WILSON HARRIS AND THE EXPERIMENTAL NOVEL  

by  

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Abstract

Wilson Harris is the author of fourteen novels and two books of shorter fiction. His work, cryptic and yet urgent, checks the widespread belief that experimental writing today is condemned to parody and self-referential performance. Located at the crossroads of numerous cultural traditions, African, Amerindian, and European, his novels evolve a complex language well suited to the articulation of marginal needs in an increasingly polarized world. The novels are difficult, and to examine the grounds of their difficulty, I rehearse at the outset a general theory of experiment in fiction, before reviewing Harris's own remarks on the subject, gleaned from his critical essays. Harris's distortions appear first at the level of the line; the oddity of his style, and its attendant vexations, are the subject of my next chapter, "Experiment and Language." Here I consider the techniques and uses of stylistic fracture and surreal montage, showing how Harris undoes the traditional concept of rhetoric by working an amalgam of the extraordinary and the commonplace. The rhetoric of unrhetoric has its structural equivalent in an unmaking of narrative sequence and causation. "Experiment and Narrative" examines the devices by which these securities are foiled, time by space, presence by absence. "Experiment and the Individual" considers the fate of character in fictions set at the ragged edges of the modern world. Harris refuses the holographic illusion of conventional identity, depicting instead those individuals whose resources are so slender as to have become invisible. Finally, "Experiment and Tradition" attempts to show
how the dispossessed begin to find a voice in the experimental language of a writer whose very obscurity allows him to perplex the ideology of civil discourse. Harris has developed a style which is representative but not mimetic; his marginal discourse adds a new dimension to the "blank slate" of the avantgarde.
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Introduction

The case of Wilson Harris is a contradictory one. That a writer of his genius should have to wait his due in an age when literary criticism is nowhere in short supply, is the least of the contradictions that I propose to explore in the pages that follow. Some of his obscurity reflects the distribution of other kinds of power than literary power in the world of letters, but a portion is of his own making, and it is this contradiction which I will chiefly address. Harris is a difficult novelist, and his work wants careful reading. The difficulty is not gratuitous; it has a purpose, and to discover that purpose is a task as rewarding as it is sufficient. My policy will not be to simplify, but to map, from various angles, the grounds of Harris's difficulty. To do this, I must clear away at the outset certain misconceptions which hedge about the author.

Harris is first a novelist and only then any of the other things he has been taken to be, whether mystic or shaman, anthroposophist or mythographer, poet or psychodramatist. That he could come to be so variously construed, speaks an enigma in the man and his work, but it is also the product of a taxonomic impulse in literary studies which begins by plunging the man into a bath marked "Guyanese" or "West Indian" or "Caribbean," and thereby shifts the reader's interest from what the novelist writes to what he represents. Once this elementary displacement (but one of Archimidean proportions for the novels) has been effected, the critic may dart unabashed into the street proclaiming his discovery of the real Harris, who will usually prove a national myth-maker, a regional voodooist, an exotic geomancer, or else a chimera formed of these parts. Lost in the
press of claimants is usually Harris the experimental novelist, and it is he who is the object of my study.

Theodore Wilson Harris was born on 24 March, 1921, in New Amsterdam, British Guiana (now the independent republic of Guyana). He was educated at Queen's College, Georgetown, and trained as a land surveyor, in which profession he advanced to the office of Senior Surveyor. During the 1940s and early 1950s, he traversed the interior of Guyana on various mapping expeditions, developing an intimacy with the landscape that would feature so prominently in his work, including his short stories and poems which began to appear at the time. His knowledge of the many faces of the land (a knowledge most Guyanese lack, living as they do along the coast) Harris took with him to Britain when he emigrated there in 1959. A year later, his first novel, Palace of the Peacock, appeared. Since then, he has lived in London, producing a steady flow of fiction published by the house of Faber and Faber. His fourteenth and most recent novel is The Tree of the Sun (1978). A book of critical essays, The Womb of Space, will mark his North American debut, and a new novel, The Angel at the Gate, is due in 1982.

It would be idle to deny that Harris's novels are scored by their author's origins, and that the sensibility which informs them, especially in the period prior to 1970, is a West Indian one. The reader who is unfamiliar with the West Indies or with its literature, will find a brief literary history of the region in my final chapter, but since the account given there is scant and moreover that of an outsider, he would be better advised to go to Michael Gilkes's Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel, or to any of the small but growing number of West Indian literary histories written or edited by various hands. To some degree, then, a formal
approach is enjoined on an outsider, who is better qualified to treat the novels as novels than to judge their truth to a life he has not known. This is no especial misfortune, since the most arresting feature of Harris's novels is not their setting but their experimental surface, an assumption which has determined the course of my thesis from its title onward.

I have chosen in what follows to preserve an overarching chronology with respect to the publication of the novels, while bringing to bear at different stages a schematic cross-section of concerns ranging from style and structure to individual character and social history. In this way, a sense of the progress of Harris's work is combined with successive inquiries into a variety of experimental modes. So "Experiment and Language," "Experiment and Narrative," "Experiment and the Individual," and "Experiment and Tradition" straddle sequential stages of Harris's canon, covering in each case novels most appropriate to the moment's inquiry. Such an approach will mean that certain aspects of certain novels get short shrift, but I have preferred this method to the alternative and greater sin of examining every one of the novels four times over. At the same time, in order to compare developments of technique, I have in each chapter introduced a relevant novel from outside the period under consideration, an intrusion altogether in keeping with Harris's own disruptive practice.
I. Experiment

i) On Experiment

Two decades after the publication of *Palace of the Peacock*, Wilson Harris stands in the front rank of contemporary experimental novelists. During the years since that beginning, he has worked his literary skills with an independence that has won him admiration even as it has caused his partial eclipse. Unwilling to couple experiment with prudence, he has forfeited a wide readership, but then out of his patient practice has come a new writing that could not have been won without this risk. Certainly, prudence is not the most evident quality of the first paragraphs of his first novel:

A horseman appeared on the road coming at a breakneck stride. A shot rang out suddenly, near and far as if the wind had been stretched and torn and had started coiling and running in an instant. The horseman stiffened with a devil's smile, and the horse reared, grinning fiendishly and snapping at the reins. The horseman gave a bow to heaven like a hanging man to his executioner, and rolled from his saddle to the ground.

The shot had pulled me up and stifled my own heart in heaven. I started walking suddenly and approached the man on the ground. His hair lay on his forehead. Someone was watching us from the trees and bushes that clustered the side of the road. Watching me as I bent down and looked at the man whose open eyes stared at the sky through his long hanging hair. The sun blinded and ruled my living sight but the dead man's eye remained open and obstinate and clear.

Here is no conventional entry into the sublunary world of fiction any more than it is a safe beginning to a novel. Yet its very abolition of security, its teasing ambiguities, and its unsettling syntax, link it with a tradition of experiment which renders it intelligible.
This "tradition of experiment" is not so improbable a beast as might first appear. The contradiction lodged in its heart is both the motor force and the mortality of all avantgardism: the new needs what it despises in the old. "Modernity," says Paul de Man, "which is fundamentally a falling away from literature and a rejection of history also acts as the principle that gives literature duration and historical existence." The new, moreover, not only needs the old; it becomes the old. No sooner does the critic discover and anatomize modernism than he is compelled to create a space marked "postmodernism." Whereupon one gains the uneasy liberty to drive a "post" before what the world had taken to be contemporary, or else to create a new word whose hoary fate is sealed in its conception. The novel is a singular victim of this passion: embarrassed by its generic name, which will draw such unseemly advances as "New New Novel," it prefers to go abroad disguised as "fiction." In its track we find innumerable tokens of the old anxiety: metafiction, kafafiction, parafiction, surfiction, superfiction, even postcontemporary fiction.

There is, then, no especial urgency for the reader of Harris to join the fray, and certainly no excuse for him to swell the progress of its bloodied nominalism. "Postmodernism" will serve most purposes quite satisfactorily, since there is tolerably common consent as to what and when modernism was, and for the innovative impulse I will be content with "experiment" and its derivatives. Since, however, a reaction to experiment in the novel is now underway, it is worth pausing to measure Harris's achievements in that mode before a springtide of neo-conservative pronouncements engulfs them. Reaction is perhaps too strong a word to describe the present impatience with formal innovation, since the movement, for all its revivalist intensities, lacks conviction and wears an air of having been
with us before. Among critics, it may be no more than a motion of censure hatched to outwit the theoreticians of the avantgarde, and insofar as its novelists seek to unmask the posturing that much experimental writing has become, it is in fact justified. There are, however, the usual indications that the movement would prefer to oust form altogether and create a new orthodoxy of noble content.

It is true that experimentalism had created an orthodoxy of its own (and it will be one of my chief concerns to distinguish the work of Wilson Harris from that orthodoxy) by enshrining formal innovation in a sanctum which fewer and fewer could penetrate. Inasmuch as it did, it was itself a reaction, or the late phase of a reaction, to conventional realism. There is no surer sign of this than that even its mannered flamboyancies had declined into a kind of ill-Mannerism, a febrile mimicry of innovation condemned to rehearse forever its repertory of one trick. It would be a mistake, however to assume that because, fairly early in the spree, John Barth declared all fictional forms exhausted, this was in fact the case. Nor need one devalue the achievement of a Borges (whom Barth was concerned to honour in his article) in order to suggest that even at this stage experimental writing had come to be boxed rather too readily into the parodic mode. At any rate, ever since that time, critical writing has dwelt on this aspect of experimentalism, its desire to parody everything, including itself. The self-consciousness which such a desire must entail is accordingly transformed from the aesthetic sin it was under the old dispensation, into a muscular virtue, for as Richard Poirier pointed out in his excellent book on this fiction, "Life in literature is exhibited by the acts of performance that make it interesting, not by the acts of rendition that make it real."
One might, nonetheless, ask whether this energetic parodying was ever quite so far removed from a heavy-lidded aestheticism as it liked to imagine. There is, after all, something close about the air in a novel whose characters are forever announcing that they are aware of their fictionality, whose multiple narrators look directly at the reader and force him to call the fictional bluff. Moreover, the novelist whose entire construct is an elaborate hoax wants a reader who will not only allow but connive in his own discomfiture. Which is to say, the self-conscious author begets, by close inbreeding, the self-conscious reader. Extreme sophistication in the one will tolerate no dullardry in the other: you cannot call in question all the forms of yesterday nor advance bravely into tomorrow's with a sullen or laggardly audience. And where the parody of others once demanded a particular outside knowledge, the parody of oneself and one's audience cries out for a coterie. Now there might be no end to these steamy intimacies but for the strict limits which literary involution must confront. The parody of a parody undoes itself; even less credence can be given the parody which begins to take itself seriously. It will be remembered that, very early in the history of the English novel, when Fielding began to do just that in Shamela, he wisely abandoned his project and got on with Joseph Andrews instead. Contemporary parodists and self-parodists have ignored this precedent to their own cost.

There is none of this self-consciousness in Harris. His novels are not about other novels, and when they are about themselves they are not cloyingly so. At the same time, they are unmistakably experimental in their technique, bearing a certain (and confusing) resemblance to another strand of avantgardist fiction, one which has been called apocalyptic. Where parodists find cause for despair and the darkly comic, apocalypts
see grounds for hope and chaotic celebration. Antonin Artaud spoke for the mode when he declared: "The highest art is that which brings us nearest chaos." Whether their conjectures are founded on transcendental notions or not, apocalypts make no secret of their energetic engagement with the unknown. It is sometimes suggested that their writing, despite its energy (or because of it) is untroubled, that they have not heard the bad news about the death of meaning, the death of God, the death of man, death itself. Yet, such a charge is with greater justice brought against parodists, whose mocking laughter must always hover on the brink of angst but never quite go over or else the charade is spoilt. A more telling critique of the literature of inspired madness, Eros unbound, mysticism, and the various cults of poetic dementia, is that which demonstrates how easily these forms of protest and aspiration can be contained. The point has been often made, as in Gerald Graff's article, "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough," where it assumes a special trenchancy. Graff goes on to predict an identical fate for parodists, but, being kindly disposed towards "Western rational humanism," he tends to prefer their sombre strategy, if only because of their honest bafflement before a reality emptied of meaning. The suspicion that the visionary company tend to cheat a little dies hard.

I am not disposed to plead either cause, though I will suggest that literary experiment goes more readily with serendipity than with suasion. Harris's is in any case a specific experimentalism, neither parodic nor apocalyptic. In order to situate what might be called his symbolic experimentation, I would like to return to the question of experiment in the abstract to sift certain elementary words in its poetics, words such as "symbolism," "realism," and "experiment" itself, since they are
each susceptible to diverse and not always defensible interpretations.

It has been customary in the criticism of fiction to speak of realism and experimentalism as antithetical categories. The realist writer, it is said, copies the world, and the experimental writer distorts it. Now this may be a satisfactory account of the case, and even where it is not, little is to be gained by calling in question words which have in their commonly accepted usages served admirably to sustain a valuable if yet unresolved debate. I do not propose, therefore, anything so drastic as a scuttling of this terminology. I will, however, suggest that there are certain ambiguities, contradictions even, which have come to lodge in these words, and which, perhaps because of their contradictory nature, can be coaxed into extraordinary meanings.

Before the heyday of the realist-formalist debate, the pair to realism was not experiment but symbolism. That symbolism has fallen out of favour, that there is today no flourishing school of symbolists, reflects our growing impatience with exalted given meanings, whether personal or traditional, and perhaps also our contempt for the conjurings of interested commentators. It is not, however, the method of meaning but a faith in its immanence that I am concerned with, and in this respect, as has often been pointed out, the symbolist movement was not a reaction to but a continuation of romanticism. Realism, on the other hand, was committed from the start to a simple documentation of reality, to the recording of meanings but not to the discovery or imposition of transcendent meaning. Accordingly, it dealt with available significations until that pass in December 1910, when immanent meaning was found to be hollow. Realism's commitment to documentation now required it to record meaninglessness (or else to continue an anachronistic reflection of nineteenth century meanings, which last it has contrived to do with great success to this
day), and by this token, much modern experimentalism can be shown to be realistic. The French New Novel is a case in point. Its chosisme, its desire to record without romancing or romanticizing, to describe objects without bestowing on them the teleology of human metaphor, constitutes nothing less than realism, only, the terms of the real are now revised. All that the New Novel rejected in the old realism were its subjective, psychological elements, and this in a bid to ensure that its description not appear to be an imposed one (as far as this was possible—which is not very far, and which is why the whole enterprise has fallen foul of a certain vulgar and healthy scepticism). Even taken on its own terms, as an attempt at strict placement of the observable world without the projection of any human emotions, this act is a mimetic one and so falls within the province of realism, however newly defined. And as with chosisme, so with the parodic mode we have glanced at, since the latter either reports on the absurdity of the real or enacts that absurdity ad infinitum.

The point of this excursus is, as I have suggested, that realism and experiment are not invariably and easily the antithetical categories they are taken to be, since the one represents a view and the other an action. It is a point worth making, because when we come upon the symbolic experimentation of a writer like Harris, which is an attempt to challenge the mimetic view of the world, we might be tempted into an opposite fundamentalism, declaring symbolic writers the only experimentalists. And the corollary of this belief would be that the ruck of experimentalists are producing 'realist texts, while a great many realist writers are in fact symbolists since they continue to traffic in meaning. In fact all I am suggesting is that the action of experimentalism can have as its object
equally a realist or a symbolist view of things.

I do not wish to defend the value that is traditionally attached to symbols and symbolism. That their powers have been both rhapsodized and berated is a matter more to do with the habits of interpreters than with the performance of writers. I have summoned them up simply to clarify the concept of experiment, and to distinguish Harris's symbolic perspective from his experimental practice. Nevertheless, the return to meaning—a meaning no longer deemed immanent in things but one created by an individual in his sensuous mediation with the world—is a minimal requirement for those engaged in the writing and reading of texts, not to speak of other pursuits. In a pluralist universe, symbolic experimentalism might be fairly characterized as the naive counterpart of a sentimental avantgardism committed to the celebration of meaninglessness. But if the parodic version of the real were itself subverted, one might begin to speak of a symbolic realism. Here is that "new form of 'classical' animation rather than 'romantic' escape or self-delusion" Harris foreshadows. This realism is not the subject of experimental action but its object. It is the product of that exploratory impulse in the arts and sciences of which in turn Harris's marginal fiction is an exemplar. The rejection of the parodic "real," then, does not imply an ineluctable return to nineteenth century realism, and the symbolic experimentation of writers such as Harris points a way out of this false impasse. It is here that we may relinquish any provisional sense lent these elementary words.

There is another, graver problem with traditional realism. It has to do with certain ripples in the face of the real which vex the conventional category of reality and the customary manner of its representation. An aesthetics of this disturbance would have to consider the modernist
practice of rupture as more than simply a reflection in its turn of the growing complexity of modern life. It would also need to show that the realist enterprise is no securer than that modernist practice, for all that the former appeals to common sense. Such a system does exist, for there has grown up beside experimentalism an anti-organicist poetics of considerable influence and explanatory power. I am thinking of the aesthetics of fracture which draws on the Marxist theory of ideology.  

If realism seeks to show the world as it is, its task is immediately complicated by the fact that the world is not available for transcription in itself but only as an ensemble of prevailing ideas about it, that is, as "ideology." 9 Realism confronts, then, not the world, but a picture of the world. Nor is the picture a complete one, for ideology is always a selective account of the real, a real destined to elude this and every other form of representation. Ideology resembles, or perhaps dissembles, the real by reflecting only those of its features that are consonant with the material interests of the power elite (whether of class, gender, or race) in a particular economic and social formation. This sense of ideology as an entire mode of production's representation of itself, is clearly not the common construction put upon the word, that of any system of ideas peculiar to an articulate group. So far from being the willed formulation of a doctrine, it is in fact an involuntary reproduction in the realm of ideas, of the disposition of social forces in the material world. Ideology, then, is not to be confused with dogma, though its elaboration is a form of dogmatism. Its fixity is nevertheless amenable to manipulation in the interest of control, even as it is to distortion for the purpose of resistance, and this distortion of the supposedly real returns us to the issue of experimentalism in the arts.
If ideology is itself a kind of realism, a functional reproduction of the real, then fictional realism is a mimeticism twice removed. Looked at in this light, realism is not simply a preferred manner of description but an obliging re-presentation of a reified or unreal reality: the more faithful that representation, the more specious it is likely to be. And since the style of this representation is inseparable from its ideas, its knowledge, it copies along with the shape of that world, its ruling prejudices. Committed to realism, the sternest critique of society comes to be couched in terms that are already chosen for it and therefore denatured, and it is compromised not despite its realistic exposures but because of them. Thus it has become a commonplace of literary criticism that a work may be more effective through its silences, the gaps in its representation, than in the details it carefully reproduces. It follows that a work which experimentally de-forms the world strays no further from the real than one which simply, or not so simply, reflects it; in fact, its distortions, for all their seeming unreality, may tell us more (or more that is useful) about a contradictory world.

It is not long since, in liberal as well as Marxist theory, this view was a sort of heresy. In the eyes of both a Lubbock and a Lukács, if for different reasons, those novels were most successful which seemed of a piece with reality. With Lubbock, the motive for this requirement was an aesthetic one: that a novel reconstitute its world without authorial refraction; for Lukács, the considerations were social: that a novel accurately embody the contradictions of the society which it strives to represent. 10 Inevitably, then, content was to take precedence over form, and quite as inevitably the reaction to this principle would take on a formalist colour, one which it is only now beginning to lose. It is
fitting that Lukács's insistence on the correct depiction of human alienation should be met by Brecht's experiments with an "alienation effect," a largely formal gesture. For, as Brecht, himself no formalist, pointed out, realism and anti-realism are equally formal, that is, "on paper." For this very reason, their politicizing "does not involve undoing techniques, but developing them."¹¹

That the technicality of novelistic experiment came at last to construct a monad is part of the further adventures of a formalist dialectic, and need not detain us here. Of greater interest is the process by which "bourgeois bohemianism," itself... "The Ideology of the Modern," could be transformed into an anti-ideological charm. This revolution may be traced in the passage from a conception of the literary work as an embodiment of contradictions to that of the work as itself contradictory. Where the realist novel sought to purify itself of inconsistencies, the modernist novel and its successors revelled in formal contradictions. In this, literary experimentalism has commonly traced its lineage to Victor Shklovsky, whose twin dictums of "making strange" and "laying bare" may serve as mottoes of the mode.¹² By these principles a novel was not simply to "defamiliarize" its subject but to reveal at the same time the workings of that defamiliarization. So where a traditional novelist might, having already resolved any inconsistencies in his book, seek to erase scrupulously all marks of labour from its surface, the experimental novelist would not only generate contradictions within his novel, but put the generative mechanism on display. The first of these impulses has been described as the commodification of the literary product:¹³ every effort the author makes to render his work believable ensures its ready consumption along with the ideological "reality" it embodies. The second impulse is,
accordingly, a refusal of commodification, and the notorious "difficulty" of modernist and postmodernist works, which is an instance of making strange even as their self-consciousness is a way of laying bare, ensures that ideology does not go down easily. Indeed, a great portion of the charge of obscurity that has been brought against Harris may be laid at the door of this textual negation, a refutation of the given by a denial of its terms.

"Demonic, terrible and negative: this is the Modern Muse," wrote Leslie Fiedler. And from Jung's description of Ulysses as "sheer negation" to Marcuse's notion of the "Great Refusal," critics have seen in modernist art a contradiction. Now, this perception has itself been roundly criticized for its wish to place literature in a shelter outside ideology where its critical resources remain free from contamination. The criticism is a just one within its limits; literary works do not transcend ideology: they give it shape, allowing it to be read. But it is also worth asking whether an all too esemplastic conception of ideology is not itself susceptible to rupture, whether one might not speak of peripheries to ideology.

In the first place, a symbolic experimentation such as Harris's operates on the edge of consciousness as well as on the fringe of predictability: its deformations are wrought as much by random juxtaposition as by authorial necessity. In the second, ideology, while encompassing specific orders of social relations, is not yet global. It may be said to have margins where one mode of production meets another and where it is more readily breached than at its centres. This is where Harris's novels are located: here is a novelist from a former colony writing at the metropolitan centre works which do not spring wholly from the ideology
of either of the worlds they straddle. The very marginality of these works serves to warp the ideologies of both colonizer and colonized when they concur, for instance, in producing a "historyless" West Indian past. Out of this supposed barrenness, Harris is able to develop a minimalist experiment which is rather more convincing than the endless self-parody of much Northern postmodernism. While Harris certainly inhabits a European literary tradition, which might include Continental symbolists and British romantics and modernists, he shapes this tradition to his own needs, and while he is inevitably led into ideological resolutions of real contradictions, his own contradictory works mix the traditions of alien cultures with results that illumine as often as they mystify.

This raises once more the question of difficulty, which I have suggested is a species of working contradiction. To describe it so is to elucidate difficulty, not the difficult; the task of interpretation remains. It is an idle pretence which declares that criticism deals not with meaning but with the production of meaning; the one, in fact, derives from the other. The conceptual division is a useful one, however, for if the critic can discover in the mechanism of the book a method which links the production to the product, his task of interpretation is facilitated. In this, Harris's novels, far from being the riddles they are commonly taken to be, go a long way to meeting the critic. For contradiction is at the heart of Harris's writing: it obtains in the shape and movement of his typical sentence; it is generated by his swift and unpredictable conjunction of disparate elements, by the brisk shuttle of his narrative, and by the masking and unmasking of his characters; it is, finally, the stuff of the larger rebuttal of realism which his entire oeuvre represents. In fact, the critic concerned with Harris's experimentalism could hardly do
other than first come to terms with the most significant feature of the prose and the ideas that prose experimentally advances. I have sought, then, to discover in Harris's style a general principle for the interpretation of his novels. Since I have taken this principle to be contradiction, it will be necessary in the chapters which follow to elaborate a grammar of dissent by which these texts may be parsed.

Contradiction is in the first place a saying no. It is true that silence will pronounce quite as eloquent a negative, but then silence, despite the absurdist experiment, is not a literary form. Besides, it involves a certain solipsistic retreat, and contradiction is also a form of advance. So, it is necessary to go beyond this elementary level of contradiction, to which an odour of the querulous clings, and enter at once into the realm of the polysyllabic, into literary constructions which return a more complex negative. I do not wish to imply that a successful experimentation must employ contradiction, or, even more reductively, that the more contradictory a novel the greater its value. What I am suggesting, is that the texture of Harris's literary material agrees with the action of a larger dialectic. It is a concept to which Harris himself makes explicit recourse, so the contradictions I will treat arise out of his criticism as well as his novels. I choose contradiction not because Harris's text illustrates the concept or advances its theory, but because the concept serves to elucidate much that is otherwise obscure in Harris.

I wish to give the word "contradiction" an idiosyncratic scope which will not always agree with the tradition of negative dialectics from which it springs. When I deal with Harris's style, I will take rhetorical contradiction to be sufficiently capacious to admit the varieties of
parataxis which he employs. In considering Harris's narrative, I will put
an even more strenuous construction on the word, seeing its presence in
the movement between states of dream and waking, death and life, oppression
and resistance, ruin and origin. It is there also in the antinomies
established between the various stages of journeying by which Harris
enacts the dialogic history of the peoples he describes. So, too, in
the chapters on character and on community, I will examine Harris's experi­
mental treatment of the individual and society, both in and out of the
Caribbean, through contradictions which may have no name or function in
the theories which contemporary received wisdom has devised for the study
of marginal cultures. One of my chief claims for Harris's importance
will rest upon his development of a unique voice by which he articulates
the contradictions of a divided world by making small or else subversive
recourse to traditions which have been responsible for that division.
Having once developed this voice, Harris begins, in his more recent
novels, to turn it upon alien landscapes to produce a new and rich
resonance. I will argue that he has been able to do this only through
his commitment to experimentation and despite the difficulties that
commitment has necessarily generated. If Harris is difficult, it is
because he has found simple reportage wanting; if he is obscure, it is
because the lucidity which other writers have brought to bear on the
problems he confronts has been unequal to the task of addressing the
contradictions of marginality.

If contradiction generates difficulty, it also generates meaning.
This is why—and not only because he deals in symbols—I have chosen to
speak of Harris's "symbolic" experimentation. If I have laboured the
issue of contradiction it is because the paradoxes which reside in that
theory bear a significant relation to Harris's own theories of experiment
in fiction. I speak advisedly of his theories, since he has nowhere advanced a synoptical poetics of the genre, having chosen, as with his novels, to show himself by degrees. It is to these theories that we may now turn, bearing in mind that although their sources are statements Harris has made in critical essays, addresses and interviews, they form only the scaffolding of the novels. The present chapter, therefore, is a preparation for those which follow, chapters in which this scaffolding will be assumed to have been dismantled but not forgotten. This is perhaps a perilous assumption, because Harris has developed over the years an idiosyncratic vocabulary of description and analysis, a vocabulary itself responsible on occasion for allegations of obscurity. In fact, the reader armed with patience and memory will find that its construction admirably serves Harris's purpose of bringing to light resources concealed within the folds of conventional discourse.

ii) Harris on Experiment

An early essay, "Art and Criticism," will serve to introduce Harris's fragmentary aesthetic. Published in 1951 in the Guyanese journal, Kyk-over-al, it is a slight piece of some five pages, but containing as it does the seeds of ideas Harris was to develop later in more substantial essays, it may be taken as a kind of exemplar. The essay begins by recalling a "very important contribution to criticism of art" made by Engels and later reaffirmed by Georg Lukács. Before we are served the contribution, Harris, in a characteristic and illustrative gesture, has already dug in his heels. The contribution, he reminds us, "reacts with poetic justice on many of the theories of Lukács himself" (p. 7).
Then he proceeds once more: the contribution "is that creative work may, and often does, have entirely different meanings to what the author hopes, and may be the exact opposite of his subjective idealism or the mechanical idealism of his time." Nevertheless, beside these idealisms, "an objective process exists, a secret form or tradition, which yields itself, fragmentarily perhaps, but decisively as time goes on." Already the Harrisian hermetic caveat has come to be inscribed in the material, not in opposition to that materialism, but rather as a reminder that the objective is not to be taken as only the outward.

A "new architecture" (p. 8) is needed, Harris maintains, to supplant the pitiful classical order of things; between human passion and the given order and morality, a great gulf is fixed. Marxism and existentialism are attempts to bridge this gulf, "the first concerning itself with mechanical necessity, the second with subjective fate," but the identity they seek, that objective process, constantly eludes them. For this process is in fact a disruption of the purely "subjective" and the purely "mechanical": it exists in the space where their separate forces meet, "in the association of life and environment" (p. 9). This association is a "deep process immensely altering or breaking the shape of things..." for,

the impact of the human mind and body on the hard world, in constructing something and destroying something has a unity or combination that is both secret and plain, immaterial and material, showing forth the power of passion, the limits and order of being.

There follows a glancing treatment of American poetry, chosen because of its "natural daring beyond the statistical rectitude of exhausted or bloodless passions" (pp. 9-10), at the start of which Harris is once more detained. He is reminded of a school of West Indian art which
idealizes the sun. This he finds curious, "an American attitude, American idealism." The surveyor in him responds:

I have lived for long periods in savannahs so much exposed to heat and fire, that the sun has become an adversary—one of two antagonistic principles—night and day—and only an association of these two principles provides release.

What is needed, Harris contends, is an "architecture of release," and in the American poets he has chosen, he finds "an overwhelming ordeal without release." He concludes that although this poetry is "one of the arts where America has consciously and unconsciously held a mirror to the contradictions of society and the individual," it is still "burdened by the continuation of classical idealisms" (p. 12). It has not learnt the principles of the new architecture, one of which is that "life in its essential contradiction is art: it is the deep unconscious humour of carnival."

The reader who finds this brief essay burdened, through some critical equivalent of Engels's wisdom, by a continuation of romantic idealisms, is barking up the wrong tree. For, what is of interest here is not a residual nostalgia for meaning at the heart of things but the positing of an objective identity in the interests of heterogeneity. This otherness deflates the totalities of the "subjective" as well as the "mechanical," even as its aesthetic extension denies the value of endless oblations at the shrine of the whole, or else repeated testimonies to the ordeal of society's contradictions. The new architecture is not one which mimes the given or "classical" order of things or else parodies the hollowness of that order, but one which experimentally disrupts that order through constant reminders of its inherent friability. Only by this assumption does Harris speak of an emerging classicism, one with its roots in a carnival which does mischief to solemn order. Not the overt but the
underground contradictions of life are the model of this art. Harris's metaphor is a telling one: the new architecture which would bring the forms that are bound in a principle of subjection, genuinely into the light of day, without cruel suffering, must find truly that the sun has no stationary hold over its subjects like a feudal lord over his serfs (p. 10).

The language of these statements is necessarily private, but it clothes in turn a desire to make its workings public. "Each one of us, I believe," says Harris in a gesture of laying bare, "has to expose his personal method, to challenge the originality of other minds" (FR p. 14). Harris's own originality begins with the assumption of originality in others; to return this courtesy might seem incumbent on us. Moreover, to take his experimentalism for granted is to avoid rehearsing the customary distinctions between the old and the "new" novel, distinctions which are hardly peculiar to Harris, and to concentrate on the more important task of discriminating between the conventional new and Harris's own work. Nevertheless, it must be said that Harris's battle with the "demon of realism" amounts to something of an obsession, if clearly not a possession. If Harris and his early interpreters tended to harp on this anti-mimetic theme, they were right to do so in a critical (and British) climate largely hostile to formal experimentation. For my part I have wished, in a chapter on experiment, to isolate a sufficient though not necessary contradiction to symbolism upon which Harris's own theories might react.

Harris's classic statement of his position is his lecture, "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," delivered before the London West Indian Students' Union in 1964. In this remarkable address, to which I will return more than once in the chapters which follow, he distinguishes the "novel of persuasion" from the "epic and revolutionary novel of associations," and sees the former as resting "on grounds of apparent common sense" and a certain consolidating "selection of items, manners, uniform conversation,
historical situations, etc." (p. 29). This selection is justifiable in the nineteenth century novel, where it coincides with "states of society which were involved in consolidating their class and other vested interests," but to the pale literary successors of that novel Harris seeks to counterpose a "native tradition of depth" (p. 31). The consolidating drive wants for its literary reconstitution a reflective tissue which the native tradition of "landscape-in-depth" rejects. Reflection, says Harris in another place, "is built into a passive order of the imagination which possesses its own marvels of exactitude though to reify it absolutely is to submit to a straitjacket of tradition..." (RV p. 15). The native tradition will not make this mistake, and once again Harris cites Lukács, who points out that a simple affirmation of classical tradition is not enough. And he says a renewal of the classical form can only come by repudiating much in the historical apparatus of the novel or as he puts it in Hegel's words 'in the form of a negation of a negation' (TW p. 42).

Harris's own negation is his experimentation (a matter in which he is more consistent than Lukács), and he takes his fellow writers to task for their formal timidity:

it is one of the ironic things with West Indians of my generation that they may conceive of themselves in the most radical political light but their approach to art and literature is one which consolidates the most conventional and documentary techniques in the novel. In fact many of the great Victorians--Ruskin, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dickens in Bleak House, for example, where a strange kinship emerges with the symbolism of both Poe and Kafka--are revolutionaries who make the protestations of many a contemporary radical look like a sham and a pose. The fact is--even when sincerely held political radicalism is merely a fashionable attitude unless it is accompanied by profound insights into the experimental nature of the arts and the sciences (p. 46).

So Harris finds that the work of a writer like V.S. Naipaul "serves ultimately to consolidate one's preconceptions of humanity, the comedy
of pathos and the pathos of comedy," thus remaining "a persuasion of
singular and pathetic enlightenment rather than a tragic centrality,
or a capacity for plural forms of a profound identity" (p. 40). In a
recent interview, he ascribes this to Naipaul's ironic detachment:

Naipaul it would seem to me is a brilliant writer whose position
is that of a spectator. I don't sense in his work a profound
immersion in the elements he describes. Thus his work seems
to me to conform much more to a kind of brilliant journalism.22

And towards the end of the same interview, he remarks that

very many novels which claim to be realist fasten on catastrophe,
they see only that. They're purely spectatorial novels, and
they simply inspect the catastrophe and they have no sense of
the life running through it, or of the regenerative seed that
can come out of it (WH p. 29).

When he turns to George Lamming, Harris is again dissatisfied, though
he recognizes Lamming's own growing impatience with conventional forms.
These forms are a kind of tyranny, but one which the early Lamming
has chosen:

in terms of the ruling framework he accepts, the individual-
ity of character, the distinctions of status and privilege
which mark one individual from another, must be maintained.
This is the kind of realism, the realism of classes and
classifications...the novel, in its orthodox mould, demands
(TW p. 38).

More recently, in the same interview from which I have just quoted,
Harris finds that Lamming

quite clearly...is not content with the shape of the novel,
the English shape of the novel. And thus you see various
thrusts and perspectives coming in which would suggest that
the sort of disintegrations which occur in the novel are
themselves the threshold for something else (WH p. 23).

This "something else" is the literary figuration, through "apparent
gaps, angularities, turbulences, opacities" (CP p. 143), of that principle
of heterogeneity, that objective identity at the intersection of the
subjective and the mechanical, whose existence the Harrisian novel
celebrates. Since the disintegrations Harris speaks of do not constitute this otherness so much as form its precondition, the larger claims of formalism collapse. For if simple realism will not wash, mere "extravagance of pattern" washes perhaps too readily. It is here that we begin to see Harris discriminate among experimentalisms. In the same way as realism the style entails realism the positivist world view, experimentalism the action must modify its object by perceiving it anew in and through its exploration. Without this always fragmentary production of its "knowledge," experimentation can slip all too easily into the parodic mode, which, anti-mimetic as it may well be, "represents" a certain vicariousness whose quality is caught by Harris when, quoting deftly, he suggests that "the practitioners of the art of the absurd...may themselves merely 'stiffen in a rented room'" (B p. 26). Parodic experimentalism, for all its sombre—or else frivolous—strategies of disavowal, becomes an escape route which may well prove the best of two worlds and permit a skilful shortcircuiting of a real crisis or confrontation in depth. The art in short not of alienation as it is popularly called but of insulation (UC p. 44).

To this pretence, even the ambiguous civilities of realism are preferable, and in fact Harris's criticism shows him quite as appreciative of realistic novels, so long as their mimeticism is not the product of an obsessive ironic detachment, as he is of their anti-mimetic counterparts. So, his taste in fiction runs to novelists as widely removed as a measured Patrick White and a "problematic" Amos Tutuola, with a diversity of experimental writers in between, from Latin American magic realists such as Márquez, Carpentier and Asturias, to French or English new novelists such as Claude Simon and B.S. Johnson. In none of these writers is either the conservation or the disruption of form canonized.
For Harris, then a wilful fracturing of language is not experiment enough; it must consort with "a certain explosion of a subjective order of experience...which unsettles to an extent the stable or objective illusion of the world..." (SM p. 68). His rejection of both formalist and realist exclusivities is explicit:

the breakthrough of the 'experimental' writer...will instinctively divest itself not only of 'intellectual pastime' or 'self-indulgence' but of every kind of exclusive and one-sided consolidation, though in this element of freedom there may well be intrusions of obscurity like constructive but hidden agents in a dismantling process (SM p. 66).

The obscurity Harris allows, in his theory as in his practice, now comes to show its fettle. It is a productive, not a perverse, distortion of language which figuratively deploys the experience of the unconscious against the given order of things whose outer armour is a given order of language. Neither order is sacrosanct: this was Nietzsche's point when he scoffed that we have lost God but still believe in grammar.23

If Harris's obscurity is not perverse, neither are his clarities portentous. The symbolic dissonance which identifies his score is a reminder that what these symbols do matters more than what they traditionally mean. So far from conveying one swiftly to a realm of unchanging meaning, they serve, by their surreal yokings and unyokings, to budge old meanings and substitute experimental ones. Confronted with an ideology of barrenness, symbolic experimentation demonstrates through its contradictory techniques that psychological and cultural disintegration do not signify an end to meaning. Harris offers an example:
I could illustrate this best by referring to a novel by Juan Rulfo called *Pedro Péramo* in which you do have a world that is collapsing, disintegrating, but what is strange about that novel is that the life of the psyche is so intense that it moves through that shell of a world—in other words the stubborn structure is cloven. And the psyche therefore moves so that even though the world that has been depicted remains bleak, there is a curious power there, a wildness that witnesses to the possibilities of life, and the whole structure of the fiction is therefore quite different (WH p. 23).

Instead of ceaselessly lamenting, or drily satirizing, the oppression and the barrenness of the Caribbean past and present, and the havoc these have wrought on the individual consciousness, one must "creatively descend into the disorder of it, suffer creatively the disorder of it" (UC p. 44).

A resource the experimental novelist shares with the inarticulate individual in the face of the ideology of historylessness is that carnival undercurrent to devastation which we heard Harris speak of earlier. Against the "homogeneous comedy"--or indeed the homogeneous tragedy, the "monolith of conquest"--of the given, an order lent credence by the "so-called lucid and documentary tactic of the tyrant or demagogue" (NP p. 146), are discharged "clowns of broken realism" (BC p. 45). What is more, such a disturbance can erupt even within the realist novel (and here we see the demon laid):

> because language itself...carries an inverse factor, an unsuspected revolutionary pressure which stands in inverse proportion to obsessive centrality (obsessive animism): thus one may find oneself picking up in fiction—at the heart of sovereign realism itself—a decentralizing, de-escalating *tabula rasa* irony as the serial play, the serial deaths/serial rebirths of a child (the half god, half monster in ourselves) (FP pp. 9-10).

This is Harris's riddling expression of his denial of pure or organic identity to the individual or to history, a denial which subverts not only the liberal or classical conception of either of these entities but also their romantic versions, vestiges of which may seem to recur in his
own work. We begin to grasp his meaning when he declares that "an uncon­scious political irony is in the process of being born within the telling silences of the family of the Word" (RV p. 19). The ritual syntax (and ritual is one of Harris's synonyms for a spectral realism, a spurious reality) of absolute power is being figuratively undone, the grammar of habitual perception going the way of God.

The new grammar is not an escape from history, though it is a denial of the numb, wholly conditioned subject, which is an escape into history. The calamitous past and its debris are available as hollow forms. They exist, says Harris,

in a void and therefore one needs to participate in it... with an art of fiction, an imaginative fluidity that is as close as one can possibly come to existing now, with immediacy, in a form that has already been broken in the past (PL p. 3).

The broken realism of Harris's fiction is the aesthetic equivalent of continuous historical rupture; it is an attempt to capture the style of history by approaching and yet scrambling its contradictions.

It is in this extreme realisation of the contradictory and sometimes terrifying properties of consciousness that one begins to enter a phenomenal tradition which...may affect our approaches to the media of painting, architecture, and sculpture as well as literature (PL p. 1).

