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T H E   C A R I B B E A N   S Y Z Y G Y

A STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF EDGAR MITTELHOLZER AND WILSON HARRIS

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph. D.

at the Faculty of Humanities,

University of Kent at Canterbury, in July, 1973

by M. A. Gilkes.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The problem of racial inheritance - the "search for identity" - is a recurring theme in the criticism of Caribbean literature. It is a pre-occupation with Caribbean writers, affecting both subject matter and literary quality, as F.M. Birbalsingh, for example, has shown with reference to the novels of John Hearne and E.R. Braithwaite (Caribbean Quarterly Vols. 14, December 1968 and 16, March 1970). This study of the work of Edgar Mittelholzer and Wilson Harris will attempt to show that there are important areas still to be explored relating Caribbean literature to its complex racial and cultural background.

Both Mittelholzer and Harris deserve close, critical study in their own right; but a parallel examination reveals similarities and differences which bring into sharper focus wider concerns of Caribbean literature. The two important directions of West Indian writing are more clearly seen: the one, pioneered by Mittelholzer, in which the writer looks outward towards a "parent" culture, and the other looking inward, seeking in its own, complex inheritance the raw material for new and original growth.

Mittelholzer and Harris are both Guyanese of mixed racial stock, both deeply concerned with the psychological effects of this mixture, and both writers have a profound awareness of the Guyanese historical and cultural heritage. They also share a deep feeling for the Guyanese landscape which appears in their work as a brooding presence affecting radically the lives of those who live within it.

Mittelholzer's attitude to his mixed racial and cultural origins, however, produces in his work a schizophrenic imbalance while Harris, by accepting racial and cultural complexity as a starting-point, initiates a uniquely creative and experimental art. Mittelholzer, in his approach to history, human character and landscape, remains a

"coastal" writer never really concerned (as Harris is) with the deeper significance of the "Interior" and all that this implies, both in a geographical and psychological sense.

The fact that Mittelholzer's work reflects a psychological imbalance induced by a pre-occupation with racial identity has been demonstrated by Denis Williams in the 1968 Mittelholzer Lectures, and by Joyce Sparer in a series of articles in the Guyana Graphic. Mittelholzer's awareness of this imbalance, however, and his attempt to come to terms with it in his art remain to be examined and documented, as does Harris's attempt to create an "associative" art aimed at healing the breach in the individual consciousness of Caribbean Man.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that Mittelholzer and Harris, although antithetical in impact and style (each representing an approach to fiction directly opposed to the other) are, in fact, the opposite elements of a dichotomy. Their work illustrates the negative and positive aspects ofthe racial and cultural schizophrenia of the Caribbean, for both writers in their different ways are pre-occupied with (and therefore have embodied in their work) the juxta-position and contrasting of apparently irreconcilable emotional and intellectual qualities - the Caribbean Syzygy.

Acknowledgements

I wish to record my especial gratitude to Dr. W.L.G. James of the University of Kent for his encouragement and guidance; to Mrs. Jacqueline Ives for allowing me to consult and to quote from Edgar Mittelholzer's manuscripts, diaries and letters, as well as from her own unpublished memoir, "The Idyll and the Warrior"; and to Mrs. Roma Mittelholzer for her generous patience with all my questioning.

Special thanks are also due to the University of Kent Library; to the Librarian and staff of the Guyana National Library for their prompt help, at short notice, in obtaining copies of almost inaccessible material; and to the Association of Commonwealth Universities for the scholarship grant which made this study possible.

List of Abbreviations Used

EM	:	Edgar Mittelholzer (only in footnotes)
Sylvia	:	*The Life and Death of Sylvia* (1953)
Hubertus	:	*The Harrowing of Hubertus* (1954)
Shadows:		*Shadows Move among Them* (1951)
CQ	:	*Caribbean Quarterly* (Mona, Jamaica)
Kyk	:	*Kyk-Over-Al* (Georgetown, Guyana)
WLWE	:	*World Literature Written in English* (Austin, Texas)
U.W.I.	:	University of the West Indies
OUP	:	Oxford University Press
TLS	:	*Times Literary Supplement*
Lectures	:	*The Edgar Mittelholzer Memorial Lectures* (Guyana)

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION:

A Biographical Approach

On 31 May, 1933 Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary:

> ... something very profound about the synthesis of my being: how only writing composes it: how nothing makes a whole unless I am writing:[1]

In 1971, V.S. Naipaul, in an interview with Adrian Rowe-Evans in Accra is reported to have said:

> ... as the horizon of my writing expanded I sought to reconstruct my disintegrated society, to impose order on the world, to seek patterns.[2]

What is striking about the remarks of both writers - although their work and backgrounds are very different - is the similarity of their regard for the act of writing as an associative art: a means of establishing identity and of making a recognizable whole out of a fragmented world. The artist or writer, it seems, feels a special need to express, through his work, his sense of identity as a human being in a universe that threatens at any moment to revert to its original chaos. As the novelist Brian Aldiss puts it:

> Like my writing, my belief that the state of the world is permanently wrong is part of me ... I burn down undergrowth, cultivate a strip of land and then move on elsewhere - preferably to somewhere not too overcrowded.[3]

One thinks of three of the greatest writers of the 20th century; James Joyce, self-exiled Irishman creating literary masterpieces out of his love/hate relationship with Ireland and his Catholic upbringing; T.S. Eliot, self-exiled American speaking for the Old World, welding together, through his poetry and criticism, the fragmented "Mind of Europe",

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1 A Writer's Diary ed. Leonard Woolf (Hogarth Press, 1953) p. 208.

2 Transition Vol. 8 (December, 1971) p. 59.

3 "Aldiss and Heaven too" Guardian (6 August, 1971) p. 8.

and grafting himself at the same time on to the parent-body of the great European Tradition ("These fragments I have shored against my ruins");[1] D.H. Lawrence, self-exiled Englishman, spokesman for the New World and for the Dark God of the Inner Self, advocate of "wholeness" of Being. Each in his own way seeking, through artistic expression, to impose order on a world in flux: to establish roots.

The astonishing upsurge of writing in the Caribbean - in the period between the nineteen fifties and the nineteen seventies a significant and rich body of literature was created from virtually nothing[2] - is clearly related in a very special way to the West Indian's sense of rootlessness, and the consequent need to formulate a racial and cultural identity. Post-colonial West Indian societies were, in a sense, forced to come to terms with their own broken cultural ties with the past and their new racial and cultural links with the present. The "search for a cultural pedigree"[3] had begun. In addition to the deleterious effects of colonization on the indigenous cultures of the people, racial admixture (especially in Guyana) which had, by the early 19th century, become a diagnostic feature of West Indian society, contributed to the blurring of strict racial pedigree: the various gradations of skin colour, hair texture etc. encouraged and hastened the general dilution and confusion

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1 T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land" from Collected Works (Faber & Faber, 1970) p. 79.

2 The remark that West Indian literature is "a bootstrap literature" deriving from "the bedrock poverty of the West Indian past" (Bill Carr, "The West Indian Novelist: Prelude and Context" Caribbean Quarterly March and June, 1965, p. 74) actually serves to illustrate this sudden growth of West Indian literature; since Carr's remark already appears "dated" and, today, even a trifle rancorous.

3 See p. IX of Philip Mason's foreword to David Lowenthal's West Indian Societies (OUP 1972). Further references to this work will appear as Lowenthal.

of cultural and ethnic identity. That the continuing obsession with identity, with individual and personal status, is a part of West Indian life is certainly true, whether based on the limited experience of the white "outsider":

> I can only say that from what I have seen and read, the West Indian probably has a greater problem of identity than most other people.[1]

or on the more detailed, deliberately subjective, diagnosis of the "insider"; a West Indian psychiatrist writing about Antillean society:

> The Negro is comparison. ... he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal.[2]

or on the opinions of the native writers and artists themselves: "There are certain themes [in the West Indian novel] which are specifically Caribbean. I mean slavery and the quest for personal identity."[3] The lack of a continuous, coherent cultural and racial background; what Denis Williams refers to as the lack of "the assurance of the indwelling racial ancestor"[4] drives the West Indian writer to ask over and over again the question "Who am I?". Although the attempt, in the novel, to assert a positive West Indian way of life - a West Indian identity and culture - began with earlier writers like Claude McKay, C.L.R. James and Alfred Mendes in the nineteen thirties; it was the Guyanese novelist, Edgar Mittelholzer, who first raised the question of the rôle of heredity itself:

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1 Christopher Searle, The Forsaken Lover (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) p. 1

2 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks (Paladin, 1970) p. 149

3 Martin Carter, Lectures (1971) p. 12

4 Denis Williams, Lectures (1969) p. 10

the phenomenon of racial admixture and the cultural disorientation which lay beneath the West Indian's deep psychological need to define racial and cultural identity.

The act of writing novels certainly meant a great deal more to Edgar Mittelholzer than merely the pursuit of what he called "a pleasant career"[1]. It was also a way of challenging society's laws, of righting wrongs in both a social and a personal context, and, above all, a means of defining and justifying himself as an individual. A Morning at the Office (1950) was written with a social purpose in mind:

> To debunk certain fallacies held by people in northern regions about the people in the W.I. especially the fallacy that makes us out to be a backward half-civilised people, it is really a grand tract nicely dressed up.[2]

The earlier, unfinished "Caribbean Villa" had been designed as "a true representation of the coloured middle class element in B.G. and the West Indies". England and America were to see, in this novel, that West Indians could appreciate "Bach and Beethoven and Gaugin and Rembrandt and T.S. Eliot".[3] But Mittelholzer's concern, as a writer, lay deeper than social protest. In a polyglot, colonial society, where a hierarchy of colour (with the European at the top and the Negro at the bottom) generally determined one's station in life, Mittelholzer felt very keenly that his own racial pedigree had been seriously damaged by the Negro blood which he had inherited, and which he always regarded as an unfortunate genetic blemish for which he was made to suffer: psychologically, if not physically. Born in British Guiana on 16 December, 1909, a

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1 The title of the unpublished second part of EM's autobiography of which A Swarthy Boy (Putnam, 1963) is the first. In the possession of Mrs. Jacqueline Ives, the author's second wife, now re-married.

2 Personal letter. Quoted in A.J. Seymour, Lectures (1968) p. 13. All enquiries about the date of this and others letters from EM in Mr. Seymour's possession, have met with no response from Mr. Seymour.

3 Ibid.

swarthy "throwback", the first child of European-looking parents, he was a great disappointment to his father, "a confirmed negrophobe"[1] whose resentment instilled in the child both a sense of having been deeply wronged by Nature, and an inordinate pride in his German blood. "Just one drop of that great blood. Just one drop in your veins, and it makes you different from everyone else. German blood!"[2] There can be little doubt that the father's Negrophobia communicated itself powerfully to the child; for throughout his life Edgar Mittelholzer bore his sense of genetic injury like a mark of Cain. In much the same way Hubertus van Groenwegel, the central character in The Harrowing of Hubertus (1954), the second book of the Kaywana trilogy, bears the stigma of "bad blood":

> It is the mad beast in me. It defeats my restraint when I least expect it to. I'm sure I have inherited it from my mother ... Some mysterious intuition informed me of it - since I was a boy. Evil, evil. (p. 71).

Mittelholzer consciously identified himself with the European side of his ancestry, and his work reflects his consistent, determined effort to be accepted by a European "parent stock" and to reject the title of "West Indian" with its legacy of racial admixture and "impurity". His desire to become "rich and famous by writing novels for the people of Britain to read"[3] was, at a deeper level, the wish to be recognised and accepted as an individual in his own right by a European "parent".

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1 EM, A Swarthy Boy (Putnam, 1963) p. 17.

2 Ibid., p. 43.

3 EM, "A Pleasant Career", op. cit., p. 42. This work is part of an unpublished manuscript, "The Idyll and the Warrior", a copy of which was kindly lent by the author, Mrs. Jacqueline Ives, who gave me permission to quote from it.

W.O. Dow, a close friend of the author while he lived in Guyana, writes:

> Anonymity was not for him, and his greatest test came when the publishers agreed to accept "Corentyne Thunder", but suggested that, as Adolph Hitler had made German-sounding names mud in England, he should write under a nom de plume. The first work that had got so far - a temptation? No, not for Edgar A. Mittelholzer. Off went a cable. "Refuse write under nom de plume."[1]

At that time, Mittelholzer had been trying for twelve years, with enormous effort but no success, to get his work published. Much later, in 1965, when his fortunes had declined and, in some financial distress, he was trying to find a publisher for The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965); he was offered publication on condition that he agreed to omit certain passages which the publishers felt would be obnoxious to readers. Rather than alter his novel, Mittelholzer endured fourteen rejections before he finally succeeded in getting the book published. His comment on this bitter struggle for publication is curiously self-deceiving:

> Since the publication of The Piling of Clouds, I have lived under an ever-darkening cloud-pall of opprobium [sic.] . The respectability I earned with A Morning at the Office and Shadows Move Among Them has long since vanished. My new novel, due for publication in a few weeks' time, The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham, was turned away by fourteen publishers before it was eventually accepted by Anthony Gibbs and Phillips last September ... But that's the kind of life to expect when you decide to make writing a pleasant career, and persist in this resolve even though you get caught in the blistering cross-fire of a literary world that you have alienated.[2]

This comment obscures the fact that, far from being an attempt merely to pursue a "pleasant career", the writing of this novel was a deliberate embodying of his own extreme right-wing views on politics, sex, crime and

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1 Letter of tribute included in a catalogue of EM's work, prepared by Georgetown Public Library, Guyana 1968. This little-known incident illustrates both EM's pride in the family name and the quality of his determination.

2 EM, "A Pleasant Career", op. cit., p. 43.

English society, intended as a broadside against "the cloying syrup of Welfare-State ease" and the "over-ripe rottenness"[1] of English society, and written from a deep sense of disillusionment. England, it would appear, was finally too liberal, too left-wing to serve as the stern, Victorian parent-image so important to Mittelholzer. To change any part of the novel would have been a falsification of his own attitudes, and the deletion of any passage would have constituted "emasculation" (a word Mittelholzer himself uses in the book's sarcastic dedication to the publishers and agents who refused to handle it). Acceptance by the British publishing world had to be on his terms: his individuality needed to be maintained at all costs.

Mittelholzer's refusal to change, or to accept change, seems to have been characteristic of his attitude both as a man and as a writer. According to Mrs. Roma Mittelholzer, his first wife, he hated change of any kind; even changing the position of the furniture could rouse him almost to fury. His life involved a strict adherence to routine, the smallest deviation from which could make him extremely irritable and unhappy.[2] Mittelholzer was obsessed by the fear of "weakness" (in his novels it is always the strong-willed who "inherit the earth" while the weak are ground underfoot), an obsession which seems to stem from his own childhood experiences of suppression and chastisement at the hands of his sternly Victorian parents and aunts. In A Swarthy Boy (1963) he recounts the incident when, as a young child in the care of a nanny, he is mistakenly reported drowned when his hat is found floating on a pond in the public garden. He is found later sitting on the bench where

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1 EM, The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (Library 33, 1965) p. 144.

2 EM's diaries reveal a predilection for minute detail as well as a remarkable love of routine. Typical daily entries include the patient recording of indoor and outdoor temperatures and barometer readings. Even the time of his nightly constitutional stroll is faithfully recorded and seldom varies. (Diaries in the possession of Mrs. Jacqueline Ives who very kindly allowed me to consult them).

his nanny had left him and from which he had not moved; but his parents, relief replaced by anger, refuse to believe him and he receives a severe thrashing:

> Something clicked in me. Something angry and adult, something fiery and unforgettable. I knew I was a person, and a person who had been gravely wronged. (p.55)

This incident, like the fear he had of his strict, authoritarian father who "had his violent tempers, and often made me shiver and urinate in terror when he shouted at me";[1] or the Victorian cruelty of "Aunt Eugenie" who, entrusted with the boy's first formal education, punished spelling mistakes by locking the terrified child in an empty room, must have contributed to the grown man's ambiguous attitude to authority (a mixture of hatred and respect), his dogged resistance to change and his refusal to admit blame or accept guilt. At any rate, the young man, brought up in a household dominated by women, repressed and frequently chastised, even in his teens; who felt in the home "that my masculinity was perpetually under attack",[2] grew up with a major obsession: that strength of will was a pre-requisite for individual happiness, and that his "Germanic", European blood represented this "strength" while his "West Indian" blood revealed a "weakness". This attitude undoubtedly led to the psychological disunity which became, in turn, not only the chief cause of his unhappiness as a man, but also the main theme in his work as a novelist.

As he matured, Mittelholzer's sensitive, romantic nature (he was an extremely imaginative child, with a taste for fantasy - an element which appears mainly in his early work) seemed to be in serious conflict with a rigid, hyperactive super-ego, finally becoming almost obscured by

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1 A Swarthy Boy, op. cit., p. 30

2 Ibid., p. 128

the latter. R.N. Sanford writing on "The Genesis of Authoritarianism" says:

> A very strict and punitive superego is behind the inability to admit blame or to bear guilt ... It is this inability that makes it necessary for the subject to put blame onto others who may then be hated in the way that he would hate himself were he to become conscious of his own impulses. This superego is not integrated with the ego but stands much of the time in opposition to it. Indeed, the ego would get rid of it altogether if it could ... Wishing to be free of the punitive superego the individual is always ready to exchange it for a suitable external agency of control.[1]

One thinks of Mittelholzer's hatred of the criminal mind (a recurring theme in his novels is the painless extermination of all wrong doers "like vermin") and his bitter invective directed against the liberal and hence "weak" attitudes of society: his refusal to allow for the possibility of psychological or environmental reasons for anti-social behaviour. In fact, a refusal to admit virtually any element of personal blame. By relating the qualities of "good" and "evil" to an exclusively genetic source, the question of personal responsibility for one's own impulses, good or bad, is neatly dodged and heredity becomes "a suitable agency of control". In A Swarthy Boy (1963) we read:

> People, I am convinced, are born what they are. Environment and "traumatic" experience cannot change character. Put an honest, decent individual in a sewer and he will emerge honest and decent. Under the best of conditions, a neurotic will remain a neurotic. (p. 30).[2]

This is an attitude that reappears in novel after novel, running through the work like a frenzied leitmotiv. Paul Mankay, the hero of Uncle Paul (1963) says: "it's blood. Environment only adds surface colour to our

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1 R.N. Sanford, Psychology of Personality (Logos Press, U.S.A. 1959) Reprinted in Attitudes (Penguin Books 1966) p. 112.

2 A view only slightly more alarming than that of the controversial psychologist, H.J. Eysenck, whose theories include the idea that, on the basis of childhood introversion/extroversion potential, certain genetic types are "predestined to become criminals and delinquents." (H.J. Eysenck, Crime and Personality, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1964, p.163). See also: Professor Johannes Lange, Crime as Destiny (Allen & Unwin, 1931).

characters. What we are now we were from the day of our birth." (p.79). Faced with the inner conflict brought about by an inheritance of German and Jewish blood, Mankay identifies with the "strong", Germanic side of nature, but wishes, at the same time, to be rid of the "punitive super-ego" it represents. He deliberately joins a neo-Nazi organisation in order to set fire to its headquarters, but nevertheless cannot help admiring the "strength" which the Germans represent:

> Should I or should I not highlight the Teutonic in me and blot out the Jewish forever and so bring myself into a oneness of fellowship with the world of undespised and unpersecuted men? Difficult. It set up a conflict of loyalties in me. (p. 148).

> I hate, I admire, I hate, I admire. I get confused wondering who I really am ... (p. 149).

This "war" in his blood produces in Paul Mankay (who is, according to the author, "an intensive character study of myself - though only I will know that")[1] a division of consciousness:

> You asked if I'm not happy. Well this is why I'm not. My split-ness. My two-ness. Meine Zweideutigkeit. The disease in my spirit. (p. 164).

Having identified with the stern, rational, "Germanic" attitude which, like his father's, was "strong" and desirable, Mittelholzer apparently tried to suppress the emotional, romantic side of his nature which, like his mother's, was "weak" and therefore undesirable. From here it was only a short step to the concept of white (European) = strong; black (West Indian, Negro) = weak, and the other dichotomies of Intellect/Emotion, Realism/Romance, Piety/Sensuality, Spirit/Flesh which lie at the heart of the novels. These "conflicting opposites" call to mind T.S. Eliot's famous phrase, "Dissociation of Sensibility" and the Romantic dualities of Blake, Coleridge, Keats, Lawrence and Yeats; but it is worth noticing that, in Mittelholzer's case, the awareness of this condition of "two-ness" seems to come, not from any deep, introspective, intellectual questing, but from

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1 Personal letter quoted in A.J. Seymour Lectures, op. cit., p. 17.

an early apprehension of genetic "accident": the Caribbean condition of racial admixture. Any critical appreciation of Mittelholzer's work, it seems to me, would have to take into account the central importance of this psychic disunity which is embodied in his characters, since it is precisely here that the tension in the novels is generated. Frank Birbalsingh in his excellent article[1] on Mittelholzer, does not see this as a focal point in the novels; and by assuming a "hidden conflict" which is "not in itself significant"[2] but which the author sublimates in fantasies engendered by the conflict, he finds a general pattern "in which moral purpose is confounded by free-ranging fantasies"[3], a seriousness of theme which is "counteracted by the perverse behaviour of his characters"[4], and episodes which are "not incorporated by coherent theory".[5] In looking for moral schemata, selecting social reform, sexual love and transcendentalism as the most important themes, he misses the deeper significance of what he calls Mittelholzer's "irrepressible tensions". Looked at from the point of view of the author's pre-occupation with "two-ness", however, the perversities of his characters and the apparent lack of coherent "moral theory" are seen to constitute a very clear pattern in which Duality of Being is the main theme, and the re-integration of the psyche the chief impulse. Thus, the hero of Uncle Paul (1963), asked about his aim in life, replies; "I've found the parts that are me, but my job now is to fit them together and make them stick." (p. 50)

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1 Frank Birbalsingh, "Edgar Mittelholzer: Moralist or Pornographer?" Journal of Commonwealth Literature (July 1969) pp. 88/103. References to this article will in future appear as Birbalsingh.

2 Ibid., p. 100

3 Ibid., p. 94

4 Ibid., p. 89

5 Ibid.

Many of Mittelholzer's characters actually reveal their duality of being in their physical appearance. Colonel Jilkington, for example, the father of the tortured Garvin in The Jilkington Drama (1965) is described in terms of the strong/weak conflict:

> The lower lip kept drooping sensually, refusing to be curbed by the austere upper lip. It was as though a continual war were being waged between the two - the one on the side of discipline, the other on the side of slackness, licence. (p. 10).

a duality which is manifested in his son as a conflict between Flesh and Spirit which ultimately drives the young man to seek self-immolation as a means of enabling his spirit to "plunge out of this gross body and leap into the clear space of another dimension". (p. 175). Mittelholzer tells us, in A Swarthy Boy (1963) that he felt as if:

> Two elements have always lived within me, side by side and in restless harmony, something, no doubt, after the fashion of uranium atoms. Any positive disturbance, and the precarious symbiosis dissolved into roaring chaos. The Idyll Element dreamed of a peaceful, sylvan situation ... The Warrior Element listened always to the sound of the Conflict ... perpetually ready to resist, to repulse, to do battle to the death with any foe that might appear. Greensleeves weaving through the Sword motiv from The Ring. (p. 126).[1]

This is reminiscent of the obsessive introspection of the Romantics, but in fact has very little to do with a Yeatsian principle of "Self and Anti-Self" or with a Lawrentian apprehension (in both senses of that word) of a numinous, Dark God. Mittelholzer recognised a division within himself, but to the end of his days firmly refused to consider the subject of psychology, with its insistence on the Unconscious and the role of "conditioning", anything more than a pseudo-scientific hoax. "The older I get," he says in A Swarthy Boy "the greater grows my contempt

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1 Cf. Gustave Flaubert's sense of "inner division":

> There are in me, literally speaking, two distinct persons: one who is infatuated with bombast, lyricism, eagle flights ... and another who digs and burrows into the truth as deeply as he can.

(Letter to Louise Colet, 1852) From Selected Letters, translated by F. Steegmuller. (Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1954) pp. 127/128.

for the pontifications of psychologists." (p. 30)

In refusing to accept the possibility that environmental and sociological factors (such as his authoritarian upbringing with its vigorous suppression of spontaneity) might influence character development; and by attributing the formation of personality entirely to genetic inheritance, Mittelholzer was unconsciously reinforcing a personal, self-destructive myth: that of racial "impurity" as an indication of the lack of psychic integrity. As the Guyanese artist and writer, Denis Williams, puts it:

> Attuned to an Old World culture, one has come to view one's own condition as mongrel, one's own being, in fact, with the racial biases of pedigree man. One has imbibed the most self-annihilating of fallacies; this is that the mongrel, lacking 'purity' of blood, ipso facto also lacks the virtues inherent in purity of blood: cultural integrity, wholeness of soul.[1]

Mittelholzer sedulously developed what he regarded as the "Germanic" side of his nature (with its insistence on strict routine, discipline and strength of will) cultivating a taste for the pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer and for the heroic, "Teutonic" resonances of Wagner's music, nourishing what was to become a highly oppressive super-ego. Such "one-sidedness" of character, with its repression of the Unconscious, leads, according to C.G. Jung:

> ... to attempts at mutual repression, and if one of the opposing forces is successfully repressed a dislocation ensues, a splitting of the personality, or disunion with oneself. The stage is then set for a neurosis.[2]

Even as a young man, Mittelholzer was aware of a deep disharmony within himself and was constantly on his guard against melancholia and morbidity. The insistent note of despair in his novels is already present in the diaries of 1932/36: "A very sombre week. The artificial necessity of

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1 Denis Williams, Lectures (1969) p. 7.

2 C.G. Jung, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche (Vol. VIII Coll. Works. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960) p. 33.

living." (16 January 1932) is a typical entry. He read widely and tried different "philosophies"[1] (rather like a hypochondriac trying out different medicines) in an attempt to cure his tendency towards melahcholia, but apparently with little success. The entry on 14 March 1936 reads "First attack of morbidity since institution of new philosophy", and on 11 April 1936, "Philosophy has fizzled out". The frequent use of battle-imagery (a prominent feature in his novels: even as a child he found war-games extraordinarily fascinating) seems also to reflect the deeper, internal conflict of opposing tendencies. Mittelholzer was perpetually "at war" with his emotional urges. Even an apparently normal physical attraction to the opposite sex was treated as an "infiltration" by the "Enemy". "The impulses of the Flesh returned", runs the entry for 8 October, 1932, "Mastered them up to present"; and on the last day of that year, the entry reads:

> Year's Retrospect: The going is still rough and the combat fierce. The big shell from the gun of Eros burst, adding to the general whirl of the melee. Much destruction of illusions. And many acid burnings within. Much more sophisticated about women and life as a whole, much more of a philosopher.[2]

In spite of the "new philosophy", depression returned (aggravated by a

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1 EM is represented by most of his commentators as influenced mainly by his childhood reading of Sexton Blake stories and "Boys' Weeklies" (a view which his comments in A Swarthy Boy would seem to support); but he did, in fact, read very widely, as his diaries show. Between 1932 and 1936, for example, his reading (an average of a book a week) includes works by Hemingway, Hardy, Samuel Butler, Conrad, Shaw, Wilde, Zola, Voltaire, Dostoevsky, Goethe and Shakespeare. The later diaries (those of 1955, 1959 and 1960 are also extant) suggest that he kept up his reading.

2 The young would-be author's concern with "philosophy" as a necessary counter to the sensual life brings to mind the letters of Keats: "I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for Philosophy." (To John Taylor, 24 April 1818). "With respect to Women I think I shall be able to conquer my passions hereafter better than I have yet done." (To Thomas Keats, 26 July 1818).

hopeless love-affair), culminating in his attempted suicide[1] on the night of 14 May 1936.

This, then, is the pattern which seems to have run through Mittelholzer's life, and it is also the pattern that informs the lives of almost all the principal characters in his novels: the attempt and failure to re-integrate, by effort of will, an inherited psychic disunity leading, in turn, to despair and an obsession with death. In his first published novel, Corentyne Thunder (1941), one sees this "divided consciousness" already at work. Geoffry Weldon, the son of a wealthy Mulatto (but European-looking) plantation owner and a Guyanese Indian peasant, is torn between loyalty to his father, who wants him to go abroad to study, and his love for the Corentyne coast and Kattree, an Indian peasant girl to whom he is related. Kattree symbolises the natural, "idyllic" qualities: love of the land and the physical, sensual life; while the Metropolitan world represents intellect, ambition, culture. Geoffry finds it difficult to choose between these two "opposing" qualities, and the dark prophecy which he makes to Kattree: "One day ... I'm going to commit suicide, Kattree, and people will wonder why" (p.263)[2] is the crie de coeur of a man fatally divided within himself: a cry that echoes througnout Mittelholzer's work. The fact that Geoffry's equivocal attitude towards racial and cultural origins reflects the author's own "split" is acknowledged in the publisher's foreword to the first

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1 The diary of 25 April 1936 records the purchase of "Chlorodyne" (a Chlorinated germicide) "for future use", and on 14 May the entry is: "Attempted suicide on the night of this day." EM attempted suicide again in 1963, and on 5 May 1965 died as the result of a carefully-planned, Bhuddist-like act of self-immolation in an open field in Surrey, near his home.

2 All quotations are from the Eyre and Spottiswoode edition of 1941.

edition:

> Edgar Mittelholzer, the author of this novel, is a half-caste of mixed English, French, German and Negro blood. All his principal characters are half-castes, and they are therefore presented with that intimacy of view which comes from self-revelation.

From the very beginning, then, a biographical approach to Mittelholzer's fiction is indicated. Corentyne Thunder (1941) is important, therefore, not only because it is Mittelholzer's first published novel (it is also the first novel to deal with Guyanese peasant life) and shows a surprising and considerable insight into the Hindu peasant community of the Corentyne; but also because it is the first, though muted, appearance in Mittelholzer's fiction (in the character of Geoffry Weldon) of the theme of division of consciousness - one of the main themes in the novel. There are other important themes to be considered, but, as this discussion of the novel will suggest, the main impulse in the book is towards a dichotomy. Two ways of life, two opposing attitudes, are constantly juxtaposed: Urban is contrasted with rural, "European" with "West Indian", "foreign" with "local", intellectual with physical. This is, in turn, related to the theme of cultural and psychic division which informs most of Mittelholzer's work, and which is our main concern in this study.

Chapter Two

THE DIVIDED CONSCIOUSNESS:

Inner Conflict as Main Theme.

(I) Corentyne Thunder (1941)

In Corentyne Thunder Mittelholzer is very much the young, would-be colonial author "writing novels for the people of Britain to read".[1] After a self-conscious beginning ("A tale we are about to tell of Ramgolall, the cow-minder") the novel develops as a sympathetic but unsentimental evocation of Hindu peasant life on the Corentyne, calculated to interest readers in the United Kingdom who would, of course, know nothing about this kind of life. The frequent historical and geographical glosses are clearly concessions to the metropolitan reader's ignorance of the book's ethos. Ramgolall, Mittelholzer explains:

> ... lived on the Corentyne coast of British Guiana, the only British colony on the mainland of South America ... He was an East Indian who had arrived in British Guiana in 1898 as an immigrant indentured to a sugar estate. (p. 7, my underlining).

Ramgolall has many children, among them Baijan, who "was the owner of a rice-mill in Essequibo, the largest of the three counties of British Guiana." (p. 7, my underlining). The atmosphere of the flat, wild coast with its swampy savannah lands is conveyed with great accuracy, the result of patient and sensitive observation;[2] and the squalid life of the peasants is repeatedly offset against the stark, sombre beauty of the landscape:

> The grey clouds in the east broke up into filmy fragments that melted overhead, leaving a blue sky streaked faintly with feathery tendrils of cirrus. The savannah glistened wetly in the sunlight, and flocks of white birds settled on its surface, making faint, harsh cries that mingled with the lowing of the calves to form the strange dawn-music that freshened the spirits of Ramgolall. (p. 18).

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1 EM, "A Pleasant Career". Vide footnote 3, p. 5 of this study.

2 In his autobiography A Swarthy Boy op. cit., EM recalls his visits to the Corentyne coast where he "absorbed the atmosphere of the district and even got to cultivate a deep affection for it." (p. 70).

Mittelholzer adopts a conventional, omniscient attitude to his characters and the style of the writing is occasionally pompous. When Beena suffers an attack of stomach cramp, the result of over-work and under-nourishment, the author is not content simply to convey Beena's agony or Ramgolall's sense of alarm and frustration through his characters' own awareness, but enters the narrative in an obtrusive, supervisory manner.[1]

> Beena moaned softly and her breathing came in heavy gusts as though her soul were fatigued with the things of this life ... "Talk, na, bettay? Try. You' belly a-hurt?" The moan came again like a portent, like the echo of a horn sounded in the depth of the earth. 'The Dark gathers,' it seemed to tell the soul of Ramgolall, 'and Death cometh with the Dark. Be resigned my son.' (pp. 9/10).

The author's intrusion mars an incident which is nevertheless quite convincing:

> Ramgolall stood up in a panic, looking all around him. He saw the cows, a group of moving spots, headed for their pen and getting smaller as they went. He could smell their dung mingled with the iodine in the air. (p. 10).

Here, Ramgolall's own consciousness is allowed to function. We are made aware of his helplessness naturally, through his inability to focus his mind on the immediate disaster.

Introducing Geoffry Weldon, Mittelholzer suggests the inner resources of his character by direct authorial comment, but, in so doing, strikes an excessively portentous note:

> He had power, a deep, tight-locked power that, one felt, might make a terrible whirl of damage, like a cyclone, if unlocked

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1 Kenneth Ramchand, in discussing the West Indian writer's use of dialect, chooses this passage to illustrate EM's "indirect method" of conveying the inner consciousness of his characters. His insistence on a view of the West Indian novel as "an imaginative fiction built around the lives of the folk", however, leads him to suggest that Corentyne Thunder is an artistic failure since, thanks to "Mittelholzer's limited view of Ramgolall's possibilities" the peasant's character is not the central focus of the novel. (See Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and its Background (Faber & Faber 1970) pp. 15 and 104. Further references to this work will appear as Ramchand.

> without warning. Seeing him, one thought of a coppery sky and a dead-smooth sea - the China Sea of Conrad - and a falling barometer. (pp. 52/53)

The author also reveals an occasional weakness for the self-consciously "Poetic" phrase, as in his description of the chimneys of Speyerfield sugar-factory as "huge guns of unreckoned age trained upon Eternity", (p. 48), a phrase which is repeated a few paragraphs later. Having chosen to remain omniscient, the author is, as a result, forced to intrude at points in an attempt to explain apparent anomalies in characterisation or plot. The sign on the green 'bus which overtakes Jannee and Beena on the road, for example, presents a problem of this kind to the scrupulous Mittelholzer:

> They could see the lettering ... Claudette Colbert, though Beena and Jannee could not tell this from the lettering, not being able to read. They recognised it by its colour and shape, however, and Beena smiled and said: "You' frien' deh inside Claudette Colbert."(pp. 48/49)

These infelicities of style and technique are the exception rather than the rule, however, and Mittelholzer's characters, though lacking in depth, nevertheless retain their credibility for the reader. An example of the successful use of the omniscient, authorial technique is in the meeting of Geoffry and Kattree where Geoffry speaks to her about his own complex emotional problems while her awareness remains outside of the range of his remarks, concerned only with external, physical appearances:

> She never understood him when he spoke to her jumbie. She never tried to understand him ... she would just be silent and listen to the sound of his voice until he stopped speaking. (p. 273)

There is also a positive advantage in the use of direct, authorial commentary, for although the author's presence is at times obtrusive, at least the need to engineer situations, as in C.L.R. James's Minty Alley (where the young middle-class negro, Haynes, is at times too obviously an authorial device used for the objective observation of

working-class life in Trinidad,[1] is happily avoided. Characters' inner lives in Corentyne Thunder are not explored in depth, partly because Mittelholzer's determined stance as omniscient author/narrator does not readily permit this kind of development; but also, more importantly perhaps, because the environment is allowed to loom larger than the lives of its inhabitants. It is a landscape imbued with an almost living intelligence, but neutral, unknowable, indestructible:

> To the right of them the canal flowed with calm, telling nothing of what it knew of the rainstorms and the high winds, and the droughts of years gone by, of the stench of dead cows and the thunder of purple clouds. Only now and then a sherriga would scramble to the surface and claw redly at the air, so that two bubbles made a tinkling gurgle and sent ripples hooping wider and wider into the nothing of the mirrored sky. (p. 57)

In spite of the impression given in the opening lines of the novel, Ramgolall is not the central figure,[2] and his character is not developed much beyond his miser's compulsive love of money and his pleasure at the social and material advancement of his offspring: a trait he shares with his "local-white" son-in-law, James ("Big Man") Weldon, whose materialism has a far less understandable basis, and whose aesthetic perspectives are narrower even than Ramgolall's, in spite of his success as a cattle-rancher, his superior social status and his well-furnished, comfortable home. Seated in his chauffeur-driven car:

> Big Man grunted and settled back comfortably against the leather upholstery, feeling very contented. He looked out at the bright sunshine and liked it ... Gazing out over the flat

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1 C.L.R. James, Minty Alley (Secker and Warburg, 1936). "Mr. Haynes's" observation of the life of "No. 2, Minty Alley", begins with the aid of a fortuitous crack in the floor through which he peeps, and which is later suitably enlarged, camouflaged and arranged "so as to command a wide and comprehensive view of the whole yard." (p. 54)

2 Louis James, in his introduction to the 1970 Heinemann edition, makes the point that Ramgolall, though a peripheral character, is central to the novel's ethos, "a world he, Ramgolall, has largely created through his seed by two marriages." (p. 2)

> savannah country, he felt no romantic or poetic thrill. He was merely conscious of a complacent triumph. There lay the land he had conquered. (p. 125)

Life, for him, holds no uncertainties or perplexities:

> The whole thing lay before him, complete, void of all mystery. ... All that was left for him to do now was to see that the parts continued to hold together and were not scattered by any disturbing wind. That was the only real interest life held for him now: the guarding of his property and his family. (pp. 125/126)

Alongside this monolithic egocentricity, which has its counterpart in Ramgolall's patient, obsessive hoarding of coins, Mittelholzer places, without obtrusive moralizing, the enduring, all-encompassing beauty and menace of the land - what Wilson Harris calls "the open Oudin savannahs"[1] - a very different world from the well-ordered, domesticated one envisaged by Weldon with such complacency; and one, we realize as the novel proceeds, which is far more real. Both Ramgolall and Weldon use the land solely to nourish and increase their stock of cattle, as they have used their wives merely to reproduce their own seed. The accent is always on the returns on an outlay: nothing is freely given by either. Weldon sees Sosee, who lives with him as his mistress, as:

> ... a kind of slave - a healthy female slave whom he had brought into his house to satisfy his sexual needs and to reproduce his kind ... He had taken them from his body as complete seeds and planted them in her as in fertile soil ... (p. 127)

And faced with Kattree's possible pregnancy, Ramgolall's first concern is for his savings and the drain on them which a new life will create. Sosee's affair with Big Man Weldon had received his sanction only when it became clear that the alliance would bring lasting material benefits; and Baijan"s success in the world, even though it is a world his father does not understand, brings tears of pride to Ramgolall's eyes, for the

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1 This phrase occurs in Harris's <u>The Secret Ladder</u> (Faber and Faber, 1963, p. 16), and also refers to the coastal savannahs, the scene of his second novel <u>The Far Journey of Oudin</u> (Faber and Faber, 1961).

son's marriage is a social and financial triumph which redounds on the father:

> ... Ramgolall groaned and nodded his head, smiling. "Baijan great boy," he said, ... "Me na disappoint' in 'e. 'E great boy. 'E bring me honour and de worl' - like Sosee bring me long time ago. 'E great boy. Me proud to call 'e me son. Eh-heh." ... Glancing at him, Kattree saw that his eyes looked wet in the corners. (p. 208)

Weldon regards his own offspring with a similar, though less forgiveable, vulgar pride: the feeling of satisfaction that comes from a sense of personal power:

> Big Man smiled a faint, affectionate smile as he regarded the children. He always felt oddly content and proud when he saw them all together like this. Something glowed pleasantly within him. It made him feel important, generous and big ... as though he were the wielder of solid power, even more so than his money gave him. (p. 123)

The differences between poor peasant and rich cattle-rancher are more significant, however, than the similarities. The miserly Ramgolall is, at least, still in harmony with the landscape, and his life is still related to the simple needs of the body, the natural cycles of the land:

> He opened his eyes and looked around him, and though everything still lay cloaked in dark, he knew it was dawn. He knew that the east was fair like the bellies of the cows in the pen. He heard the lowing of the calves, who, separated from their mothers, hungered for the milk in the swollen udders. Maw-aw-w-w, went the calves, and Ramgolall felt the blood of life run afresh within his veins. This was a new day. (p. 17)

and although he is proud of the material and social success of his son, Ramgolall instinctively rejects the pretentious, urbanized way of life of Baijan and the Ramjits who represent the rising, "creolized", Hindu middle class, no longer tied to the land. It is, incidentally, one of Mittelholzer's achievements that he is able to present with gentle irony and considerable insight and economy a graphic picture of the process of "creolization" at work in the Hindu peasant community of the Corentyne. In the characterisation of Baijan he catches exactly the brash, energetic tone of the man determined to make his way up the social ladder - an older,

less introverted Mr. Biswas:[1]

> "I hear Dr. Matthias buy over ol' Mrs. Clyde' house, eh? Good place, you know. One o' dese days I got to own a house like dat. Big house wid a tower and plenty bedrooms and servants, an' a piano fo' Liza to play." (p. 199)

In the Ramjit's big "two-story house wid de red roof" (p. 201), Mr.Ramjit, with ostentatious generosity, calls:

> "Charlie boy, make you'self useful in deh an' bring out some biscuits an' soft drinks fo' Beena an' Kattree an' de ol' man. Keep deh mout' occupy till breakfast time!" (p. 204)[2]

while "Miss Elizabeth Irene Ramjit" (p. 203) plays "Backerollee, from de tales of Hoffman" (p. 204) on the piano for guests who feel increasingly uncomfortable and intimidated by the opulence of a living room crowded with furniture and thick rugs on the floor, on the polished surface of which Beena has already left faint, accusing toe-prints. Made to feel exposed, awkward, out of place (Joseph Ramjit's furtive staring at Kattree, who wears no underclothes, makes her, for the first time in her life, sexually self-conscious) Ramgolall, Beena and Kattree do not enjoy their visit. Later, at Baijan's Anglican church-wedding, their naturalness asserts itself in the face of all the bourgeois clutter of flowered hats, white gloves, iced cake and champagne. Baijan:

> ... bought vests and silk panties and brassières for them in Speyerfield, and hats trimmed with ribbon and pink flowers. He bought for them, too, high heeled shoes of shining black leather, but Kattree and Beena overbalanced and nearly fell down when they tried to walk in them so he had to buy flat heeled shoes instead. ... Ramgolall, too, kept wriggling and fidgeting in the light-grey suit which Baijan had had made for him.

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1 The main character of V.S. Naipaul's <u>A House for Mr. Biswas</u> (Andre Deutsch, 1961).

2 In V.S. Naipaul's <u>The Mystic Masseur</u> (Andre Deutsch, 1957), Ganesh and his wife Leela, East Indian peasants newly arrived at middle-class respectability, display the same vulgar benevolence to social inferiors. Even the status symbols are similar:

> The deputation sat down carefully on the Morris chairs in the verandah and Ganesh shouted for Leela to bring out some Coca-Cola. (p. 162)

> During the ceremony he took off his collar and tie and stuffed them into his coat pocket, and the people in the pews behind him gave muffled sniggers. He did not mind, however. He preferred to be laughed at than to be choked to death. (pp. 287/88)

At the reception they understand neither the forced gaiety nor the pompous, wordy speeches; and when the parson makes "a queer sign with his hand", intoning "In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti" (p. 289), their incomprehension is complete. On the way home, Ramgolall is sick in the car.

By contrast, the curry-feeds to which they invite their neighbours whenever the rice harvest has been gathered in, when they sing to the music of drum, serangee and sitar, are natural, unpretentious occasions for merrymaking and serve as a tacit comment on the newly-acquired, westernized habits of Baijan and the Ramjits. The drift away from the land has already begun, however, and cannot be reversed. When Ramgolall dies of shock and grief after he discovers that his canister has been rifled, his death is symbolic of the passing of another, older way of life: for the canister had contained not only his hoard of coins, but also a whole past existence:

> In it lay stored away all the troubles and pleasures that life had brought him: kicks and angry words from the overseers, his first marriage - riot and the shooting by the police, Pagwah festivals, the death of his first wife and that dark day when his eldest son had got killed in a dray-cart accident, his second marriage, Sosee getting of age and Big Man coming to take her out, and the birth of Kattree and Beena, Baijan and his provision shop; all those things, and more, lay hidden in the gloom within his faithful canister. (p. 269)

The death of the old man is linked to Jannee's "new" life, for Beena steals the money to pay the lawyer who saves Jannee from the gallows; but Ramgolall's death is given a wider, almost cosmic significance: it is a part of the cyclic rhythm of nature, and is foreshadowed earlier in the

book:

> Were he to die tonight he should die feeling that he had not lived in vain. He should die feeling that he had added to the good things of the world. He had seen the flowering and the ripening of his seed and of his seed's seed. (p. 89).

This circular pattern of life and death, like the indifferent grinding of the machinery of the sugar-factory:

> The red sunshine whitened into noon and waned into orange and still it went on. Rug-a-rug, rug-a-rug, rug-a-rug: a leisured sound, cold and detached, uncaring, like the sky or the savannah or the stars at night. (p. 291)

runs throughout the book. Sukra's baby is born; Boorharry is murdered; Jannee's life is saved; Ramgolall dies; Kattree becomes pregnant.

Big Man Weldon, however, is, unlike Ramgolall, almost completely alienated from the land which, for him, is little more than a pleasant, or occasionally unpleasant, view from the window of his speeding car. The sounds of the land like the "dawn-music that freshened the spirits of Ramgolall" (p. 18) are, by Weldon's ears, either unheard or unheeded. The land, the people, life itself are all seen by him in terms of his own ability to manipulate them. When Geoffry endangers his chance of going abroad to study for a career by making Clara McLeod, a city girl-friend, pregnant, Weldon's reaction is predictable: "Nonsense! It is unfortunate that she's got pregnant as a result, but that's no fault of yours" (p. 124), and he promptly, and with characteristic cynicism, arranges for an abortion (without the girl's knowledge) with the sophisticated, urbane, Eurasian family doctor:

> "Oh!" Dr. Roy raised his brows and nodded slowly. "Begun to sow his wild oats, eh?"
>
> "Like his father. Blood will out, Roy. What to do?"
>
> They both laughed over the sally and Dr. Roy told a <u>risqué</u> story with child-birth as the theme. (p. 141).

The sterile, cynical worldliness of their conversation is given a further ironic twist when we learn later on that Geoffry's chosen career, like

Dr. Roy's, is medicine. Although Big Man Weldon is the son of a mulatto mother and an English father, he is nevertheless presented as the stereotype of the imperialist pioneer in outlook and temperament:

> Had he lived years and years ago in England he might have been a great general like the Duke of Wellington or Lord Clive of India, or a great sea-adventurer ... like Drake or Frobisher or Raleigh. (p. 40)

and he remains totally committed to a colonist's "external" view of the land as a means of wealth through conquest. Geoffry, however, inherits his father's "European", boldly outward-looking attitude as well as his mother's peasant sensibility. His education at an institution, run on English public-school lines (he and his friend Stymphy speak a "Billy Bunter" sort of English)[1] has helped only to widen the already present division within his consciousness, so that he is able to reject the land and the life of the peasants while recognising at the same time that these things are a vital presence from which he is excluded:

> "It's queer," Geoffry said slowly as if speaking to himself, "but at most times when I look upon scenes like this I get the feeling that I'm locked out. I want to feel deeply about beauty, but something in me always seems to say that it's not for me." (p. 79)

In fact, the character of Geoffry, and the significance of his relationship with Kattree, provide what is perhaps the most interesting focal point in the novel; for he and Kattree are made to represent the two parts of what later becomes a familiar dichotomy in Mittelholzer's work: Intellect/Spirituality _versus_ Emotion/Sensuality. Kattree and her sister, Beena, are the embodiment of natural beauty and goodness, as yet untainted by the outside world. They both reflect the unselfconscious

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1 The exploits of "Billy Bunter" and the boys of "Greyfriars" (the first episode of which appeared in _The Magnet_ (1904) as well as other British Boys' Weeklies were familiar reading among middle-class Guyanese youths. EM records, in _A Swarthy Boy_, his own lasting devotion to the "Sexton Blake" and "Nelson Lee" Libraries.

open-ness of the land itself:

> Beena was thin and very brown, like Ramgolall. She had beauty like the beauty of the savannah before the sun rose in the morning. Kattree was of a lighter brown and her eyes were like the dark lowing of the cows in the after-glow of sunset. (p. 8)

but it is Kattree who is made to function as a living symbol of the savannah:

> Walking with grace in her dirty clothes, she looked like a figure created by the magic of the savannah and the sunlight. She looked aloof from the good and the evil of the earth, and yet a chattel of both. She looked serene like the far-reaching plain of stunted grass and earth. (p. 34/35)

Geoffry is strongly attracted to the natural, physical vitality of Kattree and the Corentyne, but at the same time longs for the outer world of ambition and culture. He tells her:

> Your sort of life is the sort of life I want deep in me, but, of course, my ambitious and artistic longings upset everything. ... I'd begin to dream of the cultured world beyond all this savannah and water, of London and symphony concerts...(p. 260)

this is, of course, the familiar, hackneyed theme of the conflict between Nature and Nurture, with Kattree in the rôle of Noble Savage; but it is also a foreshadowing of what is now a much-discussed and well-documented problem: the Caribbean artist's crisis of identity - his need for roots within the context of his own landscape as well as for the cultured, Metropolitan atmosphere in which his art can grow and flower. It is a dilemma which still faces the Caribbean writer, and makes possible the apparent paradox in which the successful Caribbean writers (with few exceptions) live and work abroad, mainly in Britain, but quarry their material from within a Caribbean consciousness. That the simple need for access to publishing houses (of which there are still only a very few in the West Indies) was not by any means the most important reason for the exodus of writers which began shortly after Mittelholzer's departure for England in 1948, is attested to by the comments of the writers themselves.

In a radio discussion in 1963 between a group of Commonwealth writers on the subject of the overseas artist living in London, Wilson Harris gave this as his reason for "self-exile":

> I came from Guiana because I had to gain a certain distance from the stage where I wanted to set these novels - the novels of the Guiana quartet. ... I like the English landscape. ... I find that this is an enormous relief after the harsh South American jungle ... I mean it's stimulating at one level but it's also - it has this claustrophobic character.[1]

Jan Carew, in another, earlier radio discussion, had rejected the idea of a "return to one's roots ... Africa or India or China or whatever land one's ancestors came from," since "this as you know is very difficult in the West Indian melting-pot"; and in the same discussion, Denis Williams suggested a solution:

> Certainly, the way out of this dilemma, it seems to me, doesn't lie in turning back, but in facing the future - not in the absolute rejection of Europe, but in knowing Europe better ... once we succeeded in doing this, then we can accept or reject what we will from this civilization."[2]

What most of the Caribbean writers seemed to have in common, in the nineteen fifties and early 'sixties at any rate, was the desire to "get out", as Lamming puts it in The Pleasures of Exile,[3] to leave the Caribbean so as to avoid the atrophy of creative talent which remaining might bring about. V.S. Naipaul's nightmare, recalled by him when on a return visit to Trinidad in 1960:

> ... for many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bed-sitters with the electric fire on, I had been awakened by the nightmare that I was back in tropical Trinidad.[4]

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1 From the transcript of "The Exiled Imagination" a programme in the series of the B.B.C.'s "Caribbean Voices" transmitted on the Overseas Service on 11, 12 and 14 June, 1963.

2 From "The West Indian Artist in the Contemporary World" transmitted on "Caribbean Voices", B.B.C. Overseas Service, 21 October, 1951.

3 G. Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile (Michael Joseph, 1960) p. 41.

4 V.S. Naipaul, The Middle Passage (Andre Deutsch, 1962) p. 41.

is a later expression of the same inner panic felt by Mittelholzer on his return to his homeland in 1956. He too records a recurring nightmare: the feeling of being "trapped" by one's origins:

> And then, with a shudder, I would awake to find myself in Bagshot, Surrey, or in Montreal, Canada, or on the Maxwell Coast of Barbados, and the relief would be tremendous.[1]

George Lamming had, in 1956, already recognised the dilemma of the Negro/Caribbean writer as a manifestation of a more universal malaise:

> To speak of the Negro writer is therefore to speak of a problem of Man ... of man's direct inner experience of something missing ... a condition which is essentially ... tragic.[2]

and it is this sense of incompleteness, of "something missing" which tortures young Geoffry Weldon, as it had tortured his creator. In an early poem entitled "For Me - the Backyard"[3] Mittelholzer expresses his disgust of polite collar-and-tie society which he rejects for the simple, more natural life of the Folk:

> ... And why should I even spurn
> These little ragged clumps of fern
> And the rickety latrine standing near
> The old grey-trunked Tamarind!
> Assuredly for me - the naive backyard
> Where bajak ants, without hypocrisy, troop by
> And no gentlemen politely smile and lie.

In "October Seventh",[4] however, a sense of the inadequacy of the simple, "passional" life is clear:

> Yes in me I am troubled
> By some hungry want
> That stirs the hollow of me
> And will haunt
> Will haunt me long after
> This night with my passion

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1 EM, With a Carib Eye (Secker & Warburg, 1958) pp. 134/135.

2 G. Lamming, "The Negro Writer and His World". From a talk delivered on 21.9.1956 at the first International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists held in Paris (reprinted in Presence Africaine June/November, 1956, p. 329. See also CQ, February, 1958, p. 111).

3 See Kyk Vol. 3 (December, 1946) p. 8.

4 See Kyk No. 19 (year-end 1954) p. 76.

This night that is warm and stilled
Hath been brushed aside
In my usual fashion
With a smile and a chuckle
- And my empty laughter.

His short story "Sorrow Dam and Mr. Millbank[1] is also centred around the conflict between a "civilized", urban way of life, and the more natural, physical life of the peasants. The timorous bank clerk Mr. Millbank - a Prufrock figure who, on his nightly walks along "Sorrow Dam" on the New Amsterdam east coast, is attracted more and more to the simple, quietly happy life of the poor East Indian peasants - finally takes his fate into his own hands. The tongue-in-cheek story ends on a wry but pathetic note:

> And Mr. Millbank, despite all that was said, despite all that everyone did to dissuade him, went and lived in the little cottage he had built. And he still lives there and works hard and wades barefooted through the rain to bring in his cows. Like any of the peasants. Himself a peasant. The silly madman.

Geoffry's crisis of identity, like Mr. Millbank's, embodies this split between two ways of life, but reveals at the same time another, more disturbing aspect - an inability to reconcile intellectual and physical urges. Against Kattree's unaffected sexuality his own guilt-ridden condition appears neurotic:

> "There are so many things one would like to root oneself away from but just can't. Where sex is concerned especially. I can't help myself when it comes to sex. I'm like a piece of wood moving towards the centre of a whirl-pool ... In a way, the thought of sex irritates me. It seems so petty and contemptible. And yet it attracts me such a terrific lot that I can't do without it. That's what makes me want to commit suicide sometimes, you see." (p. 273)

A clear case, one suspects, of what D.H. Lawrence called "sex in the head". In fact it is this aspect of Geoffry's inner division which

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1 Transmitted 30 January, 1949 on "Caribbean Voices", B.B.C. Overseas Service.

predominates and which is ultimately responsible for his cynicism and rootlessness. The suggestion that he is merely "sophisticated" or "ruthless"[1] in his rejection of Clara McLeod or of Kattree misses both the fact that he feels deeply guilty and ashamed when Clara (who is, apparently, as "sophisticated" as he) goes through with the abortion without a murmur, and that he is too honest to mislead the simple, innocent Kattree into thinking that his affection for her has anything more than a sexual basis:

> "I'm not in love with you yourself - only with your body. I told you that on the second day we were together, if you remember, and you said that you were quite satisfied with my loving only your body. Ugh, but I'm sick of loving bodies, Kattree. It leaves me unsatisfied and depressed." (p. 292)

He is capable, too, of self-criticism, and can admit the possibility that "I may be nothing more than a great, conceited ass." (p. 293) In Geoffry Weldon we can recognise the prototype of the virile Mittelholzer hero whose fear of spiritual atrophy leads to deliberate sexual repression and a pre-occupation with occult science and Eastern mysticism in an attempt to enter "into the pure spirit of the Higher Plane."[2] The need to find a solution to the conflict between Flesh and Spirit is the driving force behind Gregory Hawke of _Shadows Move Among Them_ (1951), Hubertus Van Groenwegel of _The Harrowing of Hubertus_ (1954), Mr. Holme of _The Weather in Middenshot_ (1952), Brian Liddard of _A Tinkling in the Twilight_ (1959), Garvin Jilkington and Lilli Friedlander of _The Jilkington Drama_ (1965) and Sheila Chatham of _The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham_ (1965).

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1 In his introduction to the Heinemann edition, Louis James says that Geoffry "is to have a child by Kattree and ruthlessly reject it" (p. 2), and that he is "cynically aware that he neither loves her nor intends to take responsibility for the child she bears him." (p. 5/6) This is perhaps the impression one gets from Geoffry's attitude to his affair with Clara McLeod; but his treatment of Kattree, who wants and is happy to have his child, is neither cynical nor ruthless.

2 EM, _The Jilkington Drama_ (Corgi 1966, p. 124)

Geoffry Weldon is only the first of many Mittelholzer characters who, faced with an almost irreconcilable, inner division of consciousness, are drawn "like a piece of wood moving towards the centre of a whirl-pool." (p. 273).

The main presence in Corentyne Thunder, however, is not a human one. It is the landscape itself, which remains an ever-present, enduring reality, indifferent to human conflict. As Ramgolall becomes a more and more peripheral figure and Geoffry and Kattree come into focus to give way in turn to the triangle of Sukra, Jannee and Beena and then that of Jannee, Beena and Boorharry, so the brooding savannah seems to enclose them all as they work, play, make love and die. Their lives are affected, whether they know it or not, by the moods of the weather; and the weather is always close at hand. Almost every chapter begins or ends with a description of the weather about which there is some reference on almost every page. Human character is often described in terms of the weather. Big Man Weldon has a severe, forbidding manner, we are told:

> Yet there ran in him a kindly vein, kindly like the golden vein of light that one can sometimes see running along the horizon when all the sky is heavy grey. (p. 41)

and Jannee's moody taciturnity conjures up in Beena's mind, a natural image:

> Jannee slowly knocked out his pipe and began to refill it, and Beena thought of a black cloud moving silently overhead in calm air. (p. 133)

She feels "as though lightning had flashed sharply and her soul were awaiting the deafening roar of the thunder." (p. 133) Even the one climactic incident in the novel: the brutal murder of Boorharry, is made to seem no more unnatural or sensational than the destruction of a coconut palm by lightning, an image with which the deed becomes associa-

ted in Jannee's mind:

> When Beena told them of how the lightning had cut Manoo's coconut palm in half, Jannee grunted and muttered: 'Shoulda Boorharry 'e cut in half.' (p. 184)

The weather, the changing faces of the land, the way the rice grows inevitably towards the harvest: the real life and heart of the novel are here, one feels, and transitory human activity is deliberately distanced and tacitly commented upon by the slow, inexorable turning of the years. This, rather than "Mittelholzer's limited view of Ramgolall's possibilities" is why "Corentyne Thunder never really becomes the tale of a cow-minder that it sets out to be"[1] and remains instead the evocation of a living landscape within which moves a people with their own unique way of life.

The weather, for Mittelholzer, was a subject of lasting and almost obsessive interest, as his diaries show;[2] and could affect him in an unusually direct, physical way. Thunderstorms, in particular, gave him a definite, sensuous thrill[3] which he related in kind to the pleasure he derived from the music of Wagner, and it is significant that, in the "Leitmotiv trilogy"[4] he attempted to combine the elements of music,

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1 Ramchand, op. cit. p. 104.

2 EM was a compulsive amateur metereologist. The Guyana diaries include daily remarks on cloud-conditions, rainfall etc. and the English diaries contain regular, daily entries recording indoor and outdoor temperatures as well as general weather conditions. Even the occasional changing of the position of weather-guages or thermometers is faithfully noted as in the entry on 12 March, 1959, where a note refers to the position of a thermometer which is to be placed "henceforth on window sash."

3 A fact communicated to me by Roma Mittelholzer, the author's first wife, who related an incident which took place in Barbados, when she awoke during a thunderstorm at night to find the pyjama-clad Edgar standing before an open window, an ecstatic look on his face.

4 The first two novels of this projected, but never completed, trilogy are Latticed Echoes (1960) and Thunder Returning (1961).

weather and landscape by using "Wagnerian" leitmotivs (the phrase "thunder returning", in the novel of that name, is one of the leitmotivs used to suggest impending tragedy), many of which contain images of the weather and the natural environment. The Weather Family (1958), Of Trees and the Sea (1956), The Weather in Middenshot (1952) and that extraordinary, Gothic ghost-story, My Bones and My Flute (1955), exemplify the technique through which Mittelholzer uses weather and landscape to inform and control his characters' behaviour so that climate, natural environment and human thought and action become inseparably welded together. The dark, menacing clouds over the Corentyne reappear as the gathering storm in the mind of the psychopath, Charles Pruthick (The Piling of Clouds, 1961) as surely as the lightning that "flashed sharply" in Beena's soul is followed by the later, internal thunder which draws together Richard and Lindy and almost precipatates a tragedy in Thunder Returning (1961) in which the hero, Richard Lehrer, can be seen as a more mature, more tortured Geoffry Weldon, now finally alienated from the land of his birth and from himself. The cry of the goat-sucker, which in Corentyne Thunder is an integral but unremarkable feature of the landscape:

> ... and once a goat-sucker, lying flat on the road a little way ahead, said: "who-you?" and flew off in swift silence. (p. 172)

is seen, in retrospect, as the first, perhaps unconscious, stirring of the theme of psychic division: the "zweideutigkeit" felt by the hero of Uncle Paul (1963), and, indeed, by Mittelholzer himself.

In fact, most of Mittelholzer's later themes are already present, in embryo, in Corentyne Thunder. Big Man Weldon's gruff, practical attitude to life, his rough, planter's philosophy:

> The damned world wants re-organizing. That's what's wrong. Less talk about morality and religious myth and more simple, practical common-sense. (p. 124)

is heard again in the later work, where (especially in the "English" novels) it acquires the compulsive, dogmatic tone which eventually led to the publishers' repeated rejection of Mittelholzer's work. The sense of the Guyanese past, of life on the old Dutch plantations and the legends born of a violent history of slavery, are present in the description of Dr. Roy"s house, "Vryheid" which was "built in 1827 by a Dutch planter, Mynheer Vanderhyden, whose tombstone may still be seen in the backyard" (p. 139), and which is haunted by the ghost of a young, black slave who stands guard over the Dutchman's coffin and buried jar of gold coins. It is Mittelholzer's double sense of the violence and mystery of the past with its residues of legend and racial admixture that pervades the Kaywana trilogy and My Bones and My Flute (1955) and creates the charged, hallucinatory world of Shadows Move Among Them (1952); but the intolerable, inner conflict of the indivual - the division of consciousness which afflicts the young Geoffry Weldon, forcing him to consider suicide as the only possible solution - is the most notable (and the most disturbing) theme in Corentyne Thunder, and finally emerges as the central theme of the later novels.

The list of Mittelholzer characters who, like Geoffry Weldon, come to regard suicide as a means of solving an intolerable inner conflict is a long one. It includes the lonely, brooding Harry Hoolcharran of the short story, "We know not whom to mourn" (West Indian Stories, Faber & Faber, 1960 pp. 20/27), Bertie Dowden and Sylvia Russell of The Life and Death of Sylvia (1953), Princess Esmeralda in The Weather Family (1958), Brian Liddard of A Tinkling in the Twilight (1959), Charles Pruthick of The Piling of Clouds (1961) and Garvin Jilkington of The Jilkington Drama (1965). The problem common to most of these characters appears to be a psychic malaise: a conflict of opposing

tendencies which expresses itself, essentially, as a struggle between what Schopenhauer called "the will to live", and the Freudian death-wish.[1] It is characteristic of Mittelholzer's writing that images of darkness and death are often juxtaposed with images of light and vitality and that often even while death by suicide is being considered, there is a paradoxical insistence on the beauty and joy of life. In A Tinkling in the Twilight (1959), for example, Brian Liddard, considering suicide, says:

> I'd take a trip out into the country, and sit under a tree where no one could see me - on a fine day, of course. (p. 149) ... I would have to do it before the autumn came - in a lonely, bee-humming corner of Brameley Common, wild-flower perfume in the air, and the tinkle of the brook not too far. (p. 192)

In The Life and Death of Sylvia (1953), descriptions of Guyana's east coast under rain:

> Here or there intruder weeds, fresh and green, stood unbowed, resisting the pelting drops. On occasional islets she could discern long-legged grey gauldings or white ibises, perched like elegant hieroglyphics against the uncertain background of drab wetness.[2] (p. 77)

or of the city of Georgetown at dawn:

> The patch of sky over the house-tops and the trees ... glowed with a soft pinkness ... The cabbage palms stood out stern, jet-black, against the clouds, but the shorter trees seemed to absorb some of the colour of the dawn; ... the house-tops, too, glistened, the galvanised iron cool-looking and wet in the drizzly air. The rain was visible as flimsy threads ... (p.113)

have a tender, almost lyrical quality which is in sharp contrast to the

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1 Rosalind Willoughby, one of the main characters in an unpublished Mittelholzer play, "No Guileless People", convinced that all human relationships are futile, attempts suicide when she realizes that the real trouble lies in her own lack of psychic integration. She says: " The emptiness inside me is growing wider and wider. A kind of ever-expanding nought." (p. 59). From an MS. in the possession of Mrs. Jacqueline Ives.

2 This passage, apart from being a sensitive and accurate piece of description, is a pre-figuring of Sylvia's own situation when she, too, still "fresh and green", will attempt to resist society's continual, squalid pressures. (All quotations are from the Secker and Warburg edition of 1953.)

oppressive, squalid circumstances in which the young heroine is forced to live, and finally to die.

(II) The Life and Death of Sylvia (1953)

In this early novel[1] Mittelholzer attempts to portray the complex life of the colonial middle-class to which he himself belonged; but the considerable creative effort is finally undermined by an inherent, inner division. For Sylvia, like her creator, is born with a genetic handicap - "black blood" - and her tragic end is eventually traceable to this "tainted" beginning. She has to fight against an unjust society as well as against her own conflicting desires, and her vitality and good looks are constantly counterpointed by the ugliness and sterility of the society in which she lives. As the novel proceeds, Sylvia's sensitive awareness to Nature is more and more closely linked to her sense of impending tragedy:

> Sylvia said nothing. She found that she was crying. She could not tell why she should cry, but the tears ran down her cheeks. She looked out of the window at the April sunshine. It thrust prongs through the foliage of a Sapodilla tree and made a dappled pattern on top the water-vat next door. (p. 236).

At the end of the novel, when she lies dying, a kiskadee is singing outside in the sun. Sylvia is the daughter of an English architect - an eccentric but kindly man and an unregenerate womanizer - and a lower-class Guyanese woman of African and Carib Indian extraction. Her middle-class status is shaky from the start; for Grantley Russell's unexpected marriage to the prostitute Charlotte barely redeems Sylvia (who is one year old at the time) from illegitimacy. Such a marriage, in the British Guiana of the 1920's - the time in which the novel opens - would have been rare indeed. Sylvia is the darling of her father, but is disliked and envied by her mother who often ill-treats her.

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1 The novel, or a version of it, had already been completed by 1948. EM's diary entry of 29 July of that year reads: "Rec'd letter from Macmillan's (rejected Sylvia). Wrote Hart and Bucklin Moon of Doubledays."

At the sudden death of her father, who, involved in a _liaison sexuelle_, is murdered by a jealous rival, the Russell fortunes begin a steady decline. The rascally solicitor, Mr. Knight, who by destroying the promissory note in his name held by her father (he finds the note in a drawer of her father's desk) is able to foreclose on their mortgage; gradually reduces Sylvia, her brother David and her mother to poverty. Sylvia is forced to look for a job, since Mr. Knight's offers of help are barbed with lewd suggestions, but finds herself no less exposed and threatened by dissolute, lascivious employers. In spite of the occasional support and help of friends, Sylvia, whose moral integrity will not allow her to accept the values of a corrupt society, drifts helplessly towards destitution, until, suffering from starvation and pneumonia, she dies, a lonely, rejected figure, in the house of a childhood friend.

The novel can be seen, therefore, as an indictment of the New Amsterdam and Georgetown societies through which Sylvia moves as a tragic heroine.[1] But Sylvia's tragedy, as this discussion of the novel will attempt to show, is also a projection of the author's pre-occupation with the psychological effects of genetic "taint"; and the real tragedy lies, not so much in society's cruel rejection of the heroine, as in her own, destructive psychic disorientation, the result of _inherited_ characteristics: the Caribbean condition of racial admixture. Sylvia is not a tragic figure simply because she is an innocent victim of a coercive, philistine society; but also because (and this is the more significant reason) of her own irreconcileable inner division: her mulatto inheritance.

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1 Ramchand sees Sylvia's dilemma as:

> ... having to do with the spirit of her time (the novel is set in the 1930's), not with the fact of her mixed blood.

(_Ramchand_ op. cit., pp. 44/45).

Mittelholzer's use of lyrical description against a background of lower and middle-class vulgarity and intrigue reflects then, not only Sylvia's pathetic struggle against the squalor and injustice of New Amsterdam and Georgetown society, but also the conflict within the heroine between her two "selves"; an image that comes to mind when she thinks of her guilty, incestuous feeling for her brother, David:

> ... she saw herself as two beings - one ugly and deformed, the other lovely and striving to be good and clean. (p. 163)

She is torn between an obsessive desire for sexual experience and an instinctive chastity: between the demands of social acceptability and personal integrity, and, ultimately, between life and death. Sylvia seems, as a matter of fact, to be suffering from a form of mulatto <u>angst</u>, and her psychological identification with "whiteness" reveals itself as a sexual preference. She has early identified with her English father, developing an oedipal fixation; and when he dies, her brother David becomes the object of her sexual approval:

> David was fair-complexioned, too - not pink as her father had been. David's complexion was sallowish. Still, in certain lights, and especially after exertion when the blood was in his face, he could have passed for pure white. He showed every sign, too, of being masculine as her father. The warmth in her increased, spread through her limbs. Her heart beat faster. The impulse to run her fingers through his hair burned in her. (p. 143)

To Sylvia, David's "whiteness" is clearly indivisible from (perhaps responsible for) his sexual acceptability, and although she is attracted to the Portuguese boy, Benson Riego, who looms larger in her affections after David runs away to sea, her feeling for him is less wholehearted:

> She knew that he attracted her only physically. Her body responded to him - but her spirit regarded him with a sneer. (p. 276)

Sylvia is not a racial snob (she likes Jack Sampson, a Negro friend who has "an attractive laugh"), but she unconsciously ascribes a racial significance to her father's "superiority" over her mother. Just before

her eighth birthday, her parents have a serious quarrel:

> Though she had not understood what the quarrel had been about, Sylvia had sided with her father. She always sided with him. Her mother was, she felt, in some way inferior to her father. Mother was no lady. (p. 41)

Her mother's deplorable lack of breeding and etiquette seems a disingenuous, or at least an unsatisfactory reason for Sylvia's attitude to her in view of the fact that there are other, more justifiable reasons for her dislike. Earlier, for example, her mother had worked off her own frustrations, under the guise of punishment for obstinacy, by cruelly burning the young child's leg with a live coal; and Charlotte Russell is certainly a selfish, shallow individual. Nevertheless, Sylvia's revulsion carries unmistakably racial overtones:

> "Yes, who is dat?" said Charlotte into the 'phone. Her dark negro-Indian face looked really stupid, thought Sylvia. Stupid and weak. No character at all. (p. 131)

Charlotte's negative attitude, her "cringing inferiority" (p. 28), is, to some extent, counterbalanced by her good taste in clothes and her considerable ability as a dressmaker; and Sylvia is aware that her low opinion of her mother is not entirely justified. When her father dies, Sylvia is asked by her mother to look after his papers and business affairs:

> She did not speak in her usual surly manner. She spoke as though she recognized that she had a daughter who was more capable than herself. But when Sylvia went through the documents in the drawers of her father's desk she saw, with humility, how very little more capable than her mother she was. These legal papers and sheets of foolscap with close typewritten words baffled her completely. She had to put them away. (pp. 140/141)

She is finally unable, however, in comparing her father with her mother, to think of the latter as a fully human being in her own right:

> That thin, filthy caricature lying on the bed there whining at me is Mrs. Charlotte Russell, my mother - widow of the late Mr. Grantley Russell, an Englishman. She was once attractive enough for my father to kiss and fondle. Incredible, but very real. (p. 240)

The novel is intended, basically as an exposé of the hypocrisy and intrigue in a typical, colonial, West Indian society in the early and mid-twentieth century: the complex social ethos of Mittelholzer's own childhood and early manhood:

> There are the whites in an exclusive little corner of their own. Then the high-coloured in various little compartments, according to good, better and best families, with money and quality of hair and shade of complexion playing no small part in the general scheme of grading ... the East Indians in another cluster, with a hierarchy of their own ... (p. 36).

But Sylvia struggles as much against an oppressive, racially divided society as against her own ambiguous feelings - the familiar dualism of Spirit and Flesh - so that while, at one level, the book is an indictment of the class-structured, colour-based hierarchy of the colony (one of the novel's strengths is the way in which cumulative, entirely convincing detail is used to evoke this atmosphere); at a deeper, psychological level, operating, as it were, through the heroine's "divided consciousness", the novel manages to be both a celebration and a denial of sexuality. For Sylvia, as for Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, sex holds a terrible fascination, and like Miss Harlowe, she is at once attracted and repelled in her attempt to escape the strictures of an unjust society by a sexuality which she again and again equates with death. Sylvia, a more explicit heroine, regards her "good luscious virgin body" (p. 240) almost as a kind of sexual prize and treasure to be surrendered only at the expense of personal integrity or as a sacrifice in death. In her mind the thought of sexual intercourse is almost always accompanied by visions of rape or violence:

> What would he be like - the first man who would caress her and pin her down in the love-embrace? ... He would stand and look at her, and his eyes would get bright. Then he would rush at her. In less than a minute it would happen ... Her throat felt dryish with fear - fear and pleasurable anticipation. (p. 83).

Jerry's brutal beating of Naomi, a scene in which Sylvia is a fascina-

ted witness, turns out to be a sexual encounter:

> He tore off the brassiere, slapped her face hard, smashed his fist into her chest ... Naomi uttered low moans. Jerry continued to smash blows into her. Sylvia, of a sudden, took note of the expression on Naomi's face. Naomi's lips were slightly parted, and the light in her eyes revealed pleasure. A deep, luxurious pleasure. Her body seemed to writhe and quake in spasm after spasm of delight at every blow Jerry struck. (pp. 90/91).

Sylvia, wondering whether, like Naomi, she has a masochistic leaning, and suspecting an even wider significance to this sexual trait, has her suspicions confirmed by her father:

> "Are all women masochists?"
>
> "Basically - yes." And after a brief silence, he added: "Frustrations and civilized inhibitions often cover it up, but it's always there." (p. 95).

Sylvia's virginity, like Clarissa's, is constantly under attack in a coercive society which offers no refuge for the spirited, individual woman; and the suspense builds up around the question of whether she will give in and become the rich Mr. Knight's mistress, accepting his offer of material wealth, or remain a virgin, chaste but destitute. When, a few pages from the end of the novel, Sylvia is tempted, in desperation, to trap the eligible Benson Riego into marriage by encouraging him to make love to her, the effect of the writing is intentionally "apocalyptic":

> How often hadn't her imagination conjured up this event! ... yes, the moment was here. Far inside, she heard herself trying to recall the words of the NUNC DIMITTIS ... They were the right words for her now. After this had happened she could depart in peace. She would have seen salvation. (p. 280).

This echoes the words of the roadside preacher, snatches of whose sermon Sylvia remembers, especially the phrase "out of suffering cometh salvation" which, in her mind, becomes associated with the idea of sexual experience as a purgation leading to "easeful death". Although Sylvia remains a virgin, thanks to her own moral misgivings, as well as to Benson's innocence, she does, like Clarissa, welcome death and achieve a kind of apotheosis im the final chapter:

> "I can hear a kiskadee." She was gasping again. After the spa sm had passed, she smiled. "A lovely piece, that. Can you hear it? The Militia Band is playing it ... on the Sea Wall ... I can hear a kiskadee ..." She was quiet after that. The sun came in and touched her hand. (pp. 287/288).

Sex and death are inseparably linked in the novel. Even as she admires her naked body in the mirror, Sylvia's mind conjures up an image of death:

> She smiled and tilted her head, shook her hair about and watched it gleam in the electric light. Cupped her breasts in her hands. ... but death crouched always in the offing. A shadow-hound waiting to pounce on the shadow-self that was the real being contained within the solidity of one's shapely body. (p. 191)

The imagery used conveys the "threatening" nature of sexuality: the destructive, disorientating quality which it imposes upon a psychic balance already precarious. And it is here that the similarity between Sylvia and Richardson's heroine, Clarissa, ends. For, although they share an equivocal attitude to sex (which appears to them as both a threat and an enticement), Sylvia's mental equilibrium is already adversely affected by a genetic taint: the mulatto condition. It is interesting to notice that the creole heroine of Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea[1] (Penguin, 1968) whose lack of psychic balance is related to a genetic trait[2](Antoinette Cosway is

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1 The novel is an imaginative "re-construction" of the early life of "Antoinette Cosway" (Bertha Antoinette Mason, the mad wife of Mr. Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre) extrapolated from the bare outline of her West Indian past given in the Brontë novel. For a discussion of the significance of Jean Rhys's novel, where the conflict between Rochester and Antoinette is shown to be essentially an encounter between the "white" and "black" worlds of personal and social experience - ultimately a conflict involving psychic disorientation - see Wally Look Lai's interesting analysis, "The Road to Thornfield Hall" (New Beacon Reviews 1968) pp. 38/52 .

2 As Antoinette's faithful black servant, Christophine, says to Rochester (unconsciously implying that the real trouble lies within the Caribbean psyche): "She is a Creole girl, and she have the sun in her." (p. 130) One is reminded of Wilson Harris's remark that the sun should be regarded as "an adversary - one of two antagonistic principles - night and day - and only an association of these two principles provides release ... the sun therefore is a great reality in the West Indian world in a more terrible sense than the poet realizes when he exclaims: 'Sun's in my blood'." ("Tradition, the Writer and Society", New Beacon Publications 1967, p. 10, My underlining)

a "white nigger" and, according to her coloured half-brother "is no girl to marry with the bad blood she have from both sides." (p. 81) and who does eventually go mad, also insists on the link between sex and death. Her dream of being followed into the forest by an unknown man, like Hester Prynne's encounter with the "Black Man of the forest" in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter[1] is an expression of both the fascination with and terror of sexual violence:

> ... I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me I would refuse ... He smiles slyly. 'Not here, not yet' he says, and I follow him, weeping. (p. 50)

and when she and Rochester make love, she says:

> 'If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn't have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don't believe me? Then try, try, say die and watch me die.' (p. 77)

Antoinette, like Sylvia (although Jean Rhys's heroine is not, in a strictly racial sense, a "mixed" creole) is a type of the Creole Woman - a figure who "unites in one flesh the opposing European and African poles":[2] an ethnic and cultural polarity which is also seen to be a moral polarity, involving questions of Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, Strength and Weakness.

Sylvia's unhealthy, ambivalent attitude to sex is, however, only one expression of her psychic and genetic imbalance. The "division of

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1 This symbolic "meeting" (the genesis of the scarlet "A") carries more than a hint of the sexual guilt attached to a taboo on miscegenation; and it is significant that, in Hester's illegitimate child, Pearl, "there was a trait of passion, a certain depth of hue, which she never lost." (The Scarlet Letter, OUP 1965, p. 82. My underlining).

2 Leslie A. Fielder, Love and Death in the American Novel (Paladin, 1970) p. 281.

consciousness" in Mittelholzer's work often took other, as it were, allotropic forms, appearing, for example, as a conflict between Good and Evil (<u>My Bones and My Flute</u>, 1955), Material and Spiritual (<u>The Wounded and the Worried</u>, 1962), or between the individual and society at large (<u>The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham</u>, 1965). In <u>Sylvia</u>, the main conflict is, in fact, between "Strength" and "Weakness" - a subject that held a continual fascination for Mittelholzer.[1] Milton Copps, who is (like Milton Woodsley of <u>My Bones and My Flute</u>) clearly another of the author's self-portraits - his fierce individuality and his love of Wagner's music and Nietsche's philosophy are enough to indicate this - recognizes that Sylvia's internal conflict stems from something more than an Oedipus Complex:

> Heredity, let's assume, has inflicted upon her a streak of weak character which, no matter what environmental influences have been at work, cannot be suppressed. Despite all efforts on her part, it continues to push up its head, because it happens to be a legacy from dear Mother. (p. 253)

This is the familiar Mittelholzer thesis which is worked out in elaborate detail through the Kaywana novels: an inherited strain of coloured ("bad") blood inevitably precipitates a "weakness" or "taint" of character which, unless heroically resisted, is finally destructive to the psyche. In <u>Sylvia</u> it is not, as F.M. Birbalsingh claims, simply that Mittelholzer, his moralist's leanings frustrated, "indignantly denies altogether the whole notion of purpose and value" or that "the dominion of an amoral world-order [is] feverishly asserted";[2] but rather that, by allowing his

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1 During a radio discussion ("The Exiled Imagination", recorded for the B.B.C. programme, "Caribbean Voices" on 21 May, 1963) Mittelholzer said:

> I have definite ideas of particular strength and weakness: the conflict between strength and weakness. In fact, living here [in Britain] has intensified those views.

