

51ನೇ ಗಣರಾಜ್ಯೋತ್ಸವ

ಸುವರ್ಣ ಮಹೋತ್ಸವ ಸಂಭ್ರಮದಲ್ಲಿ ಭಾರತ ಗಣರಾಜ್ಯ - ನನ್ನ ನೂರು ದಿನಗಳ ಸಂವತ್ಸರದಲ್ಲಿ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ

ನಮ್ಮ ಭಾರತದ ಪರಂಪರೆಯ ಉತ್ಕೃಷ್ಟತೆ ಮತ್ತು ಪ್ರಾಚೀನತೆಯ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ನಾವೆಂದಾದರೂ ಗಮನಹರಿಸಿದ್ದೇವೆಯೇ? 5000 ವರ್ಷಗಳಿಗೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಪ್ರಾಚೀನವಾದ ನಮ್ಮ ಭವ್ಯ ಇತಿಹಾಸವನ್ನು ನಾವೆಂದಾದರೂ ಅವಲೋಕಿಸಿದ್ದೇವೆಯೇ? ಜಗತ್ತಿನ ನಾನಾ ಮೂಲಗಳಿಂದ ಬಂದ ಶ್ರೇಷ್ಠ ಹಾಗೂ ದಯಾಮಯ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಗಳ ಆಸರೆಯನ್ನು ಪೋಷಿಸಿದ, ಮನವು ಕುಲಕ್ಕೆ ಅತ್ಯಂತ ಉದಾತ್ತ ಆದರ್ಶಗಳನ್ನು ನೀಡಿರುವ, ಸರ್ವಧರ್ಮ ಸಮಿಪತೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಭ್ರಾತೃತ್ವವನ್ನು ಅನುಸರಿಸಿ ಸಾರ್ವತ್ರಿಕವಾದ ಧರೆಯ ಈ ಅತ್ಯಂತ ಪವಿತ್ರ ಭಾಗ ಯಾವುದೆಂದು ಒಮ್ಮೆ ಯೋಚಿಸಿ ನೋಡಿ - ಅದುಮೇ ನಮ್ಮ ಭಾರತ. ಈ ಮಹಾನ್ ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರದ ಪ್ರಜೆಗಳಾದ ನಾವು ಈ ಉದಾತ್ತ ಶಕ್ತಿಗಳಿಗೆ ಕಾರಣ, ವಾಣಿ, ಮನನಾ ಬದ್ಧರಾಗಿ ನಡೆದುಕೊಂಡಲ್ಲಿ ಆದೇ ನಮ್ಮ ದೇಶದ ಘನತೆಯನ್ನು ಎತ್ತಿಹಿಡಿಯುವ ಸಂಗತಿ - ಅದುಮೇ ನಮ್ಮ ಸಚ್ಚಿದ್ರಾ ಕಾರ್ಯವು ಭಾರತ ಗಣರಾಜ್ಯದ ಸುವರ್ಣ ಮಹೋತ್ಸವದ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ಅರ್ಪಿಸಬಹುದಾದ ಬಹುದೊಡ್ಡ ಕೃತಜ್ಞತೆ.

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಶ್ರೀ ಎಸ್. ಎಂ. ಕೃಷ್ಣ ಅವರ ಕೀರ್ತಿಯೇ, ದಕ್ಷ ಮತ್ತು ದೂರದೃಷ್ಟಿಯುತ ನೇತೃತ್ವದಲ್ಲಿ ಅಧಿಕಾರಕ್ಕೆ ಬಂದ 100 ದಿನಗಳ ಅತ್ಯಲ್ಪ ಅವಧಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದ ಜನತೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಹೊಸತೊಂದು ಆಶಾಕಿರಣವನ್ನು ಮೂಡಿಸಿದ. ಹೊಸ ಸಹಜವಾದ ಸವಾಲುಗಳನ್ನು ಗಮನದಲ್ಲಿಟ್ಟುಕೊಂಡು ಆಧುನಿಕ ಜಗತ್ತಿನ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಗೆ ಸ್ಪಂದಿಸಿ ಅದರೊಂದಿಗೆ ಮುನ್ನಡೆಯುವಂತಾಗಲು ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಅದ್ಭುತಾ ವಲಯಗಳನ್ನು ಗುರುತಿಸಿ ಅವುಗಳಿಗೆ ಸೂಕ್ತ ಪ್ರಾಧಾನ್ಯತೆ ನೀಡಿದ.

