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WILSON HARRIS'S MYTHIC VISION IN THE GUYANA QUARTET

WILSON HARRIS A JEHO MÝTICKÁ VIZE V THE GUYANA QUARTET

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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V Praze dne 16.8.2021

Mai Chi Nguyen

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to this MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used when referencing the works of Wilson Harris throughout this thesis:

FJ *The Far Journey of Oudin* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961)

GQ *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985)

PP *Palace of the Peacock* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960)

SL *The Secret Ladder* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963)

WA *The Whole Armour* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962)

Abstract

This thesis engages with Wilson Harris's vision for the Caribbean in light of the processes of land settlement, appropriation, genocide and slave trafficking that have historically denied the region's population of human identity. Concerned primarily with Wilson Harris's first four published novels, *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961), *The Whole Armour* (1962), and *The Secret Ladder* (1963), which were then grouped together and republished as *The Guyana Quartet* (1985), the study of this quartet also focuses on Harris's critical essays, most notably "The Amerindian Legacy" (1990). Firstly, this thesis situates Wilson Harris within the context of postcolonial thought and Caribbean literature in the 20th century. Then, it focuses on the remnants of colonial conquest that appear continuously in Harris's four novels under the repeated motif of pursuit. By exploring the presence of Jungian thought in Harris's fictional writing and critical writing, as well as the immanent ontology of the Caribbean that underpins the author's vision, the thesis draws out Harris's response to the cycle of persecution that he believes to stagnate the Caribbean. Harris's mythopoetic revisioning of Caribbean identity in *The Guyana Quartet* proposes a form of rebirth that transforms the dialectic between pursuer and pursued, all the while bridging the absence of history in the Caribbean. Previous scholarship has viewed Harris's fiction as difficult to align with postcolonial theory, in accordance with Harris's own perception of his writing. Given the dominant focus on the power of poetics and Harris's universality of the imagination, the praise of Harris's mythopoetics has perhaps overlooked the lack of exploration of female figures in *The Guyana Quartet*. Taking into consideration the weight of scholarship on Harris's re-imagining of the Caribbean, this thesis questions *The Guyana Quartet*'s depiction of women within its revised, myth-making Caribbean consciousness and offers an understanding of Harris's work that adopts Gilles Deleuze's concept of time in contrast to

previous readings of the singularity of Harris's poeticist, mystical and idealist Caribbean imaginary.

Abstrakt

Tato práce se zabývá vizí Karibiku Wilsona Harrise ve světle procesů osídlování půdy, přivlastňování, genocidy a obchodování s otroky, které historicky upíraly lidskost místní populace. Práce se soustředí především na jeho první čtyři vydané romány – *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961), *The Whole Armour* (1962), a *The Secret Ladder* (1963), které byly později společně vydány jako *The Guyana Quartet* (1985) – přičemž současně také zohledňuje Harrisovy kritické eseje, zejména „The Amerindian Legacy“ (1990). Tato diplomové práce začíná zasazením Wilsona Harrise do kontextu post-koloniálního myšlení a karibské literatury 20. století. Následně se zaměřuje na pozůstatky koloniálního dobývání, které se v uvedených čtyřech románech opakovaně objevují v podobě motivu pronásledování. Tato práce se snaží osvětlit Harrisovu reakci na cykly perzekuce, které jsou podle něj jednou příčinou stagnace Karibiku, skrze zkoumání přítomnosti jungiánského myšlení v Harrisově fikci a kritice, jakož i imanentní ontologie Karibiku tvořící základ jeho vize. Harrisova mytopoetická rekonceptualizace karibské identity v *The Guyana Quartet* navrhuje formu znovuzrození, která transformuje dialektiku mezi pronásledovatelem a pronásledovaným a současně překlenuje absenci historie v Karibiku. Předchozí literatura, podobně jako autor sám, považovala Harrisovu fikci za obtížně sladitelnou s post-koloniální teorií. Vzhledem k převládajícímu zaměření na sílu jeho poetiky a univerzality představivosti, pozitivní kritika Harrisovy mytopoetiky potenciálně přehlédla nedostatečný důraz na ženské postavy v *The Guyana Quartet*. S ohledem na objem a vliv kritické literatury o Harrisově rekonceptualizaci Karibiku, tato práce zpochybňuje způsob, jakým *The Guyana Quartet* zobrazuje ženy v rámci své nové koncepce mýtotvorného karibského vědomí, a nabízí chápání Harrisovy tvorby, které – narozdíl od předešlých interpretací jedinečnosti Harrisovy poetické, mystické a idealistické představy Karibiku – přejímá koncepci času od Gillesse Deleuze.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Wilson Harris: the Postcolonial Writer

Wilson Harris was born in former British Guiana in 1921, at the time a British colony that would today be known as the nation Guyana, having become independent in 1966. The Guyanese writer was prolific as a novelist, having published twenty-four novels in his lifetime prior his death in 2018, as well as an essayist. The wealth of his fictional and nonfictional production was matched by the academic research that has followed his first novel, *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), and the importance of Wilson Harris's essays on his own writing is reflected in an obituary published in *The Journal of Commonwealth*

Literature:

They are landmarks in Caribbean philosophy, in that they concern not only his own writing, but also explore the deepest questions pertaining to Caribbean art, aesthetics, and thought (colonial trauma, conquest, the upheavals created by slavery, time, representation, and consciousness, among other matters — as well as their links to the aesthetic process). His work is underpinned by a humanism that places the human back into the vital impulse of nature.¹

Jason Allen-Paisant, the author of the obituary and also the Director of the Institute for Colonial and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Leeds, praises the Guyanese writer's ability to penetrate philosophical thought, demonstrated through the vibrant discussion between Harris and Allen-Paisant only three years before the former's passing. In interviews, Harris explores the very areas listed by Allen-Paisant, drawing attention to his essays in combination with his novels.² It is the breadth of Harris's nonfictional critical essay writing,

¹ Jason Allen-Paisant, "Obituary: Wilson Harris (1921–2018)," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 53, no. 2 (2018): 332–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989418776814>.

² Such as Kalu Ogbaa and Wilson Harris, "Exile, Philosophic Myth, Creative Truth, Thrust and Necessity: An Interview with Wilson Harris," *Caribbean Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (July 19, 1983): 54–62; Wilson Harris and Kerry Johnson, "Interview with Wilson Harris," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 1, no. 1 (July 19, 1997): 83–95; Charles H Rowell and Wilson Harris, "An Interview with Wilson Harris," *Callaloo* 18, no. 1 (July 19, 1995): 192–200.

however, that demonstrates the way in which he draws upon or responds to Western philosophy in his exploration of non-western traditions.³

Allen-Paisant correctly summarises Harris's essays as an exploration of "the deepest questions pertaining to Caribbean art, aesthetics, and thought". And indeed, scholarship on Harris revolves around examining his fiction in tandem with his critical essays: Hena Maes-Jelinek, whose close analysis of Harris's novels has been seminal to critical studies on the writer, is one such example, drawing upon Harris's fiction and non-fiction alike.⁴ In the proliferation of Harris studies, with its beginnings in the 1970s, the writer's fiction has seemed inextricable from the author's reflective essays that later accompanied his novels' publication.

Both his fictional and nonfictional writing have focused on the problematic of postcolonial identity, more specifically in the context of South America and the Caribbean. Colonisation in this area of the world, carried out for the purposes of European imperial gain and consisting most notably of the Atlantic slave trade and the creation of plantation economies, was a process that began at the end of the 15th century in the Caribbean. The creation of Western Europe's colonial dominions was eventually followed by large-scale rebellion, which allowed for the emergence of today's independent states.

The series of independences and rebellions that occurred, both in the Americas but also on other continents, may have resulted in relative autonomy for these countries, but several Caribbean islands are still part of European states and the relations of power and domination still continue today. For this reason, the term 'postcolonial' will be used in order to refer not only to formerly colonised areas, but also to these spaces during an era in which the majority

³ In the following example, Harris uses his analysis of Amerindian myth to question Cartesian worldviews explicitly, as well to respond to Christian and Dantean literary tradition: Wilson Harris, "Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition," in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. Andrew Bundy (London and Paris: Routledge, 1999), 177–87.

⁴ Hena Maes-Jelinek, *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*, ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek (Sydney and Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1991).

of colonies have obtained political independence. It does not negate, however, the reality of the remnants of colonisation that persist in these countries. In fact, the term emphasises the complexity of the relationship between these ‘independent’ states and the continuing impact of imperialism on them. The author had himself been a land surveyor and was educated in the British system, both colonial in Guyana and then metropolitan in England.⁵ The impact of colonialism on these states have resulted in identity tensions that are rooted in the relationship between colonial identity, which consisted of subservience and the denial of human rights or the denial of recognition as human beings, and postcolonial relations not only between former colonies and dominant states, but also between the people within these former colonies.

This thesis engages with the way in which Harris responds to this postcolonial condition in four of his novels: *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961), *The Whole Armour* (1962) and *The Secret Ladder* (1963). These novels, which form the first four novels that he ever published, were then regrouped into *The Guyana Quartet* and published collectively in 1985, all the while still retaining the order of their respective publications as their order in the collection.

1.2 Wilson Harris’s Writing and Caribbean Studies

The Guyanese writer, who moved to Britain in 1938, places himself within a wider tradition of the West Indies and of West Indian writing.⁶ The British West Indies was a collective term that designated not only British colony islands in the Caribbean Sea, but also the colonies British Guiana and British Honduras, current-day Guyana and Belize respectively. In 1959, the short-lived West Indian Federation attempted and failed to group some of these territories politically. Following the dissolution of the West Indies Federation, the term continues to be

⁵‘Chronology’, Hena Maes-Jelinek, *Wilson Harris* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

⁶Ogbaa and Harris, “Exile, Philosophic Myth, Creative Truth, Thrust and Necessity: An Interview with Wilson Harris”; Wilson Harris, “Tradition and the West Indian Novel,” in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. Andrew Bundy (1964; reis., London and Paris: Routledge, 1999), 135–46.

used and undoubtedly is rooted in the beginnings and continuation of British colonial control in a specific geographic space. As has been noted by the Kenneth Ramchand in *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, in which the author seeks to draw together a typology for West Indian novels, the West Indies designates “formerly British islands in the Caribbean Sea and the South American mainland territory now known as Guyana.”⁷ West Indian literature is therefore produced by writers who were born in or grew up in the West Indies.⁸

In light of the emergence of West Indian writing in post-war Britain, by those considered Windrush novelists (V. S. Naipaul, Kamau Braithwaite and Samuel Selvon are examples), Harris has also been examined in a comparative manner to his contemporaries and under the lens of anticolonial efforts. An example of this can be found in the more recent *Migrant Modernism*, a study on the role of British Modernism in the emergence of West Indian literature.⁹

The focus on Wilson Harris’s works has also extended beyond the characterisation of his writing in relation to the Windrush generation. Interest in Wilson Harris’s work has centred on his particular understanding of universalism and humanism, developed in his writings. This has led to those such as Syed Manzu Islam to explore Harris alongside Jungian theory of archetypes as well as Heidegger’s ontological thought.¹⁰ Numerous researchers have also focused on drawing out Harris’s aesthetics, and many have examined him in relation to the works of Edouard Glissant, Alejandro Benitez-Rojo and Gloria Anzaldúa, to name a few.¹¹ The wealth of research into Harris’s work has developed from the initial

⁷ Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*, 2nd Editio (London, Kingston, Port of Spain: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), 3.

⁸ As defined in Kenneth Ramchand, “West Indian Literary History: Literariness, Orality and Periodization,” *Callaloo*, no. 34 (1988): 95–110.

⁹ J. Dillon Brown, *Migrant Modernism : Postwar London and the West Indian Novel* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Syed Manzu Islam, “Postcolonial Shamanism: Wilson Harris’s Quantum Poetics and Ethics,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 16, no. 1 (2007): 59–82.

¹¹ Barbara J. Webb, *Myth and History in Caribbean Fiction: Alejo Carpentier, Wilson Harris, and Edouard Glissant* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); Melanie Otto, “Poet-Shamanic Aesthetics in the Work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Wilson Harris,” *The CLR James Journal* 23, no. 1/2 (2017): 135–56.

exploration of his work in terms of anticolonial cultural nationalism or racial politics and identity in the West Indies, already criticised by Michael Gilkes in 1975,¹² but still apparent in later studies on West Indian literature.¹³ There has been a widening in the scope of studies on Harris, exemplified by the research into the conceptions of universalism, humanism and aesthetics that are being posited in Harris's work. More recently, the representation of Guyanese landscapes has garnered interest in Harris's literary production from an ecological standpoint.¹⁴

Within the extensive studies on Wilson Harris, it is therefore apparent that the research on him has been concerned with understanding his writing in the context of West Indian writing, but more widely as well. Throughout his fiction and nonfiction, and in his interviews, Amerindian tradition, loss (through colonisation), redemption or continuation have been recurring themes. The style of Wilson Harris's fiction has led him to be considered an opaque writer, sometimes called incomprehensible,¹⁵ to the point where he discourages being read for lack of being understood. However, it is undeniable that he seeks to formulate a vision of the world that responds to the difficulties of the lingering and ever complex relationships between colonial powers and colonised peoples and territories in a postcolonial world. When asked about his reaction to academic responses and critics in the field of postcolonial studies and literature, Harris focuses on "the life of the imagination" rather than theory.¹⁶ He claims that postmodernists "have these theories which they hold onto and that is dangerous", seeking instead to turn critical interest towards fiction:

¹² He states that much work, at the time, overlooks how Harris is "primarily concerned with the re-integration of the divided psyche" and not collective, national identity. Michael Gilkes, "The Journey Inwards," in *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel* (London, Trinidad and Jamaica: Longman Caribbean, 1975), 36.

¹³ The importance of racial identity: Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*.

¹⁴ James Green, "Mapping the Guyanese Dream-Space," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 43, no. 1 (2007): 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449850701219777>; Patricia Noxolo and Marika Preziuso, "Postcolonial Imaginations: Approaching a 'Fictionable' World through the Novels of Maryse Condé and Wilson Harris.," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103, no. 1 (2013): 163–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2011.628251>.

¹⁵ Hena Maes-Jelinek, "Ouverture," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2, no. 3 (2000): 8.

¹⁶ Harris and Johnson, "Interview with Wilson Harris," 94.

Is it possible for the humanities to begin genuinely to perceive what is required... if a different kind of language in fiction is to be rooted in revisionary momentum?... I grant that, it seems as if I am making a plea for myself, but even though you may scoff at this, I am making a plea for the strangers of the self.¹⁷

The reply indicates that Harris seeks to push forward a revisionary language and a form of fiction that holds weight, and indeed surpasses, postcolonial theory. Moreover, Harris's fiction is also aimed at "strangers of the self", indicating the universality that he proposes and that has been identified in his fictional work.¹⁸

This thesis will therefore examine Harris's fiction as an envisioned future for postcolonial societies, stemming outwards from his portrayal of Guyana in *GQ*. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate *GQ*'s validity for understandings of postcolonial identity and for the future of this identity. Harris provides a vision, a projection into the future, and the characteristics of this vision are present in his first four novels. Indeed, it has been stated that these main characteristics, which form the core of his visionary mythmaking (mythopoesis) and are already found in *Palace of the Peacock*, "are traceable throughout his later fiction, from *The Carnival Trilogy* through *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*, to his latest work".¹⁹ For this reason, the concentration will remain on *The Guyana Quartet* as an expansion upon the ideas developed in *Palace of the Peacock*.

The title already indicates the four novels' presentation as an englobing vision of Guyana, and though the novels vary in terms of their time periods and settings within Guyana, there are thematic links between all four that first arise in *Palace of the Peacock*. The repeated themes and images throughout the novels are centred most notably around the depiction of pursuit and possession. Both are displayed as driving forces of the novels' plots, and are woven into Wilson Harris's depiction of colonial conquest, more explicitly in *Palace of the*

¹⁷ Harris and Johnson, 95.

¹⁸ Hena Maes-Jelinek, *Labyrinth of Universality: Wilson Harris's Visionary Art of Fiction* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006).

¹⁹ Arturo Cattaneo, "Harris the Myth-Maker," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2, no. 1/2/3 (2000): 96–108.

Peacock but still just as strongly in the consequent novels. Nevertheless, the differences between the novels allows for an analysis of the complexities – that may seem to be conflicting – in the images being portrayed across the four texts.

The relevance of Caribbean writing in understanding postcolonial relations globally, which supports Wilson Harris’s belief of his writing as being universal, has been succinctly stated by James Clifford: “We are all Caribbean now, in our urban archipelagos.”²⁰ In this chapter of *The Predicament of Culture*, Clifford mainly focuses on the problematic of colonial standpoints in carrying out ethnography in Africa, but Clifford’s statement ties into the following chapter, on the Martinican Aimé Césaire and his poetic illustration of his homeland.²¹ In these two chapters, Clifford brings to the forefront the need for hybridity and the rupturing of pre-existing structures, through the creation of new language in the case of Césaire or through disrupted narrative forms in ethnographic writing, in depictions of cultures and peoples. Later in that very paragraph, Clifford turns to Wilson Harris as an example of creating identity out of heterogeneity. The quoted statement above refers to the nature of the Caribbean and the processes of continuous re-fragmentation and re-composition that have formed it, and Clifford, with whom Harris would agree, demonstrates that these core aspects of the Caribbean extend beyond that area.

Though it seems that the term ‘West Indian’ would regionalise the writer and relegate him to a tradition that concerns Britain and its relationship with the West Indies, this term would be used in the thesis in combination with ‘Caribbean’ in order to emphasise the way in which Harris writes as a West Indian and as a Caribbean writer. The terms ‘West Indian’ and ‘Caribbean’ will be used throughout the thesis to indicate the specificity of the writing, in

²⁰ James Clifford, “Tell about Your Trip: Michel Leiris,” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 173.

²¹ The two chapters: Clifford, “Tell about Your Trip: Michel Leiris”; James Clifford, “A Politics of Neologism: Aimé Césaire,” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 175–81.

terms of West Indian or Caribbean historical events, for example, or in the context of research that focuses on these areas, but not to restrict it to merely pertaining to such geographical locations of cultural-specific writing and people.

1.3 An Overview of the Novels in *The Guyana Quartet*

All four novel take place in Guyana, though the time periods in which they are set seem to differ, and they were individually published in the early 1960s before being re-published collectively in 1985. Though their plotlines seem difficult to capture due to Harris's opaque writing style, the narratives are in fact straightforward. A summary of the plots would aid in understanding the subsequent analysis of the texts.

In *Palace of the Peacock*, a tyrannical plantation-owner named Donne leads his crew through dangerous rivers in search of Mariella, an Arawak woman who is both his former slave as well as mistress. Their journey proves to be fruitless and ultimately deadly as many crew members are lost along the way; indeed, it is noted that the crew had already once made the very same journey and already failed, having died during that first journey. After chasing Mariella through uncharted territory leading deeper into Guyana's heartlands, the ship crashes and its remaining shipwrecked members continue their perilous journey on land. In the end, they are faced with a peacock structure whose blinding image is accompanied by an ethereal and piercing whistling that seems to emanate from Carroll, a member that had died earlier in the novel.

The Far Journey of Oudin has a much smaller geographical focus. Ram, a miserly landowner and moneylender in the savannahs of Guyana, possibly near Oudin, frantically seeks a supposed contract that had been signed between him and a recently deceased man named Oudin, of which Beti, widow to Oudin and pregnant with his son, knows nothing. This agreement supposedly entitles Ram to the possession of Beti and Oudin's child, but the paper upon which the agreement had been made is eaten by Beti. Throughout the course of the

novel, it is revealed that Oudin had been working for Ram to rebrand – and therefore steal – cattle from Ram’s tenant, Mohammed, in order to sabotage his profits. The novel reveals the intricacies of betrayals and downfalls that surround Mohammed and his late brothers, whose ancestors had gained control of their estate via illicit means and felt threatened by Oudin, their supposed half-brother. Beti is the daughter of Mohammed’s cousin, and had been raised by Mohammed following her own father’s death. In the final scene, Beti and Oudin have eloped in order to escape Beti being betrothed to Ram, but they are betrayed by a cattlehand who had also been ruined by a loan from Ram that had been mediated by Oudin.

The Whole Armour is based in Jigsaw Bay. A young man named Cristo is accused of murdering a man implicated with Sharon, the object of Cristo’s love. The man who shelters him, after being begged by Magda, Cristo’s mother, also dies; Cristo insists that he is innocent and that a tiger had ravaged the body, whilst Magda accuses her son of a second murder. In an attempt to facilitate her son’s escape from the law, Magda uses the remnants of the attack to claim that it had been Cristo, not Abram, who had been killed by the tiger, after which she organises a wake to cement the belief her son’s death. Sharon’s appearance at the wake causes disarray as Magda reveals that Cristo has left her a letter telling her the truth. Her suitor at the time, Mattias Gomez, falls on his own blade in a fight with Peet, Sharon’s father, the latter of which is declared innocent by Mattias’s own last dying words. However, Peet commits suicide and Cristo gives himself up to the police, despite Sharon’s claims that Cristo’s supposed victim had died in the same manner as Gomez.

Finally, *The Secret Ladder* seems the least dissimilar to *Palace of the Peacock*, for the land surveying job of the protagonist can be viewed as a form of land conquest that parallels the conquest for Mariella in the first novel of the quartet. This final novel follows the demise of a community that resides at the Canje river, whose water levels are being gauged by a government surveyor, Russell Fenwick. Fenwick is given the job of surveying the land, for

though it cannot be used profitably for crop-growing, its potential as a flood reservoir for the dry season is of great interest to the government. Poseidon, a highly venerated member of the community, directly opposes what he believes to be the potential government-ordained flooding of the area, despite Fenwick's claims of knowing nothing on the subject. At the same time, Fenwick's authority over his crew also waivers and threatens to collapse during their endeavours. The novel ends with a closely avoided torture of Catalena, the wife of one of Fenwick's crew members and lover of another member of the very same crew, after Poseidon dies at the hand of Bryant (Catalena's lover) as he attempts to murder the woman.

