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Jonathan Corncob Visits Barbados: Excerpts from a Late 18th Century Novel¹

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Introduction and Background to the Adventures of Jonathan Corncob

Published in 1787, this obscure satirical novel written by an author who to this day remains anonymous,² treats the adventures of a young man from the farmlands of Massachusetts during the period of the American Revolution. Living by his wits, Jonathan Corncob³ manages to extricate himself from a variety of situations of his own making or into which circumstances have thrust him. During the course of his adventures, Corncob spends some time in Barbados, and the three brief chapters that depict this visit are reproduced below in their entirety. (In publishing these chapters, we retain the original spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraph ordering.)

To place these three chapters in the context of the chapters that precede them, we summarize the novel up to Corncob's departure for Barbados.

At Jonathan's birth, a local witch told Mrs. Charity Corncob her son would die "either by some unforeseen accident, or of some violent disease." The witch failed to mention the beatings, imprisonment, starvation, exhaustion, and heartbreak from which the young American would recover – over the course of his turbulent youth. Before his escapades began, Corncob enjoyed a quiet childhood in Massachusetts Bay Colony, where his pious and superstitious mother struggled to protect him from his fate, and his illiterate father insisted on his formal education. However, neither his mother's coddling nor his ability to read, write, and calculate

prevent him from getting into trouble.

A curious young man, Jonathan manages to court and impregnate his neighbor, Miss Desire Slawbunk, a girl whose defining characteristic is her obsession with molasses, which shows in her conspicuous lack of teeth. The town fathers give Corncob two options: marry the disgraced girl or pay a fine of £50. Jonathan quickly adopts a third alternative, stealing from his father and taking off into the woods in what he hopes is the direction of New York City.

Lost and starving after days of wandering in the forest, Jonathan mistakenly ends up in Boston, where, running low on cash, he gets a job as a clerk on an American privateer. After a successful voyage, Jonathan returns to Boston with coins to spare. But when he makes a flippant remark to an elderly gentleman over the unsubstantial weight of American coinage, the Boston patriot takes offense and has Corncob arrested for treason.

While in prison, Corncob learns that he and his jail mates are soon to be tarred and feathered; they successfully tunnel out of their cell and with very little trouble make it to safety.

Now a fugitive in Boston, Corncob quickly joins another ship bound for New York City, and after a storm en route and a serious whipping, he arrives safely. As luck would have it, a roaming band of displaced Tories is looking for an accountant. Corncob's job is to manage the equal distribution of booty taken from homes of patriots by the thieving Tories. Meanwhile, in his landlady's home, Jonathan succumbs to the charms of Miss Dinah Donewell. She suffers from some kind of seizure disorder, possibly brought on by one of the venereal diseases that the girl transmits to Jonathan. An incompetent doctor only exacerbates Jonathan's condition.

Finally recovered, Jonathan goes to a pub where he attacks a man who has told an insulting story about the King. After a bloody fight, Jonathan emerges victorious and is much celebrated by the other patrons of the bar.

His work with the band of loyalist thieves takes Corncob up to Rhode Island where he enjoys an active social life and has a brief, if unsatisfying, affair with his hostess's daughter Dolly before sailing to New York.

At the end of his first night back in New York City, Corncob stumbles drunkenly back to his boarding house, but he wakes the following morning to discover that he has chosen the wrong chamber and is in bed with none other than the toothless Desire Slawbunk, the girl from his hometown whom he had impregnated earlier. Desire, who miscarried Jonathan's child, has married a

captain in the British army, and is now Lady Seeclear. After a steamy reunion with Desire, Jonathan learns that his entire family is staying in the same lodging house.

The elder Mr. Corncob recounts how the family came to flee to New York. Mr. Corncob had been falsely convicted of forging currency, and, as a traitor to his country, he was imprisoned and his land was confiscated. After being released he and his family were persecuted by their neighbors, so they escaped from the town and made their way to New York, where they have only just arrived when Jonathan finds them.

Apparently reluctant to linger with his family, Jonathan is soon off on another voyage, this time taking advantage of his younger sister's beauty to procure an accounting position on a ship bound for Barbados.

Jonathan Corncob: The Barbados Chapters

CHAPTER 12

Jonathan goes to Barbadoes, and is highly satisfied with that island.

As my youngest sister was extremely pretty, I was soon after this affair appointed acting purser of a frigate going to Barbadoes. We very soon sailed, and had a prosperous passage. When we were in the vicinity of the West-India islands, we met at different times more than fifty sail of ships, none of which we approached, our captain, who looked at them very attentively, assuring us always that they were ships of the line. It must be observed, that we were at this time at war with the French. Our sailors murmured at being disappointed in their hopes of prize-money, and our sea-officers, who were used to arithmetic in working their day's work, calculated that the French had only twelve sail of the line in the West-Indies. The captain, in short, was blamed by everybody but myself. I endeavoured to vindicate him, and proved to the officers, that even if he mistook, it was natural enough, as he always looked through one of Dollond's best six-feet glasses, which magnified exceedingly.