ಸರ್ಕಾರ ತನ್ನ ದ್ವೈಯೋದ್ದೇಶಗಳ ಸಾಧನೆಗಾಗಿ ರೂಪಿಸಿದ ಯೋಜನೆಗಳು ಮಧ್ಯಸ್ಥತೆ : * 52 ರೂಗಾಮ ಹಳ್ಳಿಗಳ ಮಧ್ಯದಿಹರಣ. * 1600 ನೀರು ಸರಬರಾಜು ಯೋಜನೆಗಳ ಪೈಕಿ 809 ಯೋಜನೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಮಧ್ಯದಿಹರಣ ಪೂರ್ಣ, ಉಳಿದ ಯೋಜನೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಮಾರ್ಚ್ 2000ದ ವೇಳೆಗೆ ಮಧ್ಯಸ್ಥ ಸಂಪರ್ಕ. * ದ್ವಿತೀಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಮಧ್ಯಸ್ಥ ಅನಾಲ್ ಪರಿಹಾರಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ : * ರಸ್ತೆಗಳಿಗಾಗಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಾಚರಣೆ ಪಡೆ. ಆರೋಗ್ಯ : * ಆರೋಗ್ಯ ಪರಿಹಾರನೆಯ ಇಡಿ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯನ್ನು ಪರಿವೀಕ್ಷಿಸಲು ಕಾರ್ಯಾಚರಣೆ ಪಡೆ ಸ್ಥಾಪನೆ. * 573 ವೈದ್ಯರು ಮತ್ತು 115 ಸಹಾಯಕ ದಂತ ಶಸ್ತ್ರಚಿಕಿತ್ಸಕರ ಸೇವಾಕಾತಿ ಅಂತಿಮ ಹಂತದಲ್ಲಿ. ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ : * ಶಿಕ್ಷಣಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಾಚರಣೆ ಪಡೆ ಸೇವೆ. * 10,000 ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಶಾಲಾ ಶಿಕ್ಷಕರ ನೇಮಕಾತಿ ಪೂರ್ಣ. * ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ರಂಗದಲ್ಲಿ ತಂದೆ ತಾಯಿಗಳು, ಶಿಕ್ಷಕರು, ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿಗಳು ಹಾಗೂ ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯ ಪ್ರಜೆಗಳ ಸಕ್ರಿಯ ಸಹಭಾಗಿತ್ವ. ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣಾಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಮತ್ತು ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ರಾಜ್ : ಕೆಬ್ರವಂ 2000ದಲ್ಲಿ ಗ್ರಾಮ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಗಳಿಗೆ ಚುನಾವಣೆ. * ಗ್ರಾಮ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಗಳ ಅನುದಾನ ರೂ. 1 ಲಕ್ಷದಿಂದ ರೂ. 2 ಲಕ್ಷಗಳಿಗೆ ಏರಿತು. * ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣ ಸಂಪರ್ಕ ಜಾಲದ ಸುಧಾರಣೆಗಾಗಿ ಪ್ರತಿ ತಾಲೂಕಿಗೂ ರೂ. 1 ಕೋಟಿ ಮಂಜೂರು. ವಸತಿ : ರಾಜೀವ್‌ಗಾಂಧಿ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ವಸತಿ ನಿಗಮದ ಸ್ಥಾಪನೆ. * ಪ್ರತಿ ವರ್ಷ 2 ಲಕ್ಷ ಮನೆಗಳ ನಿರ್ಮಾಣಕ್ಕೆ ಕ್ರಮ. ಕೃಷಿ : ಜಲಾನಯನ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಗಾಗಿ ಪ್ರತ್ಯೇಕ ನಿರ್ದೇಶನಾಲಯ ಆರಂಭ. * ಜಾ|| ಎಂ. ಎಸ್. ಸ್ವಾಮೀನಾಥನ್ ಅವರ ಅಧ್ಯಕ್ಷತೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಕೃಷಿನೀತಿ ಶೃಂಗ ಸಭೆ ನೀಡುವರು : * ನೀರು ಬಳಕೆದಾರರ ಸಹಕಾರ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯನ್ನು ಸ್ಥಾಪಿಸುವುದರ ಮೂಲಕ ಸಾಲಾ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯನ್ನು ಸಹಭಾಗತ್ವದ ಆಧಾರದ ಮೇಲೆ ಕೃಷಿಕರಿಗೆ ಪಡಿಸಲಾಗುವುದು. ಮೂಟಿತಿ ತಂತ್ರಜ್ಞಾನ : 2005ರ ವೇಳೆಗೆ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕವನ್ನು ಜಗತ್ತಿನ ಮೂಟಿತಿ ತಂತ್ರಜ್ಞಾನದ ಆಗರವನ್ನಾಗಿ ಮಾಡಲು ಮೂಟಿತಿ ತಂತ್ರಜ್ಞಾನ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರದಲ್ಲಿನ ಅವಕಾಶಗಳ ಕ್ರೋಢೀಕರಣ. ಕೈಗಾರಿಕೆ : ಹೊಸ ಕೈಗಾರಿಕಾ ನೀತಿ ಇಷ್ಠಾರ್ಥ ಪ್ರಕಟಣೆ. * ಉದ್ಯಮಿಗಳ ಸ್ಥಾಪನೆಗೆ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಅತ್ಯಂತ ನವಜನ ತಾಣವನ್ನಾಗಿ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಗೊಳಿಸುವುದು. ನಗರಾಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ : ಜಂಗಳದ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಗಾಗಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಾಚರಣೆ ಪಡೆ ಸ್ಥಾಪನೆ. * ಡಿಸೆಂಬರ್ 2000 ವೇಳೆಗೆ 10,000 ನಿವೇಶನಗಳ ರಚನೆ. ಆಡಳಿತ ಯಂತ್ರ : ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಗಳ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಪರಿಷತ್ ಆರಂಭ. * ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ವೀಡಿಯೋ ಕಾನ್ಫರೆನ್ಸಿಂಗ್ ಸೌಲಭ್ಯ. ಈ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ಕಾರ್ಯಗತಗೊಳಿಸುವ ದಿನದಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಸಕ್ತ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ನಿರಂತರವಾಗಿ ದುಡಿಯುತ್ತಿದೆ. * ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಂದು ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರದಲ್ಲಿ ಯಶಸ್ವಿಯಾಗುವ ಸಂಪೂರ್ಣ ವಿಶ್ವಾಸ ಸರ್ಕಾರಕ್ಕೆ.