2 <u>Birbalsingh</u>, op. cit., p. 97

heroine to be overwhelmed and finally destroyed by implacable social forces, he is able to demonstrate the gradual psychic erosion which comes as a natural consequence of an inherent "weakness" of will - the result of racial admixture. Sylvia dies not only because she is born "tainted" and therefore divided within herself, but also because she is incapable of following the advice of the "strong" Milton Copps:

> If you act like a weak fool then you will suffer the fate of all weak fools; if you act with strength, you will enjoy the triumph of the strong. So take my advice. Don't let up. Resist, resist ... (p. 237)

Sylvia does try. Her attempt to eject forcibly from the house her sick mother's friends, Janie and Sarah, who are simply opportunist hangers-on, ends in "defeat" (p. 241); and, in a letter to Milton Copps, she acknowledges her in-built inadequacy: "Your letters are very inspiring, but how can you inspire a person who lacks guts?" (p. 240). The radio reports of the aggressive activity of Hitler and the German troops just prior to the second world war are used by Mittelholzer to counterpoint, in a rather obvious way, the gradual decay of the Russell household after Sylvia's father is murdered. The "weakness" of Sylvia and her mother leads to their destitution and when Mr. Kinght, the unscrupulous solicitor, forecloses their heavily mortgaged house and they are forced to live in a slum area, their enforced move down the social scale is contrasted with Hitler's occupation of Austria which occurs on the same day: and Milton Copps/Mittelholzer's ominous assertion that "Darwin and Nietzshe knew a few sound truths" (p. 234) since only the "strong" survive, is shown, through the suffering and eventual death of the Good

Heroine, to represent a pragmatic truth about life.[1] The novel is, to a great extent, an illustration of the author's theories about "strength" and "weakness"; and the "dimensions of high tragedy"[2] which Patrick Guckian finds in the book, and which he suggests come fromSylvia's refusal to abandon her high principles, must be placed alongside Mittelholzer's deliberate use of his heroine as an example of the "weakness" that is always crushed by the forces of "raw, brute humanity" (p. 227). Sylvia does not, it is true, abandon her principles (or, rather, her virginity, for this is made the main issue in her struggle against society), but even her final, narrow "escape" when she suddenly finds herself responding passionately to the advances of Benson Riego, whom she does not love, is the result of Benson's moral rectitude and is seen by Sylvia as a final humiliating defeat, since it forces her to acknowledge the remorseless vigour of her disconnected, repressed sexuality. "I was so ashamed of myself", she says on her death-bed, "I felt so empty. Futile. I'm not even capable of loving" (p. 288). Sylvia's recognition that her misery is partly self-inflicted, owing to her inability to fight (like Milton Copps) for survival, is reflected in her pre-occupation with death as a release from her problems. "I feel I could take a walk into the sea and not come back", she says, "... I'm longing to die" (p. 215); and, earlier, "Why did she have to live? ... Oh, for death! A fade-out. A knowing-nothing. Death must be so soothing." (pp. 206/207). The idea of death as a means of escape from an intoler-

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1 EM's two excursions, in the 1960's, into the field of "ghost" writing: ("Life is a Fight" - the autobiography of the American boxer, Harry "Spitzel" Goodman, and "To Struggle and Win" - the autobiography of an Australian, Eileen Whitehead) reflect his lasting fascination with the idea of the survival of the fittest. The MSS. - both unpublished - are in the possession of Mrs. Jacqueline Ives.

2 Patrick Guckian, "The Balance of Colour" (Jamaica Journal, March, 1970, p. 41). Further references to this article will appear as Guckian.

able conflict, used to heighten the effect of impending tragedy, is present from the beginning (where it is first introduced by Bertie Dowden who later takes his own life) and runs through the novel like one of the leitmotivs Mittelholzer was later to use in his unfinished trilogy. But Sylvia's death wish, her longing for a "fade-out" has another, more sinister meaning, for it is precisely the death-wish, "the Would-rot. The Wish-to-Rot, a philosopher like Schopenhauer might have called it" (The Piling of Clouds, 1961, p. 81) that becomes, in the later novels, the disease of the whole society against which, to the alarm of his publishers, Mittelholzer raised his authorial voice in violent condemnation. The "fade-out" wish is the sign of "weakness" par excellence in Mittelholzer's later work, and Sylvia's inability to fight, to counter the deleterious effects of her "legacy from dear Mother" (p. 253), makes the death-wish almost obligatory, since her integrity is not reinforced, like Milton Copps's, by "strength".

It is significant that in the unpublished "Angela Vimiero"[1] (the plot of which reveals close similarities with Sylvia), Angela, a young Portuguese girl who grows up faced with all the frustrations and prejudices of Guyanese colonial society and suffers a traumatic emotional crisis, does not give in to a death wish (although she does consider suicide) but recovers her balance. For her, Clive Bell's Civilization[2], Schopenhauer's philosophy and the music of Wagner act as positive aids to

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1 MS. in the possession of Mrs. Jacqueline Ives. The title-page bears EM's 1948 Trinidad address, and the note: "Previously Published: Corentyne Thunder, a novel (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London)."

2 Civilization: an essay (Chatto and Windus, 1928). Clive Bell (b. 1881) was a prominent member of the so-called "Bloomsbury Group".

will-power; and since there is never any question of an inherited strain of "weakness" (i.e. "black blood"), she is spared the total futility of Sylvia. Her habit of introspection - the taking of regular, psychological inventories of herself - and that of making a clicking sound with her tongue when in deep thought or when registering disapproval, are shared by the high-principled English heroine, Sheila Chatham of The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965) - another beleaguered, but more mature, individual who wrestles with a hostile world and gains a balance between Spirit and Flesh, Strength and Weakness. Significantly, Mrs. Chatham also has an undamaged racial pedigree. Since "Angela Vimiero" was written after Corentyne Thunder (1941) and before the publication of A Morning at the Office (1950), and was intended as a sequel to his first novel;[1] it provides useful insights into the author's intentions with regard to the direction his writing was to take. Angela, who like Geoffry Weldon of Corentyne Thunder has been brought up in the countryside and feels a sense of kinship with the land, is also attracted to the world of "reflection and education" (p. 259); and the novel is a detailed account of her attempt to solve the conflicts between Nature and Nurture, Material and Spiritual, Strength and Weakness, an attempt which, for Sylvia, proves fruitless but is allowed, in Angela's case, to have good hopes of success. In a sense, the theme of this unpublished work is the obverse of the theme of Sylvia, for although the ethos is identical - a vulgar, middle class, hierarchical society in which the stigmata of "bad" skin-colour and hair-texture can be mitigated only by the acquisi-

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1 Beena, one of Ramgolall's daughters, is employed by Angela as a servant, and through her we are given a "flashback" of the events in Corentyne Thunder and brought up to date on the situation with regard to the main characters. In fact, it is Beena's wish to escape from the misery of her hopeless love for Jannee that brings her into Angela's home; and Dora Weldon's affair with Angela's husband which (along with Beena's eventual suicide) brings matters to a head for Angela.

tion of social graces - Angela, happily insulated from the trauma of genetic "taint", gradually learns to come to terms with a hopelessly dualistic Universe.[1] Even the structure of the novel is the counterpart of Sylvia, which begins with a chapter headed "Overture with loud trumpets" and ends with the death of Sylvia, whose life has been a pattern of futility; while "Angela Vimiero" begins with "Book one - The Pattern of Futility" and has as its penultimate chapter "Book 4 - The Trumpet", ending with Angela's optimistic apprehension of the "riches" of life which make for faith in humanity. The theme of sex and death in Sylvia is distanced in "Angela Vimiero", appearing mainly in the music of Wagner (Tristan and Isolde and Gotterdammerung - the "Glorification in Death" motiv) which her Aunt Miriam encourages her to like and respect. Aunt Miriam, in fact, is the female counterpart of both Grantley Russell, Sylvia's father, and Milton Copps. She is an "eccentric revolutionary" who lectures Angela about reincarnation and the gunas of desire, introduces her to Clive Bell's Civilization, whistles leitmotivs from Wagner's The Ring and is convinced that "it's a cold world" (p. 45) in which only the strong-willed survive. She recommends to Angela a copy of Schopenhauer's Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung: "His chief work. The World as Will and Idea. I've delved into it. Damned good ... A sound theory." (p. 318). But in this early work the theme of strength versus weakness is not pursued, and Angela becomes disenchanted with her oppressively "masculine" aunt, finally rejecting her pessimism for a broader, more humane view:

> The secret of benevolent extraversion. The turning outward of one's mind and imagination to establish a sympathetic rapport with the rest of mankind. (p. 396)

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1 It is tempting to regard Mittelholzer's comment on Angela's growing control of her own dualistic feelings - a control made possible because she is not "weighted down with two many complexities" (p. 180, my underlining) as containing a classic, Freudian slip.

and in spite of the fact that "everything was in a flux. Everything was uncertain" (p. 398), she:

> ... respected the idea of humanity. It was a heroic idea ... such an idea, she believed, was worth living for – and struggling for. (p. 396)

Angela's search for a balanced philosophy of life is able to proceed uncomplicated by racial admixture:

> She could comprehend why the Portuguese were discriminated against and regarded as being on a lower social level. But it was a question of deportment and general education and culture rather than that of race ... (p. 58)

and her awareness of an "inner voice" – a symbol of the Unconscious Self[1] – suggests a healthy integrated psyche:

> For no reason at all, a voice echoed her thoughts or commented on things in which she was interested ... She called this voice the voice of her grown-up self speaking somewhere in the future – a future her present self was too green to comprehend fully ... a wise and sophisticated voice – a symbol of the wisdom and sophistication she one day hoped to possess. (p. 7)

In <u>The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham</u> (1965) we again hear this voice. The "grown-up" heroine, Sheila Chatham, whose search, like Angela's, is for the balanced "choice of life", also listens to her "inner voice" and chooses "a sympathetic rapport with the rest of mankind" ("Angela Vimiero", p. 396); but by then (the published version of 1965 is the result of many revisions, the earliest version of the novel appearing in manuscript form in the early nineteen-fifties) this "still small voice" is all but silenced by the author's almost hysterical pre-occupation with what he came to regard as the "effeteness" of English society and the consequent need for "strength".

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1 According to C.G. Jung:

> The inner voice is the voice of a fuller life, of a wider, more comprehensive consciousness ... and it faces people with ultimate moral decisions without which they can never achieve full consciousness and become personalities. (<u>The Development of Personality</u>. No. 17 of Coll. works, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1954, pp.184/185).

In Sylvia then, the idea of a quest for the balanced life is subordinated to theories of Strength and Weakness, and Mittelholzer combines and complicates these with his sense of racial admixture as an emotionally divisive, socially disruptive condition: but the novel is, nevertheless, well-planned. Between the "Overture with loud trumpets" and the "Finale with cymbals and low drums", which act as a background first to Sylvia's birth and then to her death, the five "parts" of the novel trace her gradual development within the complex atmosphere of early and mid-twentieth century British Guiana. Mittelholzer handles the difficult task of unravelling the dense, complicated social network of his own boyhood and early manhood with enthusiasm, incisiveness and honesty within a well-organised plot. Although epic in conception, dealing as it does, like V.S. Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas (Andre Deutsch, 1961), with the entire life-span of the main character, and full of accurately observed, sensitively recorded detail; the novel is, one feels, too often made to bear the additional weight of the author's own moral and social anxieties. The long description for example (given by Sylvia's father) of "how the society in the colony was graded" (pp. 60/63) appears to be a flimsy device for inserting an authorial gloss for the benefit of a European reading public: and the discussion between Milton Copps and Gregory Brandt about Sylvia's dilemma, although presented as a bantering, good-humoured "debate", with Sylvia as an amused listener, too obviously sets the stage for a dénouement and reveals the author bustling about in the wings:

> For instance, take Sylvia. Review her life up to the present and suggest what one stable outlook she should adopt toward living ... let us assume that Sylvia, instead of adopting a negative attitude toward her life, decides to solve matters on a positive basis. (pp. 251/252)

But it is Mittelholzer's deliberate moral and philosophical excursions (particularly in the utterances of Milton Copps) as well as the often self-

indulgent, melodramatic writing that finally deny real epic or tragic stature to the novel: and Mittelholzer, for all his considerable ability to marshal detail in the working out of his plot and to re-create the atmosphere of place, is often guilty of mawkishness and banality of style. In the "finale", Sylvia, near death from pneumonia after her walk in the rain, knocks on Naomi's door, "water dripping from her person in a steady trickle" (p. 284):

> Dup, dup, dup! She knocked thrice. Solemnly. That was how a knell should sound. The dull thud of a hammer on a coffin lid. And I'm tired. Tired after a long walk from Brickdam. After a long journey from babyhood. Twenty-one panting years. I have a right to knock slowly. Deliberately. Virgin Sylvia. Dup, dup, dup! (p. 283)

As she lies dying, clutching the bedsheet in pain, she says (and the effect on the reader is surely the opposite of that intended by the author):

> "The last pains. You know, I wish - I wish I could have seen pneumonia bacilli under the microscope." (p. 287)

This is the kind of thing that forces one to question any reading of the novel which finds that "there are many touches which give Sylvia the dimensions of high tragedy" and that "the death scene has the serenity of a Mozartian *andante*."[1] The novel's ambitious epic form - a form that leads Patrick Guckian to suggest that "the Russell household is Guiana in miniature" [2] and that the mis-naming of Sylvia (her name should have been "Cynthia") is "a corollary [sic] of the misnaming of the West Indies[3] - is betrayed by the author's less than epic intentions: the demonstration of a deterministic, philosophical theory of "strength" and "weakness" - a theory which is seen to be related to a concept of genetic "damage" - an

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1 *Guckian*, op. cit., p. 41.

2 Ibid., p. 40.

3 Ibid., p. 41.

unsparingly honest examination of his own complex, colonial background, and, quite simply, the telling of a good story. In 1953, writing to a friend in Guyana about the book's forthcoming publication, Mittelholzer said:

> I know several females will hold hankies to their eyes before they've finished it ... I shall look forward to chuckling over this book with you when I come. You'll recognize many portraits, even in their disguised states. Even I myself am in it, very thinly disguised - And you yourself come in for a "mention". Oh, there'll be a lot to giggle over.[1]

The idea of the individual's need to achieve a healthy emotional balance: to come to terms with the inner conflicts of Flesh <u>versus</u> Spirit, of Instinct <u>versus</u> Reason or of Strength <u>versus</u> Weakness, so as to establish "a sympathetic rapport with the rest of mankind"[2] is the truly creative universal theme which, so often bedevilled in Mittelholzer's work by the peculiar nature of the author's own obsession with genetic "taint", is never really given the central place it deserves. For this reason, Mittelholzer's attempts at a creative art never quite survive the undermining effect of the psychic disorientation - the "twoness" - which was always present in the author's own divided consciousness.

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1 Letter quoted by A.J. Seymour, <u>Lectures</u> (1968) op. cit., p. 15.

2 "Angela Vimiero", op. cit., p. 396.

Chapter Three

MAGNUM OPUS

The Kaywana Trilogy and the Theme of "Blood".

(I) Children of Kaywana (1952)

The Kaywana trilogy is generally accepted as Mittelholzer's most outstanding work.[1] It is certainly the finest example of his ability to organise a wealth of detail (the time-span of the novels is approximately three hundred and thirty seven years) in the telling of a story of epic proportions. To Mittelholzer who, as we have seen, identified with his Swiss/German ancestor and felt a sense of "genetic damage" - the African side of his ancestry - the sexual and racial conflict and the resultant mixing of "bloods" involved in the violent slave-past of Guyana, in which his ancestry actually took root,[2] must have seemed a natural choice for what was to be his magnum opus. His love of story-telling, his sense of the mystery and excitement of the past, his ability to evoke the atmosphere and "feel" of a place, his delight in vigorous, often violently sensational action, his prodigious facility for inventing, amassing and organising detail all came together to equip him for the formidable task he set himself: the imaginative reconstruction of the social and political history of Guyana from the early seventeenth

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1 A.J. Seymour's enthusiastic appraisal, however:

> The Kaywana series, as a group of three novels, is perhaps Edgar's most considerable achievement, and places him in the fore-front of the entire range of Commonwealth Caribbean novelists. (Lectures, 1968, op. cit., p. 28)

placed alongside the view of another distinguished Guyanese, the writer and artist Denis Williams, receives a significant qualification. Williams, by claiming that the trilogy was not:

> ... the greatest novel written by a Guyanese, but ... supremely the one which, for this nation, had to be written" (Lectures, 1969, op. cit., p. 13)

highlights the archetypal, rather than the artistic, value of the work.

2 In the foreword to the first book of the trilogy, EM recounts the story of his ancestor, Herr C. Mittelholzer, a planter who was actually involved in the 1763 uprising and "was attacked, but resisted, cutting off the hand of one of his assailants with a sabre." (Children of Kaywana, 1960, p. 5. All quotations used are from this edition).

to the middle of the twentieth century, and, within this framework, the epic saga of the growth and development of the van Groenwegel family tree. Mittelholzer's diligent research and scrupulous honesty are apparent in the use he makes of the slim documentation available[1] and in the chronological accuracy of historical, factual events in the novels. Like Sylvia (1953), the main theme of the Kaywana trilogy involves a working-out of the author's theories of "strength" and "weakness". Within the maze-like, winding corridors of "Huis Kaywana" runs the thread of "blood", the "strength" or "weakness" of which finally determines the character and actions of every member of this extraordinary family; and it is this theme, with its complex irony (a complexity which has generally gone unacknowledged or unnoticed by Mittelholzer's critics) that I shall attempt to trace through these three novels; since this is the source from which all the apparent vagaries and inconsistencies of plot and characterization spring, and the point from which any discussion of "the wanton nature of the world of Mittelholzer's novels" or of the "haphazard principles"[2] which govern the actions of Mittelholzer's characters, must proceed.

The theme of the trilogy is announced at the opening of Children of Kaywana when Kaywana, who is half Aboriginal Indian and "half English sailor" (p. 14), reveals her unalloyed pride in her English blood which sets her apart as "stronger" and more intelligent than the Indians, who appear childlike and foolish alongside her. Even Wakkatai, the shaman, who is an important figure - a leader among the Indians - is made to look little more than a superstitious, easily flattered, fraudulent

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1 Mainly James Rodway's 3-volume History of British Guiana (Georgetown, Demerara, 1891, 1893, 1894) and H. Dalton's A History of British Guiana (1855).

2 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 90.

character. August Vyfuis, the young Dutchman whose overtures are instantly acceptable to Kaywana, is presented, on the other hand, as the possessor of desirable qualities, among which "strength" is of primary importance:

> You're strong. I like the way you hold me... I like men so ... The others want me, but they can't even look at me in my eyes straight. They beg and plead. I don't like men to beg and plead. They must hold me and take me and show they have more strength than I have. (p. 12)

After the heroic death of August Vyfuis during a Spanish raid, Adriansen van Groenwegel comes on the scene. He too, receives automatic approval from Kaywana, and for the same reason:

> He had strength - like the strength of August. He was the kind of man, she felt certain, who would not plead with a woman. (p. 17)

Although Adriansen often insists that "I'm a hard man" (p. 22) he nevertheless introduces a note of anti-heroic "weakness" in his use of flattery and guile to get his own way, finally winning over even the hostile Wakkatai to his side. As he tells young August (the son of August Vyfuis):

> When we're up against the Wakkatais of this world, force is not the weapon to employ, my boy. The weapon is subtlety ... (p. 42)

But at the same time Adriansen's attitude to his enemies contrasted with Kaywana's implacable hatred ("... when anyone hates me I hate in return. If anyone hurts me I hurt them in return," p. 43) is shown to be both more intelligent and more humane. When there is a threat of Indian revolt and Kaywana suggests that the soldiers be called out to quell any uprising by force, Adriansen says:

> Nothing of the sort. We must never threaten them with violence except as a last resort. These Indians are good people. It's always a mistake to show them force ... There are other ways of being strong than the way of guns, Kaywana. (p. 47)

And when the rebellion does take place, it is Adriansen's "weak" policy of tact which succeeds, and Kaywana's bravery (like August Vyfuis's) which is ultimately futile. The climactic fight between Kaywana and her children and the Indians led by Wakkatai, is remembered later by Willem, one of the van Groenwegel children who survived (Kaywana and most of the other children perish in the fight) with a deep sense of pride:

> My mother was a fighter. Do you know what it is to have a mother who can stand up with her sons and fight to the death? (p. 61)

But by then it has acquired an ironic flavour, since Willem himself would not have survived, had not Adriansen, by arguing with the rebels and appealing to their common-sense - but showing no less bravery than Kaywana - managed to put down the rebellion even while Kaywana and Wakkatai were locked in mortal combat.

From the very first chapter, then, Mittelholzer's view of "strength" and "weakness" is seen to be, if not ambiguous, at least presented with a certain irony; an irony which grows in significance throughout the book, reaching its climax in the later chapters where Hendrickje attempts to establish the van Groenwegel family as a power in the land. Willem, meanwhile, is the "strong" character whose views are given the centre of the stage. He reiterates the theme of "blood" ad nauseam:

> It's blood that counts, Griselda. Blood. Men can say we're van Groenwegels with the bar sinister. Let them say it. Not a mortal can drain the blood of that old man from my veins - or the veins of my children. (p. 61)

and when Major Scott and his marauding band of Caribs attack the colony in 1666, Willem seizes the chance to prove the "strength" of van Groenwegel blood. His wife, Griselda, and his son, Reinald, are presented as "weak" elements: indeed, the "strong" and the "weak" are quite unmistakably labelled, as, for example in Reinald's pitiful efforts to get his group of slaves to rally during the siege:

> " ... Don't you hear me? Please," besought Reinald. 'Please. ... For God's sake get back to your posts ... Quick! I beseech you! Quick!' None of them made any move to obey. (p. 86)

His brother, Laurens has to come to his aid with a demonstration of the required "strength":

> 'Never speak kindly to slaves, or try to persuade them to do anything ... Take up your positions again and start firing as Massa Reinald directs you or I'll kill you. I mean it. I'll kill you, you black cowardly clumps of filth!' He trembled. He had an insane look.[1] (p. 87)

The attack is successfully resisted, and Willem, swollen with what he now considers an amply justified sense of pride, casually dismisses the death of his "weak", academically-minded brother, Aert who, it is reported, died retreating from the enemy "clutching two haversacks of books to his bosom as though they were beloved creatures." (p. 96):

> The soft fool. Reinald will be Aert all over again. A misty-brained book-worm. Anyway, there's Laurens. I have hope for that boy. I must build him up. I must consolidate him. He won't let me down. (p. 96)

Willem's remark: "The decades will show whether my faith in our blood was justified." (p. 96) embodies the ironic nature of the theme of these novels; for it is with Laurens's later introspective questionings that the value of a credo of "strength" which excludes finer feelings such as unselfishness, respect and love, is examined and found wanting.

We are frequently shown Laurens's private thoughts on matters concerning family pride and his own attitude to it. In the big house at Cartabo Point (the scene of Kaywana's death) he is aware of being both attracted to and revolted by the family history and clearly disenchanted

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1 It is worth noticing that this is not an instance of crude, racial hatred, but rather a violent disapproval of "weakness". Those slaves who show bravery command respect as men; "Memba stood out from the others. Bamah and Teekaba too. Good fellows." (p. 88)

with his father's insistence on the importance of "blood":

> This family pride is on his brain. Susannah says it's a mania. He can think of nothing but our blood: our fire-blood, as he calls it. Our stand up the Mazaruni against Scott's Caribs has made him trebly pompous and obsessed with the importance of the family. (p. 98)

When his sister Susannah visits him, her advice on whether he should marry simply for the sake of carrying on the family name, is balanced:

> Certainly not. Fall in love first. Your happiness comes before any such considerations as family survival. Not that you musn't try to see that the name goes on. I do get a little throb of pride when I remember that I'm a van Groenwegel, but the idea can be overdone. (p. 101)

Laurens's attraction to his house-slaves, Hannah and Katrina; the bastard, mulatto girls who are the product of the young August's earlier excursions into the slaves' logies, is seen by him as "an instinctive partiality for coloured women ..." perhaps even "a degenerate streak" (p. 98) - another sign of "weakness". But this "weakness" is accompanied by a moral strength; since his sense of decency will not permit him to overcome his shyness with the girls by simply getting drunk and ravishing them as his fellow planters would. Susannah's remark: "Your morals are very high. I like you for it." (p. 110), seen in the context of the brutal sexual licence taken, as a matter of course, by the planters in their treatment of female slaves is a compliment indeed. Laurens's own estimate of himself at this point: "He was soft. He was not a man" (p. 109) is, therefore, not without a certain irony. Katrina, the self-effacing, loyal slave-girl[1] who becomes pregnant for him (and so introduces the "taint" of Negro blood into the family) unwittingly brings home to Laurens a moral lesson. When he suggests marriage, she reminds him with

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1 Like Kattree of Corentyne Thunder (1941), whose natural sexuality is contrasted with Geoffry Weldon's neurotic attitude, Katrina (who is glad to have Laurens's child and expects no material reward) typifies a natural "goodness".

alarm of her position as a slave, and he replies, with a sudden realization of the truth:

> I don't care. To-night I'm seeing things differently. To-night I can see you as a human being. It doesn't matter how you speak - or that you wear a smock. You've broken down my pride. I see you now as a woman. You have my child in you, and you're good. You have a good nature. (p. 133)

This attitude comes from Laurens's recognition of precisely those deeper, human qualities beneath the surfaces of skin and family; and Willem's furious reaction to the "taint" introduced by this marriage:

> The bitterness of this day will never fade. I shall never be converted to the belief that our family has not been tainted. I shall never be reconciled to this slave-blood which Laurens has seen fit to introduce into our family." (p. 137)

receives a sharp, ironic twist in the following chapter; for the child of this marriage, Hendrickje, grows up to be the ultimate embodiment of what Willem himself had always regarded as the van Groenwegel "fire-blood": a fierce, proud figure like Kaywana, imbued with an obsessive family pride, who institutes and enforces the motto "the van Groenwegels never run!"

Hendrickje, a precocious, strong-willed child, begins quite early to demonstrate symptoms of extreme "van Groenwegelism". So concerned is she about the danger of "diluting" the strength of the family blood, that, at the age of fifteen, she earnestly suggests to Ignatius van Groenwegel, her cousin, that they consider marriage so as "to keep the blood together." (p. 145). Dismissing their grandmother, Griselda, as a "weakling", she says with chilling intensity:

> She brought weak blood into the family. That musn't happen again. You must marry a girl with fighter-blood. A girl like me. Then we'll have hard children to carry on the tradition. We have to keep hard. (pp.145/146)

This is, of course, the echo of Willem's own obsession, returning now with added power and virulence; and through Hendrickje, the mania for "strength" expresses itself with growing violence. She has a megalomaniac vision of the family spreading and becoming an irresistible force

in the land, seeing herself as a fertile soil from which, like dragon's teeth, a whole race of hardy, ruthless van Groenwegels will one day spring.[1] Riding roughshod over everyone in her path, including her father, Laurens, she inevitably gets her way. Her enormous confidence in the strength of van Groenwegel "blood", and in herself as its representative:

> The family, for me, will always come before everything else. ... I have faith in myself. My spirit is strong, and my body is strong. I'm going to prove a good breeder. I'm hoping to have no less than ten children - twelve, if possible. More. And among these a few must be like me. (p. 178)

is proved, however, like Willem's faith in van Groenwegel blood, to be unjustified. As the novel proceeds (in the chapter headed, "The Way to Power"), Hendrickje's cold-blooded drive to establish herself as a sexually potent breeder of van Groenwegels is made to appear ridiculous, and, finally, grotesque. A kind of grossly fecund, tropical Lady Macbeth, she is ruthless towards all who get in her way, including her ineffectual, artistic husband who is treated merely as a provider of the ancestral sperm and made to run the household and feed the baby while she rides out into the fields, whip in hand. Her vision of herself a "born breeder", strong-willed and "physically invincible" (p. 187) suffers a rude shock, however, for she is able to have only two children, both of whom (thanks to her consistent brutality and lack of warmth) develop a lively hatred for their mother, one becoming homosexual - almost as a protest, one feels, against her own viscious sensuality - and the other eventually growing up to hate the idea of family pride. After a fall (sustained when, pregnant, she had insisted on riding out into the fields) she loses the third baby and is told that she will not be able

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1 In Ovid's Metamorphoses, the dragon's teeth, sown by Cadmus, produce a crop of fierce warriors who fight amongst themselves, five surviving to help him build the city of Thebes.

to have any more children. She does become pregnant twice after this, but each time the baby does not survive long. Her strength of will: "I won't give up ... I must and will have more children. By sheer will I'll conceive again." (p. 195), is ultimately futile. In Mittelholzer's treatment of Hendrickje the excessive love of strength for its own sake and the unreasoning insistence of family pride are shown to be a form of wilful self-delusion; as is Hendrickje's denial of a desperate, unfulfilled need for warmth and love:

> "Love and tenderness can go. I'm prepared to live without them. ... so long as I have my children as planned, so long as I have them established in the country and the most powerful family, all else can go ..." But though she wrote this, the actuality was different. (p. 215)

Her "weak" husband, Ignatius, realizes that, for all her strength and cruelty, "in many ways, Hendrickje is a simpleton" (p. 204) and that "she's a tortured woman." (p. 221). Asked by his son, Adrian, whether his grandfather, Laurens, believes, as his mother does, that the family must be powerful at all costs, he replies: "No. ... Your Grandfather Laurens is a balanced man;" adding: "It was your Great-Grandfather Willem who began this power campaign. But even he was not the fanatic that your mother is." (p. 217).

Adrian, however, suffers what is, in effect, a temporary attack of "van Groenwegelism" - the malignant effect of his inherited "blood" - in spite of the fact that his mind is already warped by hatred of his mother and all that she stands for. He finds himself revolted by his homosexual brother, Cornelis, and incestuously drawn to his mother who, to his great consternation, appears "not such a bad person after all." (p. 239). This digressive episode, in the chapter headed "Oedipus", is used by Mittelholzer, one suspects, mainly as an occasion for propound-

ing his own views on incest. Hendrickje says, with obvious authorial approval:

> Don't let's have illusions about ourselves. We're mother and son, but we're in love like two animals. We want to be in bed. (p. 255)

This view - that sexual urges are entirely physiological and therefore "natural", even if expressed in a taboo relationship such as incest - often encountered in Mittelholzer's work, is elaborated more fully in The Harrowing of Hubertus (1954)[1]. Here, it appears merely as an attempt at erotic sensationalism, since nothing is made of the episode and it is not used to advance the plot in any way; except to suggest that even Hendrickje, in need of human affection, can benefit from receiving it. Her long, intimate chats with Adrian certainly soften her brutal attitude to the slaves, who now receive larger rations and fewer whippings. The division of loyalties experienced by Adrian, however, who feels both a violent moral revulsion from, and a strong sexual attraction towards his mother, is a notable example of the psychic imbalance deriving from mixed racial inheritance - the conflict that is to "harrow" the life of Hubertus in the second book of the trilogy.

When the French invade the colony and Hendrickje, like Willem, seizes the opportunity to demonstrate the family motto - "the van Groenwegels never run" - Adrian quietly pricks the balloon of her pride:

> I don't care one jot about our family traditions. ... This family pride you've always tried to instil into us is nothing to me. I think it foolish and small - unworthy. Why should we consider ourselves better than other people? It's not right.

and when the siege begins Hendrickje, sitting disconsolately in her ruined bedroom, tearful and covered with the dust of battle, is an almost

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1 In an early MS. version of The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965) the "naturalness" of incest is actually a main theme. In this version, the novel's climax involves Mrs. Chatham's discovery that incest is a normal sexual function within the Lessier family.

pathetic anachronism:

> I feel distracted, Adrian. Distracted. I didn't anticipate this. I thought they would have attacked with muskets - as in '66. I didn't reckon with bombs. (p. 272)

Adrian's bravery is not in question, for he does stay on to resist the attack, which nevertheless ends in defeat for the van Groenwegels. The slaves desert ("Missy never treat us good. Why we should stay in house and fight for her?" p. 273), Cornelis runs away with a French turncoat friend, and as Adrian calmly calls back the French envoy whom Hendrickje had sent away with a grandiose show of defiance, the whole myth of van Groenwegel "strength" is seen to be hollow. Adrian vows that:

> In future one of the things I shall work for is to destroy the memory of the old days and the deeds of our ancestors. ... I shall live to wipe it away, to poison the minds of my children against it. (p. 279)

As the novel moves towards the great slave rebellion of 1763, Hendrickje degenerates completely, becoming a monster of cruelty, burying alive a sick, old slave so as to create more space in the logies, and dabbling in obeah with Bangara, her favourite head-slave and paramour. Rosaria, a dissolute half-Spanish, half-Carib slave-girl is deliberately used by Hendrickje as a means of furthering the van Groenwegel line, since Jabez (the only other healthy van Groenwegel male, apart from Adrian) who is Rosaria's husband and the father of Hubertus, is beaten up and suffers castration at the hands of a jealous rival. Adrian, unaware of her plan, obligingly fathers, with Rosaria's eager help, a brood of mulatto van Groenwegels, in the mistaken belief that he is hurting his mother's pride in the family's "blood". Adrian himself, now totally unbalanced by hatred, becomes a mere cipher, and dissoluteness reigns. "Better dissolute animals", says Hendrickje as she encourages the lowest urges and the worst vices of the children (in a ghastly reductio ad absurdum of her policy of "hardening" them) "than high-thinking dreamers." (p. 329)

Among the sensational occurrences that follow are the burning alive of Bangara, the attempted murder of Hendrickje by Rosaria and the latter's death at the hands of her own children who, from a vantage-point in a tree, shoot her down in the home of her latest lover. Amid all the lust and carnage and childish avowals of loyalty to the van Groenwegel code of "honour" - intended as a mordant comment on Hendrickje's philosophy of "strength" as the answer to life's haphazard brutality, and not simply as erotic or sado/masochistic titillation (although this element is always present) - the one silent voice is that of Jacques, who instinctively hates cruelty and rejects the amoral, brutish philosophy of Hendrickje and the rest. When the rebellion of 1763 takes place, Lumea's earlier remark:

> There will never be any slave uprising in this colony. ... they haven't got the guts - nor the intelligence - to marshal themselves into a fighting force. (p. 397)

is seen to be ironic,[1] as is the young Laurens's contemptuous rejection of his in-laws, the Teuffers, as "weak" when he hears of the cowardice of Vincent Teuffer (whose mother was a van Groenwegel):

> Laurens pawed the floor <u>with his deformed foot</u> and scowled. 'That's why', he said, 'we've got to be careful whom we pick for wives.' (p. 397, my underlining).

for Laurens's mis-shapen foot is a visible outward sign of the dreadful, inner deformity imposed on them all by Hendrickje's insane will. Hendrickje herself appears almost senile with glee, tittering and cackling at the prospect of the impending fight. Jacques, who is captured by the rebel slaves and held hostage, functions as an objective observer of the

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1 In Berbice, the slaves, headed by Cuffy, gained control and issued ultimata to the Dutch governor demanding a partition of the county. This, "probably the most disastrous slave revolt that ever occurred in any colony" (James Rodway, <u>History of British Guiana</u> vol. 1, 1891 p. 174), lasted from February 1763 to April 1764 and irrevocably altered the economic, social and political life of the colony.

scene. We witness the brutality of both sides through his eyes, and when his fear of physical pain (although, morally, he is not a coward) forces him to appeal to the rebel leader's sense of decency, Mittelholzer uses the situation to make a deftly ironic thrust:

> 'Decency! My sense of decency!' Cuffy laughed. He backed away a pace or two and looked at Jacques. 'You expect me to have decency? You look on me a black man, van Groenwegel, and talk about decency! Where I could get decency from?' (p. 450)

and when Amelia says of her black captors 'They're beasts. Beasts.' Jacques replies: 'Not more so than the beasts we have been toward them.' (p. 447). The wheel comes full circle in the final chapter, headed "Finale: Like Kaywana" where, as in the beginning, the van Groenwegel family, led by a fanatical warrior-woman, faces the enemy. Jacques, who has escaped his captors, returns to the beleaguered family but finds that the rot has set in. With the exception of Hendrickje, they all want to give up the struggle and escape while there is still time. Jacques, disillusioned with the apparent senselessness of a world in which brutality seems the norm of human behaviour, has come prepared to face certain death. His action is misunderstood by Hendrickje, whose delighted approval is the book's final irony:

> 'Jacques, I'm beginning to feel that despite your softness, you are the hero among us.'
>
> Jacques laughed. 'Wrong, old lady. I wasn't born to be a hero. Heroes are strong. I'm one of the weak who have discovered the depressing truth that it takes strength to make a secure world. Physical as well as moral strength.' (p. 507, my underlining).

With the suggestion that a balance is needed for true, creative strength, the novel ends as they all meet their deaths resisting the inevitable.

(II) The Harrowing of Hubertus (1954)

Mittelholzer, in a letter to a friend, described The Harrowing of Hubertus as a "quiet book devoted chiefly to a study of the character of Hubertus van Groenwegel" who, he said, was "a projection of a facet of my own personality".[1] This, the second novel of the trilogy, opens, therefore, not with the theme of "strength" *versus* "weakness", but with a more personal, though allied, theme: the need for a co-existence of the two sides of one's personality - the physical and spiritual "selves". Hubertus, like so many of Mittelholzer's characters, is keenly aware of the fact that he is not an integrated being: that he suffers from a "division of consciousness":

> There were times when Hubertus believed that he possessed another self over which he had no control. It caused him to do and say things he would normally have hesitated to do and say. It sprang surprised on him. Yet he knew that he approved of this self; he did not regret its presence. (p. 17).

This suggests a psychological approach and prepares the reader for the low-keyed, introspective theme of self-discovery. Hubertus's awareness of an unpredictable, inner "self" which he accepts as a necessary counterpart of his outward, ego-personality is, in itself, an indication of psychic health. This is the "inner voice" which makes its first appearance in the unpublished "Angela Vimiero" and which, representing the Unconscious Self, becomes less and less audible in the later work. By his conscious approval of this "submerged" self, Hubertus apparently chooses the hard path of self-integration, the danger

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1 Quoted in A.J. Seymour, Lectures (1968), op. cit., p. 15.

2 All quotations are from the 1954 edition.

of which lies in the "swamping" nature of the Unconscious.[1] Superficially, his struggle is simply between "low urges" and "high principles": between Flesh and Spirit; but, at a deeper level, it is also the conflict between the Ego and the Unconscious; and Hubertus's "harrowing" carries overtones of a universal, archetypal significance. According to C.G. Jung, the "inner voice":

> ... makes us conscious of the evil from which the whole community is suffering, whether it be the nation or the whole human race. But it presents this evil in an individual form, so that one might at first suppose it to be only an individual characteristic. ... But if we can succumb only in part, and if by self-assertion the ego can save itself from being completely swallowed, then it can assimilate the voice ... (C.G. Jung, The Development of the Personality; No. 17 of Collected Works, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1954 p. 185, my underlining).

Hubertus's "harrowing" can be regarded as an "individualized" form of the general guilt of the community of slave-owners and of the van Groenwegels in particular. Certainly the above quotation might serve almost as a summary of Hubertus's attempt at self-knowledge. He does "succumb only in part" to his wilful, unpredictable "inner self", but avoids the danger of psychic disorientation and manages to achieve a precarious balance between his opposed "selves".

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1 The "void of the Unconscious" (fear of which is the origin of Freudian "repression") is, in literature, frequently expressed in terms of the "oceanic" nature of sexuality. Baudelaire, in the Jeanne Duval cycle, talks of "immersion" in the loved one's hair: "Je plongerai ma tête amoureuse d'ivresse/Dans ce noir ocean ..." ("La Chevelure", Penguin ed. of Baudelaire's poetry, 1970, p. 58); and in D.H. Lawrence's work, fear of the Unconscious is equated with fear of "Blood" - the instinctual as opposed to the intellectual life. In Women in Love, for example, Gerald Crich's fear of his "submerged" self is revealed when (he is an expert swimmer on the surface of the water) he has to dive beneath the lake in search of the drowned couple: "a whole universe under there; ... you're as helpless as if your head was cut off." (Penguin 1965, p. 206). This anxiety is also dramatically expressed in Conrad's Heart of Darkness, in the very nature of the wilderness which engulfs the El Dorado Exploring Expedition "as a sea closes over a diver" and which "had whispered to [Kurtz] things about himself which he did not know. Things of which he had no conception." (Heart of Darkness, 1961, pp. 92 and 131).

The problem expresses itself as an ambiguity of attitude, seen first as he considers the question of providing the Aborigines with rum:

> It was against his principles to give rum to Indians. Drunkenness, he was convinced, was impious ... displeasing to the Almighty. Yet ... to have adhered to his principles ... would have meant that his family would have to do without game and fish, and, of greater importance, his slaves would have been more difficult to control. (p. 16)

Hubertus's dilemma reflects the double standards of the early European settlers and colonizers (who, it is said, "first fell upon their knees and then upon the aborigines") for, faced with the choice of remaining loyal to his Christian principles, or of jettisoning his religious scruples in order to maintain the status quo, he chooses the latter and, quite confidently, prays for divine forgiveness: "God" argued Hubertus, "was a reasonable Being." (p. 17). Within this concept of "loyalty", which he has chosen as a secure frame of reference for his actions, the double standard is made explicit:

> Loyalty, felt Hubertus, was what mattered most in life. One must be loyal to God and Christian men and women. ... The negro slaves and the Indians he considered as beings in an entirely separate category. ... One did not have to be loyal to slaves and Indians. (p. 20)

Even in the matter of family pride, his "two-ness" expresses itself and sets the pattern of the duality which characterizes all his actions:

> Our name? Proud of it? Van Groenwegel? ... I don't want to remember how close I am to them in blood. It makes me feel tainted, too. ... It is because of them - and their foul mother - that I have such low urges. ... And now you tell me you're proud of the name. I can't understand that. ... Yes, I can. That's the terrible part, my dear. I can. I'm proud of the name myself, though I spit at you for saying you are. (p. 83)

This suggests the schizoid tendency (a tendency of which Mittelholzer, as we have seen, was himself victim) which appears as one of the main themes in most of Mittelholzer's serious work. The exploration of the sexual and emotional drives which influenced the actions of earlier van Groenwegels had revealed "strengths" and "weaknesses" which were the

result of chance genetic transference and, as such, entirely outside the realm of moral choice. Hubertus, whose mania for consistency and control - for some fixed, external standard of reference - is mocked at every turn by the ambiguous nature of his own, inner disharmony, also, at first, chooses heredity as a suitable, culpable agent of control:

> It is the mad beast in me. It defeats my restraint when I least expect it to. I'm sure I have inherited it from my mother, that lost woman, that pit of evil. Yes, evil. She was evil ... some mysterious intuition informed me of it - since I was a boy. Evil, evil. (p. 71)

But whereas in Children of Kaywana (1952) brutality and dissoluteness are presented as the inevitable result of a credo of "strength" for its own sake and part of the general climate of the early slave plantations; in this novel they reflect and comment on the inner conflict of the main characters. When, for example, Hubertus sentences a slave to a particularly severe punishment for a petty misdemeanor, he is externalizing his self-torture:

> Faustina rose, deciding that she must act. She must go and speak to him. It was not the man he was sentencing to this torture; it was himself. He would writhe on the broken bottles, not the man. (p. 86)

Similarly, the young Edward's cruel streak ("People to me are like pebbles. I always feel like kicking them along the ground." p. 179) stems from his detached, almost clinical view of human relationships, and his revulsion from sexuality. Like his cousin Hubertus, he has to learn to come to terms with his own, hidden nature; and the "buzzing as of a nest of desperate bees" (p. 279) within him is an image of the Unconscious seeking expression - an image that recurs in the later work and is used in Latticed Echoes (1960) and Thunder Returning (1961) as a leitmotiv for the brooding, insecure Richard Lehrer.[1]

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[1] In Latticed Echoes (1960) this is introduced as "The bass buzzing of giant bees ... trapped in a huge basement." (p. 7)

Throughout the novel, Hubertus tries to come to terms with his lack of psychic "wholeness", but derives little comfort from his reading of Spinoza's Ethics and St. Augustine:

> That that fleshly in us can only be related to evil. This is foolish! Absurd! It is contrary to all one's instincts. ... Moreover, I feel that we are born with tendencies for good or evil. It is the blood in us that dictates our allegiance to God or to the Devil.[1] (pp. 118/119)

Hubertus's conviction that any deed is moral or immoral only in relation to the "allegiance" of the doer - whether inspired by genuine ("good") or corrupt ("bad") feeling - makes possible his adultery with his cousin Faustina in spite of his own avowed, high principles. And it is also this intuition that lies behind his apparently inconsistent attitude to the rebellious slave, Danrab, whom he pardons after having ordered his severe punishment for the serious crime of sedition.

The description of the incident clearly implies that a sense of genuine, moral dignity attaches to the slave's "disloyal" action, which is therefore worthy of respect:[2]

> A black human being with character. Watching him from upstairs, Luise felt almost as much awe for him as she did for her father ... He's a slave and his skin is black but he is a man, she thought. If he were free and had a house like this I could respect him. (p. 145)

Just as Hubertus's own "division of loyalties" finally sabotages all his earlier attempts at an uncompromisingly Christian stance; so too the problem of the incompatibility of Spirit and Flesh, first stated in an

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1 Cf. the pessimistic determinism of H.J. Eysenck whose theories include "the determination of human conduct by hereditary forces." (H.J. Eysenck, Crime and Personality, op. cit., p. 59).

2 After the rebellion is put down, the white instigator is brutally tortured and killed; but Danrab is "strung up" to await his fate, then dropped altogether from the story.

apparently definitive way:

> The flesh is not of necessity evil, yet to yield to its urges is to wound the spirit. The spirit cannot grow in stature while the flesh is being satiated.[1]

undergoes a change, eventually leading to the less manichean view of the older, sadder and wiser Hubertus:

> I used to think of God as an austere Spirit whose one purpose was to punish mankind when the flesn triumphed, and scatter rewards when the spirit showed its superiority. Now ... well, now I am doubtful what my conception is, because I have changed my attitude to the flesh. ... surely if we can find good in human passion - the flesh - there must be some element of the spirit contained in fleshly indulgence? (p. 270)

In fact, Hubertus's ultimate humanism: "You ask about God. Sometimes, my boy, I want to believe that I myself am God" (p. 270) reflects his unwillingness to accept finally that any external agency, such as heredity, should be held answerable for one's inconsistencies. Even the narrow concept of loyalty to "blood", to the family or to the nation, gives way to a more liberal view:

> Look at the number of changes we have suffered since 1781. From Dutch to English then to French then back to Dutch now English again. What do nations matter, Bentley! Why can't we be loyal to each other as members of the human species. (p. 293)

This is a far cry from the early, narrow jingoism of the van Groenwegels and points the way to later novels, like The Wounded and the Worried (1962) and The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965) in which the problem of emotional balance and the need to transcend petty, conventional concepts of society are given a much wider significance.

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[1] This is interpreted by F.M. Birbalsingh not only as a final statement of Hubertus's dilemma , but also as evidence that "Mittelholzer innocently expects perfect satisfaction of human activity from which the body is totally excluded" (Birbalsingh, op. cit. p. 91). In fact the opposite would seem to be the case; for it is Hubertus who"innocently expects" satisfaction from a bodiless spirituality, and Mittelholzer who shows him coming to terms with sexuality in an attempt - the theme of the novel - to achieve an emotional balance.

The reader's impression that the theme of psychic integration is Mittelholzer's main concern in the novel, is sustained by his treatment of other main characters who seem to function as negatively or positively charged complements, often appearing as the paired elements of a dichotomy. Rosalind Maybury, Hubertus's English wife, can be regarded as the spiritual, "sanctified" opposite of Faustina, his sensual, illicit mistress (who is also his cousin, and therefore doubly "taboo"); and Hubertus unites, in loving both women, his "sacred" and "profane" urges. His adultery with Faustina[1] is not, therefore, simply an indulgent, sexual excess, but the necessary counterpart of his love for Rosalind; and contributes to the "balance" which he strives to maintain. He describes his feelings for both Rosalind and Faustina as "deep and sincere" (p. 172) and does not regard his openly adulterous relationship with his cousin as immoral since:

> So long as love is deep and sincere, whether the predicants or the law officials approve it or not, such love is a joy in God's sight. (p. 172)

Hubertus's daughter, Luise, who has a sensitive, easily impressionable nature is portrayed as a foil to the insensitive, cynical Edward, ten years her junior. She follows him around, a faithful, loving shadow, absorbing his cruelty, encouraging his talent for sketching (a sign of "weakness" in earlier van Groenwegels, but recognized by her as the valuable gift it is), and finally helping him to understand and accept their parents', and their own, sexuality. With the introduction of

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1 Faustina, who is related to Hubertus, functions almost as his <u>anima</u>: her name certainly calls to mind Goethe's famous tragic hero and emphasizes Hubertus's "Faustian" conflict. Interestingly enough, "Faustina" was the name Goethe gave to one of his mistresses with whom "for the first time he abandoned himself to physical love fully and unfettered by remorse." (Karl Stern, <u>The Flight from Woman</u>, Allen & Unwin, 1966, p. 246).

Clara Hartfield, the sensual equivalent of Faustina, the menage a trois of Edward/Luise/Clara functions almost as a sub-plot to the relationship of Hubertus, Rosalind and Faustina. Hubertus's marriage survives his infidelity largely because of Rosalind's Christian forbearance; but Luise, as Edward's wife, is able to rise above sexual jealousy, recognizing that Edward's love for her is not diminished by his physical desire for Clara. Edward, too, is more successful than Hubertus in keeping a "balance" while accepting the fact that his moral principles are not proof against the irrational nature of his sexual urges. Like Hubertus, who refuses to "deceive myself about myself" (p. 269), Edward is committed to personal integrity; ("I am myself, Clara, ... I can't escape from myself." p. 273) and his own attempt to discover some unalterable Truth about himself and his relationships with others, mirrors and confirms Hubertus's. He says to Clara:

> Cousin Hubertus is right. It's not easy to tell where the flesh ends and the spirit begins. These afternoons with you have been beautiful. It wasn't simply lust. There was the beauty of the spirit in them. (p. 277)

At the end of the novel, as the questioning cry of the goatsucker returns with its suggestion of the need to explore one's identity:

> "Listen! A goatsucker. Such a long time I haven't heard one."
>
> ... Hoo-yoo!
>
> They listened, and it came again. Far away amidst the trees. Hoo-yoo! (p. 294)

we see the old Hubertus, still victim of his divided nature, but no longer in any doubt of the need to find a solution from within himself.

> ... do you still believe in God?
>
> God. A Supreme Being. ... Yes. Yes, Edward - I believe - have always believed - in myself. (p. 303)

Such, then, is the outline of the deeper, psychological theme of psychic orientation which, first sounded in Corentyne Thunder (1941) and

further developed in "Angela Vimiero", was to become the main theme of many of the later novels. The recognition of this theme of psychic imbalance and of its centrality in the novel is a necessary first step to any discussion of Hubertus; for although expressed mainly in terms of sexual ethics, Hubertus's ambiguous attitude reflects a deeper conflict of "loyalties" and questions the whole concept of Christian chastity. Mittelholzer's attempt to convey Hubertus's moral conflict within the narrative of events, however unconvincing, does at least enlarge the scope of the novel well beyond the narrow boundary laid down by F.M. Birbalsingh, who claims that:

> Hubertus's attempt to distinguish right from wrong in sexual conduct is briefly stated and his career, or those of others connected with him, then become ribald accounts of sexual pleasures.[1]

for not only is Hubertus's ethical dilemma more complex than this suggests, but the sexual encounters, which serve to illustrate it, are hardly "ribald accounts". Indeed, the love-making in the novel is presented as the natural result of physical intimacy: a biological function which leaves both partners with a feeling of tenderness and respect for each other, and which calls in question the Pauline concept of the sinfulnessness of the flesh. As Faustina says after she and Hubertus make love: "it couldn't be wrong. Only evil people could think it wrong. By every rule it was right." (p. 96). At the deeper, psychological level, Hubertus, by condoning the urges of a "hidden", unpredictable self as a legitimate expression of his "wholeness", admits the Dark God of the Anima and acknowledges the essentially "double" nature of Man. The sexual emphasis also has psychological validity which is borne out, for example, by Jung:

> The shadow can be realized only through a relation to a

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1 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 93.

> partner, and anima and animus only through a relation to the opposite sex. (C.G. Jung, The Coll. Works, vol. 9, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1959, p. 22).

Mittelholzer's handling of this psychological theme – his "character study" of Hubertus – is disappointingly superficial, however. The reader is never allowed, so to speak, to observe the characters from the inside; and attempts at describing inner feelings and emotions tend to trail off into vagueness. Faustina's feelings, when she is out walking with Hubertus, are generalized as "the uncertainties and fluctuations of the warm mist that was the physical in her" (p. 71); and Luise, fearing a return of Edward's earlier, childhood cruelty, feels:

> A shrinking and shrivelling, as though a cold rag had brushed her heart and it was her heart that was shrinking and shrivelling. (p. 196)

Flattered by Edward's attentions, however, she feels " like a ghost contained in a cloud of love." (p. 178). When Edward's detached, artist's interest in Clara takes on a more personal tone, we are told that "a mist wreathed in his senses." (p. 267). This apparent ineptitude of style makes it difficult for the characters' inner conflict to emerge as a genuine struggle; nor is the writing free from a certain obvious sentimentality. An example of this is Faustina's rapturous memory of her sexual experience with Hubertus:

> Oh, I wonder. And I wonder if she has even once tasted with Hubertus such bliss as I have done. I hope she has – once, twice, innumerable times. ... Poor creature. I have robbed you, but I am a thief unrepentant. ... Oh, sweet wet leaves! Lovely damp rain. (p. 97)

There is also what appears to be an attempt at erotic illustration for its own sake. Luise, asked by Edward to strip for a nude sketch is too shy to do so; but when he reveals his wish to marry her, she relents and offers herself to him sexually. "When we're married," he says, "not before." (p. 184). The reader is thus prepared for a later, less

inhibited sexual encounter; and, later on, when Luise again sits for him she undresses, and, predictably, tries to break down his reserve. Edward refuses, with great effort, to indulge in sexual intercourse, but is so excited that he nevertheless has an ejaculation. "Next time", promises Luise, "it will be different." (p. 192). These incidents (like the affair between Luise's sister Jacqueline and the Scots overseer, Robert Guire) are intended to illustrate the "unnaturalness" of a code of ethics which sanctions sexual intercourse only within marriage; but they function, one feels, mainly to provoke sexual excitement. But perhaps the most distracting element in the writing, is the lack of restraint shown by Mittelholzer in bringing in extraneous, personal "theories", such as the innate masochism of women (a prominent feature in Sylvia, 1953) and of the efficacy of "doing first unto one's enemies as they would like to do to you." The former "theory" lies behind Luise's meek, almost grateful acceptance of Edward's cruelty; while the latter is expressed in Hubertus's "strong" attitude to a possible slave uprising:

> The strong, the ruthless win. The weak, the timid, the kindly and faltering are annihilated. ... No, Rosalind, we must love our enemies - but when our enemies attack us we must butcher them without mercy. Or we shall get butchered. (p. 142)

The suspicion that this is only a self-conscious posturing is borne out by Hubertus's merciful treatment of the slave, Danrab, and his inability, at the last moment, to fire point blank into the face of a black attacker. In fact, neither "theory" is used structurally or thematically to advance the novel as a whole. To make matters worse, Mittelholzer is, it seems, unable (or unwilling) to follow his psychological theme through to its deeper implications. It is as if a powerful super-ego stands guard against too close an examination of "a facet of my own personality": that the subject - the need for psychic integration was too close to his own psychological malaise. Hubertus's intuition that his "animal" self is as

important to total psychic health as his "spiritual" self, is never allowed to develop into a dialogue betweem Ego and Unconscious:

> At this point Hubertus would think no further. He felt it would be an act of blasphemy to probe deeper into the mysteries. (p. 54).

The novel fails ultimately as a work of art not because "ethics are absent",[1] but because Mittelholzer does not explore the implications of his theme deeply enough, and so fails to create what might have been (and what the author apparently intended to be) a genuine psychological drama: a reconciliation of the opposing elements of the "Old Blood" within the alembic of Hubertus's consciousness.

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1 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 93.

(III) Kaywana Blood (1958)

Hubertus (1954), then, is the digressive book of the trilogy: a more personal novel, the main theme of which is the need for psychic integrity - a theme taken up again in later novels. It is in Kaywana Blood, the final book of the trilogy, that Mittelholzer's examination of the "strengths" and "weaknesses" which stem from the "Old Blood"[1] takes its full, ironic effect. The first chapter contrasts the attitudes of Storm van Groenwegel's sons, Graham and Dirk, towards the family's traditions. Very soon, we find that Graham has inherited the "Soft Streak" and Dirk the "fire-blood"; and, while Graham develops an instinctive liking for dark-skinned people[2] and a precocious, introspective nature, Dirk reveals a streak of cruelty, a surplus of family pride and Negrophobia. He appears almost to be a re-incarnation of Hendrickje, complete with driving egotism and power-lust; and, like Hendrickje, he is allowed to damn himself by his own excesses in the name of "strength". The killing of a pet puppy for use as bait during

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1 The title EM had originally intended to use. In a letter to A.J. Seymour, he mentions Kaywana Blood and says: "The true title, of course, is 'The Old Blood'." (Lectures, 1968, op. cit., p. 28). An abridged, paperback version of Children of Kaywana (Savage Destiny, Dell Publishing Co. Inc. New York 1965) carries, on its facing title page the note: "Author of Old Blood and The Life and Death of Sylvia." No edition of Kaywana Blood entitled Old Blood appears to exist, however.

2 A trait he shares with his ancestor, Laurens. Graham's early erotic experience with his black nurse, Nibia, who lets the child fondle her breasts (an incident similar to the childhood experience EM records in A Swarthy Boy, 1963, p. 18) appears to contribute to both his "weakness" and his Negrophilia.

an alligator hunt, is, for him, a rational act:

> 'All life is cruel,' snapped Dirk. 'And sometimes you have to be ruthless to achieve some big thing. ... The capture of an alligator was more important than the life of a mere puppy.' (p. 70)[1]

His mania for keeping the family "pure-blooded", and his consequent attempts to disengage the "coloured" from the "pure" stock (even insisting that "mixed" van Groenwegels undergo a change of name) strenuously refusing to admit any Negro "taint" into the family, are shown, in the light of the earlier novels, to be a self-damaging pre-occupation - the unhappy result of poring over the letters in the old canister, now the only link with the family's past. Dirk's "strength", presented as characteristic of the "Old Blood" in its forceful expression:

> These slaves need a kick or thump now and then to keep them active. They are too lazy. ... it would be a mistake to treat them like human beings. (p. 61)

is, however, essentially comic, since it is clear that the old order is already dead. When the old slave, Cushy, is ordered by the young "massa" to relate what he recalls of the glorious van Groenwegel stand in 1763, his recounting of the sober facts of the rebellion upsets Dirk's romantic image of his ancestors' heroism: and when Cushy retreats to his logie to shelter from the sudden downpour, the grave "crisis of authority" which presents itself to Dirk's mind is used by Mittelholzer for purposes of ironic humour:

> 'I order you to come back out, Cushy!' Jacob growled. 'Don't be foolish, Dirk. You getting wet. Come in.' ... Dirk advanced a pace. 'I shall strike you, Cushy! Do you hear me? Obey me this instant and come back out here. I won't enter your stinking logie.'
>
> Jacob laughed. 'Stop all that talk, Dirk. It's my grandpa.' (p. 66).

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1 All quotations are from the 1958 edition.

The incident finally resolves itself as an expression of the childish fantasy which, in effect, it is; and as Dirk and his coloured half-brother, Jacob, run back to the house they play a game of "let's pretend":

> Let's imagine we're after a party of rebels in 1763. We're tracking them to their headquarters through the pouring rain. We're defying the elements because we're two brave van Groenwegels who won't be scared by God, man, or dirty slaves. What do you say? (p. 67).

Dirk's sheer energy, however, is clearly intended as an admirable quality: "He's quite off his head," says his grandfather, "but he has spirit, damme!" (p. 67). His misfortune is that he is unable to harness it to good ends.

On the other hand, Graham, who is, significantly, put in charge of Huis Kaywana, determines to use his influence for the benefit of others:

> I must prove what kindness and gentleness and consideration for one's fellow humans can bring forth. ... I shall use my softness wisely. (pp. 102/103).

Graham's "softness" does, however, have its unfortunate counterpart: a view of sexual love as a comforting, sentimental indulgence. This is a genuinely "weak" trait which later develops into homosexuality, but he is nevertheless presented in the novel as a worthy successor to Hubertus. As Clara Hartfield puts it: "You are going to be an outstanding van Groenwegel - perhaps as outstanding as Cousin Hubertus." (p.105). Graham's treatment of his slaves is humane; and it is surely ironic that the first chapel built for the slaves in the colony is established right at the heart of the "Old Blood" - plantation Kaywana - where Dirk

later admires Hubertus's portrait, assuming his ancestor to be the possessor of outstanding qualities of "strength". The disabusing which follows is only another of the ways in which Dirk's obsession is quietly mocked:

> 'There's a man, by God! ... There's a van Groenwegel to boast of!" Graham smiled slyly. "He used to curse the Old Blood. He called it the blood of beasts." (p. 160)

Later, when Dirk notices a large bible on the table he says, condescendingly: "I suppose you read it every day. How Cousin Hubertus' ghost must sneer at you!" (p. 163). Graham informs him, with relish, that the bible had, in fact, belonged to Hubertus. Again and again, Dirk's solipsism blights his relationships with others. His estimate of his coloured half-brother, Jacob, as "lazy-minded" is shown to be hopelessly inaccurate; for it is Jacob who provides the momentum for Dirk's prosperous timber business:

> Jacob, despite his air of indolence and apparent lack of ambition, was a man of ideas, and always on the alert for opportunities to improve the business. (p. 243)

Dirk's crude attempt to deflect Graham from marriage with Rose - a mulatto relative - fails, and he has to be content with Graham's agreement to adopt the name of "Greenfield": the English equivalent of Groenwegel.[1] But Rose proves to be a fine, spirited individual, in spite of her "tainted" blood, and, later on, Dirk "would nod and tell himself that she had earned her place of honour in the history of the van Groenwegels" (p. 328) as mistress of Huis Kaywana. The reader is, however, also shown Rose's "weak" side: a sensual streak which rapidly develops as Graham becomes more and more "unmanly". Her long-standing attraction

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1 EM. makes this change from Dutch to English reflect the historical and social situation. The county is now in English hands, and Stabroek - the main, coastal town where the Greenfields go to live - is now called "Georgetown".

to Dirk, whose Negrophobia begins to dwindle, leads first to adultery with him (she has a child by him which is stillborn) amd then, her longing for a child and for Dirk's love frustrated, to a liaison sexuelle with Pelham van Groenwegel. She dies in a fire after a rum-soaked orgy which is clearly an expression of her death-wish: "The flames had not hurt her, for she had given herself to them." (p.328). She remains, like Hubertus, an enigmatic figure: an unstable mixture of "sacred" and "profane" elements.

Dirk's violent racial prejudice - the expression of his fear of genetic "taint" - is given an almost pathological significance; and it is this revulsion from "black blood" which underlies his treatment of Rose:

> Black, shiny faces in the hot noonday sun. Frizzy black hair, in mops on their heads. To think of future van Groenwegels inheriting some of that pigment. And that coarse, rough, kinky hair! Never! Never! (p. 208)

This fear is shown, however, to be the result of a pathetic, personal fallacy, for Rose is the only woman (as Dirk admits) who "treats me with entire freedom and easy friendship and does not show towards me any hostility." (p. 139). Because of his deep, irrational fear of racial "impurity" (a fear that is deeply ironic, since he is unaware that Hendrickje, whose memory he venerates, is part Negro) he tries to distance her as he had distanced his boyhood friend, Jacob: but his superior manner disguises an inner instability:

> ... for in Rose's presence he was always unsure of himself; deep within, he knew why, but it angered him to admit it openly to himself. Secretly he feared Rose. (p. 134)

He forces himself to reject Rose's freely offered love (although he admits that he loves her) because she represents "black blood" and therefore the "soft streak" in the family: but immediately afterwards, he cold-bloodedly forces the desirable Cornelia (whom he later marries) to have intercourse with him. His use of sheer physical strength to overcome the "white" Cornelia's reservations, and his stubborn refusal to give in to the

"black" Rose's entreaties constitute an ethical perversion. Dirk's seduction of Cornelia is a crudely erotic, humorous, mock-heroic event, used by Mittelholzer, one suspects, to satirise Dirk's prowess as a "hard" van Groenwegel:

> " ... Come on, warrior-woman. Yield."
>
> " Release me. This is absurd - and undignified. You are a madman."
>
> "It's a fight to the end. The van Groenwegels never run. And I'm Dirk - the hardest of them all." (pp. 157/158)

In this encounter, a ludicrously incongruous echo of earlier, heroic confrontations, not only is Dirk's "strength" made to appear questionable; but the predatory quality with which it is associated is also imaged in the harsh barking of a raccoon[1] in the nearby bushes:

> The raccoon hack-hacked in the bush across the canal, getting nearer, now getting more distant, then getting nearer. On the prowl. (p. 157)

When, however, Rose lies dangerously ill after an abortive pregnancy, it is Dirk who encourages her will to live; and the rallying cry of the van Groenwegels is seen here to have a beneficial effect: for Rose finds the strength to recover. Mittelholzer is clearly at pains to suggest that qualities of strength and weakness are to be judged only in so far as they reflect, in a positive or negative way, deeper, humane values. Graham's "weakness" is praiseworthy when it expresses his innate belief in the finer qualities of the human heart:

> I shall prove to Dirk that it isn't only hardness and brutality that can win power and glory for a family. (p. 102)

and Dirk's "strength" is evil when, motivated by a mental image of power - the desire to "aim at the pinnacles" (p. 155) - it ignores the inner "essence" of things in its ruthless attempt to consolidate material benefits

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1 Dirk's eyes are often described as "wild" or as "raccoon's eyes".

and to bolster narrow pride. In a rare moment of self-revelation, Dirk admits that his strength of will has become a prison:

> Yours is a flexible strength, Rose. Mine, alas, is brittle. I must be strict in the guard I place over my integrity, over my code of stability, for damage done to it - and this would be serious damage - would be irreparable. (p. 260).[1]

Moreover, the "iron in his soul" (p. 155) is harnessed to an anachronistic dream of power. As Cornelia tells him, somewhat wryly:

> You were born too late, Dirk. You should have been a brother of those on the upper reaches in 1763. Then you would have had so many opportunities to kill and to be cruel. (p. 153).

The section of the novel which deals with the development of young Francis, Dirk's favourite nephew, appears, at first sight, to be simply another example of the author's penchant for lurid, sensational writing. The boy, left in charge of the younger children, suddenly reveals an unhealthy delight in bullying, indulging in obscene practical jokes and entering into grotesque, sexual experiments with the Negro slave, Elvira,[2] who has encouraged him under the pretext of teaching him the secrets of <u>obeah</u>. Francis terrifies the other children with his disgusting behaviour and lewd threats and when, finally, he realizes that Elvira has merely used him as a means of obtaining the money she requires to purchase her freedom, he strangles her. Undoubtedly, Mittelholzer does give free rein to his own gift for bizarre story-telling and clearly panders to the public's enduring interest in the salacious; but this episode, like the one in which Mary offers herself to a coarse seaman to

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[1] This shows some psychological insight, suggesting as it does the need for a constantly vigilant super-ego in order to avoid the "irreparable" damage that might result from an incursion into ego-consciousness by repressed, unconscious elements.

[2] As a child EM was terrified of the family's Negro cook, Elvira, who had a grotesque squint. So much so, he says, that "I could not possibly name a character Elvira in one of my novels unless I depicted her as someone sinister." (<u>A Swarthy Boy</u>, 1963, p. 22). This is an example (<u>vide</u> footnote 1 p.101.) of the psychological "conditioning" which EM often underestimated or attempted to repudiate.

omit

be ravished and defiled,[1] is also used as a comment on the baneful effect of the canister[2] with its burden of old letters which have already exerted so damaging an influence on Dirk's character. Francis says to Elvira, during one of their perverted rituals:

> Cousin Dirk will discover that he isn't the most powerful van Groenwegel, after all. All those letters he made me read about Grandma Hendri[ckje] and her cruelties - ... Wait until I begin to be cruel! (pp. 351/352, my underlining).

and later, he pleads with his uncle:

> It's those letters, Cousin Dirk ... I kept remembering what Grandma Hendrickje said. The pinnacles - and power. I was determined that I would win for myself all the power I could, so that I could take the family to the pinnacles - that's why I fell in with Elvira. (p. 355).

Dirk's "education" of Francis, his determination to "see that Francis made something of himself as a van Groenwegel" (p. 356) receives a horribly ironic fulfilment, in the face of which Cornelia's disclaimer that "he was born with a bad streak" (p. 357) appears, to say the least, disingenuous. The malignant influence of the "Old Blood" is acknowledged by Dirk in the final chapters of the novel:

> I have spoiled so many lives by the words I've uttered. Between myself and that canister, I wonder which has brought more unhappiness to the van Groenwegels this past half century? (p. 477).

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1 F.M. Birbalsingh claims that the sado/masochistic elements in the episode are without moral implications, since "there is no question of right or wrong in the girl's conduct." (Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 92). The reader is, however, invited to see the incident in the light of an earlier passage in which Mary rails against her father:

> I hate the Old Blood! I hate the family! I wish you'd burnt those letters with all their tales of cruelty and misery and ugliness. They've had as baneful an influence on me as they've had on you - and Adrian. (pp. 458/459, my underlining).

The suggestion that Mary's sexual deviation is partly a conditioned response, is unmistakable.

2 In My Bones and My Flute (1955) the canister of "J.P. Voorman" contains an ancient parchment the merest physical contact with which immediately releases a miasmal Evil.

and when the last surviving letters (Laurens' to Susannah in the seventeenth century) are unearthed and translated, Dirk discovers a bitter truth about the "Old Blood". As he talks to himself, he fancies that Rose's spirit is listening:

> The final irony, my love. Grandma Hendrickje's mother was a quadroon - a <u>mestee</u>. ... She had black blood in her, Rose. - the queen of the van Groenwegels. After Kaywana, our greatest heroine. An octaroon, Rose. One eighth negro. (p. 497)

The irony is intensified by the fact that a number of the lower-class, coloured folk in the novel are shown to be better mannered and to possess higher principles than the upper-class whites and near-whites. When Dirk, supported by his parents, had insulted Rose and her mother and a friend, Clara Hartfield, in his blind opposition to Graham's wish to marry Rose; during the shocking display of crude racial prejudice and vulgar social snobbery, Mrs. Clark, Rose's coloured mother, "was the only one who had retained her dignity intact." (p. 227). In spite of Dirk's earlier censure, Jacob marries his childhood sweetheart, a "silly, ignorant coloured girl" (p. 80) and lives a reasonably, happy, prosperous life. But when the degenerate Francis marries (to spite his family) a <u>sambo</u> girl whose father, to Dirk's alarm, is "a coarse, crude nigger" (p. 365), the girl's parents are far from pleased. As Edward van Groenwegel reports:

> The truth of the matter is that Francis got her pregnant, and the parents only agreed to her marrying Francis to prevent her living in a state of sin. ... The impression I gained was that they are even less happy about the match than we are. (p.366)

The news from England of the Queen's awarding of a baronetcy to Reginald Greenfield, the son of Graham and Rose, is felt by Dirk as the final twist of the knife; for, had he not insisted on Graham's changing his name, the family would have received some of the reflected glory: "and to think that it might have been Sir Reginald van Groenwegel. That hurt." (p. 452). Later, he says: "Black blood. I might have been richer in spirit had I taught myself not to scorn it." (p. 489); and whereas

Graham:

> ... had conquered the warp in his nature, and had come through to peace of mind in the final decades of his life. (p. 495).

Dirk takes refuge in a fatalistic philosophy of hereditary accident:

> In the final reckoning each member of our family will achieve only that which his inborn nature dictates that he is capable of achieving. The strong will prove strong. The weak will prove weak. (p. 427).

This sounds suspiciously like the attempt of a disillusioned man to cheer himself up; and with his visions of van Groenwegel power and glory falling in ruins around him, his impassioned outburst:

> The sexual urge. That is the driving force, my child, behind all our actions and all our destinies. It colours our lives from birth to grave. (p. 498).

far from being Mittelholzer's view of a world in which sexual anarchy prevails "because ethics are absent"[1] is an expression of Dirk's failure to "conquer the warp in his nature" and to acnieve a balance of physical and moral strength. The real driving force, heredity, which, in Mittelholzer's view could provide the potential both for success and failure in achieving this balance, is shown to be the only influence over which one can have absolutely no control: the unpredictable force which constantly mocks the arrogance of "whoremaster man" and makes nonsense of his pretensions. It is Hubertus's wider, more humane vision that finally provides a counterbalance to the van Groenwegel obsession with "blood":

> I believe in the brotherhood of men on earth - not in the brotherhood of separate nations. ... My loyalty has always been to human kind - not to a nation. (Hubertus, 1954, p. 226)

Any obsessive, narrow view of loyalty, Mittelholzer seems to be suggesting, (such as the view of a Hendrickje or a Dirk) inevitably involves self-delusion. The novel - and the trilogy - ends as old Patrick Baxter-Hough

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[1] Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 93.

(a "white" descendant of the van Groenwegels), taking an after-dinner stroll along a Georgetown street in 1953, pauses to amuse himself by listening to a political address. He instantly dislikes the political complexion of the young East Indian speaker: "Confounded fool," he mutters as he passes on, "thank God he's no relative of mine!" (p. 515). This is Mittelholzer's final, wry comment; for "Georgie Boodoo" is also a bearer of van Groenwegel blood, and Patrick's casual dismissal of the "coffee-complexioned man" (p. 515) - an attitude all too common in the well-off, "respectable", "local-white" upper-class of the colony, at the time - is itself ironic; for the socialist, multi-racial party the man represents - the People's Progressive Party - did, in fact, come to power in 1953 and provided the first impulse for what was later to become the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

The progress through the trilogy of the ancestral "blood" of the van Groenwegels reflects Mittelholzer's enduring pre-occupation with "two-ness" and the need for psychic integration. The pattern which evolves may be summarised as follows: an inherited strain of "bad blood" produces an inner division (strong/weak, spiritual/sensual) which, if unchecked, leads to degeneracy and the death-wish; but, if resisted, can be channelled and re-directed to good ends. The novels' historical framework serves mainly as a vehicle for the author's real concern with what is, in effect, a personal and psychological *malaise*; and Mittelholzer projects on to the events of the Guyanese past with its burden of violence and sexual guilt, his own sense of an inner conflict of allegiances. Part African slave, part white slave-owner, Mittelholzer deliberately fragments his personality, as it were, allowing these two conflicting elements of his psyche to act out their opposition to each other in terms of Strength *versus* Weakness or (in Hubertus's case) Spirit *versus* Flesh. It is precisely because Mittelholzer is himself involved in this way that the

that the novels' "moral purpose" appears to be undermined by intractable, contradictory impulses. But, as a closer reading of the novels' ironic purpose reveals, the author is aware of this conflict of opposites: in fact this is his main concern and gives a centrifugal unity to the work, for these irrevocably opposed forces are the expression of an indivisible whole, and, representing two facets of the author's personality, they are inevitably bound up together within the writing. In Kaywana Blood (1958), when Adrian van Groenwegel, Dirk's son, plays his own piano composition, his description of the piece reveals it as a musical allegory which summarises the dualistic theme of the trilogy itself and reveals the author's deliberate, contrapuntal approach:

> 'It's loose in form', said Adrian, 'but there are two twin themes, the one sad, the other gay. One is symbolic of the strong and the other of the weak, and they keep intermingling and - and warring with each other ... and eventually the strong one takes command near the middle of the piece, and the other one seems as if it's going to die away, but suddenly it comes back into its own, and another warring takes place. Then towards the end you hear them both interlaced, and both are being resolved in a perdendosi.' (p. 454)[1]

It is remarkable how closely Mittelholzer's embodiment, in the Kaywana novels, of a conflict between "strong" and "weak" elements reflects modern psychological views on the importance of patriarchal and matriarchal principles in society. According to Erich Fromm, (invoking Bachofen's theory of "The Maternal Law")[2] since "the principle of matriarchy is that of universality, while the patriarchal system is that of restric-

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[1] The last section of the book is headed, "Perdendosi"; a musical term which means "gradually fading away". Musical analogy is also used by EM. in A Swarthy Boy (1963) to describe his own sense of being possessed by two conflicting elements which, he says, "have always lived within me ... Greensleeves weaving through the Sword motiv from The Ring." (p.126).

[2] Johann Jakob Bachofen, Das Mutterrecht (Stuttgart 1861)

tions"[1]; a blending of both is needed for a full and "sane" life, because:

> If they are opposed to each other, the matriarchal principle manifests itself in motherly over-indulgence and infantilization of the child, preventing its full maturity; fatherly authority becomes harsh domination and control, based on the child's fear and feelings of guilt.[2]

In other words, a situation develops in which the natural quality of each principle becomes exaggerated or perverted and a radical opposition between "strength" and "weakness" ensues. Any excessive bias towards either principle is equally undesirable, for:

> A viable and progressive solution lies only in a new synthesis of the opposites, one in which the opposition between mercy and justice is replaced by a union of the two on a higher level.[3]

Mittelholzer's "two twin themes", therefore, like his characterization of Dirk and Graham van Groenwegel as "strong" and "weak", constitute an artistic rendering (whether conscious or unconscious) of this psychological theory: that a balanced union of the strong/male and weak/female principles alone can bring about psychic and social health. Mittelholzer's own awareness of inner conflict between the "male" and "female" aspects of his personality: "Greensleeves weaving through the Sword motiv from The Ring"[4] would certainly seem to have provided the background to his lasting obsession with "strength" and "weakness". And in his characterization in presenting, for example, Hendrickje as a "phallic", power-seeking female, Graham as an excessively "soft" or "matriarchal" male and Dirk as overly "masculine" and "hard", Mittelholzer has, with some insight,

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1 Erich Fromm, The Crisis of Psychoanalysis (Jonathan Cape, 1971) p. 101.

2 Ibid., pp. 104/105.

3 Ibid., p. 105.

4 Vide footnote 1, p. 92 above.

suggested both the symptoms and the inevitable result of a perversion of the patriarchal or matriarchal principles and revealed his overriding concern with psychic balance.

Mittelholzer was, as we have suggested, and as the available autobiographical evidence shows, conditioned from an early age to regard a "strong", patriarchal, authoritarian attitude as a good in itself. Like Milton Copps of Sylvia (1953) he set about to cultivate a "strong" persona to compensate for an exaggerated fear of "weakness" and a sense of the futility of life in a philistine, repressive society. His theory of "strength" and "weakness" was not, therefore, the result of a reasoned philosophy, but was influenced largely by his direct, emotional experience of the world. Living in Britain, he said,[1] had "intensified" his views on this subject, and, as we shall see when we come to look at the novels from about 1961 onwards (when he began to experience serious publishing difficulties) this "intensification" took the form of an increasingly dogmatic and peremptory rejection of "weakness" in an effort to preserve and protect his individuality. Identification with his own schizoid heroes became more marked, and because his personality was always heavily biased on the side of authoritarianism – of "strength" – this aspect tended more and more to predominate. In Sylvia, Mittelholzer retraced, to a large extent, the terrain of his own boyhood and young manhood; and in the figure of Milton Copps, is himself present to comment on the narrow coercive society whose strictures he so deeply resented. But, in the Kaywana trilogy, though still personally involved through historical and family ties, he is at a sufficient distance from his subject – Guyana's colonial slave-history – to maintain a certain objectivity in the treatment of character and theme. He is able, therefore,

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1) B.B.C. "Caribbean Voices" (vide footnote 1, p.46).

to resist (at least, in two of the novels of the trilogy) the tendency to identify with his characters: a tendency which, in most of his work, precludes a balanced view of the theory of "strength" and "weakness".

When one considers that the West Indian pre-occupation with identity: with a psychological and cultural split (the most persistent theme in West Indian writing) has its origin in colonization and slavery; then the remarkable nature of Mittelholzer's sustained creative effort in the Kaywana trilogy; the act of bodying forth this psychological and cultural schism within the historical framework that gave it birth, becomes clear. For the conflict in the trilogy between "strength" and "weakness" is also the conflict between White and Black, master and slave; the basis of that forlorn, sterile round of protest which, in erecting static biases of colour or class forces the West Indian to confront the "white" world in an attempt at self-identification. This, one suspects, is what lies behind Denis Williams's remark that, though not the greatest Guyanese work ever written, the trilogy was:

> ... the one which _had_ to be written ... not only for clothing the bare bones of history with the vestments of the creative imagination, but also for proposing this unique problem of our relationship to the ancestor.[1]

The Kaywana trilogy is not only an epic, imaginative record of the peculiar social and historical reality of Guyana, a national novel: it is also a prodigious, pioneering attempt to examine the cultural and emotional ambivalence which is a heritage of the West Indian past. By embodying the conflicting claims of history and heredity within the violent, ambiguous fortunes of the van Groenwegel family, Mittelholzer, like Nathaniel

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1 Denis Williams, _Lectures_, op. cit., p. 13.

