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THE NAKED DESIGN

A reading of
Palace of the Peacock



For Anna Rutherford

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INTRODUCTION

Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative... it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.

Henry James

It may seem surprising that the names of two writers as dissimilar as Henry James and Wilson Harris should be associated. It becomes understandable if one remembers that

James's fiction heralded the psychological novel of the first half of the twentieth century, of which Harris is an original and perhaps unexpected continuator. The above quotation is a most relevant description of the very substance of Harris's work: the unfinished, evolving character of experience as a mental happening and the translation of invisible energy into perceptible forms. His fiction runs counter to the realistic trend in the novel that came into fashion again after the second World War; it is predominantly inward-looking, and life, particularly in the later novels, is apprehended in the flow of the characters' thoughts and dreams. The sophisticated techniques of novelists like Joyce and Faulkner are further developed in his rendering of specifically South American material: the impressive landscape of Guyana and its heterogeneous population. These are the source of his vision of man and his role in the universe. The Guyana of Harris's novels is obviously a microcosm standing for the world at large. His main subject is the growth in consciousness of his characters, their understanding of the past and of the diversified configuration of the Guyanese community; such understanding, however, does not only lead them to a sense of their own distinctiveness as a nation but makes them aware of what they share with the rest of mankind.

The most traumatizing events in Guyanese history were exile (imposed or reluctantly accepted), the dismemberment of peoples (particularly African) and the exploitation of man by man. All three are major themes in Harris's fiction and take different forms according to the plane of existence on which they are experienced and the characters' level of consciousness or unconsciousness. In the *Guiana Quartet*, for instance, the protagonists range from the most ignorant and illiterate labourer or peasant, through experienced money-makers and well-to-do farmers, to the educated younger generation and finally the intellectual representative of technological civilization. Each, however, has access in his own way to a creative vision. It

is interesting to note that the first main character, the alien invader Donne, should eventually be succeeded by the highly cultivated Guyanese Fenwick in *The Secret Ladder* (both lead a multiracial crew into the interior), who not only grasps the full meaning of his country's past but realizes that such understanding can give rise to a genuinely new conception of man and society.

Exile, dismemberment and exploitation are shown to be interdependent and to involve separation and division. Exile, the original condition of most Guyanese, is now the lot of the Amerindians and the descendants of runaway slaves, of those whom prejudice excludes from the recognized and established society; but it is also the state of that part of oneself, of the inner community (ancestors, dead and unborn selves), that we all carry and often deny. The achievement of consciousness corresponds to a retrieval of those outer or inner outcasts but also involves for the protagonist a deliberate going into exile – an exile from the self and all the prejudices that imprison it in order to meet the 'other' or others on his (or their) own territory. The recognition of exile as a significant aspect of modern life and its transformation into a fruitful experience link Harris with the earlier great practitioners of the art of the psychological novel, Henry James and James Joyce. The theme is fully developed in *The Eye of the Scarecrow*. All Harris's novels, however, express the same need to renounce an authoritative, one-sided view of oneself or one's group, which can only be maintained at the expense of others. Possessiveness, exploitation and/or self-exploitation are seen as distorting all human relations and pervading all fields of human activity. Harris shows that they are the more difficult to eradicate as, except when deliberately ambitious or greedy like Donne and Ram in *The Far Journey of Oudin*, man is usually unaware that an instinct for possession lurks behind most of his attitudes.

The dismemberment suffered by all who were transported to

Guyana was a psychic as much as a physical ordeal since the slaves snatched away from many different tribes had no common language in which to communicate and were suddenly thrust into a complete void, in which, isolated from familiar surroundings and people, they were unable even to give voice to the psychological collapse that must have followed the disintegration of their world. Harris sees in this inner and outer dislocation the condition of modern man and peoples, inwardly divided and outwardly cut off from their fellow beings. Yet it is characteristic of his optimistic faith in man that he should also see in this very dislocation a prelude to the discovery of a fundamental unity between all forms of being, the recognition of which is itself a preliminary to a regenerated consciousness. It is thus imperative that the Guyanese (and implicitly contemporary man) should re-live this disintegration imaginatively and grasp the true nature of the cleavage among and within themselves before attempting to progress towards wholeness and 'community of being'. We have here the essential philosophy informing Harris's narratives and the development of his major characters: the crumbling of existing premises, of the hard crust of appearances in order to reach what to human eyes must be the void but which in fact opens the way to a fluid, 'nameless' and therefore (in Harris's terms) more authentic dimension of being.

In the *Guiana Quartet* this basic process is enacted in different landscapes thus insisting that possibilities of regeneration are open to different communities. Together the four novels offer a wide picture of Guyana and its people and succinctly recall major historical facts from early colonization to later independence and the consequences that followed from this march of events. And so we move with the early explorers towards the heartland on a dangerous river between jungle walls, come back to the coastal plains where the descendants of East Indian labourers grow rice, move on to the mouth of the dark

Pomeroon river and the precarious strip of land between bush and sea with its turbulent population, then back again into the forest in the Canje region, where Fenwick meets the descendants of runaway slaves. In each novel the landscape is alive with a spirit born of the trials of the past; it is a mirror for man and a catalyst to his spiritual growth. In all four the topography of Guyana with the omnipresent water full of obstacles (in *Palace of the Peacock*), flooding the land (in *The Far Journey*), gnawing into it (in *The Whole Armour*) or turning it into a swamp (in *The Secret Ladder*) is a chart of man's soul; it exteriorizes the soul's anxieties and reflects its instability and uncertainty. These have their origin in a cruel history. But they can be turned into assets if recognized as a necessary state to be experienced before partaking in a dynamic quest for wholeness.

By making uncertainty into a positive element Wilson Harris modifies the usually accepted conception of character. There is an unmistakable shift in values: the relatively self-sufficient, 'strong' character of the traditional novel is not necessarily aware of a need for change and might even consider as evil any alteration of his accepted standards, whereas in Harris's fiction the characters must accept a state of flux. Evil for Harris is mainly the non-acceptance which excludes the 'other' from dialogue with the self. That is why he objects to fiction that upholds the perpetuation of given, unquestioned conceptions of the individual or society; in his opinion neither can ever be taken for granted. Those of his characters who at the outset strive to maintain their position or to conform to a static order not only lack the open-mindedness required for a constant development but are also obstacles to other people's fulfilment. Donne is an obvious example but Magda in *The Whole Armour* is a more difficult one to understand. By ordinary standards, she is a magnificently powerful character. But her very strength and self-assurance make her utterly blind to the potential for spiritual discovery and renewal that her less assertive son

responds to. By the same standards, Fenwick must appear irresolute and weak. Yet he is the one who with full maturity recognizes his (or man's) limitations and throws light on the whole *Quartet* by his unremitting analysis and revision of conflicting convictions. Moral strength in Harris's characters demands a good deal of humility and the courage to face the often terrifying ordeal incurred by the breakdown of a familiar view of reality. However varied their experience, all Harris's main characters face this test through which alone the hidden face of truth can be revealed.

Before this breakdown is discussed any further, one frequent objection to Harris's characters must be forestalled. Contrary to what has been said, they are rooted in the concrete world particularly in the *Quartet*. As a matter of fact, it is only the experience of living and working in concrete situations that can generate the necessary tension to impel the characters towards self-discovery. But even the most concrete objects or situations suggest a quality of being (see the description of Oudin and his hut at the beginning of *The Far Journey*) just as descriptions of nature convey a reality beyond. Through the themes he develops in the *Quartet* (the discovery of unity and of the meaning of freedom, responsibility and genuine authority) Harris is concerned with the nature of man as described by the philosopher Martin Buber: 'When we recognize man's finitude we must *at the same time* recognize his participation in infinity, not as two juxtaposed qualities but as the twofold nature of the processes in which alone man's existence becomes recognizable.' Buber's italicized words '*at the same time*' point to the main feature in Harris's fiction, its two-dimensional reality: the world of appearance and its spiritual counterpart, the 'moving naked design' that informs it, invisible to human eyes but, Harris suggests in *Palace of the Peacock*, 'structural', enduring and accessible to intuition.

Although the characters do not consciously attempt to

discover this dynamic reverse of the visible world, they sometimes perceive it in moments of vision or face it when they reach the frontier between life and death. What occurs in each case is a crumbling or erosion of what Harris sees as self-made fortifications imprisoning the mind. Their disintegration is conveyed through the movement and structure of the narratives themselves, which destroy the illusory fixity and the impression of completion one gets from the concrete world. Thus form and content concur to produce the same effect. Reality is approached from many different angles and through different modes of perception. It is sometimes described objectively by a third-person narrator, who disappears at times and leaves the reader confronted with the content of a character's mind; this subjective presentation itself alters as the character's consciousness is laid bare through juxtapositions (without transition) of fully conscious thoughts or reasonings, moments of intense awareness, dreams and even hallucinations, while sometimes different levels of consciousness overlap. This discontinuity in the character's mode of perception is often provoked by unexpected incidents and catastrophes, real or re-lived (the 'crash' which shatters self-created barriers), and is paralleled by a breakdown of chronological time. The character, however, is at once the instrument and the object of his exploration, and his changing mode of apprehension usually brings about a breaking apart of his rigid and self-contained world and makes possible his insight into a deeper reality. So that dismemberment, 'breaking down things in order to see *through things*' (*Kas-Kas*, p. 52), becomes discovery, just as in the later novels the diminished state of man (the scarecrow man) becomes a necessary stage prior to a new growth in consciousness and imagination.

Though the general movement of Harris's narratives is one of disruption followed by reconstruction or the promise of rebirth, the main character's progress is not straightforward.

Nor is the stripping of his soul complete except in *Palace of the Peacock*. He progresses according to a jigsaw pattern in which growth and fulfilment alternate with setbacks or are interrupted by unpredictable circumstances which demand a new choice of him before his advance can be resumed and previous insights further explored. Within his all-encompassing consciousness partial deaths are followed by partial rebirths as fragments of experience are understood and assimilated. Harris also allows for the haphazardness with which such fragments can appear on the slate of consciousness or disappear from it. One therefore gets a fluid, intricate, many-layered portion of life. The novels are often inconclusive and even when they end with the death of the protagonist, like *Tumatumari*, this death is also birth for it is a death into what Harris calls 'the ever-living present'.

It is becoming increasingly clear that, however different from its predecessor in plot, subject and setting, each novel is a new instalment of a 'work in progress': themes and metaphors which are briefly presented in one novel receive a gradually fuller treatment in later ones. A good example is the fall of man: dealt with in a short episode in *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, it is at the very centre of Harris's preoccupations in *Companions of the Day and Night*. After the *Guiana Quartet* and *Heartland* (which can be seen as a transitional work, winding up the quartet and anticipating further developments), the novels take place mostly in one character's mind. Through the interplay of material dimensions with 'immaterial perspectives' Harris goes on exploring the 'densities' of the individual consciousness and the buried content of former civilizations in present-day societies. His field of exploration extends to other landscapes and cultures (Scottish and Mexican). But it also deepens so that much of *Companions of the Day and Night* seems to be written from that innermost, nameless state the protagonist has reached while travelling through the vestiges (material and

psychological) of Mexican history. It is a state of 'aloneness' within as well as beyond the trappings of civilizations. It therefore evinces a basic nakedness and frailty common to all men that must be accepted with humility and compassion for the sake of a unity in the future, latent within the 'naked design', that cannot be reached by any easy path.

