What explains our constant literary evocation of Indian and indigenous themes? Is it just an echo of romanticism? No. In fact we are secretly moved by the sacrifice of those who were our last truly free countrymen. Our Indianist yearnings show a nostalgia for freedom.

(Juan Antonio Corretjer, *Yerba bruja* (San Juan: 1970), pp. 10-11)

I never find it easy to explain my fascination with the Caribbean, and in particular the arcane interest I have in its pre-Columbian history. Hardly an obvious research topic for a teacher of literature. My recent visit, between September 1986 and January 1987, had a reputable academic purpose - to research the background to the Caribbean Amerindian artefacts held in British museums, with a view to mounting an exhibition. But this wasn't enough to justify four months away from home. There had to be a different kind of journey involved, one which would aim to understand the pertinence of the Amerindian past to a Caribbean present in no need of antiquarianism; and would at the same time reveal something to me about my own motivations. I thought a diary might help. What follows is not a simple transcription of the journal I kept but a rearrangement, a construct, a fiction of a diary if you like; but one which I hope retains an openness so structurally absent from the kind of academic paper I'm more used to writing. Perhaps this will make it easier for people to respond to it.

I'm not sure that a diary did help me understand, it's probably too early to say. But when I first came across Corretjer's words in the library of the University of Puerto Rico I felt 'secretly moved' by them, felt they were telling me something, making a connection, although there was no way in which his 'our' could include me, a white English academic. I would like to think that, despite the differences, there is some kind of analogy at work, possibly one as banal, if vital, as that we are all struggling against the same imperialism.

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Kingston, Jamaica (5. ix. 86)

In England 'research' usually involves London's Liverpool Street station and Holborn tube on the way to the British Library, so it's mildly ironic that my first
stop in Jamaica should be the Indies Hotel in Holborn Road. Maps are often a good starting-point, at least for understanding official symbolization. In post-colonial Algiers it’s difficult to follow the topography of Camus’s novels and essays because most of the street-names were changed after the revolution. Here the imperial past is still present on the map: the name Kingston itself, of course, but, more evocatively still, the street-names: Piccadilly Road, Victoria Street, Vauxhall Avenue, Chelsea Close, Trafalgar Road. However, since independence there has obviously also been an official attempt to create a more ‘authentically’ Jamaican symbology. There is now a pantheon of national heroes, each with their statue in the National Heroes Park. Their faces are on the banknotes and their names added to the street-map: Marcus Garvey Drive, Bustamante Highway, Norman Manley Highway. But what interests me in particular is the resonance of the most central name of all - Jamaica itself. The word is the Hispanic form of the indigenous - Arawakan - name for the island, possibly meaning land of wood and water. For reasons I’ve never properly understood, Columbus’s attempted redesignation of Jamaica as Santiago never took, and the island retained its native name. But does that native name have any symbolic import today? Is it a significant feature of Jamaica's contemporary image of itself...?

* * *

The Jamaica National Heritage Trust has chosen Diego Pimienta as an appropriate symbol to denote guardianship of the nation’s heritage. It is also one way to keep alive the bright glimpse of an early Jamaican of humble status, who fought courageously in defence of his country.

(Jamaica National Heritage Trust official booklet)

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Jamaica’s new national motto is ‘Out of many, one people’, stressing its heterogeneity of origin and of histories. The sentiment is impeccable. The official guardian of those histories, the National Heritage Trust (founded in 1958), chose for its coat-of-arms the figure of Diego Pimienta, an African who fought for his Spanish masters against the English invasion of the island in 1655. It’s a subtle choice, evoking, if not an origin, then a relatively early moment in the island’s recent history when the three cultures - Spanish, African, English - were brought together. Admittedly in hostile fashion, but three hundred years have passed and the national monument at the scene of the battle is pointedly dedicated to all who died there. (Nevertheless it is clearly a bonus, though not overplayed, that ‘an early Jamaican’ who was black was defending his territory against the invading English.) The dominant cultural note is one of reconciliation. The current heritage project focuses on those sites - New Seville, Port Royal, Spanish Town - where the component cultures overlap, either through historically documented contact, or archaeologically in the middens and
cemeteries that have been discovered in recent years. The mid-seventeenth century has become the focus for the construction of a national heritage.