The four novels' plots are different, but nevertheless linked, especially in the first and last novels: Donne and Fenwick both grapple with the tensions between themselves, as either colonisers (Donne) or representatives of colonial endeavours (Fenwick), and those who perceive themselves to be victims of and opponents to such powers (Mariella and the Canje community). The depiction of land conquest via the ownership of human bodies appears in *Palace of the Peacock* explicitly in the form of slave ownership, but also appears in *The Far Journey of Oudin* under the form of indenture and servitude. In *The Whole Armour*, the community of Jigsaw Bay operates under its own, closed judicial system that seeks to operate apart from federal police control, providing a parallel to the community of the Canje river in *The Secret Ladder*. Moreover, throughout these novels, Wilson Harris interweaves the historical trajectories of mass genocide, territorialisation, landscape reformation, and migrancy – both forced and otherwise – that have created the nation Guyana. His work provides a spatiotemporal panorama of Guyana through the different time periods and social groups (people of South-East Asian, South Asian, African, European and Amerindian descent) that are represented in his novels.

1.4 Identifying Harris's Vision

The analysis of *Quartet* seeks to examine more closely the themes that run concurrently through the novels, in light of *The Guyana Quartet* as a microcosm of Guyanese society. Harris's style remains unchanged from the first to the last, and his motifs of blindness, truth, desire self-questioning recur from *Palace of the Peacock* to *The Secret Ladder*. The population of these images demonstrate the spiritual quality of Harris's work and this thesis aims to examine the ways in which these images participate in Wilson Harris's vision of Guyana, and their role in his fiction as an englobing vision of a future for Caribbean and postcolonial peoples. The thesis focuses on the pursuer-pursuant relationship that is foregrounded in *The Guyana Quartet*, for it underpins all relations in the novels, including those that are socio-political and environmental. As such, the novels are examined as responses to the continuous and damaging repetition of the colonising mission that has produced Guyana. Furthermore, in light of Harris's universalist aims, this thesis also seeks to evaluate the limits of Harris's vision.

In Harris's introduction to *GQ*, titled "A Note on the Genesis of *The Guyana Quartet*" and composed in 1984, the writer mentions "the convertible imageries in the narrative of the entire quartet, the paradoxes of emphasis born of necessity as sliced being revolves nevertheless into a new configuration or complex evolution, complex regeneration, sound yet sight woven together."²² There is no doubt that Harris is difficult to decipher, even as he perhaps tries to speak directly to the reader in his introduction – as opposed to indirect communication via his fictive writing – and the interpretation of this sentence proves Harris's opaque, sometimes called incomprehensible, style of writing. The notion of configuring

²² Wilson Harris, "A Note on the Genesis of 'The Guyana Quartet,'" in *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 10.

newness out of de-composed images, which could perhaps be the “sliced being” that Harris mentions, and the appearance of paradoxes, will be pursued through Harris’s essays.

According to Hena Maes-Jelinek, who has set the foundations for studies on this highly prolific Guyanese writer, Wilson Harris resists theory and offers a unique vision for the future of the Caribbean that incorporates and responds to the problematic of its colonial history.²³ This is reflected across research on Harris’s universalism, which has been drawn out from his critical essays in combination with his fiction. This thesis responds to this universalist vision of Guyana, and the writer’s stance of being against theory, by applying Gilles Deleuze’s understandings of time to the quartet of novels. Though this has been considered before, by Jason Allen-Paisant and Lorna Burnes, it has not yet been applied to *GQ*’s depiction of women in consideration with Harris’s vision. Moreover, Allen-Paisant concentrates on the theatrical space of Harris’s novel *Carnival*.²⁴

Burnes, on the other hand, seeks to use Deleuze in her analysis of Caribbean literature as a form of bridging Surrealism and postcolonial discourse, using *Palace of the Peacock* as an example upon many others. Though Maes-Jelinek concentrates on the individual texts of *GQ* in *Labyrinth of Universality*, I aim to examine them under a comparative lens: though *Palace of the Peacock* is viewed as emblematic of Harris’s oeuvre, its parallels with the others, and with the last novel of the four in particular, suggest that the novels should be examined together. Drawing mainly upon Burnes and Deleuze, I seek to consolidate Wilson Harris’s vision of Guyana, as it is presented in his quartet of novels, with Deleuze’s perception of literature, philosophy and life. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that Wilson Harris can be viewed as practising Deleuze through his writing. I aim to show that Harris’s own vision of

²³ Hena Maes-Jelinek, “‘Numinous Proportions’ Wilson Harris’s Alternative to All ‘Posts,’” in *The Labyrinth of Universality: Wilson Harris’s Visionary Art of Fiction* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006), 527–47.

²⁴ Jason Allen-Paisant, “Reading Wilson Harris with Gilles Deleuze: Carnival, or the Novel as Theatrical Space,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 55, no. 2 (2020): 294–308; Lorna Burnes, *Contemporary Caribbean Writing and Deleuze* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012).

the Caribbean not only aligns with Deleuze's conceptions of life, but can be developed through them and that the cycle of novels provides a mode of reframing the past of the Caribbean.

To do so, I establish that Harris's *GQ* is a response to the postcolonial condition of Guyana. This is done in the first chapter, whose aim is to identify, firstly, that the pursuer-pursued relationship is the one that is perceived by Harris as the core of Guyanese identity. In demonstrating this, as well as in examining Harris's response, I will turn to scholarship on Harris that has been carried out since the publication of the novels in the 1960s and, through my application of it on *GQ*, provide a synthesised overview of such research.

In the following chapter, I focus on a heretofore less focused on, but highly apparent, element of Harris's *GQ*: the role of women and their future in the novels, in light of the way in which Harris places them as victims of the colonial mission. This chapter demonstrates that *GQ* depicts the remapping of colonial desires onto the female body, with little space for an ending to this cycle of desire and possession, and that the writer's redemptive vision of Guyana can be perceived as limited in its scope as a result.

Finally, I bring in the more recent scholarship on Deleuze in order to reformulate Harris's vision through a Deleuzian lens. This involves a response to the previous issue of Guyanese womanhood and the repetition of violence being inflicted upon them throughout the novels, as well as the way in which they are presented as symbols of the land. This closing chapter therefore attempts to evaluate whether, through Deleuze, it is possible to advance an amended understanding of Wilson Harris's mythopoesis that opens up a way for Wilson Harris to be viewed outside of his mystical and spiritual vision of Guyana.

2. Pursuit

This chapter aims to demonstrate that Wilson Harris's exploration of the pursuer-pursued relationship embodies his vision regarding the development of Guyanese, and therefore Caribbean, identity. The analysis of Wilson Harris's fiction demonstrates that *GQ* re-creates the relationships of pursuer and pursued, capture and flight, and possession and loss, which figure as the dynamic underpinning Guyanese experience and Caribbean ontology. Harris's fiction provides a mythopoetics of Guyana, through which the author revisions Caribbean identity by creating a new imaginary. In showing that the motifs of pursuit and flight are emblematic of the colonial and postcolonial conditions of Guyana, the following chapter also seeks to present Wilson Harris's resolution of this dialectical relationship through the analysis of *GQ*.

2.1 Pursuer-Pursued in *The Guyana Quartet*

The plotline of the first novel of the quartet, *Palace of the Peacock*, clearly places the novel as a depiction of pursuit: Donne's search for Mariella motivates all crew members, and the weight of their mission is expressed by the narrator of the novel: "Mariella was the obsession we must encounter at all costs".²⁵ The desire for re-acquiring the escaped slave is a sentiment that seems, though it is later questioned, to be shared by all members of the crew. It certainly costs them many of their lives, and the suggestion that their crew had already died upon the same voyage underlines the danger as well as the futility of the endeavour.²⁶

The recapturing of an escaped slave, especially given the 16th century setting of the novel, is a theme that of course reflects the history of the population of the Caribbean, where today's

²⁵ Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, in *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 15–117., p.26. All future page references to *PP*, *FJ*, *WA* and *SL* will be to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text.

²⁶"The odd fact existed of course that their living names matched the names of a famous dead crew that had sunk in the rapids and been drowned to a man, leaving their names inscribed on Sorrow Hill..." (*PP* 26)

conglomeration of races is due to global slave-trafficking. The instances of slaves escaping and forming their own communities were widespread and termed *marronage* in French. The concept of *marronage*, which entered into English and was the basis for the term ‘maroons’, refers to the Caribbean phenomenon of escaped slaves forming communities outside of plantations, normally in dense jungle or mountainous areas.²⁷ Donne’s attempts at re-capturing Mariella, who is depicted as a native Amerindian woman, therefore represents initial – and failed – attempts at enslaving native populations, the purpose of which was to exploit both people and land in order to bolster European imperial economies.

At the end of a long and perilous journey, Donne and his surviving crew members climb a cliff and arrive at the Palace of the Peacock, described as “the palace of the universe”, where “the windows of the soul looked out and in” (*PP* 112). Donne, his brother, who narrates the novel and is referred to as the Dreamer, as well as others listen to the whistled “the cry of the peacock” that allows them to perceive their true selves (*PP* 113).

Despite its confusing ending, *PP* can be interpreted as a re-constituted and re-presented depiction of Caribbean identity, in which Guyana’s slave past (and the greed for ownership of other peoples as well as the land) is acted out on scene. As is stated by Hena Maes-Jelinek, Harris looks to offer a “re-creation of the Guyanese experience and of the dispossessed void-like condition of Caribbean man”.²⁸ The void-like condition is marked by the erasure of identity that occurred in the Middle Passage from Africa to the Caribbean, which has also become “a challenge to them [Caribbeans] to reassemble their cultural fragments, fuse their

²⁷ “‘maroon, n.2 and Adj.2,’” in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/114284?rskey=AA9lvt&result=3> (accessed August 07, 2021).

²⁸ Hena Maes-Jelinek, “Introduction,” in *The Labyrinth of Universality: Wilson Harris’s Visionary Art of Fiction* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006), xv.

multiple ethnic identities, and appropriate imprisoned social spaces”, thereby becoming the cornerstone of the Caribbean imaginary.²⁹

The subsequent novels to *PP* seem, upon an initial reading, less anchored in this violent and core aspect of Guyanese identity; furthermore, they also lack the same driving theme and would therefore resonate less with their readership. Given that *PP*'s plotline consists of a European colonial on the hunt for an escapee slave,³⁰ the novel can be construed as a depiction of colonial conquest in Guyana that seeks to all social groups involved in the process. The crew members' own racial and ethnic backgrounds are diverse, thus forming a microcosm of Guyanese society. As Islam states, the members represent “a rainbow spectrum of colour, cultures and races in their varied hybrid formations”, and the author summarises of the cultural and racial backgrounds of these characters.³¹ Together with *Donne*, the crew of *PP* relate the story of Guyana's creation through their tale of “the quintessence and repetitive pattern of Guyanese history: the invasion of the country by successive waves of conquerors in search of a legendary El Dorado, motivated by the mixture of brutality and idealism that characterized all such expeditions.”³²

In turn, these subsequent novels seem to be highly different from the first due to their more modern settings, but the theme of pursuit is not at all absent. In *SL*, Poseidon presides over a community whose slave ancestors had occupied the Canje river after running away from their owners, and the origins of the Canje river community serve to signal that the novel hearkens back to the origins of *GQ*, that is *PP*. Though the plot of *FJ* revolves around land ownership, it is significant that the novel opens with Ram's distress at his and Oudin's former

²⁹ Simon Gikandi, “Introduction: Modernism and the Origins of Caribbean Literature,” in *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 14.

³⁰ *Donne* is described as a “hard and ruthless colonizer”. Maes-Jelinek, “Palace of the Peacock,” 33; He is also identified as a “classic conquistador”. Paget, “Intrasubjectivity in the Philosophy of Wilson Harris,” 216.

³¹ Islam, “Postcolonial Shamanism: Wilson Harris's Quantum Poetics and Ethics,” 75.

³² Maes-Jelinek, “Palace of the Peacock,” 32.

agreement no longer being valid. With the agreement missing, and Oudin dead, the promise of handing over Oudin and Beti's future child to Ram disappears. As such, this reiterates the correlation between human and land ownership. *The Whole Armour* not only depicts Cristo's trajectory as a fugitive, but also reveals the persecutory behaviour of the entire Jigsaw Bay community. Finally, in *SL*, the government's possible repossession of the land also threatens to drive out the slave descendants from the area. The land surveying mission therefore echoes the conquering of the New World in its depiction of territorial pursuit.

2.1.1 Desire in Caribbean Consciousness

The images of pursuer and pursued that Harris creates act as more than mere references to the history of indigenous and slave persecution in Guyana: the roles of pursuer and pursued are presented as powerful drives that fuel the characters' very being. In *PP*, the conquistador figure Donne describes his task as a "nightmare burden of responsibility" (*PP* 50) during his conversation with the narrator. Donne is governed by a greater need to recapture Mariella: he is burdened by his role as slave-owner, and even deplores his own position as castigator and slavedriver. If *PP* focuses on the results of a singular drive, that is to regain Mariella – considered an object, of course – and repossess a loss, then the narration of Cristo's fugitive state can also be analysed in a reversed but parallel manner: the drive of the novel lies in the successful escape from capture. The burden of being pursued, which constantly forces Cristo to flee, is embodied by his mother's desperate machinations in preventing his capture.

The writer of the novel also raises the question of the fixed nature of roles, for Donne – in the very same conversation – questions whether there is still a "ghost of a chance" (*PP* 50) that he may change. His short outbursts denote his frustration at needing to extend control over his possessions, but he also considers the possibility of acting differently. However, his considerations do not lead to change in his behaviour, for he perpetuates the cycle of pursuit,

and therefore continues to re-enact the pursuer-pursued relationship. This relationship characterises the Caribbean, as has been observed by Duane Edwards in his article on Harris's response to the ontological nature of the Caribbean: "According to Harris, history, as it is approached in the Caribbean, centralises a victor/victim opposition which contributes to a deformed psyche by keeping history locked in an infinite rehearsal of this staged duality."³³ This "victor/victim syndrome", as Harris terms it, chains its actors into a perpetual dualism.³⁴

Thus, when faced with his own desire towards the end of the novel, Donne lacks the ability to understand that he is caught within the fallacy of the fixed nature of his being within the entire Mariella chase. He may have considered the possibility of change earlier in the novel, but he pushes aside such thoughts with a resolute desire to accomplish his original intention. This underlines his static nature: he believes that his role as pursuer is an inherent part of his character. In a similar manner, Ram is obsessed with becoming the owner of Beti's child in *FJ*, having failed in gaining her as his bride, but his dead end consists of Beti's carnal and perhaps even self-destructive act of devouring the very paper on which Ram and Beti's late husband Oudin had secretly signed the agreement to allow Ram to take Beti's child (*FJ* 236-7). There are few options available to Beti, as an illiterate woman, and she does not even know the contents of that which she consumes. However, the act of eating is the only tool – and one that is violent – with which she is equipped.

Furthermore, Mariella is not only the name of the former slave, but also the mission in which she and other escaped slaves reside. Thus Harris explicitly draws parallels between ownership of woman-Mariella and mission-Mariella, and this focus on the land extends beyond *PP*. In *FJ*, the estate owned by Beti's relatives had been violently acquired and is

³³ Duane Edwards, "What Happens When We Stop Dreaming? A Critical Exploration of Social Change in Walter Rodney's and Wilson Harris' Works," *Social Epistemology* 33, no. 3 (2019): 239.

³⁴ Wilson Harris, "The Amerindian Legacy," in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. Andrew Bundy (1990; reissued, London and Paris: Routledge, 1999), 163.

violently kept by the brothers, for they murder their half-brother and hide the amended will of their father in order to prevent the estate from being lost. Ram undoes such efforts though, by placing Oudin in their midst. This very same Oudin is reminiscent of the dead half-brother, and so it seems that the potential usurper is resurrected and continues the same work as before, though this time he has been appropriated by Ram. The frenzy over ownership devolves back to owning a human being: Ram desires Beti's child, which is Beti and Oudin's child. Human ownership and land ownership are once again equivocated.

2.1.2 Conquering the New World

The New World has been inhabited by European settlers, but it is also the re-shaping and the re-territorialising of the land, in the forms of landscaping via the creation of plantation for goods deemed desirable by Europe, that forms a major part of the conquest and is reflected equally by the exploitation of people in the process.³⁵ In *FJ*, Mohammed looks forward to obtaining the leftover overseers' frames from Demerara plantations, once the latter are upgraded (*FJ* 150). The mention of Demerara sugar plantations recalls the profitability of Guyana and many other locations in the New World through the sugar industry. Mohammed seeks to profit from Demerara's success, thereby hoping to improve his own conquest of the land, but this suggestion of success only seems to haunt the plantation-owners in the novel as they attempt to prevent their descent into economic ruin due to their own dwindling production.

The battle over the land is one in which the settler attempts to re-make the land in accordance with the metropole's desires, yet at the same time create something that can be controlled by the settler. However, the settler cannot achieve indigeneity, which is

³⁵ "Man and landscape share a common experience (violation by the conqueror). The landscape at times takes on the features of a human body which can prove as treacherous as any ill-intentioned adversary." Maes-Jelinek, "Palace of the Peacock," 34.

highlighted by Donne's reliance on Schomburgh's "Buck lingo" (*PP* 53) in order to communicate with the Arawak woman on the whereabouts of Mariella. The settler therefore inhabits a space of continuous settling, aiming to approach indigeneity whilst maintaining their colonial power. However, as demonstrated by Settler Colonialism researcher Lorenzo Veracini, the settler is unable to reach the moment of having settled: "despite recurring fantasies of ultimate supersession... a settler society is always, in Derridean terms, a society "to come," characterized by the promise rather than the practice of a "settled" lifestyle."³⁶ Of course, the plantation owners in *FJ* are of Indian descent, which points towards the West Indian immigration flow of indentured workers, rather than settlers. Nevertheless, their desire to control the land and its production mimics the Europeans who aimed to gain power over the New World, and it is their inferior position as descendants of indentured workers that also prevents them from being able to attain the levels of economic power provided by the original plantations, such as Demerara.

Furthermore, the Americas have been tied to virginal images of women, in which the countries are depicted as helpless and innocent women who must be saved from the cruelty of savages. Depictions of the Americas as women, in which native men appear to be savage and beastlike, underline the self-importance given to the New World conquest.³⁷ This saviour role is of course undermined by the violence enacted upon American territories and people. Thus Mariella, as a representation of Arawak people and of the slave escapees in *PP*, embodies the New World and Donne's pursuit of her parallels the relationship between colonisers and the colonies. Yet, of course, Harris refuses to portray such pursuits as ones in which the pursuer seeks to swoop in and save the woman desires. Instead, Wilson Harris

³⁶ Lorenzo Veracini, "The Settler-Colonial Situation," *Native Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (2010): 107.

³⁷ See Appendix: Jan van der Straet (called Stradanus), *Allegory of America*, ca.1587-89, ink and chalk drawing (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/343845>; Adriaen Collaert, "Allegory of America", from the *Four Continents*, 1580–1600, engraving, (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/385674>.

displays the ironic pertinence of the re-inscription of male-female relationships onto New World narratives: masculine preservation of maidenhood, whose external honourable appearance hides violent and abusive behaviour, indeed acts as a suitable parallel to the exploratory, civilising and merited exploitations of land that occurred during colonial conquest.

The native lands are not attainable, however, as shown by the demise of Donne's crew (if the death of the first crew is not sign enough of their inability to navigate Guyana's heartland). In *SL*, Fenwick also seeks to know the land, this time acting on behalf of the government and their desire to profit from taming the otherwise wild interior space. Given the endings of *PP* and *SL*, in which both Donne and Fenwick abandon their original missions, it is clear that Wilson Harris seeks to denounce the repetitions of colonial conquest, through Donne's tyrannical pursuit of Marianna as well as through modern-day reterritorialisation missions. After all, these novels seem to result in destruction, exemplified by the deaths of Donne's crew, and the near death of a member of Fenwick's crew on the boat 'Palace of the Peacock'.

However, Wilson Harris seeks to provide a conclusionary and fulfilling ending to the crew's journey in *PP*: "It was the inseparable moment within ourselves of all fulfilment and understanding" (*PP* 116). If the cycle of pursuit and flight continues throughout history, revealing itself in modern-day Guyana, then Wilson Harris's "fulfilment" at the end of *PP* needs to be decoded; and indeed, Harris's essays illuminate the ways in which the continuation of violence, fear and apparent failure that is presented in the entire quartet of novels can lead to a fulfilment that is attained through a shift in human understanding and the human psyche itself.

2.1.3 The Human Psyche: Jung and Harris

In *GQ*, the narrative elements of Wilson Harris's novels – character actions, plot, speech – are more often than not embedded in descriptive writing that ties the contents of the novel to commentary on the human condition.³⁸ This surrounding and highly spiritualist writing can indeed often account for the difficulty of reading Harris, which entangles the plot with greater notions of the divine, read as Harris's projection of the nature of humanity as well as reality. Gregory Shaw, a Wilson Harris scholar from the University of the West Indies, argues that Harris's depiction of the material environment of Guyana, in *GQ*, serves to undo its external nature and reveal that the space of nature is also occupied by human consciousness.³⁹ This supports Maes-Jelinek's understanding of Harris when she puts forward that Harris's fiction moves towards an "immanent creative Spirit",⁴⁰ for her studies of Wilson Harris interpret Harris's novels as explorations of an immanent human consciousness, residing in creativity and an "original spirit, original soul"⁴¹. The landscape in Harris's fiction is therefore a "trope of historical and psychic fragmentation", intimately tied to development of human consciousness through history and myth.⁴²

Understanding the ending of *PP* can be greatly aided by, if not necessitates, Harris's conception of the unconscious, myth and the imagination, all of which have been linked to Carl Gustav Jung by Harris himself.⁴³ The relevance of Jung and his influence on Harris's

³⁸ To provide one example of Harris's style, taken from *The Far Journey of Oudin*, lightning is described as "forked and veined and vicious, flashing closer still, blindingly, again and again, and unrolling into a webbed hand and foot like a crumpled flying napkin and sheet, on which the sacred embryonic beasts of the sky crouched." (*FJ* 195) Wilson Harris, "The Far Journey of Oudin," in *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 195.