Her ancient dress was her hair after all, falling to the ground and glistening and waving until it grew so frail and loose and endless, the straw in the cradle entered and joined it and the whole room was enveloped in it as a melting essence yields itself and spreads itself from the topmost pinnacle and stars into *the roots of self and space*.

(*Palace of the Peacock*)¹

The equation of self with space in *Palace of the Peacock* occurs at a crucial stage in the fashioning of Donne's vision of consciousness, when he recognizes at last the 'essence' that informs the inner depths he has been confronted with while climbing the waterfall. 'Self and space' should also come with a shock of recognition to the reader, who has just been immersed in the description of the 'implements of vision',

frames, rooms, dynamic structures that remould Donne as he ascends. But these metamorphoses of the veil of water into the many spheres of experience that Donne, unsuspectingly, has housed throughout his existence will appear to many as the most difficult part of the novel. It brings into play a store of images which convey more than a symbolical correspondence between the landscape and Donne's inner life. These images are not a mere static projection of inner states. Their variability and dynamic relatedness of similarity and contrast express Wilson Harris's vision of the universe and of Man's relative place in it. Since the publication of *Palace of the Peacock*, Harris has made numerous comments on the 'drama of images in space'² or 'drama of consciousness' that is being enacted with such extraordinary creative intuition in his first novel.

From his first book of essays *Tradition the Writer and Society* to the more recently published 'A Talk on the Subjective Imagination' Wilson Harris has expressed the need for 'a new architecture of the world' or a new 'architecture of consciousness' that can only be achieved through a 'capacity to digest and liberate contrasting spaces'.³ This apparently puzzling proposition underlies Harris's deep concern with both the art of fiction and the state of community in the world. By making space or images in space the basic and saving element of a dialectical process of renewal, he trusts the artistic imagination to be the prime mover of change not only in art but in society. 'Space', Wilson Harris writes in *History, Fable and Myth*, 'is our weakest resource in that we appear to move freely through it or bend it freely to our wills'.⁴ This malleable, intangible dimension, which offers man an unlimited field of action, lends itself to the realization of all potentialities and can contain the best and the worst of human achievement ('contrasting spaces'). It is not merely the receptacle of good or evil existence; it is lived

in but also *lives* and is capable of embodying moral notions or expressing sensations and feelings that can sometimes find no other outlet. In *Tradition the Writer and Society*⁵ Wilson Harris gives a striking illustration of this spatialization of experience. Discussing Haitian voodoo, he explains that the dancers, moving in a trance, are 'turned into "objects"' while the inner drama which arises out of their subconscious becomes externalized in space. Space is the medium, 'the sole expression and recollection of the dance — as if "space" is the character of the dance'. Similarly, West-Indian Limbo is seen as a dramatization in space of the tribal dismemberment and inner dislocation that the Middle Passage imposed on African slaves. Harris sees in these dances an art of compensation, an attempt to express through space, however limited, as in the case of Limbo, what could not be expressed in words since most slaves were deprived of a common language; and he also reads in them the invocation of 'a curious psychic re-assembly of the parts of the dead god or gods',⁶ that is to say the representation of an unconscious wish for wholeness that could be the source of a genuinely West-Indian art.

What is the relation between the inarticulate dancer and the consciously creative/articulate writer? They share a common territory like 'the complementary halves of a broken stage'.⁷ The kind of illumination that the dancer in a trance unconsciously expresses in outer space is visualized by the poet in his inner territory. 'The "vision" of the poet', Harris writes, 'possesses a "spatial" logic or "convertible" property of imagination'.⁸ This capacity to *visualize*, to open the 'living eye' to the inner broken territory is described in *Palace of the Peacock*.

In his book *La Poétique de l'Espace* the French scientist-philosopher Gaston Bachelard explains that such an illumination is not the simple reflection of a light in the outer

world but is truly a phenomenon of the soul which animates what would otherwise be an inanimate object for the mind. Like the poet Pierre-Jean Jouve, who writes 'la Poésie est une âme inaugurant une forme',⁹ Bachelard considers images of space as more than mere substitutes for an outer reality, though they are in constant dialogue with it. Immensity, says Bachelard, is in us. 'It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life restrains and that prudence checks, but it revives in solitude'.¹⁰ He also insists on the concreteness of that inner space, or 'space as substance' (*espace-substance*), that expands with the consciousness of our existence. Though it may be difficult for ordinary people to accept as real the inner world created by the poet's language, he 'lives this inversion of dimensions, the reversal of inner/outer perspectives'.¹¹ By musing on his images it is possible to participate in the interpenetration of inner and outer spaces that he experiences. The intimacy of the room he describes 'becomes our intimacy'.¹²

Once we accept as real the inner spaces through which the poet guides us and the power of the redeeming and creative imagination to bring to life, i.e. to set in motion, the fixed or 'fossilized' landscapes and ghosts which inhabit them, it becomes easier to follow Wilson Harris's thought. What he is asking modern man to do is to 're-sensitize', and so to experience in his being, through the sensuous impressions and the feelings that a truly lived poetic image can arouse, the contrasting and divisive situations of his past and present existences. The Guyanese consciousness, for example, is saturated with images of its terrifying past, frozen images of historical antagonisms between the different races that compose it. Yet it is a 'variable' past since its images can be re-animated and seen from different perspectives. 'The question which arises', says Wilson Harris, 'is how one can begin to let these parts act on each other in a manner which

fulfils *in the person* the most nebulous instinct for a vocation of being and independent spirit within a massive landscape of apparent lifelessness which yields nevertheless the essential denigration and erosion of historical perspectives'.¹³ Letting 'these parts act on each other', lending oneself to a dialogue with the past or between images of the past within oneself, is the process in which the writer (and the reader with him) is immersed through the unpredictable (because genuinely new and creative) medium of language.

In his 'Talk on the Subjective Imagination' Wilson Harris alludes to the creative energy that can be released by a juxtaposition or constellation of images and illustrates this with passages from *Palace of the Peacock*. My purpose is to show how in this novel the architectural, dynamic revision and re-constitution of the past works itself out through a store of images intimately related to the Guyanese experience. Since much has already been written on *Palace of the Peacock*, I shall take it for granted that the story line is known and understood. I shall deal specifically with the effects of language, the use of similar words in altering contexts, and the interrelatedness and contrasts between words and expressions. In this way I hope to show that language is for Harris the mainspring of vision, 'the life-blood of *seeing* and responding without succumbing . . . to what is apparently seen and heard'.¹⁴

The animated beginning of *Palace of the Peacock* creates the impression that the narrative is taking up, at a moment of crisis, a life-story that remains temporarily in the dark, and that it takes it up at the very moment when the main character's life is passing through physical destruction into another state. The dual personality of Donne is presented both objectively and subjectively by a third-person and a

first-person narrator. From the outset the horseman and his inseparable double who, we realize later, is also the visionary self, are represented as the contrasting and divided parts of one being, who is both dead and alive. At this early stage the I-narrator is eclipsed by the powerful deadness of Donne, and as he bends over his twin brother, he realizes that 'the sun blinded and ruled [his own] living sight' (p. 13). That the sun can also be identified with their 'dead seeing eye' becomes obvious at the end of chapter I, when N.¹⁵ says: 'His dead eye blinded mine. "Look at the sun", he cried in a stamping terrible voice' (p. 19). As Wilson Harris has remarked, the sun in Guyana is often destructive; in the narrative it is a fit symbol for both the destructive will-power of the conqueror and the opening consciousness with which it is identified towards the end of the novel.

N.'s dream immediately follows the death of Donne (killed by the vengeful Mariella) and seems to have been started by it. We are free to imagine that the dream, and the whole of the novel, take place in the timeless flash in which man is said to re-live his past at the moment of death, or that Donne's consciousness moves on after his physical death into an 'ever-living present'. N.'s dream is a reconstruction of the significant events of Donne's life. It is an imaginative experience which nevertheless strikes the reader with the immediacy of concrete life, for the phenomenal world, both outside and within N.'s consciousness, is the necessary setting of his 'dreaming' quest. The word 'dream' is used frequently in Books I and IV intimating the subjective and intuitive character of the exploration and, within the limits of a linear and plausible story, giving it a freedom that a purely objective or rational approach would exclude. The word 'musing,' also used frequently, combines 'muse' with the notion expressed in the French word *rêverie*, which connotes the kind of contemplation that stimulates the imagination.

N. awakes to his 'second' life in an oppressive room that might be either a maternity ward or the cell of a prisoner sentenced to die: it contains the contrasting possibilities also focused in the 'living closed spiritual eye' and the 'dead seeing material eye'. When N. remembers an earlier similar experience and the primitive desire he had felt 'to govern or be governed' Donne appears as the 'gaoler and ruler' who reigns over both their inner house and the outer savannahs. Mariella also emerges as a part of themselves ('[her] breath was on my lips') in the haze of N.'s eye, and the duality of the hero manifests itself in Donne's ill-treatment of her and N.'s moderate attempts to appease her wrath. Mariella soon vanishes from their consciousness for Donne 'had conquered and crushed the region he ruled, annihilating everyone and devouring himself in turn' (p. 24). Mariella is now an obsession and an enigma, the real purpose of their journey.

As N. re-lives Donne's 'first innocent voyage' in quest of her, his brother's original lust for her returns. Yet this thirst for possession is inseparable from 'a desire and need' as yet undefined but related to the understanding and spiritual fulfilment with which Mariella will become more and more clearly identified in the course of their journey. Its stimulating effect makes him see now the 'bodily crew of labouring men [he] had looked for in vain' (p. 25) in the savannahs, the ghosts Donne has 'rake[d] up in his hanging world and house' (p. 24). Frightening as the expedition threatens to be, N. cannot leave the crew any more than he can separate from Donne. To perceive the significance of experience entails acknowledging the reality of all who take part in it, and the truth of experience now impresses N. as 'the enormous ancestral and twin fantasy of death-in-life and life-in-death' (p. 25).

Though the reader may find it difficult at first to establish some connection between events in Book I, he will discover

upon closer examination that they are linked by an inner logic, one vision or 'dream' stimulating another. N.'s re-awakening to the ambivalence and the tyrannies of his and Donne's personality is conveyed through a series of related images and word patterns that recur frequently in a slightly modified form, introducing each time a new association. They weave an intricate fabric in which each element is seen distinctly in its own right, yet all are intimately related. As a starting point we can take the first description of Donne just after he has been shot by Mariella, and trace its ramifications in Book I:

The horseman gave a bow to *heaven* like a *hanging man* to his *executioner* (p. 13).

I put my ... feet on the ground in a room that oppressed me as though I stood in ... the ... *cell* of a prisoner (p. 14).

Someone rapped on the door of my *cell* and *room* (p. 14).

We walked to the *gate* ... taller than a *hanging man* ... the gate was as curious and arresting as the *prison house* (p. 16).

