

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks through a close-reading of The Secret Ladder and the essays contained in Tradition, the Writer and Society and by cross-references to the other novels of the Guiana Quartet to locate the work of Wilson Harris within a dialectical framework.

It begins by defining the concept 'dialectic' in terms of Hegel's system and method; and by an analysis of the essays it indicates how the dialectic underpins Harris's theoretical concerns and carries over into his fiction. The study demonstrates that Harris is chiefly concerned with ideal structures and formal problems rather than external and objective reality, whether of history, society or landscape. It shows that the primary idiom of Harris's fiction is the image; it analyses the structure of the image and shows it to be dialectical.

The close-reading of The Secret Ladder follows the application and unfolding of the dialectical method in terms of language, structure, personae, images and ideas in the novel. It sets as a key task the identification of the major imaginative constructs of Harris's fiction and indicates that these are only explicable in terms of the dialectic. The Secret Ladder is identified as a problem novel which, nevertheless, represents a crucial stage in Harris's experiments with form and in the development of the dialectical novel.

In identifying the personae of the novel the study shows that they function within a dialectical pattern of 'doubling', existing not as autonomous entities but as aspects of a total, subjective consciousness which becomes identified with the narrative consciousness. The thesis also examines the major psychological motivations of the protagonist and shows him to be involved in a drama of individuation. It indicates that at the psychological level the narrative unfolds within the context of a clearly defined formal structure.