Hawthorne,[1] attempted to exorcise the ghosts of the past: and at the conclusion of the Kaywana trilogy might almost be saying, with Hawthorne:

> Let us thank God for having given us such ancestors; and let each successive generation thank Him, not less fervently, for being one step further from them in the march of ages ("Main Street" from Twice-Told Tales, second series, Frederick Warne & Co., 1893. p. 70)[2]

Hawthorne's ironic puppet-show, in which the New England "heritage" is seen to be ambiguous, has a great deal in common with Mittelholzer's Kaywana trilogy: and the puppeteer's remarks remind us of Hubertus van Groenwegel's ambivalent regard for the family name; an attitude which lies at the heart of the Kaywana novels. Divided within himself, Mittelholzer sought in his work both to examine and to identify this "two-ness". As a result, he is generally, to an extraordinary degree, emotionally involved in his fiction, so that it is never safe, in reading his work, to accept a superficial estimate(even if it appears to be Mittelholzer's own) of events or characters. Criticism of Mittelholzer's work tends to be concerned mainly with refuting or supporting his "status" as a novelist; and often appears to proceed from a too ingenuous reading of the work itself. Thus the credo of Hendrickje van Groenwegel: "That's the way of life. Everything is blind and haphazard" (Kaywana, 1952, p. 246), though it reflects the author's atheistic leanings, does

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1 There are interesting similarities between EM. and Hawthorne. Both New World writers regarded the heritage of the colonial past as occasion for family pride as well as for a feeling of hereditary guilt. Both seem obsessed by an apparently hopeless dualism of "higher" and "lower" motives; and their work harbours a curious, moral ambiguity. Frederick C. Crews claims that: "a definable, indeed classic, conflict of wishes lies at the heart of Hawthorne's ambivalence and provides the inmost configuration of his plots." (The Sins of the Fathers, OUP, New York, 1966, p. 2 6). A similar conflict is observable in the work of EM.

2 The story, "Main Street", is (like the Kaywana novels) a nostalgic, clearly ironic reconstruction of a historical legacy, beginning in the pre-colonial past. Hawthorne's New England is seen to be founded as much on exploitation as on heroic "vision".

not expose Mittelholzer to the charge of amorality any more than Gloucester's cry in King Lear ("As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport") exposes Shakespeare. Clearly Hendrickje's outburst lacks the dramatic stature of Gloucester's great cry of anguish, but it reflects an identical sense of "the wanton nature of the world".[1] The important point is that Mittelholzer has already demonstrated the flaw in Hendrickje's character; the blind, self-will which, like Lear's, initiates its own train of evil, and which the author is at pains to condemn. Patrick Guckian (attempting to clear Mittelholzer of the charge of racial prejudice) issues a timely warning with regard to the special danger of quoting Mittelholzer out of context or of attributing to the author the views of his characters:

> The author himself drew attention to this abuse by making Charles Pruthick interrupt a tirade against the writer Colin Wilson with "But it was his character who put forward these ideas."[2]

But Guckian, not reckoning with Mittelholzer's deviousness, falls into the same error, as an extension of the quotation reveals:

> "Don't throw that one at me, for God's sake! ... We know it's supposed to be the character who's thinking these things, but behind it hovers the author. ... What you've got to watch in these novels is the prevailing tone - the deep underlying trend in the things that happen and the things that are said." (The Piling of Clouds, 1961, pp. 64/66, my underlining).

This advice is particularly applicable to Mittelholzer's own work; for the real problems of any critical exegesis of the novels come from the fact that deeper levels of meaning are often overlaid by self-conscious or prolix writing, and trivial incident and superficial characterization often coincide with real insights. It is therefore

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1 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 90.

2 Guckian, op. cit., p. 39.

possible to discover within the novels as a whole both a Tragic Vision[1] and the frivolous "free-ranging fantasies" of a "moralist manqué".[2] If there is a tragic element which rescues Mittelholzer's work from the category of the merely trivial, then it is to be found in the Faustian theme that underscores so much of his writing: the split in consciousness which, unless repaired through an associative effort - an "at-onement" of Spirit and Flesh, Strength and Weakness, leads to repression and the consequent death-wish.

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1 See W.J. Howard, "Edgar Mittelholzer's Tragic Vision". CQ No. 4 (December 1970) pp. 19/28. Reference to this article will appear henceforth as Howard.

2 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 98.

Chapter Four

THE ASSOCIATIVE ATTEMPT

Part One: The Search for "Wholeness".

(I) A Morning at the Office (1950)

In this study, so far, it has been suggested not only that the central concern of the novels is with psychic imbalance, the result of inherited qualities, which is ultimately responsible for the characters' ambivalent attitudes; but also that Mittelholzer's own division of consciousness further complicates this theme, since he is so often directly involved in his fiction. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that, because there are redeeming psychological levels of meaning (whether unconscious or not) in the writing, the novels are therefore successful. Indeed, much of Mittelholzer's work fails precisely because of the serious and obdurate disharmonies between intention and expression. The effectiveness of a work of art must surely depend:

> ... as much on the skill with which its component parts are woven into a single pattern as on the conscious or unconscious meaning of any particular part of it.[1]

This chapter will attempt to examine the extent to which Mittelholzer was himself aware of his "submerged" themes of psychic malaise, by discussing those novels in which there is a clear movement towards an associative art, and by the use of biographical and autobiographical evidence to illustrate the parallel between the author's life and the fictional life of his characters. Just as the undermining presence of a personal obsession often prevents Mittelholzer's work from achieving the status of a truly creative work of art; so the extent to which he was able to view his inner conflicts objectively and to incorporate them without setting up undue strain within the structure of the novel, is, I submit, a valid measure of the success of his writing. Those novels, therefore, in which there is the most successful blending of conscious design or form with "submerged" or "hidden" meaning: where, in short, the creative

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1 Charles Rycroft, "The Artist as Patient" TLS (22 September, 1972) p. 1090.

attempt at psychic re-integration does not seriously fracture the novel's structure: must represent a high-water mark in his art, and something in the nature of an achievement of "wholeness of soul". It has been suggested that in A Morning at the Office (1950) there are two main themes, and that: "Mittelholzer's subsequent career is a record of these two themes and their orchestration; the variations are both positive and negative."[1] Although one may disagree about the configuration and importance of these themes which, for Howard, are, respectively, "the importance of psychic phenomena" and "a situation in which longing encounters frustration"[2], the suggestion of a "two-ness" in the work is well-grounded; for it is clear that there are two conflicting impulses at work in the novels: the psychic disorientation which precipitates a death-wish, and the associative attempt aimed at a re-integration of the divided psyche. The novels in which this associative attempt is successful, at least in part, include A Morning at the Office, Shadows Move Among Them (1951), A Tale of Three Places (1957), The Wounded and the Worried (1962) and A Tinkling in the Twilight (1969). In each of these novels the main character (or characters) attempts to cope with an essentially schizoid condition and achieves a psychic balance, however precarious. In examining these novels I shall try to show this process of psychic integration at work within characters and events - a process which is, I suggest, an indication of the extent to which Mittelholzer was able to achieve a creative art, relatively free from the undermining influences of both the "super-ego, stern Old School symbol of

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1 Howard, op. cit. p. 21. It is interesting to notice how closely this echoes EM's own use of musical analogy to describe his sense of "two-ness". (Vide footnote 1, Chapter 3, p. 92).

2 Ibid., pp. 20/21.

my parents and aunts"[1] and the resurgences of a repressed libido.

When Mittelholzer travelled to Britain in February 1948 he was the first of the "New Generation" of West Indian writers who later emigrated to Britain and whose work, from the 1950's onwards signalled the extraordinary growth of the Caribbean novel. A Morning at the Office, his second published novel, has been distinguished as the work:

> ... which first won wide recognition for British Caribbean writing ... and paved the way for the remarkable march of English-speaking Caribbean novelists who followed.[2]

Yet, curiously enough, little critical attention[3] has been given to this novel which brought Mittelholzer immediate recognition and critical acclaim; and to which West Indian writing, apparently, owes so much. This may be partly a result of the general unevenness of Mittelholzer criticism, which has tended, so far, to adopt two main attitudes: a frank (often uncritical) advocacy, and a sympathetic, but dutiful, exposure of the "pathetic triviality of Mittelholzer's art".[4] Mittelholzer's work, it seems, is allowed either to be very good and (because of its pioneering qualities of energy, integrity and dedication) "in the fore-front of the entire range of Commonwealth Caribbean novelists";[5] or revealed, with due respect, to be embarassingly bad. A Morning at the Office is generally held to be one

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1 EM., With a Carib Eye (1958) p. 134. EM's recognition of the psychological conditioning which lay behind his decision to "leave British Guiana last" in writing his travel-book, because "my super-ego ... could not brook the more logical course of treating of my home colony first" (p. 134), is another instance of his self-awareness.

2 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 88.

3 But see Howard, op. cit., Wilfred Cartey "The Rhythm of Society and Landscape" (New World, Guyana Independence issue, pp. 97/101), and Louis James's introduction to The Islands in Between (OUP, 1968) in which the novel's importance is discussed, though briefly.

4 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 100.

5 A.J. Seymour, Lectures op.cit. p.28.

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of Mittelholzer's "good" novels, "a real success",[1] a novel that is "classical in structure, observing the unities of time, theme and place"[2] and, in the opinion of discerning critics, "probably his best novel".[3] The novel's strength, however, lies, we are told, in its sense of felt experience: "the authenticity never falters, and therein lies the power of the book":[4] and its excellence is seen to reside in its force as an authentic social study - its examination of the West Indian, colonial ethos: "if the book is a social document, it is a document with a difference - one that is read for pleasure".[5] This tendency to regard A Morning at the Office as primarily a social tract: a sensitively written documentary study of colonial life in Trinidad which is, at the same time (as a kind of bonus) an entertaining novel, is unfortunate. The novel's deeper, more complex meaning, like the writer's attempt to produce an "associative" art of fiction, has, as a result, generally gone unnoticed. Authors are not (perhaps fortunately so) always the most reliable authorities on what their work is "about", for "any work of art functions like another person, having independent life of its own";[6] and the narrow view of A Morning at the Office as a social treatise is actually encouraged by Mittelholzer's own remarks. The

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1 A.J. Seymour, Lectures, op. cit., p. 32.

2 Guckian, op. cit., p. 41.

3 Louis James, The Islands in Between, op. cit., p. 37.

4 Margery Foster-Davis, CQ, Vol. 4 (1950) p. 43.

5 Guckian, op. cit., p. 42.

6 Anton Ehrenzweig, The Hidden Order of Art (Paladin 1970) p. 117. One is also reminded of D.H. Lawrence's injunction: "never trust the artist. Trust the tale." ("The Spirit of Place" from Selected Literary Criticism, Heinemann 1964, p. 297).

novel, he had said, was written in order to:

> ... debunk certain fallacies held by people in Northern Regions about the people in the West Indies especially the fallacy that makes us out to be backward half-civilized people, it is really a grand tract nicely dressed up.[1]

Consequently, the occasional travel-book style of the writing:

> In the West Indies, Chinese are of two main divisions - those who are the descendants of the immigrants from Hong Kong, Canton or Peking who arrived in the latter half of the nineteenth century ... (pp. 208/209)[2]
>
> Portuguese, in the West Indies, are not looked upon as white. ... They came from Madeira, the great majority of them, in the latter half of the nineteenth century ... (p. 217)

serves mainly to provide a documentary function, and it is this "social" aspect of the novel that we shall consider first.

Mittelholzer had wanted desperately to emigrate to London where he felt he might more easily, and with better success, pursue a literary career; and the period he spent in Trinidad (February 1942 to February 1948) where he married and started a family, provided the impetus for his final "escape" from the West Indies. It may be that the greater emotional stability of his life in Trinidad, where A Morning at the Office (like the unpublished "Angela Vimiero") was written,[3] allowed him, at least temporarily, to adopt a more detached view of his fiction; for he is certainly

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1 A.J. Seymour; private letter quoted in Lectures, 1968, pp. 13/14. EM also, according to Seymour, described the book as "a mere social document (very necessary, however) in the guise of a novel." (p. 14).

2 All quotations are from the Hogarth 1950 edition.

3 In "A Pleasant Career" (op. cit., p. 37) EM wrote:

> In February, 1948, I sailed for England, taking with me the completed script of a novel that treated of the social scene in Trinidad. It was entitled A Morning at the Office.

less emotionally and personally involved in this novel. Like Sylvia (1953) the book is an unsparingly honest and penetrating appraisal of a typically hierarchical, colour-based, colonial society. The name of the office ("Essential Products Ltd.") has an ironic, Naipaulian ring: the firm's activities - the export of sugar by-products such as jam and marmalade - are not only not essential, but also unconstitutional, since they are permitted (thanks to the political influence of the firm's white principals) in spite of a government ban. The office itself is a microcosm of Trinidad and, by implication, West Indian society, whose formal pattern of racial and social echelons is repeated in the organisation of the multiracial staff: the white manager insulated at one end, behind the frosted glass door of a private office, and the black office messenger at the other, physically separated by a wooden barrier from the central area with its coloured, East Indian, Chinese, French and Spanish creole workers, each in a distinct role or category according to racial and social status. This compact framework,[1] at once actual and symbolic, reflects the author's tight, artistic control as well as his deliberately objective view of his material. Mortimer Barnett, the local writer who depends upon advertisements to finance publication of his work because: "We haven't any publishers in the West Indies who will bring out a writer's work at their own risk"; (p. 228) and whose theory of novel-writing

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[1] The precisely described structural and architectural details of the office reflect its restricting nature - like that of the strictly "layered" society it symbolizes: "The pink paint that covered it, though fresh-looking, could not disguise the fact that it contained many other layers."(p. 3). Miss Henery's desk, thinks Mr. Murrain, forms, with his and Jagabir's "an equilateral triangle, Jagabir and I forming the points at the base and she the point at the top." (p. 44).

exactly matches Mittelholzer's own in this novel:

> You start out ... by writing about a group of characters ... painting in their backgrounds with a certain amount of detail, but ... pause every now and then to go into the stories of objects that surround your characters or objects in the past lives of your characters ... (p. 214)

does, it is true, have a good deal in common with the author; but he appears only briefly near the end of the book, talks to Mr. Murrain about his theory of "telescopic objectivity" and leaves as quietly as he has come.

It is this effect of "telescopic objectivity" which characterizes the novel and allows Mittelholzer, within the precise time-scheme (6.56 a.m. to noon) of one morning in the life of a colonial Trinidad office, to examine the West Indian situation, simultaneously revealing the historical "shadows" which have conditioned and created the characters' present responses and indicating the possible direction and shape such a society might take in the future. Thus, behind the hopeless infatuation of Horace Xavier, the black office messenger, for Mrs. Nanette Hinckson, the manager's coloured secretary, lies a dense hinterland of social, racial and cultural gradations and taboos:

> His complexion was dark brown; hers was pale olive. His hair was kinky; hers was full of large waves and gleaming. He was a poor boy with hardly any education, the son of a cook; she was well off and of good education and good breeding. He was low-class; she was middle-class. (p. 9)

Similarly, the distrustful, officious manner of Jagabir, the East Indian assistant accountant who takes a malicious pleasure in exerting his petty authority, and who is consequently disliked by the others, is shown to have its origin in the social stigma of indentured labour from which his people have only recently been emancipated: "because he was an Indian, because he was the son of indentured coolies, they all looked upon him as dirt." (p. 23) His obsequious, almost servile attitude to authority stems from fear of jeopardizing his position. Behind the self-confidence

and poise of the coloured typists, Miss Henery and Mrs. Hinckson lies "a background of gentility and social superiority over the Negro, East Indian and Chinese elements" (p. 45): and the brusqueness and cupidity of the chief clerk, Eustace Benson, are products of a deprived, bitterly unhappy childhood:

> His parents had been nobodies - at least his mother had been. He was not even legitimate. His black mother ... had had to hire out her body to these good-class coloured people ... Then, as though to pile up ignominy upon ignominy, she had died when he was seven, getting another child. (p. 166)

Indeed, the lives of all the characters are, whether they know it or not, burdened with the oppressive weight of the past which is responsible for the frustrations and prejudices that create a self-perpetuating sequence of resentment which "goes round like the shock that is passed from coach to coach in a shunted train."[1] But events in the novel also suggest the gradually changing order of things in the present, as well as the possibility of a less unjust, better-integrated society in the future. The episode in which the young English overseer, Sidney Whitmer, depressed and morally offended by the racial snobbery of the "pretentious, shallow local whites" (p. 26), comes to the office drunk, and creates a scandal, not only exposes the iniquities of the colonial colour hierarchy:

> The hypocrisy and the nerve of you English hounds. You come out to these colonies and squeeze the guts out of 'em - and then you piss on the natives! Insult to injury. (p. 145)

but also serves indirectly to draw together the coloured staff in a common cause; for the overbearing behaviour of Mrs. Murrain, the white assistant manager's wife (who happens to come in at this moment), is the visible justification of Whitmer's drunken accusations. So, too, the dock strikers' demonstration which passes outside highlights the injustice and inequality inherent in the colonial situation of which the office is

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1 Guckian, op. cit., p. 39.

itself an example, but at the same time provides the impetus for self-assertion and a re-appraisal of personal relationships. Eustace Benson repairs his self-respect (damaged by his earlier exhibition of diffidence when confronted by Mrs. Murrain) by openly expressing approval of the strike; and the discussion that follows between manager and secretary reveals that not all expatriate whites are as self-consciously Caucasian or as patronizing as Mr. Murrain. The people's growing political awareness is reflected in Mrs. Hinckson's wholehearted support of the demonstrators' demands for a West Indian federation and the nationalization of the oil industry:

> Mr. Waley whistled and raised his brows. "You're really in favour of nationalizing the oil industry?"
>
> "Most certainly! Don't you think it a scandal that millions of our dollars should go into the pockets of absentee proprietors in England and America every year while, comparatively speaking, we get next to nothing?" (p. 185)

In the "debate" that follows, Mrs. Hinckson makes much the better showing. Towards the end of the novel as high noon approaches, a series of events occurs which indicate some of the ways in which the society may be different in the future. Mr. Murrain, after his talk with Mortimer Barnett, realizes that his snobbish attitude to coloured folk is only a lack of self-assurance and an absence of practical experience on his part:

> He knew that every word he had said to Barnett had been free of hypocrisy; somehow, he had not found it necessary to indulge in conventional cordialities. ... Good gracious! But one couldn't object to the company of a person like Mortimer Barnett on the grounds of his colour! (p. 226)

Mr. Lopez, the junior accountant, notices a dirty smudge on the pocket of the jacket which Jagabir wears in the office in a pathetic attempt to preserve his self-importance. It is a grease stain from the <u>roti</u> which is to be his lunch. The sudden compassion Lopez experiences is

a momentary dissolving of the class prejudice which has always made him despise Jagabir:

> The contempt that arose in Mr. Lopez was abruptly extinguished by a flash of pity. He saw Mr. Jagabir as a lonely, too-much-despised figure. (p. 236)

Horace Xavier, the black office-boy (who, earlier had surreptitiously placed a love-verse from Shakespeare's "As You Like It" on Mrs. Hinckson's desk), simmering with embarrassment and anger because he suspects that he has been found out and is now a laughing-stock, finally explodes:

> Horace strode through the barrier-gate with a crash. He was at Mrs. Hinckson's desk in three strides. Mr. Jagabir half-rose from his chair. Horace snatched the paper from the File tray.
>
> "Boy! You gone off you' head!" shouted Mr. Jagabir.
>
> Horace sprang round to face him.
>
> "Because I black? It's my paper! I put down de words on it! I got a right to take it back!"
>
> He was trembling all over. ... "Keep you' job! I don't want it!" (p. 245)

His action is at once a protest against the barrier which a colonial society has erected to keep him out, convinced of the danger of his participation as an equal ("But for the barrier", thinks Miss Yen Tip, "she would have felt a little alarmed." p. 234) and an expression of the black West Indian's vigorous claim for respect and recognition as an individual. But the process of social emancipation in the West Indies is visualized as a re-structuring and unification of all racial and national attributes of the region:

> ... if the West Indies was to evolve a culture individually West Indian it could only come out of the whole hotch-potch of racial and national elements of which the West Indies was composed; it could not spring only from the negro. (p. 242)

and beneath the novel's message as a social document urging the full and compassionate integration of different peoples and cultures, lies the even more urgent message: the need for personal integrity as a starting-point. This is a deeper, more complex theme and the real source, I suggest, of the novel's power.

For the characters in A Morning at the Office are linked together not only by their involvement, within the narrow confines of office and island, in the West Indian colonial situation; they are also united, at a deeper, more personal level, by a shared psychological impediment. This is the inner frustration which the central "Jen fairy-tale"[1] contains in an allegorical form, and which produces (in Mr. Murrain, as well as in other characters) the sensation of being "trapped in the skin". The fairy-tale is closely associated with the character of Miss Bisnauth, who finds it a great consolation. Written by her literary friend, Arthur Lamby, the story involves "a little girl called Mooney [who] lived in a big house near the Canje Creek" (pp. 132/133) and whose nurse tells her a story about a terrible creature called a "Jen", an indestructible and indescribably dreadful monster: "Once a Jen is born and grows up, nothing and nobody can kill it." (p. 134) Mooney, alone upstairs one day, is visited by the "Jen". In the conversation that ensues, she finds, through her sympathetic interest, that the "Jen" is really a lonely monster:

> "I'm lonely. A great, lonely, dreadful Jen."
>
> "Too great and lonely and dreadfully dreadful for anyone to let you hurt them? Is that what you mean?"
>
> "That's exactly what I mean. ..." (p. 137)

The description of the "Jen", who is a reason "for many things" and whose evasive nature is "part of my badness" (p. 136) supports the interpretation of it as a projected aspect of the human psyche: a quality which, though capable of causing immense upheaval if allowed to act, is nevertheless kept inactive through being suppressed or ignored. Like the "friend" the "Jen" describes "who was as dreadful - in his day" (p. 137) but who scared people so much that they nullified his dreadful power simply by buying "millions of masks to hide their faces from him" (p. 137), the "Jen"

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[1] I am indebted to W.J. Howard for the suggestion that the "Jen" tale is "the functional structure for interpreting A Morning at the Office." (Howard, op. cit., p. 20).

appears to represent the repressed, creative self. Immediately after she remembers Arthur's fairy-tale, Miss Bisnauth thinks:

> Arthur had genius, she was convinced. He would get far - but he must escape from that newspaper office. It was cramping his soul, killing his creative urge. (p. 138, my underlining).

This stifling of the creative urge was, to Mittelholzer, the most pernicious of the evils of the colonial condition;[1] and it is no coincidence that "Mooney" (a pejorative word when applied to a would-be writer, suggesting an attitude with which the "eccentric" Mittelholzer was quite familiar) lives in the vicinity of Mittelholzer's home town of New Amsterdam near the Canje Creek, symbol, for Mittelholzer, of the mysterious, forbidden interior:[2]

> The water in the Canje Creek is black ... you never knew what might be wriggling in the water besides fishes, and sometimes strange cries that frightened Mooney came from the bush. (p. 133)

or that Miss Bisnauth, who writes poetry in her spare time, has "Nightmare

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1 EM's New Amsterdam diaries reveal the frustration of the would-be writer imprisoned in the West Indian colonial situation. The entry of 30 March, 1935 reads: "Depressed almost to point of insanity. Started writing a novel. Spirits soared!" On 17 August, 1935 he finds himself "chafing to leave this disgusting hole of a town"; and on 16 November, 1935 he records:

> Spirits continue fairly high, as result of literary creation - "Mr. Gore-Drary Gentlemen". [A short novel.] Saving every cent in hope of going to London next year. Quite determined to go!

The following year, desperately disappointed, he attempted suicide. One is reminded of Derek Walcott's bitter observation: "to be born on a small island, a colonial back-water, meant a precocious resignation to fate." (From the preface of Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays Jonathan Cape, 1972, p. 14).

2 In With a Carib Eye (1958) EM writes:

> Unlike Georgetown, New Amsterdam is very near to the jungle. You can feel the mystery of unknown tracts of land simply by staring east towards the Canje Creek. (p. 137)

In EM's work, descriptions of the interior (especially up river along the Canje) almost always convey a sense of threat and foreboding. This quality of menace receives its most concentrated expression in My Bones and My Flute (1955), where the "interior" becomes synonymous with the inexpressibly evil forces which attempt to engulf the characters.

Moments" when she feels herself becoming emotionally and spiritually dead: experiences which Arthur Lamby attributes to her early childhood experience of repression:

> Arthur said it was a neurosis - the result of her naturally vivid imagination coupled with repressions she had suffered in her home, especially during early childhood when she had had as a nurse an old relative of her mother's who was deformed and who had often frightened her by making grimaces at her and loud panting sounds. (p. 77).[1]

Mr. Murrain, the white assistant manager, has a scar on his left forearm - the result of a wound received at Dunkirk - which tingles whenever he suffers an attack of the "trapped-in-the-skin shudders". (p. 99). But although his traumatic war experience haunts him, it is equally clear that his life has been blighted[2] by a much earlier experience. As a romantic ("Moony"?) young boy he "had written verse of the idealistic and sentimental variety" (p. 42) and had ambitions of becoming an author. His cruel discouragement at the hands of his practical father:

> "Thousands - possibly, hundreds of thousands - of self-fancied geniuses have tried their hand and flopped at this sort of thing, Everard. ... You have no talent, boy." His massive frame began to quiver with mirth, for he was a man with no small sense of humour. (p. 42)

even though it is well-intentioned (and in later years Everard Murrain "had come to discover that he had no talent", p. 43), merely drives his creative urge underground, where it remains quiescent, occasionally rising to the surface as an embarrasing, unidentifiable itch. In every-day life he remains a misfit. In the office, the "trapped" feeling is

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1 This is almost exactly parallel with EM's childhood experience, recorded in A Swarthy Boy (1963) p. 22, (vide footnote 2, p. 81) of his family's cross-eyed, Negro servant, Elvira.

2 Patrick Guckian points out the punning significance of the name: "Murrain and his wife represent a blight on inter-race relationships." (Guckian, op. cit., p. 41). In The Weather in Middenshot (1952) the word reappears as a metaphor describing a particularly unpleasant fog as "a white murrain upon Middenshot". (p. 100).

intensified by his knowledge that the efficient, underpaid Jagabir, the assistant accountant, makes his own position as accountant a sinecure. When he thinks of this, he experiences "a discomfiture which, in its intensity, frightened him. It was a psychopathic discomfiture, he felt." (p. 37) He supresses his conscience, however, as he also tries to rationalize his "demeaning" sexual attraction to the coloured Miss Henery - an effort that involves a refusal to "admit it, so to speak, in open conference with his ego." (p. 45) The repression of the creative, emotional self is also implied in Mrs. Hinckson's wish "to think that her life was governed by her reason rather than by her emotions." (p. 111) An intellectual herself, she admires and respects intellect:

> ... but she had a strong sensual streak, and she would have liked a man who could have made love to her with a wild and unrestrained recklessness. (p. 110)

and, realizing that because of this "sensual streak" she had never really loved her late husband, who was also an intellectual, feels frustrated because of her conviction that she will never find both qualities combined in one man. Mr. Reynolds, the coloured, homosexual salesman also possesses a "Jen":

> He was afraid of himself. He dreaded introspecting, for when he introspected he pitied himself and saw his loneliness as a thing of magnified terror and ugliness. (p. 195)

But it is in the figure of the gentle Miss Bisnauth that the creative nature of the "Jen" is most readily observable. In her, the associative impulse of the novel finds its most sustained expression. She is not obliged to work for a living: her parents are wealthy. It is the creative activity of writing poetry[1] ("she liked music ... but

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[1] The connection between music and literature - an important one for EM - as "associative" arts, is stressed by the fact that Miss Bisnauth's mother gives her a copy of T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets for Christmas.

the linking together of words fascinated her far more." p.79, my underlining) and the wish to broaden her experience of people to this end that makes her choose to work in an office:

> Her object in working in an office was so that she could meet people and study them and get to feel sympathetic with their different outlooks ... (p. 79).

She is the personification of the natural, intuitive imagination at work attempting to repair the broken relationships and hostile differences between people. Arthur Lamby, whose extraordinarily mixed racial pedigree ("I'm a regular U.N. council", he says, and in so doing emphasizes the positive aspect of racial admixture) forces her parents to object to him as a son-in-law, is, for her, significantly, "the best man in existence." (p. 77). The poem she attempts to write about "a potent flower of petals three" has as its theme, love, pity and humility; concepts which "her fancy welded into a single whole" (p. 74) and which underline her "soft nature and her intense pity for all living creatures." (p.80). She is nevertheless aware that her own kindness, like her poetry, may be ultimately futile, human nature being what it is; and her "Nightmare Moments"[1] of self-doubt during which she experiences a temporary paralysis

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[1] Miss Bisnauth's sense of a sudden loss of creative vision:

> ... a shutter seemed to face her where there should have been an opening that emitted waves of creative plasm. ... Positive colour departed from her surroundings; everything took on a sepia hue. (p. 76)

has a great deal in common with EM's New Amsterdam record of his own depression:

> Plenty hard work. Rather good week. Really enjoyable - But there is such an unaccountable gulf in the soul. ... There is a lack of feeling, of emotion; a passivity. There is no real joy in life - and on the other hand there is not the slightest sorrow. ... Can it be the aftermath of too much disillusionment? It is curious. (Diary entry of 22 April, 1933, my underlining).

of her creative powers, reveal her identification with the "Jen":

> Not a few minutes ago it had come to her - all in a flash - that her poem was no good. It was idiotic. (p. 237)
>
> ... Am I really a kind lady, I wonder? Or could it be just the sentimental in me that makes me feel a great pity for humanity? She felt completely negative, desperately miserable. And lonely. She was the Jen. (p. 239)

Appropriately, it is in this penultimate section of the novel (headed "The Jen") that Horace's suppressed frustration finally achieves release, just as Miss Bisnauth is thinking:

> He's only Black, but he's intelligent. One day he may be a famous writer, who knows? I must ask him if he's never tried his hand at writing stories. He could begin with simple little tales like The Jen. (p. 244)

and as Horace leaves the office for good, Mr. Reynolds is already making a vow to "get him another job tomorrow - easy as kissing hands." (p. 246)

The movement in the novel towards a resolution of inner conflict and, as it were, a freeing of the "Jen", is reinforced by the arrival of the gifted, but as yet obscure, writer, Mortimer Barnett, whom Miss Bisnauth recognizes as "a high soul" - in fact another representative of the "Jen":

> I'm sure he's going to be famous one day. The world will recognize him. Everybody treats him now as if he's a silly crank, Arthur says. They say he's mad. ... It's always the way. (p. 203)

Barnett's physical appearance reflects his inner stability:

> He paused and looked about the office, a very faint smile of inquiry on his face. A controlled smile in harmony with the rest of him. (p. 201)

and his aura of personal warmth and integrity has an immediately infectious quality. "A change has occurred in me", says Mrs. Hinckson after meeting him, "not half an hour ago I was certain such a man never existed." (p.237) After talking to him, Mr. Murrain feels "as though he had had a spiritual purge", (p. 233) and begins to think that:

> ... in time to come he might yet achieve his dream of writing a good novel. Or a good poem. This young man had given him a sudden wild new hope; he had revitalized something in him - something which had been dying. (p. 233).

His "trapped-in-the-skin shudders", he suddenly realizes, are cured. When one considers that Mortimer Barnett's theory of "telescopic objectivity" is, in fact, Mittelholzer's technique in this novel; and that the impotence of the "Jen" - the repression or atrophy of the creative urge - often represents the writer's worst fear,[1] it becomes possible to say that A Morning at the Office is, at its deepest level, not only an associative effort aimed at creating a whole out of the composite fragments of West Indian experience, but also a novel about an art of fiction that can make possible the controlled release of the repressed creative impulse. That this idea of the release of the creative spirit is of central importance in the novel is implicit in W.J. Howard's assertion that "the tale of the Jen structures every relationship in the book".[2] He interprets the "Jen", however, as "a situation in which longing encounters frustration",[3] and leaves it at that, thereby missing the deeper significance of the "Jen" as the latent, repressed creative urge itself. In fact, the "Jen" is obviously related to the well-known Grimm fairy-tale of the "spirit (or 'Jinn') in the bottle",[4] a tale which itself conjures up the dual nature of the Unconscious as a

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1 In George Lamming's Season of Adventure (1960), the painter, Chiki, fears that his creative impulse has dried up because of the psychological and cultural division caused by his West Indian origin but Europe-orientated education:

> Chiki will not paint again because he thinks he is a man imprisoned in his paradox for all time ... (p. 366).

2 Howard, op. cit., p. 20.

3 Ibid.

4 In the tale by the Brothers Grimm, the spirit released by the woodcutter's son first threatens to kill him, but is tricked into returning into the bottle. The spirit promises to reward the boy and, when released, gives him a magic cloth. EM recounts, in With a Carib Eye (1958), the Guyanese folk tales about "Water People" (or "Fair Maids") which, as a child, he heard from his nurse; tales which closely resemble the Grimm fairy-tale.

potential force capable of causing irreparable damage as well as possessing magical, creative power. The element of psychic manifestation in the novel (demonstrated when Miss Henery's sexual imaginings place her en rapport with the "psychic plasm" adhering to the desk-leg whereupon she feels a rough hand on her thigh) reflects Mittelholzer's interest in the occult and his belief in the interpenetration of the material and spiritual worlds; and serves to illustrate the unpredictable, terrifying aspect of the suppressed, libidinal self. This is an element which receives fuller treatment in other novels, such as My Bones and My Flute (1955) and Of Trees and the Sea (1956), where inanimate objects and the natural environment itself are charged with the (sometimes malignant, sometimes benificent) residues of human emotion. The main impulse in A Morning at the Office, however, is a benificial, associative one, and Mittelholzer's stated intention in writing the novel a debunking process, like Arthur Lamby's aim in writing the "Jen" fairy-tale "to debunk the old West Indian nancy-story" (p. 238); belies the subtly-controlled art with which he creates, from the superficialities of a typically fragmented West Indian situation, a hall of mirrors in which "one shadow behind another, telescoped backward to infinity" (p. 206) - a momentary vision of wholeness.

(II) Shadows Move Among Them (1951)

In Shadows Move Among Them Mittelholzer attempted to give to this vision a local habitation and a name. "Berkelhoost", the Reverend Harmston's plantation and Mission, is, in one sense, like Prospero's island: a tropical utopia in which the shell-shocked Englishman, Gregory Hawke, learns to find inner peace. In Moss Hart's dramatization of the novel - The Climate of Eden[1]- this aspect of the book is taken to be the main theme. Hart considers that "its very strength and virtues as a novel, defeat it as a play", and sees it as "a utopia of the heart".[2] The resultant sentimentality of treatment may have been partly responsible for the play's failure. The dramatist ignores the book's disturbing, ambivalent quality and concentrates on the theme of "innocence regained":

> Gregory (wonderingly)
>
> How wonderful you all are! What a shining innocence there is about all of you! What is it? There's the Climate of Eden about this place! What secret do you all possess?
>
> Mabel (softly)
>
> We love. (p. 138).

But, placed as it is in the Guyana jungle along the upper reaches of the Berbice river, "Berkelhoost" is also, in another sense, the mysterious, forbidding Interior with its residues of past violence: the area bristles with the psychic influences of the great slave insurrection of 1763. The

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1 First performed at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York City, on 6 November, 1952. Quotations used are from the Random House, N.Y. 1953 edition of the play.

2 p. xi of author's foreword.

"shadows" of the novel's title, therefore, have disturbing historical as well as psychological associations. The Reverend Harmston and his wife (who is Gregory Hawke's cousin) are a middle-aged English couple who have learned to cope with these influences; and under his benevolent, but sternly disciplinarian, guidance the community exemplifies the happy co-existence of the unpredictable emotional and the civilized intellectual life. "My aim", he tells Gregory, "is to teach them to be civilized without cynicism." (p. 87).[1] To this end, "natural" behaviour, including pre-marital intercourse (contraceptives, which are specially imported, are freely available to all) and the expression of feelings of anger or frustration (but "premeditated obscenity" is severely punished) is encouraged. Religion is regarded as a healthy indulging of the fabulous or supernatural aspects of the personality. Instead of sermons, Harmston reads ghost stories which enthrall his congregation (who are not obliged to attend regularly, but come when they like), and himself a member of the humanist "Bretheren of Christ the man", espouses the doctrine of "a life of cultured simplicity." (p. 138). The creed to which the whole congregation of local white, mixed and mainly Carib members respond with obvious pleasure includes a belief in "God the Father of all Myth ... Himself ... the most wonderful Myth", and in the Bible as "a book of lovely legends. ... And a few true tales of long, long ago." (p. 138).

The whole atmosphere of "Berkelhoost" is one of liberal humanism, frankness and emotional and sexual freedom. The Reverend Harmston's high-spirited, twelve year old daughter, Olivia, whose wild flights of imagination are a main feature in the novel, typifies the free, imaginative spirit of the place. For Olivia, it as natural to see ghosts as to be intuitive about people, or to imagine her own feelings emanating from her

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1 All quotes are taken from the 1951 edition.

"like smoke. Or like the Genie escaping out of the Green Bottle". (p. 7). This reference to the "spirit in the bottle" - recalling the story of the "Jen" in A Morning at the Office (1950) - is no coincidence: for in this novel Mittelholzer appears to have set about giving his own repressed romantic and creative urge - his "Jen" - a completely free rein. This is evident from his comments about the novel:

> Perhaps I might mention that I am prepared to be judged on Shadows. ... It is a novel as I like, and want to write, a novel. I wrote it to please myself entirely, without a thought to publishers or public.[1]

The result is certainly an extraordinary inventiveness in the handling of character and incident; but there is, because of the lack of emotional control, also a disturbing (but not entirely unexpected) mixture of the serious and the banal; the sincerely moral and the lubricious, the tragic and the trivial. For within this apparently ideal, liberal community stalks the harsh spectre of Authority: the super-ego that takes its revenges on the free-ranging, libidinal imagination. A closer examination of the novel reveals both of these polarities: the associative attempt - the activity, as it were, of the free creative imagination - and the disintegrative, undermining element of repression.

The novel's main theme is the "civilizing" effect of "Berkelhoost" as a tropical paradise. Gregory Hawke, "an aloof Englishman; a man from the north with a superior, self-sufficient air" (p. 11), is a representative casualty of over-civilized Europe. He is also the now familiar schizophrenic Mittelholzer hero. On the steamer travelling up-river to the mission he is barely able to conceal his pathological condition from his fellow-travellers:

> Innumerable times he had pictured himself breaking up into so many pitiable bits. ... In such instants he cringed outside him-

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1 Personal letter quoted in A.J. Seymour, Lectures, op. cit., p. 14.

self and whimpered ... (p. 13)[1]

The jungle appears to him as a menacing, evil presence. The water is "black and evil", the trees "glower with the sullen menace of many watching eyes". (p. 10) The Harmstons believe that his nervous condition is the result of war experience, but it is later revealed that his marriage to a superior, dominating woman, now dead,[2] is responsible for his schizoid condition. It is Olivia who senses his trouble:

> He's two people. One of him is a kind of shadow; that's the him we know now. He's hiding the solid him from us ... (p. 108)

Mittelholzer underlines the fact of his character's "two-ness" by telling us that Gregory himself is at a loss to know how to "achieve harmony between spirit and fevered flesh." (p. 194) His psychic dissociation is further dramatically revealed when, looking at his own reflection in a mirror, he suddenly feels, with horror, that the mirror-image of himself is caught, frozen "rigid with cold, in the arctic mirror." When Olivia's brother, Berton, unexpectedly comes into the room "Gregory smiled. The boy had rescued him. He stepped back into himself." (p. 54) Indeed the novel is an enactment of Gregory's psychic recovery which takes place in the Guyana jungle. Split between the elements of "spirit" and "flesh" - represented symbolically in the novel by young Olivia who is an Ariel-figure, and her mature, sensual sister, Mabel who is physically desirable - Gregory learns to reconcile himself to both. Because of his

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1 cf. Virginia Woolf's record of her own experience of psychic disorientation:

> ... and I lay presiding, like a flickering light, like a most solicitous mother, over the shattered splintered fragments of my body.

(A Writer's Diary op. cit., p. 185)

2 This is the first suggestion of the anima-figure of the domineering female which recurs throughout EM's work.

disturbed mental state he has "blackouts" during which he acts in an unconsciously homicidal manner; and during one such period he forces Mabel to strip to the waist, threatening to cut her throat with a razor if she refuses. Meanwhile, however, Olivia, armed with a rifle, is hidden in the bushes, ready to shoot if her sister is in serious danger. This incident certainly appears to be yet another example of Mittelholzer's instinct for the bizarre situation, but is also related to Gregory's psychic split. His treatment of Mabel, whom he sees in his deranged state of mind as the re-incarnation of his dead wife, is an attempt to control and subdue his own libidinal self:

> I must humiliate you before help comes. After this you'll admit I'm your equal. Your better, you may say. Yes, you may want to confess that, who knows. Undress. (p. 156)

Towards the end of the novel, when Gregory is out walking with Olivia she tells him why she thinks he has decided to go out with her: "It's because the freckled flesh has annoyed you and you want to be with the spirit for a change" (p. 313); and Gregory has to admit that her intuition is correct:

> I tell you what I want. I want somebody like you - living spirit, volatile and light, and with no murky passions to beguile me and remind me of the instinct-part of myself. ... But the trouble is that the very passions in Mabel that I want to escape from are in me - and very strong and active. (pp.316/317)

Olivia, because of her childlike innocence and often embarrassing directness, is able to help him come to terms with his inhibitions and fears - to reconcile spirit and flesh - a process the success of which is reflected in his decision to marry Mabel and live in "Berkelhoost".

This associative element - the positive impulse in the novel - is suggested in the general atmosphere of "Berkelhoost". The Reverend Harmston is a Prospero-figure who acts as father and teacher not only to his own family, but also to the community as a whole. Racial prejudice is unknown, nudity is normal and sexual intercourse is regarded as a

perfectly natural, untrammelled expression of affection. As Mrs. Harmston explains:

> We're very sincere in wanting to live sane and healthy lives. We train the children to be restrained when restraint is called for, but we want them to be free in such things as involve their natural urges. (p. 264)

Art and music form part of the general educational pattern; and when Gregory, on a conducted tour of the plantation, exclaims "Penguins ... in an Indian benab!" (p. 148), he is referring, not to a freak of nature, but to the fact that literature is also a normal part of the general life of the natives. Gradually, Gregory's metropolitan attitudes of fear, suspicion and repression begin to dissolve. It is the very "mixture of fantasy and reality" (p. 198) which the place exudes, as well as the absence of sexual repression and the constant freedom given to the imaginative faculty, which aids him. Olivia's tiresome behaviour is indulgently permitted because "she's exercising her creative imagination" (p. 232); and the willing acceptance of ghosts of "shadows" (which can be seen as symbolic of the integration of the Self, where the "shadow" represents the dark, libidinal side of the human personality) is, in turn, related to the "Berkelhoost" ethic. Harmston's son, Garvey, tells Gregory that it is:

> "A case of values. You," said Garvey, "are a good example of the misery and emptiness of your pseudo-civilization. Look at you! Rudderless, unhappy, cynical. And look at us in contrast. We're full of life and fire. ... You beyond this jungle take life so seriously, and estimate human nature at so high a rate, that you have no time to enjoy life." (p. 233)

In writing this, however, Mittelholzer was clearly indulging in wishful thinking. His own attitude to life was exemplified by "taking things seriously"; and he had had little chance, to his despair, of enjoying life as a young man, as A Swarthy Boy (1963) attests. The

diaries of 1930-36[1] convey a picture of the author as a hard-working, depressed and miserable young man, unable to relax and enjoy life for long. It is true that in the novel Gregory gets the better of his own unconscious fears and inhibitions, but one is aware at the same time of another element - a negative impulse - at work redressing the balance, as it were. It is almost as if, in the ambivalent figure of Reverend Harmston (a severe disciplinarian who, in spite of his humanism can be almost inhumanly cruel) the author's powerful super-ego asserts itself. Consequently, the extent of Gregory's cure, his recovery of psychic balance, is inexorably counter-balanced by an equivalent projection of animus, present in Harmston's brutality to his servant, Logan - the Caliban[2] of the novel - and in the general insistence on stern discipline for even minor offences. For beneath all the liberalism and naturalness, the idyllic atmosphere of freedom and creative expression, lies a disturbingly perverse element of cruelty and sadism. Harmston is excessively cruel to the slow-witted Logan whom he chains up one night for the crime of throwing a hard object through the glass of a window in the Harmston's house. Logan's terror of the Dutchman's ghost which he believes still haunts the area (the chains are a relic of slave-days) is well known to Harmston and he uses this fear to reduce Logan almost to gibbering imbecility. In fact, Harmston deliberately prolongs Logan's ordeal by lulling him into a false sense of security before revealing his intentions. Even Harmston's wife protests at this apparently pointless cruelty:

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1 EM's diary entry on 16 January, 1932 reads: "a very sombre week. The artificial necessity of living. Monotony. Visited nowhere." At the end of the 1933 diary, under the heading "Retrospect", he writes: "an exceptionally bitter year. Worse than 1931." The entry for 28 September, 1935 is: "soul-starved. Only work, work and no play, no sentiment." EM often worked, writing and re-writing novels and short stories even while feverish with malaria and depressed in spirit.

2 Logan's rôle, like Caliban's is that of porter and hewer of wood.

"Oh, Gerald, Gerald!" exclaimed Mrs. Harmston, a sob in her voice.

"Yes, Joan?" said her husband, turning towards her with an air of surprise and enquiry.

"Why draw him out like that!"

"Um", said Mr. Harmston. (p. 220).

The suggestion that Logan needs and enjoys the regular floggings and punishments: "he's an intractable, perverse fellow. Distinctly abnormal, too, in many ways" (p. 66) carries a hint of Harmston's own sadistic streak. That the punishment is "part of my programme of discipline" (p. 66) and therefore the result of adhering to a strict moral code, does not really bear examination, for when Harmston's daughter, Mabel, breaks a major rule of the society by not reporting the criminal behaviour of Sigmund (an Indian who has been thrice convicted of stealing and is therefore reqired to be sentenced to death by _curare_ poisoning for his fourth attempt) she receives a trivial punishment. She is made to wear an old, ill-fitting dress for two weeks; but even this hardship is lessened since she is allowed to wear her own clothes again before the allotted time is up. And there are many other anomalies. The Church is no longer regarded as a "sacred" building since conventional Christianity is not observed, yet no clapping is allowed in the building. Egalitarian social ideas are promoted at "Berkelhoost", yet the Indians live in _benabs_ on a reservation while the Harmstons live in the plantation "Great House". Education is available to all, but it is Europe-orientated and largely irrelevant consisting (to give typical examples) of unrelated information about the Restoration period, the correct spelling of Samuel Pepys's name and Clive Bell's _Civilization_. There is also a rigorous streaming of students into pseudo-military "squads": the "labour squad" for the unintelligent, the "book squad" for those who show signs of intellectual ability. It is here too that Mittelholzer's

later, violent expression of hatred of the criminal mind finds its first outlet in the novels.[1] The community's principle of exterminating habitual thieves by administering <u>curare</u> (the cause of death is recorded by Harmston as "snake-bite") is part of a view of criminals as "human vermin". This is hinted at in Harmston's remarks as he checks for signs of termites in the buildings: "we dealt with them pretty drastically last time ... can't let them undermine the building" (p. 334). Gregory kills a centipede muttering "couldn't let it live. ... It was a threat to my safety" (p. 324); and Mabel, trying to explain why it is her duty to give evidence against Sigmund (the Indian she caught attempting to steal a fourth time) says: "the types that openly reveal their criminal tendencies ought to be dealt with effectively" (p. 308). Harmston is merely the first of Mittelholzer's characters (in the novels) who, genuinely concerned to create a society free from crime, does not hesitate to urge the ruthless destruction of all "criminal types". This aspect of the novel - what we may call its negative impulse - is also expressed in the many gratuitously obscene incidents in the book, such as Olivia's reference to the cook, Ellen, as "a stink-puss girl" (p. 60) and in Ellen's revenge which takes the form of kicking Olivia's prostrate body and urinating in her face. The latter episode is doubly obscene, because Olivia (acting out Mittelholzer's theory of the innate masochism of women) obviously <u>enjoys</u> it:

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1 This theme: the destruction of criminals like "human vermin", had already appeared, however, in a sketch "Sibiltant and Lost" in <u>BIM</u>, vol. 4 No. 13 (December 1950). The psychotic "hero" says, in one of his lucid moments:

> A terrible thing, doctor, when people grow too liberal-minded. Too over-mellow with humanity. The criminal and the mentally unfit ought to be liquidated quietly and without pain - for their own good and for the good of the community. (p. 4)

> Olivia lay quiescent and took the punishment. Shivers of elation ran through her, and she thought, even as stars spattered the gloom behind her shut eyes: I know now how Logan feels when Daddy beats him. This is joy. (p. 180)

The utopian freedom of "Berkelhoost" permits an extreme looseness of behaviour, which is clearly compensated for by an equally extreme code of discipline. The whole novel seems to exist on the thin knife-edge between reality and fantasy[1] and reflects the author's equivocal attitude towards the regenerative nature of the interior – a nature which is also, clearly, terrifying. Gregory Hawke is seen to be "cured" of his schizophrenia; but, one feels, the nature of the cure is almost as bad as the disease. One is left with the impression that the theme of regeneration proves too much for Mittelholzer to handle.

The central story of the novel – the re-discovery of a natural, creative and humane way of life in the South American jungle by a jaded, emotionally unstable, European artist – has an interesting parallel with the theme of Alejo Carpentier's The Lost Steps[2]. Carpentier's hero, like Mittelholzer's, discovers in a community in the heart of the jungle a primitive but vital existence which mocks the futility of his over-civilized past life in New York. In the Adelantado's city there is harsh discipline too. It is "an Order that had its severity" (The Lost Steps, p. 175). There is, for example, the incident in which a half-crazed leper who has raped a young Indian girl is hunted down and shot like a wild beast; and there is a hint that "gold-seekers" from the Metropolitan world who attempt to return after banishment ("this is not the place for those people" p. 188), are quickly and quietly eliminated: " 'lost in the jungle',

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1 As Louis James puts it: "the vision of the book quivers into nightmare." (The Islands in Between, OUP 1968, pp. 41/42).

2 First published as Los Pasos Perdidos (Mexico, 1953). All quotations are from the Penguin edition of 1968.

those interested in his fate would conclude." (p. 188). One is reminded of the Reverend Harmston's recording of "snake-bite" as the cause of death of the recidivist members of his community. But Carpentier's Adelantado, unlike Mittelholzer's Harmston, is not primarily a disciplinarian, punitive figure: he understands the responsibility involved in making the punishment fit the crime and knows, to his sorrow, that "the day will come when there will be so many of us that more severe penalties will be called for." (p. 187). And whereas, in Carpentier's novel, the healthful, regenerative effect of the jungle community is conveyed through the sensitive observation and introspection of the articulate hero; in Shadows Mittelholzer attempts to convince through social illustration and the proselytizing of Harmston, with whom he clearly identifies. "Berkelhoost" society is accordingly made to embody the author's own pre-occupations and fears about religion, politics and sex. The sense, in Shadows, of the extraordinary in nature, of the "world of appearances that concealed reality, casting doubts on many truths" (The Lost Steps, p. 149) does, it is true, emerge from the writing:

> The silence had an ethereal, intelligent quality. There was no vacuum here, but a vibrant, replete livingness: a world of voices on the verge of sound, a shadow-crowd shifty just beyond the edge of vision. Death and life seemed to whirl with equal strength in the elusive aromas that continually smote the senses. (p. 117)

but it is often the romanticized Nature as seen through the eyes of the precocious adolescent, Olivia. Her characterization is convincingly done, and her headlong attitude, malapropisms and fantasying are suitably conveyed in the writing. When one reads:

> At the bottom of the Ibi creek it was maroon-dark, and dim, deathly plants uncoiled tongues to lick at you as you squirmed by looking for the Green Bottle in which the Genie lived. Fiery fish-eyes hovered, and faded like lamps snuffed out ... (p. 123)

there is a sense of the fitness of the style, since the passage is a credible rendering of Olivia's day-dream. But the style of other passages:

> Gregory smiled, entertained to such a degree that tulips rose red around his toppling spirit and rendered smooth-petalled support from the imminent fall. (p. 52)
>
> The fire-flies flickered without sound in the darkness - several at a time, sporadic and unstable. They could have been semaphoring danger or trying to show the way to some secret track that led to treasure. (p. 46)

show the same whimsicality of language that, because it is here incongruous, seems merely self-indulgent.

This is perhaps symptomatic of the book's self-defeating quality. The theme of personal freedom and psychic integration runs parallel with that of strictly militaristic, disciplinarian social reform. Indeed, it is possible now to say that the one is implied by and inimical to the other; and Mittelholzer, even while presenting the ethical and social standards of "Berkelhoost" as exemplary, manages at the same time to make its spokesman appear ridiculous. We are told that the Reverend Harmston, worried (not surprisingly) lest he appear a tyrant (for the community "looked up to him as though he was a god" p. 238) deliberately arranges to have himself "framed up as the father of an illegitimate child" (p. 238). And his son, Garvey, at the height of a diatribe against the "pseudo-civilization" of the outside world, gets a flea in his pants:[1]

> He cracked the flea between his thumbnails. "See it! Big female. Got an egg. Where were we again? Something to do with dynamic ... I say, am I boring you or anything?" (p. 234)

Shadows is finally disappointing as a whole because the main associative and positive theme of psychic integration is too closely matched by the concomittant presence of destructive, repressive elements which contradict the insights gained and so render the associative attempt invalid.

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[1] In The Climate of Eden (op. cit.), Moss Hart's stage adaptation of the novel, it is the Reverend Harmston, significantly, who gets the flea in his pants.

(III) — The Mad McMullochs (1959)

The Mittelholzer novel most closely linked, thematically, with Shadows (1951) is The Mad McMullochs (1959)[1] which is, in effect, another, later version of the same theme. The book is itself something of an oddity. First issued under the pseudonym "H. Austin Woodsley" (although Mittelholzer was already a well-known author) but re-issued in 1961 under the author's real name, there is some evidence that the novel was written pour epater le bourgeoise.[2] Mittelholzer, however, considered it to be one of his basically serious works and classified it under the heading "sociological-philosophical".[3] Like Shadows, The Mad McMullochs appears to have been written originally without thought of publication: the book is dedicated to "Anne B. who read the script and egged me into publishing it". Like "Berkelhoost", the McMulloch plantation is a private community (this time on the island of Barbados), and is presented as a successful social experiment: an egalitarian society, unsophisticated but intelligent, where nudism is a way of life, uninhibited sexual expression is encouraged, and violence, greed and crime virtually unknown. Behind limestone walls and a screen of casuarina trees, about one thousand people of different races live a harmonious, industrious and happy life, apparently free from the restraints, hypocrisy and corruption of the world outside. The "local-white" McMulloch family who own the plantation and live there with their followers are regarded by outsiders as "mad" because of their eccentric rules which involve strict secrecy maintained by an elaborate

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1 All quotations used are from this edition.

2 According to A.J. Seymour, EM may have written the novel partly "to scandalise and shock the staid Barbadian types he knew." (Lectures, op. cit., p. 37.

3 See "The Intellectual Cissies", Books and Bookmen (August 1962) p. 21.

system of partition from the rest of the island.

The novel's similarity with Shadows (1951) is further suggested in the shape of the plot. Ronald Barkley, a "local white" Barbadian, and his English/Canadian friend, Albert Grahamston, meet the two nubile McMulloch girls, Evaline and Euphony, who regularly come down to the public beach near a big tourist hotel in the hope of attracting eligible men. At first shocked and embarrassed by their unabashed directness (in reply to Ronald's complimenting her on her attractiveness Euphony says "thanks. ... And I'm quite intacta, in case you'd like to know" p. 15), Ronald and Albert are gradually drawn by the girls' relaxed, uncomplicated natures and are invited to become members of the McMulloch community. There Ronald meets Roxanne, the youngest of the McMulloch girls and falls in love with her. Like Albert, who marries Evaline, he decides to marry and remain within the community where they have discovered a better, healthier and more worthwhile way of life than they had thought possible. The main theme is again social reform, and the novel's message is that if the McMullochs are "mad", then their form of "madness" is preferable to the "sanity" of the conventional but repressive and sterile society of the outside world. Within this framework, however, is the more personal and more interesting theme of psychic integration; for Ronald turns out to be another emotionally divided hero whose personal quest is for a sense of "wholeness". Lack of sexual inhibition is the most striking feature of life within the McMulloch community, and it is this that attracts both Ronald and Albert. Albert, who is good-natured but diffident, learns to lose his own feelings of sexual inadequacy, while Ronald's worldly-wise, jaded appetite, the result of an inherent cynicism, is given a new stimulus and his capacity for love begins to develop. In fact, in many ways, Ronald is yet another Mittelholzer self-portrait. He is eccentric ("he had always been looked upon as being 'not all there'" p. 18), irreligious

and gruff ("is it just your manner", asks Euphony, "or have you been terribly frustrated in sex?" p. 25), and his discontent with life in general carries psychological as well as sociological overtones:

> I've been spoilt. Sometimes I want to feel it's that. And other times I am convinced it isn't. Other times I am sure my attitude was shaped by sheer heredity. I was born to be as I am. Discontented with my lot. (p. 37)

His reference to "the old discontent, the old futility, the familiar Weltschmerz" (p. 220) is an echo of the loneliness and frustration of spirit which so often plagued Mittelholzer himself[1] as well as a reminder of his view of "sheer heredity" as a kind of Nemesis. Ronald's moodiness and brusque, extravert manner are diagnostic features of the Mittelholzer hero, and hide an inner instability:

> Within him, if people only knew, he was as soft as pap. Sometimes it frightened him, this soft core: made him feel vulnerable, unprotected. It was a kind of Achilles heel that he must conceal from his enemies. His scowling and bravado constituted his special protective armour plating. (p. 185)

This immediately brings to mind Mittelholzer's awareness of his own "split" condition: of the "two elements which have always lived within me, side by side and in restless harmony."[2]

In the figure of Albert, too, one sees the typical Mittelholzerian dichotomy of Spirit and Flesh: sitting next to Roxanne, he is at once attracted and repelled. "How to avoid it? How to escape from the physical?" (p. 106). One, as he puts it "ought to be able to control one's Lower Urges" (p. 95); and he envies the McMullochs' ability to accept and enjoy the physical side of life. Ronald also envies the

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1 EM's diary entry of 31 August, 1948 records his pleasure sitting in Hyde Park on a fine day, but adds: "and yet in me there is an emptiness. Weltschmerz?"

2 EM, A Swarthy Boy (1963). (Vide footnote 1, p.92).

girls' easy naturalness. He is not in love with Euphony, only with the personal harmony and stability which she represents, and which her name implies. That his attraction to her (and to the McMulloch way of life) is really a veiled desire to be taken out of himself, to silence his own inner chaos, is suggested by Euphony's archly jealous remark when she finds that he is in love with Roxanne:

> One day ... I'm going to lap you up. ... I'll swallow you completely. You'll wriggle in me as if I'd conceived you, nourished you inside me. (p. 120)

This passage, conveying as it does both an erotic effect and an implicit, psychological meaning (the suggestion of a regressus ad uterum), is an indication of the dangers involved in accepting only the explicit and therefore superficial meaning of the novel. Beneath the straightforward subject of social and sexual reform lies the unstated theme of psychic re-integration and "re-birth": the search for "wholeness". To insist on the significance, in Mittelholzer's work, of submerged meanings or unconscious motives is, in effect, to indicate the logical activity behind both the apparently perverse behaviour of his characters and the self-defeating, subversive movement in the novels.

A good example of the latter is the incident of the young Roxanne McMulloch's appearance in the story. She is "a little devil" and a "most unpredictable child" (p. 81); and her immediate, startling effect on the cynical Ronald is described in an oddly portentous manner:

> Only a minute ago he had been revelling in his release; ... lightheaded with the new sense of freedom and fun ... (p. 83)

> He glared at her, and she glared back, her large eyes steady, dark, and as terrible in their limitless profundity as the dome above them. Good Christ, thought Ronald, Good Christ. (p. 86)

Since Roxanne appears to be as immature, as sulky and as ill-mannered as Olivia of Shadows (1951), Ronald's sudden agony of love is first unexpected, and (when he is unable to eat, distracted to the point of embarrassment) finally almost absurd. This is the kind of thing the reader may

with justice find hard to forgive; since Mittelholzer seems (as in Shadows, 1951) to be deliberately threatening the credibility of his characters. Robert Taubman, reviewing The Wounded and the Worried (1961) writes of the author:

> He has a light touch and sharp intelligence, but I haven't yet understood why he likes to use them to humiliate his characters.[1]

The objection is understandable, and relevant here, too. Why does Mittelholzer reduce the validity of his characters by introducing what appear to be entirely gratuitous elements of farce, and (as in Euphony's explanation of her withdrawn manner: "I've been relaxing and reflecting. Just before you called I had a nice long pee. The earth is so dry.", p.53) obscenity? The novel is full of incidents which are, apparently, intended to convey the uninhibited, natural way of life of the community, but which often manage to be strictly lewd or obscene. When Euphony tells Ronald that she is "intacta" she goes on: "you can verify it any time you care"; and Evaline completes the image already in the reader's mind by adding: "with a decorously probing forefinger." (p. 15). Throughout the book there is a constant focusing of the reader's attention on breasts, nipples and navels. At one point, while the girls are relaxing in the hot sun, the camera (as it were) comes in for a close-up:

> The area between Evaline's navel and the bases of her breasts glistened as though a cloud of lovely little locusts, quite translucent, had descended in pin-point thousands to feed upon the fields of tiny hairs that only their eyes could easily discern. (p. 148).

There is a curious, lip-smacking effect here, re-inforced by the alliterative prose. In fact, by equating sexual intercourse with eating - the satisfying of an appetite - Mittelholzer removes that very quality of shared experience which makes the act a mutually enriching experience.

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1 New Statesman (13 July, 1962) p. 53.

Ronald's argument for "natural" sexuality exposes, ironically, a basically unhealthy attitude to sex:

> In Good Housekeeping Magazine haven't you seen pictures of lovely, tempting meals! Fat, nice, juicy roast chickens with sumptuous dressing! Pictures that made your mouth water? ... But would Good Housekeeping Magazine publish a picture of a girl with luscious legs and breasts, lying nude on a couch all ready for copulation? They'd be prosecuted. Because we've been brought up to feel that copulation - as natural a function as eating - is a filthy business. (p. 113).

The frequent reference (and this is true of Mittelholzer's work as a whole) to breast-fondling and thigh-pinching: the titillating aspect of sex: seriously damages his wish (like D.H. Lawrence's) to re-instate sex as a natural, liberating, biological function: leaves it, in fact, with only its lubricious value. The characterization also reveals this peculiar combination of serious intention and disastrously trivial treatment; and it is not enough merely to dismiss the novel as no more than a deliberate attempt at sexual titillation. It is, of course, partly that; and Albert's grumbled objection to life in the community ("so much emphasis on breasts and sex", p. 170) finds an echo in the reader's mind. The point is, however, that apparently trivial actions; the mawkish, lewd, perverse or jejune behaviour of Mittelholzer's characters; are obviously taken seriously by them; and Mittelholzer's identification with and approval of his "split" heroes is so consistent that we are forced to look, in the novels, for something more than the author's "stated" concern which is, in this case, social reform. An approach that attempts to go beyond the surface of the novels' "meaning", that looks instead at the underlying, often veiled motivation - that of a personal, inner conflict; is, with Mittelholzer, always a surer guide to the author's true concern, if not to his conscious intention.

Like Shadows (1951), The Mad McMullochs does reveal a deeper, submerged meaning that goes beyond that of social reform. This is the idea

of psychic division and the need for an associative effort, and the McMulloch plantation, therefore, like "Berkelhoost", serves not only as a locus for Mittelholzer's theories about culture, art, religion, education and sex; but also (and more importantly) as a symbol of the natural emotionally integrated state denied the self-divided man. He is represented by Ronald, the uncompromisingly "masculine" hero whose brusque manner disguises an inner emptiness and fear. Looked at in this light his relationship to Roxanne is now seen to have a logical, understandable basis. She is a representative of the repressed, "female" side of his personality. Equally uncompromising and frank ("you're a conceited fool",p. 86, she tells him), she is determinedly female, insisting on wearing a bra and high-heeled shoes even though this constitutes a breach of the community's laws. On several occasions, she deliberately undermines the authority of the leaders in order to assert her own individuality. Mittelholzer's description of her eyes as "steady, dark, and as terrible in their limitless profundity as the dome above them" (p. 86) gives her a disturbing, threatening quality. We are reminded of Mooney's fear of the mysterious, black depths of the Canje Creek in A Morning at the Office (1950); of Mittelholzer's view of the dark, forbidding Interior. Her sudden, alarming effect on Ronald can be satisfactorily explained only in these symbolic terms, since in fact she remains a sulky, immature child whom no-one takes very seriously. As a symbol of Ronald's anima, however, his dark, unknown self, her effect on him immediately becomes explicable. The sudden panic that seems to rock his mind, so that he momentarily considers suicide:

> If I don't try to think my way out of this I'm dismally lost. I might even have to consider a vial of sleeping pills ... (p. 14)

is the standard reaction of all Mittelholzer's unbalanced heroes, faced with the sudden discovery of their own, hidden, irrational desires.

Ronald's fear and gradual acceptance of Roxanne as his inevitable "other half" ("I suppose you must be very conscious", he tells her, "that you have me in your power" , p. 103) and his decision to stay and become a part of the McMulloch community, underlines the associative impulse in the novel: the re-integration of the divided psyche.

This effort, however, like the attempt to banish the spectre of sexual inhibition, exacts a virorous and opposite reaction. As one critic (comparing "Berkelhoost" with the McMulloch community), observes:

> ... sexual permisiveness, in reality, is not so permissive, for ... Both settlements deny more freedom than they allow and their civil and moral code contradicts itself.[1]

The associative attempt in the novel does not, in fact, survive "the super-ego's prohibiting voice" (p. 17). The elaborate precautions which the community takes to preserve its privacy involves a complicated warning system of lights and buzzers and passwords needing to be changed every four hours. There is an outer as well as an inner wall around the estate, entrance to which is controlled by well-guarded iron gates as part of a defence system which even has its own "secret service". Inside the estate the atmosphere, oddly reminiscent of a top-security prison, is one of strict, military discipline. There is an "Army Department", "Defence Department", a "Eugenics Department" (whose ominous function is "to keep our population free of human vermin." p. 127) and a special section "UND", where the "undisciplined" members are obliged to live. In this nudist colony, sexual permissiveness appears to be the rule, but pre-marital intercourse is not allowed. Married couples must obtain a permit to have children, and are obliged to keep a record of their orgasms to enable the "Health Department" to keep a check on the vitality of the community. The frank sensuality which is encouraged as a counter

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1 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 89.

to "morbid and unwholesome imaginings" (p. 136) is nevertheless heavily tinged with guilt, in spite of the leaders' protestations to the contrary:

> " ... we experience no guilt when a pair of breasts or two promising testicles strike us as particularly tempting. ... Oh we enjoy life here, Albert boy."
>
> "Shameful thing to admit," nodded Doctor Hoban, "but true. We do." (p. 136, my underlining).

Stern discipline is also necessary, one of the leaders explains, because it "prevents our men raping our women" (p. 136). The peaceful air of the estate is regularly shattered by loudspeakers blaring forth Wagnerian music which heralds the war-games which the inhabitants must play to "keep on their toes". The list of contradictions seems endless. The love-making which follows the signing of a "marriage-book", takes place in empty, air-conditioned burial vaults kept solely for this purpose: (the dead are disposed of by cremation) and it is finally this linking of copulation with death that reflects most strongly Mittelholzer's ambiguous attitude to the libidinal self, the indulgence of which, it seems, always involved a return of the Repressed.

There is an emotional confusion that attaches even to the idea, in the novel, of racial integration. The community boasts "fully integrated Negroes"[1] who nevertheless seem to fill the roles of cooks and shovel-men; and the McMulloch girls are permitted to marry only white men, in order to "carry on the white strain" and thereby provide "a solid white nucleus" (p. 125) in the society. The explanation that, in order to demonstrate that "pure negro, mixed coloured and white could live in perfect harmony" it is necessary to avoid becoming "one great palebrown community" (p. 126) because people would say "they're all coloured: it's only natural they should get along harmoniously" (p. 126), is not only specious, but positively absurd. Such an argument assumes an Old World criterion of racial

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[1] Guckian, op. cit., p. 44.

pedigree and is ultimately self-defeating. Only Mittelholzer's ambivalent attitude to racial admixture[1] could have made him envisage a society of deliberately maintained racial "types" in order to prove the success of racial integration. Again the real explanation lies deeper, in the implied psychological attitude to racial pedigree, and in Mittelholzer's sense of genetic "taint":

> [Evaline] smiled at Albert. "If it's purity you were looking for when you came here you would have been terribly disappointed. Nothing is pure in this island."
>
> "Every white person," said Euphony, "is suspect."
>
> "Suspect?"
>
> "I mean their pedigrees." (p. 14)

The McMullochs have apparently achieved that miracle of racial purity: the dream of genetic "wholeness" which meant so much to Mittelholzer. They were once "coloured", but "after Grandfather Peter married a pure white Irish girl ... became a white family again." (p. 107). And the family's pride in their new status is evident. "Do Daddy and Uncle Hoban betray any signs of colour?" (p. 125, my underlining). The ambiguous nature of both the McMulloch and the "Berkelhoost" societies which advocate individual freedom but impose harsh disciplinarian restraints; promote the serious ideal of personal and social integrity but spend their energies in irrelevant or trivial pursuits which are often opposed to their own ideals, reflects the deep malaise in Mittelholzer's work. This ambiguity, like the schizoid condition of the novels' heroes, is an embodiment of the writer's own inner conflict, the implications of which create a serious

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1 An attitude that has produced, significantly, both a convincing charge of the author's racialism (see Joyce Sparer, "Mittelholzer: the Theme of Blood" Sunday Chronicle, Guyana, 16 and 23 April, 1967) and an equally convincing defence (see Gucklan, op. cit.)

rift within the novels which tend to remain trivial with respect to the development of outward events: the presentation of a "stated" theme. The attempt to present "Berkelhoost" or the McMulloch estate as successful utopias simply does not work. The triviality of Mittelholzer's social themes, however, is a result of the psychological necessity of his obsession with schizoid heroes; and the "hidden" motives in his work do compensate for the poverty of his professed moral and social attitudes. For it is in the submerged meaning in his novels that his art most clearly reveals itself as an associative attempt: an attempt that is almost always vitiated by the very nature of his own divided condition. The atmosphere of the McMulloch community, like that of "Berkelhoost", peopled with the dark shadows of the Unconscious, contradicts itself with that inevitability with which the jungle will always reclaim any timid clearings in the Interior.

(IV) A Tinkling in the Twilight

(1959)

The lighthearted fantasy, A Tinkling in the Twilight, achieves, however, a good measure of success in conveying its hero's schizoid condition as well as Mittelholzer's awareness of this inner division: of its implication and cure, in spite of (or, perhaps, because of) the author's deliberate use of a framework of comedy-satire. There is a certain objectivity which comes from the fact that Mittelholzer is able to poke gentle fun at his hero but without undermining his credibility, while projecting, through him, his own inner conflict. A very odd novel, it takes the form of an autobiographical record written by the hero, Brian Liddard, as events occur, in an attempt "to put myself in perspective for myself". (p. 20). Liddard, a thirty-nine year old Paddington bookseller, has decided to cultivate the spiritual side of his personality by becoming a vegetarian and by practising meditation and yoga. For five years he has imposed celibacy on himself and has lived the rigorously abstemious life of a recluse, but now finds that his repressed libido has begun to

reassert itself. He has odd lapses of memory during which his actions are uncharacteristic and inexplicable. Bottles of sherry appear in his shopping bag, a prostitute claims to have been solicited by him, and his thoughts begin to turn, unaccountably, to sexual fantasy. When he discovers that, at unpredictable moments, he is temporarily transported through time into the future (he finds himself involved in a conversation with a nude woman in A.D. 2046, and at an art gallery in A.D. 2039), he begins to fear insanity. He is finally driven almost to suicide, but, with the help of a childhood friend, Margaret Beaver, whom he has not seen for many years, and who shares his eccentric interest in the Occult, he learns that his problems all stem from sexual repression. With Margaret, he decides to "mingle the Physical with the Psychic and produce Harmony - and even children." (p. 268).

This summary of the novel, however, draws heavily upon insights gained, so far, from our study of Mittelholzer's concern - amounting almost to an obsession - with schizoid heroes. It excludes the digressive elements of the plot, elements which involve comic fantasy and satirical social comment, and which tend to obscure what we are now able to identify as an "autobiographical" theme - the process of psychic decay and the need for re-integration. A review of the criticism of the novel when it was first published serves to illustrate the difficulty critics experienced in discussing it:

> The merit of Mr. Mittelholzer's weird little book is that it treats paranoia comically without falling too far into facetiousness or morbidity. ... [But] What Mr. Mittelholzer is up to it is impossible to say.[1]

> ... [The book is] bad in a way that makes it singularly difficult to furnish a reasoned summary of the plot. ... there is the continual strained sense that he is forcibly writing himself out of wilfully created situations.[2]

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1 John Davenport, Observer (26 July, 1959).

2 John Coleman, Spectator (31 July, 1959).

Reviewers, in short, found the direction of the novel's theme confusing. It was clear to one reviewer that a main idea in the book was the psychic disintegration of the hero:

> The book lacks shape; and its central part is flabby. But its main purpose (to show in detail the breakdown of a peculiarly English obsessional type) is fully achieved.[1]

but the general feeling seems to have been that whatever the author was "up to", it seemed to be something very odd and far from clear:

> "A Tinkling in the Twilight" is a strange novel. ... Edgar Mittelholzer manages to keep one foot on the ground: whimsy is avoided, however narrowly. ... All the same it's a tricky tight-rope that Mr. Mittelholzer walks and I am not all sure that I know why he should.[2]

More recently, A.J. Seymour refers to the novel as a ""humorous and delightful"[3] book; but by mentioning only those passages which contain satirical references to modern art and music, clearly considers the novel to be primarily concerned with comic social satire. E.M. Birbalsingh, on the other hand, sees the novel as an altogether more serious undertaking: an attempt:

> ... to portray religious melancholia as a phenomenon involving moral judgements. But Liddard's experiences are vulgarized, and their scientific content reduced to pseudo-science by nonsensical delusions and visions.[4]

In other words, the novel appears to contain a serious, moral purpose over-laid (and, it would seem, subverted) by elements of fantasy, comic social satire and farce.

This serious, moral aspect of the novel, its central theme, in fact, is the core of the book's meaning. But it is more than a study in religious melancholia or the portrayal of the breakdown of an obsessional

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1 Sunday Times (9 August, 1959).

2 Phyllis Young, Yorkshire Post (29 July, 1959).

3 A.J. Seymour, Lectures, op. cit., p. 44.

4 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 95.

type: it is an assertion of the need for psychic re-integration; the healing process which leads to "wholeness of soul". Brian Liddard, as a young boy full of romantic ideas -"a dreamy fellow" (p. 14)[1] - has had a strange, almost mystic experience in which he felt a deep sense of well-being because of the unseen "watching female presence" (p. 18) which he called "Celina Caliente". The experience had impressed him deeply:

> ... the realest thing that had ever happened to me - and the realest that would ever happen to me (if it did happen again), no matter how long I lived. (p. 18)

Now, although he often invites it, the experience (the sign is a tinkling in the twilight) occurs only rarely, and for short periods. This feeling of well-being is the antithesis of Miss Bisnauth's "Nightmare Moments" in A Morning at the Office (1950)[2] and is, in effect, an expression of the creative spirit which gives a sense of wholeness. But by attempting to ignore his physical, sensuous nature; by living a solitary, ascetic life, Liddard has encouraged an unbalanced attitude that, by definition, excludes the experience of "wholeness". His alienation from himself is already clear in the first chapter of the novel ("Whirlpool Point") in which, as narrator, he explains his object in writing the book: "to see myself as I have never done before." (p. 20). He has to learn to accept the dark, unknown side of his personality, but is afraid of the attempt: "It's the Otherwise, I confess, that frightens me." (p. 20). His decision to be celibate, made five years ago, stems from an incident when,

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1 Cf. "Mooney" in the "Jen" fairy-tale of A Morning at the Office (1950).

2 During the "tinkling", a beautiful amber light suffuses everything, and the whole environment "vibrated with a life that was really life." (p. 19). During Miss Bisnauth's "Nightmare Moment", however, "positive colour departed from her surroundings; everything took on a sepia hue." (p. 76). She feels her body going "dead".

suffering from post coitum tristitia, he had seen in his mind's eye, an hour-glass:

> In the lower chamber lay settled the dross of my natural urges. In the upper the air was free and clean ... never again must I reverse the glass. (p. 39).

Determined henceforth to lead a "pure" life, Liddard institutes a pseudo-military programme of strictly planned activity:

> I now consult my POW (Programme of the Week; it is always made out in advance on Sunday afternoon), and see what I have assigned for the 8 to 9 p.m. period, or PSP as I call it (Post-supper Period). (p. 12).

Even his customary after-dinner walk is planned with the military precision of an R.A.F. mission:

> I imagine myself as an aircraft setting out on a flight. ... O.B. means Outward Bound. On my way back this, naturally, becomes H.B. (Homeward Bound) ... the signal as I pass the entrance-way is "G.A.Mid.O.B." (Midway Ghost Area, Outward Bound). (p. 42).

This insistence on strict routine, like his code of vigilance ("It's part of my general policy. Discipline and vigilance." p.100), which involves the setting-up of several Heath-Robinson[1] type burglar devices after he locks up for the night is, in fact, an outward manifestation of the constant watch his ego keeps over his repressed, sensual self. On his return to his home town - the place of his youth - the young man on a scooter reminds him, for a moment, of his lost "other" self: "he had red hair and could easily have been my doppelgänger, so I did not stare too hard after him." (p.105). During his telephone call to the intuitive Margaret Beaver, there is a suggestion that his "other" self is, in fact, the libidinal, anima-self which he has so long denied. She tells him: "I believe I'm your feminine counterpart. ... I think we'd make a harmonious team." (pp. 112/113). She advises him to find a sexual outlet: "your

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[1] The late English artist and illustrator Will Heath-Robinson (b. 1872) was famous for his patriotic, wartime cartoons and for his ingenious, completely absurd but hilarious "inventions".

body is in need of adjustment. If you put it right your spirit will automatically adjust itself too." (p. 159). Liddard seeks out a friendly prostitute, but suffers a failure of nerve. The "buzz of spirit-bees in [his] head" (p. 164) - an image used to suggest the hero's emotional instability in A Tale of Three Places (1957), The Harrowing of Hubertus (1954) and in Latticed Echoes (1960), where it becomes a leitmotiv representing Richard Lehrer's schizoid insecurity - signals Liddard's psychic imbalance.

In Brian Liddard, then, we encounter another of Mittelholzer's "divided souls" whose Faustian dilemma is an extension of the author's own divided consciousness. It is evident from Mittelholzer's pre-occupation with this theme of psychic division that he constantly identified with his unbalanced heroes. In fact autobiographical evidence shows that the author's own life and that of his fictional characters often contained remarkably similar elements. In early 1959 (the date of the novel's publication is July, 1959), divorced, living alone in Maida Vale W. 9, near the Paddington area, Mittelholzer was unhappy and lonely.[1] Even a holiday in Germany, the country which had such a powerful emotional attraction for him, found him "bored and lonely as usual".[2] He attempted to counter this depression by instituting a strict time-table which included shopping excursions divided into "part one" (on Thursdays),"part two" (on Fridays) and "unofficial shopping" (on other days); yoga exercises and regular nightly walks.[3]

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1 EM's diary entry for 21 April, 1959 is: "Home 10.05. Went for walk 10.10. Pub (a stout). Home 11.05. Another bout of loneliness." On 24 May, 1959, it is simply: "desperately lonely."

2 Diary entry 17 July, 1959.

3 Diary entry of 2 September, 1959, reads: "Evg [evening] tried deep breathing and concentration exercise. Good results."

In August of that year, he met Jacqueline Pointer, the English girl who was to become his second wife. This meeting proved to be a turning point in his life, as his letters suggest. Referring to his friendship with her he writes: "I feel an integrated being",[1] and later, writing about the conflicting elements within him he says:

> I can only hope that through you I'll be able to get a glimpse of the Soft Side, and so eventually grow convinced that the heroic and militant in me is absurd and wrong-sided.[2]

This is very much like Brian Liddard's hopes for his relationship with Margaret Beaver; and it seems more than likely that the parallel between his own situation and that of his hero of A Tinkling in the Twilight may actually have suggested itself to Mittelholzer. Writing to Jacqueline he says:

> When I was reading your letter after breakfast I heard the tinkling of a piano ... and I smiled, thinking that the sound was like a portrait of you - gentle, clear, sweet and very soothing. I shall listen for more piano tinklings ...[3]

The correspondence between this and the tinkling sound that heralds the soothing presence of Liddard's "Celia Caliente" is striking. Liddard's one-sidedness; his wish to become "an integrated being"; undoubtedly represents a serious moral question; and one with which Mittelholzer was deeply concerned. The comic treatment of events in the novel, like the element of fantasy, therefore, serves the superficial but acceptable function of entertainment, allowing the author a reasonably objective approach to what is clearly a very subjective goal. Liddard can be considered a comic, slightly absurd version of Hubertus van Groenwegel. Like

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1 Letter to Jacqueline Pointer dated 21 August, 1959. Mrs. Jacqueline Ives (née Pointer) has kindly given me permission to quote this and other personal letters from EM.

