

The Amerindian Presence in a Selection of Children's Literature from Jamaica, Dominica, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago in the Anglophone Caribbean¹

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Introduction

Despite revivalist interest in Amerindian cultures, the representation of Amerindians in Caribbean literature has not been given much attention. While contemporary scholars such as Forte (2005, 2006) have pointed to the influence that both colonial and postcolonial writing has had on the inextricable mix of myth-and-truth of which socio-cultural and political representations of aboriginality in Trinidad, for instance, is composed, not much has been done to draw out this Amerindian representation from a literary perspective.[1]

Consequently, this paper focuses on the representation of Amerindians in children literature of the Anglophone Caribbean and arises out of a teaching project that has no quarrel with the calysonian's refrain "All a we is one family,"² yet refuses to succumb to the idea that the different tribes of Caribbean society have all disappeared into each other. It examines the Amerindian presence in a cluster of texts from the small but growing field of Anglophone Caribbean literature, written for or used with children.³ Caribbean literature depicting Amerindians is hard to find, but the texts discussed, which are available in libraries in Trinidad, were studied in an undergraduate children's literature course. They date from the recognizable beginnings of a Caribbean children's literature in the 1960s to 2002⁴ and were written by writers from four former British colonies that have had appreciable Amerindian populations – Jamaica in the north, Dominica in the central and leeward Caribbean, and Guyana and Trinidad in the south. Ten texts in four genres – drama, non-fiction, fiction, and the folktale – are presented here in chronological order:[2]

- *West Indian Folk Tales* (1966) – Philip Sherlock (Jamaica)
- "Twins of Illora." (1975) – Jan Carew (Guyana)
- *Children of the Sun* (1980) – Jan Carew (Guyana)
- *Baucumar-The Carib* (1982) – Ronald Nanton (Trinidad)
- *Anansesem* (1985; rpt. 2002) – Velma Pollard (Jamaica)
- *Tales of Makonaima's Children* (1994) – Henry Josiah (Guyana)
- *Paulana and Tanako* (1996) – Paula Sorhaindo (Dominica)
- *The Caribs and The Arawaks* (1996) – Paula Sorhaindo (Dominica)
- "Taino Boy" (2002) – Jean Goulbourne (Jamaica)
- *The Sisters and Manco's Stories* (2002) – Jan Carew (Guyana) [3]

Technically speaking, Amerindians are not the authors of this body of children's literature, but in some cases the literature was written by descendants of mixed ethnicity. Nevertheless, as Stewart (2002) points out, "being an "insider" does not guarantee that

one can create authentic literature, nor is the opposite true” (181). The analysis reveals that the depiction of the Amerindian in texts emanating from the island Caribbean is different from that in texts emanating from the continental Caribbean over the forty-year span of writing. The study of textual representations of Amerindian culture adds to research on cross-cultural children’s literature studies in the Anglophone Caribbean. It also adds to an understanding of the development of Anglophone children’s literature since the beginning of the literature in the post-Independence era of the 1960s.[4]

Identifying the Amerindian Presence in Anglophone Caribbean Children’s Literature

In “Outside Looking In: Nonnatives and American Indian Literature” (1994), Robin Riley Fast cautions against literary approaches to reading the Native Indian that are primarily formalist, romantic, nostalgic, stereotypical, self-referential, and based on “incomplete knowledge” (73). All of these caveats are relevant to depictions of the Amerindian in children’s texts of the Anglophone Caribbean; but interpretations based on “incomplete knowledge” are the greatest threat. For, while a tangible Native American presence has always existed in the United States, until recently it was believed that the indigenous people of the Caribbean had been decimated both by European cruelty and diseases.[5]

Forte (2005, 2006) has refuted this post-Columbus extinction thesis that has helped to marginalize Amerindian culture, noting with respect to his study of the Arima Carib community of Trinidad that in their parroting of European sources as their most readily available archive, colonial and postcolonial scholars have tended to repeat this thesis, thus influencing much of written Caribbean history and ethnography. Indeed this longstanding thesis of extinction was part of the rationale for the introduction of African slavery and later Asian indenture into the Americas, thus shaping the ethnic and socio-political construction of the post-Columbus Caribbean and indirectly the invisibility of Amerindians within Caribbean culture.[6]

The large infusion of African and Asian populations over the past five centuries into the Caribbean as replacement labour for the Amerindian population brought creolization and diffusion of the Amerindian traditions, which in turn led to cultural syncretism in the society at large. This cultural syncretism lends to what Forte (2005) terms in his chapter entitled Nationalizing the Carib, “the appropriation of the Amerindian in nationalistic discourse” (149). Thus with particular reference to Trinidad, he describes and analyses “the articulation of the Carib (by non-Carib social institutions and actors) in Trinidad’s search for a national sense of indigeneity ... outlin[ing] the key ways in which the Carib has been appropriated as a symbolic anchor for mooring modern articulations of Trinidadian and Arimian identity” (41).[7]

Nevertheless, at least two facts make the study of representation of indigenous culture in Caribbean literature used with or for children and young adults relevant. First, the

examination of actual representations of Amerindians in Caribbean children's literature from a literary perspective is rare. Second, if continental Guyana, which is a member of CARICOM (the community formed by former British territories), is included in the Anglophone Caribbean, a comparative study reveals two distinct traditions – a scribal tradition and an oral tradition – as discernible differences between the island and the continental Caribbean. Scribal is defined as writing based in or derived from archives, such as written histories and anthropological collections, while oral is defined as work in which the impulse of the writer comes from primary contact with stories received or told. Ironically, the scribal tradition is the earlier impulse, while latter day texts show more features of primary orality, crafted within a secondary and techno-based orality. This is especially evident in tales, revised subsequent to their first publication.[8]

