



Amerindian Ante-Coloniality in Contemporary Caribbean Writing

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Amerindian *ante*-coloniality in contemporary Caribbean writing: Crossing borders with Jan Carew, Cyril Dabydeen and Pauline Melville

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When speaking of the Caribbean, one often finds it difficult to reconcile the singular term used to refer to it and its linguistic, social, historical and aesthetic plurality. Even if the archipelago has shared similar experiences of traumatic transportation and indentureship, the specificities of each island have hindered the emergence of a shared *Caribbean* identity. Emphasis has been put on the *extinction* of the indigenous Amerindian peoples, but Amerindian *resilience* has not been granted sufficient scope. Only a few writers have chosen to imaginatively return to that Amerindian past that precedes the trauma of forced transportation – a past that has almost receded out of collective memory, dominated as it has been by the African dimension. In the wake of Wilson Harris, Pauline Melville is one of the writers who have been trying to gain access to a collective identity that might be termed *ante*-colonial. With reference to the work of Melville, Jan Carew and Cyril Dabydeen, this article reads the presence of Amerindian culture in Caribbean literature as a renewed symbol of resistance to domination and a symbol of a shared identity, providing a stronger bond between the land and the people. It argues that this *détour* through Amerindian culture finds its meaning in the desire to override colonial dispossession, thus providing a possible focal point of connection for the Caribbean at large.

Keywords: Amerindian; myth; Caribbean; Jan Carew; Cyril Dabydeen; Pauline Melville

Peter Hulme, in his essay on “Islands of Enchantment” reminds us that the word “Jamaica” is the Hispanic form of the indigenous Arawak name – “land of wood and water” – which Columbus’s renaming (“Santiago”) never replaced. The Arawak presence remains a ghostly one, visible in the islands mainly in museums and archeological sites, part of the barely knowable or usable “past”. Hulme [...] [recounts] the story of how Prime Minister Edward Seaga tried to alter the Jamaican coat-of-arms, which consists of two Arawak figures holding a shield with five pineapples, surmounted by an alligator. “Can the crushed and extinct Arawaks represent the dauntless character of Jamaicans. Does the low-slung, near extinct crocodile, a cold-blooded reptile symbolise the warm, soaring spirit of Jamaicans?” Prime Minister Seaga asked rhetorically. There can be few political statements which so eloquently testify to the complexities entailed in the process of trying to represent a diverse people with a diverse history through a single, hegemonic “identity”. Fortunately, Mr Seaga’s invitation to the Jamaican people, who are overwhelmingly of African descent, to start their “remembering” by first “forgetting” something else, got the comeuppance it so richly deserved. (Hall 401)

These lines by Stuart Hall, in his influential article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, lay the emphasis on the Amerindian in the Caribbean as “a ghostly presence [...] part of the barely knowable or usable ‘past’”. Hall refers to a 1987 article by Peter Hulme, “Islands of Enchantment: Extracts from a Caribbean Travel Diary”. Even though both scholars have

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endeavoured, since the 1980s, to draw historical, critical and theoretical attention to Amerindian people of the Caribbean (see Hulme's *Colonial Encounters* and *Remnants of Conquest*), it is only recently that the focus has been narrowed, thanks to the work of a new generation of historians and anthropologists such as Maximilian Forte and Samuel Wilson. Scholarship of the past decades has tended to devote the majority of its attention to the Caribbean as it was shaped by the Middle Passage, slavery and plantation culture. In many ways, the Amerindians are the blind spot of the Caribbean at large, and of Caribbean literature more specifically – a blind spot that has existed for too long.

I will be dealing here with the ways in which certain contemporary writers of Caribbean descent have explored the Amerindian presence, alongside the endeavours of historians and anthropologists in order to reinforce that very presence in our contemporary consciousness. This was an idea that David Dabydeen articulated more than ten years ago, when he spoke of the Amerindians as “the most invisible of the West Indian peoples”, complaining of the “wilful neglect of Amerindian cultures” (145).