2 Letter dated 2 September, 1959.

3 Letter dated 9 September, 1959.

Hubertus, convinced of the uneasy existence within him of two inexorably opposed elements - Spirit and Flesh - he naively tries to discipline himself into a bodiless spirituality. The libidinal half of his psyche, however, soon begins to exact its revenge, and he finds himself hopelessly divided between ascetic and sensual; reality and fantasy; present and future. Time is literally out of joint, insanity seems imminent, and suicide appears the only solution. His renewed acquaintance with Margaret Beaver (herself a yoga enthusiast, but a basically sensible, practical person) restores his balance and instead of suicide, Liddard decides on marriage. A significant "wedding of opposites" ensues; for Margaret represents his "lost" anima-self which is now incorporated into ego-consciousness. Psychic stability is now possible.

Mittelholzer's deliberately whimsical approach gives the style of the novel a distinctly self-indulgent, broadly humorous tone, of which the following are typical examples:

> When deeply disturbed, some people resort to gin or whisky. I resort to Omar and Eliot, with Rhythmical Breathing as a chaser. The Rubaiyat and Four Quartets never fail me. Putting it a little clinically, they give just the right stimulus to my R-Trinity System (Realist-Religionist-Romanticist) when it is in a run-down condition. (p. 130)

> My own switch from sex to solitude did not come about merely by putting my forefinger on a button. ... No. Much crawling through the heated labyrinths of libido had to be achieved. ... The labyrinths seared. The nymphs leered - and nibbled. It became a flickering, flailing ballet that would have floored even Fokine to keep in focus. (pp. 62/63)

Beneath the flippant presentation, however, which (if we are considering the book's merit as a "finished" work of art) inevitably urges the classification of the novel as trivial; runs the genuinely serious and important theme of the division of consciousness and the need for psychic integration.

The psychic split between Spirit and Flesh is also the main theme

of Herman Hesse's Steppenwolf[1] with which A Tinkling in the Twilight has many interesting similarities of plot and, occasionally, of style. A comparison of Mittelholzer's novel with this work: "the first German novel to include a descent into the cellars of the unconscious in its search for spiritual integration":[2] serves to indicate both the importance and the psychological accuracy of Mittelholzer's concern with psychic division, or "twoness". Steppenwolf is a "poetic" novel: a tale which purports to be the autobiographical record of Harry Haller, a strange, shy and lonely middle-aged man with a Nietzschian genius for suffering. He lives alone with his books in a rented attic room, intensely unhappy and disillusioned with his life which, it appears, has become polarized between Intellect and Sensuality:

> I have practised abstinence myself for years ... but now I find myself once more beneath the sign of Aquarius, a dark and humid constellation. (p. 24).

Like Brian Liddard, he is a failed ascetic. Haller attempts to counter the insistent demands of his physical nature with repressive controls. He "kills" time and tries to order his life with "breathing exercises" and "thought exercises" (one thinks of Liddard's exercises in Yoga and meditation) while longing for a return of the feeling of joy and well-being which he had glimpsed in the past, and which he sees now only at odd moments, fleetingly:

> I caught a glimpse of it now and then. Sometimes for a minute or two I saw it clearly, threading my life like a divine and golden track. (p. 38).

This is, like Liddard's "tinkling", a moment of transcendent beauty - a symbol of the harmony of soul and body. Haller, convinced that his life is doomed to a disintegration of this "wholeness"; that he will remain an

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1 First published in Germany as Der Steppenwolf (S. Fischer Verlag, 1927). All quotations are from the Penguin edition of 1971.

2 E. Rose, Faith from the Abyss (Peter Owen 1966) p. 96.

outsider, a "steppenwolf" who is hopelessly divided between intellect and emotion, spirit and flesh, man and wolf; decides to commit suicide. It is the café prostitute, Hermine, who diagnoses his problem:

> You're dying just for the lack of a push to throw you into the water and bring you to life again. (p. 130)

and offers to "teach you to dance and to laugh and to live." (p. 130). She encourages the renaissance of his long neglected sensuous nature by introducing him to her friends Maria, who teaches him the innocent delights of the body, and Pablo, the café musician whose natural humanity mocks Haller's own shallow, pretentious ethical attitude. Finally, in a fantasy episode, Haller, in a fit of jealousy, stabs Hermine to death, symbolically rejecting all he has learnt from her of the importance of the sensuous life. He is then "tried" by a dream-court, found guilty, and condemned, not to death, but to _life_. He is to "live and to learn to laugh". (p. 251). Haller's look into the future is a comic, ironic vision of a world gone mad, where the population explosion has occurred and there is a brutal, lunatic war raging between motorists and pedestrians in an attempt to possess what little remains of the unpolluted air. Pedestrians ruthlessly shoot down motorists and _vice versa_, but are also quite capable of changing sides:

> It's childishness, just as war is childishness on a gigantic scale. In time, mankind will learn to keep its numbers in check by rational means. Meanwhile, we are meeting an intolerable situation in a rather irrational way. However, the principle's correct - we eliminate. (p. 219)

This is the same kind of satirical comment we find in Liddard's "time-travel" into the future. There, English society of the twenty-first century accepts suicide as a means of keeping the population down; and "QD" ("quick-death") tablets are freely available at local chemist's shops. Literature, drama, music and painting have degenerated into little more than intellectual games, and religion has been replaced by séance-tables

and "psychic investigation" (p. 209). There is also a long passage in which Mittelholzer airs his own extreme views on crime (criminals are "human vermin", to be exterminated) and politics (a "coterie" system of elitist government has come into being: "The Germans are the most admired people nowadays" p. 214), but it is lightly done, with a touch of sardonic humour, and does not contain the urgent, obsessive note so evident in novels like A Piling of Clouds (1961) or The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965). The satirical social comment in the novel takes, in fact, a good-humoured tilt at certain government policies of the time. The neon sign Liddard comes across in one of his unpredictable trips through the time-barrier: "THE WOLF-In-DEN" (a "licensed sex-house" or "girlery"): is, for example, an ironic reference to the Wolfenden Report[1] of 1957 which made it illegal for prostitutes to solicit in the streets, but, as Mittelholzer implies, led in effect to more widespread and better organized prostitution. We are reminded of the bizarre signs which confront Harry Haller in Pablo's "magic theatre" and which include:

> ALL GIRLS ARE YOURS
> ONE QUARTER IN THE SLOT (p. 209)
>
> DELIGHTFUL SUICIDE. YOU LAUGH YOURSELF
> TO BITS. (p. 222)
>
> DOWNFALL OF THE WEST. MODERATE PRICES.
> NEVER SURPASSED. (p. 222)

Even Liddard's delusions share with Haller's a certain similarity of treatment. At the depth of his depression, Haller imagines that he meets his musical idol, Mozart:

> [Mozart] turned a somersault in the air for laughter's sake and played trills with his heels. At the same time he shouted at me: 'Hey, my young man, you are biting your tongue, man, with a gripe in your lung, man? ... I caught hold of Mozart by the pig-tail and off he flew. The pig-tail grew longer and longer like the tail of a comet and I was whirled along at the end of it. (p. 241).

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1 Sir John Wolfenden was chairman of the committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, whose report was published on 12 August, 1957.

Liddard, too is chided by an imaginary, superior figure:

> ... a milky-bearded deva from the Upper Planes - had leant over my bed, his aura glowing blue and pink, and wheezed hoarsely: "See your mistake now, you fool! You should have gone the whole hog. When you employ half-way methods you turn half-spirit - and that's too bad. ... He coughed and capered back into the Astral World. (p. 126).

Der Steppenwolf (1927) like A Tinkling in the Twilight (1959), is only partly an indictment of bourgeois society with its intellectual and moral pretensions. Hesse was surprised at the reaction of his public, who saw in the novel "only half of what I intended."[1] Readers, it seems, tended to regard the book either as a social treatise or as a study of the disintegration of a divided personality, thereby missing the deeper, psychological implications of the story: the need for a re-integration of the divided consciousness. As Hesse explains:

> ... the story of the Steppenwolf pictures a disease and crisis - but not one leading to death and destruction, on the contrary: to healing.[2]

This is also true of Mittelholzer's story, in which Brian Liddard learns to accept the "animal" side of his nature as a necessary complement to his "spiritual" side. The Steppenwolf's discovery of his female counterpart in the girl Hermine (whose name Haller guesses to be the feminine equivalent of "Herman", the name of a boyhood friend)[3] is analogous to Liddard's discovery of Margaret Beaver (in the section of the novel entitled "counterpart"), who represents his anima.[4] In Hesse's

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1 Author's note in the 1961 preface to the Penguin edition of 1971 (p.5).

2 Ibid.

3 Ziolkowski argues that:

> The Steppenwolf is more overtly autobiographical than any of Hesse's other fiction. Almost every detail in the characterization of Harry Haller ... is drawn from Hesse's own life and person.

(Theodore Ziolkowski, The Novels of Herman Hesse: a Study in Theme and Structure. Princeton University Press U.S.A. 1970, p. 179).

4 "The anima usually contains all those common human qualities which the conscious attitude lacks." (C.G. Jung, Coll. Works vol. 6. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, p. 468).

novel this aspect of the heroine as anima is made even plainer. Hermine says:

> I am a kind of looking-glass for you, because there's something in me that answers you and understands you. (p. 128)

"Why," replies Haller, "you're my opposite. You have all that I lack." (p. 128). Hesse, however, takes his diagnosis of Haller's "two-ness" much further than the mere assertion of an inner division: a gulf which needs to be bridged. He also suggests that the Steppenwolf's self-induced malady is the result of a serious lack of self-knowledge. In the "treatise on the Steppenwolf" - Harry Haller's "inner biography" (p. 68), we read:

> The division into wolf and man, flesh and spirit, by means of which Harry tries to make his destiny more comprehensible to himself is a very great simplification. (p. 69, my underlining)[1]

> ... and to explain so complex a man as Harry by the artless division into wolf and man is a hopelessly childish attempt. (p.70)

Hesse is saying that the rigid, dualistic thinking of a Harry Haller is a kind of tragic folly, leading as it does to hopeless romantic delusions and, eventually, to self-hatred and suicide. This is the kind of clear-headed insight denied Mittelholzer, and whereas Hesse stands, as it were, intellectually above his character in an almost Joycean position of objective sympathy,[2] Mittelholzer is concerned chiefly to embody in Brian

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1 Cf. Liddard's attempt to "put myself in perspective for myself." (p.20)

2 As a warning against the danger of over-romanticizing Life or Art, for example, Haller is shown a vision in which the contrite figure of the great Richard Wagner is seen doing penance for his "thick orchestration" and waste of material. Hesse's ironic, humorous treatment provides an interesting contrast with EM's consistently reverential regard for Wagner's music.

Liddard, his own apprehension of a dual self in which two inexorably opposed forces, flesh and spirit, are at war. In both Der Steppenwolf and A Tinkling in the Twilight there is a fantasy "trial" in which the hero is "condemned". In both trials there is the same, apparently superficial, comic handling of events; the same serious, underlying theme: that the hero's hubris is a deliberate divorce of heart and head. This is a theme of universal significance and one which informs such important and seminal works as Goethe's Faust, Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Thomas Mann's Death in Venice where, in the figures of Faust, Kurtz and Aschenbach, "the hero of the ethical will crumbles under the onslaughts of instinct and its demons from underground."[1] Mittelholzer's attempt in A Tinkling in the Twilight is, however tenuously, related to this great theme, and the severe limitations of his work must be attributed to his own limitations as a writer and thinker, as well as to the nature of his peculiar involvement in his fiction. In the summing-up of the case against Brian Liddard, there is an oddly personal ring to the passage:

> Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you see before you a kind of dragon-man, by accident English. At heart he is a Siegfried - but a pseudo-Siegfried. ... He is doomed because of his own personal myth - a myth that is at entire variance with the circumstances of his birth and upbringing. What can this court rule other than a sentence of death for such an impostor? (p. 254)

In the light of Mittelholzer's sense of "genetic accident"; his cultivation of the "Germanic" side of his character; his personal acceptance of the Old World bias of racial pedigree and hence of the "most self-annihilating of fallacies"[2] - the myth of "purity of blood", it is almost as if the author himself stands accused with his hero as a "pseudo-Siegfried ... doomed because of his own personal myth." And it serves as a further

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1 H. Gross, "Aschenbach and Kurtz: the Cost of Civilization" Centennial Review no. VI (1962) p. 133.

2 Denis Williams, Lectures, op. cit., p. 7.

indication of Mittelholzer's consistent psychological identification with his self-divided heroes.

Mittelholzer's explicit themes; social and religious reform, sexual freedom and transcendentalism are informed by an implicit concern with his heroes' inner division. Even the apparently distinct theme of oriental occultism which runs through his work reveals itself as an extension of this obsession with a body/mind split. Yoga and meditation, for Mittelholzer, represented a form of practical, rigorous control, a self-generated source of strength which he felt to be a necessary means of countering the tendency to romanticism or sensuality. In A Swarthy Boy (1963), he records his rejection, at the age of nineteen, of "conventional Christianity", and his adoption of"Yoga and Oriental Occultism." (p. 18). He was, however, a dilettante where Yoga was concerned,[1] and although he was an abstemious person, virtually a vegetarian, limiting himself to six cigarettes a day; his attempt to live even a mildly ascetic life was not without its quota of frustration and anxiety. Brought up by repressive, authoritarian parents, conditioned to regard his own naturally romantic, sensuous nature as wicked, it seems he continued, in adulthood, to live his life *as if* he believed his upbringing to have been correct. Modern psychology regards parental punishment and restriction as the most common antecedent of a strict personal conscience where the child, it is suggested, adopts the parents' excessive prohibitions in an attempt (often unconscious) to retain their love:

> The child who is punished and rejected appears keenly aware of his parents' attitudes toward him. Moreover, he begins to view himself as unwanted and unworthy; that is, he begins to adopt his parents' attitudes toward him.[2]

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1 This view has been confirmed by both Mrs. Roma Mittelholzer and Mrs. Jacqueline Ives.

2 Paul Henry Musson et. al., Child Development and Personality (Harper and Row N.Y., 1956) p. 401.

In an attempt to quell or repress that aspect of the personality which offends the parent, developing meanwhile the more socially "approved" characteristics, the ego encourages what Fairbairn calls an "internal saboteur" or "anti-libidinal ego". A normal process of maturing is thereby made difficult, if not impossible, by this "spectre", itself the source of a deep resistence to psychotherapy.[1] And so:

> The antilibidinal ego goes on 'bringing the patient up' in the same way as the parents did. Furthermore the disturbed child feels a need to be controlled, even though it be by the very parents who upset him.[2]

Mittelholzer's insistence on the value of "strong" Germanic traits of character; his frequently expressed view of tenderness or love as a "weakness", a "marshmallow mood",[3] his authoritarian cast of mind, seem to constitute evidence of the promptings of such an "internal saboteur", since:

> The cultivation of a fictitious sense of strength in the hating, antilibidinal ego, i.e. an embittered personality, has to substitute for genuine ego-strength.[4]

Should this fictitious ego-strength be exposed, however, or seen to be a delusion, then a dilemma ensues and the ego's "internal saboteur" directs its destrucivenesss inwards upon itself. The "pseudo-Siegfried" faces suicide. Brian Liddard's discovery that his attempt to transcend the

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1 Throughout EM's work there is a marked antagonism to psychotherapy – a refusal to accept it as a valid science. In The Piling of Clouds (1961), neither Peter Elmsford nor his wife, "had any respect for the pontifications of psychologists." (pp. 190/191). In The Weather in Middenshot (1952) a character refers to "all these shits of psychologists" (p. 98), and in A Swarthy Boy (1963) EM himself says, with more restraint, "I still thumb my nose at the psychiatrists!" (p. 62).

2 Harry Guntrip, Schizoid Phenomena Object-Relations and the Self, (Hogarth 1968) p. 203. Further references to this work will appear as Guntrip.

3 EM, A Tinkling in the Twilight (1959) p. 126.

4 Guntrip, op. cit., p. 206.

flesh is really a symptom of his own inner division, leads inevitably to a wish for self-destruction which then appears as the only alternative to the self-knowledge that has exposed his asceticism as an ego-weakness. Suicide, however, is to be an escape to a "higher plane" of existence where his sense of inner division will be removed. For Liddard, as for all Mittelholzer's schizoid heroes, suicide is:

> ... not really a wish for death as such, except in cases where the patient has lost all hope of being understood and helped. Even then there is a deep unconscious secret wish that death should prove to be a pathway to rebirth. ... Whereas in depressive suicide the driving force is anger, agression, hate ... i.e. self-murder, schizoid suicide is at bottom a longing to escape from a situation ... and be reborn later with a second chance to live.[1]

Herein lies the psychological root of Mittelholzer's abiding interest in re-incarnation, the religious teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, and in Schopenhauer's ideas on death[2] and its value as a release from the "fever and the fret" of life. Indeed, the theme of suicide which permeates Mittelholzer's work runs parallel with his interest in oriental occultism and the theory of re-incarnation. For Brian Liddard, as for so many Mittelholzer characters, the possibility of suicide is a reassuring one; and the vial in his pocket containing six deadly drops of cyanide (in fact Margaret Beaver, suspecting his motives, has substituted water) is not only an insurance against insoluble mental conflict, but also a one-way

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1 Guntrip, op. cit., pp. 217/218.

2 Schopenhauer defines death as "the great opportunity no longer to be I" and suggests that Nature "as Krishna does in the Bhagavadgita", regards man's life or death with indifference. (The World as Will and Representation vol. II Dover Publications Inc. N.Y. 1966, pp. 473 and 507). It is interesting to notice that Schopenhauer also links death and the Bhuddist concept of Nirvana.

ticket to another, higher, plane of existence.

Mittelholzer, like the hero of Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks,[1] clearly regarded death as a happy release - a conflict-free state of existence which was always available if one's patience and persistence in working out life's problems proved futile. The flippancy of Liddard's "well, off into the Astral world!" (A Tinkling in the Twilight, p. 150) belies Mittelholzer's serious belief in the theory of the three Gunas, the earthly passions which, according to the Bhagavad Gita, shackled one to a process of unending, cyclic re-incarnation. In each re-incarnation one re-lived a life on earth, until, by achieving liberation from Karma (the Law of Universal Cause), one finally attained Ātman (absolute reality, pure Being), and no longer needed to be re-born. This theme of re-incarnation appears mainly in the later novels, but was present from the beginning. There is mention of it in the early, unpublished "Angela Vimiero"[2], and in The Weather Family (1958), where Princess Esmeralda, a schizophrenic South American heiress, lectures the sex-obsessed Eva Cranwell on the three Gunas, using her own copy of the Bhagavad Gita: "a good translation", she says, "the best. Do not bother with Isherwood's. This is the best. It is by Yogi Ramcharaka."[3] (p.315)

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1 Thomas Buddenbrook, at the end of his tether, reads - almost by chance - Schopenhauer's Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung:

> The chapter was called "On Death, and its Relation to our personal Immortality." ... What was Death? ... Death was a joy ... it put right again a lamentable mischance.

(Thomas Mann, Buddenbrooks Martin Secker 1930, pp. 256/258).

2 Written as a sequel to Corentyne Thunder (1941). Vide footnote 1 p.49 of this study.

3 Brian Liddard's edition of the Bhagavad Gita (like that of the heroine of The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham, 1965) is also the one by Yogi Ramcharaka. EM had read the Gita in 1930 - a fact recorded in his diary of that year - and it is likely that this was the edition he himself used.

The yogi, Herbert Lessier, in The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965), has long conversations with the heroine on the subject of yoga and meditation as a means of achieving Ātman; and Garvin Jilkington in The Jilkington Drama (1965), finally unable to reconcile spirit and flesh, rationalizes his failure as part of a mystic "pattern" which requires his suicide. The surest evidence, however, that Mittelholzer took the theory of re-incarnation and the concept of Astral projection seriously, as an alternative to Western Christianity, is found in The Wounded and the Worried (1962), where it is the main theme.

(V) The Wounded and the Worried (1962): The Achievement of Tom Dellow.

In an interview shortly after the book's publication, Mittelholzer, asked to say into which category he placed this novel, replied:

> It's one of my serious books, and it's the first time that I have ever attempted to treat my beliefs of an Other World nature seriously. Since the age of 19 I have been a convert to Oriental Occultism but I have always been cautious not to bring this theme into the open in a novel because I know how sceptical most people are in this sphere.[1]

The story of the novel concerns the middle-aged spinster, Fanny Newbold, a retired hospital matron who, having survived a suicide attempt, decides to throw open the doors of "Ravensdene" (her large country house) to other unfortunates who have also attempted suicide and to dedicate her life to helping them. She has three "guests": Gwen Wellings, an elderly unmarried headmistress, forced to retire from a job that had been her life; Stella Burges, a young, brash American whose sexual experiences at the hands of a lewd, boorish ex-husband have left her with an obsession for "clean sex"; and Tom Dellow, an Anglican parson unfrocked for his sexual involvement with a young parishioner as well as for his eccentric, high-church leanings and his incipient mysticism, now a full-blown belief in Oriental occultism and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. It soon becomes clear, however, that the three real sufferers - the "wounded and the worried" - are the three women, and Tom is to be the agent of their release. He sets himself the task of curing them and converting them to his beliefs practising "magnetic healing" and "Astral projection" - a process by which he saves Gwen (who has left the house to be on her own) from another suicide attempt. The novel ends as Gwen, Stella and Fanny, now convinced of Tom's powers and willing to accept his philosophy of life, decide to stay on at Ravensdene to help other mentally disturbed, would-be suicides.

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1 "The Intellectual Cissies" Books and Bookmen (op. cit., p. 21)

The urge to suicide is here used by Mittelholzer not only as a link between the characters, but also as a way of contrasting the conventional Christian attitudes of the women with Tom's oriental transcendentalism. For whereas the three women have each attempted suicide because of insoluble personal problems, Tom, convinced of the reality of re-incarnation, tired of an earthly existence in which his Real Being is suppressed and his vision of Truth is an object of ridicule, has attempted suicide by drowning in order to release his spirit, his Real Self, from the world of flesh. The women are therefore depressive suicides while Tom is a schizoid suicide, where the aim is re-birth and not merely self-destruction. Rescued at the last moment, he now spends his time fulfilling his _Karma_. The novel is therefore a straightforward exposition of the writer's belief in self-transcendence as a way of life. Tom Dellow acts as spiritual guide to the three women in the novel who represent the three "earthly desires" which, according to the _Gita_, must be overcome before freedom from the cycle of re-birth - _Atman_ - can be attained. Talking to Stella, Tom offers to tell her about the _Gunas_:

> I was thinking about you three women in relation to the Gunas. Gwen, I'd say, is shackled by Satvas. You by Rajas. And Fanny by Tamas. ... Satvas ... has to do with wisdom and truth and knowledge which I believe really rule Gwen's life. ... But Rajas has to do with sensual pleasure. ... That's you, ... With Fanny, she's rather on the side of Tamas, which is indifference, lethargy, cowardliness. (pp. 110/111)

Mittelholzer therefore presents Fanny as good-hearted and sensitive, but timid and weak-willed; Gwen as intellectually proud and stubborn, though highly intelligent; and Stella as vulgar, nubile and highly-sexed. The result is a rather obvious, stilted characterization. Stella's sexual excitability is, predictably, often accompanied by a rather heavy, explicit symbolism. Watching Tom carve the roast:

> ... she kept rubbing her legs together gently under the table as he manipulated the carving knife, as though in her

fancy she felt the blade tickling her thighs. (p. 34)

Fanny is always tip-toeing nervously about the house, peering into rooms and surreptitiously reading her guests' diaries (in which they are encouraged to write as part of the therapy) in her timid attempts to help. Easily confused, apologetic, she frequently leaves sentences unfinished or is interrupted in mid-sentence by other speakers. Gwen is shown to have a keen, critical intelligence, and, in spite of her earlier scepticism becomes Tom's most apt and willing "pupil". Because Mittelholzer wishes to make his philosophy as digestible as possible, he deliberately avoids introducing his ideas on "human vermin", female masochism and elitist social and political reform, keeping the focus on Tom Dellow as advocate for Eastern Mysticism <u>versus</u> Western Materialism. As Tom says:

> I have quite clear-cut views on politics, sex, art, crime and punishment and a number of other 'material' matters, but why should I discuss them now? At the moment we're in a situation ... that calls for the application of non-material principles. (p. 192)

This novel, Mittelholzer's first serious attempt to articulate his religious world-view, is therefore mercifully free of the dogmatic, almost hysterical self-assertion which is so noticeable in the later work.

It is also Mittelholzer's last serious attempt at an associative effort: the attempt to re-integrate body and soul; and in this sense, Tom Dellow represents his most significant achievement. It is noteworthy that the author presents the views of his main character with some caution. He does not simply import doctrines of the Instinctive and Intellectual Mind, Real Being, Astral Projection <u>etcetera</u> into the novel without restraint, but prepares the reader for these unusual ideas by presenting Tom as a <u>reticent</u> advocate for Oriental occultism who has

been misunderstood and ridiculed in the past, and is now extremely reluctant to expound his views. When he does, it is with a somewhat apologetic manner and a sense that he may appear absurd:

> " ... I've begun to discover a strength in myself I hadn't known was there. It's exciting. And I want to use this strength. I want to play it on the three of you as if it were a flame, and I want to see you revive." ... His glance flicked sideways, and he grinned. "Tell me. Do I sound very mad? Do I sound like a fanatic or something?" (p. 93)

and his attempts to convert the others meet with less than their whole-hearted approval. "Playing God again," says Stella, "trying to arrange us about to suit your plan." (p. 217). If Tom does, however, appear at times too much the author's mouthpiece preaching a Higher Truth to a self-deluded Western civilization - a Truth which he alone possesses, and which he feels compelled to assert:

> ... I won't be completely happy until I get you all to believe in what I believe. ... It gives me a terrible feeling of despair ... when I'm sneered at for what I know to be the truth. Yes, for what I _know_. I _know_! Not what I've guessed at, but I _know_. (p. 75)

his certain knowledge of being mis-understood, his fear of ridicule and his genuine concern for others help to redress the balance. In fact, in terms of the body/mind duality, Tom Dellow appears to be the most balanced of Mittelholzer's heroes. His serene faith in re-incarnation and the teachings of the _Gita_ makes it possible for him to articulate and so accept the inner conflict which unbalances other Mittelholzer heroes:

> ... I've thought it out for myself, and my feeling is that the body is as important as the spirit. If you develop one at the expense of the other your whole being will suffer. ... it's a mutual arrangement, so to speak. (p. 110)

Because of his psychic stability, he is able to deal successfully with all three _Gunas_ represented by the three women. He extends sympathy and warmth to thaw Gwen's cold reserve; offers encouragement and strength of will to steady Fanny's dilatory, rudderless life; and

provides Stella with the "clean sex" she desires. The story is well told, and Mittelholzer's skillful use of suspense holds the reader's interest; and Tom's characterization is generally convincing: his concern for a better life, for sincerity and warmth in personal relationships, comes across as genuine. But in portraying him as a perfectly integrated, balanced man at home in both the physical and spiritual worlds, Mittelholzer is not, unfortunately, content to leave it at that. Tom is made into both a spiritual and sexual superman. He is not merely a normally virile male, but is given sexual powers that appear, to say the least, enviable. His love-making with Stella is presented as a kind of marathon coitus un-interruptus during which Stella, as delighted as she is amazed, says "you don't get tired. You won't come. How do you do it?" Tom's answer is, one feels, a trifle smug: "Control, that's all. And vitality." (p. 72). His prowess in the realm of the spirit is no less spectacular. He not only practises a kind of spiritual acupuncture, employing "elan vital" to remove headaches - a process for which one is reasonably willing to suspend disbelief - but also projects his "astral body" across the countryside to urge Gwen against suicide. Mittelholzer, one feels, has overplayed his hand; and in Tom Dellow manages to produce a hero who has not only reconciled the body/mind split, but who also has, paradoxically, full power of dissociating the two elements, existing either as pure Flesh, or as pure Spirit. The achievement of Tom Dellow is therefore finally ambiguous. In fact, his apparent psychic stability disguises a rigorous dualism which insists on the separation of body and mind , and Dellow's dualistic cast of mind ultimately reflects Mittelholzer's obsession with the body/mind problem. No philosopher himself, Mittelholzer was nevertheless dealing with a problem which has, for centuries, perplexed philosophers. As Keith Campbell

puts it: "The Mind-Body problem, like the problem of God, is ... one of the crucial problems of philosophy",[1] and, summing up the current position in philosophical studies, he admits that "we just do not know enough about ourselves to be sure what the relation of mind to body must be."[2] It is not surprising, therefore, that Mittelholzer, in attempting to resolve his heroes' (and his own) schizoid division, should turn to sources which seemed to suggest a simple, practical solution to the problem:

> In certain books on Eastern philosophy you read of the Intellectual Mind and the Instinctive Mind. The one controls the more refined part of us - the spirit side, if I may so put it; the other sees after the functions of the body. Through our own wills we decide which of the two should have the greater say. (p. 67)

The Wounded and the Worried, perhaps the most straightforward of Mittelholzer's novels, is simply an embodiment of this dualistic view of the Mind/Body problem, and Tom Dellow, of all Mittelholzer's heroes, remains, finally, the most uncomplicated, the most accomplished, but by no means the most credible.

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1 Keith Campbell, Body and Mind (MacMillan 1971) p. 10.

2 Ibid., p. 124.

THE ASSOCIATIVE ATTEMPT

Part two - The Failure of Will: an Appeal to Nature.

(VI) My Bones and My Flute (1955)

So central to Mittelholzer's work is the problem of the Body/Mind dichotomy, that even a slight and apparently straightforward novel like My Bones and My Flute bears witness to the author's concern with inner division. The novel is sub-titled "a Ghost Story in the Old Fashioned Manner", and is, on the face of it, a very simple, effective tale of supernatural horror. Milton Woodsley, a Guyanese of mixed race living in New Amsterdam, Berbice, learns from an old, respected friend of his family, Mr. Nevinson, of the discovery of a canister which (found buried on Nevinson's estate, "Goed de Vries", in the Berbice jungle) contains an old parchment, the property of a long-dead Dutch slave-owner. The parchment is cursed, possessing "some strongly psychic emanations" (p. 40)[1] of the personality of the dead man, Jan Pieter Voorman. Mr. Nevinson, in touching the parchment, inadvertently sets in train a process of haunting in which the intermittent sound of a flute, heard only by the victim, approaches nearer each day until a hideous incubus appears and, by degrees, drives the victim to suicide. Woodsley, intrigued by this mystery and bored by New Amsterdam life, deliberately touches the parchment and so becomes directly involved in the affair. Translated, the old Dutch script reveals that exorcism of the haunting (also experienced now by Mrs. Nevinson and her daughter, Jessie) involves finding Voorman's grave and administering Christian rites over his remains. The forces of evil which threaten Woodsley and the Nevinsons are, it appears, the result of the Dutchman's dabbling in the "Black Arts": and the curse on the parchment and the haunting which results are Voorman's way of enlisting

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1 Cf. the incident of the desk-leg in A Morning at the Office (1950).

aid beyond his unquiet grave. The evil manifestations which hinder their attempts to locate Voorman's burial-place become more and more hideous until, guided by Mrs. Nevinson's dreams by means of which Voorman's ghost attempts to communicate with them, they stumble upon the grave deep in the jungle and manage, at the eleventh hour, to carry out the Dutchman's request, whereupon the forces of evil vanish forever. The ghosts of the past are exorcised.

The novel is a well-constructed ghost-tale, the plot and style reminiscent, as Mr. Nevinson puts it, of "something out of Edgar Allan Poe - or that other writer, M.R. James" (p. 36). Nevinson, in fact, reads M.R. James's Ghost Stories of an Antiquary, and we are told that "his mode of expressing himself had, indeed, been subconsciously influenced by M.R. James." (p. 113). Indeed, Mittelholzer adopts, with notable success, a suitably "Gothic" narrative style. The atmosphere of the Berbice jungle is conveyed with extraordinary power: one is reminded of the disturbing, hallucinatory world of Shadows Move among Them (1951), which has, incidentally, the same locale. The brooding, mysterious presence of the jungle obviously made a deep impression on Mittelholzer. There is a curiously autobiographical note in the narrator's introduction to the story. Mittelholzer makes Woodsley present the novel as a belated attempt, using his "diary notes", to write a carefully re-constructed account of a real experience: a story which "should have been written about twenty years ago" (p. 5). Woodsley, the narrator, dates his introductory remarks, "N/Amsterdam, British Guiana, July 1954",[1] which places the "actual" time of the events of the novel, therefore, at about 1934, a period in Mittelholzer's

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[1] By October 1948 My Bones and My Flute, it seems, had already been written. The diary entry of 7 October 1948 includes the note: "publisher anxious to reconsider My Bones."

life when he was suicidally depressed and miserable.[1] And there are other autobiographical references. Milton Woodsley (like Milton Copps of The Life and Death of Sylvia [1953]) is a self-portrait of the author. He comes of an old, coloured New Amsterdam family, can trace his ancestry back to the late eighteenth century; refuses a "good office job in Nevinson's brother's hardware firm" (p. 9),[2] and is "regarded by the respectable people of New Amsterdam as an eccentric crank" (p. 9). He is also "a romantic and extremely susceptible to [his] surroundings" (p. 12). That Mittelholzer, in writing this tale of haunting - of the appearance of an ugly, evil shadow which drives its victims to suicide - did, in fact, have in mind his earlier, frustrating New Amsterdam experiences during 1934 and 1936 is borne out by the detailed personal confession of Woodsley that he is the victim of moods of deep, morbid depression during which he is aware of:

> ... a shadow-voice which assures me that there is no substance in the scene which I am beholding. ... Such moods are always accompanied by a sense of depression and emptiness. (pp. 43/44) [3]

Woodsley's "innately morbid disposition" we are informed, coupled with

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1 Typical diary entries are: "depressed. A great emptiness of spirit - the emptiness of failure, despair." (31 December, 1934). "Very depressed. Resigned to suicide, perhaps early or middle January." (28 November, 1935). EM attempted suicide on 14 May, 1936.

2 EM's diary records the event, on 24 November, 1930, of his refusal to accept the offer of a job in a New Amsterdam firm. "Interviewed Mr. Farrar. His Offer. Turned it down. E.M. is not to be troddon [sic] on!"

3 There is a striking similarity between this and Miss Bisnauth's "Nightmare Moment" in A Morning at the Office (1950). Both incidents display classic symptoms of schizoid depression, in which there is "a serious breakdown of constructive effort ... Nothing seems worth doing, interest dies, the world seems unreal, the ego feels depersonalized." (Guntrip, op. cit., p. 39).

a rejection, at the age of nineteen, of "my former religious fears" and the lasting emotional damage caused by his grandmother's "ability to produce terror in small boys like myself" with her stories of the Hereafter, have contributed to his present pre-occupation with death "as an adventure which should offer a pleasant solution to my earthly fumblings" (pp. 71/72). Here we have both the childhood conditioning (recorded in A Swarthy Boy [1963]) and the resultant schizoid attitude to suicide as an escape from an intolerable emotional conflict. It is not only difficult to disengage the autobiographical elements from the story, but actually undesirable to do so. Indeed, the peculiar power of the narrative comes as much from the suggestion of hidden, numinous fears - the subterranean activity of the story - as from the author's considerable ability to hold the reader's interest by the sheer, compulsive quality of his story-telling. At the psychological level, the story becomes an attempt by Mittelholzer to grapple, yet again, with the mysterious Interior, the portentous description of which is perhaps more than just an attempt to create suspense and an atmosphere of foreboding:

> Now that we were far from the coast there was no wind. The jungle, glittering in the sunshine, reared up in two dense walls on either bank, shutting us in. It had a rigid, listening look as though held in a spell. The river, from a light muddy amber, had turned black and ominous. (p. 16)

This is also the dark Interior from which Mooney (in the "Jen" fairy-tale from A Morning at the Office [1950]) hears strange, unexplained cries: the unknown, forbidden territory of the Unconscious.[1] It is also the place of origin of the historical ghosts which always haunted Mittelholzer; the scene of the bloody slave rebellion of 1763 in which his ancestor (like Jan Pieter Voorman) had been involved. Finally, the

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1 One of the leitmotivs in Thunder Returning (1961) used to signal Richard Lehrer's need for self-knowledge, is "untrodden forest".

evil in the novel is given what, for Mittelholzer, must have been a deeply personal meaning, for Voorman's death is the result not only of the slave rebellion, but also of his struggle against "the Blacker Ones" - the dark forces of evil within. In the novel's "postscript" the dreadful truth is disclosed: Voorman had been trying to achieve an intellectual "first" - a scientific method of increasing the musical range of the flute - and, turning to Necromancy, had sold his soul to the devil. Like the hero of Hawthorne's Ethan Brand[1] he had committed the Unpardonable Sin: a divorce of intellect and emotion, Body and Soul. The manuscript which Woodsley and Mr. Nevinson find in his grave places the responsibility for the evil, which peoples the present with the ghosts of the past, firmly on the Body/Mind split: "it is I who plague myself in several forms projected and created by my errant will" (p. 221) and the evil incubus which, to Woodsley's horror, nightly inhabits the sleeping form of the Nevinsons' beautiful, virgin daughter, becomes a symbol of the lurking demons in the mind of the self-divided man: demons for whom the burial service (read by Woodsley and Mr. Nevinson over the Dutchman's grave) remains merely a temporary, expiatory gesture.

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1 There is, in Hawthorne's story, a suggestion of a pact with the devil; and Brand's consequent "intellectual development, which, in its progress, disturbed the counterpoise between his mind and heart," is the familiar schizoid malady which leads to his fiery suicide in the lime-kiln. (Hawthorne's Short Stories Alfred A. Knopf, N.Y. 1964, p. 388).

(VII) Eltonsbrody (1960)

For the morbid element in Mittelholzer's imagination, like Woodsley's "innately morbid disposition" (My Bones and My Flute [1955] p. 72) had a lasting effect on his work; providing the framework, for example, of the later Eltonsbrody, a horror-story written by Mittelholzer, it seems, simply in order to indulge his fascination with death. Mittelholzer's hearty, devil-take-the-hindmost approach to the writing:

> It's a shocking story - a story of real horror - and anyone who feels that he can't stomach real horror had better go no further than here. For those who feel they're up to it, well, let's be off! (p. 1)

is itself an indication of the novel's excesses. The hero, an Antiguan who has been brought up in England, is also given the "autobiographical" name Milton Woodsley. He, too, is an amateur painter, and on a visit to Barbados is taken in as a guest at the nineteenth century "Great House", Eltonsbrody. Mrs. Scaife, the owner, an elderly widowed "local-white" Barbadian turns out to be morbidly obsessed with death; and the novel is an enthusiastic recounting of the grisly events which take place at Eltonsbrody. The plot includes a shapely, exhibitionist servant-girl, a glum, taciturn janitor, foul odours that seep from behind locked doors: the paraphenalia, in fact, of a typical, nineteenth century Gothic horror-novel. Coffins vanish at night, dogs howl, figures lurk in dark cemeteries. Even the author/narrator occasionally seems aware of the triteness of "all the old creepy effects" (p. 150):

> A feeling of monotony and pointlessness came upon me. Wind and old wardrobe creaking, windows downstairs rattling, leaf against the window. It was getting tiresome now. (p. 150)

The main element in the novel, however, is Mrs. Scaife's morbid interest in corpses (which she dismembers) and in death generally, an interest which Mittelholzer appears to be defending in the novel. Mrs. Scaife is presented as a basically good and generous person, who

merely happens to have a morbid cast of mind; and one feels that the novel is really a disguised piece of special pleading for a trait of character the author felt he himself possessed. Mrs. Scaife, who has second sight, is able to spot the "mark of Death" on certain people, of whom Woodsley is one. She describes it as "the mark of destructive lust ... a desperate hunger to watch things die" (pp. 102/103); and Woodsley is finally unable to condemn the old woman, in spite of her brutal murder of the nurse, Miss Linton, and her ghoulish activities in general:

> Up to this moment I haven't yet made up my mind about her. I somehow simply can't bring myself to dismiss her out of hand as a homicidal maniac. ... Perhaps there's something dark in me myself that makes me able to feel sympathy for her in spite of her horrible deeds. (pp.190/191)

The book is a study of the phenomenon of necrophilia, and the author's sympathy for the morbid preoccupations of his characters is obvious. This self-identification is responsible too for the ambiguous characterization of old Mr. Jarrow in The Weather in Middenshot (1952) who, while cooly and deliberately exterminating the two criminals whom he regards as "human vermin", nevertheless derives a perverted pleasure from the act: "I've done what I've wanted to do - wanted to since I was a young man. I'm at peace. Peace." (p. 163). The psychopathic killer, Charles Pruthick, of The Piling of Clouds (1961) whose morbid sexual interest in little girls would seem to qualify him as "human vermin", is, curiously, also an enigmatic figure.

Mittelholzer, it seems, like Milton Woodsley of Eltonsbrody, aware of "something dark" in himself which made it possible for him to celebrate, even while condemning, the morbid inclinations of his characters; and it is striking how much of Mittelholzer's fiction deals with (in fact seems to be driven by) hidden, dark motives.

(VIII) The Adding Machine (Pioneer Press, Kingston, Jamaica [1954])

In My Bones and My Flute (1955) the dark forces of evil were seen to originate from a heretical attempt to divorce heart and head. The perversion of will which allows a man to damn himself by refusing to acknowledge the interdependence of emotion and reason, body and soul, is the subject of the short "fable", The Adding Machine. The tale, set on a Caribbean island, involves the grasping Mr. Hedge, owner of a coconut plantation, who grows fat and rich through the agency of a "magic" adding machine - the gift of a mysterious stranger who visits him in a dream - and through his own ruthless business methods. The machine records not only his profits, however, but also his spiritual debts - for which he is made to pay. He is inflicted with boils, warts and painful ulcers each time he cheats his fellow-men or refuses them Christian charity; and eventually he loses an arm and a leg. Hedge's business prospers, while the machine acts as a repository of all his evil thoughts and actions, developing a horrible blight, which Hedge notices when he registers his week's profit: "He started back. Even as he watched, another red scab appeared." (pp. 40/41). Finally, when he attempts to register an amount of profit which the machine considers to be immoral, the thing leaps upon him and kills him. The story is reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray[1] in which a portrait takes on the hideous inner nature of the man, leaving him, however, innocent-looking and youthful. Dorian Gray's Unpardonable Sin, like Mr. Hedge's, is the wilful attempt to separate the soul from the body - an attempt that leads to a violent end. And Hedge's death, like Dorian Gray's is the soul's revenge on the body:

> From each spot and blotch there emerged a greenish, horny tentacle. ... Each tentacle burrowed, with an easy and know ing familiarity, into Mr. Hedge's chest. ... As they came

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1 First published as a novel in 1891 by Ward, Lock and Company.

> away they brought Mr. Hedge's heart entangled in their writhing midst. A heart black like the machine and as spotted and blotched and putrescent. (pp. 100/101)

The machine which (as the stranger tells Hedge) "will add only for you" (p. 11), is Hedge's soul: his real self. For not being honest with it he has to pay a terrible price. The story's sub-title "a fable for capitalists and commercialists", is misleading. Mittelholzer was against, not capitalism or commerce, but the lack of personal integrity which often accompanied them: a one-sidedness of personality. Hedge had:

> ... all his life ... been a realist. Money, so far as he was concerned, was the only real thing worth bothering about. (p. 20)

and this lack of balance between material and spiritual is his undoing. He remains another example of the Mittelholzer character who discovers that he cannot ignore, or fool, the inner self.

(IX) Of Trees and the Sea (1956)

Mittelholzer's attempt to create an associative art comes, then, from his acute awareness of psychic division; and his characters are almost always motivated by the inner urgency of their schizoid condition. The failure of their attempts at personal integration - a failure, essentially, of will - is also, paradoxically, implied by their author's own sense of inner division, his morbid concern with death, and his consistent personal involvement in his fiction. This is not to say, however, that Mittelholzer's art is always self-divided and fragmentary. A Morning at the Office (1950), as we have seen, is one completely successful example of the positive, unifying activity of which his writing is capable. And there is another aspect in which the associative impulse of his art is frequently successful. This is the linking together of landscape and character in an almost musical harmony. Mittelholzer's love of nature and strong feeling of "oneness" with landscape, weather and natural objects made it possible for him to evoke, with extraordinary accuracy and insight, the actual spirit and "feel" of a place. This ability is obvious in most of his novels from Corentyne Thunder (1941), where the East Coast savannahs and rice-lands are brilliantly re-created for the reader; to The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965) in which the heroine's walk through a snow-covered English countryside conveys an almost physical experience of time and place. In Of Trees and the Sea, written in Barbados,[1] human character, landscape and natural environment become fused in a comedy-fantasy which Mittelholzer obviously enjoyed writing: a novel which gave scope to his undoubted talent for linking together people and natural objects, and for conveying the atmosphere of place.

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[1] EM's Barbados diary entry for 11 July, 1955 is: "started work in rough on new novel - Of Trees and the Sea." On 1 September of the same year the entry is: "prepared MS (Of Trees) for the post."

The Mittelholzers were happy in Barbados[1] where they lived from 1953 to May 1956 on the leeward Maxwell coast. Mittelholzer, by then a fairly successful and well-established author, was able to pursue his favourite hobby (observing and recording weather conditions) in an atmosphere which he found congenial and which provided many ideas for use in his writing. In The Weather Family (1958), for example, the hurricane ("Janet") which struck the island in 1955 is the novel's main centre of interest - the principal "character"; and the lives of people are intimately related to the moods of the weather. Mittelholzer's fascination with weather and environment is given full rein, and the book's foreword mentions the fact that his own weather records are used in the story. In Of Trees and the Sea, chapter headings ("the Acid Menace of Manchineels"; "the Flotsam of Hurricane Seas"; "the Entangled Foliage of Family Trees") reflect the theme of weather and landscape, stated in the title, and characters bear the names of trees or shrubs. The Frondsons, Oakbents, Pollards, Larches and Mandrakes are all Barbadian families whose names, incidentally, also sound legitimately Barbadian. In this novel Mittelholzer, half-humorously, links character and environment so that the peculiar qualities of a tree,[2] for example, are mirrored in the character with whom it is associated. The unstable Susan Sedge is therefore quiet, secretive and nervous: full of "secret purpose" (p. 10), a characteristic also present in the description of casuarina trees with which she is linked. The dark brown evening gown she wears fits so closely that

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1 A fact which emerged during my conversations with Mrs. Roma Mittelholzer.

2 In his travel-book, With a Carib Eye (1958) EM writes:

> After the casuarina, the manchineel is my favourite tree in Barbados. It is a Wagner among trees ... - a tree that seems to offer the possibility of infinite bliss. And profound tragedy. (p. 91).

It is interesting to note here EM's automatic linking of music, natural environment and human emotion.

"it might have been a thin bark" (p. 69) protecting her body. The eccentric Colonel Heather, who is suspected by the locals to be "trying to brew a strange drug from herbs - a drug that will turn people into trees, or trees into people" (p. 65), but who, it is finally discovered, is merely writing a book on Barbados - a "poetical comedy-fantasy ... with botanical and religious overtones as a matter of course" (p. 256) is a comic sketch of the author himself at work. But Mittelholzer's aim in writing the book is a much more subtle one; for in uniting character and natural environment, he is at the same time recommending (as he does in Shadows Move Among Them [1951] and The Mad McMullochs [1959]) a racially mixed but unified society in which people can be "natural", warm and loving, and in which prejudices involving race or religion have ceased to exist. Above all, a society which encourages the unselfconscious functioning of a healthy sexual and emotional life.

The story concerns a young, newly-married English couple, Pat and Roger Wort, who have only recently arrived in the island and find themselves becoming more and more affected by their Barbadian neighbours' unorthodox behaviour: an odd mixture of naïveté and sophistication. Roger is a target for the frankly sexual advances of Daphne Sedge, while Pat (whose pregnancy "old Broome", the local obeah man predicts, warning that the child is the offspring of "Beelzebub") becomes almost hypnotically drawn to Mr. Drencher, the coloured village patriarch and "father-confessor" who, still virile at eighty-one, has a special fondness for young women. Roger is seduced by Daphne, who becomes pregnant as a result; and Pat has a recurring nightmare in which she commits a vicious murder. Pat also becomes pregnant, but is not certain whether the child is Roger's or Mr. Drencher's, for on one of her visits to the old man's cottage, Drencher had, it appears, been more than usually

sympathetic and helpful. The Worts' marriage is threatened by guilt and suspicion until, at a party given by Mr. Drencher, it is revealed that Roger, by an extraordinary coincidence, is related to the old man, who has now secretly married Daphne Sedge. The novel ends with a suggestion of confused heredity in the future, for Daphne's child has been fathered by Roger, and Pat's by old Drencher. But as Mr. Drencher says:

> We're all human beings together, as I've often remarked. We should strive to be one happy family, shouldn't we? Why upset ourselves about the entangled foliage of family trees! (p. 249)

The novel's light, humorous touch tends to disguise the serious nature of the theme which it shares with Shadows Move among Them (1951) and The Mad McMullochs (1959): the discovery by English "outsiders" of the natural, healthy and ultimately more "civilized" way of life of the Caribbean. The Worts' arrival as unwelcome foreign interlopers is expressed in Old Broome's vision of:

> ... a strange male beast from far across the seas that emerged from the waves bearing on its back a female beast who was pregnant with a female child - the child of Beelzebub. (p. 98)

and both Roger and Pat are given to expressing a latent quality of violence. "I get so frightfully jealous sometimes I can kill" (p. 78), he tells her, and, worried by Daphne's attentions to him, she says "I'll kill her if she attempts to - to win you away from me. I mean it." (p. 164). Pat's recurring nightmare, which begins with their arrival in Barbados, is also an expression of repressed violence. In her dream, she stabs with a pointed, wooden stake, the prostrate figure of a black man, an action which suggests a symbolic attempt to silence her own dark, unconscious urges. This impression of Pat as dangerously introverted is reinforced by the fact that she is linked with the Manchineel trees which she loves and which exude a corrosive, white sap. This tree possesses leaves which, we are told, "fold forward secretively" unlike the white-wood trees whose leaves (which act as an antidote for the poison) are

"wide open and frank" (p. 206). She is clearly afraid of the psychic disturbance caused by the appearance in her consciousness of hitherto repressed, dark motives:

> She remembered tales she had read about white people going to pieces in the tropics. ... It wasn't only tropical natives who could be superstitious. ... All that was dark and morbid and silly and romantic in her heredity was being dredged up ... (p. 201)

Old Drencher's stability, warmth and sexual vitality act on Pat like a balm, the effect of which is like that of the sea itself:

> He leant forward as he spoke, goodwill surging out of him in almost visible spume, salty and sincere, and surrounding her on all sides, so that she thought she would swoon from the abundance of it. (p. 33) [1]

The woods and the beach (the scene of Roger's seduction) near his cottage are owned by him, and the whole area exudes the all-embracing, vital quality with which he is associated. "The beach is <u>drenched</u> with it" (p. 139, my underlining). Drencher is the central, associative agent through whom first Pat, and then Roger, overcome their European reserve as well as their resistance to the natural urges of the flesh. Roger dreams of a city of old men:

> ... a city composed of wicker baskets ... piled one on top the other at the entrance of a huge cave, blocking the whole entrance. (p. 155)

There is a suggestion here, of old Mr. Drencher in his wicker-work rocking chair and Roger's feeling of claustrophobic panic represents his resistance to Drencher's relaxed, promiscuous generosity of spirit. Pat, on the other hand, in the old man's company, "felt herself in a dry cave crouching within the quiet gloom of his protection" (p. 173), and it is Drencher who, like some aged, coloured, good-humoured

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[1] EM's deliberate use of alliteration to create an effect of sibilance (the sound of the surf) is noteworthy.

Prospero,[1] finally exorcises Pat's morbid anxiety-dream.

The tropical landscape, the trees and the sea, stand for all that is good and healthy in Nature, as well as in people; and the weather-images with which the book abounds are used as a contrast to the insincerity and superficiality of human relationships. The description of the Pollards' engagement party (at which the bride-to-be discovers that her ring is a fake diamond) is a typical example of this half-humorous linking of people with the natural environment as a means of contrasting the superficiality of the one with the genuineness of the other:

> People were still coming in, and soon the large sitting-room became a forest of human trees standing in a clutter about the floor rustling with conversation in the gale of alcoholic beverages that swept in from the dining room where half-a-dozen black boys kept up a cyclonic service centred around a sturdy, old-fashioned side-board. (p. 68)

Susan Sedge, Roger and Pat are only too glad, however, to escape from the party into the open air again, for "the trees and the sea ... never traded in black ties, silk lapels and fake diamond rings" (p. 77). This passage also illustrates Mittelholzer's inordinate liking for alliteration, which appears to be a conscious attempt to create a pleasing, rhythmic and musical style. One is reminded of Miss Bisnauth's love of "linking words together" in A Morning at the Office (1950). Mittelholzer's frequent use of alliteration and assonance, however, instead of producing the desired, poetic effect, generally appears an obtrusive and whimsical device, as, for example, in the description of the cordia blossoms:

> ... that turned the grass beneath into an arena of recent revel; a party of harlots, last night, might have discarded their over-painted mouths before dawn dismissed them at their dissipation. (p. 13)

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1 At one point, Roger quotes a line from The Tempest, to describe the tranquil beauty of the island. One is reminded that the Barbadian writer, George Lamming, has found in the Caliban/Prospero relationship a lasting metaphor for much of his own work.

This insistence on using alliteration to create a "musical" effect is occasionally taken by Mittelholzer to absurd limits. In The Weather Family (1958) we come across this description of the lull in the weather just before the hurricane arrives:

> The fiery flutes continued to frolic. The passionate piccoloes peep-peeped their chicken-tunes in high-powered peppery squeaks, shaming the shivering buzz of the bassoons with their background shush-shush policy. (p. 306)

There is a good deal of this kind of writing in The Weather Family. Indeed, the frequent use of alliteration is a diagnostic feature of Mittelholzer's style. More interesting than his efforts to employ an alliterative "musical" technique, however, is Mittelholzer's attempt to use musical form as a framework for his novels. The idea is present in the Kaywana trilogy - in the description in Kaywana Blood (1958) of the "twin themes" which interact, finally ending in a Perdendosi[1] - and in The Life and Death of Sylvia (1953) with its opening and closing chapter-headings: "Overture, with trumpets", and "Finale with low drums and cymbals". In the leitmotiv novels, there is actually an attempt to combine a musical "score" with a verbal story. Indeed, not only does Mittelholzer adopt the Wagnerian leitmotiv technique by using certain set words and phrases and combinations of these to indicate particular characters and emotions; but he also uses the leitmotiv as a link between character and environment. There is, therefore, a doubly associative quality in his approach to these novels, where his love of music (especially the music of Wagner) combines with his feeling for landscape and natural environment to produce a genuinely original experimental technique of novel-writing.

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1 The word means "gradually dying away". See footnote 1, p. 92 of this study.

(X) The Unfinished Trilogy

Latticed Echoes (1960)

Thunder Returning (1961)

The leitmotiv novels Latticed Echoes and Thunder Returning, were intended as the first two books of a trilogy which was never completed. Like the Kaywana series, the leitmotiv novels reflect Mittelholzer's enormous energy and extraordinary ability in organizing detail (there are over forty leitmotivs, some involving twenty or more words, in Thunder Returning). The painstaking care with which he planned and wrote these novels is reflected in the foreword which he felt obliged to include in Thunder Returning in order to explain this new, leitmotiv technique. The leitmotivs were, he explained:

> ... mere symbol-adjuncts to the dialogue. They are intended to mean nothing in so far as their literal content is concerned. ... The "lucid" story is told in the dialogue, but parallel with this the Leitmotivs are also telling the story in symbol form. (Thunder Returning, p. 7).

He is careful to disassociate his leitmotiv method from the "stream of consciousness" technique of James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, and though he admits including "thought passages" in the second novel, these, however,

> ... are done in a straightforward manner, being enclosed within brackets. They have nothing whatever to do with the Leitmotiv section, and, in fact, may even be looked upon as a secondary dialogue. (p. 6)

Quoting a passage from Thunder Returning:

> Menace wreathes like a dark-green fragrance out of the veiled magic belonging to several shadows, several realities duplicated on the green-painted walls. Menace moves like a duck out of a pine forest, out of hush violet with silent shudders and weak, red but clear responses ...

Mittelholzer uses it to explain the complex functioning of the leitmotiv technique:

> ... it is at once apparent that here is a scene that introduces Tommy Rowleyson (the key-words in his Motiv are "menace", "veiled magic", "dark-green" and "duck"). Lindy, his wife, is also involved, for "weak, red but clear" is part of her Motiv. Moreover, "pine forest", "hush" and "violet" are key-words from a new Motiv introduced at the end of the previous chapter — a Motiv indicative of Lindy's secret longing for union with Richard Lehrer ... (p. 7)

Moreover, the images used in the <u>leitmotivs</u> are generally drawn from the natural environment. The New Amsterdam <u>motiv</u> includes "amber water ... ribbed ... backdam"; the Georgetown home of Richard Lehrer's father is conjured up by "hibiscus ... latticed portico ... narrow street"; and the words and images are actually descriptive of each place. But <u>leitmotivs</u> are also used to indicate particular personalities, as well as their emotions. The words "cherry ... plum blossoms ... holly hedge ... coming showers" introduce Lindy Rowleyson, and "star-apples ... cobblestones" her joy in being pregnant. The <u>leitmotivs</u> therefore are intended to function not only as a symbolic story-line: they also link character and environment within a musical framework. The "new technique" was, in concept, clearly an ambitious and commendable artistic attempt, but one which, in practice, has a number of serious drawbacks, not the least of which is Mittelholzer's own eccentric formulation of the <u>leitmotivs</u> themselves and the unintentional effect of banality which they often produce in the context of the story. Unfortunately, in attempting to weave the <u>leitmotivs</u> into the story Mittelholzer often simply inserts the images between gaps in the narrative, or in the dialogue. This results in sentences in which the jagged ends of the <u>leitmotivs</u> are left sticking up like so many verbal splinters. In <u>Latticed Echoes</u> Lydia's <u>leitmotiv</u> includes the words "dark-green", "swim" and "duck", so her conversation (or those which mention her) is frequently supplied with these <u>leitmotiv</u> "markers":

> "Richard." A duck swam. "Yes?" In a pond. "Never mind." With a dark-green head. (p. 30)

> "Richard has married an English girl." Buzz and chirrup ... "Yorkshire girl" Churr and duck ... "Do you know her?" Chirrup and swim. (p. 42)

The portentous <u>leitmotiv</u> passages which introduce the "straight" narrative, often lead to an anti-climax:

> Huge and serrate are the shadows. An amber trellis perpetually ribbons the mango and jamoon foliage. A duck swims in lonely peace, dipping, rocking insecurely, silently past a cosy feather-bed in our windless basement ... "Have you just come in, Richard?" (p. 177)

and in striving in the leitmotiv sections for a lyrical, "poetic" style, Mittelholzer often creates an unintentionally comic effect:

> Several stirrings, several rockings ... with dark-green grins and poison-blue thunder. Plong-beng! Dark, dark, dark are the echoes of a million centuries of uncoiled snakes, of red grins in a moaning evening dusk ... (p. 247)

The chorus of moaning alligators and "quarking" bull-frogs, like the rest of the leitmotiv accompaniment, remains in the final analysis, an overly-symbolic background to a fairly pedestrian plot, and it is impossible to deny the justice of the criticism that:

> ... the characters and story are not at all of heroic proportions. Infidelity among expatriates in British Guiana does not lend itself all that much to the reverberating echoes of the Wagnerian system.[1]

Whereas, for Wagner, the leitmotiv principle was used to underscore a theme of mythopoeic, heroic proportions; for Mittelholzer, the leitmotiv remains simply an interesting, verbal assembly-device aimed at adding a "symbolic" dimension to a quite conventional love-drama.

Mittelholzer's concept of a detailed Wagnerian leitmotiv technique for the novel was, nevertheless, a genuinely original one, and one that provides further evidence of his attempt to create an associative art. But his use of Wagnerian leitmotivs has a psychological, as well as a stylistic, significance; for there is in the novel's plot, an underlying theme of cultural and racial heritage: the idea of genetic "purity" as an indication of "wholeness of soul". Richard Lehrer's Germanic ancestry is shown, in the novels, to be a kind of Holy Grail

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1 R.M. Gamble, Irish Times (27 February, 1960).

of Identity which contains the ultimate solution to his inner division; and his quest for Identity involves a recognition and pursuit of a European/Germanic destiny. The story of Latticed Echoes involves two couples; the Guyanese-born Richard Lehrer and his wife Lydia who is from Yorkshire, and Tommy Rowleyson (also from Yorkshire) and his German wife Woglinde, or Lindy, as she is called. Richard, Lydia and their six year old daughter, Susan, return to New Amsterdam, British Guiana where Richard is to take up a post as Government Architect. The Rowleysons also live in New Amsterdam (Tommy is a road engineer) where Richard meets Lindy, becomes instantly attracted to her, and they have an affair. When Lindy, who has always desperately wanted a child, becomes pregnant, Tommy, knowing himself to be sterile, gets drunker than usual and threatens to shoot both Richard and Lindy. Tragedy is, however, averted and the novel ends with Tommy resigned to cuckoldry, Lydia bitterly jealous of Lindy, and Lindy herself anticipating motherhood - her one obsessive desire. In Thunder Returning, the relationship between Lindy and Richard develops into mutual love, while Lydia (who is now also pregnant, much to Richard's annoyance) becomes neurotically jealous of the pregnant Lindy, inviting her to tea with the object of kicking her in the stomach. The attempt fails, and, as Tommy becomes more and more of a cypher and Lydia a hysteric, Lindy's baby - a boy - is born. In hospital, Lydia, almost insane with jealousy and disappointment (her baby is a girl) kills herself by leaping from a window. Tommy degenerates still further, becoming a hopeless alcoholic, and Richard and Lindy, at the end of the novel, consider the possibility of meeting again sometime in the future, perhaps abroad.[1]

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[1] According to EM's second wife, Mrs. Jacqueline Ives, he had intended to set the scene of the final novel in the trilogy on the Rhine, where Richard and Lindy were to meet again.

Stated in its bare essentials like this, the story of the leitmotiv novels appears trite, even vulgar: little more than "infidelity among expatriates in British Guiana".[1] There is, however, another, symbolic "story" which is revealed in Mittelholzer's deliberate use of psychological echoes from The Ring of the Nibelungs throughout the two novels. We know that Mittelholzer was extremely enthusiastic about Wagner's music, and that he was familiar with the story of the Ring cycle in which there is a notoriously complex symbolism[2] attaching to the apparently childlike, fairy-tale plot. It is said of Wagner's Ring that the opera is an embodiment of archetypal elements and functions at levels "on which the psyche itself is the ultimate hero";[3] and it becomes clear, on closer reading of the novels, that Mittelholzer was attempting to give this quality of psychic relevance to his simple story. Mittelholzer's longing for a racial and cultural pedigree must have made the Teutonic mythology of Wagner's operas seem attractive indeed, and the idea of the death and regeneration of the gods of Walhalla is both a vision of the final supremacy of Teutonism in the world of men[4] and a successful integration of the human psyche, in

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1 R.M. Gamble, op. cit.

2 See, for example, R. Donington, Wagner's 'Ring' and its Symbols (Faber 1963). He finds in the opera "a study of life from the psyche's point of view," but makes the point that "the Ring goes on meaning many things to many people at one and the same time." (p. 33)

3 Ibid., p. 34

4 In spite of Wagner's association with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi movement, however, the charge that his operas reinforce a theory of the supremacy of the Nordic races remains as difficult (or as easy) to prove as to disprove. Wagner's schizoid character almost ensures an inconsistency between his stated political and social theories and his art.

psychological terms. Both these concepts were important to Mittelholzer, whose work reflects a deep desire to integrate the two opposing halves of his own divided self, as well as a need to be accepted, by European society, as an individual in his own right. Richard Lehrer's attraction to Lindy is based on the Germanic "blood" which they share. Richard has always felt drawn to Europe and knows that his "spirit" is not in British Guiana:

> It never has been. At heart, I'm a European. It was one of Fate's nasty little jokes - my being born in this country. (p. 32)

This is a reminder of Siegfried's refusal, in the Ring, to believe that the lowly Mime can be his father or that the gloomy cave of the Nibelung is his true home. Lindy's real name, Woglinde is, of course, the name of one of the Rhine-maidens:

> "Lovely name. It seems to ring a bell, somehow. Woglinde."
>
> "There's somebody in a Wagner opera called Woglinde, love. It may be that you're thinking of."
>
> "Of course. In The Ring, if I remember." (Latticed Echoes, p. 60)

Richard's senile grandfather, between shouts of "Deutschland über alles!" and the excerpts from Wagner's operas which he orders to be played regularly on the phonograph, lives in a Germanic dream-world; ordering Richard out of the house when he hears of his Royal Air Force service and of his bombing missions over Germany. The old man nevertheless represents a heroic father-figure (his Leitmotiv is "source" ... "giant") and Richard himself has a similar "feeling" for Germany:

> ... I like Germany. When I was there in the summer I felt at home. Something in me responded to the feel of the place. (p. 93)

When, in Thunder Returning, both Lydia and Lindy are pregnant, their condition is seen to be symbolic; for each woman becomes the bearer of the ancestral Lehrer sperm, success going to the German, Lindy. In

fact, the main theme of the novels involves sexual and psychic potency: the ability of the sperm, and of the psyche, to survive genetic damage and to act as a regenerative force. Richard, in making Lindy pregnant, is in fact obeying a noble "destiny" whereby he re-establishes a genetic and psychological link, through his seed, with the Teutonic heritage he admires and shares; leaving behind his racially "impure" West Indian background. Lindy's pregnancy is therefore bathed in a heroic, Wagnerian light. The baby is a "young Siegfried" (p. 35), and its birth heralded by the leitmotiv "lightning etches a scarlet sword over the top of the mountain." (p. 89). It is as if, through Lindy, Richard himself is re-born into a Teutonic heritage. In Latticed Echoes, his interview with Mr. Sinclair, the Negro American journalist, is a final rejection of his own Negro/West Indian roots:

> I don't identify myself with the negro race, Mr. Sinclair. (p. 217)
>
> Don't tell me, Mr. Sinclair, that if, with the knowledge that you have now, you'd been offered by the gods, in the hour before your birth, the option of being a European or a negro you'd have chosen to be a negro. (p. 222)

Richard sees himself as a Siegfried figure, poised for a heroic flight to Europe; and it is no coincidence that his grandfather's favourite record is an excerpt from The Ring : Siegfried's Rhine journey.

Both Lydia and Tommy are made to condemn themselves out of their own mouths, Lydia blaming herself for not taking Richard's unfaithfulness "like a man". She says, incredibly, "it was only me who couldn't be consoled. A woman you know. Bloody fools, all of us." (Thunder Returning, p. 18). Tommy admits, ruefully:

> I knew I was sterile, and I didn't tell you before we married.

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[1] Further evidence of the link between RM's life and his fiction is provided by the fact that when he re-married in 1960, he and his English bride honeymooned on the Rhine, the scenario in which he had planned to set the final novel of his leitmotiv trilogy. (vide footnote 1, p. 184 above).

> That's where I'm the villain in the picture, so I have no right to squeal because you've gone and got yourself a child by another fellow. (Thunder Returning, p. 27).

Clearly, the reader is expected to see Lydia and Tommy as weak, inferior beings: Nibelungs, perhaps. Lydia's overpowering urge to kill Lindy's unborn child is described as a "worm" or "serpent" in her mind, an image suggesting the evil dragon, Fafner, who guards the ring made of Rhinegold, and whom Siegfried has to kill in order to reclaim the ring. In fact, Lindy (Woglinde), as a Rhinemaiden, is the true, lawful guardian of the Rhinegold, represented by the child she carries, which, in turn, symbolizes the re-born "self" of Richard/Siegfried. The jealous Lydia imagines that Lindy is:

> ... proud of the young Siegfried restless in her womb. ... Richard must look forward to the day when the young German will slip out into the daylight and sound his horn, wave his little Teutonic sword, howl defiance at the Untermensch! The lowly Nibelungs. A super-baby. (Thunder Returning, p. 35).

But Richard Lehrer, for all his Germanic ideals, his longing to adopt a Teutonic heritage and landscape, remains a self-divided man. His love of Europe is at odds with his intimate feeling for the landscape of Guyana. Looking at the countryside as it rushes past outside the window of the train, he unconsciously reveals by the delighted expression on his face a deep pleasure and one-ness with the land. Lydia notices, and smiles:

> It's your face, love. I wish you could look at it in the mirror there. It isn't the face of a man who hates the country. (Latticed Echoes, p. 50).

There are hints, too, that Richard's Germanic outlook is not a genuine trait of character, but rather a form of overcompensation for his feelings of shame and guilt for the fact of his mixed racial ancestry. His

aunt's remarks about Richard's grandfather are equally applicable to him:

> Poor papa. This German obsession of his. It's almost pathetic. Why, why should he have inherited such a strong Germanic spirit? His own father, a pure German, was not so German in outlook. Poor papa. Always ignoring the negro blood in his veins. (Thunder Returning, p. 92).

and Richard knows that his own obsession for the ordered, cultured Old World values of Europe stems from unconscious, inner compulsions which always remain just out of focus:

> ... it's like trying to focus my gaze on a ghost - a hazy apparition that melts away in the very instant that I catch sight of it. Something is wrong with me, but I can't diagnose it - and no one else but me can ever diagnose it. (Thunder Returning, p. 65).

It is this sense of psychic division which Richard Lehrer tries to dispel by adopting a "Teutonic" (i.e. "strong") attitude to life, and by attempting, through Woglinde his German "Rhinemaiden", to recapture the "pure" genetic inheritance he so passionately desires. The trilogy is, however, incomplete. Richard Lehrer remains a pseudo-Siegfried. Perhaps Mittelholzer felt instinctively that his hero's emotional ambivalence precluded the possibility of a simple solution; and that the ghost which haunts Richard Lehrer, as it haunts so many Mittelholzer heroes, was only too readily recognizable as:

> ... the deep unrevealed part of me. The part of me I've never talked about to anyone. The part of me I'm afraid of and hardly even like to face up to myself. I curtain it off from myself - but I know what's behind the curtain. Oh, I know only too well. It's no mystery to me. (Thunder Returning, p. 216).

It is interesting to consider Richard Lehrer as a mature version of Geoffry Weldon of Corentyne Thunder (1941). Weldon remains undecided, vacillating between love for the Corentyne and a yearning for the Metropolitan culture of Europe. He is caught between two worlds. Richard Lehrer, however, has been abroad, experienced this culture and returned. He is now certain that the solution to his dilemma (like

Weldon's, it is that of a "white" mind in a "coloured" body) lies in rejecting his Caribbean background and looking to Europe as a spiritual home.

Chapter Five

THE SHIFTING EMPHASIS:

Personal Acceptance and Social Reform in the "English" Novels.

(I) A Tale of Three Places (1957)

So far we have examined Mittelholzer's attempt (implicit, when not deliberate) in dealing with schizoid heroes, to embody in his fiction the theme - first sounded in Corentyne Thunder (1941) - of a Duality of Being: the psychic split which undermines his and his characters' explicit motives. We have also seen that his art, however trivial in effect, is often profoundly serious in intention, and driven by an associative impulse: the reconciliation of antithetical, opposed elements such as Love and Hate; Spirit and Flesh; Emotion and Reason. Mittelholzer's own sense of inner division and his consistent, personal involvement in his writing further complicate the nature of his themes, often adding a deeper, psychological meaning to even his most trivial-seeming plots. The psychic fracture which had its origin in his sense of genetic damage, and the resultant anxiety about racial and cultural pedigree, proved to be extremely persistent: in fact, grew deeper with time. In this chapter we shall consider Mittelholzer's attempt, already observable as an underlying impulse in the Leitmotiv novels, to seek a solution to this intractable psychic malaise by jettisoning his West Indian background in an effort to graft himself on to a European parent-stock. And we shall find that the attempt leads not to a cure, but to the exacerbation of the disease.

In A Tale of Three Places[1] the hero says:

> I've always felt deep inside that it's stupid to get worked up about national pride and a chauvinistic love of one's country. Since I was a boy I knew that the day would come when I'd run off and merge myself with the world at large ... (p. 290)

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1 All quotations used are from the 1957 edition.

This is Alfy Desseau, the racially mixed, emotionally insecure, middle-class Trinidadian who, in an attempt to cure "the disease of unstable loyalties" (p. 60), leaves Trinidad for England, returns to the West Indies temporarily, finally deciding to settle permanently in England.[1] Desseau's problem of "loyalties", like Mittelholzer's, stems from his awareness of not being a "true" West Indian. His introspective, romantic nature, his dislike of "calypso culture", his enthusiasm for Clive Bell's Civilization and the music of Wagner combine to make him dissatisfied with Trinidadian life. "The trouble about Trinidad", he says, "is that there are no set standards to live up to. I have to set my own standards." (p. 209). He therefore rejects his West Indian background, adopting a "European" attitude to native customs, which he considers "inferior". Commenting on this aspect of the novel, F.M. Birbalsingh says:

> The view of Alfred Dessau [sic] in A Tale of Three Places that a West Indian can, at will, erase the cumulative psychological effect of fears and uncertainties built up over twelve generations in the Caribbean is clearly wishful thinking - the sublimation in fantasy of a continuing Caribbean problem. Such a view is as implausible in the novel as it is incredible in real life.[2]

The point is, however, that Desseau, like most of the West Indian middle-class of the time, considers his problem of "loyalties" - of identity - to be simply a by-product of his "second-hand" colonial status; and he believes that by simply altering that status - by merging with the civilized, outside world - this problem will cease to exist. Under the circumstances, his conclusion that chauvinistic love of one's own

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1 Alfy's movements parallel his author's. EM travelled from Trinidad to England in 1948; from England to Barbados where he lived from 1953 to 1956, finally settling permanently in England.

2 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 101.

country, as a West Indian, makes no sense, is not only plausible, but logical. The novel is set in the late 1940s, and at that time in the West Indies, the view of an Alfy Desseau (especially among the middle-class) would have been considered neither fanciful nor absurd. Europe (and England in particular) was commonly regarded as "the world at large" – the seat of culture[1] and the recognized criterion of social behaviour. To feel a patriotic pride in one's country and a sense of identity as a native of it was a privilege reserved for the Metropolitan citizen in the larger, outside world, not for a West Indian colonial whose education and cultural ideals were inspired by, and orientated towards, Europe. The standards of art and literature, like those of society as a whole, were unquestionably European; and any serious attempt to create a West Indian culture or art was considered a kind of mimicry:

> What was worthwhile had already been said, and in any event you were presuming, as a young colonial, when you attempted to use the language which Shakespeare had used. Then again what on earth could you write about? You didn't have the nightingale that stimulated Keats. ... There was not the beauty idealised about the mango or sapodilla that had been woven about the apple.[2]

> Even the local landscape was an inferior imitation: the very trees and hills of Jamaica were only a kind of papiermâché – the famous landscapes were in England. No Jamaican bird could sing like Keats' nightingale, and Jamaican flowers were not as beautiful as Wordsworth's daffodils.[3]

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1 As one commentator puts it:

> For the individual West Indian, coming to England was thus an inward movement, a journey into his cultural womb. (Dilip Hiro, Black British, White British Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1971 p. 17).

2 A.J. Seymour, Lectures op. cit., p. 48.

3 Louis Simpson, " The Eton of Jamaica" London Magazine vol. 12 no. 1 (April/May, 1972) p. 63.

Such a view of the West Indies - one quite commonly held without any critical questioning by West Indians as late as the 1950s, and still noticeable even today in spite of its general rejection - could lead only to anxieties about one's status in the world: anxieties to which the educated middle-class was particularly prone. For them, the colonial condition represented a restricting, second-hand cultural framework. In fact, because the Caribbean was the most colonial of all colonial societies:

> The mass of people - whether they followed the tradition of rejection or of imitation - had no target to aim at, no ideal vision, that was not self-defeating.[1]

Lack of a national identity, the lack of status, was often felt (however naively) to be remediable simply by going to the "Mother Country". The exodus of West Indian writers and artists which began in the nineteen-fifties is partly attributable to this vision of Britain as a spiritual and cultural "home", residence in which provided automatic proof of both the status and identity which were threatened by remaining in the West Indies; for "since Caribbean elites are by tradition absentee, merely to live there is to forfeit status."[2] In an interview with V.S. Naipaul, Alex Hamilton records the writer's vision, as a young man, of "leaving the New World which was imperfect, spiritually poor ... [to] ... just go to the Old World and flower."[3] That a psychological and not a purely literary impulse lay behind Naipaul's decision to adopt Britain as his literary "capital" seems evident from his concern with his own rootless condition - the keenly felt absence of traditions which might guarantee identity and personal stature. His anxiety about his

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1 See p. IX of Philip Mason's foreword to Lowenthal, op. cit.

2 Lowenthal, op. cit., p. 135.

3 Alex Hamilton, Guardian (4 October, 1971) p. 8.

status has a peculiarly obsessional note (in view of his considerable success as a writer) and appears inextricably bound up with deeper anxieties about personal and psychic integrity:

> I can't help thinking that I might have had much greater success, been much better understood as a writer, if I had been born in England. ... I am concerned about the dignity of myself as a writer, and when I find people offending the status of my writing I can get very angry. I have to protect that status, because there's no one protecting it for me.[1]

There is a suggestion, too of the psychological dangers attendant on the attempt to adopt a "parent-culture":

> When I asked if he [Naipaul] could not graft on to any main body, he said wryly, turning down the corners of his mouth, that it was rather that the main bodies rejected the graft ... it was policy now to move on, he knew he would damage himself if he accepted the idea of staying.[2]

Alfred Desseau's unquestioning belief in the acquisition of a "European" identity as the logical solution to his own conflicting feelings is therefore understandable in both a historical and psychological sense. His consequent self-alienation however, is predictable, for:

> ... the search for a cultural pedigree, the desire for roots in a past that is not derived from former masters ... leads often to self-distrust ... to a dogmatic refusal to compromise, to ... a polarization of all relations into hostility or support.[3]

Desseau is painfully aware that his malaise is partly the result of genetic inheritance:

> Alfy felt himself attacked by a gigantic frustration. Why could he not have been fashioned like Tullum? Careless, slangy, uncritical, a relaxed West Indian? ... In this instant he felt as though life had imposed upon him, had been unfair in giving him the nature he possessed. (p. 268)

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1 From an interview with Adrian Rowe-Evans in Transition no. 40 (December, 1971) p. 61.

2 Alex Hamilton, Guardian op. cit.

3 See p. IX of Philip Mason's foreword to Lowenthal, op. cit.

and on closer examination of Alfy's division of "loyalties" - his vacillation between England and the West Indies - we find that Mittelholzer is again pursuing his compulsive theme: the psychic split which comes from the lack of a stabilizing racial pedigree. This psychological theme is the central concern of the novel, the general plot of which can be quite quickly summarised. Alfred Desseau is of genteel, middle-class, French creole stock; a fact which, together with his consciously moral, artistic temperament, has unfitted him for life in Trinidad. His dislike of the crude, careless, self-regarding attitude of his good friend, Errol Ming-Ho, a shameless but likeable womanizer, is matched by his devoted admiration for Errol's English wife, Constance, who returns his liking and respect. Fed up with life in Trinidad, unwilling to accede to his parents' wish that he marry the socially desirable Elsa Tijero who loves him hopelessly, but whom he does not love, Alfy considers going abroad to escape. He makes up his mind to do so when Constance, whose marriage has never been a success, decides to leave her husband and settle in England. In London, pursued by Elsa (who is on holiday with her parents) and threatened by the jealous, frustrated Sidney - a Trinidadian rival for Elsa's love - Alfy meets and is sexually attracted to Lavinia Skelton, a nymphomaniac English model, but is soon repelled by her crude sensuality. His visits to Constance are a source of pleasure, but he is not in love with her, and broods over what appears to be his inability to form a balanced, lasting relationship with a woman. He then meets a West Indian planter friend and his white Barbadian wife, Martina, whose beauty acts as a spur to his decision to accept their invitation to visit them in St. Lucia. In time, he discovers that, once again, his feelings are engaged only at the physical level; and, disappointed in Martina because she reveals herself to be without sexual scruples,

he decides to return to England to marry Constance (now divorced), the only woman he has ever respected.

The book is divided into three sections ("Trinidad"; "England"; "St. Lucia"), in each of which there is a good deal of descriptive writing intended to convey the atmosphere and "feel" of the place. This aspect of the novel is, however, subservient to the main theme of Alfy's inner conflict; although the novel's length of nearly three hundred and fifty pages, its discursiveness and consistent lack of action tend to overbalance the theme of rootlessness. As A.J. Seymour observes:

> There is a shapelessness about the book even though it bulks a certain size. The opening section ... is too wordy, the encounters of Trinidadians in London ... too casual and episodic without helping on the action. One would suspect that the diary had been very much in use in bodying out the novel.[1]

In fact there is evidence that Mittelholzer drew on his diary notes for material which appears in the book[2]; but the novel's disjointedness and lack of action can be related to the fact that Mittelholzer's real concern is with Alfy's tentative probing of his own psychic maladjustment: the need for an emotional centre of balance which he feels only life in England can provide. Alfy, like the English heroine of The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965), is looking for stability of soul; but his search, unlike Mrs. Chatham's, is complicated by a sense of genetic disablement. His love for England, like his devotion to Constance,[3]

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1 A.J. Seymour, Lectures op. cit., pp. 33/34.