³⁹ Gregory Shaw, "Wilson Harris's Metamorphoses: Animal and Vegetable Masks in 'Palace of the Peacock,'" *Callaloo* 18, no. 1 (1995): 157–70.

⁴⁰ Hena Maes-Jelinek, "Introduction: Approaching Wilson Harris's Creativity," in *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2002), xvi.

⁴¹ Wilson Harris, "Theatre of the Arts," in *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2002), 7.

⁴² Norval (Nadi) Edwards, "Tradition, the Critic, and Cross-Cultural Poetics: Wilson Harris as Literary Theorist," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 16, no. 2 (2008): 4, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23019879>.

⁴³ See Harris, "Theatre of the Arts."

writing has already been researched extensively,⁴⁴ and the relation is explored deeply in the Guyanese writer's essay, originally delivered as a paper in 1997, on Jung and the cultural imagery of Merlin and Parsifal.⁴⁵ In 'Merlin and Parsifal', the author diverges from Jung's conception, in which the Christian hero Parsifal is doubled by the "dark" Merlin.⁴⁶ Harris considers Parsifal to not only Merlin's "adversarial twin" but also his superior, having become more technologically advanced and therefore able to imprison Merlin in the "prisonhouse" of forests and caves with which he is associated.⁴⁷ Harris makes the relationship between the two as one of doubling, and he emphasises that Parsifal, for all his superiority, is also a "prisoner of inflexible sovereignty".⁴⁸ Merlin represents the unconscious, dominated over by the superior ego and only heard through his cry, which figures as a questioning 'inner voice' to conscious actions. It is possible to view Donne and the Dreamer as forms of Parsifal and Merlin respectively, and Wilson Harris argues for making Merlin's presence known, making what he terms as 'self-judgement' more apparent.

In the essay, Harris plays the opposing twins in relation to the way in which land, animal and human species have been victim to the man-made progress. This dichotomy can be developed further, for progress is linked to technology and "absolute knowledge".⁴⁹ If Parsifal is absolute knowledge and technology, in other words civilisation, then Amerindian life and land would be assigned to Merlin. Furthermore, Harris argues that Merlin's presence becomes apparent in Parsifal's world through his cry, which in psychological terms is

⁴⁴ Hena Maes-Jelinek, "The Writer as Alchemist: The Unifying Role of the Imagination," in *The Labyrinth of Universality: Wilson Harris's Visionary Art of Fiction* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006), 19–28; Michael Mitchell, "Legends of the Fall: On Rereading Companions of the Day and Night," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 49, no. 2 (May 1, 2013): 187–97; *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴⁵ Wilson Harris, "Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins," in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. Andrew Bundy (London and Paris: Routledge, 1999), 57–64.

⁴⁶ "Merlin represents an attempt by the medieval unconscious to create a parallel figure to Parsifal. Parsifal is a Christian hero, and Merlin, son of the devil and a pure virgin, is his dark brother." Carl Gustav Jung, "The Tower," in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 228.

⁴⁷ Harris, "Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins," 57.

⁴⁸ Harris, 58.

⁴⁹ Harris, 61.

described as ‘self-judgement’. If, according to Harris, self-judgment would reveal the “price humanity and the animal kingdom pay to perceive themselves within interchangeable roles of bride and bridegroom, priest of God and sacrificial victim”,⁵⁰ then Harris could be interpreted as calling for a reintegration of civilisation’s opposing double in order to destabilise the assumed superiority of that which is associated with ‘civilisation’, such as colonisers during the colonial conquest.

The political sociologist and Caribbean scholar Henry Paget, in his article on Harris’s intrasubjectivity, views *GQ* as four depictions of the interplay between sub-ego personas, whose antagonisms and tensions result from each persona’s “attempts to deny and exclude the existence of the others as integral parts of the self.”⁵¹ This applies to this chapter, for Donne seeks to deny the integral nature of his opposites, embodied by the Dreamer as well as Mariella, and is transformed into a positive force of creativity through his acceptance of these other personas that he formerly desires to destroy or control. The article is a study of archetype phenomenology, as Paget terms it, and it demonstrates the way in which Harris’s Jungian archetypes can lead to a radically idealist subjectivity. However, as Paget continues his archetypal analysis of Harris’s fiction, he concludes that Harris’s writing consists of an exploration of the functions of universal human consciousness, which he refers to as Psyche and Spirit. In doing so, he neglects the ramifications of *GQ* as a depiction of Guyanese identity in its historical and cultural development.⁵²

Nevertheless, it is true for Harris’s fiction that changes in the material landscape reflects that of the human psyche. Therefore, the manifestation of Jungian thought in *GQ* nevertheless relates to the realities of the Caribbean and indeed the history of its territorial conquest. As

⁵⁰ Harris, 63.

⁵¹ Paget, “Intrasubjectivity in the Philosophy of Wilson Harris,” 214.

⁵² Paget, 217.

Edwards has stated, Harris's fictional "native and phenomenal environment is a witness to the serial fragmentations of conquest" and "fuses history, geology and myth".⁵³ In the essay 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas', Wilson Harris explores aspects of Caribbean and Guyanese culture that have been born from their mixed origins and transfigured by their displacement. He focuses on limbo as a representation of slave experience of the Middle Passage that has become a creative act, emerging from the absence of history and the loss of identity caused by the slave trade, to form a Caribbean "renascence" away from the "prison of history".⁵⁴ This provides a creative and regenerative path that undoes the barrenness of cultural genocide that has been historically marked onto the Americas and repressed the history, and therefore subjectivity, of slaves.⁵⁵

2.1.4 Spectres of Carib Culture: Decomposition and Recomposition

Though the processes of psychical regeneration are apparent in *PP*, Harris's inclusion of Amerindian mythology allows for a bridging between the idealist subjectivity that Paget sees in Harris's works and the Guyana-specific setting of Wilson Harris's first novels. The regenerative journey of Donne's crew in *PP* could be identified, via Wilson Harris's use of the child spectre in Carib culture, as a metaphor for latent creativity. In 'The Amerindian Legacy', Harris writes that during the Carib ritual of consuming parts of their enemy, there would be "a sudden upsurge of bush-baby spectres which rose out of their cooking pots like wraiths of smoke or sparks of fire".⁵⁶ The consumption of the body of the enemy emphasises the drive of conquest that forms, as Harris later states, "the Carib syndrome"⁵⁷ and therefore

⁵³ Edwards, "Tradition, the Critic, and Cross-Cultural Poetics: Wilson Harris as Literary Theorist," 4.

⁵⁴ Wilson Harris, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. Andrew Bundy (1970; reis., London and Paris: Routledge, 1999), 150.

⁵⁵ "Slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory." Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, 5; cited by Gikandi, "Introduction: Modernism and the Origins of Caribbean Literature," 6.

⁵⁶ Harris, "The Amerindian Legacy," 163.

⁵⁷ Harris, 165.

the Carib consciousness. In 'History, Fable and Myth', Harris already consolidates the idea that a new "architecture of cultures"⁵⁸ needs to emerge from the re-assembly and re-composition of past cultures. The Carib ritual represents, therefore, a form of ingestion that may represent a victory over the enemy, but also leads to the creation of 'spectres' that nevertheless partially co-inhabit the same space as the Caribs.

However, Wilson Harris states that this Carib syndrome is merely latent: "[it has been] unrealised in the West Indies from the Carib/ Latin age to our day... except on Carnival occasions..."⁵⁹ The re-compositional creative process, necessary in Caribbean identity, only occurs in the moment of its expression at the Carnival. The limbo dance is an exteriorisation of a creative process, but it remains within the boundaries of its performance and, above all, is not accessed by the dancer himself. Harris believes that, on the other hand, the writer possesses the ability to "visualize a drama of consciousness" and unravel the process.⁶⁰ To the Guyanese writer, the act of writing is a form of conversion of the imagination; and though the writer does not comment on the form of the written word, a written conversion of the Caribbean imagination can also be repeated, reread, turned over in the imagination of the reader: unlike the viewer of the limbo dance, the reader would participate in this act of the imagination.

The violence of the journey encompasses the violence of the Caribbean. Donne's cruelty reflects the colonial project, whilst Mariella represents the land to be possessed. The violence of such possession is in turn reflected by her body, which carries the marks of colonisers' violence, transmitted through Donne's assaults (*PP* 21). Her victimisation is also representative of colonial conquests, described as predatory male acts:

⁵⁸ Harris, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," 152.

⁵⁹ Harris, "The Amerindian Legacy," 164.

⁶⁰ Harris, "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," 157.

Orientalism itself, furthermore, was an exclusively male province; like so many professional guilds during the modern period, it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. This is especially evident in the writing of travellers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.⁶¹

Though Mariella is a fugitive, the Dreamer narrator recalls that Donne had “first seduced her above the doom of the river and the waterfall” (*PP* 217). The form of their relationship, recounted by the Dreamer and not by Mariella herself, is framed under the gaze of the male pursuer who believes to have gained his prize. It reiterates the reinforces the male chase.

In an article exploring the different forms taken by Mariella and their links to deities, the critic Jeffrey Robinson observes that Mariella is likened to a mare whom Donne seeks to control as well as ride sexually, linking further the relationship between sexual and colonial ownership.⁶² And indeed, Donne reveals during his rant on entitlement to the land – where the exclusion of settlers, despite also having lived their whole lives in the colony, to ownership of the land is apparent – that “The only way to survive of course is to wed oneself into the family” (*PP* 51). Such is the solution that Donne finds to his own feelings of foreignness in Guyana, which involves an insidious method of inserting oneself into a community of “the only people who got the real devil of a title to this land [Guyana]”, as is admitted by the crewman Schomburgh (*PP* 41).

As the crew travels towards the supposed encampment of Mariella, the wilderness and even violence within the crew causes several lives to be lost. It is the Caribbean itself that is ingesting them, and the destructive journey into the heartland also overturns their position as pursuers:

The monstrous thought came to them that they had been shattered and were reflected again in each other at the bottom of the stream. The unceasing reflection of themselves

⁶¹ Edward W. Said, “Latent and Manifest Orientalism,” in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 207.

⁶² Jeffrey Robinson, “The White Goddess and Palace of the Peacock,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 2, no. 2 (1988): 15.

in each other made them see themselves everywhere save where they thought they had always stood (*PP* 80).

The colonial consciousness consists of not only Donne, but also the Dreamer, who is Donne's brother. The Dreamer's voice questions Donne's unflinching resolve, like Harris's conception of Merlin's cry to Parsifal's established superiority. It seems that this interplay can be aligned to Jung's theory of shadows, as is noted by Gianluca Delfino in the critical study *Time, History and Philosophy in the Works of Wilson Harris*. And indeed, Donne, in response to these protesting thoughts of kindness, "prefers to leave them in the shadow, because it helps him to assume that he is perfectly innocent".⁶³ However, as is shown in *Palace of the Peacock*, Dreamer does not remain in the shadow. In fact, the entire crew becomes changed during their journey, thereby demonstrating a change in the superior, colonial consciousness that is being represented in their pursuit of Mariella.

The violent journey of the entire crew is an act of de-composition, in which the colonial endeavour is represented by all members who also abuse Arawak women for their own ends (the women represent Guyana and therefore the land of "plenteous return" as is stated in *FJ*). The Dreamer's inclusion in the crew places him as the shadow to the conscious self of the coloniser. In the end, the colonisers accept this hidden part of their consciousness as they undergo the transformative experience. The destructive journey into the heartland is in fact Donne and his crew becoming ingested by the Caribbean in an act that overturns their position as the pursuers, after which they can re-appear as the wraiths of the bush-baby myth.

In the chapter 'Pre-Columbian Legacies', Gianluca Delfino explores the possible Carib legends to which Harris refers in his critical reflexions on his own work.⁶⁴ Delfino's

⁶³ Carl Gustav Jung, "Lecture One," in *Analytical Psychology: Its Theory and Practice: (The Tavistock Lectures)* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986), 23.

⁶⁴ Gianluca Delfino and Koray Melikoglu, *Time, History, and Philosophy in the Works of Wilson Harris* (New York: Ibidem Verlag, 2014).

enumeration of the possible sources of inspiration for Harris, as well as the exploration of anthropological studies on cannibalism, already provide a rich background to the impossibility of understanding the role of cannibalistic practices. This demonstrates Harris's weaving of Amerindian legacies into his fiction, thereby not neglecting the legacies of fragmentation and conquest, in the Caribbean, in his exploration of human consciousness.⁶⁵ If the act of cannibalism is linked to the notion of re-birth, where the vanquished is ingested by the conqueror but also therefore re-emerges in the form of the conqueror, then the embedding of Amerindian myth into contemporary fiction is a similar act. The process of the search for Mariella reflects this transformative decomposition, where the roles of pursuer and pursued, victor and vanquished, are through the process of cannibalisation no longer distinct and therefore no longer oppose each other. As a result, the author puts forward a form of decomposition and re-composition of the original colonial dynamics that have victimised the Caribbean.

2.2 Living Dead Sacrifice

This second half of the chapter analyses the final pages of *The Whole Armour*. Whilst the preceding pages explore the possibility of Caribbean rebirth through cannibalistic writing, paving the way for re-composition, the following analysis demonstrates that the third novel of *GQ* is equally as illustrative of Harris's vision of renewal as *PP*. It uses the lens of shamanism Wilson Harris's conception of the West Indian novel, via Cristo's death and the end of *WA*. In *WA*, the authorities' pursuit of Cristo, an accused murderer of Jigsaw Bay, underpins the narrative. Though Cristo's flight results from the possibility that he had committed murder, which seems far removed from the representations of pursuit in *PP* and in

⁶⁵ As Edwards states, "Harris' predilection for myth and fable underscores his notion of tradition as an archetypal "secret form", a meta-narrative that constantly revises itself; a changing same which augurs a vision of human community". Edwards, "Tradition, the Critic, and Cross-Cultural Poetics: Wilson Harris as Literary Theorist," 13.

FJ, the narrative of his flight reveals the ways in which historical destruction of identity has been ingrained into the consciousness of Caribbean people. This, in turn, manifests itself in Guyanese social relations, illustrated by the local community of Jigsaw Bay.

The Guyanese writer calls for the disintegration of the pursuer and pursued relationship that marks Caribbean consciousness, echoing the coloniser-colonised, and even master-slave, dialectic. Whilst *PP* demonstrates this through the de-composition of Donne's pursuit of Mariella, the rest of the novels in *GQ* are not set during the colonial period. In *WA*, the writer shows the way in which the pursuer-pursued dynamic manifests in postcolonial Guyana, using the fictional Jigsaw Bay as an example, and, furthermore, presents a possible and different future for Guyana and therefore the Caribbean.

2.2.1 Wilson Harris and Magical Realism

Towards the end of the novel, Sharon asks Cristo to recount his experience in the heartland of Guyana, where he had been hiding from both the police and his entire community. Cristo's memories are confusing and fantastical, for he believes to have encountered the extinct Caribs: "They were Caribs, I knew. God knows where they were coming from... They had spears, long pointed flying spears... I swore they'd do me in... *And then I realized they took me for one of themselves*" (*WA* 340; author's emphasis). The writer blurs the distinctions between reality and fantasy in his novels, already signalled in *PP* through the journey that may be a ghost repetition of an earlier failure. Sharon attempts to give an explanation for Cristo's return to the past, stating that there had been a mock battle staged by the Catholic Mission. She implies that Cristo may have witnessed a re-enactment of past events.

The appearance of the natives is accompanied by bloodshed and violence, even if in the form of make-believe. For Sharon, the scene is a re-staging of a "ferocious war" (*WA* 337)

and she explains that the battle re-presents an original act of mass violence that served as its inspiration. The legend of the war also contains an element of necromancy, given that the Arawaks' victory is believed to be attributed to their ability to restore the dead (*WA* 337). For Cristo, it also ends in his death: "I was beaten... decapitated" (*WA* 341). Of course, Cristo is relating this history and therefore cannot have been decapitated. There seems to be more on Sharon's side of disbelief than in the strange survival of headless Cristo.

If, according to Wendy B. Faris, a magical realist text is one that "combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them [realism and the fantastic]";⁶⁶ then Cristo's transportation into the past could be interpreted as a feature of the blurred distinctions between realism and the fantastic in Harris's fiction. This is indeed present elsewhere in *GQ*, where the implied resurrection of Donne's crew in *PP*, and the ghostly presence of Oudin in *FJ*, seem to border the realm of the fantastical.

Furthermore, magical realism as a discursive practice questions dominant Western narrative: magical realist writing has been attributed with the ability to "rediscover and affirm extinct or vanishing indigenous beliefs in the face of colonial ones."⁶⁷ And so Cristo's story could be interpreted as a confrontation between objective knowledge, of the type that has dominated Western thought in the form of rationalism and empiricism, and other forms of knowledge or ontologies that are considered invalid. Sharon's explanation represents rationality: she knows two things: the Arawaks and Caribs have been wiped from their land; moreover, she also knows of re-enactments of different tales, one of which is the legend of a war between Arawaks and Indians. Cristo's beliefs are questioned for not fitting in with the

⁶⁶ Wendy B. Faris, "Introduction," in *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 1.

⁶⁷ Wendy B. Faris, "'Along the Knife-Edge of Change': Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Dynamics of Alterity," in *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 137.

norms of Western society, in which scientific rules are constant and must be obeyed. Harris places the clash between two types of knowledge at the forefront.

This would indeed fit in well with the beginnings of magical realism as ‘lo real maravilloso’ (Alejandro Carpentier) or ‘le réel merveilleux’ (Jacques Stéphen Alexis). In the 1930s, the Surrealists began to focus on liberating the unconscious mind, thus questioning rationalism. This form of rejecting Western rationalism went hand in hand with the questioning of imperialist powers and important decolonising movements, including Négritude, one of whose founding fathers was the Martinican Aimé Césaire, were allied to Surrealism.⁶⁸

In the 1950s, however, there was a rejection of Négritude’s emphasis on Africa as the homeland for Afro-Caribbean peoples, given that this image of Africa as the true home inevitably categorised Caribbean people, though of African descent, as alien to the lands that they had been living on for generations. Furthermore, it seemed to suggest that the Caribbean was barren in its identity and that the purity of its roots was of greater worth. Faris considers magical realism, as a response to Pan-Africanist decolonial movements, as a feature of the culture of survival that J. Michael Dash aligns with the Caribbean. This “culture involves an attempt not to inscribe in Caribbean literature a universally conceived negritude with African origins but rather to affirm the contingencies and particularities of Caribbean identity.”⁶⁹

In the book *Myth and History in Caribbean Fiction*, published in 1992, Barbara J. Webb examines the works of Alejandro Carpentier, Edouard Glissant and Wilson Harris in terms of their mythopoetic contribution to, as well as the mythopoetic transformation of, history. The author states that the emergence of magical realism from the Americas, which comprises

⁶⁸ As has been demonstrated in Timothy Brennan, “‘Postcolonial Studies between the European Wars: An Intellectual History.’” in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 185–203.

⁶⁹ Faris, “‘Along the Knife-Edge of Change’: Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Dynamics of Alterity,” 136.

Latin and Central America, as well as the Caribbean, sought to counter Surrealism's view that "the juxtaposition of disparate realities derived from the subconscious."⁷⁰ Magical realism, by way of Carpentier, brought forward a location for the paradoxical coexistence of the marvellous and the real, which was the New World, where several different realities, such as Europe's dominating worldview, the absence of history for those who arrived via the Middle Passage, or the fragments of pre-Columbian cultures, co-existed along with conflict. Webb argues that the embedding of the marvellous (or the magical) allows writers such as Harris to transform the absence of history into newness and myth, with promise of the future. This indeed has been put forward by others, focused on Harris's mythopoeics, such as Jean-Pierre Durix.⁷¹

Whilst Webb's understanding of magical realism counters Surrealist emphasis on the role of the unconscious, it seems that Harris's fiction can be perceived both as a contributor to magical realism's decolonial functions and a participant of surrealist desire to enter the subconscious. As has been shown, Harris's Jungian fiction presents the world of *The Guyana Quartet* as a land/mindscape in which the inhuman environment is the set of the human consciousness. Rather than opposing the transformational power of magical realism, Harris incorporates the tropes of reconciling opposites and alchemy into his "unfinished genesis of the Imagination"⁷², creating a process of reconfiguration that combats the total control of the "sovereign ego"⁷³ continuously, rather than arriving at a conclusionary rational truth that conforms to Western rationalism.

⁷⁰ Webb, *Myth and History in Caribbean Fiction: Alejo Carpentier, Wilson Harris, and Edouard Glissant*, 19.

⁷¹ See 'Magical Realism and the New Literatures' in Jean-Pierre Durix, "From Fantasy to Magical Realism," in *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 143–48.

⁷² Wilson Harris, "The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination," in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. Andrew Bundy (London and Paris: Routledge, 1999), 237–48.

⁷³ Harris, "Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins," 58.

2.2.2 Cristo and Time-Travelling Transformations

It is true that, as demonstrated in the analysis of *Palace of the Peacock* in ‘Pursuit, Possession and Cannibalistic Writing’, Wilson Harris provides a moment of self-realisation and fulfilment at the end of *PP*. In it, Donne’s dialectical relationship with his adversaries, who represent pre-Columbian history and knowledge, is dissolved. However, though the pursuer undergoes a form of death, via psychological decomposition, and is then reborn at the end of *PP*, and in an opposing but similar manner *The Far Journey of Oudin* starts with the promise of future through Beti’s child but then unravels to reveal the cannibalistic origins of the child’s existence (for the novel ends with the scene of Beti and Oudin’s capture rather than the known fact that the two do indeed survive), Cristo seems not to fall into this category of newness and promise. Instead, the man dons the cloak of murderer despite his innocence and undoes all attempts to prevent him from being imprisoned by giving himself up, with little motive for doing so.