A chronological approach to the analysis of these texts will be used to elucidate how they impact the evolution of Caribbean children's literature. Textual delineation of the Amerindian presence will also focus on thematic structure and plot, since these texts are not widely known.[9]

The Scribal Tradition: Anthropology, Didacticism, and the Influence of Schooling

A landmark text used with children, depicting the Amerindian is Philip Sherlock's *West Indian Folk-tales* (1966). This collection of retold tales is laid out to suggest the historical evolution of Caribbean society, with Amerindian tales making up the first half of the book and Afro-Caribbean tales, many featuring trickster Anansi, making up the second half. Sherlock acknowledges indebtedness for his "Carib stories to the Rev. Henry Brett, whose *Indian Tribes of Guiana* was published in London in 1868 ... and to Mrs. St. Aubyn who kindly let [him] read her version of some of the stories" (Sherlock Acknowledgements). In other words Sherlock, a highly respected Jamaican university academic and creative writer, was one of the earliest post-Independence, West Indian compilers of Amerindian tales used with children; and his tales were derived from written anthropological documents.⁵ [10]

In this text compiled before wide sensitivity to ethnocentrism associated with stereotyping, the few illustrations, mainly of males, are hirsute and sinewy. Although the Warau, one of the nine Guyanese Amerindian nations, is referred to, the contextual base for the collection is the clichéd Carib-Arawak binary that is prevalent in Western-based representations of the Amerindian. Creationist and *pourquoi* emphases are clear.⁶ Thus the collection includes legends such as "The Coomacka-Tree" and "The Warau People Discover the Earth" that tell how people whose "first home was the moon" (p. 7) and people who came from "a land beyond the sky" (39) settled on the earth, making accommodations to their new environment, when they found that they could not get back to their sky worlds. In a similar fashion, the *pourquoi* tales relate the evolution of earthly norms, such as how the dog's nose became cold ("The Dog's Nose is Cold"); and how the powi bird got its crest, became the wise leader of all animals, and gained its regal name of crested curassow ("The Crested Curassow"). In the Sherlock's Amerindian folktales sky and earth are not distant or divorced from each other; they are interconnected by a

ladder which gets pulled up, leaving stranded the curious who wander periodically down the hole from the sky. Amerindian nations are presented as having come down from their various worlds in the sky in like manner at different periods; thus “the Warau people discover the earth” after the Carib.[11]

Sherlock’s stilted presentation suggests not only an attempt to mimic ‘Amerindian-speak,’ but also his unfamiliarity with the culture that he, a Jamaican, was representing. It also suggests the infancy of the written tradition, the lack of recognition still given to living indigenous sources, the lack of awareness of the Caribbean islands of their own cultural composition and the non-existence of Amerindians writing about their culture at this stage of Caribbean literary development.[12]

It is with educational publications, targeting broad literacy and Social Studies agendas in the primary school system during the 1980s that the representation of Amerindians, begin to gain visibility both in fiction and non-fiction. There is also evidence of visualizing Amerindian integration with other ethnicities in a post-colonial Caribbean, and an attempt to engender critical thinking about the European entry into the region in material for children. Velma Pollard’s *Anansesem: A Collection of Folk Tales, Legends and Poems for Juniors* (1985, rpt. 2002), which contains two stories, is an early example of these shifts in representation. Like Sherlock of the elder generation, Pollard is a well-known Jamaican educator and poet, but her Amerindian selection, although limited, shows greater evidence of cross-fertilization between African and Amerindian folktales than is evident in Sherlock’s compilation.[13]

Anansesem is a compilation of narratives and poems in the didactic tradition, with many textbook features. The 2002 version is fitted with introductory notes for teachers and students, and an activity section entitled Things to Do and Talk About. Of the two Amerindian tales, the first “How Yawrie Got its Smell,” a Guyanese tale, has its roots in the oral tradition and blends both Afro-Caribbean trickster and Amerindian cultural features. For like Anansi, Mr. Yawrie, the manicou, in his greed, outsmarts himself and is swallowed up by a lukanani, a fresh water Guyanese fish. In addition to the use of Amerindian names, Amerindian cultural elements such as cassava bread and the hammock feature in the story.[14]

The second Amerindian story in *Anansesem*, “A Tale adapted from Little Hunter Meets Columbus” and subtitled “Arawak Story” tries to take a revisionist position on the encounter between the Amerindians and the Europeans, but it contains many ambiguities. First, Things to Talk About indicates that the Amerindians referred to in the story are not Arawaks, but are “now correctly referred as Tainos” (119). However, over-simplification (perhaps with the school-aged reader in mind) results in the Arawak-Carib binary. The family of Big Hunter the father, Little Hunter his son, and Shining Star the daughter conform to well-known stereotypes, and Big Hunter greets the Europeans in mimicry of Amerindian English: “Oh strange ones, from the strange winged canoes, welcome to our land! If you come as friends, we greet you as friends” (53) Further, the placement of “There was an Indian” by Sir John Squire, the British poet in close proximity to the anonymous Arawak tale creates ambiguity, since a student can easily be misled into

thinking that Squire was the author of both the tale and the poem, especially since the language of both pieces side by side are similar in their use of Standard English diction and register.[15]

Like *Anansesem, Baucumar-The Carib* (1982), the only Amerindian children's play found, has its origins in the primary education system. It is a one-act play with a Social Studies agenda, published by a publications officer (also a poet in private life) in the Ministry of Education, Trinidad.⁷ Although the didactic intent is clear, in that the play is a supplementary text aimed at widening the heritage knowledge of students through role play, orality lies at its core. Thus, in the plot Uncle Harry, an archeologist from the University of the West Indies, takes the opportunity of the visit of his nephew Arnold, to the country village of Savonetta to corroborate the Amerindian history the nephew has learnt in school. Savonetta Hill is a midden and Uncle Harry, poring over a table full of artifacts, provides a context for a review of what "Miss" has taught about zemis, hammocks, and boucannering (meat preservation).[16]

