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The shamanic and quantum womb of nature: Wilson Harris's 'immunity from evil that is embodied in sexual gymnastics, sexual consumerism and sexual escapism'

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Until Wilson Harris, the Guyanese/British fiction writer and theorist, made his ubiquitous mark within the literary tradition of the Anglophone Caribbean in 1960 with the publication of his first major novel, Palace of the Peacock, few Anglophone Caribbean writers and theorists in the first half of the twentieth century focused on non-normative concepts of gender and sexuality in their fiction. Indeed, there are only three literary writers who engaged with such thematic concerns by the 1960s.[1] This trend, however, was fissured by later writers in the Anglophone Caribbean.[2] Harris, nevertheless, had a

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[1] As the postcolonial critic Linden Lewis (2003) puts it in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*: 'The creative writers of the Caribbean have treated the subject of sexuality much more seriously and explored it much more fully than their academic counterparts. Alfred Mendes was among the earliest writers to examine the subject. In his 1935 novel *Black Fauns*, not only did he address the topic of sexuality but he dared to explore the theme of lesbian love at a time when few felt comfortable pursuing the subject, let alone bringing it to the attention of the public. Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, published twenty-seven years later than Black Fauns, also addresses this subject of forbidden love between women, admittedly in equally problematic ways: "[…] And a good example of the discourse on sexuality can be gleaned from a conversation between two young women in George Lamming's *Season of Adventure* […] The willingness to address the topic of sexuality, often exploring its implications for gender or race, is of increasing importance in the works of Caribbean writers of a younger generation—Harold Bascom's *Apata*, Lawrence Scott's *Witchbroom*, H. Nigel Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark*, Patricia Powell's *A Small Gathering of Bones*. What is different about these writers is that they do not restrict themselves to addressing issues of heterosexuality in their work but are prepared to explore homosexual desire as part of the terrain of Caribbean sexuality in ways that most of the writers of an earlier generation did not" (pp. 9–10).

[2] Vera M. Kutzinski (2007) in 'Violence and Sexual Others in Caribbean Literary History' affirms this. Kutzinski claims: "Non-normative genders and sexualities are frequently at issue in the works of noted Caribbean writers, among them H. Nigel Thomas, Laurence Scott, Patricia Powell, Dionne Brand, Michelle Cliff, Robert Antoni and Shani Mootoo" (p. 36).

completely different epistemology. As far as he was concerned, gender could be authentically related to ancient pre-Columbian shamanistic traditions that possessed an inherent quantum value. Harris developed this perception into a concept that he termed the shamanic womb of nature (1996, p. 227). This theoretical concept challenges an institutionalised concept of heteronormative gender. For Harris, the shamanic womb of nature is a theory of experiencing and understanding the nuances of human gender. As it develops within the dominant male/female binary of this twenty-first century, Harris's shamanic womb of nature does not represent a naïve theory of gender. Instead, even if it is culturally distant in space and time, it is Harris's achievement to have developed a unique Caribbean critical perspective that challenges our present understanding of a fixed cisheteronormativity and should be recognised for its potential otherness.

This paper begins with Harris's shamanic womb of nature as derived from the pre-Columbian myth of Omeoteotl, an androgynous deity. Next, I will discuss the inherent nature of quantum immediacy found in the shamanic womb of nature. Moreover, the implicit yet nuanced correspondences that Harris's gender fluidity shares with queer theory and transgender studies will be introduced. There will also be an examination of critical scholarly works that discuss Harris's subversion of the conventional male/female binary. Finally, I will show that Harris, in his literary experimentation of language in *Carnival*, plots a way to reinsert the notion of gender fluidity found in the shamanic womb of nature into the present-day politics of cisheteronormativity.

