

'Unfinished Genesis'

The Four Banks of the River of Space

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Mutual. It is all mutual.

Voss

Modern physics . . . penetrates in our time into other parts of the world where the cultural tradition has been entirely different from the European civilization. . . . [Its] openness may help to some extent to reconcile the older traditions with the new trends of thought.¹

What unheard-of marvels does cosmic gestation prepare in each of us? . . . It is now possible to reconstruct the odyssey of the universe, which gives birth to consciousness. . . .²

'I am a king of oceans and skies,' said Proteus to Rose. 'I swam, flew the Atlantic through Middle Passage Africa, India, Greece, Rome, multiple Christian/pagan motherhood of carnival. I reached the margins of the world, I came to El Dorado, all in jest. What a golden jest colonialism and post-colonialism are. What untold riches! He knows as he dreams in his cradle. What a gift for a newborn child. Let us give him the riches of the Imagination for we have nothing. We are poor. Give him a chance, Rose. Let him live to create his Imaginary City of God.'³

In this plea for the survival of the two-year-old Anselm, Proteus, a Ulyssean figure, reiterates Harris's representation of the child as the carrier of hope for a regenerated imagination. He also clearly presents the deprived post-colonial world as a major locale and source of creativity to counter the crisis of civilization which ruling powers have been unable to solve through 'the long Day of the twentieth century', the time-span through which Anselm, the 'living dreamer' in *The Four Banks of the River of Space*, retraces his steps in order to conceive a better future. Though from his very first novel Harris has emphasized the need for the 'civilized' world

¹ Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy, The Revolution in Modern Science* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), p. 173.

² Hubert Reeves, *Patience dans l'azur, l'évolution cosmique* (1981; rpt. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988), p. 20, trans. mine.

³ Wilson Harris, *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 103. Further references are given in the text.

to plumb and attempt to understand, rather than merely exploit, the resources of the 'primitive', his protagonist travels further than ever before into unexplored geographical and psychological landscapes in search of his family's past and of the roots of civilization. The result is an astonishingly orchestrated narrative eliciting unexpected correspondences between pagan myths (Guyanese and Greek) and Christian history and belief, between nature and psyche, a perception, both scientific and imaginative, of the cosmos and the human consciousness, in a language once more abstract and metaphorical of an extraordinary poetic density.

Four Banks is the third part of the trilogy which opens with *Carnival* and progresses through *The Infinite Rehearsal*, though in keeping with Harris's rejection of sovereign personality, the characters wear different masks as agents of the protagonist who, himself in different guises (Jonathan Weyl, Robin Redbreast Glass and now Anselm) but with similar preoccupations, unites the three narratives. Each novel 'revises' a masterpiece of Western literature and the specific genre to which it belongs, freeing it from the historical/social/psychological frame and ideology of a given period. *Four Banks* is a cross-cultural re-writing of *The Odyssey* which breaks and reverses the finality of Ulysses' deeds, particularly his homecoming at the end. The novel is also full of echoes and self-revising 'rehearsals' from earlier fictions, in particular *Palace of the Peacock*, *Heartland*, *The Waiting Room*, *Tumatumari* and *Ascent to Omai*. Like the universe itself, the exploring consciousness in Harris's fiction never stops expanding, as appears from the distance covered by Anselm in comparison with, say, Stevenson in *Heartland*. While the latter penetrates the interior towards a frontier between life and death, he does not actually cross it except when he disappears at the end of the novel through 'an open winding traverse', along the river 'like an *unfinished script* which . . . had been half-washed away into a message of timeless incompleteness . . .'⁴ Though Stevenson keeps wondering 'who' and 'what' there is to discover in the heartland depot, he is beset by existential fears that the 'visionary resources' he hopes for are non-existent. Anselm, who also disappears into the rain forest,⁵ comes close to these enigmatic resources and is seen entering the kingdom of the dead as he *crosses* the threshold of the door into the unconscious, while the river of space along which he travels runs from the living to the dead.

To paraphrase Malcolm Bradbury on modernist fiction, the most obvious subject of this novel 'is the making of that particular work of art

⁴ Wilson Harris, *Heartland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 89, italics mine.

⁵ This is a recurring event in Harris's fiction, perhaps inspired by the disappearance of his own step-father into the jungle. As well as a metaphor for lost lives and civilizations, it symbolizes an enigmatic passage from life into death as into another form of being rather than the sharp break between life and non-existence that a witnessed physical death conveys.

itself,⁶ for the comments on creativity inform, and make one with, its own exegesis as the narrative unravels and the characters come to life. The self-reflexiveness in Harris's work, at first unobtrusively woven in the texture of first-person sections, as in *Palace* and *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, is an obvious feature in his latest novels, most emphatically so in the trilogy. Anselm, like Glass, is 'a grave-digger in a library of dreams' writing his 'fictional autobiography.'⁷ *Four Banks*, however, even more explicitly construes its own substance into varying structures as Anselm travels from one bank of the river of space to another and complexities come to light in the plot, giving rise to new interpretations of known facts. The significance of Harris's narratives largely grows out of the protagonist's capacity (and the reader's) to discriminate between basic motivations beneath *apparently* similar events or conduct.