Where though does this leave the Arawaks? Clearly on the margins of the national story. By the seventeenth century the Amerindian population of Jamaica had completely disappeared, exterminated by European weaponry and disease. Yet the archaeological excavations inevitably find Arawak remains, in part it seems because the Spanish built their settlements where the Arawak towns had stood. This is not exactly an embarrassment; the Arawak presence is given full due at the White Marl museum, the site of major Arawak finds. But there is some difficulty in knowing how to integrate an undeniable part of the Jamaican past - its first known inhabitants, after all, and the originators of its name - with the subsequent components, the two most important of which, African and English, had little known contact with the Jamaican Arawaks. The National Heritage booklet falls back, properly enough in the circumstances, on the importance to the Jamaican diet of foodstuffs - like cassava, pineapple, or guava - originally developed by the native cultures.

Kingston (8. ix. 86)

Meet with the director of the JNHT who tells me about the attempt a few years ago to change the old imperial coat-of-arms of Jamaica - which features two Arawaks.
Kingston (9. ix. 86)

Emerge from the library of the Institute of Jamaica badly in need of refreshment after reading through six months’ editions of *The Daily Gleaner*. The native culture may not feature too prominently in Jamaican national life, but in the summer and autumn of 1983 it was at the heart of an extraordinary outburst of public fury over Prime Minister Edward Seaga’s attempts to pension off the Arawaks - along with the alligator and the pineapple - as irrelevant. Tomorrow to the library at Government House to check out the parliamentary debate in the Jamaica Hansard.

* * *

*Can the crushed and extinct Arawaks represent the dauntless character of Jamaicans? Does the low-slung, near extinct crocodile, a cold-blooded reptile, symbolize the warm soaring spirit of Jamaicans? Where does the pineapple which was exported to Hawaii, appear prominently either in our history or in folklore?*

What would be relevant, Morris Cargill asked in the lead article of The Daily Gleaner (5 August 1983): ‘What about a design containing entwined marijuana plants against a background of US dollar bills, with Toyotas rampant and ladies couchant?’

* * *

Seaga had announced in parliament, without a hint of irony, that he’d given the National Heritage Trust the task of organizing a competition to find a new coat-of-arms more ‘relevant’ to contemporary Jamaica. A creative use of the notion of ‘heritage’: to find a modern replacement for something which in all its essentials dates back to 1660. Obviously to his complete surprise the idea caused an extraordinary public outcry. There was a constant stream of letters to the newspapers, and the competition was eventually sabotaged by a well-organized campaign to send in the existing coat-of-arms with an extended justification for its importance. It was a strange and galling defeat for Seaga to suffer. He is, after all, a Harvard-trained anthropologist with a reputation for being able to manipulate popular culture to his political advantage, as with the recent returning of the body of Marcus Garvey to Jamaica. In the end, though, luck was on his side and he managed to drop the whole idea quietly when the murder of Maurice Bishop turned everyone’s attention elsewhere. So Jamaica still has its two Arawaks.

* * *

April 11, 1799. Isaac Alves Rebello, Esq., F.A.S., exhibited to the Society three figures, supposed to be of Indian Deities, in wood, found in June 1792, in a natural cave near the summit of a mountain, called Spots, in Carpenter’s Mountains, in the parish of Vere, in the island of Jamaica, by a surveyor measuring the land. They were discovered placed with their faces (one of which is that of a bird) towards the east.

(Arcaeologia, vol. 14 (1803), p. 269)

* * *

Port Royal, Jamaica (22. ix. 86)

The last three days have been hectic. I hired a car to travel round the island but didn’t see much because of constant tropical storms. Then yesterday I went on the first real ‘expedition’ of the trip, into the savanna to the west of Kingston, with two new acquaintances from the Jamaican Archaeological Society. The aim was to locate the cave where several of the most spectacular pieces of Caribbean wood-carving were found in 1792, having presumably been hidden by their
Arawakan wooden figure (Jamaica, c. 15th century).