Moreover, once one recognizes the contradictory "substance" of reality, one begins to visualise, negatively as it were, heterogeneous forms of social as well as literary association, "one starts to concede, and enter upon those alternative realities ('phenomenal legacy') which may lead to a new scale or illumination of the meaning of 'community'" (PL p. 3).

Realism, writes Harris, lives by "simplifications of experience." Its converse form, a self-referential experimentalism, and especially the theory of that form, stand in constant danger of erring on the other side. The extraordinary self-consciousness of the one and the highly
theoretical anti-empiricism of the other are fraught with the peril of all desanctification: they reify themselves into a new sufficiency, a substitute virtuality. So, the literature desirous of re-forming realism and the theory designed to criticize reification become in their turn a single formalist effigy by something like that "tactic of fascism which battens on fear of contrasts" (NP p. 144). Against this uniformity there endures the heterogeneity of experience, and not least the "lived otherness" of culturally dissimilar experience. Of this experience, Harris's "landscape" is a model, just as his "imagination" is a metaphor not of a return to some romantic capitalization of the Subject but of the individual's experience of that landscape. Harris's experimentalism resides in his readiness to join the one to the other.

The self-referential experimentalist will court and at length capitulate to theory; examples of this melancholy fate abound. Harris has had the good sense to skirt the theoretic snare; indeed, it is exhilarating to find in his fiction discoveries or at least assumptions which theorists did not come upon for themselves until another season. His advances are the product of a great experimental virtue, namely, risk: the experimental novelist is unafraid of saying the wrong thing. In this he is an example to the critic who lives in constant terror of falling victim to the very cutting edge he so keenly hones. No contemporary critic would allow himself to speak in these "nostalgic" tones:

One could think of the instinct of a bird, a bird that flies with uncanny orientation from one area of the world to another. On a higher level you begin to see an element of faith, and faith can mutate at a higher level into what one calls risk. These are all irrational formations. But once one can sense that one's reason and one's logic have their roots in such layers of irrationality, one is constantly aware that the gifts of nature are gifts which one must accept, and which one must prize. One must have the faith
to accept what one is given in the midst of a world that may seem shattered and dangerous. And those gifts all the time relate to the continuing act of creation, which goes through the obstacles that surround us (WH p. 25).

It is precisely Harris's willingness to take risks that is responsible for his astonishing power as a novelist.

The critic's prescriptions, then, are a kind of imposition, and one which the experimental writer properly resents, if he is listening at all. Here lies the paradox of writing about such fiction: for even when one describes rather than prescribing, one is setting up expectations, and the experimental novel lives by upsetting expectations. More hopeless still is proscription. When B.S. Johnson declared passionately that "telling stories is telling lies," and set up truth over against fiction, he was calling despite himself for a neo-realism, that is, the coupling of an experimental technique with a facticity that takes the real, or verifiable "truth," on its own terms. More than this, he would have disqualified those fictions which might include stories as part of their experimental strategy from inclusion in the novel canon, whose very concept he was at pains to spike. To allow story-telling is not to embrace uncritically all the implications of Forster's celebrated "oh dear, yes," but simply to refrain from setting boundaries to writing. Such stories do figure in Harris's novels; to speak classically, there is the imitation of an action, though its unities are severely violated. Experiment is by its nature a breaking of rules, and Johnson's own novels are fine examples of this recalcitrance.

It is now nearly ten years since Johnson published his short list of novelists—including Harris—whom he saw as mattering on the British scene. While it is dangerous to make discriminations within discriminations, one may hazard the opinion that while the recent work of many of
these writers reveals an enviable amplitude, few of them have experimented with Harris's linguistic daring, and certainly none has evolved so original and striking a style. I will turn to an examination of this style in the following chapter; for the present it remains to scotch a non sequitur.

Formalism may well have overreached itself: the parodist has become a kind of platitudinarian, and defamiliarization has become so familiar (if not plain) that Pound's old cry of "Make it New" has met its echo in John Gardner's "Postmodernism means New! Improved!" To the extent that Gardner's moral reaction is a reproof delivered to the intransitive, monadic avantgarde, it is justified. But this should give no handle to contemporary traditionalists who wish to dodge all experiment and malinger amid the arts of a Victorian fiction which served its own period without anachronism. The call for a return to established values is rarely disinterested, and it rings loudest in high places:

What is 'Modernism'? The barbarous Latin word modernus (from modo, 'just now') occurs first in the sixth century....

In art we all know what 'Modernism' means. It prides itself on a repudiation of all traditions and all accepted canons of beauty, and shows an affinity both with the naive artistic attempts of savages, and with the newest proletarianism in Russia. A modernist painter will cover his canvas with zigzags or depict a woman with green hair...These phenomena are clearly pathological....

How easily our contemporaries allow themselves to be brow-beaten by this puppyism!....

I have not read Ulysses or any of the works of D.H. Lawrence, so I must not speak of them; but there are others who seem to take a pleasure in tearing away all veils. I confess that I copied the bishop whom I referred to just now, and threw my copy of one of them into the Adriatic....

If the matter were not so tragic, one might smile at the notion that the most deeply-rooted racial habits--religion, private ownership, the family and patriotism--can be uprooted in one generation by a gang of revolutionaries.
Russia, if I am not mistaken, has been through the fever, and is coming out into something more like her old self. I have no doubt that cubism and futurism and most of vers libre will soon pass into limbo.26

The voice is that of the Very Reverend W.R. Inge, delivering his presidential address before the English Association in 1937. It is easy to smile at past vexations; if those who inveigh against postmodernism today are less shrill, it is because a certain sophistication in matters of newness prevents them, and indeed permits yet another call for a return to "realistic" meaning. As I have argued, the cultural and critical evolution of these words has rendered them adaptable, so that a little bending will allow "realism" versus "experiment" to signify an opposition between meaning and unmeaning, and to obscure the fact that the pursuit of meaning is intimately bound up with experiment.

Harris has spoken of the kind of writer who "sets out again and again across a certain territory of primordial but broken recollection in search of a community or species of fiction whose existence he begins to discern" (TW p. 48). We may see in this metaphor traces of Harris's experience as a surveyor during the years he spent mapping parts of the interior of Guyana, but it is primarily the statement of a novelist's faith, for all novels worth the name are explorations.
II. Experiment and Language

The reader who takes up one of Harris's novels for the first time will not go far before being struck by a certain peculiarity in the shape of the sentences. It is this peculiarity and its attendant complications which I wish to examine here. So, if I speak of "Experiment and Language," it is not because I propose elsewhere to consider Harris's experiments in any other medium. It is simply that I will treat here the lower reaches of the fiction, those narrower orders of its writing which are part of, but do not in themselves constitute, form. I might equally have spoken of "Experiment and Style," but style is a vexed issue.¹ There is better agreement about the nature of language; besides, Harris has some interesting things to say of it and very little except rudeness for "style."

"Literary style" even today evokes writing with a "finish," in more than one sense of the word. The traditional complaint against style finds the lustre of its surface a distraction from the meaning beneath, the manner from the matter. The propositions of contemporary semiology have silenced this particular grievance by calling into question the distinction between form and content,² though in practice the couple live happily on. The other sense of "finish," that of completeness, meets a like objection. The literary text, so far from being sufficient unto itself is, after all (and this is not an insight which wanted semiotics)³ an inert quantity requiring a reader for its realisation. Existing as a virtuality, it must be produced anew each time. So, although style would seem to be vindicated by the judgement that there is nothing but style, its popular
reading is one that cannot seem to adjust to the incompleteness of "language" without a loss of face.

If, however, we can bring ourselves to see style as the production of language in the same way that reading is a production of the text, we have no reason to abandon the concept on such trivial grounds. For if writing is a material practice, then to confront style is to confront the physicality of language. It is part of the lesson that we learn from this encounter that the action of language may be quite as intriguing as its meaning, and indeed is the meaning. Read correctly, style is the profile of language in action, and the effects of this action need be no less significant than its motives.

These are some facets of Harris's language that I will examine: the work of his works. Such an approach has its limitations, and it may be that our present absorption in the mechanism of meaning reflects a revulsion against an endless supply of commodities, not excluding literary commodities, and an archaic longing to grasp once more the functioning of things. The relationship between the how of a work and its what or why, then, will not here be one of subordination or exclusion: it is a poor wisdom which knows the clockwork but cannot tell the time. But this realisation in no way diminishes the perils of a purely explicatory approach which either advances empirically or, entertaining loftier scientific ambitions, hopes to fashion a Casaubonish Key by which a difficult style may be opened and all perplexities resolved.

To proceed so, by effusions or by grids, is in a sense to betray the text. To render it into expository prose by anticipating its patterns, restoring its rhythms to normality, taking stock of its surprises, in short, naturalising it, is to nullify its challenge to our habits of
reading. If, instead of thus translating the style, we learn its language, we may extend our style of knowing as well as our knowledge of style, for Harris's syntactical strategies are often also heuristic ones. Further, by refusing to transpose his tonalities into a simpler key, we respect the original by never seeming to excuse what we would explain. We also secure our apprehension of the text in the mode of the text's apprehension of the world.

In Harris's fictions, this knowledge is one of strange and sometimes savage complexity; to tame it would be to do it harm. In the first place, it is not, or not principally, a question of grammatical complexity. Unlike the Proustian sentence, which is endlessly proliferated but always accessible, Harris's sentences are usually "simple" and yet semantically difficult. Theirs is a state which will sometimes approach that fourth and last type of difficulty which George Steiner has distinguished, where "the contract of ultimate or preponderant intelligibility between poet and reader, between text and meaning" is breached. This difficulty is evident in a great deal of modernist and postmodernist writing, though its seductions are neither universally entertained nor altogether new. Besieged by such difficulty, "we bear witness," says Steiner, "to the precarious possibility of existence in an 'open' space of collisions, or momentary fusions between word and referent." In this fragile moment, one may find pleasure of another order and duration, but no less real than that which the Proustian sentence yields.

There may be pleasure in difficulty; more often there is displeasure. We do not as a rule relish bafflement, although if this is true there is an element of masochism in our remorseless and conspicuous consumption of much postmodern literature. Certainly, there is no virtue in difficulty.
To admire Harris because he is difficult would be a singular piece of childishness, but to revile him because he is difficult is no maturity. Unreserved praise may well have given reaction a cause: the critic who professes to be unmoved by such devotion is always at hand with a trump card of unspeakable simplicity, and such contests are invariably dull. On one of his earliest appearances in print, Harris was reproached for inhabiting "a wordy metaphysical world of his own making." We shall have to examine the justice of this charge (and there is some) to see whether part of its impatience does not derive from a failure to grasp the strategies of Harris's prose. In fact, difficulty is simply a tactical weapon in Harris's work; its deployment represents a kind of mining of the fictional terrain. Nor is this deployment unrelenting, for the decorum of a contradictory style is precisely its refusal of the wholly obscure along with the utterly plain. It is no coincidence that the informing principle of Harris's "new architecture" is asymmetry, a principle whose contours appear first at the level of the line. The decorum of asymmetry is a curious paradox, but not one without precedence. It ends, as we shall see, by undoing the very concept of decorum.

In a review of Harris's novel, Companions of the Day and Night, the British poet, Martin Seymour-Smith, has made a crisp assessment of the novelist's style. "There is," he states simply, "no rhetoric." The implications of this laconic judgement are immense and its function pivotal. With one stroke it lays bare the workings of Harris's experimentalism and distinguishes his practice from that writing which practises either on the reader or on itself. Yet, as a judgement it must immediately be qualified. Strictly, the only novel which is unrhetorical is the aleatory one which comes to its reader loose-leaved in a box, and even there one is hostage to the page. All writing, even the most formless, shows a
minimum of authorial control, and we would do well to guard against immaculate conceptions of literary style. Harris's novels have, of course, a rhetorical quotient, to the degree that any work may be said to have a design, that is, a shape and purpose. It is when shape bows to purpose that a novel becomes unequivocally rhetorical. For it is then that the author's self-consciousness becomes acute and eventually coy. And since the knowing self is here wholly in control, rhetorical experimentation is scarcely experimentation at all. It knows its effects before they are caused, or, to put it another way, it is certain of the causes of its effects.

By "rhetoric," therefore, I intend an excessive designing in the use of language, a meaning which Seymour-Smith doubtless had in mind. Where this designing is either severely reduced or deliberately thwarted, it becomes possible to speak of a rhetoric of unrhetoric, a writing that is worked and yet unwrought. It is true that writing represents a decisive action, that style is, in Susan Sontag's words, "the signature of the artist's will." Even so, there is room for an unconsciousness in the creative use of language which does not advertise itself as automatic handwriting. As Sontag goes on to remark, this arbitrariness dogs the critic who insists that a work of art could not have been other than it is: "every artist, when it comes to his own work, remembering the role of chance, fatigue, external distractions, knows what the critic says to be a lie..." (p. 33). To this company of men from Porlock one might add randomness and happenstance, if no longer divine afflatus. Harris himself insains on the intuitive as existing alongside the conscious:

My approaches to such a residue of experience [as we all share] --I cannot overemphasise this--are not intellectual, but rather part of a hard and continuous wrestling within the medium of my own work, a process more akin to something active and unpredictable rather than planned and theoretical (PL pp. 1-2).
Not surprisingly, when Harris does mention rhetoric, it is usually coupled with a pejorative: "nightmare rhetoric" (FJ p. 41), "rhetoric and sterility" (SL p. 206), "ruin and rhetoric" (AO p. 124). In a declarative mood he will pin his faith on "an art of the imagination based on concentration and intuition rather than formula or rhetoric" (MT p. 39). This concentration must be recognized, for it is easy to misread Harris's refusal of rhetoric as an excuse for carelessness. Among the conscious ways in which traditional rhetoric is flouted are the obvious admission of inelegance or the deliberate use of cliché, not to speak of those spontaneous irrelevancies which appear from time to time and whose function we shall examine in due course. Finally, there is the notorious opacity of the language, its ambiguities ranged in the farther reaches of Empson's schema, but serving to complicate rather than to mystify. For this reason, complexity is perhaps a better word than the obscurity sometimes imputed to Harris, since it will admit of an urge to communicate, if not always in the language of the tribe. Language, Harris seems to say, already has its own rhetoric besides and other than the "persuasions" of the author's authority. But the laws of this rhetoric are of a volatile nature, their rule a kind of misrule because

the concept of language is one which continually transforms inner and outer formal categories of experience, earlier and representative modes of speech itself, the still life resident in painting and sculpture as such, even music which one ceases to 'hear'--the peculiar reality of language provides a medium to see in consciousness the 'free' motion and to hear with consciousness the 'silent' flood of sound by a continuous inward revisionary and momentous logic of potent explosive images evoked in the mind (TW p. 32).

We may now observe this language at work in Harris's first novel, Palace of the Peacock (1960). The novel is a variation on the quest for El Dorado, its principals a crew of dead men, the motley pickings of race
and time. Captain to this crew is a rancher of "terrible stamping" energy, the horseman of that opening fragment with which we saw Harris begin his novelistic career. Deserted by his Amerindian workers and shot by the mistress he cruelly used, his ghost now leads an expedition upriver in pursuit of the fugitive folk. But the woman, Mariella, has become an enigma, both a place and a people, and pressing beyond the Mission, the crew learn some truths about the nature of desire and power before reliving their former deaths. Imperilled by rocks and rapids, and musing on their sundry obsessions, the men come finally to a waterfall which overhangs their graves on Sorrow Hill. Mounting ladders set in the face of the cliff, they climb past windows which open onto a beatific vision. They have reached the Palace of the Peacock. Then they fall to deaths which no longer matter, for all are caught up in the music of the peacock's dance.

This is the "dreaming skeleton" of the story told by Donne's brother, who stands within him and relives the entire expedition as he poros over the map of the savannahs. His roll-call of the men as they set out is a good example of Harris's supple and yet quicksilver prose:

The crew swarmed like upright spiders, half-naked, scrambling under a burden of cargo they were carrying ashore. First I picked and counted the daSilva twins of Sorrow Hill, thin, long-legged, fair-skinned, of Portuguese extraction. Then I spotted old Schomburgh, also of Sorrow Hill, agile and swift as a monkey for all his seasoned years. Donne prized Schomburgh as a bowman, the best in all the world his epitaph boasted and read. There was Vigilance, black-haired, Indian, sparkling and shrewd of eye, reading the river's mysterious book. Vigilance had recommended Carroll, his cousin, a thick-set young Negro boy gifted with his paddle as if it were a violin and a sword together in paradise. My eye fell on Cameron, brick-red face, slow feet, faster than a snake in the forest with his hands; and Jennings, the mechanic, young solemn-featured, carved out of still wood it seemed, sweating the still dew of his tears, cursing and reproving his whirling engine and toy in the unearthly terrifying grip in the water. Last I counted Wishrop, assistant bowman and captain's understudy (PP pp. 22-23).
When they have lifted their craft out of the water, the crew arm themselves with prospecting knives to cut a line of portage through the forest.

A wild visionary prospect. The sun glowed upon a mass of vegetation that swarmed in crevices of rocky nature until the stone yielded and turned a green spongy carpet out of which emerged enormous trunks and trees from the hidden dark earth beneath and beyond the sun.

The solid wall of trees was filled with ancient blocks of shadow and with gleaming hinges of light. Wind rustled the leafy curtains through which masks of living beard dangled as low as the water and the sun. My living eye was stunned by inversions of the brilliancy and the gloom of the forest in a deception and hollow and socket (p. 26).

Already the reader will have become aware of the contradictory, oscillating quality of this prose: its frequent recourse to antithesis (Schomburgh's age yet his monkey's agility, Cameron's slow feet yet his snaking hands, Jennings, carved out of still wood, reproving his whirling engine); its Metaphysical couplings, as with Carroll's paddle or Jenning's "engine and toy"; its startling inversions of darkness and light, bulk and cavity, up and down. The topography of the language shapes by "hinge" and "mask," those deceptions of landscape and human presence the dreamer senses. With equal disdain, its tactile and visual prodigality (notice the recurrence of "swarmed" and "swarming" in the two passages) gives and takes away.

For all their clarity, the images this poet-turned-novelist deploys do not function to consolidate or reflect or even to represent, for each exists by virtue of that to which it is joined. The poet Harris had explained it in this way: "We might juxtapose 'heaven' with 'roots' or 'jungles'--TROPIC OF HEAVEN...to bring into sharp focus the disturbance created by opposing conditions" (FR p. 15). And many years later, the novelist retained this conviction:
the convolutions of image, whether clear or grotesque, are related as diverse rooms, capacities expanding or contracting within one field of consciousness. To prise these images apart is in fact to lose the dialectical field in which they stand or move (WS p. 55).

The effect of these laminations of image is a density that one ordinarily associates with concrete poetry, but its function goes beyond what Shklovsky called "making the stone stony." To say this is not to shrug away the experience of Shklovsky's (or indeed Dr. Johnson's) stone in the name of anti-empiricism, but to preserve a certain skepticism about the formal completeness of the world. The compaction Harris repeatedly invokes is a kind of searching out of the "peculiar gaps or holes in the solid material" consistent with a "fiction of implosion" (WS p. 49). And since there is no way by which the resources discovered there can be described except by analogy with the images that are cast up out of the unconscious, the writer seeks to capture these prior to their domestication by rhetoric. What issues from this "expressionistic void of place and time" (SI p. 38), is a prose of neither absences nor objects but of objects in motion. Not surprisingly, their state is expressed in the language of mysticism: "The sun rolled in the grasses waving in the wind and grew on the solitary tree" (p. 144).

Even when the prose is still, its stillness is charged with an energy which derives from its adjacencies. The image is no longer simply the representation of something in the world but of a space surrounding that thing and of the relationship of that thing to another. Seeking, as so often, to explain this relationship in local terms, Harris alights on the Arawak *zemi* or icon, which he takes to designate perspectives eclipsed by the debris of conventional West Indian "history" and ideology. Seen in this light, the *zemi* comes to challenge the category of simple identity
and to "image" a network of relationships about that seeming sufficiency. The result is a prose of continuous flux which seeks to convey not so much the shape as the process of a nature whose constant is change. This becomes particularly noticeable when the pace of Harris's prose accelerates.

In the following passage, the crew drive on above Mariella, having found it deserted except for an ancient Arawak woman they press into service as a guide.

Her race was a vanishing one overpowered by the fantasy of a Catholic as well as a Protestant invasion. This cross she had forgiven and forgotten in an earlier dream of distant centuries and a returning to the Siberian unconscious pilgrimage in the straits where life had possessed and abandoned at the same time the apprehension of a facile beginning and ending. An unearthly pointlessness was her true manner, an all-inclusive manner that still contrived to be—as a duck sheds water from its wings—the negation of every threat of conquest and of fear—every shade of persecution wherein was drawn and mingled the pursuer and pursued alike, separate and yet one and the same person. It was a vanishing and yet a starting race in which long eternal malice and wrinkled self-defence and the cruel pursuit of the folk were turning into universal protection and intuition and that harmonious rounded miracle of spirit which the world of appearances had never truly known.

Before the sun was much higher we were in the grip of the straits of memory. The sudden dreaming fury of the stream was naught else but the ancient spit of all flying insolence in the voiceless and terrible humility of the folk. Tiny embroideries resembling the handwork on the Arawak woman's kerchief and the wrinkles on her brow turned to incredible and fast breakers of foam. Her crumpled bosom and river grew agitated with desire, bottling and shaking every fear and inhibition and outcry. The ruffles in the water were her dress rolling and rising to embrace the crew. This sudden insolence of soul rose and caught them from the powder of her eyes and the age of her smile and the dust in her hair all flowing back upon them with silent streaming majesty and abnormal youth and in a wave of freedom and strength.

The crew were transformed by the awesome spectacle of a voiceless soundless motion, the purest appearance of vision in the chaos of emotional sense. Earthquake and volcanic water appeared to seize them and stop their ears dashing the scales only from their eyes. They saw the naked unequivocal flowing peril and beauty and soul of
the pursuer and the pursued all together, and they knew they would perish if they dreamed to turn back (pp. 72-73).

Here we begin to see Harris's prose enact the contradictions it seeks to convey. First, it roundly declares conquistadorial adventures, old and new, a "fantasy." Then it sets up a series of paradoxes: an apprehension "possessed and abandoned"; pursuer and pursued as "separate and yet one and the same person"; a race "vanishing and yet starting." Having called into question time ("beginning and end") and space ("the world of appearances") and absorbed both of these in an "unearthly pointlessness" and "all-inclusive manner" born of the Arawak woman's dream memory of the Amerindians' first coming, the writing proceeds to demonstrate the strategies of this productive remembering.

Immediately the boat is swept into "the straits of memory," outlines begin to lose their value. An image—that of a handkerchief—is recalled from the past (it and its associations have figured in the two previous pages), and "spit," "handwork," "embroideries," "crumpled," "ruffles," "powder," and "dust" are threaded at random into the prose until river and woman are indistinguishable. In this way, not only does the flow of the language match that of the river (the crew have entered the War Office rapids), it constitutes the mnemonic lesson which is "the negation of every threat of conquest and fear." Once again, the language of mysticism is put to work against the ritual perception of absolute despoliation. It recalls Harris's

landscape-in-depth—the shock of great rapids and complex landscapes and forests—playing through memory to confirm perspectives of imperilled community and creativity reaching back into the Pre-Columbian mists of time (NP p. 149)

and warns against simple documentary readings of history: conquest, we remember, was a "berserk and cannibal realism" (NP p. 148).
The image takes its place, then, within a grammar of disturbance. Its deployment in this way is the rule, not the exception: in each of Harris's novels there is this constant and unpredictable surfacing of fragments from another context, so that the reader's attention is wrenched backwards and forwards through the text. Clearly a rhetoric of sorts is at work here, but if the scattering of the image is not accidental, neither is it a controlled affair, and its haphazard nature serves to disorder the uniform ideology of absolute power.

In seeding his early novels with Jungian symbols of transformation, Harris is again rhetorical, this time in a more deliberate way, but fascinating as the tracing of these symbols may well be, one must not allow the exegetical impulse to obscure their textual function. It is true that Martin Carter, the Guyanese poet, wrote of Harris that "in his work no river is simply a river, no tree merely a tree...Everything is a symbol," but once these rivers and trees have been tallied with their ineffable signifieds, it is still a task to elaborate a theory of their action in the novels. Nor would this work be divorced from meaning; it would, in fact, describe the mechanism of meaning, though perhaps in ways which might modify our conception of the signified.

The very concept of "symbol" might take on a rather different complexion in the West Indian context from that it ordinarily wears if we see in it not a stable eidolon of plenitude but a strategem of carnival deception and unpredictable ingenuity. At the close of one of his essays, Harris introduces what could be the germ of such an aesthetic in a curious passage lodged between two parables:

'What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?'
The elusive question of man's nature, man's inhumanity to man, remains unsolved, symbolic of flesh as well as of stone. The division between man and man is the momentous conceit, the tragic conceit, the tragi-comic conceit which provides life blood to the theatre. We are heavily indebted to this invisible, world-wide capital for a magical economics—the knife-edge of humanity on which we bargain still. In The Black Jacobins, by C.L.R. James, a slave is accused of stealing a pigeon. He denies it. The pigeon is discovered hidden in his shirt. 'Well, well, look at that pigeon. It takes my shirt for a nest.' Through the shirt of another, a master can feel the potatoes which he denies he has stolen. They are not potatoes, he says, they are stones. He is undressed and the potatoes fall to the ground. 'Eh! master. The devil is wicked. Put stones, and look, you find potatoes' (B pp. 26-27).

By this view, the referent of a symbol is neither absent nor brimming with meaning: it is often simply obvious. What is of interest is the relation between its bald reality and the magical, but equally real, line of shifts and ploys which traces it. It is no accident, then, that when Harris speaks of the epic stratagems available to Caribbean artists, he invokes the trickster figure, Anancy:

the rise of the poet or artist incurs a gamble of the soul which is symbolised in the West Indian trickster (the spider or anancy configuration). It is this element of tricksterdom that creates an individual and personal risk absolutely foreign to the conventional sanction of an Old Tribal World: a risk which identifies him (the artist) with the submerged authority of dispossessed peoples but requires of him, in the same token, alchemical resources to conceal, as well as elaborate, a far-reaching order of the imagination which, being suspect, could draw down upon him a crushing burden of censorship in economic or political terms. He stands therefore at the heart of the lie of community and the truth of community (HFM p. 17).

The symbol, which preserved unsullied its capacity to signify a stable and single meaning, is now contaminated by the paradox of lies in truth and truth in lies, so that its function may quite as readily be to deflect as to conceal. And since its deflections may be assisted by the immediate presence of others, it is the concatenation of these,
the clash of symbols, as it were, which commands our attention and works on the subconscious, that is, is read, before we can reach for our dictionaries of hermetic wisdom.  

Consider this passage which occurs in the final pages of Palace of the Peacock:

I saw the tree in the distance wave its arms and walk when I looked at it through the spiritual eye of the soul. First it shed its leaves sudden and swift as if the gust of the wind that blew had ripped it almost bare. The bark and wood turned to lightning flesh and the sun which had been suspended from its head rippled and broke into stars that stood where the shattered leaves had been in the living wake of the storm. The enormous starry dress it now wore spread itself all around into a full majestic gown from which emerged the intimate column of a neck, face and hands, and twinkling feet. The stars became peacock's eyes, and the great tree of flesh and blood swirled into another stream that sparkled with divine feathers where the neck and the hands and the feet had been nailed (p. 146).

The tree here would seem to bear out Carter's claim: it is more than a tree. The nailed hands and feet make that plain, and indeed one might, if inclined, find other significances in the passage which do not appear within the text. But surely the most zealous of diviners and the most spartan of binarists might be persuaded that the writing is in the first place pleasurable? To begin at once to hunt for nodules of wisdom cunningly sown in the furrows of the text is to seek examples of its craft rather than its craftsmanship. This is not to ignore the fact that one inevitably brings to a book systems of knowledge that are extrinsic to it, or even to forget that there are limits (usually of world enough and time) to one's rapture. It is simply to require that we attend first to the writing, upon which we discover that a good measure of our delight springs from those metamorphoses which the language undergoes before our eyes, from its collisions, disintegrations and remakings, in short from its surfaces rather than from its depths.
This action is even more graphically rendered by the next two paragraphs.

Carroll was whistling. A solemn and beautiful cry—unlike a whistle I reflected—deeper and mature. Nevertheless his lips were framed to whistle and I could only explain the difference by assuming the sound from his lips was changed when it struck the window and issued into the world. It was an organ cry almost and yet quite different I reflected again. It seemed to break and mend itself always—tremulous, forlorn, distant, triumphant, the echo of sound so pure and outlined in space it broke again into a mass of music.

The dark notes rose everywhere, so dark, so sombre, they broke into a fountain—light as the rainbow—sparkling and immaterial as invisible sources and echoes. The savannahs grew lonely as the sea and broke again into a wave and forest. Tall trees with black marching boots and feet were clad in the spurs and sharp wings of a butterfly. They flew and vanished in the sky with a sound that was terrible and wonderful; it was sorrowful and it was mystical (pp. 147-48).

Here again, our pleasure in the language derives in large part from the "dance of words," from its harlequin oppositions which enact that "deep unconscious humour of carnival" (AC p. 12) we saw the early Harris foreshadow. The passage has attracted, and justly, a good deal of commentary, so I will have little to say of it except to repeat that there is enough occurring at the phenomenal level to render deep soundings unprofitable. More important, it is precisely this superficiality which shields us from overinterpretation or misinterpretation; and here we see that our attention to the language constitutes the meaning of the passage as well as that of the novel. For if we examine what Gerald Moore has called its "dissolving style" in its own right, we are prevented from attributing a teleology to what is in fact a technique.

The function of the contradictory images and indeed of all the shifts and changes of the prose is to operate within and establish the conventions of a larger form, so that we read it not as mysticism but as a mystical novel. This might seem a scholastic quiddity, but a great many of Harris's
readers have indeed taken *Palace of the Peacock* as a piece of naked mysticism, and what is more, felt moved to apologise for this aspect of the novel. If instead, we begin by assuming that the novel's mysticism is a linguistic means of organising its assault on settled conceptions of the nature of power, we cannot mistake what is a convention for the trappings of a transcendental Signified. To declare that in the later novels Harris will not come by his vision of ecstatic unity quite so easily, is to undervalue the primary quality of this novel: its extraordinary writing. It is exactly because of its untrammelled use of the mystical mode that *Palace of the Peacock* is a better novel than any of the others in the so-called Guyana Quartet.

To find the mysticism of the novel on the one hand embarrassing, and on the other elevating, is to discover either too little or too much. Harris is, of course, not writing a theosophical tract: by reading his work as such, whether uncharitably (as quackery) or with devotion (as a repair manual for the broken individual or the wasted country) we miss its primary intent, which is a literary one. The manuscript of *Palace of the Peacock* was, after all, sent to Faber and Faber, not to the Rudolf Steiner Society. If Harris's explicit warnings against faith in hidden forces were not sufficient, the vigorous tugs of his language would suffice to distract the reader from the charms of the Absolute. One of the lessons we learn in the course of our reading is that the signified exists precisely as an unmaker of absolutes, pointing strategically back to the contradictory surface of the text.

The novel is, then, not so much an abacus of symbols as an allegory of the nature of power and desire in the world. This theme is present from the start in the shooting of the dream horseman, for no sooner does the
dreamer awake (strictly, he dreams he awakes), than he remembers having once been rocked by "the oldest uncertainty and desire in the world, the desire to govern or be governed, rule or be ruled for ever" (p. 14). Immediately, there is a knock on the door and the dream horseman enters, greeted as "gaoler and ruler." This is Donne, who, even as he governs his brother's imagination, dominates his mistress Mariella's body: as she bends to feed the chickens, he looks at her "as at a larger and equally senseless creature whom he governed and ruled like a fowl" (p. 15). At the close of the first chapter, we hear him counsel his brother in the lore of power:

'Rule the land,' he said, 'while you still have the ghost of a chance. And you rule the world. Look at the sun.'
His dead eye blinded mine. 'Look at the sun,' he cried in a stamping terrible voice (p. 19).

The scene is now set for a countervailing force which, in conjunction with the first, will furnish that "architecture of release" we saw Harris foreshadow in his homily on the feudal overlordship of the sun. Nor are we kept waiting, for Chapter Two opens with the unrolling of a dream map that is both "an actual stage," and an allegorical one: "I saw this kingdom of man turned into a colony and battleground of spirit, a priceless tempting jewel I dreamed I possessed" (p. 20). This duality gives Harris a purchase, a "necessary stone and footing," of which he makes splendid concrete use in the course of his swirling mystical current of prose.

From this point on, dream works its way towards vision as each member of the crew discovers for himself what the dreamer at one pass struggles to express, that "nothing existed to fool and terrorize anybody unless one chose to imagine one was bewitched and a fool all one's life" (p. 96). The lieutenant of power is fear, a fear which blinds one to
resources which become visible only when this apprehension is turned inside out into a knowledge which liberates one from fear and therefore from power. Certain of death, even the most abject of the dispossessed learn that "fear is nothing but a dream" (p. 59). This is the substance of the Arawak woman's "insolence of soul," and once the scales are dashed from the crew's eyes, they are "on the threshold of the folk." Under the guidance now of Vigilance, the Indian in their midst, the men are brought to their journey's end and to the realization that not their obsessions but the extinction of desire, not their scheming lives but "death and nothingness" (p. 130) are their support. The same desire that Donne had turned into "a compulsive design and a blind engine of war" (p. 150), is now transformed into the outspread fan of the peacock.

Within the mystical convention of the narrative, the contradictions of power and powerlessness are resolved in a universal dance to the music of the peacock, a dance in which pursued and pursuer are no longer distinguishable, since both stand firmly in the palace, "free from the chains of illusion we had made without..." (p. 151). Such resolutions can be subjected to the critique of any mysticism, but to mount this critique here would be to evince an unfortunate literal-mindedness. It is obvious that the polarizations of conflict are here dissolved only because they come to be immersed in a plenum whose boundaries are not boundaries at all. The vitalist conception of the whole ensures that all antagonisms are defused, all opposites interpenetrate. But read on its own terms, the allegory presents a consistent if unconventional critique of power and not simply another text for deconstruction.

To designate the argument of the novel as, say, "fear is the only subjection," or "power is an illusion," is not to have finally distilled
a content from its spirited extravagance of words. Otherwise one could argue that this message might equally have been clothed in a form which showed, realistically and by the cumulation of detail, the sorrows of young Mariella and the botched tyranny of a rancher, Donne. Yet there is no guarantee that, had this been managed, the meaning would have remained the same: the message of *Palace of the Peacock* is inseparable from its form, and the dismantling of power is conducted as much by the language as through it. If power seeks above all things stability to ensure its dominance, this is the one estate which the "melting essence" of the language withholds from it. Within the conventions of the novel's mysticism, the undoing of power must take the form of the undoing of every "material hoax" (p. 83). This then is the function of a sentence such as the following:

The fowls of the air danced and wheeled on invisible lines that stretched taut between the ages of light and snapped every now and then into lightning executions of dreaming men when each instant ghost repaired the wires again in the form of an inquisitive hanging eye and bird (p. 108).

The "inverse stream" and "inverse craft" which the dreamer speaks of might equally apply to the language and art which produce river and boat. And even as the language, like Carroll's cry, seems "to break and mend itself always," so the structure of the novel with its "mixed futuristic order of memory and event" (p. 53), militates against the linear order of a history which seems to ratify dispossession by its placid reflection of the past. The present is, likewise, amenable to misrepresentation by documentary renderings. At the close of the book entitled "The Second Death," one of the daSilva twins who had dropped out of sight, reappears. His presence had been not so much forgotten as obscured by the prose, and now we see why.
His bones were splinters and points Vigilance saw and his flesh was newspaper, drab, wet until the lines and markings had run fantastically together. His hair stood flat on his brow like ink. He nodded precariously and one marvelled how he preserved his appearance without disintegrating into soggy lumps and patches when the wind blew and rocked the pins of his bones a little. He shook his head again but not a word blew from his lips. DaSilva stared at the apparition his brother presented as a man would stare at a reporter who had returned from the grave with no news whatsoever of a living return (pp. 122-23).

In the terms of the allegory, not death's sting but absolute death, slavishly rendered, is the ultimate victory of power. The apparition, therefore, plays a dual role: as an allegorical vector, the daSilva twin is a poor representative of his absolutist ideology; as a newspaper man, his sorry condition mutely testifies to the power of the surreal to confound realistic reportage. Both the ideology and its mode of projection are refuted by the only means a novelist has to make such refutations: the allegory puts absolute power into doubt even as the language puts realism into disarray.

The dislocation of Harris's language is its most evident feature, and now we realise it is not the product of whimsy. To be sure, the fragmentation is neither unique nor especially radical: aside from the more common typographical variations, there are none of the split texts, fractured columns, scattered words, blank or solid or fenestrated pages, vanishing marginalia, or any of the numerous visual irruptions which have been the stock in trade of the playful novelist since Sterne or the dedicated formalist since futurism. At most, the later novels admit one or two rather schematized diagrams, which are neither ludic nor earnest but simply forlorn. They do, however, continue within their graphic parameters those oppositions whose presence in the body of the text takes the shape of imaged contradictions: physical targets are set over against mental
targets, soluble uniform against insoluble deity, tone against non-tone, fossil walls of time punctured by cannibal bone flute. Always the distinction between apparent and real, always the suggestion of untapped energies.

The cumulative effect of these antinomies is not that of a Yeatsian cosmogony but simply a sense of the fragility of the received text of the world. If what we take to be reality is indeed such a text, a style of representation as much as an ontology, then a language which distorts this style is some short way advanced towards figuring an alternative reality. This is the substance of Harris's "mimetic crash or crack or bone," his "breaking down things in order to sense a vision through things" (KK p. 52).

In one of his Amerindian tales, "Yurokon," we find this passage:

Break the land. Break the sea. Break the savannah. Break the forest. Break the twig. Break the bough. The unwritten symphony of the wind, unwritten spark of the wind, made him bark—a sudden bark. [The Carib boy, Yurokon's uncle] stared at the bristling dog of the fire, fire break, fire bark, delicacy, magic; he smacked his lips and the roast of Yurokon's bark subsided into the silent bay of conscience like an invocation at the heart of the feast: man's best enemy or friend.

Was it the immortal dog of war and peace that sang in the break of the fire, shadowy tail or bone? (SR p. 69).

Harris glosses the piece in this way:

The 'breaking of the land, sea, savannah etc' is an inner perception or anticipation of cleavage in the persona of conquest--mimetic crash or crack or bone of a native/universal symphony within which image and imagelessness are orchestrated into a metaphor which implies that the very ruined walls of time may provide an aperture or organ or flute through which the theme of community is restated as a capacity to sustain inner and outer overlapping perspectives. Thus 'the breaking of the sea, land, etc' in the Yurokon symphony stands in parenthesis to Carroll's crew and the 'cloudy scale of incenstuous cruelty which tumbled from their eye' (NP p. 150).

The shock troops of this action are Harris's images, but the breakage goes beyond this atomic, sensory level to that of the line. Hence the tropes of reversal and overturning omnipresent in the Harrisian grapholect.
Next in the Guyana Quartet, *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961) opens so:

The stars shone faint in the stream on the windy night and they penetrated a flying cloud. The lights shining far across the river were uncertain and distant, close to the ground and one with glimmering heaven. The shape of a cow loomed on the opposite bank, so enormous it blotted out the lights and invisible windows of the far scattered settlements: it loomed like a cloud, shapeless and massive in the dreaming faint light, slithering down the bank and suddenly into the water, washing the stars away as it swam across the night (FJ p. 11).

The continuous shifts of perspective in this opening paragraph prepare the reader once more for a tale of duplicity and self-deception. And indeed, the story about to unfold is that of a trickster, Oudin, who becomes the willing tool of a grasping moneylender, Ram, and plays this role well until he discovers the virtue of freedom in responsibility. Awakening to this knowledge, he marries the girl he has been set to abduct for Ram, outwitting his master both now and on the day of his death, thirteen years later. The girl, Beti, illiterate daughter of one of Ram's scheming victims, is left pregnant, but suspecting a plot by which her future child will now become Ram's in exchange for a freehold, she finds the vital scrap of deed paper in her dead husband's hands and eats it.

To this story, Harris brings his apparatus of disturbance, rippling the surface of things in a way that is well illustrated by the passage below. Ram, who is spying on Beti, has come upon her washing clothes at the river's side. He hopes to observe her secreting the scrap of deed paper in some "empty rum bottle or jug"; instead he sees only himself, waving up and down as he trod on the shaking planks, slicing and waving almost endlessly until the slices and fragments were drawn together on a loose sailing thread. He could make out very little as he peered into the river's obsession and depth, save that a banner had been unfurled over the grave of Oudin, one of those waving flags anonymous processions hold over their head when they celebrate a victory or resolution and triumph. A public banner and epitaph everyone knows it is, and yet a most private symbol of rebirth and death, since the
face on the banner represents an absent hero whose sliding proportions are the mask of timeless spirit rather than Ram's fading personality (p. 25).