Anselm, a Guyanese 'engineer, sculptor, painter, architect, composer' (one of Harris's scientist-artist alter egos and the 'living dreamer' within him) is visited one evening in Essex in his 'theatre of dream' by Lucius Canaima, a murderer in their earlier life in Guyana, whom Anselm had allowed to escape. Paradoxically, his presence now arouses in him a moral compulsion to retrace his steps into the past, a compulsion that initiates Anselm's homeward Odyssey and a series of encounters in the Guyanese interior with half-real, half-mythical characters: Inspector Robot, a promoter of artificial intelligence and a manipulator of souls, still in search of Canaima after all those years; Anselm's uncles Proteus and Harold; his aunt Alicia (another mask for *Carnival's* Alice Bartleby), and an English missionary couple, Penelope and Ross, between them the shadow of Penelope's first husband, Simon, a British officer who was to die at El Alamein. Together, those three represent the colonizing powers, the army and the Christian church.

A major strand in Harris's work foregrounded in this novel is the probing into the nature of evil and violence, together with the imaginative capacity to 'redress' and 'convert [the] deprivations'⁸ from which they arose, in his eyes the major *moral* function of fiction and myth. Harris's was never an idealized world picture. Rape and murder, greed, thirst for power and possession, a one-sided 'block' mentality, all feature prominently in his novels, must be confronted, their motives and the depths of emotion of those involved understood. To break and reverse mechanisms of frustration is central to many of his plots and part of the ambivalent

⁶ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern World. Ten Great Writers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 24.

⁷ Wilson Harris, *The Infinite Rehearsal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp. vii & 2.

⁸ Wilson Harris, 'Character and Philosophic Myth', in *A Sense of Place*, Essays in Post-Colonial Literatures, ed. by Britta Olinde (Göteborg: Gothenburg University, 1984), p. 124.

process by which a 'radical change of heart' (p. 31) stimulated by the imagination can occur. *Four Banks* concentrates more specifically on the role of 'daemons' and 'furies' in man and nature as inescapable *dramatis personae* in the creative, thus regenerative process. When Canaima, whose 'victims reflected the moral dilemmas of an age' (p. 4) and who nurses in them 'a conflict of values' (p. 11), first appears to Anselm, he finds it impossible to escape. In Amerindian mythology Canaima (with a K) is an evil spirit and the god of retaliation,⁹ therefore a still highly relevant mythical archetype in a twentieth century convulsed by catastrophic conflicts and expeditions of vengeance, 'a violent and terrorist age' (p. 87). Harris's insistence on the vicious circle of violence and war as 'the long Day of the twentieth century' draws to a close seems to have been prophetic. Yet (or precisely because of what he is) Canaima is now a catalyst and temporary mentor, though a tormenting one, in Anselm's homeward journey, having himself retraced his steps towards self-knowledge and understood that 'if a crime is forever a crime, if tautology rules in our dogmas and poetries and statecraft' (p. 10), the very instruments of human law and freedom imprison both murderer and victim in their fate. The breaking up of such tautology in order to initiate a process of reformation is a major theme in this novel. Nevertheless, Canaima remains an ambivalent guide as he *dances* his way into 1948 with the freedom of movement of his victim (the Macusi bird-dancer Anselm had seen him kill then, who now becomes a messenger of possible change) and pokes his metaphoric knife in Anselm's ribs. He gives him the 'transfigurative wound'¹⁰ which opens for him the 'door of the dream-unconscious' (p. 11) and enables him to meet the ghosts who arise from the past, making him sensitive also to 'the abuse of others, to the perils that encompass the globe' (p. 16).

As Anselm now makes his way, momentarily invisible like an epic hero, on the first bank of the river of space, he first comes across a Macusi axeman felling a tree which turns out to be 'HUMAN TIMBER' (p.15), out of whose roots (also the roots of the cross) arises the king of thieves, the well-nicknamed 'Black Pizarro', a pork-knocker in whom merge the obsessions with poverty and wealth that have plagued humanity from time immemorial. The sculptor in Anselm chisels him (echoes of *Palace*) 'as a thief who sought to steal in every century on earth the heaven he had lost on Calvary's hill' (p. 17), thus giving form to the mixture of spiritual longing and greed that, through Harris's fiction, motivates the search for El Dorado. In this novel it is *within* the fabulous ruins of El

⁹ See Harris's early story 'Kanaima' and Michael Swan, *The Marches of El Dorado* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958), pp. 50-54.

¹⁰ Wilson Harris, *Carnival* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 25.