Analysing Cristo’s time-travelling recollection of death therefore reveals a different process of transformation, linked rather to Harris’s conceptualisation of limbo and shamanic ritual as forms of rebirth across time. These concepts demonstrate Harris’s contesting of Western ontologies of the Caribbean, framing them within Harris’s perception of human consciousness.

Upon entering the unknown interior of Guyana, Cristo enters a past realm and experiences the pre-Columbian persecution of the Arawaks by the Caribs. The mystery surrounding the wilderness of the bush adds to the magical element of the scene that he witnesses, enabling its fantastical characteristics to border the realms of possibility as closely as possible: since Sharon is excluded from the intimate understanding of Guyana’s impenetrable wilderness, which motivates her keen interest in it, Cristo’s experience can still

linger alongside or on the margins of Sharon's reality as a testimony of the re-enactment of battle.

Given that Sharon remains largely silent during Cristo's lengthy speech, the possibility of Cristo's time-travelling experience takes over the narrative. Sharon's silence is not, however, a form of acquiescence through her silent acceptance of Cristo's fantastical story. Her lack of response indicates instead that she is incapable of grasping Cristo's experience, even less so than he himself is capable of decoding his death, a scene that he had witnessed and to which he had simultaneously been subjected. The two interlocutors, whose stunted exchange reveals that each refuses the reality of the other, demonstrate the impasse between Western paradigms and the seemingly undecodable reality of the New World. However, Cristo's experience can only be understood as Cristo revisits it through his conversation with Sharon, and it is via this last scene between the lovers that Wilson is able to bring to light the conditions of reformulation that are needed in Caribbean identity.

The reader witnesses the integration of violence and Guyana's past resurfacing and playing a role in the contemporary moment of Cristo's movement through the heartland, for the young man witnesses the Arawak destruction of Caribs during his journey. In an angry tirade against the ineffectiveness of his higher education, Cristo describes Pomeroon as a racial microcosm of Guyana (*WA* 333). Furthermore, as he lists the various racial groups to be found in Guyana, he also qualifies them by their historical background, marking the Guyanese as descendants of imperial and capitalist forces (*WA* 334). However, during his escape into the heartland of Guyana, Cristo is taken to be one of the Caribs, though he considers himself to be African (*WA* 340). He believes himself to be wrongly interpreted, but it is the very facility by which he is accepted as a Carib that points towards his misconceptions of his own identity. The spectral moment of mistaken identity begins the re-shaping of Cristo's understanding of his own self. Having viewed himself as African, he had

dismissed the role played by the violent beginnings of Guyanese identity, which pre-dated Columbus's arrival.

In an essay on the vestiges of Amerindian history and their impact on West Indian culture, "The Amerindian Legacy", Wilson Harris explores the interactions between the past and the present, mediated via the geographical environment of the first act. In it, he highlights the crossover of past and present and considers the earth itself to be marked by the ghosts of the past.⁷⁴ Harris writes of a moment not unlike Cristo's transportation into the past, though autobiographical and more frivolous, in which the writer revisits the shoreline that he had swum in as a young boy and sees that it has moved further into the sea. In that present moment of once again being on that shoreline, the spectre of his past, lingering in a place that is topographical changed to the original, springs up and Harris observes that his young self would be swimming on dry land, due to the changed shoreline.⁷⁵ The ghost that surfaces therefore endows the dry land with the fluidity of the former sea, creating a fluid dimension that is imaginative and yet springs from the past.

Likewise, in *WA*, the Carib/Arawak past is contained in the heartland. The past event, that would later be re-enacted by actors in Sharon and Cristo's present time, is contained in the wilderness that Cristo stumbles upon during his evasion of the authorities. At first, Harris's anecdotal tale seems to be revealed in a Proustian turn of involuntary memory, which differs from Cristo's supernatural appearance in a past that is not his own. However, the difference between the two perhaps highlights the particularly West Indian imagination that Harris attempts to make bloom in his work. The past of several groups in the West Indies, whether pertaining to Africa or pre-Columbian inhabitants, is marked far more by

⁷⁴ Harris confirms this belief in an interview for the *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*. Harris and Johnson, "Interview with Wilson Harris," 84.

⁷⁵ Harris, "The Amerindian Legacy," 167–68.

absence than presence. It is for this reason that Harris focuses on the impersonality of his younger swimmer self's impact on the present moment. The moment of recalling the former shoreline is not a nostalgic one but rather an imbuing of a dimension that edges on the present reality, where the fluidity of the water of the past still remains a part of the dry shores. Wilson Harris's memory only serves as spectre that carries this quality through to the present moment, and is therefore not a fleeting experience of loss, but a mutation of the present.

Though knowledge of oral, pre-Colombian culture in the Caribbean has been erased and replaced by Western hegemonic culture, in the form of literary education for example, Cristo's experience in the heartland exemplifies that, out of the paucity and the cultural memory of the wiping out of Arawaks (and, later, of Caribs in Guyanese history) nevertheless emerges their presence. Edwards concurs: "Fossils, ruins, fragments, and the varied debris of serial catastrophes, are reconstituted within the catalytic inner womb of space to emerge as alternative modes of being."⁷⁶ The land itself is shaped by it, and their presence then brings forth a new dimension: in this dimension Cristo can be a Carib; Cristo can die; Cristo can be resurrected (as he is by the "white priests and magicians" (*WA* 345)).

This experience in the imaginary is not detracted from the real, calling forth Guyanese history and, more importantly, building newness out of it: Cristo is a West Indian, where the Middle Passage does not negate Amerindian pasts. In an article on Wilson Harris's shamanism, though concentrated namely on *PP* and marginally on Harris's novel *The Four Banks of the River of Space*, Syed Manzu Islam makes a succinct and apt remark upon Harris's proposed response to the destruction of previous civilisations: "sublime memory then becomes a vehicle for ethics: the duty to remember those who disappeared without leaving any monumental memory..."⁷⁷ The space to which Cristo is transported is sublime in

⁷⁶ Edwards, "Tradition, the Critic, and Cross-Cultural Poetics: Wilson Harris as Literary Theorist," 22.

⁷⁷ Islam, "Postcolonial Shamanism: Wilson Harris's Quantum Poetics and Ethics," 72.

its violence and imagery of death; but the sublime also refers to writing itself, highlighting the importance of Caribbean writing's function as a form of embarking into the future with the acceptance and memory of the absences in history that form Caribbean identity.

Even in the seemingly tragic ending appears a new myth, which could be explained by Wilson Harris's essays and focuses on the intense theme of guilt in the novel. From the beginning, Cristo is guilty of murder, not only from the eyes of the law but also from the perspective of his own mother, who nevertheless attempts to aid her son – despite not believing in his innocence – and who herself carries the guilty secret of having been solicited (as a prostitute) by the father of Cristo's love, Sharon. Unlike the other novels of the *GQ*, *WA* concentrates on the perspective of the fugitive and the theme of escaping the clutches of guilt, whether they be cast onto a person by others or merge from a deeper secret.

During Cristo's recounting of the past, more directed towards his own self rather than in reply to Sharon, the young man concentrates on the fact that "Every black ancestor and bloodless ghost" (*WA* 343) passes by in a flight of escape. Cristo seems highly disturbed by their need to flee: "'What had they done to be running like that, Sharon?' he demanded of her, speaking to no one in particular. 'What were they guilty of?'" (*WA* 343) Another form of guilt resonates through the couple: Peeta, Sharon's father, had hanged himself following his fight with Sharon's former suitor, Mattias, during which the suitor falls on his own weapon.

Though Peeta had committed suicide, it seems that the death would be blamed on the couple, and thus the possibility of their guilt, from the point of view of the police, currently hangs over them in a form of spectral prefiguration: it is a guiltiness that pre-empts future guilt before the eyes of the police. If Cristo is not truly the cause of Sharon's ex-lover's death, then the ending points towards a very sombre moment in which the police, whose presence is exterior to the Guyanese community and who seems to be little more than a

personification of imposed institutional laws, succeeds in gaining control by validating their version of order and therefore their power. Though it seems that Cristo has finally been reunited with his love, Sharon, who proclaims his innocence, and is offered another chance at escape by his mother, Cristo's final resignation seems to lack the elements of rebirth and possibility that are present in *PP*.

In 'The Amerindian Legacy', Harris's examination of the downfall of the last Carib warrior chieftain, Mahanarva, could lead to an understanding of Cristo's key role in *The Guyana Quartet*.⁷⁸ Harris explains that Mahanarva, upon interacting with the English Governor in former Stabroek, now known as the Guyanese capital Georgetown, claims to have a tribe of warriors in the heartland in order to appear threatening to the English. However, an English spy follows the Carib and perceives only a small, broken group of warriors who cannot constitute either a threat to Stabroek nor a formidable ally for their conquest of the uncharted interior of Guyana.

Harris analyses Mahanarva's claim, stating that it represents a reconstitution of the dynamics between the Crown's representatives in Guyana and the victimised inhabitants, enabled through shamanism. The writer assigns the shaman with a specific role: to break through "the Carib syndrome that... was the diabolic overburden of the character of conquest... to make of every inner divergence, every subtle omen of change – subsistence of memory to feed the imagination in the future."⁷⁹ The change is enacted in two ways, according to Harris: the warrior chieftain brings forth, into his claim of having a strong tribe of warriors under his control, the past of conquest that has resulted in the dwindling of the Caribs, whose presence remains as a spectre embedded into the heartland of Guyana; furthermore, the claim causes the spy to be able to see into the heartland and reveal that the

⁷⁸ Harris, "The Amerindian Legacy," 165.

⁷⁹ Harris, 165.

pursuit of conquest no longer exists, for the Caribs are no longer as formidable as they had been.⁸⁰

The first of the two enactments of change also marks a shift in the chieftain's own role:

he was compensating in himself losses his people had endured over centuries. He became the womb of the tribe in certain respects that are analogous to traces of mythology—ancient Greek, Persian, Mithraic as well as Christian—in which stones and rocks become charged with architectural latencies, inner rooms, etc., and therefore give birth to numinous tenants. In the same token, Pallas Athene, half-feminine, half-warrior archetype of wisdom, leapt from the head of Zeus; the Christian aeon was born of Peter the Rock. The shaman therefore stands in a perspective wherein 'death' becomes 'life' and the diseased warriorship is translated into half-priest, half-feminine guide into the underworld. And that underworld of the lost Caribs constitutes for us a very significant dimension of elements (animate and inanimate realms of psyche, realms of subsistence of memory).⁸¹

The change in the chieftain's role is a final embrace of the past of his people, which includes their deaths both past and near future, but also a certain path of continual living. Rather than existing from behind a shroud of claimed power, the chieftain steps out and brings forth the realities of the violence of the Carib's conquests and downfalls, shaping in turn the future by including the "latencies" of the past into the future unconscious memory of the Caribs in Guyana.

In the case of Cristo, the decision to remain in Jigsaw Bay ruptures the cycle of flight, which had been carried out only through the false acquiescence to accusations of guilt. Cristo was able to flee Pomeroun through the aid of his mother, who believes her son to have murdered both Sharon's ex-lover as well as Abram, an acquaintance of Magda and the first man to have sheltered Cristo following the initial murder accusations made against him. The novel is plagued with accusations, broken promises and constant misuse and abuse of other

⁸⁰ Harris, 166.

⁸¹ Harris, 166.

beings and between beings. These are threaded through *GQ*, in the example of Oudin being used to betray the landowners in *FJ* as well as the plotting within Fenwick's crew, whose sources are obscure yet hang over the crew-master as a threat to his endeavours and even his life.

The final scene of *WA*, when considered in terms of Harris's evocation of the role of shamans in Caribbean myth, signals not a moment of pure loss nor of a safe promise of future, but a path of continuation that accepts and builds from past violence. It allows Cristo to bring forth the past deceits of his faked death and the destructive desires of the people of Pomeroun. Cristo's sacrifice entails an unveiling of "the naked impetus of flight from self-reproach and insensibility. Cristo would be free... in an armour superior to the elements of self-division and coercion" (*WA* 352). This character is hounded by not the police, but also by his own self-reproach, for the act of escape only serves to carry on the persecution of Cristo as a murderer. By not fleeing, Cristo creates a newer path for Sharon and their child, which does not consist of implications in Peeta's death, for presumably Cristo assumes that final role.

And indeed, the cyclical nature of persecution is implied through the actions of Magda, who runs into Peeta's room, still not yet aware of his suicide, begging him for help: "I going to be better to you than if you were Abramsself. All I ask is hide Cristo for me (*WA* 352)". This plea echoes the very beginning of the novel, in which the opening pages depict Magda begging Abram to shelter her son (*WA* 245). Thus, Cristo commits a sacrifice for the future and his "legacy to his son was the legacy of every ancestral ghost – appraisal as well as the execution of the last fictions in time" (*WA* 348). Cristo and Sharon's son would carry his father's past with him with the ability to judge it for himself, whilst also ending the 'fictions' surrounding his condemnation.

PP, which takes place over seven days, has been called a re-writing of Genesis that creates a new Caribbean myth of origin.⁸² Harris himself, in a recorded interview for the *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, openly discusses elements of Hellenic and Christian, as well as Amerindian, beliefs and cultures in his work. Furthermore, he reveals his association of “magic” and “openness to the future” with the complex “Catholic legacy”.⁸³ It is therefore not unsurprising that Harris’s Cristo, in his sacrifice as a scapegoat for different murders, shares qualities with Christ’s act of self-sacrifice. Furthermore, Cristo and Magda’s names echo both Christ and Mary Magdalene, and the latter figure still draws forth associations of prostitution, which further strengthens the parallel between her and Cristo’s mother, who is a prostitute.

It would therefore, through the parallels with Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, be possible to align *The Whole Armour* with *Palace of the Peacock*’s re-imagination of Creation. While *PP* consists of re-writing Genesis, thereby giving birth to a new form of consciousness that focuses on the violence of Caribbean history, Cristo’s path also consists of re-birth through the redemption for Magda, Sharon and Cristo’s future child. However, Wilson Harris does not merely replicate Christian sacrifice: like the characters of *PP*, the violence of Pomeroun’s community – and indeed, the violence of their pre-Columbian ancestors – is accepted as a part of Cristo’s own identity. This is supported by Hena Maes-Jelinek: “The conclusion is not, I think, that Harris subscribes to the recurring pattern of sacrifice imposed on innocent men by their insensitive fellow beings.”⁸⁴ More importantly, and this is not

⁸² Jean-Pierre Durix, “Origins in Palace of the Peacock,” in *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean*, ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek and Bénédicte Ledent (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2002), 91.

⁸³ Monica Possi and Wilson Harris, “A Conversation with Wilson Harris,” *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2, no. 1/2/3 (2000): 269.

⁸⁴ Hena Maes-Jelinek, “A Compassionate Alliance: The Whole Armour,” in *Wilson Harris* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 2006), 38.

addressed by Maes-Jelinek, Cristo is not entirely innocent: like Mahanarva, he also carries the deaths of Sharon's former suitor, of Abram, Mattias and Peeta.

Gregory Shaw examines the nature of death and rebirth in *GQ*, arguing that it represents a journey towards authenticity. In his examination of the mythological allusions in the novels, Shaw concludes that they form "a kind of code which masks a confrontation with some trauma from the past associated with the mother, some guilt-ridden association with the past – the failure of a relationship, perhaps, or an aborted relationship."⁸⁵ In the article, the author concentrates on Jung's Great Mother/Terrible Mother archetypes, arguing that Cristo's death resolves his relationship with his own mother, exacerbated by his lack of a father, allowing him to "be born again in the spirit".⁸⁶ Shaw reads Harris's novels as depictions of a broken human consciousness, tormented by antagonistic forces such as the Great and Terrible Mother, where the consciousness regains wholeness through *GQ* characters' acceptance of the violent and destructive Other. In re-mapping these processes onto the movement of Guyanese history, demonstrated through the heartland scene in *WA*, it is possible to include both the universality of human consciousness and the locality of Guyanese consciousness in this turbulent process of acceptance. Cristo's sacrifice is therefore a transformation that embeds past violence into memory, paving a form of newness that incorporates the violent and murky past of its birth.

Moreover, Cristo's final sacrifice as a shamanic transfiguration can be read to offer possibility beyond the tragic end of the novel, and indeed beyond the moment of demise that is represented in its preceding novel within the *GQ*, for the final scene of *FJ* focuses on Beti and Oudin's failed attempt at escaping in the savannah owners that are Beti's uncles and

⁸⁵ "Joseph Campbell and C.G Jung tell us that the hero in his thousand masks must repeatedly undertake the same journey, re-entering the belly of the beast, the Terrible Mother in her various guises, vanquish it and at the same time absorb its powers." Shaw, "Wilson Harris's Metamorphoses: Animal and Vegetable Masks in 'Palace of the Peacock,'" 162.

⁸⁶ Shaw, 162.

Ram, Oudin's master. The choice of ending *FJ* with the failure of the couple's escape, given the non-chronological order of its events, places greater emphasis on the revelation that their plan is undone due to previous relations between Oudin and the one that holds the runaways captive.

Oudin occupies the space of an indentured man, not wholly a slave, but a victim of the system of debt put in place by his overseer, Ram. He then propagates this very system by ensnaring another man into the same system of debt, and his demise, into which Beti had been pulled, reflects his position as Ram's total servant: he not only carries out his master's tasks, but he also carries the backlash of those victim to Ram's cupidity, falling victim to the struggle for possession of land that is exhibited by all but his own wife. This is partially undone through the revelation that Oudin's death releases Beti from the earlier promise of Oudin giving his future newborn to Ram, but it seems to be a stroke of luck for the mother. Cristo, however, embraces the violence of Pomeroun and of Guyana, offering another 'life' beyond his own that does not continue the cycle of guilt and flight shown throughout *WA*.

Cristo repeatedly takes flight in *WA*, in order to escape the otherwise inevitable arrest that follows him, but this cyclical movement of persecution and evasion is demonstrated to pervade the social relations of the residents of Jigsaw Bay. It is more than an accusation of murder: Jigsaw Bay, acting as a microcosm of Guyana, is rampant with the desire for blame, where one can project their own dissatisfactions, much like Magda or Peeta, onto others. Wilson Harris, as a result, offers to disrupt this cycle through shamanic sacrifice, enabling Cristo to create a different future for his offspring. His transformative moment mimics the voyage in *PP*, for Donne and crew also undergo a decomposition of the pursuer roles to which they have affixed themselves. These two moments of dissolution, of one's former selfhood as it had been shaped historically by periods of conquest, offer a path that therefore re-shapes Guyanese identity anew.

3. Narrow-sightedness in Wilson Harris's Vision

The last chapter provided an outline of Wilson Harris's vision and a close application of it on *GQ*, demonstrating that his response to the postcolonial repetition of pursuit and flight is portrayed in his reinvention of cannibalistic myth. This chapter focuses more closely on the potential gaps in this vision and demonstrates that previous reliance on Harris's ontology of the Caribbean, which also purports a conception of consciousness that is universalist, has left Harris's depiction of women overlooked.

Despite the very intricate thinking that underpins Wilson Harris's work, this reading of newness and possibility within *GQ* relies upon a conception of reality that, due to the idealist framework of Harris's poeticist ontology, renders his fiction difficult to align with materialist and historicist views of the Caribbean. Furthermore, the analysis drawn in the previous section was heavily based upon Harris's own reflections about his fictional writing, which to date has formed the basis of most research on him. The previous section has revealed the depth to which Harris is able to evoke that which he considers to be elemental to the fractured identity of the Caribbean. However, these views are not impervious to criticism: the reliance upon Wilson Harris as the expert of his own writing can cause less explored parts of his novels to be overlooked. This chapter seeks to add to the last chapter's reading of Harris's fiction by questioning of the portrayal of women within the quartet, given the repetition of male desire of the female body as a theme in *GQ* and the re-inscription of colonial desires upon the female body.

3.1 Harris the Creator

The inclusion of Wilson Harris's reflective essays into the analysis also brings forth with it the question of the degree to which any rigorous analysis of the work requires Harris himself as a literary critic. There is no doubt that Harris's essays elucidate the depths of his thoughts

and seem to support a positive and, more importantly, anti-positivist vision, but the predominant reliance on Wilson Harris's post-publication texts suggests that the writer's fiction has been read through similar lenses, proffered by Harris himself. This reading support, consisting of the very influences cited by Harris, is opposed by the poststructuralist view of texts as continuously mutative through the act of reading. Roland Barthes calls firmly for the separation between text and author in *The Death of the Author*. His essay stresses, with great emotional vigour, the need to overthrow the emphasis that literary criticism has formerly given to the author, who had been considered as the key to unlocking a text's meaning.

According to Barthes, "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text... [for] when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic."⁸⁷ Barthes' sardonic use of 'victory' reflects his opposition towards any belief that an interpretation of a text results in a conclusionary ending. It is a warning against heavy reliance upon the author's life, wishes and intentions behind his impulse to write, for to look towards the Author as the source of meaning of a text then removes the space of multiple and changing interpretations provide by a text's readers. Furthermore, the prolific literary theorist draws a parallel between a text's author and the Creator, whose scripture can and must only be read in the sense of unlocking some ultimate and secret meaning.

Though Barthes seeks to counter any literary critic's claim to having arrived at a stable meaning of a text, which has not been proposed in the previous chapter, it is nevertheless possible, in the context of Wilson Harris's *GQ* and critical studies on Harris's mythmaking fiction, to consider Roland Barthes' criticism as pertinent to the previous chapter. For example, it is Harris's own evocations of Jung, in particular his personal

⁸⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 147.

interpretation of the Merlin and Parsifal archetypes, that have propelled the previous section's analysis of the quartet. And, whilst Harris's essays have illuminated the Amerindian myths that are embedded into his novels, the reliance on Harris's essays seems to indicate a level of indecipherability and over-reliance on the Guyanese writer's critical vision.