Uncle Harry's origins are in the old Carib town of Arima which not only celebrates a Carib festival day, but has also erected a Carib House for relics in a national park. Uncle Harry takes Arnold to Arima to revisit his Carib past, where through a play-within-a-play format, the children of the Carib household he visits, prepare for the upcoming Carib feast according to traditional Carib custom. In the course of the preparations, the children's ignorance of their heritage is revealed, and through masking, the adults take the opportunity to induct the young into practices still remembered by older heads as part of oral history.[17]

In *Baucumar*, masking in traditional wear is used as a vehicle for reenacting the initiation from boyhood to manhood of Chief Baucumar, an Amerindian hero who "became a man and lived on to unite Carib and Arawak in one last great stand against the Spaniards" in Trinidad (p. 27). In the plot Pedro, one of the young men of the household who knows little about his ancestors assumes the persona of the youthful Baucumar. Pedro's initiation is necessary, since he is growing up culture-less, dismissing his heritage with arguments of the irrelevance of Amerindian customs to a modern world and the fact that he is multiethnic. Pedro says: "But. Ma, we not living in the days of hyarima again.⁸ This is modern times. ... "I not no pure Carib. I mix up"(11). Pedro's initiation is intended to inform the young that distinct continuities exist between the past and the present in Amerindian culture, in spite of the integration of cultures over the intervening centuries.[18]

Of note, in *Uncle Harry* the university professor Nanton sites his play within the academic community. As the twentieth-century progressed, literature for children in the scribal tradition would display a greater degree of Caribbean research as well as more attention to literary design and to invoking "the pleasures of literature" for children. And so Paula Sorhaindo's *Caribs and Arawaks* (1996) and *Paulana and Tanako* (1996) in the Read Awhile Graded series are glossy, color-covered texts with black and white illustrations. *Caribs and Arawaks* is a comprehensive informational text most likely intended as supplementary reading in a Caribbean Social Studies programme. As is

typical with non-fiction, subheadings guide access to the information, and similarities and differences between the two named Amerindian cultures can easily be grasped.[19]

Further, although the terms Caribs and Arawaks are used, they are not used in a limited clichéd way, but as identifying features of language classification. Therefore, it is explained that “[t]here were different Arawakan-speaking groups who lived in South America and the Caribbean” and some of them such as the Ciboney and the Taino are named. The text also seeks to create reading interest by relating myths that link features of the landscape, associated with an Amerindian past, to the present. For example, in describing the Snake Staircase ridge in Dominica, Sorhaindo relates that there are Dominicans who say that they have seen the “large snake with a jewel in its forehead that rises from the sea” (23).[20]

By contrast, Sorhaindo’s fiction, *Paulana and Tanako* published in the same year, follows the pattern of the Western clichéd romance. The story is told of an Arawak girl, Paulana, falling in love with a “gentle Carib boy,” Tanako, whose gentleness, it is implied, comes from his mother, a captured Arawak woman, who “became the wife of one of the Carib warriors: Tanako’s father” (11). It may seem unfair to criticize this ‘families forsworn’ love plot as stereotypical, since it is common to many cultures. However, an examination of other features of the story, such its illustrations, indicates portrayals of male and female sexuality and beauty skewed towards Western models. Paulana’s garb looks like a Hawaiian bikini, while the courtship between her and Tanako is displayed in coquettish poses, accentuating contemporary youth culture. Linguistically, the story beginning, “in the old days,” is closer to North American Native Indian story openings; however, the tale ends with the conventional Western fairy tale ending:[21]

From that time on, the two groups of people stopped fighting each other. They lived happily and peacefully side by side. The peace of the mountain was never ever destroyed again. (26)[22]

Further, not only is the tale designed around the stereotype of the war-like Carib and the peaceful Arawak, but it is also built around the simplistic interference and manipulation of gods who “hated the endless fighting between the tribes” (3) and decided on intermarriage between young people of the two nations as the solution:[23]

The Sky God and the Earth god decided on a plan.
“We shall have peace for ever on this island!” (3) [24]

Paulana and Tanako seems designed to provide extended reading for too wide a diversity of Western-based Social Studies themes, thus compromising its representation of Amerindian culture. And so in an enclave such as the leeward Caribbean that has a history of Amerindian syncretic populations like the “Black Carib,” perhaps incomplete knowledge or perhaps deliberate choice yields in these two texts the predominant portrayal of the Amerindian in literature for children, as inter-tribal conflicts between “Yellow Carib” groups, a stock feature of Western fare.⁹ [25]

Jean Goulbourne's "Taino Boy" from her *Freedom Come* (2002) in the Sand Pebbles Pleasure Series is the final text discussed in this analysis of the Amerindian presence in Anglophone Caribbean literature for children and young adults. Published at the beginning of the beginning of the twenty-first century, "Taino Boy" is one of a collection of five children's stories featuring Jamaica's heritage and multiethnic identity. In this story Stephen and his classmates who have been "studying the Tainos for two weeks" are on a school outing to the Taino Museum where they expect to get firsthand perspectives on Taino customs (Freedom 25). However, Stephen falls ill on the outing and passes into unconsciousness. In this dreamlike state he goes back as a Taino boy into Jamaica's Amerindian past, where he becomes Tailo, the younger brother of a family whose father had been killed in a Carib raid.[26]