As I knew the climate we were approaching was extremely warm, I fancied that I should find a country totally parched up by the heat, and destitute of foliage and verdure; but when we came within a few miles of Barbadoes, and were sailing round Needham's point, I was astonished at the beautiful appearance of the island. The broad-leaved palm-trees, their stems surrounded with weighty cocoa-nuts; the long lawns well covered with grass, and the white airy houses

of the planters, formed a view as picturesque as pleasing, while the romantic highlands of Scotland completed the landscape.⁴ 'What a pity,' said I, 'that Barbadoes should be subject to hurricanes!'⁵

No sooner had we cast anchor, than a motley assemblage of inhabitants swarmed on board, composed of all the different shades between the sable African and pale Quadroon, carrying the marks of slavery on their backs, and of content on their faces. They were loaded with the most delicious tropical fruits, poultry, vegetables, and all kinds of refreshments.⁶ Our apartment was instantly filled with mulatto girls, almost all of them slaves, yet many of them ornamented with gold necklaces, ear-rings, and bracelets to an amount that would have purchased their freedom, could they have prevailed on themselves to part with their finery. These ladies danced, sung, and caressed us, displaying their talents and their charms, by way of disputing with each other the trifling advantage of washing our linen. When I saw with what good humour they received even a refusal, when I heard the sounds of joviality and joy among our sailors and their black mistresses, and when I had a slice of pine-apple in my mouth, I could not help exclaiming again, 'What a pity that Barbadoes should be so subject to hurricanes!'

The following evening I went on shore, and on going into the coffee-house at Bridgetown,⁷ I thought myself in the midst of my acquaintances, though I could not recollect a face I saw. Half a dozen persons together, each a bowl of punch in his hand, crowded round me, and insisted on my drinking. As soon as I had an opportunity of observing them a little, I was of opinion that they had certainly drunk enough themselves, and was no longer surprised at their offering their punch to a stranger, or at their pouring it into his shoes. At any rate the lime punch was excellent, and I could not help saying to myself, that it was a pity such a country should be subject to hurricanes.

A few minutes after, a gentleman came up to me, and asked me if my name was not Corncob. I answered in the affirmative, but said I had not the honour of recollecting him. 'I wonder at that,' said he, 'for we were fellow prisoners at Boston, and made our escape together from gaol.' We immediately began to congratulate and compliment each other.

'Do you remember,' said I, 'the fire on board the English ship that took us aboard?' 'Yes,' said he. He then asked if I remembered the gale of wind on our passage to New-York: I answered yes very faintly, and directly shifted the conversation to some other subject, trembling for fear he should mention my having been flogged. On taking leave he invited me to dine with him the following day, at his

plantation, when I was regaled in a most luxurious manner. The turtle was superior to any ever served on a lord mayor's table; the oranges and pine-apples were of the highest flavour; Ben Kenton's porter sparkled like champagne, and excellent claret and Madeira crowned the feast. At the end of the dinner I caught myself unbuttoning my waistcoat, and crying out, 'tis d—d hard that there should be hurricanes in this country.

Towards the evening the gentleman asked me if I would look at his hen negroes.⁸ I accepted the proposal, and we walked along a rank of about thirty females of that species. He then asked me how I liked them. I said that perhaps it was owing to prejudice that I did not think them very amiable. After supper he conducted me to my apartment, where I was surprised to find a very pretty mulatto girl. My friend told me, that as I did not seem to like any of his hen negroes, he had sent to a planter of his acquaintance to borrow a beauty of a somewhat lighter hue. I thanked him, told him there was no occasion for such an attention, and expressed my sorrow at his incurring such an obligation on my account.

'Oh!', answered he, 'that is nothing; I shall lend him one of my people to work at his sugar-mill tomorrow, which you know is much the same thing.' Though this extraordinary attention of the West-Indian shocked the morality of my ideas, yet, as I have always made it a rule to conform to the customs of the countries I visit, I invited the young mulatto girl to get into bed.

'Ki, Ki!' cried the tawny beauty, starting back with the greatest marks of astonishment. Upon my renewing my solicitations, she told me that it was a liberty she could never think of taking; that the mat at the bed-side was destined for her bed; and, 'if massa,' said she, 'want ee chambepot, he will put he hand out of bed; if he want me, he will puttee out he foot.' — There was something droll in this arrangement, but however, it was convenient, and I thought it a thousand pities that Providence should visit so hospitable a country with such frequent hurricanes.⁹

CHAPTER 13

The West-Indian way of white-washing, or rather the true way of washing the blackamoor white. Jonathan begins to lose his good opinion of Barbadoes.

