

“Inimitable Painting”:
New Developments in Wilson Harris’s
Latest Fiction

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It was the universe whose light turned in the room . . . painting the carpenter's walls with shades from the sky — the most elaborate pictures and seasons he stored and framed and imagined.

Palace of the Peacock

IN the church *Santa Maria dei Frari* in Venice there is a celebrated Assumption of the Virgin painted by Titian. In the middle ground of the painting, suspended as it were between heaven and earth, the Madonna stands in a round pool of light, presented on a vertical plane filling the background, shaped in its lower half by a cloud and the cherubs in her wake, while its upper fringe, coincident with the round upper edge of the picture, is filled with the transparent heads of angels. Her very human figure appears to be pulled upwards towards God, represented as a large moving shadow emerging through the surface of the pool from depths of golden light. But the unhaloed Virgin remains only just beyond the reach of men, and the arms of one Apostle are lifted up to her in an ambiguous gesture, for he appears to be at once pushing her towards God and welcoming her to his lower plane. Another source of ambiguity is the expression of fear and anguish on the face of one angel on the Madonna's right. There is a strong contrast between the flesh-and-blood solidity of some figures — including the Virgin's — and the transparency of others, as well as between light and darkness at all three levels of the picture. Erratic patches of light on the lower and middle planes are hard to account for

because the area of the pool that might produce them is concealed by the dark shape of God. Some of them seem to arise from the surrounding darkness. The only possible explanation, however, is that the light circulates while emerging from the pool, just as the whole pool is clearly animated by a circular movement. Recently, the painting was taken out of the frame in which it has been enclosed for several centuries. It now hangs frameless from hardly visible threads in front of the altar, so that the canvas itself appears to be moveable and on the point of taking flight.

The relevance of this painting to Wilson Harris's *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness*¹ will, I hope, become clear in the course of this article. The relation between fiction and painting has long preoccupied Harris himself, whose concept of the "novel as painting"² has developed out of his own practice of the art of fiction. In *Palace of the Peacock*, Donne's vision of several framed pictures in the waterfall brings about his final conversion, the transformation of his consciousness into the palace that accommodates a heterogeneous community. The correlation between self and space in this first novel, the spatialization³ of psychic content, marks the beginning of an exploration in which the projection into images, and the visualization, of contrary states of consciousness serves as a catalyst to a renewal of sensibility. Increasingly since then, painting (not the finished picture but the picture in the making) has become in Harris's fiction an exploratory metaphor for vision. Numerous examples are to be found in *Tumatumari*, *Ascent to Omai* (see Victor's sketches concurrent with his writing a novel) and even *Black Marsden* before, in *Companions of the Day and Night*, a new phase of development opens with Goodrich editing Nameless's papers, sculptures and paintings. Goodrich's editorship gives life to the Nameless collection, which would otherwise fall into oblivion; it also sets in motion a revision by which the "highest canvases"⁴ of men (their greatest but petrified achieve-

ments) can be reanimated and their original spark, "the element of conscience" fallen into them, can be retrieved as a new source of inspiration.

Painting, as Harris shows in *Companions*, can be both a static shelter or mask, and an imaginative recreation of experience, a gateway to renewed existence ("the paintings . . . were doorways through which Idiot Nameless moved"⁶). The two faces of painting coexist in Da Silva da Silva, a revenant from *Palace*, in which he disappeared yet mysteriously survived to reappear and die in *Heartland* in the anonymity of the jungle. He is here resurrected as a professional painter, his twin name a token of his double vision and of the dual perspective, material and immaterial, explored by Harris through his fiction. On one winter day, in his wife's absence, Da Silva revises the paintings he did six or seven years before while she was in Peru. Characteristically, his reconstructions of a world sensuously perceived and represented nevertheless lay bare "unpredictable densities" (p. 10) which arouse in him, and therefore in his art, a dialogue conducive to change between given, apparently immovable forms and weak, barely perceptible ones. Like a migrating bird flying from one world to another, he moves freely from one level to another of the universe he recreates, fixing himself in neither, distancing himself from one or the other, his imagination (like the Nameless imagination in *Companions*) "void of identities" (p. 13), a vacant frame capable of enclosing variable pictures.

