

THE WISDOM OF UNCERTAINTY: "RE-VISIONARY STRATEGIES"  
IN WILSON HARRIS'S "THE INFINITE REHEARSAL"

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To understand ... the world as ambiguity, having to confront, instead of one absolute truth, a lot of relative truths which contradict each other, to possess therefore as the only certainty *the wisdom of uncertainty*, this requires great strength.

Milan Kundera<sup>1</sup>

The imaginative universe a writer creates may so turn upon him, address him, even strike him - as if it were alive in its own right - that the writer is drawn backwards and forwards to other imaginations he may have ignored or misunderstood in the past, other imaginations he may grasp more truly when he comes upon them in the future.

Wilson Harris<sup>2</sup>

Many years ago, after I had begun exploring the new literatures in English and written a few comparative articles, Albert Gérard told me that I was involved in comparative studies. I rather felt like Monsieur Jourdain who was speaking prose without knowing it, for I was more familiar then with the concept of comparative literature which required that the comparison should apply to literatures in different languages than with the broader conception which allowed for comparison between literatures written in a similar language. But I was grateful to Albert Gérard for drawing my attention to a critical framework which I had until then little taken into account in spite of the practice of comparison. I am now convinced that in terms of both difference and similarity, of historical, sociological and/or interpretative approaches, the new literatures in English offer one of the richest fields for comparative explorations even if, as Helen Tiffin argues, the basis for comparison and the criteria of judgment specific to that field need to be clearly defined.<sup>3</sup> It is not my purpose in this essay, however, to enter the arena of theoretical definitions. Rather, I shall try to show in what way Wilson Harris's creative and critical writings contribute an extra philosophical and humanistic dimension to the very notion of comparison in its widest sense and its deepest ramifications.

Wilson Harris is a poet, novelist and thinker of Guyanese origin who worked for many years as a surveyor in the South American interior. Since settling in England about thirty years ago he has published seventeen short, densely poetic novels and is completing another. Like Joyce, who only wrote about Dublin after leaving it, Harris has kept writing about Guyana (with two or three exceptions) even in those novels that are mainly set in London. He has also written two collections of novellas which re-create Amerindian myths. Yet to call him prolific would be to misunderstand the nature of his creative venture since each fiction can be called an installment and a "rehearsal," with variations, of its predecessor (however different in its surface texture) within an opus which, by its very nature, must remain incomplete or unfinished. He was also a proponent of cross-culturalism *avant la lettre* since his first novel, *Palace of the Peacock*

(1960), remains, to my knowledge, the most genuine expression of that now fashionable concept.

Cultural encounters were from the very beginning the staple of Wilson Harris's imagination, not only the confrontation between so-called old and new worlds in the Renaissance, which, for all its hideous consequences, he does not see in exclusively negative terms,<sup>4</sup> but also the clash *and* cross-fertilization between Caribbean and European cultures as one realizes when, for example, coming across Greek gods metamorphosed into Guyanese peasants in his early poetry. From his first novel also, Harris has "re-vised" the generally accepted, realistic versions of New World history, Guyanese and Mexican, as well as the notions of community and individual personality prevailing in both Caribbean and European fiction. His rejection of realism or, as he put it many years ago, of the "novel of persuasion,"<sup>5</sup> springs from a deeply moral vision which has stimulated him to a never-ending quest for the "lost body," the eclipsed presence and soul of those defeated by European conquest. Realism, Harris suggests, presents as inevitable a "given" plane of society and is therefore authoritarian, whether consciously or not. He himself rejects all absolutes since human vision is necessarily partial, so that uncertainty and incomplete knowledge of the mainsprings and far-reaching consequences of experience prevent man from achieving a wholeness forever desirable but forever out of reach. Hence his own multiple approaches to, or "rehearsal" of, a given experience *not*, as might be supposed, as a post-modernist stance in which to destabilize reality can proceed from an absence of value but, on the contrary, in a repeated attempt to reach the enigmatic source of value, the connection he probes between "moral vision and creativity,"<sup>6</sup> as I hope to show presently.