My friend took me the following morning to the house of the planter from whom he had borrowed the mulatto girl. He was not at home, but we were, nevertheless, ushered into an apartment, at one end of which was sitting an old negress, smoking her pipe.¹⁰ Near her was

an elderly mulatto woman; at a little distance was a female still less tawny of complexion, called in the country, as I believe, a mestee and at the other end of the room I observed a yellow quadroon giving suck to a child, which, though a little sallow, was as white as children in Europe generally are.¹¹ I could not help remarking to the West-Indian this regular gradation of light and shade.

'This,' said he, 'is the family of my friend, Mr. Winter; the three younger females and the child are the progeny of the old negress.'

'And who are the fathers?'

'Mr. Winter himself is the father of them all,' replied he: 'when he was very young he had the mulatto woman by the negress: when the mulatto was twelve years old, he took her for his mistress, and had by her the mestee. At about the same age his intimacy with the mestee produced the quadroon, who had by him a few months ago the white child you see in her arms. This is what is called in this country washing a man's self white, and Mr. Winter has the credit of having washed himself white at a very early age, being at this time less than sixty years old.'

This complicated incest, and the coolness with which my friend spoke of it, made me begin to think it no wonder that Barbadoes was subject to hurricanes.

I returned to Bridgetown, and as I had several things to purchase for the use of the ship, I was sometimes obliged to sleep at a tavern there. One morning, when I was sleeping very soundly, I was waked by the most terrible cries of distress. I started up in a fright, supposing it could be caused by nothing less than a hurricane, slipped on my breeches, the hind part before, put my right arm into the left sleeve of my coat, and ran downstairs. I found below two ill-looking negroes, who were flogging two young negresses stripped entirely naked, while the tavern-keeper superintended the operation, and proved himself no bad anatomist, by pointing out the most sensible parts. The two poor girls interrupted their cries between each lash to call out to the inn-keeper, 'Oh! Oh! good massa'; and, 'Dammee heart,' to their black executioners.

'What is the matter?' said I, to the master.

'Nothing in particular,' said he. 'It is the last day of the month, when I always make it a rule to give a few lashes to my slaves, otherwise, look'e, Sir, they would not be worth a squeezed sugar-cane. However, nobody on the island is more humane than I am; I am not one of those who flog for flogging's sake, and without reason or bounds. I al-ways observe the mosaical law, and give exactly forty stripes save one.' As these reasons were unanswerable, I returned to my bed, and left him to make up the number, though I

could not help muttering, as I went upstairs, that a good hurricane would be no bad thing at Barbadoes.

The same day I met with two officers of my acquaintance, who asked me to go with them to a ball, given by an inhabitant of Bridgetown. I consented readily to be of their party, though I afterwards repented of my complaisance, on observing that they had both taken rather too large a dose of Madeira. We went into the ball-room, engaged partners, and all went on very well for about half an hour, when the lady with whom Lieutenant Dasher, one of my friends, was dancing, dropped a garter. The lieutenant, who was a very polite man, picked it up, and offered to put it on. The young lady blushed, and begged to be excused. Her brother, a creole,¹² who was standing by, interposed, and pointed out to the lieutenant the impropriety of his offer. However, my friend insisted, with some reason, that the lady could not dance with her stockings about her heels; that he was her partner, and that as nobody knew better how to put on a lady's garter, he had an exclusive right. The brother denied it.

'Pshaw,' said Lieutenant Dasher, with a hiccough, 'you're drunk, Sir,' and stooping down, prepared to put an end to the debate.

The brother took him by the arm to prevent him, but my friend catching him by the leg, threw him on his back. In an instant half a dozen creoles ran up to his assistance; the lieutenant drew his sword, at the sight of which two ladies fell into hysterics, three begged permission to faint, and four called for smelling bottles. The number of creoles increased, the lieutenant was disarmed, another officer and myself joined him, and the battle became general; but as they were thirty to three, we attempted to make a handsome retreat and gain the door. We should have succeeded if our ill-fortune had not placed a curst musician in the door-way, who seeing our design, stopped me, who was in the front, by thrusting the reed-end of his clarinet into my mouth. I attempted to draw back my head, but the crowd behind prevented me, and I continued jammed up in this situation for several minutes, with the wind instrument in my mouth; every thump I received from the enemies producing a note high or low, agreeable to the part on which the blow fell, and I played such a piece of involuntary music as I believe was never before heard. At last, however, our efforts got the better of the clarinet player, and we descended the stair-case with great precipitation.¹³

As soon as we were at the bottom of it, we desired a parler, and offered to fight any of the combatants, man to man. The creoles told us, that they were rather inclined to dance at that moment, but that

they would settle the matter the following morning. The following morning we waited on them all, and were astonished at their assuring us severally, that so far from having ill-treated us, they had interposed in our favour; that they had received blows intended for us, and each of them in particular declared upon his honour, that but for his interference we should certainly have been killed. As we could not insist upon fighting with people to whom we had such great obligations, we were obliged to be content with our threshing, and to leave our revenge to the next hurricane.