The first set of such paintings is "The Madonna Pool" series, which evokes the many metamorphoses of the pool image as a source of reflection or vision. There is the lake into which Da Silva crashes in his dawn dream, an imaginative shattering which brings about the revision of his canvases; there is the pool-like tennis court at the back of his house; the pool is an image for contrasting areas in London, one elegant near Holland Park, the other destitute; there is also the pool of water near a "wilderness" theatre in Holland Park. In other words, the pool is the visible

world (the cosmos even) changing under our eyes according to the setting of our experience and the intensity of our perception. The quality of the light varies in harmony with these metamorphoses, offering a superb evocation of the shades of light in the London sky at various times of the day while intimating "layers of potentially mingling afresh with illusion in the bodies one saw in the street" (p. 13). The Madonna, a variant of the muse (present in Harris's work from the first), does not become a character in her own right until *Companions*. In the earlier novel *Idiot Nameless* pursues her to no avail after a brief day and night spent with her; in this novel, however, Da Silva is married to her. She is Jenine Gold, of mixed Celtic and Peruvian ancestry, just as he, a Brazilian by birth, is of mixed Portuguese and Arawak descent. Their marriage so far has remained barren, possibly because his need of her has been so great that he sometimes tends to see her as a goddess and therefore complete in herself, whereas in the dawn of his revisionary day, she is also the fruitful earth (Jenine Gold) in which "masked populations reside" (p. 5).

Of the two other painted versions of the Madonna, Manya, Da Silva's Brazilian model, lives in the destitute pool, a dark world filled with "spiritual corpses" of fashion, wearing a black coat of uniformity as repulsive to Da Silva as Jen's immaculate coat of practical and economic self-sufficiency can sometimes be. Though she is unaware of her own enduring subservience to the tyrants of the day ("economic deity, chaos, industry, fashion," p. 18) Manya's naked, essential humanity becomes a source of light unravelling her dark garment in Da Silva's revisionary canvas. Indeed, the painter recalls that in actual life her intense love for her five-year-old son, Paul, saved him from being taken into care. She fled with him, leaving her black coat behind with Da Silva. The third Madonna is Kate Robinson, a schoolmistress and model of practicality, who seeks Da Silva's help to take Paul away from his mother because she neglects his education. Her beautiful

marble flesh hides a scar, the result of an abortion, and Da Silva must descend with her through thick layers of reflection in the pool, must in fact penetrate her self-creating existence (by aborting she has "killed" Adam in herself) and discover in her the "stigmata of heaven."⁶ Yet she too, by her genuine concern for the survival of Paul, becomes an agent in the discovery of light at the heart of the pool.

Survival, with its contrasting implications of resilience (the victim's) and apparent immutability (the conqueror's), can be discerned in the shapes of Legba Cuffey and Magellan, at once historical and contemporary figures. Legba Cuffey combines in himself the features of an eighteenth century black rebel (Cuffey) and Legba, the West Indian god who, in Brathwaite's words, comes to church "Like a lame old man on a crutch."⁷ He comes limping to Da Silva's door with a West Indian cricketer's bat for a crutch and through their confrontation conjures up in Da Silva the figure of Magellan, the limping conquering seaman who received credit for circumnavigating the globe (while his nameless crew fell into oblivion) but derived no benefit from his daring feat. Magellan subsisted on allowances from kings and queens just as Da Silva now subsists on Jenine Gold's earnings. Da Silva cannot ignore him any more than he can Cuffey and identifies with him as "one paints into oneself the mystery of the world's injustice" (p. 12). When the two limping men confront each other, "a whispered dialogue" (p. 11) arises, of which Paul is the indirect fruit. He is indeed the son of a contemporary seaman called Magellan, introduced to Manya by the bar-tender Cuffey. In spite of his mother's affection and Kate's well-meant but tyrannical attention, he is the neglected "child of humanity"⁸ (of the always resurgent conqueror and the exploited muse), embodying both its capacity for conversion in "hollow Damascus" (p. 19) and its hope for rebirth. He is the "spark" (p. 19) in Manya that makes her in Da Silva's eyes a proof of his "challenging conception" (p. 16)

of the Madonna pool as "our twentieth-century sea, sea of redress, undress, unravelling elements" (p. 13).