From his earliest writings Harris has asserted the partiality (in two senses) and the biases of all human perception, which led him, in his own words, to relive and reverse "the 'given' conditions of the past, freeing oneself from catastrophic idolatry and blindness to one's own historical and philosophical conceptions and misconceptions which may bind one within a statuesque present or a false future."<sup>7</sup> In his introduction to the one-volume edition of *The Guyana Quartet*, he calls this "re-vision" of the past and of his own earlier perceptions of it "a fiction that seeks to consume its own biases through many resurrections of paradoxical imagination."<sup>8</sup> I have already alluded to the poetic density of his novels' narrative texture woven with "convertible images" which express the changes and partial transformations of the characters' vision. Referring to his reconstruction of the past and the occasion which made him reject "idolatrous realism," the I-narrator in *The Eye of the Scarecrow* describes his creative process in the following terms:

It was to prove the re-living of all my life again and again as if I were a ghost returning to the same place (which was always different) shoring up different ruins (which were always the same).<sup>9</sup>

This is the substance of Harris's own writing, although it has changed considerably in form between the quintessential narrative line of *Palace of the Peacock* to the complex self-reflexiveness and "re-writing" of the Faustian myth in his latest novel to date, *The Infinite Rehearsal*.<sup>10</sup>

"Re-visionary strategies" are both exploration in depth and intuitive arousal of layers of experience ("living fossil-strata"<sup>11</sup>) that have been lying dormant in the unconscious, in order to re-vise both one's own and the other's ingrained roles or functions. This process, through which the author dialogues with his own earlier fictions as well as with existing myths and/or major texts from various cultures, affects all aspects of his writing, whether content, narrative texture, symbolism and even genre, as we see in his use of allegory. Most importantly, it stimulates the redemptive, unifying role of the imagination, a theme that has run through his work since *Palace of the Peacock*. In retrospect, one can read an "infinite rehearsal" in Donne's several ways of dying, as in Masters' serial deaths in *Carnival* (1985), though as a concept, it is clearly a late outgrowth of the "drama of consciousness" or "play of the soul" in which Harris's protagonists have always been involved. His latest novel picks up what he calls "intuitive clues"<sup>12</sup> from *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (1965), which in many ways he "re-writes." "Ghost," for example, has developed from "the ghostly idiot stranger ... in one's own breast" who first appears in *The Eye*, and in the two novels both nature and man's deepest self ("inner space, inner time"<sup>13</sup>) are the seat of that third nameless dimension or "IT"<sup>14</sup> which Ghost also represents allegorically.

Since *Black Marsden* (1972) Harris has created his own form of allegory in close connection with his "re-visionary strategies":

I do not believe an imaginative writer may re-visit - if I may so put it - the field of allegory and discover new emphases such as complex comedy, complex modernity, save through the uncanny depths of creative experience within his own work and the sensation he or she may have of *living interior guides* arising from the collective unconscious encompassing the living and the dead.<sup>15</sup>

In the same essay Harris wrote that

if we are to re-discover an originality to cope with the terrors of our age, an evolution in form needs to occur that cuts through narrow vested interests and narrow sovereign state. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe are as much the heritage of black men and women because the triggers of conflicting tradition ... lie in, and need to be re-activated through, the cross-cultural psyche of humanity, a cross-cultural psyche that bristles with the tone and fabric of encounters between so-called savage cultures and so-called civilised cultures.<sup>16</sup>

The *cross-cultural psyche of humanity* informs what he calls the "literate imagination," i.e., "the true arousal of a native universal imagination - the true arousal of a diversity of cultures in counterpoint with one another within a tapestry of mutual self-knowledge."<sup>17</sup> Literacy, for Harris, is thus the reverse of the "mental incest" or one-track thinking which asserts the purity of identity or the supremacy of one culture in opposition to others.

Though *Carnival* seemed like a climax in his opus, *The Infinite Rehearsal* probes even deeper into the labyrinths of self and nature to present as facets of the same allegorical quest the survival of modern civilization and the creative process of fiction writing. Significantly, it is a "re-writing" of the ever-modern myth of Faust, who longed to reach heights accessible to God only and thereby pierce the mysteries of creation but paradoxically attempted to do so through a pact with the devil. There can be no such pact in Harris's novel because good and evil are not separate moral categories. Like