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ - ಹೊಸ ಸಹಜವಾದದಲ್ಲಿ ಹೊಸ ಸರ್ಕಾರ, ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಗೆ ಹೊಸ ಚೈತನ್ಯ
ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ವಾರ್ತೆ

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Lawrence Scott's Caribbeanness : A Personal Reading of *Witchbroom* and *Aelred's Sin*

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*It is as if a daemon navigates within the imageries
of the text*

- Wilson Harris ('Validation of Fiction')

In the first creative outburst of Caribbean fiction in the fifties and sixties, a few novels by white Creole writers came out which mostly concentrated on remembered childhood, love for a devoted black nanny and the nostalgic memory of an Eden-like Caribbean from which fall was inevitable.¹ As the child grew up, s/he was usually quick to assert her / his separateness and alienation from the rest of society, though not without a sense of regret, as if the loss of innocence made such separation inevitable. Only Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* explored the nanny's role in greater depth and represented the slaves' experience in post-emancipation rebellion, while she also conveyed the indissoluble link between black and white through the resentful friendship between Antoinette and her black friend Tia.

Lawrence Scott's *Witchbroom*² is of an altogether different scope from that of early childhood novels. Though written from a white man's point of view, it takes in all the compositional elements of Trinidadian society and history albeit with different emphasis. The effect is of an admirable fresco teeming with life, in which << the personal [mix] with the historical >> (110) in the narrator's memory and imagination. With the publication of this novel, it seems that the white art-

ist is at last prepared to acknowledge the planter's responsibility in the creation of a society built on exploitation and oppression³ and that he considers himself as an integral part of the society. Interestingly, and in contrast to his earlier fiction, the sense of the white man's belonging, Caribbean identity and acceptance by other racial or social groups are also recognised by the Afro-Caribbean writer Earl Lovelace in his latest novel, *Salt*. It is worth pointing out that, though he has been living in England since 1963, Scott considers himself as a West Indian not an English novelist and declares his allegiance to the Caribbean fictional tradition in his acknowledgements of the inspirational influence of other Caribbean writers. This is obvious in the intertextuality with Caribbean writing in *Witchbroom*. But the most important expression of his artistic Caribbeanness is to be found, as we shall see, in the conception of the narrative and its layers of significance.

The narrative framework opens with an "Overture" by an anonymous I narrator who reappears in two brief chapters at the end of the novel, "J" and "Postscript." In between are six "Carnival Tales" in the middle of which is inserted the I narrator's journal from 1st September to 15th August 1981, the year Eric Williams, Prime Minister of Trinidad, died. The Tales are told in the third person, supposedly by Lavren, the last descendant of a Spanish family of planters, the Monagas de los Macajuelos. Though he reconstructs the family history and

1 See, among others, Phyllis Allfrey's *The Orchid House* (1953), Geoffrey Dayton's *Christopher* (1959) and Ian McDonald's *The Humming-Bird Tree* (1969).

2 All page numbers are given in the text.

3 Benedicte Ledent rightly reminds me that Michelle Cliff's novels evince an obsession with slavery.

that of Trinidad, he is as much “written” as writing or telling, shadowed by the I narrator who records at a distance his flights of memory, understanding and imagination as these shape the past both from true fact and unreliable legends and data.

The Overture opens with a <<he>> that soon turns into <<I>>, who in turn alludes to Lavren, his << alter ego >> (2), thus creating an apparent confusion of pronouns, actually a community of voices from which the narrative emerges. Lavren is more, I think, than a mere alter ego. He enjoys a freedom in both space and time unknown to the I narrator. He dives for his tales into the Gulf of Sadness (the Gulf of Paria) which separates Trinidad – here called by its aboriginal name Kairi – from the South American continent. And he **surfaces** into his tales (15, 149), or comes upon them (43), that is into the reality he evokes as into what Wilson Harris calls << a living text >> (1989 (1), 23). << The sea is history >>, said Derek Walcott with whose work Scott has often expressed a deep affinity. Not only did the conquerors of the so – called << new >> world arrive by sea, it also contains the successive victims of their greed : the extinct Amerindians forced to dive for pearls until none were left ; the martyrs of the middle passage, some of whom were thrown alive overboard when suspected of illness⁴ (64, also in *Aelred's Sin*, 434) and the not much better treated indentured labourers who also arrived by sea (80). The sea, moreover, is a metaphor for the unconscious, and as Lavren dives into the Gulf, the initial *locus* of so much history, connecting the island with South America from where the first Monagas came, he rises from its depths with the terrible legacies of the past and faces his ancestors' guilt. To my knowledge, this is the first novel by a white Caribbean writer to do so explicitly. Lavren then is also the I narrator's and his family's

4 Compare with Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997).

conscience, his inner self and possibly, at a further remove, he is the author (Lavren/Lawrence, see 202). He swims through layers of West Indian experience, << through the nether world and the kingdoms below the sea >> (3) and builds story upon story (103), weaving a panoramic history of Trinidad. For all the hostility or contempt between exploited and exploiter, his surfacing with their affiliated subterranean past is reminiscent of Wilson Harris's << eruption of consciousness >> crowding him with << phantoms and figures >> on a Guyanese river and acting as << catalysts that become the inner ground of a narrative fiction... of related features that seem alien to homogeneous patterns of the novel >> (1973, 41, 40, 42).

