

our beginning . . . beginning . . . beginning. Fenwick awoke. It was the dawn of the seventh day. (p. 126-7)

Harris is consciously playing a variation on the well-known passage from Section Five of 'Little Gidding', the last of Eliot's *Four Quartets*; by so doing he is aligning himself once again with the poetic tradition, but is also adding all the richer implications of the most classically existential quotation in the book:

We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them.
The moment of the rose and the moment of the Yew tree
Are of equal duration. A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments.

Eliot's words not only indicate a method for reading the final section of *The Secret Ladder*, they also invite the reader to consider *The Guiana Quartet* within that well-known tradition: being born again through the artist's recreation of the dead Donne, Oudin, Christo, Abram, Poseidon; experiencing the four timeless moments of *Palace of the Peacock*, *The Far Journey of Oudin*, *The Whole Armour*, and *The Secret Ladder*, which are a finished *Guiana Quartet* and do reveal not a people without a history, but a history that is a pattern of timeless moments.

Mother and child

Lighter by a life, you settle back
into a dune of pillows;
remembering, as the tide runs slack,
its current the night it rose
wrestling through you, lifting inland
the unknown here, at the tide's return,
made known, breathing under your hand.

Black grapes, as long in the growing, torn
from shrunk capillaries of the vine,
bleed in your mouth, letting the rain
sucked by the sun from the raw earth
run back into the earth again.

JON STALLWORTHY