Harris's earlier fictions, this novel reads as a dialogue between the living and the dead, close and distant voices, or sovereign and lost traditions. The first-person narrator, Robin Redbreast Glass,<sup>18</sup> is dead but speaks through W.H., his "adversary," with whom he nevertheless shares "an approach to the ruling concepts of civilization ... from the ruled or apparently eclipsed side of humanity" (vii). Since his "Da Silva" novels Harris has entered his own fiction as a character "in search of a species of fiction"<sup>19</sup> as if the fiction pre-existed, a "living text" brought to the fore through a polyphonic narrative in which both he and the existences or "agents of personality"<sup>20</sup> he creates are vessels rather than the omnipotent author and sovereign characters of realistic fiction. Tenuous, even uncertain facts underlie Glass's narrative. He introduces himself as a "grave-digger in a library of dreams and a pork-knocker [a gold and diamond prospector] in the sacred wood [echoes of Dante and Eliot]"(2). He drowned in 1961 at the age of sixteen with his Aunt Miriam, his Mother Alice and a small party of children, actors in Aunt Miriam's childhood theatre in which she staged plays "revising the histories of the world" (35), in order to revise also the deprivations she called "*illiteracies of the heart and mind*" (27). Only Peter and Emma were saved. Glass and W.H. are each a fictionalized character in the other's narrative, and each claims to have been in bed feverish with flu when the accident occurred, after which W.H. occupied Aunt Miriam's little theatre while Glass set out for the "sacred wood" "in the multi-textual regions of space" (42). Actually, the shipwreck in which Aunt Miriam, the female creator, and her young actors drowned can be read as the shipwreck of civilization. Both "Third"- and "First"-World catastrophes are evoked such as the Guyana strike and riots in 1948 (also the hub of the historical reconstruction in *The Eye*), the destruction of earlier Western civilizations, the two World Wars, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the civil war in Lebanon and the Chernobyl disaster.

In the striking opening of the novel, Ghost, the "numinous scarecrow" (1) appears, rising out of the sea and the wreck of a great ship on the beach of the universe. While in *Carnival* New Forest represented the Caribbean, Old New Forest stands here for the "global theatre of mankind" encompassing old and new worlds. Ghost, the "spectre of wholeness" who embodies the residue of opposite fates (conquistadorial and victimized) comes to Glass as night is falling on twentieth-century civilization. He comes as his conscience, dumb at first yet eloquent with disasters resulting from originally hopeful policies: the axe falling on plantation El Dorado but leaving the slaves homeless, falling on dynasties and privileges in 1914-18 but sending to death the unemployed and, in Wilfred Owen's words, "children ardent for some desperate glory," falling in 1939 on Chamberlain's *peace in our time*. "Why", asks Glass, "must we axe evil and hurt ourselves?" (9) Nevertheless, he agrees to hide Ghost from Ulysses Frog, the immigration officer who sees in this apparition both God and Beast and wants to capture him. Ulysses Frog is an ambivalent Faustian figure "who patrol[s] the world in every national costume" (6) and whose very idealism and longing to entrap "the glorious Beast ... from time immemorial ... had led him blindly into the uniform he wore ... patrolling the beach of the sacred wood" (10). His mistress Calypso (Homeric nymph and West Indian musician) sings a Caribbean folksong voicing the lament of the slaves on the Middle Passage. When Glass resists Frog and is 'axed by him (another version of

his death), his head "topple[s] into the globe," (11) a dismemberment which sets him on his quest for the resurrection.

Glass's name naturally conveys both reflection and transparency,<sup>21</sup> reflection and thus sharing of the biases that prevail in the world (particularly Frog's) and the transparency concomitant with creation, whose very origins he attempts to grasp, particularly in the first half of the novel which reconstructs his birth and childhood. Glass can be seen as the fictional offspring of the "glass woman" in *Carnival* in whom Masters saw himself as a foetus. A similar "pre-natal adventure"<sup>22</sup> occurs here when Glass, a foetus in his mother's womb, responds to his grandfather's revised version of *Faust* which his mother is typing. His grandfather, poet and mathematician, was himself a Faustian character who went pork-knocking for "crass gold" but was converted when he heard voices singing "Stone Cold Dead in the Market" (Calypso's lament) and within it the faint whisper of his future grandson, clearly his spiritual progeny. Glass was born the year his grandfather died, 1945, when the bomb fell on Hiroshima: "[My mother's] contractions began. *The bomb fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*" (17). The simultaneousness of the two events, "birth threaded into death," (17) illustrates a basic conviction that each catastrophe carries its own seed of rebirth.

