betweenness of her situation. Pauline Amy de la Bretèque discussed this complex relation between the situation of the conquered and the need to re-possess and re-invent through the idea of creolization. The garden is more than just a garden and becomes a space for the invention of a creolized nature. By creating a garden in Vermont, Kincaid was re-inventing the natural world of the Caribbean. Seen from a historical point of view, grafting can be seen as a form of controlled hybridization that reflects the colonial appropriation of nature, as opposed to

creolization, which is unpredictable. Finally, from an aesthetic point of view, gardening and writing can be seen as complementary, as processes that both repeat and renew.

- 12 A complete session was devoted to discussions of *The Autobiography of My Mother*. Simone Alexander, Professor of English, Africana Studies and Women and Gender Studies at Seton Hall University, New Jersey, spoke about "Postcolonial Hauntings: Ghostly Presence in *The Autobiography of My Mother*." Kaia Glover, Associate Professor of French and Africana Studies at Barnard College, Columbia University, entitled her talk "Caliban's 'Woman' and the Procreative Trap: Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*" and Natacha D'Orlando, a doctoral student at Paris 8, presented a talk entitled "Grafts and Parasites: aborted body, decolonized body in *The Autobiography of My Mother*." Simone Alexander examined the novel in its generic dimension, exploring the way in which the disguising of the novel as an autobiography blurs the borderline between the two genres and in so doing also generates the mother as a "ghostly presence," making possible the creation of an "exemplary space for recreation of self and community beyond patriarchy." What Alexander calls "ghosting" can thus be seen as a form of grafting; the mother is both hypervisible and invisible and helps her daughter both to refuse to be used, or commodified, by others as a mother, thus refusing to replicate the history of the island, and also to mother herself. Kaia Glover also addressed the issue of Xuela's refusal of maternity, but essentially through the intertextual relation to *The Tempest*, which can be seen as an *Urtext* of Caribbean letters. Taking up and extending the question raised by Sylvia Wynter in *Out of the Kumbula* (ed. Carole Boyce Davies) concerning Caliban's woman, Glover argued for seeing Xuela as Caliban's counterpart rather than his woman, thus placing her "beyond Wynter's beyond." She emphasized the significance of Xuela's refusal of the notion of women as gifts suggested by the relation to Shakespeare's play. Natasha D'Orlando took up the multiple implications of abortion in *The Autobiography of My Mother*. According to D'Orlando, the novel revolves around problems of transmission which have both personal and historical resonance in the novel. The body is both decolonized and overcolonized; through the actions of what are called "serial fathers," the female branch of the family is left without names or stories. The desire of Mrs. Labatte to use Xuela to compensate for her own inability to produce children constitutes a repetition of the colonial exploitation of women's bodies. From a personal point of view, Xuela cannot accept to become a mother for, having been deprived of a model for maternal affection, she finds herself carrying two children, one of which is her own unloved self.
- 13 The morning session ended with a keynote speech given by Daryl Dance, Professor Emerita from the University of Richmond and author a several books, most recently *In Search of Annie Drew*.
- 14 Daryl Dance talked about Jamaica Kincaid's mother Annie Drew (1919-1999), accompanying her comments on Kincaid's family and the people surrounding her in Antigua with a series of photographs. The focus of her talk was Kincaid's complex relationship with her mother, a mother Kincaid claimed had undermined her desire to write. From talking with Kincaid's older brother Joseph and other people who knew both Kincaid and her mother Annie, such as the minister from the Methodist church Annie Drew attended, Dance was able to get a more complete picture of the woman who clearly played an important, perhaps the most important, role in Kincaid's life. People described her as a woman who spoke her mind, who was active in politics and who considered she had done "all [she] could" for her daughter. Although she insisted that



what her daughter wrote was fiction, she was shocked by the details revealed in her daughter's books, to such an extent that Reverend Lee declared, "I think those books hastened her death." She concluded her talk by referring to Toni Morrison's notion of the reader's "response-ability" in approaching Kincaid's mother from angles not necessarily provided by Kincaid in her own writing, thus making it possible to have a more complete picture of a very complex mother/daughter relation.

- 15 The final session returned to the question of gardening which is of course at the root of the notion of grafting as a metaphor for Kincaid's writing. Eleonor Byrne, Senior Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, presented a paper entitled "After the Plantation: Tropical Gothic and the Globalised Garden." Paola Boi, Professor of Anglo-American literature at the University of Cagliari, Italy, examined Jamaica Kincaid and James Baldwin in a paper entitled "From the Other Side: James Baldwin, Jamaica Kincaid and the Extravagance of Double Consciousness." Myriam Moïse, Senior Lecturer at the University of the Antilles in Martinique, also examined the question of gardening through a comparison with the poetry of Olive Senior in a paper entitled "Jamaica Kincaid and Olive Senior: Gardening through History, Cultivating New Female Subjectivities." Eleonor Byrne, starting from an evocation of the colloquial British use of the term "hard graft" to mean digging, looked at Kincaid's gardening discourse as a way of "digging" up a buried past in order to reveal "unfolding narratives of conquest" and to make an addition to a garden that can be seen as "an open wound." She finds the notion of "postcolonial gothic" or "tropical gothic" useful as a way of accounting for the ways in which the establishing of connections between different areas of the globe produces a kind of "intercultural flow." Connecting up, or "worlding" can be seen as a form of grafting and produces a sense of the uncanny through the revelation of links between things not previously understood as having a connection. It also generates an "extreme intimacy," revealing the ways in which the local is also uncanny, and Kincaid's garden is full of ghosts. These ghosts provide a clue to the numerous forms of grafting, like the grafting of colonial names on plants, which can be seen as the historical traces of the various forms of stealing and destruction involved in colonialism. Paola Boi compared Kincaid and Baldwin as "angry people" involved in a struggle with an inescapable reality associated to a past of slavery which subverts the idea of normalcy. For both of them, leaving their native land was a way of surviving through a "radical transplant." Both Baldwin and Kincaid can be viewed through Deleuze's idea of the separation that precedes creation. She evoked Kincaid's ambiguous relation to the island as both home and exile and her relation to plants as a metaphor for conquest; here also Kincaid was sensitive to the ambiguity involved in her gardening, which was creating a new geography of herself but which also made of her a member of the "conquering class." Following such a line of investigation, Myriam Moïse looked at gardening as a way of digging into the earth in order to investigate the past and define oneself. She approached the question from the perspective of women's umbilical relation to the land. The garden becomes a metaphor for identity construction beyond borders; the garden is "expandable" in Carol Boyce Davies' sense of the term. In Kincaid's writing and Senior's poetry there is a sense of discomfort but also a rejection of the "normative space" of the garden. The seed can be seen as a natural colonizer (Senior's focus on the berry/ovary) but also as a sign of resistance. It becomes the "fluid and elastic space" described by Paul Gilroy and in Kincaid's and Senior's writing creates a fluidity connecting it to "wider garden of the earth."

- 16 The conference also included activities that extended and enriched the discussions. On the evening of Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> Marc Jeanson, one of the curators of the exhibit “Jardins” at the Grand Palais and Manager of the National Herbarium at the Musée national d’histoire naturelle, offered a guided tour of the exhibit to the participants at the conference. On the evening of Friday 19<sup>th</sup>, the group “Lectures féministes” from Paris 8 invited the attendees to participate in a reading of a medley of Kincaid’s texts. The actor Théophile Choquet proposed readings of translated versions of texts from *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *Mr. Potter*.