Over the past decades, a few Caribbean writers have been going back to Amerindian history, underscoring the most forgotten aspect of the forgotten, the most ghostly of the ghostly. Why have these writers extracted those themes and stories, myths and characters from the abyss of memory? Why have Amerindian cultural elements been gaining ground? Could such writers be telling us something about the Caribbean that the Caribbean itself does not want to know, that very Caribbean where the presence of the Amerindians has been said to have been erased, but in fact hasn't been? What are the words and forms used by those writers in order to speak about the original erasure, the original trauma, and the eventual persistence, resilience and survival of Amerindian peoples and their cultures? The trauma of the Middle Passage has, justifiably, been subject to much exploration by creative writers, but what about the original trauma linked to the first European migration and settlement? Why should one trauma erase an earlier one? Are the dispossessed doomed to replicate dispossession on to another people?

I would like to suggest that the Amerindian ghostly presence-absence in contemporary Caribbean literature is one of the *topoi* where *Caribbeanness* is at stake, or through which contemporary notions of *Caribbeanness* can be reviewed and revised. My aim is to examine what exactly the Amerindian invisibility and silence means for the Caribbean at large, and how the retrieval of an Amerindian voice participates in the Caribbean struggle against dispossession and disinheritance, possibly offering a new trans-national bond of connection between Caribbean peoples as well as between the land and its inhabitants.

The destruction of indigenous societies in the Caribbean was a rapid process once the Europeans had arrived in 1492. Most of the indigenous peoples did not survive the period of conquest, at least in the Greater Antilles. So much so, that the myth of complete erasure of indigenous peoples was commonly held as a truth for centuries. The period of erasure is well documented, but it is only in the past few decades that *survival* has been deemed as interesting as *erasure*, and the emphasis shifted. When postcolonial literatures began to emerge in the 1950s, in the Caribbean as elsewhere, the main focus was on socio-political and sociological issues, on the development of the young nations, on the relationships with the Mother Country, on postcoloniality, etc. It soon became clear that the focus on the African part of Caribbean history, on the Middle Passage and Plantation society, was predominant, thereby occluding the indigenous people who had originally conquered the Caribbean from South America, and marginalizing the few descendants of those indigenous people who had indeed survived, against all odds. In many ways, the indigenous peoples were killed off a second time, since for a long period only marginal breathing space was granted them in the historians' studies.

And yet the Caribbean is made up of all the major and minor migrations of people who went to the Caribbean, from the first colonization almost 6000 years ago to the one undertaken by Europeans only 500 years ago and which led to the forced migration of Africans to the world of the Plantation – a “tapestry of people” in Kwame Dawes’ term, highlighting the silence and invisibility that have shrouded the Amerindian peoples and cultures:

The unfortunate thing [...] is that it’s up to the different ethnic groups to write their own history and culture. To me, that’s outrageous, because that reveals a kind of a self-apartheid. [...] I speak objectively in view of the massive ignorance that we entertain about our Amerindian, and our Indian, and our Chinese and Portuguese heritages. Obviously, we have to correct that, otherwise how can we boast about being a tapestry of peoples and cultures? That can just be rhetoric, and basically, what it would mean is that we are still offspring of Britain. We don’t talk about Indianness or Amerindianness because we don’t make the effort to understand those languages and concepts. (Dawes 199–200)

Although the numbers of indigenous people are very small today,¹ I would like to read the Amerindian history in the Caribbean as one of survival and resistance, not one of extinction. In this context M. Samuel Wilson argues: “Had the archipelago been uninhabited in 1492, the modern Caribbean would be radically different in language, economy, political organization and social consciousness” (206–07).² He continues:

despite the ravages of five centuries of European conquest, the indigenous people of the Caribbean have survived. The role they have played in the formation of the Caribbean culture is immense, and the voice of their descendants is growing ever stronger in the modern Caribbean. (8)

Wilson Harris is the best-known pioneer in bringing to the foreground Amerindian history and myth in many influential ways, since the 1950s and 1960s. If Wilson Harris can be said to be the Caribbean writer in whose writing the Amerindian element is the most vibrant and dominant, other writers of his generation or of the following generation such as Jan Carew, Cyril Dabydeen and Pauline Melville pay tribute to him and have been taking up his legacy.³ Melville’s homage is very clear:

As a writer of fiction and as a fellow Guyanese, there are certain lessons that it has been my privilege to learn from this extraordinary writer. Like Wilson, I have spent many years out of Guyana. But from him I have learned that nationalism is not necessarily important for the creative artist. He gave me confidence in the idea that my imagination can be my homeland and that it can be fed from many sources.