I ... leaned ... against the frail brilliant *gallows-gate* of the sky (p. 16).

The *map* of the savannahs was a dream (p. 20).

I could not help cherishing my symbolic *map* and my *bodily prejudice* like a well-known *room* and *house of superstition* within which I dwelt. I saw *this kingdom of man* turned into a *colony* and *battleground* of the spirit (p. 20).

I pored over the *map of the sun* my brother had given me (p. 20).

Trust Donne to rake up every ghost in his *hanging world* and *house* (p. 24).

This was long before he had established himself in his *brooding hanging house* (p. 24).

The nucleus of that bodily crew ... I had looked for in vain in his *republic and kingdom* (p. 25).

The leading thread in these sentences progresses from the 'hanging man' to the 'cell and room' then to the 'prison house', the 'room and house of superstition', which is also

the 'kingdom of man' yet 'colony' and 'battleground', then again to Donne's 'hanging world and house', 'his brooding hanging house' and finally 'his republic and kingdom'. In this progression the original outer-world image of Donne's hanging body takes on the inner-world forms, first of a self-made prison and house of superstition, and then of the kingdom he has reduced to a desert by exploiting others and himself. 'Prison' and 'kingdom' suggest contrasting states, as does the expression 'gallows-gate' which juxtaposes Donne's execution with a potential freedom (*beyond* execution) suggested by the gate. Even the word 'hanging' first used to qualify Donne's execution suggests in the other sentences in which it appears now imprisonment and death, now a link with heaven as if Donne were sustained by it. The image of the hanging man recurs with this second significance when Donne has shed his destructive self and creates a new vision: 'He slipped and gasped on the misty step and a noose fell around his neck from which he dangled until ... he had regained a breathless footing' (p. 130).

In the midst of the progression a new motif is introduced with 'map' described as a 'dream' and thereby linked to the 'dream-horseman' (p. 14), Donne, then to the 'house of superstition' and later to the sun, whose glare has been identified earlier with Donne's clear, open eye. I have also underlined the words 'heaven' and 'executioner' to indicate that they develop their own ramifications in relation to Mariella, herself a double-natured muse. Practically every simile and metaphor in the narrative would lend itself to such an analysis and show that it is from the rich texture of its language that Harris's 'novel of associations'¹⁶ grows. Images typically suggest both the abstract and the concrete as well as the recognizably human quality Harris discovers in all living creation. Nor are any of the significant images lost or left unintegrated: through a series of metamorphoses all are

brought together at the end in the construction of the palace. Similarly, words or symbols are not necessarily conscripted into one meaning: their altering significance gives the narrative its peculiar fluidity. A good example is the word 'sun' which radiates a spectrum of destructive and creative possibilities.

The intertwining of closely-knit and overlapping word-patterns often shows apparently contrasting spheres to be an extension of each other. As we shall see, the frontier between the two is not static; it even tends to disappear altogether or rather both spheres seem to be animated by a similar essence or 'spirit' which makes the frontier between them irrelevant. Donne's exclamation, 'Every boundary line is a myth' (p. 17), can be taken in more senses than one. For example, when the jungle and the river become alive to N. as he pores over his brother's map, he begins to re-live the trials of their first trip on the river in the following words:

One's *mind* was a chaos of sensation (p. 21).

From every quarter a *mindless* stream came through the ominous rocks whose presence served to pit the mad foaming face (p. 21).

The outboard engine and propeller still revolved and flashed with *mental* silent horror now that its roar had been drowned in other wilder unnatural voices whose violent din rose from beneath our feet in the waters (p. 21).

In the first sentence quoted it is the mind that sustains the assault of the river and is assailed by sensations which it registers but which the turmoil makes it impossible to analyse. The mind is reduced to a capacity to feel. The 'mindless stream' of the second example, on the contrary, implies that the stream is capable of having a mind, an assumption strengthened by the description of it as a 'mad foaming face'. This personification of the stream is a first step towards its use as a metaphor for Mariella as well as the

crew. Finally, the 'mental silent horror' of the propeller also imputes mental activity to the mechanical energy of the vehicle that carries them, whereas at the end of Book I we see Donne and the crew identified with both the engine and the river, therefore with a mechanical and a 'mindless' natural energy: 'A lull fell upon the crew, transforming them, as it had changed Donne, into the drumming current of the outboard engine and of the rapid swirling water around every shadowy stone' (p. 34). In all these examples all preconceived ideas of the categories of being are upset. So is our notion of ordinary mental activity in: 'I stifled my words and leaned over the ground to confirm the musing footfall and image I had seen and heard in my mind . . .' (p. 31). Moreover, when Wilson Harris has N. say: 'The whispering trees spun their leaves to a sudden fall wherein *the ground seemed to grow lighter in my mind* and to move to meet them in the air' (p. 27), though 'seemed' qualifies the poetic statement, he does not simply fuse inner and outer realms within one sphere but presents them both as unrestricted by our usually limited sense perceptions.

It is indeed our normal apprehension of the phenomenal world and of ourselves that is being modified and intensified through Harris's poetical associations. These always develop from the physical and the concrete and make us see through them to what N. calls 'the true substance of life' (p. 59). Such a discovery results from moments of intuition or vision which, like the revolving beam of a lighthouse, illuminates successively different areas of N.'s consciousness. The very opening of the novel is one such moment when N.'s 'dream' is stimulated by the death of Donne. Another intense moment of intuition occurs in chapter Two immediately after N. has recorded the impressions he receives from contrasting features in the forest: 'ancient blocks of shadow and ... gleaming hinges of light ... inversions of the brilliancy and the gloom of the forest' (p. 26). Wilson Harris himself

has commented on these contrasts which, he says, 'are built into character'.¹⁷ N. sees them just as he hears the sigh which, like the 'ubiquitous step' shortly afterwards, reveals a presence other than his in the forest. As he forces his way further into the jungle he becomes overwhelmed by that presence both in the bush and in himself:

At last I lifted my head into a normal position. The heavy undergrowth had lightened. The forest rustled and rippled with a sigh and ubiquitous step. I stopped dead where I was, frightened for no reason whatever. The step near me stopped and stood still. I stared around me wildly, in surprise and terror, and my body grew faint and trembling as a woman's or a child's. I gave a loud ambushed cry which was no more than an echo of myself — a breaking and grotesque voice, man and boy, age and youth speaking together. I recovered myself from my dead faint supported by old Schomburgh, on one hand, and Carroll, the young Negro boy, on the other. (pp. 27-28)

The contrasts in the forest have evoked in N. contrasting personalities within himself, 'man and boy, age and youth', and these materialize in Schomburgh and Carroll, who belong to the crew 'every man mans and lives in his inmost ship and theatre and mind' (p. 48). Note the significance Harris is able to elicit from the fairly commonplace sense of undefined anxiety that nearly everyone experiences when faced with the mystery of the forest: he evokes an 'other' whom N. is unable to locate or recognize even though the 'echo' is an expression of the community he will discover to be in himself at the end.

The third significant event in Book I occurs in chapter three when N. detects on the river 'a pale smooth patch that seemed hardly worth a thought' (p. 32). Yet it makes the crew aware of 'corrugations and thorns and spears' which bring forth an image of crucifixion or of the sacrifice that life seems to exact in order to perpetuate itself and that they will

experience when Carroll and Wishrop die in the rapids.

The 'moon patch' also draws their attention to 'the silent faces and lips raised out of the heart of the stream' (p. 33), obstacles which they discover to be their own reflections in the water. Here again the confrontation with danger in nature calls forth an awareness of the 'ambush of soul' (p. 34) that N. had already sensed when Mariella ambushed Donne to kill him, and in the 'ambushing forest' (p. 26). N. now recalls the three moments of intensity in Book I which have brought home to him the nature of the quest and given him the intimation of an invisible presence: 'The murdered horseman of the savannahs, the skeleton footfall on the river bank and in the bush, the moonhead and crucifixion in the waterfall and in the river' (p. 33). We have here in the diversified landscape of Guyana (savannahs, bush, waterfall and river) all the parts of the heterogeneous community that will be brought together in the palace: Donne and Mariella, the muse who first existed as 'a fleshly shadow in [his] consciousness' (p. 25) before she became his victim and executioner; the phantoms of youth and age buried within N.; and finally the labouring crew, invisible in Donne's deserted savannahs but ambushing his vessel from within the deep stream of his consciousness. The light in which they appear to N. is also dual, 'half-cloud, half-sun' (p. 33). As in N.'s other moments of intuition, the light is an essential element and source of vision: 'In this remarkable filtered light . . . it was as if the light of all past days and nights had vanished. It was the first breaking dawn of the light of our soul' (p. 34).

The moments of intensity in Book I are taken up again in Book II and expanded through the deeper intuitions and emotions experienced by N., but their effects begin to erode Donne's hard carapace of will-to-power and pride. The structure of the novel is based on alternate movements

between these moments, and the calmer, more matter-of-fact episodes in which significant fragments of the crew's lives weave a background of circumstances typical of their relations with Mariella. The crew are representatives of Guyana's heterogeneous and hard-working population. But as we have seen, they also inhabit Donne and N.'s inner territory, and it is from the recognition and gradual integration of those inner selves in the individual consciousness of Donne that the novel draws its significance. The crew are 'agents of personality',¹⁸ living embodiments of those instincts and passions that are usually deeply buried, unacknowledged and therefore 'undigested' sources of conflict. Through the crew, various areas of the accumulated experience of Donne, as a representative of man and of the human community at large, are brought to light and shown to be indissociable. The men seem to be living variations of the contrary states and motives that shape Donne's existence: innocence and guilt, love and hatred. Unconsciously, they enact the negative and positive potentialities contained in Donne and N.: exploitation, cruelty, murder, as well as the desire to be free from these self-imprisoning iniquities, a desire expressed through Carroll's song, Wishrop's dance and Vigilance's gift of vision. Each member of the crew occupies the foreground by turns, as if pulling successively their common organism in a different direction, and every attitude or action affects the whole. When, for instance, da Silva acts out their murderous impulse and kills Cameron, the victim's blood 'ran and encircled *their* hand' and Donne expressed 'surprise and horror *as at himself*' (p. 115). Da Silva commits murder in a fit of despair believing that by wounding the heraldic parrot, Cameron has thwarted his chance of reunion with the muse, whom, he thinks, he now wants to reach in order to love and not to exploit. Though he still deludes himself, his reaction is typical of the ambivalent attitude of

the crew: their obstinately primitive lust for possession and their longing for a sense of fulfilment which they have always been incapable of achieving. This ambivalence develops through a series of juxtapositions illustrating their initial intention to hunt down Mariella and her people in order to exploit them, and the counterpoint to that pursuit: 'the immortal chase of love' (p. 31).