Tailo wants to prove his manliness by providing ducks for the village feast for the night. Using Taino hunting lore based on their knowledge of nature to aid him in his quest, Tailo swims among the ducks below water and grabs their feet, pulling them underwater and drowning them, thus succeeding in bringing home his trophy. During the feast, as Lal "the storyteller and village historian" pays tribute to ancestors ("brave men who had killed the Caribs when they came to raid and to kill the men and take the women for themselves as their wives"), Tailo drifts away to the beat of the drums and the writer provides this hallucinatory space for Stephen to return from the ancient world of the Tainos into his Jamaican self (pp. 35-41). His fever has broken and he is on the mend.[27]

Thus this story is similar to *Baucumar*, on more than one level. For one, the story comes directly out of a classroom experience and seems designed to serve as extended reading for the primary school, Social Studies and integrated curriculum. Similar to Nanton, the author of *Baucumar*, who used masking, Goulbourne who is also an educator and writer, uses hallucination to transport her central character into the past for purposes of identification with Amerindian culture. In similar fashion both plots seeks to represent feasts and religious rituals, present the organization of communities and households, and depict Amerindian ways of life. They are both character-building stories that aim at elevating the simple life and closeness to nature as values important for shaping moral consciousness among the young. They are also aimed at inspiring boys into manliness, through use of stereotypes such as the Amerindian male as warrior, the depiction of successful initiation challenges, and the achievement of hunting prowess as models of masculinity. The stereotype of the female as the docile, homebound manageress of domestic chores runs alongside.[28]

Thus over the first forty years of Caribbean children's literature, the representation of the Amerindian in literature for children and young adults under the pen of educators from primary to tertiary level, who also double as creative writers in their private lives, has moved from creationist and pourquoi folktale beginnings to informational, historical, and cultural depictions. Also in tales emanating from the island Caribbean, archivist and didactic strains are embedded in each other. Further, reader identification with characters has increased, although it is still heavily linked to didacticism. These didactic strains emanate directly from authors or agencies affiliated to Caribbean primary schools and

Ministries of Education, and they combine literacy, Social Studies, and integrated curricular ends. Amerindians are presented to a large extent as edifying artifacts, a civilization set apart in epochal time, serving as examples of bravery, wisdom, and natural and instinctive simplicity that young people need to respect, witness, and use as spiritual lessons in the shaping of their own character and moral consciousness.[29]

The Oral Tradition – Magical Realism, Socio-cultural Allegory, and the “Guyanisation” of the Amerindian Presence

My analysis so far has shown that the representation of Amerindians in children’s literature from the island Caribbean is largely composed of cultural and historical descriptions, myths, legends, and tales retold. These collections tend to be fragmented – composed of isolated stories that invariably have as their centerpiece stock binary representations such as ‘warlike Carib’ in confrontation with ‘peaceful Arawak’ and with conquistador. By contrast, the Amerindian presence in tales by two Guyanese writers Henry Josiah and Jan Carew manifests a different ethos.[30]

In the continuing analysis Carew’s stories, in particular *The Sisters and Manco’s Stories* (Manco 2002) and Josiah’s *Tales of Makonaima* (1994), in which the lead story “Makoanaima and Pia” won a children’s story competition in 1966, are explored. It should be noted that the children’s stories of both these Guyanese writers span almost the entire period of Caribbean writing. My analysis will show that the Amerindian presence in tales by these two Guyanese writers is portrayed differently from the Amerindian presence represented in tales written in the scribal tradition. For one, while Amerindian culture tends to be objectified in the scribal tradition, in Josiah’s *Makonima* and Carew’s *Manco’s Stories* Amerindians and Guyanese are one and the same. Further, the culture clash between Europeans and Amerindians, followed by the subsequent coming of the various ethnic groups to the Caribbean is not much in evidence. In fact one marked feature of ethnic representation is an Afro-Amerindian cosmology that exists from the society’s commencement. Since the Carew’s stories treated in this paper span over thirty years from the 1975 to 2002, while only one collection of stories by Josiah, a collection of stories republished in 1994 is discussed, I will deal with the representation of Amerindians in Josiah’s work first.[31]

While Sherlock acknowledges “Rev. Henry Brett, whose *Indian Tribes of Guiana* was published in London in 1868” and “Mrs. St. Aubyn who kindly let [him] read her version of some of the stories,” as his sources, Josiah, whose tales are peopled with the same characters, acknowledges the Guyanese oral tradition as his springboard. In his introduction to *The Tales of Makoanaima* Josiah explains:[32]

The stories are folklore. They come from traditions passed on by word of mouth through descendants of the original Guyanese I have taken the liberty to recreate them in such a way that familiar and universal English language would breathe the spirit of the old Amerindian tongues – Carib, Macushi and Patamora, Wapishiana, Warrau and Wai Wai, Akawaio, Arecuna and Arawak” (Preface 1).[33]

Despite the declaration of orality, though, Josiah's Makoanima shows much of the didacticism and archivist agenda evident in the children's writing of the scribal tradition. Josiah informs us, for instance, that "Makoanima and Pia" was used "as supplementary reading material in Guyana's primary school" (Preface). He also says that his intention in putting together his collection was to "reflect for the new generation those things of value in the old way of life now almost overrun by the new civilization" (Preface 1). He even includes an extract from a 1965 report of S.C. Knapp, Indian Affairs Officer, Canada, on the Amerindians of British Guiana in the collection. It tells about an Amerindian girl who braves the currents of the Potaro paddling her way to and from school on a three mile journey each way in a split canoe. The extract seems selected as much for its depiction of aboriginality as for its tacit statement about sacrifice in the name of traditional book-learning.[34]

