

¹¹ *The Best of Don Drummond* (Kingston: Studio One, SOL 9008); *Don Drummond's Greatest Hits* (Kingston: Treasure Isle L/P 101/6).

¹² Cf. "Rasta Reggae" by Cedric Brooks, performed by Count Ossie and the Mystic Revelations of Rastafari; "Dialogue for Three", choreographed by Rex Nettleford for the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica; *The Zoo Story*, a play by Edward Albee; (for "A Drawing") "Ascending and Descending", a lithograph by M.C.Escher; (for "Mother of Judas, Mother of God") "The Rope & the Cross", choreographed by Sheila Barnett for the NTDC; (for "Dance Macabre") "The Maiden and the Death", an engraving by Edvard Munch.

³ Edward Baugh, *A Tale from the Rainforest* (Kingston: Sandberry Press, 1988). "The Poet Bemused" is on p.19.

⁴ Accepted for an anthology forthcoming from the Creative Arts Centre, UWI, Mona.

⁵ Lines 12 & 13 will probably read: "Frustrated by/ a host of evils".

⁶ See *Caribbean Voices*, Vol.2, ed. John Figueroa (London: Evans Brothers, 1970), 181-182; or *Nine West Indian Poets*, ed. Velma Pollard (London: Collins, 1980), 53-54.

⁷ Pamela Mordecai in *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, ed. Daryl C. Dance (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 346.

THROUGH AND BEYOND DEMARCATIIONS: WILSON HARRIS'S CARNIVAL¹

- Christine Pagnouille

Each apparent finality of performance was itself but a privileged rehearsal pointing to unsuspected facets and the re-emergence of forgotten perspectives in the cross-cultural and the universal imagination.

The Infinite Rehearsal, vii

Like everything written by Wilson Harris but perhaps more strikingly here because of the explicit and constant reference to 'Carnival', Carnival takes its readers deep into the labyrinth of 'the cross-cultural and universal imagination' not only by showing how different cultural traditions and approaches clash and match, how their repeated 'collisions' occasionally become a regenerative 'collusion', but by recovering lost 'connections within partialities and partial formations'² and by disclosing forgotten continuities underneath familiar demarcations.

A number of statements or questions point to the potentially 'redeeming' or 'illuminating' impact that a clash of cultures and cultural traditions could have on our civilization, if perceived through an open, re-visionary mind, and not reduced to the immediacy of catastrophic eruption. To take only one telling instance. On the last page but one of the novel the narrator exclaims as he looks at the baby girl in the arms of his wife Amaryllis, a child whose father might be Masters and whose mother is 'Jane Fisher the Second', the stranger woman in whose embrace Masters was stabbed by a heart attack before being stabbed by the dagger of a masked and cloaked stranger (this at the beginning of the novel):

Pagan and Christian! Such a blend, such profound self-confession, would illumine and redeem, I felt, the cinder of the wound I re-imagined at the globe's side, it would illumine, I felt, every global fall from colonial plantation into metropolitan factory. It would illumine and redeem, I dreamt, global meaninglessness that stems from fear, the rule of fear, that threatens all, that threatens to abort submarine as well as superstellar civilization. (p.171)

What I intend to explore here, however, are not explicit situations of transition from destructive confrontation to creative configuration but some of the ways in which accepted cultural boundaries lose their absolute limiting power in a creative re-visionary perspective.

The distinction between literary genres, the respective positions of narrator, characters and readers, convenient distinctions about degrees in reality and dimensions in time, set allegorical references, polarities that make up the 'tautology of power'³, these are some of the falsely reassuring demarcations that the novel calls in question.

If Harris's works in prose that are not essays deserve the name of novels, it is in the first and strongest sense of the word: they are unfailingly innovative. The word 'fiction' is central in his writing. If we have to use the cumbersome words that clutter our critical approach, his fiction is at once mythical, metaphorical, allegorical, philosophical, and dramatic (in more than the obvious sense of things happening). Conversations between Everyman Masters and the narrator often sound like Socratic dialogues, while there is something reminiscent of the two in the paradoxes they disclose. The meanings of old myths are regenerated and new myths evolve from unexpected conjunctions. The pervasive use of theatre vocabulary gives to the art of actors a universal relevance to our condition while it distances our view of things by setting them on a stage in a truly Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*. So Harris's use of the novel gives to this open genre an inclusive dimension often obliterated by a narrowly realistic tradition.

