

Obscure Sorrow Hill, The Caribbean Source of Wilson Harris's Fiction¹

Hena Maes-Jelinek

The legacy of Wilson Harris is a legacy of myth and legend.

Pauline Melville

[Wilson Harris] is widely recognised as the Caribbean novelist whose work best embodies the slave and colonial history of the region as well as the myths and legends of the indigenous peoples whose presence pre-dates that of both Europeans and Africans.

Fred D'Aguiar²

In his many comments on the nature of fiction and of art generally, Wilson Harris has repeatedly drawn attention to the Caribbean origin of his vision and explained how it came into being as a result of his surveying expeditions into the Guyanese heartland:

I am particularly concerned with the Caribbean, the Guyanas and the Central/South Americas where a cross-cultural medium of traditions may be discerned.[. . .] a truly creative response to crisis and conflict and deprivation [. . .] may well come from the other side of a centralised or dominant civilisation, from extremities, from apparently irrelevant imaginations and resources. The complacencies of centralised, ruling powers [. . .] begin to wear thin at the deep margins of being with a multi-levelled quest for the natures of value and spirit. ("Literacy" 28-29)

This quotation is not, in postcolonial terminology, a gesture of "writing back" to former colonial powers. It is a quiet profession of faith in the creative potential of marginalized people(s). While it may appear unduly optimistic in the present-day context, it expresses the belief that what Harris calls "value and spirit" (on which more below) could tip the scales in favour of those who have long been silenced by history. His own work, followed by that of younger poets and novelists, who have also awakened the

interest of the anglophone world for their artistic achievement, are testimony to that creativity and its capacity to bring to light original and multi-faceted ways of interpreting the world.

Apart from the three so-called "London novels" and one set in Edinburgh,³ his narratives are all set in Guyana or in similarly conquered New World countries, Mexico (*Companions of the Day and Night*) and Peru (*The Dark Jester*). His first novel, *Palace of the Peacock*, was inspired by an early major expedition "in the deep interior, the Cuyuni River interior" (D'Aguiar Interview 76). The location of Sorrow Hill, an actual settlement near Bartica at the confluence of the Cuyuni, Mazaruni and Essequibo rivers, figures prominently in the novel and other subsequent narratives.

Sorrow Hill was both a legendary harbour and a human settlement, it was an epitaph and a cradle, it was native and universal. [. . .] It was born of a precipitation from voyages and movements of peoples descending from ancient America, from Renaissance Europe, from the Siberian straits, from Africa, from India, from Asia. Sorrow Hill was no artefact of social engineering. It could not be framed within a formula. It was born from a precipitation of craft imbued with legendary voyages, yes, but it equally sprang from the soil of written and unwritten histories at a confluence of three rivers and three civilizations, pre-Columbian civilization, post-Columbian civilization, and a civilization that dwells in spaces still unplumbed which embrace North, South, East, West, and one sometimes felt other Nameless Horizons.

(*Resurrection at Sorrow Hill 4*)

Harris presents here in a nutshell the multi-layered significance of what is surely one of the most obscure places in the world as the potential source of a new vision of humanity and of a civilization "that dwells in spaces still unplumbed." To understand the full import of this location as a metaphor of creativity in the wake of the colonial encounter as well as the source of his notion of cross-culturality, one should remember that Sorrow Hill was a burial ground for both local people and European river captains who led expeditions into Guyana in search of its legendary riches. In the vicinity of Bartica also stand the ruins of an old fort built by the Dutch in the eighteenth century, "Kijk-Over-Al" (Master-of-all-I-survey), a name which clearly expresses the determination of the imperial gaze to exert full control over the conquered territory.

Harris's work is an imaginative, historical, social and metaphysical inquiry into an originally geographical experience. In an often quoted essay on "The Subjective Imagination" he recalls that on two successive expeditions he was leading on the Potaro river, a tributary of the Essequibo, the anchor of his boat gripped the bed of the stream. The second time it happened he and the crew would have been pulled into the Tumatumari falls and decapitated on the rocks (an experience imagined in *Tumatumari*) had he not managed to pull up the anchor. When he got to the river bank, he realized that it was hooked in the lost anchor he had cut off on the previous surveying journey. Harris's account of the experience and the effect on his consciousness, an "illumination," ("Subjective Imagination" 42) as he calls it, also throws light on the source of his art, on "catalysts of experience within the density of place [. . .] that become the inner ground of a narrative fiction" (*Ibid.*).