2 Alfy Desseau's first impressions of London are very similar to the descriptions of Hyde Park and the Kensington area recorded in EM's 1948 diary. Alfy's visit to the Albert Hall (to hear a Wagner concert) is matched by the diary notes of EM's similar visit in 1948.

3 The name suggests stability, security. Alfy thinks of her as "the gyroscope in his life." (p. 283).

Errol's English wife, represents a wish for the stable, fixed standards and traditions not available in his West Indian background. In a word, his search is for pedigree. An interesting, apparently unconnected episode early in the novel illustrates this search and its importance. We are told that Constance was the illegitimate child of her mother's indiscreet affair before marriage. Having rejected and disowned the child, the mother had married and fled to Trinidad where she and her husband had quickly achieved status as people of social importance. Constance, now a grown woman, had managed to secure a job in Trinidad, intent on confronting her mother with the unpalatable fact of her existence. The meeting takes place at a party where Constance deliberately embarrasses her mother by scandalously announcing herself as her illegitimate child. This incident, not connected with the general movement of the plot, and somewhat far-fetched if considered as merely the result of Constance's wish for revenge, becomes credible when seen as part of the general theme of the need for a pedigree. By this public confrontation, Constance is attemptin to re-establish the genealogical existence denied her by her mother's attempt to ignore the fact of her birth. This interpretation of the incident gains support from the fact that her mother's sexual morals are not in question. As Constance later tells Alfy, she forgave her mother's promiscuity, "but to behave as though I didn't exist - it was that that made me bitter." (p. 14). Any claim to a "pure" Old World pedigree is, however, denied Alfy who knows only that "the Desseaus had once spelt their name D'Essieu, and Desseau was a corruption." (p. 16). His attraction to Constance carries an unmistakable suggestion of the longing for genetic security - a security represented by England. Indeed, the fact that all the women to whom he is attracted are white or near-white reflects the coloured, middle-

class West Indian's deep-seated wish to "marry white" and so "improve" the strain:[1] a logical attitude, one is bound to feel, given "whiteness" as the criterion of genetic purity.

In England, Alfy goes to a performance of Wagner's The Ring and is so captivated by it[2] that he begins to see his own life in a heroic, Wagnerian light, imagining himself to be a Siegfried, impelled by destiny towards self-discovery. As he thinks of his earlier decision not to follow his parents' wishes; "in his fancy he thought he could hear a troublous theme from the Ring ... Wotan in a thunder of anger." (p. 98). After the concert he meets Lavinia, the beautiful but crudely sensual model, for the first time, and immediately sees her as a Rhine-maiden; and Martina Soul-Bastigue, the wife of his St. Lucian friend, later becomes a destructive Brünhilde. When he is first introduced to her he hears "a trombone blaring something from The Ring. The Sword motif." (p. 257). It is not surprising that the rootless, Europe-orientated Desseau finds in the self-contained, mythic and heroic Teutonic universe of Wagner's opera an expression of his own wish for racial and cultural identity: part of Wagner's explicit intention in creating his operatic works out of the mythical stories of Aryan gods was to anchor his music in a psychological framework in order to achieve a unity of form. The Ring, it has been suggested,[3] enacts, by virtue of

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1 Cf. the McMulloch's achievement of racial purity: "after Grandfather Peter married a pure white Irish girl ... we became a white family again." (The Mad McMullochs 1959, p. 107).

2 EM's diary record of the actual event - an unusually emotional and expansive note, considering his normally brief, factual jottings - reads: "Wagner concert. Excellent. An evening that must not be described - only remembered in detail for all time." (13 September, 1948).

3 See R. Donington, Wagner's 'Ring' and its symbols, op. cit. Also see C.G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (Routledge & Kegan Paul 1959) pp. 179/182.

the archetypal nature of its symbols, the process of psychic integration in which it is possible to consider the characters of Siegfried and Brünhilde as representatives of the eternal Male and Female principles. Interestingly enough, there is a hint of this dimension of meaning in Mittelholzer's novel.

For Alfy's inability to love, like his anxiety about national and cultural identity, stems from a psychic imbalance. Flesh and Spirit are not in harmony. Sex is for him a powerful but enervating impulse; and in his simultaneous fascination with and revulsion from sex, we recognize the typical Mittelholzer hero who, as if driven by some psychic law, has to learn through sexuality to reject the purely sensual side of his nature in order to gain the emotional perspective which will allow the "male" and "female" aspects of his psyche to co-exist. His many encounters with women in the novel all serve to purge an unhealthily unbalanced attitude to sex. Lavinia's voraciousness finally disillusions him. "Here was no Rhine maiden", (p. 202) he thinks, when he discovers that her sexual desires are mildly perverted. Her obsessive sensuality acts on him as a psychically dissociative force. "Fondling her he felt that he was losing touch with himself." (p. 227). Like Susan Scanlan of The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965), Lavinia represents the emotionally damaging nature of sexuality when it is unrestricted by ego-sanctions:

> It was degrading to allow himself to give in to this purely physical attraction. ... It was contrary to his whole personal code. (p. 182).

With Martina, Alfy again finds that only the sensual part of his nature is engaged; and the thrill of anticipation he experiences when he thinks of their meeting:

> Deep in the centre of his being he could hear a low harmonious bourdon, as though millions of tiny spirit-bees were at work in a spirit hive ... (p. 266)

is at once a suggestion of sexual delights to come and a warning: a reminder of his inner insecurity and lack of psychic balance. The image of bees trapped within is also the leitmotiv in Thunder Returning (1961) of Richard Lehrer's inner division: an image which is also used (and with the same effect) in The Weather in Middenshot (1952), Shadows Move among Them (1951) and A Tinkling in the Twilight (1959). Alfy's almost morbid obsession with sex is illustrated by his overpowering desire to see Lavinia naked, and, in particular an anxiety to examine the state of her teeth.[1] She laughs, opening her mouth widely, inviting his inspection of her teeth and asks him to visit her when she is posing in the nude for her artist friend. "It would not be easy" thinks Alfy darkly, "to forget a body like that." (p. 186).

Elsa Tijero, the Trinidadian girl who loves Alfy and follows him to London, represents a natural, healthy sexuality; and Sidney, the jealous rival, though he is l'homme moyen sensuel, is genuinely in love with her. His emotions are not, like Alfy's, dogged by sexual morbidity. Elsa continually discourages Sidney, but he remains deeply in love with her:

> What then, Alfy asked himself, could be the nature of this obsession that drove him to follow Elsa around like this? A subtle kind of envy stirred in Alfy ... he felt a troubled regret that he did not possess Sidney's capacity for devotion. It must be exciting to find oneself in the grip of such a terrible passion. (p. 160).

Sidney (who follows Alfy and Elsa "like a shadow"), might almost be Alfy's alter ego: the genuinely passionate side of his nature which is not divorced from love and affection. The fight between them, in Trinidad, during which, threatened by the drunk Sidney, Alfy allows himself (to his later shame) to kick his opponent when he is down, has

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1 This strongly suggests the fear of the vagina dentata of la femme fatale: a fear related to the male's neurotic distrust of "self-abandonment" in sexual intercourse. (See Karl Stern, The Flight from Woman, op. cit., for an interesting discussion of this element in psychology and literature.

symbolic overtones. It is a fight[1] between Ego and Shadow, and the excessive violence displayed by Alfy reflects his fear of the unknown side of himself. Significantly, it is Sidney who introduces him to Lavinia (whose unnatural lust helps him to recognize and reject his own lubricious sexuality) and who finally marries the sexually pure Elsa. Alfy goes on to St. Lucia where, after a visit with Martina to the crater of Souffrière - described with images symbolic of a descent into hell (i.e. the "hell" of his own morbid obsession with sex) - he is finally able to reject sex as the ruling obsession of his life. He calmly decides that from now on, his life will be more balanced. He tells her:

> ... just as I loved but renounced Trinidad, I'm going to renounce you. and marry her [Constance] and settle down with her in England. (p. 347).

The view that "he marries because he is exhausted, not because of greater emotional self-control"[2] needs, therefore, to be qualified. Alfy's success in transcending his insistent sexuality is at least a temporary silencing of his inner chaos; but it is not enough to cure his psychic division. He is unable to follow Constance's advice to trust his intuition, because:

> Trouble is that often I hear intuition as a chorus inside me, and each voice seems to be singing a different tune. ... There is one voice that is more insistent than the others. ... What's wrong with me is my damned cowardice. Instead of obeying the dominant voice, I try to make peace between them all. (p. 150).

Alfy's decision to leave the West Indies and marry Constance is a renunciation of his "tainted" background and a turning to Europe for the solution to his problem of psychic instability. Desseau attempts

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1 In The Weather Family (1958) the unstable hero has a dream in which a fight between "two brown demons" serves to project his psychic conflict: "their faces were his own! They were not really demons, but projections of himself." (p. 160).

2 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 96.

to graft himself on to a parent-culture. But he is still a self-divided man, and one feels that the attempt is doomed to failure, as indeed it proved to be for his author.

For Mittelholzer himself sought to resolve his own problem of cultural and national identity by rejecting his Caribbean background and adopting the Old World culture of Europe. From 1961 onwards[1] his novels deal exclusively with "English" characters in an English background. His characters' relationship to English society now becomes his main theme, and his heroes tend to insist dogmatically on what are obviously their author's own extreme, right-wing views. The psychological theme of the Body/Mind split becomes overlaid[2] with sermonizing about religion, art, politics and crime and punishment. Mittelholzer seems to be writing these "English" novels in an attempt to impose his views on English society which, to his essentially Victorian cast of mind, must have seemed too left wing, too liberal, to fit the important image of a stern parent-body which alone could command his respect and allegiance. The novels of this period are all, in a sense, a protest against the "effeteness" of the society which he has now adopted as his own; and for the health of which he now feels a certain filial anxiety. This is not to say, however, that the underlying element of psychic malaise (in character as well as in author) disappears: in fact it becomes more intransigent, developing almost into a neurosis. His earlier, youthful anima-figures: Olivia (Shadows Move among Them, 1951); Roxanne (The Mad McMullochs, 1959); Margaret Beaver (A Tinkling in the

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1 Thunder Returning (1961) was the last of his novels to incorporate a Caribbean background.

2 The Wounded and the Worried (1962), as we have seen, is an exception. In this novel, EM decided for the first (and only) time in his career, to deal openly with the theme of the Body/Mind split in relation to his belief in Oriental Occultism.

Twilight, 1958) now re-appear as fully mature, sexually destructive women like Sally Elmsford (The Piling of Clouds, 1961) and Susan Scanlan (The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham, 1965). His heroes, meanwhile, become fatally self-alienated and develop an almost pathological arrogance towards society. In examining these "preachy" novels, The Piling of Clouds, Uncle Paul (1963) and The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham, we shall find that, for Mittelholzer, success as a novelist depended upon much more than regular publication: the real need was for public approval of his private attitudes. Acceptance by the parent-culture of England had to be on his own terms, and when this was clearly not forthcoming - publication difficulties began in earnest with The Piling of Clouds - the dogmatic authorial voice became almost hysterically insistent. Rejection of his novels meant rejection of himself by the parent-body; and the books were, at their deepest level of meaning, a protest at this "unreasonable" course of action. The result of this sort of conflict on a person as psychically unstable as Mittelholzer, was almost bound to be tragic.

(II) The Piling of Clouds (1961)

The title of the novel suggests the gathering storm both in Mittelholzer's life[1] and in the lives of his characters, Sally and Peter Elmsford who live with their nine-year-old daughter, Jeannette, in Mill Hill, S.W. 5. Their middle-aged neighbour, Charles Pruthick, is a mild-mannered tax inspector whom they have known for two years, and who often "baby-sits" for them. There is a perverted streak in his nature, however (suggested by his liking for stories about war-time Nazi atrocities and the nervous trembling which he experiences in the little girl's presence), which eventually precipitates a tragedy. He rapes and murders Jeannette one night when her parents are out and shoots himself after confessing to Peter and Sally:

> I was simply that way, Peter. Just your misfortune - and the poor little creature's - that I happened to live next door to you. Nothing happened to make me what I am. I was always so. The germ was there from birth. It grew in me like a little cloud. (p. 258).

The novel is intended as an illustration of Mittelholzer's theories about crime and punishment, and Pruthick's action is meant to support the thesis that:

> ... a neurotic will always be a neurotic, under the best of conditions. A sane, steady person will remain sane and steady if you force him to stand on his head for a year. (p. 212).

This is, of course, Mittelholzer's view of the nature of heredity, and it is the basis of his argument for the extermination of criminals - "human vermin" - as the only solution to crime. We have heard the theme before. First announced in Shadows Move among Them (1951), it is the main theme in The Weather in Middenshot (1952), and appears, briefly, in a number of other novels. Peter Elmsford, who, like old Mr. Jarrow of The Weather in Middenshot, is a self-appointed judge and would-be executioner of criminal types - he carries a loaded revolver and keeps

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1 EM attempted suicide again in 1963. This has been confirmed by both Mrs. Roma Mittelholzer and Mrs. Jacqueline Ives.

a hypodermic syringe full of cyanide for use against criminal types - has certain characteristics which identify him as a projection of the author. Superbly virile, he adopts a gruff manner, a dogmatic style os speech, and has definite, if somewhat bellicose views about everything, especially "Strength" and "Weakness":

> If you keep strong and vigilant you win out; you triumph over those who are weaker ... It's Life, and if you try to ignore the way Life fun tions, down you go! Ruthlessly you're hacked down. Because Life is cruel. (p. 209).

Mittelholzer's own obsession with "Strength" and "Weakness" had been the generative force in the Kaywana trilogy, where the root cause of both qualities was seen to be genetic inheritance. His own sense, therefore, of genetic "damage"; of having inherited "tainted" (i.e. Negro, and hence "weak") blood, impelled him to insist on a "strong" attitude to life. His advocacy in his novels of "extermination" of criminal types is simply an outstanding demonstration of this commitment to a policy of "strength".

The novel is described by Mittelholzer as:

> ... a book in which I had decided to take up again the theme of The Weather in Middenshot ... the crime problem in our society and how it could be cured.[1]

and he makes it quite clear that "the views I express through my hero"[2] are his own; and that the theme of the book is nothing less than the need for social reform in Britain:

> In every serious book I attack directly or obliquely the attitudes of our so-called liberal intellectuals - especially in respect to the coddling of dangerous criminals. I feel that this is one of several manifestations of the 'rot' in our society, the effeteness of our intelligentsia.[3]

This is the Mittelholzer of the novels from 1961 onwards; the violently right-wing social reformer, bent on imposing his views on crime and

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1 "A Pleasant Career", op. cit., p. 42.

2 Ibid.

3 "The Intellectual Cissies", Books and Bookmen op. cit., p. 21

social responsibility, deeply concerned for what he calls, (adapting Schopenhauer) the "will to rot" which he finds, to his dismay, in English society, "the country and the whole of our Western civilization" (The Piling of Clouds, 1961 p. 84). Reviews of the novel, at the time of publication, praised the book's serious intention and the writer's social concern:

> In THE PILING OF CLOUDS, however, he has bravely tackled a problem that, to our shame, fills the front pages here at home rather than across the Atlantic: the suffering of children at the hands of sexual maniacs.[1]

and even though the reviewer feels that the novel does not provide any answers, he considers that "it is to Mittelholzer's credit that we feel compelled to ask such questions."[2] In a weekly journal the book is described as "based on the terrible contemporary problem of the suffering of children at the hands of sexual maniacs."[3] These reviews are concerned, however, mainly with the social relevance of the novel and do not attempt to discuss its literary quality. The reviewer in TLS, however, mentions this social aspect but draws attention to the novel's shortcomings as a piece of fiction. The style is criticized as laboured and portentous:

> Clearly it is all meant to have the inevitability of a Greek Tragedy. Clearly, too, it is wide open to parody. But it would be unfair to dismiss this novel summarily. Mr. Mittelholzer can write well, and he is dealing with a real issue. If only he had not overplayed his hand.[4]

The reviewer, of course, could not be aware of either the author's inner compulsion to adopt an uncompromising attitude towards both liberalism and criminal violence, or of his deep, psychological need to assert his

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1 R.C. Churchill, Birmingham Post (14 November, 1961).

2 Ibid.

3 John O'London's (23 November, 1961) p. 578.

4 TLS (24 November, 1961).

own view of "strength" and discipline through his hero. The critic was therefore "misrepresenting" and "attacking" not only the views expressed by Peter Elmsford, but the author himself. Stung, Mittelholzer replied:

> Sir, - Had your reviewer, in your issue of November 24, been less hasty in his perusal of my latest novel, The Piling of Clouds, he would have discovered that I made it quite clear (though obliquely) that the views expressed by my hero were my own. ... This being so, I feel compelled to correct the impression ...[1]

Mittelholzer then goes on to differentiate between "Human Vermin" and "would-rotters":

> ... people possessed of the "will-to-rot" (as opposed to the will-to-live in Schopenhauer's Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung).[2]

categories which the reviewer had mistakenly placed together as "Human Vermin" and, therefore, fit to be exterminated. The reviewer's reply to Mittelholzer's objection is damaging and unanswerable because it exposes the apparent fascism of the writing:

> While I strongly suspected that Mr. Mittelholzer shared his character's views I did not think I would be justified in stating this categorically. Further, the nature of these views urged restraint.[3]

Mittelholzer's reply is, typically, both honest:

> Most of what your reviewer wrote may be considered "fair comment". Indeed, as a rebuttal to what I wrote two weeks before it is excellent.[4]

and self-deceived:

> ... my hero's doctrine (and mine), as propounded in this work, is, far from being one of "hate", an attempt at genuine liberalism - the kind that can weigh up issues in a truly fair

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1 TLS (1 December, 1961). (My underlining).

2 Ibid.

3 TLS (15 December, 1961).

4 TLS (22 December, 1961).

> and balanced spirit - as opposed to the kind that has gone sickly, syrupy and sentimental with too much milk of human kindness turned sour by over-civilization![1]

As I have attempted to suggest in this study, Mittelholzer, when it came to issues about which he felt strongly, was uniquely disqualified from any exercise of true liberal-mindedness - "the kind that can weigh up issues in a truly fair and balanced spirit" - because of his own, peculiar psychic imbalance. His deliberate cultivation of "Germanic" attitudes, his admiration for the dualistic philosophy of Schopenhauer and for the "Teutonism" of Wagner were contributary factors in his schizoid view of life. Such influences, one feels, on a personality as eccentric as Mittelholzer's were almost certain to prove unsettling.

The extraordinary violence of his hatred for the criminal mind is striking. Peter Elmsford says that he would like to control the administration of justice in the country for just one year:

> Before that year was over this country would be a place safe to live in. Safe and clean. I'd have cleaned it completely of every specimen of Human Vermin I could get my hands on. ... Those whom I couldn't get at with a hypodermic syringe of cyanide I'd shoot down as I'd shoot down a cobra or a tiger in the Indian jungle. (p. 117).

This has the ring of paranoia, and after his outburst a friend asks, half-sarcastically, "You'd do that all on your own?" Elmsford, with the characteristic inability of the zealot to see the absurdity of his position, replies "well, don't take me too literally. I'd have to have assistance, of course." (p. 117). That a serious emotional disturbance in the author is implicit in the writing, is suggested by Robert Taubman:

> ... the ideas developed in the book strike me as no less frightening than the rape of the child. ... Mr. Mittelholzer is concerned not with causes but effects, and makes of them a smooth melodrama with a dubious moral - so dubious that <u>it</u>

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1 <u>TLS</u> (22 December, 1961).

> looks like a symptom of the moral collapse all too apparent in his characters.[1]

This is a revealing remark, and gives the clue to the novel's particular ineptitudes: the proselytizing which puts the reader out of sympathy with the hero, and the apparently pointless irony of the novel's ending (it is Peter's own wife who precipitates the tragedy); for it indicates Mittelholzer's involvement in the novel, and hints at the buried motives which we have come to expect as part of the writing. A closer look at the characterization helps to make this clear.

Pruthick, a secret sexual pervert with a homicidal weakness for little girls, is Peter's best friend, and he accompanies the Elmsfords on a week-end visit to Peter's mother-in-law in the country:

> "I very seldom", said Peter, "feel warm about men. I mean warm in an affectionate way. But Charles is one of the few men I feel that way about. I like him ... and I know he likes me too ... and that's one of the things I'm certain about." (p. 138).

There is a curious insistence here on Peter's liking for the man who is to become his young daughter's rapist and murderer; and after the tragedy occurs it is Charles who has to insist on being treated as "Human Vermin", and killed. "You have been decent", Peter objects, "I simply can't see you as - as Human Vermin." (p. 261). Faced with an unequivocal example of the violent criminal mind, Peter is unable to act, and it is Charles who finally takes his own life. It is difficult to decide whether Mittelholzer is simply weighting the argument by producing this unexpected justification of Peter's theory of "Human Vermin", whether he is, in fact, questioning Peter's (and his own) stated views on the criminal mind, or whether there is here an implied suggestion that Pruthick is only the agent of a deeper evil which is ultimately

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1 R. Taubman, New Statesman (10 November, 1961) p. 714. My underlining.

responsible for the tragedy. Of these possibilities, the last gains credence if we consider the rôle of Peter's wife, Sally. In contrast to her friend, Lilian (a quiet, sympathetic soul who likes helping others), she is a realist, blatantly sensual, naturally promiscuous. She deliberately lets Pruthick see her naked, and taunts him, curious to see his reaction, until she seduces him. This is the incident which releases the latent violence in Pruthick. It is not simply that he "bides time in order to rape and murder his child leman." [1] Indeed, young Jeannette is far from being a Lolita-figure. She is described as an ungainly child with "clumsy legs" (p. 125) who is "pleasant and hearty, and showed no sensitivity of any kind." (p. 35). It is Pruthick's sexual intercourse with Sally that rouses the evil dormant within him from the outset. When, at the end of the book, Charles explains his brutal action to Peter, he significantly omits to mention Sally's part in the affair. In fact his confession, which seems to justify Peter's views on heredity ("a neurotic will always be a neurotic ... " (p. 212), needs to be taken in conjunction with his earlier thoughts on his "abnormality":

> Oh God! This England and its pruderies! Why did I have to grow up as I did! So shut in, so encompassed by fears and petty dreads about things that, after all, are simple - simply natural urges. One complicates one's urges so much. (p. 134, my underlining).

What now begins to emerge is that spectre of sexual morbidity - the result of the early repression of natural urges - which we have been encountering in novel after novel. This, not "heredity", appears to be the real villain; and Peter's reluctance to regard his best friend as "Human Vermin" comes from his subconscious recognition in Pruthick, of the repressed violence and unhealthy attitudes within himself. Hence

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1 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 93.

his ironic liking for Pruthick and his inability, faced with the unpalatable truth about the man, to take action; for to kill Pruthick would involve a conscious recognition of his own, inner motives and fears. The fluttering of the bird trapped in the attic (reminding us of the image of "bees trapped in a basement" - a leitmotiv of insecurity), disturbing Peter's sleep - Sally is able to sleep through it - is a symbol of Peter's hidden fears and of his inability to identify or exorcise them: he finds that he cannot reach the bird when he tries to rescue it. His action in placing a stray cat in the attic to kill the bird is later paralleled by his giving the gun to Pruthick, who then takes his own life. These are both symbolic actions. Like the cat, the gun is unlicensed and cannot be traced to Peter (a point, incidentally, that Pruthick makes), and both incidents can be interpreted as the psyche's attempt to keep unconscious motives out of range of ego-knowledge. Finally, Pruthick strikes Peter with the gun - a swift, unexpected blow that draws blood - in order to make the authorities think that there had been a struggle. It is another means of leaving Peter "in the clear", but the wound can also be seen as a token of the inevitable damage to consciousness which follows any attempt to deceive the unconscious, inner self.

The underlying ambiguity of Peter's doctrine of the extermination of "Human Vermin" stems, therefore, from his secret identification with Pruthick - an identification which Mittelholzer, as author, shares; and the effect of the book - a mixture of purely sensational events (Sally strips to taunt and seduce Pruthick who, as a result, becomes pathological and rapes Jeannette) and serious, moral purpose - is finally attributable to Mittelholzer's incapacity to ignore or control the driving personal obsessions which people his novels with the very devils he wishes to cast out. The deep anxiety which

compels his characters' hysterical insistence on the need for uncompromisingly "strong" attitudes comes ultimately from a nagging fear of the demon within: fear of psychic disintegration. In this regard it is worth noticing that the cyanide (it is curare in Shadows Move among Them, 1951) which, in The Weather in Middenshot (1952) and The Piling of Clouds (1961) is to be administered to violent criminals in the outside world is also held in readiness, as in A Tinkling in the Twilight (1958), for use against the evil within. Peter's horror at the tragedy which enters his life comes, significantly, not so much from the fact of Jeanette's brutal murder, as from the knowledge that the evil originates from inside: from "the only friend I have ... the last one I'd have called Human Vermin." (pp. 258/259, my underlining).

W.R.D. Fairbairn, in his study of schizoid patients, relates repression to the internalizing of "bad" objects (i.e. those things morally unacceptable to the ego, but necessary for emotional well-being, like "bad" parents or sexuality, even when it is regarded as "sinful") in an attempt to achieve security:

> The sense of outer security resulting from this process of internalization is, however, liable to be seriously compromised by the resulting presence within him of internalized bad objects. Outer security is thus purchased at the price of inner security; and his ego is henceforth left at the mercy of a band of internal fifth columnists or persecutors, against which defences have to be, first hastily erected, and later laboriously consolidated.[1]

In Mittelholzer's work, sexuality and sentiment appear to be internalized "bad" objects which are present from Corentyne Thunder (1941) onwards as vitally important but disruptive elements, the free expression of which is always accompanied by a correspondingly harsh insis-

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[1] W.R.D. Fairbairn, Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality Tavistock Ltd. Publications, 1962) p. 65. Further references to this work will appear as Fairbairn.

tence on discipline. Any attempt to define or identify the problem by introspection is doomed to failure because of the activity of the vigilant super-ego. Fairbairn, in a footnote, compares his patients' schizoid repression with "a locked door which the patient is afraid to open" because the "bad" objects are "buried in the cellar of the mind."[1] These are, of course, familiar images of the Unconscious; and call to mind Mittelholzer's use of the image of bees trapped in a basement and evocations of the forbidden darkness of the interior or of the Canje Creek. In The Weather in Middenshot (1952), the timid horticulturist, Holme, who is aware of "an element of instability" in his character which makes him both fear and desire sexual passion, attempts to examine the nature of his emotional problem but soon finds that such self-knowledge is denied him:

> He had reached the limit of his probings. ... His pick-axe had struck a slab - a granite door - beyond which he could dig no further. ... What lay beneath the slab - beneath the unknown rock strata - must forever remain a mystery to him. (p. 184).

Mittelholzer's heroes' paranoiac insistence on upholding "strength" and discipline while ruthlessly suppressing sentiment and all other forms of "weakness", reflects a deep, inner insecurity which, I suggest, has its origin in the author's own divided consciousness, a product of his resentful awareness of genetic "taint" and the lack of pedigree it implied. This is the basic, poisonous ingredient in all Mittelholzer's phobias: the emotional schism that even life in England and his relative success as a novelist could not heal. Indeed, it always lay beneath the vitriolic, right-wing "philosophy". In Richard Lehrer's logical, but excessively violent refusal to be classified as a Negro and in his limited view of the African: "all I can see are nude shining black bodies in chains, cannibalism, juju, barbarous rituals and practices." (pp. 221/222) one sees both an unthinking acceptance of the white world's

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1 Fairbairn, op. cit., p. 65, footnote 1.

stereotype of the black man as well as his own implied self-hatred. Lehrer's African ancestry recalls Mittelholzer's "slave" blood, which, though an inescapable adjunct of his personality, found expression in a violent condemnation of the "weakness" which alone could be responsible for the "shameful" condition of slavery:

> A people who submits to slavery should expect no sympathy. ... Better battle to the death of every man, woman and child - better complete annihilation - than enslavement.(p.229).

The consequent need to be "strong" at all costs may easily have led to the suppression of the "soft" side of the personality and the selection of suitable external targets against which the internalized self-hatred could be directed in an effort to resist or silence the promptings of the Unconscious. The growing tone of belligerent didacticism in the late novels is particularly striking, and Fairbairn's comment on the vigour of the super-ego's resistance:

> It should always be borne in mind that, from the patient's point of view, the maintenance of the resistance presents itself (literally) as a matter of life and death.[1]

though, of course, it refers to a clinical case of schizoid depression, does throw some light on Mittelholzer's intransigence with respect to his apparently fascist views. Referring to his theme of the need to exterminate criminals, he said:

> I shall keep on hammering away at this theme, no matter how unpopular it makes me with the critics and our Left Wing sissies.[2]

It is impossible not to notice the correspondence between the difficulties of publication from about 1961, the increasingly obsessive, dogmatic writing of the late novels, and Mittelholzer's rapid emotional decline which ended in suicide in May, 1965. It is true, of course, that as fewer and fewer publishers were prepared to handle his work, and as his

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1 Fairbairn, op. cit., p. 67, footnote 1.

2 "The Intellectual Cissies", Books and Bookmen op. cit., p. 21

fortunes suffered, so he must have become dispirited and unhappy: but it is also necessary to say that his attempt to graft himself on to an Old World culture was not working. For it was not simply that Mittelholzer's writing deteriorated, but rather that he deliberately took a stand against what he called the "effeteness" of English society in an attempt to force acceptance of his own views, and, by implication, of himself. By 1961, it was already clear that the parent-culture had begun to reject the graft.

(III) Uncle Paul (1963)

Uncle Paul is, in effect, a study of this rejection. The main theme is the hero's dilemma of racial and cultural division and his consequent awareness of an impending disaster, the true nature of which becomes clear only when the novel is seen in the context of Mittelholzer's own attempt at self-identification. Admittedly, such a deliberately autobiographical approach is always open to objection as a dubious undertaking, but we are nevertheless justified in this by the author himself who admits that the hero is:

> ... really an intensive character study of myself - though only I will know that. I've disguised the character too well for readers who are strangers to suspect.[1]

and, as we have seen, Mittelholzer's self-involvement is a constant factor in his work. The overt plot is, consequently, by no means the most significant aspect of the novel, and can be quickly set aside. The hero, Paul Mankay, who is part Jewish and part German,[2] has been ambiguously involved with a neo-Nazi organization in London, finally wrecking their headquarters and escaping to the Hampshire home of his sister, Freya, whom he has not seen for ten years. The novel actually begins at this point. Socially and morally adrift, expecting at any moment to be tracked down by former colleagues seeking revenge, he suddenly finds himself the object of a young girl's hero-worship and, at the same time, pursued by his mistress, Delia, a blasé Londoner. Eventually he is discovered by two gunmen who have been searching for him, and in the ensuing gun battle kills both attackers. The young girl, Valerie, dies after being hit by a stray bullet. The obviously trivial nature of the story deserves a summary dismissal as a plot that "parallels the mystery,

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1 A.J. Seymour, Lectures op. cit., p. 17.

2 His two names, one German (Charles Fricker) and one Jewish (Paul Mankay), also reflect this inner conflict. It is interesting to notice that "Lionel/Lobo" the divided hero of Denis Williams's Other Leopards (New Authors Ltd., 1963), a novel in which the psychic split in the West Indian Negro is the main theme, is also "plagued by these two names ... Lionel the who I was, dealing with Lobo ... this alter ego of ancestral times." (pp. 19/20).

crime and adventure surrounding Buffalo Bill, Nelson Lee, Sexton Blake and Dr. Wang Fu",[1] the fictional heroes of Mittelholzer's childhood reading, but even this brief outline of the novel suggests another level of meaning. Bearing in mind Fairbairn's comments about the schizoid patient's internalizing of "bad" objects and the ego's subsequent need for a defence again t a "band of internal fifth columnists or persecutors",[2] we shall find that Mankay's attempt to destroy the headquarters of the Fascist group of which he himself is a member, has clear psychological overtones. To the reader who looks beneath the superficialities of the plot, a surprisingly complex emotional drama appears, acting as a psychological compensation, as it were, for the triviality of outward events.

Paul Mankay is a schizoid character whose sense of genetic damage retards his emotional growth,[3] poisons his relationships with others and alienates him from himself. He is proud of his German blood and admires German culture but cannot forgive the Germans for their brutality to the Jews with whom he still feels a sense of kinship. He regards his Jewish blood as a hereditary "weakness", and his German blood as a "strength". The result is "a continual war in my blood" (p. 121), a conflict of "loyalties" which his sister Freya recognizes intuitively as a psychological symptom of a deeper malaise:

> You keep posing this question of loyalties. ... My opinion is that you deliberately set up obstacles to balk yourself. It's a kind of perverse quality in you. (p. 121).

The suggestion here of an internal "fifth column" at work is inescapable, and Mankay does indeed feel the need to set up defences against the ever-

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1 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 98.

2 Fairbairn, op. cit., p. 65.

3 His failure to achieve "wholeness" is reflected in the pun on "Mankay" (manquer is French for "to fail", "to lack").

present danger of psychic fragmentation: "if I didn't try to adhere to one or two principles", he says "I'd ... I'd disintegrate. Cease to exist." (p. 161). This psychic instability leads to sudden, apparently pointless, rages. His impassioned "lecture" to his young nephew, Martin, for example, seems totally unwarranted by the facts. The child, its feelings hurt, is weeping:

> You've got German blood in you, do you know that? ... Fighting blood. You must be tough. Prepare for battle. ... The Jews always lose, boy. ... Always in retreat, always having their faces pushed into the muck. You mustn't be a Jew. Be a German. (pp. 89/90).

This outburst, which, incidentally, echoes Mittelholzer's childhood conditioning at the hands of his negrophobe father:

> Just one drop of that great blood. Just one drop in your veins, and it makes you different from everyone else. German blood! (A Swarthy Boy 1963, p. 43)

is further evidence of Mittelholzer's overcompensation for his African blood; and is related to his obsession with concepts of "strength" and "weakness", "master" and "slave". And Mankay, since he speaks for the author, inevitably establishes the link between Jew and African slave:

> Do you know what galls me, what burns in me most? ... It's the Jews. The way they caved in. The way they let themselves be led off into those camps. Docilely, ignominiously. Oh my God! That burns me! ... I'm a born warrior. I fight. ... I never surrender. I shall never be a slave. (pp. 165/166).

Mankay, forced to accept the "bad", Jewish half of his nature, since it is a genetic fact, learns to internalize it: a process which sets up an insoluble conflict within his psyche. Like his author, Mankay is unable either to ignore or reject his undesirable racial inheritance which is, nevertheless, essentially a part of his whole personality. This produces a crisis of identity:

> I hate, I admire, I hate, I admire. I get confused wondering who I really am. Paul Mankay, the grandson of a Jew, or Charles Fricker, grandson of a pure Aryan grandmother? (p. 149).

According to Fairbairn, this internal possession of a "bad" object (which is nevertheless needed for psychic health) can lead to a tragic situation in which the patient accepts himself as "bad" and "destructive" even to those he loves. He learns first to distance libidinal (i.e. "good") objects, and then:

> ... he mobilizes the resources of his hate, and directs his agression against others. ... Since the joy of loving seems hopelessly barred to him, he may as well deliver himself over to the joy of hating and obtain what satisfaction he can out of that.[1]

The first of these effects is seen in Mankay's fear of harming those nearest to him. Young Valerie, for example, represents a quality of goodness which he is afraid to damage:

> There's someone who takes me seriously. She's fourteen and she listens to me. She doesn't sneer. She doesn't accuse me of melodrama. There's goodness in that child. (p. 117).

Consequently, he tries to warn her of his secret "destructive" nature:

> It's a fever in me, Valerie, love. It burns and burns and I breathe out the poisonous vapours, trying always though, not to let them reach others. I'm afraid of being found out. (p. 164).

The fact that she does die as a result of her involvement with him is proof of his "lethal" nature. His attempt to befriend the cows in the lane by tearing up some chicory plants with which he tries to feed them is not only unsuccessful, but alienates his young nephew whose carefully cultivated plants they are. Mankay's "destructive" nature extends even to the rabbits which Valerie shows him:

> "Look! That's a rabbit!"
> "Yes. It's watching us. Want me to shoot it?"
> His hand moved back to his hip pocket. (p. 103).

The prelude to his love-making with Delia also conveys the curiously

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[1] Fairbairn, op. cit., pp. 26/27. Cf. Mankay's "It's hate that drives me. The hatred of what I perceive in myself." (p. 52, my underlining). According to R.D. Laing, "if there is anything the schizoid individual is likely to believe in, it is his own destructiveness." (The Divided Self, Penguin Books 1970, p. 93).

"damaging" quality which he always appears to project:

> He reached out and gripped her arm, squeezed it hard. Stood staring at her mid-riff and shaking his head, his eyes with a look as though trying to burn holes through her belly. (p. 112).

His reason for joining the Fascist organization reveals this urge to hate, to "let evil be his good" with startling clarity:

> I wanted to see what it was to feel hatred. Can't you see how interesting it was for me? Me with a Jewish Grandfather hating the Jews with a roomful of genuine Gentiles of Nordic blood, recording the minutes of our meetings and throwing out useful suggestions for action against the contaminating elements in our society. To the lions with all Jews, coloured people and Communists! ... I enjoyed examining myself under the given conditions. I learnt a lot about myself. (p. 51, my underlining).

Mittelholzer was here revealing perhaps more than he realized, for in Mankay's schizoid rôle-playing we may also see the author's persistent, violent denunciation of "Human Vermin" in its true light. It is, like Peter Elmsford's and Richard Lehrer's apparent fascism, an expression of the hating, anti-libidinal ego's attempt to disguise the self-hatred which comes from the possession of internalized "bad" objects. What Mankay learns about himself is that his division of "loyalties" is only a superficial indication of a psychic disturbance; and that his unhappiness comes ultimately from "my splitness. My two-ness. Meine Zweideutigkeit. The disease in my spirit." (p. 164). His nihilistic view of life, like Peter Elmsford's: "there is ugliness as well as loveliness in the world. Well, FACE the ugliness ..." (The Piling of Clouds, p. 210) is the result of this fatal "two-ness" which disrupts Mittelholzer's fiction and leaves his heroes resigned to their own social unacceptability, convinced that their "badness" is the result of a genetic taint. As Mankay says:

> It's blood. Environment only adds surface colour to our characters. What we are now we were from the day of our birth. (p. 79).

Mittelholzer's obsession with heredity as a once-for-all personality determinant denies his heroes any real, emotional development. In much the same way, his constant concern, in the later work, to confront English society, criticizing its "weakness" and Liberalism, severely limites the scope and quality of these novels. It is, of course, always a mistake to assume that a writer's later work will necessarily reveal greater depth of insight or maturity of style than that found in his early work. In Mittelholzer's later work, even where an increase in technical assurance is apparent, there is not usually an accompanying increase in emotional depth. Many critics have, with some justice, regarded the early novels A Morning at the Office (1950) and Shadows Move among Them (1951) as being among his most "mature" work. Joyce Sparer claims that "an immaturity of philosophy and of style persists throughout his work - in fact becomes more marked."[1] Louis James finds Corentyne Thunder (1941) "a perceptive and delicate 'first novel'".[2] In the later "English" novels, although the author's perceptiveness, (especially in dealing with schizoid or unbalanced characters) is evident; there is little delicacy or restraint in style or expression. One of the main reasons for Mittelholzer's difficulties with publishers in the later years of his career was, as we have seen, his growing tendency to "sermonize" in his work. Writing to a friend in Guyana he says, referring to Uncle Paul, "I admit I've become a bit preachy, but that can't be helped. I MUST say what I feel is wrong with society today."[3]

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1 Joyce Sparer, "Attitudes towards Race in Guyanese Literature" (Sunday Chronicle, Georgetown, Guyana, April 16, 1967).

2 From the introduction to the Heinemann edition of 1970, p.1.

3 Quoted in A.J. Seymour, Lectures (1968) op. cit., p. 17.

Because of this attitude, coupled with his extreme right wing views, Mittelholzer alienated publisher after publisher. The Piling of Clouds (1961) was rejected by five publishers and The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham by fourteen, before being finally accepted. What had begun for the young writer in Guyana as a desire "to become famous and rich by writing novels for the people of Britain to read"[1] eventually became a personal invective against political liberalism and "the cloying syrup of welfare-state ease."[2]

Mittelholzer often revised and recast earlier work (in which the subject had been treated superficially or even humorously) to produce a "serious" novel. The Weather in Middenshot (1952) for example, a novel in which the author gives his views[3] on the problem of crime and the methods by which he felt society ought to deal with it, is, apparently, a recasting of an earlier work which appears in unpublished MSS. as "The Weather in Middenshot - a serio-comedy in 3 acts", and as a comedy entitled "Soap Bubbles in Middenshot".[4] The theme of the novel is treated even more dogmatically, and with less objectivity, in the later The Piling of Clouds, a copy of which (in the possession of Mr. A.J. Seymour of Linden, Guyana) carries the author's autographed note "for A.J.S. Herein is expressed my disgust of contemporary society."[5] In his autobiography, Mittelholzer has this to say about the book's rejec-

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1 EM, "A Pleasant Career" op. cit., p. 42.

2 EM, The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (Library 33, 1965) p. 144.

3 In a letter to a friend (dated 1 October, 1959) he writes:

> Read Middenshot and you'll see the case I present through the detective Southerby. Those are *my* views and I'm very earnest about them.

4 MSS. in the possession of Mrs. Jacqueline Ives.

5 Quoted in A.J. Seymour, Lectures (1968) op. cit., p. 16.

tion by Secker and Warburg:

> In 1961 I sent them the script of The Piling of Clouds. Within three weeks it was hurled back at me, and Fred Warburg ... advised me to ... forget it. It was a book in which I had decided to take up again the theme of The Weather in Middenshot. ... The views expressed in The Piling of Clouds were considered 'extreme' and 'abnoxious'. [sic] [1]

In the later novels, therefore, it would seem that Mittelholzer's hatred of violence and criminal behaviour was given an outlet through an uncompromisingly harsh, didactic approach which, ironically, repels the reader precisely because of its violence of expression.

Among Mittelholzer's later novels, The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965) which appeared between the publication of Uncle Paul and The Jilkington Drama (1965. Published posthumously), is of special interest for several reasons. Mittelholzer himself considered it to be one of his most "serious" books;[2] and the novel certainly embodies most of his deeply-held views on sex, transcendentalism, politics and English society. But while society's rejection of the principal male character (who has dedicated himself to exposing what he regards as its weak, left-wing liberalism: it's "will-to-rot") is a main concern in the novel; there is also another, more temperate - though no less personal - theme: the preservation of psychic integrity through a process of withdrawal ("aloneness") and self-discovery. These two themes are yoked uneasily together in the main characters, Charles Harpenden Lessier ("Harpo") and the heroine, Sheila Chatham, and represent the two impulses which run throughout Mittelholzer's work - one masculine, disruptive, militant, aggressively individual, the other feminine, quietly introspective, con-

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1 EM, "A Pleasant Career" op. cit., p. 42.

2 According to both Mrs. Roma Mittelholzer and Mrs. Jacqueline Ives, EM considered this to be one of his best and most important novels: one in which he felt himself to be most deeply involved.

cerned with inner peace and "wholeness". They recall once again the two elements which Mittelholzer had said "have always lived within me, side by side and in restless harmony";[1] and their interaction provides the main interest, as well as the major disharmony, in the novel. The book's dogmatic, assertive style almost occludes the introspective theme of "aloneness", which appears ill-at-ease in the context of Harpo's violent outbursts against the "effeteness" of English society; and, interestingly enough, The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965) represents the final version of a work Mittelholzer had begun several years earlier. An examination of the six MSS.[2] which have recently come to light, reveals the change in Mittelholzer's approach to his art as he revised and recast the work. One sees the novel undergoing a "hardening of the arteries", as it were, and the shift in emphasis away from an associative art, related to a Caribbean scenario, towards the development of a dogmatic, proselytizing fiction involving English characters in an English setting.

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1 A Swarthy Boy (Putnam, 1963) p. 126.

2 Six typed scripts in thin cardboard file-covers. No hand-written scripts are extant. EM composed on the typewriter, generally producing a "fair copy" right away. For a detailed discussion of these six "Chatham" MSS. in terms of their relationship and chronology, see Appendix One.

(IV) The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965)

In the published version, Sheila Chatham, childless and widowed at thirty-three, decides to live "unto herself" in her Hampshire cottage, in order to avoid the distractions and demands of family and friends. The lives and affairs of others, however, gradually intrude. Two likeable homosexuals, Archie Chiffers and William Flintdown, Mary Heathmore, an old friend who is also widowed, and Whitley Scanlan, a publisher with a schizophrenic wife, Susan, all take an interest in her. Her policy of "aloneness" is most severely upset, however, when a family of New Zealanders, the Lessiers, become her neighbours. On holiday in England, they are a strange uninhibited group consisting of three brothers, Alva, Herbert and Harpo, a sister, Jasmine, and Herbert's wife, Maggie. Herbert is a mystic, and introduces Mrs. Chatham to yoga and oriental occultism, while Harpo, a forty-five year old businessman and dilettante writer at first repels, then attracts her by virtue of his brusque, "manly" attitude. Mrs. Chatham, fascinated by the conflicting, yet complementary claims each of these two brothers makes on her emotions; one advocating withdrawal from society, the other urging her to take positive action against society, is finally convinced that Harpo's credo of "strength" is justified when she is nearly killed by the psychopathic Susan Scanlan, who attacks her with a fruit-knife. Recovering in hospital, she realizes that Susan had always been a threat, but no one had taken a sufficiently "strong" line with her. Susan, in fact, comes to represent the "sickness" of English society in general: a sickness against which Harpo continually warns, and about which his book of essays ("England, the Rotting Fruit") is concerned. The essays, thanks partly to Mrs. Chatham's efforts, are published; and the novel ends as she goes for a solitary walk in the snow, experiences an "epiphany" and realizes that the Truth she has been seeking involves the need to "be myself to the end". (p. 224).

Harpo, the "hero" of the novel, is another Mittelholzer self-portrait. Gruff, sexually virile, outspoken and given to dark utterances about the pernicious effects of sentiment, liberalism and "weakness", he is a type of Mittelholzer surrogate whom we have met before as a mouthpiece for the author's right-wing views. His attitude to crime and criminals, for example, is depressingly familiar:

> Eradication. Simple. Not hanging. That's primitive. Give them a painless death. Gas them, or give them an overdose of morphine. Get rid of them as you'd get rid of a mad dog or a cobra or any dangerous creature in the wild beast world. (p. 151).

His views on the deterioration of English society are given a central place in the novel; for the movement of the plot in which the hostile elements (the two delinquent children of a lower-class neighbour and the sex-crazed schizophrenic, Susan Scanlan) menace and finally attack Mrs. Chatham physically, illustrates and justifies Harpo's views on the "rotten" state of English society. Susan's violent outburst, just before her attack on Mrs. Chatham, is quite obviously meant to underscore Harpo's earlier warnings about the need for "strength" and "vigilance":

> Be like me. Be a psychopath. Be disgusting. Be filthy in mind and speech. Be violent. Take what you want and rip the guts out of whoever gets in your way. That's what'll win you sympathy from society. Yes, stare at me. I'm safe. Nobody can harm me. When I slash you as I mean to do, and leave you lying here a bloody corpse, who will lay a finger on me? I'll be safe. Diminished responsibility. They must keep me alive. But you'll be dead, you dull, decent fish. That's your lot - to be carved up by people like me. (p. 205).

Herbert, the yogi, has long conversations with Mrs. Chatham about the ascetic, spiritual life, but these serve as occasions for re-inforcing Harpo's arguments. Even a long talk about love as a state of being "in harmony with the cosmos" (p. 158) is used to convince Mrs. Chatham of the "logic" of Harpo's theory of the painless eradication of criminals as "vermin":

> Now you can put what I've said against the picture of our present problems. Every day we read in our newspaper of some

> ruthless thug or band of thugs attacking decent people, injuring, murdering, robbing. ... What really effective means of curbing them have we got save extermination? They aren't acting with love. They are out of tune with the cosmos ... (p. 159).

Finally, Mrs. Chatham, convinced that Harpo is right in his diagnosis of English society, dedicates herself to the task of getting the collection of essays, "England - the Rotting Fruit", published. She tells him, by way of explanation:

> I just got the notion I must do something to help you. ... You were in harmony with the cosmos when you worked on this thing. And I must have caught something of this harmony. Felt the love that had inspired you to write this thing. And so I wanted to help - be a part of it, too. (p. 164).

This forcible linking together of Mrs. Chatham's inner desire for personal and psychic integration and Harpo's violent condemnation of the "effeteness" of English society leaves a considerable gap which appears like a fracture running through the book. It is a thematic discord from which the novel does not recover, in spite of the very fine descriptive passage (of Mrs. Chatham's walk in the snow) with which the book ends:

> She had now emerged into open meadow-land. The lane here had waist-high hedges, and beyond them, on either hand, lay sloping fields. And you could let your gaze sweep round to take in the more distant fields undulating white, off-white, grey-white, shadow-white and angel-white into the infinite horizon haze of bluish-white. Over there, a military mass of white-cloaked pines; over there, farther off, a feminine clump of white-draped elms. Much farther off, a massive copse of firs showing gaps of bat-wing dark amidst the mantling white.
>
> Out of the waste of snowy sky, the sun, low down in the south-west, had broken through. And now the whole sky had taken on different hues. In the east and north it had a pale greenish-bluish tinge, like the eggs of certain birds. ... Tints were in conflict, yet in harmony. There were no boundaries. Where one tint yielded to another it was impossible to tell. It was like music. (pp. 223/224).

The writing here, like the snow-fall itself, has "a purposeful, hushed intensity" (p. 220). The sweep of the landscape, as well as the movement of the falling snow, is mirrored in the muted alliteration ("... into the infinite horizon-haze of bluish-white ..."), the frequent pauses in the lines, the repetition of the key-word "white" and

the general, easy, effortless flow of the narrative. Mittelholzer's extraordinary sensitivity to the weather, his feeling for the "spirit" of a place, was always one of his strengths, and it is this quietly powerful evocation of the natural landscape and his heroine's reaction to it (rather than the dogmatic "preaching" of the book) that convinces us of Mrs. Chatham's new-found inner peace and of her decision to live "in harmony with the Cosmos." (p. 224).

The main theme of the early version (represented by MS. X) which is set in Barbados, is concerned with Mrs. Chatham's determination, after the death of her husband, to find peace through living alone. There is no discussion of society's values, no controversial essays on "England - the Rotting Fruit", no reference to the difficulties of publishing, for although the Lessier family appear (as they do in the published version), there is no evidence of the voluble Harpo, who dominates the published version. Mrs. Chatham whose husband, a black Barbadian doctor, has recently died, wishes to "live unto herself. Quietly and at peace." (p.5). Her neighbours, the Lessiers, who are from the West Indian island of St. Lucia, include Alva Lessier, an attractive, entirely sensual man, and Herbert, his deeply religious brother both acting as powerful, attracting forces (the opposed elements of Spirit and Flesh) on Mrs. Chatham, who finally learns to compromise between the extreme attitudes each represents. She "keeps her balance" and resolves to live alone. The inner conflict of the heroine is conveyed with perception and delicacy. There is no hint of the moralising so evident in the later "English" versions.

The characterisation of Sheila Chatham is done with tact and considerable technical skill. Mittelholzer, in the first paragraph of this version evokes the post-funeral atmosphere in the cottage and sets

the scene for Mrs. Chatham's "inner dialogue":

> Humming through the cottage in cool, brief gusts, the wind had driven out the fragrance of the flowers, and that was a great relief, for she had hated the wreaths especially - the scent as well as the sight of them. The crowd in black and white she had not minded so much, nor even the comments of his relatives, for she had prepared herself, steeled herself, for these. But the wreaths had taken her unawares. (p. 1).

Immediately, one senses that the action of the novel will unfold mainly through the heroine's consciousness, and as the writing proceeds this is precisely what does happen. We are gradually shown Sheila Chatham's sense of purposelessness, her awareness of the critical balance of her life, poised as it is between loneliness and despair on the one hand, and the possibility of a new beginning on the other. Mittelholzer conveys this by the telling use of a natural image: the night-insects attracted by the light in the cottage:

> Anyway, at last, she could sit here alone and watch the night-insects crawl round the rim of the reading-lamp shade ... Ant-like creatures, about an eighth of an inch long, with wings. She could not recall ever having seen any like them in Twickenham. They must be tropical insects. Round and round the rim of the lamp-shade they kept crawling, odd-looking, gawky, indeterminate creatures, their wings sticking out rigidly, like adolescent children dressed up as angels ... (p. 1).

The "indeterminate" nature of the insects is linked with Mrs. Chatham's feeling of uncertainty about her own life: she too is "on the brink". As she thinks of her English past and her Barbadian present, the reader is prepared for what is, in fact, the main theme of the story: Mrs. Chatham's "choice of life". As the first chapter ends, the image of the night-insects returns:

> A tiny thing. A midge, really. She bent forward to examine it closely as it alighted and grew still. It had black edges to its wings - like mourning envelopes. How really strange! (p. 6).

The detail of the creature's wings, edged with black "like mourning envelopes", is a nice touch: a precisely observed, neutral detail, but

linked in Mrs. Chatham's mind (quite naturally) with the recent event of her husband's funeral. But the sound of distant laughter is borne in by the wind from the neighbouring house along the beach, and Mrs. Chatham is forced to return to the business of living:

> A girl's laugh came on the air from the cottage nextdoor - on the west ... She remembered very hazily having seen two men and two women on the veranda. ... She would probably meet them on the beach before long, and smile and nod - perhaps even exchange a polite word or two.
>
> Yes, she would not shun people. That would be no way to live. (p. 6).

The writing is not always as controlled or as sensitive as these extracts might suggest, however. There are many passages (especially those dealing with the heroine's feelings when she is sexually attracted to Alva Lessier) which are over-sentimentalized and, occasionally, even silly. Sheila, attracted by Alva's masculine charm feels as if:

> ... a flood of delightful agony went pouring through her body so that she thought she would melt away into the hot, viscid turbulence of it and yet be content at the destruction. (p.129).

When they make love, we are told that "her delirium of rapture was almost a blot-out." (p. 185). This kind of forced, unnatural writing does not, however, seriously undermine the total effect of the novel. The main theme, Mrs. Chatham's "choice of life", remains central, and the novel ends with an evocation of both the English and Barbadian landscapes. It is almost as if the two ways of life represented by Mrs. Chatham's "English reserve" and the Lessiers' "tropical exhuberance" (as well as by Herbert's spirituality and Alva's sensuality) are finally reconciled within the heroine's consciousness:

> The sunshine had almost vanished from the walls. A mere flicker remained around the upper half of a picture - an English landscape scene of red-brick cottages and poplars and copper beeches. The lingering sunshine framed the dark frame with a pinkish aura.
>
> Outside, the sea sounded very leisurely, crashing on the

> beach at longish intervals, and the casuarinas soughed softly and ceaselessly in the wind.
>
> From over at "Cranmere" came a loud bark of laughter, male and derisive. Virile. But it did not disturb the peace in the gallery here.
>
> Sheila, watching the wall, saw the sunshine fade ... [sic] Now it had gone entirely, and the picture remained, solid and alone. (p. 210).

The "English" versions of the novel introduce the character Harpo Lessier who acts as a mouthpiece for Mittelholzer's views on crime, politics, sex, religion and English society.

In the "intermediate" version[1] of the novel, there are a number of minor characters whose relationships with Mrs. Chatham are shown in some detail. Sheila's friends discuss her attitudes at some length, and chapters nine and ten are concerned with Mrs. Chatham's aunt Elsie's attempts to undermine the heroine's resolve to live alone. This material is deleted in the published version, Mrs. Chatham's aunt Elsie having been cut out of the story altogether, appearing only as a voice on the telephone in chapter thirty-five. In fact, the general effect of revision is to make Harpo's presence more central and to de-emphasize the theme of "aloneness" and the heroine's need to avoid extremes. Many of the passages which show Mrs. Chatham's "resilience of spirit" and her later inner conflict, and a number of those in which Harpo's views are criticized, or where Mrs. Chatham appears to question his moral convictions, are omitted from the final version. Chapter fourteen begins with a detailed reference to Mrs. Chatham's inner stability, as yet untroubled by the advent of the Lessiers.[2] These ten lines are omitted from the published text. Chapter seventeen opens with a conversation

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1 Represented by MSS. B and B1. See appendix one.

2 Appendix one p. 452.

between Sheila and Whitley Scanlan which shows her concern about the conflicting attitudes of spirituality and sensuality. She comes to the conclusion that she is "green on both counts".[1] These thirty-one lines are omitted from the published text. On p. 141 of chapter eighteen, Mrs. Chatham's mild rebuke of Harpo, "why do you seem so worked up? You speak as if you have a chip on your shoulder."[2] is omitted from the corresponding part of the text of the published version (where it becomes after revision, "She did not reply"), re-appearing much farther on, in chapter thirty-two, after a particularly violent outburst by Harpo, and there the rejoinder is toned down:

> She laughed. "Harpo, I wonder what got you feeling like this? How did you get this chip on your shoulder?" She looked at him like a schoolmistress trying to be indulgent towards an eccentric ex-pupil. (pp. 152/153. My underlining).

On p. 142 of MS. Bl,[3] Harpo's attitude to the precocious Elvie Curry is questioned by Mrs. Chatham. "How do you know ... about her playing truant?" she asks, and encourages him to "be more explicit". These lines have been revised, and in the corresponding section of the published text Mrs. Chatham is made to agree with Harpo's condemnatory attitude without a murmur: "She's a pretty bad case, I admit." (p. 75). In MS. Bl, a long section of dialogue between Mrs. Chatham and Whitley Scanlan, in which they discuss her resolve to live a life of "aloneness" in the year ahead (it is New Year's Eve in 1960), is excised and omitted from the published version (p. 30 of the novel). The author's note on p. 49 of MS. Bl[4] reads: "(let them ponder on what may happen in 1961). Briefly!"

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1 Appendix One p. 453.

2 Ibid., p. 454.

3 Ibid., p. 455.

4 Ibid., p. 456.

The literary style of the later versions also reflects the "hardening" process. Mrs. Chatham's thoughts and feelings are very often conveyed by direct authorial comment. The final published version abounds in statements like "it was obvious that she was reasoning it out this way now" (p. 51), "her whole manner revealed relief" (p. 51) or:

> She looked at the sunny morning scene, and you could note the troubled mote of fire that trembled in each eye ... " (p. 78).

These and the many prefixed intrusive remarks such as "perhaps she was thinking ... perhaps she was saying to herself ..." (p. 63) greatly reduce the immediacy of the characterization. Added to this, Mrs. Chatham is made by the author to write down her thoughts and confused feelings in a notebook; and this serves to create another authorial "voice" in the novel. Mittelholzer writes about Mrs. Chatham who writes about herself. This is how chapter thirty-eight of the novel begins:

> "And so this is how my life of aloneness proceeds. Not how I'd foreseen it in November. But what had I foreseen? Can I say that I had anticipated a plain, smooth passage from day to day and week to week, without any interference from people outside? No, it would be untrue if I say that I had." (p. 63).

This is an extract from Mrs. Chatham's notebook; and while nothing is gained in terms of plot or characterization, a good deal is lost because the reader is "distanced", since the notebook entry adds nothing which is not already known. But the notebook has a subtler part to play in the novel. Mittelholzer uses it as a means of exegesis (Mrs. Chatham's views, and consequently the author's, about Harpo's essays are reported in detail) and for winning sympathy for his chief male character, Harpo. While reading Harpo's essays "England - the Rotting Fruit", Mrs. Chatham records her impressions in the notebook:

> Something jingoistic about this first essay, but it comes from the heart, and there is honesty in every word. At times the style is inclined to be incoherent, yet it is attractive for this very reason. It has spontaneity. There is a nervous strength in it that couldn't fail to impress the reader. (p. 134).

But Harpo's essays are not only reported in Mrs. Chatham's notebook: she also discusses them with others. Talking to Susan about them, she decides to read a passage to her in order to demonstrate Harpo's right-mindedness:

> The Victorians would have foreseen the social and economic problems that would be created by a large influx of coloured people, and they would have clamped down from the outset ... But what happens today? A lax, complacent Britain ... just sits back and simpers while thousands of West Indians, Africans and Pakistanis inundate the country, cluttering up midland towns and creating desperate housing problems and ill-feeling among the local residents, and resulting in nasty race riots like the Notting Hill affair. (p. 143).[1]

It is significant that even Susan Scanlan, who is clearly meant to be a living example of the "rottenness" of English society reacts to Harpo's attitude in a quite wholehearted way. "That's a man," said Susan, "I can go to bed with." (p. 143).

In spite of the didacticism of the published version, there are attempts at objectivity. Whitley Scanlan, the publisher to whom Mrs. Chatham submits Harpo's script, is not impressed:

> He made a grimace, grunting doubtfully, then said: "I won't say it's badly written. But they aren't essays - not as I know essays. They're blasted sermons." (p. 124)

and later, when she defends Harpo's attitude to Whitley, his rejoinder is an illustration of Mittelholzer's ability to laugh at himself, occasionally:

> "Integrity of self. Haven't you ever thought what a great feeling it is to know that you've stood, and stand, in rock-like

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1 This refers to the London race-riots of the early Autumn of 1958 and is something of a misnomer. The riots "fanned out from Shepherd's Bush and adjacent Notting Dale to several pockets in Notting Hill, Kensal New Town, Paddington and Maida Vale." (Ruth Glass, Newcomers, Allen & Unwin 1960, p. 133). Harpo's (and consequently, EM's) appeal to Victorian standards is noteworthy.

> firmness within the flame of your own strength?"
>
> "Good God! You're catching his literary style, Sheila ducks!" (p. 166).

Such attempts at objectivity are nevertheless outweighed by the writer's obvious intention to vindicate his hero's extreme views. Mrs. Chatham finally agrees with Harpo's attitudes, and the script of "England - the Rotting Fruit" is published in its entirety. The development of the novel, then, as revealed by a study of the MSS. shows quite clearly the movement, in Mittelholzer's art, away from a low-keyed, introspective approach (with its suggestion of a reconciliation of opposing tendencies) towards the strident, hectoring tone of the final version, where the author is at pains to expound a philosophy and preach a moral.

In the published version of the novel, the author's intention is clearly didactic. English society has "gone soft", Mittelholzer is saying, and through the character of Harpo he expresses his dismay at its "laxity" and "indifference". Mrs. Chatham's search for inner peace, a balanced choice of life, has, in effect, become a secondary theme: one that has its origin in Mittelholzer's early, West-Indian orientated work. Her introspective concern with the resolution of opposed elements in her character - with psychic balance - derives from an earlier version of the novel, where it is the main theme, and is gradually displaced during revision to give way, in the final version, to what had by then become a more urgent concern for her author: the hero's bitter disillusionment with a society with which he identifies, but to which he can no longer relate:

> I loved this country, and still love it - but that's what makes it all the more bitter: To see the core of things being eaten away and no one even aware of it, no one trying to stop the process. (p. 74).

Harpo's bitterness, like Sheila Chatham's "aloneness", comes ultimately from a deep sense of loss and the consequent fear of emotional disorienta-

tion: it is a defence-mechanism against a society which is desirable but finally alien and hostile, where to lower one's self-protective barriers would be simply to invite psychic disintegration. Herbert, repeating Harpo's advice to Mrs. Chatham, says:

> He was trying to tell you to keep strong. Be on your guard against the enemies of the spirit lurking about you, only ready to make infiltrations, and then deep thrusts, into your defences. (p. 214).

The suggestion of an urgent need for ego-preservation, the battle imagery, the insistence on "strength" and vigilance; are unmistakable indications of Mittelholzer's deeply personal involvement in the novel, and of its relationship to his own unhappy situation at that time.

(V) The Jilkington Drama (1965)

The spectre of psychic disintegration haunts almost all Mittelholzer's heroes who, in an attempt to disguise their inner fears, pretend to be outwardly confident and assert uncompromisingly "strong" views; but are usually, like Paul Mankay, "afraid of being found out."[1] Their inner insecurity is repressed and controlled by the ego's defensive mechanism, and any crack in this defence immediately produces serious results. Brian Liddard, because:

> ... he was not thorough and treated his Occultism in the spirit of a dilettante, something suddenly went wrong and these delusions began to plague him.[2] The whole structure of his life began to disintegrate. (A Tinkling in the Twilight, 1959, p. 142).

Afraid that his personal malaise will adversely affect others, he decides to commit suicide. Mittelholzer was only too aware, in his own life, of the danger of psychic collapse; and, according to Mrs. Jacqueline Ives (his second wife, now re-married), he left a suicide note explaining that he had taken his life partly because he was afraid that his own emotional difficulties were beginning to damage those dearest to him. The personal psychic disintegration that leads ultimately to tragedy is the theme of his last novel, published posthumously, The Jilkington Drama.

The novel is a study of the psychic disintegration of the hero, Garvin Jilkington (who is already emotionally unbalanced by the death of his pregnant wife in a road accident) and his eventual death from burns sustained in his suicidally-inspired firework display. The plot centres around Garvin's relationships with his father, with Katherine Friedlander (his father's German mistress) and Lilli Friedlander, Katherine's daughter. Attracted to Lilli, a chaste, devout Roman Catholic tortured by secret guilt (she is sexually attracted to Garvin's

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1 EM, The Piling of Clouds (1961) p. 164.

father), he begins to think of marriage to her as a possible means of relieving both his loneliness and his sexual frustration. Garvin and Lilli have a sexual encounter which is disastrous not only because Garvin, over-excited, has a premature ejaculation, but also because Lilli is not sexually attracted to him and merely allows his attentions as a means of assuaging her feelings of guilt and frustration. Katherine accompanies the distraught Garvin to Bournemouth (where he plans to visit his estranged mother) and later allows him to make love to her in order, as he puts it, "to restore my confidence in my manhood." (p. 152).[1] At the Jilkington home, meanwhile, Lilli, made desperate by sexual frustration, offers herself to Garvin's father. He at first firmly refuses, but when Garvin telephones to tell him that he and Katherine have made love ("so that you could get used to it before she returns home" p. 152), he changes his mind and makes love to Lilli out of pique. Garvin returns, overjoyed that he is not impotent after all, and proposes marriage to Lilli who refuses him since she loves his father. Stunned by this unforeseen development, Garvin rushes off and deliberately risks his life in setting off the fireworks which he has been collecting for some time. He is rescued, but dies in hospital as a result of severe burns received during the incident.

This bare summary of the plot: it seems little more than a contrived series of immoral couplings: does not do justice to Mittelholzer's ability (which is considerable, given the oddness of the story's events) to make the novel seem plausible. The unstable Garvin's growing hysteria is especially convincing in spite of the frequently inept writing. His longing to be comforted by Lilli, for example, is expressed in a style that embarrasses by its banality:

> Comfort will seep through my blood like frost from an incandescent flame - a fireworks rocket - a frost that is cooling but

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1 All quotations are from the 1965 edition.

> not numbing because it comes from a centre of glowing warmth. It's searing Life, but it's Love. Life and Love in symbiosis can't burn. Can't harm. (p. 34).

This passage retains some credibility only because we know that the speaker, Garvin, is mentally unbalanced. But even this willing suspension of disbelief is severely strained when, on the way to hospital after his suicide attempt, he is made to say: "the bowling is too much for me. Rain has turned the wicket sticky" (p. 189), and that his pain is "like Death. Death etched in Bengal lights. ... like a squib snapping at my vitals." (p. 190). In spite of this kind of thing, however, the novel does exert a strangely compelling quality. The reader has the feeling of being allowed to witness the actual process of mental disintegration which seems to threaten all the characters. Lilli's sudden, suicidal behaviour when rejected by Garvin's father:

> Harry saw her stare at the disorder on the bed, then saw her snatch up something. A pair of small scissors. She held it in one hand, looked at the wrist of the other hand, the two blades of the scissors opened in a V like the bill of some bird of prey. (p. 147)

is convincing especially because Mittelholzer suggests, by the use of apparently casual detail (the "poppy-red" finger-marks which Harry's slap leaves on her cheek; the manner in which she licks away the tiny trace of blood that has seeped from under the bandage on her slashed wrist) the latent mental abnormality of his characters. The reader's attention is also engaged at another level, however, for the novel deals with frankly incestuous taboo-relationships; and Garvin's need for sexual acceptance, involving as it does his father Harry as sexual rival, has an obvious psychological and archetypal significance. Garvin's urgent attempts to achieve a potent, satisfying relationship with Lilli and Katherine and to gain approval in his father's eyes, and his failure to

do so,[1] gives the novel a certain compulsive fascination comparable in kind (though not, of course, in quality) to our response to Hamlet's apparently inexplicable emotional impotence. That it is lack of potency, in the sense of recognition as an individual, and not merely frustrated sexual desire that finally drives Garvin to suicide, is borne out by the fact that it is his father's hold on Lilli's sexuality and Katherine's love and devotion that makes both women finally unavailable to him and denies him status as a "man" in his own right. Hamlet, committed to revenge his dead father, incestuously drawn to his mother, suffers from an ambivalent conscience; since love and duty to his father involves a sense of sexual guilt as well as the usurpation of another paternal figure - Claudius. It is the image of paternal authority which "popp'd in between the election and [his] hopes"[2] denies him potency. Death, in a sense, is a release from this position of helplessness: from an insoluble emotional conflict. Garvin's death-wish is similarly the result of emotional ambivalence; and his psychic disintegration proceeds ultimately from his hopeless attempt to silence the demanding inner voice of paternal authority, the super-ego. In fact, the two themes of sexual frustration and transcendentalism which run through the novel (the familiar Flesh/Spirit duality) are subservient to and illustrative of the repressive, overdeveloped super-ego which, in the novel, exacts its final, tragic revenge on the divided personality. The novel is an almost classic example of the primary pattern which runs through all of

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1 This main plot is re-inforced by the sub-plot in which Lilli (who, like Garvin, is also victim of a psychic split between Spirit and Flesh) tries to establish a sexual relationship with Harry, but does not succeed until her mother's emotional claim on him is temporarily in abeyance.

2 Hamlet, act V, scene 2.

Mittelholzer's work: an inherited "weakness" produces a psychic imbalance which, unchecked, leads in turn to a morbid death-wish. Garvin's failure to "be a man", to assert himself as an individual, comes from the psychic division which is symptomatic of Mittelholzer's heroes whose deliberate repression of their libidinal natures leads, inexorably, to a compensatory increase in the "hating", censoring activity of the super-ego.

The physical description of Garvin's father, Colonel Jilkington:

> ... the lower lip kept drooping sensually, refusing to be curbed by the austere upper lip. It was as though a continual war were being waged between the two - the one on the side of discipline, the other on the side of slackness, licence. (p. 10)

announces the duality of Flesh and Spirit which is reflected in his son. But whereas the colonel, an old army man who "kept himself erect just naturally" (p. 10), displays features which clearly carry the stamp of authorial approval (he is manly, practical, disciplined: he whistles in the bath, not because he is happy, but because "it's a habit of mine to whistle in the bath" p. 140), Garvin has inherited an inclination towards "weakness" from his mother:

> Garvin resembled his mother rather than his father. ... his mouth tallied somewhat with his father's: the disciplined upper lip seemed in conflict with the slack lower lip. His chin was his mother's - weakish and receding when seen in profile. (pp.13/14)

After the tragic loss of his wife, Celia, he turns to occultism in an attempt to deaden the shock. His interest in "spiritual planes" and the "Astral world", therefore, is merely a form of escapism; and the fireworks he begins to accumulate represent (like Brian Liddard's vial of cyanide) a means of escape - as a last resort - through suicide. His growing interest in Lilli as a "love-object" is wholly dependent in character, for he sees her as a <u>dispenser</u> of love; a giver of security. He tells her:

> You have love in you, Lilli. Next week I'll give you the chance to pour some of it out on me. Oh God. I can feel

> myself swimming in it. Drowning in it, but not expiring of asphyxia. It will bouy me up. Like a featherbed-cloud. I'll lie on it and be comforted. (p. 34).

This passage quite clearly suggests both Garvin's need for the security provided by a love-object and his sense of the destructive nature of sexuality. The image of "a featherbed-cloud" is a reminder not only of the Richard Lehrer leitmotiv of insecurity ("feather-bed tilting") in Thunder Returning (1961), but has autobiographical resonance, too. In A Swarthy Boy (1963) Mittelholzer records, among other images which remind him of his repressed New Amsterdam childhood, that of "being in a feather-bed"[1] at night. Garvin's attitude to sexual love has schizoid overtones; and his almost clinical interest in the effect his love may have on Lilli is a particularly revealing feature:

> The expression on his face was that of an experimenter rather than that of a man suddenly seized with lust. He watched her face as he rippled his hands over her nipples. He seemed anxious to note what changes would take place in her manner as he proceeded. ... whether her spirit would burgeon with life or splinter and run to ruin like a sand-glass suddenly shattered. (p. 88).

This recalls Paul Mankay's sense of his love as a lethal quality; and illustrates the psychological view of the characteristic anxiety (associated with libidinal and destructive impulses) of oral fixation. Melanie Klein, in her study of children, links feelings of agression against the mother with oral anxiety, but concludes that "it is difficult to say at what time this fusion of the destructive and libidinal instincts occurs".[2] Fairbairn, taking this view further, considers that, at the oral stage, where the child's libidinal object is the mother's breast:

> The libidinal situation is one which confers tremendous significance upon the states of fullness and emptiness. ...

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1 EM, A Swarthy Boy (1963) p. 51.

2 Melanie Klein, The Psycho-analysis of Children (Hogarth Press, 1969) p. 182.

> The anxiety which he experiences over emptying the breast thus gives rise to anxiety over destroying his libidinal object.[1]

Garvin's wish for Lilli to "pour some of it out on me" (p. 34) is accompanied by anxiety about the destructive effect his love may have on her. There is a tendency, in all Mittelholzer's heroes, to treat love-objects as a means of satisfying their own requirements rather than as having inherent value in themselves. According to Fairbairn, this is a tendency which "springs from the persistence of an early oral orientation towards the breast as a partial object."[2] The extraordinary emphasis, in Mittelholzer's work, on the breast as the desired sexual object[3] is revealing, for it lends support to the view that the aggressive attitude of his split heroes, the predominance, in their behaviour, of taking over giving, of "internalizing" and incorporating, stems not from any genuine social or moral position (such as the religious, political and social theories presented in the novels might suggest), but rather from a deep, psychological anxiety. Their gruff, apparently extroverted manner is in reality a defensive measure against libidinal impulses from within:

> Thus [the schizoid individual] ... may quarrel with people, be objectionable, be rude. In so doing, he not only substitutes hate for love in his relationships with his objects, but also

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1 Fairbairn, op. cit., pp. 11/12.

2 Ibid., p. 13.

3 EM remembers, as his "earliest erotic experience", his shapely Negro nurse "casually fumbling out a full breast and letting me fondle it." (A Swarthy Boy, 1963, p. 18). In V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men (Andre Deutsch 1967), Ralph Singh's emotional dependence is effectively conveyed by his fixation on Sandra's breasts "to which [he] had for some little time been admitted" (p. 43) and about which he rhapsodizes. He also dreams he is a baby again in his mother's arms enjoying "the freedom of her breast." (p. 116).

> induces them to hate, instead of loving, him; and he does all this in order to keep his libidinal objects at a distance.[1]

Garvin is therefore doomed to remain frustrated because of this "internal saboteur" (represented, fittingly, by his <u>father</u>, the colonel) which opposes his libidinal instincts and denies him potency: wholeness. His talk about "the true path to Reality" (p. 179) and the need to complete his "Pattern" by attempting to "plunge out of this gross body and leap into the clear space of another dimension" (p. 175), a process symbolized, for him, in the firework display, is, like the grandiose visions of Morgan, the "pyrotechnicist" in V.S. Naipaul's <u>Miguel Street</u>,[2] both tragic and absurd - an escapist fantasy that can lead only to self-destruction. Morgan's talk about a "Cosmic Dance", his ambivalent wish to be both laughed at and respected, is a veiled desire to be accepted by Miguel Street society as a man in his own right. Garvin's need to prove himself, to "measure-up" as a sexually potent individual[3] in his father's eyes, is implied in the cocky manner in which he tells the colonel that he and Katherine have been sexually intimate:

> It's Fate old man. Somehow, after that London trip with her I felt something stirring in the wings. I heard a sort of bourdon of premonitory intimations. (p. 152).

A comparison of Garvin's emotional impotence with that of the hero of

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1 <u>Fairbairn</u>, op. cit., p. 26.

2 We are told that Morgan "loved fireworks. And he was full of theories about fireworks. Something about the Cosmic Dance or the Dance of Life." (V.S. Naipaul, <u>Miguel Street</u> Four Square 1966, p. 57).

3 According to Anthony Storr:

> For the majority of the human race, self-esteem is chiefly rooted in sexuality. A confident belief in one's own masculinity or femininity is a fundamental part of human identity. (<u>Human Aggression</u> Allen Lane, Penguin Press 1968, p. 68).

<u>Hamlet</u> was certainly in Mittelholzer's mind. Towards the end of the novel, Garvin, as he lies dying, asks Lilli if she likes the play, as his dead wife did, and adapts the famous line "to be or not to be" in a most significant way: "to be potent or not to be potent, that is the question." (p. 190). This strengthens the view that it is the failure to brook the stern image of the super-ego that finally drives him to suicide: his failure to achieve "the adequacy of my father" (p.190)[1] which leads to self-destruction. Mittelholzer's authoritarian upbringing which characterized and to a large extent determined his development, and which he "internalized" as a "bad" but necessary object - a Germanic "strength" - seems to have created continual psychic damage by gradually occluding the genuinely sensitive, artistic side of his nature. This stern, parental image, at once hateful and binding, lay behind his yearning for an Old World culture and the status he felt he had been denied by a trick of heredity. Instinctively hating and respecting authority, rebelling against any form of attack on his status as an individual, his more and more frequent and hysterical attacks against the "effete" state of English society expressed both this fierce individualism and his disappointment in a society that was finally too liberal, too "left-wing", to function as the authoritarian parent-figure he hated but found necessary for his psychic well-being. Rejection (as he saw it) by English society and by the publishing world meant a rejection of himself as an individual by a parent-culture; and Mittelholzer's psychic condition, always precarious, doubtless contributed to his final, tragic self-destruction. His novels, as this study has tried to show, reveal this gradual erosion of emotional stability - the result of an obdurate, ambivalent apprehension of life - at the

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1 This "genetic" emphasis - the need to carry on the ancestral sperm - links the novel with the <u>Leitmotiv</u> "trilogy" where it is also a main theme. (<u>Vide</u> chapter Four (X), p. above).

psychological level; and his explicit subjects of sexual freedom, religious and social reform and transcendentalism often disguise deeper, more complex themes. These are the buried motives and ideas which are not always clearly identified by Mittelholzer, but of whose obstinate life he was certainly aware. "You know", says Garvin Jilkington:

> ... when I die it will be from an explosion resulting from an accumulation of too many meanings. ... I keep weaving meanings together, and what a bewildering pattern they make! They send my head into a spin. ... and the meanings take shape and begin to weave and weave and overwhelm me with a weight of significance too great for me to bear. I feel I'm going to be crushed under the weight. I feel I'm going to be extinguished - or disintegrate - from the sheer pressure put on me. (p. 86, my underlining).

(VI) Creative Schizophrenia in the Caribbean Novel: The Relevance of Mittelholzer.

Our study of Mittelholzer's art reveals, then, a good deal more than an "essay in freedom"[1] or a quest for the personal satisfaction of "a pleasant career". One also encounters what Denis Williams calls "a question of the relationship to the ancestor",[2] conscious attitudes which (often the result of unconscious motives) were ultimately responsible for the nature, and frequently for the content, of his work. The sense of genetic damage which drove the writer, attuned to an Old World culture, to seek acceptance by a European parent-body, finally widened an inherent psychic division into an irreparable gulf. Mittelholzer's outward-looking, Europe-orientated attitude to culture and racial pedigree, acting upon his own inner awareness of a "mulatto" condition, worsened a division of consciousness which is clearly and fatally reflected in his work. If we read Mittelholzer's novels for their social or political wisdom, or expect to find in them an artistic embodying of coherent, explicit moral theories; then the effect of the work - with only a few exceptions - is extremely trivial and disappointing. Crude sensationalism, sexual titillation, morbidity and a certain marked facility for retailing bizarre incident and for describing disturbed mental states are the characteristics which are most easily distinguishable, and which give to much of his work an undeniably popular, but sub-literary value.[3] His commentators have therefore tended to highlight the pioneering nature of his work and the example which he set other, younger West Indian writers by his sheer energy and

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1 A.J. Seymour, Lectures, op. cit., p. 14.

2 Denis Williams, Lectures, op. cit., p. 12.

3 The success of EM's Kaywana novels in this genre, for example, makes him unique among West Indian novelists.

dedication to writing. According to A.J. Seymour, the importance of Mittelholzer's work lies in its reflection of the artist's integrity and professionalism - qualities which are without doubt among Mittelholzer's real virtues - and that if his work has any "message" for us, it is one that "includes the value of strength, energy and persistence and the quality of dedication."[1] L. Edward Brathwaite refers to Mittelholzer, indeed, sums him up, as "Guyana's finest story-teller"[2] and "the historical novelist of Guyana".[3] Frank Birbalsingh compares Mittelholzer's pioneering attempt with that of the nineteenth century American novelist, Charles Brockden Brown:

> Because of their separation from England, the direct source of ideas and models, they shared common stresses and strains in creating a 'displaced' literature with new subjects and themes; for essentially it was the same pioneering problem they both faced - that of moulding, out of their fresh New World experience and received Old World ideas, appropriate artistic forms.[4]

But all that this appears to suggest, however, is that, like Brown, Mittelholzer is a precursor: the first native West Indian novelist whose work is "not narrowly bound by regional themes or interests".[5] And the comparison of Mittelholzer and Brown is, in many respects, extremely apt:

> ... all his works are imperfect. ... any interpretation ... therefore, that seeks to resolve the critical disagreement his works have engendered must first go back to the man himself ... for the study of his early life is most pertinent to the discussion of his art.[6]

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1 A.J. Seymour, Lectures, op. cit., p. 51.