Like Harris's previous novels, *Carnival* moves outside those forms of fiction in which the author is the all-powerful ('authoritarian') manipulator and the reader but a passive audience. Narrator, characters and readers are playing together in this comedy, which is both *comédie humaine*, though without any claim to Balzac's epic scope, and *divina commedia*, though not set on Dante's theological stage. At the beginning of Chapter Four the narrator realizes that he too is a 'character or character-mask in Carnival':

in a real and unreal sense the Masters and other character-masks were the joint authors of *Carnival* and I was their creation. (p.31)

In Chapter Six he explores at more length his relation to his guide:

It dawned upon me also that the paradoxical game between parent-creator and child-creation have a luminous tone to some of the phantom rocks in the river. It was an argument that Masters and I ceaselessly conducted through many character-masks. Was he my phantom guide, my spirit-parent, or was I his divine clerk, his fiction-parent? Had I been nursed into becoming a writer through contact with him or had I nursed him into becoming an incalculable guide into being? (p.106)

The answer to the two questions is 'both': no-one rules the game.

Incidentally, interrogative forms are repeatedly used at crucial moments of the text, stressing that nothing is ever given as certain. They reflect the questioning and questing mood of the narrator, constantly reaching for some parcel of elusive truth or glimpse, shadow-reflections of startling parallels.

As he writes, the writer discovers clues in what he has written which he didn't know were there, and so is object as much as subject, except that these categories are hardly valid any longer.⁴ Narrator and characters are mutually dependent. This sets in train a fascinating reflection on the status and nature of fiction and of the narrator's (and the writer's) relative autonomy, not only in relation to the characters, but in relation to the readers, for they too have to participate, to 'play with', in order to make sense and create meaning. This is radically different from de-constructivists playing around with the fictionality of fiction.⁵ While it questions any set role or 'block function' in fiction as in society, *Carnival* stresses the importance of a fiction that leads to a creative, liberating re-vision:

The price of wholeness is a fiction that so relives the fragmentation of cultures that it cannot be duped by ideal rhetoric or faiths or falsehood. (p.49)

The novel questions easy assumptions about the nature of reality and gradations within 'reality'. Masters is no less 'real' when he has become 'the dead king' and acts as a guide in the plantation overseer in New Forest. In the Market place episode in Chapter Four when Johnny Flatfoot confronts

the 'cunning bitch' Lady Charlotte, Bartleby's second wife, the narrator, who stands on a burnt schooner as a 'ghost from the future' (p.48), is as 'real' as Johnny or the Market woman or Thomas, who are either actors in or spectators to the scene.

Conventional expectations about time are disturbed too. What happens is not just that the line of time becomes reversible. There is no line of time any more. There is a constant interaction between events reenacted in the revisited past and the discussion of their significance after Masters' death. In the 'labyrinth of past/present/future' (p.32) all aspects reflect on each other and modify each other. In entering *Carnival* we step into a maze, not a maze in which we get lost, a maze in which we gather some of the threads woven into the fabric of humankind.

Most of the characters have an obviously allegorical dimension. Mr. Delph, the teacher of English who asked his pupils to incorporate into a story lists of words 'straight from the oracle's blackboard mouth in the cave' (p.75), hardly needs a gloss. The name 'Everyman Masters' does not merely juxtapose opposite perceptions of man, the singled-out ruler and the average man, but is a way of suggesting that one contains the other.⁶ Within the novel the 'master' in the temporal sense of worldly powers chooses to become everyman; conversely we see that everyman, any man, can become a master, also in terms of knowledge and wisdom. Thoms, Masters' elder cousin, is Saint Thomas the Doubter, governed more by uncertainties than by faith, who embodies the compulsive need to prove and probe, "the uncertainty that seeks proof and needs to tear every rag, re-open every wound", and so comes to stand for "the obsessional neurosis of 'proof' that haunts our civilization" (p.20). Once dubbed a knight by ancient and dancing Aunt Alice he becomes 'Sir Thomas', which recalls Sir Thomas Mallory of *La Morte D'Arthur*, and so the Grail Quest and the use of violence in the cause of justice. In this relationship to the marble woman he displays an adolescent need to help and love, however clumsily. When he kills the drunken tyrant Johnny at the end of Chapter Four, the revolution that might have taken place is aborted because of the protagonists' immaturity. All are still caught in the cloying need to worship, prisoners of a one-sided perception of power.

The Carnival use of masks suggests this allegorical dimension in characters that can never be reduced to the 'museum configuration associated with allegory'.⁷ As is clearly to be seen in the instances of Masters and Thomas, even the allegorical aspect of the characters is far from determined as something fixed. With Harris allegories evolve.