Dorado that Anselm (namesake of a Canterbury archbishop and saint) creates his Imaginary City of God (p. 13). The king of thieves (also a major but more enigmatic persona in *Heartland* and *The Waiting Room*) is another archetype that cannot be eluded, for he too personifies a recurring human attitude. A sinner to the end, he is closer to ordinary human beings than the repentant thief on the cross, and his role here is shared by many other thieves, notably Penelope's suitors. Through a variety of circumstances and characters who have apparently little in common but among whom what would otherwise be an absolute or implacable kind of behaviour is here fragmented, repetitive patterns of behaviour and history elucidate the functioning of the human mind and psyche overshadowed or stimulated by similar drives and desires in widely distant times and spaces. Correspondingly, 'Home' is simultaneously the longed for El Dorado, the Imaginary City of God Anselm attempts to conceive and, as we shall see, ancient Ithaca. On a more realistic plane, it is the home that was to be built for refugees of the Second World War when Anselm was sent on an actual expedition to the Potaro river in 1948 to investigate the possibility of creating a settlement there. Though he was unconscious of it then, his meeting with Canaima's primitive victims and 'spiritual refugees' was the seed of metamorphosis in him. Here again merge in the refugees' lot a quasi universal modern condition, material and spiritual, while 'Home' is a physical, mythical and spiritual reality.¹¹

It was in the course of his expedition to the Potaro that Anselm met Ross and Penelope, both obsessed still by her dead husband, who had once come home to find them together in bed, as one version suggests, actually in the garden according to another (p. 26). Since the marriage between Simon and Penelope had ended long before, Ross need not have felt guilty nor responsible for Simon's death. Yet he kept haunting them after their departure for Guyana as if both Penelope and the land (it had been his ambition to become governor) were his lawful possessions. Anselm's understanding of the role of the avenging hero in their lives is complemented by his perception of another facet of the Ulyssean figure in his uncle Harold, his 'proprietorship of Imaginary estates and slave-women within the Rose garden' (p. 64), since Simon and Harold are partial embodiments of the mythical Ulysses. The revelation Anselm is compelled to listen to through Harold's confessional need, on the second bank of the river of space, is that his uncle, a womanizer married to Alicia, had abused the Rose twins on the estate. Overjoyed when he heard that the second Rose, pregnant by him, would give him his first heir, she had told

¹¹ Unintentionally, Harris provides an answer to Camus's question in *The Rebel*, quoted by Bradbury as an epigraph to *The Modern World. Ten Great Writers*: 'Where can I feel at home?'

him that his first son was Anselm, the child of the first Rose twin he had 'bought' seven or eight years before. On the third bank of the river of space Anselm must digest the fact that his brother is Canaima.

The kind of associations which allow Anselm to draw a parallel between Simon and Harold as partial Ulyssean figures, while Uncle Proteus plays the role of the homecoming Ulysses in Aunt Alicia's fossil/garden theatre, is one example among many of the 'imponderable' transitions (see the William James epigraph) through which Anselm progresses in his pilgrimage of the mind. A more concrete though still metaphorical thread of associations (yet related to the former as everything is in the dense fabric of Harris's narrative), grows out of the metamorphoses of nature, a multiple shape-changing reality which substantiates Hubert Reeves's statement that 'nature is the family of man',¹² and acts out its endless capacity for renewal or rebirth. One example of this is the 'HUMAN TIMBER' felled by the Macusi axeman since the rain forest is the lung of the globe and, as we saw, the king of thieves arises from the tree's roots. While still on the first bank, Anselm comes to the god-rock of the waterfall, where he meets Inspector Robot and they ascend the rock together. Robot tempts him to look down at the world through his (Robot's) glasses as into a purely technological laboratory of graves from which no one can escape death. But the very glasses through which Robot fixes the dead into their fate enable Anselm, the sculptor suspicious of all absoluteness and finality, to carve the rocks into a moving procession of 'living ... existential sculptures' led by the king of thieves, who from '[s]culpted wood ... became ... rock visionary flesh and blood' (p. 39), and they all ascend the hill where they bury Canaima's victim, the Macusi dancer.¹³ Thus the same glasses which for Robot are a tool of power allow Anselm to sculpt 'live absence' into 'presence', to alter the effects of evil through evil and a *felt* (re-sensitized) experience of its effects:

I became genuinely involved ... in uplifted veil upon veil of darkness until I possessed a glimmering apprehension of the magic of creative nature, the life of sculpture, the genesis of art, the being of music. (p. 39)

Such metamorphoses are not merely the expression of Harris's poetic imagination but of his visionary insight into complex overlapping levels of natural and existential being and into the evolutionary processes which

¹² *Patience dans l'azur*, p. 22, trans. mine.