It appears from subsequent essays and the many protagonists in his fiction who are either surveyors or engineers travelling on rivers into the Guyanese interior, like the peoples and conquerors who over the centuries penetrated the land, that he came to see his work as a professional surveyor before becoming a full-time writer as an opportunity to gauge the impact of colonialism first on his country, then on a global scale.⁴ At the time of the experience described above, the two constellated anchors imprinted on his consciousness and memory his own Amerindian ancestry and pre-Columbians surviving in the interior but also the crews of many expeditions lost in the Guyanese rivers, a constellation that clearly symbolized a latent relationship between these peoples, which Harris was to investigate again and again.

In subsequent essays and interviews Harris has often insisted that landscape is never passive⁵ and has evoked his struggle to conceive the kind of language and narrative that would adequately express his perception of it as a "living text" (Gilkes, "The Landscape of Dreams" 33), its voices and speech in the Guyanese interior, which he interprets as so many expressions of animal and human life embedded in nature. This accounts for his stylistic fusion of all categories of being, not just geological, vegetable, animal, human features but the protean fluidity that informs their interweaving. Examples abound as his protagonists "[navigate] the veins and arteries of the heartland" (*Resurrection* 56). One recalls the beginning of the expedition in *Palace of the*

Peacock when the boat is in the grip of "a living streaming hand that issued from the bowels of the earth" (*Palace* 21), "the silent faces and lips raised out of the heart of the stream" (*Palace* 33), the skeleton footfall on the river bank, which frightens the narrator or, to take a more recent example, the "Who You" bird talking to Hope, the protagonist of *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* (*Resurrection* 49, 63). In *The Dark Jester* the song of the incandescent Bird evokes the myth of the Feathered Serpent (*Dark Jester* 22, 42). One must also keep in mind that each of Harris's narratives as well as his opus as a whole progress through movements inspired by the animated configuration of the environment, nature itself, an alternation of eruption from, and dying again into, apparent nothingness discernible in the interweaving of life and death in the existential process; of blindness and insight in man's consciousness; the movement of advance and retreat in Stevenson's physical penetration of the jungle in *Heartland*, the ebb and flow of his emotions and, as we shall see, the mixed twins of fate and freedom in *Genesis of the Clowns*. These are manifestations of the endless vital process Harris discerns at the heart of all existence and experience. Similarly, in the wide open-ended canvas of his fiction characters disappear to reappear in later novels like one of the Da Silva twins, who vanishes from the narrative in *Palace of the Peacock* but turns up again and dies in *Heartland*, then is resurrected as a double personality in *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness* and *The Tree of the Sun*. The same is true of some mythical locations like Raven's Head in *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, while the actual Sorrow Hill reappears at intervals with accretions of meaning inversely proportionate to its apparent irrelevance on Guyana's and certainly the world's map.

In *Palace of the Peacock* several members of the crew are from Sorrow Hill,⁶ already presented as a locus of death and resurrection. It is also the seed of an ever deeper, more complex exploration of the imaginative resources and spirit of place in Harris's art of fiction. In Book Two of *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, significantly subtitled "Genesis," the narrator travels from "Waterloo," a street in Georgetown, where he glimpsed "the hollow darkness of their room" at the back of destitute tenants (*The Eye* 30), to Sorrow Hill, "the lost womb of a mining town" (*Ibid.* 48). Then standing on a bridge with Sorrow Hill at his back, he watches

a ripple, a footprint almost, [appear] in the middle of the water and [vanish]. [. . .] the river over the sandbank was

a glittering [. . .] enclosure, a coffin of transparency [. . .]. The dazzling sleeper of spirit, exposed within the close elements [. . .] awoke all too suddenly and slid, in a flash [. . .] turning darker still as it fell [. . .] vanishing into a ripple, a dying footfall again [. . .] and rising once more [. . .] distinct trace of animation upon a flank of stone.
(*The Eye* 48-49)