Roland Barthes' highly provocative call for the liberation of the reader "at the cost of the death of the Author"⁸⁸ would, in the absence of Harris's supplementary essays, most likely lead to a response characterised by confusion. This was indeed apparent in the responses to Harris's fiction in the 1960s, prior to Harris's nonfictional essay publications, which began to appear from 1966 onwards. One such response states that Harris "draws heavily upon Guianese scenery and Guianese lore. And these are wrapped in so personal a symbolism that communication is only partial."⁸⁹ Another attributes the "apparent obscurity of Harris's work" to the "nexus between the dead, the living and the unborn" in his novel.⁹⁰ This has been noted by Maes-Jelinek, who, when writing about *FJ* in *Wilson Harris*, states that the "mystifying" language has given rise to "baffled criticism".⁹¹

By the end of the 1960s, the "baffled criticism" is quickly contested: in 1970, Edward Brathwaite already views Harris's fiction as a "realization of a much more universal and immaterial vision"⁹²; Joyce L. Sparer, in 1968, states that Wilson Harris underlines "The idea that the real identity of a Guyanese, of any origin, is to be found in Guyana itself and its particular history and not in the places that grand-parents had to leave (Africa, India, China, Portugal)"⁹³; and, even earlier, in 1967, John Hearne sees Harris's "mandate as one of

⁸⁸ Barthes, 148.

⁸⁹ W. I. Carr, "Reflections on the Novel in the British Caribbean," *Queen's Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (1964): 588.

⁹⁰ A. Derrick, "An Introduction to Caribbean Literature," *Caribbean Quarterly* 15, no. 2/3 (August 10, 1969): 76.

⁹¹ Hena Maes-Jelinek, "A Naked Particle of Freedom: The Far Journey of Oudin," in *The Labyrinth of Universality: Wilson Harris's Visionary Art of Fiction* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 2006), 26.

⁹² Edward Brathwaite, "West Indian Prose Fiction in the Sixties: A Survey," *Caribbean Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (August 10, 1970): 15.

⁹³ Joyce L. Sparer, "Attitudes towards 'Race' in Guyanese Literature," *Caribbean Studies* 8, no. 2 (1968): 36.

creating a mythical framework” for the West Indies’ search for indigeneity.⁹⁴ However, Braithwaite’s observation is made in conjunction with a reference to Harris’s “Tradition, the Writer and Society”, a published version of his 1964 lecture, “Tradition and the West Indian Novel”⁹⁵, and, equally, Hearne looks towards the same lecture in his analysis of Harris’s first four published novels.

To ignore Harris’s nonfictional texts, such as his lectures, essays and interviews, would not only lead to responses of bafflement, however. Given that postcolonial literature derives its meaning, within postcolonial discourse, from the conditions of colony, the absence of a text’s author would discredit the influences of Harris’s land surveying past and remove Harris’s vision of the West Indies almost entirely from analyses of his fiction. Furthermore, John Hearne underlines the “The complex urgency of our [the West Indies’] need for an indigenous myth”.⁹⁶ It seems that the author of the article finds Wilson Harris’s approach fruitful: “What Wilson Harris is asking his West Indian people to do is to fashion a mythology while consciously living the beginnings of a history.”⁹⁷

It seems, therefore, that Harris’s appeal to mythology, publicised not only through his fictional texts but also via his nonfictional ones, is inextricably tied his personal understanding of the West Indies. Given that the governing structures in the Caribbean had been European, from the beginnings of colonial control to residual systems of education and land reformation, and that the Caribbean is marked by its denied identity (through its erased history), the refashioning of indigenous myth that is attributed to Harris seems to be inseparable from his authorial presence.

⁹⁴ John Hearne, “The Fugitive in the Forest: A Study of Four Novels by Wilson Harris,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 2, no. 2 (1967): 102.

⁹⁵ Harris, “Tradition and the West Indian Novel.”

⁹⁶ Hearne, “The Fugitive in the Forest: A Study of Four Novels by Wilson Harris,” 99.

⁹⁷ Hearne, 106.

3.2 Harris as Literary Theorist

Nevertheless, Barthes' outcry against the Author/Creator, in reading texts, raises the question of whether Harris's own views, by being privileged in such a way, should be used as the basis of all analysis of *GQ*. In considering the ways in which Wilson Harris has been read and reads himself, it is clear that great emphasis has been placed upon the writer's formulations of critical approaches to his own work, leading to significant research into Harris's nonfictional essays and his revisioning of literary criticism methods.⁹⁸ The authors of these articles have focused on identifying the revisionary aspects not of Harris's representation of Guyana, or indeed of the Caribbean, but of his understanding of poetics as well as literary criticism. And indeed, Aniruddha Chowdhury examines Harris's essays, as a philosopher, separately to his fictional writing, which demonstrates the wide-ranging scope of Harris's critical writings and is one example in an equally broad area of scholarship that perceives the Guyanese writer as having contributed significantly to the field of philosophy.⁹⁹

In terms of literary theory, however, a common feature across critical studies on Harris is the notion of literary reciprocity in the creative process of writing fiction: "The creator's creation is alive: the sculptor sculpts, and is sculpted and subtly changed by what he sculpts... and all these reciprocities are susceptible to alteration in the mind of fiction."¹⁰⁰ In this paper, which was originally presented at a conference in 1979, before being published in 1982, Harris outlines his process of continuous re-imagination through his writing, consisting of "re-readings, revisions, and reversals".¹⁰¹ This is most noticeable in his 1985 publication of

⁹⁸ Such as: Brigitta Olubas, "'The Mind Of Fiction': Questions Of Theory And Reading In Wilson Harris's Essays," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2, no. 1/2/3 (2000): 187–97; Edwards, "Tradition, the Critic, and Cross-Cultural Poetics: Wilson Harris as Literary Theorist."

⁹⁹ Aniruddha Chowdhury, "Postcolonial Irony: Time, Subject, and History in the Critical Writings of Wilson Harris," in *Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity and History: Phenomenology, Critical Theory, and Postcolonial Thought* (Leiden: BRILL, 2013), 121–41.

¹⁰⁰ Wilson Harris, "Metaphor and Myth," in *Myth and Metaphor*, ed. Robert Sellick (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1982), 5.

¹⁰¹ Edwards, "Tradition, the Critic, and Cross-Cultural Poetics: Wilson Harris as Literary Theorist," 17.

GQ, where he provides additional references to the myths that he uses in his novels. This is an addendum to his previous preface to *PP*, where he explains that, since his first publication of the novel, he has found that the history of the Carib bone-flute, which was “hollowed from the bone of an enemy in the time of war”, validates the music of Carroll’s whistle at the end of the novel.¹⁰²

The particularities of Harris’s argument for the parallel he sees between Carroll’s whistled notes and the Carib bone-flute lie in the Harris’s portrayal of transformation in his fiction, and is only one example of many in which Harris draws upon Amerindian culture in his writing. More importantly, he admits that he did not learn about the Carib flute until after having written the *GQ*.¹⁰³ Throughout Harris’s writing career, which spans over more than half a century, the writer adds further elements to the myth-making that he presents in his novels.

Norval Edwards defines Harris’s as profoundly anti-realist through his “investment in myth and the primacy of the imagination”.¹⁰⁴ Rather than investing in stable notions of nation, culture and identity, as if to patch up a loss temporarily, the writer engages in heterogeneity: his repeated juxtapositions of opposites and his portrayal of instability, through his depiction of the environment in immaterial, psychical terms, attacks the “homogeneity and static categories” that Edwards identifies in social realism.¹⁰⁵ And indeed, this is Harris’s own position against fiction that is conscripted by realism.¹⁰⁶ It appears that Harris’s revisioning of the consciousness, through fiction, necessitates additional reading,

¹⁰² Harris, “A Note on the Genesis of ‘The Guyana Quartet,’” 9.

¹⁰³ Harris, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, “Tradition, the Critic, and Cross-Cultural Poetics: Wilson Harris as Literary Theorist,” 1.

¹⁰⁵ Edwards, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Harris and Johnson, “Interview with Wilson Harris,” 86.

and, via reading, writing. Thus, in response to Barthes, it would seem that Harris in fact adds to the interpretive process and seeks to continue it.

The writer therefore assumes to position of reader and researcher, imbuing the texts with even more than they had perhaps initially possessed. However, though this is clearly lauded and allows Harris's fictional texts to be understood as a literary form that resists Western rationalism, Edwards himself admits that Harris "borrows freely from any arena that will enhance his own hermetic excavations of what he terms "the subjective imagination"."¹⁰⁷ This lends itself to the objection that Wilson Harris remains confined within an imagination that is almost impenetrable without the aid of the writer himself:

What one objects to is that he replaces existent reality with another arbitrarily created out of his own imagination; not in opposition to, nor as a contrasting illumination of reality as it exists, but one so totally unrelated, that it ends up being escapist. Whilst denying the fixity of the Individual character'... Harris in fact establishes in his novels the primacy of the unrelated individual imagination.¹⁰⁸

Though this criticism appears within the first decade of Wilson Harris's career as a novelist, it is still a point of view that is noted by others, such as Gregory Shaw, who states that, for Harris, "the poet becomes his own shaman and high priest and... demiurge standing at the gateway of a new age".¹⁰⁹

In spite of the excitement with which Shaw embraces Harris's mythopoesis, through which Shaw believes Harris refashions Caribbean consciousness, the critic admits that "the hero in whom this irresistible force is embodied is the artist."¹¹⁰ And, when Edwards acknowledges that Harris's essays are "more an exercise in divination than a discursive

¹⁰⁷ Edwards, "Tradition, the Critic, and Cross-Cultural Poetics: Wilson Harris as Literary Theorist," 10.

¹⁰⁸ Sylvia Wynter, "We Must Learn to Sit down Together and Talk about a Little Culture: Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism," *Jamaica Journal* 3, no. 1 (1969): 40.

¹⁰⁹ Shaw, "Wilson Harris's Metamorphoses: Animal and Vegetable Masks in 'Palace of the Peacock,'" 169.

¹¹⁰ Gregory Shaw, "Art and Dialectic in the Work of Wilson Harris.," *New Left Review*, no. 153 (1985): 128, <https://newleftreview-org.ucd.idm.oclc.org/issues/i153/articles/gregory-shaw-art-and-dialectic-in-the-work-of-wilson-harris>. Accessed 23rd July 2021.

argument”, he also acknowledges the way in which the poetic force of Harris is underpinned by the triple role of artist, reader and researcher that Harris undertakes in his writing.¹¹¹ This view of Harris would most likely separate him, from the perspective of Edwards and Shaw, from the ‘Author’ figure that Barthes criticises, for Harris is also a participant in the act of reading, rather than merely an authorial figure; for them, Harris’s vision of the Caribbean is founded upon the writer’s mythopoetics, which cannot, it seems, be extricated without the aid of the writer himself.

3.3 The Imagination and Universality

As he creates his mythopoetics, which is a form of refashioning the Caribbean consciousness, the Guyanese writer appeals to a universalist understanding of the psyche. Whilst Jung’s collective unconscious, according to Harris, is only concerned with that which is human, the “universal unconscious” “encompasses living landscapes as well as the human psyche”.¹¹² Through this statement, Harris seeks to underline that he encompasses the environment and human destruction of the natural world in his fiction; as a result, the way in which the environment is both a landscape and a mindscape in Harris’s fiction, given that he integrates archetypal personas of the mind into phenomenological experiences of his novel’s subjects, does not neglect the role of land settlement in the historical development of the creation of the Caribbean. Furthermore, the environment allows for man’s unconscious state to emerge, leading to a materialisation of conflict (such as Donne’s chase of Mariella) that could lead to transformation. Thus the landscape does not merely reflect the inner psyche, but is continuously a part of it.

¹¹¹ Norval (Nadi) Edwards, “Tradition, the Critic, and Cross-Cultural Poetics: Wilson Harris as Literary Theorist,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 16, no. 2 (2008): 3.

¹¹² Rowell and Harris, “An Interview with Wilson Harris,” 193.

If Harris's fiction is also an art of fiction, then his creative process pertains to the creation of one's self: as Maes-Jelinek states, Harris looks towards "achieving self-knowledge" through the power of the imagination.¹¹³ In this unification of matter and spirit in Harris's fiction, where influence of ideas on the self is paired with their influence on the world, the power of the imagination pertains to the development of the self beyond the Guyanese, or indeed the Caribbean, setting of *GQ*. According to Harris, "all cultures are partial; they are parts of a greater whole and they illumine each other."¹¹⁴ He therefore perceives the change in Caribbean consciousness, enacted through a recognition and transformation of the stagnating processes that have governed it, as one that would also incur a change in Western culture. The journey of transformation occurs both within one's consciousness and on the level of world consciousness, explaining "the inner universality of Caribbean man."¹¹⁵ This form of universalism lies not in a stable, common identity of some shape or form, but in the processes of the imagination and in Harris's call for a revision of the self through a change in conscience and consciousness.

However, Harris's poeticist response has been criticised for its distance from the immediate, material world. This was raised in the 1960s by Sylvia Wynter, but has re-emerged more recently as well. In Duane Edwards' article on the chasm between materialist and poeticist approaches to social change in the Caribbean, Caribbean poeticism is characterised by its focus on "the creative way of combining words, images, plots, figures of speech and characters in producing meaning which would have a liberating influence on human/social consciousness and conduct".¹¹⁶ Wilson Harris's

¹¹³ Maes-Jelinek, "The Writer as Alchemist: The Unifying Role of the Imagination," 20.

¹¹⁴ Ogbaa and Harris, "Exile, Philosophic Myth, Creative Truth, Thrust and Necessity: An Interview with Wilson Harris," 55.

¹¹⁵ Harris, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," 151.

¹¹⁶ Edwards, "What Happens When We Stop Dreaming? A Critical Exploration of Social Change in Walter Rodney's and Wilson Harris' Works," 236.

emphasis on the imagination places him in opposition to the historical undertakings of nationalism and social action that Edwards identifies with Caribbean historicism¹¹⁷, and the author of the article acknowledges that Harris's idealist approach to change is a "somewhat misplaced optimism"¹¹⁸.

It seems, therefore, that Wilson Harris seeks to lead his readers to a radical form of self-acceptance, via an intrasubjective transformation (as Henry Paget terms it), that forms the universalist imagination proposed and created in his fiction. This poeticist perspective, however, remains not only somewhat disconnected from the immediate material world, but also highly dependent on Harris's imaginary. If this imaginary can only be fully explored through the aid of the writer's nonfictional texts, then it would suggest that Wilson Harris has been the only traveller on this radically transformative journey of the creative mind: even if, as Maes-Jelinek states, Harris believes that humanity's vision is only partial, and only privy to fragments that "are rooted in an immanent creative Spirit beyond them",¹¹⁹ it seems that Harris is solitary in having the awareness of this immanent Spirit. In turn, there is still some doubt that the inner universality of the Caribbean man, whose fragmented identity allows him to question the hegemonic notions of identity as ingrained by Western ideas of nation and culture, can be captured by the reader alone in reading *GQ*.

3.4 Female Characters in *The Guyana Quartet*

The previous part of this chapter has focused on problems with understanding Wilson Harris's fiction in light of not only the opacity of his writing and the need for his elaboration of his works, but also in light of the ways in which his nonfictional texts have become the foundations of scholarship on the writer. The subsequent commentary in this chapter seeks to

¹¹⁷ Edwards, 239.

¹¹⁸ Edwards, 242.

¹¹⁹ Maes-Jelinek, "Introduction: Approaching Wilson Harris's Creativity," xvi.

add to concerns that have been expressed by re-examining the role of Mariella, and indeed of female characters in the four novels of *GQ*, within the dynamics of the pursuer-pursued relationship that is fundamental to Harris's transformative vision for the Caribbean. Within the broad range of scholarship on Harris's work, and indeed on *GQ* – despite the focus being predominantly on *PP* – the roles of female characters in these novels have unfortunately seemed to merit little attention.

Though male desire for female characters features prominently in *GQ*, the writer overlooks the gendered dimension of this power dynamic. When exploring his depiction of female figures in his novels, Harris focuses on their role in the rebirth of Harris's characters and therefore of human consciousness. In the essay 'Apprenticeship to the Furies', Harris evokes the Virgin archetype and states that it implies "intercourse, shorn of violence, with the womb-body of nature and reality."¹²⁰ According to him, the womb is a vessel that also implies the "intercourse between man and woman, intercourse between the partiality of the male and the partiality of the female."¹²¹ This archetypal fusion, however, consists of the intercourse of doubles and opposites. Jung's belief of identity as being constructed of both the animus and the anima therefore lends itself to the ending of *PP*, as the death of Donne and his crew can be viewed as the pursuers being engulfed by their colonial desires. Thus the pursuers attain rebirth via the acceptance of the violence of their colonial desires. This colonial pursuit, whose object is Mariella, is therefore the anima to Donne's animus, and the ending is an illustration of renewal via a total acceptance of violence and the self-destructive nature of colonisation.

¹²⁰ Wilson Harris, "Apprenticeship to the Furies," in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. Andrew Bundy (1996; reis., London and Paris: Routledge, 1999), 224.

¹²¹ Harris, 218.

The self-destructive nature of this relationship is underlined in Donne's treatment and view of Mariella. The cruel slaveowner considers himself "the last landlord" (*PP* 22), and, given that Mariella is the name of the mission that Donne strives to recover, the character Mariella embodies Donne's desire for ownership and riches. Furthermore, Donne considers himself "the most violent taskmaster... with no hope of redemption" (*PP* 50), and this self-deprecating view underlines the character's belief in the inability to change. If Donne must pursue the path of a cruel slavedriver, then he can fully adopt that role via the validation of his cruelty, which would be the recapture of Mariella and the Mission folk. Therefore, even more than riches, Mariella is also a means to self-fulfilment: from a Hegelian perspective, Mariella serves to underline Donne's self-perception and identity.

Donne and his crew's self-destructive search for Mariella has been the main focus of critical analyses of the novel, but this seems to overlook the violence that is inflicted upon Mariella through that chase. The portrayal of Mariella, and Harris's indication of Mariella's role in the process of rebirth of the consciousness, suggests that the process of desiring her is necessary to her transformation; moreover, this transformative process and unification of the animus and anima only seems to be useful in terms of Mariella's role as "a kind of earth goddess".¹²² She is and must be perceived in a different, symbolic or archetypal, manner and also must be sacrificed for the redemption of her other. Donne "looked at her as at a larger and equally senseless creature whom he governed and ruled like a fowl" (*PP* 20), and Harris's own depiction of her, though it does present her as "a womb of potentialities", seems to operate only within the framework of the conquest for Guyana.¹²³

¹²² Harris, 225.

¹²³ Wilson Harris, "New Preface to 'Palace of the Peacock,'" in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. Andrew Bundy (1998; reis., London and Paris: Routledge, 1999), 56.

In other words, the solution that Harris offers only applies to a re-thinking of the coloniser-colonised relationship through Mariella's symbolic significance of the latter in that relationship. According to Mary Lou Emery, the trope of the New World as a woman is heavily referenced by Harris, and she concludes her identification these tropes in *PP* by stating that "Guyana enters European history as a virgin awaiting violation and possession".¹²⁴ Throughout *Quartet*, the violation and possession of women continues beyond the ending of *PP*, and it is this very sacrifice that is needed in order to lead male characters, such as the entirety of Donne's crew, on their transformative journeys.

In a brief commentary on the evolution of female figures in Harris's writing, Joyce Sparer Adler notes that the transformative element of Harris's oeuvre is located unfavourably in the male consciousness:

The muses arouse the imaginations of the male characters but, with the important exceptions just noted, do not seem to have imaginations of their own...Nor do they seem in the narratives to have significance outside of their relations with the males, whereas the males always have a being apart from the female characters. They are active in other than their sex-oriented roles, the main male character being captain, engineer, surveyor, explorer, painter or writer. The female characters, muses or not, are seen solely, in the pre-1982 novels, as wives, mistresses or prostitutes and especially as mothers, potential mothers or women unable to be mothers.¹²⁵

This short essay touches upon several of Harris's novels, drawing upon specific examples of Harris's female characters in order to demonstrate that the majority of Harris's female characters are indeed, especially prior to 1982, no more than supports in the transformation of a male Caribbean consciousness. At the end of the chapter, she notes that there is space for change, and believes "that in a Harris work of the near future a creative artist in female form will come to birth", but it appears that female

¹²⁴ Mary Lou Emery, "Limbo Rock: Wilson Harris and the Arts of Memory," *Callaloo* 18, no. 1 (1995): 118.

¹²⁵ Joyce Sparer Adler, "The Evolution of Female Figures and Imagery in Wilson Harris's Novels," in *Exploring the Palace of the Peacock: Essays on Wilson Harris* (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2003), 71–72.

agency is subsumed into the male consciousness that Harris seeks to transform, or, worryingly, that it is secondary to Harris's focus.

Elsewhere in *GQ*, male desire is oftentimes cruel and women are continuously treated with little care for their agency. Ram, the nefarious and plotting landowner in Oudin that parallels Donne very easily, offers Rajah "all the machines he wanted if he would let him have Beti, his daughter... the very coming night, and afterwards he would marry her" (*FJ* 191). Beti may not represent the land directly, but Ram's offer of equipment to Rajah demonstrates that the exchange, or purchase, rather, would allow the father to increase his profits from the land. However, she is no more than an object of desire and, through her marriage to Ram, Rajah would be sure that Ram would "control her and discipline her in the proper style, something that every father must, in all conscience, desire for a daughter" (*FJ* 191). The offer is followed by Rajah finding reason in accepting the offer. His thoughts reveal the monetary value of wifehood, but his concerns lie in the poor dowry that he had himself received for Beti's mother, leading to defeat: "he would be doing the best thing after all. Ram would treasure a virgin of fifteen years like a rare prize. And after all, what great harm could he do to her?" (*FJ* 193) The rhetorical question may assuage Rajah's fears, but ironically reveals the truth of the suffering that most likely awaits Beti as a wife to Ram.