The Carnival tales are embedded in the successive houses inhabited by the Monagas, set in the environment they shape in their search for fortune, cultivating the crops (cocoa and sugar cane) that will be their El Dorado. The houses are the seat of the family chronicle, symbols of power and of the *folie des grandeurs* they cultivate in their colonial way of life. The very first Monagas, however, Gaston and the beautiful Clarita seduced away from her convent in South America, enjoyed no such supremacy. Crossing over to Kairi in search of an earthly paradise, they knew the fate of many a pursuer of an ambivalent El Dorado, << City of Gold, City of God, >>⁵ symbol of the mixed idealism and greed that motivated colonialism. They were eventually found hanged in retaliation for massacred Amerindians, << their Eden ... become a Golgotha >> (57). Thus was initiated the tradition of reciprocal violence and revenge that was to plague Kairi until late in the twentieth century : << As [Elena and Georges Philippe] neared their death, they realised that the screams came from the future as much as from the past >> (58).

The real founders of the Monagas dynasty and wealth were Georges Philippe and his child – bride Elena (the first of a series in the family), Clarita's sister whose tears together with the dying Amerindians' renamed the Mar Dulce Gulf of sadness. The subsequent history of the Monagas is one of cruelty, greed and exploitation. Georges Philippe, the first Monagas Governor, orders a mass execution of Amerindians when he hears of their rebellion (45), while simultaneously the Spanish priests impose their religion and salvation through << the fire of baptism >> and repeated crucifixions (54-55). One is reminded here of Todorov's *La Conquete de l' Amerique* with its endless descriptions of the horrors perpetrated in the conquest of Mexico. The Monagas women alone acknowledge that they are destroying the world (55, 74) but, from the very beginning, they take refuge in religion : << In each century the women understood the horror. They knew, but they turned to the porch of the church >> (64). Themselves victims of their husband's selfishness and sexual greed,⁶ some are hysterical like the screaming parrots Elena keeps hearing but << all would do their duty, pay the marriage debt [i. e. bear innumerable children in obeisance to the prescription of the Church] but the rosary beads would never be far from their fingers >> (52).

They are stronger than men, who significantly all take the name Monagas de los Macajuelos transmitted through the female lineage. Elena Elena runs the plantation alone when

⁵ Wilson Harris, *Tradition, the Writer and Society*, 35. Referring to the European conquistadors and modern pork-knockers [gold seekers], Harris writes that << it would have been very difficult a century ago to present these exploits as other than a very material and degrading hunger for wealth spiced by a kind of self –righteous spirituality >>, 35, This sums up exactly the Europeans' state of mind in their colonisation of Kairi. See also V. S. Naipaul 's *The Loss of El Dorado*.

her English husband leaves for the Planters' Club to be nearer to the prostitutes, while Marie Elena, Lavren's Mother and "last of the great matriarchs of the new world" (245). " controlled the [twentieth] century" (242). However, the women's wilful blindness and ambiguous complicity in the men's enterprise, their total allegiance to a corrupt clergy, the other powerful instrument of colonialism (the cross sustaining the sword) help maintain the system of victimization and account for the complex and contradictory make – up of the relations between masters and servants. Elena Elena suffers in her flesh the slaves' torment :

'Ernestine, my back, someone is beating me.'
'Mistress, I know ; they beating old Moses down in the yard. That is what you feeling.
Is your husband's whip you feeling.' (63)

Nevertheless, she insists on having slaves after emancipation, and when these are replaced by East Indian indentured labourers, she triumphantly tells Ernestine :

'You want freedom, yes, but how are things to work, how am I to cope with this estate, again over run by the parasite? What the lord takes away with one hand he gives with another.' Ernestine, the balck woman, put her eye to the glass and came face to face with Madoo [a young East Indian] ... Madam, you people can do anything! Just so, you bring these people all this way to cut cane, Cheups'.(80)

⁶ The Monagas were named de los Macajuelos after the python and its enormous digestive capacity. << He eats like a python >>, they said of the conqueror, << digester of peoples >> (36-37).

Even Marie Elena, served through the twentieth century by the faithful Josephine and the only woman who, at the time of her death, asks forgiveness for the white man's guilt (22), insists on Josephine's presence when she is delivered of Lavren, regardless of her servant also giving birth to a boy on that day, thus perpetuating the white woman's authority yet entire dependence. On the other hand, Josephine is but the last of African servants who, in spite of their occasional defiance and verbal liberties, remain totally loyal and dedicated to their mistress: "between the two women there was an allegiance which history had shackled them to" (249). One recalls here a similar indissoluble link between slave / servant and master in Fred D' Aguiar's *The Longest Memory* or, for that matter, in South African literature under apartheid, in particular Dan Jacobson's beautiful story 'A Dance in the Sun'.

The parasite Elena Elena alludes to in the above quotation is the witchbroom of the title, also an imaginative metaphor which epitomizes Scott's capacity to sustain throughout the novel his rendering of colonial exploitation as a state of mind inherent in the plantocracy's greed, self – perpetuating though eventually also self –destructive (41-42). Lavren follows the growth of the parasite in the men's mind and the women's sensibility, his labyrinthine journey traced by the I narrator who comments on his (Lavren's) narrative method as if observing at a distance his own imaginative non-linear progression. His comments and his wish to construe fictional, not actual truth, clearly indicate that the complementary writing of Lavren's tales and his "chronicle of the heart" (98, 100) is also a quest for form weaving multifarious incentives into its course. If, as suggested above Lavren's tales partly emerge from the collective unconscious, his memory is also stimulated by a pregnant, "living (in Wilson Harris's sense of the

word⁷) landscape and by varieties of sensations. Like the sea, the forests and savannah of Kairi are also history. In a forest clearing on the Tamana hills where Georges Philippe and Elena discovered their crucified brother and sister, the screaming parrots voice the wailing and lamenting of both European and Amerindian victims :

This province of ghosts ... had become a grave for the last of the feathered and ochred people of the gilded one.