The child in Harris's fiction is always a symbol of resurrection which is here probed more deeply since Glass is "revised foetus" ("foetal terror revised, foetal hope revised" [13]), whose imaginative quest after death makes him re-live the turbulence and chaos into which he was born. A dazzling nature imagery weaves the cosmic setting of ocean (crest of the waves and bottom of the sea), flatlands and sky in which Ghost's apparition and Glass's rebirth as *redbreast* (also "lost golden species" and "lantern-butterfly") take place, a "sacred wood" of iridescent beauty, nevertheless menaced by "Capital block prosperity" and "Marxist block necessity" (12,13), block suggesting monolithic ideologies, the auction block of slavery and the block on which heads roll. Glass is tempted from infancy to seize "the kingdoms of space" (20,66) and the bait of simulated life offered to him by Faust but he desists and acquires his own organs of perception, *ear, eye*, and above all his own *voice* when he screams and rejects Faust's "kingdom bell" (23). While the Easter bells in Goethe's First *Faust* prevent the hero from committing suicide, they are here the instrument of temptation. Indeed, in spite of, or precisely because of, the prevailing Faustian morality, Faust the tempter is also a major guide in Glass's quest towards a "waste land through which to plumb the rebirth of [his] age" (15). He appears again when Glass reaches the city of Skull and must ascend the Mountain of Folly. Skull, the nihilistic city of the swamps is "archetypal colony" (54) where a hollow and doomed humanity live in terror and uncertainty "held in thrall by the logic of violence, the logic of hell" (57). It is also the seat of progress which Faustian technology has transformed into a simulated, "an electric paradise. Cheap energy is the opium of the masses, the new lotus" (54).

While Goethe's Second *Faust* presents humanity's aspiration towards progress and the rational ideal of freedom and perfectibility (*streben*), Harris's shows that the ideal has been perverted. Temptations may be material or ideological as when Third-World populations yield not only to Faustian ambition but to the lotus flower exuding not death

but "the drug of deprivation that looks like the seed of black (or white) purity, the black (or white) seed of God, when the drummer of the senses protests in a fever against the ills of the world that are as much in him as in those he assaults. The lotus flower of addictive bias that hardens into terror!" (30) In a world which puts its faith in material progress Faust, "the comedian of the machine," is a "prodigious immortal" (22). Others give in to fake spiritual temptations "convinced [they] possessed a duty to maim or kill in upholding the laws of God" (49), not to mention the political lures of "dangerous superpowers professing the good intention out of cunning self-interest, the good life out of expedient design" (67). Skull is full of refugees who have given in to various visions of new El Dorados, and when on the Mountain of Folly beyond Skull, Glass comes upon the window of Billionnaire Death who explains that from the World Wars alone he pocketed billions of royalty, Glass looks at "the terrible opera of an age" (68) and the masks of the victims *through* the eyes of Death. Yet this very identification with the vision of Fictionalized Death leads him on to the "hospital of infinity," the vortex below the Mountain of Folly, first under the guidance of Peter, his childhood friend, then of Tiresias, the "seer of the underworld" (80) (also the leader of a steel band, who died protesting in the Guyana strike).

As in Harris's earlier "comedies,"<sup>23</sup> the pilgrims's progress and "translation" occurs through the recognition of a central spiritual irony at the heart of all life, a capacity to discriminate between "LIKE YET UNLIKE FORCES" (23) which assume different shapes in his narratives. As already shown, the Easter bells, a symbol of resurrection, are used by Faust to tempt Glass into an act of possession, while on the Mountain of Folly he tempts him and Peter to seize a "glorious rope" to climb into heaven, which they reject to follow the "true seam" that will take them *through* the Mountain (72). The central irony here is the distinction between illusions or simulations of immortality and, as we shall see, true survival in "Infinity's chain" (71). As "*Fallen angel from the workshop of the gods, ambivalent sceptic of the purposes of evil, reluctant doctor of the soul,*" Faust incarnates this irony. When Glass begins to re-live, as it were, his Grandfather's revisionary *Faust* (19), he (Faust) appears, as we saw, as both tempter and guide, inducing in Glass through his very temptations (to which Glass sometimes succumbs) and the horrors he makes him witness "the ironies of strangest hidden conscience" (15) his grandfather had also experienced in the "sacred wood," so that Glass acquires the ironical capacity "to mirror yet repudiate and breach Skull reflexes and automatic behaviours" (60). Paradoxically, the "bridge of wisdom" is also the "Faustian bridge" (52,53) arching through opposite worlds, like the suspension bridge in *The Eye*. Faust explains that he must be *read* properly with a literate imagination (24) and Glass wonders later: "Were not mockery and self-mockery a measure in themselves of the changing shroud, the changing investitures, of bias?" (77) When he borrows Faust's "Quetzalcoatl eyes in which were entwined the marriage of heaven and earth,"<sup>24</sup> he perceives the movement and parallels at the heart of the universe:

The backward shift, the forward shift, the folly, the creativity, the parallel laughters of the universe, the laughter of grace and mystery for which one pays dear, the laughter of the electric machine, of mechanical simulation, one buys cheap. (64)

I have already indicated that in this "fictional autobiography" Glass's quest "for the nature and the meaning of value" (9) is also a quest into the nature of creation and fiction. All Harris's fictions illustrate through antithetical poetic imagery what he called "Adversarial Contexts and Creativity," which means more than a Blakean progression through contraries. It implies a descent into humanity's buried so-called "savage" past and a probing into, as well as a partial identification with, the alien "adversary within and without." Creativity is rooted in a profound grasp of those elements both foreign and native to ourselves ("the everlasting stranger within oneself"). Fiction grows, as it were, from the accumulated intangible remains of human experience in the "womb of space."<sup>25</sup> Hence the author's constant re-visions of "living texts," his own and other writers'. In the wake of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Harris frequently intersperses his narratives with images or phrases borrowed from other writers but in a way which modifies their original meaning and liberates them from a given or fixed cultural frame. For example, the frequently mentioned "chapel perilous" in this novel alters both the meaning of Jessie Weston's commentary in *From Ritual to Romance* and of Eliot's symbolism. This process is here expanded, so much so that echoes or transformed tags of multifarious origins offer a kaleidoscopic view into the "universal imagination" (82) which sustains the novel. Faust (Marlowe's and Goethe's) relates to a pre-Columbian myth. *The Tempest*, Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," *Treasure Island*, Burns's "Auld Lang Syne," *Under Milk Wood*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Four Quartets* and possibly Hardy's "Moments of Vision" (among others) voice cultural contrasts and parallels. There is a juxtaposition by Ghost of "familiar texts" by de la Mare and Eliot with Calypso's folksong:

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,  
Knocking on the moonlit door.  
  
Belly to belly  
Back to back  
Ah don't give a damn  
Ah done dead a'ready  
  
And I Tiresias have foresuffered all  
I who sat by Thebes below the wall  
And walked among the lowest of the dead. (32)

Though the three extracts refer to the dead and suggest an "absence" which is also a "presence," there is at first sight little connection between them. Yet, as Glass realizes, in spite of the cultural gulf which separates them, they counterpoint each other and "become strangely cross-cultural,"(32) expressions of an "enduring tradition" (48) which, as suggested, grows from the residues of human experience. This "enduring tradition" is the reverse side of Leavis's "Great Tradition" which, as Michael Gilkes rightly points out, was supported by "the Imperial Adventure."<sup>26</sup>

Unlike Goethe's protagonist who finally climbs into heaven, Glass's quest is both one of ascent and descent and at the end of it he is back in Skull though preparing to sail into the future to meet Emma, certainly a subversive counterpart to Jane Austen's heroine since she is a priest who in AD 2025 is to become Archbishop of Canterbury, a foil to woman-hating which has been a "long-standing taint in the body of our civilization" (74). Like the Arawak virgin in *Palace of the Peacock*, she wears the seamless garment of the

saving muse and does indeed offer the "religious hope" (44) Glass looked for, stimulating a balance between "terror" and "sacrament" (87). We remember that both she and Peter had survived the shipwreck, and Glass's last conversation with Tiresias is on the true nature of survival; he presents it as a seed "between survivor and non-survivor,"

a seed or frail bond between light and shadow, a frail window of strangest flesh-and-blood between the visible and the invisible. That seed is the primitive impulse of the resurrection of the body.... To measure or weigh ourselves against the light-in-the-shadow, the shadow-in-the-light of others is to deepen a reality that breaches the ailing premises of time. (81)