The "dazzling sleeper of spirit" is a manifestation of the nameless dimension, the apparent void in which all victimized, exploited, destitute people(s) move in Harris's narratives. It is also "the trespass of feeling rising anew out of the stumbling labour and melting pot of history" (*The Eye* 49). In other words, a purely geographical phenomenon is equated with the arousal in the narrator's consciousness of the violated feelings of the victims of history and with history itself textualized in the landscape. This is just one passage among many in the novel, in which the configuration of place and its attendant natural phenomena are clearly the very source of vision (the opening eye of the scarecrow-narrator) as well as the "Well of Silence" (*The Eye* 95) out of which Harris's proliferating, protean imageries evolve. In kaleidoscopic fashion the "Well of Silence," or "reality of the original Word" (*Ibid.*), is at different times the void, the unconscious and, increasingly in Harris's later fiction, the Sacred, the unfathomable centre and multi-dimensional androgynous God. He also refers to it elsewhere as the seat of the "non-verbal arts of the imagination" (*Womb of Space* xix). In *The Eye of the Scarecrow* the expedition also marks the beginning of Harris's self-reflexive meditation on the art of fiction. As we shall see, in *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*, the protagonist's consciousness is awakened by sound as much as sight and the "dazzling sleeper of spirit" becomes a "ventriloquism of spirit. . .the activation of inherent originality in the ramifications of apparently passive psyche in nature to break the hubris of one-sided human discourse" (*Resurrection* 78-79). This is no pantheistic idealization of nature but the livingness of the world manifesting itself in voices other than human:

Is there a language akin to music threaded into space and time which is prior to human discourse? [. . .] pre-natural voices in rivers, rapids, giant waterfalls, rock, tree.
("The music of Living Landscapes" 40)

Except for *Palace of the Peacock* and to a lesser extent *The Secret Ladder, Genesis of the Clowns*⁷ is probably the novel which most explicitly allegorizes the psychological pressures of the crew

who are both accomplices and victims of the geographical penetration of the land. All of Harris's novels stage a journey, sometimes limited in space and time, and not always into the heartland. But it is always also one of psychical revelation, though sometimes in retrospect as in *Genesis*. Moreover, the movement of advance and retreat already mentioned, the approach to the object of exploration from several directions as in *The Eye of the Scarecrow* break up the linear charting which Harris views as the imposition of a deceptive structure on both physical territory and narrative. On the oscillating course of his fiction, *Genesis of the Clowns* looks backwards to the elemental clues associated with Sorrow Hill in *Palace* and *The Eye* and forwards to *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*. The I-narrator, symbolically called Frank Wellington, is of white creole English and Brazilian stock. His parents, who died on a journey down the Essequibo when their boat capsized, were buried in Sorrow Hill. He worked as a government surveyor until he emigrated to England and twenty years later on a mid-summer's day in 1974 he receives a letter announcing the death of Hope, his former foreman. This prompts the evocation of expeditions he led twenty five to thirty years before in Guyana, of the personality of Hope and of the crew whom he now sees as characters in a "shadowplay of a genesis of suns—the shadowplay of interior suns around which I now turned whereas before they had turned around me in processional sentiment" (*Genesis* 86).

"The shadowplay of a genesis of suns" is a "drama of consciousness"⁸ which involves Wellington in a "re-vision" of his past relations with his now dead crew. It develops out of the major dynamic metaphor in the novel, cosmic rather than merely geographical, the Copernican revolution by which the sun of Empire is being decentered in favour of the formerly exploited, just as in his re-vision of the past, he becomes aware of the power of changing feelings to set in motion a globe immobilized in the days of Empire: "a Copernican revolution of sentiment that displaces rivers, lands, into a wheel of dreams imprinted around each sun in the very ground under one's body and feet" (*Genesis* 92). The "processional sentiment" telescoping people and feeling into one expression stems out of another, this time economic, metaphor: the payable to which Wellington's crew came one after another to collect their scant wages, though he did not realize at the time the price **they** paid in repressed feeling for serving the Empire.⁹

While talking to each of them, Wellington used to sketch them as doodles in the margins of his field book, symbolically the margins of the colonial territory. He now sees that these doodles were "breathless bodies" on the "stilled page of the globe" (*Genesis* 87), mere instruments doing his bidding, returning twenty five years later to seek their "real wages" (*Genesis* 92), i.e. his contrite acknowledgement of his former callousness and of their contribution in hard labour and disorientation to the "capital genesis" (accretion of profit) on the payable of Empire.