Amerindian owners in the early part of the seventeenth century. We drove as far as we could and then, in time-honoured manner, asked the oldest people we could see if they knew of Spots Mountain. Nobody did, but two men, one of them about seventy, offered to guide us to a series of caves. The trek through the bush was exhausting - and ultimately fruitless - but deeply exhilarating. Towards the end, all uphill, we had to rest frequently. The guides trotted off into the surrounding trees and emerged with guineps and sweetsops to refresh us. I had this strange sensation of having been compelled by the circumstances to act out a whole series of pre-ordained moves, as if troped by the conventions of ethnography. Yet the atmosphere was relaxed. Perhaps the guides were acting out their roles too, just a little more effortlessly than I was. The last move - the payment - was the most difficult. I asked George, a long-time Jamaica resident, how much to pay the guides, and added 50 per cent to make sure. The traveller needs to be reassured by the smile of gratitude.

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Three weeks away from England now, and the strange rhythms of solitary travel
are beginning to assert themselves. New friendships are intensely experienced, but the evenings can be lonely. I escape into the labyrinths of Conrad’s *Chance*.

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**Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (27. ix. 86)**

The consciousness of an indigenous past is inscribed much more fully in the topography of Santo Domingo. The street-names again give an immediate impression: Guarionex, Caonabo, Anacaona, all the heroes of the Amerindian resistance are there. And a glance at the telephone directory shows that the names survive as names despite the usual Catholic resistance to anything other than saints' names. Here, too, there is a fine national museum - the Museo del Hombre Dominicano - more than half of which is given over to the indigenous Taino culture.

The higher Amerindian profile in the national consciousness clearly has historical roots. Dominican independence goes back to the nineteenth century and has a famous national novel, Galvan's *Enriquillo*, which takes an Amerindian as symbol of the new nation. And from at least the early 1960s extensive professional archaeological work has revealed the island as a rich source of indigenous material, bringing into clearer focus a culture (the Taino) known from the early Spanish accounts as the most ceremonially and politically complex in the Caribbean.

As with Jamaica, though, the political thrust is towards synthesis. Outside the Museo del Hombre Dominicano the statues of Enriquillo and the African Lemba (leader of a slave revolt) stand on either side of - and slightly behind - the emblematic figure of Bartolome de Las Casas, the 'good' Spaniard who can represent a supposed national synthesis between the different cultures. Behind this bland official history lies the recurrent problem of a divided island. It's difficult to avoid the suspicion that Dominicans welcome the sobriquet 'Indian' as a way of avoiding the term 'black': only Haitians are black.

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**Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico (15. x. 86)**

First impressions of Puerto Rico suggest a surprising similarity with Jamaica. There is an official tripartite synthesis: the stamp of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture shows a black and an Amerindian flanking a Spaniard holding a copy of Nebrija's grammar. But unlike the use of Diego Pimienta in Jamaica there is no suggestion of conflict here - it's just as if the three had combined quite happily over the centuries to produce *'cultura puertorriquena'* . But the official picture is under critique. As in Jamaica the early period of colonization (here the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries) is the subject of intensive historical investigation and, as in the Jamaican case, the topic is fraught with political reverberations. There is, to be sure, an older and more polite interest in Amerindians - part of that *indigenismo* which has always sat comfortably with a deeply conservative *hispanismo*; but the contemporary wave of interest is very different. In a country that has never, since 1493, been independent - but which

*ISLANDS OF ENCHANTMENT*
Statue of Enriquillo, Museo del Hombre Dominicano, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Photograph: Peter Hulme.
has a large portion of its intelligentsia sympathetic to the idea of independence - the return to the origins of colonization is a return to the roots of conflict and ethnocide, which cannot help but disturb the equanimity both of the conservatives with their official, basically Hispanic, culture, and of the modernizers who want accommodation with the colonial successors from the north. Then again there are hints that the conventional picture of the development of Amerindian culture before 1492, which owes much to the work of US archaeologists and anthropologists, is on the point of radical revision, one of the grounds being the implicitly neo-colonialist bases of that conventional map, its diffusionism serving to suggest that the Caribbean always receives culture, never produces it.

