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Title of Paper: Wilson Harris's re-visionary strategy in his second novel, *The Far Journey of Oudin*, is influenced by the intuitive blend of quantum physics and the Haitian vodun belief of *expedition* or *l'envoi morts* (sending of the dead).

Abstract

In his theoretical writings, Wilson Harris asserts that the revisionary momentum in all proportions of narrative convention represents an essential aspect of artistic creativity. Above all, Harris's revisionary dynamic or alterations of absolute models of fiction is most influenced by his intuitive combination of shamanistic beliefs and quantum physics. *The Far Journey of Oudin* is one of Harris's fictional works that reflects such an assertion. The major objective of this paper is to demonstrate that Wilson Harris's revisionary strategy in the novel, *The Far Journey of Oudin* is influenced by the intuitive blend of the Haitian vodun practice of *expedition* or *l'envoi morts* (sending of the dead) and quantum physics. Harris's intuitive combination of *l'envoi morts*, parallel universes and quantum entanglement has allowed him to create a novel which "diverges from one-track realism" ("Apprenticeship" 233). The parallel universes of quantum physics combined with the resurrected body of *l'envoi morts* creates a "*breach ... in the tautology of ... the [conventional] story-line*" ("The Unfinished Genesis" 250). Most importantly, Harris's unconscious or intuitive dialogue with *l'envoi morts*, parallel universes and quantum entanglement offers him the opportunity to "revise the one-sided moral conclusions built into the ... premises of the novel" ("Reflections" 94). Furthermore, this essay will be guided by Alfred Mettraux's and Maya Deren's anthropological and psychological explanation of the Haitian vodun practice of *l'envoi morts*. Above all, Reginald Crosley's analysis of the shamanic practice of *l'envoi morts* in a quantum physics framework, will be referenced in this essay.

In his theoretical writings, Wilson Harris asserts that the “revisionary momentum in all proportions of narrative convention” (*Jonestown* 111) represents an essential aspect of artistic creativity. Above all, Harris’s re-visionary dynamic or alterations of absolute models of fiction is most influenced by his intuitive combination of shamanistic beliefs and quantum physics. *The Far Journey of Oudin* is one of Harris’s fictional works that reflects such an assertion. The major argument of this paper is to demonstrate that Harris intuitively connects quantum physics to the shamanic practice of *expedition* or *l’envoi morts* or sending of the dead in his novel *The Far Journey of Oudin* to achieve his re-visionary strategy. The two major objectives of this paper are: Firstly, this essay seeks to evaluate that Harris’s intuitive portrayal of *expedition* or *l’envoi morts* in *The Far Journey of Oudin*, correspond to the quantum concepts of parallel universes and quantum entanglement. Secondly, and most importantly, this paper will analyse the intuitive blend of the Haitian vodun practice of *expedition* or *l’envoi morts* and quantum physics and its relation to Harris’s re-visionary strategy in the novel, *The Far Journey of Oudin*.

In his theoretical essay, “Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition”, Wilson Harris claims that he found an intuitive connection between his early novels and quantum physics. Harris argues in this essay that:

Palace of the Peacock ... was written in 1959 (published in 1969) and I knew nothing of quantum mechanics at the time. Indeed though I have read *Quantum Reality* by the physicist Nick Herbert, and have been excited by it, and what I discern as validating premises to certain things I have been doing in my fiction.... I find now that I could give many examples of this phenomenon in the work I have written within the past four decades. With hindsight they are abundantly clear to me (186).

Such an assertion leads to the conclusion that Harris “was not consciously aware of such a threshold or how strangely his imagination had been pulled into coincidence with [the] black theatre of psyche [known as] the *expedition* or *l’envoi morts*” (Harris, “Reflections on Intruder in

the Dust in a Cross-Cultural Complex” 94). Harris terms this type of intuition as the “intuitive imagination” or “intuitive dialogue” (“Jean Rhys’s ‘Tree of life’,” 119). It is Harris’s view that his fictional works inhabit or belong to “an intuitive rather than explicit dimension.” In other words “it is unlikely” that Harris was “consciously aware” of quantum physics “that seems to ... secrete itself in the margins” of his earlier fiction and, as a consequence, “there exists in the narrative indirections” of his earlier novels “that peculiar blend of opacity and transparency that alerts us to the force of the intuitive imagination in building strategies of which it *knows* yet does not *know*” (Harris, “Jean Rhys’s ‘Tree of life’,” 119). Consequently, Harris’s intuitive ability to “visualize ... bridges between art and science” leads to the creation of fictional works that are not “conscripted by linear biases and fallacious absolutes” (“Profiles of Myth and the New World” 202).