The figure most relevant to this argument is Reddy, an Amerindian whom Wellington hired in the forties in Sorrow Hill to carry his theodolite which Reddy called the "pole of the sun" (*Genesis* 121), thus transforming the telescope's scientific source of vision into a mythical one (one of the many examples of the blending of science and myth in Harris's fiction). Wellington now sees their original meeting as an instance of "the frozen genesis of an encounter [colonial encounter]" (*Genesis* 112), also that although Reddy saw in him a substitute father-figure, he (Wellington) ignored the nature of his fear in a universe from which Reddy was being alienated. Indeed in Reddy's and his people's mythical perception of sky and earth, the gods, givers of light, inhabited the descending waters falling from the pole of the sun (*Genesis* 113). But as he travels with Wellington from Sorrow Hill to the Abary, a coastal area, he sees with terror objects, logs and trees, moving of their own accord against the stream and even that the "very water itself. . .moved contrary to the shadow of the gods" (113). At the time he hid his fear in sudden flares of laughter. Now Wellington sees that the demise of his gods and the reduction of his culture to a mere satellite were for him a Copernican reversal. In the general economy of the novel, the geographical phenomenon frequently observed by Harris, i.e. powerful Atlantic tides pushing upstream and running counter to the normal flow of the river, produce circular movements and set in motion an "unfrozen genesis" (*Genesis* 127) or "revolving and counter-revolving" (*Genesis* 92) physical and psychical forces. Thus nature itself offers a model for the relativization of cultures, one invading the land from the Atlantic, the other rising up from the Equator, revolving in opposite directions, not around the static dominating sun of Empire but around the "unfathomable centre" (*Genesis* 117), the undiscoverable source of being that informs all material masks and shapes in Harris's fiction.

Another agent of unfrozen genesis is Reddy's sister whom Wellington also meets in Sorrow Hill. In Harris's early fiction Guyanese women are frequently shown to be mere objects of gratification and exploitation by domineering men, though they can also be a major catalyst of vision and potential saviour as in *Palace of the Peacock*. In *The Waiting Room* and *Tumatumari* the protagonist and centre of consciousness is a woman engaged in a complex process of self-realization and imaginative re-vision of history. In his later novels the "Madonna/Whore" complex has evolved into a "Fury/Virgin" ambivalence.¹⁰ Moreover, landscape and cosmos are often sexualized in Harris's fiction, strikingly so in *Jonestown*, in which a sexual intercourse between elements in the cosmos becomes an act of creation and leads to a vision of the lost city of Atlantis as "a counterpoint between rape and devastation [. . .] to balance extinction with a renaissance [. . .] of lost cultures [. . .]" (*Jonestown* 136). There is a long literary tradition of identification of land with woman, especially in colonial and post-colonial travel narratives, as well as an abundance of recent critical commentaries on the "double colonization" of each. For Harris too space is feminine, as his well-known phrase the "womb of space," first used in *Genesis of the Clowns* (*Genesis* 120) shows. Not only do the women in the novel make one with the land and the "female earth" (*Genesis* 114), Wellington has desired them all and "undressed" them all if only imaginatively. But it is with Reddy's sister that he experiences a "climax in [his] bones [. . .] consistent with a bond that lay between [him] and a file of breathless bodies" (*Genesis* 122), as if his intercourse with her, whether real or imagined, were also one with her people. It is this conjunction of woman, people, land (like Mariella in *Palace of the Peacock*) which arouses in him a vision of glimmering figures "in the bed of the river [. . .] in a mysterious landscape," figures he now sees as actors in a "comedy of divinity whose roots lay on the mountains [. . .] as they lay in Sorrow Hill, as they lay in blackened rooms of cheap graves and lodgings [. . .]" (*Genesis* 124).

As mentioned above, it was the letter announcing Hope's death that triggered off the "comedy" (drama, shadowplay) in which Wellington's crew began to move again in his consciousness, "clowns" or ambivalent trickster¹¹ figures coming to life and stimulating his alternative vision of the traumas of colonization on individual soul and society. The Marti brothers, for example, perpetuated the economic deprivation of their East Indian indentured