¹³ This scene further develops Prudence's vision in *Tumatumari* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 48-49. Anselm, however, is more keenly aware of the possible deceptions of science. Another example of the deadening or creative use to which science and technology can be put is when Anselm realizes the danger of filming the Macusi woodman merely to feed millions of T.V. viewers with images of near-extinction of a tribe, like exotic animals or flowers, 'to satisfy a mind infused with metaphors of the hunt and the kill, the seizure of others within every museum or cinema' (p. 14).

underlie the greatly endangered survival of both nature and humanity in the twentieth century. Rose, for example, is at once Anselm's abused (though also abusing) mother *and* mother nature. Anselm's scientific explanation of the reversal and conservation of the river's resources not only throws light on the natural phenomena by which rivers, the 'veins and arteries' of the earth (p. 34) survive to irrigate it, his scientific measurement of the river's increasing energy potential gives him a glimpse of the creative resources embedded in the area fertilized by the river, namely the Word and the 'voices of the flute' (p. 44) which arise from the river, *tilting*¹⁴ and translating its banks into a ladder of space while creating a 'curvature of music' (along a geological curve) which of necessity deepens his perception of the inexhaustible resourcefulness and mutations in nature and their parallels in a psychological landscape:

That glimpse [he concludes] empowered my pilgrimage upwards in space yet backwards in time ... [it] became a key into cross-cultural capacity to bear the dual, triple (sometimes self-reversible) content of some of the greatest myths of survival in the body of humanity. (p. 47)

In other words, just as earlier in this passage Anselm had described the interaction between stars and river and sensed the correlation between a natural phenomenon and the spirit of the place as it found expression in word and music (on which more below), so now he becomes aware of a parallel between a phenomenon he observes in nature (the varying levels and the contents of the river) and the imaginative phenomenon by which men have given form in myths to their many-layered experience of development and survival. Harris's approach to nature has always fused scientifically known facts with an imaginative approach, and in his criticism he has often stressed the need to match the scientific revolution by which the relativity and quantum theories completely modified our perception of the universe at the beginning of this century with a similar revolution in the humanities that would pull down barriers and palliate the limitations of our one-track minds. Already in his earlier fiction he attempted to bridge the post-Renaissance division between science and art and achieve what scientists have called 'the new alliance' between science and human creativity.¹⁵ More recently, he gave the lie to George Steiner's assertion that

[I]t is arrogant ... to invoke such basic notions in our present model of the universe as quanta, the indeterminacy principle, the relativity

¹⁴ On the disorientation caused by the 'tilting of the field', the perception of nature's own instability and endless capacity for metamorphosis prior to a necessary psychological rupture and change, see also Alan Riach's comment in this volume on the protagonist's similar experience in *Black Marsden*.

¹⁵ Ilya Prigogine et Isabelle Stengers, *La nouvelle alliance, Métamorphose de la science* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

constant ... if one cannot do so in the language appropriate to them—that is to say, in mathematical terms.¹⁶

One must add, in all fairness, that Steiner has since qualified his statement. True, scientists themselves have pointed to the difficulty of developing a satisfactory language to describe the insights of quantum mechanics for non-specialists. Hubert Reeves explains that man's incapacity to retrace his steps to the origins of the universe is not due exclusively to his limited understanding but to the limitations of language which are also the limitations of logic and the scientific method.¹⁷ Yet he too trusts to consciousness to explore a reality which is 'something' rather than 'nothing'.¹⁸ Harris, however, largely trusts to intuition to compensate for the shortcomings of man's one-track mind (see the Nick Herbert epigraph to the novel).

Probably the most revolutionary implications of the discovery of modern physics, in modern man's understanding of the universe and his philosophical approach to it, was the replacement of monism by the pluralism inherent in quantum mechanics, a pluralism which even Einstein could not subscribe to in spite of his contribution to the quantum theory. I am not suggesting that the relativity and quantum theories had an immediate influence on non-scientists. A similar perception of plurality was intuited by modernist writers in their exploration of an enlarged subjective consciousness and the shift their work exemplified from a largely external 'objective reality' to inner plural subjective worlds. But whereas the breakdown of a unitary world view, of traditional structures and forms in all fields of experience was a source of deep pessimism and anguish at the beginning of this century, further aggravated into sheer despair or a philosophy of meaninglessness as the horrors and after-effects of two world wars piled up, Harris sees in the very dissolution of monolithic world structures (including, of course, the dissolution of empire) an opportunity for the renaissance of a more 'balanced' civilization. It does not in any way imply that he condones the violent destruction of a supposedly decadent civilization. Rather, as with all manifestations of an external reality which can never be ignored, it is through that very reality, when

¹⁶ George Steiner, 'The Retreat from the Word', originally published in *Language and Silence*; rpt. in *George Steiner: A Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 286.

¹⁷ Commenting on this problem and the split which occurred between science and the humanities, including religion, after the trial of Galileo, Werner Heisenberg, the famous physicist, concludes: 'whatever the explanation of ... other forms of understanding may be the language of images, metaphors and similes is probably the only way to approach the "one" from wider regions. If harmony in a society depends on the common interpretation of ... the unity behind a multitude of phenomena, the language of the poets may be more important than that of the scientists.' *Natural Law and the Structure of Matter* (London: The Rebel Press, 1970), p. 45.

¹⁸ *Patience dans l'azur*, pp. 67–68.

its fragmentation or dissolution occurs (whether man-willed or not) that a perception of the deeper motivations and emotions that underlie it becomes possible and that, as in the particular case of destructive violence, 'an essential *rapport* between ruin and origin'¹⁹ can emerge.