Each of Wilson Harris’s novels is a dense nexus of dream, myth, archetype, and prophecy that cuts clearly across the conventions of much Caribbean literature – a literature which mainly focuses on the purely historical features of slavery, colonialism, or indentured labor and which surrenders to an overwhelmingly materialist view of the post-Columbian period. I can think of no other English-speaking writer who deals with pre-Columbian myth and history reaching back through time to the Aztec and Mayan civilizations and who weaves threads from other civilizations as well, Greco-Roman for example, into a complex picture of the present. His work is courageous and visionary. It is revolutionary both in content and form, a melting-pot of the material and spiritual history, not just of the region but of the deepest levels of all humanity. He is not afraid to draw on whatever tradition – European, South American, Asian, or Judeo-Christian – that will give form to his ideas. In that sense his writing is a benison and a living example of redemption through integration. (“Wilson Harris” 50)

In fiction, the Amerindian presence is being made palpable through the deep and intricate association between diegesis, human character, natural landscape and myth, in such a

way that they almost merge and fuse into one element. Wilson Harris was the first writer in the 1950s to ground his fiction in the significance of the Guyanese geosphere, history and the notion of myth being inextricably wed to geography. Cyril Dabydeen's fiction also revolves around this attraction for the *hinterland*, so different from the ethos of the islands, character being shaped by landscape, diegesis by landscape, landscape and myth fusing into one. Indeed, seemingly the Guyanese landscape penetrates the whole of Dabydeen's fiction and non-fiction. In "Where Doth the Berbice Run", an essay in which Dabydeen narrates his childhood and formative years as an artist-to-be on the Rose Hall sugar plantation in the East Canje district, he conveys the original mixture of landscape, *hinterland* and coastland, collective history and personal geography.

Dabydeen's short novel *Dark Swirl* focuses on the character of Josh, a young boy who is drawn to the multi-hued serpent, the *massacouraman* of Amerindian myths, which haunts him, pulling him down into the creek of his dreams and nightmares:

Josh turned and twisted, frantically kicking out and twisting his hands in a vain swimming motion as he felt something pulling him down to the bottom of the creek. Vast ripples surged its length. A mighty board-stiff tail swayed, creating waves that reached the houses nearest the banks, rocking them as in an earthquake. Large emerald eyes belched fire as a head surfaced. Then it plunged to the bottom before quickly tearing up through the mud and decaying vegetation. Water splashed high in the air. A gurgling sound that never seemed to end roared in his ears. (19–20)

When a European zoologist settles in that part of the Guyanese forest and starts looking for specimens, it problematizes a simply fantastical interpretation of Josh's experiences. This is retained, associating in Dabydeen's text more closely the human individual, the landscapes and the myths that link them together. Myth gives access to what Mary Condé calls a "heightened consciousness of alternative realities" (64).

In Pauline Melville's novel *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, Amerindian myth and, more generally, questions that surround indigeneity, also give backbone to the story, interrogating the present via the past. The novel is organized in three separate but interlinked narratives. The first one is split into the Prologue and the Epilogue, spoken through the disembodied voice of an elusive, hybrid, shape-shifting trickster character, the eponymous ventriloquist, modelled after the Amazonian, hybrid, elusive mythological figure Macunaima, echoing other shape-shifting characters to be found in her collections of short stories, *Shape-Shifter* or *The Migration of Ghosts*.⁴ Macunaima and his brothers Jigue and Maanape, the offspring of the sun and a savannah woman, are mythological figures that are central to Amerindian tribes, the Wapisiana or the Macusi offering different versions of the creation myth in which a flood was let loose on the world when the tree of life was cut down. The reference to the Brazilian writer Mario de Andrade, who translated the oral myth into its written form and made it into what he called a "rhapsody", is made explicit both in the Prologue and in the Epilogue:

Spite impels me to relate that my biographer, the noted Brazilian Senhor Mario [*sic*] Andrade, got it wrong when he consigned me to the skies in such a slapdash and cavalier manner. I suppose he thought I would lie for ever amongst the stars, gossiping – as we South America Indians usually do in our hammocks at night – and spitting over the side to make the early morning dew of star spittle. Well, excuse me while I shit from a great height. Excuse me while I laugh like a parrot ... which reminds me. Did he tell you the whole story of the parrot or did he just leave it flapping and heading for Lisbon? He didn't? I might have guessed. I'll tell you. Later. (1)

Andrade relied on ethnological texts, stories and legends of Macunaima and his two brothers, explaining the birth of a constellation in Amerindian cosmology, when Macunaima

eventually gave up on life on earth and ascended to the sky. At the end, Melville winks at her reader and has her narrator conclude: "Now that I'm leaving I will let you into the secret of my name. It's Macun ... No. I've changed my mind. But yes. I will tell you the story of the parrot. Another time" (357).