forebears in a "fast" that allowed them to build up capital and later invest in various economic ventures in imitation of foreign neo-capitalism. On the other hand, African Hope, who bears the scars of his own and his people's sufferings around his mouth (*Genesis* 82,88), sought an outlet for his frustrated desires and ambitions in womanizing, velleities of power (he was a great admirer of dictators) and in revenge. Wellington's first memory of him is of a slightly threatening figure when Hope emerged from the dark in a receding storm that broke the ridge of the tent the foreman had put up for him, as if a shot had been fired and just missed him.¹² It gave Wellington an impression of being confronted with the repressed violence of the crew, though it is only when re-living the event that he understands its implications, acknowledges "a central darkness of buried sun" (*Genesis* 92) and sees himself riveted to the wheel of empire as to a "moving threshold of consciousness" (*Genesis* 86). Though it is never explicitly stated, one feels that his (the colonizer's) assumed superiority and indifference generate a violence which finally explode when Hope kills his ward, Lucille, apparently to assert "a jealous right to possess properties of flesh-and-blood" (*Genesis* 148), then turns the weapon against himself. Nevertheless, the narrative is inconclusive and apart from the genesis of clowns who enlighten Wellington on his former lack of insight, the main function of his shadowplay is to unblock the stasis of their former relations and generate "revolving and counter-revolving potentials to which we begin to relate" (*Genesis* 108). So that when he pulled the trigger, Hope may have seen Wellington as "a head among the clowns" (*Genesis* 148) just as the surveyor sees "[his] own clown's head welling up on the page" (*Genesis* 143). However, his perception of his true relation to the crew, his response to it, and the nature of his new vision are essentially moral, though they also generate his new conception of being. True, the economic, social and political iniquities of the colonial system are represented through the various tensions in the crew's everyday life. But I cannot agree with Sandra Drake who in her generally perceptive analysis of the novel asserts that Harris, like other Caribbean intellectuals, addresses the question "of how to synthesize Black consciousness and solidarity with some aspects of Marxist-Leninist theory and practice with other, more traditional values."¹³ In both *The Eye of the Scarecrow* and *Genesis of the Clowns*, Harris's characters criticize the Marxist inspired strike in

Guyana in 1948, and in other novels (*Black Marsden*, *The Infinite Rehearsal*) Harris criticizes Marxism Leninism as much as Capitalism, especially in their dogmatic form. In *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* Hope resists the temptation to dive into the midst of the turbulent populations beneath Sorrow Hill "to unravel inner hopelessness with their demagogic addiction to convention, to the surfaces of revolution, to authoritarianism" (*Resurrection* 69). My impression is that the anonymous letter sent to Wellington but actually signed F.W. (a suggestion that the nameless narrator is one of his own selves) points to various directions open to post-colonial Guyana, obviously a concern of the symbolically named Hope. The letter's subtitle, "*Counter-Revolving Currencies Of Fate And Freedom On The Paytable Of The Sky*" (*Genesis* 142), echoes the first sentence of the novel and is a counterpoint to the many failures due to colonial stasis in the past. It translates what sounds at first like economic return (currencies) onto an existential plane where fate and freedom, confinement to what seems an inevitable destiny and the capacity to liberate oneself from it, are inextricably bound and the shadowplay goes on in a cosmic/spiritual sphere, the "paytable of the sky," which brings to mind "value and spirit."¹⁴

That Hope himself/itself remains an actor in this unending play is a possibility put forth by the letter writer: "*Perhaps you were there in the shadows of that last payable midnight and he did not fire. Then history may possess an unwritten anecdote, an eclipsed but naked spiritual fact*" (*Genesis* 146). This spiritual fact is unearthed and more deeply scrutinized in *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*, in which Hope, still a gauge reader but now protagonist and part narrator has taken over the authorship of the text from his former skipper and writes a "Dream-book" which is also "a book of space" (*Resurrection* 17), though in keeping with a process recurrent in Wilson Harris's later fiction, it is "edited" by him. The shift from one narrator to another implies, as appears clearly in *The Infinite Rehearsal*, that the narrative or "immanent substance" of the novel emerges of itself from "the well of silence" mentioned at the beginning of this essay. At the end of *The Infinite Rehearsal* the narrator wonders: "Whose hand would seek mine, whose mask become my age in the future?" (*Infinite Rehearsal* 82). Hope is also a part-time inmate in the Sorrow Hill asylum, formerly a prison where the ambivalent Christopher D'eath at one time occupied each of the seven cells. Here is

another feature of the aftermath of colonialism: repression has given way to psychological depression, already fictionalized in *Tumatumari* and *The Angel at the Gate*. Harris adheres to Michael Gilkes' concept of "creative schizophrenia,"¹⁵ postulating that, like any other rupture, self-dividedness can be an opportunity to break up a static condition (here blocked psyche) before a therapeutic reconstitution. When, for example, Hope's mind "split" following a fearful experience in the jungle, "[i]t was the beginning of acute self-knowledge" (20). The other inmates or "clowns of Sorrow Hill" who seem to "traverse a border-line between madness and genius" (3) also suffer from this schizophrenic dividedness and illustrate the doubling in characterization frequent in Harris's writing as they impersonate famous historical figures like Montezuma, Leonardo, Socrates and even an Archangel, indirectly showing the need to conciliate in themselves and in a place dense with the psychological vestiges of conquest the variegated parts of their cultural inheritance.