This is obvious too if we look at the way he uses Dante's *Divine Comedy*. While Masters may be seen as the narrator's Virgil and Amaryllis as his Beatrice, there is, as Hena Maes-Jelinek has also shown,⁸ a fundamental difference between the two works. Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise are not three states or conditions separate in space or time. They too are shown to be interdependent. Although Masters' role as a guide seems to fade into Mr. Delph's Oracle and finally devolves to Amaryllis, Masters has been called into the narrator's fiction by his loving wife Amaryllis, who has been there from the start (p.15). The heaven he experiences with her, which must be balanced by Masters' descent into the hell of factory life (see pp.123 & 125), is the bliss of true love, and true love is not all disincarnate, it involves body and soul in a common dance. Whereas our twentieth-century condition is repeatedly equated with either Purgatory or Inferno (factory or plantation), Heaven can only be reached in brief moments of ecstasy. As Masters tells the narrator at the end of Chapter Five: "Heaven requires your gift of originality. It is but a straw but god will cherish it in the midst of the storm." (p.92)

Vivified by a regenerative approach, allegory in *Carnival* has become again something alive and moving, in both senses of motion and emotion. The novel is called *Carnival*. Its characters are also masks that reveal as much as they conceal. When he joins young Masters on the playing grounds of the College and witnesses Mr. Quabbas being stabbed by the knife of a heart attack while watching his niece as she practises her high jump in a kind of dance to heaven, the narrator thinks:

Alice leapt from one realm into another. The knife of her being flared within the seed of the air, the seed in his body. It was a knife, it was a dance. It reopened parallel lives dressed or masked in music, in liturgy, in the Market-place, Carnival dance and song. It was the knife of profoundest ecstasy, startling self-knowledge. It was the seed of Carnival that *hides us from ourselves, yet reveals us to ourselves.* (p.86, my italics)

In *Carnival* reality is taken to a more acute level of perception through the play of masks. Carnival is a form of theatrical performance, of play-acting. More pertinently still, Carnival is a time of transgression that makes reversals possible.

The novel shows the interdependence of oppressors and oppressed, of conquerors and conquered, of hunters and hunted; not as a denial of the reality of oppression or in a lack of awareness of the plight of the downtrod-

den and dispossessed, but in the recognition that such polarities partake of the stasis of power and have to be seen through, or else they will go on echoing each other endlessly and destructively in hollow repetition.

This is the difference between repetition and rehearsal. In rehearsals the same play is acted several times, but no two performances are the same. The (impossible) identical repetition of the same movements and words without any new insight, would be hell without prospect of purgatory. On the other hand, rehearsals do not lead to some final performance which would be an absolute image and would freeze or congeal ever evolving relationships.⁹ They are an infinite process with loops or holes or wounds allowing for transfigurative changes.

Harris's novels do not illustrate ideas. Notions that are crucial to our survival are disclosed in the fiction, they emerge from the texture of the narrative, and exist only in clusters of potently concrete images. Continuities are shown too in the fluid metamorphoses undergone by images and motifs.

In this respect a look at Masters's evolution and at what he is associated with is revealing. From the impressionable child who crawled on the foreshore and peered at his mother's tears he becomes in turn apprentice princeling, plantation overseer, unskilled factory worker, resurrected teaser ('Lazarus'), 'dead king' and far-seeing but disabled prophet (Tiresias). When referred to a child or youth he is often called El Dorado, the mythical figure native to the 'New World' and brought to a new life by the greed of the invaders. He is associated with Christ in his ambiguous functions, on the one hand a prophet of love and a sacrifice who puts an end to the repetition of bloody sacrifices, on the other the too often waved banner in the name of which or whom cultural economic rapes have been carried out. Within the cosmic context that locates the fate of our planet in the perspective of a universal becoming and simultaneously links advanced technologies and discoveries with ancient mythology, Masters is associated with Orion, the constellation of the hunt.¹⁰ In itself the story of the ambitious and lusty hunter eventually hunted and killed by Artemis the huntress points to a reversal from hunter to hunted already expressed in Chapter Two:

I perceived an equation between plantation overseer and hunted beast, between the prince of the colony and the soul of all sliced creatures, between the enigma of love or jealousy and the emotion of the hunter/huntress elevated in space to alter our conception of complacent tradition in the heights as in the depths. (p.16)

The 'seed' of Vega, the possibility that life and intelligence develop on one of Vega's satellites as they have on our planet, suggests a creative counterpart to 'the hunter/huntress Orion and the male/female crab nebula' (p.134), that is, to forms of violence and to a constellation of fortified and therefore diseased power.