Da Silva's conviction that the mirror-like immobility of the pool can be shattered, its elements unravelled and that truth "half-glimpsed, half-concealed" can arise from its depths, is best illustrated by his interpretation of a sixteenth-century print representing Amerindian beauties standing up to the waist in water in a lake in Brazil while Portuguese courtiers march towards the lake "as if it were a mirror in the palace of the sun (their civilization then at its zenith)" (p. 15). The print has two legends, one, *Sex and the Portuguese in Brazil*, callous in its implications of sexual exploitation, the other, *Paradise*, full of ironical overtones. This second heading also becomes the title of the paintings into which Da Silva's "Madonna Pool" series develops before its mutation into the "Prodigal" series. The print conveys the two meanings of Paradise, creation of a new world and innocence of perfection. Modern versions of illusory Edens appear on Da Silva's canvases, expressions of man's repeated attempts to create an immovable state of perfection that subsists on the suppression of others. Yet at the heart of the pool of ambivalent paradises Da Silva eventually discovers the seed or spark, the "child-genie" (p. 28), evidence at once of man's physical survival and of his imagination and sensibility.

If *Companions* was a novel about man's fall and fear of extinction, *Da Silva* is primarily about resurrection and survival. The complementarity of the two themes is not fortuitous; it is part of a continuous development in Harris's fiction, one that illustrates his conception of existence as a cyclical manifestation of life appearing and disappearing, advancing and retreating, whether in nature, human civilizations or the individual human consciousness. To this view is linked his concept of a living, immaterial tradition which survives the dissolution of all material forms and man-made orders. In *Da Silva* previous developments come to a head in Harris's treatment of resurrection. There is the physical

rescue from a flood of the five-year-old Da Silva by Sir Giles Marsden-Prince, the British ambassador in Brazil, who later dies in London while attempting to save a child from being run over by a car; as an adult Da Silva takes up his role and also saves a child from the London traffic. There is Paul's father, Magellan, who was expected to die of leukaemia and at first attempted to survive through the child but was healed and returned to life. Imaginative resurrection occurs through Da Silva's identification with his models, whom he sees as so many resurrected selves. By recreating their trials he is able to sift out original motives and subsequent sufferings from given situations and so discover the human dimension that makes the "prodigal" return of life possible. Moreover, survival through another (Da Silva's birth on the day Sir Giles's wife died) or through another's predicament (Paul's orphaned childhood a reiteration of Da Silva's) irrespective of family ties is a further development of Harris's concept of community — his belief, that is, that life cannot be conscripted into one narrow identity. It is nameless life that assumes a particular shape before subsiding again. Insensitiveness to this, however, leads to the resurgence of similar situations, to fixed patterns of behaviour and, indeed, to conscription into one narrow identity: " 'Poor healed Magellan . . . never ceases to prove himself. Dies on every foreign beach [the beaches of conquest whether Cuba's Bay of Pigs or the Philippines]. Poor shot Cuffey . . . He never ceases to live. Lives in every foreign bar' " (p. 49).

Resurrection in whatever form is a token of the continuity of tradition in its oppressive as in its oppressed manifestations. Legacies of conquest and victimization are embodied, as already suggested, in Magellan and Cuffey, while Henry Rich, Earl of Holland (many of the paintings are done in Holland Park where his house used to stand) is the representative of a strong historical tradition who, from being a member of the ruling class, became himself a victim in Cromwell's time. The unravelling of the conqueror and

victim fixations is the major theme of the "Paradise" and the "Prodigal" series of paintings respectively. Already in "The Madonna Pool" section Da Silva was aware that his models were not the stereotypes of history he had originally seen in them, and his perception of their scars and vulnerability had actually set him on his voyage of exploration through painting. During the "drama of maturity" that takes place in "wilderness" theatre (there is actually a theatre not far from where the "wilderness" in Holland Park used to be) a mutation occurs in the paintings as a prelude to change in the polarizations of tradition and to the partial uncovering of the "immovable yet mutated light" (p. 54). That light is the essence of "immortal dying tradition" (p. 61), an ambivalent concept elicited from Da Silva's paintings of flesh-and-blood people. As already suggested, it implies that tradition, although mortal in its perceptible forms, is an undying, immaterial, and therefore nameless reality nourished by the sacrifices and sufferings of all men. Da Silva makes a first step towards retrieving the light when he paints Manya and sees Magellan through her. He begins to understand their motives and perceives at once her "inimitable pathos" (p. 36) — has her love healed Magellan back to life though he only made use of her and left her afterwards? — and his "anguish of being healed" (p. 37). This is the anxiety of one who, unexpectedly returning to life, needs to prove constantly that he does survive and is stimulated to ever-new feats of conquest, to the discovery of ever-new paradises even on "the moon's beach" (p. 39).