Cameron illustrates the desire to rule and to possess at its most primitive. He belongs with those courageous but ignorant and unimaginative men who through the ages embrace animism in its successive, different guises. And so he 'had acquired the extraordinary defensive blindness ... of dying again and again to the world and still bobbing up once more lusting for an ultimate satisfaction and a cynical truth' (p. 42). He appears to be fixed on the crew's common territory like 'a melodramatic rock in mother earth' (p. 41) unable to loose himself from what is actually both 'grave' and 'womb' (p. 40) or to shake off 'the stab of death' (p. 44). Only when they have passed 'the door of inner perception' does Cameron stand 'heavy and bundled like rock, animal-wise, conscious of a rootless superstition and shifting mastery he had once worshipped in himself and now felt *crumbling* and lost' (p. 98). By bringing together 'grave' and 'womb' Wilson Harris emphasizes the paradoxical fertility of the grave in which the crew have long been buried — the grave of history and the grave of Donne's sleeping consciousness. The two words point to the necessary ordeal of death and rebirth. They also express the two poles towards which N., like Schomburgh, feels himself 'drawn two ways at once' (p. 48). The old man is not without imagination but out of a sense of shame and guilt he has never dared to recognize his deeper intuitions, rejecting them as monsters within himself like the electric eels he sometimes fished and threw back into the river; rejecting therefore not only the death-wish that they all

share but also the birth-wish on whose strength he has given birth to Carroll, the son he is afraid to recognize. Only in death does he become reconciled to the two dimensions he had sensed and which finally meet in the cross he shares with Carroll: 'One death, a cross for father and son' (p. 92).

Extremes of the birth- and death-wish in the crew are to be found in Carroll and Wishrop. While Cameron, Jennings and da Silva are entangled in the meshes of uncertainty, inertia or thoughtless daring, and quarrel over the necessity to pursue Mariella, Carroll laughs, and the sound of his voice strikes the crew 'as the slyest music coming clear out of the stream' (p. 63). Through Carroll they are all freed from the tormenting and destructive effect of the passions that have shaken them and are still rooting them in the soil of Mariella as well as from the burden of their first death: 'Something had freed them and lifted them out of the deeps, a blessing and a curse ... The sound was like a dreaming sword that had cut them from the womb' (p. 64). Earlier in the novel Carroll had been described as a boy 'gifted with his paddle as if it were a violin and a sword together in paradise' (p. 22). And we learn later that he wanted at all costs to keep the child he had conceived in Vigilance's sister, who is one of the *personae* of Mariella. He does give life by cutting the crew free from the grave and womb, enabling them eventually to discover and recognize the mother and child as part of their community.

In contrast with Carroll, Wishrop restores the crew to 'the sense of their indestructibility' (p. 68) by purging himself of his death-wish. In order to understand the full implications of the crew's death-wish one must first refer to the storm in which they are caught on the soil of Mariella. The storm arises from the shock N. receives when he sees Donne with the old Arawak woman he has arrested, and realizes that the tragic event — the meeting between conqueror and conquered

— is undigested and can only evoke 'a future time, petrifying and painful, confused and unjust' (p. 54). The storm occurs when, in a crescendo of terror, N. confronts, and is enveloped by, the frightful ambition that drove Donne to possess Mariella, and he struggles to shake himself free from it: 'He was an apparition that stooped before me and yet clothed me with the very frightful nature of the jungle exercising its spell over me' (p. 55). The storm takes place in his head and gathers momentum from his own movements with the effect of bringing into the open the motives that drive Donne on: 'I shook my head a little', 'I shook my head violently', 'shaking my head', 'I could no longer feel myself shaken: dumb with a morsel of terror' (pp. 53-55). All this time the crew '[are] blasted and rooted in the soil of Mariella like imprisoned dead trees' (p. 55), while N. alone lives and is aware of Donne's paralyzing hatred. This hatred has first been felt through the 'burst of *congealed lightning* [that] hung suspended in the atmosphere ... shap [ing] a noose in the air' (p. 54) and recalling his death and execution by Mariella. At the height of the storm when Donne addressed his companions, 'Meaning was petrified and *congealed and then flashing* and clear' (p. 55). 'Congealed lightning', which describes a frozen tension, has become 'congealed and then flashing', suggesting that the frozen meaning seeks release and breaks through in a flash. The release has a staccato quality also evident in the attempt of Wishrop (the member of the crew who most resembles Donne) to attain inner harmony:

His desire for communication was so profound it had broken itself into two parts. One part was a congealed question-mark of identity-around which a *staccato* inner dialogue was in perpetual evolution and process. The other half was the fluid fascination that everyone and everything exercised upon him — creatures who moved in his consciousness full of the primitive feeling of love purged of all murderous hate and treachery. (p. 64)

The congealed mark of identity relates to the 'roots of mortal and earthly sensation' (p. 55) by which Donne and the crew are seeking to define themselves at this stage, while the 'staccato inner dialogue and labouring monologue' stress the difficulty of real communication and consequently of acknowledging one's kinship with others. The second part of Wishrop's desire (the '*fluid* fascination that everyone and everything exercised upon him – creatures who moved in his consciousness') refers to the many people he has killed and who go on 'living and never dying in the eternal folk' (p. 68). It is as if by purging himself of the desire to kill, Wishrop had partly escaped the frozen condition created by his self-imprisoning hatred. His sacrificial death will free him and the crew completely from their death-wish ('They ... spat their own – and his – blood and death-wish' [p. 102]); it will also resolve his inner contradiction, an achievement perceived by Vigilance: 'He seemed to ... experience *its congealment and its ancient flow* as if he waded with webbed and impossible half-spider feet in the ceaseless boiling current of creation' (p. 103). Significantly, it is Wishrop's desire for communication that splits into contrary impulses. Communication is what makes real community possible, and the crew are mostly incapable of it. They usually 'croak' or 'bray', noises that emphasize their animal instincts or their stupidity. Real communication and a sense of harmony develop through Carroll's song and Wishrop's dance.

The other moment of intensity in Book II takes place in Chapter Five. It gives N. a premonition of the dissolution into nothingness and the rebirth that Donne goes through when he reaches the waterfall. During their first night in Mariella everything in the scenery partakes of the charcoal into which the fire subsides 'spitting stars and sparks ... and barking like a hoarse dog' (p. 45). N. begins to dream and is under the impression that 'Every grey hammock around

[him] became an empty cocoon as hollow as a deserted shell and a house' (p. 45). The 'deserted shell' is also an image for Jennings (and by extension for Donne) just before the process of resurrection starts (p. 119). N. feels 'the soul of desire to abandon the world at the critical turning point of time' (p. 46). It is then that Donne's death is re-enacted in his dream through a series of images that seem to develop from the fire and the barking dog. The protean and menacing animal, which at first takes on the shape of creatures associated with Donne and the crew ('half-wolf, half-donkey'), turns into Mariella, and this metamorphosis suggests that both sides are responsible for the death of Donne. As the dream ends, N. recalls Mariella's anguish of soul, and the fire, which earlier was 'devoid of all burning spirit', comes now 'like a bullet, flooding [him] ... with penitence and sorrow' (p. 46). N.'s dream of death gives way to the ensuing vision, which takes place when he is awake and conscious. Whereas everything in the dream was grey and left him with 'a grey feeling inside', now

The leaves dripped in the entire forest the dewy cold tears of the season of drought that affected the early tropical morning and left me rigid and trembling. A pearl and half-light and arrow shot along the still veined branches. The charcoal memory of the hour lifted as a curtain rises upon the light of an eternal design. The trees were lit with stars of fire of an unchanging and perfect transparency. They hung on every sensitive leaf and twig and fell into the river, streaking the surface of the water with a darting appearance crimson as blood. (p. 47)

The 'dewy tears' (Mariella's, who has just expressed her sorrow?) which have become the 'stars of fire ... streaking the surface of the water with a darting appearance crimson as blood' prefigure the breaking of the sun into the stars which sparkle on the flesh and blood and feathers of the peacock when the palace is being constructed (p. 146). As N. rightly

understands, the significance of his vision is that if Mariella has killed, she will also save, and it is indeed soon after this that she appears in their midst in the guise of the old Arawak woman.

Mariella, the persecuted and vengeful mistress of Donne, is a link between all members of the crew: they are all obsessed with her for at one stage or other she has played a part in their individual lives. She is Carroll's mother and presumably Schomburgh's love, Vigilance's sister, the Arawak woman Wishrop has killed, the woman da Silva made pregnant, and finally the old Arawak woman who stayed at the mission and was made prisoner by Donne. Like the crew, she contains opposites such as age and youth, innocence and guilt. She is the Amerindian muse who represents her people and their relation with the crew. Donne rightly says that the only way to survive and belong to the land is 'to wed oneself into the family' (p. 58). Significantly, however, no member of the crew ever married an Amerindian woman for the Indians distrust the conquerors. Like the 'clear fictions of imperious rocks' surrounding, and bending towards, the moonpatch in the water (p. 32), Mariella's people 'turn into a wall around her' (p. 38). The crew also encircle the old Arawak woman whom they have made prisoner. As a muse Mariella is captive to both her people and the crew; she cannot yet unite fruitfully with anyone.

Mariella is also the spirit of the place: not only is the territory of the mission called Mariella but through most of the narrative the imagery coalesces into one reality the woman (and by implication her people) with the country into which they penetrate. Their experience in the landscape alive with the unseen presence of the folk relates the crew to the fugitive natives though they are not aware of it until their rebirth. Already in Book II the mission of Mariella and the

vanishing Amerindians are shown to be part of the crew's deeper, unconscious self (and Guyana as a whole is N.'s 'bodily prejudice'). The epigraph to this second part is a line from Hopkins' *The Wreck of the Deutschland*: '... the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps', these deeps being Donne's and the crew's deeper instincts for possession and exploitation. As they leave with the old woman to pursue the folk, the mission of Mariella acquires a new meaning: it is the mission the woman will fulfil by guiding them into the unknown country ahead. In whatever form she appears Mariella is a catalyst that stimulates N. or the crew to vision and memory.

Book III, *The Second Death*, describes the crew's progression up-river and the different stages of disintegration of their hard, self-oppressive cocoon of ambition and lust. As in Book II, moments of tension alternate with spells of calm which enable them to move forward and reflect on the significance of their trials. The first of these occurs soon after their departure from the mission. The old woman among them is at first seen as 'crumpled-looking, like a curious *ball*, old and *wrinkled*' (p. 71). Her wrinkles are part of a mask she adopts in self-defence like Cameron's 'adopted *wrinkle* and *mask*' (p. 41). But they also reflect the endurance of her race, 'the unfathomable patience of a god in whom all is changed into wisdom, all experience and all life a *handkerchief* of wisdom when the grandiloquence of history and civilization was past' (p. 72). When the crew enter 'the straits of memory' they are confronted with the earlier insolence of the folk in the united form of the river and the woman who, from old and depleted, is transformed into the young Mariella they had pursued in their first voyage:

Tiny embroideries resembling the handwork on the Arawak woman's *kerchief* and the *wrinkles* on her brow turned to incredible and fast soundless breakers of foam. Her crumpled

bosom and river grew agitated with desire, bottling and shaking every fear and inhibition and outcry. The ruffles in the water were her dress *rolling* and rising to embrace the crew. This sudden insolence of soul rose and caught them from the powder of her eyes and the age of her smile and the dust in her hair all flowing back upon them with silent streaming majesty and abnormal youth and in a wave of freedom and strength.