The "slices and fragments" we are now accustomed to, but the larger antithesis of public "and yet" private sets up a new contradiction, and one which lies at the root of the fable. Antithesis is, of course, a recurring feature in the style of a great many writers, not all of them modern, yet where ordinarily it represents a logical play between conceptual opposites, here its "sliding proportions" stress not a brace of identities but the relation which connects them. When, much later, Ram is discoursing largely on politics before his last victim, Mohammed, we are expected to remember this relationship between public and private.

'Korea—a country just like this I would say'—he waved his hand generously—'split in half, man. What a mix-up family story. God know who is killing who. You is not the only one in this new family trouble. And what happening to you is private, plain AND ordinary compared to that' (p. 98).

The point of the analogy and indeed of the entire parable of Oudin is that the distinctions customarily made between power on a grand scale and that which operates between individuals are null: the very categories of public and private collapse.

This is both a bad and a good thing. On the one hand, it allows Harris to mock the public sphere and to mystify the sources of social power by personalising them; on the other, it raises important issues of individual exploitation and resistance that commonly go unnoticed. Antitheses of this kind fasten on contradictions not so much in the body politic as in its members. In the same way as the crew of Palace of the Peacock have the scales dashed from their eyes, so the various characters of this novel have their moments of crisis and self-knowledge. At the end of the novel, a fissure begins to open in Ram, "the thief who had
stolen from himself." But as he scans "the new bitter wastes of water over which a blue window in the clouds had opened," he remains a "seemingly self-contained man," plotting to create "an unassailable appearance." He is not cured of his obsession with "a son who would be the acknowledged child of his life to fill the widening blue crack in heaven like a picture" (p. 134-135). Even this mimetic distraction will be denied him, for the novel has opened with Oudin's death and Beti's eating of the "covenant."

Oudin, we are told, "embarked on this fabulous dying journey" when, thirteen years before, he "cancelled out Ram's command."

By following this intuition, Oudin outwits Ram and frees himself. This equation of independence with self-knowledge is constantly iterated through such stylistic devices as the oxymora "midnight morning" and "dark, intuitive thought-sun" here lodged among larger antitheses. The link is even more plainly conveyed by a Harrisian device, that of multiple conjunction. Where once Oudin had been Ram's "listener and slave," turning every "pillar and proprietor" into the money-lender's "lasting fence and world and market," now he is intent on overthrowing "every misconception and inferior relationship."

A string of "ands" is no doubt a kind of rhetoric, but only marginally so. It is the rag-and-bone rhetoric of bricolage, or making do with available materials. "But is who fault if the only language we got is a breaking-up or making-up language?" Mohammed asks. The question is one
which West Indian writers have voiced in many and ingenious ways. Harris
turns to rich account the lack it addresses, disdaining no source and
rummaging through every midden he comes upon to piece together the
creature we might call his crooked style. His third novel, *The Whole
Armour* (1962), begins with two epigraphs, one of which, from Hopkins,
reads:

This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood,
   immortal diamond,
   Is immortal diamond.

And taking this text to heart, Harris has written a hard and brilliant
novel which once more grapples with "the ancient jaguar of death" as
it marauds "on the frontier between changing fantasy and the growth of
a new settlement" *(WA* p. 37). Again we begin with a dream, one that
fades on

a parody of a hut on a spit of land that looked unyielding
and hard amidst the trenches that had been torn and eroded
on either side, until they were crowded with a gnarled husk
and mask and a twisted alphabet of timber. Every private
notice and fable and boundary against the sea stood in the
turmoil of the foreshore as in a graveyard of sculptured
history and misadventure *(p. 17)*.

Out of the twisted materials of this wasteland—Book One is called
"Jigsaw Bay"—a new history is to be pieced together, though it is not
before a lengthy vigil, and one that will probably end in his death, that
the hero, Cristo, can claim his ordeal has remade him. "Fitted me
together again," he says of the "Caribs" he imagines he met in his
forty days and nights in the jungle. The son of a Pomeroon whore,
Cristo is in hiding, wrongly suspected of murder. Magda, his mother
prevails on one of her long-time customers, Abram, to hide Cristo in
his remote hut, but Abram dies two months after taking the young man in.
While Cristo ventures out to report this death to his mother, a jaguar
carries away the body, so that when mother and son return, a column of crows is hovering over the remains. Believing this to be Cristo's second murder, but driven nonetheless by a desire to protect the son she has scrimped for, Magda forces him at gunpoint to dress the corpse in his own clothes. Forty days after the "death" or her son, Magda holds a wake to which the entire community is invited, including the girl Sharon, whose first suitor Cristo was believed to have killed. Sharon comes escorted by her new suitor, Mattias, but he too is accidentally killed in a scuffle with her drunken father. Meanwhile, Sharon learns from Magda that Cristo is alive, and some nights later she goes to him in the forest. The next morning Cristo decides that he will give himself up. His ordeal has taught him that to fly from a mistaken justice is to perpetuate a lie. He knows that it will go hard by him: the recent rash of violence in the district has left the community nervous and ready for a scapegoat. At the close of the novel, he is observed, and as the police net closes in on Sharon's house, he dreams of the child who will survive him.

If *Eternity to Season* was Harris's poetical Book of Genesis, and *Palace of the Peacock* a kind of Revelations, *The Whole Armour* aspires, with an audacity that compels admiration, to be the Guyanese New Testament. Even as "every private notice and fable and boundary" of the old covenant is demolished, we may pass from techniques of breaking to those of joining, and observe at work the second part of that question left hanging in *The Far Journey of Oudin*: "Is who fault if the only language we got is a breaking-up or a making-up language?" An equal portion of the "making-up" will fall to the reader. So, if the burden of the novel is that it is imperative to recognise a primeval chaos in the individual and to fabricate
out of this state a new meaning to community, this process is closely replicated in that by which meaning is produced from the chaotic language of the text. Indeed the stages by which the identity of the central characters is broken down from a strict "self-possession" into "a strange and blundering excitement and participation" (p. 70), might be shown to have their equivalent in the process by which the reader learns to resist the strict identity of a word or image and to make sense of the far-flung network of relationships between words and images.

The yoking together of heterogeneous ideas is not a device of recent origin, but where in the Metaphysical conceit a logic of distant resemblances, once established, is worked out with a precision that appeals to paired sequences within a universe of identity, in the surrealist practice of Harris's writing this machinery is disrupted. In making up "notice and fable and boundary," the prose appeals not to pairs of resemblances or even to homologies of these (for there is little that the three elements directly share) but to a fourth and absent quantity whose outlines are formed by a coalescence of the given three. It is not so much that the identities of the superimposed words are shaken, as that the relationship between them produces, by a transference among metonymies, a new idea. In the sentence which ends the paragraph describing Abram's "parody of a hut," the chimera compounded of petrified limits ("boundary") and posted sanctions ("notice") is one whose identity the subsequent "graveyard of sculptured history" would seem to confirm, were it not for the troublesome "fable." By its very insubstantiality in this solid company, fable recalls one's attention from graveyard and misadventure, putting their finality in doubt, or at least setting up an expectation that they will be overturned. This message is,
in fact, the novel writ small: history is not a closed chapter, nor is it hallowed ground, graven and daunting as its authorized version may well be.

To be sure, the reader does not seize all this in some blistering epiphany, or even in the elastic moment of his travelling eye; he may well have to stop and go back a short way. It may even be that his reading will not match the one given here (or for that matter his last or his next reading of the same passage) but the process of its construction will have required him to revise his habitual strategies of reading. This is also what is asked of the Pomeroon community, who have, as it were, put on the wrong armour,

rallying...all their forces into an incestuous persona and image and alliance—the very antithesis of their dark truth and history, written in the violent mixture of races that had bred them as though their true mother was a wanton on the face of the earth and their true father a vagrant and a rogue from every continent (p. 49).

Assembled at the wake, they remain "blind to each other"; they "lose each other in the midst of their chronic density and identity" (p. 68). It is pale, uncertain Mattias, Sharon's escort, whose "terrible honour" it is to be "chosen by the shattered medium of the wake to redeem the relics of crippled perspective." As he stands, on "the threshold of a profound participation,"

every disjointed picture and impression revolved in his mind—a series of revelations, engagements and disengagements, each pattern appearing the very unstable antithesis of another and undermining even itself as it dawned (pp. 73-74).

Instead of shrugging off the "most troubling question of all mankind—the meaning of individual innocence and guilt," he remains to resolve it over a trifling accusation and forfeits his life.

It is possible that, as with another young man's tragedy, the emotion
generated here is in excess of the action, but Harris is trying to carry off two things at one time: to point his thesis that a closed identity, whether of individual or group, is a failure of communal responsibility, and to illustrate this need for participation by writing it out. As he faces Sharon's drunken father, Mattias sees a beast he recognizes with a primeval start

from the moment one finds one has crawled out of the ancient egg of the sea into a new brutish shell and hatching family tree and camouflage. All hunted and hunting sensation was draining from Peet's creaturely face so that it turned half-woman, half-man, turning instantly again on itself in order to bite itself. He grabbed a knife and lifted it high in the air to strike the nearest visionary one. Mattias caught the raised arm just in time, twisting the wrist and extracting the knife. The crowd went mad. A little harmless blood must spill in the foreday morning, they began to chant. Mattias tried to push his way back. Someone pushed him forward. He fell upon Peet who pushed him from him as a ball jumps from foot to hand and hand to foot.

Mattias bounced forward again and tripped on the leg of a chair. He was in a state of curious intoxication. He thought he was falling on the iron trunk of Abram's tree and he stretched his hands out to save himself from being terribly bruised, losing sight of the knife, he still grasped. A scream burst from his lips, so clear and discerning, there was a dead silence all around. No one trusted their eye as it beheld the dripping treasury of blood (p. 94).

Having already declared that "Mankind itself was the tiger" (p. 78), the text now creates something of the jungle which it contends is to be faced before a community of responsible persons can be born. The cluster of images which follows the first crawling does not make strict sense; a progression of sorts is all that can be made out at once, and then perhaps the notion of each state encapsulating the next. Any further advance in the reader's understanding of this cluster will not be a linear one, and will in fact devolve upon a recognition of the undifferentiated nature of the words so brought together. The several elements, which Harris would call a "constellation" (SI p. 40), constitute a kind of multiple contra-
diction: they remain suspended synchronically, as it were in a solution of consciousness, without any authorial attempt to resolve or tame them rhetorically.40

If the text works by suggestion, the reader perforce falls back from time to time on impressions. This is why the pejorative "impressionistic," wants to be sparingly used, for in cases such as this (and, for that matter, others where the reader might suppose himself to be proceeding with the analytic rigour of a scientist) our responses occur in precisely this domain. The job is a taxing one, and it is with a sense of relief that the reader finds the deceptions of "shell" and "tree" and "camouflage" to give onto a more tractable series of contradictions. Harris has himself remarked, in a preface to the paperback edition of The Whole Armour and The Secret Ladder, that the "fantastification of imagery" in the first novel has been "a source of difficulty for some readers":

I can only say it is intended not as an exotic device but as a subjective alteration of form in order to relate new content or new existences to a revised canvas of community (p. 9).

The fantastication, then, is not "surplusage"; moreover it has its own contradiction in a style of nothingness.41 At the end of the novel, Cristo dreams it is five minutes to the ten o'clock of his execution:

his mind was so empty it had become a frame for the future, almost as though he had stopped existing already, in fact no one existed, a hundred serial years had passed, and they were all dead fused portraits on the wall for anyone to recognize and learn whatever they wished they understood (p. 129).

Here again, the writing produces the required dissolution of self: the vital images of that ungoverned chaos Mattias recognized, now give way to "dead fused portraits," serially interchangeable within the empty frame of Cristo's mind. The serial deaths of the novel attempt to express this conception of history structurally: they are in a sense the formal equivalent of the style of nothingness, delineating the space where the
hollow subject touches history. Cristo's realisation that "nothing always contained everything" is not a mysticism or the self's final absorption of the other, but a recognition that the two are locked in a ceaseless exchange of identities.

The third epigraph of Harris's next novel, *The Secret Ladder*, reads:

It is indeed an integration of the movements of the agent with the movements of the Other, so that in action the self and the Other form a unity.

MACMURRAY

The self in this fiction is that of Russell Fenwick, a young surveyor; the Other takes the shape of Poseidon, venerable leader of a group of bush negroes, the descendants of runaway slaves settled in the barren region Fenwick and his party have come to survey. Friction between the outsiders and the river people is not long developing. Word has got about that the survey party is preparing the way for an irrigation scheme that will drown the catchment of the Canje river and "everybody's land will duck for good". The conflict divides the team and triggers a crisis within Fenwick, who finds himself drawn, against the wishes of his foreman (a man of power) and his storeman (a man of prudence), to sympathise with the river folk and their ancient chief. Nevertheless, the work must go on, and as it does, the threatened inhabitants resort to sabotage. The hardliners in the survey party press for reprisals, especially when one of their number, Chiung, is attacked at night. But Fenwick resists, and Chiung himself confesses he had tried to cheat the men who struck him down. Matters come to a head when Poseidon meets an accidental death, seemingly at the hands of Fenwick's boatman, Bryant, the man who loved him best. In disarray, Poseidon's followers are about to wreak their revenge, when the two bushmen who believe they have killed Chiung come
running with their tale of fear, and cause a general panic. Poseidon's body is abandoned, but this is no ignominy, for it is the husk of a purpose already served.

Compared to the other novels of the Quartet, The Secret Ladder is a sluggish stream; the rapids of Palace of the Peacock would seem to have debouched onto a sudden plain. This effect is partly that of the physical terrain which the novel evokes, the flats of the Canje headwaters. The novel is also the darkest of the four, the greater part of its action unravelling in the twilight of the jungle or at night. It is as if the underworld so often lurking at the fringes of the previous novels were now at last penetrated. The transition occurs at the very start of the novel: a hundred yards from where Fenwick stands by the stelling, in the "exposure and defeat" of the noonday sun, "the jungle turned blind as a shuttered place and the eye learnt to relinquish the neighbouring sun for a tenebrous, almost electrical gloom" (p. 143, paper edn.). But if the sensation of stillness and gloom is conveyed by the landscape and atmosphere of the novel, it derives also from a modulation in the shape and pace of Harris's writing. And this in turn is traceable to the novel's scheme, or rather its scheming.

Despite its relatively conventional surface, The Secret Ladder is a highly wrought novel. Certain resemblances link it with Harris's first, and round off the Quartet: its action spans the seven days that Donne's crew journey beyond Mariella, and Fenwick calls his boat Palace of the Peacock. But where in the earlier novel the writing and the design were always one, so that the form was the content, here there are occasions when the two come apart and the content appears to tyrannize the form. "Intent" is perhaps a more accurate word than "content," for where the design becomes most designing the phrasing satisfies least. The narrative
usually redresses this imbalance, but whenever it is invested with a greater significance than its frame will bear, the novel becomes unfortunately rhetorical. Curiously, it is the significance and not the frame which suffers, and chiefly in those passages where a highly contrived series of hermetic connections overpowers the narrative and proceeds to rarefy it.

Harris is himself conscious of this danger, one which springs as much from the intangibility of his subject as from his penchant for Jungian symbology. It is because his theme can so easily be taken as hackneyed—the need to unite head and heart, science and modes of feeling—that he chooses indirection, and yet this very indirection commits him to a preciosity which renders his intent the more palpable. Like Chiung, who struggles to tell a truth which will incriminate himself, he grows "despairingly crafty, the vaguest hint of a parable in his flat insensible voice" (p. 234). He is driven to apologise:

Dead easy to join in pointing a facile finger at the mocking portentous letters of an age and to acquiesce in misreading its true meaning and spirit (p. 193).

Or again, "All was an artifice of mystery to which one addressed oneself often with idle and pretentious words" (p. 195). Protesting too much, Harris would seem to condemn himself: the seven days of decreation, the secret ladder, the cross that is Poseidon's house, the vessel that is the woman Catalena, these perhaps weigh heavily on the writer who has coupled "rhetoric and sterility" (p. 206). But Harris is not blaming his tools; they are, he insists, all that is available to him and at the last, expendable. If we take him at his word, we find that the "true meaning and spirit" of the novel do not in fact lie in those accoutrements of myth which the contemporary sensibility finds implausible and even fatuous.
A good example is Poseidon himself. On each of his appearances, he is described with an imagery that befits his mythical character: the "flapping ragged fins of trousers on his legs" (p. 155), his "ancient feet—webbed with grass and muck," his hands "wreathed in a fisherman's writhing net of cord" (p. 181), but when Bryant declares that the old man is "freer than you and me..." Fenwick retorts, "look at him, man, he's like a fish in a net." And to himself he cries,

Yes, I confess I owe allegiance to him because of his condition, allegiance of an important kind, that of conscience, of the rebirth of humanity...But surely this does not mean I must reduce myself to his trapped condition, become even less human than he, a mere symbol and nothing more...

Then, speaking openly again:

Plain wholesome understanding of history and facts and possibilities is important, Bryant. Take the unadorned facts of science, the plain economic structure of society shorn of worshipful emotion, shorn of this fiction of freedom you claim Poseidon alone possesses. I am glad we can see him as he is so that we can know what this life is, the hard business of this life, here and now (do you follow me?) and indeed we can see—beyond a shadow of doubt—the necessity for human freedom (pp. 182-83).

So, at the end, when Poseidon dies, Fenwick marvels that the two who have brought the news are in tears, for what has died is merely the symbol, the god that was: "An angel of polemic and absurdity would have shouted for joy" (p. 246). This knowledge, Fenwick immediately reflects, is always "instantly plastered with the slime of spiritual parody, the parody of a universal and uncapturable essence"; properly regarded, the symbolic style is a pis aller which invites disbelief because it advertises a nothingness which makes meaning possible.

The symbol, then, is always an unfortunate parody: it is not a sign concealing an absence, but a rich, even profligate, excuse for a bare possibility that cannot be explained in any satisfactory way. It has its
public equivalent in societies that are compelled to start with nothing, or very little. The potatoes are there, the pigeon discovered, but the story is an invention _ex nihilo_, snatched out of the air and run up, like Abram's parody of a hut, with the materials to hand. The much-vaunted empty sign, the exhaustion of meaning, and so on, assume a new significance when viewed in the context of this marginalism: their emptiness is cause for celebration, their story-telling, their pretence, even when these include a measure of mimicry, speak an inventiveness. They are what make both life and existence bearable; not any supposed plenitude behind their language, but the work (and the play) of the language itself is of interest. One might have wished for greater invention or a wider ransacking here, but Harris has not chosen to spurn a _ready-made_ symbolic system. As for the style into which it is worked, that is his own, and in its fabric not unlike Poseidon's home: "created equally by destiny and accident."

Musing on its "sacred comedy of materials," which have been transplanted from a Roman Catholic Mission upriver, Fenwick asks

To what and whose spirit did the house belong? Had it been grafted from above (unconscious of itself) on to the land, or did it possess a self-conscious kinship and identity beneath? It had an air both foreign and native, ideal and primitive, at one and the same time; and yet it seemed so precariously and absolutely right, belonging so truly in this natural or unnatural context of landscape, that the thought of an imposition, of pretentiousness or absurdity in the life of the crumbling building, seemed equally ridiculous and impossible. In fact—if it had been the gift of an imposing high divinity—it bore a certain generous conception, economic and still humane. There were no marks of exclusiveness—rather a spirit of all-inclusive privacy, the most welcome artifice of humanity. What was at stake here was not the inevitable ruin of an old house, but a perception of depth more lasting than time, the moral privilege and right of place. This was Poseidon's asylum and home. It had acquired a special seal and privilege, the stamp of a multiple tradition and heritage (pp. 199-200).

This "most solid (though disintegrating)" house is the forge and the
emblem of Harris's contradictory style, a style which effects what he calls "the primitive juxtaposition of the unclean" with the clean, of the fantastic and the everyday, of ornament and breakage, of real and surreal. The alternation between realistic and symbolic writing in The Secret Ladder is a case in point, and it is this which repeatedly rescues passages of metaphysical floundering. At the very moment where difficulty would seem to have been enthroned, a thrust of startling lucidity will unseat it. Dialect often functions in this way. In every one of the Guyana novels it is put to remarkable use, relieving or intensifying, deflating or disrupting, carrying the narrative forward or back. The "many a gipsy phrase" which Pater would have purged from good style is exactly what Harris, who early approved of "doing violence to Standard English" (SM p. 65), introduces to great effect. These are, of course, all rhetorical devices, but along with the numerous other contradictory intrusions and splicings, they constitute an indecorous decorum, a mixture of rhetorical registers which may well offend readers of a purist kidney, not least those who prefer their postmodernism unadulterated with metaphor and meaning. Harris is explicit:

The point I want to make in regard to the West Indies is that the pursuit of a strange and subtle goal, melting pot, call it what you like, is the mainstream (though unacknowledged) tradition in the Americas. And the significance of this is akin to the European preoccupation with alchemy, with the growth of experimental science, the poetry of science as well as of explosive nature which is informed by a solution of images, agnostic humility and essential beauty, rather than vested interest in a fixed assumption and classification of things (TW pp. 32-33).

If there are moments in The Secret Ladder when Harris seems to have yielded to "a fixed assumption and classification" of symbols borrowed all together, this fixity is left behind in the later novels. One such, which represents a return to Guyana unusual in the more recent Harris, is
Genesis of the Clowns (1977). The novel bears a certain resemblance to The Secret Ladder, concerning as it does the relationship of a young surveyor to his crew, but there the resemblance ends. Lacking the careful plot of the earlier novel, it lacks also the tailored and largely derivative set of symbols. Here, the random speculations of surveyor Frank Wellington find their images in a far more mundane sphere: homunculi and Gorgon's heads give way to (or take their place among) a paytable, a market stall, a dumpy level, a surveyor's pole.

One noonday, Wellington meditates on his mechanic's wife, Ada.

Hope had already eaten and stood looking out to the line of the tide. He held an umbrella over my dumpy level to preserve the bubble on the instrument from shrinking excessively under the fire of the sun.

Cummings Day stood beside her with a twelve-foot tall staff, black and red decimal numbers on a white background; he leaned his forehead upon it so that it possessed him like an elongated mask, a vertical pole, a science....

'I wonder,' I thought to myself as broad daylight dreamed of Mistress Ada's naked flesh, 'how deeply rooted are we in a datum line of space to which we remain in part unconscious within the black/red land and the sea's harlequin fire' (p. 94).

At sunset, after the day's work, he sees her again in the crowded village market; then, his attention is caught by his surroundings:

The marketplace was crowded. The voice of the sea stood at my back like a rough crowd on the coast threatening wall and defences. The ground itself moved until the market swam.

Then as I looked away from black/red stalls with harlequin meat and fruit like a harvest of the sea I was struck by an absolute print of stillness in the vacant evening overhead. The leaves on the trees were extended into the palm of sunset. Not a feather, not a fin moved. A density of creatures seemed bound there in space as if the globe itself had moved to stand on tiptoe within the heterogenous body of fish, bird, gods, goddesses for sale all refined to an impulsive root for redress, undress of fates (pp. 95-96).

Mistress Ada is indeed a "fertility goddess," but it is what the language does rather than what she represents which matters. By its "solution of
images," this language produces that fecundity of "explosive nature" which Harris invokes. Hence the bounty of the marketplace, the "density of creatures" and their heterogeneity. In this process, the metaphoring is as often that of mute nature as it is anthropomorphic. On the one hand, there is the neutral transfer of category attributes at work in the "palm of sunset," or the collapse of identities by which Day's staff possesses him as mask, pole and science. On the other, there is the unpredictable recurrence of the decimal benchmarks in the evening, like spots imprinted on the retina by the fierce light of noon, an endless peopling of the landscape by the harlequin congress of black "Mistress Ada's naked flesh" and the "fire of the sun." Both courses are possible because the narrative is neither exclusively naturalistic nor relentlessly symbolic, a contradiction epitomised in the proliferation of the oblique ("black/red") as a stylistic feature of the later Harris. In this way, what might seem to be an overt denial of rhetoric which admits it all the same by some tradesman's entrance, is in fact neither indulgence nor abstinence. It is rather a kind of carnival license, a tumbling in which the concept of rhetoric comes to be deflowered.
I am not a Platonist. But I was reminded recently of that most enigmatic work of Plato *The Timaeus* within which a Seniority of Forms is propounded as antecedent to the divine will—an enigmatic seniority which defeated Christian Platonists in their attempt to modify it in accordance with their basic dogma.

The curious priority of Forms to the mind and will of God in *The Timaeus* (regarded as heretical by the Church Fathers) may be interpreted, no doubt, in several ways but I would suggest our visualizing it...as a poetic warning to look through the ritual proprietors of the Universe for a scale of self-deception in self-definition—a scale that assists us to bind humility and creativity together into an essential caveat of the imagination (NP p. 150).

These cautionary words, which appear at the close of Harris's essay, "The Native Phenomenon," can be pressed to serve more than their immediate purpose. In their context, they embody what might properly have been called Harris's first principle were not the doctrine of primacy itself in question. That principle is stated forthrightly both here and earlier in the same essay. Taken out of context, as surely it begs to be taken, the Seniority of Forms performs another task, and this without etymological strain, that of furnishing a formal paradigm of the narrative structure of Harris's novels. By such a paradigm, the method of these novels is one where the narrative proceeds through a series of tentative thrusts in the void, with material assistance from a past which may delimit but never determine present forms. But if these present constructs do not have a single and exclusive origin, whether in the author or in his fund of patterns social or literary, neither are they sufficient in themselves, being at every stage qualified by one another. In terms of the metaphor, if
not strictly of the *Timaeus*, there is always an unmaking structure of otherness, a margin of indeterminacy, a senior form. This is the sum of Harris's Platonism; in finding more we misread the caveat.

We begin with a reversal. Where in the previous chapter we considered the surface of language, here we will examine the innards of the text, those structures which run as it were crosswise to the prose, regulating its advance and guiding its direction. In passing from style to structure, we may rehabilitate along the way the concept of rhetoric: not the rhetoric of language but the rhetoric of the text is now intended by that word, and where we saw Harris flout the one, we now see him flaunt the other. We will leave language behind, then, though it will not be easy or even at all times possible, in order to consider the larger units of novel-writing, those which have come, since Wayne Booth, to be called the rhetoric of fiction. It is this rhetoric which Harris lays bare through a variety of asymmetrical devices, in the interest of that larger anteriority whose virtue we have just heard him expound.

The rhetoric of fictions has, of course, been much displayed of late, so much so that a mass return to discreet narrative "showing" is daily expected. Harris's narrative strives for neither pure *mimesis* nor pure *diegesis*, neither faithful imitation nor undiluted recitation. His laying bare of the text's rhetoric proceeds not through a brazen "telling" but almost inadvertently, as if declamation mattered even less than the surreptitious pulling of strings. This inadvertency should not be misread as insouciance: rather, it springs from an awareness that absolute structure can masquerade equally as illusion and verisimilitude or as self-consciousness and performance. At the same time, the novels' affinities are decidedly modernist, and it is by means of a modernist aesthetic that
their narrative method deserves to be analysed.

There is now no dearth of grammars of narrative by which texts ancient and modern may be parsed. The best known among these draw their inspiration from earlier formalist morphologies of diverse cultural objects from the folk tale to kin groups, and seek by corollary to reduce complex literary systems to their functional units, units which in many cases are divisions of apparently irreducible entities in the original. Hence the rococo taxonomies and endlessly ramified stemmata of much recent narrative analysis. Hence also the proliferation of terminologies by which these newly discovered narrative cells are described, terminologies which, however salutary their intent, by their sheer multiplicity begin in competition and end in confusion. So we will shut: anachronies and anisochronies, obligatives and optatives, functions and indices in a box, there to await the Pandoras of another age, and make do with certain basic materials: story, narrative, and narrating, though for the most part we will deal with the middle item, narrative proper.

The distinction between story and narrative is plainly put by Christian Metz: "There is the time of the thing told and the time of the narrative (the time of the signified and the time of the signifier). A story, that is to say, follows a causal sequence such as its signified might in the real world, while a narrative guards its own order. A narrative, for example, may well begin with the execution of its hero, but it is a rare man, be he never so heroic, who begins his adventures in this way. So much is unremarkable; what Metz goes on to say is of greater interest. The duality between the time of the story and time of the narrative, he continues, "invites us to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme." Metz is speaking of film, but equally in fiction
it is the tension between the two schemes which generates much of the reader's interest in a novel and indeed makes plausible the category of narrative itself. Finally, there is the time of the narrative utterance, the narrating, a further source of tension, for now a third conceptual surface presents itself, though one whose precarious life, eked out at a bare remove from the narrative, reminds us of the fragility of all our fictional categories.

Narrative, like story, implies a succession, but where a story is bound to a fixed linearity, narrative may do as it pleases with the action it signifies. It is a matter of presentation, and though it may choose to reproduce a sequence of events, it may equally produce that sequence anew. So where we saw style produce the surface of an event or gesture in such a way as to defamiliarise it so that it is experienced as if for the first time, we now expect to see narrative produce a sequence of events and gestures in such a way as to disorder them and prevent our being lulled into a secure four-dimensionality. To this end the modern novelist has deployed irregular blocks of action, shifting perspectives, multiple levels of narration, a variable locus of narrating, and so on, all of which devices occur as planes whose surface lies against the grain of sequentiality.

Now the unfolding of a story is ordinarily a matter of time—the and then of the action—but time is not all of narrative, since action occurs in space and this applies not only to the realm of the signified but that of the narrating itself. All of the metaphors we have used here—block, perspective, level, locus, plane—will be seen to evoke spatiality, and this not because time is made visible by these means alone but because any attempt to examine a mobility must stop it in its tracks or despair of an exact description. Northrop Frye's opposition
of dianoia or meaning and simultaneity to mythos or narrative and movement is unhelpful here for we need a theory which does not put narrative and simultaneity in opposite camps. Nor is the concept of spatial form an answer, though it comes close, for the numerous criticisms of ahistoricity which have been brought against it do have some basis. We are saved the trouble of looking outside fiction for a model by the fact that much contemporary fiction has itself turned away from the evocation of temporality characterised, for example, by stream-of-consciousness writing. "I think," says William Burroughs, in a remark which sums up the present reaction, "the future of fiction is in space, not time."

Space is indeed the content, or better, the subject of Harris's fictions. I reject "content" because the word suggests a recognizable reality worked by some mimetic illusion into a formal frame. Quite the opposite is intended by Harris's usage, for the signified space of the novels is a matter so dense as to always conceal some intransigent perspective behind its empirical surface. We shall see that this is not a flight from experience, but for the moment we must return to the use of this space as a model. The seniority of forms now takes on a further significance, for it becomes an emblem of the way in which there is always a structure of space posited around the given. The structural principle of the novels is one of anteriority rather than simple sequentiality, an anteriority to be thought of as spatial rather than temporal, beyond rather than before, in short, an alterity. This continuous positing of an otherness which unmakes the whole, is enacted in the machinery of the novels and is inimical to both structure and antistructure. Hence Harris's warning that we "see through the various dogmatic proprietors of the globe within a play of contrasting structures and anti-structures" (NP p. 148).
The spatiality of the novels, then, invites a kind of geological cross-section, only this cut must traverse more than one plane so as to satisfy the requirements of anti-structure as well as structure. Where synchronic structure attempts to collapse time into a single surface, a multiplicity of planes preserves something of the bewildering multi-dimensionality of a structure in motion. A multiple synchrony cannot, it is true, be said to have access to "history" but then neither does a diachrony, whose structures are no more a genuine rendering of time than its figural representations are an authentic rendering of space. We deal always, that is to say, with conventions, just as the linearity of the text is always with us, and as Gerard Genette remarks, "easier to deny in theory than eliminate in fact." To this degree even the most radical of experimentalisms are confined by circumstance and dependent on rhetoric, a state which the post-Boothian reader will recognise but not scorn.

If the larger units of narrative are structurally juggled and yet bound by the tyranny of the line, the reader perforce experiences them sequentially. His next resort must be to discover how these units react upon each other, whether by reinforcement or by negation, and his investigation is advanced if he recalls the function of images in the Harrisian text. The image, we remember, was a creature of interior space, the token of eclipsed perspectives which it served to disclose. So conceived, it was an agent of destabilization: "an asymmetrical power of images," Harris wrote, "is one which cannot be sustained by the conventional novel" (IN p. 142). In the same way as the image reacted with and upon its contradictory neighbours, the larger structures of the fiction continually make and unmake each other in a discontinuous seriality which disrupts the illusion of a whole present or past and leaves a way open for a form
to come. As Harris puts it in another, and this time historical context, the "dislocation or interior space serves therefore as a corrective to a uniform cloak or documentary status of imperialism" (HFM p. 11). We will come to the historical use of this mode in due time; for the present the dislocation must be seen to serve a structural (or anti-structural) purpose by correcting the uniform and consolidating accretions of realistic narrative. The play of forms, that is, creates the future of the text, and this not by a studied and cumulative orchestration of structure building upon structure, but out of

a 'vacancy' in nature within which agents appear who are translated one by the other and who (in a kind of serial illumination—if 'serial' is the right word) reappear through each other, inhabit each other, reflect a burden of necessity, push one another to plunge into the unknown, into the translatable, transmutable legacies of history. Their uniqueness lies in this curious openness to originality as well as change... (IN p. 146).

It is in this sense that the linearity of narrative is overcome: structures are qualified and even negated by those that surround them, each installment already forestalled. But might it be that what was won from linearity has been surrendered to circularity? The Secret Ladder, it will be recalled, ended with the Eliotic refrain: "In our end...our end...our end is our beginning...beginning...beginning": a refrain which rounded off not only the novel but the tetralogy which has come to be called the Guyana Quartet. Lest the whole too readily round upon itself, Harris's next novel, Heartland, extends and asymmetrically breaks the pattern, as the fifth in a quartet. It stands in relation to the preceding novels as a senior form, at times explicitly calling into question their claims to the truth. We must not, however, make too much of this metaphor until we have seen it at work. "It is easy to make propaganda of ideas," Harris warns. "One may claim a novelist is doing this, doing that, doing
the other, when in fact he may not be doing what is claimed for him at all within the narrative pattern he uses" (SI p. 45). With this in mind we may turn to the narrative pattern of Harris's fifth novel.

In a canon of short works, *Heartland* is one of the shorter; it also has one of the smallest casts. Four figures make their appearance on its stage (although others are alluded to): Stevenson, a watchman on a wood grant above a waterfall; Kaiser, a lorry driver (who looks like both his namesakes from *The Far Journey of Oudin*); a pork-knocker or lone prospector, daSilva (one of the twins from *Palace of the Peacock*); and an Amerindian woman, Petra (who is the Mariella of Harris's first novel). The fates of these characters are played out on a significant landscape whose power, amounting to dominance, commands the very title of the novel. *Palace of the Peacock* had had an indeterminate setting, but one perhaps not far from that which we are about to enter, while the three subsequent novels of the Quartet showed representative areas and communities of Guyana: the central croplands, the Pomeroon of the west, and the Canje headwaters in the east. *Heartland* is set at the gateway to the interior; in later novels Harris will penetrate deeper into Guyana, but for the present this is the farthest identifiable point. It is here that "the sleeping [Cuyuni] river loses its poise and drops like a smoking breath down the face of the Kaieteuran escarpment" (p. 70). This escarpment is a divide and a point of departure, just as Kartabo Point, downstream from the falls, marks "the beginnings of a new legendary continental offspring born of many races" (p. 66).12

The story of the novel is easily told. Zechariah Stevenson, jnr., is in self-imposed exile from the city following a financial scandal that involved his father's company, his mistress, Maria, and her husband, the
company's accountant. Stevenson barely has time to digest the news of
his father's unexplained death, when the scandal breaks. Stunned, he
nonetheless refuses to credit Maria's involvement in the fraud, and
believes she will return to him from Brazil, where she and her husband
have fled. Only after a year in his forest retreat does he come to
strip himself down to a knowledge of his own timorous self-deception
and irresponsibility. In this process he is assisted by another pawn of
fortune who is "trying to find me self-portrait" (p. 20), the lorry
driver Kaiser. One morning, Kaiser, whose job it is to bring supplies
from Lower Kamaria to the depot at Upper Kamaria, leaves some ration
boxes for a daSilva, "funniest pork-knocking guy in the world" (p. 16).
Stevenson is sceptical when he learns that the boxes are under lock and
key, but after daSilva has passed by his landing, stopping for a cup of
coffee and a mocking sermon, he finds that the precaution was necessary
but futile: the rations are gone. Where he had left a note for daSilva
to find on his way back from the depot, daSilva in turn has left a note
at the depot to say that he has gone to report the theft. Stevenson
sets out after him, following the line of portage around the falls. Half
way down he notices the body of a man lodged in the depths of a ravine.
It is daSilva. The thief, it turns out, was Petra, who is far gone in
pregnancy, got with child it is rumoured by daSilva himself. Discovering
this, her tribe have ejected her and ambushed daSilva. Reaching Kaiser's
depot at the foot of the falls, Stevenson finds Petra in labour and tries
to help deliver her child. Afterwards, he takes a fishing line down to
the river; when he returns, mother and child have vanished. Stung, he
sets once more upon a course of recrimination and self-examination until
he arrives at last at the beginning of understanding. Now he sets out
on a road which leads farther and farther into the interior until he disappears in the jungles of the heartland, leaving only fragments of letters to Maria and three scorched poems.

This is story of Heartland; by way of passing to its narrative, we may note that the predominant action of the novel is a journey, or many journeys, and may be summed up simply as "looking for." Indeed at one point we find Stevenson looking for daSilva who is looking for Kaiser who is looking for supplies. Hence this series of notes:

SHALL TRY TO FOLLOW ANCIENT LINE TO DEPOT. HOPE TO MAKE IT AND BACK BY NOON. DINGHY GONE FROM LANDING (p. 51).

SOMEBODY STEAL MY RATIONS.
WHO?
GONE TO TELL KAISER (p. 55).

CLOSED, GONE TO COLLECT SUPPLIES (p. 61).

Gone. The word tolls through the tale until we can almost predict the issue when Stevenson returns to Kaiser's house to find Petra: gone. Finally, Stevenson himself vanishes. Doubtless, in the thinly populated interior such absences are to be expected, and one might find sound reasons for them within the universe of the story. But the pattern of flight and exile has been set up and requires a closer scrutiny at the level of the narrative.

Where the story began in the city a year and more before the main body of the action, the narrative begins and ends in the forest. Its antecedents are not recounted until one morning—the first day of the narrative—Stevenson has paddled downstream from his post to the depot at the top of the falls where he meets Kaiser and learns that daSilva is to pass that way. When Kaiser has gone, Stevenson begins to reflect on the events which led him to this outpost and a seam is opened between the present of the narrative, indicated by a string of italicised nows, and
and the past of the story, an "italicised then. What is of interest is
of course not the existence of this opposition, which few novels exclude,
but the frequency of the shifts and the urgency of the distinction.
Clearly the narrative now is more important than the story's then, even
though the latter included most of Stevenson's residence in the forest:

Indeed the choice of the heartland had not been his...until
now...for what had really started in an accident and the
pursuit of mere expediency was only now, today, in process
of confirming itself in retrospect as his own grave stake
and risk...Would he be confronted finally by an impossibility
of escaping from himself, living or dead, or would he discover
an identity of abandonment which would inform him and some­
times lead him like his own shadow into the subtlest real­
ization of time? (p. 21).

"Retrospect" and "risk," "identity" and "time" we will discover to be
signal words, even key words, for Stevenson has now been launched upon
an enterprise of memory and identity on this first day. Kaiser's
farewell was loaded:

"Why, beggars and pork-knockers like daSilva! You need them
and they need you like skin need bone. Man need man,
Mr. Stevenson." Kaiser's eyes opened and flared and surveyed
the flag of grass behind which the paradoxical key of all
substance he guarded was hidden (pp. 20-21).

Stevenson's ruminations begin immediately upon the narrative space
which follows Kaiser's departure, and continue interwoven with the
present (set parenthetically off) until he is drawn into the woods
for a kind of initiation by which the temporal is given substance.
He is about to reach for the key to the depot when he hears "a sharp
splintering crack like a dry branch underfoot" (p. 29) and springs
about. Deciding to investigate, he follows a fresh trail along which
Kaiser has been hunting, and is led by "the mood of the place" to reflect
on those who have been there before him.

Nothing had changed over the centuries. Long before
European colonizer--Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch,
English--and African colonized arrived and ventured into
nameless tributaries, their pre-Columbian spiritual ancestors had been on the selfsame ground, Toltec or Peruvian administrators or merchants with their attendants and middlemen. They had apparently failed in their mission to catch the unreality of themselves which they encountered in the rude nomadic tribes they came to rescue and civilize, who flitted like ghosts under a more compulsive baton, born of the spirit of place, than any human conqueror could devise. (p. 30).