Harris's probing into the process by which ruin (an illusory *tabula rasa*) can actually offer a seed of creation, like his conviction that a truly creative response to crisis 'may well come from the other side of a centralised or dominant civilisation'²⁰ is concomitant with his 'quantum' perception of world and experience. 'The theory proposes that all the possible *alternative* quantum worlds are equally real, and exist in parallel with one another.'²¹ An awareness of parallel and alternative worlds and of their 'coexistent potentialities'²² informs the narrative of *Four Banks* in its major aspects and themes: the evocation of cosmic reality and of perceptible nature; the treatment of myth; Harris's own well-known rejection of realism and the arousal of overlapping layers of the unconscious into consciousness; all converge and unfold in Anselm's role as 'medium' (medium of discourse, medium of dance) as he gathers within himself 'plural forms of profound identity.'²³ Finally, Harris's 'quantum Imagination' can be said to underpin both his fictional rendering in this novel and his definition of literacy as a perception of a multiplicity of texts, 'different texts playing against each other',²⁴ as opposed to illiteracy, which he sees as a psychological and metaphysical phenomenon excluding the presence of the other.

The 'ruined corridor of space' (p. 75), a passage into the future, the 'uplifted Jacob's ladder in its primitive lightning arc, one curved wing of the law upon the earth, the other breaking into the ceiling of the sky' (p. 121) and the changing 'light of the constellations' (p. 157) evoke the cosmic setting through which the river of space runs, at once a geographical reality (the Potaro river) and a metaphysical one: 'the river of the dead and the river of the living are one quantum stream possessed of four banks'

¹⁹ Wilson Harris, *Explorations, A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966–1981* (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1981), p. 55.

²⁰ 'Literacy and the Imagination', in *The Literate Imagination*, ed. by Michael Gilkes (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 30.

²¹ Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 116, italics mine.

²² Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p. 159.

²³ Wilson Harris, *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon Books, 1967), p. 40. See also 'In my approach to the quantum imagination ... I visualise the dismemberment of ourselves in others'. 'Oedipus and the Middle Passage', in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990), p. 15.

²⁴ 'Literacy and the Imagination', p. 27.

(p. 44). This major expression of a plural reality (the world of the living in parallel with the invisible stream of the dead far below) which sustains Anselm's journey into the past as he glimpses its possible conversion into the seed of a regenerated future, also conveys the creative paradox at the heart of Harris's writing, *the perception of what is both similar yet different* ('and' and 'yet' are the most frequent conjunctions in his writing). His re-vision of Gertrude Stein's 'a rose is a rose is a rose' into 'a rose ... is a particle is a wave'²⁵ epitomizes his simultaneously poetic and quantum approach to creativity as 'meaningful paradox'.²⁶ One of its most significant representations in this novel is Aunt Alicia's 'museum of fossils' (p. 13)—fossils imprisoned in their static historical condition—which is nevertheless a 'garden' 'live fossil' and 're-visionary' theatre (pp. 15, 18 & 26). This is a paradox which may call to mind the fossil radiation in space. It recalls Aunt Alice's 'realm of oblivion or absolute limbo' which is nevertheless a 'realm of Carnival evolution into a family of spirit' in *Carnival*.²⁷ Alicia's main concern is with the 'poor in spirit' whom Anselm is to retrieve from the abyss.

The abyss (cosmic void, geological gorge but also ideological gulf and black holes of forgetfulness) separates parallel and alternative worlds, yet is also 'creative hollow' (p. 67), as Anselm realizes when he grasps the distinction between a fast that is 'the seed of art' and 'the pit or hole of bottomless greed' (p. 67). From his own resistance to the temptation of excessive food and Proteus's 'creative fast' (p. 112) Anselm knows he must also resist identifying *absolutely* with the starved for this would mean imprisoning oneself into 'one or other false eternity' (p. 50), a static condition akin to death, whereas his task as 'the architect in the City of God is to [animate] a gulf, an abyss, yet a crossing' (pp. 50 & 52) between parallel lives and experiences without yielding to either in order to approach the mystery of a possible conversion of deprivation ('abyss of an incalculable, inner reformation' [p. 40]). It is now a commonplace to say that Harris's art is paradoxically rooted in the so-called historical and cultural void of the Caribbean, summed up here as the 'creative riddle of the abyss' (p. 60). Interestingly, the state of the void remains an unexplained mystery in quantum mechanics and it too 'is one of the states of the physical system which includes all the possible states of the

²⁵ Wilson Harris, 'Comedy and Modern Allegory: A Personal View', in *A Shaping of Connections, Commonwealth Literature Studies—Then and Now*, ed. by Hena Maes-Jelinek, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anne Rutherford (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1989), p. 129. Any book on modern physics comments on the scientific paradox of the particle being also a wave.

²⁶ Wilson Harris, 'Validation of Fiction: A Personal View of Imaginative Truth', in *Tibisiri*, ed. by Maggie Butcher (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1989), p. 51.