.....
Earthquake and volcanic water appeared to seize them and stop their ears dashing the scales only from their eyes. (p. 73)

Mariella (and the river) is the Circé who makes them all deaf. Though the crew have to fight like Ulysses 'glued to the struggle . . . screwed to boat and paddle' (p. 74), none of them hears the song of the muse. Nor does any of them enjoy the freedom of escape that was Ulysses' through the deafness of his crew. They are unaware and blinded by the 'unforgiving and unforgivable incestuous love' (p. 74) in the heart of which they move and which is really what they are fighting. For they are imprisoned in it as Jonah was in the whale. It is only with the death of Carroll that 'the cloudy scale of incestuous cruelty and self-oppression tumble[s] from their eye' (p. 75) leaving them with a sense of compassion that had been concealed before. The sacrifice of the innocent Carroll has redeemed them from their sin and created a 'new relationship' (p. 76) with the woman/river. Like the woman before, the river has now become 'a musing ball upon which they *roll* forward' (p. 76). Carroll's sacrifice and the understanding it entails in the crew also initiate the erosion of their stony personality: 'a great stone of hardship had melted and *rolled* away' (p. 76).

In the pursuit of Mariella the landscape is a go-between: on the river the crew's kinship with the folk is conveyed through the quality(ies) each shares with particular elements in nature. For instance

— They first see the moon-patch 'in a *volcanic* . . . bosom of

water' (p. 33) (we have seen above that bosom and river are identified).

— When the old woman is transfigured, her hair *flows back* upon them and the '*volcanic* water appears to seize them' (p. 73).

— While they are imprisoned in their incestuous love, the 'rape and fury' in the crew's heart (which recalls Donne's rape of Mariella on their first voyage) becomes the '*lava* of water' (p. 74).

— As the crew progress deeper into the unknown, they travel between cliffs 'of *volcanic* myth and substance' (p. 103) and shortly afterwards the boat rights itself 'in the *volcanic* stream and rock' (p. 105). In the last example *volcanic* brings together the stream (mainly associated with the woman) and the rock (mainly associated with Donne and the crew). The repetitive use of *volcanic* not only weaves a relationship between the woman and the crew, it shows that both parties contain within themselves the substance of a shared past experience (as oppressed and oppressor) that can erupt and break down their monolithic make-up.

The second frightening ordeal of the crew is the passage into the unknown world of their unconscious, the second death they must go through before rebirth. In the context of Guyanese experience it is a regression into the 'grave' and 'womb' of history.¹⁹ As a re-enactment of their first death, the second offers the possibility of coming to terms with 'undigested' experience. 'They had passed the door of inner perception *like a bird of spirit* breaking the shell of the sky which had been the only conscious world they knew' (p. 94). As Donne rightly understands, the 'bird of spirit' has been hatched by the death of Carroll and Schomburgh. The comparison makes clearer the process of the crew's dying into life. For parallel with the uncertainties that disorientate

them increasingly, something is being created, the beginning of a dialogue in which for the time being only Vigilance knows he is involved. In this part of the novel the members of the crew come to the fore: each of them acts out by turn his deeper wishes, and all act on one another, gradually purging their collective being of the destructive passions contained in Donne. This implies a recognition of what had previously been unconscious. N. is now absent from the narrative, and it is as if his intuitions of the nature of their pursuit were moving into the crew with various intensity, eliciting different reactions.

The crew's confrontation with their deeper self is the starting point of their disorientation. As N. had been faced with Donne's hatred on the soil of the mission, so their own dark currents manifest themselves in Jennings while they are on the river bank. Obeying a 'stubborn nameless streak' (p. 95) the latter turns himself into an obstacle for the crew as a whole. The irritation and resentment that '[boil] within him' (p. 95) seem to be of the same nature as 'the *boiling* stream and furnace of an endless life without beginning and end', (p. 99) though in Jennings this boiling current is always transformed into mechanical energy. The boiling stream also seethes within Donne, who puts a stop to the quarrel between Jennings and Cameron with 'suppressed turbulence'. Jennings's outburst has unsettled Cameron: 'The ground felt that it opened bringing to ruin years of pride and conceit' (p. 96). Cameron wishes the 'grave under his feet' would close for he experiences what is happening to them as an 'acute dismemberment' (p. 97). Indeed soon afterwards on the river, 'The monstrous thought came to them that they had been shattered and were reflected again in each other at the bottom of the stream' (p. 99). 'Shatter' and 'splinter' frequently occur in Book III and describe the necessary breaking apart the crew experience as a group in order to free themselves and Donne from the re-assuring fixity of their collective

being and create a truly harmonious relationship. The 'exchange of soul' that they find so horrifying (even though after a while they cling to the shreds of earthly identity apparently re-established by this mutual recognition) is part of the psychic fragmentation they go through. Caught in the turmoil of both inner and outer stream, they are moved by forces which appear now to expand now to shrink the extent of their being somewhat in the manner of the limbo dancer mentioned at the beginning of this essay, stretching in space or shrinking on the ground.

The fluidity of space is further emphasized by the '*elastic* frontier where a spirit might rise from the dead and rule the material past world' (p. 100). The crew appear to have reached that frontier when 'the vessel had struck a rock. And they saw it was the bizarre rock and vessel of their second death' (p. 100). This encounter with themselves is the 'crash' which in Harris's novels usually explodes the hard shell of the protagonist's personality and enables him to revise his one-sided outlook. It implies that one cannot really progress along a straight, unbroken line. The only way in which one can hope to have a glimpse of the truth is through broken, constantly revised perspectives. At this moment of crisis, the death of Wishrop, which like Carroll's is a sacrifice and a baptism, a source of harmony expressed in his dance, saves the crew for a further erosion. They are once more splintered and confounded by the whirling currents but the boat continues to advance driven now by 'the naked *spider* of spirit' (p. 102). Indeed Jennings's engine has lost 'its vulgar mechanical fervour and its enthusiasm was dwindling into an indefatigable revolving *spider, hopeless and persistent*' (p. 101). Similarly, when Cameron dies, Jennings loses 'an opposition and true adversary within himself' (p. 119). Other examples could show that the members of the crew continue to act on one another like the moveable parts of a whole. One of the most

striking is the life-giving effect Wishrop's death has on Vigilance, who, like N., has been from the start an instrument of vision contrasting with the blindness of the rest of the crew.

Prior to the discussion of Vigilance's role, 'naked spider of spirit' requires some explanation. The image of the spider is used initially to describe the crew who swarm 'like upright spiders half-naked, scrambling under a burden of cargo' (p. 22). The picture this sentence evokes is of a slaving body of men, and indeed we realize in the course of the novel that the crew are labouring people whom Donne has been exploiting. Shortly afterwards, just before N.'s intuition of another presence in the jungle, he says: '*Spider's web* dangled in a shaft of sun clothing my arms with subtle threads as I brushed upon it' (p. 27). The subtle threads of the spider's web evoke the weaving process of life as well as the subtle labour in the design of the old woman's handkerchief described much later (p. 72). The symbol of the spider is thus dual: on the one hand it suggests the oppressed and enduring state of the exploited also conveyed by 'hopeless' and 'persistent' in the sentence referring to the energy that drives the vessel on. On the other hand, it describes a creative process as the use of 'spider' after Wishrop's death shows. Wishrop is the member of the crew in whom the duality of the spider symbol is eventually reconciled. That he is himself 'persistent' is evident since after shooting himself he is found 'still alive. . . crawling. . . into the bush' (p. 67) where he meets an Arawak woman, who later reports that she saw him '*crawling* like a spider into the river' (p. 67). Wishrop, Anancy-like,²⁰ survives all catastrophes. When he dies his second death, his 'fingers [cling] to the spokes and spider of a wheel' (p. 101). Here the spider combines with the wheel in an image of life, the life that Wishrop transmits to the crew as he dies: 'this taste and forfeiture of self-annihilation [experienced through

Wishrop's death] bore them into the future on the wheel of life' (p. 102). After his death he is seen by Vigilance as 'a *spidery* skeleton *crawling* to the sky' (p. 103).

The living quality of the spider has been transferred to Vigilance at Wishrop's second death. The well-named Vigilance, the only Amerindian member of the crew, is also the only one who sees beyond appearances: 'He was always *there* . . . or he always seemed to *see* something through a half-open door or window or crack' (p. 85 author's italics). Vigilance's vision into the 'nameless kinship and identity' which, as we shall see, is the goal of the quest, has 'liberated him from death and adversity' (p. 85). After the crash, though he still steers the vessel 'with *spider* arm and engine' (p. 107) and is still part of the crew, his vision (and dream) also sets him apart from the 'herd'. The sacrifice of Wishrop has united Vigilance with the old woman, and this union prefigures that of the crew with the folk. He finds himself 'like a *spider* in a tree' climbing the cliff with her and wondering 'at the childish repetitive boat and prison of life' (p. 104). Vigilance has been wounded and this identifies him with the wounded tapir injured by 'the huntsman of the folk', which serves as a link between them and the crew. It is as if his wound intensified Vigilance's vision and allowed him to see, as through a crack in the imprisoning cliff, 'Wishrop's *spider*, and transubstantiation: wheel and web, sunlight, starlight, all *wishful* substance violating and altering and annihilating shape and matter and invoking eternity only and space and musical filament and design. It was this *spider* and *wheel of baptism* . . . on which he found himself pinned and bent to the revolutions of life that made his perception of a prodigal vessel and distance still possible' (p. 105). Vigilance alone understands the message of the 'dancing' and 'wheeling' parrots. In the ring of a bird that Cameron takes for a vulture, he recognizes the spirit of God, 'the blue ring of



pentecostal fire in God's eye as it *wheeled* around him' (p. 116).

The word 'naked' refers to the state of helplessness and vulnerability to which the crew are reduced in the unknown world 'on the threshold of the folk' (p. 94) when, as Cameron keenly feels, they are being deprived of former certainties: 'They felt *naked* and *helpless* . . . And the terror of the *naked* self-governing reality [of the boiling stream] made them feel unreal and unwanted' (p. 99). So that the phrase 'naked spider of spirit' expresses the sense of being stripped and weakened felt by the crew, yet implies, as we have seen, that they have in their midst a spirit which takes them forward with 'responsible' insight. This contrast opposing Vigilance to the other members of the crew is emphasized in Chapter 9: Vigilance escapes higher on the cliff and, at once spider and parrot ('his limbs had *crawled* and still *flew*' [p. 117]), is now fully conscious of human primitiveness as well as divinity within himself (pp. 117-118). His companions, on the contrary, increasingly ghost-like, dwindle further into nothingness. Jennings's face is an old dry mask, a 'coconut shell' (p. 119); Da Silva is 'the frailest shadow of a former self' (p. 122). The word 'crumble' is repeatedly used. But even though Jennings is only aware of crumbling into nothingness, Vigilance remembers the coconut shell that had crumbled 'to an ancient door of life' (p. 119). Vigilance's vision is reflected 'in the mirror of the dreaming soul' (p. 122) of which, like N. earlier in the quest, he is a medium. The wall of the cliff is this mirror in which Vigilance sees 'the blind dream of creation *crumble* as it was re-enacted' (p. 124). His vision seems to anticipate Donne's in the waterfall.