Yet love, such as the intense, free and truly reciprocal relation between Jen and Da Silva, can release non-institutionalized values, the "light" eclipsed with the shot and bombed Cuffeys of this world. "Love," says Sir Giles to Da Silva, "is a deep-seated gesture towards the living and the dead, despite incompatible appearances, an act of healing . . . prodigal return where one least expects it" (p. 30). After Jen's (prodigal) return from Peru the light returns,

not directly but in Cuffey's "regenerated eyes" as these come alive with "newfound compassion" (p. 59) on the painting of "'wilderness' theatre: middle ground of paradise" (p. 53). As Da Silva realizes again and again, light itself (arising from a deep invisible source akin to nothingness) cannot be immobilized into one shape or in one place, for this would amount to a new hardening of tradition in his work. Like the bird or spirit that flies "within a marvel of opposites" (p. 3) in Da Silva's dream, the light moves between Magellan and Cuffey on his "Paradise" and "Prodigal" paintings until on his "wilderness" canvas the two men seem to have been "conscripted into an elaborate plot to heal each other's wounds in the conception of a child" (p. 60). As usual in Harris's fiction, there is no facile reconciliation, no evidence even that it may take place, only a suggestion that a mutation may be occurring by which the dissolution of one mould of tradition (such as Magellan's) disclosing its hidden face (Cuffey's) and allowing a glimpse of "never-to-be-painted, never-to-be-trapped light" (p. 38), illuminates the "middle-ground" or "middle-passage of paradise" (p. 58). This is the ground of a possible dialogue between incompatibles of conquest or glory (paradise) and victimization or eclipse (middle passage). The death of one kind of tradition and of its material achievements is thus the "*apparent* death of tradition" (p. 25) only since it resuscitates, temporarily brings to light, through an awareness of the sacrifice gone into every achievement, the immortal tradition common to all men. It is paradoxically a source of creation and maturity⁹ as it becomes part of the process of life and death, appearance and disappearance of material forms and immaterial perspectives, which together form the whole world recreated by Da Silva.

This brings us back to our starting point, the two-faced world or "cultivated wilderness" Da Silva paints in himself and on his canvases. The word "wilderness" is used with all its implications of wildness, barrenness, complexity and

confusion with reference to nature as well as to man, his inner state, and the world he has built. The "wilderness" theatre in Holland Park is the "'wilderness' theatre of the globe" (p. 37), and the earth is a "wilderness mother" (p. 65). There is a "wilderness" of communication (exemplified in Kate's and Da Silva's incapacity to understand each other). The "beautiful man-made wilderness" (p. 57) built in Holland Park in Imperial days contrasts with the "urban 'wilderness'" (p. 61) Da Silva discovers in a demolished area of London. But the antithetical image of a "cultivated wilderness" carries a hope of regeneration and reconstruction. As Da Silva revises his "urban 'wilderness'" mural, he becomes aware of "varieties of twilight" and "transparent densities" (p. 63) of colours, reminiscent of the "varieties of transparent eclipse" (p. 38) in the "Paradise" portraits of Manya. In those earlier paintings the light was synonymous with "indestructible impersonality" and "independence within all masks" (p. 38), synonymous with a spirit that discarded the coat of uniformity. On his city mural he discerns a light more real than wood or brick, "the inimitable substance of a new architecture" (p. 63). I have already suggested that this inner light can never be fully apprehended. Nor can what is apprehended be fixed, for it would then become institutionalized and hide the very source from which it originally sprang. It is to restore the light to its mobility that Da Silva "cultivates" the wilderness, sets in motion the densities of the pool (the pool and wilderness metaphors merge here as they do on the sixteenth-century print though with new meaning). Cultivation means creation, Da Silva's capacity to visualize as an "inimitable painting" "the suffering infinity of man" (p. 62). It is Jen's dowry and Sir Giles's legacy that leave him free to do his painting, and he owes his inspiration to Jen's love and Sir Giles's guidance. As the latter's name suggests (Marsden¹⁰-Prince) he both serves and rules. His library "span[s] civilizations" (p. 7), as Da Silva intends his Commonwealth Institute paint-

ings to do. And as the "ambassador of god" Sir Giles represents the "insoluble cross-cultural deity" (p. 69) — again the immaterial face of tradition which offers the only hope of genuine change in the Commonwealth precisely because it can only be perceived when men discard the "soluble uniform" (p. 69) they wear.