This adventure gave myself and fellows in misfortune but little taste for the society of the Barbadians, and we rather chose to pass our evenings in strolling about the vicinity of the town, than at the balls and concerts of the inhabitants of Bridgetown. In one of our walks our attention was attracted by the appearance of something black under a hedge, which, on examination, we found to be a negress. This hapless creature was lying on the bare ground, in the last agonies of a burning fever. Her whole body was covered with sores and pustules, caused by the bites of the flies and musquitos, that, from the freedom with which they preyed on her person, seemed to insult her defenceless situation. The remnant of a blanket about her waist was her only covering, and a little dirty water in the bottom of a broken pitcher the only nourishment within her reach. Her eyes, though already covered with the film of death, seemed to implore our assistance. We ran to a neighbouring house to learn the reason of her being there, and were told by a woman, that she was the slave of a planter, that her master fearing she might communicate the fever to his other negroes, had brought her to die under the hedge, and that she had already been there three days unnoticed by anybody, and without any sustenance but the water in the pitcher. As she told us, that without a sum of money it was impossible for us to give, nobody would afford her a lodging, we proposed to leave some provisions by her, but the woman assured us that the other negroes would not fail to steal them immediately. We were devising other means to assist the sick slave, when giving a last groan, and expiring, she left us nothing to do but to wish her a better fate in another world. Lieutenant Dasher proposed setting fire to Bridgetown, but I begged him to leave the punishment of this Barbadian cruelty to the next hurricane.

CHAPTER 14

A hurricane at Barbadoes, and an account of the damage caused by it.

Our ship being ordered to prepare for sea, I went to say farewell to my friend the planter who received me with his usual hospitality. After having been treated (during the day in the most luxurious manner, in the evening I retired to bed; the little mulatto girl being as usual stretched out on her mat by the bed-side. Soon after we both fell so fast asleep, that we could not hear ourselves snore. I, for my own share, was dreaming of nothing less than a hurricane, when I was waked by the falling of the Venetian blinds and sashes into the room. I started up in my bed, and opening my mouth to call out murder! thieves! the wind rushed in so furiously, that I could not shut it again. I then began to suspect what was the matter, and was not a little alarmed at the rocking of the house. I was in doubt what step to take, and was much afraid I should be buried in the ruins of the building, when the mulatto girl took me by the arm, and pulled me towards the opposite window. 'One curse hurricane to be sure,' said she; 'but good little macky!¹⁴ blue-coat, never be afraid.' She then lowered herself down by her hands, and jumped to the ground. I followed her example, and jumped upon her back. The girl immediately recovered her legs, and, driven on by the wind, ran along at an amazing rate. As my good fortune had placed me on her back, I thought proper to keep my hold, for as she was in the front, it was clear that she would first encounter any obstacle in the way, and save my bones at the expence of her own. This reasoning, as she was a slave, was very fair; but the wind and my weight soon became too much for her; she fell upon her face, and I was dismounted. I continued to be carried on by the wind with the greatest swiftness, and was much afraid I should be driven to sea, where in all probability I should have been lost, when I was suddenly taken off my feet, and falling from a considerable height, found myself very happily seated in a kind of ravine that was sheltered on every side. During my journey the wind had blown my shirt piece-meal off my back, and when I got into shelter, I perceived that I had nothing but the collar and wristbands left to cover my nakedness. There was a very numerous company in this hollow way, which was every moment increased by stragglers, who came flying in upon our heads, till at last we were crowded one upon another, and almost stifled with excessive heat. Terrible were the complaints on every side of me, every one enumerating his supposed losses, and lamenting his friends killed, or supposed to be killed. 'My poor

wife!' cried one; 'my poor dear boy!' exclaimed another.

As I had heard that the best way of consoling our fellow-creatures, is to divert their attention from their misfortunes, by relating our own, I began to cry out, 'Oh! my poor dear blue coat! my best white dimity waistcoat! my new prince's stuff breeches!' A planter, who was standing near me, and who was probably in a bad humour at being blown out of bed, imagined me to be making game of him; he fell upon a creole lady whom, in the dark, he mistook for me, and pummeled her till her cries, and some discoveries he made in the action, undeceived him. When I perceived what was the matter, I left off my lamentations, and shifted my place to another, where, though I was safer, I was not near so much at my ease. I found myself in the middle of a company that did not seem to be of the most cleanly kind, at least if I could judge from the strong smell of perspiration that almost suffocated me. As soon as the day began to dawn, perceiving that I was in the midst of six overgrown negresses, I begged these black natives of Congo to give me a little room, 'for really,' said I, 'my good women, you smell very strong.'