A close reading of Book III shows that the language creates a dynamic pattern in which life disintegrates into death, itself a preliminary to new life. Though the crew have not yet reached the waterfall nor been reduced to the nothingness

necessary before the resurrection, the redemption of Vigilance even before the complete annihilation of the crew points to the complexity of the life-and-death process: Vigilance is a connecting thread between opposites, an indication that a 'community of being' is never completely dead or alive but consists of an intricate fabric of broken and alternate threads of life and death, a fabric of discontinuous elements within a continuous whole. The paradoxical juxtaposition of 'creation' with 'crumble' in the last sentence of Book III describes one stage in the continuous process of creation. It makes clear that creation involves destruction, the breaking down of what would otherwise be a rigid construction. Significantly, until Donne is being refashioned by the Carpenter in the waterfall, the days of creation are days of growing uncertainty, fluctuation and breaking apart intended to confront the crew with their own limitations and with another, sacred reality of which N. has had intuitions in the jungle, on the river, and at the mission.

This 'otherness' (p. 149) is the contrasting element which the crew ignore within themselves and pursue outside. It is associated with Mariella and the folk, and with their own as well as Donne's roots. The word that links together the various shapes of otherness is 'nameless.' It is applied to Carroll, who has been deprived by his mother of the kind of name that would have been but 'a material mask and label and economic form and solipsism' (p. 85). Wilson Harris clearly suggests that racial identity, connected as it is with selfish pride or economic interest, is but a meaningless 'material mask' whereas Carroll is identified with the folk through a more authentic and universal essence. Because he sees beyond the material mask into a '*nameless* kinship and identity' Vigilance is saved from death. When the crew feel naked, they are in fact coming nearer to their original namelessness.

It is important to stress that the nameless 'other', though

in a sense sacred because of the religious or spiritual meaning inherent in the suffering of the folk, is in no way an ideal of perfection. That it is itself dual shows, for instance, in the ambivalence of Mariella, in the poisonous electric eel first referred to as 'nameless fish' (p. 65), or in the 'nameless streak', recognized as irritation and resentment, that boils in Jennings like the boiling currents of the 'nameless rapids'. The 'other' is a moving and often elusive reality, rarely perceived through a crack in the wall of appearances. It is the reverse side of life or its lost and forgotten, but persisting, past. To sense and recognize this coincidental flow of life is part of the drama of consciousness; it is what Harris was to call 'being dead in step with the swift runner of life'.²¹

When Donne reaches the waterfall on the fifth day, he comes to a point in his voyage of discovery at which a perception of the dual constitution of life becomes possible for him. Positive and negative elements within the crew have been recognized and shed with the second deaths of Carroll, Schomburgh and Wishrop, and Donne is now left only with the wooden Jennings and the stupid da Silva to construct his new vision from the nothingness he has at last attained. The most striking impression conveyed by chapter ten is of the contrast and distance between that nothingness and the density and richness of the sights Donne sees in the waterfall. He has reached the El Dorado he was looking for, as the 'melting gold' of the river indicates, but even that gold is 'nothing' when he dips his hand in, because he cannot yet see it for what it is, just as he cannot clearly perceive the enduring value of the boat or 'drowned man's hulk' that he abandons at the foot of the waterfall. Indeed as the images in the waterfall show, the paradox Donne eventually comes to terms with is that it is only through the physical world, the world of appearances, that one discovers the 'immaterial con-

stitution'.²² The emphasis at the beginning of the chapter is on the words 'nothingness' and 'abstraction'. These are at first a source of hopelessness, an expression of the utter negativity of Donne's life. As soon as he and his companions begin to ascend the escarpment of the waterfall, however, and Donne realizes that his house in the savannahs was 'a horror and a hell' (p. 130), he also understands that his domination over the savannahs was 'a ruling function of nothingness' (p. 130). His understanding gives him a desire 'to understand and transform his beginnings' (p. 130). From then onwards his state of nothingness turns into something positive for it gradually becomes identified with the 'invisible otherness' (p. 141), and the 'structural void' (p. 141) is shown to inform the world of appearances; it is 'the remote and the *abstract* image and correspondence, in which all things and events gained their substance and universal meaning' (p. 130).

Just as for Vigilance earlier, the cliff that Donne ascends along the waterfall is a mirror which, at first reflecting nothing, soon becomes the theatre of his growing consciousness. The narrative is a tissue of contrasts and paradoxes. To take but a few examples:

- 'The waterfall . . . *moved* and still *stood* . . . the immaculate bridal veil *falling motionlessly*'. (p. 128)
- The room Donne sees in the veil and window of the fall 'was as *old* as a cave and as *new* as a study'. (p. 133)
- The protean hunted ram is at once '*light and cloud*'. (p. 136)
- Donne sees 'his own *nothingness* and *imagination* constructed beyond his reach', and even the light that he has not yet reached belongs to 'a dark invisible source akin to human *blindness* and *imagination*', (p. 141) which suggests that the informing spirit of essence is itself of a dual nature and cannot be idolized as one thing or another.

Donne's ascent also has a twofold character since he climbs 'as a workman *in the heart* and *on the face* of the construction' (p. 131). In spite of the distance that separates him from what he sees, the world he discovers is actually part of himself as he is part of it. Though on one plane he is surrounded by the nothingness he must go through before rebirth, on another he is being refashioned by the carpenter who, remote as he may seem, has been within him all the time and is one with the inner reality Donne must acknowledge as a kinship between all living elements and beings. This is expressed by a word (or words) which describe(s) a similar action yet acquire(s) a different meaning according to the spirit in which it is done. For instance: 'the *hammer* of the fall shook the earth with the misty blow of fate' (p. 131) suggests the inexorable action of an unbending element. With a very earthly impatience Donne repeatedly *hammers* against the wall to draw the carpenter's attention, and the panicking 'ghostly men and women . . . *hammer* with the waterfall' (p. 136) apparently submitting to its blow of fate. But hammering, which has so far suggested an implacable or a domineering action, is a creative one for the carpenter: 'He raised his *hammer* and struck the blow that broke every spell. Donne quivered and shook like a dead branch whose roots were reset on their living edge' (p. 134).

The carpenter is the transforming and creative agent, the 'craftsman of God' whose 'implements of vision' operate upon Donne 'to make him anew' (pp. 132-133). However, because he is one of the spiritual forbears Donne must rediscover in himself, he is also in a sense recreated or envisioned by him: 'they alone [Donne and da Silva] were left to frame Christ's tree and home' (p. 137). The carpenter is indeed a Christ figure but not one that conforms to the specific conception of Western Christianity. Rather, he is the spiritual redeemer peculiar to each people and place. As

Donne looks at him, he realizes that he is made of all the primitive and natural elements among which both the conquerors and the Arawak folk have been living:

A rectangular face it was, chiselled and cut from the cedar of Lebanon. He was startled and frightened by the fleshless wood, the lips a breath apart full of *grains* from the skeleton of a leaf on the ground branching delicately and sensitively upward into the hair on his head that parted itself in the middle and fell on both sides of his face into a harvest. His fingers were of the same wood, the nails made of bark and ivory. Every movement and glance and expression was a chiselling touch, the divine alienation and translation of flesh and blood into everything and anything on earth. The chisel was old as life, old as a finger-nail. The saw was the teeth of bone. (p. 132)

This passage anticipates the description of the grains in the woman's hair and dress (p. 139), and while drawing attention to the moving grains of life common to the carpenter and all living elements, it seems to suggest that it is by looking through living matter itself that consciousness is achieved: 'Finger-nail and bone were secret panes of glass in the stone of blood through which spiritual eyes were being opened' (p. 132). 'Stone of blood' also stresses the livingness of matter and can be related both to the wall of the cliff and to Donne's 'sides of rock' (p. 105). Matter can express the duality of life as well as anything human does. Like 'hammer' analysed above, 'wood' exemplifies this duality. Through most of the narrative Jennings's lifeless countenance is called 'wooden', then wood is seen to be alive first in the carpenter, and after the resurrection in the moving tree of life and in N. himself: 'I found the courage to make my first *wooden* steps . . . My feet were truly alive' (p. 145). See also: '[The animal] stood thus . . . with a curious abstract and *wooden* memory of its life and its death. The sense of death was a *wooden* dream, a dream of music in the sculptured ballet of the leaves

and the seasons' (p. 135). In these examples 'wooden' means alive and moving, and the 'sense of death' is shown to be part of the ever-moving reality of experience.

The animal is one of the images and components of the vision Donne builds in conjunction with the carpenter. It belongs to his past experience and recalls at once the wounded Vigilance and the tapir wounded by 'the huntsman of the folk' (p. 104), who also appears in the waterfall. The animal can be seen as an embodiment of 'the swift runner of life'²³; it appears to be life itself vibrating and changing into a thousand shapes:

It was everywhere and nowhere, a picture of abandonment and air, a cat on crazy balls of feet. It was the universe whose light turned in the room to signal the approach of evening, painting the carpenter's walls with shades from the sky — the most elaborate pictures and seasons he stored and framed and imagined. (p. 134)

From the moment of its appearance in the carpenter's room the wounded creature appears to set in motion an extraordinary cosmic dance in which all elements and experience are orchestrated by the carpenter's creative touch. Nothing exists in itself, everything can be or become everything else. The same light paints pictures of season and 'impressions of eternity' (p. 134). Space turns into time: 'The animal light body and wound . . . turned into an outline of time' (p. 135), and among other metamorphoses, 'a stampede of ghostly men and women all shaped by the leaves' (p. 136) rain and run against the sky like the animal 'running for life' (p. 136). The catastrophic image of running humanity makes it clear that even within their own species men are involved in a hunter/hunted relationship which, though inescapable, can at least be mitigated if the hunter, aware of his kinship with the hunted, relates himself to him as Donne and da Silva relate themselves to the animal by experiencing the same contra-

dictory emotions: 'The alert dreaming skin [of the animal] — radiant with spiritual *fear and ecstasy* — quivered where the mark of the old wound was' (p. 135). Then while Donne and da Silva continue to ascend, 'They shook with the primitive ram again, scanning the endless cliff in *fear and ecstasy*' (p. 137).