Josiah's tales, some of which, like "Pia and Makonaima" were published in the 1960s like Sherlock's, also contain many *pourquoi* and creationist elements. For instance, while Pia and Makonaima await the return of the ladder to take them back to their sky home, they meet other children who have also come down the ladder. The ladder never returns, so the children wait at the foot of Mount Roraima from which they have come down, and intermarry and age. However, Makonaima returns unseen by all and becomes to those who remain on earth "the all-wise father of us all who lives in the Place of the Sun above the Sky" (p. 15). Thus Mt. Roraima in the Guyanese hinterland, the highest tabletop mountain of the world, is invested with the added cultural importance of gateway from earth to sky: "And this is why to this day, clouds always cover the summit of the tomb-like mountain called Roraima and the rain falls forever on the mountain top" (p. 9).[35]

Beyond their similar didactic agendas and creationist characters, though, Josiah's stories show more cultural detail than Sherlock's. One differentiating feature is Josiah's use of skin-colour description in his characterization of Amerindians. The explanation for the dark skin of Pia and Makonaima is: "Their skins were dark because of the sun in whose warmth they lived always" (5). Additionally, Amerindian and Guyanese are markedly presented as synchronous concepts in the use of "we" and "our" that identify the sameness of both and the author's self-inclusion in that synchronous identity. Thus "Guyana," owes its name, "land from the waters" to the fact that it is the land mass that surfaces after a creationist flood, which gives it its name (p.13); one learns that "the haiawa" is the tree "from which we get incense for the rituals to make our spirits visit the world to come" (13); fire is collected from the crater of the volcano at Roraima; and one also learns how the man-eating perai have been turned into "ugly little fish with teeth sharper than any every known before" (p. 26). Makonaima is God: "All these Makonaima named so that our people would know what to call them" (p. 13).[36]

As the stories unfold, their earth creation elements increase, and the separation between human and sky worlds enlarges. The reader is told, for instance, that Akawaio is a good hunter, but his earthliness is specified. He is "a proud and skilful offspring of the first people who had come down to Guyana from the place of the Sun but who had since lost the magic arts of their ancestors" (pp.16-17). In the final analysis all converges in an Amerindian-Guyanese connection: "All these Makonaima named so that our people

would know what to call them” (13). In these respects Josiah’s tales show allegorical leanings.[37]

In his presentation of the Guyanese and Amerindian as one unified entity, Josiah prepares us for the tales of Jan Carew, a compatriot of greater writing skill, whose literature for children and young adults, spans more than four decades. Carew’s tales are similarly oral in origin, but seem more intensely influenced by his growing in a community, which received its electrifying stories from the mouths of village griots who inspired his retelling of them. In his article “The Fusion of African and Amerindian Folk Myths, he explains how two eccentric village storytellers impacted on his “recreat[ion of] six folk tales [he] had heard in his childhood”: [38]

The two ... were troubadours, archetypal messengers, culture bringers and inspired interpreters who stood between God and the villagers. They were the maestros of the storytelling profession, the spellbinders who attracted crowds of listeners, not in Agricola but everywhere in Guyana that they choose (sic) to go. In the village itself, however, there were many anonymous practitioners of the storyteller’s craft, for folk legends were an intrinsic part of the extended family and its culture. (BIM 242)[39]

In explaining his transposition of one of his oral tales to print, Carew suggests that his tales are much more than indigenous myths; they are an integral part of the fabric of Guyanese society. It is possible that Josiah owes his similar claim to him. Carew explains:[40]

It became apparent after I had written THE LEGEND OF NAMELESS Mountain, that the story had evolved out of a tradition that was neither purely African nor Amerindian, but essentially Guyanese. Therefore, the Guyan-isation of the African and Amerindian folk legends was a phenomenon that I, as inheritor of the end-product, had overlooked until I transposed one story from an oral into a written form and examined its symbols, its structure and its meaning for the first time. (BIM 243)[41]

The “Guyan-isation” that Carew refers to here is descriptive in force and used as a term to identify characteristic features of the Guyanese legends that he had come in contact with. In this respect the term is used in quite a different sense from Forte’s nationalizing in “nationalizing the Carib.” The difference is that in Carew’s Guyan-isation, an identity is not so much an appropriation being imposed from outside the group, as it is a form of self-articulation; self-discovery, and self-identification from the awareness of a long-standing pre-Columbian historicity from within. [42]

Carew’s main text, *The Sisters and Manco’s Stories* (Manco 2002), discussed in this paper is a book in the Macmillan Caribbean young adult series. It is a revised collection of some of his early children’s writing published in the 1970s and 1980s, in particular, “The Twins of Illora,” *Children of the Sun* (1980), and “The Third Gift” (1981). The plots of most of these stories focus mainly on the mythical juxtaposition of good and evil in human as well as in spiritual life. In “The Sisters” and “The Twins of Illora,” for example, the ugly sister with the pure heart, who is banished from the kingdom, triumphs

over and eventually takes in the beautiful favourite who grows up to be an arrogant and mean queen who is later deposed and destroyed. In “The Children of the Sun,” the gentleness of Pia and the powerful evil of Makoanima are personified, as the lives of both children, born from Sun’s rape of the beautiful maiden Tihona, are shown from their birth to their adult assumption of their spiritual roles in Guyanese cosmology. “The Third Gift” projects the least likely children within a society into prominence, by endowing these children with pure hearts and allowing them to bring enduring virtues to their people. However, to outline the plot of Carew’s tales in this fashion is to rob them of their literary impact – a literary impact that comes from the artistry with which they are composed and not from a didactic, sledge-hammer approach such as that of the writers of the scribal tradition. Some aspects of this literary artistry will now be outlined.[43]

Clear socio-allegorical parallels can be drawn between Guyana and Carew’s fictive world in both the early and revised tales. The geographic resemblance between Guyana and Illora is one of the more obvious parallels. Illora with its inheritance of vast plains, rivers, majestic mountains and prehistoric flora and fauna is “nested between the heartland of the Amazon rainforests and the amber, silt-laden rim of the Atlantic Ocean” (*Manco* 3). Illora resembles Guyana, further, in that in spite of its great size, “[t]he majority of Ilorans live[] in four hundred hamlets, villages and towns on the banks of the Great River; and the capital, Ikowan, which, in the Iloran language, meant City of Light and Shadows, was wedged between the right bank of the Great River and the sea” (4).[44]