2 L.E. Brathwaite, "Kyk-Over-Al and the Radicals" New World (Guyana, 1966) p. 57.

3 Ibid., p. 100.

4 Birbalsingh, op. cit., p. 102.

5 Ibid., p. 103.

6 Donald A. Ringe, Charles Brockden Brown (Twayne, N.Y. 1966) p. 17.

> The main biographical impression he makes on us is, after all, of the energy with which he staked out a vocation in literature and applied himself to it.[1]

These are remarks which might as readily be applied to Mittelholzer. Birbalsingh does, however, give a clear hint of the really original aspect of this "pioneering" quality in Mittelholzer's art ("Mittelholzer's novels ... deal mainly with psychological themes that are of both local and universal significance")[2] - a hint that comes, unfortunately, at the end of his essay, and is immediately blurred into the more general observation about "themes not wholly limited by application to local conditions".[3]

Now the superficiality of Mittelholzer's art <u>qua</u> art cannot be denied, but the importance of his psychological themes require more than the formal recognition of their presence in his work as an indication of the writer's commendable lack of parochialism. For when Mittelholzer's work is seen as an attempt, at a deeper, psychological level, to resolve a Body/Mind split of which the author was himself aware, and which he often deliberately chose as his main theme; then the novels do not only become very complex and interesting indeed, but also serve to embody, in a comprehensive yet fairly accessible form, an important aspect of the development of West Indian writing as a whole.

The theme of psychic disintegration is central, for example, in the work of Caribbean writers as important, as accomplished and as different as George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul, where it appears as an ever-present danger to be guarded against. In the work of Naipaul in particular, psychic wholeness is presented as a continually retreating

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1 Warner Berthoff, <u>Arthur Mervyn</u> (Holt Rinehart and Winston, N.Y. 1962) p. xxi of introduction.

2 <u>Birbalsingh</u>, op. cit., p. 103.

3 Ibid.

vision, always just out of reach. When this psychic imbalance is seen to be largely the result of the colonial Caribbean condition of fortuitous racial and cultural admixture, where no background of long established habit, no social, political, religious or cultural traditions exist to give a sense of individual stability; then the importance of Mittelholzer's work in the literature of the Caribbean becomes evident. Indeed, the already commonplace view of Caribbean writing as expressive of a "search for identity" will be seen to be capable of a much deeper and altogether more meaningful formulation: the writer's attempt, by examining his relationship to the environment, to the natural and historical condition of the Caribbean, and to himself, to define and to preserve the integrity of the psyche against the constant danger of disintegration threatened by outer historical and social, as well as by inner, psychological forces. And this is an enterprise - a theme - which is finally universal. It is the theme that may be discerned as a major impulse in the Romantic and Symbolist movements with their insistence on imagination as an associative impulse - an impulse towards Unity of Being: as well as the principle which underpins the psychological theories of ego-dissociation from Freud and Jung through to the work of modern psychologists like Erich Fromm, W.R.D. Fairbairn, R.D. Laing and Anthony Storr.

The significance of Mittelholzer's associative attempt, therefore, can hardly be overstated. His work embodies the dilemma implicit in the whole body of Caribbean literature: "that wrestling contradiction of being white in mind and black in body."[1] But it is a condition which is, paradoxically, a source both of despair and of creative power;

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1 Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: an Overture". Preface to Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays. (Jonathan Cape 1972) p. 9.

for much of the vigour and originality of Caribbean writing comes from the artist's attempt to make "creative use of his schizophrenia".[1] In the study of Wilson Harris's work which follows, we shall be concerned with that aspect of the Caribbean novel in which the writer, looking inward towards a native or "host" consciousness, attempts to discover a renewed sensibility, a new imaginative source <u>within</u> his contradictory cultural and racial inheritance. The discussion of Harris's work will attempt to illustrate what must be considered the most remarkable and original development in the Caribbean novel: one in which the condition of cultural and racial admixture itself becomes the "complex womb" of a new wholeness of vision. A creative attempt is made to <u>heal</u> the divided psyche of Caribbean Man by exploring an inner theme:

> ... a theme of a living drama of conception, the conception of the human person rather than the ideology of the 'broken' individual.[2]

Despite the similarities between Edgar Mittelholzer and Wilson Harris (both are mixed natives of Guyana born in New Amsterdam; both are of middle-class origin; both are deeply concerned with the social and psychological effects of heredity, history and environment on character - the psychic disorientation of Caribbean Man) no two West Indian novelists present a more striking contrast in terms of the impact their work makes. Where the themes of Mittelholzer's novels, in general, reflect a disintegrative movement - a <u>division</u> of consciousness - and his characters seem frequently to drift towards death; Harris's themes convey a sense of wholeness and coherence - the result of a

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1 Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: an Overture". Preface to <u>Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays</u>, op. cit., p. 17.

2 Wilson Harris, <u>Tradition the Writer and Society</u> (New Beacon Books 1967) p. 27. Further references to this work will appear as <u>TWS</u>.

deliberate, sustained associative effort - that characterizes all his work. Where Mittelholzer's novels are straightforward and conventional in terms of style and language, Harris's are notoriously unconventional and "difficult" to read. Mittelholzer is a superficial writer, unless (and this has been our contention in this study) one is aware of a complex, underlying psychological level of meaning: the indirect result of the author's own ambivalence or "two-ness". Harris's novels, on the other hand, are quite deliberately unorthodox, written to convey "subterranean emphases" consistent with a well-articulated theory of "implosion". This is a method of fiction in which the meaning of the work is to be found neither in the overt plot nor in characterization; but within the numerous echoes, associations and reverberations of meaning set up in the reader's mind as he enters the novel, so to speak. It is an approach which requires the writer's (as well as the reader's) open-ness to language less as a medium of intellectual meaning, than of vision:

> And this is the germ of the thing the writer feels when he says in everyday talk that 'a work begins to write itself', to live its own life, to make its author <u>see</u> developments he had not intellectually ordered or arranged.[1]

One may complain of the "oddness" or "difficulty" of a Harris novel, but never of its triviality.

Harris claims that his approach to the novel is:

> ... not intellectual, but rather part of a hard and continuous wrestling within the medium of my own work, a process more akin to something active and unpredictable rather than planned and theoretical.[2]

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1 <u>TWS</u>, op. cit., p. 47.

2 Wilson Harris, "The Phenomenal Legacy" <u>Literary Half-Yearly</u> Vol. XI No. 2 (July, 1970) p. 1.

But one is nevertheless aware of a remarkable, omnivorous intellect behind the complex, often esoteric nature of his work. His interests, unlike Mittelholzer's, are wide and extremely varied, ranging from alchemy to Zen Buddhism. But although his obvious intellectuality (in the sense of his interest in the interconnectedness of all knowledge) contrasts sharply with Mittelholzer's rigidly dogmatic, often cranky, mental attitude; it is interesting to notice that both writers are deeply concerned with the "Faustian" nature of reality itself: the existence of a complementary, "irrational" world of myth and fantasy. Whereas Mittelholzer regards this "Other World" as a way of escape from a burdensome reality, however (as in his belief in the occult theory of "astral planes"), Harris, characteristically, sees it in a Jungian light: as the nature of the Unconscious - the inner self with which the ego must be re-united.

In his deliberate choice of a theme of psychic re-integration, as in his choice of a fiction of "implosion", Harris is the antithesis of Mittelholzer. Yet these two writers are again linked in a curiously ironic way through their shared concern for the genetic and cultural relationship to the ancestor.[1] Where, however, Mittelholzer regards his mixed racial inheritance as a static, "weak" condition: a damaging impediment in his effort to relate to a European "parent"; Harris (himself racially mixed) considers this fact of admixture a strength and a vital source of new and original growth towards identity. He rejects the implied views of both George Lamming (who seeks self-definition through confrontation with the white world) and Vidia Naipaul (whose Old World bias forces him - as it does Mittelholzer - to reject

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[1] As Denis Williams puts it:

> ... on the one hand the problem [of relationship to the ancestor] has been stated by Mittelholzer, and on the other, as I believe, resolved by Wilson Harris. (Lectures 1969, op. cit., p. 15).

the "inferior", "broken" cultures of the West Indies). For Harris, a new sensibility, and, consequently, a new Art, is the vital substance and goal of any true quest for identity or for wholeness. And by adopting a dynamic, experimental approach to the problem of divided consciousness, he is able to expand the theme of the "broken individual" to universal proportions; finding in it almost unlimited creative scope for his own associative art.

Chapter Six

WILSON HARRIS AND THE DRAMA OF CONCEPTION

Theodore Wilson Harris, born in New Amsterdam, Berbice, Guyana in 1921, was a senior government surveyor and had conducted many expeditions in mapping and geomorphological research in the interior, rain-forest area of the country between 1955 and 1958. He came to London permanently in 1959, but his experience of the interior was to be a lasting influence. He began his literary career as a poet, and even his early work, like "Tell me trees: what are you whispering?" (a poem for children)[1] or "Savannah Lands",[2] an evocation of "Lands open/To sunshine and sky/And to the endless winds/Passing their eternal rounds", or "Words Written Before Sunset"[3] which is a vision of Man "standing upon the lip of darkness/in grand and ageless contemplation", already conveys his awareness of the interconnectedness of Man and Nature, the sense of a vast, sweeping canvas of life within which the human spirit struggles and learns to be free in its very rootedness in earth. His experience, as a land-surveyor, of the rain-forest's disturbing effect upon the normal centres of perception, its characteristic heightening of the less familiar modes of awareness; encouraged in his sensitive, introspective mind the contemplation of larger themes - the nature of awareness, of Being itself. The unpredictable nature of the landscape, the deceptive "lie of the land", where rivers and trees, rocks and waterfalls may contain both a threat and a bounty; where tacoubas (barely submerged rocks, logs or tree-branches) wait in ambush just below the mirror-like surface of quiet creeks and rivers, impressed upon his mind the need for an unconventional "reality". A less "tidy" approach to art which could allow for, and embody, the unpredictable

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1 Kyk Vol. 1 No. 1 (December, 1945) p. 17.

2 Kyk Vol. 1 No. 2 (June, 1946) p. 8.

3 Kyk Vol. 1 No. 3 (December, 1946) p. 9.

nature of life. If for Mittelholzer the interior represented a numinous, vaguely hostile presence, for Harris it became both a danger and a means of creative vision: both tomb and womb. For him the rain-forest was neither pitiless, raw Nature nor a romantic symbol of an unspoilt world, but a "world-creating jungle"[1] like that which Blake's "Tyger" inhabits. A symbolic chaos out of which all creations are fashioned.

The predominance in Harris's work, therefore, of images of death and rebirth, spiritual ascent and physical descent and destruction, reflects the phenomenon of the cycles of nature, the apparent paradox of regeneration through chaos and death, and relates to his wish to convey in his art the sense of interdependence between Man and his environment. But whereas Mittelholzer, who also felt this interdependence, nevertheless saw the environment as essentially related to human life in an anthropomorphic way - affecting and reflecting the moods of men - Harris sees the forest as a dynamic presence ultimately independent of man but containing within itself an unalterable Truth embodying the means to renewed vision. Harris himself frequently makes the connection between Nature - his own experience of the interior - and creative art. Discussing the "self-destructive" energy of American poetry he says:

> ... there is a school of West Indian art which idealizes the sun. And it has always struck me that this is an American attitude, American idealism. I have lived for long periods in savannahs so much exposed to heat and fire, that the sun has become an adversary - one of two antagonistic principles - night and day - and only an association of these two principles provides release.[2]

And it is this view of the practical and psychological necessity for a juxtaposition of opposites - a positive <u>associative</u> response to the apparent contradictions of normal experience - that gives to Harris's art its peculiar, paradoxical quality. His awareness of the many layers of experience, of race and culture: of "the paradoxes of his world":[3]

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1 Wilson Harris, "Amazon" <u>Eternity to Season</u> (Guyana 1954) p. 11.

2 <u>TWS</u>, op. cit., p. 10.

3 Ibid., p. 14.

forces him to reject any one-sided, deterministic view of Man. The "dissociation of sensibility" which (unlike T.S. Eliot) Harris sees stretching back to the early economic growth of fifteenth century Europe ("the Faustian transformation of Europe"),[1] had already begun with the Spanish conquest of the ancient South American nations. This is the psychological problem that lies at the root of mankind's failure to achieve a status quo:

> This enigma of divided personality which began to join unwitting hands to the Renaissance mood of classical return, was to become one of the prophetic and ruling features of the age: the age of sovereign nations, torn by idealism and bestiality ...[2]

and if a solution is to be found whereby the widening gap between Man's technological achievement and his emotional development - between head and heart - may be closed; then the "whole man" must be reconstructed from the "broken individual". Herein lies Harris's concern with psychic re-integration. For him, the West Indian writer's especial theme, his central concern and symbol, is man and his relationship to a precarious existence where nothing seems given, no traditions exist to provide a stable culture, where even his ancestors and his gods are various, unknowable. Placed thus in a situation of dread, he must learn first to Be, and then to know. As Heidegger expresses it:

> Dread reveals Nothing. In dread we are "in suspense". ... In the trepidation of this suspense where there is nothing to hold on to, pure Da-sein ["Being there"] is all that remains.[3]

It is this sense of the fluid, unstable nature of existence; of the need to discover an interior validity, that leads Harris to repudiate the "novel of persuasion" in which the writer consolidates his characters -

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 22.

2 Ibid., p. 23.

3 Martin Heidegger, Existence and Being (Vision Press Ltd., 1956) pp.366/367.

persuades us to believe in their life-like portrayal - and to adopt an alternative method of fiction:

> ... a theme of a living drama of conception, the conception of the human person rather than the ideology of the broken individual.[1]

Because (unlike Mittelholzer) he refuses to consider concepts like "strong" and "weak"; "good" and "evil" or even "actual" and "fictitious" as self-evident absolutes or diametrically opposed definitions; Harris's universe, like Blake's, is composed of contraries. And the purpose of his work is to convey the conjunction of disparate elements which contribute to his complex vision of reality as a "one-ness" in which both Man and Nature (animate and inanimate) participate. This is not, however, the Romantic Vision: the "wise passiveness" of a Wordsworth or the "negative capability" of a Keats; but primarily an existential position in which the artist's own creative leap is a pre-requisite. For Harris, this "one-ness" of life can be experienced and communicated only through "authentic" existence and an acceptance of "dread". Like Heidegger, who sees Man as _thrown_ ("geworfen") into existence, Harris regards "authentic" experience as a conscious decision to face the _angst_ which this condition of precariousness creates:

> When the toy-man, the exploited man, becomes aware of original rhythms within the oppression of his world, contradictions are bared in a manner terrifying and yet containing the secret of change.[2]

This is, indeed, a rigorous humanism which requires a profound sense of the experimental and unpredictable nature of reality: a need for an intense, personal centre of balance as well as a condition of "open-ness", since:

> ... the life of situation and person has an inarticulacy one must genuinely suffer with and experience if one is to acquire the capacity for a new relationship and understanding.[3]

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1 _TWS_, op. cit., p. 27.

2 Ibid., p. 19.

3 Ibid., p. 41.

Harris's main concern, then, is with "unaccommodated", incomplete Man, the "subtle and nebulous links which are latent within him",[1] and the possibility of a fiction of fulfilment rather than consolidation, which places the human consciousness at the centre of the universe. But if Man is the central reality of the universe, this reality can be understood only in apparent paradox: through the extremes of outer existence within space and time, and of Inner Being, beyond space and time. The tension between Existence and Being, therefore, between Man's life in the world and his ability to manifest the transcendent; is central to Harris's work, which continually aims at an embodiment and resolution of this tension. There is a constant movement towards a reclamation of the inner life (the neglected interior) and an extension of the "space" inhabited by Man. The social and geographical contrast between Guyana's extensive, densely-wooded and mountainous (but virtually unpopulated) interior and the overcrowded main city on the flat, alluvial coast provides Harris with a natural metaphor for man's highly developed, but superficial outer existence and his neglected, undeveloped inner Being. And his interest in what is unpredictable and "hidden" in the individual is related to his fascination with "the interior of a landscape within which men lose themselves to find themselves."[2] Harris may therefore be considered an "interior" writer in contrast to the "coastal" Mittelholzer whose stylistic concern is for conventional characterization and plot;[3] and the "contraries" which

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 28.

2 Wilson Harris, "Interior of the Novel" National Identity (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1970) p. 138.

3 In a tribute to Roger Mais, Mittelholzer defines a "good" novel as:

> ... one which succeeds in three basic things: telling a story that holds the interest, depicting credible characters and creating a strong atmosphere of place. (Kyk vol. 6 no. 20 Mid-year 1955, p. 165).

divide and fragment the work of Mittelholzer are accepted and used by Harris for new, creative development, imaginative explorations which employ symbol, metaphor and myth to suggest a reconciliation of opposites.

Harris's earliest collection of poems, Fetish (Guyana 1951), already reflects his concern with an interior exploration. The book, published under the pseudonym "Kona Waruk" (the name of a river and mountain-range in the interior), opens with "Tropic of Heaven", a poem whose title links the opposite poles of earth and sky, and in which there is a deliberate attempt (as in Rimbaud) at a déréglement des sens. Images proliferate in a manner apparently calculated to surprise: to disturb the reader's normal habit of perception:

> Elemental stars burden or release
> music: deliberate networks turn to
> spasms. Combs crust or are uncoiled in fury
> are broken headache: bosoms parch:
> salty hungers indent journeys of electricity ... (p. 3).

The chaotic jumble of images is intended as a comment on the actual "untidiness" of our perception of life: the conflicting, confusing elements which make up "reality". The poem is full of paradoxes ("walls are pools where he drowns ... rocking in roots of pain and gaiety") and there is an effect of continual contraction and expansion:

> ... impermanent
> visitor whose residue borrows a coat
> to stain the skies ...
> discontent to be tearless and unjust comet
> or to be narrow string tying a parcel ... (p. 3).

Here the shift in scale from "coat" to "skies", "comet" and back again to "narrow string tying a parcel", recalls (like the poem's title) both Man's earthbound existence and his transcendental aspirations. "Fetish", the title-poem of this early collection, is quoted in its entirety in Harris's ninth novel, Ascent to Omai (1970) where, during a "cosmic trial", it is presented as evidence for the "defence". It is dismissed by the prosecu-

tion as "a kind of rubbish heap of images ... the blasted bunk of civilizations" (p. 71),[1] but described as a "restorative" medium by defence counsel:

> Fetish is a poem about disintegration ... but you are unable to see you are being assisted, as it were, to break the callous [of insensibility] you deplore ... mess - rubbish - is invaluable. It is, in fact, a new experimental source of wealth. (p. 72).

This exchange between "prosecution" and "defence" (itself suggesting a "balance" of opposites) incidentally defines the poem's purpose and relates to Harris's associative, reconstructive attempt. For although a fetish is (in the pejorative sense of the word) a superstitious or exaggerated habit: a preoccupation with ornament: it is also the mysterious talisman of aboriginal societies which (made from bone or hair or other "rubbish") provides the wearer with "a frail entrance and exit for the spirit/a channel into the furious sky." ("Fetish", p. 7). The concept of the fetish as an imaginative bridge or "gateway" through which Man, imprisoned in history and time, is able to achieve a <u>rapport</u> with a timeless, AB-original existence; underlies Harris's interest in the myths and legends of the aborigines of Guyana as well as in vestigial African rituals and masques. Referring to the small god-images of the Arawaks (called "zemis") which had been dubbed "gross superstition" by Father Jesse,[2] Harris argues that the Arawak "zemi" was an icon which signified the "inner space" or "hidden perspectives" of the Caribs' totemic world; and, as such, represented the "collective unconscious" of

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[1] One is here reminded of V.S. Naipaul's view of the West Indies as a kind of rubbish heap of fragmented cultures, a "disintegrated society" which is not "a coherent, understandable thing". (See interview in <u>Transition</u> No. 40 Accra 1971, pp. 59 and 61). And it is significant that he chooses, for his opening epigraph to <u>The Middle Passage</u> (1962) an extract from Froude's <u>The English in the West Indies</u> (1887) which ends: "There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own."

[2] See The Reverend C. Jesse, <u>The Amerindians in St. Lucia</u> (Archaeological and Historical Society of St. Lucia 1968).

a whole people:[1]

> Space ... is analogous to the Arawak seme (which means delicate) and to zemi or icon. ... We are involved therefore - if we can imaginatively grasp it - in iconic or plastic thresholds - in an architecture of consciousness or re-constitution of spaces in the West Indian psyche running through Negro limbo and vodun into sculptures or spaces equivalent to rooms of an Arawak cosmos (rooms of turtle, bird, lizard).[2]

The key phrase here is "reconstitution of spaces in the West Indian psyche", for it points to Harris's vision of integrated Man, whose inner life, no longer neglected or obscured, makes his fulfilment possible.

Eternity to Season (Guyana 1954), Harris's best known and most important collection of poems, is a cyclic work that restates his theme of the necessary coexistence of two kinds of Being: temporal (season) and timeless (eternity). The work is divided into "poems of separation and reunion", and the general effect is of an organic, pulsing energy - like the expansion and contraction of a beating heart - which suggests the rhythm of human life and the natural cycles of death/rebirth, day/night,

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[1] A similar misjudgement of "primitive ornament" - one which had serious results - was the British governor's attempt, in 1900, to make the subdued Ashanti surrender their much sought-after Golden Stool. Sir Frederic Hodgson, unaware that the fabulous Stool was the shrine of the sunsum (soul), and therefore the spiritual repository of the entire Ashanti nation - a sacred object not intended for use, even by their King, as an ordinary stool - requested that it be produced for him to sit upon. According to R.S. Rattray:

> The historian relates that the governor's speech 'was received in silence.' A few days later we were at war, which the Ashanti had declared on us. Comment seems superfluous. (Ashanti OUP 1969, p. 292).

[2] Wilson Harris, History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas: (The Edgar Mittelholzer Memorial Lectures, third series. National History and Arts Council, Guyana 1970, p. 23). Further references to this work will appear as Lectures (1970).

drought/flood etc.:

> Who brings the water
> from the deep interior of earth
> is magical with the science
> of vision
> is the godlike being of the well.
>
> Who bears the water away
> from the well
> is seasonal
> death and drought
> is the mortal being of the well. ...
>
> So love chooses a glorious meeting:
> the days divide slumber from waking ... ("The Well"
> [prologues of creation] , p. 13).

The theme of self-discovery and the quest for "home" - for "roots" - is, as Louis James indicates, of central importance in the cycle:

> Eternity to Season is the exploration of the pilgrimage from the flux of time to the 'season' of a meaningful moment within time. Like James Joyce in Ulysses, Harris uses the Greek myths to reinforce his structure and extend meaning ... the classical story of a man leaving a decayed civilization (Troy), mastering immense spiritual and physical dangers through courage and ingenuity, and coming at last to harbour, recurs in the West Indian pattern of a journey from the older cultures of Europe, mastering the forces, threatening disintegration, of the middle passage, exploitation, and colonialism, to final self-discovery.[1]

But the cycle also contains the idea of a New Beginning, a re-constitution of the individual psyche, as the sequence called "The Fabulous Well" suggests. Subtitled "the quest of home", these poems begin with "The Well" (prologues of creation) in which the image of the well[2] stands for "the life of the world" and "a stone in darkness" (p. 13). This reminds

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1 "The Necessity of Poetry" New World (Guyana 1966) p. 113.

2 The biblical story of Christ's meeting with the woman at the well symbolizes the need for new consciousness - the "water of life". So too, Jacob's discovery of the well covered by a stone which he rolls away to obtain the water. His later dream of a heavenly ladder is the resultant spiritual vision.

us of Harris's interest in alchemical symbolism as a link with the "melting pot" of the West Indian character: the search for a subtle, evanescent reality, the significance of which is "akin to the European preoccupation with alchemy."[1] The symbol of a "stone in darkness" certainly suggests the nigredo (the undifferentiated prima materia or massa confusa of the alchemists) which is the primary stage from which differentiation of the lapis filosophorum (the symbol of the Self) proceeds. The well is also likened to a dark, unconscious state of Being which must be taken into account before authentic existence is possible:

> ... one must lose and one must gain
> this earthen flower, this well
> which has its original currency between life and death, science
> and drought, joy and compassion. ...
> The solid and dark
> flower of the well promises illumination of its
> roots, promises the flavour of its earth, promises the brown vision
> of its god. (pp. 14/15, my underlining).

The image of the "flower" of the well is reminiscent of the ancient Chinese Taoist and alchemical treatise, The Secret of the Golden Flower[2] which is concerned with the re-integration of the self and the "other"; and the promise of "illumination", "flavour" and "vision" is fulfilled in the second poem of the series, entitled "The Well" (recreation of the senses). Here, the mute at the well has "his hearing formed to rhythms of life",

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 32.

2 The ancient Chinese MS. was introduced to C.G. Jung in 1928 by the famous sinologist, Richard Wilhelm. The work provided Jung with the confirmation of his own ideas on alchemy as a metaphor for the development of the self; and was thus central to his researches on a psychology of the Unconscious. (See C.G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections Collins 1963, p. 195). Harris quotes from The Secret of the Golden Flower to illustrate "a profound otherness of experience." (See "Interior of the Novel" National Identity op. cit., p. 138).

learns to listen to the "soft yet heavy guttural accents" of the universe, and gradually learns "to understand what life says": (pp. 15/16)

> Eyes
> once blind
> now open to the beauty of life. Life achieves contours
> of vision. ...
> From earthiness space learns
> again ...
> to be born to the universal taste of life. (p. 16).

The senses have been reconstituted, and the psyche is ready for fulfilment: "under the vast space of sky/the dark rhythm of realisation/moves within/and brims each human vessel." (p. 17). In the final poem of this group, "Charcoal",(subtitled "epilogue to the senses: the heart") the subject is the need for a re-fashioning of <u>intention</u>: a new direction to be dictated by the "heart". The poem's ending is enigmatic, suggesting both a passive acceptance of blind "spendthrift creation" and a "passionate intention" to change the world:

> The Negro once leaned on his spade
> breathing the smoke of his labour,
> the arch of his body banked to shelter or tame
> his slow burning heart
> like a glittering diamond:
> or else like charcoal to grain
> the world, lines of passionate intention. (p. 18).

This group of three poems, therefore, exemplifies the spiritual, alchemical theme of psychic re-integration: a "timeless" theme within the historical framework of the cycle as a whole. Man and Nature are linked by the "spirit of creation", and the great "Fall" is both waterfall and "a torrent of evolution" ("Spirit of the Fall," p. 42); a symbol of wholeness in which heaven and earth, life and death, stillness and movement, are one. For Harris, the creative spirit is:

> ... the unity of extremes that reach out from one end of
> the world
> to the other, the extremes of being, the luxury in squalor,
> the knowledge in ignorance, the strength in weakness.
> ("Creation", p. 47).

But in attempting to encompass such a cosmic vision of man, "to find a scale that contains/what is very great and never loses what is secret and

small" ("Laocoon", p. 45),[1] Harris pushes his poetry, his use of symbols and metaphor, to the limits of normal comprehension, and often beyond. The frequent use of tightly packed images creates constantly shifting meanings within the lines; and a re-reading (once for "sound", once for "sense") often seems necessary. The moment one attempts to examine the verbal structure of lines like:

> Necessity is the suitor
> that urges the violent caricature of royalty to test
> the internal habit of convulsion, the fever, the seal of distress,
> the one sensation violently shaping time, broad-based and
> solid, or a vanishing point and intrepid. ("The Beggar is King: Antaeus [The Suit]", p. 28.)

the difficulty becomes obvious. The poem is subtitled "Vindication of earth", and is a reminder of Man's ultimate dependence on Nature and his need to be "wedded" to his own, deepest self, as to "the ground of his own Being":

> ... a grounded and more solid basis
> must truly exist. Not above or below but on the broad plain
> of earth, not in the consequences of unjust thought or action, not
> in unhuman
> power and its attraction,
> only in sources and interaction, the muscularity of space,
> the strong husband responsive to the incomparable earth. (p.29)

Like Antaeus, Man, removed from contact with his elemental nature, inevitably weakens and dies. In this context, therefore, the lines previously quoted ("Necessity is the suitor ...") may be taken to mean that "authentic" experience of life ("Necessity") is the occasion which

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[1] Cf. Karl Stern's theory of the need to recognize the transcendent (male) and immanent (female) polarities of Man. He argues that just as heroic action, "the Promethean fever", is characteristically masculine, so "hiddenness and littleness" are the traits most naturally associated with the feminine, receptive attitude. A conjunction of the two is necessary for psychic health. (See Karl Stern, The Flight from Woman Allen and Unwin 1966, p. 277). One is also reminded of Coleridge's dictum that a truly great mind must be androgynous.

forces the outer, pretentious self ("the violent caricature of royalty")[1] to question its stock responses ("the internal habit of convulsion" etc.). It is thus a cosmic, cataclysmic force "violently shaping time", although essentially an intangible, unseen impulse which radically alters things. One is left, however, with the uncomfortable feeling that the passage has to be made to yield a meaning, and that other meanings may be just as readily found in the same passage. It is a difficulty neatly summarized by Louis James as a:

> ... comparative failure to come to grips with the poetic experience in the medium of words ... as if Harris had the moment of inspiration, and then was hurried along to the next insight before fully working the earlier one out.[2]

Harris's view of the creative spirit as "the unity of extremes that reach from one end of the world/to the other, the extremes of being" ("Creation", p. 47), because of its extremely wide range and scope, provides its own problems of construction and form. The extended, cyclic pattern of Eternity to Season serves as a suitably epic framework, but the poetry does not, one feels, in the final analysis, entirely succeed in conveying the sweeping mythological, philosophical and spiritual significance of the artist's thought.

The reason for this is not, as L.E. Brathwaite suggests, to be found in Harris's "sense of contradiction" or in the fact that his "concern is with symbol"[3] and not Man (indeed, Harris's central concern is, as I have attempted to suggest, above all with Man: with the reconstitution of the "broken individual"); but something at once more obvious and more complex: the gap that always exists between the visionary artist and his

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1 Cf. King Lear: "Take physic, pomp;/Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel ..."(Act III Sc. iv).

2 Louis James, "The Necessity of Poetry" op. cit., p. 114.

3 L. Edward Brathwaite, "The Controversial Tree of Time" BIM vol. 8 no. 30 (January/June, 1960) p. 114.

audience. A disparity of perception. Louis James's criticism of the "de-humanizing", dislocating tendency in Harris's poetry is justifiable and unanswerable:

> ... if everything is in flux, if qualities, values and substances are interchangeable ... if time is collapsible, and all proportions relative ('The tiniest flake is a cliff, the merest trickle of water/a deluge') the reader is desperately in need of something to hold on to.[1]

In knocking away conventional props, the reader's habitual framework of reality, the writer risks forfeiting the very communication he seeks. But it is also necessary to say that the disordering of conventional response, of setting the reader adrift, as it were, is part of Harris's purpose. It is a deliberate disorientation of the senses in an attempt to establish a new awareness: an "authentic" response. There can be no doubt that this creates a real difficulty of interpretation. Harris's poetry is frankly idiosyncratic. But, invoking the spirit of Blake, the writer might well say, in reply to charges of "obscurity" or "eccentricity":

> ... both read the Bible day and night
> But thou readst black where I read white ...
> Do what you will this Life's a fiction
> And is made up of Contradiction.[2]

and argue that the "difficulty" of his work is a concomitant of the extreme risk he takes in his Promethean rôle as poet for a new sensibility. His art, then, becomes an art of extremity, the immediate, practical difficulty of which lies in its original and complex imagery. The concentration of meaning in his poetry is, at times, almost too dense to unravel, unless the reader is prepared to accept the author's "double focus" and to read reality with <u>his</u> rules. A good example of this "double focus" occurs in

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1 "The Necessity of Poetry" op. cit., p. 114.

2 William Blake, "The Everlasting Gospel" from <u>The Complete Writings of William Blake</u> (OUP, 1966) pp. 748 and 751.

the following passage:

> So life discovers the remotest beaches in time
> that are always present in action: the interior walls of
> being
> open like a mirrorless pool, the ocean's nostalgia
> and the stormy communication of truth turn still deeply
> like settlement and root. ("Behring Straits", p. 9)

Here the poem's theme, "the tremendous voyage between two worlds", refers to the great migratory journey of the early Caribs as well as to the individual's inner journey between the two states of Existence and Being. Because of this double meaning, at once historical and personal, the imagery reflects both poles of reference. "The remotest beaches in time" become both the distant coastline of the New World and the "timeless moments" of the visionary which are always present in Man's daily existence in time. It is the "mirrorless pool" of the inner self that is discovered by the "traveller" as well as the interior of the new land; and the explorer, settling on the land, forgets, but is still subject to (and changed by) past experience of hardship and extremity, just as the visionary sense of the numinous, the "stormy communication of truth", remains as important as a settled belief. It is necessary to retain an open, fluid awareness, in order to avoid the prison of historical, "dead" time. Later in the poem we read:

> The voyage between two worlds
> is fraught with this grandeur and this anonymity. Who
> blazes a trail
> is overtaken by a labyrinth
> leading to many conclusions. (p. 9).

This again suggests the "double" nature of the journey (a task both heroic and humble) as well as the imprisoning, falsifying nature of historical time. The pioneer, like the visionary, is always in danger of being caught up in the web of historical time: of being overtaken by "a labyrinth leading to many conclusions" (a phrase reminiscent of T.S.Eliot's

"History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors ...")[1] unless he preserves a sense of the eternal, the unending circular movement of life-in-death and death-in-life: "broken shadows lift new sap from the ground/ partake of glowing sustenance, die and live again." (p. 9).

Harris's imagery constantly fluctuates between cosmic and particular, historical and personal, inner and outer; and the reader is often bewildered by the poetry precisely because like the "world-creating jungle", its life is made up of "movements so vast and precise as to have no gesticulatory action." ("Amazon", p. 11). Meaning is conveyed, not by a limiting device which convinces through its outward appeal to recognizable and accepted forms or traditions, but by an unpredictable free association of ideas and images which are always directed inwards. This "implosion" of meaning creates difficulties for the poet, as for the novelist:

> A fiction of implosion indeed we can never completely grasp in the way we appear to grasp a documentary realism of the surfaces of life ...[2]

but Harris accepts a Promethean rôle as a consequence inherent in the creative artist's particular vision. The cycle of Eternity to Season, therefore, opens with "Troy", which re-enacts the death of Hector who, aware of the contradictory nature of reality ("So he must die first to be free" p. 7), knows that his rejection and sacrifice in death is a fulfilment of his visionary rôle: "the mortality of man/broken into scales that heal the strife of god." (p. 7). The poem may be seen as symbolic of Harris's own view of the rôle of the creative artist in society. After spending seven years abroad, he returned to Guyana during the country's independence celebrations in May, 1966 as a guest of the government. In an article giving his impressions of the new Guyana, Harris (confining his

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1 "Gerontion" Selected Poems (Faber 1972) p. 32.

2 TWS, op. cit., p. 49.

remarks mainly to the writers' and artists' conference which took place at the same time) describes Hector's struggle with Achilles before the walls of Troy as a "fundamental metaphor" for the rejection of the artist by society. Just as Hector is rejected by his gods and his countrymen, the gates barred behind him, so the creative artist:

> ... once he has entered an arena where his resources are ultimately the deepest and most problematic resources of the imagination - he may grow to find no true alternative remaining to him but to endure his confrontation with the Faustian character of the modern world. ... The inevitable destiny of the imaginative artist therefore ... is one of rejection at this stage by that society. For the value of such an imagination remains unpredictable, since it is an imagination which ... stands "out there" in a problematic encounter with history, which a closed society ... cannot follow - with the best intentions in the world ...[1]

This is not pessimism, however, but simply the recognition and acceptance by the creative artist of his "scapegoat" rôle. Society, by its narrow, one-sided biases, precipitates a crisis of sensibility for which the artist witnesses on its behalf: it is, in effect, a question of self-repair, and the artist becomes the "still small voice" which functions to redress the balance. Harris recognizes this and is therefore able to see the artist's function in a universal context:

> I am grateful to a society which because of its peculiar imbalance ... brings into crucial focus the extraordinary need for an exploratory tradition that will seek to relate disparate bodies, not only in a particular society such as this but throughout a world civilisation that is fast being conditioned by rigid emplacements and tragic confrontations.[2]

This then is the philosophical and psychological framework within which Harris's work must be observed. His theme of psychic re-integration is related to his awareness of the critical imbalance in human society with

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1 "Impressions after seven years" New World No. 44 (Guyana 25 July, 1966) p. 18.

2 Ibid., p. 19.

its implacable oppositions of vested interests, just as his apparently cavalier use of language comes from a desire to enlarge and enhance vision by freeing the reader (and himself) from the tyranny of a habit of perception which consolidates and "fixes".

What Harris finds remarkable in the West Indian is:

> ... the series of subtle and nebulous links which are latent within him, the latent ground of old and new personalities.[1]

and his approach to character and situation in his fiction is therefore experimental and exploratory: a creative undertaking that includes the author's own developing self-awareness. It is an undertaking which has links with an earlier, nearly forgotten, tradition. As he observes:

> ... we may be closer than we think to the Hermetic arts of Bruno and the alchemical imagination where the filter of the mind was as much part of the process of experiment as the material itself under scrutiny.[2]

and this concept of art as a tentative, exploratory and re-constructive attempt in which the artist is only a medium, himself a part of the creative process, makes Harris's work highly original and gives a consistency of style and purpose to whatever he undertakes. His poetry, novels, talks and critical essays all witness to his concern for a new vision of consciousness, a new dimension of feeling which will free "the toy-man, the exploited man"[3] from his prison of static, single-visioned perception.

This attitude[4] informs, for example, Harris's critical response to

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 28.

2 Ibid., p. 57.

3 Ibid., p. 19.

4 In his review of A.J. Seymour's collection of poetry: The Guiana Book, Harris criticizes Seymour's exploration of history as a poetic ornament "without committing himself to the person." Indeed, he considers that "most writers in British Guiana are completely devoid of anguish or real passion." (Kyk, vol. 2 no. 7 December, 1948, pp. 37 and 38).

the painting of Denis Williams. Piet Mondrian, the great Flemish experimental painter had, in his later work, "shattered volume and space. Planes no longer existed on his canvas"[1] and Williams, like Mondrian, is seen by Harris as a pioneer in the work of freeing the observer from pre-conceptions about painting - from an approach to art which traditionally "coerces" and "captures" the attention. Williams, says Harris, "worked ... almost as if he were an engineer tracing the stage-discharge curve of a river from plotted values.[2] Each application of colour was a test of the artist's own genius in response to an "unknown form" and its relationship to the work: "it was a Presence that grew ... like ordering a New Universe that appeared under the brush."[3] That Harris has in mind his own wish to create a New Art of Fiction is obvious not only from his concern with the artist's exploration of his own "genius" within the framework of an experimental art; but also from his analogy of the engineer measuring the stage-discharge curve of a river. Harris had worked as a senior government land-surveyor in the interior of Guyana for three years doing precisely that as part of his job; and in The Secret Ladder (1963) his hero, Fenwick, is a government land-surveyor whose work of gauging the levels of the Canje river has the symbolic meaning of self-exploration and self-knowledge. The impression of a gradual, tentative approach towards definition is also clear in his lectures and talks. Ideas are thrown out, tested, his own work often serving as illustrations or being measured against these ideas; new directions are suggested, questions left unanswered. Looking back on his critical work between

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1 Kyk, vol. 6 (Mid-year 1955) p. 187.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

1951 and 1967, he says:

> I am conscious ... of a groping towards something I could not hope to define except within a deepening cycle of exploration. Even the later essays are still incomplete.[1]

Indeed, for Harris, "to be complete is to be static",[2] and one's impression is that having experimented with poetic form in an attempt to make it embody the complex substance of his private, symbolic vision: having, as it were, exhausted the vessel of poetry, he turned to prose fiction as his vehicle.[3] The alchemical analogy (of art as a "vessel" and the writer as alchemist) readily suggests itself; for Harris is deeply interested in the Hermetic arts. Francis Yates's scholarly work, The Art of Memory (1966), which he praises enthusiastically and which he considers a valuable and timely reminder of the "subterranean" emphasis in art coming from the Middle Ages and beyond, prefiguring the modern, terrifying "cleavage in the psyche of man standing once again ... upon the brink of a great change or equally great catastrophe",[4] has an obvious importance for him. For, as a writer setting out to explore his own creative imagination- the "sovereign element" in Man - in a New Fiction, the Hermetic art of memory would be of immediate importance:

> It is as if within his work he sets out again and again across a certain territory of primordial but broken recollection in search of a community or species of fiction whose existence he begins to discern.[5]

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 3 (author's note).

2 Joyce Sparer "The Art of Wilson Harris" New Beacon Reviews (1968)p.22.

3 In a recent interview, discussing the importance of form and content, Harris argues that form must be subservient to content:

> ... where 'new' content - or 'old' content of eclipsed memory - addresses the imagination and breaks through in surreal flashes or parables, a necessity for alteration of textures, creative revision of form, reassessment of form, exists. (Kas-kas, University of Texas, Austin 1972, p. 45).

4 TWS, p. 57.

5 Ibid., p. 48.

Palace of the Peacock (1960), Harris's first published novel, was in fact the culmination of several earlier attempts at novel-writing. In a recent interview he says:

> ... the work which lies behind Palace is important in that it led up to a kind of key feeling which made Palace possible.[1]

These early novels are not extant, however, but a short excerpt from one of them survives, entitled "Banim Creek",[2] and this shows the author's fascination with the subtleties of human relationships within the brooding presence of river and forest: a subject which is central to the later novels. Banim creek is the name of a survey camp several miles along an interior river. A group of four men (they are to set up gauges and "read" and record the levels of the river) are deposited at the camp as part of the survey team, and their relationship to each other is highlighted and illustrated by the arrival of an attractive Portuguese huckster whose husband mistreats her, and whose frequent visits to the camp create "tides" of emotion among the men analogous to the river "tides" which they must "read".[3] The woman appears to represent a quality of compassionate love which the men pursue in vain, because of their own spiritual incapacity. In their rivalry over the woman, each of them in turn stands indicted by self-concern. As Van, the most alert and self-aware of them tells Champ, who has just been rebuffed:

> You believe she come all the way in this jungle just for a good time? She is the sort of woman you got to love and she got to love you before all you can come together and make one. (p. 40).

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1 Kas-kas, op. cit., p. 49.

2 Kyk, vol. 6 no. 18 (Mid-year, 1954) pp. 36/42.

3 The similarity of this extract with The Secret Ladder (1963) is noteworthy. In the later novel a surveying party's tidal "readings" also have a symbolic meaning; and one of the obstacles which the hero (the leader of the group who gradually becomes involved in a process of self-discovery) has to cross, is a filthy, weed-choked stream called "Banim creek".

The woman, Paula, remains faithful to her cruel husband, and so demonstrates an unselfishness which the men lack. But her presence forces them to examine their own motives. After a quarrel in which Champ, defending Van, accuses Jerry (the troublemaker) of trying to stir up rivalry, Van nevertheless begins to see himself in a new light:

> In one respect Van had emerged victorious in the battle of wits. ... But in another and hidden respect Van was involved in a deeper and more frightful struggle ... was left face to face with himself as a mirror, and he did not like the image he saw there. (p. 41).

The author/narrator who is a passive observer in this extract, sitting in the cool of the clearing, realizes that this new situation comes from "that secret companion to which one is ever attached ... one's conscience" (p.41) and knows that Champ cannot succeed in his suit:

> ... ever since his encounter with Marie when he had been dismissed by her, in her enduring role as Woman (that embodies both fertility and death) from all reckoning as a living truly compassionate body. (p. 42).

The woman is therefore the personification of one's conscience: that compassionate counterpart of the self which, forever fugitive and rejected, nevertheless has to be faced and accepted by the individual. She re-appears in the early novels as the Amerindian mistress Mariella (Palace of the Peacock, 1960), the whore Magda (The Whole Armour, 1962) and the brutalized, illiterate Catalena Perez (The Secret Ladder, 1963); and she is the focal centre of the short story "Tomorrow",[1] Harris's first published prose work.

In this story, the author/narrator, sheltering from a sudden downpour under the shed of a delapidated building, is invited in to the house by the owner, an old artist. In a brilliantly lit, but sparsely furnished room, he notices a stone sculpture on which the mysterious old man has been

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1 Kyk, vol. 1 no. 1 (December, 1945) pp. 30/34.

working:

> It seemed to hold an immense secret locked too deep for words at its heart. Its long shadow falling upon the floor crossed the threshold of the room like a threat to all who came, a dark invitation, the proud gesture of a hand lifted with some obscure power to smite or bless. (p. 31).

The work is in an unfinished state, however, a figure of a man whose face is "the beginning of a face, with blind eyes, tormented, struggling to be born, struggling for vision." (p. 31). The artist is lamenting his inability to finish the work, his masterpiece, when there is a loud knocking and his housekeeper, Mary, enters. She has sad, beautiful eyes, but is in a state of great fear and panic, for she has killed her lover who has mistreated her and threatened to leave, laughing in her face "like a devil". (p. 33). The old man lies to the investigating policemen to protect her, but she gives herself up, saying:

> Maybe if we go on running we'll never find out. Maybe it's time we start meeting ourselves, knowing ourselves. I believe that's what we're going to do from now on."

The theme of self-knowledge as a starting-point for the authentic existence of the individual, as for a nation (the solitary painting in the room is of Kaieteur Fall, "a symbol for this land. The symbol of power waiting to be harnessed", p. 30) is thus spelt out in the narrative. The woman's raised arm mirrors that of the unfinished statue ("like brother and sister", p. 33) and suggests a youthful Guyana poised on the brink of identity and nationhood, as well as the "blind", undifferentiated psyche, waiting for vision and wholeness.[1] The writing conveys these ideas almost as direct philosophical statements, however, and the

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[1] In Conrad's Heart of Darkness (Everyman 1967) Kurtz, the chief of the "Inner Station" has an oil-painting "representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre - almost black." (p. 79). There is a clear suggestion here of a "blind", undeveloped inner self - like the unfinished, "blind" statue and the woman, Mary, in Harris's story. These images all strongly suggest the dark anima seeking conscious acknowledgement.

characters are made to bear a heavy, symbolic function at the expense, one feels, of credibility. Mary, the housekeeper, for example, in considering her plight, reveals a surprisingly philosophical cast of mind:

> Who would hear or understand the dark meaning of her life? Couple the light and the shadow, the good and the bad into a true pattern? (p. 34).

One suspects that this is the author's voice attempting to define the particular demands of his fiction, sensing the exciting possibilities latent in the theme of the Woman "without a people, without a home, without a friend" (p. 34), a symbol of the "Folk" which, like the unconscious self, remains to be tapped. So too, the ending of the extract, "Banim Creek", suggests the young author discovering the deposits of quartz which indicate the presence of a rich seam of gold deeper down:

> One has to be careful not to let one's thoughts race ahead too quickly! With this warning ringing in my ears as if uttered by a voice in the wind or in the trees around me I knew it was necessary to pay the utmost attention to the story of Mark and Paula. Their relationship was an important link in the chain I found myself so painfully reconstructing! The chain of man's existence and his eternal damnation or his eternal heaven on earth. (p. 42).

Harris's early work may be seen then as the prologue to the Drama of Conception, "the conception of the human person rather than the ideology of the 'broken' individual"[1] which is enacted in the later work. And it is the development of this theme which we will trace in our examination of his first four published novels - the novels of the "Guiana Quartet".

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[1] TWS, op. cit., p. 27.

Chapter Seven

THE JOURNEY INWARDS - HARRIS'S ASSOCIATIVE ATTEMPT

(I) Palace of the Peacock (1960)

In this discussion of the novels of the "Guiana Quartet"[1] we shall be concerned mainly with their "subterranean emphasis": the "deepening cycle of exploration"[2] within which the writer attempts a reconstitution of the Caribbean psyche. And we shall need to bear in mind that the progress of the alchemical theme of renewed sensibility and vision - the re-integration of the individual through a juxtaposition or "wedding" of opposites - is an inward journey in keeping with the author's own awareness of a "presence" that must be allowed to grow in response to an unknown form. The strangely dislocated language of the novels, therefore, (quite unlike the straightforward prose of the earlier work) and the protean nature of character and environment - where several kinds of reality and meaning shade into each other - are part of the process of a New Art of Fiction consisting of:

> ... a 'vacancy' in nature within which agents appear who are translated one by the other and who ... reappear through each other, inhabit each other ... push each other to plunge into the unknown ...[3]

and whose uniqueness lies in:

> ... this curious openness to originality as well as change: a constitution of humility in which the 'author' himself is an 'agent' ...[4]

Harris had always regarded Guyana as only a part of a larger historical

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1 These are: Palace of the Peacock (1960), The Far Journey of Oudin (1961), The Whole Armour (1962) and The Secret Ladder (1963).

2 TWS, op. cit., author's note on p. 3.

3 Wilson Harris, "Interior of the Novel", op. cit., p. 146.

4 Ibid.

and geographical reality, and (in contrast to narrower political and nationalistic views) its forests contiguous with the larger South American landscape. In 1961, interviewed shortly after the publication of his first novel, Palace of the Peacock, he said:

> I have planned to set upon [sic] novels deeper into South America, like Brazil. Because it is all part of my native landscape ...[1]

In fact, historical and geographical boundaries are virtually erased:

> One has to begin to conceive of Guiana in the imagination of a world which has its roots far back before Columbus discovered America.[2]

Harris's attempt, in the novel, to explore the hinterland of his imagination in search of an "inward dialogue and space"[3] - a new, comprehensive mythology that would support his vision of a unified consciousness - begins with Palace of the Peacock; and this first novel (which contains most of his main themes and is the core of his imaginative, associative attempt) is the overarching vision which informs the "inward journey" of the "Quartet".

Palace of the Peacock is set in the Guyana interior. The plot centres around a journey made in an open boat by Donne (a white creole rancher with a reputation for cruelty and hard efficiency) and his racially mixed crew in search of the Amerindian settlement or Mission deep in the forest to which Donne's entire Amerindian work-force has fled because of ill-treatment. The crew, after an arduous journey, often carrying the boat overland through "portages" in the forest, finally

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1 Guiana Graphic (Georgetown, 5 February, 1961) p. 6.

2 Ibid.

3 TWS, op. cit., p. 33.

arrive at the Mission only to find that the Amerindians (many of whom had earlier rowed out to meet them, out of curiosity) have again fled. They prepare to set off once more in search of the elusive Folk, taking along as a guide an old Amerindian woman who has been left behind by her people. They encounter rapids where a series of misfortunes begins. Carroll, the youngest crewman falls overboard and drowns; Schomburgh, the oldest, dies in his sleep; yet another man is lost overboard, and another is killed in a fight. The others all meet their deaths trying to climb the rock-face of a waterfall into the basin of which their boat eventually drifts and is abandoned.

This simple story, however, is only the most superficial level of a multilayered novel. There are historical references to the early European quest for gold in the "El Dorado" of the Caribbean and the consequent conflict with the indigenous Caribs, as well as to the later arrival of African, Indian, Portuguese and other elements as a result of the slave trade, indentured labour and migration. For Donne is clearly meant to represent the early European Colonizer (the Elizabethan resonance in his name, his rôle as harsh ruler of the land and its indigenous Folk suggest this) and his crew is made up of a mixture of races (African, Amerindian, European, Portuguese) which, in their complex, genetic relationship, constitute a truly Guyanese society:

> Cameron's great-grandfather had been a dour Scot, and his great-grandmother an African slave and mistress ... Schomburgh's great-grandfather had come from Germany, and his great-grandmother was an Arawak American Indian. The whole crew was one spiritual family ... knotted and bound together in the enormous bruised head of Cameron's ancestry and nature as in the white unshaven head of Schomburgh's age and presence. (p. 40).[1]

The quest of Donne and crew is therefore related to the European's "first innocent voyage and excursion into the interior country. ... Long before

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[1] All quotations are from the Faber 1960 edition.

he had conquered and crushed the region he ruled" (p. 24), as well as to the modern Guyanese dream of "repossessing the interior": a phrase which can be taken to mean both the developing of an extensive and potentially rich hinterland, and the establishment of a genuine sense of cultural and psychological roots. Like Donne, the crew recognize that only the Amerindians have any real title to the land, and, in seeking the Mission (called "Mariella") they are in fact yearning for a sense of belonging to the land. Their veiled desire is for permanence and direction. Cameron knows that, for him, the search for the Folk is symbolic:

> He wanted space and freedom to use his own hands in order to make his own primitive home and kingdom on earth. (p. 41).

and the crew are all (metaphorically and actually) in the same boat. Donne and crew therefore represent the complex mixture of cultures and races which constitute modern Guyana, crowded together, living on the "narrow boat" of land[1] on the coast, while the Amerindians, true heirs of the land, continue an elusive, little regarded existence in the vast hinterland. The journey, in the novel, is an imaginative attempt to discover and come to terms with this other, interior life.

The suggestion here of a theme of religious depth is intentional. For this is also a spiritual journey, as the epigraphs from Hopkins' "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (another boat-journey in which death is seen as a spiritual regeneration) and from John Donne's "Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness" suggest. The journey takes seven days (the period of the Creation in Genesis) and in the end, though skipper and crew die, all are "re-born" through a process of self-knowledge. The death of each member

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1 The metaphor is John Hearne's:

> The people of the Guyana coastland inhabit a narrow boat filled with carefully nurtured earth and anchored at the middle of the boundary lines between two oceans. ("The Fugitive in the Forest" The Islands in Between, op. cit., p. 140.

of the group enlarges and illuminates the lives of the others:

> So Donne had died in the death of Wishrop; Jennings's primitive abstraction and slackening will was a reflection of the death of Cameron, Schomburgh had died with Carroll. And da Silva saw with dread his own sogging fool's life ... like one who had adventured and lived on scraps ... (p. 123).

Donne and the rest of the survivors, hanging precariously to the slippery rock-face at the side of the great waterfall, experience an "epiphany": an incredibly beautiful vision first of Christ, then of the Madonna and Child through the torrent of water. They fall to their deaths, but "the truth was they had all come home at last to the compassion of the nameless unflinching folk." (p. 143). Their interior journey leads ultimately to life-in-death, as their outward existence had been a form of death-in-life. It is, in effect, a spiritual re-birth.

But this process of death and re-birth (like that of the rhythm of Nature itself) is continually going on: and, deeper still, the novel embodies this idea, already present in the poems of the cyclical <u>Eternity to Season</u> (Guiana, 1954):

> Broken shadows lift new sap from the ground
> partake of a glowing sustenance, die and live again.
> This is the exhaustion that falls
> and is renewed, the contradiction that rises
> and is fused to death. ("Behring Straits", p. 9).

So we find that Donne and his crew are the descendants of an identical group of travellers long dead:

> The odd fact existed of course that their living names matched the names of a famous dead crew that had sunk in the rapids and been drowned to a man ... (p. 23).

but their ghostly presence still manifests itself and informs this new (but identical) journey:

> The whole crew was one spiritual family living and dying together in a common grave out of which they had sprung again from the same soul and womb as it were. (p. 40).

Each member of the new crew is aware of a past self, and the journey is therefore a second chance, a second birth. The chapter headed

"The Second Death", which stands, structurally, at the middle of the book, begins: "We stood on the frontiers of the known world, and on the self-same threshold of the unknown." (p. 92). They are poised on the brink of a new self-awareness through a "second death" which occurs, paradoxically, at the end of the seven-day period of creation - the journey which is the novel's subject. The "peculiar feeling of absence of living persons in the savannahs where [Donne] governed" (p. 24) at the opening of the novel, gives way at the end to "an intuitive feeling that the savannahs - though empty - were crowded." (p. 144). A new beginning, a new and vital society, is clearly being evoked.

This does not exhaust the novel's meaning, however, for, running parallel with this theme of society's spiritual re-birth through common suffering and the resultant new vision, is the psychological and alchemical theme of the re-integration of the individual psyche. The "living" crew is twinned not only with an identical "dead" crew (the inverted commas suggest themselves, since Harris makes sure that we are never certain for long which crew is which), but certain of their members are (often by actual hereditary links) related to some other member who answers to a psychic need or lack. So, Donne and the Dreamer/narrator are brothers, the one extroverted, harsh, a "gaoler and ruler" of men: the other ineffectual, introverted, but having sympathy and understanding for others. The young Negro, Carroll, is the illegitimate son of old Schomburgh whose longing and insecurity are in contrast to the boy's natural warmth and sense of joy. Vigilance, the "seer" (his job as "look-out" is, in fact, to give warning of hidden dangers such as "tacoubas") is the antithesis of Jennings, the practical engineer who mans the outboard motor.

Donne and the Dreamer/narrator are the first such "double" to whom we are introduced. The opening section of the novel takes the form of a

dream or hallucination:

> A horseman appeared on the road coming at a breakneck stride. A shot rang out suddenly, near and yet far as if the wind had been stretched and torn and had started coiling and running in an instant. The horseman stiffened with a devil's smile, and the horse reared, grinning fiendishly and snapping at the reins. The horseman gave a bow to heaven like a hanging man to his executioner, and rolled from his saddle on to the ground.
>
> The shot had pulled me up and stifled my own heart in heaven. I started walking suddenly and approached the man on the ground. His hair lay on his forehead. Someone was watching us from the trees and bushes that clustered the side of the road. Watching me as I bent down and looked at the man whose open eyes stared at the sky through his long hanging hair. The sun blinded and ruled my living sight but the dead man's eye remained open and obstinate and clear. (p. 13)

This opening section has been quoted at some length in order to show how, by the simultaneous contracting and expanding effect of the writing (a quality we have already noticed in the poetry) Harris is able to convey at the same time both a realistic incident and the vague, numinous atmosphere of a dream. This is the peculiar double-vision which is a main stylistic feature of the novel. The shot which echoes "near and yet far", the effect of the wind being "stretched and torn", the "devil's smile" of the horseman and the fiendish grinning of his horse all add to our sense of strangeness:

> ... where everything that meets the eye,
> Flowers and grass and cloudless sky,
> Resemble forms that are or seem
> When sleepers wake and yet still dream ...[1]

Indeed, the actual incident - the shooting of a man on horseback - becomes charged with numerous echoes. The epigraph from Yeats's "Under Ben Bulben" ("Cast a cold eye/On life, on death./Horseman, pass by!"), itself an epitaph, gives significance to the horseman of the passage as the "pale rider", Death or the horseman of the Apocalypse:

> The rider on the white horse! Who is he, then? ... He is the royal me, he is my very self and his horse is the whole MANA of a man. He is my very me, my sacred ego, called into a new

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1 W.B. Yeats, "Under Ben Bulben" (Collected Poems MacMillan 1950) p. 399.

> cycle of action by the lamb and riding forth to conquest, the conquest of the old self for the birth of a new self.[1]

There is also a suggestion of the "hanged man", the sacrificial Christ-figure of the Tarot pack and of the Crufixion ("The horseman gave a bow to heaven like a hanging man to his executioner").[2] The Dreamer is also aware of an intimate relationship with the dead man: "The shot had pulled me up and stifled my own heart in heaven." His own "blindness" is contrasted with the dead man's "open and obstinate and clear" vision. This image of "living" and "dead" sight is continued as the dream proceeds: "I dreamt I awoke with one dead seeing eye and one living closed eye." (pp. 13/14). As the Dreamer half-wakes, and the horseman of the dream, Donne, enters the room, he and the "dead" man look through the window together "as though through his dead seeing material eye, rather than through [the Dreamer's] living closed spiritual eye." (p. 14). There is a clear suggestion here that the material self, the ego, is in control of the spiritual, visionary self represented by the Dreamer. Later still, we learn that the Dreamer's left eye[3] has an incurable infection, and that his good right eye goes blind in his dream. In fact Donne's obsession with ruling the material world makes him blind to personal danger - the threat to his ego (enacted in the dream in which he is shot down from his

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1 D.H. Lawrence, quoted on the opening page of The White Horseman (Routledge 1941) an anthology of prose and verse.

2 " ... he said, it is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." (St. John's Gospel 19:30).

3 Much use is made of eye-symbolism in alchemical writings. The left eye is often portrayed as the "spiritual" or "eternal" eye; and the "fishes eyes" of certain texts are symbols of the "divine soul-sparks" or scintillae of spiritual illumination. (See C.G. Jung, "Aion" Collected Works Routledge and Kegan Paul 1959 and Walter Pagel, Paracelsus S. Karger Basel (Switzerland and N.Y. 1958).

horse) and, indeed, during an earlier "lifetime" he had been shot and killed by Mariella, the young Amerindian servant-girl whom he had "governed and ruled like a fowl." (p. 15). The Dreamer is Donne's inner, spiritual self, whose presence he suppresses:

> "I had almost forgotten I had a brother like you," he smiled matter-of-factly. "It had passed from my mind - this dreaming twin responsibility you remember." (p. 19).

And Donne represents the Dreamer's outer, active will:

> [Donne] stared at me hard as death. "Rule the land," he said, "while you still have a ghost of a chance. And you rule the world. Look at the sun." His dead eye blinded mine. "Look at the sun," he cried in a stamping terrible voice. (p.19).

Donne's insistence on the qualities of ruler or conqueror - will-power and energy - (he is identified with the sun) and the Dreamer's shadowy, passive existence mainly in sleep, in the dark, remind us of Harris's own concern with the opposed concepts of victor/victim, life/death etc., and his attempt to reconcile these in the mythopoeic, associative activity of his art. His belief that:

> ... the sun has become an adversary - one of two antagonistic principles - night and day - and only an association of these two principles provides release.[1]

provides the rationale for the juxtaposition, in Palace of the Peacock, of Donne and the Dreamer who represent this dichotomy in which there is both antagonism and release. The echoes here become complex and multiform. Donne and Dreamer are two facets of one character, one psyche, representing the will or ego (the outer, seeing "I") and the unconscious self (the inner, visionary "I"). This pair also serves to embody - like Cain and Abel - concepts of victor and victim and the brothers of Greek mythology, Thanatos ("dead" historical time) and Hypnos ("living" mythological time). They are inseparably linked in the novel, and as the journey begins, the Dreamer/narrator and Donne are almost interchangeable: "he was myself standing outside of me while I stood inside

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 10.

of him." (p. 23). As the novel progresses, the Dreamer realizes that his need is to be re-united with Donne, the other half of his divided nature, rather than merely to be:

> ... fascinated and repelled by his company as by the company of my sleeping life. How could I escape the enormous ancestral and twin fantasy of death-in-life and life-in-death? (p. 25).

This at-one-ment takes place gradually as the boat heads deeper into the interior. Donne's appearance changes subtly, fades. He "looked the strangest shadow of himself" (p. 33) and the Dreamer realizes that this change is in _himself_. On the first night spent at the Mission (also called "Mariella") the Dreamer has a nightmare which is a "re-enactment and reconstruction of the death of Donne" (p. 46) and which is symbolic of his need to face his own "inauthentic" existence (since he is still a divided self) and his fear of doing so since this entails an acceptance of "death" as a means to life: "How could I surrender myself to be drawn two ways at once?" (p. 48) he thinks, but this is precisely what he _must_ do in order to reconcile both the visionary and the active life:[1] both "Dreamer" and "Donne" aspects of himself. In the nightmare, therefore, he is himself cast in the role of horseman, and suffers both the anguish of Mariella, the misused mistress, and of the murdered Donne:

> I sat bolt upright in my hammock, shouting aloud that the devil himself must fondle and mount this muse of hell and this hag, sinking back instantly, a dead man in his bed come to an involuntary climax. The grey wet dream of dawn had restored to me Mariella's terrible stripes and anguish of soul. The vaguest fire and warmth came like a bullet, flooding me, over aeons of time it seemed, with penitence and sorrow.

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[1] Symbolized in the biblical story of Martha and Mary (St. Luke's Gospel 10:33/42) in which:

> Mary is the type of contemplatives, that they should match their lives with hers, and in the same sort of way Martha stands for the actives. (_The Cloud of Unknowing_ Penguin 1965, p. 76).

The passage suggests the necessity for "authentic" experience (Heidegger's Dasein) but hints at the fact that the Dreamer is not yet ready for the fullness of such an experience. The dream is "an involuntary climax", a "wet dream"; and he is as yet a "premature rider". The sexual metaphors relate to Donne's rape of Mariella (like his rape of the land) and serve as a reminder that the capacity for joy is also the capacity for pain.[1] The Dreamer is in this way made aware of his own lack of wholeness, and his glimpse, on awaking, of the beauty and perfection of the natural environment:

> A pearl and half-light and arrow shot along the still veined branches. ... The trees were lit with stars of fire of an unchanging and perfect transparency. They hung on every sensitive leaf and twig and fell into the river, streaking the surface of the water with a darting appearance crimson as blood. (p. 47).

is not only one of the remarkably sensitive evocations of the rain-forest with which the novel abounds, but also a silent contrast with the Dreamer's own imperfect manhood and self-knowledge.

Meanwhile Donne, who continues "ageing in the most remarkable misty way" (p. 54) is undergoing a change of attitude - there is a softening. He admits to the Dreamer that he has been harsh and cruel, and in referring to "this nightmare burden of responsibility" (p. 56) which he hopes his brother will perhaps take from him, he alludes both to the running of the land and to the necessity of authentic existence - the substance of the Dreamer's previous nightmare. He admits that he desires now "to find a different relationship with the Folk" though he still hopes to use them as cheap labour. Like his counterpart, he is still unready for the final at-one-ment: "We're all outside of the folk," as the Dreamer puts it: "it's fear of acknowledging the true sub-

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[1] As Yeats expresses it: "for nothing can be sole or whole/That has not been rent." ("Words for Music, Perhaps" part VI Collected Poems, op. cit., p. 295.)

stance of life. ...And somebody ... must demonstrate the unity of being ..." (p. 59); but he, too, is not ready for this final step. It is not until they start off again from Mariella with the old Arawak woman among them as guide (and a silent reminder of the Folk), after the deaths of young Carroll and old Schomburgh, his father, that the real trial begins. This is the mid-point of the novel (the chapter is headed "The Second Death") and the crew stand, as it were, poised on the brink of death and self-discovery in the "War Office" (the name of a notoriously treacherous rapids). And it is at this point that the "I" of the narrator/Dreamer disappears: for they are "on the threshold of the Folk" (p. 94), (i.e. nearing self-discovery as well as the Amerindians they seek) as Donne now knows:

> ... they had passed the door of inner perception like a bird of spirit breaking the shell of the sky[1] which had been the only conscious world all knew. In the death of their comrades, the cross of father-and-son, ... they had started on the way to overcoming a sacred convention of evil proprietorship and gain. (p. 94).

They are, in other words, about to enter the "straits of memory" (p. 73), as the rapids are called, experiencing greater self-awareness and compassion, and about to be re-united with their other selves. It is interesting to notice how subtly Harris weaves into his narrative the Christian idea of the sacrifice and atonement of Christ on the cross in

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[1] Note Harris's sudden expansion of a particular image. The suggestion of a bird breaking out of its shell is immediately widened into that of a bird soaring up beyond the dome of the sky itself. This image of rebirth occurs in the title of D.H. Lawrence's The Escaped Cock (Black Sun Press, Paris 1929) which re-appears as the resurrection story, The Man who Died (Martin Secker, 1931); and in Herman Hesse's Demian (Fischer Verlag, Berlin 1919) where one of Sinclair's pictures is that of a sparrow-hawk breaking out of its shell. According to one critic:

> The basic theme of the book is the emergence of Sinclair's integrated self from his earlier schizoid separation into Demian and the conventional Sinclair. (E. Rose, Faith from the Abyss Peter Owen 1966, p.54).

the reference to the deaths of Carroll and his putative father, Schomburg, as "the cross of father-and-son".

The actual process of arousal - the fight to survive the rapids and almost certain death - which serves as the stimulus forcing Donne and crew to come to terms with their inner selves; is a prelude to "authentic" existence. The description of the crew's struggle to keep afloat in the churning water of the rapids is couched in language that evokes the legendary crew of Ulysses' boat, their ears stopped against the sirens' song:

> The crew were transformed by the awesome spectacle of a voiceless soundless motion, the purest appearance of vision in the chaos of emotional sense. *Earthquake and volcanic water appeared* to seize them and stop *their ears dashing the scales only from* their eyes. They saw the *naked unequivocal flowing peril and* beauty and soul of *the pursuer and the pursued all together, and* they knew they would perish if they dreamed to turn back. (p. 73, my underlining).[1]

The old Amerindian woman becomes, in the men's eyes, a seductive siren - their longing for the Folk and the security of the Land - whose disturbing presence encloses them all, like the rapids:

> Tiny embroideries resembling the handwork on the Arawak woman's kerchief and the wrinkles on her brow turned to incredible and fast soundless breakers of foam. Her crumpled bosom and river grew agitated with desire, bottling and shaking every fear and inhibition and outcry. The ruffles in the water were her dress rolling and rising to embrace the crew. (p. 73).

but also guides them to safety, because their ears are stopped, like those of Ulysses' crew, and they are not therefore seduced into self-concern

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1 See Harris's discussion of the myth of Ulysses' flight from Circe as a symbol of "freedom rather than tyranny of response." (TWS, op. cit., pp. 52/54). The situation, Harris argues, creates a displacement of the conventional responses of Ulysses and his crew so that:

> ... it becomes a new form of 'classical' animation rather than 'romantic' escape or self-delusion. ... [Ulysses'] symbolic embrace of Circe ... turns cosmic and life-giving rather than emotionally claustrophobic and death-dealing ... (pp. 53/54).

through fear of disaster. They are able to assimilate the catastrophe, to see with clearer vision that the apparent oppositions of pursuer/ pursued: oppressor/oppressed: ruler/ruled (like their own conflicting desires) are no more than a part of "that harmonious rounded miracle of spirit which the world of appearances had never truly known." (p. 72). When Carroll falls overboard to his death, he is seen as a sacrifice through which they become aware of the possibility of an inner harmony in life:

> Who and what was Carroll? ... the living and dead folk, the embodiment of hate and love, the ambiguity of everyone and no-one. (p. 83).

The song they all hear when he vanishes in the rapids (and "their ears were unstopped at last", p. 75) is "an indestructable harmony within the tragedy ", p. 75). It is the sirens' song, the beautiful music they will all hear again at the "Palace of the Peacock" when, after they have all met their deaths on the seventh day of their journey from the Mission of Mariella, the work of self-integration is complete and the "I"-narrator's voice returns to comment on the "authentic" existence which is now possible:

> My feet were truly alive I realized, as were my dreaming shoulder and eye; ... It was a new sensation and alien body and experience encompassing the ends of the earth. ... I had never before looked on the blinding world in this trusting manner - through an eye I shared only with the soul, the soul and mother of the universe. (pp. 145/146, my underlining).[1]

Here the narrator speaks for both the Dreamer and Donne. The harmony of Carroll's music at the end of the novel is a reflection of the psychic integration which has been the main purpose of the interior journey, and the ego and unconscious, the outer and inner vision, the self and the Other,

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[1] The first part of this passage may be seen as the Dreamer's, and the underlined section as Donne's response to this new condition of "wholeness" of vision.

are, at last, re-united:

> One was what I am in the music - buoyed up and supported above dreams by the undivided soul and anima in the universe ... Each of us now held at last in his arms what he had been for ever seeking and what he had eternally possessed. (p. 152).

There has been a good deal of critical writing on the novels of Wilson Harris, and on Palace of the Peacock in particular. In an essay written in 1962,[1] Ivan Van Sertima drew attention to the remarkable nature of Harris's first novel as:

> By far the strangest, the most original and disturbing work to come out of the Caribbean so far ... It seems to me to transcend the conventional framework of the novel and possesses an unique conception of time, character and event. (p. 33).

It is a brief review, however, and Van Sertima (though clearly aware of the psychological aspect of the work, "the unity of the internal and external, the material and spiritual poles of being", p. 35) sees the novel mainly as an assertion of the principle of the "spiritual beauty in life" (p. 34) over the material principle: the transforming power of the Muse. In his preface to the 1968 Faber edition of Palace of the Peacock, Kenneth Ramchand discusses Harris's "Blakeian" response to conflicting, opposite states of reality and the unorthodox nature of his fictional approach:

> Palace of the Peacock tends to run against the expectations of habitual readers of fiction. Its narrative technique ... invite[s] us to respond sensuously before seeking an intellectual ordering. (p. 9).

Ramchand's main purpose, however, is (very properly) to elucidate the complex form and structure of the novel in order to commend to the reader a "difficult" work. He indicates the significance of Harris's view of the possibilities latent in the historical, social and political nature

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1 Re-printed by New Beacon Books (1968) from which all quotations are taken.

of the West Indies, placing this novel in the general context of Harris's work and illustrating by well-chosen quotations from the novel Harris's peculiar and original approach to fiction:

> Harris leaves it to the responsive reader to fill in the gaps between a series of vividly realized episodes, and to sense, with the whole novel behind him the ways in which the apparently unrelated parts act upon one another. (p. 9).

In discussing Harris's:

> ... almost literal-minded obsession with expressing intuitions about 'the person' and about the structure of societies men have built for themselves through the ages (p. 3)

and in concentrating on Harris's approach to "the person" as a "reconciliation in man and society of the parts of a heritage of broken cultures" (p. 3); Ramchand sees the apotheosis at the end of the novel as a visionary moment which is a credible fictional climax only because no clear resolution is possible. What we are left with, therefore, is a curiously negative quantity: "the human paradox that generates the tension in all Harris's novels." (p. 6). As Ramchand points out, Harris "contracts out of the 'novel of persuasion'" (p. 9); but Harris's approach, in fact, is even more radical than this suggests, for the novel is used to portray, to explore and to re-create the individual psyche itself. It indicates the personal re-integration which must precede (and so make possible) a change in society at large.

John Hearne, in his essay[1] on Harris's "Guiana Quartet" does consider the symbolic use of the "reflecting and imprisoning" eye, the presence, through this symbol, of "a separate but complementary world" (p. 142); and he is aware in the novels of "a community of souls where double vision, an acceptance of the two worlds of reality is a condition of survival." (p. 150). But his main theme is Harris's Yeatsian attempt

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1 "The Fugitive in the Forest" The Islands in Between op. cit.

to forge a mythical framework capable of sustaining his vision of a unique, fictional world. He regards Harris's "commission" in the novel as a re-interpretation of History in the "inspiring reverberations of myth" (p. 148). By concentrating on Harris's larger "symphonic" design, his mythopoeic activity in the use of symbols, Hearne misses the deeper, psychological undertones of the interior journey, so that the end of Palace of the Peacock, for him, represents the characters' knowledge "that all the territories 'overwhelmed and abandoned [have] always been ours to rule and take.'" (p. 147). This historical and sociological emphasis leads him to dismiss The Far Journey of Oudin (1961) which he finds "the most complex of the quartet, [but] also the least satisfactory." (p. 149). In fact, as our discussion of this novel will attempt to indicate, the "complexity" of The Far Journey of Oudin is commensurate with that dimension of meaning which Hearne does not discuss: the re-construction of the psyche.

W.J. Howard's account[1] of the 'Guiana Quartet', like John Hearne's (which is acknowledged in a footnote) is concerned to place Harris within the "symbolist tradition of English poetry" (p. 48) and by examining the broad implications in the work of "the liberated spiritual imagination - as developed from Swedenborg, Blake, Yeats and Eliot" (p. 59);[2] to trace the emergence of "the formative myth of a culture" (p. 48). Again, like Hearne, Howard illustrates the universal aspect of Harris's work by placing

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[1] "Wilson Harris's 'Guiana Quartet': from Personal Myth to National Identity" Ariel (January, 1970).

[2] Professor Norman Jeffares also makes this link in referring to Harris's "blending the Biblical along with echoes of Donne, Swedenborg, Blake, Yeats and Eliot in his poetic novels." ("The Study of Commonwealth Writing" Supplement to WLWE newsletter No. 15, April 1969, p. 6).

it within the larger contexts of Blake, Yeats and Eliot; but in doing so, leaves untouched the other equally important though contrary direction of Harris's activity from "national myth" to "personal identity". For if Harris, like Yeats, is concerned to re-interpret history as myth via the creative unconscious - and clearly, he is - then it is also true that (again, like Yeats) he is equally concerned to use mythology as a means towards a vision of wholeness: a re-uniting of self and anti-self. And Yeats's "Byzantium", like Harris's "Palace of the Peacock" is a mythopoeic symbol which also points to a renewed psychic wholeness:

> I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one ... the vision of a whole people.[1]

Harris's use of the El Dorado legend: man's everlasting search for a mythical City of Gold, far from being "unconnected with a particular event or character"[2] has a direct bearing upon both, as our discussion of the duality of Donne and the Dreamer has suggested. To locate, in the novels, a sweeping philosophic activity in which:

> Harris the symbolist and mystic, following Blake, Yeats and, as we shall see, Eliot, seems to see the relation between the emotional, intellectual, and natural in terms of Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences and differences.[3]

is not only to illustrate Harris's lack of provincialism, clearing away the objections of earlier critics that "in the Guyana quartet there is no social density"[4] or that Harris isolates himself "in a wordy,

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1 W.B. Yeats, A Vision (MacMillan 1937) pp. 279/280.

2 W.J. Howard, "Wilson Harris's 'Guiana Quartet': from Personal Myth to National Identity" Ariel, op. cit., p. 47.

3 Ibid., p. 55.

4 Kenneth Ramchand, "The Dislocated Image" New World (Guyana 1966) p. 107.

metaphysical world of his own making",[1] but also, paradoxically, to vitiate the intensely personal, inner psychological element in the novel's associative attempt.

This element is observed, however, by Joyce Sparer and Hena Maes-Jelinek who both use Harris's view of the sovereign function of imagination as a starting-point. In Miss Sparer's account, the novels' exploration and healing of the divided personality is given prominence as a main theme - the novel discussed is The Waiting Room (1967) - in which:

> A unity must be established of present, past and future if the present is to give birth to a new whole human person ... replacing the 'broken' isolated individual of today. (p. 23).[2]

But it is in Hena Maes-Jelinek's essay that a sense of the full importance of Palace of the Peacock as an attempt at the re-integration of the psyche through an "interior journey" emerges. The emphasis on the creative imagination itself as a means of regeneration or self-repair, as well as an exploratory principle, seeking to resolve contradictions through experience, leads naturally to a discussion of the importance of Harris's associative attempt. Writing on Palace of the Peacock, she says:

> In its dual role as both the creating and the created function, imagination transforms man's response to the world in which he lives. It shocks the individual character into recognizing the limitations imposed on his consciousness by prejudice and custom; hence, it frees him from the intellectual and emotional conservatism which prevents him from accepting the necessity for continual exploration and regeneration.[3]

In a word, the concern is with "authenticity": wholeness of soul. And the two opposite, but complementary directions of the novel's theme in

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1 A.C. Pearse, CQ Vol.2 No.1(April/May/June, 1949) p. 34.

2 "The Art of Wilson Harris" New Beacon Books (1968) p. 23.

3 "The True Substance of Life: Wilson Harris's Palace of the Peacock" Common Wealth (Akademisk Boghandel, Aarhus 1971) p. 151.

which the extremes of Existence and Being, the active and the visionary life are placed within "a scale that contains/what is very great and never loses what is secret and small";[1] are both orchestrated within the archetypal myth of the Interior journey:

> The allegory develops on two planes: the material and historical on the one hand, and the spiritual and psychological on the other. (p. 152).

Professor Maes-Jelinek sees the spiritual and psychological aspect of the novel's theme reflected in the divided consciousness of the crew:

> Da Silva's twin-brother, for instance, seems to represent that part of himself unknown to him and of which he is most afraid. Donne is a divided being: he and the narrator are the two selves, the one material, the other spiritual, of the main character and skipper of the boat. (p. 152).

That Harris is, in fact, primarily concerned with the re-integration of the divided psyche as a solution to the tyranny of a static, destructive opposition of contraries is clear from his approach to fiction as an experimental, associative art which seeks "a strange and subtle goal, melting pot" [2] within the theme of "a living drama of conception."[3] Herein lies the significance of Harris's interest in the Corpus Hermeticum[4] and the Medieval and Renaissance cabbalists. Indeed, if Harris can be "placed" within any literary tradition at all, he belongs here. For this is precisely the nature of his own alchemical art, and as Hena Maes-Jelinek

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1 Wilson Harris, "Laocoon" Eternity to Season op. cit., p. 45.

2 TWS, op. cit., p. 32.

3 Ibid., p. 27.

4 A collection of religious and alchemical writings by "Hermes Trismegistus", originally thought to be of ancient Egyptian origin, but actually a third or second century Greek work. See Frances Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (Routledge & Kegan Paul 1964) pp. 2/3.

observes:

> Few writers identify themselves with their work to such an extent that their imagination is at once the mainspring and the subject matter of their art.[1]

The seven-day interior journey in Palace of the Peacock may be seen in the light of the seven stages of the alchemical process[2] during which a massa confusa (the nigredo or "chaos") is immersed (ablutio - a stage recalling Christian baptism or "death by water") and subjected to a controlled series of chemical and physical changes - a process instituted by the agency of the alchemical spirit, mercurius (or Hermes, spirit of mercury, a notably tricky substance: a liquid metal) through a "whitening" or purifying stage (albedo) to the final aurum non vulgi or Cauda Pavonis (the "peacock colours") which symbolizes unity within diversity.[3] The crew's original state of nigredo, the later journey through the ablutio of the rapids, where Carroll is cast in the rôle of an ambiguous Hermes

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1 "The True Substance of Life" Common Wealth, op. cit., p. 151.