In Da Silva's Commonwealth paintings brilliant and imaginative use is made of the actual architecture (the helmet-like dome and the three-decked structure) and the exhibitions at the Commonwealth Institute in London to give an idea of the new forces at work in the Commonwealth.¹¹ The individual figures on Da Silva's earlier canvases are now given a universal dimension. The "soluble uniform" of Empire (a dead or dying tradition) has given way to formerly "suppressed tones of feeling" (p. 10) in exploited populations (the "embryonic scarecrows" glimpsed in *Jenine Globe* in Da Silva's dream?). New tones merge into new national uniforms and new "purist masks of technology" (p. 73), which may well hide the line or area of "*non-tone*," the state of nothingness in which "the violated bodies of history" (p. 69) subsist. This reversal of situation (in which former victims are now possibly turning into tyrants) presents and develops more clearly than before implications that had been present in Wilson Harris's work from the beginning. Seen from the outside, the helmet of the Institute recalls Cromwell's helmet and *his* Commonwealth, but looked at from the inside the dome is like a circular star cluster, "the constellation of Hercules" (p. 67), which shelters the "genie of forces" (p. 69). Will this genie be recognized as the fruit of "complexities of nakedness" (p. 69), the flesh-and-blood "wilderness" of the exploited? Will the resurrected people remember the price they paid in the past and sometimes still pay in terms of "millions on the brink of starvation or on the brink of the grave" (p. 68)? Will their new forces be used by themselves or by others to serve violence or freedom? "How soluble," wonders Da Silva, "are the stables that groomed

the horses the conquistadores rode" (p. 72)? His revised canvases give no answer to the questions threaded into them, though their transparencies elicit "the glimmering light of a *perception* of value beyond the quantitative mirage of civilizations" (p. 74, italics mine).

The "glimmering light of perception" is not *the* light, glimpsed by man but forever out of his reach, whose elusive presence has illuminated Da Silva's canvases. It is only one of its manifestations becoming perceptible through Da Silva's regenerated vision, "the 'middle-ground regenerated eyes' of . . . compassion as original vision available to the human imagination in every age" (p. 70). The genie of man, an expression of light, appears in many different guises on the paintings (in a sense these are all variations on the theme of light). But the emphasis at this stage is clearly on a resurrected sensibility ("compassion as original vision"). Naturally, the renaissance of feeling and imagination — clearly the two are inseparable — that Harris envisages can take place only in the individual. At the end of the day in the "Homecoming" section the narrative shifts back from a world-wide to a personal perspective or, more accurately, the two merge in Jen, who is met by Da Silva on her way home and announces that she is pregnant.

Jen is one of the most successful feminine portraits in Harris's fiction. Neither Virgin nor whore (an inevitable polarization in the novels evoking a society in which there was sometimes one woman to fifty men), Jen is in every sense "an extraordinary affirmation of life" (p. 55). Her relationship with Da Silva is joyfully sensual as well as spiritually and imaginatively fertile. It is one of complete and happy reciprocity between muse and artist ("you are in me I in you forever," says Da Silva on the morning of their mutual "creation", pp. 5 and 4) and their child, the offspring of their physical love, is also "the immortal presence they ceaselessly conceived into existence through each other" (p. 48). The painter's new vision and the muse's pregnancy (the awaited "homecoming of spirit", p. 30) are

the more striking if one remembers the essential life-giving (not receiving) role of the muse at the end of *Palace of the Peacock*. In this novel not only is creativeness revitalized but its very source is fertilized and on the point of giving a new lease of life to the genie of man. Embracing Jen on their way home Da Silva feels he encircles the globe and its once more "circulating," hence released and creative, light.

The annunciation with which the novel ends is an extraordinary affirmation of faith in the future of humanity though it is not an unqualified one since Da Silva must suppress fears of the many dangers that threaten the coming child, of the anguish that each birth, like each death, involves. Hope itself carries its own biases and self-deceptions as Harris shows in *Genesis of the Clowns*, which counterpoints *Da Silva*, offering an alternative version of the rebirth that may follow the total eclipse of a man or a people. Without analysing it in detail, I should like to indicate briefly in what way the second of Harris's latest novels complements the first and to show that, together, the two present contrasting and overlapping possibilities of man's future. The basic proposition that informs the rich metaphorical texture of the narrative in *Da Silva* is, as we have seen, that the creative act can result only from a marriage between feeling and imagination since feeling makes possible the retrieval into the creative consciousness of neglected inner selves ("others" inhabiting our common being), whose resurgence partly illuminates areas of darkness in inner and outer world. If, then, creation by man is a "displacement of opposites"¹² through the recognition of others originally created by God (as Eve was created by God as a part of Adam), it follows that man's creativeness is primarily a capacity to apprehend and bring to light an already existing but invisible reality. Da Silva says at one stage: "Whose is the hand I wonder . . . that guides my hand sometimes to paint a self-portrait of prodigal life coincident with birth, coincident with