Glass's fictional autobiography is thus a spiritual quest not towards a final goal but rather towards the apprehension of the nexus and frail equilibrium between the antinomies of existence, which is what makes for survival. "Fiction," said W.H. to Glass, "explores the partiality of the conditioned mind and the chained body, chained to lust, chained to waste" (49). Just before vanishing himself, Glass looks at a blank page in his autobiography and wonders: "Whose hand would seek mine, whose mask become my age in the future?" (82) In the Postscript written by Ghost in AD 2025 as he is on the point of being engulfed by a wave, he converses "with the mind and the hand of the new mid-twenty-first-century drowned voyager who is to be reflected in Redbreast Glass" (85). In the course of his quest Glass had envisioned the year 2025 when W.H. himself would have vanished and "someone else - some other ageing mask - played the role of authorship/character in my book as if I were he, he me" (57). Thus new faces and masks take on the role of author and character and there is no end to the "revivification of the spaces of meaning that tie one voyaging generation to another" (87). The last words of the novel, "Remember me, remember Ghost" (88) which may paraphrase Dante (*Purgatorio*, v. 133) or perhaps Christina Rossetti's "Remember" sum up the "infinite rehearsal" in which Ghost within Robin Redbreast Glass within W.H. have been involved.

From *The Eye of the Scarecrow* onwards, Harris's fiction shows that we live in a hollow dying age though he sees that very hollowness as "the ground of creative conscience and value" (51). Like many contemporary writers, he equates life with a text ("language is world"<sup>27</sup>) but *not* with *discourse*, and his work does not emphasize the fictionality of fiction. On the contrary, as W.H. insists at some point (48), fiction reveals truths and the reality of the world, while fictionalized author and characters are, as indicated above, mere mediators or "vessels" through which fiction takes shape. It could be argued that to reveal truth or rather truths (since Harris insists on the heterogeneity of truth and the "uncertainty," "the ambiguity of the Word" [50]) has always been the function of art but Harris's view reverses the traditional view since fiction, for him, is reality in the deepest sense while "authors become unreal" (48). In this novel Harris gives the impression of attempting to approach the mystery of creation from both sides, as if his protagonist were mid-way between the living and the dead. Glass explores the "origins" of sensation and of perception (35), the origins of sexuality (74), the origins also of spirit (19) and of value (51). On the other hand, through Tiresias' eyes he sees "the negative film of Thebes ... the negative film of ancient walls under the sea ... Napoleon's negative crown and Alexander's sceptre" (72). In a world falling apart Harris significantly uses this very disintegration (which found its theoretical equivalent in "deconstruction") to urge a

reconstruction with the "building blocks of humanity" (18) or, as he put it in an earlier allegory, "to re-sensitize our biased globe into moveable squares within and beyond every avalanche of greed and despair."<sup>28</sup>

The final word in this novel is Ghost's, who sees the resurrection he has enacted as

a complex revival of buried resources arching through many cultures and civilizations towards a true voice, a true ear, a true dialogue that the resurrection body nourishes as its ultimate originality. (85)