2 The significance of alchemy was twofold. Its exoteric purpose was the preparation of the "philosopher's stone" which was supposed to have the power of transmuting base metals into gold. Its hidden, esoteric purpose, however, was to transform sinful man (through its mystical, devotional system) into a perfect harmony with God: "The more serious alchemists realised that the purpose of their work was ... the problem of psychic transformation. (Aniela Jaffé's footnote in C.G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, op. cit., p. 201).

3 The "peacock colours" are related to the "rainbow colours" - another term for the final stage of "illumination". The rainbow, consisting of the seven primary colours, and existing between the extremes of nigredo ("blackness" interpreted as the total absence of colour) and albedo ("whiteness" or the presence of all colours) lends itself as a perfect image of the "alchemical marriage".

figure:

> Who and what was Carroll? ... the living and dead folk, the embodiment of hate and love, the ambiguity of everyone and no-one. (p. 83)

and the final stage of unity in a "wedding of opposites" or Canda Pavonis at the "Palace of the Peacock"[1] may all be related to the alchemical nature of their inner transformation. This is, of course, the esoteric meaning of the quest; but the clues are there, nevertheless, and point to this deepest level of the novel: the alchemical core of the work which reinforces the primacy of the theme of self-integration.

Early in the novel, the Dreamer, just before the journey begins, is aware that an important series of events is about to begin, and that his innermost Self will be involved in what is to be a transubstantiation of Being - a rite de passage:

> I stood on my curious stone as upon the reality of an unchanging presence ... How could I escape the enormous ancestral twin of death-in-life and life-in-death? (p. 25).

The Dreamer is here both attracted and repelled by an intuition of the need for this "journey" and of the dangers ahead. The reference to a "curious stone" suggests the unum vas or lapis - the alchemical symbol of the self which is traditionally both the subject and the vessel in which the spiritual transformation takes place. Earlier, the crew are seen by him moving "like upright spiders, half-naked, scrambling under a burden of cargo they were carrying ashore." (p. 22). This conjures up the "spider-transubstantiation" in which the shaman[2] initiates the neophyte. The

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[1] Like the "yellow castle" of The Secret of the Golden Flower, the "Palace of the Peacock" (the waterfall which combines stillness and movement, "heaven" and earth - a "bridal veil" [p. 128] of water) is a symbol of the alchemical conjunctio or "marriage".

[2] A Hermes or "trickster"-figure like the West African god, Ananse. In West Indian folk tales, "Anancy" - derived from Ananse - is always portrayed as a spider.

process is one of "becoming", in which the subject is in a transitional state (in "limbo") and in which:

> The arcane knowledge or 'gnosis' obtained ... is felt to change the inmost nature of the neophyte ... not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being.[1]

Later on, when Wishrop is lost overboard, Vigilance imagines that he sees him as "a spidery skeleton crawling to the sky." (p. 103). This is another reminder of the gradual transformation which is taking place within the crew and especially within Donne:

> Donne's boat had righted itself [Vigilance] dreamed, in the volcanic stream and rock and the crew were all there save Wishrop's spider and transubstantiation: wheel and web, sunlight, starlight, all wishful substance violating and altering and annihilating shape and matter and invoking eternity only ... (p. 105, my underlining).

Donne at last, has a "perception of a prodigal vessel and distance still possible." (p. 105). The Dreamer's disorientation during his "initiation" in the forest - he stops for a moment and finds himself alone in the gloom of the trees - is conveyed with remarkable force and power:

> Spider's web dangled in a shaft of sun, clothing my arms with subtle threads as I brushed upon it. The whispering trees spun their leaves to a sudden fall wherein the ground seemed to grow lighter in my mind and to move to meet them in the air. The carpet on which I stood had an uncertain place within splintered and timeless roots whose fibre was stone in the tremulous ground. I lowered my head a little, blind almost, and began forcing a new path into the trees away from the river's opening and side.
>
> A brittle moss and carpet appeared underfoot, a dry pond and stream whose course and reflection and image had been stamped for ever like the breathless outline of a dreaming skeleton in the earth. The trees rose around me into upward flying limbs when I screwed my eyes to stare from underneath above.

Harris's frequent use of the conjunction "and" as a simple device for linking unlike things or qualities or for a proliferation of meaning ("moss and carpet"; "a dry pond and stream"; "course and reflection and image"), the

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1 Victor Turner, The Forest of Symbols (Ithaca Press N.Y. 1967) p. 102.

subtly lulling effect of alliteration:

> The whispering trees spun their leaves to a sudden fall wherein the ground seemed to grow lighter in my mind and to move to meet them in the air ...

together with phrases suggesting an indeterminate "uncertain place" where "splintered and timeless roots" in the "tremulous ground" appear like "the breathless outline of a dreaming skeleton", all contribute to the hallucinatory effect of the passage. The sentence"I screwed my eyes to stare from underneath above" produces an almost vertiginous effect through the unexpectedly direct juxtaposition of "screwed" with "eyes" and "underneath" with "above". The whole passage is in keeping with, and reinforces, the "limbo" state of the Dreamer. Later, the unnamed fear which overcomes him, and which is described as:

> A sigh [which] swept out of the gloom of the trees, unlike any human sound as a mask is unlike flesh and blood. (p. 26)

recalls the cri de Merlin which C.G. Jung, in his study of the Arthurian legend, relates to the unconscious self:

> Parsifal is a Christian hero, and Merlin, son of the devil and a pure virgin, is his dark brother. In the twelfth century, when the legend arose, there were as yet no premises by which his intrinsic meaning could be understood. Hence he ended in exile, and hence "le cri de Merlin" which still sounded from the forest after his death. This cry that no one could understand implies that he lives on in unredeemed form.[1]

The sudden terror the Dreamer experiences is therefore a warning of the dangers attendant upon the alchemical opus, in which:

> ... the adept staked his whole soul for the transcendental purpose of producing a unity. It was a work of reconciliation between apparently incompatible opposites, which, characteristically, were understood not merely as the natural hostility of the physical elements but at the same time as a moral conflict.[2]

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[1] C.G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, op. cit., p. 216.

[2] C.G. Jung, "Mysterium Coniunctionis" Collected Works Vol. 14 (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1963) p. 554.

We are reminded, once again, of Harris's own view of his art as an exploratory, experimental and associative attempt: a reconciliation of "the great problem of opposite tendencies",[1] and a process in which the artist is himself involved and made vulnerable by virtue of:

> ... the burdensome sensibility the individual artist constantly carries and bears like a scarecrow before the world. Here is no rebel but a sacrifice and victim.[2]

The interior boat-journey in Palace of the Peacock, then, like the progress of the river-steamer which takes Marlow towards the inner contradictions of Kurtz in Conrad's Heart of Darkness,[3] is essentially a psychological and alchemical quest for inner harmony. And by aligning his novel's theme with the traditional and archetypal motif of the inner journey, and by using proliferating images and symbols, Harris is able to expand the boundaries of the novel almost indefinitely. The reverberations and echoes set up within the novel go on multiplying in the reader's mind well beyond the actual limits of the story. The significance, for example, of the aborigines whom Donne and the crew pursue, becomes clearer in the context of the psychological and alchemical search for "wholeness" when one thinks of the meaning of Ab-original as the pre-historical time (like the "Dream Time" of the Australian aborigines) during which, according to primitive legend, the world was first created. The longing for a New Beginning - a tabula rasa or opus contra naturam (expressions which recur frequently in Harris's work) - from which a renewed, integrated Being might ensue; is implied both in Harris's approach to the novel (as to poetry) in which existing conventions must be broken down in order to reconstruct a

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 16.

2 Wilson Harris, Kyk No. 23 (May, 1958) p. 23.

3 First published 1899. Harris, in an article on E.M. Forster, refers to "the nigredo of Conrad". (Literary Half-yearly Vol. X No. 2 July, 1969, p. 36).

New Art concerned with the re-integration of the dislocated, "broken" Caribbean man. Mircea Eliade, writing on the "destruction of the language of art" which, as he sees it, began in the field of painting,[1] also implies a link with alchemy:

> We get the impression that the artist wished to make a Tabula Rasa of the entire history of painting. There is more than a destruction, there is a reversion to chaos, a sort of primordial 'massa confusa'.[2]

In fact, by applying the open-ended scale of myth and archetype, Harris discovers possibilities for the novel which are virtually endless. The ascent of the escarpment of the waterfall at the end of Palace of the Peacock, for example, draws upon all myths and legends involving a spiritual ascent: an image which is found in most religious writings and has, consequently, clear psychological overtones. One thinks of Jacob's ladder (an image used in The Secret Ladder, 1963), the mystic ascent of St. John of the Cross, Dante's ascent of the hill of purgatory etc. But there are also non-Christian echoes. The Mukto rite of the Bhil tribe of India for instance, involves the ascent of twelve rungs of a bamboo ladder (representing "stations" of the mountain) by the spirits of the dead. At each rung obstacles are overcome. A "spirit rider" - an effigy of horse and rider - is supposed to act as a helper in a sacred capacity.[3] The parallels here with Harris's use of the dream of the dead horseman and the "nightmare" which the Dreamer must ride, as well as the final ascent to the "Palace of the Peacock" are striking. The use also of the motif

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1 One is reminded of Harris's own view of the painting of Denis Williams as a "response to an unknown form and its relationship to colour." (Kyk vol. 6 no. 20, mid-year 1955, p. 187). Vide p.274 of this study.

2 Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (Harper and Row N.Y. 1968) p. 73.

3 Ibid., pp. 24/27.

of the old Arawak woman's embroidered handkerchief ("a handkerchief of wisdom", p. 82) which blends with the foaming torrent and enfolds all the crew in their struggle in the rapids, can also be related to the Indian textile art of the Kantha: a patched, embroidered cloth made of rags and threads of many colours which, as a rite performed by women of the Bhil tribe signifies the creative act of integration. In the Rg Veda and the Upanishads, the universe itself is imaged as a fabric woven by the gods. We are reminded too of Harris's use of the image of the weaving Penelope in the poems of Eternity to Season (1954) where the three epigraphs which preface the book:

> In the daytime I would weave the
> mighty web and in the night
> unravel the same ... (The Odyssey of Homer)
>
> At the whirring loom of time unawed
> I work the living mantle of God. (Goethe)[1]
>
> Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
> Birth and the grave, that are not as they were. (Shelley)

all refer to a continual, regenerative activity. Harris's use of the symbol of the "spider transubstantiation" of Wishrop similarly draws upon the universal archetype of the trickster-god which appears in many forms from Loki of ancient Norse legends to the figure of Felix Krull in

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[1] C.G. Jung quotes this passage (from Goethe's Faust) as an example of the alchemical concept of spiritual regeneration, commenting: "thus the Earth Spirit, the spiritus mercurialis, says to Faust." ("Alchemical Studies" Collected Works, op. cit., p. 79, footnote 61.

Thomas Mann's Felix Krull, Confidence Man.[1] The West African spider-god, Ananse (ancestor of the modern West Indian "Brer" Nancy), the Yoruba god, Esu, Ikto-mi ("Spider") of the Dakota and Sioux Indians of North America are all expressions of the unpredictable nature of the Unconscious, which is capable of both creative and destructive activity. The relationship of this "trickster-god" to the paradoxical figure of Mercurius or Hermes in alchemy (the "living spirit" of quicksilver) has been pointed out by C.G. Jung in his study of the Corpus Hermeticum:

> Mercurius, following the tradition of Hermes, is many-sided, changeable, and deceitful. ... He is duplex and his main characteristic is duplicity. ... He is "two dragons", the "twin", made of "two natures" or "two substances".[2]

In his later work, Harris more and more frequently uses the image of the shaman/trickster"conjurer to underline the problem of opposites and to point to a resolution of the cleavage in the psyche of man. For the trickster-figure is:

> ... the one who can bring the unconscious problem of opposites up into consciousness and in this way might act as a "lightbringer" for men.[3]

In spite, however, of the density of symbolic meaning which the novel conveys; and the startlingly unfamiliar language which continually

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1 First published in Germany as Bekenntrüsse des Hochestaplers Felix Krull S. Fischer Verlag (1954). Felix is pre-occupied with the idea of "interchangeability" and adopts many "personalities" during his career. Once, he confesses to his victim that he is a thief, but finds, to his astonishment, that she is delighted. Her outburst is significant:

> Oh how much more precious to me is the thief than what he took! Hermes! He does not know who it is - and it is he! Hermes, Hermes! (Penguin 1967 edition, p. 161).

2 C.G. Jung, "Alchemical Studies" Collected Works op. cit., p. 217.

3 Emma Jung and Marie Von Franz, The Grail Legend (Hodder and Stoughton 1971) p. 358.

links together unexpected or contradictory ideas and epithets:

> The savannahs grew lonely as the sea and broke again into a wave and forest. Tall trees with black marching boots and feet were clad in the spurs and sharp wings of a butterfly. (p. 148).[1]

the reader is able (once he is prepared to approach the novel without pre-conceived ideas about narrative style and plot) to experience the work at a directly sensuous level. For Harris does not impose a theoretical idea upon us, but provides an enactment of the gradual, tentative awakening of consciousness which is part of the novel's experiment. This is conveyed partly by the unpredictable numinous nature of the environment itself, as well as by the inarticulacy of the characters' response to it. The episode during which a flock of parrots suddenly appears out of the bush, is a good example of Harris's use of a simple, natural event to convey, sensuously, rather than intellectually, a deeply symbolic and complex state of developing consciousness in the human characters. The crew, still seeking the elusive Folk, are experiencing doubt and fear (three of their number, Carroll, Schomburg and Wishrop, are already dead). They are in a state of <u>dread</u>. One of the birds appears to be ringed, and da Silva (who has in the past fathered a child with one of the Amerindian women of Mariella and so is secretly linked with the Folk) thinks this bird is a good omen: a reminder of a lost love, and a hope for the future. His stumbling attempt to articulate the longing they all feel is conveyed by Harris with a quite remarkable use of tone and characterization:

> "Ah telling you Ah dream the boat sink with all of we," da Silva said speaking to himself as if he had forgotten Cameron's presence. "Ah drowned dead and Ah float. All of

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[1] A not entirely fanciful description, however. The trees of the rain forest frequently have large, dark and spreading buttress-roots; and brightly-coloured butterflies may often be seen in the upper storeys of the trees. Add to this the effect of dappled sunlight among the leaves above, and Harris's description becomes perfectly credible.

> we expose and float ..."
>
> "Is vulture bird you really feeling and seeing," shouted Cameron. His voice was a croak in the air. Da Silva continued - a man grown deaf and blind with sleep - "Ah dream Ah get another chance to live me life over from the very start. Live me life over from the very start, you hear?" He paused and the thought sank back into the stream. "The impossible start to happen. Ah lose me own image and time like if I forget is where me sex really start. ..."
>
> "Fool, stop it," Cameron hissed.
>
> "Don't pick at me," da Silva said. "The impossible start happen I tell you. Water start dream, rock and stone start dream, tree trunk and tree root dreaming, bird and beast dreaming. ..."
>
> "You is a menagerie and a jungle of a fool," Cameron's black tongue laughed and twisted.
>
> "Everything Ah tell you dreaming long before the creation I know of begin. Everything turning different, changing into everything else Ah tell you. Nothing at all really was there. That is," he grew confused "that is nothing I know of all me life to be something ..." He stopped at a dead loss for words open mouthed and astonished as if he had been assaulted by the madness and innocence of the stream.
>
> "Tek a batty fool like you to dream that," said Cameron. "A batty fool like you ..."
>
> "Is a funny-funny dream," da Silva said slowly, recovering himself a little. "To dream all this ..." he pointed at the wall of cliff behind him - "deh pon you back like nothing, like air standing up. ..."
>
> "You got a strong-strong back," Cameron croaked and his hands brushed the water with beak and wings. (pp. 110/111, my underlining).

The (entirely credible) use of dialect conveys directly, da Silva's own sense of the vague but urgent moral issues which direct his life, his confusion in a world where "everything turning different, changing into everything else" (p. 111). It is interesting to notice that Cameron's jeering replies, enacting a metamorphosis from man to parrot (his retorts are empty of meaning - parrot-like), actually mirror da Silva's remarks and his disturbed state of mind. The whole passage is, at the same time, consonant with the novel's development at this point, for the pursuers (Donne and crew) have now become the pursued and depend on the Folk to succour them. When therefore Cameron wounds one of the birds

with a stone, the action assumes (like the Ancient Mariner's killing of the Albatross) a moral significance:

> Da Silva muttered wildly - "I tell you when you pelt she you pelt me. Is one flesh, me flesh, you flesh, one flesh. She come to save me, to save all of we. You murderer!" (p. 115)

Da Silva then stabs him in a fit of blind rage.

It is precisely because the novel is anchored in such entirely believable, yet symbolic, incident and character that it conveys different levels of meaning within "a deepening cycle of exploration"[1] without becoming too abstract. Just as Donne and the crew, venturing deeper and deeper into the interior, find their original goal becoming gradually more subtle: an inner quest for wholeness; so the reader as he enters the novel, becomes aware of the developing multiple meanings of the apparently simple journey into the interior. Palace of the Peacock may be considered the overarching vision which informs Harris' fiction: a Grail-quest or *bildungsroman*; the alchemical *opus* which must be undertaken again and again as part of the creative process of psychic reconstruction.

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1 TWS, op. cit., author's note, p. 3.

(II) The Far Journey of Oudin (1961)

In The Far Journey of Oudin the scene is set on the Corentyne coast of Berbice, "British Guiana", as in Mittelholzer's Corentyne Thunder (1941), among a community of East Indian peasants where the accumulation of material goods through greed and sharp practice seems the only alternative to a harsh, unrewarding life of back breaking toil on the land. The characters face domination either by the cruel nature of their existence itself, or by the grasping land-owners and money-lenders who feed upon those less fortunate than themselves. Mohammed and his brothers Hassan and Kaiser, along with a cousin, Rajah, plot to steal the inheritance of land left by their father to their idiot half-brother. They succeed, but die each in turn, as if cursed by their act of greed and murder. Ram the moneylender, meanwhile, has gradually enmeshed them all using a vagrant jobber, Oudin, first to steal Mohammed's cattle and do his dirty work in general, and finally to abduct Beti, Rajah's virgin daughter, whom he hopes will give him an heir for his growing "kingdom". Oudin, a mysterious figure who, significantly, resembles the dead idiot brother whom Mohammed and the others have murdered, kidnaps Beti at Ram's request, but takes her for his own bride, relinquishing his former rôle of slave. After the death of Mohammed and his brothers, Oudin and Beti live for thirteen years as tenants of Ram. When Oudin dies, Ram, attempting to recover the contract which will make all Oudin's possessions his, is balked by Beti who has eaten the note. Beti discovers that she is pregnant, and Ram, who has begun to fear that he will die intestate, bargains with Beti to surrender her unborn child to be his heir in exchange for her freedom from debt to him.

The novel begins with the death of Oudin, then re-creates events

leading up to this in a "flash-back": past, present and future co-exist with the narrative. Characters exist on several levels, as in Palace of the Peacock (1960) where the living are linked with the dead. When Beti meets Oudin for the first time, "his face was new and strange to her and yet he seemed like someone she had seen before." (p. 33). And Oudin's resemblance to the murdered half-brother of Mohammed is uncanny. The Negro woodcutter who meets Beti and Oudin in the forest, is almost a reincarnation of the dark-skinned Kaiser who has been burnt to death in a rum-shop fire. The woodcutter's ragged clothes:

> ... were incredibly tattered and dark as if they had been burnt and rescued from the ashes of a fire, and his bushy beard too, looked as if it still sprouted from magnificent glowing coal in which a fire of eyes had been ambushed and set. (p. 116).

The fisherman whom Beti and Oudin encounter at the start of their flight from Mohammed, resembles the dead Hassan. Incidents too have an echoic effect. The negro woodcutter, the charred "ghost" of Kaiser, leads a bull which threatens to attack Oudin. The incident reflects Mohammed's narrow escape, as a young man, from an enraged, runaway bull. And there is an incident even further back when, as children, Mohammed and his brothers had all been chased by a bull owned by a "black-skinned coolie man" (p. 50).

In spite of its occasionally confusing time-sequence - the correspondence of events and of living and dead characters - the plot is sufficiently detailed and extractable to allow the novel to be read simply as an interesting story. But, like Palace of the Peacock, the novel is, at a deeper level, concerned with the need for a new vision of consciousness - a new Caribbean Man who will be the true "heir" of the land. The theme of dominion, of the tyrannical authority of history and sterile materialism, is merely part of the larger design of the book in which the Indian peasant girl, Beti (like Mariella of Palace of the Peacock),

represents the Folk, the land, authentic Being, Ram (like Donne), the active, unscrupulous "possessor", and Oudin (like the Dreamer), the spiritual, unsubstantial but quickening essence. Ram, Oudin and Beti - the <u>tria prima</u>[1] of the novel, are introduced (as Donne, Mariella and the Dreamer are in <u>Palace of the Peacock</u>, 1960) on the first few pages. Indeed this novel also opens with a dream and a death, and the symbolic framework of the book is suggested by the description of Oudin's death as part of the cycle of nature itself:

> Oudin knew it was still a dream, the dream of the heavenly cycle of the planting and reaping year he now stood within - as within a circle - for the first time. ... It was the end of his labour of death. (p. 11).

Oudin's visionary spirit has found release and contemplates (like the final visionary "I" of <u>Palace of the Peacock</u>) the living world with a newly-gained, quiet insight:

> The day cleared in the new light of his eye and the land was a wilderness on which had fallen the curious naked spoil of his conquest and death. He possessed it all now as one would a match-box world ... Oudin held it all in the corner of his eye. (pp. 12/13).

Oudin's ghostly, presiding essence begins to fade as we see the living bodies - "the vague harvested bundles lying on the floor of the room" (p. 12) stir and move. Beti's discovery of his dead body and her scream: "Oudin dead. Oudin dead. Oudin dead." (p. 13) which brings Ram running, introduce the "real" world of the book, and the reader is then swiftly prepared for the "flash-back" which is the substance of

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[1] An alchemical term, attributed to Paracelsus, signifying the three "primary bodies" sulphur (soul), salt (body) and mercury (spirit) which were supposed to enter into the "chemical marriage". Sulphur and salt (or <u>sol</u> and <u>luna</u>: sun and moon) were combined in the presence of the hermetic spirit, mercurius.

the rest of the novel. The extraordinary sense of repose - of timelessness - conveyed in the writing:

> The stars shone faint in the stream on a windy night and they penetrated a flying cloud. The lights shining far across the river were uncertain and distant, close to the ground and one with glimmering heaven. (p. 11)

the use of opposite elements of expansion and contraction[1] - the stars which are reflected in the stream and (though "faint") penetrate a cloud; the lights which, shimmering in the distance seem to unite earth and heaven - create the effect of time suspended. We are taken up into the sky for an aerial view of the whole "flimsy scaffolding of the world" (p. 13). In some passages:

> The dark surface of the river cleaned suddenly, showing in the running tide a deeper spirit and across the track of spiritual reflection stood the hanging head of horses and cows. (p. 12, my underlining)

a religious dimension is added. We are led from the outset, therefore, to see the novel in a larger, all-inclusive visionary framework, and the unsentimental description of the bereaved Beti:

> She had the refined emaciated face of an East Indian and Guianese woman that looked older than it was, bearing the stamp of a well-known ornament. ... the stamp of timeless slavery. (pp. 13/14)

reminding us as it does of the description of the old Amerindian woman in Palace of the Peacock (1960) gives to her characterization a wider, symbolic dimension. She is in effect "the representation of a slave despite her secret longing and notion to be free" (p. 14): in other words, the incomplete, as yet unfinished consciousness of the Folk. Her resemblance to the earlier enigmatic Mariella/figure in Harris's short story

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1 An example of this "telescopic" effect is in the description of the traditional steaming dish of curry and vegetables with its small cones of rice which Beti absent-mindedly places on the table for (the dead) Cudin: "she stared at it unseeingly and yet with a bird's-eye view of Cudin's savannahs cooking in the sun." (p. 22).

"Tomorrow"[1] is clear. Beti too, is treated like an outcast "without a home, without a friend"[2] but holds (through the child in her womb) the promise of a new beginning.

The moneylender Ram, forcing his way up the material ladder by systematically tricking and crushing those in his debt, is a Donne-figure, "a soldier of fortune" (p. 25), who wishes "to found a conception of empire" (p. 27) and whose link with Oudin reminds us of the inter-dependent relationship of Donne and Dreamer. After Oudin's death, the suspicious Ram, unable to find the contract which will give him possession of all Oudin owns, including guardianship of the unborn heir, keeps watch on Oudin's hovel, the door of which is kept shut by a piece of string tied around a post:

> Ram learnt to retire at last with the coiled twine in his eye, and he knew in his dreams, when he snatched a couple of hours of sleep before dawn, the slightest interference with the coil on the door would start him cruelly awake in his bed. The twine, he was aware, would uncoil before him, so that stretched taut at last it drew him forward as Oudin walked backward into the distance like a sleep-walker, till their vision met in a way that shattered him to the core. (p. 21).

The unseen bond between the living, material Ram and the dead, visionary Oudin is powerfully conveyed by this almost physically painful image of a "coiled twine in his eye". Here again, the use of the eye-symbol, as in Palace of the Peacock (1960), is an effective means of suggesting the complementary nature of Ram and Oudin as opposite aspects of consciousness. Ram's "waking sleep" (p. 21), like Donne's "dead seeing material eye",[3] is counterbalanced by Oudin's "unsleeping watch" (p. 21)[4] which

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1 Kyk, op. cit., Vol. 1 No. 1 (December, 1945) pp. 30/34.

2 Ibid., p. 34.

3 Palace of the Peacock, (1968 edition) p. 14.

4 This also refers to the ritual of the "wake", during which the dead man's friends and relatives stay up all night in the presence of the corpse.

reflects the Dreamer's "living closed spiritual eye".[1] And the suggestion that a meeting of these two kinds of vision will "shatter him [Ram] to the core" (p. 21) reminds us of Donne's fall to his death when he achieves this unity of vision. In employing Oudin to do his dirty work, Ram had not bargained either with his immediate compliance or his subsequent deception. For Oudin is also the "trickster"-figure who introduces the problem of opposites and illustrates the psychic division which lies behind, and is responsible for, the characters' perpetual condition of slavery. He is a mysterious stranger, and "the truth was no one knew whom he represented or where he had sprung from." (p. 28). In fact, he is symbolic of the psychic need in Man which surfaces periodically (hence his relationship to the seasons of harvest, life and death) to redress the balance of conscious activity:

> The archetype of the trickster therefore always appears as a healing figure when collective consciousness is in danger of stiffening obstinately into one-sidedness. Again and again he holds open the approaches to the divine-animal sub-strata of the psyche.[2]

So Oudin "was the vessel in which Ram poured his hunger and ambition and hatred and contempt", a figure who "had materialized - to fulfil this reflective need - no one knew from where and when." (p. 27).

The need for a way out of the restraints and boundaries of history - a "gateway" leading out of the sterile cycle of slavery and domination - is one of Harris's main concerns:

> I believe the possibility exists for us to become involved in perspectives of renascence which can bring into play a figurative meaning beyond an apparently real world or prison of history.[3]

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1 Palace of the Peacock, op. cit., p. 14.

2 Emma Jung and Marie Von-Franz, The Grail Legend, op. cit., p. 366.

3 Wilson Harris, Lectures, op. cit., p. 8.

and his interest in vestiges of African and Amerindian legends - in fact in mythology as a whole - stems from this belief in history as a discontinuous (rather than a linear) series of events. He sees the rôle of the shaman/trickster as indispensable to this end:

> The process of shamanism resembles a nervous breakdown. The shaman, as we know, is likely to appear in the tribe in times of crisis and his role ... is an indispensable creative attempt to see through or break through a hang-over of the past ... and to make of every inner divergence, every subtle omen of change - subsistence of memory to feed imagination in the future.[1]

Harris himself makes reference to Jung's religious and alchemical concept of the rôle of the unconscious in this regard, recognizing that the primitive rebirth-myths, such as that of the Carib "bush baby" (a numinous spectre) "[correspond] to what [Jung] calls the puer aeternus - the immortal or archetypal child of dreams."[2]

A central theme in the novel, therefore, is the need, through an imaginative re-structuring and re-integration of the psyche, to incorporate hidden, cthonic or daemonic elements: an impulse towards wholeness of vision. Without this deeper associative element, the theme of psychic re-birth and re-integration, the central concern of the novel remains, like Forster's Howard's End, simply a social and political question of "inheritance" of the land, or, at a more superficial level, a trite, moral condemnation of materialism and greed.[3] This need for a new, unified consciousness also informs the "sub-plot" of the novel in which Mohammed and his brothers murder their idiot half-brother, true heir of their father's wealth, and divide the inheritance among themselves.

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1 Wilson Harris, Lectures, op. cit., p. 22.

2 Ibid., p. 20.

3 As in John Hearne's appraisal of the novel:

> Unlike any other stories in the quartet, this one also seems to preach a message, and the message is in the end platitudinous: 'all that glitters is not gold', 'you can't take it with you', and so on. ("The Fugitive in the Forest" The Islands in Between, op. cit., p.149).

Again, the realistic plot has many mythical and archetypal echoes. One thinks of the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers, of Christ's death at the hands of the Roman soldiers who throw dice for the possession of his robe, of the numerous fairy-tales like the traditional German märchen where the "foolish" or disreputable youngest son is rejected or ridiculed by his brothers but turns out to be the genuine hero and true heir. Mohammed and his brothers find that they too, like another notorious Corentyne family, the Allamans "a family of ambiguous Hindu and Moslem and African descent" (p. 62), are part of "a recurring myth and a particular fable" (p. 63)[1] which settles upon them all like a curse. The murder of their brother has, therefore, an archetypal significance; for by elininating their idiot half-brother, the rightful heir, they have, symbolically, cut themselves off from their own primal natures: just as in subscribing to a one-sided vision of economic and material gain, they have rejected the spiritual dimension of life which gives value and direction to these very things. Thus psychically undermined, each is destroyed from within.

Hassan is the first to die - from (significantly) heart-failure. In a moment of intuition just before his death "at the zenith of life, after the plot and conspiracy that eliminated their imbecile half-brother" (p. 56); he asks to be cremated in the ancient manner of his ancestors. It is a futile propitiatory gesture. The pyre, wet by the rain, finally catches alight only after some difficulty. The ominous

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1 The epigraph from St. Luke XX, 9 (which recounts the parable of the greedy husbandmen who kill the true heir of the vineyard) points to the "particular fable"; but by naming the "ambiguous" family of the novel the "Allamans" (All men) Harris also indicates the wider, universal application of the myth.

roar of the flames seems to "speak" to the crowd of onlookers:

> No one knew whether it spoke its anger for the shedding of innocent blood in the past and the present family of man, or whether it resented the defeat of a mob, and the self-surrender of Hassan, and the fire of his prayer for release from the rotten crime and conspiracy of death. (p. 58).

Then Muhra, Mohammed's wife, loses his child and heir after a fall: " 'A curse there 'pon we Kaiser,' Mohammed said. His eyes were like red fire. 'Is who next?' " (p. 60). Kaiser, meanwhile, has begun to see the inner contradiction of his own life and, as he tells Mohammed: "Ah getting old before me time and Ah seeing things Ah would like to get to the bottom of." (p. 65). Drinking in a rum shop with Mohammed, he grows maudlin and light-headed: "he felt himself on the threshold of the darkest and clearest purgation ..." (p. 67). He has a hallucinated vision of himself as a Negro, blackened and charred, and of the dead Hassan. Both figures are clothed in beggar's garb and still attempting (in death as in life) to conceal "a terrible longing and need"(p.70), the long-denied wish for a more purposeful existence:

> They leaned against the wall that appeared to float with them on their insubstantial back, wondering how they could still summon an obscure passer-by for the help they were too proud and too spiritual to ask. (p. 71).

It is already too late, however, and Kaiser meets his death in the sudden fire which destroys the shop. He dies thinking that all he had ever really wanted was "the freedom to die when and where he pleased, and to love whom and what he wished." (p. 72). But, like Hassan, whose longing to return to the land of his ancestors is only a delusion, a form of escape; Kaiser remains:

> ... like an obdurate child still playing in a kingdom he had a long way to go to begin to learn to build. (p. 75).

Rajah, Beti's father, is (like Mohammed, Hassan and Kaiser) also

enslaved through debt to Ram, and the inheritance, the "promised land" gradually slips into the control of Ram. The analogy of the Israelites in bondage in Egypt suggests itself[1] but Mohammed and the rest have been equally hard landlords, Mohammed keeping his womenfolk, including Beti, in virtual bondage, illiterate in a man's "labouring, bargaining world" (p. 34); and after Hassan's death:

> The promised land of plenteous return stood in view before them but a still greater sacrifice had to be endured before they would free themselves of bondage. (p. 59).

The curse which leads, first to Hassan's death, then to Murha's accident which robs Mohammed of a son and heir and still later to the fiery death of Kaiser; is not yet propitiated, however. Rajah's death - the second death by fire - is still to come. His overpowering desire to succeed in "gaining all the machinery he needed" (p. 81) to extract a good return from his labour, a single-visioned obsession which eventually makes him virtually a slave to Ram, the moneylender, and finally no more than "an extension of his own oxen" (p. 81); has its origin in an inner, spiritual emptiness:

> Rajah believed in nothing save filling his belly. Food was the beginning and the end of life. Whatever he had, he would never have enough to satisfy a gnawing anxiety and appetite. (p.79)

The hookworm infestation which led him, as a child, to steal in order to satisfy a perpetual inner hunger, is, of course, a symbolic reference to this lack of wholeness of vision, for "to steal was to murder all sentiment and vision in order to survive." (p. 79),[2] and his death by lightning comes just after Oudin has called to see him on Ram's behalf. Oudin's

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1 There is also a hint, in the name "Ram", of "Rameses", the Pharaoh who kept the Israelites in bondage in Egypt.

2 This echoes his part in the plot to murder the idiot half-brother of Mohammed and the rest.

resemblance to the dead half-brother of Mohammed startles and shocks Rajah with the memory of the murder, and the writing at this point suggests both the symbolic, revenant-like quality of Oudin[1] and the damning nature of the crime which (like Cain's murder of Abel) is an archetypal sin against the Spirit:

> Beti opened [the door]. At first Rajah saw no one but the wind. His eyes were blind with the cooking fire and the shadow of the sun. And then he thought he distinguished the eyes of stars in the night. ... "Is the same man that been this afternoon me daddy," Beti cried curiously. "Look at he good. You know is who?" ... Rajah's eyes had grown clearer at last. He remained stooping and still, unable to believe what he saw, until he was galvanized into action. The pot spoon flew from his hand, striking the forehead of the sky and burning a flashing place between two stars and eyes. (pp. 86/87, my underlining).

Rajah's violent, guilty action prefigures his own death when he is struck by lightning during a thunder-storm and falls "dead in a flash" (p. 89).

So, Oudin is the living reminder of the "rightful heir" whom the others have tried to deny, and Mohammed, now desolated by loss, addicted to drink and grief, begins to find his whole past life called in question by Oudin. "I don't know exactly how to explain," he tells Ram during one of his now frequent introspective, drunken spells:

> But time itself change since he come. Is like if I starting to grow conscious after a long time, that time itself is a forerunner to something. But Ah learning me lesson so late, is like a curse ... What I used to value and what I used not to value overlapping. ... And yet all is one, understand me? (p. 91).

This is, in fact, the beginning of self-knowledge, and the awareness of hitherto unknown, or repressed psychic elements:

> Ah feel that I, me then, is just a piece of moving furniture, and something else, bigger by far, pushing me about until I don't know whether I standing 'pon me head, me backside, or me foot. (p. 92).

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1 "Oudin" also calls to mind Odin, the Norse god of the winds who is related to the German folk-god, Wotan (and also to the alchemical Hermes/Mercurius). Later, when Oudin appears at his door, Rajah sees "nothing but the wind". (p. 86).

Mohammed meets his death when, attempting to track down Oudin and Beti, he stumbles drunkenly through the forest, falls and cracks his skull. The incident, however, is clearly meant to convey both his death and his final awareness of inner poverty and frustration. Like Donne's shattering death in Palace of the Peacock (1960), Mohammed's death is the inevitable result of a confrontation with his own heart of darkness:

> It was not the plain forest that frightened him. It was another premature growth of ringing weakness. It was the dark labour and self-generation of horns he saw now as never before, it was the contest with the devil, and the collision of temples in nature, the egg falling and breaking on the hard unexpected ground, the sun and the moon meeting until the sparks burst and flew. (p. 131).

The suggestion of grandeur and frailty in the word "temples", the destruction of life present in both the homely image of an egg smashing on the ground and in the cataclysmic collision of sun and moon, are further examples of the simultaneous effects of expansion and contraction which are typical of Harris's writing. The image of the cracked egg (suggesting Mohammed's cracked skull) is related to his state of psychic incompleteness. Mohammed had:

> ... cracked the premature egg of his dying time and he stood face to face now with the prospect of himself alone with terror and with nothingness. (p. 130, my underlining).

The extraordinary subtlety and daring with which, in this passage, Harris creates and uses imagery and symbolism to convey (within a natural and completely acceptable context) a complex, psychological theme: that of the need for psychic re-integration or spiritual rebirth: merits a more detailed examination. The forest itself (a "world-creating jungle") is a brooding, creative influence, a hen nestling on her eggs:

> The leaves rustled like feathers and the tender illumination shifted and pooled and changed all the time. The forest was settling as a hen settles, or standing as a hen fluffs and stands to dry its raining feathers and circulate the light like a hatching cushion of eggs. (p. 130).

Mohammed's impatience to break a path through the trees, and his confused, drunken condition which makes this difficult, illustrate his "premature" state of consciousness:

> The twittering sought to warn him to remain still and not to resist, but Mohammed did not want to listen. He was ringing with his own voices of drowning alarm. He stampeded. The wings of the forested hen shook its fluid feathers from him like a bird taking flight over his head.

Here, in addition to the image of a hen "taking flight" from her nest[1] (it is Mohammed's consciousness which is being "hatched"), there is the reminder, in the word "stampeded", of Mohammed's earlier experience of being attacked by a bull. In fact his professed attitude to life (like Donne's)[2] of "taking the bull by the horns", is shown to be one of mere bravado. He is charging blindly - like a bull - through life, unaware and self-divided:

> He heard the repetitive tinkle of the rum bottle when a limb and hoof fell from the still waving trees and ploughed the ground underfoot. The snort shook him again. Mohammed trembled like a wild bull. (p. 129).

His identification with a bull (reminiscent of Cameron's metamorphosis into a parrot in <u>Palace of the Peacock</u>, 1960) also has sacrificial Mithraic and Dionysiac overtones, for Mohammed is cast in the rôle of archetypal victim:

> Mohammed was a kind of symbol of all his [Ram's] tenants rolled into one. Ram had teased the proud, religious bull, and the susceptibility to superstition, until he had fashioned the ideal victim and accomplice. (pp. 132/133)

and his death is therefore given a certain quality of inevitability.

This final section of the novel, in which there is a second death by fire (and in which Mohammed also dies) is entitled, paradoxically,

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1 To the drunk Mohammed, falling to the ground, the whole forest of leaves would appear to be <u>flying upward</u>, away from him.

2 Cf. Donne's "rule the land ... and you rule the world" and his "stamping terrible voice." (<u>Palace of the Peacock</u>, 1968 edition, p. 19).

"Second Birth". The apocalyptic epigraph from Blake: " ... all things have second birth:/The earthquake is not satisfied at once:" is followed, however, by one from the Bible which promises release from bondage to Nature and to Man: " ... the dayspring from on high hath visited us." This hope for the future appears in the shape of the quiet, child-like, illiterate Beti. Pregnant with Oudin's child, she is the womb of the future, like the brooding forest itself, with which she is linked:

> She was the bird of Mohammed's flying spirit that had returned to nest on its ancestral mystique and tree. The horns of the bull were nothing to fear, she said. Every man's death made him level nature and subdue it. (p. 131)

and it is in her passive, feminine acceptance of life (in contrast to Mohammed's blundering attempts to grapple with it) that allows her, almost literally, to "take the bull by the horns". For later, faced suddenly with the black woodsman's runaway bull in the forest, she calmly strokes the animal's head. But Beti is not yet a fully "conscious", integrated being; and for her, as for Oudin, their flight through the forest is not merely an escape from the pursuing Mohammed and his men, it is a "far journey outward, into the land that was nowhere." (p. 100). These words recall the Secret of the Golden Flower which, as an alchemical text, is concerned with the individuation of the psyche as a journey to "the land that is nowhere, that is the true home."[1] It is also an inward journey (from savannah to forest) towards a new unity of self.

Oudin, thinking back on his various rôles in the past: first as Ram's willing slave, then as Mohammed's labourer and now as Beti's consort;

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1 Wilson Harris quotes this line in "Interior of the Novel" National Identity, op. cit., p. 138. The opening epigraph of The Far Journey of Oudin is also taken from The Secret of the Golden Flower.

is conscious of:

> ... the dreadful nature in every compassionate alliance one has to break gradually in order to emerge into one's ruling constructive self. (p. 101, my underlining).

His reason for abducting Beti has this deeper purpose, and reflects his creative rôle as shaman/trickster, the agent of a new consciousness:

> When Ram had been inspired to seek his help in winning Beti, Oudin felt the stirring spirit of an ancient compassion, and the call to obey a spiritual desire that cancelled out Ram's command. (p. 100).

The man "fishing on the other bank" whom Oudin approaches for guidance, reminds one of the Fisher-King of the Arthurian legend of the Grail quest - a figure which also appears in T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land[1] and underlines the spiritual, alchemical nature of Oudin's journey with Beti. As they stand half-way between the open, flat savannah on the western bank of the river and the rain-forest on the eastern bank, "the sun rises "like an enormous, grotesque spider." (p. 102). This suggests the transitional stage between existence (savannah) and Being (forest):[2] the "spider" symbol of the shaman standing for the "transubstantiation" of the neophyte, Beti. Beti bathes fully clothed in the warm river - a symbolic act of baptism reflected again in their final view of the fisherman submerged up to his neck in the water - and the imagery is continued in the "visionary breakfast" (p. 105) of fish (a gift from the fisherman) which they eat just before entering the forest. They reach a pegasse belt (a swampy area where the ground turns as soft and as treacherous as quick-sand) and Oudin has to carry Beti, each footstep a painful

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1 A figure who is seen "fishing in the dull canal." ("The Fire Sermon", "The Waste Land" Penguin Selected Poems 1972, p. 58).

2 This is observed by Gerald Moore who sees the forest as "expressing eternity" and the savannah, "season and the limited mortality of individual plant or tree." (The Chosen Tongue, Longmans 1969, p.75.)

effort. It is a "ritual walk", and his perseverance in not abandoning Beti in "the place where they mankind had always put down the troublesome one" (p. 107) is a sign of his willingness to keep his "covenant" with God: his commitment to achieving true selfhood for both Beti and himself:

> The morning he abducted Beti, Oudin perceived there were barriers and difficulties ahead of him, through which he must pass as if they were nothing. These relative, ghostly encounters lay between himself and the consummation of his being ... (pp. 99/100).

He gives in momentarily, depressed and alarmed by the living presence of the forest, "a consciousness clothed with gloom and impending horror and despair" (p. 108), to a feeling of panic: the fear of being "unable to play the role of an ambiguous beggar while conscious of being the heir and master of a world" (p. 110) - in other words, his creative rôle as shaman/trickster - but recovers and has intercourse with Beti, aware only that "this was what he had to do." (p. 110). The moment of union - the symbolic coupling of spirit and flesh - is marred however by Oudin's lust and by Beti's still uncomprehending nature: her desire "to keep one foot in a corner of the ruling past." (p. 114). Wishing to be free, she nevertheless remains held prisoner by her self-concern and the vicarious pleasure and thrill of the adventure. The sign[1] she makes in the sand with her foot:

> With her toes she drew in the sand an incomprehensible fertile figure within a hollow cage at Oudin's feet. It was a way of saying that she was equal to him after all. (p. 113)

is both a recognition of her rôle as the mother and womb of consciousness and an admission of her continuing imprisonment in the past. She has eluded the cages of childhood, of Mohammed and of Rajah, but still needs

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1 It is a mandala - a sign of the psychic integration she is unconsciously seeking.

to break out of the cage of romantic, self-regarding love:

> A simple cage of abandonment, however, was as far as she could venture to go in the present, whatever Oudin thought. (p. 114).

The Negro woodcutter whom they meet is a representagive of the unreal "romantic" life of adventure and intrigue. At one time a politician and at another a pork-knocker, he had ruined himself through his impractical schemes and illusions, blaming it all on bad luck and "a trump-up love story". (p. 118). Beti finds herself drawn to the adventurous figure "admiring the way he had swung his axe like a violent romantic chip on his shoulder" (p. 118) and both she and Oudin (who has remained silent all the while) are literally taken prisoner by the woodcutter. Harris uses the incident to reveal the dangers of a facile romanticism as opposed to a genuine, existential quest for authentic Being, and this is related to Beti's wish to keep in touch with the past, with family and friends. Beti suddenly becomes aware of the woodcutter's resemblance to the dead Kaiser (and to Mohammed, who is virtually Kaiser's twin) and rights herself: the road to selfhood is, after all, a lonely one. A choice is necessary:

> She felt the spirit of incurable pride and oppression and thwarted romance that counted and sold everyone, and even wished to pursue and enslave the world, with the best of mistaken intentions. It was as if she had not yet learnt to choose and reject a suitor because she was still part of a uniform lust and power and old estate ... (p. 119).

Her cry: "Oudin. Oudin. Oudin." (p. 119) re-establishes her faith in, and dependence on, the spiritual freedom and authentic Being of Oudin, and provides the link with her second pregnancy (her own Second Birth), thirteen magical years in the future, when she will at last be a mature vessel for the new consciousness of a people, and her cry then: "Oudin dead. Oudin dead. Oudin dead." (p. 13) will signal both an end and a beginning.

The novel ends with the disillusionment of Ram:

> It had all started in the beginning of time with the dream of an heir in the heart of an old man like Ram, and in the unconscious womb of a child and a daughter like Beti. (p. 132).

Having "lost his true victim" (p. 132), Mohammed, Ram knows that he is without a focus for his will to power, without a mask:

> The circumstances surrounding the death of Mohammed had somehow ripped from him his self-disguise ... To whom would he appear now to be what he was not, strong and brutal and subtle? (p. 134).

He understands at last his need for Oudin, as for a vital centre of depth and balance, for a son "who would be the acknowledged child of his life to fill the widening blue crack in heaven like a picture." (p. 135). In short, for the <u>puer aeternus</u> or archetypal child of dreams. Terrified at last by the prospect of his empty future, convinced that only a miracle can "heal him and make him an ordinary man" (p. 135), he offers Oudin an ambiguous contract which vaguely promises release from debt in exchange for the legal guardianship and adoption of Beti's only child. We are now back at the beginning of the novel, and Oudin's final "trick", played this time on Ram. For by his death and disappearance (like the vanished contract which Beti has swallowed) and in the promise of re-birth through Beti, he has transferred Ram's sordid covenant to a higher reality: the future heir which Beti now carries: "Beti was another name for 'daughter', the daughter of a race that was being fashioned anew." (p. 136).

<u>The Far Journey of Oudin</u> is, therefore, like <u>Palace of the Peacock</u> (1960), another quest leading to fulfilment of Being, to the re-integration of the self which will make possible a new, creative consciousness in the future. It is a "gateway" leading out of the prison of historical fact:[1]

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1 In Mircea Eliade's <u>Forêt Interdite</u> (Gallimard, Paris 1955) the hero and heroine, encouraged by <u>Anisie</u> (Cf. the "Anancy" figure of West Indian folklore) who represents age-old wisdom, escape from history through death in the forest. Their "escape" is symbolic of self-realization and re-generation. Like Oudin and Beti, they arrive at psychic equilibrium.

an alternative to the self-perpetuating despair of the Caribbean situation of "historylessness" and cultural and psychic fragmentation. But the route is an unfamiliar one: the journey inward to the source of creative imagination. The question: "who will inherit the land?" is not simply a political or social question. It is an existential one as well; for the New Man must also be whole, if history is not merely to repeat itself. The re-constitution of the "broken individual", therefore, is central to the novel (as to all Harris's work) and the visionary, alchemical nature of the experiment - suggested also in the book's epigraphs: one from The Secret of the Golden Flower, another from Blake and two from the gospel of St. Luke - must be given prominence in any discussion of the work.

Harris's use of densely woven, interconnected images and metaphors reflects the alchemical nature of his imagination. Indeed, the use of imagery is closely related to the mediaeval Art of Memory which is, in turn, related to the Hermetic Arts. As Frances A. Yates puts it:

> This inner art of Memory which encouraged the use of the imagination as a duty must surely have been a major factor in the evocation of images.[1]

and in this respect, therefore, Harris's images carry great significance. Although at first rather mystifying and at times almost impenetrable, his images and metaphors have a mnemonic function and actually elucidate the novel's meaning. To unravel the complicated web of meanings contained in Harris's images and metaphors, however, would require a separate study; and we shall therefore attempt here only a brief examination of some of the novel's recurring images. The window-image, for example, which (as in Palace of the Peacock, 1960) symbolizes consciousness or spiritual vision, appears on the first page of the novel. The dead Oudin

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1 The Art of Memory (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1966) p. 104.

is described as a "window that had fallen from its house to rot on the earthen floor" (but which allows the new grass to sprout forth within the spaces of its broken panes). The image occurs again in Mohammed's wish for inner peace: for a house of his own whose windows:

> ... would thwart the fierce eye of the sun ... to accustom his eye to a settlement of darkness within, or to veil the world with a living darkness without. (p. 39).

As Beti awakes, having gained in self-knowledge, the morning light of the forest shines through the window of the woodcutter's hut illuminating the dark interior of her room and prison. The images of egg and egg-shell are used to convey the idea of the confining, limited circumstances of the characters - their need to achieve freedom - or, in another sense, their blind, unknowing, foetus-like existence. It is a symbol of both death and rebirth, since the cracking of the shell signifies the emergence of a new life (as in Kaiser's wish to "crack his egg and fly" p. 74) and premature death (as when Mohammed falls and cracks his skull like an egg-shell).[1] Effective use is made, too, of recurring images of flood and fire to symbolize the death/rebirth motif. Indeed, the natural cycle of death and rebirth is a constant reality for the Corentyne peasants,[2] whose precarious existence hovers between flood and drought. The marriage procession which, as a child, Ram sees setting out in frail boats along the flooded village road, is echoed by the wedding procession of Oudin and Beti, ten years later, in "the year of the great flood". (p. 27). Each

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1 As an alchemical symbol, the egg is:

> ... a copy of the World-egg, the egg white corresponding to the "waters above the firmament," the "shining liquor", and the yolk to the physical world. (C.G. Jung, "Alchemical Studies", Collected Works, op. cit., p. 82.

2 This is also true of the general atmosphere of Mittelholzer's Corentyne Thunder (1941).

event is symbolic of a New Beginning - another Noah's Ark. The rain and thunder-storm in which Rajah dies is described with apocalyptic imagery conveying a strong biblical and visionary impact:

> There was a moment's hush and stillness and one could hear a beetle walking on the ground. Then the far track of lightnings came closer, without warning, and flew into one's eye, forked and veined and vicious, flashing closer still, blindingly, again and again, and unrolling into a webbed hand and foot like a crumpled flying napkin and sheet, on which the sacred embryonic beasts of the sky crouched. (p. 88).

The storm has the significance of a heavenly retribution. It is as if Rajah is being punished for his part in the murder of the "true heir". This suggestion is strengthened when, later on, having (as it were) carried out a divine command, the elements appear to <u>return</u> whence they have come:

> The rain grew solemnly from the ground up, rather than falling from the clouds down, an enormous inverted theatre and curtain, upon which rose the webbed dreams of bird and beast the sky had unloaded on the lightning earth. (p. 89).

Like the lightning which destroys Rajah, other images of burning - sun and fire - are also given a wider, symbolic meaning related to the theme of spiritual death and rebirth. Hassan's cremation and Kaiser's and Rajah's fiery deaths all appear to suggest the soul's purgation by fire. We have already observed how other recurring, natural images, like the woodcutter's "sacrificial" bull, the forest (the eternal, creative unconscious) and the open savannah (the seasonal, temporal self) contribute to the book's main alchemical and psychological theme. But this is not to say that Harris's use of imagery and metaphor is always successful. When, for example, we read that Ram's shock on learning of Oudin's death "burst his inner tube to flatten him and rob him of air" and that his heart "plunged with the force of a cricket ball falling" (p. 16), our impression is that the metaphors are too obviously contrived to be acceptable. One feels that the writer is here deliberately reaching out for unlikely or unusual comparisons. The total, symbolic effect of the book's imagery, however, is

produced in a quite natural, unforced way.

The movement of the novel towards a vision of "wholeness": a conjunction of temporal and eternal within the rhythm of life, death and rebirth: is also reflected in the author's choice of locale. There is an interesting correspondence here with the poetry, for in the poem, "Canje", Harris has prefixed a note:

> There is a legend that a great lake of fresh water feeds the Canje River and is still to dry up. The known facts are that the Canje River is part of a natural flood basin influenced by the ocean tides and successful so far in withstanding long inroads of salt from the sea.[1]

By dismissing the myth of an assumed, and hopefully inexhaustible, supply of life-supporting fresh water for the irrigation of crops, and by revealing the actual situation as a natural one of flux: of the precarious counterbalancing of damaging salt water and vital fresh water (the poem's subtitle, "river of ocean", highlights this conflict of opposites): Harris focuses attention on the paradoxical nature of Being, and on the need for a juxtaposition and resolution of opposites. In the novel, Ram, standing on the bank of the Canje, reflects on the recurrent flooding of the river and land by the salt sea: "survival was a miracle, a miraculous ascendancy upon the flux of death." (p. 26). This awareness of "the problem of opposites" is related to the need for a conscious acceptance of the dark, unpredictable nature of the unconscious; and to be aware of both river and sea, or to make the journey inward from savannah to forest (as Beti and Oudin do) is to take the first step towards a new, integrated consciousness. This is the significance, too, of the decision of "Ulysses", the fisherman in the poem, "Canje":

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1 Eternity to Season, op. cit., p. 32, my underlining.

> No more for me a contract with the barren
> plantation, drowned in flood
> or dry as bone. I have understood I cannot run
> from the open sea or the sun
> and shelter under the falling trees of time.
> Labour is just begun.[1]

At the end of The Far Journey of Oudin, the child in Beti's womb holds the promise of a better future: a vision of the unified consciousness of a "whole" people. And so the progress of the novel is circular, for it begins with what is, structurally, its ending (the death of Oudin) and ends with the suggestion of a New Beginning - a re-born Oudin. This circular pattern is, in fact, the pattern of the whole "Quartet", the final novel of which (The Secret Ladder, 1963) is also set in the Canje area and has as its plot the conflict between a government survey team (sent to measure and record the periodic rise of the Canje river) and the backward, fearful inhabitants of the forest. The novel ends with the echoing words heard in a dream:

> In our end ... our end ... our end is our beginning ... beginning ... beginning. Fenwick awoke. It was the dawn of the seventh day. (p. 127) [2]

thus recalling both the form and meaning of The Far Journey of Oudin as well as the seven days' journey of creation in Palace of the Peacock (1960). Before going on to examine this, the final novel of the "Quartet", however, we need to look at The Whole Armour (1962) where we shall find that the long struggle towards psychic wholeness is again enacted until there emerges, in the figures of young Cristo and Sharon, another promise of a New Beginning: "the first potential parents who can contain the ancestral house." (p. 110).[3]

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1 Eternity to Season, op. cit., p. 39.

2 This quotation (from the Faber 1963 edition) echoes the last line of T.S. Eliot's "East Coker" (Four Quartets Faber 1959) which is in turn an echo of the motto which Mary Queen of Scots embroidered on the royal dais of state: "In my end is my beginning."

3 All quotations are from the Faber 1962 edition.

(III) The Whole Armour (1962)

In this novel Harris sets the scene on Guyana's north-western Essequibo coast near the mouth of the Pomeroon river - an area directly exposed to the constant eroding action of the sea. Inland, there is extremely fertile soil which permits a variety of provision and fruit crops, making this a potentially rich part of the land; but the inhabitants live precariously on the coast or in timorous clearings in the "bush" near the great Pomeroon, unable or unwilling to establish deeper roots, living from day to day virtually helpless between alternating seasons of drought and flood. The crops which they plant in the thin, pegasse belt and which are frequently destroyed by rain, wind and flood, are a reflection of their superficial, fatalistic attitude to life. Their need for a deeper awareness, for a more responsible attitude to the land (and to themselves) is, as in The Far Journey of Oudin (1961), the book's main subject; and the re-fashioning of a unified consciousness its main theme.

The plot centres around Magda, a strapping prostitute of mixed racial origin, her son Cristo, Sharon (a Pomeroon beauty whose sweetheart has, allegedly, been killed by Cristo) and Abram, a respected, patriarchal figure - a recluse who lives in a cabin on a bare promontory of land at the mouth of the Pomeroon river. Magda begs Abram to shelter and hide Cristo, who is wanted by the police, until she is able to smuggle him out of the country. Abram agrees, but later falls dead of a heart attack during an argument with Cristo, who runs back to his mother's house further down the river-bank. Magda refuses to believe Cristo's story, and forces him to return with her to Abram's home. They find that a "tiger" (the local name for a jaguar) has broken into the cabin, and discover Abram's half-eaten, decomposing corpse upon which vultures are already feeding. Seeing a chance to save Cristo from the law, Magda

forces him at gunpoint to dress the remains of Abram in his own clothes and later informs the police of the "disappearance" of Abram and of her discovery of "Cristo's" mangled remains. As Cristo flees towards the Venezuelan border, Magda continues the pretence by holding a "wake" for her supposedly dead son, forty days after the discovery of Abram's body. During the drinking that takes place, Mattias, the educated, well-to-do Portuguese who is Sharon's new fiance, is accidentally stabbed in an argument with Peet, Sharon's drunken father. At that very moment, however, Magda, upstairs in her room, is showing Sharon a love-letter from the fugitive Cristo who, dressed in a tiger-skin and venturing out only at night (thus giving rise to the recent rumours of a marauding tiger) is still in the area, hoping to see Sharon again. Several weeks after the "wake", they meet and make love in the forest; but Cristo has meanwhile been spotted and recognized, and the police are again after him. The novel ends as they close in on Cristo and Sharon in a farmhouse rendezvous by the river. Cristo has decided to give himself up, but there is a suggestion of hope for the future in the child which Sharon has conceived.

The fragmentary, vicarious existence of the villagers, "men and women alike dominated by a furtive desire for unrestricted union with the goddess of identity" (p. 44), who spend their energies:

> ... scraping together ... every penny a man can find without the ghost of a conception of what it means to belong to the grass-roots. (p. 109)

clearly suggests their rootlessness and lack of "authenticity". The death of their old way of life (symbolized by the father-figure of Abram) becomes, therefore, a necessary preliminary to the New Vision of Cristo and Sharon, who represent a future Guyana deeply committed to the land.

As Cristo tells Sharon:

> ... our black parents and capitalists (sometimes they're as white as snow) don't know the instability of their own earth and soil, I tell you, which we are now beginning to sense and find out. ... And we have to start all over again where they began to explore ... and we've got to start again from the roots up even if they look like nothing. ... *We're the first potential parents who can contain the ancestral house.* (pp. 109/110, author's italics).

By placing the action of the novel in the agriculturally rich Pomeroon area, where a sugar-based, colonialist hegemony has never been established; Harris puts the responsibility for making the land fruitful squarely on the shoulders of the inhabitants:

> ... what we possess comes from the ground up - coconut, copra, plantain, banana, wood-grant, sawmill (don't forget Pomeroon is a nursery of boat-builders, think of the lively schooners as well as the sturdy seamen). ... There's cattle, goat, sheep. ... it's all ours. Can't you see what it all means? Nobody *need* carry a self-righteous political chip when the only slave-driver we've ever had is ourselves. (pp. 108/109).

In the prostitute, Magda, the undisputed *grande dame* of the Pomeroon, there is an ironic reference to the bastard, hybrid heredity of the West Indies. She is every man's "body-in-the-dark woman" (p. 15), a powerful, sphinx-like presence:

> ... the very antithesis of their dark truth and history, written in the violent mixture of races that had bred them. ... There was something superstitiously holy about such an unholy woman. (pp. 43/44)

and the dark Cristo is a racial skeleton in the cupboard; born "wild", illegitimate, and morally as much Abram's son as any other man's, but denied by all. When Abram reasonably points out that Cristo cannot be his son, since he has only recently become one of her customers, Magda replies:

> Even if you knew me and had me wrapped in you arms a hundred lightning year ago you still wouldn't *believe* Cristo is you flying seed and son; he too *black* and you too *white*. (p. 16).

And presiding at the wake, barefooted, in a full-length gown of royal purple, secluded in her room upstairs like some grotesque, enigmatic deity; Magda is both a denial and a reminder of the bitter truth behind the public mask of propriety and convention. When the drunken Peet, intent on lust, climbs the stairs to her room and forces himself on her, she angrily knocks him cold with his own boot, but when he revives, says:

> Don't shame if you feel bad. Remember not a soul downstairs see what happen. If they hear you fall they believe me and you been having fun. Fool them and satisfy them. I don't care two dam'. (p. 54).

Magda therefore supports the myth of the "over-riding erection which must sustain the collective rape or ghost"[1] in her function as communal whore. It is a public but superficial rôle which, in making of her a promiscuous, sexual object, turns potentially creative need into sterile gratification of appetite. Like the rich, dark soil of the Pomeroon, she is frequently purchased and used, but never imaginatively possessed. Amid the general hypocrisy and self-concern, therefore, Cristo's decision to stay and face his accusers, when offered a chance to escape, is an unprecedented act of moral courage - a gesture towards responsibility for himself and for the land:

> He glanced across the river and knew, whatever he suffered, *he would remain at all costs. He had returned and he would not fly again.* (p. 108, author's italics).

Taken at this level of meaning alone the novel is a fascinating and accomplished work. The social and political implications of the question it raises - who shall be the "true heirs" to the land? - are here made even more provocative than in *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961). And it is this aspect of the novel which has received most critical

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1 Wilson Harris, "The Unresolved Constitution" *CQ* Vol. 14 Nos. 1 and 2 (1968) p. 46.

attention. Kenneth Ramchand refers to The Whole Armour as "Harris's most obviously political novel to date";[1] and John Hearne, discussing it as "perhaps the most accomplished work of the series",[2] while he does indicate the symbolic levels of meaning (Cristo as "Christ the tiger", and the novel's general Christian symbolism) nevertheless sees it primarily as "a flank attack on the material exchanges of everyday life,[3] and as "a serenely confident charter of liberation from the immediate past."[4] Gerald Moore, in a more detailed study, also regards this aspect of the novel as important, but points to the deeper meanings involved in the religious, almost mystical theme of the book. He discusses the figure of Magda as a "cruel mother-goddess"[5] and "the way [the characters] frequently reflect, inhabit and even become one another";[6] the need for the reader to:

> ... try to carry many hints in the mind at once, without seizing upon any one of them in the hope of eliminating the others.[7]

He regards the main aspect of the novel as an essentially spiritual one: the need for the individual "to put on the whole armour of God."[8] But the novel is also, at its deepest level, an enactment of the quest for

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1 See introduction to Faber 1968 edition of Palace of the Peacock, op. cit., p. 4.

2 "The Fugitive in the Forest" The Islands in Between, op. cit., p.149.

3 Ibid., p. 150.

4 Ibid., p. 151.

5 The Chosen Tongue, op. cit., p. 69.

6 Ibid., p. 68.

7 Ibid., p. 69.

8 Ibid., p. 72.

wholeness and authentic Being. Cristo and Sharon undergo a process of individuation: a shamanistic initiation into their roles as vessels of the New Consciousness. This is the alchemical process which forms the core of the novel and which is reflected in the book's epigraphs from Goëthe, the Bible, Blake, St. John of the Cross and The Secret of the Golden Flower. This is the theme, as we shall see, that adds a deeper dimension to the religious, social and political aspects of the novel. For, as Harris is suggesting, no society is finally "free" until each individual within it becomes "authentic" by first freeing himself from the tyranny of his own divided consciousness.

Like both Palace of the Peacock (1960) and The Far Journey of Oudin (1961) the novel opens with a dream of death. Abram's vision of the axle-tree of life "its roots spreadeagled in the air, naturally and invisibly cradled and supported" (p. 11) from whose branches he leaps, is both a glimpse of eternity and a pre-figuring of his own death. He half-wakes, wondering "whether he would find himself in a land that was nowhere". (p. 11). This echoes the mystical state of "illumination" or one-ness with God mentioned in the alchemical work, The Secret of the Golden Flower,[1] and is connected with Abram's wish "to rediscover an innocence at all costs". (p. 11). The theme of regeneration and rebirth is therefore made clear at once, and the biblical echo of "Abraham" in Abram's name suggests his function as progenitor of an enlightened, new, chosen race. The essentially physical nature of Magda[2], her concern for her son, Cristo, for whom she is willing to give her body freely, and the

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1 Vide footnote 2, p. 265.

2 The name suggests the biblical Mary Magdalene, the "woman of the streets" who became a faithful follower of Christ.

sculptural way in which she is described:

> Chinese eyes, emotionless in expression and filled with the blackest unshed tears. Barefoot. The columns of her legs were sculptured to stand out from the loose formless miraculous stone of her dark body and dress, unadorned and plain. (p. 12, my underlining).

gives her a similar quality of heavy, fecund, rootedness. The "loose, formless miraculous stone"[1] reminds us of the unum lapis or massa confusa of alchemy, the starting-point of the great experiment towards individuation or consciousness. Magda's earthy, vital but unfinished, undifferentiated state also links her with Mary, that earlier Mother-image of personal and racial consciousness in the short story, Tomorrow.[2]

Cristo is young, imaginative, unwilling to accept the old order and "derelict premises" of Abram and Magda. His instinctive wish for individuation is present in his appearance:

> High questioning cheek-bones, penetrating eyes, a restless way of shaking hands and wrists, the sensitive nervous shuddering joints and limbs of a sprinter at the start of a race. (p. 16, my underlining).

He feels that he is being made to pay for a crime he has not committed (there is some doubt surrounding the circumstances under which he is alleged to have killed a man), and his sudden thought, spoken aloud: "I refuse" (p. 17): is the "non serviam" of the archetypal Lucifer/Prometheus figure[3] who wishes to be free as an individual. But in Cristo's Christ-like rôle of victim there is no avoiding the suffering involved, and the

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[1] Cf. the Dreamer's "curious stone" mentioned in Palace of the Peacock, (1960) p. 25.

[2] Kyk, op. cit., Vol. No. 1 (December, 1945)

[3] Stephen Dedalus, the young hero of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is also a Promethean rebel:

> I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church ... (Jonathan Cape 1968 edition, p. 251).

inexorable death which this requires. His appeal to Abram: "I am innocent so why must I give myself up?" elicits only the harsh, inevitable reply: "nobody innocent." (p. 17). And Abram's sudden heart-failure places the burden of consciousness - of real freedom - firmly on the shoulders of the "son". The scene which follows, in which Magda forces Cristo to return to the place of Abram's death and, at gunpoint, to dress the stinking carcase of Abram in his own clothes, is clearly meant to symbolise the unwilling but necessary assumption by Cristo, of this difficult rôle of saviour and victim: he now bears the cross of father and son. It is also a stage in Cristo's initiation into a state of psychic wholeness; for he has now made "the compassionate alliance of the dead with the living" through the demonic urgings of his unconscious self - in the shape of Magda "an unfathomable stranger in his mind's eye, whom he must placate and abandon at all costs" (p. 23) and to whom he has "confessed" to killing Abram, thereby accepting moral responsibility for his task of spiritual and psychic re-integration.

The fugitive Cristo, hiding by day and appearing at night clad only in the skin of a tiger which he has shot, is paradoxically the saviour of the community as well as the marauding beast which terrifies the villagers. He is "Christ the Tiger", whose presence forces the painful self-awareness as a necessary preliminary to the soul's freedom.[1] Peet, knocked unconscious by Magda (again suggesting her function as the demonic power of the Unconscious), has a startling vision of himself as Abram's corpse carried in the jaws of the tiger - it is a comment on his death-like ephemeral existence and his need to face life-in-death: "the sensational corpse of the medium of man borne swiftly by the living tiger

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[1] Cf. T.S. Eliot's "In the juvescence of the year/Came Christ the tiger." ("Gerontion" Collected Poems Faber 1970, p. 39).

of death." (p. 52). His new awareness is brought about by the presence of Cristo (whose shirt Magda offers him to replace his own torn one): "But at last he knew. It was Cristo." (p. 53). Later, as he returns to the wake, Peet knows that "they knew he was 'dead'" (p. 44), that his own lack of wholeness has been responsible for the failure to engineer, with Magda, the illusion that: "'East and West had met', the opposite camps of order and chaos had been bound in a truce." (p. 49). The onus of this "wedding of opposites" lies, in fact, with Sharon, his daughter, and the "re-born" Cristo.

But Sharon is not yet ready for her role in this alchemical marriage - the symbolic union of opposites often portrayed in hermetic writings as a coniunctio between sulphur and mercury, sun and moon, man and woman. Cristo is seen (in Peet's brief vision), in alchemical terms, as sulphur or sol: "it was Cristo's sulphuric face in truth, burnt by the fumes of hell and reality" (p. 53); and the next section of the novel, "Time of the Tiger", begins with an expectation of his union with Sharon as mercury or luna. The writing sets the night-time scene in which nature itself seems to wait, in hushed expectancy, for her appearance:

> The night had changed over a long interval of waiting, the frozen stars had become crystals of dew immured in the alchemical waiting shadow of a mirror. All nature was waiting with a passionate longing for the thaw of love buried as deep as everyone wished to dream. ... Magda felt the faintest hopeful shiver ... everything was moving with great subtlety and Sharon was coming now. (p. 59, my underlining).

And as soon as Sharon arrives she is summoned upstairs by Magda who shows her Cristo's letter. She climbs the stairs with a "strange paradoxical sensation ... a hint of a consummation of love she had never actually experienced." (p. 71). She has had many suitors and her latest lover, Mattias, though educated and well off ("the only son and heir" [p.60] of his father's hardware store) is a shallow, insubstantial character,

cynically detached from life and from himself: "One wondered whether Mattias would ever awaken fully to the riddle of himself." (p. 61). He means little to Sharon, like her previous beau, whom, according to Peet, she never really wanted ("in point of fact she really grieve for Cristo, and nobody else." p. 46). He is accidentally stabbed in the quarrel which arises from Peet's drunken accusation that he and Sharon are late not because of the delay at a cousin's farm where the tiger has been seen, but to Mattias's taking advantage of an opportunity to have sexual union with Sharon. When Peet cries: "the tiger is none other but you. You. Sneaking behind every helpless maiden in the dark," (p. 70) the effect is tragically ironic, for the remark suggests a hidden wish for the potency which neither he nor Mattias possesses. Mattias's death comes at the precise moment when Sharon, upstairs with Magda, realizes that she must accept union with the living Cristo; and his body falls "almost in the identical position ... in which Sharon's first suitor had fallen." (p.89).

Sharon, then, is to be the "bride" of Cristo, but she must first relinquish her rôle as a destructive, virgin goddess or "snow maiden" whose lovers meet their deaths attempting to possess her. Even as she is told that Cristo is alive, she at first feels "the strongest, most vivid desire ... to slay the tiger with her 'snow-maiden's' hands." (p.72). And her virginity, like Magda's promiscuousness, is a kind of unconscious complicity in a universal myth of purity/impurity: an "erotic fable, one of the white fables of the wake and the mixed ancestral legendary land." (p. 72, my underlining).[1] Enraged at Sharon's decision to show Mattias Cristo's letter, Magda tears it to shreds, handing these to her along with

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[1] There is a suggestion here of the European bias of racial purity/impurity - a bias which Mittelholzer readily accepted.

the torn dollar bills, the remnants of Peet's earlier attempt to buy sexual pleasure. Magda thus juxtaposes both hers and Sharon's sexual rôles - the contrasting black and white "fables" - and links the predatory, "white" virgin firmly with the brazen, black prostitute: "show [Mattias] me son's private letter as you please but show him too you whoring father nasty dollar bill." (p. 77). Sharon's vanity, her unthinking acceptance of her "fairy-princess" rôle, drops away, and she feels herself "crushed in the arms of a wild beast." (p. 78). In her sexual union with Cristo, Harris uses imagery to convey the sacramental, alchemical nature of the event. Sharon's element - the moon - now appears unclouded and bright. All obstacles to her true rôle are removed in Cristo's embrace:

> The moon stood high overhead. Its full radiance had been intercepted by the forest so that the light which still fell and painted stripes and bars under the trees was purplish and vague and blue. (p. 79, my underlining).

Here the forest's "interception" of the moon's radiance, the pattern of stripes thrown on the ground, the purplish-blue colour all point to Sharon's need for Cristo. The first, to her eager anticipation of this meeting with him in the forest, then to the striped tiger skin which he wears, and finally to the colour which is ascribed to him in Peet's vision of "a purplish light ... shining on the elbows ... a blue anatomy and presence." (p. 53). A branch suddenly breaks and falls from the upper storey of the trees:

> ... ripping open a shaft and a window, along which the thwarted flower of the moon now bloomed in a mysterious bulb of fulfilment in a dark confused room and roof. Sharon stared along the tunnel of the moon to the womb of the sky cradling Cristo's shoulder. (p. 79).

This is not only a perfectly credible and accurate evocation of a natural occurrence seen from the forest floor (the break in the dense foliage overhead, through which a shaft of moonlight streams), but it also images

Sharon's new freedom as she lies "in the arms of the universal bridegroom of love, pierced by all the ecstasy of constructive innocence." (p. 79). No longer a "thwarted flower of the moon", she is at last in her true element. The whole process is conceived as an erotic, initiatory rite in which Sharon gains shamanistic knowledge[1] or mana. Through Cristo's body she becomes one with the landscape and now feels her spirit ascend to gaze with new eyes upon the heartland she has discovered:

> ... she had gained the reins of freedom. She could see beneath her and around her for a great distance with a sanity she had never possessed. ... Sharon let her hand slide tenderly along the vibrant backbone of the land. ... The feeling in her stroking fingers made her see far away across the moonlit river ... across Devil's Hole rapids and the Nameless Falls, greenheart ravines streaming with most, blue mountains frowning in cloud, coming from as far as the heart of Brazil into Venezuela's Orinoco and Guiana's Potaro, Mazaruni, Cuyuni and Pomeroon. (p. 82).

During the weeks before her meeting in the forest with Cristo, Sharon had had vague intimations in dreams, the nature of which clearly indicate the gradual process of initiation she undergoes. References to the "tiniest newest spider of the living" (p. 96) like the "tiny fluid spider" (p. 98) which she sees running along the skylight in the roof of her home, suggest the "spider transubstantiation" which she is experiencing. The "spasmodic homunculus" (p. 98)[2] which in her dreams literally fashions and re-moulds

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[1] The "tunnel of the moon" (p. 79) through which Sharon seems to travel upwards to the sky, is clearly related to the shamanistic symbol of the tree or pillar of light by which the shaman climbs up to heaven or down to the underworld. (See Mircea Eliade, Shamanism Routledge and Kegan Paul 1964, pp. 120/132).

[2] An alchemical symbol of the Anthroparion or "inner self" ("little man") - the diminutive figure "which you see in the pupil of another's eye." (C.G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, op. cit., p. 215).

her consciousness:

> Sometimes he caught her in a lump of mud, squeezing a bead of moisture into a crooked hand, lapping it up with an eager tongue. Sharon was swallowed and reduced once more to nothingness as it had seemed at the very beginning of her life. (p. 98)

suggests in one sense, Peet's jealous, almost demented guardianship of his virgin daughter - his constant, fearful watch over her movements. But it is also part of the process of her <u>rite de passage</u> from girlhood to womanhood: a process of individuation. When she finally escapes at night to meet Cristo in the forest it is with the knowledge that she is at last ready for her new role:

> O yes, tonight was the total female night of initiation and self-surrender before time ran into a vitally changed tomorrow. (p. 98).

This is not then merely a lovers' tryst. It is an elemental and terrifying "conversion", and as Sharon runs out into the night, "her upturned face under the moon was wild." (p. 98). She feels both the sharp stirring of passion and a paralysing sense of dread:

> On such a night one was reduced to the genes of being nothing again, in the wildest mad embrace, one's ghostly seed and ghostly parents and all. (p. 98).

Together, Sharon and Cristo have achieved wholeness and are now prepared to break out of the prison of historical and social stasis: truly free because they are clothed in "an armour superior to the elements of self-division and coercion." (p. 128).

Cristo, too, had had to undergo an initiation into selfhood. During his adventures as a fugitive in the forest he experiences, and takes part in, a dreamlike recapitulation of the whole, futile process that has been Guyana's (and the Caribbean's) history: a charade of successive conflict and flight where everyone - Caribs, runaway slaves, whole civilizations - appears to be running blindly as if from some cataclysmic disaster. His own flight leads, finally, to an encounter

with a band of "white priests and magicians" (p. 121) - the Carib shamans. They minister to him and, as he later tells Sharon, "fitted me together again." (p. 122). He has earned the right to the whole armour of true selfhood. His awareness is now "sharp as the devil's chameleon" (p. 104) after his forty days and nights in the forest. The reference to the "devil's chameleon", an image of the shaman/trickster, suggests that this new awareness is, in fact, shamanistic knowledge. The self-knowledge and self-surrender in love of Cristo and Sharon makes possible a future no longer threatened by inner division or outward change; for the child in Sharon's womb is a symbol of the new vision of consciousness, the genuine stability of soul that has escaped everyone for so long.

But their new vision is alien to the other characters, who have yet to acquire self-awareness. The fluctuating fortunes of life on the Pomeroon (a <u>tidal</u> river like the Canje) where drought and the influx of the salt sea alternates with the rains which bring a flow of fresh water down from the Cuyuni watershed:

> ... that overcame the salt desert of the sea and chased it downriver away from the sluice-gates of every besieged plantation. (p. 93)

is accepted fatalistically by the people who, lacking vision and a sense of responsibility, curse their bad luck in one season and thank their lucky stars in the next. Peet, Sharon's father, is their representative. Accepted and admired as a "hearty old-school pioneer" (p. 86), he is the epitome of thrift and prudence, dressing like a pauper, but possessing a "big bank balance he hardly touched." (p. 85). He keeps hundreds of dollars stored in a wooden chest (made from a hollowed-out tree-trunk) which he has hidden under his bed. His outwardly prudent and practical nature, however, conceals a poverty of spirit; and his physical disability becomes the visible evidence of the emotional atrophy within:

> Why did he insist on dragging his left foot, when he was drunk, as if it was a paralysed trunk he drew after him? Why did his arm appear to turn to wood, and his body twitch a little like a falling tree? (p. 86, my underlining).

The link between his paralysed left foot[1] and the wooden trunk (made from a fallen tree) under the bed is significant; for by putting his faith in his "dreaming treasury under the bed" (p. 86) Peet lives an incomplete, superficial existence, like the accountant, Mattias, who is concerned only with "mercenary calculations and provisions". (p. 61). His death at the end of the novel is therefore foreshadowed in the death of Mattias, who, falling on his knife, reveals "the dripping treasury of blood". (p.88). This incident becomes a comment on the community's timid and cowardly acceptance of a truncated, selfish life: their deliberate avoidance of the knowledge that "the roots and branches of transformation descended and arose only in the starred eye of love." (p. 93). Their persistent self-concern almost guarantees the futility of their lives, so that:

> The trunk of triumphant prosperity became - in this context - a recurring fate and epitaph rather than the ascension of ever-lasting thanksgiving. (p. 93).

Gerald Moore chooses this passage to illustrate Harris's "tendency to overwork language",[2] claiming that:

> No conceivable reading of 'trunk' prepares us for either 'fate' or 'epitaph', still less for 'ascension'. Here the reader is left outside Harris's meaning, unable to enter.[3]

But the passage is, in fact, another example of the cumulative effect of Harris's use of imagery. Because of the meanings now associated with "trunk" (the tree-trunk "treasury", Peet's mercenary attitude and spirit-

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1 Cf. the incurable infection of the Dreamer's left eye (the visionary eye) in Palace of the Peacock (1960)

2 The Chosen Tongue, op. cit., p. 73.

3 Ibid.

ual "lameness"), "prosperity", "epitaph" and "ascension", this is clearly a reference to the futile, self-damaging efforts of Peet and the rest to ward off the inevitable by laying up treasure on earth.

Peet's hollowness and hypocrisy as a chosen leader is also conveyed by his failure to persist in the search for the child carried off by a tiger. Faced with a swamp leading to an almost impenetrable jungle (symbolic of the "inner journey" he needs to undertake), he panics and, as leader of the party, abandons the search:

> Peet shrank from exploring the navel of the world where the mate of all generations of fantasy was devouring the umbilical chord [sic] of a stolen life. The search came to an abrupt halt in this sensation of severance from the child they sought in the heart of their gloom. (p. 85, my underlining).

This motif of the lost child (the lost "inner self" or archetypal child of dreams) is repeated in the loss of his son and heir in his wife's fatal miscarriage - the result of a fall she sustains while he is away conducting the half-hearted search:

> The baby (it was a boy) would have been coming into manhood today, Peet said sixteen years after the event, staring across the land into the navel of misadventure. (p. 85).

We are obviously meant to see this incident in the light of Peet's failure to pursue a personal goal of wholeness and psychic integration - his own "vision of buried fertility" (p. 85) which the lost child represents.