He imagines the shamanistic rites by which these predecessors sought to discover their heartland, but realises that to experience their heights of intoxicated limbs was to suffer as well an acute fall into the void. The golden age they wished to find—the Palace of the Peacock—may never have existed for all anyone knew. Existence now was what counted. And this existence was becoming real for Stevenson... (p. 31)

Brought up short by these reflections, Stevenson experiences his own fall into the void: he finds he has lost his way. A "panic of associations" grips his mind and he suffers a seizure in which his body is contorted "into every alarming shape, snake and man and beast" and his clothes are "ripped to scales." Afterwards, he has the sensation that time has been "retrieved."

In discovering "existence now" Stevenson has had to brush with the here of things; he must still tackle the not here before finding his "identity of abandonment." In order to "catch the unreality" of himself, he must discover a valid otherness, even when the looking for means finding nothing: the journey itself is a motion away from self-absorption and nothingness is precisely the goal, or one pole, of the quest. This is the pattern we have seen the narrative produce by its successive "gones," and in the same way suspense (and even mystery) function to displace time by withholding knowledge of what is now or next. At the level of story or event, the crack of the branch is probably caused by Petra, who is watching the depot for her chance. But this is concealed (and even
rarefied) by the narrative: Petra is not introduced until Book Three, where she is described as "the muse of the jungle" (p. 62). For the moment, Stevenson is visited only by the "spirit of place," and the following day at his own landing he has "the dark impression of someone walking across the clearing" (p. 45). While he dozes, a shadow falls on the jungle and his dinghy is freed from its moorings by "an arm of spray."

This structure of displacement also gives form to the consolations which the story provides, and the first of these is seriality. Recognizing now "the genuine human impossibility of breaking through beyond oneself" (p. 48), Stevenson feels compelled to abandon a letter he has been writing to Maria, motivated, he sees, by a kind of self-gratification. In place of this desire there comes by degrees a sense of the intricate web of disinterestedness which binds him to others:

Who was it that fed one (the anonymous midwife and middleman of the ages) and who the person one helped, in turn, to feed, possessed an answer equally in the spirit of the jungle as in the spectre of dismantling a rose (p. 50).

Stevenson's letter rots at the bottom of the dinghy that will now be used by someone he does not know. "Man need man," as Kaiser said, but it is not always clear just whom one is bound to, and by what ties of debt. The message was driven home by daSilva: "everybody's death belong to everybody's life" (p. 43), so that innocence and guilt become curiously enmeshed. In these circumstances, sacrifice assumes a certain significance, but a sacrifice emptied of sentiment and satisfaction, for the web of dependence is spun upon anonymity. One dies in another's place, as the daSilva whose twin killed Cameron in Palace of the Peacock, discovers here. When Stevenson finds his corpse at the bottom of the ravine, pinned between two boulders, "staring, suspended between dreadful compassion and curiosity, half-monkey, half-man," it is some moments before he realises
that the body is indeed the pork-knocker's: "It was daSilva after all who stood stark and dead—though so changed in twenty-four hours he could have been Kaiser or Cameron or Stevenson himself" (p. 58). But the moment and the mode of daSilva's death are not described until the last quarter of the novel, and then in an extended parenthesis spanning seven pages (73-79). Within this loop, the blow is a recurring one; in the course of its many nows it triggers in daSilva a recollection of his mongrel dog which died the day of his own recovery from a deathly fever, "digesting his mortal ailment." The narrative's far-flung network of connections has come to reflect those correspondences which the story desires for its fulfilment.

There is another plane upon which this web of indebtedness may be traced in the narrative, and this is hinted at the primary divisions of the novel, its three books, entitled "The Watchers," "The Watched," and "Creation of the Watch." Perspective is already built into these headings, but we shall see that the problem is more complicated than the tripartite structure suggests. Although the point of view or "focalization" of the narrative is largely Stevenson's, we have from time to time seen him and the other watchers watched in their turn. Again, although we have marked a drift towards "place" in the novel, it is still with the landscape's surface rather than its depths that we deal. This being so, any unmaking of structure must proceed horizontally, dealing with angles rather than levels. And it is here that we find the limited cast of Heartland begin to widen, for it is as if the play of perspectives in this novel were not bound by the four characters at all but extended beyond the species to all nature. This is to be expected of a novel set in a solitude of bush, but there are other reasons why we should not too quickly diagnose a pathetic fallacy at work. It is in fact quite
the reverse: the proliferation of perspectives suggests a reality that is never to be wholly grasped by an individual perceiving subject, a reality which so far from reflecting his peculiar needs, makes its own inscrutable demands.

So, while the watchman Stevenson is asleep, it is not an omniscient narrator who steals away from him to report the theft of the dinghy.

The line attached to the bow appeared to stiffen its hold, reluctantly giving way in the end to the pull of the frame as an arm of spray mounted and descended, sprinkling the passage of a minute spider crawling in the hammock of the vessel's interior: it grew difficult to tell where the veined grassroot of one's life commenced and the rocking cliff of illusion ended as the world half-turned on its side eclipsing the native eye of the spider trained on the circumstance of space.

A swallow darted from loops of air and flew straight to the boat to alight on the stern. It flew nervously off as the dinghy, which was running backside foremost, struck a rock. The vessel bounced off and this time when the swallow returned, it chose to fall back upon the bow. The animalcule gaze of the bird crossed the web the spider had spun, as though the frailest refraction of vision occurred, swift as a glistening bead of water on dispersing and immaterial fabric. It was a fleeting coincidence established out of spiralling visionary moments; in the spider's terrestrial universe the sky was precariously revolving around the earth, a sky whose silken broken texture one could conceivably have built; in the swallow's flying instinct the earth was leaning upwards condensed out of every shattered cobweb which held a running stream together like an instinctual ball one could never—in one's wildest imagination—have invented or made....(pp. 46-47)

The world is seen here by animate and inanimate alike: by spider, swallow, even boat and bead of water. What suffers, accordingly, is the supremacy of the constituting subject, of that classical individual who makes absolute sense of the world, drawing all perspectives together into a single intelligible totality. The difficulty of expressing a prevailing otherness is felt by those who have experienced long periods of solitude. As he talks to Stevenson, Kaiser's voice grates "with the mournful rhythm
the body of a tree makes when it cracks with the wind, seeming to deplore the inadequacy of language itself" (pp. 16-17). Time and again in this novel (surely the largest menagerie in all Harris's fiction) perspective will stray from the characters to a dog, a rabbit, a fish, a fly, a beetle, an ant, a tree, a rock. It is true that a teleology is affirmed beneath this "jigsaw of intangible resources" and man is effaced only to be restored, but the new meaning which the invention of identity implies, is achieved not through a unity but a multiplicity of perspective. In fictional terms this means a check upon the privileged insight of the narrator who from a position of security manipulates ironic distance and perspective to consolidate a standard version of the world. As each perspective is challenged by another, the old irony and "absolute rage for good" (p. 84) succumbs to a principle of displacement and what Harris has called "a new unconscious political irony" (RV p. 19). In this way the order of things is shaken and it is through the contrasts built into the narrative that another order is figured. To extend Metz's description, narrative is a matter of inventing not only one time scheme in terms of another, but as well one spatiality in place of another.  

The "eclipse of time" (p. 66) is better illustrated if we reduce the narrative to a skeleton and its characters to their functions, a device by which the small human cast will be seen to shrink even further, to three. Reduced to this frame, the action of the novel follows a sequence not unlike that of a folk tale. In such a schema, the most obvious pairs are readily conflated; as the novel repeatedly suggests, Petra is to daSilva as Maria is to Stevenson. The significant merger, however, is Stevenson-daSilva, daSilva being Stevenson's other, that not-self whose discovery is in fact the hero's mission. DaSilva says
so quite openly:

"I turning into the ghost of a reporter of the one court of conscience after all--comprising nobody else but the mystery of me (or you)--in spite of the f___ contradiction on every crowded conventional body's lips. DaSilva. DaSilva," he confessed. "Stevenson. Stevenson," he ejaculated, giving Stevenson an ironical, almost unholy, look. "Somebody or other always addressing me as a flesh-and-barebones seducer--full of tricks--and you for the Jekyll-and-Hyde devil in your name (p. 44).

With Stevenson and daSilva become one, Petra's structural position as heroine is further strengthened, not least because Maria is an absent heroine while Petra is indubitably and solidly present. It is she who gets the drifting letter from the hero which was cast away before being sent to the absent heroine. The third irreducible character is Kaiser, who may be described as the absent midwife, for although it is the hero who is present at the critical moment, he is helpless, and it is in Kaiser's bed that Petra's infant is born. Kaiser is in more ways than this the middleman, for he is the go-between of folk-tale (he drives a lorry between Lower and Upper Kamaria) and moreover the classic mentor who guards the "key to all substance" and sets the hero upon his quest. It is he who, as it were, introduces Stevenson to himself by first telling him of daSilva. This done, he withdraws, and Stevenson undergoes his ordeal of initiation (the seizure) before starting out on his mission of finding another place. The knowledge he is looking for does not come at once (hence the gones, the empty chambers) but his encounter with daSilva is a beginning. His next "ordeal"--so described--is his presence at Petra's childing, followed by another disappointment. A sentence midway in the novel crystallized his task:
It was the selfish fear of experiencing fear, the selfish love of the possession of love one was being summoned to transcend or see through by 'abiding to a steadfast covenant and refusal to shrink from the extremity and volume of the demoralizing contact and content of death (p. 48).

DaSilva and Petra have cured him of selfish fear and interested love; now Stevenson must not shrink from his last ordeal. He sets out upon "the longest crumbling black road" by which he comes finally to merge with the heartland.

The tale is not quite told. A postscript remains, which tells of Stevenson's disappearance and includes the fragments of three poems he left behind. But before we look at these, there remains another vacancy in the morphology of this narrative. We have encountered in our schema a hero, a heroine, and a go-between: we have not met a villain. He is of course an absent villain, but only because Time cannot properly be counted a character. Time it is which evokes in Stevenson "the greatest fear of all, the fear that every elaborate means however varied and admirable in encompassing distances in space, always accomplished the same end in time" (p. 49). But there is a way in which the villain can be collared, and to illustrate it we will effect a final merger. We have seen Stevenson disappear into the jungles, thus meeting his match in time and becoming one with space. Surviving him, with her child, is "the muse of the jungle," the "spirit of place," Petra, who herself has pronounced spatial qualities. When big with child, she was "like a numinous boulder informed by arms and legs" (p. 71), and her name is, after all, Petra. Like the Mariella of Palace of the Peacock, she has become both person and place. Together, the dead hero and the surviving heroine come at last to forge an equal alliance against time, namely space.
Space will assume larger proportions, or a greater density, in Harris's next novel, *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, but we may pause on our way there to observe that the "eclipse of time" by the "disc of place" (p. 80) is never total. Nor is space altogether benign, since it must in turn be fissured. Although the poems which close *Heartland* are poems of place: "Troy," "Behring Straits," and "Amazon," they are each a meditation equally on "the controversial tree of time." 16 Taken together, the fragments (damaged by fire, and so incomplete) are a kind of sunken bridge from Old World to New, and in this way preserve the pattern of migration or journeying or "looking for" which the main body of the novel set in motion. It is this movement which traces the intersection of the two dimensions, and as "Hector/hero of time" and Stevenson, hero of space discover, there is no escaping that nexus: "man must die first to be free" (p. 93). Petra responds to the "losses, raids and deprivations" of history with a mute assertion of identity which enables her "to incorporate the flight of time and draw assistance out of granite" (p. 71). Stevenson's more ratiocinative response is to elaborate a philosophy of uniformity and diversity which leads him into a duality whose consequences we will examine shortly. Here it allows him to master or regain time: he picks up and winds—or dreams he does--Kaiser's clock, and sets it going again. It is an old dream.

*The Eye of the Scarecrow* does not abandon this hope. Endeavouring to "retrace my own steps in time" (p. 21), the narrator remembers a dream in which as a boy he saw a balloon, "half-carriage, half-bird floating above the housetops" and carrying "officials and directors of church and state, by whom I was employed in an obscure alchemical capacity" (p. 22). The balloon comes down next door, and wishing to elude his employers, the narrator climbs to an upstairs room furnished with "royally made beds."
Undeceived and sick at heart, he sees a door in the wall which he had not
noticed earlier, and enters by it a secret apartment

devour of every film or integument of a window. Nevertheless
however cloistered it first appeared—it was filled with a
rust-coloured light like ammunition fired from distant stars,
naked metallic rose, neither iron nor bronze nor gold: the
sleep of an immaterial unsupported element: the armour of the
poor, and I knew then how dread and necessary it was to dream
to enter the striking innermost chemistry of love, transcending
every proud chamber in the inexorable balloon of time (pp. 22-23).

There is much of the Harrisian project here: the dream itself, the
conjunctive impulse ("half-carriage, half-bird"), the "obscure" alchemical
calling, the visionary light, the mystic love, the hermetic chamber. The
lesson is plain enough: politicians and divines promise a spurious heaven;
truth lies a step beyond. But we may take the movement of the dream as an
exemplum also of the narrative pattern of this novel.

Where the flight from time in Heartland found refuge in a plethora of
surface perspectives, that in The Eye of the Scarecrow seeks to penetrate
rather than multiply space. In the earlier novel, the interior was a
retreat, a plateau of seclusion crossed by a road along which the hero
pressed farther and farther; the interior, that is to say, was largely
exterior in its conception. The later novel is riddled from start to
finish with sockets of space and time; its interior is no longer a matter
of journeying farther, but deeper, tunnel and grave having replaced road
and depot. Of all Harris's novels to date, The Eye of the Scarecrow is,
perhaps for these reasons, the most impenetrable, the most obscure, meta-
phors which will be seen to share a subterranean dimension. It is as if
Harris had vowed, following Lawrence, to reach "a stratum deeper than...
anybody has ever gone, in a novel" Recognizing the problems which such
an endeavour must pose for the reader, he added an author's note to the
paperback edition of the novel, in which he addressed the issue of difficulty as it concerned what he called "pace and new dimension in a certain kind of imaginative fiction" (n.p.). The two terms should not automatically be reduced to private time and inner space, but the imaginative history Harris proposes does indeed seek to capture the essence of the one and the substance of the other.

Some of the difficulty of this novel stems from the fact that what little there is in the way of a discernible story, even one so slender as that of Heartland's emerges in dislocated fragments at the whim of the narrator. Instead of a plot, there are scattered vignettes from the narrator's past, a number of which concern L____, his friend from boyhood, whom he later accompanied on an expedition to a remote mining town. Another pair had already made this nine months' journey to Raven's Head: the narrator's father and his friend and engineering colleague. This friend was to become the narrator's stepfather after the real father was executed for murder when the narrator, it was said, was less than a minute old. The stepfather was in turn drowned when he returned to Raven's Head to try to prove his friend's innocence. Now the narrator (who signs himself Idiot Nameless) makes the same journey with L____, again an engineer. In the interior, they send for a prostitute named Hebra (but also Raven's Head) and come to quarrel over her. They are involved in a crash of car or plane in which both survive but are separated, Nameless being found and cared for by a shepherd. Nine months later, he wanders out of the jungle just in time to save L____ from being executed on a charge of having murdered his missing friend. The story is further complicated by the deliberate confusion of L____'s and Nameless's identities; moreover, it transpires that the actual victim is Hebra,
herself much the same woman as she whom Nameless's father had strangled. The murder charge, which now includes Nameless as well, is dropped only when a pork-knocker, Scarecrow, confesses to the deed.

Like Palace of the Peacock, The Eye of the Scarecrow is an account of a journey relived. The overt doubling in the first novel, by which the names of the two crews match man for man, is not here repeated, for the narrator's father and step-father remain anonymous, but then so do the chief characters, while it is clear that Nameless stands for his father while L____ stands for the father's friend. The phrase "parent scaffold," which recurs in the text, may thus be read as something of a pun, for while Nameless recovers his father's execution, the prior series of events not only overhangs but encircles and forms the frame of that which repeats it. There is also a resemblance to Heartland. Like Nameless, Stevenson embarked on an expedition into "an interior where one saw oneself turned inside out" (p. 48), but where Stevenson was lost, Nameless lives to report back from "the final station...of ourselves in time and space" (p. 76). His closing communications are dated "Night's Bridge."

It is a reporting of this kind which constitutes the bulk of the narrative, so that the story filters through obliquely and almost by accident. Yet even without this supervention of narrative, the story would be a disjointed one, a fact which suggests that here story is of its own accord approaching the condition of narrative, and on narrative's terms. In the course of story's becoming narrative, narrative uses the story's action for its own rhetoric until the narrating itself becomes, if not the subject of the novel, then the enabling process of that subject. The novel becomes a meditation on narrative construction and reconstruction. Having finished an asymmetrical quartet, for the most
part fictional, the novelist now allows himself to reflect on his factual past. Yet the special intensity of this novel is not wholly to be explained by the narrative "I" and certain thinly veiled passages of autobiography. What is of essence is less the author's past than the art of its recapture and, more, the fact that what is laid bare in the structure of the narrative is his private philosophy and the states of its evolution, in fine, the growth of a narrative poet's mind.

In a public letter entitled "Kith and Kin," in which he later treated once more certain incidents associated with L____, Harris spoke of visualizing "one or two contradictions of memory." This phrase happily sums up the method of The Eye of the Scarecrow as well: if the past sleeps in disordered memory, it is woken in a language no less contradictory. One mode in which these contradictions ordinarily appear is the journal, and it is as a journal that this novel begins. Such a genre wants no plot (until one arrives and begins by degrees to manipulate the writing); it is in fact non-fiction, and is moreover a way of beginning when the past offers no other handle. "Kith and Kin" plunged, as is so frequently the case with letters, into a salutation and then at once found itself in trouble:

My Dear L____,

Now that I am embarkèd on this letter I find myself involved in the most curious difficulties. Memories that I have carried around (and taken for granted) since child­hood suddenly seem more reticent, more withdrawn, than ever. And yet in that reticence paradoxically more active, with a deep inwardness to resist or scrutinize from their side any kind of facile portrait or summary on my side (p. 1).

Harris is having problems starting, and this not from any lack of native invention or technical skill, but because the past is to be more than regained; it is to be remade in the moment of its discovery, worked out, given shape, quite literally fabricated.
In *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, the contradictions begin with the organ of inner visualization itself: it is both "the explosive train of memory" (p. 21) and the "frail visionary organization of memory--one thing against another" (p. 16). Recognizing that he cannot "recall--like a ghost returning to the past--the identical map of place," the narrator, who is perhaps not yet Nameless, finds himself "conferring the curious baptism of living imagination upon helpless relics" (p. 15). To attempt exactitude, he declares, would be to succumb to the dead tide of self-indulgent realism. On the other hand, to travel with the flood of animated wreckage that followed after, is a different matter, a trusting matter in which I am involved (p. 15).

Harris will trust to the contradictions of memory, "one thing against another," and in order that his rhetoric be laid bare, he works the poles of past and present into the text. Hence the alternating time-scheme: the present of the narrating, 1963-1964, and the rescued presents of the past, 1929, 1932, 1948, those spots in time which inhabit the early narrative space of the novel. Once the cross-play of this series has been set in motion, it gathers momentum and a fiction generated by collisions of fact takes over the text. Writing elsewhere of an attempt "to fuse the actual and fictitious within an asymmetrical location," Harris remarks that resort must be made to "an art of memory which dislocates, in some measure, an idolatrous plane of realism by immersing us in a peculiar kind of ruined fabric" (IN p. 142).

"Ruined fabric," "animated wreckage," "Is it that within the rubble of oneself still lies the key?" (p. 27): all of these images illustrate the extraordinarily fissured form of *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, marking a seismic activity equalled so far in Harris's canon only by the "mixed futuristic order" of *Palace of the Peacock*. With its tales of innocence
and experience which undermine cause and effect (as in an account of the narrator's pushing L into a canal) and supplant identity with relation (as in the confusion which follows the crash of car or plane), the text sets out to question the sequentiality of time and the solidity of space. Its chosen techniques of rupture and ellipsis are close to those of film, with its jump-cut and montage, but a cinematics which, having combed the "rubbish heap of memory" (p. 56), recognizes that materials are scarce and shots not to be squandered. Hence an art that is both dense and fragmented, whose bricoleur is Nameless himself.

The Eye of the Scarecrow would seem almost a casebook of that bricolage described in Lévi-Strauss's classic opposition of engineer and bricoleur. The two central characters fit this mould precisely, the engineer L with a reputation for "sober and matchless good sense, judgement, responsibility," while Nameless is "the striking, unpredictable one" (p. 40). Together they stand on a suspension bridge that is to one a technical feat and for the other "a trapdoor and a poem," and while L discourses on tension and load, Nameless sees "the most fragile and beautiful web against the sky," and is possessed by the "muse of place." L has been commissioned to relocate Raven's Head for the "fantastic gold deposits" said to lie thereabouts; "an astronomical investment, labour, machinery, a new township" hang on his success. For Nameless, this is a shoestring adventure into his own obsessions; the trails to his ghost town straddle the mnemonic past. A passage from one of Harris's early essays developed this same opposition of "masses and materials" to the "barenness of the West Indian world," a barenness whose "symbol is man, the human person." The West Indian has

most significantly to influence the architectural problem of his time, since though he may work principally in terms
of values in his bare world, the effects will be felt soon or late in terms of masses and structural organization.

Now, it is not an easy matter to see the human being today. So many walls fall between us and our fellows. Money, myth, and numerous obsessions. Yet when we look at the human we must be prepared not to overlook these obsessions but to work them into the structure of art...(FR p. 14).

As a poet, Harris was quick to apply his philosophic marginalism, which might have taken many directions, to "the structure of art," and this is what concerns us here. An aesthetic structure based on "masses and materials" would be none other than what Harris was later to call the novel of "persuasion" or "consolidation" (TW p. 29). Such a structure could not tolerate rupture and disequilibrium, or the rapid and illogical leaps of memory which scorn its order and mock its seamlessness. On the other hand, an art of marginal experiment, confronted with sparse but diverse resources, must employ precisely such techniques, laying bare their bareness and finding virtue in their unstructuration. The resulting difficulties, as Harris warns in his preface, cannot be smoothed over; they have been worked into the narrative with a purpose which—at the level of the line—we examined in some detail in the chapter on language.

In The Eye of the Scarecrow, language now offers, in its zany patchwork (the image of stitching occurs again and again) a striking pattern of the larger narrative counterpoint. Racking his memory for a picture of the old shepherd and his grandson who found and cared for him after the crash, Nameless wonders:

How did I contrive—in the void of the mind which seems so long ago—to stitch a wild apprehension of them together? Glaring touch of conceit: fallacy. Needless to say it was they who obscurely measured and needled me when they found me lying on the ground. Rumpelstiltskin threads bristled like the wisest whiskers. A stich in time saves nine. Cat's eyes fabric. Balloon skin pattern. Skyscraper tapestry. The toy cow jumped over the toy moon (p. 79).
This passage is not to be mistaken for a stream-of-consciousness rendering of the dazed Nameless's thoughts as he lies on the brink of unconsciousness. Or if it is that, it is more, for it works in miniature the structure of that "epic and revolutionary novel of associations" which Harris opposed to the novel of persuasion. All of the motifs sewn into this passage are traceable across varying distances of narrative to elements in the text; at the same time, they appear to be generated out of each other, in a random progression. This, as we have seen, is the method by which the novel got underway. The bricoleur's activity, Levi-Strauss holds, while comprising a "continual reconstruction from the same materials," has this distinctive feature that "it is always earlier ends which are called upon to play the part of means: the signified changes into the signifying and vice versa."\(^22\) The aesthetic moral of this formula (which Levi-Strauss declares "could serve as a definition of 'bricolage'") is that in a passage such as Harris's stitchery above, language is guiding rather than imitating consciousness, the images have become signifiers rather than passive signifieds. In its turn, the passage expresses or signifies the structure of the novel;\(^23\) the larger narrative units, debris in their own way of past experience, are played off one against the other: 1928 against 1963 against 1948, even "2048." The "toy cow" fragment, for example, gives directly (but not chronologically) onto the subterranean vision which constitutes the turning point of the novel: "THE FIRST BURNED IMAGES which returned to me (long before I actually saw the face of grandfather or grandson) were the womb and carriage of a dream I had forgotten" (p. 79). Inventing as it goes, language helps memory take on form and direction.

By returning briefly to the level of the sentence, which was our horizon in Chapter Two, we have glimpsed the narrative counterpoint writ.
small. The narrative "sentence" is subject to the same disordereding, and for the same purpose, as that of the novel's language, its parts of speech juggled, its inflexions deflected, its syntax unbound. Such procedures, common enough in modernist fictions, disorder not only the time of the story but also the history of the time in which the events are set. Thus they serve Nameless's express purpose of exercising an "open memory" the better "to escape from the prison of past knowledge" (p. 46). The dream logic of the narrative structure is one more attempt by Harris to disrupt what in his preface he calls the "nightmare of history," but unlike Joyce, who wished to wake from the nightmare, Harris wishes to pass to another mode of dreaming. Reviewing in his author's note the events of the forty years covered by the novel, he denies "the claims of historical narrative to be identical with universality," to be at once

a general framework of expression bound up with the institutions of the day; to be at the same time a general framework of protest bound up with the institutions of the day (n.p.)

It should be clear from this that Harris is here concerned with history as discourse: not the events themselves but a version, the standard version, of the events is in dispute. Hence the vehemence of his attack on the received account: "history (as universal given tool) was both culprit and nightmare."

The imaginative history offered in The Eye of the Scarecrow no more than glances at the public events of the day, but its first foot in the past is planted in 1948, "year of the Guiana Strike." The strike is not sympathetically portrayed: it arises out of an "irony and nihilism of spirit," and the unity of the workers involves

the hideous and logical denigration of every person, high and low, in the horror of a progressive realism which was far more dangerous, because it seemed politic and necessary
however aimless and subversive, than the most fertile incestuous fantasy. It was the devil's abyss blocking the way, I dreamt... (p. 18).

The ideological content of Harris's own account is spelt out here. If ideology inevitably takes the form of narrative, this narrative obligingly gives the ideological its fictive nomenclature: "irony" and "realism" versus "fantasy" and dream. In the teeth of historical realism, the narrator proposes to follow the victims of the police firing (and perhaps others in the procession of strikers) to "some funereal cellar corresponding to the burning of all material ambition" (p. 21). Then commences the dream of the balloon and the bedchambers and the genuine "armour of the poor." It is to be a quest for individuals; spurning the "nightmare account" of the mass, the narrative will represent "the psyche of ordinary men and women," the "pace" of whose lives is distinct from that of history. Herein lies the source of that ambition to transcend "every proud chamber in the inexorable balloon of time." The project involves, as any transcendental "history" must, an extraordinary valuation of the individual's capacity to overcome the contingent (as with the family Anthrop, who alone of all the tenants in a shanty alley preserve a cheerful demeanour and manage to pay their rent) and eventually the necessary (as with the enigma of the "poor man's hearse," which vehicle, lacking the glass sides of conventional mourning carriages, may well be empty, its paupers having cheated what is later called "the liberal form of death" [p. 93] ).

But "pace" is only one half of the proposed revisionary history: "new dimension" is the other. Early in the novel there is a recollection of a boyhood visit to the city seawall. Harris returns to this site in a lecture given five years after the novel, while on the subject of landscape and realism.
...I recalled my boyhood (before World War II broke out) when I often swam at the Fort on the Georgetown foreshore. I reflected also on an observation I made when I was last in Georgetown in 1966: the sea no longer stands where it used to be and the land has grown in its place by six or seven feet. Therefore, if I were to endow the de facto mound or grave which now exists on the foreshore with a figurative meaning beyond the present stasis of reality I might see the ghost of the past (the ghost of my childhood) swimming in dry land (HFM p. 24).

Something of this imagination—which Harris at once recognises as "suspect" --is necessary for an apprehension of the space evoked in The Eye of the Scarecrow. And since this space is one which assumes ever greater responsibilities as Harris's writing progresses, it is worth quoting a passage from another essay that might further clarify the concept. In a piece revealingly entitled "Reflection and Vision," Harris puts it this way:

Take an object. A bridge perhaps, a bone, a flute perhaps, a coat, a piece of sculpture, a fence, a tree, a river, a canal. Around it may lie deepseated reflections of a personal and/or historical nature.

Indeed those reflections may be the seed of institutions, the psychological texture, the proud, implacable scars a society wears on its back as institution, costume, ritual etc...And as that texture reinforces itself over generations and centuries into an imprint of sovereign earth...it is inevitable that a vulnerable centre, an original frailty (and all that that means as marvellous susceptibility to space and depth) is wholly masked and forgotten (RV p. 16).

The depth intended here is in the first place not the illusionism of perspective, whether in painting or in fiction, for Harris goes on to speak of "'black holes of gravity' as an extinction of light drawn into paradoxical genesis of suns beyond imagined or imaginable models" (RV p. 17). But if it is not old-style realism, neither is it that reactive experimentalism which treats the world as a surface to be swept by a neutral, travelling intelligence. Rather, it looks beyond this spatiality of superﬁces into a marginal zone of "eclipsed perspectives," that "original frailty" which while empirically undemonstrable exists nonetheless as a
posited state of extreme density.

The density of the novel, then, is an attempt to express formally this hypothetical content. Where earlier we saw Harris take the image as a kind of fragmenting device when juxtaposed with a sharply differing other, here we see him press layer upon layer of narrative to produce that "density of place" which, although an early conviction, did not become the subject of a novel until *The Eye of the Scarecrow*. Although on one level the novel presents the tracking of a murderer now dead, at another, further down, it comes to prosecute the concept "murder" in a way which detective fictions would consider scandalously irregular. It is only after the crash, when the "driver" has pierced through these sedimented strata to a recognition of "the realm of depth or place," that the "framework of a parent scaffold" begins to show itself. Now he enters "a sphere of reduction," at which zero point in space, "one frail body of instinct" may imaginatively communicate with the "instant dust of another," Nameless with that other who is his executed father. Having now suffered "death," he begins to acknowledge and reconstruct the murder he has been so anxious to deny, from a misconstruction of his father's innocence and guilt. The reconstruction involves an account of death which is as daring as the doing (or being done) to death will be controversial. All of the novel's images and obsessions point this way: the coffins, graves, tunnels, cracks, holes and faults. At last, by way of a descent into a Kafkaesque vision whose implications are that murder is a pact in which the principals act out an equal struggle where absolute categories such as loss and gain, active and passive, are inadequate, Nameless imagines himself facing his father "in the dense and transparent cell of his moveable, immovable, deceptive prison and person" (p. 91). The instruments of death his father
does not fear, but "space he could not yet dream to bear" (p. 93). Having by his "art of murder" invoked a life in lifelessness, a somethingness in nothingness, he now finds the walls of his cell close in upon him in turn, "inch by wall, wall by foot," until every conventional distinction between volume and surface became inextricably close and unreal.

For since a cube is subject to filling or hollowing, it subsists in potential depletion or repletion of itself (its own paradox of vain expansion): but since the thinnest film or surface into which it may ultimately resolve is susceptible to an abstract measurement in depth still, however unimaginably frail and indistinct, THIS (and no other) lives in a true body of density which demolishes at one stroke the technical, subjective hollow or void; but remains, as it were, technically full still, a dripping mist or sweat of proportion, incapable NOW of being dug into or dug out, inner space (its true unassailable possession), indestructible, faint scale or measure of One universe (pp. 93-94).

The unity of victor and victim, the "unity of ancestral master and slave" (p. 25), could not but subsist upon this central Oneness. It is true that the novel resolutely insists upon a duality to things; from the moment of the crash, the driver (who is himself both Nameless and L___) learns to respect this "strange company--TWO and IT--though who it was no one could say: a crumbling scarecrow perhaps" (p. 75). And the postscript which Nameless attaches to the whole is a catalogue which oscillates between the qualities of "one" and two." But there is nevertheless a tendency for this dualism to collapse--as if by virtue of Harris's commitment to depth, and in violation of the seniority of forms--into a prime Idea, or in Nameless's language, "the original Word, the Well of Silence" (p. 95). This unity Harris is driven to confess despite his deepest mistrust of finality: "after addressing every caution to oneself against absolutes, there is an absolute medium of consciousness which we must learn to accept as the language of art" (PL p. 5). Art, that is to say, makes speak the original silence.
In *Heartland*, the dualism of "two" and "it" took the shape of a philosophy in which uniformity and diversity were held in equilibrium: "The uniform burden of place was neither nearer nor farther from the truth of being than the diverse gambols of station" (p. 87). In *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, where the pair have become "capacity" and "density," there is an avowed attempt to "find in nature an innocent array of objects and the ground, as well, of classical unity free from an arbitrary interest in mood or colour" (p. 96). The "as well" is significant, for Nameless's project seems to be to find reality both dead and living (the unmaking of murder is part of this scheme), or to arrive at a point where the distinction between these states is null and, literally, void. Hence those "numinous boulders" which strew the landscape of both *Heartland* (p. 71) and *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (p. 68). Hence also the numerous contradictory states in these and Harris's other fictions, contradictions undone by the unity which lies at their heart. It is as if the *conjunctio* which the obscure alchemist desired were an interpenetration of opposites so complete that the marriage bed opened into an "ultimate grave of stillness" (p. 43). This still point is what Harris has elsewhere called the "unnameable centre" (WH p. 24), and what others have called the "romantic heart of things" (Barthes) or simply a "suspect interiority" (Robbe-Grillet). Nameless has already declared his "an unproven, even unprovable manifesto" (p. 95), but his postscript steadfastly asserts that twoness is "a continuous and miraculous conception of 'living' and 'dead' nature, rehabilitation of the lost One, the unrealized One, the inarticulate One" (p. 108).

The critic must not pounce too swiftly on this metaphysics; his will not be a "groundless fall." If there is a logocentrism here, it is one
that will be found to have a tactical value beyond its original stillness, pointing away from itself to engagement with the world. The way back to the contingent is best shown by means of certain remarks on language which Nameless includes in his manifesto. "Language," he asserts, "because of its untrappable source transforms in a terrifying and well-nigh unendurable perspective—every subjective block and fixture of capacity" (p. 96); one sees inwardly by means of language and thus learns to distrust the given order of things. But the plausible new language of fluidity, that "very apparent birth of a 'future' language of possibilities" (p. 97) which imitates the inward state and seems to replace the rhetorical order of the old, is itself to be distrusted and broken down. Only out of this second negation can a poetic language come, one which neither passively records nor actively denies because it is "the lifeblood of seeing and responding without succumbing" (p. 97). The eye of the scarecrow looks both ways.

At the level of the novel's story, authentic being and seeing have required a crumbling of the landscape of will, of that invulnerability of self which prevents a character from standing in another's shoes (or space) as Nameless eventually comes to do both with his father and with L____. It is by way of this "'negative' identity, self-contradiction, even 'positive' loathing of the 'ground' of 'spirit'" (p. 101), that one arrives at a new sense of community by which one can sympathize with "the derangement of all creatures within history and circumstance" (p. 102) without self-indulgence and with a genuine solidarity because one has in fact been another.

The narrative consequences of this scarecrow otherness are further testimony to the virtue of indirection. Just as settlements like Raven's Head "belonged to those who voluntarily began to relinquish the right they
deserved to a place in them" (p. 55), the "original well of silence" is
tapped when one is, as it were, not listening, the Word best read when one
is looking the other way. Similarly, the forms of the narrative's future
are best figured when they are not rigorously determined by the author's
will. This is not, as we shall see, a surrender of the author's authority,
but rather an openness to the unconscious of language through what Nameless,
in the vocabulary of romanticism, calls "an Imagination empty of self-
determined forms to come, blank frames, indwelling non-resemblance, freedom
from past, present, future form and formlessness" (p. 98). We have seen
how the most freely associating passage in the novel, that of the needlework,
led structurally into the vision which completed the crumbling of the
driver's will. In the same way, the narrator's recoveries of the past
and the narrative's discoveries of its future depend on the collisions
of unrelated, even irrelevant, structures one with an-other. A novel on
whose surface such words as "crumbling," "uprooting," and "subduction"
frequently reappear may expect to find its narrative sentence shaped by
their corresponding verbs and any residual securities of form and direction
imperilled by the void it freely invokes. There is even a suggestion of
relativity to the time-scheme, as if the narrative met itself returning:
in choosing to give himself up, the father retreats from "the assured
dictation of the future" (p. 95), while the son, in tracing him to his
cell retreats from his own present, finding that he has come "in this
backward, unexpected pregnant way to the goal of my long quest" (p. 91).
The novel closes with a formal embodiment of Nameless's quest for
"phenomenal space rather than phenomenal time" (p. 108). Its final
"dispossession of the strait-jacket of time" is a series of eleven self-
quotations of varying lengths and stations in time past and future entitled
"THE BLACK ROOMS." Here The Eye of the Scarecrow provides its own synchronic structure the better to disclose its narrative space. The postscript is a final asymmetry.

The void in The Eye of the Scarecrow, then, has a literary as well as a metaphysical dimension: it serves both as a caveat in nature and as the empty frame of the novel's discovery of its own form. Indeed, properly read, the unnameable centre is a "structure" of postponement, where unity is always in the future or in some other place while the now and here of the narrative remain formally broken and organically unredeemed. Looking "both ways in the same blank crude instant" (p. 75), the scarecrow represents not a denial of the world but an "unsleeping signal" of this unstructuring structure of otherness and its function in the interpretation of that world through the inventive revision of its forms. The force of this revision is demonstrated with splendid brio in a later novel to which The Eye of the Scarecrow is closely related, Black Marsden (1972).

Much of the spirit of Black Marsden is contained in its subtitle: "a tabula rasa comedy." The novel is a kind of comic play, and a good deal of the wry wordplay within the play is of the same improvisational kind as that of the structures we have just examined in the scant light of The Eye of the Scarecrow. Clive Goodrich, winner of the Football Pools and patron of the arts, takes in the vagabond impresario, Doctor Black Marsden and his troupe, Jennifer Gorgon, Knife and Harp. Making themselves at home, the actors come and go, rehearsing a play and discussing the world and its contents to all hours with their host. Then one day, Goodrich finds they presume too much and turns them out. There is no plot: the writing instructs and entertains like some impromptu morality play whose actors invent their lines as they go until the final abrupt
Like all Harris's work, *Black Marsden* is stoutly, even obsessively anti-realistic. Early in the piece, Goodrich dreams he sees Knife slash Marsden who is dressed as Deacon Camera; relief is instant. There follows a narrative of continuous shifts and surprises, with a bewildering "rain of perspectives" and tense. Once again, there is a diary, and although its form is not imposed on the novel, it is an instrument of discovery. The morning after his dream of the slashed photographer's "wig of cloth," Goodrich's entry is entitled "COMEDY OF FREEDOM" and begins in a sinister void:

**LEFT HAND:** Tunnel/garment. Doodles of ink. When my doodling tunnel is blackest I move towards a pinprick of light at the far end which grows brighter until the pinprick becomes a skylight (p. 24).

And so on. Relieved of the necessity to imitate, Goodrich writes out of nothing, feeling his way as he progresses. The elements of the world are preserved; what is changed is their order, for the diary entry is the issue of a dream.

Goodrich's "deep diary," as Marsen mockingly calls it, is not the only element this novel shares with *The Eye of the Scarecrow*. The narrative of the earlier novel began with a recollection of Edinburgh; *Black Marsden* is set in that city. The conflict between Nameless and L___ has some resemblance to that between Marsden and Goodrich, and Jennifer Gorgon, whom host wishes to wrest from guest, has an ugliness to her beauty even as Hebra had a beauty to her ugliness. Goodrich himself has a "scarecrow eye" (p. 42), but must learn to use it, and it is as if he were pushed by Marsden (who is in fact a "projection" [p. 32] of his host), as L___ was pushed, into discovering himself. What then has become of Nameless? Like Mariella, like Petra, like Hebra,
he has become a place: the desert town of Namless [sic], scene of the novel's most bizarre fantasy. In a sustained piece of surreal writing, Goodrich reconstructs a journey to his childhood homeland, now laid waste by political turmoil and yet for that reason "a laboratory of startling contrasts" where an experiment of great consequence might be successfully brought off, a "subconscious theatre or liberation of men from fanatical pursuits" (p. 83).

Goodrich's notes are in fact that "guerrilla theatre": as the cultural emissary of a larger movement, he sets out to undermine both naturalism and the avant-garde, but is quite willing to ironize his own theory of spatiality: one spring day he stops at Dean Bridge, high above the Water of Leith, to ponder the fate of those who have leapt from there, and is lost in his philosophy of interfused space when he steps back into the path of a car and is almost killed. He is also quite happy to lay his narrative method bare. At the end of the Namless fantasy, there is an abrupt shift to the first person, present: continuous.