The novel spans three generations, starting with Chofy McKinnon, the third generation of a mixed Amerindian Scottish-Wapisiana family of Guyana. The second narrative of the novel focuses on Chofy, on one of his trips to Georgetown, during which he meets and falls in love with Rosa Mendelson, a Jewish British academic researching Evelyn Waugh's stay in the Rupununi in the 1930s.⁵ Thinking they can extract information from Chofy's aunt, Wifreda, Rosa and Chofy talk her into delving into the past. As her memory turns backwards again and gradually unlocks, the prophecy that was spoken by Beatrice, Wifreda's sister, comes true and Wifreda is struck by a severe bout of blindness. This blindness allows the tale of the past to be told and the secret of the Wapisiana family gradually becomes unearthed, the repressed memories of the older generation coming out into the open for the younger generation.

Travelling through myth along generations brings the reader to the story of Danny and Beatrice in the 1920s, which constitutes the third narrative, taking place at the time of Evelyn Waugh's visit to the Rupununi. Danny and Beatrice are the children of the Scotsman Alexander McKinnon and of Maba, of the Wapisiana tribe in the south savannahs of the Rupununi. Their settlement is at Waronawa near the Kanaku Mountains, but the novel is traversed by the journeying of the different Amerindian tribes who live in Guyana – the Macusi of the north savannahs, the Wai Wai of the forests in the south. The elusive narrator of the Prologue, shifting shape, comes to be associated with the incestuous and autistic son of Danny and Beatrice, Sonny. The incestuous love affair of Danny and Beatrice is explained as being induced by the stars and prompted by the eclipse of 1919, making this "living close" understandable if not acceptable by the rest of the tribe – what is unacceptable is how one can let oneself be dominated by the Spirit of Revenge, Kanaima, and this is the reason why Beatrice is eventually rejected by her people and leaves the Savannah to end up in Canada. In the chapter entitled "The Master of Fish", it is made clear how the Amerindians' everyday life is ruled by the constellations and the myths attached to them:⁶

During the month of May, the slow dive of a certain constellation takes place in the night sky, headfirst and arching steadily backwards over the western horizon. It signals the advent of the rains and in the Rupununi district of the Guianas, in the red, parched savannahs, the fish-runs begin.

The constellation is called Tamukang, the Master of Fish, because he orchestrates the silver battalions that come leaping along the rivers at this time. To Europeans, that same configuration of stars is known as the Pleiades, the Hyades and part of Orion. But the constellation of Tamukang does, indeed, look like the skeleton of a fish, head and backbone rolling through the singing blackness in a descent towards oblivion. The moaning winds, they say, are Tamukang blowing his flute. He remains out of sight until his resurrection over the eastern horizon in the months of August and September.

It was one particular cluster of stars in the constellation, the one that the Europeans called the Hyades, that was thought to control the tapirs which were so plentiful during the rainy season. (175–76)

More specifically, the Wapisiana believe that man and nature used to be one, until an eclipse separated them:

They believed that a brother came secretly to his sister at nights. She enjoyed this but not knowing who he was, blackened his face with the magical *genipap* to identify him. In his shame he rose to the sky and became the moon. That is why the moon has dark patches on its face. (82)

The Taruma version has it that the brother started to chase his sister and she transformed into the moon and he the sun:

Whenever he catches her and makes love to her there is an eclipse. Demons come from the forest and rivers to attack people. Those massive camoodies in the rivers raise their heads from the water to see why the sky has gone dark. (194)

Even an anthropologist's version is ironically worked into the story – one Michael Wormoal from the University of Berne whose research field is Amerindian mythology and whose presence in the novel, coming into contact with Rosa in the first part of the book, offers an ironic comment on anthropology and structuralist ethnology. It is one of the many modulations that the myth is shown as being open to.

The whole novel is kept alive with Amerindian myths of the creation of the world, Wapisiana, Taruma, Wai Wai and Macusi myths of how the constellations used to be beings who lived on earth and went up to the sky to avoid persecution. Myth also circulates from one tribe to another and from one generation to the next. It shows the original cohesion between human beings and their environment, indifferent to national(istic) considerations.