... Their spirits inhabited the rocks and their screams flew into the forest and became the hysteria of parrots and the sad cry of Clarita, the sister of Elena. (60-61).

The landscape literally screams (73), though the forest seems by turns loud with the hysteria of parrots, which haunts the mythological origins of the Monagas, and silent, "hysterical with amnesia" (99). The savannah, "a calender of the seasons" (62) is also saturated with the sufferings of chained slaves marched through it to the "overcrowded barracoons" (echoes of Naipaul, 62), the unruly ones hanging "like strange black fruit" (62) in town and the Monagas estate. Like Wilson Harris who, in *The Eye of the Scarecrow* evokes "the sublime long-suffering geography of history" (1965, 32) the "violence of geography" (198) runs through Scott's landscapes. But the land is also an inner reality shaped by the I narrator's beloved island and informing in turn his childhood memories, his intense love for his mother and frustrated desire for a manifestation of his father's love :

⁷ For Harris's comments on living landscape, see an interview with Michael Gilkes, 'The Landscape of Dreams', in Hena Maes – Jelinek, ed., *Wilson Harris : The Uncompromising Imagination* or 'The Music of Living Landscapes', in Wilson Harris's *Selected Essays*, 40-46.

I try to lift the chronicle of my heart out of its forests, from beneath the contours of its plains, the swamp, the clogged rivers and the wet sand, where herons and crabs inscribe their hieroglyphs, their fictions, which are pulled away by the incoming tide and the force of the moon. I wish mine to remain, to be read as part of the truth. (126).

The impact of the physical environment also guides the recreation of the past. In "The Tale of the House in Town" Lavren is drawn to his grandparents' house at the turn of the century by "the scent of cuscus grass from Dominica and eau de Cologne," (150) a scent diluted when he gets there "by the pungence of ginger and bay-rum, the scent he knew from when he used to bury his child's head in Josephine's woman's breasts" (153). In a similar way, the I narrator "smells" the sadness of Antoinetta's hard labour and sacrifice (116, 117). A whole world of sensations also drives Lavren as he asks himself questions about his (then young) aunt's nun-like behaviour and his mother's unrestrained impulse to tell untrue stories. Both Lavren and the I narrator are intoxicated by the perfume of their somewhat excessively loved mother, both try on her black lace dress inherited from Sou Sou, the grandmother, both remember the body of Josephine/Antoinetta as a source of comfort to themselves, an expression of defiance to their mother.

The two women, mother and black servant, are Lavren's inspirers, the island's living memory and frequently vessels of secret knowledge and rumours. In this respect too they are

8 See in particular 'the House of Funerals' in Scott's *Ballad for the New World and Other Stories*, in which Cecile Monagas de los Macajuelos has been dying for years (98). Much of the material of Scott's stories is reworked in *Witchbroom*.

inseparable, while their different orality and remodelling of the "truth" give the narrative its specific rhythms. Throughout his tales Lavren expresses his obsessive "passion and interest" (158) for his mother, Marie Elena, also "the muse of history" (226) and, in the dual role of mother and muse, womb of creativeness. Significantly, he completes his manuscript the moment she dies (259), one of several characters in Scott's fiction whose death marks the end of an era.⁸ Actually, Marie Elena is dying all through the narrative in parallel with the time of narration as if the death of colonialism was intrinsic to its growth. "Muse of history" brings to mind Derek Walcott's famous essay which, to some extent, Lavren's narrative exemplifies in that it is neither linear history nor the literature of remorse, despair or revenge that Walcott repudiates. Rather Lavren's "transforming memory" (28) breaches mimetic historiography and creates the mythopoeic beginnings and past that elicit his ancestors' desire and passion, like Gaston's seduction of Clarita with Tamarind balls in the convent's parlour while important events simultaneously take place outside. However, Scott's vision of the origins of Caribbean society diverges from Walcott's in its omission of the Adamic strand that recurs in the latter's poetry and essays. The Amerindian presence and its eradication are too haunting a memory to admit of beginnings in an empty world, even for Europeans. "You are my Eva and this is our Eden" (31), Gaston had told Clarita. But, as we know, for them as for the Amerindians, their mythical paradise turned into a hell of cruelty.

Marie Elena's tea-time stories, her omissions as much as her memories,⁹ are counterpointed by Josephine, "the storer of other tales" (5), who "breaks ... through the lines of [Lavren's] fragmented narrative" "with words of another life"

⁹ In his review of *Witchbroom* Wilson Harris emphasises the issue of amnesia, 1992, 65.

(171, 170). She introduces her stories with the familiar “cric” of Anancy tales to which an eager and delighted Lavren answers “crac” to signal his participation, a beginning repeated in the inner dialogue between Lavren and the I narrator (96,101). So he hears of Josephine’s mother’s death standing by the sink where she had stood most of her life. And he hears the tale of the bed, a Monagas family heirloom, where Josephine had made love with Lavre’s father, giving birth to his child and thus feeling the right to claim the bed as her inheritance when Marie Elena dies. It is Josephine who leads Lavren to “the small board-house on the road to Moruga” (64, 154), where an old African tells him about the Middle Passage (like the Old Man in Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*) and evokes as devil Lavren’s grandfather, Dr Monagas, venerated by all as an angel.