'Fie, fie, massa,' answered one of them, 'what we smell! ee fair sex smell! 'tis impossible no - neber see de day dat ee fair sex smell.' I made my way from among these sable fair ones, and went up to two young ladies of my acquaintance, whom I observed at a little distance, and who were as totally naked as myself. I made them a very ceremonious bow, they returned full as formal a courtesy, which, in the situation they were in, had so comical an effect, that I could not help laughing. The ladies, suspecting the cause of my mirth, turned their backs upon me, an expedient that by no means lessened my merriment. However, as I observed that my laughter seemed to displease some of the people about me, who were almost all naked too, I changed my tone, and began to comfort those that appeared to be the most in want of consolation. There was one planter in the number, whose sorrow was more turbulent than that of his neighbours. He roared, sobbed, cursed the hurricane, and called himself the most unfortunate of men.

I went up to him. 'Sir,' said I, 'consider we are all mortal, and if your wife had not met with this misfortune, she must have died sooner or later. Your sorrow, my good sir, cannot bring her back. Besides, she is, no doubt, in heaven; where, according to the best accounts, she must be better off, than we poor, naked Christians in this nasty ravine.'

'What do you mean, Sir?' said he, still sobbing; 'my wife is the lady whom you see just by.'

'I beg your pardon for my blunder,' replied I, 'but if you have lost

your children, do not let it afflict you too much; it is a loss your lady, who is still young, can easily repair.'

'Children, Sir!' said he, 'I never had any in my life.'

'Oh!' said I, 'I see what is the matter, your crop of sugar is destroyed, and your house blown down.'

'Oh! no, no, no,' answered he, 'that house yonder is mine. Oh, oh, oh! I left it last night, for fear it should fall; but I see that it is safe, and my crop of sugar is all housed.'

'For G-d's sake, what is the matter then?'

'Oh, oh, oh!' said he, sobbing still louder, 'Oh, oh, oh! I have lost twenty negroes, and six of them, oh oh, oh!' - here his tears interrupted his voice - 'Oh, oh, oh! six of them were she's, oh, oh, oh! and big with young, oh, oh! I would not have sold them for fifty Jos a-piece.'¹⁵

A few hours after day-break, the wind became moderate, and naked as we were, we determined to leave the ravine, to inquire after our respective friends. I directed my steps towards the house of my acquaintance the planter, which I was overjoyed to find standing. He had left it in the night, as well as myself, but was just returned, and had the kindness to supply the loss of my shirt. From the plantation we went to Bridgetown, which was no more than a heap of ruins. An infinite number of its inhabitants were carried off by various accidents, and a few days after, the following list of the victims of the hurricane appeared at Bridgetown:¹⁶

Men, women, and children, buried beneath the ruins of buildings	527
Drowned	134
Total	661
Loss of black cattle.	
Oxen lost by different casualties	745
Which, with 4273 head of negroes	4273
Makes the amount	5018

CHAPTER 15

Jonathan returns to New-York, where he is appointed purser of an armed brigantine. Meets at sea with the Picaroon American Privateer. The captain of Jonathan's brig obliged to strike, the commander of the Picaroon being one of the most obstinate fellows upon record.

Lucky was it for me that I had a friend in the kind planter who had been formerly my fellow prisoner. My ship was blown to sea, and

was never afterwards heard of. During four months that I waited in hopes of its return, he insisted on my staying at his house. At the expiration of that time, I took a passage in a merchant ship to New-York . . . [here ends Corncob's visit to Barbados]

Discussion: Did Corncob's Author Visit Barbados?

In a discussion of literary works set during the period of the American Revolution, R.W.G. Vail claims the author of Corncob was "thoroughly familiar with . . . Bridgetown in Barbados, where he describes the life in city and plantation and strongly disapproves of the ill treatment of the slaves. His sympathy for them came from actual observation and from humanitarian feelings not found elsewhere in his story."¹⁷ Yet, Vail does not demonstrate how he knows that Corncob's author was "thoroughly familiar" with Barbados or that his comments on slavery were based on his own "actual observation"; in fact, Vail's comments might just as easily reflect his own unfamiliarity with Barbados and the literature on slavery than a familiarity he attributes to Corncob's author.