No part of Harris's work could prove to be a better foundation for re-assessing and re-interpreting heteronormative perceptions of gender than his critical theory of the shamanic womb of nature. This, it seems, is the place where one can test, discuss, challenge and even transgress the boundaries of the male/female binary. In his theoretical writings and fiction, Harris subverts the pervasive, essentialist and fixed convention of the male/female binary that monopolises our modern social, cultural, economic and political landscapes. His theory is thus critical of heteronormative conformity with its purist expulsion of other possibilities of knowing and being. For as he puts it in *Carnival*, heteronormative conformity is an "evil that is embodied in sexual gymnastics, sexual consumerism and sexual escapism" (Harris, 1993, p. 120).[3] In Harris's theory and fiction, however, the term 'sexual' is never pushed in the direction of its literal or narrow meaning. Rather, it is Harris's achievement to expand on heteronormative sexual relations as symbolic of original cross-cultural art. As Harris puts it in 'Concentric Horizons': "The cross-cultural [...] runs deeper than cliched sexual structure" (1990, p. 112). To develop a notion of artistic diversity, the figurative use of the term 'sexual' becomes an option within Harris's philosophy of art and language of fiction. With Harris, the absolute and conventional notion of male and female sexual relations is subverted and moved from a state of "cliched sex, cliched renascence" towards cross-cultural linkages or

[3] This article references the novel *Carnival* from Wilson Harris's *The Carnival Trilogy,* published in 1993, and which comprises three novels: *Carnival* (1985), *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987) and *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (1990).

the “productive union between man and woman, between one and another, between culture and culture” (1990, pp. 112–116).

Of importance here, is the way in which Harris links up his critique of stultified aesthetics with a metaphorical interpretation of heteronormative sexual relations. Harris offers the picture of challenging the pervasive and callous form of heteronormative sexual behaviour by presenting the artists’ obedient and puppet-like relation to absolute traditions in light of its conventions or games (sexual gymnastics), to an economic framework that profits from commodities of absolute traditions (sexual consumerism) and to the sensuous pleasure (sexual escapism) elicited by such commodities. In this thinking, one finds, the articulation of an idea that the unification of all males and females transcends the banality of sexual relations found in the twenty-first century and becomes expressive of all forms of cross-cultural and original art. This becomes particularly clear in Harris’s own words in ‘Concentric Horizons’: “The ground of ecstasy [...] lies a mutuality of contrasting yet embracing presences, complex rainbow arc of mankind” (1990, p. 114).

Wilson Harris is perhaps best known for his experimental literary writing in the 1960 novel *Palace of the Peacock*. In ‘History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and the Guianas’, Harris claims that innovations in art rest on their ability to be influenced by Caribbean **“**shamanistic [...] vestiges” of pre-Columbian traditions and other cultural legacies" (1995, p. 158). Harris asserts that these shamanistic vestiges can be found in certain cultural forms and practices existing in the Caribbean. Harris further claims that these shamanistic vestiges possess “archetypal resonances” and therefore can be viewed as “epic stratagems” by the Caribbean writer (1995, pp. 156–158). Of importance here is the fact that Harris’s view of original Caribbean art culminates in his fusion of the shamanic and the quantum. Harris’s reflections, however, on the cross-cultural linkages between the shamanic and the quantum constitute just one of his intellectual commitments. Harris’s strong interest in the contemporary politics of gender led him to formulate his notion of the shamanic womb of nature. In his treatment of the shamanic womb of nature, through the use of experimental literary language, Harris evokes a promising insight into this theory’s dialogical encounter with conventional, cisheteronormative gender. Even though numerous critics have viewed Harris’s theory and language of fiction as difficult, his notion of the shamanic womb of nature paves the way for an important counter-criticism of cisheteronormativity.[4]

[4] See, for example, Sandra Drake (1986) in the Preface of *Wilson Harris and the Modern Tradition*. She stresses the great difficulties one has in reading Harris’s works. The literary critic John Hearne, also shares this evaluation of Harris’s writing as difficult in the essay ‘The Fugitive in the Forest’ (1968, p. 143).