* * *

**Rio Piedras (24. xi. 86)**

I spend the weekend on Vieques, the small and spectacularly beautiful island off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico. Several thousand viequenses were displaced overnight in the 1940s to allow Vieques to become part of the massive naval facility that would accommodate the British fleet and the royal family should Hitler successfully invade England. The Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility, as it is now called, offers strategic protection for the shipping lanes to and from the deep-water harbours on the south coast of the USA; and is a military training environment of unparalleled importance. Vieques was the place where the marines trained for the invasion of Grenada during Ocean Venture 81, the largest naval manoeuvres conducted by western forces during peacetime since the Second World War. This involved a totally hypothetical invasion of a Caribbean country called Amber and the Amberines, which of course bore no necessary relation to Grenada and the Grenadines. The US navy owns 70 per cent of the island and uses much of it for target practice, thereby
Poster for archaeological exhibition about Vieques, held at the museum of the University of Puerto Rico, March-April 1983.
provoking a good deal of local protest, both from the fishermen whose livelihood is destroyed, and from the independentista parties who can use Vieques as a symbol round which to gather support for their anti-imperialist policies. The navy admits that it's only able to get away with using Vieques in this way because local protests will have no repercussions in Congress, where Puerto Rico has no representation. So - whatever their positive attitude to the USA in other matters - all Puerto Ricans are outraged that the navy treats them, who are citizens of the USA, in a way that it wouldn't dream of treating citizens of the mainland.

However, Puerto Rican archaeological work carried out on the island of Vieques has been at the forefront of the possible revision of pre-Columbian Caribbean archaeology, and has provided, in the form of one of its most fascinating finds, a series of beautiful jade and serpentine birds, which have become a potent symbol of viequense identity to set against the island's only other claim to anyone's notice. Symbolically, this condor has come to represent a heritage which is literally covered by the buildings and weaponry of an occupying force. A centuries-old pendant, often proudly inscribed on the T-shirts made by local artisans, shows the continuing power of Caribbean Amerindian artefacts in the changed circumstances of political struggle.

* * *

A cinema advert opens with a young white couple completing a tracing of a pre-Columbian rock carving at the extraordinarily atmospheric ceremonial centre near Utuado in the central cordillera of Puerto Rico. A romantic voice begins to sing: 'Andando por nuestra tierra, buscando por lo que somos' ('Travelling through our land, trying to find out who we are'). They visit some older friends, possibly parents, have lunch, and head off home. The key word of the advert is 'nuestro'. They enjoy our things: the native heritage, the countryside, the food, the rum, the coffee. They are joined by the last element in the partnership (as the couple stand, smoking, on the deck of the Vieques ferry) - 'Winston y Puerto Rico, no hay nada mejor' ('Winston and Puerto Rico, nothing but the best').

* * *

Bridgetown, Barbados (5. xii. 86)

An exhausting day. Having spent much of the previous three months reading archaeology I'm finally roped in to doing some digging. Living in Colchester I've become used to pre-construction archaeology: a site is cleared preparatory to some new shopping complex being built, and the archaeologists move in, sometimes for several months. In Puerto Rico there was a good deal of unease about this. Under federal law any construction even partly funded by federal
finance has to employ an archaeologist, but it is suspected that 'private' archaeologists can be paid to find nothing, thereby facilitating rapid construction. In the smaller islands there are no professional archaeologists to interfere with building programmes. Occasionally enthusiastic amateurs follow the bulldozers, finding masses of material, mostly pre-Columbian, but obviously outside any stratigraphic context. Here in Barbados a Peace Corps worker, trained in archaeology, was digging in an old suburban garden, soon to become a supermarket warehouse, and had found a pre-Columbian burial. This had stirred considerable public interest and the removal of the bones had been filmed by the local television station. Teams of volunteers were now digging and sifting the surrounding areas in the hope of further finds.