Masters crawling on the foreshore 'gingerly like a king crab' (p.26) partakes of that destructively carapaced power. In Chapter Four Thomas sees in the 'cannon of a crocodile' another mask donned by Masters:

another game that he was playing in the wake of the Crab nebula. The god of Carnival had slipped off the crab and the fish to don a dinosaur rocket resembling cannon as much as crocodile. (p.58)

The crab is obsolete armour and armament ('spiked cannon'). It is also a disease and the expression of a disability. The constellation of the Crab is better known as Cancer and cancer is the illness from which the Amerindian king on trial for matricide in Chapter Six released his mother (so that his ritual killing was also a form of euthanasia, see pp.94-95), as well as the illness that the narrator's mother developed after his father's death (p.121). The crab is also associated with Johnny Flatfoot, the 'idiot giant' who is so embarrassingly close to Masters in his susceptibility to Ambition. Because of the deformity enforced upon him by the false shaman (p.47) Johnny awkwardly draws one leg behind him and so moves somewhat like a crab. Facing each other in a deadlock of confrontation Johnny and Charlotte are two crabs ready to devour each other, 'the mutual devouring principle within the chained civilization' (p.52).

Such endurged aspiration to absolute power is shown to be a form of paralysis contrasted with the freedom of movement that can paradoxically be found in Aunt Alice's dancing:

Curious to think of destitute woman, Bartleby's third wife, as a dancer... and the other, the well-to-do second wife, as riveted by pride into the Market-place. Was Alice the fleet spirit, Charlotte the chained, despite her fortune and her privileges? (p.53)

Where Charlotte is turned into a statue of ice ('grew icy', p.51), Aunt Alice, 'everybody's ancient purgatorial relative' (p.38), belongs to those who directly partake of the lightness of being and are infused with the spirit of compassion and of loving-kindness. A similar harmony of movement is to be found in young Alice, Mr. Quabbas's sixteen-year-old niece, when she

practises her high jump (see p.82). Dancing is the 'stairway or ladder' into heaven, even when practised by Aimée, James's conceited and unfaithful, though loving, wife, who dances in a Soho nightclub.

Where Masters is the hunter hunted, Johnny is the fisher caught in the net. In Chapter Four the net is referred to several times in connection with the cautious restraint imposed on Johnny's movements by his common-law wife, in the wake of the voice of the 'unseen companion' (pp.51 & 52):

the net of counterpoint (HE SAYS, SHE SAYS) that the market woman had flung over Flatfoot JohnnyPerhaps [Thomas's] rebellion upheld the invisible net in which Flatfoot was caught ...

When Thomas sees him shuffling back home in the evening the restraints of the net bit into his soul ... Flatfoot's powers, however shackled or netted, were extraordinary. Not only because of his formidable back but because of mutual incapacities between himself and us, between rulers and rebels, mutual Byzantine masquerade in which the net of majesty that Johnny trailed around his limbs was a sieve of longing in ourselves. (p.62)

Trade, Masters says on page 48, is a 'net in which people and species have been decimated'. But the net is first associated with the 'blackest hair' of Jane Fisher the Second: 'veil or net' (p.9). 'Veils' are phonetically close to Alice's 'sails', and the motions of her body in her limbo dancing recall the sailing vessels of the Middle Passage and the agony associated with it.¹¹ Dancing, Aimée comes to Masters 'in an evening veil' (p.150). Yet where a sail is canvas to be filled by the wind to take off and away, a veil can restrain, like a net.

Through the many rehearsals of his death by stabbing, Masters perfects 'the art of dying he sought as his supreme goal'.

Such art or such a goal involves a penetration of masks that stitch into being a universal complex Carnival or capacity for shared wounds, shared ecstasies, between past and future through living actor and hidden force. (p.11)

Like love, death is a way of exploring the complexities of reality beyond the limitations of set categories. Death is lived and experienced as a challenge to be met actively. The 'wounds', which are paralleled with 'ecstasies' and that are to be shared can either 'fester', lead to more suffering, or transfigure, be the illumining breakthrough to regeneration and health, to

wholeness. And so the stabbing weapons present all through the book, dagger, bone, or knife, are not only instruments of death but instruments of life, not only tools of destruction but means of gaining insight. This becomes clear in the last pages, when the narrator writes:

Amaryllis was poking fun at me with the bone of her finger that shone like the faintest dagger under the sea. She gave me a sharp stab. I felt I had been miniaturized where the three bridges crossed, fire / and earth and water, to re-imagine the cinder of a wound in Masters's side. (pp.170-171)