Opposite and subjective views of reality are thus interwoven in a narrative texture animated by Lavren’s flights of poetic fancy while the two women’s complementarity feeds his comprehensive perception of Trinidadian life, a perception sharpened by his sexual ambivalence: “knowing himself as different, he could understand all difference” (214). For Lavren is a hermaphrodite, a mythological being (12), a Tiresias of a the new world (151, 170) “who levitates between centuries, races and genders” (59), tracing the continuity between past, present and future and probing with equal insight into the hearts of men and women. Hermaphrodites have been from time immemorial one expression of man’s longing for wholeness represented in mythology, alchemy, literature. Close to us, one needs only think of Virginia Woolf’s attraction for androgyny fictionalized in *Orlando* even if she thought of it as fantasy and “fun” (1953, 136), of Patrick White’s brilliant and tortured explorations of sexual ambivalence in *The Solid*

Mandala and *The Twyborn Affair*,¹⁰ and of Wilson Harris’s suggestion that the creative spirit is androgynous.¹¹ As major narrative persona Lavren, as we saw, embodies memory, imagination, consciousness after plunging into the I narrator’s unconscious, the other half of his divided personality. They finally make one on J’Ouvert morning when, to use Michael Gilkes’ expression, his “creative schizophrenia”¹² is healed and he realizes that “all along, [he] was Lavren... the great storyteller” (267).¹³

Lavren’s hermaphroditism can be seen as one feature among many of what has been termed Scott’s “magical realism,” which he himself assents to, acknowledging the influence of Garcia Marquez. Perhaps this is why Lavren keeps looking through the Demarara window towards South America as he writes his tales. The old African’s belief that tormented slaves flew back to Africa (also mentioned in *Aelred’s Sin*, in Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* and Earl Lovelace’s *Salt*) partakes of the magical as well. In Scott’s novel, as in much magical realist fiction, there is a fusion of the material and spiritual worlds, and fantasy blends with both the mythopoeic and the religious.

10 In Patrick White’s fiction too sexual ambivalence is a source of deeper insight and understanding.

11 See “the gestating male/female body of spirit one nurtures”, *The Four Banks of the River of Space*, 117.

12 “The Caribbean cultural challenge is nothing else than the creative use of our schizophrenia. “Michael Gilkes, 1986, 6.

13 The protagonist of *Aelred’s Sin* also has “androgynous looks” (395), an indication, it seems, that Scott links bisexuality with creativity.

14 This is how Eric Williams, Trinidadian Prime Minister once referred to himself, the formula remaining a source of fun. Williams also proclaimed “Massa day done”. The two phrases are also mentioned in Lovelace’s *Salt*, 207, 212.

The golf ball hitting the back of Lavren's head, then not quite one year old, making a dent that wakes up the boy's farseeing memory has been directed by the Holy Ghost and, as in Wilson Harris's fiction, the crush and wound open a breach in a static state of mind (the Monagas') making for a new vision. But the most striking magical occurrence, is Marie Elena's assumption. She dies on 15th August, like the Third Most Intelligent Man in the World,"¹⁴ her death announced on radio even before she dies. His is the death of a neo-colonialist dictator, hers the assumption of Lavren's inspiration. When she ascends naked to heaven (more realistically, the I narrator's mother takes a plane to an unknown destination on 15th August), Lavren can only describe it as "a matter of faith" (206).

In his review of *Witchbroom* Wilson Harris wonders, among three possible interpretations, whether Lavren might be "a resurrectionary figure from within a chasm or grave or memory" (1992, 65). I would subscribe to this reading in so far as Lavren, who "levitates between centuries, races and genders in the interstices of time" (59) envisages a new world rooted in a catastrophic past :

If there was any magic left in the world it was to be found in the masquerade of history, a history whose calamitous waste had produced the possibility of a new world. But this, only by the repeated creation and simultaneous destruction of beauty, the grasping at the ambivalence of nature in the masquerade of cruelty and horror, transforming it out of darkness into a sunlight of music and colour: Carnival!(226)

Discussing Caribbean aesthetics, the Trinidadian playwright Rawle Gibbons writes of carnivals that "what is cel-

ebrated is not the past, but the process, the making and emergence of something new" (1998, 117). And further "We are not post-anything, but a new people" (123). This is exactly the import of Lavren's *Carnival Tales* as they herald a new age (239). They are inscribed in a Caribbean cultural tradition which, at different levels of complexity, uses carnival as a metaphor of potential creativity.¹⁵ In "J" Ouvert", the first postscript and, hopefully, the beginning of a new era, carnival is both a celebration and a symbol of resurrection after the endless crucifixions of people (s) (263, 267). Regardless of race and class, it brings together the characters who animated the tales in oppositional stance and is thus also a means of reconciliation. It has been suggested that as a process of unification the "carnivalisation" of Trinidad society is somewhat contrived (Dawes 125) because as masked performers the characters are other than themselves. However, it also generates a process of creolization that rejects the conception of the creole as pure descendant of the early settlers and puts forward a social and cultural dynamics emerging from the island's heterogeneous components.¹⁶ It might be objected that "J" Ouvert concludes a tragic historical, social and political saga in purely symbolical terms. However, one must view together the two endings of the novel "J" Ouvert" and the I narrator's "Postscript" when he comes upon the ruins of the old plantation house. Next to it, the vestiges of a treacherous and cruel past are still visible. But the house itself finally disappears leaving only nostalgic memories and the invisible presence of "our remembered selves" (272). There is no closure then but rather the juxtaposed visions of two different realities : one the fabricated dream of carnival and art, the other the more realistic bitter-sweet memory of a bygone way of life, leaving only an in-

tense desire for love.