#### Notes

- 1 Milan Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, Paris: Gallimard 1986, p. 21, translation mine.
- 2 Wilson Harris, "Comedy and Modern Allegory: a Personal view of Dantesque Scenes in Modern Fiction", in: *A Shaping of Connections*, Hena Maes-Jelinek, Kirsten Holst Petersen, Anna Rutherford, eds, Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press 1989, pp. 127-128.
- 3 Helen Tiffin draws attention to the fact that until a fairly recent past more attention was given to practice than theory in comparative studies of Commonwealth literature. She pleads for a clear definition of criteria specific to post-colonial literatures. See "Commonwealth Literature: Comparison and Judgement", Dieter Riemenschneider, ed., *The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag 1983, pp. 19-35. On the definition of post-colonial criteria, see the recently published book by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge 1989.
- 4 The catastrophic eclipse of conquered people(s) is indeed a major theme in his work. However, unlike most interpreters of the conquest of America, Harris emphasizes both the terror and the "mutuality" the clash gave rise to and sees this duality epitomized in the Carib bone-flute, i.e., the musical instrument fashioned by the Carib Indians out of their cannibalized enemy's bone. On this subject see his "Adversarial Contexts and Creativity", in: *New Left Review*, N° 154, Nov./Dec. 1985, pp. 124-128.
- 5 Wilson Harris, *Tradition, the Writer and Society*, London: New Beacon Books 1967, p. 29.
- 6 "Adversarial Contexts and Creativity", p. 125.
- 7 *Tradition, the Writer and Society*, p. 36.
- 8 Wilson Harris, *The Guyana Quartet*, London: Faber and Faber 1985, p. 9. Besides *Palace of the Peacock*, the *Quartet* includes *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961), *The Whole Armour* (1962) and *The Secret Ladder* (1963).
- 9 Wilson Harris, *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, London: Faber and Faber 1965, p. 25.
- 10 Wilson Harris, *The Infinite Rehearsal*, London: Faber and Faber 1987. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.
- 11 Wilson Harris, "Valediction of Fiction: a Personal View of Imaginative Truth", in: Maggie Butcher, ed., *Tibisiri*, Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press 1989, pp. 44 and 51.
- 12 "Intuitive clues' ... appear to have been planted by another hand. It is as if a daemon navigates within the imageries in the text.", "Valediction of Fiction", p. 45.
- 13 "Comedy and Modern Allegory", p. 17.
- 14 In *The Eye of the Scarecrow* the emphasis is on the metaphysical notion of self-exile which underlies that of "infinite rehearsal." In: *Antigones* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), a comparative study of a myth nearly as haunting as Faust's, George Steiner traces the

- concept of self-exile to Hegel and writes: "It is to ourselves that we are strangers", p. 16. So does Julia Kristeva in her recent book, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris: Fayard 1988, p. 249.
- 15 "Comedy and Modern Allegory," p. 127. Italics mine.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- 17 Wilson Harris, "Oedipus and the Middle Passage." Paper read at the University of Liège on 18 June 1988, p.2. Forthcoming in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek, eds., Amsterdam: Rodopi 1989.
- 18 The name "Robin Redbreast" may have been inspired by Blake's "Auguries of Innocence" but Robin could also have been named after the ostler in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, who tries to imitate the magician, while "Redbreast," whatever its connotations, is part of the rich bird imagery in this novel, a creature of the air counterpointing and complementing water creatures (cf. "Frog").
- 19 *Tradition, the Writer and Society*, p. 48.
- 20 Ian Munro & Reinhard Sander, eds., *KAS-KAS, Interviews with Three Caribbean Writers in Texas: George Lamming, C.L.R. James, Wilson Harris*, African and Afro-American Research Institute, Austin, Texas, 1972, p. 52.
- 21 See Wilson Harris, "Reflection and Vision", Hena Maes-Jelinek, ed., *Commonwealth Literature and the Modern World*, Didier, 1975, pp. 15-19.
- 22 Harris has explained that *after* writing *Carnival* he came upon Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966) and used a passage from this book as an epigraph for his novel. The first sentence of the epigraph reads: "The wanderings of the soul after death are prenatal adventures; a journey by water, in a ship which itself a goddess, to the gates of rebirth." This is also relevant to *The Infinite Rehearsal*. For Harris's explanation, see "Valediction of Fiction", pp. 44-46.
- 23 Harris uses "comedy" in his own idiosyncratic way. It implies an ironic transformation or conversion by re-living the very evil one seeks to eradicate, moving *through* and *beyond* it. Since *Black Marsden* his fictions are called "comedies" (*Carnival* is re-vised "Divine Comedy"). *The Infinite Rehearsal* is "Dateless Day Infinite Comedy," "dateless day" evoking the Mexican calendar and the timeless passageway of memory in which Glass meets Peter and Emma.
- 24 The duality of Faust's "ancient eyes" (64) is related to Quetzalcoatl in whose dual nature the fish and bird imagery in the narrative is rooted.
- 25 This phrase is the title of a book of essays by Harris, Westport: Greenwood Press 1983. It refers to the inner territory that must be penetrated and revived to give birth to the "resurrection child."
- 26 Michael Gilkes, Review of *The Infinite Rehearsal*, *ARTRAGE*, Intercultural Arts Magazine, No 8, Autumn 1987, 15.
- 27 "Valediction of Fiction", p. 51.
- 28 *Black Marden*, London: Faber and Faber 1972, p. 66.