Rehearsals point to the partiality of perception. Masters's monologue on partial and absolute images in Chapter Four is prompted by the awareness of his kinship with Johnny Flatfoot, the hapless tyrant of market jobbers. Through the acknowledgement of partiality we can see through the absolute images that are put forward as decoy, to the potentially transfigurative wounds through which 'wholeness' might be achieved. Wholeness, etymologically related to health and so contrasted with 'diseased Ambition' or 'festering wounds', is not totality. Wholeness is not something stable and all-embracing. Very much as heaven is something to be fleetingly experienced in moments of bliss or ecstasy, wholeness is a process, not a state: 'a mediation of fiction', Masters says (p.49). Through the 'creative tension' produced by fiction

doubts and uncertainties ... become the cousins of god in reflecting their curiosity about the wounds of heaven that revive a concept of innocence, the wounds of hell by which we glorify the individual in traditions of conquest (p.49).

Just as 'Carnival' disconnects the disjunctive exclusions of rational reasoning, *Carnival* fractures the logic of enforcement whose one-sidedness denies a recognition of mutual dependence. By taking us 'through and beyond' familiar boundaries, *Carnival* makes us see the partial and paradoxical nature of truth. Wholeness can only be reached through a conscious embracing of partiality. There is no innocence without the acknowledgement of guilt. True love is the dance in which we surrender our limited and limiting selves to something beyond, something nameless that moves and becomes.

NOTES

- 1 Wilson Harris, *Carnival* (London: Faber, 1985). All page references in the text are to this edition.
- 2 Letter, 25 September, 1989.
- 3 Wilson Harris, 'The Fabric of the Imagination', *Third World Quarterly*, 12.1 (Jan. 1990), 175.
- 4 See Wilson Harris, 'Literacy and the Imagination', in Michael Gilkes, ed. *The Literate Imagination* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 19.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 6 Hena Maes-Jelinek, "'Carnival' and Creativity in Wilson Harris's Fiction", in M. Gilkes, ed. *The Literate Imagination*, 50.
- 7 Harris, "Literacy and the Imagination", 28.
- 8 Maes-Jelinek, "Carnival and Creativity", 51.
- 9 "There is no final performance—a civilization never arrives at a final performance—the final performance is itself a privileged rehearsal." "Literacy and the Imagination", 20.
- 10 In Chapter 2, as Masters is speaking about the woman who has moved into an apartment above his, the narrator recalls "Orion's severed hand in the Inferno painted on the wall of his bedroom" (p. 16). In Chapter 4, the marble woman tells Thomas that her husband the czar Johnny has written on the donkey cart which covers their cave: 'Orion chariot' (p. 61). Before that, the narrator remembers his "perverse pride and guilt at traditions of the hunt, half-male hunted, half-female huntress" (p. 56). In Chapter 8, Masters sees in the arc-light baptized Vega "a seed in parallel, through distance of psyche, with the hunter/huntress Orion and the male/female Crab nebula" (p. 134).
- 11 Russell McDougall, 'Wilson Harris and the Art of Carnival Revolution', *Commonwealth*, 10.1 (1987), 86.

MUSTAPHA MATURA'S PLAYBOY OF THE WEST INDIES*: A CARNIVAL DISCOURSE ON IMITATION AND ORIGINALITY

—Sandra Pouchet Paquet

Mustapha Matura's adaptation of *Playboy of the Western World* to a West Indian locality and a West Indian cultural milieu, transforms Syngé's play into distinctly West Indian theatre. Everything is reinterpreted and modified to reflect a West Indian reality. The central themes and metaphors of the play, the language, the setting, and the characters are all essentially West Indian.¹ Matura's adaptation of Syngé's play is as imitative and original as Trinidad's Carnival, which characteristically makes wide use of forms and images from a variety of cultures.² *Playboy of the West Indies* is a Carnival masquerade; a drama of imitation and adaptation from which indigenous culture emerges refreshed and strengthened.

Imitation and originality have long been issues in West Indian literature. Derek Walcott, whose *The Sea at Dauphin* is loosely modelled after Syngé's *Riders to the Sea*, and who was commissioned by England's Royal Shakespeare Company to write an adaptation of Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla*, has definite views on the subject. "The whole course of imitations and adaptations is simply a method of apprenticeship," Walcott says in an interview with Edward Hirsch.³ "If you know very clearly that you are imitating such and such a work, it isn't that you're adopting another man's genius; it is that he has done an experiment that has worked and will be useful to all writers afterwards" (289). For Walcott, imitation and assimilation precede originality.

The other side of this argument is articulated most fully in the works of V.S. Naipaul, for whom imitation and assimilation are essentially uncrea-

**Playboy of the West Indies* (New York: Broadway Play Publication, 1988)