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Topic/Title: Wilson Harris's Revisionary Strategy is Influenced Through the Intuitive Blend of Quantum Physics and the Shamanistic Concept of 'Timehri Script'

Abstract

Wilson Harris claims in his theoretical writings that the major task of the imaginative genius or artist is to engage with “the genuine rehearsal of legacies of tradition” (“In the Name of Liberty” 219). Harris further argues that such ‘rehearsal’ involves the “transformation of the conventional and consolidated language of fiction” (“In the Name of Liberty” 217). Harris therefore asserts that creative artists should “breach ... the ruling pattern” or the “tautology of the story-line” through the re-visionary momentum that “defies absolute models” of “tragedy, epic, allegory [and] realism” (Harris, “The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination” 250). This re-visionary dynamic comprising alterations of conventional linearity and conventional frameworks is most influenced by Harris’s intuitive combination of shamanistic beliefs and quantum physics. The major objective of this paper is to demonstrate that Wilson Harris’s re-visionary strategy has been influenced by the intuitive fusion of quantum physics with the pre-Columbian shamanistic vestige known as the Timehri markings. This essay will be guided by Nick Herbert’s theoretical perspectives of quantum reality and Carl Gustav Jung’s notion of synchronicity. Most significantly, Wilson Harris’s shamanistic notions of the Timehri script or Timehri markings will undergird the central argument of this essay. The findings of this research will highlight that the intuitive blend of the Timehri script with quantum physics results in Harris’s promotion of the re-visionary artistic vision.

Wilson Harris claims in his theoretical writings that the major task of the imaginative genius or artist is to engage with “the genuine rehearsal of legacies of tradition” (“In the Name of Liberty” 219). Harris further argues that this involves the “transformation of the conventional and consolidated language of fiction” and represents “the undercutting of [the] hubris [of] one-sided appearance or hollow figure” or a “*one-sided, ruling premise*” (“In the Name of Liberty” 217). Harris therefore asserts that creative artists should “breach ... the ruling pattern” or the “tautology of the story-line” through the re-visionary momentum that “defies absolute models” of “tragedy, epic, allegory [and] realism” (Harris, “The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination” 250). This re-visionary dynamic comprising alterations of conventional linearity is most influenced by Harris’s intuitive combination of shamanistic beliefs and quantum physics. This paper holds the premise that Wilson Harris intuitively connects quantum physics with the shamanic belief of Timehri script in his literary and theoretical works to achieve his artistic vision. The three major objectives of this paper are: This paper will firstly evaluate Harris’s intuitive fusion of the “Timehri markings” with the quantum concepts of parallel universes¹ and quantum entanglement.² Secondly, this essay will analyse the intuitive alliance that the Timehri markings achieves with quantum physics and its relation to Harris’s promotion of the re-visionary strategy. Next, this essay will demonstrate that Harris’s re-visionary art is stimulated by an intuitive bridging of the implicit music generated by Timehri markings and quantum physics.

It is important to evaluate Harris’s intuitive connection between his early novels and quantum physics. Harris contends 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

¹ In quantum physics, the concept of parallel universes 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).

² Nick Herbert states that the “world is an undivided wholeness.” This notion that “the world is an inseparable whole” is theorized as quantum “entanglement” (*Quantum Reality* 241).

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.
 (“Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition,” 186).

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 pre-Columbian tradition of Timehri markings before demonstrating its intuitive rapport with quantum physics and Harris’s artistic vision. The ancient Amerindians of Guyana believed that the primordial language of the gods erupted in human reality as “Timehri markings” or naturally occurring engravings in the physical landscape. This “mysterious signature or textuality of ... Timehri markings” (Harris, “Aubrey Williams” 222) can be found on ancient rocks in the interior of the Guyanese landscape. Harris further claims that the word “Timehri may be translated not only as ‘the mark of the hand’ but as ‘the hand of God’” (Harris, “Aubrey Williams” 222). Moreover, Harris affirms that the Timehri rock art “hints at a language or text that existed before human discourse” that could “enrich the language of the imagination” (Harris, “Aubrey Williams” 222). He argues that the West Indian artist therefore

“need[s] to look ... at Amerindian ... shamanistic ... vestiges and ... legends” since these “ancient” notions “articulate a new growth- and ... point to the necessity for a new kind of drama, novel and poem” or “arts of originality” (“History” 158-159). Most significantly, Harris contends that these “unique signatures” and “original textualities, that reside in the mark of the hand which writes upon rock” could foster “far-reaching ... implications that reside in ... the *unfinished* genesis of the imagination” (“Aubrey Williams”223) of literary artists.