However, the most noticeable stylistic feature that Carew uses to vivify his representation of Amerindian culture is ‘el maravilloso real’ – magical realism which Latin American writers such as Alejo Carpentier posit as a feature inherent in the Caribbean landscape. According to Carpentier “the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America’s varied history, geography, demography, and politics” (Faris & Zamora 75). Carpentier’s marvelous real has its poetic genesis in Haiti: “I will say that my first inkling of the marvelous real came to me when, near the end of 1943, I was lucky enough to visit Henri Christophe’s kingdom ...” (84) However, Carpentier sees this marvelous real, as being not only “the unique privilege of Haiti but [also] the heritage of all of America, where we have not yet begun to establish an inventory of our cosmogonies” (87).[45]

Key elements of this magical realism include:

- the magic of tropic vegetation, the unbridled creativity of our natural forms with all their metamorphoses and symbioses.
- an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality.
- the marvelous that does not depend on the notion that the marvelous is admirable because it is beautiful. Ugliness, deformity ... all that is terrible can also be marvelous. All that is strange is marvelous.
- the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances. (Faris & Zamora 85-122)[46]

Thus in Carew's magical realism, first, the name Manco in the title of the collection, *The Sisters and Manco Stories*, invokes continuity with the wider hemispheric Amerindian experience. Manco Capac, one of the last emperors of Peru is famous for his stand against Francisco Pizarro and the Spanish conquistadores. In choosing to issue his Amerindian stories through the revival of the pre-Columbian figure of Manco as griot, Carew achieves a "marvelously real" historicity and hemispheric embrace for his Guyanese Amerindian that Sherlock's scribal sources do not permit.[47]

Additionally, the first story of the Manco collection, the novella, "The Sisters" opens with the beguiling, inexplicable beauty of the ugly in nature. Great harpy eagles, screaming portentously, tell of the rot, and consequentially, the impending destruction and grief that is about to descend on Ilora. However, even within the impending doom the wondrous beauty and the perfection of nature reside:[48]

One of the eagles detached herself from the group and her mate followed. She dived towards the earth like an arrow shot from the Sky-God's bow. When it seemed as though she was bound to bury herself in a grassy knoll, she leveled off and, rising steeply, carried a writhing bushmaster snake in her talons. Halfway between the eagles above her, and the ground, she released the shining serpent and her mate, with perfect timing, struck it a shattering blow to the head, retrieved it in his talons, and the two headed for a distant crag to share their kill with their nest of young eaglets (3)[49]

Further, "The Sisters," is far from being the Cinderella story it seems. In this story Marta and Elana become personifications of external ugliness shrouding internal beauty, and external beauty shrouding internal ugly haughtiness that can be found in many universal reversal myths. The expected outcome occurs: In the end the ugly princess, Marta, rules with generosity of heart and throws off the burden of her hunchback, while the beautiful haughty princess, Elana, comes over time to manifest the ugliness inside of her and grows a hump. However, "The Sisters" also weaves into its magical realism, a polysemous mix of old world and futuristic myths. Etta and Osha – one advisor to the gentle hunchback Marta, the other advisor to the evil favourite Elana; one an African obeah woman living in the high mountains forests, the other a sorceress from the pages of any techno-myth, with which the young Caribbean reader would be familiar -are similarly placed in counterpoint. Interwoven around Etta are supporting African images such as the pounding of hearts like Fanti drums (14). A familiar blazing pantheon of Caribbean shrubbery can be found in her back garden: "purple bougainvilleas, oleanders, crimson hibiscus, scarlet poinsettias and orange-coloured Pride of Barbados" (20). Meanwhile Osha, her palace equivalent, the queen's sorcerer and adviser, sweeps into presence with RPG familiarity:[50]

She was forever dressed in a white robe that trailed behind her, and a tall white turban with a polished green stone stuck in the middle like a malevolent third eye. Her lips were forever smiling while her eyes had the cold glitter of a poisonous snake's/ Her bony fingers were topped with nails that curved inward like talons and her hands had the clammy feel of seaweed rotting in the sun. (Manco 11)[51]

Representations of palatial indoor as well as outdoor spaces carry a similar mix of magical realism, African-Amerindian cosmologies, and modern myth. The queen of Illora is imaged, sitting on a throne “that was carved from a solid block of red jasper and, with the light from the tall windows playing on this glowing seat of power, she seemed to be suspended in the midst of flames” (12). Violent extremes of passions are evoked in “The Sisters” similar to those of visual representations in computerized animation. Bright sword-like light and the ashen pall of shadows alternate to offset electrifying, yet devouring, man-made, and natural terrors. For example, when Kayliss, the father of the twins, Marta and Elana, is about to cross the Great River, which will consume him and send him to Imanja (Yemaja, the Afro-Caribbean goddess), his watery bride, the words of the Captain who will ferry him startle a flock of black and yellow ricebirds described in the following way:[52]

They swooped down like a dark cloud with a golden lining, until they almost fused with their shadows on the surface of the river. Some of the birds, pushed downwards by the others, struck the surface of the water and were devoured by hungry piranhas, but the others, rising steeply, flew into the sunset and vanished. (11)[53]

Artificial mirrors such as water to reflect and refract past, present, and future are also much used as vehicles of plot progression in the tales. For example, Marta sees her passage from ugliness to beauty, comes to know her future, and becomes aware of her development at varying stages in her preparation to be the ruler of Illora, through mirror illuminations in an emerald pool.[54]