The shamanic womb of nature

Harris's shamanic concept of gender is derived from the mythical Aztec androgynous deity Omeoteotl. According to Harris in 'The Making of Tradition', this god in pre-Columbian lore subsists on indeterminacy and diversity and was revered as the "formidable duality of ... male and female" (1976, p. 95). Harris's reading of this pre-Columbian deity is in line with contemporary anthropology. Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, a specialist in Mesoamerican anthropology and history, offers a similar and illuminating assessment of Omeoteotl's dual gender. As Aguilar-Moreno puts it in *The Handbook of Life in the Aztec World*: "Ometeotl – the Dual Divinity, or Lord of Duality – was the Aztec creator god and engendered both male and female qualities" (2006, p. 138). What makes Aguilar-Moreno's analysis indispensable to understanding Harris's shamanic womb of nature is its presentation of Omeoteotl as omniscient. According to Aguilar-Moreno, Omeoteotl's entangled relationship to the world was encapsulated by Aztec poets and philosophers in the phrase "the one that is everywhere" (2006, p. 145). The similarities between Harris's shamanic womb of nature and modern anthropological conceptions of Omeoteotl are striking. As Harris notes in 'Apprenticeship to the Furies':

> We need, I think to see [...] human vessels inhabited by spectralities and concretions, by a cellular chemistry pertinent to the body of the womb in shamanic lore, the womb of nature and of civilization. Think of the human vessel in the genius of the Imagination symbolizing ingredients within itself and beyond itself which are richer and stranger than individual gender. When one looks deep into its cellular fabric – into the vessel of the womb in space and time in shamanic lore – one visualizes oceanic parables littered with stars and constellations, one visualizes the spring of rivers and veined leaves of forests that have cradled cultures since time began. The womb therefore in shamanic lore transgresses the boundaries of individual gender. The womb, let us say, is a seminal vessel. The active life of that spectral concrete vessel implies, at one level, intercourse between man and woman, intercourse between the partiality of the male and the partiality of the female (1996, p. 227).

This cosmic sensation of gender seems strangely difficult to grasp within the boundaries of a static binary gender paradigm, but it becomes authentically meaningful when one comprehends and envisions the entanglement of the human 'cellular fabric'. Indeed, 'human vessels' all comprise the same 'cellular chemistry' or 'ingredients.' By ascribing conventional gender as a transcendental principle, Harris consequently explores the possibility of all interconnected human males and females. In moving on to Harris's image of the womb as a space where men and women are in 'intercourse', one cannot help noticing how this image seems to enforce rather than subvert heteronormativity. One may seem justified to argue that this aspect of the shamanic womb may imply a less transcendental conception of human gender. This, however, is not the case. The image of the womb of nature that transcends the boundaries of the male/female binary is actually

substantiated by its implicit quantum entanglement.[5] For, in fact, as one will recognise, the shamanic womb is actually bridged to the notion of a quantum universe. And it is this quantum reality that leaves room for any understanding of the destabilisation of a fixed male/female binary.

In order to understand how the shamanic womb of nature is contextualised within the quantum paradigm, one needs to go to Harris's personal experience of quantum immediacy during his 1940s surveying expeditions in the interior of the Guyanese rainforests. In these undertakings, Harris had a strange vision of all entities in the landscapes as being interconnected. Years later, with hindsight, using his contemporary knowledge of quantum entanglement, he eventually termed this vision of interconnectedness as the quantum immediacy. In 'The Absent Presence: The Caribbean, Central and South America', Harris argues that the "Quantum Immediacy ... takes one into a field of associations" (1990, p. 81). In this state, as he puts it, "parts of ourselves are embedded everywhere – in the rock, in the tree, in the star, in the river, in the earth, everywhere" (p. 81). Here one finds a strong affinity to the shamanic womb of nature, with its emphasis on all 'human vessels' as containing an interconnected 'cellular chemistry' or 'ingredients.' In drawing attention to the entanglement of all entities, the quantum immediacy thus stresses a fluid understanding of gender. What Harris is driving at in this shamanistic quantum theory of gender fluidity is the idea of a universal synthesis that transcends the grasp of anything determinative. Indeed, the literary critic, Vera M. Kutzinski in 'New Personalities: Race, Sexuality and Gender in Wilson Harris's Recent Fiction' (1997) points out that Harris's representation of gender escapes the formal demands of conventional recognition. As noted by Kutzinski, "gender distinctions [in Harris's works] do exist, but they are conspicuously arbitrary. [...] No longer locked into intractable binary antagonism, femininity and masculinity can be embraced as separate aspects of the same personality" (1997, p. 75).