The density of elements that Donne perceives in the waterfall ('the subtle running depths of the sea, the depths of the green sky and the depths of the forest' [p. 136]) are juxtaposed with the void into which he climbs. These 'contrasting spaces' become related as the carpenter and Donne are related through sharing a common essence. The carpenter first appears to Donne when his domineering material vision is shattered in the misty waterfall: 'A swallow flew and *dashed* through the veil and window. His eyes *darted* from his head and Donne saw a young carpenter in a room' (p. 131). As the swallow breaks away from the waterfall, so Donne's eyes break away from the shell he has become and enable him to see within the room and within himself. The carpenter's eyes are window panes in the veil of the waterfall in which Donne sees reflected not only the swallow but 'clouds and star and sun' (p. 133). The carpenter's vision is related to all that is being shaped through the metamorphoses of the waterfall. Donne does not yet grasp this; he is only frustrated because the carpenter looks *through* him, not *at* him, and he feels the distance between them as 'Death', the kind of death he used to impose on the 'other' in his earthly life. Actually, both life and death in the carpenter stare *through* him in his state of nothingness: 'The carpenter still looked *through* him as through the far-seeing image and constellation of his eye' (p. 133). 'The image of Death in the carpenter stared *through* him' (p. 133). Similarly, Donne himself, achieving consciousness at last, 'focuse [s] his blind eye on this pinpoint star and reflection

[himself] as one looking into the void of oneself upon the far greater love and self-protection that have made the universe' (p. 140). Only then does his earthly spiritual blindness melt away from him completely: though he is still blind, his is now a constructive kind of blindness because he finds himself in the abyss or 'endless void' that leads on to the resurrection. His nothingness is now like an invisible presence which he shares with 'the invisible otherness around' (p. 141). It is related to the 'dark invisible source akin to human blindness and imagination that looked *through nothingness* all the time to the spirit that had secured life' (p. 141). It is a way of saying that man is not important in himself. He is only one of the manifold shapes of living energy.

The other picture that finally blinds Donne's material eye is that of the woman and the child. Here again there is a strong contrast between on the one hand the impression of richness and warmth paradoxically arising from the 'nakedness' of the woman's garment and the furniture, 'the insubstantial straw in the cradle, the skeleton line of boards . . . the gleaming outline of the floor' [p. 139]) and on the other the arrogance Donne has always represented. Within the room itself the woman's hair and dress made of *threads* of light yet *threadbare*, fusing with the humble straw, turns into the 'melting essence' that 'frail and loose and endless' 'yields itself and spreads itself from the topmost pinnacle and star into the roots of self and space' (p. 139). I have reversed the word order of the sentence the better to draw attention to its meaning. Clearly, it is out of the contrast and conjunction between the material of the woman's dress (its 'grain' or 'thread') and its immateriality that the frail but endless essence grows that informs both star and man.

We are now back at our starting point having witnessed the erosion of the rigid and tyrannical personality of Donne and the crew, and his visionary apprehension of fluid spaces

within and without himself. The contrasts between various forms of material and immaterial being, between the density of matter and the mere outline of its many shapes, between light and darkness, have been seen in the metamorphoses of the waterfall as a harmonious orchestration of fluctuating images, at once part of Donne's individual 'architectonic self'²⁴ and of the cosmos. The re-making of Donne is described entirely in terms of moving space or spaces. The picture of the room has changed into a 'dancing hieroglyph' (p. 135); Donne has envisioned 'the sculptured ballet of the leaves and the seasons' (p. 135), the 'light . . . painting . . . pictures and seasons' (p. 134) conceived in eternity by the carpenter. While Donne ascends the emphasis is on 'image' and on 'skeleton', 'outline' and 'frame', which all evoke the structure supporting every visualized 'space'. N. had perceived this dual constitution in his first vision on the bank of the river when he saw 'A brittle moss and carpet [appear] underfoot, a dry pond and stream whose course and reflection and *image* had been stamped forever like the breathless *outline* of a dreaming *skeleton* in the earth' (p. 27). Now that Donne is at last fully aware of the correspondence between eternity and season, he falls and, significantly, is received into the earth by one of his own crew: da Silva. Once again we realize that the gateway to eternity is not opened by an external agent but that Donne and the crew *are* themselves the door through which they pass. The sentence 'everyone was crumbling into a door' (p. 127) calls to mind John's (X,9) 'I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved'. The 'lion door' (p. 143), which hints at Donne's power in his earthly kingdom, suggests that salvation is to be found in the self as it enters into a dialogue with the 'other.' Now on the threshold of vision Donne understands that the 'wind of rumour and superstition' (p. 143), so unlike 'the wind of the muse' (p.

130) that inspired him in his ascent, was the dividing force on earth: 'they had all come home at last to the compassion of the *nameless* unflinching folk' (p. 143).

The expression 'to come home' seems to have been inspired by a line from Hopkins's *The Starlight Night* that Harris quotes as an epigraph to Book IV. It has been used before in the novel by Carroll, when he tells his mother of his intercourse with Vigilance's sister (foreshadowing the meeting with the muse?) and clumsily attempts to express their sense of wonder and discovery: 'a frighten sweet-sweet feeling like if I truly *come home* . . . She cry a little and she laugh like if she was *home* at last' (p. 88). 'To come home' for Donne has obviously meant to 'build' his vision of consciousness through the 'Paling of ancestors'. This phrase describes at once the action and the outcome of the construction, the working of Donne's subjective will on a material reality which proved susceptible to change after all and yielded a passage towards the union with the folk when 'the great cliff sprang open' (p. 143). Like Donne's ascent in the waterfall, the meaning of this sentence is symbolical and implies that the voyage through and beyond monolithic appearances is made possible by a change in one's own perception of them. Donne's first impression as he ascends comes from the memory of 'that horror and that hell he had himself elaborately constructed from which to rule his earth' (p. 130). His last one arises from the image of the Arawak woman and the cradle. His liberating vision has developed out of the contrast between the two. After the opening of the cliff Donne 'comes home' to his origins, to a folk who are his true, if not his actual, ancestors because they share a common experience and have become rooted in the same place. This re-discovery of one's roots is what Harris means by 'native consciousness'.²⁵ Donne, however, never actually catches up with the muse but envisions her in the waterfall,

just as he does not actually meet the folk but discovers their compassion. While this indicates that the community between one and the 'other' is the fruit of the creative imagination, it also implies that Wilson Harris imagines not a facile reunion between conquerors and conquered but an alteration of their rigid relationship into a consciousness of what they share: 'This was the creation and reflection he shared with another and leaned upon as upon one frame' (p. 141).

The images Donne sees in the waterfall are the product of a poetic imagination translating into space elements of self-discovery and the sense of his participation in the ambient universe. Whereas, before, the main impression was of separation and death, after Donne's re-entry into the earth (the 'grave' and 'womb' from which he and the crew have sprung?) everything is seen to partake of everything else, and the conventional divisions between forms of being and even between categories of perception have disappeared. The I-narrator, once again the organ of vision, looks at life from a double perspective as if he could perceive in one vision the world of appearances and its reverse side. The outcome is a firework of images in which the contrasts in the cosmos are harmonized and nature is seen at once in its completed shapes and as a world in the making. The vision created by Donne in the waterfall now enables N. to *see* (Donne, we remember, had felt 'sliced . . . in the window-pane of his eye' and through the 'panes of glass . . . spiritual eyes were being opened' [p. 132]): 'The eye and window through which I looked stood now in the dreaming forehead at the top of the cliff in the sky' (p. 144). Clearly this eye, consciousness or creative imagination, is not only the agent capable of translating experience into space ('A metaphysical outline dwelt everywhere filling in blocks where spaces stood' [p. 144]) but also the very power from which nature and men

draw their substance: 'Rather I felt it was the unique window through which I now looked that *supported* the life of nature . . . in the way I knew my hands and feet were formed and *supported* at this instant' (p. 145). It is now easier to understand what was meant by 'step by step up the *support* grew' (p. 141) while Donne's vision was being fashioned. N., however, is but one medium of a wider consciousness and creativity ascribable to life itself: 'I had never looked before . . . through an eye I *shared* only with the soul, the soul and mother of the universe' (p. 146). The vision of consciousness gives life to the world informing the creation with 'the newborn wind of spirit' (p. 146) and eventually uniting into the peacock, a symbol of totality, the disparate elements of creation:

I saw the tree in the distance wave its arms and walk *when I looked at it through the spiritual eyes of the soul*. First it shed its leaves sudden and swift as if the gust of the wind that blew had ripped it almost bare. The bark and wood turned to lightning flesh and the sun which had been suspended from its head rippled and broke into stars that stood where the shattered leaves had been in the living wake of the storm. The enormous starry dress it now wore spread itself all around into a full majestic gown from which emerged the intimate column of a musing neck, face and hands, and twinkling feet. The stars became peacocks' eyes, and the great tree of flesh and blood swirled into another stream that sparkled with divine feathers where the neck and the hands and the feet had been nailed. (p. 146)

The end of the quotation evokes the sacrifice of Christ (the native Christ Donne saw in the waterfall) while the peacock visibly originates in the world of flesh and blood. The leaves, we remember, were so many 'ghostly men and women' (p. 136) in the waterfall, and the stars 'thronged everywhere' (p. 136), then, personified, 'shivered' (p. 136) while Donne and

da Silva were crawling up the ladder, gathering into constellations as they constructed the palace. Having become the peacock's eyes, they then become 'windows', the vision of men and women in a united world. The peacock is both human and divine, and its divinity lies precisely in its capacity to envision life in its duality: 'This was the palace of the universe and the windows of the soul looked *out* and *in*' (p. 146).

I have alluded repeatedly to the 'constrasting spaces' which in the course of the narrative are shaped from man's moral or psychological attitudes. In Chapter Eleven these contrasts are perceived *together* and reconciled. A few examples will suffice:

- 'the savannahs — though empty — were crowded' (p. 144).
- 'Horsemen — graven signs of man and beast — stood at attention *melting* and *constant*' (p. 145).
- 'Tall trees with *black marching boots* and feet were clad in the spurs and *sharp wings of a butterfly*' (p. 148).
- '*Frail* and nervous and yet *strong* and grounded' (p. 148).
- 'mixing blind *joy* and *sadness* and the sense of being *lost* with the nearness of being *found*' (p. 148).

As there is harmony in space and community between the individual and the universal soul, so the voice of men, primitive and an element of discord during the voyage, is now perceived solely as Carroll's music and as an echo of an inner invisible source. A source of harmony within the previously impervious waterfall, it issues from the 'construction' and is translated into space: 'It was an organ cry almost . . . the echo of sound so pure and *outlined in space* it broke again into a *mass* of music' (p. 147). And further: 'The dark notes

... broke into a fountain — light as the rainbow — sparkling and immaterial as invisible sources and echoes' (p. 148). N.'s perception of the dance of creation contrasts with the incorrigible desire in men to impose on the world their own clearly cut-out and definite pattern, which in reality cuts them off from the quickening complexity of life: '[The change and variation] were induced by the limits and apprehensions in the listening mind of men and by their wish and need in the world to provide a material nexus to bind the spirit of the universe' (p. 149).

Little has been said so far about time in *Palace of the Peacock* though I have described 'moments' of intuition or intensity in N.'s consciousness. Time provides its own contrasts through the juxtaposition of the past with the present, and of an objective with a subjective perception of duration. The seven days of the creation provide an objective frame of reference. What takes place in those seven days shows that man's creative imagination must not consolidate, but rather see through, appearances in order to discover the 'moving naked design'²⁶ behind them. In *The Secret Ladder* Wilson Harris writes: 'Seven days it had taken to finish the original veil of creation that shaped and ordered all things to be solid in the beginning . . . Perhaps seven, too, were needed to strip and subtilize everything'.²⁷ Within those seven days of 'stripping' in *Palace of the Peacock* time expands or contracts depending on whether the brothers explore their inner depths or whether the intensity of their vision is concentrated in a moment. Subjective time is as long or as short as the individual consciousness makes it. We have seen that in Donne's vision it coincides with the projection of that consciousness into space: 'The animal light body . . . turned into an outline of time' (p. 135). Donne first has an intuition of the coincidence between time and space as he begins to ascend the waterfall: 'he longed to see the atom, the very nail

of moment in the universe' (p. 130, author's italics). After the resurrection this coincidence is perceived by N. as the moment of illumination in which all things are reconciled: 'It was the inseparable moment within ourselves of all fulfilment and understanding' (p. 151).