²⁷ *Carnival*, p. 41.

world. That state of void is thus not separated from the many other states which can be realized ... [and] are *virtually present* ...²⁸

The potentialities of the abyss are revealed through the intangible and ambivalent presence of both daemons and furies *and* the arousal of music and language. Harris never concealed the tormenting element in the creative process, and, as already suggested, it is indeed Canaima, the daemon and murderer, in whom Anselm nevertheless perceives 'parallel lives, alternative existences' (p. 5), who prods him to creativeness and points to the role of furies in the 'mystery of creativy' (p. 5). Da Silva da Silva had been similarly instructed by the devil and became himself a 'daemon artist' for Julia in *The Tree of the Sun*.²⁹ Here Anselm kills a flying creature (p. 36) with the knife Canaima had planted in his own ribs and later raises his hand to kill Harold, his father, though the gesture turns into a blessing (p. 80), possibly also a translation of the Oedipus myth. Anselm is thus contaminated by the very evil he condemns. It is significantly in the self-confessional part of the novel on the third bank, when he dialogues with the judge in self-judgement (also a recurring feature in Harris's fiction) within his 'gestating unconscious' (p. 115) that he becomes aware of the 'terrifying energies that imply risk' in creation (p. 112), the daemons and furies that nevertheless 'provide a balance within [those] risks' (p. 113). One should note that it is from the concrete facts in his family's history, 'man-made events' (p. 85) and nature's that Anselm grasps the full measure of the torments of creation: his mother, the first Rose, prepared to sacrifice her son who is saved by Proteus; Aunt Alicia's real motive in adopting Anselm, a complicity with Rose seeking revenge on Harold; Proteus's fast on his drinking bouts, which proves creative, just as Harold's obsession with women reveals to Anselm 'passion's peace [the intensity of peace] at the heart of the storm' (p. 112). The trial—also a gestation of 'innermost form' (p. 117), creation in becoming—ends with the reversal of 'diseased genius' when the furies ignorantly conscripted by diseased antecedents (in their destruction of nature as much as in their conflicting personal relations) are '*balanced ... within ... the gestating male/female body of spirit one nurtures, the body one slays ...*' (p. 118). By then he has given new life or 'parented' his antecedents, thus taking a step further the role of the resurrection child in Harris's fiction since he is now the 'parent of civilization', another proof of the mutuality of creation. The above quotation also shows the androgyny of the creative spirit.

²⁸ J.M. Jauch, *L'abstrait et le réel dans la physique contemporaine* (Université de Genève, 1968), pp. 17–18, trans. mine. As a physicist, Jauch also sees a threat to humanity in the failure of ethics and religions to revise their perception of man's destiny after the scientific revolution.

²⁹ Wilson Harris, *The Tree of the Sun* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), pp. 40 & 67.

Indeed, just as in *Carnival* the translation of vision or 'far viewing' occurs while Jonathan holds Amaryllis in his arms, so here the canvas of Anselm's narrative blends with the tapestry or 'coat of tradition' (pp. 54 & 55) Penelope weaves and unravels. The mutuality of creativeness, together with its dependence on both male and female energy, is asserted when Anselm feels he becomes a 'medium of exchange with "live absences"' (p. 19) and the substance with which he sculpts Penelope and Ross into life is 'shared thought, a mutual exchange of secrets, a mixture of philosophy and reverie' (p. 20). He draws Penelope 'from the margins of nothingness' (pp. 56 & 57) but she too draws him into the tapestry of her mind. In keeping with the creative role of women in Harris's novels, Anselm emphasizes her participation as *feminine* creator and man's dependence on her when he tells her that she is '*central to every canvas.*' 'You were Wisdom, feminine Wisdom.... You are ... an emancipated centre' (pp. 56 & 57). And even though he repeats half humorously one of Alicia's 'absurdities' he refers to 'God the Mother of all men and women' (p. 65). Penelope's weaving is obviously a metaphor for Harris's conception of reality, for what he called elsewhere 'the fabric of the imagination' and for this narrative in particular, for creation as constant metamorphosis, i.e., the translation of ruin (Anselm travels through ruined premises) and the abyss. In terms of the post-colonial fiction he is writing, the coat is also a metaphor for the arousal of a conquered and lost reality as a new source of art.

Harris's originality as a post-colonial writer lies in his identification of the saving potential of apparently irrelevant resources (the eclipsed 'invisible' conquered) and their creative 'absence' with the very source of language, which is thus also associated with the many forms the 'unfathomable' yet living reality takes in his fiction whether 'the nameless forgotten dead', 'live fossil', 'ground of loss' or the sacred and the divine, as I have attempted to show elsewhere.³⁰ It is this elusive reality beyond language that Anselm approaches while attempting to move, in Merleau-Ponty's words 'beyond the classical dichotomy between subject and object.'³¹ Harris's approach in fiction to the origins of language has always been close, it seems to me, to that of phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty and more recently, Emmanuel Lévinas. For the former, *la parole*, provided it is authentic, i.e., the first and original expression of a thought as distinct from ordinary and empirical language, is that thought itself and transforms silence:

Our view of man [he writes] will remain superficial as long as we don't go back to the origin [of this transformation], as long as we don't

³⁰ Hena Maes-Jelinek, *Wilson Harris* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), p. 8.

³¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 203.

retrieve the primordial silence under the sound of words, as long as we don't describe the gesture which breaks that silence. The word is a gesture and its significance a world.³²

For Harris too 'the Word is a gesture of psyche'³³ equivalent to the arousal of consciousness. It also seems from what precedes that, just as creation is mutuality, so the Word is a dialogue between the beyond and the here. And the reality it conveys, its essential livingness and the many forms it takes, also partakes of the here and the beyond, as we realize through the metamorphoses 'within the tapestry of the Word' (p. 133) in *Four Banks*, particularly in the last part of the novel, for they are ways of fissuring the visible and reaching the beyond, however evanescent the dialogue may be. In this process Harris comes close to Lévinas who writes that

the very essence of language consists in undoing its phrase at every moment through ... exegesis, in unsaying the said, in attempting to say again without ceremony what has already been misheard in the inevitable ceremonial in which the said complacently entrenches itself.³⁴

The last part of the novel is indeed an inconclusive unravelling/ravelling web of word and music as Anselm, Penelope and Ross, led by a 'savage' guide, travel on the fourth bank towards the ruined mission house (El Dorado and City of God), each carrying one of the three Macusi children who used to sing in Penelope's choir and were drowned in the river, touched by a 'dancing' electric eel. The last episode takes up again and develops the beginning of Part II where both language and music arise from the abyss, the bottom of the river, or innermost reality:

'So deep, so far below, is the river of the dead that the sound of its stream may never be heard or visualized except when we clothe ourselves with the mask, with the ears of the dancer in the hill. Then the murmur of the buried stream comes up to us as if its source lies in the stars and it may only be heard when we are abnormally attentive to the mystery of creation and the voice of the flute within the lips of three drowned children.' (p. 44)

The child, as ever a potential agent of transformation, is here the Word made flesh and, reciprocally, flesh into Word, for the 'bruised Word or child' is a 'window through bandaged eyes into space' (p. 126) and so helps Anselm to vision. The children have been pulled up from the river of space and are, for all their frailty, the personal burden that each character must come to terms with: Anselm's twinship with the daemon-killer

³² *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 214. This formulation of the arousal of language from silence is very close to Harris's in *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 95.

³³ See *Enigma of Values*, ed. by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1975), p. 37.

³⁴ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et Infini* (1971; rpt. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990), p. 16. Trans. mine.

Canaima (brother yet stranger within oneself), and Simon's obsession with vengeance which drove him to become the hero Penelope married, hiding within and from herself a 'spectre' of conquest from which she is now freed (p. 160). She too had a share of responsibility in obsessions with vengeance and conquest, and it is mainly through her emancipation that we perceive the link between the 'conversion' of Ulysses and the retrieval of the children from the depths of space and unconscious.

From his early poetry Harris's work evinces his deep interest in Ulysses and the implicit parallel he draws between Troy and vanished pre-Columbian civilizations. His fragmented identity in *Four Banks* breaks the absoluteness of the homeric archetype, transforms the classical epic and even elicits a parallel between a humbled Ulyssean hero and Christ's sacrifice, a further development of the association between Christian and pagan myth in the metaphor of 'Christ's Trojan donkey' in *Carnival*. In Anselm's Imaginary Theatre 'the imperial design of the homecoming lord and master [is] converted into a post-colonial fable' (p. 63) and Ulysses/Proteus in rags dies, killed by the thorn Rose has sent to his brow, joining in death the 'poor in spirit' and gaining the strength to descend into the world's abyss (p. 66), which has only been possible through an acceptance of fragmentation: 'We may only heal the wounded archetype when we live the divide at the heart of the language and place its enormity on many shoulders, when several players ... take a share in performances and portrayals of ... inner immensity of craft, inner power' (p. 30).

Living the divide at the heart of the language ('an abyss, yet a crossing' [p. 50]) is what Anselm has done in his pilgrimage, realizing as Julia does in *The Tree of the Sun* that 'in that hiatus was grace to make the unbearable bearable.'³⁵ The hiatus is also the seat of 'the medium of discourse' Anselm enters reluctantly at first. In Harris's very idiosyncratic use of 'discourse' merge different forms of natural and artistic expression. While the concept of contemporary post-structuralist discourse is generally cut off from essence, a self-sufficient human construct and/or an instrument of power, discourse here is not only dialogue with the dead, the lost and the sacred (see above), a paradoxical conjunction of 'absence' and 'presence', it is dance, music, and the voice of nature that speaks through bird, leaf or waterfall. In *The Far Journey of Oudin* 'A tree was a word, a river was a word, a man was a word: yet they were—all three—as imperishable and wordless as all substance.'³⁶ In *The Tree of the Sun* Julia reflects that 'the sense of wood possessed its grain of incalculable irony or humour, incalculable spark of compassion.'³⁷ This prefigures the 'HUMAN

³⁵ *The Tree of the Sun*, p. 85.