death?" (p. 32). And in *Genesis of the Clowns Hope*, a black Guyanese, sends to Frank Wellington, his (significantly named) former employer now living in London, a book called *Timehri*, which means both "Indian patterns" and "the hand of God" (p. 144).

This has a direct bearing on the "Comedy of divinity" or "Comedy of light" which is the subject of *Genesis*. Harris, as we know, identifies suppressed humanity — here, as earlier, the natives of Guyana — with the original, invisible reality I have just referred to since exploited men are reduced to a primordial state and deprived of identity. They are represented in most of Harris's novels by the Nameless Fool or Clown, rejected slave or god, who nevertheless enjoys true spiritual freedom because he is not enrolled in any fixed order. Frank Wellington's resurrection of the "clowns" buried in his past — the surveying crew he led thirty years before in the Guyanese interior — is, like Da Silva's revisionary canvases, an attempt to bring to life the concealed, immaterial face of tradition. He too lives now in a London flat and is urged to his one-day journey into the past by an anonymous letter announcing the death of Hope, who had been his foreman. As Wellington re-envisions his men, one is reminded of the traffic-lights metaphor in *Da Silva*, stop-go signals or appearing and disappearing suns, punctuating the repetitive death and the repetitive genesis of man. Wellington sees again the members of the crew coming one by one to his payable, now merging with the sketches he used to make in the margins of his field book and taking part in "the shadow-play of a genesis of suns" (p. 86), a dark comedy in which they were all the time involved (though they did not realize it) when he was their master and substitute father (the paternal conqueror?).

In this novel as in *Da Silva* it is the protagonist's understanding of a man he once took for granted, used "to do [his] bidding, a piece of furniture" (p. 82), that now kindles the "Copernican revolution of sentiment" (p. 92) that

eventually releases the "frozen genesis" (p. 92) of relationship between the crew and their leader. But while in *Da Silva* the light, whether real or illusory, shines on all canvases,¹³ dark light fills the universe Wellington penetrates anew, and the suns around which he turns are black as if he had fallen with the Fool of *Companions* into a world of "black holes." In this world, ridden by the catastrophe of conquest, either men are extinct as individuals, having lost all expectations, or their unavowed terrors cause a tense malaise to build up in them (its origin unrecognized) that discharges itself violently later on in vengeful possessiveness or destructiveness. The scant "currency" they receive for serving the Empire can in no way compensate them for their fear. There is no price for the heroism of the Amerindian Reddy, who conceals his disorientation with laughter when the light of his gods collapses as he witnesses for the first time Atlantic tidal currents carrying logs upriver. Nor is there any for Chung's frightened and lonely watch in the jungle. Wellington senses the men's unresolved strain as menacing though unconscious energy, an anonymous gun pointed at himself and threatening to kill him as he is nearly killed by the released energy of the storm that brings down his tent. Retrospectively, he is confronted with the "terrifying otherness" (p. 126) of his men, as they must once have faced the terror aroused by the strange world he was imposing on them. As he now takes part in their "terrifying genesis," he himself becomes "a head among the Clowns" (p. 110). For in spite of the agonizing pain of the confrontation, genuine "unfrozen genesis" (p. 127) does occur when Wellington transforms the encounter into one of reciprocity. He now pays Reddy in "Currencies of light" (p. 112) — the only wages that can make up for his loss of the light of his ancestors — and to this effect "assemble[s] [his] sentiments across the payable of the years" (p. 126). Even as he does this he receives from Reddy's sister "the gift of life" (p. 127), the generous present of a cosmic gun that releases "animation" as well

as "ammunition" (p. 141), or "the fire of creation native to us whose steadfast lore it has taken us ages to begin to move" (p. 108).