Significant as this moment is, one must insist that it is not an expression of the timeless apprehension of a perfect reality. Through the creation of the palace, Donne and the I-narrator, the objective and the subjective imagination, fuse into a third realm, 'the undivided soul and anima in the universe from whom the word of dance and creation first came' (p. 152). The outcome of the quest, the harmony or community created ('our need of one another' [p. 152]) is expressed solely in terms of dance and music which, while evoking a corresponding harmony in the cosmos, clearly implies that it moves and changes, and cannot be achieved once for all. Carroll's song, which 'seemed to break and mend itself always' (p. 147), epitomizes the repetitive pattern of dissolution and rebirth inherent in all living forms.

The end of the novel confirms that it has been a search for an 'other' which is also part of oneself. It also confirms that the creation of consciousness is necessarily a dialogue, an awareness of reciprocity between the self and the manifold shapes of creation, which partake of the same source and move abreast with the self, but, like the self, alternate between light and darkness and must always be found anew. The 'other' is as fluid and dynamic as the self and would in turn become oppressive if idealized or confined to a timeless order. As the crew 'part company from [N.] and from themselves' (p. 152), it is the certainty of their kinship that they hold like a treasure.

In the newly constructed palace N. sees that 'The wall that had divided [Wishrop] from his true *otherness* and *possession* was a web of dreams' (p. 149). (In his endless march towards

eternity Wishrop seems to embody the inescapable condition of man in his constant effort to keep in step with life). At the very end 'the starred peacock . . . was instantly transported . . . to hug to himself his true invisible *otherness* and opposition', and each member of the crew 'held at last in his arms what he had eternally *possessed*' (p. 152). But duality and paradox remain essential aspects of life: 'our distance from each other was the *distance* of a sacrament, the *sacrament and embrace* we knew in one muse and one undying soul' (p. 152).

I have tried as much as possible to let the language of the novel speak for itself and hope at least to have shown that, contrary to what even sympathetic critics of Harris's novels have claimed, it does not resist critical analysis although at all times intuition is as necessary as reason. I have not attempted to explain everything, and I realize that the choice of words, phrases and metaphors I have endeavoured to clarify may seem subjective or even arbitrary; it has been guided by what I consider to be essential motifs in the novel. *Palace of the Peacock* is difficult partly because the 'drama of consciousness' which is the main theme of the novel is difficult to accept and requires of the reader the same erosion of prejudices and accepted ideas as that in which Donne is involved. Though some of Harris's writing tends to be esoteric and becomes clearer in the light of his own critical essays, the language of his novels is itself the key to understanding, the topography of his vision of man in a particular world and in the universe. This sounds like a self-evident truth and can obviously be said of other novelists. The difference lies in the vision and the immediacy with which it is expressed.

Clearly, *Palace of the Peacock* lends itself to many interpretations and, as Joyce Adler rightly asserts, 'no one

approach can give a true sense of what the totality contains and implies'.²⁸ West-Indian critics naturally insist on the correspondence between the social and political reality in Guyana and its rendering by Wilson Harris. Whatever aspect of his novels one responds to, this correspondence should be obvious, as it is equally obvious that Harris's presentation of Guyanese society could apply to other heterogeneous societies in the world. One need hardly reiterate that the universal significance of experience derives from the particular, and it is well known that Harris's experience in the Guyanese jungle was a decisive stimulus to his particular conception of the Guyanese community and of the art of fiction.²⁹ Yet in spite of its specifically Guyanese setting, population and even dialect, the picture of the jungle and of the heterogeneous people in *Palace of the Peacock* is 'quintessential' in a way descriptions of the jungle and mixed populations in other novels (including Harris's) are not. Harris starts from a simple story line (the search for El Dorado) and develops one important theme (the relationship between conqueror and conquered or exploiter and exploited) in a sensuously evoked or re-sensitized landscape. But the 'drama of consciousness' he describes (and very often the language in which it is evoked) is abstract, the product of an imagination challenging other imaginations, and the author keeps reminding the reader of it. For instance: 'He fastened on this notion to keep his mind from *slipping*' (p. 131)/ 'A singular *thought* always secured him to the scaffolding' (p. 140)/ '*In his mind* he knew [da Silva] was dead' (p. 142). Though it always derives from a concrete situation and never loses sight of it, this mental process, and the complex vision of life it elicits, requires patience and intellectual effort from the reader (as it is meant to by its very nature). Its development in *Palace of the Peacock* lays the foundations of an art of fiction that Harris sees as

tantamount to 'an art of community'. In the light of the novels he has written so far his vision is not so much an end as a much sought-after beginning.

Unlike other novelists, Wilson Harris does not attempt to create a given or recognizable picture of man in society. What the critic normally sees as a coherent world picture is all too often, in his opinion, one that confirms a world view instead of deepening or modifying it. As should be obvious even from the initial situation in *Palace of the Peacock*, he evokes the configuration of a particular society and the individual attitudes that reflect it only to show that they must be broken down and a new 'vision' created. This is not to say that Wilson Harris necessarily views all existing social and moral premises as wrong nor that the unity achieved by the heterogeneous crew makes him a utopist dreaming of universal brotherhood. There is a factual side to his fiction and a deep scientific understanding of man's environment which inspire his very real concern for the condition of modern man. The essential aspect of this concern in this novel is the divorce and feelings of hatred and fear between the strong and the weak. As Donne's experience shows, the situation can easily be reversed, but the pattern would remain the same if some effort were not made towards a consciousness of the nature of life, and towards the creation of a concept of identity that would unite men in the name of their humanity and common experience instead of economic interest or the colour of their skin.

By retracing the experience common to all who have penetrated the Guyanese heartland, *Palace of the Peacock* calls upon memory to offer the imagination the elements of a past that must be understood in a new light if man is to build the future with a sense of individual freedom and responsibility. It juxtaposes successive historical journeys into the interior (by the pre-Columbian Indians, and by a contem-

porary conquistador and his crew whose names recall their Renaissance forbears) and the shock of recognition it gives their participants frees them from the prejudices of a particular time. Although the novel ends with a vision of unity, in his later writings Wilson Harris presents the possibility of attaining it as much more questionable.³⁰ He has never ceased to insist on the 'digestion of contrasting spaces' but he does not optimistically believe they can be easily 'liberated.' They are part of man's nature (like good and evil) and of the physical world and can never be eradicated. But underlying those contrasts and struggles within man, between men and indeed among all forms of being in the universe, there is a harmony capable of emerging through the most solid walls (physical and mental) as Carroll's song emerges through the waterfall. From an attempt to dominate the country, Donne and his crew are moved to reintegrate the flow of life manifest in the phenomenal world around them. We have witnessed the contrasts and the emergence of a dialogue between them, whether in man or nature, conveyed through an alteration of the very texture of the narrative. Like men, words are unimportant in themselves; in the flow of the narrative, as men in the flow of life, they have a relative meaning and (as in the simple example of 'wood' suggesting life) are boldly used to express the livingness, mobility and extraordinary energy that inform the creation, or to stress its duality. Language itself creates the interrelatedness that Harris finds basic to all life; as we have seen, it creates a community of existence, a vast complex of relationships even before the narrator consciously realizes their significance. In this sense Harris's art of fiction is truly an art of community.

Such an art of fiction is incompatible with a given or a static view of society since it is based on constant discovery, on change — however empirical and difficult to achieve — on

an attempt 'to keep in step with life'. It gives man's purpose a cosmic rather than a social scale, though in the following novels Harris was to re-create all the particulars of life in society in various regions of Guyana. But the moral intent of his developing characters remains the same: a sense of responsibility towards oneself and others, humility and compassion (rather than some ideal fixed by society) are tentatively aimed at to counteract one's 'fear of strangeness and catastrophe in a destitute world' (p. 152).

FOOTNOTES

NOTES

1. Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock* (London, 1960). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text. I have felt it necessary to italicize a large number of words and expressions either to emphasize them, or to stress the relatedness or contrast between them. Unless otherwise specified, all italics are mine.
2. Wilson Harris, *Tradition the Writer and Society* (London, 1967), p. 51.
3. Wilson Harris, 'A Talk on the Subjective Imagination', in *New Letters* (Autumn, 1973), 37.
4. Wilson Harris, *History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas*, Edgar Mittelholzer Memorial Lectures (Georgetown, 1970), p. 23.
5. *Tradition the Writer and Society*, pp. 50-54.
6. *History, Fable and Myth*, p. 11.
7. *Tradition the Writer and Society*, p. 52.
8. *ibid*, p. 52.
9. Pierre Jean Jouve, *En Miroir*, Journal sans date (Paris, 1954), p. 13.
10. Gaston, Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'Espace*, first published 1957 (Paris, 1974), p. 169. My translation.
11. *ibid*, p. 202. My translation.
12. *ibid*, p. 203. My translation. italics.
13. *Tradition the Writer and Society*, pp. 31-32. Author's italics.
14. Wilson Harris, *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (London, 1965), p. 97. Author's italics.
15. I shall henceforth refer to the first-person narrator as N.
16. *Tradition the Writer and Society*, p. 38.
17. 'A Talk on the Subjective Imagination', p. 44.
18. Wilson Harris in Ian Munro and Reinhard Sander, Interview with Wilson Harris, *Kas-Kas* (Austin, Texas, 1972), p. 52.
19. On this subject see Wilson Harris's comments in 'The Unresolved Constitution', in *Caribbean Quarterly* (vol. 14, Nos. 1&2), p. 47.
20. On the 'limbo-Anancy syndrome' see Wilson Harris's comments in *History, Fable and Myth*, p. 9.
21. Wilson Harris, *The Waiting Room* (London, 1967), p. 67.
22. Wilson Harris, *The Secret Ladder*, first published 1963 (London, 1973), p. 206.
23. *The Waiting Room*, p. 67.
24. For a discussion of this concept see *Enigma of Values, an Introduction*, edited by Anna Rutherford and Kirsten Holst Petersen, Dangaroo Press (Aarhus, 1975).

25. *History, Fable and Myth*, p. 20.
26. *The Secret Ladder*, p. 195.
27. *ibid.*, p. 206.
28. Joyce Adler, 'Wilson Harris and Twentieth Century Man', in *New Letters* (Autumn, 1973), p. 50.
29. For the relation between the two see among others 'A Talk on the Subjective Imagination', pp. 40-1.
30. See, for instance in *Heartland* (London, 1964): 'The Golden Age they wushed to find — The Palace of the Peacock — may never have existed for all they knew.' p. 31.

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