Similarly, the other women that appear in the novels are placed in positions of victimisation. In *SL*, the sight of Catalena's abuse at the hands of her husband, a crewman of *PP*, leads to the beginnings of crew unease. This unease develops as Fenwick is warned that he is making vital mistakes by not being harsh enough as captain, and even seems to end in violence. In the end, it is revealed that fears are misplaced in the novel: the attack on Chieng (who was dressed as Fenwick) occurred spontaneously out of verbal jokes; Poseidon's death, too, was an accident that occurred at the beginning of an altercation between the old man and one of Fenwick's crew.

These misplaced fears and character-wide paranoia therefore have tragic results for the community. Joyce L. Sparer is correct in her observation that the novel forms a warning message against the search for identity outside the Guyanese present: “each man in the land will remain a stranger from the next and from himself until he finds his identity... in Guyana where he belongs.”¹²⁶ Bryant states that his row with Poseidon emerges from the absence of a “declaration of kinship” (*SL* 453).¹²⁷ By searching for a sense of kinship with Poseidon, who represents Africa, Bryant disavows the reality of his lost heritage and his resultant anger and outburst then leads to further violence and chaos within the community.

Catalena, on the other hand, endures suffering that is not characterised by her own misplaced hopes of kinship, but by male violence or desire. Firstly, she is abused by her husband, and as she tearfully lifts her dress to show her wounds to Fenwick and Jordan, she reveals a “long red mark... running across both legs as if she had been whipped and bitten.” (*SL* 414) The action and wounds are comparable to those of Mariella in *PP*, who also “lifted her dress” whilst sobbing to show “the ugly marks where she had been whipped.” (*PP* 14). It is possible to see *TSL* as a warning against a society in which the colonial power’s position as a “the most violent taskmaster” (*PP* 50). Though Fenwick is warned against appearing to be too lenient, his actions are shown not to be the root cause of the acts of violence that are then appropriated by the paranoia that is incited by the warnings of Jordan; the disruptions can be attributed elsewhere, and suggest that the crew are stuck in their preconceptions of fixed social rules, underpinned and supported by colonial relations, that should be destroyed. This therefore links the last novel to the first, for Donne’s crew, via their path of self-destruction, also face and move beyond the limits of fixed identity that also befall Fenwick’s crew.

¹²⁶ Sparer, “Attitudes towards ‘Race’ in Guyanese Literature,” 38.

¹²⁷ Wilson Harris, “The Secret Ladder,” in *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 453.

However, Catalena is abused at the expense of such realisations. She becomes Bryant's fetish for his desire for kinship with Poseidon, merely replacing the lack of love and acknowledgment, and is in turn implicated into the politics of Poseidon's community. Catalena's attempts at liberation are stopped not out of her own mistake, but as a result of the community's interpretation of her: they read her as "the seed and helplessness of their own growing disaster" and therefore as a symbol of their own fears (*SL* 460). Earlier, Jordan also interprets her as the cause of unrest, even going as far as to accuse her of purposefully creating trouble for the crew (*SL* 421). These characters project their anger onto her, but also the source of their anger. Perez, upon being sent away, abuses her even further (*SL* 453).

Even Bryant's desire does not emerge from love: "His greed for ancient remembrance and love possessed many dormant signals... beauty as well as lust. Catalena was the model of his compulsive derangement." (*SL* 453) If the sight of beauty and Bryant's own lust are only signals for a deeply set greed, then Catalena serves an object of a form of desire that is barely concerned with Catalena herself. Of course, Bryant is also a means to an end for her, as a liberator of the domestic abuse from which she suffers, but the former exploits her need for escape: he is aware that "she could be anything to him, do anything for him" (*SL* 454), which demonstrates that he seeks abuse her desperation in order to feel the gratification that he had not gained from Poseidon.

The parallel between Mariella and Catalena is therefore one of little consolation. The slavery of the past has been accepted symbolically, via a spiritual self-consumption that contains within it the violence of Guyana's history, but the status of Mariella, as a woman, is one of constant inscription of male desires. The old Arawak woman of the novel is also a means of tracking down the Mission community, and the lack of understanding or desire to approach her as other than a tracking device is demonstrated by the distance that Donne places between himself and the old woman. He criticises her mockingly: "You can never trust

these Bucks you know but she seems harmless enough. Isn't it a fantastic joke that I have to bargain with them and think of them at all?" (*PP* 51) The irony lies in the fact that Donne is incapable of any true bargaining, for he relies upon Schomburgh as an interpreter.

Nevertheless, the distance he creates between himself and the Arawaks is clear, and his use of the pejorative term "Bucks" is amplified by the description of the woman as "harmless enough", relegating her to below the rest of the Arawaks.

This focus on Mariella casts a domination-dominated relationship that parallels the power relations between genders, given that Mariella represents the Arawak people. Through Donne's assaults on her body, she carries the marks of colonial violence, and her victimisation is clearly representative of "male power-fantasy" that was embedded into colonial conquests.¹²⁸ Furthermore, Donne had achieved a level of "affection and loyalty he had mastered... when he had first seduced her" (*PP* 27). It is clear that the seduction of Mariella, which was a response to her beauty, also entailed a domination of her that extends to the Arawak people. The insidious nature of the seduction of Mariella is revealed more explicitly when Donne states that "The only way to survive of course is to wed oneself into the family" (*PP* 51). Such is the solution that Donne finds to fulfilling his settler desires in the land.

Even the other indigenous women in *PP*, who are albeit mentioned rather briefly, are used by their male, non-indigenous counterparts as a tool to the achievement of their desires. Thus the Arawak woman is no more than a means to other ends: Schomburgh, for example, dreams of "the right understanding missy and mistress would come along sweet and lucky and Bucky and rich" (*PP* 41). The use of the word 'understanding' underlines the desire for a woman that is subservient as opposed to understanding – it is not comprehension that

¹²⁸ Said, "Latent and Manifest Orientalism," 207.

Schomburgh seeks, but accommodation to his desires by the provision of them. This is reiterated through Carroll's nameless mother, whose importance lies in the "curious blessing" (*PP* 74) she provides Carroll and Vigilance with as she sends them to venture into the world; as a catalyst for the literal explorations that they embark on, which are also journeys of the self, her purpose is to facilitate their growth: "Mek yourself into a man and then come back" (*PP* 71). Wilson Harris therefore presents indigenous women as either objects of desire or catalysts to the achievement of certain objectives, always to be thought of and chased but never truly present in their own right; and again, the desire for Mariella pervades male-female relationships within the novel, creating a mantra: "Mariella was the obsession we must encounter at all costs" (*PP* 26).

The events that take place in the narrative of *WA* are presented as reiterations of events that have occurred prior to the beginning of the novel: Magda is asked by Abram about the nature of Cristo's crime "this time" when the mother comes to beg for shelter for her son (*WA* 246); and, when Mattias dies, he lies "in the identical position... in which Sharon's first suitor had fallen. It was an accident in truth... the man Cristo had been accused of stabbing to death, though everyone now intuitively saw he had fallen on his own blind knife" (*WA* 315). It is therefore possible to view the novel as a one in which Cristo's actions break a cyclical enactment of violence within the community on the Pomeroon river. As established in the previous chapter, Harris's understanding of the bush baby myth lends itself to interpreting Cristo's desire to give himself up to the police as the possibility of newness. This newness prevents a further re-enactment of Cristo's original flight hiding, which would be the fate of Sharon and his unborn child.

There is nevertheless the question of Sharon's own self in light of Cristo's self-sacrifice. Though Cristo may be breaking a cycle of constant violence by accepting violence, he leaves no choice for either Sharon or his mother. Sharon's own position is one where she

is a single mother, her own parents dead and the grandmother most likely disingenuous in her promises of taking of Sharon like own of her own. Magda makes large promises to others (Abram, Peet whilst unaware of his death) only in order to ensure her son's flight, and when speaking to Cristo, any claims of caring for Sharon are most likely made only to ensure that Cristo flees Pomeroun and Jigsaw Bay.

Magda is described as having “survived everything until she had matured into the toughest and best whore in the river district... She swore her child would have the chances she had never had. She had scrimped, and saved, and had her men to send Cristo to college” (*WA* 252). Harris seems to be critical of the notion of class mobility as a means to happiness, for Mattias feels “empty and bored”, haunted by disinterest, following his return to Pomeroun after having been educated in Cambridge (*WA* 290). And indeed, the writer achieves this criticism through his depiction of Mattias, who even in his seemingly loving interactions with his fiancée, Sharon, feels a “profound boredom” (*WA* 287). It is clear that Harris does not view the liberal dream of educational capital (whose value comes from its cost) as ensuring the happiness of the Guyanese people that he depicts.

Magda's desperation, shown in the haste with which she implements her sudden but elaborate plans to facilitate Cristo's escape from the police, is nevertheless a representation of the inability for her to achieve her desires. Her own position in Pomeroun is one of degradation. She holds a lower social position not only due to the nature of her work as a prostitute, but most likely due to being so favoured within her community (see *WA* 277, 350). Even her attempts at saving her son are met with unfulfillment, firstly in the lack of direct gain from Cristo's time in college, and also in Cristo's final decision of allowing himself to be arrested by the police.

It is valid to argue that this is a consequence of the hypocrisy, mistruth, and violence that haunts the characters of novel. Though the attendees of the wake would have felt guilt at Cristo's arrest, they are relieved by the death as it nevertheless seems a befitting punishment for him; for, according to Cristo's peers, "It had seemed a foregone conclusion that Cristo – educated in a remarkable way out of *their* pockets – wearing airs *they* could not afford – should be involved in stabbing a man in a brawling feud over a woman. He was born wild" (*WA* 274; author's emphasis). There is not only a jealousy expressed in this sentence, but also the idea that the Cristo, as someone whose education is funded through their own dishonourable practices, must not be permitted a fate any superior to their own; in fact, he is only permitted a brutish character.

And indeed, even Magda's relationship with Cristo is heavily marked by her refusal to believe his innocence in regard to Sharon's former suitor's death along with the death of Abram. However, *GQ* seems to posit that women are either passive objects, or actively unable to assert any true power. Magda herself can only exert influence over men via her position as a prostitute, or via the severance of her ties to Cristo: not only can she dress herself "like a queen" during the wake, but she is also free to reject Peeta's payment for her services (*WA* 274). At the same time, these liberties are only permissible within the framework of her identity as a prostitute, for though she may be dressed in resplendent garments "like a queen", she appears to be "a queen wishing to make a magnificent and enigmatic gift of herself to a hungry crowd" (*WA* 274). She is therefore only able to negotiate power from a position of assumed sexual subservience, and even when attempting to express her own self through clothing is she compared to an object of gratification.

3.5 Enacting Change Through Female Sacrifice

Though Sharon may be offered a chance at a new life in *The Whole Armour*, this is nevertheless also via her relationship with the unborn child: the newness that would be created via Cristo's decision lies in the transmission of information about Cristo's choice to his and Sharon's child, thus breaking the hypocrisy that underpins the relationships within the novel. It is nevertheless disconcerting that the female figures of *GQ* are relegated a deep inability to exert change within their surroundings. Furthermore, Sharon is also clearly a victim of male ownership. Her father's furious animosity towards Mattias emerges from the thought that Mattias had had sex with Sharon: "Soon as me old venerable back turn you tek me prize and maidenhead" (*WA* 297). In Peet's reference to Sharon's virginity, the inclusion of "maiden" in "maidenhead" also serves as a reminder of the objectification of Sharon's femininity, where her identity is a body that lies in the possession of her father. As such, it can be bartered and indeed stolen, which is the accusation that Peet makes of Mattias.

This accusation therefore depicts Peet as a guardian of treasure. That very object of treasure is not merely Sharon, but Sharon as a virgin, and the monetary value of a daughter's virginity is also underlined in *FJ* during Rajah's musings over the purchase of his daughter. Peet and Mattias's altercation is rendered even more striking by the fact that Mattias's anger at the accusations stem from the thought that his "perfect insight and loyalty" is being questioned (*WA* 297). Unfortunately, Sharon's own dignity is overlooked at the expense of her father's and her fiancé's inward sense of honour. This is even more poignant when considering the consequences of the existence of a sexual relationship between Mattias and Sharon: though Mattias's dignity would be harmed, such offence would be greater and more destructive for Sharon, for it would be interpreted as concrete and permanent proof of her honourless, seductive nature.

In *Wilson Harris*, Hena Maes-Jelinek states that the characters of *WA* find an illusory strength in false notions of their identity. Magda's attachment to her "dying race" and

“Chinese blood” demonstrates the importance of racial heritage in her identity (*WA* 247). This reliance on genealogical background also resurfaces when she tries to enlist Abram’s help by claiming that Cristo is his son (*WA* 248). According to Maes-Jelinek, this desire for an assured genealogical lineage reveals a deeper desire to retain certain images of identity that stem from a “primitive self-assertion rather than self-knowledge or consciousness.”¹²⁹ On the same page, Hena Maes-Jelinek identifies Magda’s need to dictate her son’s actions as a desire for her own self-assertion. This self-assertion would be identifiable with Magda’s lack of power within her immediate society, for Cristo, as her son, represents the only means for her to – via her relationship to him as a mother – find a sense of fulfilment should he conform to her view of success. Sharon, however, is according to the Harris scholar able to break free from such a path of self-assertion: she is forced “to share in a guilt which at that very instant surfaces again in the killing of Mattias”, and her former self is therefore “symbolically annihilated”.¹³⁰

It seems, therefore, that Maes-Jelinek’s interpretation of Sharon presents the character as liberated and able, at the moment of Mattias’s death, to experience “her imminent union with Cristo”.¹³¹ Like Cristo, Sharon undergoes a transformation as she comes to understand, and more importantly accept, her role in each reiteration of her suitors’ deaths. Given that Cristo, through his shamanistic insertion into the midst of the battle between the Arawaks and the Caribs, comes to understand the cycle of violence that is inherent to Guyanese history and to his greater community’s identity, Sharon’s “imminent union” seems to be a prefiguration of Cristo’s transformation. It allows her to understand the “hiding mother in the son” (*WA*

¹²⁹ Maes-Jelinek, “A Compassionate Alliance: The Whole Armour,” 29.

¹³⁰ Maes-Jelinek, 31.

¹³¹ Maes-Jelinek, 31.

305) that is Magda's vicarious living through Cristo, as well as that in the Pomeroon women were either an "unattainable idol" or a "compulsive fantastic whore" (*WA* 307).

However, Sharon's transformation nevertheless differs from that of Cristo. Though the latter finds a future of hope for consequent generations, he nevertheless asserts the impossibility of Sharon being able to follow in his footsteps. He stresses that, though Sharon believes that the truth of Cristo's innocence and Peet's suffering, and eventual suicide, could be made known to their peers, the others "needed to have a witch in the neighbourhood" (*WA* 328). Though the couple later share the grief "of the difficulty of making everything absolutely understood", it seems that Sharon's position of inferiority prevents her from being able to enact change: she would be blamed as a seducer and as the seductive instigator of the deaths that have befallen the community (*WA* 331).

Of course, Cristo's sacrifice is not insignificant, for he would be convicted of the murder of three people: Sharon's first suitor, Abram and Peeta. In that sense, his loss mirrors that of the fatherlessness of his child. Nevertheless, it seems that Sharon's importance is overshadowed by Cristo's final sacrifice. As Cristo resigns his future to that of imprisonment, he delegates Sharon with the rearing of their child under the knowledge of the circumstances of his conception. It becomes Sharon's duty to bear the reputation and false rumours that turn her into a witchlike seductress (*WA* 301, 323), all the while raising a child under the auspices of a missing father. Though this future is framed under a much hopeful light of self-awareness, for Sharon now understands the tensions that underpin their society, the future that she is given is not too dissimilar to Magda's own sacrifices for her son. And indeed, Cristo refers to the unborn baby as his "son", thereby underlining the parallel between Sharon and Magda, but also, and more importantly, emphasising the inability of women to be – despite this being a societal flaw – the enactors of change (*WA* 348). Sharon is relegated a place that is merely beside Cristo and is portrayed as an aide, though her burden is no less of

a sacrifice and also no less essential to the passing on of “the legacy of every ancestral ghost” (*WA* 348).

Throughout the novels, therefore, it seems that the portrayal of women is nevertheless disconcerting, despite the unity and wholeness that the ending of *PP* puts forward. Firstly, as passive objects, women are merely ideas after which other male characters may chase, and Mariella serves as a representation of Guyana, thereby only existing in the form of a symbol for the conquering of the land by colonial settlers; or, like the indigenous women of *PP* or Beti in *FJ*, women are used as a means of remedy to a lack of sense of fulfilment. They can perhaps exert a form of influence on their surroundings, but this restricted to an area that Harris paints as bound within the circularity of continuous violence and pain. Even the sacrifice of Sharon, who claims to find mutual love and mutual ground in her union with Cristo, seems to be set aside in light of the importance of Cristo’s transformative experience and his greater sacrifice, which nonetheless leaves Sharon with the responsibility of being a spokesperson for his cause. Yet again, womanhood is subsumed into the greater conflict in question, which is that of the future of the Caribbean, without a form of independence for woman without man.

The possible narrow-sightedness of Harris’s vision arises from two areas. The first, located in Harris’s dense prose style in combination with his equally dense critical essay-writing on his own fiction, has been noted multiple times since the publication of *PP* and, therefore, since the beginning of Wilson Harris’s writing career. Harris’s mythopoetics call for a revision of Guyana through the power of the imagination, proposing a transformative process that changes human consciousness. However, his art of fiction remains distanced from materialist understandings of reality and, due to the opacity of his writing and the reliance on his nonfictional texts in decoding his novels, perhaps somewhat distanced from his readers. Moreover, within the universality of the consciousness that is proposed through

GQ, women seem to feature only as figurative aids and sacrifices in the depicted journey of the Caribbean man's self-discovery.

4. Reconceptualising *The Guyana Quartet* through Gilles Deleuze

This chapter is concerned with the possibilities of using the thinking of Gilles Deleuze in providing an understanding of Wilson Harris's *GQ* that can respond to the problematic imagery of female sacrifice that seems to pervade the four novels' depiction of creativity. Harris's proposed vision is reliant upon a thorough excavation of the concepts of universalism, creativity and consciousness that pervade his nonfictional writing. Despite the writer's resistance to being affiliated to postcolonial theory, Deleuze's perception of life, which underpins his understanding of the processes and functions of philosophy, literature and art, can be aligned with Harris's work and enables Harris's mythopoetics to be seen a practice of productive newness. As a result, this chapter seeks to use Deleuze's approach to re-examine *GQ* and provide a Deleuzian reading of women in *GQ* as a counterpoint to the sacrificial role that they embody in Harris's quartet.

4.1 Deleuze and Surrealism: Immanence and the Problem of Dialectics

Lorna Burns, in *Contemporary Caribbean Writing and Deleuze*, seeks to overcome the oppositional relationship between Surrealism and Postmodernism by demonstrating that the development of Caribbean concepts such as universalism and cross-culturality are formed upon a concept of immanence that is shared by surrealism and Gilles Deleuze.¹³² The immanent plane upon which the Caribbean consciousness is refashioned, depicted through Wilson Harris's fiction, consists of the real, the imagined, the conscious and the unconscious.

¹³² Lorna Burns, "Introduction," in *Contemporary Caribbean Writing and Deleuze* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 22.

According to Burns, this refashioning approaches Deleuze's idea of 'actualisation',¹³³ which occurs when the virtual takes on a material form.¹³⁴

Though she may concentrate on Wilson Harris only briefly, Burns' analysis of his work suggests that previous readings of Harris's work (such as the one posited by the highly prolific Harris scholar Hena Maes-Jelinek) have been concerned with dialectical relationships. Burns states that it would be insufficient to approach Caribbean writing in a dialectical manner that, in some form, uses the notion of dualities in order to prioritise one side of dialectical pairing. Earlier in the chapter, when concentrating on Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, for example, Burns points out that a particular debate has existed, in which Caribbean writers find themselves in conflict with a British hegemonic cultural education that they have been forced to learn, yet with which they nevertheless are not permitted to identify.¹³⁵ This dialectic of 'self' pitted against 'colonially forced self of mimicry' exists in the form of Fanonian psychoanalysis, as Burns mentions, and this dialectic places the colonially forced self as an undesirable and forced self, against which the first self struggles and which the first self rejects. For Burns, however, this implicitly relegates the struggling, colonised self to the side of an authentic self and therefore implies that there is a transcendental self that exists.¹³⁶

When considering the positions and fates of major female characters in *GQ*, it seems that this dialectic is most apparent in *Palace of the Peacock*, where Mariella is desired as a possession but is also a victim of Donne's desire to maintain his authority over his escaped slave. Donne bears the weight of this relationship, stating that he feels tied to his role to the point of being "involved in the most frightful slavery" (*PP* 50). The ending of the first novel

¹³³ Lorna Burns, "Surrealism and the Caribbean: A Curious Line of Resemblance," in *Contemporary Caribbean Writing and Deleuze* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 27–67.

¹³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

¹³⁵ Burns, *Contemp. Caribb. Writ. Deleuze*, 71.

¹³⁶ Burns, 72.

seems to consist of an overturning of the pursuer-pursued relationship, which, in combination with Harris's incorporation of Amerindian cannibalistic myth, seems to provide a unity between the past on the present in order to make way for the new. At the same time, the female figures of the novels are excluded from these transformations. This means that Harris's vision of the future comes at the cost of subsuming the problematic equation of 'woman' and 'colonised land'.