Harris explains in an introductory note (unpaginated) that the inmates who don the masks of former "greats," "characters of the past-in-the-present" partake of a pre-Columbian tradition perceptible in its art. So does "the human/animal fluid and variable identity" Hope discovers outside and within himself as he travels from Sorrow Hill into the interior, to Lower and Upper Camaria and further to Serpent Creek. One example of this tradition and fluid identity arises when Hope is urged by Daemon, the asylum's doctor, to wear a holy monkey mask to talk to Monty/Montezuma and attempt to penetrate in their dialogue the nature of "terrifying revenge that Conquest had engineered [. . .] the inner desperation of victim cultures which cemented their deprivation into a royalty of hate" (*Resurrection* 92-93):

[The mask] has authentic roots in the rainforest and some say it possesses navigational skills, superior to those of Columbus himself, as a mimic deity or pilot of the buried living. . . (*Resurrection* 90)

This is just one of several passages which "resurrect" a pre-Columbian phenomenal world-view; it attempts here to approach Montezuma's fall and his people's desire for revenge in terms of their own culture. It is also an example of genuine cross-culturalism and of the variable ontological map that Hope both charts and embodies as he is being challenged "to break the contours of fate" (*Resurrection* 88).

Already in *Genesis* Wellington could hear a "jumble of voices" arising out of Sorrow Hill (*Genesis* 120), the "vaguest murmur of a shadowy crowd far in the distance" that merges with "the distant growl of the rapids" (*Genesis* 125). In *Resurrection* Hope's gauge reading of the level of rising and falling river at the Sorrow Hill "resurrection stage" is also one of "rising and falling levels of consciousness in rivers of space" (*Resurrection* 27). But as he travels from Sorrow Hill to Serpent Creek, he is made aware by his guide of the need "upon the precipice of a civilization to explore the descent of populations all around the globe in the maelstrom" (*Resurrection* 59). It is, of course, part of Hope's function to reintegrate them into the resurrectionary, evolutionary process, just as later in the novel the re-vision of the other inmates' experience in his book of dreams enhances his insight into the way that process operates: "the atmosphere of the asylum was now charged with the unfinished genesis of a vessel that had arisen in counterpoint to the funeral barge of an age" (*Resurrection* 200).

The spatialization of experience in *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* is all pervading and informs the narrative throughout in both content and form while Hope's capacity to read space increases with his "phenomenal literacy" (*Resurrection* 10, 28). Within the limits of this essay, I can only briefly discuss the ship metaphor as the major carrier of meaning. Readers of *Palace of the Peacock* will remember that Donne's indispensable means of conquest, his boat, is equated with his mind ("the crew every man mans and lives in his inmost ship [. . .] and mind" (*Palace* 46)¹⁶ and that Donne abandons it as his own hulk to rot and crumble when he is at last prepared to accept the crumbling of his domineering personality. In *Resurrection* the ship represents space itself or, I should say, all spaces geographical as well as all other spheres of experience—social, political, cultural, religious. It is also the means of charting those spaces, an instrument not ready-made or taken for granted since, like Bone later in *Jonestown*, Hope fashions it as he goes along and is involved "from the beginning of time and space in the composition of the vessel" (*Resurrection* 68) i.e. in the creation of life itself. This sentence recalls the role of hope as a necessary ingredient in man's progression in life "in parallel with the crumbling progression of the end-game world, the end-game vessel of the globe within the rapids" (*Resurrection* 68). Also in Hope's perception of the creative opposition¹⁷

between faith and end-game despair lies one expression of the "composition of reality" (*Resurrection* 112) in which he both takes part and charts while knowing he can never apprehend "reality" completely, only follow its partial breaking and re-memberments. As both symbol and instrument of the "voyaging imagination," the "foundering, self-reconstituting vessel" (*Resurrection* 217) keeps splintering through the novel as it does in all the shapes it assumes in various fields of human activity and institutions:

The ship of the church, the ship of the state, the ship of civilization, are weathered, weathering masks of a broken family (and its outcasts as well as its survivors) through which the resurrection breaks open all incorporations [. . .] and thereby gives profoundest numinosity to an Imagination that recovers, in a variety of guises, those we appear to have lost. (*Resurrection* 166)