It can be seen, then, that one of the accentuated differences between Carew’s earlier tales and their twenty-first century revisions in *Manco* is a greater fusion and partnership in the revised between Afro-Amerindian cosmologies. In the *Manco* version of *The Children of the Sun*, for instance, The Great Spirit who oversees the growing of the twin sons of Tihona, “shares [his] domain in the sky” with “The Sky-God of the ebony people” (p. 85). When the twins come before The Great Spirit they are surprised to see this “midnight-black god sitting on a throne to his right” who governs from the sky only in the daytime, “because those who worship [him] insist that before the sun sets, [he] must return to earth so that [he] can be near to them and accountable to them” (85). [55]

Another noticeable difference is that the revised tales in *Manco* give greater prominence to honouring females and female leadership, although tribute to women leadership is already quite noticeable in the earlier version of the stories. The earlier version of “The Sisters”, entitled “The Twins of Illora” for instance, is subtitled “An African Fable of a time when women ruled and age was beautiful.” Also, insertions in later versions of stories like “The Gift” and *The Children of the Sun* show an emphasis on Afro-Amerindian female leadership. Thus in the 2002 version of *Children of the Sun*, when Tihona finds out that she is carrying twins, she adds female names alongside male names for her unborn:[56]

‘If they’re girls, I’ll call one Beltina and the other Shantoba. But if they’re boys, I’ll name them Pia and Kanaima, after their two grandfathers.’ Then Tihona sang out, ‘Beltina and

Shantoba! Pia and Kanaima! Twins of Tihona and Sun. Grandchildren of the Keeper of the Lightning Eel and the Thunder Axe!’ ” (83).¹⁰ [57]

However, Carew’s updated emphasis on women carries the supra-normal, transcendental dimension already noted in his use of futuristic cosmologies. And so, “The Third Gift” contains no female character among its young people who take up the challenge to climb Nameless Mountain to bring back a gift of leadership to their tribe. All the young leaders are male, and the third one who brings back the greatest gift of all is Ika, the Quiet One, and son of Tiho the Hunter. However, in the 2002 version of this story, the third young leader who brings back the greatest gift of all – the gift of fantasy, imagination and faith – is the female Lara, who aims “to change the world” (77). A young adult Caribbean reader would be unlikely to miss the parallel identities of Carew’s Lara and Lara of the well-known, techno-myth, *The Tomb Raiders*. In his use of the techno-icon Lara, the rock climber and archeologist, one of whose missions in the RPG is to find an artifact located in a Peruvian tomb, Carew signals the cross-cultural timelessness to which he elevates his Amerindian mythological representations.[58]

It can be seen, then, that Carew’s ideological portrayal of the Amerindian in literature for children and young adults of the English-speaking Caribbean is consistent throughout his story revisions over the four decades. In his later work, though, he seems to have achieved a greater synthesis in the handling of his Guyanese Afro-Amerindian cosmology – a continuous coherent cosmology that embraces long-standing theories of the pre-Columbian presence of the African in the Americas, a position that Ivan Van Sertima, a compatriot and colleague of Carew, puts forward in *They Came Before Columbus* (1976).[60]

And so when Pia and Kanaima travel through the land on their way to see The Great Spirit and they pass through the village of their mother Tihona, they find that “things had changed since Tihona left, and black strangers were now sharing the valley with them [Tihona’s people]” (84). Spokesman, the god-messenger who leads the twins to The Great Spirit who will send them on their manhood tasks, explains to Pia and Kanaima the coming of these people whose arrival and harmonious integration with the Amerindians predate that of Africans whom the Europeans brought as slaves:[61]

These ebony people came from the East in long canoes with high prows and each canoe had a hundred rowers ... but they came as friends. They learnt our language and listened to the tales about our ancestors; and they only told us about their culture and their beliefs when we asked them to do so. Then we discovered that many of our beliefs and theirs were the same. We had a Great Spirit and they had a Sky-God... (84)[62]

The beliefs of both African and Amerindian Guyanese cultures are shown to be compatible and synchronous: “These are the beliefs that bind us together, and this is why the ebony people are our brothers and sisters” (85).[63]

Thus one sees social-allegory blended with magical realism in Carew’s representation of the Amerindian. His texts invite children and young adults to conceptualize the Guyanese

Amerindian presence as more than earthly and human – to conceptualize this presence as a regenerative, imaginative, and cross-cultural aesthetic. By back-grounding this presence in his children’s texts with an iconic blend of ancient and futuristic mythologies, he creates the magical image of Guyana as a land occupied by waves of people who little know the deep and multifarious tributaries and civilizations, linking sky, earth and people across continuous epochs of which it is composed.[64]

Recent Trends

As the corpus of children and young adult literature in the Caribbean increases to meet the demands of young readers and to satisfy literacy needs of the school curricula, representations of Amerindian culture have increased. A noticeable trend has been the use of stereotypes of Amerindians to fit environmental, moralist, nationalistic, and multicultural ends. *The Magical Mystical Ibis* (2002) is one example.[65]

This picture book, aimed at students in the early years of primary school, tells how the scarlet ibis, the national bird of Trinidad came to live in the Caroni swamp. Grandfather Ibis tells the story of how The Great Golden One, the magnificent leader with his distinguishing golden feather “led a flock of Braves from the land of our forefathers” (n. p.). The colony lived happily until poachers found their nesting grounds. On one fateful night The Golden One flew down to catch a fledgling that had fallen out of his tree nest. A shot rang out and he was never seen again. Floods, pollution and poaching threatened the ibis colony with extinction; they would need a leader to guide them where to go – a magical, mystical ibis with a golden feather. After a long period of watching hatching eggs for the successor to The Golden One, on a dark night hope is eventually reborn. A female egg hatches and in the moonlight the remaining colony sees “a tiny crest touched with gold” and knows that “[s]he had come” (n.p.). In *The Magical Mystical Ibis* the North American “Brave” is invoked as a symbol of courage, warriorhood, tribal protection, and respect.[66]