Harris's shamanistic quantum perspective of gender is thus expressive of a dialectics that he himself locates at the heart of his revisionary and cross-cultural project. He thus presents us with an epistemological turn in the politics of gender, one that emerges both as a superior alternative to and as a form of immunity from the 'evil' within incorrigible cisheteronormative purist codes pervasive in the twenty-first century. In accordance with Harris's claims about the originality of a cross-cultural art stemming from the interconnectedness of all males and females, one can also argue that his works are in

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[5] The quantum physicist Nick Herbert, in his seminal text *Quantum Reality*, defines the nature of quantum entanglement in logical terms. Herbert theorises that the invisible "inseparable nature of reality' is based on the notion of a kind of 'superluminal [...] entanglement" (1987, p. 242). This entanglement is further explained through the quantum concept known as non-local reality. Herbert states that the "essence of non-locality is unmediated action-at-a distance" (p. 212). This, according to him, means that a "non-local interaction jumps from body A to body B without touching anything in between" (p. 213). Therefore, according to Herbert, things in "arbitrarily distant locations" or vast distances in space and time can be linked by "invisible non-local connections" (p. 222).

alignment with innovative twenty-first literary art that subverts the autonomy of cisheternormativity.

Moreover, Harris's understanding of gender fluidity generates an important question with regard to contemporary gender theory, particularly queer theory and transgender studies. Does his understanding of interconnected males and females share an affinity with queer and transgender perspectives? Firstly, when reflecting on the conditions by viewing Harris's shamanic womb of nature as subverting contemporary cisheteronormativity, one may be quick to argue that it is in rapport with queer theory. This, however, may be problematic since Harris's shamanic womb of nature offers an account of what it means to engage with the biological, quantum and spiritual cross-cultural space of the human male and female genders. This is the critical gist of his theory and what makes Harris perceive, first, that gender fluidity is, by definition, biological at the 'cellular' level; and second, that it is combined, in quantum senses, with divine androgynous qualities. Here, one observes that Harris's shamanic womb of nature is in stark contrast with queer realities.

Queer theory claims that gender is conditioned by social and cultural norms and practices rather than being biologically inherent in the human body. Indeed, Harris's notion of male and female 'cellular chemistry' would certainly be challenged by queer theorists since they argue for a socially constructed meaning of gender. The queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* claims that gender is a social construction and cannot be determined simply by biological factors:

> Gender, then, is the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors – of male and female persons—in a cultural system for which "male/female" functions as a primary and perhaps model binarism affecting the structure and meaning of many, many other binarisms whose apparent connection to chromosomal sex will often be exiguous or nonexistent. Compared to chromosomal sex, which is seen (by these definitions) as tending to be immutable, immanent in the individual, and biologically based, the meaning of gender is seen as culturally mutable and variable, highly relational (in the sense that each of the binarized genders is defined primarily by its relation to the other), and inextricable from a history of power differentials between genders (1990, pp. 27–28).

When turning to transgender theory, however, one observes a relationship between biological sex, societal factors and gender fluidity. Transgender realities could certainly be extended to the realm of Harris's shamanic quantum womb of nature in terms of its nuanced understanding of biological sex and gender. One sees that Harris's entanglement of male and female attributes at the human cellular level is subtly related to the transgender understanding of biological sex. In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, the transgender theorist, Susan Stryker (2006) argues for the complex relationship between biological sex and socially constructed gender:

> Transgender phenomena call into question both the stability of the material referent 'sex' and the relationship of that unstable category to the linguistic, social, and psychical categories of 'gender.' As the ambiguous bodies of the physically

> intersexed demonstrate in the most palpable sense imaginable, 'sex,' any sex, is a category 'which is not one.' Rather, what we typically call the sex of the body, which we imagine to be a uniform quality that uniquely characterizes each and every individual whole body, is shown to consist of numerous parts – chromosomal sex, anatomical sex, reproductive sex, morphological sex – that can, and do, form a variety of viable bodily aggregations that number far more than two. The 'wholeness' of the body and 'sameness' of its sex are themselves revealed to be socially constructed. Likewise, the contrary subjective identities of transsexuals, the sartorial practices of transvestites, and the gender inversion of butches and queens all work to confound simplistic notions of material determinism, and mirror-style representational practices, in relation to questions of gender. Sex, it turns out, is not the foundation of gender in the same way that an apple is the foundation of a reflection of red fruit in the mirror; 'sex' is a mash-up, a story we mix about how the body means, which parts matter most, and how they register in our consciousness or field of vision. 'Sex' is purpose-built to serve as a foundation, and occupies a space excavated for it by an epistemological construction project (2006, p. 9).