I stop writing suddenly and clip the pages together—nearly twenty to thirty pages of notes and sketches I have made since Jennifer disappeared several hours ago around a bend in the Botanical Gardens. My notes are corrections and revisions of an early "diary of Namless" in order to build a new eye of the Scarecrow or stage or theatre of essences occupied by a phenomenon of personality reaching back into the slate of childhood. Upon that slate Clive Goodrich is a given existence and other buried traumatic existences as well wrestling one with the other to express a caveat or unknown factor, an intuitive fire music within the hubris of assured character, assured rites of passage into death or namless town (p. 94).

Then he begins again: "My name is Clive Goodrich. Yet a name is but a cloak and sometimes a strange denuded nameless 'I' steps forth."

The beginning again is part of the larger theatre: it marks a new
decisiveness in Goodrich which will end in the eviction of Marsden and company. Structurally, this decision will end also the novel, but the narrative's return to a kind of beginning, and further, to the notes of an earlier work, is the mark of a continuous revision and reinsertion of a part of the old into the new. This logic of a margin which eludes the clean sweep is a recognition that one does not in fact begin with nothing, but that what is next to nothing may be of the highest value. It lays bare once more the structural use of that "unknown factor" or senior form as a point of departure rather than a monad or a fixed pole in a dualism.

We have already seen Harris adduce West Indian bareness as evidence of the West Indian artist's need to work with the resources at hand, namely man. Now, as Goodrich's taxi crosses the bleak underworld desert towards Namless, he remarks that "a curious subtle fleshing (if that was the right word)" (p. 82) has appeared upon the rocks, while Knife the driver tells of the liberation movement's hopes. It is possible to see this as a romanticism, a wishful humanizing of nature whose corollary is that petrifaction or displacement into space of certain characters. In fact the fleshing does not last, but while it is there it serves as a reminder of what Harris sees as his primary fictional resource, the marginal human. As Marsden puts it in a drunken apostrophe, "the very desert of human consciousness cries out that tabula rasa slate is the theatre of the uninitiate" (p. 31). In the contradiction between a tabula rasa that is the emblem of an initiate avant-garde (with its clean sweep of the past) and one that invokes a theatre of the uninitiate (with its eclipsed past and marginal present) resides an acute dilemma for the experimental novelist. It is to Harris's exploration of this marginal consciousness and its fictive embodiments that we will now turn.
IV. Experiment and the Individual

A convenient place to begin is with Clive Goodrich's second beginning in Black Marsden: "a name is but a cloak and sometimes a strange denuded nameless 'I' steps forth" (p. 94). More than an "I" steps out of Goodrich: Marsden is part of him, too, and out of Marsden step Jennifer Gorgon, Knife (there are three of him), and Harp. And yet the sum of these figures, when they are ranked below Goodrich, is not a unit but a cipher. The paradox by which "one" might be both many and none, is a mark of the prevailing temper, literary and philosophical, which labels the classic liberal individual an extinct species. It is this extinction which the name "Clive Goodrich" cloaks.

The whittling away of the centred liberal self which began by discarding a creature in secure possession of a soul, was at last to produce a creature possessed only by its possessions, notable among these that language of which it once thought itself the master. For the better part of a century, the devolution of modernism has reflected, often despairingly, an unhappy knowledge that the centre cannot hold. Another of its literary tags that have passed into common speech is the hollow man, that centreless subject which is the first lesson of the end of liberal humanism. As the secure universe of identity has given way to a relativist universe of relationship, the locus of the individual--that territory which once allowed of no dispute--has come to be no more than the crossroads of all the things he knows, a crossroads leading each way to an "interpersonal" realm where, in Victor Ehrlich's words, "the emphasis is on 'inter' rather than 'personal'." At the same time, and
contributing to this dissolution, the modern period has learnt from Freud to recognize the turbulence that underlies identity, and has come accordingly to grant desire a role of such preeminence that the Cartesian dictum might be modified to read: "I wish, therefore I am."

These two concerns, which are in fact one, are brought together in the title of an essay by Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire." If desire seeks a satisfaction so intense as to tempt extinction, it is both nothingness and another which support the desiring individual. The case is not as simple as this, but to put it so is to capture both the lack in the subject and the subject's wish to overcome this lack. In this he is aided by that same language which produced his identity:

the reader should recognize in the metaphor of the return to the inanimate (which Freud attaches to every living body) that margin beyond life that language gives to the human being by virtue of the fact that he speaks, and which is precisely that in which such a being places in the position of a signifier, not only those parts of his body that are exchangeable, but this body itself.²

The individual body, then, becomes not an irreducible essence but a virtuality of language, the condition of meaning for another, but not a meaning in itself. This insight is not necessarily new (or French), but it is a modern one, and while we owe its formulation to structuralism --by which the subject is in effect an effect, or a structure of absence-- we may see an earlier figuration in this theorem of Virginia Woolf's:

*Hamlet* and a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare; there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.³

In this sense, there is no Clive Goodrich; there are his various aspects, Marsden, Jennifer Corgon, Knife, Harp, but even when these are collapsed back into him, all that remains is "a strange denuded nameless
'I'." And now we may insert the sentence which immediately precedes this announcement, where yet another "I" holds up a blank slate.

Upon that slate Clive Goodrich is a given existence and other buried traumatic existences as well wrestling one with the other to express a caveat or unknown factor, an intuitive fire music within the hubris of assured character, assured rites of passage into death or... namless town (p. 94).

Then, once more: "My name is Clive Goodrich. Yet a name is but a cloak and sometimes a strange denuded 'I' steps forth." We must not lose sight of this "I" (there is something of a pun on Goodrich's "scarecrow eye") for it is what will distinguish the Harrisian individual from the Lacanian one, but for the moment we may take up that "hubris of assured character."

When Harris was still a poet rather than a novelist, that is, before his work could be said to incorporate characters properly (or improperly) so called, one of his earliest and acutest critics remarked in his poems a thrust "inimical to the individual as we understand the term." The critic, L.E. Brathwaite, went on to deplore the fact that in the book of poems under consideration "we find no people we can recognize," and noted that where an Eliot attempts to fix the individual in time and space; Harris is concerned with a concept of time and space in which the individual has little place; or at best a rather equivocal identity.

The time is now past, though not long gone, when each of these censures might have translated at once as a compliment to the experimental writer, and it is easier for this reason to give Brathwaite's criticism the attention it deserves. Correctly gauging the temper of the poetry, Brathwaite also sensed, in advance of Harris's novelistic career, the fragmentation to come. What he could not have foreseen was the purpose
of this fragmentation, a purpose which Harris later made clear both in his novels and in various critical and theoretical essays. In one of his earliest essays, Harris declared that "the individual is not the starting point nor the goal of the human world" (RT p. 21), and in "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," where his fictional programme is set out, he states flatly: "one is rejecting the sovereign individual as such" (TW p. 34). In a still later essay, he speaks of "the philosophical hollowness of man," and remarks that

within every prisoner of history is an attachment, involuntary perhaps but concrete, to the very premises of his age. How could it be otherwise when those premises are all he possesses or is possessed by? (BC pp. 45 and 44)

Yet there is a sense in which Brathwaite has put his finger unerringly on the nub of the matter, for in the course of a remark on the omnipresence of contradiction in Harris's work, he suggests that this feature is "an expression of uncertainty from the poet himself."6 It is as an illustration of this uncertainty that he addresses Harris's treatment of the individual.

Such a division indeed exists in the novelist, but it is one which he turns to advantage. While on the one hand Harris has unfailingly and increasingly produced in his work "individuals" whose masks shift and crumble, whose identity is always unstable, on the other he speaks with equal regularity of "the creative imagination as a centering process" which may "infuse a diverse unity of consciousness into every cloak or vehicle of memory; thereby sustaining the history of crisis as a living process of individuation rather than as an expendable and fortuitous creed" (UC p. 45). The contradiction—captured here in "diverse unity"—is replaced a little later in another such ambivalent phrase which calls up "a classical/grotesque animal of which we know so little" (UC p. 47).
It is as if both the classical and the modern individual were to be made one flesh. Writing of the opposition between historical linearity and imaginative rupture, Harris observes that "it takes a peculiar kind of mind...to perceive both sides of the coin in his lifetime, namely the wall of prejudice and the infinite phenomenal resources for divergence and discontinuity" (HFM p. 26), and perhaps this capacity for sustaining the dual accounts for the contradiction. But on the evidence of the novels themselves, just as we saw a preference for the discontinuous over the linear in narrative, so we shall find the balance in favour of the grotesque over the classical in character. And this may be for no other reason than that ideal unity is destined to elude the most stalwart organicist. In this sense, the "discontinuous or dotted line" which Harris proposes for the pattern of history might equally trace the individual were not this "identity" one which "constantly slips from our grasp" (AC p. 8). To this end Harris quotes Yeats: "Man can embody the truth but he cannot know it," and coming upon the resurgence of desire we have noticed in modern writing, this maxim assumes a special significance.

These are, of course, properly philosophical issues, and Harris's experimentation treats them on its own terms. Our concern, therefore, must be with the aesthetic consequences of placing "this body itself" in the position of a signifier, and we are shown the first of these by Michel Foucault. Marking the end of classical thought, Foucault records the enormous thrust of a freedom, a desire, or a will posited as the metaphysical converse of consciousness. Something like a will or a force was to arise in the modern experience—constituting it perhaps, but in any case indicating that the Classical age was now over, and with it the reign of representative discourse, the dynasty of a representation signifying itself and giving voice in the sequence of its words to the order that lay dormant within things.
In literature, the age of representation was in fact to outlast the Enlightenment and indeed to come into its own in an age of empiricism; the destruction of character begins in earnest only with that expressionism whose canonical example is the Nighttown episode of Joyce's *Ulysses*. The rejection of the "stable ego" extends even to a largely naturalistic Lawrence, but it is not until the *nouveau roman* that the impulse to characterize works itself out. "The chief character--one learns--is dishonest. He is honest," says the bland narrator of Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*. More recent experimental fiction has carried this disintegration much further, and though there have lately been some moral noises about a return to identifiable characters, it will not be easy to put the pieces together again.

Of his characters in *Palace of the Peacock*, Harris has said that he wished to bring them together "in a curious kind of simultaneous sacred self-exposure and rhythm, rather than invest in polarized identities" (SI p. 44). Elsewhere, he speaks of Donne, Fenwick and Stevenson as "agents of personality. They are not sovereign principles" (KK p. 52). Accordingly, when he comes to treat the novels of others, he is critical of the consolidating impulse. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, he sees Marlow driven to conceal from Kurtz's intended the truth of Kurtz's "malaise of identity, against his profoundest, most disturbing intuition of an otherness...the pull of legacies of puritan solidarity triumphs and he consolidates afresh a hollow pattern of self-made deity" (FP p. 7). In Patrick White's *Voss*, he diagnoses a "pathology of character" (FP p. 8) which the narrative itself successfully resists: Voss's version of himself is unexpectedly subverted. And of Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, he remarks that the "inner and outer poverty of Naipaul's characters--
while achieving at times memorable pathos—never erupts into a revolutionary or alien question of spirit, but serves ultimately to consolidate one's preconception of humanity." Thus we have "a persuasion of singular and pathetic enlightenment rather than a tragic centrality or a capacity for plural forms of profound identity" (TW p. 40). These plural forms of identity inhabit all of Harris's novels: none of those that I have considered so far is without its doubles, and in later works like Black Marsden, these doubles become multiples. But just as characters tend to split off from one another, there is often a movement in which this direction is reversed and two separate identities overlap. Such a state characterizes Harris's seventh novel, The Waiting Room (1967).

The Waiting Room is an account for the most part of the imaginings of a blind woman, Susan Forrestal. Susan's opposite number in this psychodrama is in fact not her "other," though he is the "other man," with whom she once lived rather than her present husband. He is, moreover, a visitor in memory alone, called up out of a past which he and Susan shared before their explosive separation. So, as the Author's Note explains, "he is sheer phenomenon of sensibility rather than identical character in the conventional sense" (WR p. 11), and in this way the waiting room becomes both Susan's upstairs retreat and her very skull which the old lover penetrates from time to time. Susan's husband, who does not directly enter the narrative, is solicitous in the extreme but unable to touch his wife in a vital part; his very protectiveness makes of him a "watchman" where the old lover had been a "thief" and ravisher. The lover, who is deaf even as Susan is blind (the husband is neither), is known simply as "he," a third person whose former crime translates at last into a theft of guarded selfhood which undoes the categories thief and watchman. In
the end, Susan and her husband are killed in an explosion which destroys the waiting room and later, in a "delayed blast," the lover as well. "He," in the jungles far away, has at last entered the "cave of Susan."

The novel is based on the joint but disjointed diary of the Forrestals (into which "he" has made certain inroads), a diary which survives the explosion. Although this exploratory "logbook" is "half-obliterated," the fragmentation only served "to enhance the essential composition of the manuscript that involved accidental deletions or deliberate erasures, reappraisals, marginal notes, dissociations of likely material (as well as associations of unlikely material)" (p. 10), in short, all those devices with which we are now familiar in "W.H.'s fiction. Dividing chapter for chapter into two mirror halves, the novel is truncated following the chapter, "Blast," so that Book II, "The Vortex," lacks two chapters which might have completed the correspondence with Book I, "The Void." The void we will now recognize as a common fixture in Harris; the vortex is here a kind of stir in the void, being that point at which the void is breached, or at any rate, reached. In their pursuit of each other and of extinction in this void, Susan and her lover are to some degree helped in that the one is undistracted by light and the other undisturbed by sound. To emphasize this fortunate deprivation, Harris has hung as backcloth to this drama that portion of the myth of Ulysses's flight from Circe which shows the hero bound to the mast as his crew row past the sirens, their ears sealed to the treacherous lure of the singing. The myth illustrates once more that paradox of possession in dispossession which The Eye of the Scarecrow described as "seeing without succumbing." Here, it is a victory over desire which is yet a submission to desire, an embrace of the destruction which nonetheless preserves the individual
and allows him to hear without succumbing.

The novel's first epigraph, from Keats's letter of October 1818 to Richard Woodhouse, states the opening premise of this argument:

It is a wretched thing to confess; but it is a very truth that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature—how can it, when I have no nature?

The individual has no "identical nature"—has "no nature" at all—and yet it is precisely this awareness which supports him in that ambivalent return which was the subject of the Nightingale and Melancholy odes. By no accident has Harris chosen the least romantic of the Romantic poets to point this theme; in treating the same myth elsewhere he speaks of it as illustrating "a new form of 'classical' animation rather than 'romantic' escape or self-delusion" (WS p. 53). It is this recognition and displacement of nothingness which gives the individual a bare capacity to act while divesting his solitary identity of all except those attachments which surround its unreality and postpone its drive to annihilation.

In The Waiting Room (which room we have seen is a kind of enclosing void, an intermediate place) this is expressed as "the obliteration of the bubble of personality in the ornament of love" (p. 26): the individual is allowed to "know" extinction, or that central nothingness which personality occludes, while remaining insulated from its finality. Yet the purchase of this insulation is possible only after the "hubris of assured character" has been abandoned. We may recall Zachariah Stevenson of Heartland, reflecting in the forest on the lesson every conquistador who had been there before him had missed: "They had apparently failed in their mission to catch the unreality of themselves" (p. 30). In the same way, Susan and her lover have been creatures of "ideal control" (p. 42), who built a "curious superstructure of love and prestige" (p. 36)
about themselves. Only when they begin to demolish this structure and plumb the void it straddles do they approach the condition described in the novel's third epigraph, from Eliot: "...a moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution, and of something very near annihilation."

When this process is begun, the "convertible void" of the waiting room turns from a "dock" and "courtroom" in which Susan arraigns the lover who once assaulted her, into a "theatre of rehearsal" that is also an operating theatre. Here, both the assault and the successive eye operations which failed to save Susan's sight, are rehearsed simultaneously. On the edge of consciousness, Susan is also "on an acute threshold of the cavern of reality" (p. 45) which is exactly the unreality of herself.

No wonder as the seal of light was torn, the ornamental atmosphere and curtain rent, that the very tatters and figments of recollection...preconception...seemed to wave and float within and above an essential bareness of conception, glimpsed--for the first incredible time--but this, too, in its inner conviction and reality, was slowly descending into the abstract blaze of solid darkness--immensity of frail distinction.

It was this distinctive night...light...the most curious awareness of self-deception, if self-deception it was, bordering as it did upon the black sail of reality--which cast a dying illumination upon a once familiar (now unfamiliar) series of landscape carved by the axe of the sea, rolling marble of ocean, knife-line of the rivers--iodine and grain of earth. Dying wound of illumination and yet the strange thing was that there emerged a frailty of convertible properties like a healing thread...design...which seemed to endure and outlast every shattered bone or region, stone or age, buried frontier or condition (pp. 45-46).

Now unconscious, Susan surrenders herself

as to a "black" pilot, weathered masthead, phantom of flesh within but beyond the sound of flesh, the echo of self-regard, song of the sirens...One embraced and was held in turn by this "deaf" mast to which one was truly bound and secured within the elements of distraction, paradoxical structure of liberation, and within certain undefinable radius of which--acute coherence and conversion of the soul--lay the
choirs of vision—sheer tenacity (even profane curiosity) of the "awakened" eye within the latent crash and operation of darkness, sheer relative beam, heavy and light, gravity as well as ironic weightlessness...

Out of this crash of darkness began to emerge one's "light" craft...billow of the senses: lightning spar...canvas of surf unfurled...in the very teeth...grinding fury, thunder of engines...sea (pp. 47-48).

The experience of nothingness ("black sail of reality," "'black' pilot") supports and indeed constitutes Susan inasmuch as she is a half-knowing, half-unknowing survivor.

Being of non-being, that is how this I as subject comes on the scene, conjugated with the double aporia of a true survival that is abolished by knowledge of itself, and by a discourse in which it is death that sustains existence.10

So Lacan, on the subject's question, "Who am I?" one which he gives an exclusively grammatico-linguistic answer: first person singular. The modern cogito's self-inquiry has absorbed philosophers from Descartes to Heidegger and Derrida. Harris treats it in passing in a piece of literary criticism which he characteristically enters himself. Approaching the San Dominick in his essay "Benito Cereno," he asks: "Who are the members of its crew? Whose value-studded masks do they wear? Who am I? What mask should I wear? "(BC p. 46). These are pertinent questions for an author who, as author, is not exempt from that fission visited on his fictional individuals, and who has declared that

"character" in the novel rests more or less on the self-sufficient individual—on elements of persuasion (a refined or liberal persuasion at best in the spirit of the philosopher Whitehead) rather than "dialogue" or "dialectic" in the profound and unpredictable sense of person which Martin Buber, for example evokes (TW p. 29).

Harris's invoking of Buber is revealing, for there is a distinct mark of existential phenomenology about his individual, and it is here that his hollow person would part company with Lacan's empty subject, for all that the void sustains both. Indeed the phrase "philosophical hollowness
of man," which occurs in the essay "Benito Cereno," is followed by a
telling parenthesis: "(hollow inertia yet spatial ground of hope)."

It is this hope that The Waiting Room sounds, and it seeks to do so by
advancing a claim for "community" which makes further recourse to nothing-
ness in order to create the subject's many others. Susan's eye operation
is "technically successful" in part because she has been the lover's
"trigger," as it were operating on him in her turn: theirs is a "common
step towards ancient self-portrait" (p. 32). In order for them to discover
this otherness, they must discover the nothingness that links them.

Susan let her hand fall again with brutal resignation upon
the blackened fetish of the log-book. It seemed to her that
"his" anatomy parted instantly and ceased to be the belly of
cloth she still remembered lying against her feet—pillow or
doll: in fact nothing stood there now but a handful of
skinny sailing pages half-torn from their covers—broken
lines which one surmised had been ruled for rib and bone.

Yet even so Susan did not mourn their (or his) material
departure: if she were to be held guilty and responsible for
incapsulating some portion of her log-book into the void it
seemed she had done the right and true thing, after all,
and that this shattered fragment and image would return
and grow ultimately to express a genuine faintness of spirit
like the rarest body of atmosphere imaginable to confirm
those immaterial and conflicting rumours of relationship
between creatures whose bodily similarity and uniformity—
profession or status—served to divide (whereas one would
have thought it would have united) them in their interests
(pp. 35-36).

The chapter which follows "The Operation," "Thing," attempts to visualize
that (no)thing which runs through doctor and patient, who are now
"inextricably involved with the 'dead' choirs of vision they had
inflicted upon each other" (p. 52). Accordingly the waiting room
is now once more that flying vessel which binds and liberates them.
As their "shared skeleton," it becomes a mast "of love, half-animal,
half-human (saddle of earth, car of sky)—mnemonic cloud—'ground' of
flight...compass of origins—convergence upon 'concrete' travail—flesh
In his reading of the Ulysses myth, Harris speaks of the community of interests on the deck of the ship as betokening a mutual support among discrete elements (captain, crew, mast, ship) through a displacement of responses from one to another. In this way the waiting room becomes a "waiting room of self-surrender or community" (p. 36). At the end of "The Void," Susan feels that "one was drawn by the skin of the vortex into the other's rent" (p. 54), and in the same way the novel ends with a repetition, a kind of anterior rib taken from its own body:

*She drew him closer still within the skin of another incongruous skeleton they shared, flesh or wood, swimming in the glass of their shop window within and without. Antique display. Waiting room* (pp. 17 and 80).

The concert envisaged in The Waiting Room--Susan and her lover mating and remaking each other, the deaf crew acting for Ulysses, the mast that is both Ulysses and his support, Ulysses hearing where the crew cannot--tries to give consciousness a negative dimension which goes beyond both romantic fascination with the death of self and absurdist preoccupation with the anxieties of the existing subject. Such a project must begin with a recognition of the individual's desire to appropriate the other, to make the other in his image, for this is part of the desire that is to be overcome. Like the representational self, this other is also a kind of verisimilitude, only one projected rather than mimed, a representation of the other as oneself. It is this order, that of persuasion or control, which comes to be fragmented: hence the "rent" in the other, the broken image. But beyond this surrender of power there is an admission of weakness which remains to be made, a weakness which must "confess its own broken existence to plumb and visualize its true relationship to freedom" (p. 10). A thesis of strength--despite--weakness will come out of this confession, so that one must not too quickly dismiss it as pragmatically
unsound: precisely the completeness (or the realism) of categories such as "weak" and "strong" is in question, just as the nature of an individual's (or a group's) capacity to survive is not explicable in terms of power alone.

Still, there is a way of showing this resilience, if only fractionally, and that is the fiction itself. "Art," Susan's lover pronounces, "is the phenomenon of freedom...What do I mean by phenomenon? The hole in the monument, that's what I mean" (p. 66). Plainly, the author feels this truth keenly (since he is here tempted into speaking in his own voice), knowing what John Mepham has called the "desire to speak with appropriate intensity about things of which our knowledge is most uncertain." We must now ask whether this desire finds expression in a form which fits its intensity, whether the music the deaf ear hears is given apt notation. Since what is to be conveyed does not cohere sensibly, the form cannot be representational; Harris's fiction is for this reason invariably fractured. "Appearances cannot be grasped in their entirety," the lover continues. "There's always this 'negative' race with or against something...And one can never keep dead in step" (p. 67). Art, that is to say, becomes this negative way of showing an ungraspable reality, one destined always to elude the single consciousness. The tableau of Ulysses and the sirens is for this reason described as "the life of consciousness in a circuit of relationships—a dialectical meeting ground interiorly visualized of dance, of music and of images half-sculpture, half-painting," giving rise to "marginal figures or species of fiction..." (WS p. 53).

The circuit of relationships, completed by halves and by marginal figures, is best shown just before the end. Susan, who has been talking
to her husband on the telephone, replaces the receiver and seems to wait for another call. As she listens, there is a crash by which the narrative anticipates the blast that will destroy the antique room and those in it.

The sea of traffic in the street suddenly appeared to rise and she felt a faint dry wave or shudder strike the wreck of the room: a blow not unlike the sound of her own fist dislodging itself from its shadow pressing into the eye of each finger-tip. Rolling "log"-book. Stranded telephone within the dust of memory. Toppling skull, ornamental ear and mouthpiece. Half-trailing, half-knotted signal and line. Watchman. THIEF.

Nothing moved. It was the strangest discordant flight of consequences she experienced—agitated body (vacant structure), nerve-end, string (bodiless splinter), tautness of sail stiff as a comb upon whose giant brow nothing moved as if "nothing" were "something". So obscure this shift or severance was it seemed little more than the prick of an eye-tooth, the pressure of a finger-nail upon the palm of one hand. Nothing still moved—a faint shadow perhaps against the banality and monument of solipsis: phantom erection and ejection of parts issuing from the solid tyranny of proportion to swing into new clockwise mouth and head, anti-clockwise defiant trunk and limb (p. 65).

Here at last the hole (in the "monument of solipsis") is given shape; here is that fractional space, which we saw in The Eye of the Scarecrow, where one is able to "be" another. Out of this vortex in the void the other's call comes: "He addressed her from within his new spiral" (p. 66), and it is here that the cryptic promise of the Author's Note is realized: "a fiction which appears to grasp nothingness runs close to a freedom of reality which is somethingness" (p. 10). If the resort to paradox and apostrophe grate on sensibilities accustomed to the bald statement of fact, this is a mark not so much of a momentary opaqueness in Harris's most minimal fiction as of the intransigence of the models of facticity it confronts.

Tumatumari (1968), Harris's next and longest novel to date, is an attempt to externalize the lessons of consciousness we have just been
considering. The interior world of *The Waiting Room* now opens onto a landscape rather like that in *Heartland* (but a little further into Guyana) and the cast comprises people whom, by Brathwaite's early criterion, we can recognize and hope to know. We would, however, be ill-advised to prod this or that character, for Harris has not put away his hollowing tools, wishing as before to undermine the "convention of consciousness—insular day or night—to violate a ghetto of temperament" (p. 79). In order the better to follow his project, and consistent with its new topography, we will pass from matters largely philosophical to those psychological. The novel is in fact the record of a crumbling not so much of the subject as of the subject's mental economy; the heroine, Prudence, suffers a collapse which makes of the novel a "THEATRE OF NERVOUS BREAKDOWN" (p. 123) and a kind of libidinal critique of pure reason.

Prudence is thirteen-months-married to the engineer Roi Solman who is in charge of a hydroelectric scheme above the Tumatumari falls. Labour problems with the local Indians have sent Roi to another part of the country in search of fresh recruits and he leaves Prudence, whose first child will die in infancy, in the care of their maid (and his mistress) the Amerindian, Rakka. Roi races back when he hears of the death, but in crossing the river his boat miscarries and he is swept over the falls and decapitated. When Rakka breaks the news of this fresh tragedy, Prudence suffers a relapse. Confined to her bedroom, she dreams what is the opening scene of the novel: coming down to the river at dawn, she finds the head of her sun king in the water. The rest of the novel is an evocation of her past, the thirteen months with Roi and Rakka at Tumatumari, and her Georgetown childhood as one of five children of
the celebrated historian, Henry Tenby. Roi and Tenby have much in common, chief among their shared traits being an apollonian faith to which their respective professions commit them. That this need not be so, that neither science nor art need be circumscribed by reason, is part of the novel's thesis. Both men therefore suffer a symbolic decapitation, each discovering himself to have been a "clown of realism," the prisoner of a strictly rational self.

Tumatumari, the name of an actual waterfall, means "sleeping rocks." Yet the site is also for Prudence a "THEATRE OF AROUSAL" (p. 123), an arousal, then, of that which sleeps. Through her "game of the rapids," which she also calls "the game of inner space" (p. 152), Prudence wakens both in herself and retrospectively in Roi and Tenby, this other sleeper, discovering that turbulence which lies beneath the smooth face of the river. An epigraph makes this arousal the more plain:

The half world is the world of the shadow wherein the union of nature and society violates and kills the incestuous image. The incestuous image loves its own kind, or that which is made in its image, being thereby visibly complete and sufficient in itself. This image the half world—that which sleeps below the surface, that which is other (it or id)—overwhelms. The "union of nature and society" has implications we shall come back to; here we must follow the epigraph to its conclusion:

An enormous mourning camouflage develops around the occasion, an occasion that is itself in deepest correspondence with what is lost and alien and dies to be reborn. Another element has been introduced here, or a correspondence with another: the concept not only of what is buried and submerged but also of what is alien and removed. Where the first concerns, as we have seen, the three main characters, the second has its fictional embodiment in certain minor
characters of the novel, beginning with Rakka herself, and a small band of "lost" Indians who are wasting away, but extending as well into the Tenbys, a coloured family who have certain skeletons in their closet.

Roi's flaw is of a different kind. He does not conceal the fact that he is part Indian, but his very admission that he is an "employer of consciousness (half-native, half-foreign). An insider/outsider" (p. 52) commits him to a paternal gambit by which he seeks to ritually placate, and thereby control, his labourers. By this means they become "his 'Indians', his 'children'," and Rakka his "Mistress in the cupboard" (p. 47). His strategy is pursued in the name of "day-to-day rule," "emancipation—enlightenment," and with a resolution that makes of him an "electric fiend."

Yet he has had his warning: five years earlier, while installing an automatic gauge in a well above the falls, he slipped to a "head-on (bulb of safety within) collision... 'When they pulled me up I felt like glass. Shining and white. Electricity to last a lifetime!" (p. 25). Later the well was abandoned, but, boarded over, its concrete shell was to become Prudence's favourite chair and the rock at its bottom the alchemical counterpart of that beneath the falls. Here Prudence sits to conjure up the past, so that it is both her father's "Chair of History" and a "chair of pride" (which, one might say, goeth before a falls).

There is a sense in which Prudence assumes responsibility for her husband's death, so that he dies "THROUGH HER (AS IF SHE WOULD SUMMON HIM, PUSH HIM)" (p. 28), just as Nameless pushed L____ into the canal in _The Eye of the Scarecrow_, turning her love into a disinterested thing. This temper she has learnt from Roi himself, who wishes to implant in her "not the incestuous mirror of love but the sceptic withdrawal at the heart of nature" (p. 27). In her memory he becomes "no longer a tissue of fear
but wires knotted into a crucial rose which penetrated her" (p. 54).

The type of technocratic pride, Roi appears to know his lesson before he has learnt it: he seems already informed of (and willing to discourse on) the stoic truth which the Indians of the story come to represent, and this before his fall. So that it is in Henry Tenby that the narrative achieves a success which the half-autobiographical Roi (with his ready inside knowledge) does not allow. In speaking of another coloured hero, this time the real life revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture, as depicted in C.L.R. James's *Black Jacobins*, Harris has remarked that his bold realization by the author avoided "fascist ornament or liberal self-deception," but that the "curious almost unwitting irony of the work" is that Toussaint "emerges not because he fits in where James wants him to stand, but because he escapes the author's self-determination in the end" (TW p. 44). Quite the same might be said of the composite appollonian figure, Roi-Tenby: where Roi seems precast, his father-in-law takes shape in the very instant he loses dimension. Tenby's moment of truth comes at the end of his life (though he has had glimpses of it earlier) and it is only as a ghost brought back by his daughter that he speaks with authority. In his dissolved person, we in turn get a glimpse of what might be called "horrified consciousness."14 As he died, Tenby's expression was "so twisted he became a creature cloven in two, one face beneath emerging from the old" (p. 45). He had, of course, been aware of his divided life, and at times of crisis reminded his wife of his "bogus historical mask," but for the most part he had managed a compromise "until the day of his death when something else, the daemon behind the virtuous mask, sprang into view" (p. 46).

In Tenby, the two "others" coalesce; both psychological and social
denials merge. The concealment (when distinguished guests are present) of Hugh Skelton, the black son among four white children, a concealment which Tenby does not authorize but which he countenances, is of a piece with his purging of all emotion from his writing. Thus the division between his published and his unpublished work sets up a duality of ego and id, conscious and unconscious. On the one hand, refinement, statistics, the mask of a public style: "RADIO SKELETON. Committed to formal documentary, skinflint essays, historical attributions which were bland and persuasive, vested interest" (p. 129); on the other, secret diaries and unpublished plays, whose atmospherics disturb his program: "secret wavelength from the future—Theatre of Nervous Breakdown—hum of the grotesque" (p. 129). The stage is set, then, for a return of the repressed, and it comes as surely as it does to that other classical historian, the Baron von Aschenbach.

The year Hugh Skelton Tenby was born, his father wrote his essay on the "Population Question." As Prudence sits in her "Chair of the Well," quotations from this essay appear at random in the body of the narrative:

"3,010,000 Negroes were transplanted from Africa to the British Colonies from 1680 to 1834. At the time of emancipation but 500,000 slaves remained to be freed" (p. 98).

Among East Indians, "at no time were ever more than 33 women brought in to each hundred men"; the "Chinese of 1853 never saw a single woman of their race until 1860," and then there were "about 15 females to every hundred males"; Amerindians suffered "a depletion of 20,000 souls during the first hundred years of Dutch occupation" (pp. 97-98). "But canes were growing" (p. 99). Then Tenby's pen falls from his hand into the well, and a new history, driven by all the desire pent and punished in those
words, comes to be written. It is a magnificent piece of writing: the remainder of the novel shows Harris at work with an intensity and daring sustained at this pitch so far only in *Palace of the Peacock*. The Tenby who has hitherto conscripted his "muse" ("I must do nothing so hideous as erect a scandal. Merely report an erection"), now finds himself confronted by a "waif of the streets" he had met in the grim post-War Europe of 1919. Married to this new "muse of history, alien fabric—degrees of fear, fear of the unknown, psyche of a new world" (p. 103), he finds his writing become undifferentiated, promiscuous in the very sense of the word. Linked to the primary process, it records the many faces of anxiety and neurosis, desire and fear, shaking off that control whose order too easily translates as domination.16

ROOM NUMBER 1924. Brothel of Masks. It was long past midnight. Prudence discerned him (her father) far beneath strapped in his space ship. No longer half-man, half-horse but half-man, half-mask. Half-man, half-woman. Business was poor on the mountain of souls. All he had been able to squeeze out of the bitch who ran the establishment was a cursed job—looked like a cripple. Underweight. Undernourished. Sometimes there was a shortage of fabric. One and the same. One had to bear with it. Limbs of straw. Bed of stone. Postwar years. Post-riot days. The whole land mourned and awaited the return of the Hero—the coming of a god—long since consigned to rot and waste—womb of silence. The space ship heaved—casket and hearse—stood on its tail like a dog at a post—lamp-post—epitaph: half-mask or woman rose into view sprinkled by immensity—a patient yet inexhaustible creature—goddess of urine and starlight—bruised by her father's fists—black and blue. Conception of Hugh Skelton--Skeleton in the Cupboard 1924 Born 1938 Prudence shivered. Unholy brother and treaty of sensibility. Shove him underground. The whole land mourned for the birth of sacrifice. Wailing women under the stars, the moon and the sun. Sprinkled by immensity. Shove him underground. It was a strange wild outcry—hoarse and fantastic within the throat of the waif of the streets. Waif of the docks and streets. Waterfall of prophecy. Bath. SHIP OF THE WAIF. Within this sprinkle—her father's quest of loathing and desire, treaty of sensibility—one saw the shoal of history—the remoulding of every vessel into the Matriarch of Obsession. Bury him six feet underground. He had abused her, bruised her for centuries. Sometimes fifty
in a single night. Now it was as if she saw him ripening into one black man. Many men subsumed in the Phallus. Which must now therefore serve her, satisfy all the appetites it had created, scenes—scores of millions. It was her turn—the turn of all the women he had raped to lord it over him. To push—pull—drive...(pp. 100-101).

When the old taboos have been violated and fear of the other overcome, the spell of sameness is broken. Until then,

(one can only whisper with the breath of the wind)—archangel of the future, sculpture of earth-shaking compassion and immunity to fear upon which dogs of ivory are chained whose masks of solipsis no longer confine us—ivory tower of poverty, ivory tower of wealth, ivory tower of race, ivory tower of...Their name is Legion. A long way to go before their bite can be endured: sink into the ground—give teeth to conscience; bone to conscience, blood to conscience...."Prick to conscience."

"Yes. Prick to conscience. In the meantime...."

"In the meantime what?" the waif of the docks and streets asked.

"We must live with FACE LIFT..." he laughed with a groan and a bark.

"Jack History," the waif of the streets cried. "What an enormous face lift. Enormous joke. There's a prick for you."

(pp. 104-105).

The "Population Question" has taken on quite another colour, and to emphasize the matter of responsibility, the narrative presents a picture of Hugh Skelton shot in the streets of Georgetown in the Budget Riots of 1962: "Message for Hugh Skelton. This bullet fired by your father's rich kith and kin—all races of endeavour—white+brown+black"(p. 120).

Here again is that "nightmare of history" we saw Nameless invoke in The Eye of the Scarecrow, and only now is that unkept promise, to trace some victim of police firing, fulfilled.

The purpose of this exercise? "Dream therapy—shock therapy...Resurrect the past in order to see through the present" (p. 126). So, when Prudence begins to learn the rules of this historico-psychotherapy, she sees an eye open in the well, the mark of that other or "IT" which
gives the lie to the ego's representations, being "a hairline or crack within the Obsessional Mask of an Age" (p. 114). For the individual, Harris's prescription is first a kind of descent into "oneself" which recognizes the hollowness of this self. Seated in his Chair of History, Prudence's father cries out to her:

"Close your eyes. Tight. What do you see?"
"I see nothing. Just a few strokes...dots...spread out like a map...shapes in a bottomless pool..."
"Nothing," he agreed....One day you may learn to look back at this dwindling moment (soul's straw) and wonder... whether there was anybody there but an abstraction of yourself" (p. 123).

But, eyes open, Tenby demands a further recognition, one which Roi, who is "in pursuit of and pursued by 'contradictions'," anticipates: "a digestion of contrary elements" which might lead to that "classical/grotesque" self Harris posits. This motion passes at last into the primal state of the individual unconscious, "the Dark, black amoral dark" (p. 134) where there is no negation. This is, as Harris recognizes, treacherous, even forbidden ground, but precisely because it is forbidden it is to be violated. Its social and natural equivalent is more troubling: an "underlying sardonic flux" to things, where the contradictions of history seem dissolved or at least held in suspension. Here then is the "union of nature and society" foreshadowed in the novel's second epigraph, one which finds its philosophic expression in a revival of that "discredited manifesto--red-in-tooth-and-claw evolutionary materialism" (p. 141). Not surprisingly, the Indians of the novel come to embody the virtue of stoicism. Stoicism is an individual affair; the "collective" Brathwaite saw in the poems turns out to be something nearer a collective unconscious, which supports rather than undermines the individual. But the sense (and even a doctrine) of "community" is strong in Harris's work,
and the qualities of compassion and love, which carry his philosophy beyond a social Darwinism, are the least private of responses. We do not, then, find the classical individual restored; what suffers is that individual’s recognizability (which we will remember to have been Brathwaite’s criterion), for from the start Harris has insisted on confronting "the unrecognizable features of the human heart" (FJO p. 79), those which astonish Tenby at the end of his life.

The naturalizing of society and the individual (a motion consistent with the displacement of time into space, or history into nature, which we noticed in the last chapter) is only half the programme, and though it sometimes verges on what might be called Gnostalgia, it is not automatically a reactionary impulse. Nor are the reasons for this exploration of "neglected areas within ourselves" (SI p. 41) to be roundly diagnosed as a projection into narrative of personal contradictions (Brathwaite’s "division in the poet," or indeed Roi’s "extremes—extremity of loathing and desire" [p. 92]) and the matter left there. "One must not read too much into the night of things," the lover declares in The Waiting Room, and while a psychoanalytic response to this denial might be to begin investigating here and at once, I would suggest that we read Harris’s engagement with darkness and void (which go by many names, from "inner space" to a Jungian "objective psyche") as a figurative attempt to keep open and alive a contradictory other which will not succumb to the homogenizing advances of the same.

The nature of community, as Harris conceives it, is primarily heterogeneous: hence his reiteration of the need to live with contraries (as distinct, for example, from "the totalitarian basis of community—the tactic of fascism which battens on fear of contrasts" [NP p. 144]).
In turn, this is where individuality finds a precarious raison d'être: the very fragmentation of the individual's wholeness, in a "theatre of nervous breakdown," for example, becomes a model of a larger social process. Her child and husband dead, Prudence finds herself "searching for a concentration or location of loss to serve as the medium out of which a new illumination of feeling could emerge" (p. 17). And it is just the same with the "lost Indians of the Sun" in Tumatumari, or the wasting Amerindian remnant of Guyana, who here as everywhere in Harris's novels persist as what Roi, in a "voice from the underground," calls "the conscience of our age...In this part of the world anyway...our precious scarecrow brood" (p. 35). The "necessary violation" of cultures then, so far from complacently reinstating natural selection, requires that the other be part of the heterogeneous community and yet for this reason retain its alien aspect. The "breakdown" violates that preservation (or reservation) intact which marks the persistence of power, whether at the level of society (where Indians become "Indians") or of the individual (where love turns out to be protection of the other for oneself). In each of these cases, the "character" of the other is determined by the representor, who thereby becomes the representative. Hence the deceit of recognizable "representation," of identity itself, and hence the experimental distortion of the mimetic mode.