Religion and sexuality are major intertwining themes in *Witchbroom* and inform much of the novel's imagery. Catholicism, a mixture of Spanish, French and Irish variety (the fear of hell instilled in young boys recalls Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) appears as a highly equivocal institution. The clergy, especially high dignitaries, are wordly, tricky, exploit the people's credulity,¹⁷ and are given to their own sexual antics. But the Church also contributes to the communal spirit and, like Carnival, is an agent of syncretism.¹⁸ Moreover, religious practices, especially in childhood and adolescence are a source of warm sensuality. In adolescence particularly, religion clearly sublimates the I narrator's desire and passion, channels his longing for perfection and provides an outlet for mixed, unsatisfied emotions, which eventually urges him to become a monk temporarily (102, 140): "I had taken my guilt, my love for her [his mother], my yearning for him [his father] into the cloister. All that passion was spent" (143).

This short quotation sums up the subject of *Aelred's Sin*,¹⁹ though Scott's second novel is not a sequence to *Witchbroom* but an imaginative exploration of the protagonist's experience in the monastery and after he left it. Jean Marc de la Borde, also a white planter's son, joins an English monastery at the early age of nineteen, right after the tragic death of his mixed

15 On this subject see Hena Maes-Jelinek, "Carnival" and Creativity in Wilson Harris's Fiction', in Michael Gilkes, ed., *The Literate Imagination: Essays on the Novels of Wilson Harris*. London: MacMillan Caribbeans, 1989, 45-61.

16 See Antonio Benitez-Rojo, "the Caribbean text shows the specific features of the supersyncretic culture from which it emerges," *The Repeating Island. The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, translated by James E. Maraniss, Durham and London, 1992, 29.

race friend and youthful love, Ted. There he falls in love first with his mentor and "guardian angel" Benedict, then with a young novice, Edward. His three or four years' stay as brother Aelred in Ashton Park monastery largely amounts to a hard struggle to conciliate the monastic discipline and vow of chastity (Benedict calls it "dangerous chastity") with his sexual passion. After leaving the monastery to live with Edward, he becomes a lecturer in history but dies, apparently of AIDS, one year after Edward in the early eighties. The narrative starts then, told by Jean Marc's younger brother Robert, who has left the family plantation on Les Deux Iles (Trinidad and Tobago) in the care of the Indian overseer and came to England both to understand Jean Marc and on a moral/spiritual journey of his own.

Aelred's Sin shares with *Witchbroom* a Chinese-box structure. Within Robert's meditation on his brother's life and his own introspection is inserted the reconstitution of Aelred's experience, the chapters on each brother alternating systematically, each also containing extracts from Aelred's journals, letters and "book of dreams" as well as memories of stories told by the black servant Toinette on the plantation. The narrative therefore creates a network of connections between the West Indies and England, frequently fictionalized

17 See also Scott's story 'The Archbishop's Egg'. It brings to mind a novel of an altogether different period and origin, Ronald Firbank's *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (1926).

18 Note that the fusion of Catholic and Hindu practices presented here favourably as an element of social cohesion was satirised in V. S. Naipaul's early novels, especially *The Suffrage of Elvira*.

19 This novel won the 1999 Commonwealth Writers Prize for best book in the Caribbean and Canada region. Page numbers are given in the text.

in recent Caribbean fiction,²⁰ especially on the subject of history, social attitudes (here towards homosexuality and racism) and landscape.

[Aelred] had watered Father Justin's hyacinths, whose scent reminded him of the smell of pomme aracs. He inhaled them deeply. Home came on the breeze of the smell ; from the big tree behind the house at Malgretoute. (48).

Aelred's story intertwines the central themes of the novel: the unremitting ascendancy of Catholicism in both its authoritarian and spiritually inspiring forms on those brought up on that religion: homoerotic desire and Aelred's failure to transform it into an exclusive ideal of spiritual love and perfection, modelled on the *modus vivendi* advocated in *Spiritual Friendship* by Aelred of Rievault, the Saint who was himself tempted by homoerotic love and transfigured it into love of God (107). Robert's growing imaginative sympathy for his brother makes him aware of the idealistic passions that inspired his brief life:

When, now, I look back at this boy, it is these things – blue veins, blood, holy communion wafers, the smell of wine and incense when caught up in the clouds of the monk's white cotton habit with his best friend – which made him leave his mother and father, his brother and sisters, to follow his best friend and the ideals of the monk.... (19)

Here, as in *Witchbroom*, sensations lead to discovery, and one of the novel's striking features is the intensity of Jean Marc's / Aelred's feelings for Ted, Benedict and Edward, the passions of adolescence and youth in conjunction with his idealization of spiritual love, one leading to the other: "Aelred strove for sublimation, his chaste and celibate ideal" (255).

As Robert reconstructs his brother's inner struggle and rebellion against the stifling monastic rule, the narrative shifts between past and present, and he remembers that Ted and Jean Marc were bullied and raped by the other boys as punishment for their illicit friendship, also that they challenged Ted to Jack-knife from a high rock thus meeting his death. The exact circumstances of his death are held in suspense and revealed late in the narrative when Robert is at last prepared to acknowledge his betrayal and guilt. He was then thirteen and, out of fear of being condemned with his brother, he hunted the two friends with the pack of boys and even nudged Ted on the rock. Now he finds his brother's story a palimpsest to his own, and with his gradual abandonment of former prejudices, especially the condemnation of homosexuality prevalent in the Caribbean, he recreates both Aelred's struggle to assert his nature in spite of the monastic rule and his imaginary tale of an African boy brought to England from Antigua.

