

ABSTRACT

The Healing of the Psyche: Wilson Harris's
attitude to and use of history in his Literature

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This dissertation examines how Wilson Harris regards history, and how he uses it in his essays, poems, short stories and novels. It illustrates his view that history comprises besides event, human behaviour, experience and growth; and that a literary history is essentially literature which can be written or interpreted to suit the point of view and goals of the writer and his culture.

Harris asserts that because history is written by different people in different times, it must be recognised as a living thing, subject to change and reinterpretation as experience grows and as new needs arise. It demands dialogue. The definitive history is therefore never achieved. He further shows that the literary historian needs to be a keen student of life, and to be compassionate to all peoples so as to tell their sides of the issues with out blame, and so that succeeding people do not suffer any loss of perspective through biased writing.

This discussion deals with the way in which the works seek to return humanity to history while they re-examine the truth of human action and reaction, and also examines the psychological state of the participants in the history of the Caribbean as Harris's work shows them. Mythology is shown as being basic to the works chosen, allowing the working of Harris's creative imagination and the interpretive variety he chooses or suggests. Chapter One gives the rationale behind Harris's choice of mythology as the vehicle of expression. Credibility is given to the myth through examination of the historical threads which he has woven into the myths, in chapters Two through Four. Chapter Five takes us into the realm of space, but still carries with it the essence of myth, since we are free to conjecture about the future and things difficult to explain.