It is necessary to explain the Haitian vodun belief and practice of expedition or sending of the dead before demonstrating its intuitive rapport with quantum physics and Harris’s re-visionary strategy. In his essay “Reflections on *Intruder in the Dust* in a Cross-Cultural Complex”, published 1983, Wilson Harris argued that this Haitian vodun belief and practice is intuitively alive in William Faulkner’s novel *Intruder in the Dust* and moreover, relates this shamanic concept to his novel *The Far Journey of Oudin*. In this essay, Harris interrogates the discerning presence of this concept in his second novel by illustrating from Alfred Metraux’s anthropological and psychological explanation of *expedition* or *l’envoi morts*. Alfred Metraux in *Voodoo in Haiti* (1972) states that:

The most fearful practice in the black arts ... is the sending of the dead (l’envoi morts or expedition). The laying on of the spell is always attended by fatal results unless it is diagnosed in time and a capable *hungan* [or shaman] succeeds in making the dead let go. (274).

Most importantly, Metraux further claims that “illnesses resulting from *expedition de morts* are not easily cured [since] the dead embed themselves in the organism into which they are inserted and it is very difficult to make them let go” (276).

Additionally, Harris intuitively appropriates certain beliefs about the reincarnation of ancestral spirits from Haitian vodun in his novel *The Far Journey of Oudin*. The Haitian vodun belief of rebirth is best explained by the anthropologist Maya Deren. In *Divine Horsemen: Voodoo Gods of Haiti*, Deren claims that the human soul or “*gros bon ange* ... could ... achieve the powers of divinity” and can therefore “manifest in a living form [through] “possession”” (29). Such an assertion is represented in *The Far Journey of Oudin*. For instance, Oudin’s state of ‘possession’ signifies that the ancestral soul or spirit of the dead Oudin, the brother of the Mohammed clan who was murdered, has reincarnated itself in his body, in order to seek “sacred vengeance” (Harris, “Reflections” 94) for the crime committed against him. The incarnated spirit’s “return from the open grave unconsciously converts” the protagonist, Oudin “into a voodoo instrument of vengeance” (Bundy, “Preface” 70). Harris’s portrayal of the avenging reincarnated soul resides in his assertion that “within our unconscious... the dead return ... to carry a burden” (“Creative” 114).

It is important to note that Harris’s claim that “in quantum physics ... there are parallel universes” with “figures that resemble each other very closely, but they are not exactly the same” (“Unfinished Genesis: A Personal View of Cross-Cultural Tradition” 97-98) corresponds to the Haitian vodoun belief of the possessed person’s uncanny resemblance to the soul of the dead. This “Quantum transference of psyche” (Harris, *Jonestown* 14) or mystical reason for Oudin’s similar mental and physical features to the dead Oudin is explicable by reference to Alfred Metraux. Metraux claims that:

Spirits, in the flesh-and-blood form of the persons in whom they become incarnate, mix with the common crowd [and] the public [who] can see and hear them. Moreover, the

possessed [body assumes] the qualities of the *loa* [or spirit] and [begins] imitating their general appearance, their walk and their voice” (*Voodoo* 93).

Furthermore, the quantum concepts of parallel universes and quantum entanglement need to be explained before any interrogation of how its combination with the ‘sending of the dead’ influences Harris’s re-visionary strategy. The quantum physicist, Nick Herbert in *Quantum Reality* states that the concept of parallel universes in quantum theory is known as the “many world’s interpretation.” This means that “Reality consists of a steadily increasing number of parallel universes” (Herbert, *Quantum Reality* 19). Herbert further explains how the concept of parallel universes is actually based on the quantum principle of quantum entanglement. According to Herbert, all parallel worlds are “joined” by an “instant connectedness” of “hidden faster-than-light-connections” (Herbert, *Quantum Reality* 222). This “inseparable nature of reality” thus represents a kind of “superluminal ... entanglement” (Herbert, *Quantum Reality* 242).