³⁶ Wilson Harris, *The Far Journey of Oudin* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 74.

³⁷ *The Tree of the Sun*, p. 79.

TIMBER' out of which the king of thieves materializes. The diversity of discursive forms is rooted in what Harris calls an *inner* objectivity, in essence and perhaps in what he terms 'the universal unconscious' but also corresponds to a religious source of life, increasingly presented as such in his fiction. That source lies in the eclipsed ancestral tongues from which both Word and music arise as Anselm comes upon the second bank. More than words, however, the 'living language' is 'miracle of being' captured in the light voices of the flute or the 're-visionary step' (p. 10) of the dance. Because they are essentially fluid, kinetic and 'uncapturable', music and dance are the most congenial expressions of Harris's transformative view of existence. At once a gateway, 'melodic door' (p. 8), into unexplored being and a conversion into life of the spark of creation, they partake of its two-way process. Music animates all forms ('rhythmic stones' [p. 125]) and is with dance 'the thread linking all creatures, all spheres, all places'; it is, as Anselm puts it, 'antiphonal discourse' (pp. 27–28).³⁸ When he retraces his steps more deeply towards the origins of discourse ('We have a long way to go backwards into all these names ... with which we have tagged genesis' [p. 133]), he perceives the 'musicality or linkage' (p. 122) between the daemon and fury of creation. Which brings to mind Hubert Reeves's description of the 'sounds' of music first as the *links* responsible for the harmonized organization of cells into molecules and of particles into atoms, then as the structures in the universe. As he attempts to define the 'music of nature', Reeves wonders whether the development of the universe in space and time was already inscribed in the interactions between particles: 'Were the flight of the nightingale in front of my window or the last sonatas of Beethoven already inscribed in the partition which quarks, electrons and photons were preparing to read fifteen billion years ago?'³⁹

In the crucial passage in which Anselm describes the birth of music out of the sieved fossilized vestiges of the (Potaro) river of space, he finds 'proof of the reality of the curvature of the music that rose upon the ladder of space' (p. 45) in his surveying work in the region in the 1940s. 'The curvature of the music' is energized into a spatial curve (see diagram, p. 46), the path Anselm follows to retrieve a similar energizing content from 'the greatest myths of survival in the body of humanity' (p. 47). 'The "curvature of space"', writes Lévinas, 'expresses the relationship between human beings ... [it] is perhaps the very presence of God.'⁴⁰ This might

³⁸ See Russell McDougall's comment in this volume that 'sound becomes the means of breaking partial orders of reality which masquerade as absolute.' A full-length essay, like his on *Palace of the Peacock*, would be necessary to construe the role of music in *Four Banks*.

³⁹ *Patience dans l'azur*, pp. 202–203, trans. mine.

⁴⁰ *Totalité et Infini*, p. 324.

serve as a summing up of the reality Anselm reaches with Penelope and Ross after their 'capture' by the primitive tribe, when at last they hear the 'drums of Home' (p. 161) and are caught up in the music's embrace. Ross's conversion has taken place just before this and may be the most significant of all because he deeply distrusted the Macusi Indians he had come to teach and was suspicious of *their* 'savage idealism' and wish to conquer (p. 138). In his conversion, however, coalesce several kinds of discourse. While early in the pilgrimage, he and Penelope were so 'seized' by the supremacy of their language (English) and unaware of the native rhythms and antiphonal quality it had acquired in Guyana that they were prepared to accept the divide at the heart of the language, the divide between 'object' and 'subject' (p. 29), as Ross carries 'the suffering Word and primitive child' in his arms, '[t]he Word changed. Its inherited glory dimmed' (p. 127).

The second change occurs when he comes upon the 'Dido Orchid' he longed to find, a rare specimen named by a German botanist, now both flower and 'woman's shape' (p. 135), whose deprivation and self-immolation by fire as queen of Carthage abandoned by Aeneas has transformed into 'blackened fossil flesh' (p. 140). As with the Rose-garden, the Dido Orchid expresses a remarkable poetic identification between woman and nature and another translation of myth. At this stage, however, only Anselm perceives in the orchid the fossil's possible resurrection into life, and it is only at the very end, when he realizes that the child he has been carrying is a girl, one of the finest voices at the mission and a dancer, that Ross is on the verge of surrendering to 'the miracle of hope ... [that] might still breach an epic formula' (p. 161). His conversion is not final but the change in the Word and the reality it represents, the possible breach in epic formula and its tragic consequences, initiate a new cycle of life.

Like the ending of *Palace of the Peacock* and, it seems to me, for the first time since that novel, the end of *Four Banks* presents the Amerindian captors (now possibly guardians) and their captives together in 'a theatre of interchangeable masks and fates and elements upon savages and civilizations' (p. 161). Anselm's rehearsal is temporarily over; 'the burden and mystery of the rising sun' seems to be suspended on the 'unfinished genesis' (p. 9)⁴¹ of his/Harris's art.

⁴¹ This view of creation recurs in both fiction and criticism and naturally follows from Harris's concept of 'infinite rehearsal'.