The "fear of the stranger" within and without, the "incestuous barricade of families" (p. 71), is a rejection of the contradictory other by a fixing of its identity. But what if that other (not to speak of oneself) were without identity, were so weak or reduced as to be nothing? This is just how Tenby's new muse appears before him when he returns to the Brothel of Masks, and understandably he has trouble recognizing or placing her:
YES SIR GOD FATHER OF LOVE—she had been there all along (his lost waif of the streets) disguised as nothing, a mere button—therefore impregnable: hairline or crack in the obsessional mask of an age—flick of transparency which cloaked his sight (p. 119).

The nothingness of the individual has assumed a new dimension, and to match it, history is imaged as a "bottomless pool" (out of which the waif emerges), receptacle of dregs and refuse, all those discarded scraps which, as we saw from his patchwork style in "Experiment and Language," it is Harris's desire to rescue. For the individual this signifies both "the splintering of perfectionist assumptions...fall of Eldorado, fall of the cliff of faith" and, after the fall, a source of "new engines or structures of the psyche" (p. 153), put together after a fashion we will examine in Harris's next novel, _Ascent to Omai._

Supporting the new history, is that familiar division in the Guyana novels between inertia and vitality as figured by coast and interior. In _Ascent to Omai_ (1970), this psychogeography is localized. The interior now becomes Omai chasm, an abyss into which the Christ-like hero, Victor, peers from time to time during his solitary climb up the hill of Omai. 19 Invoked in various contexts—the chasm in Victor's side, the chasm between a prostitute's thighs—this deep romantic chasm becomes an unashamed image of the irrational, a use which is specified in the second of the novel's two epigraphs.

Since "adventure" and "science" have led over many centuries to the denigration of humanity, robot law, unfeeling yoke, there is no ground of alternatives but to recover the "dangerous" chasm, the "forbidden" ascent and seek a new dimension of feeling—a new oath of humanity.

The quotation marks which set off "dangerous" and "forbidden" in this passage should dissipate both the notion that this is an innocent or unwary return to discredited emotions and the old fear that that way
lies a kind of political madness we had better shun. Harris is entirely aware of the risk he takes, and it is along that face where history overhangs legend and facticity feeling, that he has chosen to cut his fictional defile.

From noon to sunset, six hours, Victor climbs in search of his father Adam's mining claim on the hill. Struck by a falling stone, bitten by a tarantula, he presses on until he catches the glint of light off first an aeroplane in the sky and then the wreckage of one on the ground. Here he discovers the site of his pork-knocker father's claim: "here Adam had first come and settled with a woman upon his release from prison" (pp. 47-48). He crawls into the burnt and now overgrown shell of the crashed plane, his head almost touching the ground like one of those limbo dancers he remembers from his childhood, "dancing under a horizontal pole through what seemed the keyhole of space" (p. 48). In this fluid zone of "agility and rigidity, vertical pole, horizontal couch, wheel and spin, limbo aircraft," he begins to reassemble his past and to write, through an imagined judge who went down with the plane, a "novel history" of his father's past as well.

Adam had been a dancer and pork-knocker who, upon the death of his wife, became "stone drunk, crazed by grief, and had returned to his original craft, welding" (p. 30). Poorly paid, he squandered his little money on women he brought home, while the boy Victor would "hide beneath the petticoat of his ancient mother and keep his eyes glued through its misty fabric upon the living copulation of the dead" (pp. 30-31). At ten, Victor won a scholarship to the best day school in the land, and there proved himself "a child-prodigy, monster." After class, he would amuse himself by lying in wait outside the foundry with a mirror in his
hand to train the sun on his father's face, so that Adam would brush "furiously, irritably—at spider or bread." One day his father did not appear. A strike had begun, one that was to last six months and end only with Adam, driven to desperation, burning down first the factory and then his own house. On hearing the sentence passed—seven years' hard labour—Victor had run away from home and school, leaving only rumours behind him. Now, forty years later, he journeys to Omai and there imagines a retrial of the past by the same judge who had sentenced Adam. Sensing that the plane is to crash, the judge has nevertheless boarded the aircraft, and it is his gnomic scribbles, thirty thousand feet above ground, which constitute the bulk of the novel. In a cleverly orchestrated ending, the crash of the plane and the burning of Adam's house merge in the last flare of day, so that Victor looks up at last to find his long-lost father who had set fire to the one fighting the blaze in the other.

By the end, the hero has come to be "Victor/Adam," a composite figure whose new authority springs from having reached that classic psychoanalytic station, the confronting of the dead father, a ritual we saw enacted in The Eye of the Scarecrow as well. It is also a recognition of the death in oneself of those numerous discrete past persons whose apparently seamless contiguity makes up that uniform "character" in whose proper name one masquerades. In Ascent to Omai, the death of these "old and new personalities" (TW p. 28), is the "game of the stone." Looking back on his childhood game of tossing pebbles into a canal, Victor inscribes on each of the concentric horizons of his life a separate epitaph. This realization that "he was to die again and again" (p. 92) is the "drama of puberty" by which the boy Victor frees himself first from mother (the housecoat retreat) and then from father (the welder's mask) until he assumes
responsibility for his own creation. But there are wider implications to the judge's belief that "that small boy could be, in fact, the author of himself" (p. 79). Victor's coming to terms with catastrophe and loss initiates as well a philosophy of persistence in the face of devastation:

inoculated by fire, insulated from fire, he began with the charcoal of memory--epitaphs and stages--to adumbrate, from an unconscious/subconscious struggle with fate, a deeper and more far-reaching proccesional note of liberation (p. 109).

The subconscious now touches upon the conscious in a manner which Harris will endow with both universal and social significance, through a philosophy so intensely held that for Victor it "bordered upon a religious conviction" (p. 18).

The question is this:

sentence having been passed in the very entrenched nature of things, wherein lay the possibility of parole, genuine parole, true parole from the whole forlorn prison-house of adventure, claim of Adam, backside of the moon, OH MY? (p. 51)

The answer is of course not on Omai, but in Omai chasm. And this chasm is now conceived as a limbo zone in both man and nature which allows for a kind of redress in a world of necessity. The "sanctification of space" (p. 89), which in the individual becomes a "sanctification of vacancy" (p. 34), is a gesture I traced at some length in the last chapter. By it, the chasm is a repository "elsewhere" of what Harris has called a "sacred otherness/darkness" (BC p. 52), which is a resource (rather than a source, or origin) in times of catastrophe. Reduced to utter inconsequence, the individual finds his element in the very nullity of his circumstances, and fabricates a more credible self than any wrought from an original plenitude. He has, after all, nothing to lose. In the pitted landscape of Omai, this ironic discovery of something in nothing is expressed by "glimmers of sun...like electric light stored in the ruined
body of the bush" (p. 49). This explains the play (some might say, trick) of mirrors in Ascent to Omai: a play by which some of the randomness in the heap of broken images (glass, tin, wing-tip) that is the world, is given significance. Coincidence, that is to say, becomes the novel's many angles of incidence (in mirror, aeroplane, welder's arclight, surgeon's lamp) by which light is trained and identity salvaged from relationship.

Hence, too, the prominence, in this and many another Harris novel, of the pork-knocker. For the pork-knocker is, as I have suggested, that bricoleur whose activity endows random objects with a conjunctive significance beyond (and often despite) their original purpose or purposelessness.

So Adam, the first pork-knocker, who upon his release from prison must start with nothing, goes to work on the wreckage of the aeroplane.

He had salvaged a piece of tin for a headboard or witness to his claim since this had to be erected, according to law, to ensure his prospecting rights. It was now all overgrown with fern Victor saw like tarantula, masked fabric or aircraft on which had been inscribed—MINING CLAIM TAKEN BY ONE ADAM, MANNA OF SPACE, THIS CENTURY OF GHOSTS, TWENTIETH CENTURY. (It was the habit of porknockers to christen their claims with idiosyncratic relish compounded nevertheless of curious irony and compassion) (p. 48).

The salvaging pork-knocker is an image of Harris's own symbolic experimentation, an experimentation which snatches meaning from the jaws of the void, even at the price of a certain romancing. The novelist is, of course, alive to this risk; his is no innocent symbolism. Here he allows an Adam imprisoned in and by things to view a more believable world:

A roof, after all, which had been stitched with planks, convicts' muscle, was nothing but a roof (he reasoned); a stone, after all, which had been quarried and broken, convicts' lungs, nothing but a stone; a tree after all, which had been twisted and bent, convicts' fantasy, nothing but a tree; flesh, after all, which have been furred and torn, convicts' cat, nothing but flesh. Nerveless identity.
It was all so lucid, so abstract, drained of superstition (cinematic menu, euthanasia of the absurd, consuming appetite of the dead) that he dreamt he had emancipated the "object"—overthrown the seal of pain...(p. 41)

The implication is that Victor will discover meaning in this world, a meaning discoverable in its lapsarian pain. But this universal significance is only part of the picture, for if it confronts a consensus of meaninglessness, its social equivalent, the salvage of meaning by the "ruined porknocker," must contend with a consensus of weakness—that vision of absolute despoliation which we saw in the received version of the lost Indians of Tumatumari. In fact Victor, whatever his universal meaning, is there to redress what Harris has elsewhere called "victim stasis" (KK p. 46), that reproduction of the victim's prostration which is itself a form of victimization. So, even as he rejects the "sovereign individual," Harris is willing to speak, for example, of the "individual African slave," in order to disrupt precisely such a mimesis of slavery.

Let us look at the individual African slave. I say individual deliberately though this is obviously an absurd label to apply to the persons of slaves in their binding historical context. But since their arrival in the Americas bred a new and painful obscure isolation (which is difficult to penetrate in any other terms but a free conceptual imagination) one may perhaps dream to visualize the suffering and original grassroots of individuality...He (the problematic slave) found himself spiritually alone since he worked side by side with others who spoke different dialects. The creative human consolation—if one dwells upon it meaningfully today—lies in the search for a kind of inward dialogue and space when one is deprived of a ready conversational tongue and hackneyed comfortable approach.

When therefore one speaks of an inarticulate body of men, confined on some historical plane, as possessing the grassroots of Western individuality one is creatively rejecting, as if it were an illusion, every given, total and self-sufficient situation and dwelling within a capacity for mental and unpredictable pain which the human person endured then or endures now—in or for any time or place. To develop the point further it is clear that one is rejecting the sovereign individual as such. For in spite of his emancipation he consolidates every advance by conditioning himself to
function solely within his contemporary situation more or less as the slave appears bound still upon his historical and archaic plane. It is in this "closed" sense that freedom becomes a progressive illusion and it is within the open capacity of the person—as distinct from the persuasive refinements of any social order—within the suffering and enduring capacity of the obscure person (which capacity one shares with both "collective" slave and "separate" individual in the past and in the future) that a scale emerges and continues indefinitely to emerge which makes it possible for one (whoever that one may be, today or tomorrow) to measure and abolish each given situation (pp. 33-34).

I have quoted at length from the important essay, "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," because this passage explains in a remarkable way the recurrence in Harris's fiction of the "obscure person," of "the irrelevant disabled of mankind, the irrelevant dead, the irrelevant beaten, the irrelevant blind" (IN p. 140). Recognizing that there is no weakness so crippling as that chosen for the weak, Harris is concerned to go beyond "given" weakness. His symbolic experimentation does this by presenting (rather than re-presenting) those whose residual resources (of choice, endurance, courage, compassion) have been defined out of existence, those so marginal as to have become invisible. Hence the "negative body" of a drowned sailor in one of the novel's poems (perhaps the same Sailor who gives the boy Victor a lesson at the end); hence again, the "sanctification of vacancy": "pitiless divorce from origins as well as pitiful vacancy—alien and reconstructive self-definition" (p. 57).

In the course of another essay, Harris quotes first Anthony Burgess and then Georg Lukács on the novel hero; then he remarks:

From my point of view, weak person and middle-of-the-road hero are of distinct interest because it is here, I believe, at this location of uncertainty that a breakthrough from the consolidation of the fashionable absurd (the self-mockery of the contemporary European novel) may well lie (IN p. 144).
Interestingly, Harris now extends his critique of consolidated "character" from the nineteenth century realist novel to the twentieth century absurdist novel. In the face of the institutionalized middle-of-the-road hero, he confesses, "I must speak of a 'middle-of-the-road' hole within my iconic landscape." He then illustrates his case:

The Ibo of Nigeria are a terrifying example of the engulfment which can suddenly overtake a people within a trauma of helplessness—external conquest, internal collapse. There is reason to believe that the earliest forms of tragic art were born out of a necessity to compensate such losses within the human psyche.

With the mutilation and decline of the conquered tribe a new shaman or artist struggles to emerge who finds himself moving along the knife-edge of change. He has been, as it were, cross-fertilized by victor and victim... (p. 145).

In *Ascent to Omai*, we see the hole realized, for the judge wishes to present" the unique density and transparency of his victim (spectral character and dust)" (p. 85). It is even more graphically rendered in the opening scene of the novel, where we find Victor pursuing Adam—"lacuna of the watershed" (p. 24)—up Omai hill.

The ruined figure resumed its flight on the hill like someone falling up a ladder, looking back all the while. It seemed to Victor that the slate of his head cracked still farther around his eyes leaving a blank space all of a sudden where his features had been; and this implosive characteristic began in turn to eat downwards into his shoulders and to his middle like a gigantic collapsing globule, portrait of rain and chalk.

There remained only his stalwart legs like trees walking up the hill, ragged trousers of leaves. But blue rather than green, blue leaves within a forest of cloud (pp. 15-16).

Here we see foreshadowed that tabula rasa of Black Marsden. The void of a hollow "character," "blank cheque of compassion" (p. 85), is the experimental novel's answer to the photographic identity of traditional literary portraiture. Where the latter is posed or composed—or at any rate, composite—its other is in perpetual danger of falling in on
itself, inhabiting as it does that "borderline territory" whose fictional space is for Harris the reverse of secure rhetoric: Omai is the other, or "backside of the moon." Technically, the crumbling character is made of materials not unlike those we find in Adam's poem, "Fetish," which the prosecuting counsel in his retrial describes as

"a kind of rubbish heap of images...compounded of bunk--the blasted bunk of civilizations...Reminds me personally of certain primitive borderline areas in the Tropics. Bunk of shattered sculpture, carcases of the motor car, mast-heads and stranded skins or sails on the riverfront (pp. 71-72).

Where he has meant to expose the weakness of the defendant's case, prosecuting counsel has, all unwittingly, stumbled on its strength. As defence counsel points out, this detritus is "a new experimental source of wealth" (p. 72), for it is a reminder that the tidiness of assured identity, in rhetoric or in the world, is purchased at a price. Sailor puts it another way to Victor: "security, in our age, is merely the bauble of dispossession, a toy of the manufacturers of unfreedom..." while Raven, who sits on the judge's shoulder and "traces with the claw of memory," continues for him: "...of slavery in which we are unwittingly immersed: whereas we should be profoundly critical, creatively active..." (p. 113). The experimental bricolage of character refuses the ornamental solace of identity and in doing so renders less believable the ideological backcloth of this portrait.

Here, then, is that "ruthless criticism of everything that exists," which the young Marx proposed, and curiously the criticism of everything is made with nothing, or what is next to nothing. The debris of history and the debris of language are not so pitiable after all.

I cannot here invoke Marx without recalling that Harris's novel includes in its blanket repudiation of security the revolutionary project
as well. And now it might be said that the novel's enshrining of the unconscious as a private retreat and "higher" court of appeal (for both the boy Victor and the adult Adam) is a socially regressive act when it proposes this refuge as a substitute for the transformation of social relations. Yet the resurrection of a marginal selfhood (that scarecrow eye or I) is not an altogether ahistorical move. In the first place, as we saw in *The Waiting Room*, the value discovered in the individual is disclosed in his relation to another, and even, as we saw in *Tumatumari*, to another's loss. Both these motions depict not security (or what defence counsel calls "a certain illusion--self-sufficient illusion of character" [p. 108]) but insecurity, on which broken slate is scribbled the barest outline of a self. This invention is what Harris, in his address, "The Interior of the Novel," described as "a 'presence' within an 'absence'" (IN p. 147). And to this rule, the author himself (that now equally defunct category) is not exempt. Even as a "character" is pieced together of a great variety of elements, so, too, the author

is the complex ghost of his own landscape of history or work. To put it another way, his poem or novel is subsistence of memory. In the final analysis the reality of his existence as agent or clown—as a unity of strange powers—turns upon faith, faith in the powers and resources of the human person at many levels of feeling, translation, and inquiry to invoke a "presence" within an "absence" (IN p. 147).

The "landscape of history or work," then, is not something apart from but rather a part of the marginal self. The judge, who refuses "to impose a false coherency upon material one had to digest—perhaps all one's life," describes the task of this marginalism as "a true groping equation in art or language to the fundaments of existence through history or the void which was native to history" (p. 123). Here is no conjuring away of unpleasant conditions, nor yet a culture of poverty; rather, it is a capability which begins to discover its strength in loss. At the bottom
of the sea, Victor asks Sailor how the dispossessed welder, Adam, can possibly sign himself "king of creation."

VICTOR: But he's masked, Sailor, he's gloved and masked in my sketch. It's like a faceless thing without name or reason. How can he write anything at all?

SAILOR: It seems incredible, I know, you've put him at a considerable disadvantage, but you see the most incredible of incredible things has happened to the king of creation—he's dispossessed and he's learnt the arts of dispossession. You must let this sink into your head, Victor, if you want to help him to be free. For therethrough--through his dispossession he is enabled to enter into the innermost secret locks and prisons and chains of exiled/imprisoned mankind. He knows what slavery is about--from the inside, see? He dances through the backdoor, as it were, anywhere and everywhere: the sea, the watershed/chasm/jungle of Omai....Call it by any universal name. This is his innermost theme and function, the celebration of freedom through knowing unfreedom. One has to seek it differently in each age. It always comes from outside/in since whether you see it or not it's already inside/out--dispossessed.

VICTOR: Charcoal?

SAILOR: Call it charcoal if you wish, Victor. Charcoal signature (p. 110-111).

This is either a pretty story (in which case dispossession is dispossession and that is all there is to it) or else the "advance guard vision of maturity" it proclaims itself to be (in which case the dispossessed have no fixed identity whose "character" is determined by the dispossessor). In fact, no vision can wholly escape that ideology which determines all readings of the world whether of dispossession or of marginal capacity and community. Very likely, we see here at once a romance and the repudiation of an assured realism whose postromantic security is itself a mirage. But if that is so, the romance has the virtue of disrupting, even as it rarefies, a process which realism completes, even as it ratifies.

Sailor's fable is as much a lesson of distrust in appearances as of faith in the individual's powers. In his earliest novel, Harris spoke of "the limited way a man grasped reality" (PP p. 92), and this confession
together with his reminder that security whether of society or of self is a kind of hubris, should dispel the notion that a new idol has replaced the old. What his marginalism does intend, is an assessment of that precarious network whose enabling space is what one calls "oneself" or "another." It is also a reminder that this self remains a present locus of articulation, that ideas, words, intelligences, do not invariably, as the phrase goes, "inscribe themselves"; they are inscribed. The individual does speak, even if his language is a heap of broken images. At the same time, the "Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond" with which Harris epigraphed The Whole Armour, is less a creature of self-sufficiency than of an insufficiency that achieves a bare or virtual existence. He is that protean figure who occurs again and again in the novels, discovering his freedom in a capacity to survive at the margin, a creature whose turbid past and unstable present so distress liberal and Marxist orthodoxies alike that he is either dismissed as a picaroon or classed as lumpen because he refuses all the customary categories. Not for nothing does Harris call Victor/Adam's route "ANANCY TRAIL" (p. 23), for Anancy is the African folktale type of the trickster who scrapes through the most unpromising of contretemps. The trickster may also be recognized as a psychoanalytic figure for the eruption of the other in oneself, and in its unpredictable disordering of the text it is the literary manifestation of that anarchic desire I noted at the start.

In speaking of "Experiment and the Individual," I have intended by "individual" this marginal persistence, the occurrence of the self in history and of history in the self. It is because both these things are apprehended only as discourse that the experimental treatment of each becomes possible. In the novels following Ascent to Omai, Harris's work
begins to straddle a variety of cultural traditions and develop a style which registers this multiplicity. The marginal individual, moving at the rim of these heterogeneous fields, may be seen as the particular but shifting realization of that style, a style which at a more general level of discourse is the style of history.
V. Experiment and Tradition

The paradox of the old in the new is one we faced at the outset. It is now time to show how the new in Harris engages with the old in his milieu and leaves there its mark. And since the mark of experiment may be said not simply to identify tradition but to modify it as well, we may speak, no less paradoxically, of the weight of experiment and the thrust of tradition even as we measure the impact of the future upon the past. Within the confines of the literary work, this impact constitutes narrative; outside the work, it is a matter of history. When, therefore, I couple experiment with tradition, it is not for failing to respect the domain of history but simply to avoid a too rigid demarcation of its limits, one that might for instance banish literary history in the interests of history "proper." Besides, where one may legitimately conceive of the opposition "experiment versus tradition," the opposition "experiment versus history" is strictly meaningless, unless one has in mind a very simple version of the past.

The outlines of the Caribbean past are well known, or easily accessible, and I do not propose to review them here. European expansion, the African slave trade, Asian indenture, Amerindian marginalization: the role of these forces in producing today's plural societies in the region has been well documented by two generations of revisionist historians. Further, post-war and post-independence scholars have sought to re-examine the basis of their professional assumptions by evolving a historiography native to the region and
suited to its progressing cultural creolization. Harris has himself devoted an important series of lectures to enunciating the need for a West Indian philosophy of West Indian history, one "correlative to the arts of the imagination" (HFM p. 25). For my own part, and consistent with this felt need, I will be concerned (and then briefly) with the region's literary history, by way of situating Harris himself and preparing for a consideration of what I take to be his signal achievement.

If West Indian history is characterized by slavery and indenture, its early literary history, like that of many another colony, was one of mimicry. Bound to Europe by their language, writers took their literary conventions, and sometimes even their subjects, unquestioningly from the metropolis. But a revulsion against alien modes was inevitable, and was to go beyond a disenchantment with the Old World to the very roots of European civilization itself. Walt Whitman's cry, quoted by the young Harris, "Come, Muse, migrate from Greece and Ionia/Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts" (RT p. 21), would find its vituperative conclusion in Aimé Césaire's "Europe/pompous name for excrement." The reaction of the English-speaking Caribbean was less blunt, but the great outpouring of West Indian literary work over the past quarter century has shown a decided independence of spirit. Nor is this spirit any less pronounced in writers who have chosen exile—often in the old metropolitan centres—having found their own societies flawed by a larger mimicry, one which deprives them of a livelihood or at least a ready audience. Other writers have from time to time sought to return to the land of their ancestors (the Barbadian, Edward Brathwaite to Ghana, the Trinidadian, V.S. Naipaul to India) but have either veered into a second exile or returned home. Still others, like
the St. Lucian poet, Derek Walcott, have remained in the Caribbean and sought to come to terms with the hybrid traditions of an Old World grafted onto a New. In his polemical essay, "The Muse of History," Walcott invokes the awe of "Adamic, elemental man" at the newness of a world without ruins, and berates the nostalgia of those who look to Europe: "what they are in awe of is not tradition, which is alert, alive, simultaneous, but of history, and the same is true of the new magnifiers of Africa." Yet Walcott's is no simple rejection of the Old World (and his poetry is plain evidence of this), recognizing perhaps the perils of a New World mysticism, and a certain absurdity in the idea of the old and the new.

It is here that we must begin to situate Harris, for like Walcott a hybrid, he has repeatedly warned against the folly of shutting out any of the numerous racial and cultural strains which have gone into the making of the Caribbean. Be it never so marginal there is always a remnant which serves to epitomise the uncounted other, the always-another-exploited. The Amerindians of Guyana are such a remnant, and Harris's own part-Amerindian origins may be one reason for his reminder, in the trio of poems, "Troy," "Behring Straits," and "Amazon," of the other route by which Old and New Worlds were bridged. Elsewhere, he has challenged the notion of so-called "complete" literatures, the product of supposedly homogeneous cultures, and in a recent article on Conrad's Heart of Darkness, he remarks that "the liberal homogeneity of a culture becomes the ready-made cornerstone upon which to construct an order of conquest" (FH p. 88). Conrad's novel, he argues, throws into relief (in ways the author himself may not have suspected) the homogenizing imperatives of Europe, imperatives that underwrote the
stable novel from Conrad inherited. Harris's own novels function in much the same way as *Heart of Darkness*, disrupting rather than perpetuating the illusion of completeness and recalling to the reader the plurality of cultures which have gone into the making of the region.

It is not tradition as such which is the object of experimental distortion; like Walcott, Harris can speak of it as "inherently active at all times" (TW p. 46). Rather, it is closed, self-regarding tradition which wants rifling. On a visit to Guyana in 1966, Harris wrote in the Georgetown journal, *New World*, of the need for

an exploratory tradition that will seek to relate disparate bodies not only in a particular society such as this but throughout a world civilisation that is fast being conditioned by rigid emplacements and tragic confrontations (IS p. 19).

The asymmetrical role of marginal communities in a world of closed societies is still so obscure, he confesses, that in our time it remains a "crisis of individual sensibility," visible in the "alien function of the imaginative artist." What might seem an apology for the alienated or self-exiled artist is in fact a call for shift from unified structures to heterogeneous ones, a transition which characterizes the passage from pure subjectivity to the self-as-historical-process. It is here that experiment-and-the-individual gives way to experiment-and-tradition: literary experiment is no longer the frivolous or solipsistic activity it is sometimes taken to be (or indeed may become when reduced to self-parody) but rather the individual artist's seizure of (or indeed, by) communal forms as he struggles to give voice to his peculiar experience of the landscape he inhabits and the history that inhabits him. The articulation of this interface suggests that experiment is not a denial of tradition but an engagement with it. "There are two kinds of relationship to the past," writes Harris,
—one which derives from the past, and one which is profound dialogue with the past (one which asks impertinent questions of the past). The nature of tradition is, in some degree, a ceaseless question about the nature of exploitation, self-exploitation, as well as the exploitation of others, the exploitation of one culture by another (SI p. 45).

The vision of this statement is of a tradition which is itself experimental, or which contains within it the code of experiment, a "curious half-blind groping" towards change. In this light, tradition is as much a questioner of experiment as the experimental writer is an impertinent questioner of tradition. The question, that of the nature of exploitation, is one which a society built on genocide, slavery and indenture will readily understand, but it is not a matter of public exploitation alone, and this is why the individual artist is as well equipped as the historian to interpret the forms of tradition. It is also why Harris makes small distinction between social and literary forms, a latitude which serves him well in developing his peculiar style of history.

In Ascent to Omai (1970), the judge whose "novel history" eventually encompasses Victor/Adam's tale, describes tradition as a "sieve," the proper converse of that unbroken linearity which stems from "a desire to conscript time itself into a material commodity" (AO p. 84). Notwithstanding the judge's lament, which extends to our obsession with "time as comma and period," there is, following this novel, the sense of a break in Harris's fictional canon. The judge himself has spent a quantity of sighs —no fewer than seven—over the obtuseness of philistines, and declared—again, more than once—that this will be his last novel. Following the publication of Ascent to Omai, Harris turned his attention to two collections of Amerindian stories, The Sleepers of Roraima: A Carib Trilogy (1970), and The Age of the Rainmakers (1971). In hindsight, these collections appear both as the fulfilment of that
Amerindian promise held out in so many of Harris's novels, and as a kind of transition to what might be called, following a convention in Heidegger scholarship, Harris II. The break is not an epistemological one (such as that which is said to divide the young Marx from the old) or even a stylistic one (such as that between *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*); what changes is principally the setting of the later novels, which are for the most part cast abroad. It is as if Harris I, having pressed ever deeper into Guyana, can go no further than Mt. Roraima (the setting of Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* and the goal of Carpentier's *The Lost Steps*) and produces at last, a Scottish novel. But *Black Marsden* is neither Scottish nor West Indian; it is an amalgam of these traditions worked by a writer whom we have heard deny the validity of "complete" literatures. It is only fitting, then, that we broach the subject of Harris and tradition just when the novelist appears to have sold his birthright for a mess of porridge.

In an address called "The Making of Tradition," Harris talks of the "distinctions of eye and texture which a 'native' writer brings to a 'foreign' landscape," and declares his wish "to highlight the curious residues of active tradition one brings with oneself from one landscape to another," because, he says, his peculiar background affects him as a matter of great urgency.

So that when I came to write *Black Marsden* which is set in Edinburgh, Scotland, the sense of concealed layers of tradition affected me; threads of Gaelic, Scottish memories (that related in part to my own grandfather with his Presbyterian and American Indian connections in British Guiana), Catholic and Protestant legacies, were very important to me within so-called realistic character and a necessity to immerse oneself in and to unravel hypnotic persuasions became an enormous and subtle cue, a kind of magical reality, that bore upon new visualisations and relations between Northern Celtic and Southern pre-Columbian poles of consciousness, between apparently incompatible bodies and cultures (MT p. 34).
By this confession, one comes to see tradition as a structure which is known only by its difference from another, a structure that knows itself only when exotic incursions begin to break it down. Tradition "embodies mutation of stereotypes and is therefore susceptible to a making or a remaking" (MT p. 34); it is secure only when at risk, of value only when breached.

This is the substance of the first story of The Sleepers of Roraima, a tale in which a Carib boy, Couvade, repeatedly asks impertinent questions of tribal tradition embodied in his grandfather. It is a cautionary tale of disobedience and punishment, but curiously, those who break the law—Couvade's mother and father, who eat taboo food when they should be fasting—are shown to have imparted a necessary knowledge. The break with tradition, which is of necessity conservative, appears moreover in a garb cheerfully heterodox: Couvade's vanished parents appear to him in a dream dressed as curious birds. Perhaps some strange owl or guacharo bird since they wore sunglasses—American sunglasses (in the ridiculous way of dreams) Couvade had seen fall from the sky in the wake of a passing aeroplane (SR p. 18).

In much the same way, Harris speaks of the sea-change undergone by African customs in their passage to the West Indies. Where, for instance, African vodun was strongly conservative, in Haitian vodun, "there is an absorption of new elements which breaks the tribal monolith of the past and reassembles an inter-tribal or cross-cultural community of families" (HFM p. 16). Consequently, the recurrence in Harris's essays of the image of the melting pot must be interpreted guardedly: while a mix of cultures is indeed intended, the particularities of each are not meant to be subsumed in a homogeneous product.
Harris's use of the irrational, whether to argue an aesthetic point (as in the example from Haitian vodun) or indeed in his fiction (as in his myth-making or re-making) has on occasion brought him censure from fellow novelists. The critic who sees myths as nothing but tender evasions of history is likely to join forces with this opposition, and the present disfavour of mythopoeic writing and criticism would seem to clinch the case. In fact, Harris's literary shamanism is rather a strategic move than a drift into some gnostic pleroma. If there are moments when his project sounds romantic or chimerical, we may put them down to the eccentricity of genius; but more importantly, to the experimental writer's need for an alternative system to the ruling ideology of the day. So construed, his "mysticism" is less a (bad) faith than an aberrant reference outside the paradigm of received knowledge, not least that which informs positivist historiography. By these means mythic or symbolic fiction serves an unmasking purpose, functioning in its day in much the same way as did, say, the experimental realism of a Zola. The irrational, then, so far from mystifying becomes itself a demystifier, but one which recognizes that all demystifications work by substituting another myth.

An example of this unmasking may be found in the context of Harris's review, on the occasion of its being translated into English, of the classic, New Chronicle of Good Government: An Indian Account of the Incas and Pre-Incas of Peru, written by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. Born at the time of the Spanish Conquest and himself decidedly anti-Inca, the Indian Poma nevertheless sets out, says Harris, "to indict the Spaniards by immersing them in their own contradictions." Living "within the gateway of an Inca/Spanish world," he idealizes the "'utopian"
or timeless pre-Inca universe" and reviles the Incas, but so deeply rooted is his sense of dual violation that it is always "submerged in his narrative" and must cloak itself in "historical outrage, parenthesis of myth" (FG pp. 120–21). When, therefore, Harris speaks of the need for a philosophy of history to be derived from the folk arts of the Caribbean, he recognizes that the sense of violation, as well as that of compensation, lodged in these arts is not to be confused with the particular text which registers it—whether the text be historical or mythic. Both myth and history are to be unravelled; neither is the original form. The most an enquirer into the past can hope to do is to capture the lessons embedded in these vestiges by working out new forms for them in the experimental surface of his chosen medium. Harris's Amerindian tales work in an alien language the legends of a community that suffered the very marginalization that was later to overtake the larger society itself: the lesson of his parenthetic myth is no less pertinent for not being cloaked in historical outrage.14

It will be the work of another generation to judge the present uses of the irrational in a progressively rational (if not reasonable) society. In the meantime, West Indian writers, conscious of the gap which separates them from the masses, are alive to the folly of paternalism which stalks the busy collector of folklore, but equally aware that the traditional resources of the people cannot be lightly dismissed as superstition or millennialism. Walcott on the West Indianization of Christianity ("what was captured from the captor was his God"), or Brathwaite on Rastafarian culture in Jamaica, or Roy Heath on the folklore of Guyana, 15 provide salutary lessons in intellectual humility before a groundswell which they recognize must be recorded and respected before it can furnish the
materials of a contemporary art. Much the same example has been set by Latin American novelists, from Asturias and Carpentier to García Márquez, who have compounded their special literary forms out of equal parts of the myth and the reality of their world.

The literary works which result from this fusion are symptoms of a narrative urge which informed the original folklore itself, an urge to join the archaic to the contemporary, to supply what Walter Reed has called the "authoritative story."\(^{16}\) The timely juncture so effected is a thing apart from the timelessness so commonly associated with myths, although in the nature of experiment, the join is an irregular, even arbitrary one. Reed is writing of romantic narrative whose "language of transformation" he opposes to the modernist practice of disjunction, of radical beginnings and ends, but there is no reason why the experimental fiction which takes as its text an archaic story cannot effect such a transition. What has changed is the nature of the transition; modernism ruptures not time but a unilinear version of time. The West Indian failure to discover this new kind of rapport with the past leaves what Harris has called an "unresolved constitution," and the need to resolve that constitution explains his long quest for a native aesthetic. It is also a guiding motive of the Guyana Quartet, which seeks to tell the authoritative story of a heterogeneous people—a motive shared not only by history and myth but also by that middle item in Harris's 1970 Guyana lecture: fable.

"Fable" is a word well suited to Harris's customary mode, and if it suggests the opposite of a world of facts, this is decidedly the novelist's fictive intention. In "History, Fable and Myth," Harris quotes with approval these sentences from Maurice Merleau-Ponty:
The act of the artist or philosopher is free, but not motiveless. Their freedom...consists in appropriating a de facto situation by endowing it with a figurative meaning beyond its real one (HFM p. 8).

Such an appropriation is nowhere more pointedly shown than in Harris's use of the myth most commonly associated with the Guianas: the legend of El Dorado. And here it may be useful to compare the treatment of the same myth by another—but quite different—West Indian novelist, V.S. Naipaul.

Naipaul's history, The Loss of El Dorado, bears in its title the imprint of its author's temper. The finding of this history is that there was no history; after the "loss," there remained only "historylessness." The Loss of El Dorado begins with the end of the quest and is the long, cynical postscript to Walter Raleigh's Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana. As a chronicle, its extraordinary force owes something to that blend of narrative and history which Naipaul has mastered, and not a little to his ironic gifts. It is the record of a simple world corrupted by fantasies of its own making, fantasies which in one way or another stem from the original New World myth of plenitude. It tells of "amateurs in adventure," fantastical schemes, revolutions of "high principles," the constant blurring of make-believe and reality. The Spanish with their titles and paperwork are not the only pretenders; there are those who insist on seeing the noble Indian where there is only a decayed moiety sunk in "alcoholic ennui"; there are the underground antics of Negro slaves, whose elaborate and costumed midnight revels ("that Negro carter, an especially stupid Negro, was a king at night, with twelve courtiers and a uniform of his own") end when soldiers come and search and make the flags and uniforms "useless." The torture of a young girl becomes, to the victim herself
after numerous courtroom descriptions, "an act of ritual," and the jail "a place of myth." It is as if "the Spanish waste" left its necessary brand on a society condemned to simplicity, casual violence and futility. Nor is the fantasy confined to life: it infiltrates letters, eyewitness accounts, journals by various hands. Defeated, Raleigh "with poetic elision, begins to lie." A captain's log, besotted by wonders, is "always straining after effect"; revolutionaries, thwarted, become theatrical, using "borrowed words"; their patrician leaders become "operatic," using "words that cost nothing."

Acting, pretence, humbug, crowd this history; and always that arch contaminant, fantasy. The governing assumption of Naipaul's work is that if men would see clearly and report honestly (to others, but especially to themselves) they might be saved much hardship. Guiding this assumption is a conviction that beneath the fantasy world is a secure and accessible reality, an original substance which may be apprehended in itself and conveyed in an objective, untheatrical discourse. The spare classical style which Naipaul has cultivated speaks his desire to convey just such a reality in a transparent language. But however forceful his book, Naipaul falls short of this intention. A little inspection will reveal the objectivity, the taking no sides, the merely reporting, to have been a posture. It is a Briton's account. The Spaniards may have been greedy, ineffective; here they are buffoons. "The Spanish waste," "the French absurdity," are props for the staging of a British entry as dramatic as any hero might wish for: "one ship after another: eighteen in all to the Spanish squadron's five. Their movements were economical and precise."

Time and again the impossibility of an untheatrical discourse is shown by Naipaul's adroit narrative manipulation in a work that might easily
pass for a novel. Nor is the author's faith in a pristine text of history better founded than Raleigh's dream of a crystal mountain. The ironist's trust in a palpable and immediate knowledge of reality, shorn of ideas and politics, a trust which expresses itself in a sympathy for men of action (governors on half pay, busy soldiers) and an impatience with men of words (pretenders and pamphleteers, either comic or unwittingly baneful), is at last a fond one. We must now ask why.

The allure of unmediated knowledge is potent, but it is one contemporary philosophers have taught us to resist. It is now commonly agreed that the study of any object must include reflexively the strategies of that study, since these invariably modify the object itself as we constitute it. This is only to say that if observation is always a matter of selection, description is even more apt to impose upon its chosen theme. In Naipaul's history, objectivity quickly becomes a mirage—especially in so layered a narrative—as the author disposes his materials in the task of constituting his desired object, the real past of Trinidad. Myths of his own manufacture (which might amount to no more than his choice of two stories out of many and his ordering of their subordinate details) intervene even as he deflates the greater myth, and they do so not for any want of vigilance on the historian's part, but because the "real" is apprehended only as already enmeshed in discourse. The concrete past he seeks is not out there awaiting copy; it is the object not of his reproduction but of his production anew.

It is best to allow that pure mimesis, or objective description of social phenomena must remain an illusion, and this allowance made, we may profitably turn to distinguishing the varieties of mediated description. Such kinds of discourse might range from histories of a chronological
or else logical nature to treatments of myth and fable which prefer an extra-logical advance, modes of which Naipaul and Harris are antithetical exemplars. The ironic El Dorado is not real history cleansed of myth, but a version of that history, one no nearer the concrete than is metaphoric discourse. Nor, by the same token, should a metaphoric El Dorado, such as Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*, be deemed more authentic; overblown notions of metaphor may well encourage pietistic readings of that novel. If metaphor and symbol are thought to convey one beyond language into a zone of pure meaning, then the opposite folly to Naipaul's "real history" is reached, namely "pure myth." But if it is recognized that discourse is always with us, then the proper object of the literary-historical quest is not for an original state, such as that unviolated world which Naipaul curiously makes of pre-Columbian America, but an appropriate language, a native mode fitted to the West Indian experience past and present.

It is this quest which runs through *Palace of the Peacock*, so that not only does the multi-racial crew's journey upriver lead them to the discovery of a nothingness which binds each man to the next, but the mythic event they repeat becomes a vehicle for the creation of a new kind of language. Rather than imposing what Harris has called a "false coherency on material one had to digest--perhaps all one's life" (*AO* p. 123), this language responds to the hollow nature of the expedition. The difference between the nothingness Harris finds and the nullity Naipaul sees may have something to do with the continental sensibility of the Guyanese and the insular sensibility of the Trinidadian, but the use which each makes of his diagnosis is revealing. Where Naipaul sees a picaroon mentality and an undeveloped sense of community giving the lie to the New World myth, Harris sees what he has called "the open myth of
El Dorado" (TW p. 37), but also "the splintering of perfectionist assumptions, fall of El Dorado" (T p. 153), as giving hope as well as reason for a community, one expressed in the novel by collective attributions ("their eye," or "their heart") at moments when the crew are in great peril. Such details, together with the experimental surface of the whole novel make for an innovative use of tradition in which both the original myth and the ethnic reality of Guyana are well served. In "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," Harris speaks of the problems a writer confronts in a chapter of history where the sordid is shot through with the sublime.