These explanations of the shamanic practice of *l’envoi morts*, parallel universes and quantum entanglement could now assist with an interrogation of Harris’s re-visionary strategy. Firstly, Harris’s intuitive blend of *expedition* or *l’envoi morts*, parallel universes and quantum entanglement has allowed him to create a novel which “diverge[s] from one-track realism” (“Apprenticeship to the Furies” 233). Harris’s rejection of the conventional realism that remains a binding formula for fiction in the Anglophone Caribbean is emphasized in his following argument:

If one were to take that very first passage [from *Palace of the Peacock*], describing the man who is hanged, you would have in realistic terms, to describe that straightforwardly: he has been hanged. How can you say he has been hanged, shot and drowned at the same time? That’s not realistic. So realism is authoritarian in the sense that it has to stick to one frame. It cannot bring other texts into play. Realism has to work with one text. Very much like a journalistic text: one text, a single frame. When you bring other texts in, you question that text and then you begin to unleash resources which begin to come into play and to saturate the narrative. The narrative therefore begins to shift its emphasis and what is one thing now seems still to be like that, but it changes within itself and becomes other things *as well.*” (“Judgement and Dream,” 26.)

The parallel universes and the non-local connections of quantum physics combined with the resurrected body of *expedition* or *l'envoi morts* creates a “breach ... in the tautology of ... the [conventional and linear] story-line” (“The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination” (250). This is evident in *The Far Journey of Oudin*. The “resurrected body” of the murdered Oudin “crosses” from one dimension to another “but- in acquiring or absorbing unsuspected particularities and elements in the fabric of the risen body...he is *not* immediately recognizable” and it therefore “takes a new concentration, a new way of reading reality” for the Mohammed clan to recognize him. The notion of the “resurrection-body” obviously rejects the uniform narrative since it “does not conform to a story-line upon which everything is immediately clear and conformable to a ruling pattern.” Moreover, the resurrected human being dismantles the space-time causality that we are conditioned to accept. Through Oudin’s possessed eyes, the reader is witness to a vision of another space-time dimension.

Most importantly, this parallel space-time reality does exist according to the basic premise of quantum theory that observation creates reality. For this reason, this research paper affirms that Harris uses the word ‘quantum’ to substantiate the existence of another parallel world. Such a claim is validated by Reginald Crosley, the Haitian medical expert who interrogates the convergence of Haitian vodun and quantum reality, in his book, *The Vodou Quantum Leap: Alternative Realities, Power and Mysticism*. Crosley argues that Haitian vodun holds the belief that:

An observation at any given region causes the transformation of a state of potentiality to a state of actuality that becomes manifest everywhere in the cosmos at one and the same instant (44).

Moreover, if this parallel dimension does exist through an act of observation, then it would challenge our accepted notions of space-time causality. This quantum perception can inform a writer's ability to re-vision the consolidated language of fiction or the language of art. The artist who thus experiences an altered state of consciousness, like the possessed Oudin, could obtain that spatial logic or apprehension of this different reality of space, and subsequently this could challenge his conscious notions of space and time. The end result of the writer's quantum shamanic experience of possession will be the creation of fictional narratives that reflect the reality of this spatiality. For instance, *The Far Journey of Oudin* is crafted to represent the various space-time historical worlds of the living Oudin and the dead Oudin. It is a psycho-physical narrative or dream- book which is a bridge between Oudin's physical reality and the dead Oudin's parallel reality.

Therefore, the "motif of the resurrection-body" in *The Far Journey of Oudin* that has "its unfathomable roots in an occult dimension ...erupts" in a "re-visionary alignment" (Harris, "The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination" 250) of the conventional "linear bias [that] structure[s] itself" on "a kind of implacable fate" (Harris, "The Fabric of the Imagination, 76). The linear tautology of the story-line is thus fractured in favour" of a new type of fiction that "defies absolute models" of "tragedy, epic, allegory [and] realism" (Harris, "The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination" 250).