This entire form of thinking can be undone through Deleuzian philosophy. Burns states that "Walcott fundamentally rejects the idea that a colonial education in English literature constituted an epistemic violence, since he understands literature to be much more than a mere reflection of the immediate world in which one lives. Memory and imagination are privileged over experience and history as creative."¹³⁷ This is an argument that Burns sustains against the identity of the Caribbean through essentialist and negative terms, where Caribbean identity is assigned in an essentialised manner to those of the Caribbean Sea or negatively as those who are not of the Homeric tradition of the Aegean Sea.

And indeed, Harris would not seem to fall under such forms of identification, shown through the earlier sections. Nevertheless, there is another problem that Burns brings to the surface, albeit rather suddenly:

it is unsatisfactory simply to label Harris's vitalism as, at worst, antithetical to his materialist vision or, at best, of secondary importance to it. Hena Maes-Jelinek, Poynting suggests, is a more productive critic in that she maintains that 'the material and the spiritual exist in mutual inter-penetration' (p.104) in Harris. Implicit in this comment, however, is a view that maintains the primacy of material, dialectical transformation as the only response adequate to the realities of place.¹³⁸

Burns first makes the claim that there is a struggle between materialism and vitalism, in terms of the critical responses to Wilson Harris's work, before then stating that vitalism is

¹³⁷ Burns, 74.

¹³⁸ Burns, 95.

unfairly considered second – if not highly below – materialism. There is no doubt that the previous chapters have focused on the presence of Caribbean consciousness within the non-living, immaterial world as equally as the living one, and, in accordance with Maes-Jelinek's observation, have also concentrated on Wilson Harris's ideas of spirituality (in the form of universal desires that emerge from archetypal consciousnesses) in relation to the material world.

Lorna Burns refrains from expanding upon this observation, but the realities of one's lived world are set in a false dialectic with the unlimited possibility of one's imagination. This false dialectic was already revealed in the author's chapter on Surrealism, where she demonstrates that this very dialectic underpins the opposition between Surrealism and Postmodernity.

The struggle between materialism and vitalism is described in a certain way: Burns states that Jungian archetypes have been criticised, by such as Wole Soyinka, for the "self-positing archetype as virtual content bears no relation to the actual world of conflict and action."¹³⁹ In other words, if the archetype moves from the unconscious into the conscious (and therefore exist in the material world), then its existence is anchored in the immaterial (vitalism). This seems to run counter to the view that the material conditions of the world produce a certain situation, such as the contemporary moment of existence within a postcolonial West Indian culture.

Nevertheless, Burns criticises such a view, stating that it prioritises the transformation of the material as a response to the realities that are being experienced. It is not only a criticism that seeks to question the focus on the material, but the criticism is also seeks to question the fact that this transformation is a dialectical one. Burns identifies an issue that has

¹³⁹ Burns, 82.

been raised in the last chapter, in which Harris's prophetic vision for the future of the Caribbean seems to lie in an area that does not affect the material world. However, Burns questions the separation between the material and the immaterial (termed 'vitalism' by Burns), for she criticises material transformation as a response to material conditions. Furthermore, by stating that this is a "dialectical" transformation, she also underlines the fact that these responses maintain the dialectic of the two.

Her response is framed through Deleuzian concepts that allow Harris's work to be re-envisaged in a form that does not consist of the dialectic between materialism and vitalism. According to Burns, "just as Deleuze's notion of different/ciation captures the movement from virtual to actual, here alchemy signifies the creative dialogue between virtual/unconscious and actual/consciousness as the two sides of a single reality."¹⁴⁰ By recasting the unconscious and consciousness and virtual and actual respectively, Burns places both the unconscious and the conscious within the real world, thereby following in the same vein as her argument against the opposition between postcolonialism and postmodernism: both of these oppositions consist of a separation between reality and thought (in most basic terms), which is a false separation and can be dissolved through a different conception of reality, in which the virtual is equally real as the actual.

According to Burns, Deleuze can account for newness without disposing of the past. Instead of countercolonial discourse, which, as is believed by those such as Wole Soyinka, still operates within the parameters of colonial discourse, Wilson Harris provides a new path. The problem with reactionary discourses is that the counter-identity still conforms to an idea of identity that is fixed by the one against which the reactionary discourse battles. As such, Fanonian theory would state that that Mariella may only remain within the colonial discourse

¹⁴⁰ Burns, 94.

of her oppressors, even as she seemingly manages to wrench herself free of their grasp: her freedom, as an escapee, is still defined by those from which she frees herself. Cristo's partner, too, can only be defined by her surrounding community's thoughts of her as a seducer of men and instigator of violence. Even as she provides a new path for her and Cristo's son, this victory remains within the oppressor-oppressed dialectic and can only be seen as a victory due to Sharon's sacrifice.

4.2 Virtual and Actual Time

Burns' implementation of Deleuzian notions of time, becoming and desire respond to the previous chapter and change the relationship of the colonial-colonised dialectic. Though Burns' observations come from her desire to remove the insistence on vitalism vs. materialism, her insightful application of Deleuze lends itself to forming a reply to the difficulties surrounding accepting the fates of women in *GQ*.

According to Deleuze, time does not exist in a linear, positivist manner, in which we are part of an unfolding development of – for example – a civilisation. This positivist perception of time assumes that there is a purpose or grounded aspect to time and that we react to that unfolding. Instead, life is machinic: every aspect of it is a machine that is productive insofar as other machines connect to it (humans, for example), and in itself has no intent or purpose. Every moment in which machines connect to each other, there is a production of an event that is new and changes time as a result, offering a new line of time. In such a way, life is set of 'becomings': "Becoming is like the machine: present in a different way in every assemblage, passing from one to the other, opening one onto the other, outside any fixed order or determined sequence."¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Of the Refrain", in *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 347.

Time is therefore a flux of connections and lines of time, which, though it may not have an intention, nevertheless strives to increase production. This is summarised best, perhaps, in Claire Colebrook's explanation of Deleuzian thought: "Life is a proliferation of machinic connections."¹⁴² Deleuze argues that there is a centrality to the way in which we have perceived our surroundings: by assigning purposes to ourselves and to life, we have also perceived the universe as a movement from a beginning to an end, thereby giving time a purpose. However, life has no such directed purpose: its proliferation comes out of the machinic connections that form it. As a machine, with no subjectivity, life therefore expands in a constantly deterritorialised manner: it has no ground or foundation, meaning that it constantly changes to become other than itself. It is this change that produces actualised moments, for the "rules of actualization are not those of resemblance and limitation, but those of difference or divergence or creation".¹⁴³ The constant changing of life produces actualised moments in a machinic manner.

Alongside the actualised moment, which is the fixed arrestation of time, exists the virtual. Virtual time is no less 'real' than actualised time, and the difference between actual and virtual does not run along the axis of difference between that which is 'real' and 'unreal'. The virtual is the pre-condition of the actual, rather than the pre-condition of realised time. Actualisation must be understood as an event and therefore a break with time in which a new line of time is produced.¹⁴⁴ The virtual is the possibility of several different actualised moments, and, though, an actualised moment may seem to render previous possibilities 'unreal', this is not the case in Deleuze's perception of time. Instead, the virtual exists alongside the actual and is just as real: "Time moves forward, producing actual worlds in

¹⁴² Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 56.

¹⁴³ Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 94.

¹⁴⁴ See Gilles Deleuze, "Repetition for itself," in *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press), 70–128

ordered sequences, but time also has an eternal and virtual element, including all the tendencies opening towards the future and a past that we can always intervene.”¹⁴⁵ That which is perceived as time is actualised time, for interactions produces other actualisations, which, despite our interpretation of it as one unitary flow, consists of a production of events and problems that generate further events.

Rather than seeing time as the ordering framework of movement of the world or the sequences of life, which then posits that life is the grounding force of time and has a direction, Deleuze states that time must be understood as a flow that produces several worlds. It is an intensive, nonlinear force that takes on and produces many forms or moments. Actualised moments may seem to occur consecutively and in a linear manner, but that is only the human eye’s perception that discards the virtual whole of time and narrows it into a purpose.

It is therefore possible to see how Harris may be viewed as problematic: his focus on Jungian archetypes and the unconscious may be aligned with ideas of a linking spirit or conscious across humanity. This in turn would signal that Harris’s vision is linked more closely to Hegelian ideas of spirit and the belief that there is a grounding identity behind human differences, against which Colebrook warns.¹⁴⁶ However, “The error of psychoanalysts and ‘dreamers’ is to view the unconscious as determined and limited by consciousness.”¹⁴⁷ Lorna Burns posits that the unconscious can be aligned with the virtual, whilst consciousness can be viewed as the actual. She therefore does not oppose the two against each other: instead, she argues that the unconscious consists of possibility and change, rather than an underlying essence, that exists alongside the actualised moment of

¹⁴⁵ Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 33.

¹⁴⁶ Colebrook, 3.

¹⁴⁷ Burns, *Contemp. Caribb. Writ. Deleuze*, 42.

time. As Colebrook states, “There is the past or impersonal memory which is virtual and the actual lines of lived time. The world or life we live is an actualisation of this pure or impersonal memory, but memory or time in its pure and whole state can also interrupt our world.”¹⁴⁸ The collective unconscious exists in virtual time, consisting of the forces that have shaped actualised history, such as the desire for colonial possession.

Lorna Burns uses this understanding in order to state that Harris’s prophetic vision of *GQ* does indeed tend towards a future that incorporates the past:

In *Palace of the Peacock*, Carroll does not embody The Creator or creative nucleus, rather the sound issuing from his lips comes ‘from a far source within’ (p. 116): creativity is immanent to all created things and all created things are accordingly creative. Thus the metaphysical elements of Harris’s texts recall the twin aspects of the Deleuzian event: actual and virtual. Indeed, what Harris refers to as wholeness or the unfinished genesis of the imagination encompasses both actual events and bodies, and their virtual or pure counterparts as the potential for future becomings and newness.¹⁴⁹

This understanding is not dissimilar to the analyses of *GQ* of the first section, given that the analyses of *GQ* have stressed Harris’s desire for a future that incorporates the past without being fixed in a victim state. However, its significance is greater for Burns: this understanding of the actual and the virtual serves to undo the supposed dichotomy between the postmodern and the postcolonial, where it seems that the postcolonial is held back by anticolonial efforts, whose forms of resistance remain within a higher colonial framework under the name of universalism. Wilson Harris, on the other hand, refuses any form of fixed, universalised identity. His use of Jungian concepts serves to construct a dialogue between the timelessness of the Caribbean past and the present.¹⁵⁰

The outcome of Burns’s analysis corroborates Harris’s vision, for it agrees with the Guyanese writer’s desire for an acknowledgment of the role of absence and violent erasure in

¹⁴⁸ Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 33.

¹⁴⁹ Burns, *Contemp. Caribb. Writ. Deleuze*, 100.

¹⁵⁰ Burns, 86.

the creation of the Caribbean, along with the writer's vision of a future that is not stagnated by its ruptured past. Moreover, it supports Harris's universality, rather than universalism, by demonstrating that Harris's fiction illustrates the potentiality of virtual time. Unexplored, however, is the applicability of Deleuze to *The Guyana Quartet* when seeking to understand the proposed future of the female characters of the quartet. As established earlier, the colonial conquest over land is re-inscribed onto other desires of ownership that also include the possession of the land (*FJ*, *SL*) as well as the possession of female bodies (Mariella, Sharon, Beti, etc.). Colonial desire is the undercurrent that shapes the interactions of the characters in Harris's world, and the pursued colonial body exists throughout the spaces and times in which the four novels take place.

4.3 Responding to Desire and Womanhood

As such, the union between colonial desire and colonial resistance consists of the acceptance of the West Indian dismembered past, enabling, as Burns believes, the possibility of newness without being tied to the past nor dismissive of it. Nevertheless, there is an unsettling association between femininity, victimhood and sacrifice: though the colonial conquest is not realised, the union seems to come at the cost of the female body. The renewed births of Donne and his crew exclude any opportunities for Mariella and her counterparts. It seems paramount to question the future of the feminine West Indies as it is portrayed in *The Guyana Quartet*. The coloniser's cannibalistic act may be interpreted as a break from the perceived colonial present via the intervention of the virtual. This, however, does not occur for the women that appear in *GQ*. Though the dialectic between colonial pursuit and colonial object of desire is relinquished in *GQ*, the process of sacrificial objectification of women remains unchanged.

In *The Secret Ladder*, the final novel of *GQ*, the sacrificed woman consists of Catalena, the wife of one of Fenwick's crew members. The relationship between Catalena and her husband, Perez, seems fraught with difficulties, the cause of which is uncertain. Like Mariella, Catalena bears marks of physical violence: "There was a long red mark (the colour of brutal lipstick) running across both legs as if she had been whipped and beaten" (*SL* 414). This echoes the marks left behind from Donne's whipping of Mariella, also found on her legs (*PP* 21). Moreover, before Catalena escapes with Bryant, it is revealed that she had been whipped daily by her husband (*SL* 453). Finally, like Mariella, Sharon and Beti, Catalena is portrayed as an object of sexual desire in the gaze of Harris's male characters. Fenwick describes her as typical of many other dispossessed women in Guyana: "He [Fenwick] had seen them running barefoot on the public road, half their breast exposed, inexplicable as a wild flower or a blade of grass, archaic as a cripple, as innocent as corrupt" (*SL* 413).

The portrayal of her does not lack accusations of maleficent seduction on her part, however. Fenwick is worried by Catalena's claim of being gambled away like money at her husband's card games, and he later fires Perez from his crew. The captain is criticised for this by the camp attendant Jordan, who states that Catalena is preying upon the captain's emotions: "I know you feel sorry for the woman. But she's the picture of a whore, skipper. And she crazy, too, in the bargain. She know how to play on a man's sympathy" (*SL* 421). Though the captain believes that he is punishing Perez for his actions, and acts upon the possibility that Perez gambles his wife's body with other crew members, he causes Catalena to be punished even further in private by her husband.

In Burns' analysis of Wilson Harris, she states that Harris undoes dualities.¹⁵¹ The duality that appears in *SL* seems to be a repetition of the coloniser/ colonised, conqueror/ land

¹⁵¹ Lorna Burns, "Writing Back to the Colonial Event: Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris," in *Contemporary Caribbean Writing and Deleuze* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 95.

dualities that form the colonial conquest of the Americas. In the case of Catalena and Perez's relationship, however, which reflects the coloniser/colonised relationship of the Americas, even Fenwick's desire to undo or retaliate against this abusive relationship nevertheless maintains it. This is repeated in Bryant's actions as well, towards the end of the novel.

The ending of the entire surveying endeavour is at first related retrospectively to Fenwick by Bryant and Catalena, who cover the moments leading to Fenwick's arrival at the rebels' hiding-place, but the final pages return to focusing on Fenwick's thoughts and actions from the moment of his discovery of the two lovers. Following the increase in violence at the hands of Perez, Catalena encounters Bryant, the latter having become enamoured with her. They devise a plan: Bryant would feign a note to Perez, stating that Catalena had left to obtain wages from Fenwick for Perez, allowing them to leave. Catalena, in return, would lead Bryant to Poseidon's hiding-place in order for Bryant to warn Poseidon that their land would indeed be used for government purposes.

However, Poseidon views the arrival as a betrayal, and, viewing Catalena as "the soul of his downfall", the old man attempts to kill her but is stopped by Bryant, who accidentally kills the old leader instead (*SL* 456). In this rapid turn of events, Catalena seems to attempt to bargain her freedom, having been the victim of bargaining at the expense of her husband's gambling whims (regardless of whether these gambles were made in jest or not), but is viewed as the instigator and cause for a greater battle for land ownership. She is doubly victimised: as an object of desire, she can be viewed as Guyana and the Americas at the hands of the colonisers, but she is also blamed for the very existence of colonial endeavours. When Harris states that Mariella is the "embodiment of women and a womb of potentialities", he assigns Guyanese women with the burden of being none other than the shadow to the coloniser consciousness, thereby inadvertently locking them into the objects of desire that they are portrayed as in the novels. Jordan's accusations of Fenwick's botching of

the surveying job further underline this accusatory relationship between man and woman, and, therefore, between coloniser and colonised: “the moment you get so serious that they feel you really *care*... that you are not so superior to them any more... you gone and done the worst thing you can ever do... and whenever that happen is always some goddamn woman in it...” (SL 460). This seems to echo even Bryant’s attempt at compassion: it seems to end in violence and failure, like Chiung’s head blow and the destruction of the crew’s equipment at the hands of the rebels, with a woman placed in the centre as the cause of the problems.

As Catalena and Bryant escape, after Bryant’s accidental killing of Poseidon, they are stopped by the rest of the village. The villagers concentrate their fears and their anger upon the two characters, viewing Catalena most of all as the symbol of the loss of their land: “they saw her as the seed and helplessness of their own growing disaster they had in their power to end” (SL 460). Poseidon, before turning to attack Catalena, regards the woman as having “disobeyed him”, “intent on betraying his authority”, and these views of Catalena demonstrate that the fugitives of the Canje river re-inscribe their fears of incoming disaster onto Catalena (SL 456). Though Bryant is also implicated, for he and Catalena are both viewed as “two representatives of his [Fenwick’s] dominion”, the brunt of the villagers’ anger seems to fall onto Catalena’s shoulders (SL 456). Their violence towards her also takes the form of a desire of rape, rather than only the punishment of death. The possession of her body would allow them to enact their intertwined feelings of hatred and desire, the latter being the desire for land and power that, in light of their powerlessness after Poseidon’s death, is being placed upon Catalena.

In a sudden turn of events, Fenwick’s arrival interrupts the trial, preventing the rape and the killings from occurring. It seems that Catalena is saved and that the refugees acquiesce, renouncing their desire to hold onto the land. Catalena’s future is left uncertain,

though she and Bryant are left to “appear to run and make swift love on every trail across the earth”.¹⁵²

Given that Catalena has been caught in a cycle of oppression, the only possibility of a better future lies in the breaking of that cycle. It seems that she is able to continue her flight with Bryant, free of the tyranny of her husband as well as the persecution of either the refugees or the highly misogynistic members of Fenwick’s crew. This is indeed the ending described by Maes-Jelinek in the opening of her chapter on the complementarity of Fenwick in *SL* and Donne’s journey in *PP*.¹⁵³ Whilst the other major female characters of the *GQ* seem not to be able to flee the constraints of their relationship with male characters, given that at the ending of each novel the women are sacrificed and ignored during the transformation that the male characters undergo, Catalena seems to be the only character achieving true escape and therefore a level of independence.

4.4 Ambiguity and Newness

Providing Catalena with independence, however, would still suggest that there is a stable, assignable quality that can be ascribed to women; though demonstrating that women are independent is undeniably a positive change from the fixed sacrificial role, Deleuze would caution against depictions of the stability of identities. In the following reading of the end of *SL*, which has been commonly viewed as illustrating Catalena’s flight from the Canje area,¹⁵⁴ it is the ambiguity of the novel’s ending that paves the way for newness, rather than the clear-cut picture of Catalena’s successful escape and consequent freedom.

¹⁵² Harris, “The Secret Ladder,” 463.

¹⁵³ Hena Maes-Jelinek, “The Secret Ladder: The Immaterial Constitution,” in *The Labyrinth of Universality: Wilson Harris’s Visionary Art of Fiction* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006), 115.

¹⁵⁴ Such as: Jean-Pierre Durix, “Paradoxes of Creation: Wilson Harris’s ‘The Secret Ladder,’” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 15, no. 2 (1984): 27–38.

At the end of the novel, and indeed of the *GQ*, Fenwick's statements on the aftermath of the interrupted trial reveal that the rebels of the Canje river cede their land to whatever use envisaged for it by the government. It is clear that Wilson Harris does not provide a victorious ending, for that ideal would probably consist of the government's withdrawal from the land, along with the promise that the future of its inhabitants would be protected under law, including Catalena and Bryant's relationship. Instead, the rebels accede to the government's wishes and the grain of hope seems to lie both in the outcome of Catalena and Bryant's relationship as well as in the mentality of Fenwick himself.

Whether Catalena and Bryant achieve their ultimate happiness, however, can still be contested for it is presented in an ambiguous manner. Though several sources conclude that Bryant and Catalena do indeed continue their flight into the jungle,¹⁵⁵ the optimism is also accompanied by the ominous possibility that Fenwick's intervention secured the government's acquisition of the land through violence, rather than chance. This would suggest that Fenwick, as a government agent and therefore a compliant member of the remaining colonial conquest of land ownership, via land surveyance, accepts his destructive role in the cycle of coloniser/colonised, and that Bryant and Catalena's attempt of breaking that cycle is quashed.

Fenwick reveals that Poseidon is buried with "the instruments his disciples had vainly possessed – the apparatus of the law they once honoured" (*SL* 463). As he contemplates the turn of events, he also acknowledges that "The law cannot be buried" and understands that the burial is only a temporary measure, though it seems that time itself "would have prided itself on knowing *now*... what no one else could dream to know... God's grave over

¹⁵⁵ Maes-Jelinek, "The Secret Ladder: The Immaterial Constitution"; Durix, "Paradoxes of Creation: Wilson Harris's 'The Secret Ladder'"; Mac Fenwick, "Fenwick's Vision: Liberal Tyranny in 'The Guyana Quartet,'" *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 32, no. 2 (2001): 45–66.

emptiness, over the unacknowledged wedding of man and woman, the unacknowledged burial of man and woman..." (SL 460). Poseidon is previously called "God" (SL 396), and the "unacknowledged wedding of man and woman" seems to describe the relationship between Bryant and Catalena, since they leave Canje as unmarried lovers.