In fact 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. It is difficult enough today within clouds of prejudice and nihilism; nevertheless the substance of this adventure, involving men of all races, past and present conditions, has begun to acquire a residual pattern of illuminating correspondences. El Dorado, City of Gold, City of God, grotesque, unique coincidence, another window upon the Universe, another drunken boat, another ocean, another river; in terms of the novel the distribution of a frail moment of illuminating adjustments within a long succession and grotesque series of adventures, past and present, capable now of discovering themselves and continuing to discover themselves so that in one sense one relives and reverses the 'given' conditions of the past, freeing oneself from catastrophic idolatry and blindness to one's own historical and philosophical conceptions and misconceptions which may bind one within a statuesque present or a false future (TW pp. 35-36).

Harris's emphasis here is interpretive rather than descriptive, concerned with present use rather than past misuse. But there is more. If the ironic and the metaphoric El Dorado have an equivalent status as discourse, the one in the indicative and the other in the subjunctive, this does not mean the issue of relevance is shelved. Eventually we must ask whether classical purity and ironic distance are literary qualities suited to the West Indian experience, whether the questions of pluralism and marginality
Harris raises can be addressed by a discourse founded upon these alien traditions alone. It is a question I will ask again in a little while.

Black Marsden was Harris's first novel placed at the intersection of traditions, northern and southern. Harris's next novel, Companions of the Day and Night (1975) annexes yet another culture to the Celtic-Carribbean fringe. Its story is set for the most part in Mexico, and draws upon both ancient and modern traditions of that land as they bear upon the sensibility of the central character. He is that same Idiot Nameless who narrates The Eye of the Scarecrow and is Clive Goodrich's other in Black Marsden. Both Marsden and Goodrich also enter this fiction, as bookends, the one having come upon the Fool's diary and papers along with his paintings and sculptures, and sent them to the other to shape into a novel.

Nameless has long prepared for his journey to Mexico, having studied its pre- and post-Columbian past, though his researches concern what he calls post-Christian societies. The immediate subject of his inquiry is the fate of a Christian nunnery disbanded, along with all such religious orders, upon the Mexican revolution. The sisters of this order had fled, all but one, to various cities in Europe and the United States, where Nameless has traced them in an effort to learn both of the fate and the lesson of the one who remained. Sister Beatrice had gone underground and while in hiding instituted a play, "Christ and the Firing Squad," in which she, dressed as a man, took the leading part. She was exposed and raped, and while her martyrdom would be completed by the idolatry of such men as the guide whom Nameless hires, it is "her trial of values, her scandal" and "the alarming role played by respectable idols" (p. 45) which interest the Idiot. In Mexico City, a fire-eater introduces him to Sister Beatrice's
grand-daughter, the child of the child of a rape, who works as an artist's model. Nameless spends a night with her in his Gravity Hotel room, but when he awakes she is gone. He sets out to follow her along a trail of towns which leads him at last to Teotihuacan. There one night he spies her, but is detained by a chance argument and loses her again. Not long after, he succumbs to the "falling" sickness that has plagued him all his life. His body is found at the base of the pyramid of the sun.

The companions of the day and night are divisions of a pre-Columbian calendar whose nine intervals the novel reflects. Two "dateless days" at the end of the cycle carry the narrative back after Nameless's fall. He is in New York, on his way to Mexico, to interview two other sisters from the disbanded nunnery, sisters who live with—and are played by—Marsden's wife. In taking leave of Mrs. Marsden, Nameless asks if he might be with her "for a day, and for a night." Stunned that the man she regarded as the Christ of the late twentieth century should make so naked a proposal, Marsden's wife shuts the door in his face. The novel's epigraph, an extract from a Puerto Rican folksong, runs:

San José María a Belén llégaron
Pidieron posada y se la negaron

which might be rendered

Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem hied
Asked for room and were denied.

Rejection and sacrifice are the burden of this, Harris's most political novel, and it is characteristic that he should emphasize the individual's role by countering sacrifice with self-sacrifice. A passage from an essay written some fifteen years before Companions of the Day and Night may help construe his present meaning. Harris has just finished quoting Yeats's "Man has created death." To this he rejoins: "like a
private corollary—but above all man has created the image of sacrifice."

Then he continues:

Sacrifice for whom and for what? That is the question. It is the rigidity that appals, one that masks every concept of sacrifice, and may spring from the death-dealing sanction of tradition, yes, but which defeats the very object and mystery of all capacity in the end, in that it makes of the spontaneity of living sacrifice something already 'given' (rather than something belonging to unpredictable experience), something which loses its 'negative' film or state of possibility (B pp. 24-25).

Tradition and the individual are here plainly at odds (in a manner I have followed by separating the two in this and the previous chapter); Harris sees the positive (or positivist) mask of tradition as one which takes the negative edge off the individual and his acts of freedom. The individual's willingness to die, to confront death freely, is already undervalued by a tradition which, in the contemporary world, has enshrined the meaninglessness of death, not excluding self-sacrifice. So it is not death which kills, but "the death-dealing sanction of tradition." And Harris cites the Jamaican, Andrew Salkey's novel, *A Quality of Violence*, with its meaningless death of a cult figure, remarking: "A far cry from Saul's Stephen for whom the heavens shower grace" (p. 25).

The quality of sacrifice Nameless and Sister Beatrice seek to define in their own lives is one divested equally of heroism and a tainted love. "Each man kills the thing he loves," was Black Marsden's mocking reminder of the seed of self-interest sown in love, and it is just so with the purest idolatry. Sister Beatrice's sacrilege—one inverted by her grand-daughter, who as both whore and model poses for a statue of the Virgin—and Nameless's advances to Marsden's wife, partake of an identical iconoclasm. Their unhallowing or hollowing of tradition also casts some light backward on another cryptic remark of Harris's:
one has to visualise Che Guevara, for example, as the new tenant of memory within the hollow monument of Cortes—the new tenant of revolution subsisting upon a devolution or breakdown of historical premises which has been the fate of Latin America, in a sense, since the Conquest of Mexico (NP pp. 146-47).

The "hollow monument" is a recurring image in Harris: here it recalls both the friable shell of the past—that "already 'given'" against which we heard him rail—and a notion of interchangeable subjects whose sacrifice whether honoured or anonymous is of equal value. Another, and linked image of this equivalence in debt is the borrowed cloak or coat, which appeared in The Secret Ladder and which recurs in Companions now.

Ill and faint, Nameless has stopped by a coffee wagon in a Teotihuacan square at midnight. He has been following the artist's model but is now detained by a wayside discussion in which he does not fare well. Nevertheless, noticing his state, one of the workers gathered there throws him a coat. "Whose coat...death do I wear?" he wonders, and is led into a train of unanswerable questions:

Cloaked on all sides by the fast of the sun, bullet-ridden workman, Unknown Warrior and Workman King--two silent tongues in his head forever "No,Yes"--one loud command in his heart FIRE...ultimate buried fate...ultimate buried freedom...

All this encompassed the Fool and riddled him until all of a sudden he came to himself and remembered what he was here for. The woman. He had followed her across the city from Emperor Square through emperor death into this entanglement in sovereign hero, brute death in the overcoat of a dead workman whose name had long been forgotten at the heart of an insurrection. He had been shot when things got 'out of hand.' And the Idiot was imbued afresh by the terror of banal lips, banal dialogue with earth as he sank into unwritten reserves, codes, bodies, window dressing, overalls, bullets, factories...(pp. 66-67).

In pondering his infinite debt to unknowable individuals, the Idiot has not in fact been distracted from his quest.
Each step around the globe for the Fool subsisted upon unwritten reserves planted in the death of obscure men and women who were antecedent to the gods. As though the gods were born of antecedent silences, lost buried tongues that set up unfathomable necessities of unexpressed feeling upon which the Idiot subsisted—which drew him through them into unsuspected spaces that cried for a language, the language of creation, the language of the deaf, dumb, blind fallen who lay at the bottom of the world (pp. 67-68).

What Nameless struggles to shape is this language; his paintings and sculptures, his notes and diaries are an attempt to give voice to the already voiceless, to make speak those intangible links which bind him to them. The obscurity of his work catches something of the silence of the obscure; it has abandoned the attempt to represent them. "We need to see from within," the Fool says shamefacedly to the workman who has dismissed him, "the roles played by others in our name, in the name of the nameless forgotten dead, the nameless forgotten living" (p. 65).

The Fool's need is to discover "an equation between revolution and religion, to face a firing squad." This had been Sister Beatrice's mission before him, and indeed remains that of today's radical clergy and liberation theologists throughout Latin America. In Companions of the Day and Night the equation reads out as self-sacrifice. "Politics," says the Fool, "is the art of sacrifice," and if he insists on the individual's example, it is not for being unaware of tyranny's insatiable appetite for victims but because this ultimate readiness is a discovery of strength in weakness. There is, moreover, a strategic value to Nameless's task of giving voice to the voiceless, for what Harris elsewhere calls "an addiction to absolute power politics" (CP p. 149), might well serve to complete the process of marginalization it claims simply to describe. To view power as a zero-sum game is "to embalm the fact of exploitation" (HFM p. 28), to accept utter despoliation. On the
other hand, to accept, as Nameless does, "that to be born was to be broken in the dream play of history," is to learn to bargain from a position of weakness. It is also to learn to "see through the ritual proprietors of the globe" (NP p. 148) and their histories of "total breakdown or total catastrophe" (MP p. 30). It might be said that Harris's valuation of the individual leads him to underestimate the power and the politics of the group, and indeed there is something wishful about the "element of conscience" he expects to find in the powerful. Nevertheless, as a measure of commitment—which will always have an individual component—and risk, such as that of the revolutionary who "lives today in the shadow of the bullet" (p. 77), the Fool's argument cannot be faulted. The pivotal opposition in the novel is between the Christian's self-sacrifice and institutionalized sacrifice such as the cruel rites once performed on the Aztec pyramid of the sun for the renewal of a calendrical contract. The fearless risk of the one compared with a fearful rigidity in the other is also a present reminder of experiment's answer to tradition.

A faith—and it is that—in the stoic endurance of the disinherited requires a long view of politics, longer perhaps than the patience of many. The experimental "remaking/unravelling of tradition" wants also what Harris, in speaking of Companions of the Day and Night, calls "double vision" (MT p. 39). And in the Fool's "glimpsed proportions through nature and history" (p. 13), it is possible to see a coming together of the mythic and ironic modes. Goodrich's "Introduction," which tells of the Idiot Nameless Collection as having evoked in him a "magic of reality," and Black Marsden's concluding letter, which speaks of Nameless as having been "an ironist in the deepest sense, perhaps" (p. 81), both suggest such a union. One purpose of this alliance might
be to short-circuit the ideology of total loss and its mimetic discourse, a charge the novel conducts with much energy. Hence the numerous plays on solidity and fracture, on black holes and bullet holes and gravity beyond measure, on the Idiot's own "falling" sickness, on the absent Virgin--tactics that will be resumed in a further series of canvases by another painter, da Silva, whose work frames two of Harris's most recent novels.

Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness (1977) and its sequel, The Tree of the Sun (1978), are separated from each other by a novella, Genesis of the Clowns: A Comedy of Light (1977), which was issued bound up with the former. Unlike the da Silva novels, which are set in London, Genesis of the Clowns looks back to Guyana. Yet it represents, as I showed in "Experiment and Language," an advance upon the manner of the early novels, displaying a greater freedom from rhetorical conventions of sentence and symbol and a temper leavened with a new piebald humour. In fact the comic spirit and the harlequin style, with its curious and invariably far-fetched juxtapositions, are two sides of the one coin. A short novel, Genesis of the Clowns nonetheless encapsulates many of Harris's characteristic qualities and obsessions: "a lust for responsibility in myself and a void of responsibility in nature" (p. 124); a conviction that "each present illumination shifts the debris of the past a little" (p. 82); and consequently, the sense of a "need to preserve diametrical opposites in each unfinished day and age as a capacity to unravel self-deceptions" (p. 128), whether personal or social. As a result, the contradictory, punning surface of the novels takes on the look of what protagonist Frank Wellington himself calls "a Walt Disney/Confucian collaboration" (p. 135), and his enemies (in an unintended compliment) call "a marriage between EBONY AND MARX FATHER AND BROTHERS" (p. 144).
Something of this fantastical humour and an even greater measure of cross-cultural bricolage marks the canvases of da Silva. A painter who is neither Portuguese, nor Brazilian, nor Arawak Indian, nor European, nor African, but a little of each, he is married to a Peruvian and lives in London. In Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness, the immense "Anglo-Brazilian mural" on which the artist is at work becomes the fabric of the novel and involves him closely with the lives of his models, the landscape of his city and the past of his native South America. His "Inca" wife, Jen; the navigator Magellan; the leader of a Guyanese slave revolt, Cuffey; a Peruvian madonna, Manya; a British earl: through his subjects da Silva draws upon a great variety of traditions, blending them with an inspired experimentation. Using montages of place and time, he creates panels of extraordinary density and allusiveness: Cromwell's helmet above a Caribbean cricketer who plays on a field where the Roundheads held secret talks; a dry-cleaning machine on the astronauts' televised moonscape for the soiled coat of a model madonna. It is a celebration of all that is out of place in a time that is out of joint.

The product of this "Ars combinatoria" is a novel teeming with things, a prodigal canvas of sensuous planes and surfaces which marks a new exteriority in Harris's work. As da Silva paints his way downstairs and out along the street, his brush in the sky, a richness of colour and image gathers about his advance as if to solidify its spatiality. It is a solidity which will be undermined in the sequel, but for the present its sensuousness evokes the theme of creativity which the author has chosen to address, and which finds its narrative climax in Jen's announcement after eight years of marriage, that she is pregnant. Once more we find space triumphant: "the womb of space" (p. 46), "the canvas of space"
(p. 54), "the muse of space" (p. 64): the progression is inescapable. If space is the "infinite creditor," the prodigality of nature is to be matched by a spontaneity in the artist, one that is quite removed from the studiedness of tradition (or of pornography, as the boy da Silva learned). It is where traditions and cultures clash, where a homogeneous tradition's composure is shaken, that spontaneity can unite with prodigality, intruding on the pure.

Purist neolithic revolution.
Purist industrial revolution.
Hydroelectric ivories or stables.
Purist wing. Plane.
The spanner of Hercules.
The flight of Quetzalcoatl.
The descent of Icarus.

There was a subtle intrusion of epic, a subtle mythical code of implicit heroism or pathos or terror, diffusions of influence or style East to West, West to East, North to South, South to North, that took root in his brush as he painted techniques and frames, glittering saddles of Chinese dragons from Hong Kong, gunpowder, neolithic wheat, pre-Columbian maize, aeroplane saddles, into distillations of barbarism and modern power politics masquerading as purist masks of technology across the imprisoned centuries from which the magi-prodigals set out again and again, the star-gazing prodigals, within each tent of ancient or modern commonwealth (p. 73).

Out of this fecund chaos emerges that chain of connections we call history. Yet, da Silva contends, it is for the artist to challenge the inevitability of those links by recalling his audience to other correspondences, by disclosing those relations which conventional history might have overlooked. His charge is not to refute history but to correct a uniformity in it. Da Silva takes this charge seriously:

"I suffer my recurring twentieth-century dream of a crash that isn't a crash, a crisis that is integral to change as the body of the future learns to shed a coat it wears, a painful coat that it has worn so long it is virtually cemented into its skin until they seem one and the same investiture of space."
"I lie face down by a sea, by a lake, face up, face sideways. "And truth takes its pick of the unravelling of self-portraits of fate. "Truth flashes through the Magellan mask, the Cuffey mask, that I wear; a naked spark of truth that lingers, a glimpsed compassion, an original unity that runs with conformable institutions but is other than uniform style, uniform paint, uniform conviction" (p. 50).

The multitude of births and deaths in this novel, the pattern of death cheated or life cheated, of interlocking lives and lives repeated, spins yet again that web of debt which troubled Nameless in his borrowed coat. Here once more, on the last encounter between da Silva and his scatterbrain model madonna, the motif surfaces. In the heart of summer Manya appears in a heavy black coat, "a walking cloak or avant-garde spectacle of winter" (p. 33); she leaves in a rage having flung the coat across da Silva's easel. The experimental artist's need to make invisible connections visible now begins to assert itself against the sensuous surface of things. In learning to grapple with the obstinate shapes of survival, with the colour of freedom—a colour obscured by "the long night of history through which the monolith of space flew" (p. 13)—da Silva must develop a technique by which the uniformity of history and tradition may be fissured.

The Tree of the Sun begins with this project. Let us watch the first cracks appear in the monolith. Da Silva is painting the assassination of Montezuma when his attention is caught by "the tree of the sun" outside. Then he resumes work:

Da Silva turned from the view outside the studio to his own gigantic painting, a huge leaf of a canvas that covered one wall of the room, and sought now to trace with a nail or a finger an almost imperceptible line of blood that ran along Montezuma's pagan temple, a faint bruise from the glancing blow he had received from the hand of enemy or friend.
The autumn and winter and cruel spring of the modern world seemed to cluster there in that line, shadow of indeterminacy, stone or arrow, splintered lacework, remembered dying and living cavalry seasons in the head of sun-king and snow-king (p. 2).

The conquistadorial blow which kills Montezuma leaves a subtle bruise: here it is the merest hairline, but a line of consequence precisely because of its indeterminacy. The images clustered about it preserve this uncertainty: they magnify and prolong the initial shock of "enemy or friend" by linking together unlikely and even contradictory elements through paradox and simple juxtaposition. Accordingly, their diverse materials and improbable correspondences prepare a ground of extreme instability; so that the blow which dispatches Montezuma at the same time opens a fissure in the "fact" of his total reduction or absolute defeat.

The crack troops of this assault on the monolith are the artist's images, but they do not pretend to constitute an iconography of the concrete. Far from seeking to be a thing-in-itself, the image is simply an "opening" device. It cheerfully takes up its burden of discourse, but with this reservation that it exist by virtue of the space surrounding it, and (since this space is ordinarily filled) in relation to its fellows. This relation is both a source of strength and a danger, for a disturbance in any one region will communicate with all the others; a local frailty can bring the whole tumbling down. Consequently, da Silva's mural, so far from concealing the wall, assiduously traces its chinks and crannies: one of its recurring images is the eye of the needle, an allusion, we recall, to the smallest gate in the wall of the Holy City.

In remodelling their apartment to make room for a studio, da Silva and Jen have come across a novel and some letters which an earlier husband and wife of a past generation had written in concealment from
each other and secreted in a wall. Now da Silva begins to reconstruct
the love of this childless couple, Francis and Julia, with such sympathy
that they soon come to dominate his work, and eventually, the novel.
Not only do Francis and Julia begin to communicate with each other in
a way they had been reluctant to in life, the characters from Francis's
novel also enter the plot of the larger work and move on the same plane
as da Silva and Jen. Such a third-level character is Harlequin. A
modern version of Montezuma, he is an insubstantial creature, yet
failed warrior that he is he is utterly real in the
antagonists with whom he fought (still fights), the
uncanny way he puts flesh-and-blood on the most un-
promising skeletons, guns, bottles, houses, shattered
monuments, fallen trees, broken fires, drought-ridden
waters. They are all his antagonists drawn up into
sublimity of feud from a pool of unconsciousness from
immemorial miscarriages and myths (p. 44).
The crush of images here piled one upon the other without so much as a
connective, compounds a mass that is both fragile and combustible ("guns,
bottles"). Yet each element represents both the shrapnel of earlier and
the stuff of later explosions: guns and bottles do play a modest part in
the text, past and to come. In this way, the apparent density of the
writing exists paradoxically to draw attention to its own brittleness, and
by the same token to a hollowness in the fabric of conventional history.
Here is how Harlequin-to-be puts it:
"There's a central, apparently invincible, nothingness
to all material existence out of which time runs back-
wards and forwards...And it is this that imbues us with
a capacity to cast off a conviction that imprisons us
or to acquire a conviction that determines us (p. 22).
The link with discourse is still implicit, but the void which we
located at the centre of narratives like Heartland and The Eye of the
Scarecrow finds here a fresh disclosure, and its nothingness occasions
neither absurdist despair nor ironic dismissal (Naipaul's "nullity")
but an enabling conviction of language and community. It is not a
denial of history—Harris has spoken of "the structure and language of the novel" as "derivatives of history" (B p. 224)—but a resistance to determinist versions of history. It also suggests that the graven factuality of the historical is always an ordering of the facts, however cunningly it may pretend to objectivity. I have argued that it is not as if in myth we see through a glass darkly but in history face to face: each is in its way a palimpsest of the real. The pure history, the transparent knowledge of things in themselves, these are illusions whose nature it has been the work of numerous critics, literary and social, to demonstrate. In the same way, Harris proposes "to diminish a pattern of domination," "to cast off obsessions with models of strength (or weakness for that matter)" (p. 223). And here at last the connection speaks its name: we confront models of the world, models of language. Even as the models of weakness which constitute the ideology of "historylessness" are to be discarded, so too must the models of strength which constitute a borrowed discourse.

Once we recognize that history is available only as a set of ideas about history, ideas whose ordering, whether mimetic or ironic or mythic, inevitably partakes of discourse, it is no longer possible to regard the factual novel or the historical novel—or indeed, history—as more real or more relevant than the symbolic novel. The plea for "reality, not fantasy," for "life, not letters" becomes either disingenuous or itself properly rhetorical. "Pure fact is a myth," writes Julia in one of her letters, "an invaluable myth, a useful myth, but a myth nonetheless..." (p. 12). The discourse of facticity, particularly when it aspires to universality in seeking merely to present without judging, is never an innocent eyewitness. Its function as a representative discourse is eventually to tame and control what is represented on one's own
terms, the other being fashioned in the language or image of oneself. And it is equally so, says Harris, with defensive rewritings of history: inasmuch as these are revisions, they are dependent, taking as their text a misrepresentation. To rewrite history so, is simply to invert the original terms of the borrowed discourse; to fissure these facts in an experimental language is to begin to invent another discourse altogether.

In the last analysis, an historian of the West Indies has remarked, "dependence is a state of mind." Eric Williams goes on to cite V.S. Naipaul's strictures on West Indian mimicry, strictures that have since extended their scope to the Third World at large, its borrowed politics, its habit of "lashing the West with its own words." But it is a simple matter to find nullity and mimicry and uncreativity when one's claims are lodged in a discourse which already has these judgements written into it. To have made this diagnosis at all in a borrowed discourse is a piece of irony worth relishing. It is here that the faith in facts betrays one, for the flight from words into the bosom of things commits a writer to regarding style as an impediment, form as frivolity. Where Naipaul declares he thinks less and less of "the way the words lie on the paper and more of the meanings, the timing, the emphasis--not thinking of style or language at all..." this faith is at work. Harris, on the other hand, begins with the assumption of a mediating discourse and at once sets about probing the limits of this discourse, scrambling the rhetoric he has inherited into a virtual anti-discourse: hence da Silva's paradox of a cultivated wilderness, a rhetoric of unrhetoric. In doing so, he is, by a strange irony, nearer the historical reality of the West Indies, namely the need to develop a native voice, or rather to find ways--in this case literary ones--of capturing a voice that already sounds in
every present street and echoes about that "trail of silent things" which is for Harris the groping past.

What is this voice? Its transcription must begin with a personal trial, a sharpening of that anxiety of influence by which one individually confronts the burden of the past. But very soon it must advance beyond these protective discriminations and immerse itself in that "jumble of voices" Frank Wellington hears address him out of the past, the evidence of innumerable lives lived and speeches trailing off into one another. And here the West Indian artist is in fact the beneficiary of that same ideology of "historylessness," for he is called upon not only to imagine a past but to create the style of that past, to gather up from the surviving evidence traditions whether living or dead, great or little, urban or rural, rational or irrational, and combine these elements in a new discourse. It is as if he were set to discover the deep structure of Caribbean history and transform it into sentences. The style of Caribbean history, the violent disruptions of exploration, conquest and slavery, and the ethnic plurality that was to result, might even be said to have demanded a Harris for its scribe. The Guyanese novelist, Edgar Mittelholzer, was also to sense this hybrid voice, but in his novels its multifariousness remains a matter of story, and a story which has not found its appropriate form—as if the deep structure were simply reproduced rather than transformed. In contrast, consider this passage from Harris's *The Tree of the Sun* which tells of those thousands of men and women who perished on the slave ships which plied between Africa and the New World. "'Middle passage ritual'" explains da Silva, referring to that Atlantic crossing as he and his created subjects pause beside a crowded London high-rise block to watch a limbo dancer perform his ritual
of dismemberment and refashioning:

First the dancer merely lowered his head and shoulders as he passed under the bar but gradually as the pole was taken inch by inch, foot by foot, closer to the ground, he began to bend his trunk and limbs backwards; his legs and feet acquired astonishing agility and protean spirit.

In the background, perhaps a mile away, above pool and pitch, four or five high-rise buildings ascended into the sky like elongated dancers themselves in tune with a bottle-necked kiln of populations. The limbo dancer beside the pool re-fashioned himself into a series of distortions as he kissed the deck of symbolic slave ship, symbolic free ship, with the back of his head between pole and ground.

"On every urban ship the gods are there in each new building programme like implicit dancers, horizons as well, under which history moves by global degrees. Cramped economic degrees, dwarfed economic degrees, nevertheless in the womb of space as in a canvas of deeds that lag behind a universal conception of the body of truth. In a limbo dancer or building or monument one glimpses chains and broken chains, divided spaces, wounded angles in resurrections, movement and distortion towards the inimitable, (never-to-be-wholly-achieved) re-assembly of limbs into high rise Osiris, god-beetle, anancy spider, mast of new Christian ship, unfinished land, unfinished pier in the sea and the sky on the precipitate ladder of fate" (pp. 47-48).

The makings and breakings enacted here are perhaps the nearest approach of West Indian form to the content it seeks to convey. It is questionable whether a classical, rationalist style such as Naipaul's, with its studied objectivity, its understatement and its chaste ironies, could even begin to grapple with such a history without severely harming it with order. Yet it is not a matter of rejecting European tradition—the English language alone ensures a bond—but rather of bending or breaking it experimentally to suit the local purpose. Nor is this need a ready excuse for literary pyrotechnics. For Harris, change inheres not in the alarms and excursions of history but in that "still small
voice" after earthquake and fire, a voice recorded in the epigraph of his first novel and one which has remained with him an article of faith. Its literary equivalent is that "slow naming" which Walcott sees as the New World virtue, and as one which Harris, more than any other Caribbean writer, has made his own. As Harris's novels have come to be pitched abroad at the crossroads of an ever greater number of traditions, this cumulative naming has burgeoned. With their extraordinary capacity for bric-à-brac of every description, the exhibitions and market tables of the most recent novels are devices of a new vigour in Harris's language. They reflect his exuberant and indiscriminate plunder of landscapes foreign and native for heterogeneous images of that "strangest almost undreamt-of experimental thing, a consistency of unrestricted elements within a harsh melting pot of resistances, the crude nature of the sublime long-suffering geography of history" (ES p. 32). This spatial conception of time is of course a modernist imperative, but it does not aim to aestheticize history. Instead, its new reach attempts to approximate history on its own experimental terms, terms whose cross-cultural content bears on "the nature of community--the community of art and science--community of heterogeneous peoples, heterogeneous spaces" (SI p. 42).

In "History, Fable and Myth," Harris spoke of a "dialectic of alteration" as the "cornerstone for a philosophy of history in the Third World of the Caribbean" (HFM p. 32). Such a dialectic informs the style and structure of his own novels, and its patient working out has been less a matter of virtuosity than a careful listening to and a daring transcription of voices, past and present, that sound through the writer. That Joycean god, furiously orchestrating his effects and
then withdrawing to pare his fingernails, is today an implausible figure. A writer's style of history, fable or myth is rather his capacity, says Harris, to "suffer again through his work the ancestral torment of finding his tongue seized as if he had become a dumb thing without voice or language" (UC p. 44). The speech of the speechless: here silence assumes a shape at once personal and historical. Experiment and tradition agree momentarily that the writer does not write but is written.
Conclusion

One or two contradictions remain, contradictions which spring from Harris's work, though they are not of his designing. Those that are part of his scheme, I have spent some time examining; others will invariably occur despite the author. Harris's own view is that "life in its essential contradictions is art: it is the deep unconscious humour of carnival" (AC p. 12), so it should be no surprise if certain pranks of art meet their match in life.

The most evident feature of Harris's writing is its difficulty; yet it is meant to be read and understood, as well as enjoyed. Does the difficulty fog the reading the comprehension, the enjoyment? The answer is yes, often. If this is so, is the writer to blame, or am I as his reader lacking? The answer is again, but now illogically, yes, often. On the one hand, there is detectable in Harris a quotient of complexity which serves him rather than his work; on the other, there is in me a dulness or a conventionality that wants shaking. This being so, I might reasonably wonder whether a link exists between such difficulty as is not perverse, and such obtuseness as is not ingrained. And if this link is the unfamiliarity of the new, is novelty the only pretext for what is difficulty in Harris? We may ask help of an aestheteician who declares avantgardism "a novel concept, a novel fact." In his treatise, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, Renato Poggioli maintains that avantgardism obtains where new art begins to contemplate itself historically, and that our understanding of the phenomenon cannot be guided by the supposition that there has always been a conflict between
old art and new art.

That supposition...is only an equivocation owing to a poverty of imagination and historical culture...To this lack is added the customary confusion between the history of taste and the history of art. The inability to distinguish between these two disciplines is exactly what impedes us from realizing how novelty in an artistic accomplishment is something quite different from novelty in the artist's attitude vis-à-vis his own work, and vis-à-vis the aesthetic task imposed on him by his own era.

...we have to deal with a novelty which is not merely formal but substantial, with a phenomenon truly "of exception" in cultural history.1

If, following Poggioli, we assume that avantgardist novelty is substantive as well as formal (the form being a new substance), we come to see Harris's difficulty not only as a willed, and sometimes wilful, response to "the aesthetic task imposed on him by his era," but as a historically necessary and culturally substantial product of that era. An artist's response to a fragmented world might be to try to recover old meanings and traditional forms through ironies which invoke a prior and stable reality. Or else, he might choose to experiment in various ways with the fragments at hand, and here it becomes desirable and possible to distinguish, as I did in my first chapter, between varieties of experimental newness in art, between newness which traffics in meaning while denying meaning, and a newness which is committed to meaning, but of a kind which is yet unclear. By celebrating unmeaning, parodic experimentalism (which is the new disclaiming the new) has today spurred that humanist reaction which parades as a return to sanity, to reason, to commonsense. Yet even where such calls to order are alert and disinterested,2 they represent a surrender of experiment to tradition, a return to the discourse of the prevailing ideology. Harris has addressed this issue explicitly:
it is of considerable interest—as one reads between the lines of the new humanism—that an element of involuntary self-exposure comes into view that speaks volumes without actually saying a word. An unconscious political irony is in process of being born within the telling silences of the family of the Word and this is one of the first steps (who knows?) towards a radical change of tone in the dialogue of vested interests between old worlds and new (RV p. 19).

The gaps in the old discourse: to disclose these is the purpose of the new writing. This is why the Marxist aesthetic of formal fracture—even when it goes on to recognize the containment of literary deviance--provides a satisfying theory of experiment, since it shows how new forms de-form and unmask ideology. The new writing answers commensense with an uncommon, and here is the root of its difficulty. But it offers in turn not so much a true and ulterior script as an other or alterior one, a script whose significances are not necessarily determined by the author. That is to say, one must read between the lines of the new writing as well.

Harris has no affection for rhetoric; for him it is to language what "persuasion" is to the larger craft of fiction. Yet I have argued that rhetoric is inescapable. No doubt, Harris has in mind a special kind of rhetoric, "a public voice, the voice of a peculiar orator... a verbal sophistication" (TW p. 37), but even the most private and minimalist prose represents a certain ordering of chaos, and the style of nothingness remains both something and a style. There are passages of Harris's work which show signs of careful scripting just as there are others where randomness is the rule, but each has its rhetorical threshold. If I have suggested that the writing satisfies most where cunning is least practised, it is because knowingness sits even more uncomfortably with the symbolic novel than with the parodic. The unwrought
better suits the mode than the wrought (an important difference between Harris's symbolic experimentation and the symbolist tradition on which it draws), and even where breakage and surreal montage are fractionally deliberate, their effect is intended to be one of afterthought rather than forethought. It is still no less an effect, and therefore rhetorical, so that to appreciate the Harrisian style one must disregard the stylist's own protestations and develop some notion of a rhetoric of unrhetoric. This is what I sought to do in "Experiment and Language." Such a rhetoric would be a truer measure of both that subjective orality which Harris's own temper dictates (in contradistinction, say, to an anal temper whose forms might be encyclopaedic or else strictly regimented) and that larger orality which typifies West Indian culture.

An African novelist, Nadine Gordimer, has remarked of her own continent that where its writers choose their style, "their themes choose them." The strength of this observation is borne out by its capacity to survive a trans-Atlantic crossing: it might equally have been made of the Caribbean, where a writer's themes, and moreover the forms of those themes, seem historically ordained. The limbo of the middle passage, for instance, that slaving voyage which formed the base of a nautical triangle set between Europe, Africa and the New World, has left its outline in many a West Indian work. The void at the centre of a novel like Heartland, but also at the far edge of Palace of the Peacock is evidence of a theme whose form is chosen for rather than by the author. The hollow structure of The Eye of the Scarecrow, the black holes of Companions of the Day and Night, are extensions into physics and metaphysics of this historical wound, as are those numerous examples of perspective bent and space socketed in all of Harris's fiction. To
disclose such a structure was the task of "Experiment and Narrative." Yet, the alterity figured there is often undone by Harris himself. Having discovered a fold in history, a "vacancy in nature" (IN p. 146), he wishes to find in this void evidence of an "original frailty," a fleeting glimpse of a unity now lost. Like Burton's quest for the origin of the Nile, Donne's journey upriver to the source of things is imperilled by this nostalgia. But for the vigilance of its language, the narrative of Palace of the Peacock might engulf otherness in the solace of the same.

The early Harris's drive ever deeper into Guyana may be seen as a sign of the same urge to discover a lost innocence in the interior. The internationalism of the later Harris checks this motion with a new heterogeneity, this time of the "native" writer in a "foreign" landscape; once more form has chosen the writer.

In peopling his landscapes, Harris draws on the diverse ethnic strains which have gone into the making of the Caribbean, and latterly, the London of his chosen exile, but the identity of his fictional creatures is characterized by an instability that is philosophic rather than racial. It is an instability founded on an existential lack in the individual, on that nothingness in the subject which denies him an independent self. Yet despite this denial of closed identity (one which applies equally to word or structure or tradition), a contradiction remains. The Harris who quoted Keats's "I have no identical nature," is yet prone to invoke a centred personality, a "presence within an absence" (IN p. 147), suggesting once more a plenitude of being which it is the function of absence to undermine. Harris has, of course, a philosophy of community which devolves on the lack in the individual, and it is arguable that his invocation of presence is less a nostalgia for a primal authenticity than a lament on the alienated state. But the
collective he offers is more often to be realized in the unconscious than in material existence, and a community so dispersed into an objective psyche is the sign of a real need ideologically recontained. Nevertheless, the hollowing out of the subject was a necessary step towards any notion of community, and to describe the various techniques of its fictional achievement was the project of "Experiment and the Individual."

There is a sense in which Gordimer's antithesis may be further simplified, for style, too, can be said to choose the writer--at least as much as it is chosen. In "Experiment and Tradition," I tried to develop a notion of "voice" in the past and the present of the Caribbean, and to join this orality to the material practice of the novelist's craft. Harris's engagement in his fiction with the myth and history of Guyana, and his critical promptings towards a native historiography, are attempts to develop a fit style of history. By bringing history and imaginative writing together in symbolic fable, Harris's personal experiment gives tradition its contemporary voice. When he speaks of the writer's responsibility to nameless men and women, this is what I take him to mean. It is not a question of making the right political noises; when made in fiction, these sound suspiciously like preaching to the converted, but they may also, Harris claims, prove retrograde:

the continuity of intellectual moral protest (which has been the liberal political climate of the West Indies...) will remain an embalmed posture until immense new disciplines (a new anthropology I would think) can assess discontinuities and original divergences from the continuous character line charted by historians as a humane imposition, on one hand, or an oppressive deterrent on the other (HFM pp. 29-30).

To ring the right changes (especially in a privileged cultural medium like the serious novel) is to appeal to a prepared audience; to begin
to shape a language out of discontinuous and inchoate forms, to piece together a discourse that will help build an independent culture, this is a slower and much longer process. I do not argue for a social gradualism, but think it necessary to distinguish between a writer's work as a writer and his role as an active social being. Since books are not acts, protest fiction is no further advanced towards its goal than a fiction which has taken this longer route. The writer's duty as a writer, especially in a colonized world (and here one recalls Eric Williams's observation that in the last analysis dependence is a state of mind), is first to find an independent voice. This I believe Harris, more than any other Third World writer in English, has done. And, more resolutely than any other novelist writing in the West, he has developed a peripheral discourse whose contradictions of bricolage and blankness are a present reminder of those innumerable voiceless (and indeed invisible) people marginalized by the political economy of the contemporary world.

Harris has worked an independent style, and here it is curiously his privatized metaphysic that has stood him in good stead. Yet it is not sufficient to trace his experiment back to its literary traditions in this mystic or that romantic poet; what he has done with these traditions is more significant than the connection itself. Through such a style, the cultural Other begins to represent itself instead of being represented, and this not by a nativism but by an indiscriminate cross-cultural bricolage. A similar phenomenon is noted by Erich Auerbach:

With the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and the principle of order which it embodied—a principle which had itself been long characterized by certain senile traits of calcification—the inner coherence of the orbis terrarum disintegrated too, and a new world could only be rebuilt from its parcelled fragments.
During the process, the politically and psychologically crude ethos of the newly emerging peoples everywhere clashed with the surviving institutions of Rome, the vestiges of antique culture, which retained a tremendous prestige despite decline and rigidification. It was a clash of the very young and the age old, and at first the very young was paralyzed, until it had managed to come to terms with the vestiges of tradition, until it had filled them with its own life and brought them to a new florescence.7

The lesson is plain, and yet it points one last contradiction. Auerbach goes on to warn that the style which replaced classical discourse was a "stylizing and idealizing" of the events of the past, in which the separation of the sublime from the everyday is so complete that "the economic bases of society are not even mentioned."8 Harris's novels do not address day-to-day issues; they are concerned with first and last things, etiologies and eschatologies which are indeed their prerogative but which lend some credence to objections that such writing is apt to rarefy social problems beyond recognition.9 Harris is, of course, a philosophical novelist. This fact, more than his stylistic difficulty, makes his novels less accessible than novels of overt social interest. At the same time, the very strength of his philosophic intransigence has driven him to produce a language that is strikingly original while yet rooted in a multiplicity of traditions. Other West Indian writers have addressed other themes, some perhaps of greater immediate social relevance, yet none has evolved so distinctively national a voice in so radically international a form.

Harris's marginal writing is at once of his own making and the product of those traditions at whose common edge he moves. To make inordinate claims for the experimentalist's breakthrough would be to disregard this necessary duality. An excessively partisan modernism may well
blind a reader to the ways in which tradition will break with itself instead of being broken by some individual. It may be that the avantgardist, whether writer or critic, is too quick to see lurking behind all traditional forms a behemoth of single vision and Newton's sleep. Tradition is not everywhere a matter of monuments, nor experiment always an iconoclasm. The novel is better seen as a crucible in which elements of the old are transformed by the catalyst of the new. In this light, a novel's form need not invite fracture, but as Harris's venturesome use of tradition has shown, it can only gain from experiment.
Notes

Introduction


I: Experiment


2 "Post-contemporary fiction" is Jerome Klinkowitz's phrase, one which he, in a gesture characteristic of the general panic, drops in favour of Alain Arcas-Misson's "Superfiction." See The Life of Fiction (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 3.


7 Graff states flatly that "the conception of cultural revolution favoured by the avantgarde over the last century has come to a dead end. Advanced industrial society has outstripped the avant-garde by incorporating in its own form the avant-garde's main values--the worship of change, dynamic energy, and autonomous process, the contempt for tradition and critical norms." Graff, p. 248. He neglects to show how this incorporation is done in the name of the very rationalism to which he advocates a return. The "critical and moral traditions of humanism" are quite as speedily contained as those of the avantgarde.