Furthermore, Harris's "unconscious or intuitive dialogue with" *expedition* or *l'envoi morts*, parallel universes and quantum entanglement offers him the opportunity to "revise the one-sided moral conclusions built into the ... premises of the novel" ("Reflections on Intruder in the Dust in a Cross-Cultural Complex" 94). The literary artist is therefore stimulated to "perceive the nature of conventional morality [and] the burden in language to grapple with disturbing factors in a

society that takes cruelty for granted within the norms of the day” (Harris, *Jonestown* 34). The “quantum imagination” (Harris, “Creoleness” 246) coupled with the intuitive application of *expedition* or *l’envoi morts* permits Harris a new “language of the imagination [which] visualizes ‘space’ differently from a purely logical field or tamed universe” (“Merlin” 62). Consequently, Harris is able to vicariously or imaginatively bridge “quantum parallel lives” (*The Four Banks of the River of Space* 318) in *The Far Journey of Oudin* that have enabled him to convert the conventional “uniform kind of narrative” (“Literacy and the Imagination” 76) with its “fashionable moralities” (“Tradition and the West Indian Novel” 140-141). Harris’s intuitive dialogue with shamanic physics has allowed him to become the shamanic writer who “embodies the art of the vodun *hungan*” or shaman “to unravel the sorcery of hate” (“Reflections on Intruder in the Dust in a Cross-Cultural Complex” 95) since he is able to create a psychophysical narrative or “translated spectre of the dead-in-living” that “assess[es] the *exact shape of spirit*” or “the weight of spiritual conscience, to rouse itself from the sleep of material habit or age” (“Reflections on Intruder in the Dust in a Cross-Cultural Complex” 96). As a result of this breach of “material habit or age”, Harris is therefore able to create “the novel- *fulfilment* rather than *consolidation* [that] is profoundly consistent with the native tradition[s]” (“Tradition and the West Indian Novel” 140) of the Caribbean.

The “force of the intuitive imagination in building strategies of which it *knows* yet does not *know*” has allowed Harris to appropriate the East Indian and Haitian beliefs of reincarnation in *The Far Journey of Oudin*. It is noteworthy to comment on such cross-cultural link or bridge between two cultural perspectives. This imaginative bridging of different cultural epistemologies represents Harris’s application of the “quantum imagination” (“Creoleness” 246) to explore the “issue of complex linkages and mixed traditions” (“Creoleness” 247) in his fictional works. Harris can

therefore be viewed as the visionary writer who makes that “quantum leap” (“Wilson” 54) and infuses the traditions of the East Indian community with the black West Indian presence.” Furthermore, such a “phenomenon” offers the opportunity to discuss Harris’s portrayal in his other novels of the black West Indian presence” (“Jean Rhys’s ‘Tree of life’” 120) within the East Indian vestiges of religious beliefs, myths and legends. Above all, it is this type of theoretical analysis that makes Harris one of the most original literary artist and critic in the Caribbean. The intuitive correspondence Harris achieves with quantum physics, *l’envoi morts* and his re-visionary literary production is outstanding and there are other implicit variables or examples that further highlight his originality and which need to be further investigated. This perspective is also highly recommended by Harris who argues that “the gifts to the human imagination” could only originate from the “ongoing and ceaselessly unfinished explorations in the arts and sciences” and most importantly, these gifts “are rewarding beyond measure” (“The Schizophrenic Sea” 101).

It is important to also note that Wilson Harris is not the only writer in the Anglophone Caribbean who incorporates the Haitian vodun notion of *l’envoi morts* or sending of the dead with his literary works. This shamanic ritual is also portrayed as the ‘sending or ceremony of the souls’ in George Lamming’s fictional works, *Season of Adventure* and *Pleasures of Exile*, both published in 1960. However, unlike Harris, who claims with hindsight, that he was portraying the practice of *l’envoi morts* in *The Far Journey of Oudin*, Lamming in 1960 engages with the concept. Most importantly, Harris does not evaluate the correspondence of his use of the native tradition with Lamming’s fiction in his 1983 essay “Reflections on Intruder in the Dust in a Cross-Cultural Complex.” Such an analysis could yield provocative ideas about the corresponding use of the indigenous practices by both writers. Such a lingering issue obviously requires future interrogation.

Overall, Harris's intuitive blend of shamanism and quantum physics have stimulated his "incandescent imagination" ("Quetzalcoatl" 186). The intuitive merger of the Haitian vodun practice of *expedition* or *l'envoi morts* and the notions of parallel universes and quantum entanglement of quantum physics have permitted Harris "to participate in the genuine possibilities of original change ... and to point to the necessity for a new kind ... novel" ("History, Fable and Myth" 159). *The Far Journey of Oudin* is consequently a "fiction in dialogue with the sacred" that reflects Harris's "dialogue of creativity that is aware of the mystery of the sacred as it inhabits [the human] psyche, an awareness that breaches however -and is not the slave of -fanatical creed, fanatical absolute" (Harris, "Profiles of Myth and the New World" 202-203).

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