However, this leaves the "emptiness" and the "unacknowledged burial of man and woman" as new insertions in the recent events on Fenwick's mind. Given the repetition of the preposition "over", it is possible to consider "emptiness", the "wedding" and the "burial" as equivocated both syntactically and, therefore, semantically or referentially. Given that the government's acquisition of the land occurs through the Canje people's decision to discard their claim to it, which is lawfully inscribed in documents that are obtained by the messengers, the "emptiness" located under Poseidon's grave could be referring to the disappearance of these documents, on which is based the government's acquisition of the Canje territory. The evidence, once buried, becomes an emptiness where there is an end or a barricade to further interrogation on the object. In the same way, Bryant and Catalena disappear, but their unacknowledged union is also equated to a burial.

Returning to Fenwick's previous thoughts offers a disturbing explanation, therefore. Fenwick is able to "put stinking Poseidon in a bed over the runaway lovers for all eternity", and subsequently wonders, "Who would suspect anything when the followers of Poseidon had turned so sensible they were yielding all their holdings... to be vested in the state or in the grave?" (SL 460). In a chilling rereading of that rhetorical question, there is the suspicion that Fenwick murders the two lovers in order to prevent his implication in a coverup of the camp's legitimate claim to the land, having discovered that, given that the Chiung attack was a murder attempt, he could involve the police force. Fenwick could have acquiesced to the pressure of Jordan and become Weng, the cruel foreman that is described as Fenwick's "rubber twin" and therefore serves as his double (SL 389). This would signal the end of

futures, rather than the optimism that Harris puts forward in his own work, and, moreover, it implicates female figures into colonial reconquests of the land, yet again. Fenwick also states that “The land was the mystery in which he would never chart where they [Catalena and Bryant] had vanished.”, as if he were exploiting the impenetrability of the interior in order to hide his murder.

This reading counters both Harris’s optimism for West Indian futures and other readings of the text, which would then render the possibility of renewal and hope impossible. Given the emphasis that Harris places on creation, as well as the endings of *PP*, *FJ*, and *WA*, it seems doubtful that the ending to the entire quartet would consist of the total victory of the government’s control over the land through murder. The possibility of such an ending, however, lurks within the text and plays an important role in ambiguity that forms Harris’s vision of the future. The coexistence of sight and blindness, life and death, dreaming and waking life, light and darkness, and other oppositions, are introduced in *PP* and are characteristic of the entire quartet.

In ‘Paradoxes of Creation’, Durix demonstrates that Harris’s vision of creation is founded upon the undoing of fixed structures of meaning and truth. For this reason, the author of the article concentrates on the multiple ways in which the narration in *The Secret Ladder* consists of paradoxes, oxymorons and ambiguities. He notes that the shifting perspective provides the reader with confusion and uncertainty as to the identity of the narrator, which is central to Harrisian writing:

the only certainties which it [the narrator] provides concern the impossibility to know anything for sure, to distinguish appearances from the hidden life which binds the elements in creation. Its comments are never definite except in unmasking prejudices. They provide paradoxical representations which, far from closing the plot, question any possibility of exhaustive meaning. Wilson Harris leaves few opportunities for the reader to "translate" images into one-sided equivalents.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Durix, “Paradoxes of Creation: Wilson Harris’s ‘The Secret Ladder,’” 35.

This can be applied to the ending of the novel itself, which does not figure as one of the examples of “paradoxical representations” that are mentioned in the article. It renders Catalena’s fate entirely ambiguous, making present and visible the image of her death and the failure of her efforts alongside the image of her flight.

At the same time, Durix also states that “For Wilson Harris, vision implies the recognition that one's own image is different from what one had always imagined. This feeling of dispossession is a necessary prelude to the edification of a more authentic self.”¹⁵⁷ Durix is referring to the changes that occur in characters’ transformations within the novel, highlighting in particular Fenwick’s radical change, but this is equally applicable to Catalena. For Catalena, who is also fixed in a specific role and relationship to her surroundings, there is a change that occurs that would seemingly allow her to redefine herself.

They were both watching each other, longing for the consummation of their hopes... She knew he was already looking through her to the end of a blind trail. He knew she was looking inward upon herself, on her peculiar cross and predicament and soul of unreason, without which she would never have ventured to travel with him. It was the kind of relationship which could prosper since the future was its only design. (*SL* 455)

Catalena sees that she is a sacrifice for the future and that she possesses a “soul of unreason”, thereby only of defiance of ordained structures. It is this defiance that allows her to leave with Bryant, and which secures the future. She is following a “blind trail”, which is route along which participants move whilst blinded. The end is not revealed, and this is important: there is a future, or the future, but it cannot be described or contained/predicted.

It is undeniable that there is uncertainty in Catalena’s future, but this demonstrates that sequences and orders do not get forced into existence and cannot be imposed. In the article ‘Paradoxes of Creation’, it is true creativity that ruptures the expectation of sequences

¹⁵⁷ Durix, 32.

or structures. Furthermore, this form of creativity is not an imposition of a new structure. In its stead, there is a revealing of uncertainty. When Catalena, earlier, is perceived by Poseidon as having “disobeyed” him, this reveals Poseidon’s own mistake in viewing himself as constitutive of, and fixed in, the role of the original escaped slave and rebel, leader of other rebels and therefore a man who has been betrayed. Similarly, Catalena is trapped in the role of an unfaithful, seductive woman that does not, and will, conform to the chaste woman that the men around her view as the normative and legitimate archetype.

By carrying a “soul of unreason”, however, Catalena may escape continuous punishment, not out of conformity to the idea of ‘woman’ that is accepted by her society, but by avoiding essentialisation. It is impossible to dictate the future of Catalena, and Harris includes the sombre possibility of failure through the depiction of her burial, but this revelation of the multiplicity of the future allows for creative genesis. The biblical connotations also indicate this, for Fenwick realises, on the seventh day of his time surveying the Canje river, that “our end is our beginning” (*SL* 464). Thus the unacknowledged union of Bryant and Catalena echoes the original pairing of Adam and Eve whilst also reshaping the original descent and sin into the beginning of a creative – and therefore possibly prosperous – future.

As Durix states, “Before creation can take place, the characters must undergo radical dispossession...The working of the imagination is a genesis in reverse in order to go back to the roots of the creative process”.¹⁵⁸ Fenwick is too dispossessed of his desire for unity and humanist respect for mankind, in the form of a liberal and honourable society (“Fenwick’s own insecure liberal ideas”, 447; upholding the “spirit of his authority”, 375) for he sees that his attempts at instilling his form of order is equally as destructive as the preceding one that

¹⁵⁸ Durix, “Paradoxes of Creation: Wilson Harris’s ‘The Secret Ladder.’”

he seeks to change, in which Catalena is abused by her husband and, at the very best, an object of mockery amongst the men. Bryant becomes dispossessed when he does not receive the fatherly blessing from Poseidon that he seeks, hoping to replace the lack of paternal care in his life.

Catalena's future remains ambiguous, and the possibility of her death seems to underline the precarity of her flight into the dense jungle that is portrayed as dangerous and unknowable. However, the novel suggests earlier that death is not an impediment to change and creation. During Fenwick's interrogation of Van Brock, the latter becomes consumed by his memory of his dead grandmother. Instead of commenting on the circumstances of the night of Chiung's attack, the man recounts his dying grandmother's obsession with her lost ring, insinuating that, since he "clung to her and yet was so exasperated by her", he is the cause of her death (*SL* 452). As Hena Maes-Jelinek notes, however, it is the grandmother's loss of memory that is the cause.¹⁵⁹ In restoring the gold ring to his grandmother's dead body, Van Brock reconnects his grandmother to his grandfather, who had been forgotten by his grandmother towards the end of her life. This restoration of the gold ring, found in a swamp, recalls the alchemical process and allows Van Brock to transform the ailed memory of his grandmother into the woman that she had been prior to her memory loss, thereby acting as "a dutiful high priest at the wedding of memory."¹⁶⁰ Van Brock restores the gold ring to his dead grandmother's hand. The posthumous act also replicates her wedding, which in turn restores the past lineage and memory of Van Brock's family, but also, through the image of the wedding, signals towards future genesis and multiplicity in the family tree, which, given Van Brock's act as the priest, is now both part of Van Brock's past as well as his future.

¹⁵⁹ Maes-Jelinek, "The Secret Ladder: The Immaterial Constitution," 125.

¹⁶⁰ Maes-Jelinek, 452.

In *SL*, the mention of Oudin's savannah (363, "Oudin's Demerara/Abary savannah") places the event of the Canje surveying job as concurrent with the period of time during which Oudin, through his wife Beti, possesses the estate that had belonged to the cousins of Beti's father. This specific moment also, more importantly, recalls Beti and Oudin's victory over the complicated and criminal land struggles that took place between the Allamans and Ram, in which Beti and Oudin had been implicated. Though *The Far Journey* of Oudin begins and ends with the present moment, in which Oudin is already dead and Ram finally sees that he cannot gain the land of Beti's family, nor even her child, Harris places *The Secret Ladder* as occurring prior to the ending of the preceding novel in *GQ*. By doing so, he refuses to create a continuous, progressive sequence of events. Instead, he aims to fracture any image of time as sequential or progressive. This is already present in the narrative of *The Far Journey of Oudin*: the half-brother of Mohammed, who is Beti's uncle, is named Oudin; he is murdered in order to keep the estate in Mohammed's possession, but later returns in the form of Beti's husband (the Oudin who dies at the beginning of the novel) and presumably regains the estate via his marriage to Beti after Mohammed's death. Furthermore, following his death, his phantom presence is felt: Oudin inadvertently thwarts Ram by promising his future child to him, thereby placating the cruel landowner during Oudin's and Beti's marriage, but also intervenes later as his death frees Beti from carrying out the prior agreement.

Death is, therefore, as Fenwick himself states, a beginning: the unravelling that death causes can also be a form of intervention that returns in the future. In *FJ*, the first Oudin's death is a ploy for gain and a form of theft. The death of the second Oudin, however, undoes – doubly – both the power of Ram (the overlord and possessor of the land) as well as the bind upon Beti's body and motherhood. Equally, the present can reshape the past, just as Van Brock is able to draw gold out of dirt and restore his grandmother's union with his grandfather, after her death. These phantom presences and interventions into the past and the

future serve to recall the virtuality of time and the way in which it may differ from, but nevertheless is has a role in, actualised time.

Time, in Harris's fiction, is not continuous and cannot be chronicled: it can move forward and backward, intervening in later stages and also being remoulded in the present moment. In an article on Fenwick's liberal and tyrannical characteristics, the author states:

The novel, and thus *The Guyana Quartet*, however, does not end on a despairing note. For even as the Canje folk forsake their claims to the land, Catalena Perez and Bryant have begun a journey into the heartland that is comparable to the journeys of Cristo and Sharon in *The Whole Armour*, and Oudin and Beti in *The Far Journey of Oudin*.¹⁶¹

And indeed, the comparison that Harris makes is strengthened by his ability to demonstrate that events re-engage with each other in the past and the future. This, in combination with the coexistence of the fleeing lovers' escape and death, underlines the lack of fixity in the future of Bryant and Catalena. It does not sever their ties to the events at the Canje, but allows them to take on new futures.

Durix's emphasis on the dispossession of the characters of *The Secret Ladder* overlooks the reverberation of Harris's writing, which, in a Deleuzian manner, could be viewed as enabling readers to rethink their own perspective. This power of philosophy and literature with regard to possibility and time is essential to Lorna Burns' view of Wilson Harris's work, and she states that Harris's vision of the future, under a Deleuzian lens, embodies the function of literature.¹⁶² Philosophy, according to Deleuze, strives to look at life in its virtual form, thereby producing the power to think about life in a different manner.¹⁶³ It is concerned with the exploration of the processes of actualisation, rather than looking only at actualised events (unlike history), which is exemplified by Deleuze and Guattari's tracing of

¹⁶¹ Fenwick, "Fenwick's Vision: Liberal Tyranny in 'The Guyana Quartet,'" 63.

¹⁶² Burns, *Contemp. Caribb. Writ. Deleuze*, 100–108.

¹⁶³ Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 12.

the processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialization of religions and philosophy in ‘Geophilosophy’.¹⁶⁴

Deleuze’s view of language differs from that of the signifier-signified relationship of structuralists. Instead, language responds to a problem. Problems create the future, for a problem is life’s response to something other than itself or its response to a questioning of that which is other than itself. Language and concepts are, similarly, responses to problems and they serve to articulate those very problems, thereby having a virtual dimension along with an actual one. Though a word itself is actual, it can evoke different senses, which are virtual.¹⁶⁵ Philosophical concepts bring forward the virtual dimension by removing the fixity of meanings assigned to a word-concept and evoking the problems from which the concept has arisen.

Wilson Harris’s writing, in Deleuzian terms, seeks to bring forward the virtuality of the event. The narratives contain actualised history, in the sense that the narratives are not difficult: Donne seeks a runaway slave that has fled to a refuge site for former slaves; Oudin, who worked for the landowner that rivalled Beti’s own family, marries Beti; Cristo, who is accused of murder, is caught up in his mother’s attempts to protect him from the police but hands himself in; finally, Fenwick attempts to measure the changing water levels of the Canje river and is opposed by the people living there. The writing of these narratives, however, transforms them beyond their actual selves. As is demonstrated by Burns in relation to *PP*, Harris takes the actualised events and the problems that occur in the narrative, using the text in order to bring out the virtual dimension of these events. In doing so, the characters are able to rethink themselves and, most importantly, rethink themselves creatively. Furthermore, *GQ*

¹⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 85–116.

¹⁶⁵ Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 20.

also responds to the struggle of reconciliation between the future and Guyana's colonial past, providing a depiction of a possible future that is not transcendent, nor a negation of the colonial past. The illustration of this coexistence between past, present and future allows for a different conception of the Caribbean.

Within this process, Wilson Harris also implicates the concept of 'woman' as a metaphor of 'colonised land'. Art, rather than producing a meaningful and structured world through signifiers, frees the experience from the body that experiences it, allowing the observer or reader to be able to perceive the singular experience devoid of the system of cause, effect and experiencer that surrounds it: it presents "otherness caught in a matter of expression".¹⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari use the examples "earth's song and the cry of humanity",¹⁶⁷ which easily describe Carroll's whistle at the end of *PP*. However, art is concerned with capturing sensations, and therefore describing *GQ* as only art, under Deleuzian terminology, would be insufficient. Instead, the concept of philosophy allows for the transformative power of *GQ* to be explained: "philosophy is not a simple art of forming, inventing, or fabricating concepts, because concepts are not necessarily forms, discoveries, or products. More rigorously, philosophy is the discipline that involves creating concepts... that are always new."¹⁶⁸

If, under a Deleuzian light, the Caribbean progresses towards the future in a machinic manner, Wilson Harris no longer displays a version of the Caribbean upon which he has projected his own envisaging of the future. Instead, the reliance upon Harris's own critical approaches can be removed, all the while still retaining the elements of disjunction, multiplicity and newness that are contained in the text. This truly turns the text into a

¹⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 177.

¹⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, 176.

¹⁶⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, 4.

creation, for the process of reading turns into a creation of the Caribbean that is continuous and repeated. Through that process, the virtuality of Guyana, in its characteristics and historical past, continues to be repeated as well, thereby allowing the reader to regard the Caribbean differently, and, more importantly, allowing a different Caribbean to exist through the reading. This production of multiple readings is displayed through Harris's revisitation of his fiction, which has allowed for the growth of scholarship on Wilson Harris, and the readings also appear in literary forms.¹⁶⁹ The literary revisioning of Harris's depiction of the Caribbean would allow newness to extend beyond the Guyanese writer's own vision.

Furthermore, the texts can therefore provide a space for reading 'woman' differently. Harris describes Catalena as reaching a form of self-realisation, where she looks inwardly at her "peculiar cross and predicament", and this seems to acknowledge her sacrifice before it occurs (*SL* 455). Though she is described as blind when she peers into herself, which seems to occlude the revelation of her future and also seems to undermine the form of her dispossession and radical transformation, this differs from previous iterations: unlike in the cases of Mariella, Beti, or Sharon, for there is greater focus on the creative and multiple forms that her future can take. The future is uncertain, but Harris does seem to proffer a form of intervention that can intercede later, such as Van Brock procuring his his grandmother's ring postmortem, and Oudin's ghost aiding Beti in not falling under Ram's possession.

It seems that Harris calls for a dismantlement of current understandings and perceptions of womanhood. His novels demonstrate the equivocation of the coloniser-colonised relationship and the man-woman relationships in *GQ*. Given that he seeks to dismantle pre-given structures, his texts do not proffer other forms of viewing women, seeking rather to disengage women from their relationship with men in the same manner as the

¹⁶⁹ See Rowan Ricardo Phillips, "The Difficult Archangel: On the Poetry of Wilson Harris," *The CLR James Journal* 7, no. 1 (1999): 14–19. This critical response takes on the form of a poem.

undoing of the repeated cycles of colonial struggle in the West Indies. Though *GQ* can be perceived as ending with a projection of opportunity and possibility, enmeshed in ambiguity, this proffers little in terms of the ways in which the exploitation of women in the Caribbean could be disrupted. Nevertheless, by using a Deleuzian approach, it is possible to view Harris's novels as a call for a reimagining of 'woman' alongside their visions of the future. This understanding of virtual time and actualisation, which forms an uncertain, but different, future for the West Indies/Caribbean, also allows for a creative, though equally uncertain, transformation of the notion of 'woman'.

5. Conclusion

The Caribbean, a collective region of islands (and otherwise, exemplified by the northern South American regions included in the area) whose geographic scattering is matched by the fragmentary identities of the people inhabiting them, was born from absence, erasure and exploitation. Parallel to the colonial practice of identity denial was the mixture of roots and pasts, however faint, that became conjoined in the Caribbean by way of migration. Faced with the dominating presence of monolithic Western claims to history and nation, this region has given birth to understandings of identity that, necessarily and rightfully, seek to dismantle prior discourses and allow for a form of heterogeneous identity no longer placed in a position of inferiority.

Wilson Harris's writing has been considered visionary in this respect, as a response to the image of a fractured, historyless Caribbean and the writer speaks plainly of his view and his desire for a Caribbean rebirth: "My impression is that we will never overcome that void or lack of real alternatives until the wounds we have endured as a people are orchestrated within rhythms of renaissance".¹⁷⁰

This MA thesis has focused on the purported vision of Guyana, and therefore of the Caribbean, that has been put forward both by scholarship on Harrisian writing and by Harris himself. The aim of the thesis was evaluative: given the way in which colonial pursuit and victimisation feature heavily in the four novels *Palace of the Peacock*, *The Far Journey of Oudin*, *The Whole Armour* and *The Secret Ladder*, the thesis sought to draw out the main paths of renewal and opportunity that are promoted in the *The Guyana Quartet* and to discern possible weaknesses in Harris's argument.

¹⁷⁰ Rowell and Harris, "An Interview with Wilson Harris," 195.

In the first chapter, Harris's essays on Amerindian myth and his critical approach to his own writing were pursued more closely, using past scholarship on the Jungian influences referenced by Wilson Harris in order to demonstrate that the writer incorporates the destructive elements of both precolonial and colonial Guyana into his vision for the future. Following the identification of the main undercurrents that threaten Guyanese society, and, equally, the Harris's paths out of these cyclical conditions, the second chapter focuses on certain difficulties in Harris's perspective, namely the condition of his female characters and the impossibility of disentangling them from the fate of Guyana and the problematic associations of earth, or land, with womanhood.

Finally, the last chapter attempts to apply Deleuzian conceptions of time, more notably in the notions of the virtual and the actual, to *The Guyana Quartet* in response to the seeming fixed nature of Guyana-as-woman and woman-as-object-of-desire that is present in the four novels. The analysis of Catalena, using Burns' understanding of Deleuze and Harris, demonstrates that a Deleuzian reading of the *Quartet* in its entirety does call for a re-formulation of the idea of 'woman' and therefore an undoing of fixed associations, be that tradition and indigenous peoples or womanhood, of the Caribbean condition under the effects of colonialism. Though it may be made tenuously, the application of Deleuzian thought points to a greater avenue of possibility for re-envisioning the Caribbean via an understanding of the potentialities of time.

For Harris, whose phenomenological understanding of reality allowed him to view the imagination as a transformative force within the material world, "envisioning" a world can indeed be equated to "creating" one (*WA* 325). Therein lies the power of his writing: one must believe in the power of mythopoetics – especially so in the mythopoetics of Wilson Harris – but also in the importance of keeping theory at a distance, of disavowing rigid structures and of looking at the world by looking at the self. As such, as there is no Harris

school, only the collection of every “exercise in divination” that we, as readers of Harris, have performed, what remains now that Harris no longer writes?

The reading provided in this thesis only offers another possibility, but Gilles Deleuze’s conception of the machinic processes of life, intertwined with his understanding of time, allows us to perceive Harris’s *The Guyana Quartet*, and indeed the additional critical essays that he has produced, as a literature of *becoming*. Certainly, the writer recalls the absent history of the Caribbean as well as the continuing presence of persecutory forces that have shaped the Caribbean consciousness. These processes were founded in the imposed Western realities that viewed the Caribbean as invariably other, and yet touted realism as an appropriate, universal lens for its fiction. Beyond merely illustrating pursuit and flight, or the victor/victim syndrome, the novels of *The Guyana Quartet* allow us to perceive the Caribbean by questioning stable identities, thereby allowing us to rethink our understandings of Caribbean identity.

Mariella, Beti, Magda, Sharon and Catalena are no less deserving of this questioning, however. It is true that, despite the dense, cryptic and somewhat opaque, writing of *The Guyana Quartet*, these novels are an example of fiction as a practice, a revisionary process that does not remain in the static dimension of depiction. But, as is stated in *The Secret Ladder*, if the “delusion of material vision and survival” (SL 434) has to be decomposed, and the destructive processes of desire that characterise Caribbean identity laid bare, then the transformative process set in motion by *The Guyana Quartet* should also invite further questionings of Harris’s own re-visioning. In this way, *The Guyana Quartet* provides a chapter within a longer, productive process of new beginnings for Caribbean identity.

Appendix



Allegory of America, Jan van der Straet



“Allegory of America”, from the *Four Continents*, Adriaen Collaert

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