Readers are made particularly aware that the unravelling of the family secret of incest directly echoes what is happening to the younger generation in Georgetown, struggling against a background of eco-imperialism, with mining and logging multinationals wrecking the environment. As Jan Shinebourne stresses:

In the novel, incest is a metaphor for a multitude of phenomena including myth, science, magic, fate, destiny, desire and love – in short, existence and humanity's struggle for knowledge and survival in the race to stave off catastrophe. Danny and Beatrice's incestuous relationship is foretold oracle-fashion by the circulating myth (from the Bering Straits to Guyana's Rupununi and Brazil) that links the phenomena of eclipse and incest, both of which have the power to disturb the balance of nature and society and to defy the desire of science and religion to order and control existence. (183)

Myth implies a multiplicity of readings, versions and interpretations, and Melville lets this multiplicity remain, its different perspectives shimmering with different meanings. Essentialist categories and ready-made assumptions are systematically cut across in the novel, as are categories that would not be welded in hybridity, cross-culturality and transnationality. Several articles about Melville's *A Ventriloquist's Tale* have argued that the novel is ensnared in its own contradictions, namely advocating hybridity and cross-culturality on the one hand (Macunaima, the trickster figure of the Prologue being the very figure of hybridity and racial and cultural multiplicity) while on the other foregrounding the fact that the stories that dabble in inter-racial relationships are either doomed from the beginning or fail anyway – Chofy and Rosa both go back to "their own kind"; neither Rosa Mendelson nor Evelyn Waugh is able to see beyond what they have been culturally trained to see – and that endogamy is ultimately favoured over exogamy.⁷ Albert Braz contends that "Even though there is a considerable degree of biological and cultural hybridity in the world depicted in *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, sustained contact with the outside world is anathema to many characters" (29). On the other hand, April Shemak argues that the discourse about indigeneity has always been "marked by mistranslation" (353), or what she calls

“untranslations” (365) and ultimately by the “untranslatability of language and culture” (367). Braz reads into April Shemak’s article the criticism of a certain “evasiveness of the ‘native’ indigenous” (Shemak 354) in the novel. For lack of space I cannot refute this here, but it seems important to state that Shemak’s very interesting point is to underline the depth of the issues linked to linguistic and cultural translation, including the notions of translatability and untranslatability from one culture to another:

[T]he multiple reinventions of Macunaima are not about the translation of myths, but reveal the untranslatability of language and culture. *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* demonstrates that translation is an irreparable space symbolizing the cultural dissonances present in any encounter with textual representations of indigeneity. By portraying perpetually resistant and unassimilable native informants, *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* forces readers to acknowledge that any representation of indigeneity will inevitably remain partial and distorted. (369)

As Shemak also puts it later, *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* “reflects translation as a site where competing discourses surrounding indigeneity – endogamy and exogamy – collide” (355). What is at stake here is literature’s purpose; it exists to raise questions, not to find ready-made solutions.

Braz underlines (in order to criticize it) that both Melville and Shemak are working from the English translation of Andrade’s text, published in 1984 by E.A. Goodman. The issue of translation underscores, even more, the problematics of getting access to another culture, particularly if it is indigenous and contains all the fraught issues of coloniality and domination. It also gives another layer of multiplicity, cross-culturality and trans-nationality. As a result, Macunaima comes to embody the figure of the translator, the one who carries meaning across from one language and one culture into another one.

Even if she has been foregrounding the impossibilities of fully understanding and integrating the culture of the Other, Melville has been adapting the versatile figure of Macunaima to go against any nationalist, nationalistic or even national delineation, and transforms the myth into a “trans-Amazonian” figure, crossing the borders of Brazil, Guyana, Venezuela, and not necessarily associated only with the national Brazilian hero he was transformed into eventually, as is explained by Shemak:

One of the significant differences between Melville’s and Andrade’s text is the way in which indigenous culture serves the nation. Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei states that Andrade wrote Macunaima as part of a project with other Brazilian artists and scholars to establish a Brazilian national identity based on the “primitive”, in reaction to the increased social disparities between the elite class and the poor. In contrast, Melville does not consign the myth to a particular nation, but instead represents it as one of many Amerindian variants that circulates beyond national, linguistic and tribal boundaries. In some senses, she reclaims the diversity of the myth’s widely varying indigenous origins that Andrade chose to de-emphasize when he rendered Macunaima as a Brazilian hero. (356)