Above all, this shamanic belief of ‘Timehri markings’ needs to be analysed within a quantum physics framework before further evaluating its connection to Harris’s artistic vision. It is significant to point out that the “Timehri script on rocks” (Harris, *Resurrection* 52) represents an acausal synchronistic quantum connection or non-local connection between two dimensions or parallel worlds³ and not simply a connection between “the realms of human and divine creation” as suggested by the Harrisian critic, Mary Lou Emery (*Modernism, the Visual and Caribbean Literature* 228). This notion of the acausal synchronistic quantum connection is best explained through the concepts of synchronicity and the non-local reality. The depth psychologist C.G. Jung claims that the connection or “meaningful coincidence of a psychic and a physical state that have no causal relationship to one another” represents “an acausal orderedness [or] synchronicity” (8: 516). Moreover, Jung’s concept of that acausal bridging between the visible and the invisible states appears to have an uncanny correspondence with the quantum concept of the non-local connection. The similarity between synchronicity and the non-local linkage is noted by the quantum physicist, Nick Herbert. Herbert claims that quantum reality proposes the existence of “invisible non-local connections” (*Quantum Reality* 222) or acausal synchronistic links that connect “arbitrarily distant

³The concept of parallel universes is actually based on the quantum principle of quantum entanglement. All parallel worlds are “joined” by an “instant connectedness” that is “unmediated, unmitigated, and immediate” (Herbert, *Quantum Reality* 223). This means that “parts of ourselves are embedded everywhere-in the rock, in the star, in the light, in the wood, everywhere” (Harris, “Unfinished Genesis” 94).

locations outside the reach of conventional light-speed limited signals”⁴ (*Quantum Reality* 241). Herbert’s ‘invisible non-local connections’ is therefore synonymous with Jung’s notion of synchronicity.

Guided by Jung and Herbert, one can say that this notion of Timehri markings refer to the tangible “overlap” of those “extra-human dimensions” with “the human centred cosmos” (Harris, *Jonestown* 102). It is noteworthy to mention that Harris had intuitively explored this notion of that ‘overlap’ or acausal synchronistic quantum connection in his essay, “The Writer and Society.” Harris argues in this essay that a “primordial species of fiction” or original art that literary artists should pursue is something that occurs in “the nature of the phenomenon of space” in the “context of ... overlapping territories” (50).

Furthermore, Harris’s intuitive exploration of these quantum “overlapping territories” of “space” has developed into his perception of ‘quantum landscapes.’ It is Harris’s perception that “quantum landscapes ... imply miniscule linkages between being and non-being [or] psyche and pebble or leaf, or wood or cloud or tide or rock” (“Creoleness: The Crossroads of a Civilization?” 246). The living landscapes or quantum landscapes in Harris’s fiction thus signify an invisible or non-local quantum connection between the human psyche and the natural environment. Illustrating from the intuitive blend of the ancient pre-Columbian myth of Yorokun and the concept of a quantum superluminal entanglement, Harris perceives the quantum landscape as the shamanic “Quantum Immediacy”⁵ (“The Absent Presence” 81). Quantum Immediacy places the shamanic

⁴Herbert further argues that these “hidden faster-than-light-connections” (*Quantum Reality* 222) is based on the notion of a kind of “superluminal ... entanglement” or “inseparable nature of reality” (*Quantum Reality* 242). The “essence of non-locality is unmediated action-at-a distance” (Herbert *Quantum Reality* 212). This means that a “non-local interaction jumps from body A to body B without touching anything in between” (Herbert *Quantum Reality* 213). In short “A non-local interaction links up one location with one another without crossing space, without decay, and without delay. A non-local interaction is ... *unmediated, unmitigated, and immediate*” (Herbert, *Quantum Reality* 214).

⁵Harris claims that the notion of ‘Quantum Immediacy’ stems from the ancient pre-Columbian myth of Yorokun. Harris argues with hindsight that the quantum concept of quantum entanglement can be found in this shamanistic

writer in an acausal or synchronous “field of associations.” Quantum Immediacy means that that the individual is “embedded everywhere- in the rock, in the tree, in the star, in the river, in the earth, everywhere” (“Absent” 81). The ‘Quantum Immediacy’ has therefore stimulated an acausal or invisible architectural bridge between Harris’s artistic imagination and the physical landscapes.