Hope himself and at a further remove Harris, his editor, are the imaginative vessels through which the interrelated histories of ancient America and Renaissance Europe have been resurrected, textualized and set in motion, converting the terrors and traumas of past and present into a scene of love and compassion (*Resurrection* 244). But the "vessel of the resurrection" (*Resurrection* 233), which started from Sorrow Hill and retrieved the actors of private and historical tragedies on the way, keeps moving, not towards a resolution of humanities' crises but only maintaining its course as the vehicle of endless creation, in nature and fiction, a creation which has been metaphorized throughout Hope's journey and is epitomized in an abstract meditation in his book:

And the muses of fiction—that had long been marginalized in asylums—were being summoned once again, in the history of civilization, to begin to plumb a paradox. There was a paradoxical equation between an extraordinary theme of unity in all species, phenomena, things, galaxies, and the fragmentation of the modern world. Such fragmentation was not realistically absolute (though it threatened to overwhelm us as such) but a medium that could make strangely clear to the Imagination the price humanity was beginning to pay in gaining a composition of visionary and re-visionary interconnectedness of species and substances and galaxies within every splinter that is buoyed up by a brokenness that runs hand in hand with an Immaculate Idea of Being. (*Resurrection* 228)

Endnotes

¹ This essay is a partly modified version of "Obsure Sorrow Hill, Seminal Ground of Endless Creation," in *Routes of the Roots. Geography and Literature in the English-Speaking Countries*. Ed. Isabella Maria Zoppi. Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1998: 569-579.

² From "A BBC Radio 4 Kaleidoscope Feature" including Wilson Harris, Pauline Melville, Fred D'Aguiar and David Dabydeen.

³ *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness, The Tree of the Sun, The Angel at the Gate, Black Marsden*.

⁴ On this subject see Tim Cribb, "T.W. Harris - Sworn Surveyor." Cribb argues that Harris's work as a surveyor was for him the source of a new epistemology.

⁵ On this subject see "The Landscape of Dreams, a Conversation between Wilson Harris and Michael Gilkes," "Wilson Harris interviewed by Alan Riach," "The Music of Living Landscapes" and Wilson Harris's Interview by Fred D'Aguiar.

⁶ See Desmond Hamlet, "Renewal in a Far more Resonant Key: Reflections on the Mad Sin-Eating Relics of Fire in *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*." Hamlet mainly discusses the meaning of the resurrection in *Palace of the Peacock* and *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*. He also notes the allusion to Sorrow Hill in *The Eye of the Scarecrow*.

⁷ To my knowledge, there are only three extant critical commentaries on this novel in Sandra Drake, *Wilson Harris and the Modern Tradition. A New Architecture of the World*; Hena Maes-Jelinek, *Wilson Harris*; and Willian J. Howard, "The Reformation Process in Da Silva da Silva's *Cultivated Wilderness and Genesis of the Clowns*."

⁸ This is Harris's expression for his protagonists' growth in consciouness when they become aware of, and enter into a dialogue with, victims of the past and their suppressed tradition (*Tradition* 55).

⁹ Note the novel's epigraph: *In the psychology of the sentiments another Copernican revolution is needed* (*A Kind Of Materialism* by Stuart Hampshire).

¹⁰ On the "Madonna/Whore" see Michael Gilkes, "The Madonna Pool: Woman as 'Muse of Identity'", and Mark McWatt, "The Madonna/Whore: Womb of Possibilities." On the "Fury/Virgin" see Wilson Harris, "Apprenticeship to the Furies."

¹¹ It has developed into the "Jester" in Harris's *The Dark Jester*.

¹² There are frequent storms, both natural and psychological, in Harris's fiction. They arouse a sense of threat but can also lead to vision and liberation.

¹³ Sandra Drake, 161-162.

¹⁴ This expression is also used in the narrator's Introductory Note to *The Infinite Rehearsal*.

¹⁵ See Michael Gilkes, *Creative Schizophrenia. The Caribbean Cultural Challenge*.

¹⁶ In *The Dark Jester* the narrator alludes to his "ship of the Mind" (*Dark Jester* 65).

¹⁷ See Wilson Harris, "Adversarial Contexts and Creativity."

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For a complete, regularly updated bibliography on Wilson Harris, see <http://www.ulg.ac.be/facphl/uer/d-german/L3/whone.html>