The trans-national dimension to Amerindianness was also articulated by David Dabydeen more than ten years ago:

What distinguishes their existence is the absence of recognition of boundaries. They carry no passports, seek no visas, observe none of the territorial imperatives and protocols of the colonial legacy. They have no sense of centre or periphery. Maps, colonial in conception, which demarcate the land, are alien to them. Amerindians cross over at will to Venezuela and Brazil, irrespective of the fact that the landmass was divided up by the Portuguese, the Spanish and the British. Similarly their sense of time is not linear and periodic but circular and continuous. They are postmodern in the movements of their own lives without the bureaucracy of theory to inform them of the fact, or to validate their condition. (145–46)

One might ask why Melville preferred Macunaima to the more familiar trickster figure of Anancy. Was a *détour*, to use Glissant's terminology, once more necessary to get to her fictional destination? Should Macunaima and Anancy be regarded as two facets of that same unseizable figure that crosses borders? Guyanese writer Jan Carew gives one possible answer when, in *Fulcrums of Change*, he speaks of Pia and Makunaima, the Children of the Sun, as being "buried deep in the most ancient culture-stratum in the Americas [...], at once the most typical and the most universal creations of Amerindian mythology" (78).⁸ He adds:

It was in this region that Pia and Makunaima came to the parting of the ways. Pia became the prophet of hope, the purveyor of all things positive, the spiritual ancestor of Kanaima. Kanaima is, in the Amerindian cosmology, the ultimate embodiment of evil, a symbol of terror, nemesis stalking human beings in the cool forest of the night; he can transform himself into an animal, a reptile, a bird or a ball of fire.

The dialectical situation of the good Pia opposing the evil Makunaima is common to the foremost mythological archetypes of both the African and the Amerindian. The African equivalent to Pia and Makunaima is B'ra Anancy, the Spiderman. He is the embodiment of both good and evil, for in African religion and philosophy good and evil are in the eyes of the beholder and not necessarily in separate persons, objects or things where one is juxtaposed against the other. [...] and it was as a benign and a supremely clever trickster that he was brought by West Africans to the New World. (78)

Anancy and Macunaima are *in fine* figures that link the human being to the universe. Myth is both the material and fictional mode for the writers mentioned here, but mostly their concern is with how one comes into the possession of oneself through a circuitous journeying into the archives of the past and imagination. Likewise, I argue that the Amerindian *détour* could bring the Caribbean closer to itself, to a self that has been forgotten and despised – and the *détour* becomes the journey itself. Kamau Brathwaite formulated this most famously when he suggested that:

In the Caribbean, whether it be African or Amerindian, the recognition of an ancestral relationship with the folk or aboriginal culture involves the artist and participant in a journey into the past and hinterland which is at the same time a movement of possession into the present and future. Through this movement of possession we become ourselves, truly our own creators, discovering word for object, image for the Word. (Qtd in Lawson Welsh, "Pauline Melville's Shape-Shifting Fictions" 164)

In the novels discussed, the Amerindian element is structural in the diegetic organization, as the narratives come and go freely between past and present, between the different zones of the past and of consciousness, thus composing a specific way of claiming and inhabiting both time and consciousness, our pasts and our presents, all our *hinterlands*. This revised awareness to one's presence to oneself and one's history can only take place through the Amerindian element in a way that is both specific and general and whose impact has to be understood for the whole Caribbean today. The narrative visions created by all the permutations of the stories, all the intertextual allusions from Mario de Andrade to Evelyn Waugh, all the cross-cultural explorations, the shape-shifting and multiple meanderings of imagination, the modulations of dream and myth, are all woven into the supple web of the diegesis. The result of all those modulations, meanderings, explorations and permutations provides the sense that the self is fluid and multiple, *rhizomatic* as Glissant, and Deleuze and Guattari would say, but has to take into itself the trace of its previous belongings in order to be whole. Melville's fiction resembles this sense of self in the fact it is similarly

“syncretic, multiple, overlapping, constantly contesting categories or oppositions such as time and space, life and death, the natural and the supernatural” (Lawson Welsh, “Shape-Shifting” 148).