How does this shamanistic belief in the ‘Timehri markings’ or quantum landscapes influence Harris’s artistic vision? The Timehri markings or “[a]ncient vestiges of synchronicity [or] linkages” (“Merlin and Parsifal” 61) between parallel dimensions influence Harris’s rejection of realism⁶ and promotion of the re-visionary dynamic. Harris argues that those “quantum links” (“Fabric” 79) in the natural world leads to the realization that nature cannot be “reduced to a passive absolute” (“Fabric” 72) system. Consequently, Harris affirms that his “repudiation of [those] absolute chains upon nature” (“Fabric” 72) is simultaneous with his rejection of an art that is steeped in the absolute mode of “progressive realism or linear bias” (“Fabric” 71). Therefore, the Timehri markings or “the living, disturbing, but immensely rich text of landscapes” stimulates the imaginative writer to relinquish ties with an addition to the territorial imperative of linear fiction. The shamanic notion of the Timehri script has obviously stimulated Harris to perceive that the “landscape ... is like an open book.” As a result, “the alphabet” with which the artist uses is “all around” him. However, “it takes some time to really grasp what this alphabet is, and what the

vestige. Harris contends: “One can sense in Yurokon’s relationship to fire [and the] wind ... that there is a quantum value. One can sense associations.... Long ... before the quantum physicists had spoken of all these connections, of parts embedded in the rock, in the star, in the sky, Yurokon subsists upon that connectedness. He subsists on the notion that we are embedded in the fire, in the water, in the cauldron, in the trees. (“The Absent Presence” 85-86)

⁶ Wilson Harris: “I am writing a fiction that diverges from realism. 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*,” in Harris, “Judgement and Dream,” *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks by Wilson Harris*, 26.

book of the living landscape is” (Harris, “The Music of Living Landscapes” 40). Subsequently, the writer is “require[d] ... to find different ways of reading reality” (Harris, “Fabric” 70) once he “enter[s] into a profound dialogue with the landscape” (Harris, “Fabric” 75). This ‘dialogue’ between the artist and the landscape is that “psychophysical ... medium of communication” that erupts in linear reality (“Merlin” 61).

It is equally important, in this section of the essay, to evaluate the connection between quantum physics and the notion of the implicit music generated by Timehri markings. Additionally, this part of the essay will demonstrate that this linkage between the Timehri interior music and quantum physics also promotes Harris’s re-visionary technique. Harris claims that Timehri markings sustain an implicit “sensation of music” or “rhythmic vibrancy” (“Aubrey Williams” 222). Moreover, it is Harris’s shamanistic view that the natural “landscape possesse[s] ... a language akin to music ... which is prior to human discourse” (“The Music of Living Landscapes” 40). Therefore, this “music of silence” (“The Music of Living Landscapes” 41) is “implicitly imprinted” in the “preternatural voices” (“The Music of Living Landscapes” 40) of the Timehri rocks. Harris terms this preternatural musical language as the “living Word or ventriloquist of Spirit” (“Quetzalcoatl” 185) that contains “adumbrations” and “vibrancies” (“Profiles,” 207). It is explained by Harris as the “universal unconscious” or “voices that echo within the roots of nature ... the ancestral dead, from rivers, from rocks, from birds and other species, from the rhythm of landscapes, skyscapes” (“Profiles of Myth and the New World,” 201).

How does this implicit music of the Timehri markings affect Harris’s re-visionary strategy? Harris argues that this “ventriloquism of Spirit” or inner “rhythm [and] sound signif[y] priorities that are beyond exact representation or seizure” (“Profiles of Myth” 207) and subsequently such primordial musical language represents “art” that is “rooted in a spectrum of variable identity”

(“Profiles of Myth” 207). Harris further claims that such “[f]luid identity creates a number of windows into reality” (“Profiles of Myth” 207). Consequently, the writer who can shamanize or become attuned to this numinous rhythmic vibrancy could therefore see through “windows into reality that are other than the frame of realism” (“Profiles of Myth” 206). The artist who connects with such shamanic vibrations or quantum “musical/architectonic spaces” (“Fossil and Psyche” 9) will thus become possessed by the “mark of the hand ... upon rock (“Aubrey Williams” 222) or “the pressure of the mysterious hand” to see through and beyond the territorial imperative of a realist mode of fiction (“Aubrey Williams” 224).

Most importantly, this ‘complex musical language,’ can be acquired once the imaginative writer “break[s]” that “contract” (Harris, “Fabric” 72) with progressive realism and its “limiting frames of vision” (Harris, “Creative” 113). This is necessary because “we tend on the whole to be conditioned to read reality” (Harris, “Fabric” 70) in terms of a “Progressive Realism” that “moves in a direction which eclipses all ... those quantum connections” (Harris, “Absent” 82). Therefore, by ‘visualizing links’ or becoming attuned to those “Quantum signals” (Harris, “Wilson” 50) within “the peculiar [quantum] dimensionality” (Harris, “Fabric” 72) the writer will possess the ‘quantum language of the imagination.’

Overall, the arguments put forward in this essay have demonstrated that Harris’s intuitive blend of the “Timehri markings” with quantum physics possesses the “capacity for a revisionary understanding of reality” (Harris, “Absent” 88). Above all, Harris’s intuitive fusion of shamanic physics with the “Timehri markings” influences his promotion of the re-visionary dynamic or “alteration in the classical mould” (“Aubrey Williams” 223) of realist literary art.

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