To our mind, there are no observations on Barbados in Corncob's experiences that could not have been acquired by reading travel and other reports and/or conversing with people who had their own first-hand knowledge of the island. The traffic between North America, Britain, and Barbados during the eighteenth century is too well known to require elaboration. The novelist, without ever having visited the island, could have taken factual characteristics from various sources and woven them into incidents and events that Corncob experienced. For example, the pastoral description of the Barbadian landscape as the island was approached from the sea was commonly given by travelers, as was the scene of hawkers vending fresh fruit and vegetables in Carlisle Bay; the Scotland District, which is briefly mentioned in the novel, with nothing specific said about it, was, as it is today, a well-defined region of Barbados. Jonathan Corncob remarks that Barbados is "subject to hurricanes," but aside from a few heavy storms recorded earlier in the century, the eighteenth-century's major hurricane occurred in October 1780 while another massive storm, perhaps of hurricane strength but weaker than the one in 1780, hit the island in September 1786, a year or so before the novel was published. After Corncob arrived at Barbados he was approached by "mulatto girls," but contact with enslaved and free women of colour, including prostitutes, was well known to island visitors, including, of course, British military and navel personnel. Interracial sexual relations, whether temporary or long-standing, were a widely known feature of West Indian life; it

did not require a personal experience in Barbados to be aware of this as background to whatever scene or scenes the author wished to construct.¹⁸ The wearing of jewelry among non-whites was common, especially among free women of colour. (Although there is slim contemporary evidence for gold jewelry, gold was probably confined to free women, and was not as common as the author suggests.) This too was no secret in the world of British America. Other details mentioned in the novel, such as rum-based punch, taverns, the manner of drinking in taverns, fights involving Creole whites, the opulence of meals at the planter's table, sexual relations between blacks and whites, the sexual exploitation of enslaved people, the value placed on European racial characteristics by Creole society, pipe-smoking by slaves, white cruelty toward slaves, and so forth were also widely known attributes of West Indian life in British America and did not require the novelist's first hand experience to incorporate into his plot.

Corncob's description of the hurricane is fairly vivid and might, indeed, reflect the author's personal experience. If the author did experience the hurricane of 1780 some of his broader statements ring true in terms of the massive devastation and loss of life, and he appears to capture some of the confusion and panic during this massive storm. Yet, he reports no details on the hurricane per se that could not have been acquired through conversations with persons who had experienced the storm or through published reports (see note 15). However, the incidents he describes, such as mounting on the back of an enslaved woman, the nakedness of the people resulting from the storm, the conversation with the planter concerning his loss of slaves, seem rather a product of his novelist's imagination.

In general, then, all of the features or characteristics of Barbadian life that the author mentions could easily have been acquired through his own reading or from the oral accounts of persons who had visited or resided on the island. There is nothing in Jonathan Corncob that provides historical information on Barbados that was not widely known in British America, and the personal experiences of the novel's hero could have been literary inventions based on such widely known information.

However, it is not inconceivable that the author had actually visited Barbados. In major known details of island life and geography, his account rings true, and the fact that he chose to have his hero go to Barbados, rather than another West Indian island (for example, the more prominent Jamaica, at the time Britain's wealthiest sugar colony), might support an argument that the author

had visited Barbados and had at least “a nodding personal acquaintance” with the island.¹⁹ If, indeed, he had some association with British naval or merchant activities (see note 2) a visit (or several visits) to Barbados during this period of time would have been more than possible.

With respect to the *Adventures of Jonathan Corncob*, then, as these “adventures” transpired in Barbados, we are left with the question of whether this anonymous author of unknown nationality (though probably British) ever actually spent time on the island. We leave it to readers of this article to decide the answer on their own.

NOTES

1. *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee*. Written by Himself (London, printed for the author, 1787; reprinted David Godine, publisher, Boston, 1976). Copies of the 1787 publication are fairly rare (we have been able to locate about 15 copies in U.S. and British libraries), but there are well over 500 copies of the 1976 reprint scattered about in U.S. and British libraries.
2. As far as we are aware, the author of *Corncob* has not been identified, although various scholars have speculated on his origins. In a 1956 discussion of *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob*, R.W.G. Vail wrote that the author must have been “a British naval officer or a least a purser or supercargo on a British merchant ship” because he showed a strong “dislike for a certain type of pompous, cowardly British naval officer,” and displayed a “detailed knowledge of the sea, nautical terms and practices and the handling of a ship in storm or battle” (“*Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee* [1787]: A Commentary,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Vol. 50 [1956], p. 106). Essentially agreeing with Vail and his reasoning, Noel Perrin, in his Foreword to the 1976 reprint of the *Adventures*, while acknowledging that the author has never been identified, not even by contemporary reviewers of the novel (“one or two” of whom assumed he was a “banished American Loyalist, living in Europe”) speculates that it “is extremely improbable ... that the author was American”. Rather, Perrin writes, internal evidence “suggests that he was much more likely a Royal Navy officer who had served a long time in America, and perhaps even been a prisoner of war”. In any case, Perrin concludes that *Corncob* is “probably not an American novel, but an English novel about America” (“Foreword,” pp. xii, xv). An early foundation study in this area of literary scholarship does not even address the issue of authorship (Robert B. Heilman, *America in English Fiction, 1760-1800* [Louisiana State University Press, 1937], *passim*). On the other hand, Sean X. Goudie, in his recent literary study, asserts, but