Like many protagonists in Caribbean fiction, Aelred discovers his Caribbeanness in England where, though white, he is made aware of his otherness, while his homesickness enhances memories of his birthplace as a counterpoint to his discovery of the English landscape. It is also in England that Aelred develops a sense of guilt about racial discrimination in the Caribbean (106). Once cleaning the portrait of a young African slave kneeling by his master,²¹ he recalls Toinette's story of Mungo, the African slave boy who was hanged after trying to escape. The man in the painting is the eighteenth-century owner of Ashton park, then an estate built on the proceeds of the slave trade. Aelred calls the boy in the painting Jordan (he has discovered in the cemetery a grave with an

²⁰ See Caryl Phillips's novels and David Dabydeen's recent *A Harlot's Progress* (1999).

African head and the letter J). Little by little he fictionalises his life from his capture in Africa to his final hunting down by his master and his hounds when he plunges into a river and, like Ted, dies when his head hits a rock. It is while standing on the ladder cleaning the portrait that Aelred catches sight of Benedict watching him in a way that fires his physical attraction for his mentor and initiates their reciprocal passion. Added to his homesickness for the Caribbean, his suffering at being sanctioned by the monastic authorities awaken him to what persecution must have meant to other young men, Ted, Mungo, Jordan, and he begins to see a similar victimization between homosexuals by Church and state and the cruel prejudice and intolerance that killed the young men: "denial, punishment, death. Suicide?" (388. Also 215, 239, 272). The question applies to both Ted and Benedict who eventually dies of anorexia, possibly pursued by his grief and sense of guilt.

As to Robert, he moves from "incomprehension, disgust, received ideas of sin" (151) to an understanding of his brother's dual obsession, his "love for a man and his guilt about race" (106):

And there are other stories that insert themselves. Extraordinary coincidence, that it is here in this English park that I've come to reflect on the colossal History of cruelty in our islands; to confront even more deeply than in 1970 [at the time of the Black Power movement] for my family, what our politics, government, judicial system and trade have been founded on – what made the West Indian Estate.

21 One is reminded here of David Dabydeen's *Hogarth's Blacks*, to which Scott acknowledges his indebtedness.

Yet human compassion can confound us It is here that I read my brother's journals, and in them the black woman, Toinette, echoes her 'Dou-dou, dou-dou child' down the years. As boys, we got a lot of loving from black women. It is here that I learn my brother's story of Jordan A story of this place Yesterday afternoon I went and looked at the portrait on the staircase. I saw the African boy. I unlearn, learn anew. (271-272)

Nevertheless, to this reader at least, the assimilation in the novel of very different kinds of persecution (407) raises questions about the presentation of homosexuality. Admittedly, at the climax of crisis in the monastery, Aelred is still almost a boy, not quite a man and, as a friend sees him in retrospect, an "indulgent romantic" (443), not yet the serious historian he became later. But I see an unresolved tension – in both his mind and the narrative perspective – between the realistic description of his love-making with Edward, his unsuccessful attempts to sublimate his passions, and his extreme idealisation of homosexuality. More questionable, however, is the parallel between the horrors of the slave-trade and the ostracism of homosexuality, even if one keeps in mind that in the early sixties homosexuality was still a crime punishable by law in England. But it must be pointed out that in Trinidad, where an Equal Opportunity legislation excluding gays was about to be voted when the novel came out, it met with unanimous critical acclaim, Scott being praised, among other reasons, for his bravery.

There is no doubt that *Aelred's Sin* is a work of compassionate imagination, sensitive and moving, which captures the complex emotions that can beset young people in a secluded

environment. The flamboyance of *Witchbroom* gives way here to a more sober narrative texture and subtle use of metaphor in keeping with the evocation of monastic life regulated by religious offices, study, various chores and work on the farm. Above all, Aelred's awakening to English nature, his perception of its variegated splendours, enhanced by the reading of poetry (in particular Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'Pied Beauty') come out with great sensitiveness and prompt him to put down his discoveries in writing. As he learns to describe the English landscape, his initiation into both nature and religious life also becomes an initiation into writing, so that eventually for Aelred, then at a further remove from Robert, art replaces religion. "Eating words" becomes a substitute for the Eucharist (111, 217, 273). Nevertheless, Aelred never frees himself completely from the hold of the Church over his soul, whether in its positive or negative aspects. He remains attached to the aesthetic features of the cult, misses the monastic cell but to the end of his life is tormented by guilt and calls his homosexuality "Aelred's Sin" (434, 435). To the end also, he is haunted by memories of his native island, its history and his own life there. In 'Leaving by Plane' a story which appears to be half fiction / half autobiographical essay, a young man leaves a tropical island to join a monastery in England, where his experience is largely that of Aelred. In his intellectual progress, he feels that "the mould of [his] narrow colonial white creole Catholic religion beg[ins] to crack" (151). But for both him and Aelred, it is the creole Catholicism of their childhood and youth that informs their quest for spiritual fulfilment and human love and stimulates their journey through art :

... from that very first morning that I heard the Gregorian chant of the monks in choir, my resolve to be one of them was set upon, and my yearning

for the love of another like myself, my complicated sexual desires, confirmed me in my resolve. (147)

It is the theology of this that I am now swimming back to retrieve and examine.

Theology? Words about God. Emotions about God. (135)

A theology of the plantocracy, the catechuminate of the colonial Church. (137)

The tendency is towards narrative, but the texture is torn from a tropical poetics. (138)

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