Although Harris does not explicitly expound on the idea that biological sex anchors gender, one sees that his notion of human 'cellular chemistry' comprising an 'intercourse between the partiality of the male and the partiality of the female' is in rapport with the transgender perspective of 'chromosomal sex, anatomical sex, reproductive sex, morphological sex' that 'number far more than two' sexes and genders. One can argue that Harris's affinity with transgender theory could further stimulate Anglophone Caribbean literary scholarship to move beyond the scope of the womb of nature and towards an in-depth comparative interrogation with transgender realities. This – and not a brief analysis – is the context for a comparative study of Harris's association with transgender studies.

The critical terrain

A great deal of critical work exists on Harris's oeuvre. Most critics have also focused on Harris's re-visionary and cross-cultural strategies. It is important to note, however, that there are few notable studies that interrogate Harris's unique perception of a fluid human gender. These are: 'New Personalities: Race, Sexuality, and Gender in Wilson Harris's Recent Fiction' by Vera M. Kutzinski (1997) and 'Translations of Gender, Pain, and Space: Wilson Harris's *The Carnival Trilogy*' by Kerry L. Johnson (1998).

However, these two critical works discuss Harris's subversion of the conventional male/female binary but do not interrogate Harris's shamanic womb of nature, with its inherent quantum value and how it arises to affect the experimental language of Harris's fiction. In 'New Personalities: Race, Sexuality, and Gender in Wilson Harris's Recent Fiction' Kutzinski briefly elaborates on the gender fluid character Ghost in Harris's novel *The Infinite Rehearsal*. Kutzinski claims that Ghost bears an "androgynous appearance" and that "femininity and masculinity can be embraced as separate aspects of the same personality" (1997, p. 75). In a similar vein, Johnson argues that Harris subverts the strict notions of conventional twenty-first century heteronormativity through brief analyses of

various female characters in *The Carnival Trilogy*. For instance, Johnson claims that for Harris, "undoing the sex/gender dichotomy has its risks, as are apparent in the scene with Jane Fisher and the male glove, it also has great potential for sowing the seeds of a heterogeneous community" (1998, p. 128).

These above analyses undertaken by Kutzinski and Johnson generate an important question: Why is there a paucity of in-depth studies on Harris's shamanic womb of nature when a vast number of literary critics have discussed his fictional and theoretical works since the publication of *Palace of the Peacock*? Harris himself seems to offer the most suitable answers to this question. In Harris's view, Anglophone Caribbean writers are conditioned to use European "models of discourse, models of tradition we have been conditioned to accept as absolute" (Harris, 1992, p. 248). Harris further claims that the colonial historians and critics, and even present day West Indian critical thinkers, "consolidate an intellectual censorship of significant vestiges of the subconscious imagination" (1995, p. 156).[6] According to Harris, they thus share "a common suspicion of Haitian Vodun and other primitive manifestations which signified for them a "relapse into obeahism, devil-worship and children-eating' (1995, p. 156). Elsewhere, Harris states that "Haitian vodun [...] remains a pejorative term in that it reflects a state of mind of embarrassment over and addictions to magic" (1983, p. 52).

It is interesting to note that Harris mentions in his foundational essay 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas', published as early as 1970, those "shamanistic [...] vestiges" of the Central, South American and Caribbean regions, which have the potential to stimulate a "renascence" in Caribbean art (1995, p. 158). Later, in his essay 'The Untamable Cosmos', Harris elaborates on the androgynous nature of pre-Columbian gods and its regenerative capacities. As Harris puts it: "Ancient America tended to conceal her female muses within traditions whose male gods were shamanistically fertile, and impregnated with so many supernatural natures" (1983, p. 46). Of importance here is the fact that Harris's view of these vestiges further culminates in his eventual fusion of the shamanic and the quantum immediacy.