provides no evidence, that *Corncob* was “authored by a British West Indian who had extensive firsthand knowledge of the United States” (*Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* [University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006], p. 157). The novel itself provides strong evidence that the author had first-hand knowledge of the United States or, rather, New York City and parts of New England (see also, Vail, *Adventures of Jonathan Corncob*, pp. 106-107), but there is no internal evidence, linguistic (see below note 9) or otherwise, that he was a British West Indian Creole. Karl Watson, Barbadian historian and faculty member at the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill), is also “fairly confident that the author was not Barbadian or West Indian” (Watson to Handler, personal communication, 13 September 2006).

3. Jonathan was originally a term applied to New Englanders. Noel Perrin points out that Jonathan “is a name that eighteenth-century Englishmen delighted to use to epitomize American rusticity,” and it was also used as a nickname “for the American rebel army”; the name was found “highly offensive, at least from English lips” (“Foreword,” pp. ix-x, xix). As for the name *Corncob*, tobacco pipes were made from the bowl of the cob of Indian corn; hence *corn-cob* pipes, often used in North America.
 4. Travelers who visited the island, as approached from the sea, often gave this bucolic picture of the Barbadian landscape.
 5. As is seen in the following pages, the author regularly mentions hurricanes in Barbados, and his account of *Corncob*'s visit ends with a description of a massive one.
 6. Another scene commonly described by travelers as their vessels pulled into Carlisle Bay.
 7. Although Bridgetown had its share of taverns in the eighteenth-century, as far as we are aware, the term “coffee house” (which was used in England and probably New England as well) was not applied to them. In Barbados the taverns were sometimes called “tippling houses” or, more commonly, “dram shops and punch houses” (see, for example, Samuel Moore, *The Public Acts in Force; Passed by the Legislature of Barbados* [London, 1801], p. 239). (For eighteenth-century hotel-taverns in Barbados that belonged to free women of colour, see Jerome S. Handler, *The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados* [The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974], pp. 133-137.) However, this does not rule out the possibility of a coffee house, identified as such, in eighteenth century Bridgetown.
- Editor's note:** In J.W. Orderson, *Creoleana or Social or Domestic Scenes and*

Incidents in Days of Yore, p. 170 published London 1842, reference is made to the British Coffee House in Bridgetown.

8. It is doubtful if the term "hen negroes" was used in Barbados, but we cannot be certain.
9. Throughout the novel, the author gives his characters New England speech, but, as Perrin points out, although the "author had a pretty good ear for American speech ... in ordinary narrative he sometimes uses words that an eighteenth-century American would not have been likely to"; in fact, the "occasional appearance of words not in the American vocabulary" is one of the lines of evidence used by Perrin to suggest the author's "Englishness" ("Foreword," p. xiii).
A similar situation arises with the author's attempts to reproduce Black vernacular/pidgin/Creole-like speech patterns. John Rickford, Professor of Linguistics at Stanford University and a specialist in Caribbean Creole languages, analyzed the text. Without detailing here Rickford's technical analysis of the speech examples in the novel, he observes that although some of the elements in certain passages seem authentic, "or at least conventional in the rendering of Caribbean Creole speech at the time, and to some extent still characteristic of spoken Creole today ... it's likely that the author might have overreached in trying to make his 'Negresses' speak differently from his white characters"; although "*Jonathan Corncob's* black speech conforms in some respects to other contemporary representations ... [some of the speech] strikes me as non-authentic, perhaps creations of the author's imagination" (Rickford to Handler, personal communication, 28 August 2005; we are grateful to Rickford for providing this analysis). In line with this, other expressions used by Corncob do not seem to have been part of colloquial or every-day Barbadian speech, e.g., hen negro, coffee-house, macky.
10. Pipe smoking was commonly practiced among the enslaved population, and white clay pipes were sometimes placed in graves as offerings for their deceased; see Jerome S. Handler and Frederick W. Lange, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados: An Archaeological and Historical Investigation* (Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 133-135.
11. Although the "racial" terms "mestee/mustee" and "quadroon" probably existed in Barbados during the late eighteenth century, we are uncertain how common they were; "mulatto" was frequently used, however. In any case, these distinctions had no legal implications on the island and anyone who showed any outward signs of African ancestry, no matter how minute, faced political and legal discrimination until 1831 with passage of the so-called "Brown Privilege Bill" (Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 6, 102-105, 190-201).