The Tainos and Kalinagos may well be the *Other* of the Caribbean, but an *Other* that may paradoxically bring the Caribbean closer to itself, closer to a newly acknowledged cross-cultural multiplicity. Turning back to the Amerindians sends a vibrant message across the whole Caribbean as they could well be “signposts of the future”, as David Dabydeen calls them (qtd in Lawson Welsh, “Imposing Narratives” 108). As Forte suggests in *Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean*, the relationship of the Amerindians to nature may well signal the necessity to establish a stronger bond between the land and the people in the Caribbean at large. As is shown by Dabydeen and Melville, eco-imperialism is definitely one of the main challenges that have to be faced today in the Caribbean. The relationship to one’s history is also part of what the Caribbean may learn from the Amerindian survivors: wouldn’t forgetting about the Amerindian past and present be the equivalent to what happened to the African past that was denied and despised for so long? Finally, the Amerindian culture could be a renewed symbol of a shared cross-cultural identity, and not one based on discrimination and hatred, nor on any revised form of nationalism. There are potential lessons to be learned in relation to Caribbean environment, history and culture. To quote Jan Carew once more, from *Fulcrums of Change*, “This region, the Amerindians say, devours men and their dreams when the dreams are out of tune with the spaces around them” (81).

Finally, and more generally speaking, the Amerindians are a symbol of resistance to any form of external domination. This strategy of the *détour*, foregrounding the Amerindian culture and history in order to speak of the Caribbean as a whole, is certainly one of the most potent and creative regnant aspects of Amerindian-Caribbean literature. One hopes that, through such a cross-cultural pollination of the mind and sensitivity, a trans-national cohesion will be strengthened through the awareness of the Caribbean’s vivid and multiple legacies. The Arawak figures in the Jamaican coat-of-arms can also lend us a shield against the evils of an identity whose origin would only be perceived as post-Columbian, national and single.

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Notes

1. Considering that Dominica has an Amerindian population of about 4000, all residents of the 3700 acre Carib Territory set aside for them in 1903 in the north-eastern corner of the Island, and that St Vincent has an Amerindian population of about 1500, the numbers are inconsequential and the physical presence is scant. Even in Guyana nowadays, which is one of the few countries on the mainland which have not experienced a complete wiping out of the Amerindian population, the Amerindians comprise a little under 7% of a population of about 718,000, i.e. about 49,000 people (<<http://www.guyana.org/NDS/chap22.htm>>, 28 July 2010).
2. For the history of the Amerindian people’s erasure and survival, in order to understand how the Tainos and the Kalinagos living in the Caribbean between AD 1000 and the late 15th century are the descendants of the Saladoid people who had come to the Caribbean from the South American mainland in waves of migration between 500 and 250 BC, overlapping one with the other, see

- Forte and Wilson. See also <<http://indigenousreview.blogspot.com/>>, the precursor of which was the Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink, its aim being to constitute a network and provide information about the “indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, past and present, and the wider indigenous world” (28 July 2010).
3. Other younger writers, who do not necessarily have Amerindian ancestry, have also integrated the Amerindian element in their fiction writing. One can mention Kevin Baldeosingh in *The Ten Incarnations of Adam Avatar*, or Marie-Elena John in *Unburnable*.
 4. For a detailed comparison of the Brazilian writer Mario de Andrade’s *Macunaima* (1928) and Pauline Melville’s *The Ventriloquist’s Tale*, see Braz. See also Shemak and Bragard. These are the only articles that engage in depth with the problematics of cultural translation and ultimate untranslatability as regards indigeneity.
 5. For enlightening in-depth studies of the intertextual intricacies of Melville’s text with Evelyn Waugh’s writing about Guyana (mostly in *A Handful of Dust* and *Ninety-Two Days*), see Ness, and also Lawson Welsh, “Imposing Narratives”.
 6. See Lévi-Strauss 28, as well as Gullick 27–28.
 7. As well as the articles by Braz, Shemak, and Bragard mentioned above, see also Shields, whose article is one of the only ones to focus on the issues of trans-nationalism, from the angle of indigenous global citizenship. Other articles by Condé, François, Morris, Pyne-Timothy, Renk, Rippl, Savory, Thieme and Wallart have also been included in the Works cited list for the sake of reference.
 8. Carew’s *Fulcrums of Change*, Part Two, devotes a whole chapter to “The Fusion of African and Amerindian Folk Myth” (69–87).

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