9 The classic description of this phenomenon is Marx's: "Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence,
rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life. The entire class creates them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives them through tradition and upbringing, may imagine that they form the real motives and the starting point of his activity. ... And as in private life one differentiates between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, so in historical struggles one must distinguish still more the phrases and fancies of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves from the reality." The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, reprinted in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels: Selected Works, Vol. I (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), p. 272. In the terminology of another age, Terry Eagleton applies this notion of the "pseudo real" to the product of a representational process which signifies, not 'Victorian England' as such, but certain of Victorian England's ways of signifying itself. "Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory (London: NLB, 1976), p. 77.


15 Harris's second book of critical essays is due some time in 1982, and may include an attempt at such a poetics. The nearest published approach to this is the work not of Harris himself but of two critics, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, who draw on notes taken at a series of lectures Harris gave in 1973 at Aarhus University, Denmark. The volume is entitled Enigma of Values: An Introduction (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1975).

As for the elaboration of an aesthetic by which the great outpouring of West Indian literary activity might be measured, that is a larger and still unresolved question. The need for such a poetics has been articulated by virtually every sensitive critic in the region since Peter Blackman's article, "Is there a West Indian Literature?" Life and Letters, 59 (1948), 96-102.

Fittingly, some of the best work in this direction is that of an historian and poet, L. Edward Brathwaite, but as Kenneth Ramchand points out, Brathwaite's fine articles on "Jazz and the West Indian
Novel" (which explicitly undertake "the search for a West Indian aesthetic") are limited by their choice of a sectional working model. See Bim, 44 (1967), 275-84; 45 (1967), 39-50; 46 (1968), 115-26, and Ramchand's "Concern for Criticism," Literary Half-Yearly, 11 (1970), 151-61. Some of the most pointed remarks on this subject are, not surprisingly, those of Harris himself in his various critical essays. An especially perceptive treatment is HFM.

One of the reasons for the absence of such an aesthetic might well be the West Indian critic's eminently sane refusal to make theoretic capital out of any supposed uniqueness in the Caribbean cultural moment. But to advance a brief for a West Indian poetics is neither an innocent nativism nor a case of special pleading; it is simply that works arising out of a specific set of historical conditions may better answer questions put to them by a schema elaborated out of those same conditions. It may be that since structuralism we have become so preoccupied with methodologies of difference that we overlook the possibilities of the same.

16 The essay is reprinted in Tradition, the Writer and Society, pp. 7-12.

17 Harris has in mind Lukács's Studies in European Realism, and in particular the essays on Balzac and Tolstoy. Lukács contends there that we can only arrive at "a correct interpretation of the conscious views expressed by the author" after we have examined "the real social foundations" of the subject and "the real spiritual and intellectual content" of the work. In his essay, "The Ideology of the Modern," there is a parenthetical passage which is more specific: "(We are concerned here... with the intention realized in the work; it need not coincide with the writer's conscious intention)," Realism in Our Time, p. 19.

18 "Struggle of the Modern," in Tradition, the Writer and Society, p. 67. Elsewhere, conquest is likened to a "berserk and cannibal realism" (NP p. 148), an indication of the extent to which Harris regards realism as more than an aesthetic attitude.


20 First published by the London West Indian Students' Union in 1964, the essay is reprinted in Tradition, the Writer and Society, pp. 28-47.

21 The depth at issue here is not that of the conventional psychological novel: it has to do with a Harrisian archeology of knowledge which I will treat more fully in the final chapter. It is a repudiation not of tradition but of the traditional, so that when Harris speaks of "a straitjacket of tradition" below, he is thinking not of history but of a certain sort of historicism.

It is sometimes argued that literature changes nothing, and that textual negations are the harmless totemism of a word-saturated tribe. As a correction of certain inordinate formalist claims, this criticism is just. Literature indeed changes nothing, except ideas; there is no reason why it should change anything else, since those other things are not of its tissue and want changing in other ways. The dismantling in question here occurs within the individual consciousness; what is shaken is the "stable illusion of the world." Harris does not claim any more.


II: **Experiment and Language**

1 Where once style was commonly taken to represent a principle of deviation from a supposed norm or else a principle of supposed coherence, now that both norms and totalities are suspect, it has come to be read in a variety of ways. Common to most of these are the elements of choice and repetition, which are seen to operate within certain cultural boundaries. A recent edition of essays on the subject begins with an article by Leonard B. Meyer, a musicologist, who offers this definition: "Style is a replication of patterning, whether in human behavior or in the artifacts produced by human behavior, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints." "Towards a Theory of Style," in *The Concept of Style*, ed. Berel Lang (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), p. 3.

2 See, for instance, Roland Barthes: "if up until now we have looked at the text as a species of fruit with a kernel (an apricot, for example), the flesh being the form and the pit being the content, it would be better to see it as an onion, a construction of layers (or levels or systems) whose body contains, finally, no heart, no kernel, no secret, no irreducible principle, nothing except the infinity of its own envelopes—which envelop nothing other than the unity of its own surfaces." "Style and its Image," in *Literary Style*, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 10.

3 The early, unsemioticized Shklovsky writes: "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important." "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12.
Hence the functionalism of much recent reception-aesthetic. See, for example, Wolfgang Iser, "The Reality of Fiction: A Functionalist Approach to Literature," New Literary History, 8, 1 (1975), 7-38. For Iser, what matters is "what literature does and not what it means" (p. 7); the organised signifiers "do not designate a signified object but instead designate instructions for the production of the signified" (p. 18).


A.C.P[earse] in a review of the first issue of the Georgetown journal, Kyk-over-al, which appears in the Caribbean Quarterly, 1 (1949), 34. The occasion was Harris's review of A.J. Seymour's The Guiana Book.


Financial Times, February 27, 1975, p. 32. He goes on to claim that the novel is "outstanding in the fiction of the past 25 years: Asturias obtained the Nobel prize for writing just such strange works, and this was a just reward. Harris is in such a class."

See Werner Berthoff, "A Literature without Qualities: American Writing Since 1945," Yale Review, 68, 2 (1978), 235-54. Berthoff contrasts the "masterworks" of modernism with the work of postwar writers who, no longer intent on producing "literature," are like Musil's man who "gives up the gratification of 'qualities' for the sake of a deliberate blankness or openness before an ordering of life which has not yet come into being..." (p. 240). Compare this with Susan Sontag's earlier remark on the same literature: "most American writing is grossly rhetorical (that is there is an overproduction of means in relation to ends.) Against Interpretation: And Other Essays (New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1966), p. 41.

"On Style," in Against Interpretation, p. 32.

See also RV p. 15.

In an otherwise perspicacious essay, John Hearne chides Harris for just such carelessness, singling out The Far Journey of Oudin for especial criticism. "The Fugitive in the Forest: A Study of Four Novels by Wilson Harris," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 4 (1967), 99-112. He might have looked no further than Palace of the Peacock to find "forgiven and forgotten," and "as a duck sheds water from its wings" occurring on a single page (72). Such peccadilloes want no subtle defence; they are there precisely because Harris is not concerned with elegant variation.
Harris has himself commented on this passage during the course of a talk: "I am not sure in what degree I have been successful in conveying a curious association of spaces, of brilliancies, of hollows, of shadows, the curious architecture of blocks of shadow, hinges of light. Things which are built into character, which in fact make it possible for one to bring a group of characters together in a curious kind of simultaneous sacred self-exposure and rhythm, rather than invest in polarized identities (SI p. 44).


Harris is speaking here of the sculpture of Henry Moore and its "kinship of form" with ancient Amerindian sculpture.

See Harris's illustrations of this phenomenon from Greek myth and Haitian vodun in WS.

Harris quotes one Father Jesse as having called these vestiges "gross superstition" as late as 1968, in a pamphlet entitled "The Amerindians in St. Lucia" published by the St. Lucia Archaeological and Historical Society (HFM pp. 18-23). Before the contemporary critic substitutes "mystification," he should recognize that what is at work here is not so much a metaphysical defence as a strategem which uses the zemi as an "opening" device. Nor is it a neo-nativism: a few pages later, in elaborating on the distinction between his use of "native" and the simply local or parochial, Harris remarks of Marx that "his resources went so deep they appeared obscure and embraced many contradictions to acquire universal application in the Western World" (p. 25).

A radical extension of this process is the "cut-up," as practised by William Burroughs and others, and stretching back through the montage techniques of surrealists, futurists and dadaists alike. In a 1966 Paris Review with Conrad Knickerbocker, Burroughs spoke of cut-ups as establishing "new connections between images" so that "one's range of vision consequently expands." Of their inaccessibility he said, "cut-ups make explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway." Reprinted in William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, The Third Mind (New York: Viking, 1978), pp. 2-4.
The most scrupulous detective work in this case is Michael Gilkes's *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel* (London: Longman Caribbean, 1975).

"Introduction" to Harris's article, "Impressions after Seven Years," *New World*, 44 (1966), p.7.

Noting the use of classical myth in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Harris remarks parenthetically, "(It is fitting Homeric as well as Anancy paradox that Odysseus trails the shadow of no one or nobody with which to confuse the Cyclops, the shadow of no name or namelessness with which to confound the Cyclops)" (CP p. 143). There are numerous articles on Anancy in the West Indies and West Africa, but the trickster phenomenon is by no means a strictly tropical one. See C.G. Jung's article, "On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure," in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 9 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968).

See Dan Sperber's excellent treatise on the subject, *Rethinking Symbolism*, trans. Alice L. Morton (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), which argues that "all keys to symbols must themselves be symbolically interpreted." Symbolic interpretation, says Sperber, "is not a matter of decoding, but an improvisation that rests on an implicit knowledge and obeys unconscious rules" (p. xi). "If symbols mean," he continues, "what they mean is almost always banal. The existence of spirits and the luxuriance of symbols are more fascinating than are their feeble messages about the weather (p. 6). By clearing away both the distended mystical and the reductively structural readings of symbols (where meaning is either infinite or absent), he is able to argue that symbolism is "a cognitive mechanism...an autonomous mechanism that, alongside the perceptual and conceptual mechanisms, participates in the construction of knowledge and the functioning of the memory" (p. xii).

Here one might recall Susan Sontag's tenth thesis against interpretation: "In place of a hermeneutic we need an erotics of art" *Against Interpretation*, p. 14. And this from Roland Barthes: "Our literature is characterised by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. The reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness—he is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a referendum." *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 4.

The phrase appears in one of Harris's recent novels, *Genesis of the Clowns* (1977): "I was becoming familiar with Hope's strange dance of words that seemed so strangely prophetic and absurd" (p. 105). On the issue of West Indian "rowdy" dance as a metaphor of the subversive imagination, see *HFM* p. 10-11.

See Harris's own remarks in the course of an interview: *KK* p. 50.

29 On its first translation into French, Palace of the Peacock was greeted in Le Monde by an enthusiastic review subtitled "An Invitation to Mysticism." In another article, the reviewer, Michel Fabre, noted in passing that this subtitle was chosen "by the editor." "The Reception of Palace of the Peacock in Paris," Kunapipi, 2,1 (1980), p. 107.

In his Commonwealth Literature (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), William Walsh remarks that Harris "writes from a sensibility which aspires to mysticism" (p. 55). There is no gainsaying that the marks of this sensibility do in fact pervade the novels: a vitalist conception of the universe seems to inform most of Harris's writing. (On this subject, see Lucio Colletti's chapter "From Bergson to Lukacs," in his Marxism and Hegel, trans. Lawrence Garner (London: NLB, 1973), especially pp. 158-61 and 291-92). This need not deter the reader from attending to the novels as novels.

30 In a fine close reading of the novel, Hena Maes-Jelinek writes: "Although the novel ends with a vision of unity, in his later writings Wilson Harris presents the possibility of attaining it as much more questionable." The Naked Design: A Reading of Palmer of the Peacock (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1976), p. 61. And in the best short introduction to the novel, Kenneth Ramchand writes: "For even at this moment of apotheosis, Harris's sense of the genuine human impossibility of breaking through for more than the visionary moment (and this is also the tact of the novelist) dictates that the dream should fade." "Preface" to the paper edition (London: Faber, 1968), n.p.

31 In Harris's The Waiting Room (1967), we find this advice: "Appearances cannot be judged in their entirety. That's all I said. Not a word about hidden forces" (p. 67).

The effects of this distrust are evident in the realised world of the novel. Aside from the Arawak woman's streaming gown (which is the river) and the sweeping garment of the Madonna figure at the close (which "was her hair after all"), there is not one description of dress. Compare this with the account of another journey into the same region:

We started. An Amerindian stood in the bow; later he sat on a paddle across the bow, and never moved. His stillness fascinated me and the fascination was made almost unendurable by the tedium of the boat journey: unchanging noise, unchanging river. For hour after hour I was to see that broad blue-jerseyed back directly in front of me, those unmoving gumboots, those hands pressing on the paddle. I took photographs of him; I sketched him; and I took more photographs. His duty was to warn of obstacles, particularly submerged tree trunks with which the river banks were littered. Either he or we were lucky: for the whole of the day he uttered not a single warning cry.

The traveller is V.S. Naipaul, described by Kenneth Ramchand as "the most observant and the least metaphysical of West Indian novelists." The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Faber, 1970), p. 8. Naipaul's

32 This was the reading of one of its earliest commentators, Ivan Van Sertima. See his *Caribbean Writers: Critical Essays* (London: New Beacon, 1968), p. 33. See also Harris's own remarks on the twentieth century novel's "return to allegory, a kind of dense allegory, however," (KK p. 54).


34 See Harris's own remarks on this passage in the interview WH p. 27.

35 Book Two has the following epigraph: "A certain man planted a vineyard, and went into a far country for a long time. LUKÉ XX, 9"

36 For Harris's observations on the "bareness of the West Indian world, "see FR pp. 13-14.

37 The source is a late poem, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection." On the stylistic "extravagances" (which "may be called Oddity and Obscurity") of a poet the early Harris often quoted, see R[ober]t B[ridges]'s "Preface to Notes" in his edition of *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1918).

38 The claim for Eternity to Season was made by A.J. Seymour in his introduction to the 1954 edition.

39 If understanding is taken to be a reduction of complexity, any preservation of the complex will ordinarily be suspect. But that sense of having been swindled which usually follows on the heels of bafflement, will be found to ease upon a second reading or a reading of a different kind. If Harris's only purpose were to confound or to shock, his prose should by now have degenerated into a series of mannered academic exercises. It has not, and this is because he has something to say. That something is inseparable from the way in which it is said. By refusing a determinate meaning, Harris is insisting, along with many contemporary philosophers, that things always present themselves in a context which is already defined before their literary rendering, and that this context can become ossified. In such circumstances, a writing which disorients the reader, even through what V.S. Naipaul (in another, and fictional context) calls, "abstract cheating words," may serve him better than a lucidity persuaded of its own concrete forthrightness.

"The justification of syntactically difficult writing ... is that we begin to respond before we fully understand; we...experience the ordering of thought and mood ourselves as the initially isolated, but already powerfully affective, elements fit into place and we understand the system." So writes G.W. Turner, in his *Stylistics* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1973), p. 238.
On the process of a reading which makes use of indeterminacy, see Anton Ehrenzweig's discussions of unconscious syncretic "scanning" which makes use of "undifferentiated modes of vision that to normal vision would seem chaotic." The creative search, says Ehrenzweig, "needs an advance on a broad front which keeps contradicting options open. In the solution of complex tasks the undifferentiation of unconscious vision turns into an instrument of rigorous precision and leads to results that are fully acceptable to conscious rationality." The Hidden Order of Art (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), pp. 4-5. For a review of Ehrenzweig's notions of abstract expressionism, see Frank Kermode's Modern Essays (London: Fontana, 1971), pp. 90-96. Harris himself alludes to Ehrenzweig in the company of Herbert Read and William James at CP p. 142.

This style, pushed farthest in Harris's most minimal novel, The Waiting Room, is not the "zero degree writing" Barthes saw in the early Robbe-Grillet, or the "white" style Sartre saw in Camus. It is not consciously anti-metaphoric, though its metaphors are compacted of an illogic which frequently renders their function of meaning at least partly suspect and rather nearer the category of metonymy. Its comparisons rarely seek to be apt, as in John Gardner's example of a "hat of clouds" on his mountain, or even bizarre, as in Donald Barthelme's splendid bull, which appears suddenly in the doorway of the matador's room and begins "to ring like a telephone." (See, respectively, On Moral Fiction [New York: Basic, 1974], and Amateurs [New York: Farrar, 1976].) It is something nearer Antonin Artaud's description of night by "a tree in which a bird that has already closed one eye begins to close another." Quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, "Art according to Artaud," The Poetics of Prose, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977). p. 212.

In an early essay, Harris had this to say of the death of gods: "Man will never pass beyond prehistoric conditions until all his gods have failed, and their failure which puts him on the rack, opens up the necessity for self-knowledge and for the scientific understanding of his environment" (FR p. 17).


III: Experiment and Narrative

1 The presence of the original Form in this dialogue is ascribed by one commentator "as much to the requirements of the craftsman analogy as to any philosophic principle." Plato, Timaeus, trans. with an introduction by H.D.P. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 10. This interpretation fits more closely the secondary use to which we have put Harris's remarks, but given the valuation of order and completeness in the Timaeus, any attempt to extend the parallel is best abandoned here.


4 These are the basic units Genette culls before beginning his refinements. The numerous terms he proposes do in fact operate successfully within his analysis (of Proust's Recherche) and he is readier than most narrative grammarians to give them a decent burial once their function has been served. The larger function of such grammars is to show up the ideological content of narrative by reducing sovereign elements such as character to the level of "actants" in a process they do not in real life control. For an example of such a reading, see Fredric Jameson's Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979).


6 Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 77. A few pages later, Frye sums this up so: "The mythos is the dianoia in motion, the dianoia is the mythos in stasis" (p. 83).


Foucault: "Language has now become a thing of space...and it speaks to us by means of 'deviation, distance, intermediation, dispersion, fragmentation, difference'." Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 305.

9 Narrative Discourse, p. 34.

10 There is for instance this paragraph in HFM: "Space (our weakest resource in that we appear to move freely through it or bend it freely to our wills) is analogous to the Arawak seme (which means delicate) to zemi or icon--zemi of the turtle (space of the turtle), zemi of the lizard (space of the lizard), as well as to the Latin threshold signifying hidden perspectives (latere 'to hide')" (p. 23).

11 "The golden age they wished to find—the Palace of the Peacock—may never have existed for all anyone knew" (p. 31).

12 Compare Harris's use of the Kaieteur Fall as a "symbol for this land" in the youthful story, "Tomorrow," published in Kyk-over-al, 1 (1945), 30-34. Kartabo Point, Michael Gilkes reminds us, is "the home of Mittelholzer's Kaywana and the source of the Van Groenwegel family tree. It is noteworthy, however, that Harris sees the locale as a starting point for the birth of a creative, rather than divided, racial consciousness..." Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel (London: Longman, 1975), p. 103.

13 For Harris's own description of this phenomenon, illustrated with diagrams, see the essays EV and FP. See also, for essays based on Harris's lectures at Aarhus University in 1973, Enigma of Values: An Introduction, ed. Anna Rutherford and Kirsten Holst Petersen (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1975).

14 There is a Freudian suggestion (which we will not pursue) that the dead father from whom Stevenson has inherited a share of guilt, is associated with Time, in burdening the son with a debt that cannot be discharged. Thus the villain's role is complicated and the hero's relation to him an ambivalent one: "In condemning himself and sentencing himself to accept a certain mission or vocation...Stevenson felt the thorns of conviction: he would save not only a vital crown and spark but the true lost life of father and friend as well" (p. 86).

15 The next day's tabloid headline might well read: HERO LOST IN SPACE: HEROINE IS ROCK! Our schema may be expressed diagrammatically as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(hero)} & \quad \text{(hero's other)} & \quad \text{(absent villain:}\, \text{defeats hero and}\, \text{hero's other but...)} \\
\text{Stevenson} & \quad \text{Kaiser} & \quad \text{da Silva} & \quad \text{da Silva} \\
\text{Maria} & \quad \text{(go-between,} & \quad \text{Petra} & \quad \text{Space} \\
\text{(absent} & \quad \text{mentor,} & \quad \text{(heroine)} & \quad \text{(surviving}\, \text{hero- heroine:}} \\
\text{heroine)} & \quad \text{absent} & \quad & \quad \text{hero merges with heartland} \\
\text{)} & \quad \text{midwife)} & \quad \text{heroine is a rock)} & \quad \text{heroine is a rock)}
\end{align*}
\]
See the excellent article by L.E. Brathwaite which uses this line from "Troy" for its title in Bim, 8 (1960), 104-14. "Troy," "Behring Straits," and "Amazon" in this postscript are abbreviated versions of their eponyms which head Harris's collection, Eternity to Season (Georgetown, 1954; rpt. London, 1978).

Space, while a refuge, was still an enclosing dimension, and only at the end was the promise of the epigraph from Edwin Muir fulfilled: "The rocks will melt, the sealed horizon fall and the places / Our hearts have hid will be viewed by strangers." As Stevenson looks out into the night, a fault appears, "an endless crack in the floor or prison of the landscape" (p. 89). In The Eye of the Scarecrow, the "CRASH" comes in earnest, but there, as in Harris's next novel, The Waiting Room, it is in the nature of an implosion.


For Harris's own readings of "novels of expedition," especially Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Patrick White's Voss, both accounts of journeys into the interior of a continent, see his essay FP.

"The 'bricoleur' is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured to the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand'..." The Savage Mind (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 17. The "bricoleur," as Lévi-Strauss's translator points out, "has no precise equivalent in English." However, in the Guianese context of Harris's novels, particularly such a novel as this, "pork-knocker" might be a handy substitute. Nameless's other, Scarecrow, is a "pork-knocking beggar" (p. 85).

For another description of Harris's "testing the medium of prose," see Gilkes's Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel, pp. 111-12. See also Steven Marcus's stimulating account of this process in Dickens, "Language into Structure: Pickwick Revisited," Daedalus, 101 (1972), 183-202.

In a later talk, SI, Harris describes another "Namless" as "the kingdom of death" (p. 48).

The romantic antecedents of this philosophy are noted by A.O. Lovejoy who remarks that the shift from uniformitarianism to diversitarianism constitutes "the most significant and distinctive feature of the Romantic-revolution." The Great Chain of Being (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 297. The "chain of being" is a motif of Heartland
(as witness the extensive non-human cast, with its serial "links") and the phrase itself occurs two pages before Stevenson's thoughts on the diverse and the uniform are expressed.

26 Barthes is quoted by Robbe-Grillet in For a New Novel, p. 21. Robbe-Grillet's own phrase occurs in the course of a sentence which declares: "Henceforth...objects will gradually...renounce their pseudo-mystery..." Harris's rejoinder to this school of thought may be found at CP pp. 148-50. On another novelist's--Proust's--"spiritualization of matter" and "depth," see Henri Peyre's The Contemporary French Novel (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955), p. 82.

27 The Heideggerian connection in Harris's work has been sketched by C.L. R. James in his talk, Wilson Harris: A Philosophic Approach (St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies, 1965). On the much disputed question of authenticity of being and word as they concern modernism, see George Steiner's discussion of "ontological difficulty" in his On Difficulty and Other Essays (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 43-46. "In ontological difficulty, the poetics of Mallarmé and Heidegger, of the Orphic and the pre-Socratic, express their sense of the inauthentic situation of man in an environemnt of eroded speech." Such difficulty, says Steiner, "seems to point to a hypostasis of language such as we find, precisely, in Heidegger. It is not so much the poet who speaks, but language itself: die Sprache spricht" (p. 46). Steiner's earlier essays in Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), are also useful here. The avenging angel to this tradition, Jacques Derrida, puts being "under erasure" and passes from the logos of authentic speech to the script of fallible writing. Being "exists" in perpetual displacement or différence. See his Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976). Différence, as we shall see, is not unlike Harris's own structure of postponement by which the One is checked and balanced by the many. Compare, for instance, Harris's "unnameable centre," known only by indirection through those recurring fissures in the landscape of the text, with Derrida's "crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmer beyond the closure can be glimpsed." Of Grammatology, p. 14.

28 On romanticism and the spirit of contradiction, M.H. Abrams has an interesting passage in his Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 66: "A conspicuous Romantic tendency, after the rationalism and decorum of the Enlightenment, was a reversion to the stark drama and supra-rational mysteries of the Christian story and doctrines and to the violent conflicts and abrupt reversals of the Christian inner life, turning on the extremes of death and rebirth, dejection and joy, paradise lost and paradise regained...But since they lived, inescapably, after the Enlightenment, Romantic writers revived these ancient matters with a difference: they undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny, the experiential paradigms, and the cardinal values of their religious heritage, by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable, as well emotionally pertinent, for the time being." Abrams goes on to show that German romanticism likewise
announced the need for what Friedrich Schlegel called a 'new mythology,' to be formed 'out of the uttermost depth of the spirit,' which would serve as the unifying ground for all modern poetry; he looked to its imminent development out of a synthesis between the revolutionary inwardness of philosophical idealism and the revelations of contemporary physical science" (p. 67).

The tutelary spirit of this contradictoriness is the Blake of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, but there are examples nearer us in time. For a reading of such antinomies in Yeats and Lawrence, with both of whom (as with Blake) Harris has strong affinities, see Terry Eagleton's Criticism and Ideology, pp. 151-54 and 157-61. For Harris's distinction between romanticism and the "new classical principle" he desires, see WS pp. 53-54, and PL p. 5.

29 The scarecrow appears in Harris's fiction as early as a short piece entitled, "Spirit of the Sea Wall," in Kyk-over-al, 28 (1961), 181-83.

30 See Harris's own discussion of this passage in FP pp. 10-11.

31 For a treatment of what he has called "the structure of the remnant," see Derrida's essay, "That Dangerous Supplement" in his Of Grammatology.

32 Compare this passage in The Eye of the Scarecrow which has just finished naming the four approaches to Raven's Head: "And these approaches were ceaselessly inclined to grow blurred and insensible to their origins—to be drained as it were of all consciousness of a dialogue with the emotion or genius of place and to become outcrops of common mud or stone shaped by the indifferent hand of the dead god of the seasons into an arrested weathercock" (p. 64).

IV: Experiment and the Individual


3 Quoted by Spilka in "Character as a Lost Cause," p. 203.


5 Brathwaite, pp. 111 and 113.

6 Brathwaite, p. 108.

7 The Order of Things (New York: Pantheon, 1970), p. 209. On the pictoriality of the classical subject, see also Paul Ricoeur: "the cogito is not an absolute; it belongs to an age, the age of the 'world'

8 "You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to which the individual is unrecognizable..." Letter to Edward Garnett, 15 June, 1914. Quoted in Fredric Jameson, Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), p. 51

9 Jealousy, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove, 1959), p. 148. See also an article by one of the chief theoreticians and practitioners of the nouveau nouveau roman, Hélène Cixous, "The Character of Character," trans. Keith Cohen, New Literary History, 5 (1974), 383-402. "'Characterization' conducts the game of ideology... [It is the] open, unpredictable piercing part of the subject, [its] infinite potential to rise up, that the 'concept' of 'character' excludes in advance (p. 384). So long as we do not put aside 'character' and everything it implies in terms of illusion and complicity with classical reasoning and the appropriating economy that such reasoning supports, we will remain locked up in the treadmill of reproduction" (p. 387).


11 In WS, pp. 52-54.


14 The phrase is an adaptation of "terrified consciousness," used by Kenneth Ramchand to describe the West Indian creole's response to decolonization. See The West Indian Novel and its Background, pp. 223-36. Ramchand cites as his own source for the phrase Frantz Fanon's analysis of the colonizer's psychology in The Wretched of the Earth. In shifting this consciousness from creole to coloured, my adaptation turns on Northrop Frye's distinction between "fear at a distance, or terror," and "fear at contact, or horror" (of what might be part of oneself). Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, p. 37.

15 The quotations are from A.R.F. Webber's Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana (Georgetown: Argosy, 1931). Tenby himself may have been modelled on Webber, who was Harris's uncle by marriage. See KK p. 2.

16 See on this, Jean Francois Lyotard, "One of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggles," Sub-Stance, 20 (1978), 9-17. "In the face of the 'irrational,' the master warrior-speaker, is reinstated in his pedagogical
task: he needs a frontier to conquer and savages to civilize. Let us free him instead from his armour of words and death; let us temper him in a large patchwork of affective elements that must be intensified. One should not attack him head-on but wage a guerilla war of skirmishes and raids in a space and time other than those imposed for millenia by the masculine logos. It is tempting to attribute reversible spaces and paradoxical time to a 'feminine principle.' But this would be too great a concession to the so-called 'male principle' which the 'feminine principle' could only complement. Instead, let us propose this as a kind of theory-fiction. Let us set to work forging fictions rather than hypotheses and theories: this would be the best way for the speaker to become 'feminine'...'' (p. 14).


18 Tenby's debt is to his "historical origins": "not the lost innocence of man since such an exclusive model was an illusion but...the lost trail of an animal in suspension to which he was chained. Half-man, half-horse. Half-man, half-dog. Half-man, half-bird. Half-man, half-fish" (p. 86).

19 An actual settlement downstream from Tumatumari, overlooking the Essequibo river.

20 Events fraught with an alchemical significance whose symbolism (of lapis and spider) is traced, for this and other novels by Michael Gilkes in his Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel.

21 A reproduction often uncritically admitted into the most progressive of social analyses. The well-known poverty of the Marxist theory of the individual perhaps owes something to this admittance.

22 Although character in the traditional novel is equally the result of selection. See Robert Champigny, "Realism and Realities," Diacritics, 4 (1974), 2-6. On the camera as a character (or subject) in the drama it supposedly renders from the outside (or objectively) see FP p. 11 and, again, the novel Black Marsden.

23 The marginalism which Adam represents has its equivalent in memory, which (as in The Eye of the Scarecrow) likewise rummages in the wreckage of the past, rescuing fragments, making connections, giving meaning.


25 Or if it is, it is a blend of history and the "metaphysical" which Harris himself points in a yoking of Donne and Myakovsky. Pursuing Adam up Omai hill, Victor "felt himself addressed by a line from a Russian poet--art of revolution--a cloud in trousers....Encircling
vestments of poetry—Donne to Mayakovsky. Victor stopped to examine his own conscience in this respect—half-metaphysical, half-dialectical" (p. 17).

26 "Things are not said; people say things." So says an anthropologist, Neville Dyson-Hudson, responding to Dennis Tedlock's "Beyond Logocentrism: Trace and Voice among the Quiche Maya," Boundary 2, 8 (1979), p. 338.

27 See V.S. Naipaul's The Middle Passage, pp. 72-77.

V: Experiment and Tradition

1 A representative sampling would include the work of such historians as C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, and Elsa Goveia, as well as younger writers like Edward Brathwaite, Orlando Patterson, and Gordon Rohlehr. On William's From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969 (London: Deutsch, 1970), see Rohlehr's review article "History as Absurdity: A Literary Critic's Approach to From Columbus to Castro and Other Miscellaneous Writings of Dr. Eric Williams," in Is Massa Day Dead?: Black Moods in the Caribbean (New York: Anchor, 1974), pp. 69-108.

2 History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and the Guianas (Georgetown: Ministry of Information and Culture, 1970). For an account of the immediate reception accorded these lectures, which were delivered as part of the Guyana Republic celebrations in 1970, see Andrew Salkey's Georgetown Journal (London: New Beacon, 1972). It is to Harris's credit that he did not simplify his lectures into banality; his foresight ensured that Guyana would have a searching, if thorny, address associated with its inauguration as a republic.

3 A recent attempt to furnish a compact literary history of the region is West Indian Literature, ed. Bruce King (London: Macmillan, 1979), especially the first six chapters. See also the earlier West Indian Novel and its Background (London: Faber, 1970), by Kenneth Ramchand.

4 Quoted by G.R. Coulthard in his "Rejection of European Culture as a Theme in Caribbean Literature," Caribbean Quarterly, 5 (1959), p. 235. Coulthard notes that the attack was strongest in the French Caribbean, and remarks that one of the lines of attack was to denounce European civilization "for the brutality and cynicism with which it enslaved and exploited the Negro while still maintaining high-sounding principles of freedom and humanitarianism" (p. 241). Compare Frantz Fanon's "Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their streets, in all the corners of the globe." The Wretched of the Earth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 251.

5 The classic description of this predicament is George Lamming's The Pleasures of Exile (London: Michael Joseph, 1960).
6 In Is Massa Day Dead?, p.7.

7 Such as that which is said to have seized Columbus in his declining years. See Eric Williams, From Columbus to Castro, p. 20.

8 Some of these racial power paradoxes are brought out in Rex Nettleford's article, "Caribbean Perspectives: The Creative Potential and the Quality of Life," Caribbean Quarterly, 17 (1971), especially pp. 120-21.

9 The occasion of his challenge was this remark by one Bobi Jones: "Actually, the point is very simple: Welsh literature, parallel to Hausa, or Basque, or Russian, or Ukranian, or English literature, is a complete literature: Anglo-Welsh literature, corresponding to Nigerian English literature, or Patagonian literature in Welsh, or Haitian literature in French is (so long as it exists and has a meaning as a distinct entity) an enthrallingly interesting colonial product, and therefore part of another literature."

To which Harris responds so: "This is a remarkably athletic statement. However one twists or turns it, it is abundantly clear that certain existing literatures remain for Bobi Jones—in any and every imaginable vital circumstance—"enthrallingly interesting colonial products" reflected against or upon complete literatures which they cannot themselves invigorate, breach or deepen. Does this mean that the "complete" literatures which reflect them are immaculately closed/passive orders of the imagination?" (RV p. 18)

10 From the Jamaican novelist Sylvia Wynter, for example, in her survey article, "Reflections on Caribbean Writing and Criticism: II," Jamaica Journal, 3 (1969), pp. 39-41. Wynter acknowledges that Harris shatters "the established images of feeling in order to shatter the distorted reality which these images project and support," but objects that he "replaces existent reality with another arbitrarily created out of the imagination," a reality "so totally unrelated" as to be "escapist" (p. 40).

11 Which usually follows the line of argument traced here by Robert Scholes, who argues that the modern writer knows too much. "Once so much is known about myths and archetypes, they can no longer be used innocently. Even their connection to the unconscious finally becomes attenuated as the mythic materials are used more consciously. All symbols become allegorical to the extent that we understand them. Thus the really perceptive writer is not merely conscious that he is using mythic materials: He is conscious that he is using them consciously. He knows, finally, that he is allegorizing. Such a writer, aware of the nature of categories, is not likely to believe that his own mythic lenses really capture the truth. Thus the use of myth will inevitably partake of the comic." The Fabulators (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967). p. 171.

12 Compare Yeats's sentiment in a letter to Katharine Tynan: "I feel more and more that we shall have a school of Irish poetry founded on myth and history—a neo-romantic movement." Quoted in Frank Tuohy's Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1976), p. 46.
Suspicion of myth among English novelists is at least as old as George Eliot, whose Casaubon, with his fusty Key to All Mythologies, is the type of all who stand in the way of social and technical progress. Such progress was of course measured by a liberal positivism now itself hardly more credible. Harris, by an ironic inversion, invokes contemporary science with its "enigmatic black hole, ungraspable neutron, quark etc. etc.--in which the term 'force' seems closer to reality, to ungraspable quantum leap, than 'structured and sovereign model'" (CP p. 149), in order to bolster his notion of myth as "unstructured force."

On the contemporary artist's "rage for revenge" when faced by the crimes of the past, see Derek Walcott's essay, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), pp. 3-40.


"The Romantic interest in mythology and mythmaking is not so much a desire for divine presence as it is for authoritative story, for a culturally sanctioned sequence of events." "A Defense of History: The Language of Transformation in Romantic Narrative," Bucknell Review, 23 (1977), p. 37

A tactic which predates Gandhi: Harris tells of the Carib chieftain, Mahanarva's, coming to the English Governor "in the 1820's or 1830's" to demand his traditional fee for policing the interior when in fact his forces had quite disintegrated. The hoax was exposed by a scout, but Harris speaks of this encounter as "one of those peculiar holes, as it were, within the body of history" where the need for a realignment of power begins to be felt (IN p. 139). For an opposite account of the incident, see Colin Henfrey's excellent travel book, The Gentle People: A Journey among the Indian Tribes of Guiana (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p. 57. On the condition of Amerindians in the nineteenth century, see the collection of documents, The Amerindians in Guyana: 1803-73 ed. Mary Noel Menezes, RSM (London: Frank Cass, 1979).

In his article, "History and the Novel: A Literary Critic's Approach," Kenneth Ramchand writes: "even when they are concerned with contemporary reality, nearly all West Indian novels are engaged with history." Savacou, 5 (1971), p. 103. Nor is fantasy an evasion of either history or contemporary reality. In a recent interview, the Columbian novelist, Garcia Márquez, declares: "It always amuses me that the biggest praise for my work comes from the imagination while the truth is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality. The problem is that Caribbean reality resembles the wildest imagination." Peter H. Stone, "The Art of Fiction LXIX: Gabriel Garcia Márquez," Paris Review, 23 (1981), 54.
The chief exponent of this view is Hayden White, whose *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973) and *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978) argue a rhetoric of history. Discourse, White contends, "is always as much about the nature of interpretation itself as it is about the subject matter which is the manifest occasion of its own elaboration." This being so, "even in the most chaste discursive prose, texts intended to represent 'things as they are' without rhetorical adornment or poetic imagery, there is always a failure of intention. Every mimetic text can be shown to have left something out of the description of its object or to have put something into it that is inessential to what some reader, with more or less authority, will regard as an adequate description." For this reason, White goes on to take the British historian, E.P. Thompson, to task for claiming to proceed "with primary attention to 'concrete historical reality,' rather than by means of the application of a 'method'." 


Harold Bloom's literary concern is matched by an historian's, who speaks of writers' "unceasing effort to overcome dependence and find their own voice." Peter Gay, *Style in History* (New York: Basic, 1974), p. 11.

Conclusion


2. As in Gerald Graff's *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979). The humanist critic's refusal of literary risk, disturbance, challenge, randomness, and play, could well harden into a faith in security, silence, authority, calculation, and seriousness (though to do Graff justice, the list should perhaps read: knowledge, order, criticism, logic, and work).

4 Compare Alejo Carpentier's quest in the same region as described by R. Gonzales Echevarria's review article, "The Parting of the Waters," Diacritics, 4 (1974), 8-17. I have already remarked on the propinquity of Carpentier's The Lost Steps and Conan Doyle's The Lost World with Mt. Roraima. A more direct influence on Harris would have been yet another novel set in the region, W.H. Hudson's romantic fiction, Green Mansions (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, n.d.). The mood of this strangely temperate jungle romance and the philosophy set out in its final pages would not have been lost on a writer of Harris's temperament growing up in Guyana. Hudson's hero is touched at the start by "a strange sense and apprehension of a secret innocence and spirituality in nature--a prescience of some bourne, incalculably distant perhaps, to which we are all moving" (p. 18).

5 The undoing of a mediation between the individual and the Other, returns Harris to a Sartrean notion of seriality which Sartre himself relinquishes in his passage to a theory of community. See Evan Watkin's discussion of the transition from Being and Nothingness to the Critique of Dialectical Reason in chapter six of his The Critical Act: Criticism and Community (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1978).

6 In recent essays Harris has further spoken of myth as a kind of conduit from this objective psyche. Through myth, literary forms come to be linked with "a medium of consciousness that has its deepest roots in an intuitive and much, much older self than the historical ego" (FH p. 86). In another place, he alludes to "shadowy, almost nameless, myths within the inarticulate heterogeneity of the Caribbean. May I pause for a moment to explain, in some degree, what I mean by 'inarticulate'. There is no short-cut into the evolution of new or original novel-form susceptible to, immersed in, the heterogeneity of the modern world. If we genuinely accept the view of variables of unconsciousness a handful of eminent thinkers [Harris has mentioned Anton Ehrenzweig, Herbert Read, and William James] has advanced, it will assist us, I think, to realize that the evolution of complex imagery secretes such variables of or from necessity, and that that secretion may sustain a wealth of beauty when it is perceived in its 'true' light by different eyes in other places or by other generations. That is the price of originality. Mere academic lip-service to creativity is useless whatever its militancy or piety or apparent clarity" (CP p. 145).

7 Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), p. 120.

8 Mimesis, p. 121

9 Sylvia Wynter, for instance, remarks that "Harris attempts to evoke a primordial consciousness without providing the social keys, the communally recognized landmarks which would invite the reader's participation in the 'work of the spirit' on the journey." "Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism: II," Jamaica Journal, 3 (1969), p. 41. Since Wynter has allowed herself to speak not only of Harris's "confusion"
but also of his "failure," we may recall once more that the division which separates what she calls Harris's "highbrow consumer product" from social realist novels like her own is nothing compared with that between any novel-reading public and those West Indians who do not, or cannot, read at all.
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Addenda to Bibliography