* * *

*The Caribs were a restless and migratory race, often moving from island to island, and when evicted by Europeans prone to return with their friends in unexpected force. This mobility, coupled with their secret and treacherous mentality, rendered them a formidable obstacle to the early settlers, and the ultimate solution of the problem was provided only by a war of extermination.*

(James Williamson, *The Caribbee Islands under the Proprietary Patents* (Oxford: 1926), p. 4)
Roseau, Dominica (4. i. 87)

Although most history books blithely assert that the native societies of the Caribbean were utterly destroyed at the very beginning of the European incursion, the Carib Territory in north-eastern Dominica continues to survive and, relatively speaking, to prosper. The Caribs in fact fought a long and bitter series of wars against the European invaders, principally the English. Their final military defeat came only in 1797 in St Vincent, from where several thousand of the so-called Black Caribs were forcibly removed to Central America. The Dominica Caribs, protected by their mountainous terrain from the land-hungry sugar-planters, survived in relatively small numbers, though gradually lost their language. A cultural revival now seems well under way. A community centre has been built in the form of the traditional carbet or long-house. A dance company flourishes (it visited London last year). And attempts are being made to relearn the language, at least for symbolic use in ceremonial and cultural events. Politically, too, the community seems active, trying to resolve a long-standing dispute with the Dominica government over the exact boundaries of its territory (within which all land is owned by the community: there is no private property), and - momentous news, this - organizing a conference with their confreres in St Vincent and Belize, the first time in two hundred years that the three surviving Carib communities of the Caribbean will have met.

A courtesy visit to the chief turns into an extended discussion of the boundary question. I promise to try to look out some of the old maps in the Public Record Office. The rest of my time on the territory is taken up with visits to two of the extended families who keep alive the tradition of basket-making which, as far as can be judged, has not altered significantly over the last five hundred years. The
Horniman Museum in south London has asked me to collect West Indian material, so I buy a good number of the baskets.

* * *

Kingstown, St Vincent (9. i. 87)

A journey that began in Kingston ends in Kingstown. (The poverty of official toponymy must have led to constant confusion during the colonial period.) St Vincent is almost a microcosm of the cultural complexity of the Caribbean: African, English, Scottish, East Indian, Portuguese, Syrian - and, with their main communities tucked away in the north-east of the island at the end of an atrocious road, Caribs; the remnants of the indigenous population which, after more than two centuries of deculturation, is beginning to rediscover its cultural heritage and its place in Vincentian (and British imperial) history. A recent campaign has been pushing for St Vincent to emulate Jamaica by instituting a series of national heroes, the first one of whom would be Chatoyer, the Black Carib chief killed leading his people in the final indigenous war fought in the Caribbean, a war won by the British only after a prodigious outlay of money and lives. One of the key factors in the last Carib war has always been said to be the
hand-to-hand combat between Chatoyer and a British officer, Alexander Leith. Leith’s tombstone in Kingstown cathedral tells the official story; but on the two-hundredth anniversary of his death the Vincentians unveiled a monument to Chatoyer, with a plaque which reads ‘Joseph Chatoyer, Black Carib Chief, For Freedom, Died Here, 14th March 1795’. Some of the money for the monument was provided by the Venezuelan government, to the reported displeasure of the British High Commissioner. I spend my last afternoon at Fort Charlotte, an impressive military bastion commanding Kingstown harbour, but whose guns still point inland in commemoration of the Carib threat.

NOTE

The title of this article is meant to allude to *The Tempest* but also, less familiarly, to *Yerba bruja* (‘Enchanted grass’), a book of indigenist poems by the Puerto Rican writer and socialist Juan Antonio Corretjer (1900-85). Corretjer’s preface to *Yerba bruja* begins with a quotation from a botanical treatise explaining that yerba bruja ‘survives almost all attempts at eradication. … Its common name refers to its capacity to resist the harshest treatments.’

My trip to the Caribbean was financed with the help of grants from the British Academy and the University of Essex Research Endowment Fund. Many people helped me during those four months. I’d like to mention Roderick Ebanks, Rosalie Smith McCrea, Petrine Archer, Gordon K. Lewis, Jalil Sued Badillo, Lowell Fiet, Luis Chanlatte Baik, Yvonne Narganes Storde, Ricardo Alegria, Shelley Smith, Steve Hackenberger, Alissandra Cummins, Raymond Lawrence, Lennox Honychurch, Garnette Joseph, Diana Loxley, Mitch Stuart, Desmond Nicholson, Earle Kirby. And especially Lesley Theophilus, who shared the last month.