This simplified account cannot convey the perfect correspondence between the apparent stillness and actual mobility of earth and sun and the many other metaphors in the novel expressing a similar duality of apparent stillness and movement in men and women (the "Fertility Goddess," Ada, is a case in point). Indeed, all metaphors concur to suggest the dual possibilities open to man of spiritual freedom (movement) and acceptance of fate (immobility) as well as the inevitable fusion of both in any man's life, the notion also that freedom is reached through recognition of a previously unconscious subscription to fate. No such recognition seemed to be taking place at the time of the events recalled by Wellington. Moseley, one of the crew, saw that the strikers of a sugar estate were simply yielding to another kind of tyrannical power but not that he himself was enthusiastically complying with the imprint of technology on himself. The Frederick brothers took their revenge on capitalist tyrants by becoming capitalists in turn. And even Hope (the "witness to the pay sheet," indirectly related to each man), though equally susceptible to the "inimitable potential of the past and the future, the inimitable danger as well" (p. 99), eventually succumbed to "a tyranny of affections" (p. 147) not unlike the political tyranny of the men of deeds he so admired. The anonymous letter Frank Wellington receives on the morning of his journey in memory announces that Hope has killed a rival lover (the black namesake of his former white leader) and committed suicide. There is a suggestion that on the very brink of death Hope may have seen "another head among the Clowns" and turned towards "the gift of life without strings" (p. 148), which is a token of true freedom. This can hardly be taken to signify approval of Hope's suicide, of course. The point is rather that Hope's aggression towards the other is now turned against himself, so that, as

both assailant and victim, he has encountered as his own the fate he has imposed on the other and by doing so has obliterated the tyrant in himself. In dispossessing himself he returns to namelessness and thus becomes once more an object of compassion, the only real source of hope in Harris's novels. Hope (the character) seems to have died into that unknown dimension which forever eludes man though it is nourished by the confrontation of his (and nature's) contrary movements, a dimension which, for Harris, appears to be of the essence of divinity.

Viewed together the two novels certainly illustrate the potentialities and the dangers of man's "genie of hope" (p. 61), of resurrection as genuine rebirth or as just another rush into what Wellington calls "the riveted whirlpool of life" (p. 90). Together and separately, they present an essentially open and unfinished half-human, half-divine comedy, informed by the conviction — at once profoundly moral and in harmony with a scientific view of cosmic life — that man breaks at his peril the precarious balance between the moving contrasts of existence in whatever form. The rewarding course open to him is on the "middle ground of paradise":

There was an air, a light of incredible beauty upon the tide. That light spoke of interwoven illusions, the spell cast high by a state of illusion, uncanny threshold into oneself, into blocked divinity, blocked humanity, one drew, filled in, sculpted into oneself as the genesis of light itself. (p. 124)

NOTES

¹Wilson Harris, *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness and Genesis of the Clowns* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977). This article deals mainly with the first of the two novels. All further references are given in the text.

²Wilson Harris, *Fossil and Psyche* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), p. 12.

³For a discussion of that process see Hena Maes-Jelinek, *The Naked Design* (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1976), pp. 15-18.

⁴Wilson Harris, *Companions of the Day and Night* (London: Faber, 1975), p. 65.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 13.

- ⁶This expression (which counterpoints "Stigmata of the Void" used in *The Eye of the Scarecrow*) Harris defines as "the limits of paradise," suggesting thereby that the perfection of paradise is an illusion since it too shows the scars of suffering.
- ⁷Edward Brathwaite, "Legba," in *Islands* (London: O.U.P., 1969), p. 15.
- ⁸*Companions*, p. 52. For an illuminating account of the role of the madonna and of her child in *Companions*, see Ivan Van Sertima, "Into the Black Hole" *ACLALS Bulletin*, Fourth Series, 4 (1976), 65-77.
- ⁹Sir Giles refers to maturity as to "a capacity to start anywhere, to step back, to step forward, to be ceaselessly aware of immaterial truth in the most massive stereotypes" (p. 28). The "drama of maturity" in which Da Silva is involved grows out of, and gives a more specific meaning to, the "drama of consciousness" that has so far taken place in Harris's characters.
- ¹⁰In Harris's earlier novels (*Black Marsden* and *Companions*) Marsden reveals to Goodrich the exploring consciousness, the existence of eclipsed individuals and populations and serves him as a guide to namelessness.
- ¹¹See in particular the "Painted African Sun-Poem" and the Caribbean "Museum of Genesis" (pp. 70-72).
- ¹²*Companions*, p. 29.
- ¹³This by no means implies that Da Silva's reconstruction is "optimistic" and leaves out the pain and anguish experienced by his models or by himself.