Yet certain critics, as discussed above, who have interrogated Harris's portrayal of gender in his fiction, do not mention Harris's use of shamanistic vestiges of gender fluidity from marginalised and eclipsed pre-Columbian cultures. Thus, according to Harris, it is these kinds of "sensibilities which may recoil from what is 'seen' or 'learnt'." In other words, this is a 'recoil' towards "issues [that] are non-plussed [or] issues that lack an immediate philosophical anchorage and conventional explanation" (1975, p. 124). It is quite possible that this recoil may underwrite the reluctance of many notable Harrisian critics to interrogate and make substantial conclusions that Harris's fictional works have been inspired by his merger of quantum reality with these shamanic practices.

However, there are some theorists who view these shamanic practices as the source of artistic inspiration for Caribbean writers. Andrew Bundy, for example, claims that the 'systems of folk-belief' in the Caribbean such as "African limbo, vodun [voodoo], Carib

[6] West Indian is synonymous with the term Anglophone Caribbean.

bush-baby, rainmaking vestiges, masquerade [...] may constitute the true phenomenal environment for the future" novel (1999, p. 137). Bundy further argues that these "belief systems that could so offend the educated intelligence might conceal a hidden resource of depth" or "capacious [...] *root*" to generate re-visionary narratives that "celebrate the enigma of an inheritance that is both dialectically mixed and impure" (1999, p. 137). This research, therefore, aims to redress the existing explanations of Harris's perception of gender and its influence on his experimental writing.

The shamanic womb of nature in the language of fiction

In his womb of nature theory, Harris is not just interested in reclaiming an authentic shamanistic tradition. What draws his attention to this culturally distant belief system is its understanding of gender. In dealing with the shamanic womb of nature, which contains an inherent quantum value, the problem that Harris addresses is how the present Caribbean reality, with its limiting frame of cisheteronormativity, can make sense of an ancient tradition of gender. Harris's experiments with literary language could be the best method to interpret the shamanic womb of nature.

If Harris's language of fiction displays this ancient form of gender fluidity, then one ought to assess how this language lends expression to transgressing the fixed boundaries of gender. One finds that, in order to signify or create new meaning of fluid gender, Harris turns to one of the most common linguistic features of the English language to reflect the shamanic womb of nature: the signifier and the signified. The conventional function of the signifier and signified in language – to produce logical meaning in conscious discourse – is made explicit by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in his seminal text *A Course in General Linguistics*. Saussure theorises:

> The linguistic sign [is a] combination of a concept and a sound-image [or] signified and signifier. [...] The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: the linguistic sign is arbitrary. [...] The word *arbitrary* also calls for comment. The term should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker [since] the individual does not have the power to change a sign in any way once it has become established in the linguistic community (2011, pp. 67–68).

It is quite clear that this linguistic structure formulated by de Saussure endorses the arbitrary connection between signifiers (words) and signifieds (meanings). Within this framework, the freedom of language in conscious discourse is inhibited by reinforcing 'established' or conventional meanings in a 'linguistic community.' Following de Saussure's philosophy, signifiers point to signifieds to generate cisheteronormative meanings of gender. This forces one to view the cisheteronormative perspective of gender as the only perspective. Significantly, it is these "established" meanings, intrinsic to the logic of the signifier/signified framework, that are altered by many modernist writers,

such as Harris, to create seemingly incomprehensible meanings in their literary writings.[7] One can argue that Harris's manipulation of the fixed linguistic structure of the signifier and the signified in the English language lends expression to his vision of a shamanic womb of nature.

A notable example of how Harris translates the ancient pre-Columbian tradition of gender, with its inherent quantum immediacy, into the English language of his fiction through the destabilisation of the conventional position of signifier and signified can be found in *Carnival*. In the following extract, one recognises that 'human vessels' possess the 'spectralities', 'concretions', and 'cellular chemistry' in the 'intercourse between the partiality of the male and the partiality of the female.' As the protagonist, Jonathan Weyl, narrates:

> I was *in* the mutuality of the divine, I was *in* the mother-horse, I was *in* the father-glass, father-horse, mother-glass, I ascended, descended, into a mysterious constellation of evolutionary spaces. We were in the same broad church, the same narrow boat, the same vicarious coffin, the same ultimate cradle, and the digestive rumbling organs of space enlivened, rather than extinguished (1993, 118).