Not all recent texts invoking the Amerindian are successful. Norma McCartney’s *Tales of Immortelles*, subtitled “A collection of Caribbean fairy tales,” (cited in Forte 2005, p.144) is one of these. In this text composed of seven stories, “princess” and “witch” from the European tradition; “Soucouyan” and “Guyama” from African folklore; and “cacique” and “Kai” are all blended to create a melting pot of European, Amerindian, and African cultures that is unconvincing socio-culturally as well as stylistically. The stories that centre most on Amerindian culture, very much like *The Magical Mystical Ibis*, are post-Columbian derivatives with moral, creationist and environmentalist agendas. “The Carib and the Birds” for instance, tells about the origins of the Trinidad Pitch Lake. In this story, Indaree the vain daughter of the Carib queen who does not believe in The Invisible One sets the brave warrior, Naz, the task of getting her golden feathers from the Bird of Paradise for her wedding dress. This she does unknown to her mother. On the night of her wedding the Gods punish the village by sending a great flood. The village is destroyed, but the queen is saved and a pitch lake rises to remain one of the landmarks that Christopher Columbus saw when he arrived on the island of Trinidad. Overall, then, there the syncretism that has taken place over time among Caribbean cultures that have come

into contact with each other have brought the urge to manufacture new cross-cultural tales. However, some of the “fairy” tale mixtures stretch the representation of the Amerindian excessively.[67]

A survey of representations of Amerindians in literature for or used with children and young adults in the Anglophone Caribbean since the 1950s shows a predominance of retold folk tales and myths mainly in two strands – a distinctive Guyanese South American tradition and an equally marked island-chain tradition. The writing can be found in mixed or entirely Amerindian collections. The collections from the islands examined seem fragmented, while those from Guyana seem to bear the cultural stamp of authors who have in some way participated in or borne witness to the indigenous culture that they tell about. It is this poetic sense of lived lives, integrated with belief systems, that distinguishes between what has been designated ‘scribal’ and ‘oral’ in this paper. Surely the representation of the Amerindian depends on factors such as the sources of the stories, the ideology of the teller, the period of publication, and the stylistic skill of the teller. It seems to matter as well whether the teller is teacher, compiler-archivist, or Amerindian descendant. Certainly more research needs to be done to say how representative of Caribbean children’s and young adult literature are the texts discussed in this paper.[68]

Notes

1 The term ‘Amerindian’ is an erroneous Columbian designation. However, it is the term used by most regional scholars. There are many English-speaking territories in the Caribbean. Anglophone in this paper refers to ex-British and British Caribbean territories.

2 “All ah we is one family” is a 1982 calypso of Lord Nelson, one of the icons of Trinidadian calypso. “All ah we is one family” is a Trinidadian mantra that is conveniently trotted out in the interest of national harmony to suggest a common identity. However, this common identity thesis is just as ardently and privately disputed within ethnic and social cleavages.

3 Literature for children in the Caribbean is still heavily dependent on texts produced outside of the Caribbean. While Caribbean children’s literature has come a long way since its dependence on stock material, not originally written for children, such as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* where many children met their first Amerindian in literature, My Man Friday, depicted by the colonist as subservient, cannibalistic, captive and without language or religion, many of ethnocentric stereotypes in the field continue to be perpetuated.

4 James, Cynthia. “From Orature to Literature in Jamaican and Trinidadian Children’s Folk traditions.” *Children’s Association Quarterly* 30.2 (2005): 164-78. In this article I posit the beginnings of a visible Caribbean children’s literature as the 1950s and 1960s.

5 A listing of other international volumes in the folktale and legends series in the front pages suggests that Sherlock’s volume was most likely commissioned.

6 Creationist and *pourquoi* tales are tales that tell of how features of nature and the natural world that we have come to accept came to exist or originated.

7 In an email communication with me, Ronald Nanton, the author explained the origins of his play, *Baucamar-The Carib*:

I was given this as an assignment by my then Supervisor of School Publications, Anson Gonzalez, who knew I had a talent for playwriting. I think it was to commemorate the year of indigenous peoples at the time. I did a little research in the history of our First Nations at the time. I was School Publications Officer at the time. Ironically, I do have some Carib in me – so I was told. My father had family connections in Arima. Apart from the story-telling penchant I was aiming at getting the play to be a class project. Apart from the actors the rest of the class would be involved in procuring or preparing artifacts, clothing, foods etc. used by the Amerindians of the time. At teachers college I had this idea of drama as being a Centre of Interest in teaching and learning. Music, art, craft, and other forms of creativity, as well as linguistic skills, can be practised in the “production house” of a classroom in the preparation and production of plays. I had this in mind when writing the play.

8 Hyarima – Forte (2005) discusses the invention of this Amerindian Chief by Hosein, an Oxford graduate who was born in Arima. Forte notes parallels to Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*. “Chief Hyarima” remains one of the enduring Trini-Amerindian myths passed on from mid-twentieth century nostalgic revivalism that continues to influence Trinidadian aboriginal representations.

9 Yellow Carib and Black Carib are phenotypes used to describe Amerindians in the Eastern Caribbean. The term “Black Caribs” has connotations of rebellion arising from the resistance of integrated Amerindians and Africans maroon communities, who fought against European powers in the leeward Caribbean during the 17th to 18th. The Black Caribs were considered fomenters of rebellion, and were eventually captured and shipped to Belize where they became known as the Garifuna.

10 In her essay on Carew’s feminism, Joy Gleason, Carew’s wife, reveals that Carew would later call his last daughter Shantoba after one of his own Afro-Carib ancestors.

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