12. As used in *Jonathan Corncob*, the term "Creole" always refers to a native-born white.
13. Facing the page where this incident is described is a full-page musical score, titled "*Johann von Kornkob, Clarinet Involuntary, 'The Battle of Bridgetown,' solo obligato.*" This farcical musical illustration is guided with phrases like "molto doloroso" and "alla ribcage" indicating the phase of the beating and its effect on Corncob's playing rather than classic directions of dynamic and tempo. Corncob also apparently played in 54/10 time and sharps and flats fluctuated constantly, often on notes much higher than the clarinet is theoretically capable of hitting.
14. The Oxford English Dictionary defines Macky as "the real McCoy, the genuine article, the real thing." The term does not seem to appear in West Indian Creole languages, including Bajan; see Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford University Press, 1996), F. G. Cassidy and R. B. LePage, *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), and Frank A. Collymore, *Notes for a Glossary of Words and Phrases of Barbadian Dialect* (Barbados National Trust, 1992; 6th edition).
15. "Jos," plural of "Jo," or "Joe", was a popular name for Johannes (sometimes spelled Joannes), a gold coin of Portuguese origin. This was one of several coins current at the time in the North American and West Indian colonies, including Barbados. The Jo was an important colonial currency, but we are uncertain how common it was in Barbados, and how much the term was used in every-day Barbadian speech. Eighteenth-century Barbadians counted in pounds, shillings, and pence, and referred to "currency" (i.e. Barbados pounds) and "sterling" (British pounds). However, "at an early date the dollar became the recognized standard of value" in Barbados while various foreign coins, such as gold pistoles and Johannes and silver dollars and bits of a dollar were also used as the "media of exchange" (Ida Greaves, "Money and Currency in Barbados," *JBMHS*, vol. 19 [1953], p. 164). For contemporary comments on Barbadian money, see, for example, John Brathwaite, Reply to query 8, in "Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council ... Concerning the Present State of the Trade to Africa", *Parliamentary Papers* 26 [London, 1789], part 3; also, G. W. Jordan, *Copies of a Letter Containing Queries respecting the State of the Silver and Copper Coins in Barbados* [London, 1816]. For wider comments on colonial coinage, see John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (University of North Carolina Press, 1978), pp. 5, 6, 300; Philip L. Mossman, *Money of the American Colonies and Confederation, A Numismatic, Economic and Historical Correlation* (New York, 1993), pp. 69-70.

16. The author is probably referring to the devastating hurricane of 1780 which received considerable publicity throughout British America, but which he himself may have experienced. However, the figures for losses that are reported in Corncob vary from those available in other contemporary sources. For example Corncob reports 661 white persons and 4, 273 enslaved people killed by the storm, a total of 4,934 fatalities. Robert Schomburgk, citing the Barbados Annual Register for 1781, says the "loss of human life [was] ... estimated at 4,326 souls," 608 fewer deaths than reported by Corncob (*The History of Barbados* [London, 1848], p.47). John Poyer, relying on unspecified contemporary sources, reported the loss of black and white together "was estimated to exceed three thousand" (*The History of Barbados* [London, 1808], p. 453), while William Senhouse and John Brathwaite, relying on official figures, reported 2,033 slaves killed without mentioning the number of white fatalities ("The Autobiographical Manuscript of William Senhouse," *JBMHS*, vol. 2 [1934], p. 207; Brathwaite, Reply to query 15, in "Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council ... Concerning the Present State of the Trade to Africa", *Parliamentary Papers* 26 (London, 1789), part 3). For a vivid account of the 1780 hurricane, see *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 50 (London, 1780), pp. 621-622 (reprinted in Schomburgk, *History*, pp. 48-50).
17. Vail, "*Adventures of Jonathan Corncob*," p. 106. Although Corncob is clearly critical of the excessive maltreatment of slaves, there does not appear to be anything that challenges or condemns the institution of slavery per se. We leave it to readers of this article to judge the strength of the "sympathy" and "humanitarian feelings" Corncob displayed towards enslaved Barbadians. Moreover, the chapters on Barbados indicate the author did not lack the racist sentiments held by many Europeans at the time. In general, it is hard to accept Wylie Sypher's judgment that Corncob can be considered "anti-slavery fiction"; it does not strike us that the novel was written to advance the cause of abolitionism or that slavery is a central theme (*Guinea's Captive Kings: British anti-slavery literature of the xviiiith century* [University of North Carolina Press, 1942], p. 280).
18. For sexual relations between Black and White, concubinage, and prostitution, see Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 33, 133-137.
19. Karl Watson to Handler, personal communication (15 September 2006).