The above lines, with their clusters of imagery, reflect the entangled and omniscient gender-fluid reality of Omeoteotl. This type of entangled gendering seems startling to the reader who is conditioned to the heteronormative reality that is rooted in the semantics of the English language. One can see quite clearly the manipulation of the English language to give voice to the shamanic womb. The locative expression 'in' found in the phrases "I was *in* the mother-horse, I was *in* the father-glass, father-horse, mother-glass" helps to subvert spatial fixity as the reader is now forced to see a rapid movement from fixed gendered signifiers such as 'mother-horse' and 'father-horse'. This movement generates a destabilisation of fixed location and therefore cannot point to any possible distinct meaning and position of gender. The quantum entanglements which manifest through shifting – "I was in the mother-horse, I was in the father-glass, father-horse, mother-glass same broad church, the same narrow boat, the same vicarious coffin, the same ultimate cradle, and the digestive rumbling organs of space" – do not align with conventional signification and thus fail to constitute a fixed reality of an absolute male or female.

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[7] This linguistic play of signifier and signified to subvert "established" or "laid down" logical meanings is also central to the illogical literary language produced by other modernist writers, such as James Joyce. In Joyce's novel *Finnegans Wake* (2012), the destabilisation of conventional logic in everyday language as produced by the signifier/signified framework is expressed as irrational lexical and semantic connections in the following lines: "Rev. Mr Bbyrdwood de Trop Blogg was among his most distant connections) but every honest to goodness man in the land of the space of today knows that his back life will not stand being written about in black and white" (p. 169). Here, the production of meaning or signification is toppled as the signifiers do not point at referents to offer meaning. This results in seemingly irrational phrases such as "every honest to goodness man in the land of the space of today knows that his back life".

In another extract from *Carnival*, one finds symbolic references to Omeoteotl, with its gender fluidity, across vast distances in space and time, challenging our conventional separation of male and female. Weyl again narrates:

> We were suddenly uplifted towards them like fluid bone wreathed in stars and leaves to pipe the sweetest saddest music into the absent-minded reverie of lovers. Our bone became flesh. Nibbled bone under the sea, kissed bone, fleshed wave of bone, core-artefact, cross-artefact, of summer blending into autumn flesh, bone under star, under leaf, under flesh, all graves, all cradles of mankind (1993, p. 164).

The final sentence in the above extract directs the reader's attention to the quantum immediacy in nature. The reader may not be able to understand the tangible, conventional, causal connections here, but they are forced to recognize the incessant quantum entanglement of the male and female human as possessing a fluid 'cellular fabric'. The typical arrangement of the signifier and signified, which ensures the word has only one meaning in relation to gender, is now abolished and within the text of the *Carnival* further meanings are generated to accommodate Omeoteotl's reality.

Conclusion

Apart from 'Apprenticeship to the Furies', 'The Making of Tradition' and 'Concentric Horizons', Harris never published other theoretical works on the issue of human gender, as far as I am aware. Nevertheless, his engagement with the problems of a fixed perception of gender provides us with the most coherent articulation of a late twentieth century, postcolonial philosophy of understanding. In Harris's retrieval of the ancient pre-Columbian tradition of Omeoteotl through the language of his fiction, one can argue that he creates a most formidable counter-discourse to the consolidated cisheteronormative perception of gender within the literary canon of the Anglophone Caribbean.

In Harris's view, this heteronormative approach to gender only serves as ultimate authorities of human behaviour, and prevents one from engaging in any in-depth reflections for validating other possibilities in human nature. Harris's shamanic womb of nature serves to challenge such restrictive conventions since it transgresses the limited focus of the male/female binary and offers an addition to the theoretical accounts of gender, as reflected in its rapport with transgender studies. As a consequence, Harris's claim of an entangled humanity, in a shamanistic quantum sense, is thus often misunderstood and constrained by the limits of consolidated frames of social constructs of gender found within the present era. However, such limits, as this paper reveals, are deactivated by Harris's shamanic womb of nature in the language in his fiction.

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