The need, then, is for psychic regeneration. Cristo's cry "I wanted to make myself new (p. 102) echoes Abram's wish to "rediscover an innocence" (p. 11), as it will later become the cry of Adam, the father of Victor in Ascent to Omai (1970): "I sought to unmake myself to make something I had lost before I was born." (p. 58). This is the subterranean theme of the novel, a process of personal integration that always precedes the new vision, the new, integrated society, the political charter of freedom. And it is a process which must continually be going on. Even

as Cristo, his head in Sharon's lap, imagines that he can hear his son "crowing" in the "shell" of her womb, the police are already closing in on the house: for the birth of new vision requires the death of the old. As Cristo's regeneration had required Abram's death, so his own death is implicit in the new life which he and Sharon have brought into being:

> Cristo was thinking he might as well be dead now he could see time as a curious shell one constantly evolved and surpassed since it belonged to several modes of dying and living, peoples and places, all immaterial and elusive. (p. 124).

(IV) The Secret Ladder (1963)

This, the final novel of the "Quartet", is strongly reminiscent of Palace of the Peacock (1960) in the general outline of its plot. Russell Fenwick, the educated, articulate and introspective land surveyor leading a government hydrographic expedition in the upper reaches of the Canje river, is in charge of a motley crew of men who represent the many races of Guyana. He and his crew (like Donne and his men) are subtly changed by a series of events which take place over a period of seven days. The purpose of their survey - to take readings of the changing level of the river as a preliminary to a later water conservancy scheme - is resented by a sullen, primitive community of Negroes (the descendants of runaway slaves) living in isolation in the deep forest, and led by an ancient patriarch called Poseidon. The Negroes fear that the flood basin created by the projected scheme will rob them of their land and freedom; and they attempt to create trouble through small acts of sabotage. A river gauge is broken, the make-shift bridge which gives Fenwick and his men access to Poseidon's land is burnt, a member of the survey beaten. Fenwick, after an earlier, accidental meeting with the aged Poseidon, begins to feel less and less certain about his attitude to his men, to his job as survey director, to the backward and timid Negro community which the conservancy programme has unearthed. Catalena Perez, wife of a Portuguese member of the team, arrives in the area, and Perez arranges for her to stay in Poseidon's crumbling but roomy house in the forest. Fenwick suggests that Perez stay with her in order to keep an eye on Poseidon and his men and perhaps dissuade them from doing anything foolish. Perez, however, mistreats his wife and causes trouble through his gambling habits, and Fenwick is obliged to fire him and order them both to leave. Meanwhile he sends Bryant, a Negro who identifies with Poseidon - seeing him as a grandfather-figure - to try and make the old man see reason, and to repair the damage done by Perez. Only Catalena is there when Bryant arrives at Poseidon's place, and, terrified by her husband's threat

to kill her, she begs him to take her away. They set out together and eventually find Poseidon and his men in a forest clearing. Poseidon, however, misreads their peaceful intention and attacks the woman whom he thinks is (like Perez) a spy. In trying to intercept the old man and protect Catalena, Bryant causes Poseidon to stumble. The old man falls, striking his head on the rim of a bucket, and dies at Bryant's feet. Catalena and Bryant are saved from death at the hands of Poseidon's men only by the arrival of two of their number with news of their accidental "murder" of one of Fenwick's men (in fact the man has only been stunned) and allowed to return to the survey camp. The Negroes, their leader dead and their cause lost, decide to give up the unequal struggle.

Although the story is much more realistic - this novel is one of Harris's most straightforward with respect to style and plot - and the characterization of Fenwick and his crew more conventional than is the case in Palace of the Peacock (1960); the similarities between these two novels is striking. The old Negro, Poseidon, is (like the old Arawak woman of Palace of the Peacock) an archetypal figure representing the Folk, and the discovery of his fragile, "buried community" has deep psychological significance for Fenwick and his men, just as the Mission of Mariella has for Donne and crew. The presence of Poseidon's "buried community" is a silent reminder of the need to accommodate the Folk, the buried inner self. And Fenwick's first meeting with this ragged, inarticulate figure is described in terms that make clear the importance of Poseidon as a symbol of the archetypal unconscious:

> The strangest figure he had ever seen had appeared in the opening of the bush, dressed in a flannel vest, flapping ragged fins of trousers on his legs. Fenwick could not help fastening his eyes greedily upon him as if he saw down a bottomless gauge and river of reflection. He wanted to laugh at the weird sensation but was unable to do so. The old man's hair was white as wool and his cheeks - covered with wild curling

> rings - looked like an unkempt sheep's back. The black wooden snake of skin peeping through its animal blanket was wrinkled and stitched together incredibly. (p. 23).
>
> It was as if he (Fenwick) however much he protested within himself at the ceaseless ruse of cruel nature and sentimentality, could never, any more, rid himself of the daemon of freedom and imagination and responsibility. Poseidon had been hooked and nailed to a secret ladder of conscience however crumbling and extreme the image was. (p. 24).

The description of Poseidon as a god-like, sea-borne creature (like the Greek Poseidon or the Roman Neptune - god of the seas) conveys an impression of great dignity as well as absurdity and reflects Fenwick's ambivalent response to the old man. This is, in fact, an expression of the psychic disunity which Fenwick has to learn to cure. And the main theme of the novel is his purgatorial inward journey towards self-integration and "authentic" existence:

> Fenwick had named his dinghy Palace of the Peacock after the city of God, the city of gold set somewhere in the heart of Brazil and Guiana. He liked to think of all the rivers of Guiana as the curious rungs in a ladder on which one sets one's musing foot again and again, to climb into both the past and the future of the continent of mystery. ... The Canje was one of the lowest rungs in the ladder of ascending purgatorial rivers ... (pp. 19/20).

Poseidon is "the oldest inhabitant of the Canje" (p. 21) and the approach to his home is a narrow, weed-choked waterway into which Fenwick's boat edges with difficulty:

> At the best of times this was a narrow passage to be manoeuvred with care to avoid fouling the engine's propellor. Now it was almost blocked by an immense hurdle of grass. (p. 21)

This images Fenwick's own reluctance to face the reality of his inner life, and his first impulse, on seeing old Poseidon for the first time, is one of inner panic:

> He did not trust his own eyes like a curious fisherman, playing for time, unable to accept his own catch, trying to strip from the creature who stood before him - the spirit with which he himself had involuntarily invested it. This was no god of the swamps, no leviathan of the depths, he protested. (p. 24).

That Poseidon is a symbol of the Unconscious, the buried, dark self which Man ignores at his own peril, is clearly recognized by Harris himself. In his introduction to the single-volume edition of The Whole Armour and The Secret Ladder[1] he mentions Stanley Romaine Hopper's essay "Le Cri De Merlin" which echoes C.G. Jung's reflections on the Arthurian legend of Merlin. Like Merlin, Poseidon is a "monster" - a bizarre and unintelligible presence - but:

> We need to retrieve or bring those 'monsters' back into ourselves as native to psyche, native to a quest for unity through contrasting elements, through the ceaseless tasks of the creative imagination to digest and liberate contrasting spaces rather than succumb to implacable polarisations."[2]

Poseidon's "soundless" cry, therefore, (like the sigh which "swept out of the gloom of the trees" in Palace of the Peacock 1960, p.26) though Fenwick cannot understand it (it is quite clear to Bryant who loves and respects the old man), forces an awareness of "a secret ladder of conscience" (p. 24) which cannot any longer be ignored. And Fenwick's crucial meeting with him initiates the seven-day journey of self-discovery.

Fenwick's lack of self-knowledge, his need for spiritual re-birth, is indicated in the first paragraph of the novel where, sitting in his "narrow corial and shell of a boat" on the black, mirror-surface of the Canje,[3] he looks up at the river-gauge above him as at "an introspective ladder of climbing numbers":

> ... it seemed an interminable way for the water to mount over his head. Still it could happen in seven days, he decided, adopting for no clear reason whatever the number that stood in his mind. The sky might suddenly declare to rain and fall. (p. 9).

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1 Faber 1973.

2 Ibid., p. 8.

3 One is reminded of the forbidding nature of the Canje river in the "Jen" fairy-tale in Mittelholzer's A Morning at the Office (1950) and in Shadows Move among Them (1951).

The dry weather which Fenwick hopes will soon break, his arbitrary choice of seven days as the time it will take for the "water to mount over his head", the gauge which symbolizes a "secret ladder" of the soul (like the "rungs in the ladder of ascending purgatorial rivers", [p. 20] which the rivers represent) all suggest his spiritual condition of "dryness", of waiting and watching.[1] The men take turns on the stelling (a wooden landing-stage jutting out from the bank built upon piles sunk in the river-bed) keeping records of the gauge-readings, and the novel's three sections are headed "The Day Readers", "The Night Readers" and "The Reading". In effect, the stelling with its gauge becomes a symbolic, open stage upon which the inner drama of psychic re-integration takes place; and the "readings" become the spiritual record of their purgatorial ascent to wholeness. The monotony of "watching the river and being watched in turn by one's reflection" (p. 12) gradually takes on a symbolic meaning:

> It was an endless drama and obsession and Fenwick turned aghast at himself. What had started as the slightest pointer and current of duty was assuming enormous unwieldy proportions. (p. 12).

Fenwick momentarily toys with the idea of applying for a transfer to a camp atop Kaieteur, the great fall, but changes his mind deciding to remain and "see this thing through". (p. 60). In fact, this reference to the survey on the waterfall-top - the scene of Donne's apotheosis in Palace of the Peacock (1960) - which Fenwick regards as "another world compared to this place" (p. 60), reminds us that he is not yet ready for the illumination of self-integration, and

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[1] A condition powerfully conveyed in Gerard Manley Hopkins's well-known sonnet ("Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend ...") which ends: "Mine, O thou Lord of life, send my roots rain." (from the Penguin edition of Poems and Prose 1966, p. 67).

has yet to complete his initiation, starting from the "lower rung" of the Canje. "This is another place, a different world, this Canje," says Jordan, the camp cook, "Jesus, this is hell." (p. 16). And later, when Fenwick interviews Stoll, the young, proud apprentice disgruntled because of his status as member of the general crew; his remarks about the "treacherous time" of apprenticeship which one "suffers", like his advice to Stoll that "land surveying is a hard life and it's better to come up the hard way" (p. 61) carry a significance beyond the trite meaning of the words.[1]

Jordan, the camp's "exacting store-keeper and banker" (p. 14) whose pride and self-importance in his easy familiarity with Fenwick together with his parsimonious attitude which makes him disliked by the men, is a facet of Fenwick's personality: the hard, "Donne"-like side of his nature, concerned with efficiency, reflected in his rigorous adherence to and conformity with government regulations. And while the figure of Stoll reminds him of his own inner responsibility - his "apprenticeship" of spirit - Fenwick realizes, lying in "his cocoon of a hammock"[2] that:

> ... whether he chose to admit it or not, Jordan was his shield against importunity, an agent of governance to exercise over the men in lieu of a genuine and profoundly human natural understanding he would have given all he possessed to possess. (p. 32)

Jordan represents qualities of self-interest and greed which, Medusa-like, hold the spirit immobile: the fact that he has been cheating Poseidon over the purchase of fish (a traditional symbol of the spirit of Christ) suggests his own lack of spiritual depth. In

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1 The description of Stoll as "an overstretched spider [who] carried the spirit of accuser or trickster" (p. 14) suggests the shamanistic rite de passage which Fenwick faces.

2 Note the suggestion here of a gestatory stage.

Fenwick's mind "Jordan" becomes synonymous with "gorgon", and as he says in a letter to his mother:

> ... he [Jordan] would make a fine head for a prime minister and a governor rolled into one, believe me!1 ... Even if he's a thief, he's eminently sensible and as economic as anyone can desire. (pp. 39/40).

He is the element of self-interest which, because of Fenwick's lack of awareness, threatens to assume control. Weng, the Chinese foreman who rides the men remorselessly (significantly, he is the marksman and hunter for the camp) is, like Jordan, an extension of Fenwick's authority: his outer self. In Weng, Fenwick sees his ugly side, his alien, cruel shadow; and when the man suddenly appears at the tent's entrance, Fenwick has the uncanny impression of seeing, by a trick of the light, himself standing there. Weng appears, for a brief moment, an "involuntary twin of angst." (p.43) Weng has been making arbitrary changes in the men's rota, frequently arranging to have someone else take his place at the gauge while he is away hunting. Fenwick dislikes the man, is even a little afraid of him, because he seems to be taking advantage of his position as foreman. Once again, Fenwick discovers (in Weng as in Jordan) the selfish, "hard" side of himself which has begun to take control:

> Weng laughed again. " ... In fact the men say I resemble you in this - I don't make fun about certain responsibilities - I can be hard, hard as stone ..." (p. 45).

But already the compensatory presence of Poseidon has stirred into being a process of reconciliation:

> The binding ancestral apparition of Poseidon contained a new divine promise, born of an underworld of half-forgotten sympathies. ... Here was the ambivalent lapis of all their hopes of ultimate freedom and archetypal authority as well as the viable symbol of inexhaustible self-oppression. (p. 32).

The alchemical symbol of the lapis philosophorum links Poseidon with the Merlin-figure[1] of alchemy: the ambivalent, mercurial spirit of the coniunctio or "wedding" of opposites. In a mood of "self-surrender", Fenwick has a dream in which he sees an armed figure on horseback. He approaches the rider who vanishes leaving his decapitated steed on the ground. This is a pre-figuring of Fenwick's own "decapitation":[2] the loss of his "Medusa-head" of self-interest and inflexibility. In the letter he later writes to his mother, he says:

> My dreams are beginning to be coloured by the vision of the nameless horseman (Perseus?) slaying the cruel muse to arm himself with the head of a Gorgon. (p. 39).

The dream is therefore a stage in the process of self-knowledge, and when, next morning, Fenwick leaves his hammock (his "cocoon") and goes to the river, the images of light and brightness convey a sense of the gradual illumination[3] which is taking place within him:

> He emerged to find the river black and sparkling where the early morning sun broke through the trees. ... Each tiny aperture in the bush had been spreadeagled into a star. (p. 33).

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1 According to C.G. Jung, "the secret of Merlin was carried on by alchemy, primarily in the figure of Mercurius." (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, op. cit., p. 216).

2 This also pre-figures the death of Poseidon who falls in the shadow of one of his horses after striking his head on the sharp edge of a bucket.

3 Images of light and brilliance also occur after the Dreamer's nightmare (also a dream of a horseman) in Palace of the Peacock when "the trees were lit with stars of fire" (p. 47) and again, when the crew emerge from the "straits of memory", in the "spiritual summer of russet and tropical gold" (p. 76). These images refer to the approaching illumination of spirit in the alchemical "doctrine of the scintillae" or "soul-sparks":

> [The scintillae] correspond to the particles of light imprisoned in the dark Physis, whose reconstitution was one of the chief aims of Gnosticism and Manichaeism. (C.G.Jung "Mysterium Conjunctionis" Collected Works, op. cit., p. 53).

Shortly after, writing to his mother, he is able, objectively, to assess the importance of his meeting with Poseidon. Aware of his mixed blood; of his African, European and Amerindian antecedents, Fenwick sees the real danger of succumbing to a facile, romantic pride in a racial "heritage". He recognizes that the "legacy of the past" raises a much deeper question than one simply of racial origin: "it's a question of going in unashamed to come out of the womb again." (p. 38). It is, in short, a question of psychic and spiritual rebirth. A psychic "fault" has occurred within Caribbean Man, mirrored in the discrepancy between the aerial photographs of the land (which show the origin of the headwaters of a river to be in the savannahs) and Fenwick's survey of the actual terrain (which reveals that the "head" of the same river actually starts in higher, wooded forest-land).[1] There is a similar "discrepancy" within Fenwick himself:

> No wonder an empirical hiatus or gulf existed, to a bird's eye view, severing the river's head from its trunk and feet. ... The mysterious foundation of intelligence, the unity of head and heart had become for him, Fenwick knew, an inescapable obsession ... (pp. 41/42).

Fenwick, then, has accepted the need for psychic re-integration: the uniting of heart and head; and his task as director of the survey begins to take on new and larger significance. The Canje river is vital for the irrigation of the lower, exposed "*Oudin* savannahs" (p. 16), affecting both "the absent East Indian rice farmer and the [absentee] European sugar planter." (p.42).[2]

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[1] An example of Harris's creative interpretation of actual experience. When one recalls the significance of savannah ("outer" self; "season") and forest ("inner" self; "eternity"), the psychological significance of this geomorphological discrepancy becomes clear. It is the difference between "vicarious" and "authentic" experience.

[2] Note the implication here of the whole colonialist hegemony of sugar and rice.

But providing a flood reservoir to supply an ever-increasing demand for fresh water (the Canje is, of course, a tidal river, subject to the influx of salt water during drought) involves not only huge expense, but also "the resurrection of Poseidon, the digging up and exposure of the buried community he represented." (p. 43). In conventional terms, this means simply that the construction of a larger catchment area will necessitate the flooding of a larger portion of the land; and Poseidon's community will have to be re-housed and allocated new land. There is also, however, a deeper, alchemical significance to this situation. The greater demands of the coast (the conscious outer self) requires a corresponding flow of awareness from the source of supply (the inner self). This need to link "inner" and "outer" - symbolic of a psychic re-integration - involves the "resurrection" of the unpredictable, problematic unconscious. It is an allegory of rebirth: the ending of a spiritual "drought". And so, after Fenwick's first meeting with Poseidon, a heavy shower, "a sudden bursting pod of rain. First stinging wayward seed. ... Then a forest of rain" (pp. 24/25, my underlining),[1] which falls comes as a preliminary to the long-awaited end of the drought. Fenwick still has a long way to go. He decides to walk with Jordan to Poseidon's home - to check on Perez and the temporary gauge which has been installed there - but comes upon a densely overgrown and dangerous creek - Benim Creek[2] - where the felled tree serving as a

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[1] The imagery, suggesting germination and growth within the natural world also refers to Fenwick's need of spiritual growth. A remarkably tactile effect is also conveyed - the feel of the heavy rain on one's skin: and most Guyanese will recall the childhood game of sucking certain dried seed-pods which dehisce when wet, stinging the inside of the mouth.

[2] The title of an extract from one of Harris's early, unpublished novels is "Banim Creek" (Kyk Vol. 6 No. 18. op. cit., pp. 36/42). The extract suggests that this early work may have been an earlier version of The Secret Ladder. (See discussion on pp. 276/277, chapter 6 of this study).

bridge has been destroyed. They cross laboriously, climbing a decayed old tree overhanging the creek through which, waist-deep, they have to pick their way. Their ritual passage is marked by a sudden cleansing shower:

> The air instantly turned metallic, the forest groaned and heaved, shook its breast and burst a rain of contents. A massive crystal torrent (milky with darkness) began to pour. With each step they made, however, the storm lightened ... (p. 66)

and once they reach the other side, images of light and brilliancy return:

> The sun appeared once more ... the consenting spirit of place ... turning lighter it seemed, almost of its own volition and jewelled with rich floating illusions, each leaf now offering its shield. A drop of water like a glittering diamond. (p. 66).

Poseidon's house is, significantly, a re-constructed Roman Catholic Mission-house whose jutting verandas appear "like the arms of a cross". "It had an air both foreign and native, ideal and primitive." (p. 67). The house, like its owner, seems an indissoluble (though crumbling) part of the landscape: "it had acquired a special seal and privilege, the stamp of a multiple tradition and heritage." (p. 68). There they discover a distraught Catalena Perez who (like Mariella of Palace of the Peacock, 1960) bears the welts of her husband's brutality. Her potential, wild beauty, marred by violence and lust, is a comment on the arbitrariness of nature "in dispensing beauty as in furnishing models of imperfection." (p. 70). Catalena, like Saint Catherine after whom she is named, is the innocent love and beauty of the world that is forever broken on the wheel[1] of human greed and selfishness. The beautiful swarm

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[1] Saint Catherine of Alexandria, commanded by Emperor Maximinus II to sacrifice to idols, refused and was bound to a specially-made, diabolical contraption of wheels fixed with knives.

of butterflies that emerge suddenly from the bush is a symbolic mirroring of this:

> His eye was distracted by a flight of brilliant butterflies sailing out of the bush. They hovered overhead and one enormous distended creature - wings breathing like fans - settled on Catalena's shoulder. She brushed it off, releasing Fenwick's arm which she had grabbed in frenzy a moment or two ago. It flew straight at Jordan and he struck out savagely, venting his spleen on a mad wraith. The fantastic wings were shattered save for the spirit of their design which persisted on the ground like stars of gold painted on the blue skeleton of crumpled heaven. (p. 75).

We seem to recall the flight of parrots in Palace of the Peacock (1960): a sign of the Folk which uplifts the sensitive da Silva as it enrages Cameron, the practical realist. Jordan's savage reaction to the butterflies is contrasted with Catalena's tacit identification with them. And later, when Poseidon is dead, it is Catalena who will offer Bryant the love which allows them both to escape "upon another rung in the secret ladder". (p. 125). The "flight of brilliant butterflies" also suggests that Fenwick has attained another stage in his journey towards psychic wholeness and spiritual illumination,[1] and this first part of the novel - "The Day Readers" - ends with a general summing up of his progress so far. Four days have now passed of the seven needed for the completion of his task of re-integration:

> Four days had seen the task begun and far advanced of dismantling a prison of appearance. Seven days it had taken to finish the original veil of creation that shaped and ordered all things to be solid in the beginning. (p.74).

The conscious choice which Fenwick has made: his decision to pursue the difficult task of reconciling the demands of his official job as survey director with the no less important needs of

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[1] In Greek mythology, the virgin Psyche is beloved of the god Cupid (Eros) and is often personified as a butterfly.

Poseidon and his community, is, as we have seen, at the same time an unconscious decision to seek the esoteric, even dangerous path of psychic re-integration. The dangers attendant on such an undertaking become clear in the section entitled "The Night Readers", where images of darkness predominate, often to become a threatening presence. The rains have still not come, remaining only as a distant "threat". The men are growing hostile to Fenwick. Jordan warns him that his emotional involvement, first with Poseidon, now in the situation between Perez and his wife, can only undermine his authority. But Fenwick is no longer using Jordan as a shield against his own personal involvement with the others. He tells him:

> I've often listened to you in the past. I confess many a time I've been hopelessly at sea about things. But I've got intuition now - the kind I can't withstand. (p. 80).

Jordan instinctively realizes that Fenwick's example - his decision to _be_ involved - forces the others to face their own, inner natures, too, and involves them, and himself, in the same dangerous journey of self-discovery. Jordan is, in fact, cast in the rôle of the Tempter ("Everybody got two natures, skipper. The only way to overcome it (Confucius say) is to overlook it like a joke." p. 82) and Fenwick has taken on the rôle of saviour and victim, setting an example by which he expects others to "turn over a new leaf", and thereby risking his own neck:

> "A new leaf, skipper?" Jordan spoke slowly, his face more wrinkled and deepset than ever. "The tree that bear such a leaf is a tree of grave open disrespect. Watch they don't string you up on it." (p. 90).

But it is the enigmatic Chiung, the night reader, who unwittingly becomes the victim in the developing drama of consciousness. Ironically, it is _because_ of Fenwick's compassionate treat-

ment (letting Chiung borrow his own cap and raincoat as protection against the cold night air) that Chiung is exposed to the attack by Poseidon's men, who approach him only because they think, at first, that he is Fenwick. In fact, his symbolic changing of rôles with Chiung has placed an unfair burden of consciousness on the illiterate man: an awareness which Fenwick unconsciously still wishes to avoid. Just before he discovers Chiung's unconscious form on the stelling, Fenwick, looking up at the stars, has a disturbing mystical experience of limitless expansion - union with the cosmos itself:

> He shivered with the visionary tatoo of every branch and constellation, conscious of the threads which bound him to their enormous loom. ... The fever of emotion almost overwhelmed him ... the dream of belonging to space, his suspension, in space, his possession of, and conquest of space - the most enduring fiction of the human brain and heart, old as the first astronomical crab alighting from the wall of a cave upon the roof of the sky. (p. 91).

It is a vision of consciousness almost too much to bear, and his sudden, irrational wish that Chiung might not merely be unconscious but dead, is a desire to "flee from the image of himself". (p.94). But there is to be no escape from the burden of consciousness:

> After all, he was genuinely glad to hear Chiung was alive! And yet curiously and inexplicably startled (even crestfallen) that it was so! (p. 94).

His unconscious attempt to put Chiung in his place as victim is suggested also in the connection between the vision he has of cosmic consciousness as "the first astronomical crab alighting from the wall of a cave upon the roof of the sky" (p. 91) and the "crab" which Chiung, dazed by the blow he receives, imagines he sees somersaulting over his head just before he loses consciousness. Chiung's "crab" is, of course, the turtle[1] which he accepts from Poseidon's men

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[1] The image of a turtle is related to the novel's "hermetic" process and to Chiung's abortive rôle as "trickster". In Greek legend, the newly-born Hermes, "trickster" son of Zeus, immediately took to stealing. The first object he encountered was a tortoise, which he promptly killed, using its shell as a sounding-board for his seven-stringed lyre.

(refusing to pay for it) and which they later retrieve in a revenge attack. Chiung's refusal to pay the men for the turtle is only the incidental cause of his distress, however, the deeper reason for which is really Fenwick's veiled wish to avoid the consequences of his vision. Significantly, it is Weng the hunter - Fenwick's right hand man and a day-reader (as Chiung the night-reader is his "left-hand man" - his unconscious wish for a scapegoat)[1] who opposes and threatens Fenwick through his unsympathetic treatment to Chiung. Weng, arguing that an outright act of revenge is needed against Poseidon and his men, is openly contemptuous of Fenwick's policy of "appeasement" while Chiung, the actual victim, seems reluctant to blame anyone. Fenwick is startled by the seeming inconcistency of things:

> Why, it was Weng who had goaded Chiung to speak and live. Now the tables were inexplicably turned - Weng desired Chiung's death. (p. 99).

Fenwick begins to realize the difficulty and urgency of reconciling the two men (who appear like the opposite elements of a dichotomy) so as to preserve a balance. He resolves not to be swayed by Weng's counsel of revenge, and allows Chiung to speak. Chiung's decision:

> I mean to speak out plain because if is anybody I hate now - this very moment - it's Weng. I refuse to be ruled by him. (p. 100)

like Fenwick's, is a recognition of the ascendancy of another principle: one opposed to Weng's principle of violence: that of submission to the truth. Chiung's confession (he had tried to rob

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1 Weng and Chiung, "day-reader" and "night-reader", suggest the ancient Chinese alchemical symbols of yin and yang, the conjunction of which constitute the Tao or union of opposites.

Poseidon's men) clears the air, and reflects his new awareness of a kind of spiritual re-awakening which his recent "death" and "rebirth" on the stelling symbolizes:

> He sounded as if he had changed places with his listeners and could see the shadow of himself (born with death) created in the dark pool of their eyes and striving to be understood. (p. 103).

This theme is repeated in the epilogue of the final section ("The Reading") taken from the end of "Little Gidding":[1]

> "We are born with the dead:
> See, they return, and bring us with them. ...(p.105)

and as Fenwick takes a swim in the river - a clear suggestion of baptismal immersion - the long awaited rains begin:

> The sky was a dripping sponge over the river which had begun to swell. All the arid dusty watermarks of drought on the trees and bushes were disappearing as if they, too, had been rubbed away leaving <u>a clean but cracked state</u> ... (p. 107, my underlining).

The suggestion here of a <u>tabula rasa</u>, a new beginning, is carried over in Fenwick's questioning of Van Brock. Thinking back on the drama of the previous night, Fenwick recalls that he had seen four men on the stelling where his recollection of those present (and his check of the roll) tells him that there should only have been two. In attempting to trace these two mysterious strangers, he questions first Jordan and then Van Brock. Van Brock, in attempting to reconstruct his movements that night, finds himself taken back to the memory of an agonizing incident in his past when his

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1 T.S. Eliot's <u>Four Quartets</u> constitute (like Harris's "Guiana Quartet") a journey towards inner "wholeness" at the end of which (as in <u>The Secret of the Golden Flower</u>):

> ... the tongues of flame are in-folded
> Into the crowned knot of fire
> And the fire and the rose are one. ("Little Gidding"

<u>Four Quartets</u> Faber and Faber 1965, p. 59).

crotchety, ailing grandmother (the only living link between him and his dead parents), distressed by the loss of her gold wedding-ring (he had unknowingly thrown it out with the contents of the chamber pot) refused to be consoled. He had lost his temper and abused the old woman who, overcome with emotion, had suddenly collapsed and died. Remorse-stricken, the young Van Brock had climbed into the filthy, communal cess-pool, retrieved the gold ring and placed it on his dead grandmother's finger. The gold ring, like the ring which da Silva recognizes on the parrot in Palace of the Peacock (1960), stands for the vital link with a buried past - a buried self - which must be preserved at all costs; and his descent into the disgusting pit in search of it is symbolic of his need to re-establish contact with the ideal of a living, organic community of spirit - he comes from a small Negro village on the Pomeroon similar to the precarious settlements of The Whole Armour (1962) or, indeed, to Poseidon's small community. No sooner has Van Brock "descended into the grave pit" (p. 114) of his memory of a grandmother's death, than Catalena and Bryant return with the "dreadful annunciation" (p. 114) of the death of Poseidon, Bryant's "grandfather". Like Van Brock, Bryant has brought about the death of the past, but in the alchemical wedding of heart and head (symbolized when Van Brock places the ring on the finger of his dead grandmother "as a dutiful high priest at the wedding of memory" [p. 114] and again in the love between Catalena and Bryant) there is hope for the future:

> Catalena was ... a living projection and vessel, nevertheless, to offset the last impending signal of all, which was to be a god's death ... (p. 115).

Catalena has been prepared and initiated into her role as a "living vessel" for the future (a "catalyst"); for when she and Bryant are

prisoners of Poseidon's followers, she is made to face "her peculiar cross and predicament and soul of unreason". (p. 116). Stripped and bound by the men, she struggles "as if her limbs were the strings of homunculus". (p. 122). "Homunculus" refers, of course, to the alchemical symbol of the undifferentiated inner self: a "little man" - the lapis - which is transformed into the aurum non vulgi of psychic wholeness. And the treatment which Catalena undergoes:

> They lifted her and flung her down. ... She screamed, anticipating brutal nails on fingers of darkness, stripping her further and cutting her again, slicing into every tip of her body to the dice of bone in her blood until her flesh would quiver as if it had been plucked out of a shell .... (p. 123) my underlining[1]

suggests the alchemical process of separatio, by which the massa confusa or prima materia was divided into its four constituent elements as a first stage in the experiment. This was an esoteric expression of the Mithraic and Dionysiac ritual of "dismemberment of the god". (mirrored in the Christian symbol of the crufixion whereby the god is nailed to a cross the shape of which reflects the four elements of air, earth, water and fire).[2] Indeed, "brutal nails" and "the dice of bone" (with its suggestion of the Roman soldiers gambling for Christ's robe) in the passage quoted, conjure up the Crufixion. Naked and unprotected, "plucked out of a shell", Catalena is saved by the re-appearance of the "wild twins" (p. 123): the men who in beating Chiung think they have committed a murder.

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1 Catalena's situation bound and stripped, anticipating "brutal nails ... stripping her further and cutting her again, slicing into ... her body ..." again suggests a parallel with Saint Catherine bound to her wheel of torture.

2 "Poseidon had been hooked and nailed to a secret ladder of conscience." (p. 24).

Their news creates panic and confusion and Poseidon's men flee convinced that the jungle police will soon be on their heels. These "wild twins" are, in fact, the imaginary figures Fenwick had seen projected in the darkness of the stelling, and at an alchemical level, they represent the dual-natured "twin", Mercurius (Hermes),[1] the catalytic agent in the alchemical opus. It is the activity of Mercurius which brings about the "wedding of opposites", and his appearance (in the "wild twins") gives Catalena and Bryant a chance "to appear and run and make swift love on every trail across the earth" (p. 125) as it had allowed Fenwick to resolve the opposed elements within himself as Weng and Chiung. This reminds us of the trickster-figure which (as in The Far Journey of Oudin, 1961) provides a "gateway" just when circumstances appear to be hopeless:

> The instant the prison of the void was self-created, a breath of spirit knew how to open a single unconditional link in a chain of circumstance. (p. 126).

Fenwick's dream, with which the novel, and the "Quartet" ends; is, like Jacob's dream, a vision of the "secret ladder of conscience" which he had glimpsed after his first meeting with Poseidon, and which he is now prepared to ascend. The cry he hears just before he awakes on this, the seventh day of his "creation": "In our end ... our end ... our end is our beginning" (p. 127): is a reminder of the circular principle of death and rebirth, a hieroglyph of eternity.

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1 They also reflect Fenwick's own ambivalence before Weng and Chiung - his "involuntary twin of angst". (p. 43).

The alchemical process of psychic re-integration which we have been following through the novels of the "Guiana Quartet" is a striking feature of Harris's work, giving to it a special significance. The polyglot nature of Caribbean Man is seen to be a source of new wealth, rather than a condition of "impurity". For by the simple, but unprecedented act of rejecting the Old World bias of "pedigree Man", by repudiating this and other theories of "absolute quality" which tend towards a consolidation of values; Harris sets free the creative imagination in a truly remarkable way. His associative attempt opens "another window on the universe", for:

> ... what is truly particular is not isolated or static but is an association of numerous factors. ... The new architecture of the world must be a profound understanding and revelation of all factors that combine into the phenomenon of effort and achievement not for one race of men but for all mankind together.[1]

The writer becomes, therefore, an instrument and voice for a Universal Intelligence, and his art reflects both an Orphic and Promethean quest.[2] Harris's work cannot be regarded as an expression of Ivory Tower Romanticism, for it involves an extremely hazardous commitment to creative integrity and "authentic" Being. The artist's rôle becomes, in this context, compensatory for society as a whole: a rôle like that of the shaman, and one in which there are real dangers. From a purely practical point of view, for example, Harris, by attempting to explore a psycho/mythological hinterland, relying on an open-minded, imaginative response, accepts the risk of being dismissed as "obscure" or "eccentric". And there

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 9.

2 One notices the frequency with which, in Harris's work, images of water, darkness and descent or fire, light and ascent appear.

are other risks, since:

> ... it is a task which is profoundly personal (and archetypal) and, therefore, accompanying an enormous potency for change - for vision into resources - runs the danger of self-enchantment or hubris.[1]

Indeed, Sylvia Wynter, in discussing Harris's work, takes the view that:

> Harris in fact establishes in his novels the primacy of the unrelated individual imagination ... the novels ... end up as a highbrow consumer product, accessible only to the initiated; and alien to its own audience.[2]

This is perhaps something rather more than an irritable personal attack; for in arguing that Harris:

> ... attempts to evoke a primordial consciousness without providing the social keys ... which would invite the reader's participation in the 'work of the spirit' on the journey ...[3]

Miss Wynter is articulating the genuinely baffled response which many readers, unable (or unwilling) to accept Harris's version of "reality", must inevitably share.[4] The objection, however, that the creative activity of Harris's fiction is invalid because it is not readily accessible is, one feels, finally superficial; for it

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[1] Wilson Harris, "Interior of the Novel" National Identity, op. cit., p. 145.

[2] Sylvia Wynter, "Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism" Jamaica Journal Vol. 3 No. 1 (March, 1969) p. 40.

[3] Ibid., p. 41.

[4] One suspects, however, that Miss Wynter is here guilty of a certain dialectical impatience; and her enthusiastic appraisal of Harris's short story, "Kanaima" (in Ramchand, West Indian Narrative Thomas Nelson and Sons 1966) seems to confirm this impression. She finds the story entirely successful and assumes, without evidence, that it has been simplified and that "Ramchand as editor pares away the narcissistic accretions of Harris." (p. 40). The story, however, corresponds exactly with the original text, first published in Black Orpheus (Longmans Nigeria, 1964) pp. 142/149.

is an objection that ignores the essential fact of the "difficulty" of all really original art. Harris's novels become opaque indeed if one approaches them as one would a conventional "novel of persuasion". His work belongs rather to that genre Herman Hesse describes as:

> ... a literature of transition ... a literature that has become problematical and unsure, in the fact that it expresses its own plight and the plight of the age confessionally and with the utmost sincerity.[1]

And consequently it is an art of extremity, in which both reader and author are immersed within a complex texture of imaginative possibilities. The suspension of disbelief and an abandoning of intellectual pre-conceptions are especially necessary, since:

> ... what is hazardous in literary communication, and ambiguous ... in all the great works of art, is not a provisional weakness which we might hope to overcome. It is the price we must pay to have a literature, that is a conquering language which introduces us to unfamiliar perspectives instead of confirming us in our own ...[2]

This aspect of Harris's work: the writer's "confessional" approach in which there is an imaginative embodying of ambiguous potentialities through an endurance and digestion of catastrophe,[3] is the substance of The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965) and achieves a fully articulated form in The Waiting Room (1967). This is the form one has sensed emerging through the earlier work: an unpremeditated, creative shaping which actually incorporates the

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1 Herman Hesse, The Nuremberg Journey first published as Die Nürenberger Reise (Berlin 1927). Quoted in G.W. Field, Herman Hesse; (Twayne Publishers Inc. N.Y. 1970) p. 89.

2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Signs (Northwestern University Press 1964).

3 The image of Ulysses bound to the mast, disorientated by (but surviving) the sirens' song, again comes to mind.

developing sensibility of the writer himself. It is a creative process described by Buber:

> This is the eternal source of art: a man is faced by a form which desires to be made through him into a work. ... The man is concerned with an act of his being. If he carries it through, if he speaks the primary word out of his being to the form which appears, then the effective power streams out, and the work arises. The act includes a sacrifice and a risk. This is the sacrifice: the endless possibility that is offered up on the altar of the form. ... This is the risk: the primary word can only be spoken with the whole being. He who gives himself to it may withold nothing of himself.[1]

Before going on to examine the significance of this "confessional" approach, however, we shall look at Harris's Heartland (1964), a novel which is both an epilogue and a prologue. For Heartland serves as a postscript to the world and the characters of the "Guiana Quartet"; while the dark, crumbling road along which the hero sets out at the end of the novel leads to the increasingly hazardous task towards which the author's creative imagination turns in The Eye of the Scarecrow(1965).

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1 Martin Buber, I and Thou (T. & T. Clark 1937) p. 10.

AN ART OF EXTREMITY:
The Deepening Vision.

(I) Heartland (1964)

The novel opens on a lonely lumber grant above the Kamaria fall deep in the interior of Guyana. The watchman of the grant is Zechariah Stevenson, son of a well-to-do Georgetown family, who is in self-imposed exile from society after a scandal involving his father's company. The Portuguese accountant, Camacho, had absconded with a large sum of the firm's money, and Zechariah Stevenson senior had hushed up the affair convinced that his wayward son (whose affair with Camacho's wife had been exposed during the enquiry) was indirectly involved. After the old man's accidental death - he drowns after falling overboard from a river steamer - the story had come out. Maria Camacho, the son's mistress, had then fled the country; and Stevenson, though innocent of complicity in Camacho's fraud, found himself suspected though not accused by anyone. The Georgetown middle class, out of respect for his father, had simply closed its ranks and dropped the affair. He had then taken the job as watchman both to escape society's tacit suspicion and censure and to vindicate himself through his own efforts to make good.

The loneliness of the job and the brooding presence of the forest begin to affect him, however, and he becomes subject to introspective doubts and fancies. Kaiser, the lorry driver whose hut stands at the bottom of the fall, and whose job it is to ferry supplies from the storehouse at Lower Kamaria to the wood grant on Upper Kamaria, tells Stevenson that he has left a supply of rations in the depot about two miles along the trail from the wood grant. Stevenson is to be on the look out for da Silva, a pork-knocker prospecting in the area, who will soon be calling to collect his supplies. Da Silva arrives late one evening, spends the night at

the grant, and disappears before Stevenson awakes next morning. Stevenson then sets off (somewhat apprehensively) for the depot, but finds there only a note from da Silva: "SOMEBODY STEAL MY RATIONS. WHO? GONE TO TELL KAISER." (p. 55).[1] On his way down to Kaiser's hut, however, Stevenson comes upon the dead body of da Silva, wedged between two boulders, apparently the victim of an Amerindian attack. As he warily approaches Kaiser's hut, he notices an Amerindian woman emerging from the bushes. She is exhausted and far gone in pregnancy, and it is clear that the basket she carries contains da Silva's rations. Stevenson takes pity on her, helps at the baby's birth and later places the woman and her baby in the absent Kaiser's bed. Returning later, after an exhausting but unsuccessful attempt to catch fish to cook a fresh meal for the woman, he discovers that mother and child have vanished. Stevenson sets out in the dark for the wood grant above the fall fighting disorientation and frustration. The novel ends with a "postscript":

> Zechariah Stevenson disappeared somewhere in the Guianan/Venezuelan/Brazilian jungles that lie between the headwaters of the Cuyuni and Potaro rivers.
>
> In the half-burnt down shell of the small resthouse where he was last seen by a couple of pork-knockers was found a bundle of scorched papers: when pieced together they grew into fragments of letters to one Maria and three shattered poems, two (Troy and Amazon) practically destroyed and the other (Behring Straits) so browned by fire that some of the lines were indistinguishable. (p.93).

The fragmentary poems with which the novel ends are, of course, taken from Harris's Eternity to Season (Guiana 1954). The choice of poems: "Troy" (the artist's lonely witness for society), "Behring Straits" (the need for the journey between Existence and Being - the search for an "inner world") and "Amazon" (the "world-creating jungle") is significant; for they suggest the theme of

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[1] All quotations are from the 1964 edition.

the re-fashioning of individual consciousness. The novel's division into three "books" ("The Watchers", "The Watched" and "Creation of the Watch") reflects The Secret Ladder (1963), which is also divided into three similar sections: "The Day Readers", "The Night Readers", "The Reading". In fact, Stevenson, like Fenwick, undergoes an initiation into a new state of consciousness; and the "Reading" of The Secret Ladder is related to the "Watching" of Heartland: both activities are synonyms for the purgatorial process of self-discovery. Stevenson's sojourn in the forest forces him to see:

> ... how bankrupt and devoid of reserves he was in the past and incapable of discovering a motive or hand of distinction in himself. (p. 18).

He resists the change which he feels coming over him, wishing to "throw by the horns the bull of subversion and anxiety he inwardly faced". (p. 17). This image of "taking the bull by the horns" is an echo of the intolerance and spiritual blindness of Mohammed in The Far Journey of Oudin (1961) and points to Stevenson's inauthentic, superficial attitude. Indeed, there are many links with earlier novels. Kaiser is Mohammed's dark-skinned brother who dies in a rum-shop fire in The Far Journey of Oudin, as his description here suggests:

> It was not merely the blackness of Kaiser's skin. ... It was the ghostly ash of the garments he wore ... plucked in the nick of time, he was inclined to swear, from some ancient fire. (pp. 14/15).

Both Kaiser and da Silva (a "ghost" from Palace of the Peacock, 1960) are revenants who act as spiritual guides to Stevenson: the one as storekeeper of the "heartland", the other as a messenger sent to remind him of his need for self-knowledge:

"Don't worry," da Silva went on, "if life look like it riddling and devouring you every day to make you extend you being longer and longer, till you find what the long time of you humanity is all about." (p. 41).

Stevenson has to undergo a process of integration of his two, opposing selves - "the Jekyll-and-Hyde devil" (p. 44) which da Silva sees in his name[1] - and the death of his father and the flight of his mistress, Maria, now become symbolic of this dissociated condition: "The death of his body and the flight of his soul were now becoming real" (p. 27, author's italics) he thinks; and later, the "spidery", emaciated figure of da Silva, gulping down a cup of black coffee "as if a black cup were the transubstantiation of gold" (p.38, my underlining) suggests the alchemical wedding of opposites which awaits Stevenson: a mystical conjunction "akin to a marriage of responsibility and contemplation". (p. 45).[2] His attempt to follow a trail through dense forest to the depot - the "storehouse of the heartland" - is "a primitive ordeal of initiation" (p. 51); and it is almost as if he is subjected to a kind of ritual dismemberment, an operation in which he is both surgeon and patient:[3]

He began to exercise his prospecting knife, judiciously lopping, every now and then, a finger - or the skin of the elbow - from a branch, in order to define afresh every step he made ... he was leaving a congested corridor and entering the skin of a new communication ... so recently groomed each severed leaf or limb was freshly and gaily tinted with its own transparent juice or blood. ... Stevenson felt the cutting sensation of a presence so near him it lifted his heart like fruit into his mouth. (p. 51).

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1 R.L. Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (first published in 1886) is, of course, a classic and famous example of the fictional interpretation of schizophrenia.

2 This again evokes the complementary biblical figures of Martha and Mary as representatives of the active and contemplative life. (Vide footnote 1 page 289 of this study).

3 The archetypal image of the dismembered god and the corresponding Christian image of Christ as the "wounded healer" come to mind. Cf. T.S. Eliot's: "the wounded surgeon plies the steel ..." ("East Coker" Four Quartets, op. cit., p. 29).

Da Silva is cast in the rôle of shaman - "a flesh-and-barebones seducer - full of tricks" (p. 44) - and his death at the hands of a tribe of Amerindians[1] is also a sacrifice of the old, outworn self:

> It was da Silva after all who stood stark and dead though so changed in twenty four hours he could have been Kaiser or Cameron or Stevenson himself. (p. 58, author's italics).

Petra, the pregnant Amerindian woman is the archetypal female presence (suggesting the anima) that one encounters in all Harris's work: the inarticulate, suffering woman who nevertheless acts as the vessel of a new consciousness. Petra is a neutral, but vital, presence: "the heart as well as the heartlessness of the new world". (p. 62). The vulnerable but paradoxically rock-like presence (suggested in her name) which, like the jungle itself, is both womb and tomb. She is the ambiguous mother-goddess (like Magda of The Whole Armour, 1962), the muse "incorporating conqueror and conquered, hunter and hunted" (p. 65),[2] the dark self with which all men need to be re-united and towards which they are drawn "because of the cleavage in their natures" (p. 65, my underlining). Petra is a composite figure who also embodies Mariella of Palace of the Peacock (1960). In Heartland, having returned to her people pregnant with Donne's (or da Silva's) child, she is banished to

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[1] Who thus avenge the rape of "Mariella". In this novel, the Amerindian woman, Petra, is the re-named mistress of both Donne and da Silva of Palace of the Peacock (1960).

[2] Cf. Derek Walcott's evocation of the "complex womb" of the Caribbean as a devouring, impenetrable forest:

> ... The elongated eyes look Arawak,
> Arawak or Carib, but nakedness unsurprised
> By armoured men dividing jungle leaves ...
> They close in groaning irony at their rape,
> For that earth-coloured flesh buries all men ...

("Bronze", In a Green Night, 1969 , p. 78).

Kartabo point. This is, of course, a significant locale: the home of Mittelholzer's Kaywana and the source of the Van Groenwegel family tree. It is note-worthy, however, that Harris sees the locale as a starting point for the birth of a creative, rather than divided, racial consciousness: "it was at Kartabo Point that one found the beginnings of a new legendary continental offspring born of many races." (pp. 65/66). Helping Petra (who unaccountably begins to resemble his lost mistress, Maria) at the birth of her baby, Stevenson is symbolically being re-born into a deeper and truer sense of reality; and his distress on finding that she and her child have disappeared reflects his wish to retain conscious control of his newly-won but burdensome sensibility. It is an instinctive fear of vulnerability and dispossession: a condition which he must still learn to accept with humility:

> Would one ever learn to submit gently to the invisible chain of being without attempting to break loose and run after something or someone one knew as inadequately and helplessly as one knew one's own hand upon one's own heart? (p. 85).

The "longest crumbling black road" Stevenson follows in the darkness as he heads towards the waterfall-top is, like the eight-fold path of the mystics, the paradoxical way of enlightenment:

> In order to possess what you do not possess
> You must go by the way of dispossession.
> In order to arrive at what you are not
> You must go through the way in which you are not.[1]

or, as the author of The Cloud of Unknowing has it: "Why, when you are 'nowhere' physically, you are 'everywhere' spiritually."[2]

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1 T.S. Eliot, "East Coker" Four Quartets, op. cit., p. 29.

2 The Cloud of Unknowing (Penguin 1965) p. 134.

(II) The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965)

Whereas Heartland (1964) is clearly related to the preceding "Guiana Quartet" in terms of subject setting and style, The Eye of the Scarecrow represents a departure; and is one of Harris's most paradoxical and "dislocated" novels with regard to language and the sequence of events. The narrator's evocation of his Georgetown childhood is an arbitrary, apparently unconnected series of brilliant, almost hallucinatory images and events within which the progress of his relationships (with a close boyhood friend, "L - ", and with his mother, grandfather and step-grandmother) provide the only immediately recognizable plot. There is a disjointed account of the narrator's and "L __'s" mining expedition into the interior ("L __" is the engineer in charge) during which they quarrel over a woman, there is an aeroplane crash and "L __" is accused of the narrator's "death", the latter surviving, however, to appear in time to save "L __" from conviction. The novel ends with an enigmatic letter, written to "L __" by the narrator who signs himself "Idiot Nameless".

Harris focuses on the life of the coastal city of Georgetown itself, and the narrative takes the form of an autobiographical record of the past which the author/narrator is writing in the present. Written in 1963 and 1964, the "entries" are actually of experiences which reach back to the year 1948 and beyond. The narrator hopes to produce in this way:

> ... an open dialogue within which a free construction of events will emerge in the medium of phenomenal associations all expanding into a mental distinction and life of their own. (p. 13)[1]

The narrator does not merely recollect the past, therefore, but allows his whole consciousness to drift backward in time, as it were,

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[1] All quotations are from the 1965 edition.

so that images and events of childhood return with the startling immediacy one associates with drug-induced vision. As in Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*,[1] (which the novel superficially resembles) the memory of a particular event, even of a particular smell, returns with all the associations of the past renewed:

> *1st March - 7th May*. At the age of eleven - in the year 1932 - I spent a month in Public Hospital during which I underwent a serious operation. Chloroform. Sickly-sweet smell one never gets rid of, the half-smell of life and of death. The garden of disgust. Bewildering and nauseating fantasy akin to the strangest recollection of riding out of the womb. Finding oneself ushered into and out of a galloping skin. (p. 23).

Each separate memory, however, now acquires subtle interconnecting threads during the process of "free construction", and a new total significance begins to emerge. The image of a galloping horse in the passage quoted above, for example, reflects, and is linked to the memory of the "poor man's hearse" which he had encountered on his way to school. The sudden, frightening appearance of the paupers' black funeral hearse rattling along the road, had made a deep impression on the child's sensitive awareness:

> There was the sudden awakening clatter of horses' hooves close at hand magnetized into acute consciousness by the mildewed repellent odour of sliced leather or dung which burnt my nostrils. (p. 19).

The sight of carrion-crows tearing at a carcase on the foreshore becomes mingled with this experience of the hearse, as does his memory of the sickly-sweet smell of the chloroform (anaesthesia becomes a "dying" and a "return" to life). Eventually even the later recollection of the Great Georgetown Strike of 1948, and the funeral procession of the shot strikers later on, becomes part of a

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1 First published in eight volumes, Paris 1914/1927.

general awareness of life-in-death and death-in-life through the composite image of a black, horse-drawn funeral hearse with its nauseating "torn smell of a sick half-eaten body of leather". (p.19). In this way, the narrator's re-experiencing of the past becomes an exploratory, associative process, "the uncovering of inner space" (p. 51) or a re-discovery of the buried, unconscious self, whereby apparently concrete and particular events in the past are charged with new meaning. The boundaries of history and time are made fluid so that, unlike Proust's essentially passive researching, a reconstruction of the past is made and a new, hitherto unrealized significance given to "buried" psychic elements. The unconscious - the hinterland of the psyche - is made (by a process reminiscent of the "free-association" techniques of psychology) to manifest itself by the spontaneous, linking activity of the mind.

Events which at first appear haphazard or arbitrary therefore, are actually used to suggest arousal of sensibility as a prerequisite for renewed vision. The incident[1] in which, as a child, the narrator, before he realizes what he is doing, pushes "L —" into the shallow canal, becomes symbolic of his own unconscious urge to achieve self-knowledge and vision ("I had involuntarily and compulsively pushed him into becoming my own gauge of future extremity" p. 26). And the bond between them is, like the bond that links so many other "doubles" in Harris's fiction, a complementary one: the relationship of ego and shadow, self and other, animus and anima.

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[1] The autobiographical elements in this incident are made clear by Harris in "Kith and Kin" (Journal of Commonwealth Literature, op. cit., Vol. VII No. 1 June, 1972, pp. 1/4); a short sketch which retails the episode in some detail.

For, by assuming that he had himself slipped and fallen into the canal, "L —" unwittingly becomes the agent of "this dawning conscience within [the narrator] of the guilt of freedom". (p. 26). The seed of introspective awareness had then been sown, as the narrator now realizes, and his gradual awakening to consciousness had begun. The figures which he and "L —" fashion out of the soft mud of the garden, are thus more than childish play; for they are a reminder of the Creation itself, and point to the reconstruction of sensibility which is the novel's theme. The "symbolic tenants" - the penniless Anthrops - who live in one of the hovels of the tenement range owned by the narrator's grandfather, represent the neglected inner self, the presence of which is nevertheless vital for the growth of creative consciousness. The Anthrops suggest the Archanthropos or Imago Dei as well as the Anthroparion of the Greek alchemists - the homunculus or miniature self one sees reflected in the eye of another. Because the narrator, as a child, had glimpses into the harsh, precarious world of the Anthrops - the "stigmata of the void" (p. 33) - he had become aware of, rather than callously immune to, "an underworld, as well, within which might still be bred progenies of change". (p. 31). The Anthrops become, therefore, a contributory factor in the growth of compassionate sensibility: "the golden centre of inspiration, the most subjective scarecrow earth of all " (p. 32), since their predicament creates within the narrator an awareness of the private contradictions behind the public masks of self-righteousness and material progress.

The young child's sensitive, emotional response to experience leads him more and more towards a conviction that the truth and genuineness of life involves a necessary paradox: the need to be open and receptive to both success and disaster, and to acknowledge

both good and evil in oneself. The novel's theme is, once again, the journey towards this state of wholeness in which the two opposing selves are reborn as one, and this is the significance of the main event in the novel - the mining expedition:

> L __ was the engineer in charge of the expedition to the lost womb of a mining town, nine month's journey from Water Street into the jungle of conception traversed along each changing river of ascent; the same scale of measurement emerged when taken from each accumulative deposit of memory in the garden East of Waterloo to the heights of Sorrow Hill. (p. 48).

Mention of "Sorrow Hill" (where the epitaphs of Donne and his crew are to be found) provides an unexpected link with Palace of the Peacock (1960) and the "nine month's journey" of this novel is the period of gestation of the new consciousness just as the seven days' journey marks the period of re-creation of Donne and his men. The introspective narrator, prone to hallucinatory visions and sensitive to the imperceptible changes in others and in the environment, accompanies "L __", the level-headed, practical engineer, on an expedition to locate the true site of an almost legendary settlement (reminiscent of the Mission of Mariella in Palace of the Peacock) called Raven's Head, where rich deposits of gold are known to exist. During the expedition they acquire the services of a prostitute, Hebra, who (it appears) is connected with the mysterious settlement. She is of little help, however, and misdirects them in their search. Hebra, in fact, is the now familiar representative of "the unborn folk" (p. 53) who is merely used by others for their own selfish ends, but who is also the silent vessel of their hopes and aspirations:

> It was the most difficult trial and conviction for me to begin to accept the unpalatable truth that we - who sought to make her our plaything - were her material joke as well (twins of buried and divided fantasy) and that a price was

> about to be placed upon our heads which would involve us - whether we wished it or not - in ... the restoration of her spiritual bridge and sacred mining town. (p. 53).

The search for the lost mining town, like the archetypal search for "El Dorado", is therefore symbolic of an inner quest for unity, and (in the "personalities" of the narrator and "L —") a blending of art and science to this end.

The final section of the novel is entitled "Raven's Head" and is the strangest and most bewildering part of the book: a mixture of allegory (reminding one of Blake), deliberately fragmented narrative - in which the narrator and "L —" become inextricably mixed - and odd, occasionally inserted notes written to "L —" by "Idiot Nameless". There is a brief repetition of earlier sections of the book headed "The Black Rooms" made up of one "room" (or section) from each of the two preceding "books" of the novel. The allegory of "Raven's Head" is fairly readily recognizable as a description of the search for inner harmony through an alchemical wedding of opposites. Traditionally, the first stage in the alchemical procedure (where the sealed phial containing the *prima materia* and "mercurial" water has been heated for forty days and the contents have turned black) was known as the "Raven's head" stage.[1] And the "four possible approaches to Raven's Head town sometimes called Hebra's Town" (p. 64):

> Raven's Head Gate on the north, Hebra's Gate on the south, the Suspension Bridge on the west and Sorrow Hill on the east. (p. 64)

suggest the alchemical quaternity of air, earth, fire and water; the four elements which "in the chaos are merely co-existent and have to

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1 See E.J. Holmyard, *Alchemy* (Pelican books 1968) pp. 16/18.

be combined through the alchemical procedure."[1] The description of "Raven's Head" as a "lost town", entry to which is by four "gates" also suggests the mandala-shaped, gated "cities" of the alchemical treatises - "cities" which symbolize the inner self and wholeness. Adocentyn,[2] one such marvellous "city", supposedly founded by "Hermes Trismegistos" in Egypt, had four gates in each of its four parts: the gates of the Dog (north) the Lion (South) the Eagle (east) and the Bull (west). "Raven's Head" is therefore an alchemical symbol of the wholeness of Being which the narrator and his alter ego, "L —" need to discover; and entry to the city is difficult since "on all sides a siege was laid to the will". (p. 64). References to "the horse and carriage of the Ancient of Days" (p. 65) which evokes Blake's famous figure of God creating the world out of chaos, and the "Inn or Resthouse of the Quartering of the Cow" (p. 67) (with its suggestion of the ritual dismemberment of the god),one of the signs which point to the town, add both pagan and Christian overtones to the quest for inner illumination. In the "Item of Reconstruction" which follows, in which there is a reference to the crash of their reconnaissance aircraft in the jungle, the "personalities" of narrator and "L —" become almost interchangeable in the narrative:

> Was it he who crept and crawled that last mile to save me or I to unlock him? I still like to think it was I who saved L —'s life, and not he mine, in the nick of time ... For on that afternoon when I (it was on the tip of my tongue to say he) succeeded ... (p. 77).

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1 C.G. Jung, "Aion" Collected Works, op. cit., p. 237.

2 See Frances A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition. (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1964) p. 54.

There is, in fact, a continual confusion of identity:

> It was the quickest rationalization he (or I?) indulged in ... The unsettling conviction was dawning within that they (he and the other) ... might still be involved in a blind paradox and carriage (... I remembered treading in cloaked awareness of myself or itself) ... (pp. 80/81)

an interpenetration of relationships which creates a sense of unity and timelessness. The drama of consciousness finally resolves itself as a dialogue between the narrator ("Idiot Nameless") and "L —" in which the significance of their relationship is related to the "Raven's Head" adventure of psychic reconstruction:

> The approach to the "classical" Raven's Head - the Raven's Head into which we are still to be born like creatures who may learn to dwell in a state of penetrative relationship and self-exile - cries out for two admissions. One - a confession or admission of humility ... Two - ... a confession or admission of the mystery of capacity. (p. 107).

The novel's "quest of phenomenal space" (p. 108) through the juxtaposition of seemingly opposed concepts of time, character and place within a theme of self-abandonment to the past (and a consequent self-recognition in the present), is conveyed almost entirely by the use of echoic images, rather than by a narrative or descriptive technique. Harris attempts something like an alchemical allegory through the "art of memory", in which the alternate expansion and <u>compression</u> of language and concept (the novel occupies less than 100 pages) creates, unfortunately, almost insuperable difficulties for the reader. Sentences of over a dozen lines are not unusual in this novel (see, for example, "If indeed one were to conceive ... or art, law or love, p. 27, where the meaning of the sentence can be grasped only after a re-reading), but, on the other hand, tightly packed images within short, telegrammatic sentences also appear frequently:

> Rumpelstiltskin threads bristled like the wisest whiskers. A stitch in time saves nine. Cat's eyes fabric. Balloon

> skin pattern. Skyscraper tapestry. The toy cow jumped over the toy moon. I felt a growing animal loss that they were re-fashioning me and escalating me into the flying sequence of a dwarf and the lofty imitation of a child. (p. 79

One's impression is that Harris, in this novel, is engaged in an inner, esoteric art of memory in which he is testing the medium of prose (as he had experimented with the medium of poetry) against his own creative imagination in an attempt to expand the limits of his fiction still further. The novel appears to be a reculer pour mieux sauter or what Arthur Koestler calls "self repair", which, since it is concerned with a breaking down of rigid, intellectual and emotional obstacles:

> ... can only be done by reverting to those more fluid, less committed and specialised forms of thinking which normally operate in the twilight zones of awareness.[1]

But Harris is here concerned with the artistic problems posed by his own fictional approach, and this perhaps is why the novel takes the form of an autobiographical record of the past, "an open dialogue" within which a free construction of events is used to create "phenomenal associations". (p. 13). The novel conveys something of the writer's aesthetic concern for his art. For example, in the "manifesto" contained in a "letter" to "L —", we read:

> Language is one's medium of the vision of consciousness. There are other ways - shall I say - of arousing this vision. But language alone can express (in a way which goes beyond any physical or vocal attempt) the sheer - the ultimate "silent" and "immaterial" complexity of arousal. (p. 95).

This, one feels, is the voice of the novelist as advocate for a philosophy of the language of fiction. The tone of the lecturer and theorist is unmistakable, and somewhat distracting; indeed,

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[1] Arthur Koestler, The Ghost in the Machine (Hutchinson 1967) p. 179.

Harris has lectured on this subject of the "peculiar reality of language" elsewhere, and more lucidly:

> ... the concept of language is one which continuously transforms inner and outer formal categories of experience, earlier and representative modes of speech itself, the still life resident in painting and sculpture as such, even music which one ceases to 'hear' - the peculiar reality of language provides a medium to see in consciousness the 'silent' flood of sound by a continuous inward revisionary and momentous logic of potent explosive images evoked in the mind.[1]

In The Eye of the Scarecrow, the author is clearly concerned with the use of language to promote vision, rather than specific meaning; a "future language of possibilities" which arouses the reader's sensibilities, without coercion, to promote a condition of "seeing and responding without succumbing". (p. 97). The novel appears to be an experiment aimed at achieving a suitable form in which this condition may be embodied. Harris's interest in the story of Ulysses' flight from Circe (when, bound to the mast, he is able to hear and enjoy the sirens' song without succumbing) as a metaphor for the transforming quality of a "language of possibilities", can be traced back to Palace of the Peacock (1960). Donne and his crew, toiling in the "straits of memory", are able to "digest" catastrophe without succumbing to despair. Their situation symbolizes the drama of consciousness in which "we become more deeply aware of this community of animate and inanimate features", and which provides an "unpredictable function and freedom rather than tyranny of response".[2] This transformation in depth of human consciousness within a condition of extremity (reflected in the myth of Ulysses' flight from Circe) provides the basis of a new novel-form of which The Eye of the

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1 From "Tradition and the West Indian Novel" (1964) in TWS, op. cit., p. 32.

2 TWS, op. cit., pp. 53/54.

Scarecrow is a tentative experiment. And it is the informing vision of Harris's next novel, *The Waiting Room* (1967).

(III) The Waiting Room (1967)

In a lecture delivered at the University of Edinburgh on 30 January 1967, Harris, referring to the myth of Ulysses' flight from Circe, said: "a reconstruction of this myth in poem or novel in our age would be, I feel, a major achievement."[1] That same year, The Waiting Room was published. Joyce Sparer, in an illuminating discussion of the novel, considers it to be:

> ... different even from the earlier art of Wilson Harris. In so far as his experimental work is concerned, it represents a breakthrough, a leap in artistic development. Many of his problems in regard to the integration of scientific mind and poetic imagination have here been solved.[2]

As we have seen in the "autobiographical" The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965), Harris had experimented with the idea of incorporating, within the framework of the myth of Ulysses' flight, the opposed artistic and scientific attitudes. Art (the narrator) and science (the engineer, "L ——") were engaged in a dialogue and a common quest: an alchemical opus. The creative spirit was seen as a "spider of science" and the engineer's bridge became both "a trap-door and a poem". (p. 50). In The Waiting Room, however, this idea of the necessary co-existence of science and art, of "dead" language and "live" vision within a framework that allows both arousal and freedom of response, is expanded still further. For in the symbolic figures of the blind Susan Forrestal and her present (living) husband and past (dead) lover, Harris is also directly concerned with the universal struggle for balance between the male and female principles of Human relationships. In this novel, therefore, Harris has arrived at a type of fiction in which, although

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 52.

2 Joyce Sparer, "The Art of Wilson Harris" (New Beacon Books 1968) p. 26.

no characters exist in the conventional sense (the novel is conceived as a process of memory within a single consciousness which contains all the "characters"), the echoes and implications emerging from the narrative illuminate the universal dilemma of divided Man. The theme of psychic reconstruction in which self-knowledge is acquired through arousal in a state of extremity, is now contained within a novel-form that itself mirrors this condition of extremity. As Kenneth Ramchand observes:

> ... the statuesque person, the inanimate relics in the room and the absent lover are bound together in the waiting room, in the way that the enthralled Ulysses was bound to the saving mast while his crew moved free on the deck below ...[1]

But the novel, in embodying the myth, becomes emblematic of a great deal more than the "'hopeless', 'historyless' West Indian condition".[2] For the myth may also be seen as an archetypal expression[3] of the ego's need to recognize, through personal crisis, the existence of the "Other" - the opposing self - without being destroyed in the process. The Waiting Room becomes, therefore, a "species of fiction within whose mask of death one endured the essential phenomenon of crisis and translation". (p. 79).[4]

Like The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965), the novel takes the form of a "disjointed diary": the damaged "log-book" (we are reminded of Stevenson's burnt poems at the end of Heartland, 1964) which survives the explosion that kills the Forrestals and

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1 Introduction to Palace of the Peacock, op. cit., p. 5.

2 Ibid.

3 For a discussion of the psychological basis of the "Lorelei phantasy" in literature see Karl Stern, The Flight from Woman, op. cit., pp. 171/172 et passim.

4 All quotations are from the 1967 edition.

destroys their home. The "Author's Note" at the beginning of the book warns us, however, that this diary is evidence, not of a particular series of events in the past, but of the fact that Susan Forrestal "and possibly others" were "engaged in an art of fiction peculiar to themselves". (p. 9). Susan, totally blind at forty as a result of an incurable eye complaint, had been deserted by her lover after a violent quarrel. She had then married the considerate, though featureless, Forrestal; but finds herself unable to forget her former lover whose memory becomes, for her, a startling, dynamic presence deeply affecting her attitude to life and to herself. Her blindness (like Ulysses' condition of physical immobility) allows her to reconstruct in a fluid, creative way, without the distractions of fixed, visual perception, the fragmented, disorientating relationships which have been the substance of her life. Lover and husband become indissolubly linked in her mind - made peculiarly receptive to "unknown modes of being" by her "helpless", blind condition - and she begins to "see" how unthinking and self-deceived she had, in fact, been in the past. Her lover, whom she had known before she lost her sight, and her present husband whom she had met when already blind (and whom, therefore, she has never seen) are, at the outset, seemingly antagonistic principles - the one of sexual abandonment, the other of prudence and watchfulness. The lover is a "thief", in leaving her but retaining her love; while the husband is a "watchman" who, by his solicitous but oppressive attentions actually makes it difficult for her to achieve "a depth of self-knowledge". (p. 64):

> Amazing how much he actually knew about her. It disconcerted her because he seemed in the end to deprive her

> of an obsessional fruit of knowledge she cherished ... (p. 62).[1]

By virtue of the "log-book", which contains entries from all three lives, and which now begins "to assume the symbolic proportions of a raft" (p. 61) upon which her memory seems to drift, she reconstructs and re-experiences the past.

Gradually, she comes to realize that her rôles as loved, abandoned mistress and blind, helpless wife, had been disingenuous. She had secretly "overemphasized the rôle of domination" (p. 36), and had, in fact, herself been guilty of attempting to control and use both lover and husband. In the section entitled "Image of Conquest", as she strokes the horns of the antelope's head on the wall (a trophy and gift from her lover), the action[2] takes on the symbolic meaning of sexual possessiveness:

> And in fact - as she stroked the "blind" and "deaf" beast that had been flayed and pinned to the wall, it gave her, in tune with everything else, the thrill all over again of pursuer and pursued, the thrill of execution ... and she drew the nail of one finger across her lips ... like the breath of a sceptical axe upon his neck where he stood pinned to the wall. (p. 58).

It is in the sexual act itself (brilliantly conveyed in the section entitled "Operation" by a near-miraculous blending of images to suggest both intercourse and Susan's actual eye-operation) in which a loss of individuality, of mental consciousness, makes possible the abandonment of the self to the "Other", that a good deal of the novel's "action" occurs. Susan now understands that in the

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[1] It is interesting to notice how her hubris of self-concern is also suggested in the image of the "obsessional fruit of knowledge" which conjures up Eve's temptation by the serpent.

[2] In The Far Journey of Oudin (1961) Beti's fearless stroking of the bull's head is also connected with her view of love as a romantic adventure.

argument with her lover, although she had angrily told him to leave, she had actually wished "to bind him to her in spite of anything spoken to the contrary". (p. 71). His departure had forced her to face the truth of her relationship with him, just as now, years later, she comes to realize that her sexual domination by both lover and husband had come from the despair which she had herself inspired in them:

> The time had come to insert key into lock. ... Gaoler of and gaoled sensibilities. *It was an architecture of baffled, indeed baffling, emotional authority in which he was involved, trapped far back by his own devices in the shout and gold of person and thing.* ... He was filled all at once with rage at his own incapacity. *Might as well strike out.* *Rape in broad daylight.* (pp. 28/29, author's italics).

But both lover and husband also gain deeper knowledge of themselves through their relationship with her. In a sense, Susan *is* the "waiting room" in which they learn to re-assess their motives and reactions: it is almost as if the antique shop (owned by Susan and her husband) and the Forrestal house are extensions of her own mind:

> Through the blind or curtained window where "he" [the lover] sat and watched FROM WITHIN HER SKULL, the tops of vehicles could be seen as they passed ... (p. 15).

And in their sexual relationship with her each:

> ... was as helpless as she and in process of being informed by her about himself as if she were his most intimate victim or soul and companion in debauchery, whose visualization of the spectacle of the past made him feel he had no alternative but to shrink in ultimate horror from himself. (pp. 39/40).

Indeed, to both lover and husband she had been a Circe-figure from which they instinctively sought to escape, but were held against their will as in a sexual embrace:

> It was only the thread of ascent and descent into the hold of creation she knew to prompt him to bear the echoing coil of "herself" she drew like the snake of time

> in itself around "him". [The lover] ... And he [the husband] knew himself truly bound ... enmeshed in her wild close plea and spirit as he fled ... (p. 52).

In the "common flesh" which all three share, however, a new, fluid relationship emerges, and Susan's pregnancy, in her forties, is symbolic of this new consciousness whose features, though unknown, must inevitably bear a relationship to both the "seen" lover and "unseen" husband.[1] At the end of the novel, in an episode placed, significantly, in the Guyana interior, symbol in Harris's work, of the creative womb of nature: in "circumstances of unpredictable light or shade bordering upon the density of the remainder of the world": (p. 74) lover and husband (never entirely distinguishable entities) undertake a "voyage in pursuit of the nameless river of the world" (p. 77) in the "subterranean cave of Susan". (p. 79). This is symbolic language for their inner journey of self-discovery through their sexual relationship with her, and the snake which kills "Susan's man" (an Amerindian guide who is identified with the lover), the "explosion of memory" (p. 77) which he experiences and the actual explosion which kills Susan and her husband are used to convey the idea of their final <u>physical</u>, orgasmic "destruction" as opposed to their spiritual "translation". The "log-book" which survives becomes:

> ... the cradle of fantasy, paint of restoration, instinct for depth and survival: uncanny depth, living distance, joints of catastrophe, the mesmerism of being fractured and remaining whole. (p. 41).

Harris's use of synaesthesia, the incongruous mixing of sensations and images:

> <u>Stricken blind</u>. Iceball or eyeball. In which she felt the incongruous root of memory - green stem or leaf.

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[1] By now they are no longer opposed concepts, but intimately related within Susan's consciousness.

> Incongruous marriage of sensations - spiked heel, pool. ... needle of doctor and patient, joystick ... pilot ... space. (p. 45)

at first confusing but none the less convincing at a sensuous level, is perfectly suited to convey the heightened sensitivity of the blind Susan. The oddly scattered images within the "waiting room":

> ... part-present, part-past, part-future, it seemed - was falling through the dust of space, axe of memory, chopping sea, flying chip or vessel whose strain, leash, trough and course had become participle of its own crust and loaf - headless plunge ... ocean ... devouring perspective, joint, ground (mill of the gods), "vanished" species, felled season. (p. 54)

suggesting the shattering impact of the explosion that kills the Forrestals (as well as the emotional disorientation of Ulysses, bound to the mast of his plunging ship) are nevertheless held together by the central symbol of the blind woman - the "waiting room" - within whose consciousness the novel gradually unfolds and is finally drawn together again:

> She drew him closer still within the skin of another incongruous skeleton they shared, flesh or wood, swimming in the glass of their shop window within and without. Antique display. Waiting room. (p. 80).

The Waiting Room, then, illustrates the extraordinary "formlessness within form" towards which Harris's imaginative exploration has, so far, led him. It is an art of extremity involving the writer's abandonment to an intuitive force within, or, as Harris himself expresses it:

> ... a 'vacancy' in nature within which agents appear who are translated one by the other and who ... reappear through each other, inhabit each other ... push each other to plunge into the unknown ... a constitution of humility in which the 'author' himself is an 'agent' in a metaphysical dimension compounded of losses and gains ...[1]

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1 "Interior of the Novel", op. cit., p. 146.

Harris's work suggests the art of fiction which Herman Hesse, in a curiously prophetic remark, visualized as the novel of the future: of "the day after tomorrow":

> ... an art whose laws and forms do not yet exist. It will be an art which is no longer the representation of events and relationships, but only the revelation of the inner psychic realm of a single isolated human being.[1]

But this does not convey the full significance of Harris's art; for in his novels, events and relationships are incorporated within the inner realm not of a "single isolated being", but of a universal, unpredictable and heterogeneous consciousness. In this regard one recalls his interest in the "anti-novel of the French" and in the work of Beckett and Joyce, Irish writers whose novels reflect the sensibility of a people who, like the French, "have experienced something which bordered upon a state of tragic humiliation and eclipse."[2] The deliberate "incoherency" of the work of Beckett and Joyce has, for Harris, a certain obvious relevance to the West Indian condition of "historylessness", the writer's need for a new diverse consciousness that would reconstitute a unity at the heart of a historical "holocaust of sensibility":[3] the trauma of the middle passage. Having developed, in The Waiting Room, the technical approach which (by its author's total creative and subjective "sacrifice" to the work) could embody both "form" and "formlessness", "gains" and "losses" in a single, sustained act of memory; Harris turned again to a Caribbean locale.

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1 See G.W. Field, Herman Hesse, op. cit., p. 92.

2 Wilson Harris, "The Unresolved Constitution" CQ Vol. 14 Nos. 1 and 2 (1968) p. 44.

3 Ibid., p. 45.

(IV) Tumatumari (1968)

Like The Waiting Room (1967), the novel is conceived as taking place within the consciousness of a woman who, in a condition of acute deprivation and emotional trauma (she is suffering the effects of a recent abortive pregnancy and the sudden violent death of her husband), gradually learns to "re-conceive" the broken past. It is, in effect, a regressus ad uterum or return to chaos by a process of creative memory in order to reconstruct an "authentic" existence. Derek Walcott, in a poem which remains one of the most accurate and despairing comments ever made on the iniquitous heritage of the middle passage, has written:

> Something inside is laid wide like a wound,
> some open passage that has cleft the brain,
> some deep, amnesiac blow. We left
> somewhere a life we never found,
> customs and gods that are not born again ...[1]

Tumatumari is, in a sense, an attempt to free the creative imagination from the prison of historical, "dead" time - to "repair" the damage done by that "deep, amnesiac blow". And Prudence, immersed in the "well of the past" atop Tumatumari Fall , suffering but held by the unmoving "Eye" of the Waterfall, reaches through her helpless, deprived condition to a truer knowledge of the past. It is a process of anamnesis. To this task, Harris, at the height of his powers, brings to bear his extraordinary creative genius.

Prudence stands for the complex womb of Man and Nature, the source of life and the cruel muse of death. The dream (with which the novel opens) in which she goes down to the river and finds a floating "head" - symbol of both her lost child and dead husband -

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1 Derek Walcott, "Laventville" The Castaway (Jonathan Cape 1965) p. 35.

is ambiguous, a dream of death and birth:

> Was it lust for self-destruction she cherished? Or desire for self-creation ...? She lifted the dripping cradle into her arms. (p. 15).

Her action suggests her future role: that of gathering up the fragmented past and nursing it to new life. But it soon becomes clear that she is also (like Salome) an anima-figure whose love carries a threat of death. Her husband Roi, an engineer engaged in a hydro-electric scheme on the Tumatumari falls, meets his death hurrying home to her. His drowning had been foreshadowed, however:

> Even then at that crucial stage of their marriage - the very day she knew she was pregnant - she had a grotesque foreboding (which she tried to stifle) of his coming death by drowning in the falls THROUGH HER (AS IF SHE WOULD SUMMON HIM, PUSH HIM) ... (p. 28).

And, within her hallucinated memory, her relationship with Roi and with Rakka (the Amerindian woman who is her helper and "gaoler") is gradually explored. Roi Solman (who represents science and technology - the exploiting of the land) is the conscious, "collision-prone" outer self. His superficial, though active existence ("the engineer in me is my devil. Do you follow?", p. 23) is contrasted with her passive, but vaguely threatening, presence, like the fall itself (Tumatumari means "sleeping rocks") down which Roi's boat tumbles and is "decapitated by the Rock which rose to meet him out of the falls". (p. 19). His relationship with Prudence and Rakka reminds us of the symbolic characterization of Donne, the Dreamer and Mariella of Palace of the Peacock (1960) and reiterates the theme of psychic integration. Roi's exploitation of the Indians in spite of his description of them as "the conscience of our age" (p. 35) echoes Donne's brutality to Mariella, and the death which he meets (symbolically) through Prudence is (like Donne's death at the hands of Mariella) a consequence of "his capa-

city for single-mindedness". (pp. 21/22). Prudence, sitting within the half-finished concrete well at the top of the Tumatumari escarpment (the hydroelectricity scheme is abandoned) has a vision in which the well becomes symbolic of past and future:

> An enormous excitement gripped her - authenticity - in which her being, the being of the well, the being of the sky seemed to enfold itself and yet release itself like the unravelling, ravelling petals of a flower. *Disintegrative as well as integrative, ending as well as beginning.* (pp. 29/30, author's italics).[1]

This sense of "timelessness", of "authentic" Being, continues to develop within her like the child which she has conceived:

> ... brink of self-knowledge. ... Call it *night of the Amazon* ... *night of the womb* ... *staircase* ... *well* ... anything ... something which had begun mightily to occupy her. (p. 33, author's italics).

The pun on the word "occupy" is significant, for she is being prepared for her rôle as mother of the new, complex consciousness. Like the Greek figure Mnemosyne - the mother of the Muses - she represents the collective memory through which a Return to the Source is envisaged. Harris here seems to gather together all the threads of his earlier work, and in Prudence's dreaming consciousness, history, myth, racial and cultural ancestry, social and political division, the development of the Caribbean psyche all become involved in a re-creative act of memory. In Harris's view, the "deep amnesiac blow"[2] of history has produced a "broken" individual; a psychic fracture which cannot be repaired in any ordinary sense of the word: a new whole must be *re*-constructed anew through a return to sources. As Fenwick says in *The Secret*

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1 Cf. the use Harris makes of the weaving/unweaving acticity of the Penelope figure in *Eternity to Season* (1954). This activity also reflects the general movement of the novel.

2 Derek Walcott, "Laventville" *The Castaway*, op. cit.

Ladder (1963): "it's a question of going in unashamed to come out of the womb again." (p. 38). The novel's main theme, therefore, the underlying logic which unifies the whole, is the imaginative re-possession of the past through a creative act of memory in which art and science (in the writer's free imagination and conscious technique) are harnessed together within a unified sensibility. As he lies dying, Prudence's father says of her:

> She needs an engineer. Cultural engineer - art and science. That's where the courage for the future lies. ... Not simply technological descent into matter (vulgar ruin). But a far-reaching assessment of the collision of cultures (nature and society) - the hidden lapis, the buried unity of man. A new start from the bottom up. (p. 63).

The alchemical symbol of the "hidden lapis" (the "buried" self which seeks re-unification with the outer ego) is a reminder that the success of the quest for origins will depend upon the seeker's capacity for psychic unity; and Prudence, well on her way to this unity, now begins the journey into the past. The second "book" of the novel finds her now "wide awake" (p. 43) after her "immersion" in the well; remembering her father, Henry Tenby, a historian and mixed creole whose family of five (one of whom is very dark and consequently rejected and treated as the "skeleton in the cupboard")[1] symbolizes modern Guyana with all its social and political divisions and prejudices. Tenby, the historian whose "inbuilt prejudice" (p. 45) is hidden by a mask of conventional propriety, had suppressed his own thesis on the population statistics of 1938 (Harris contrasts this with an actual work, A.R.F. Webber's A Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana, Georgetown 1931, which exposes the shocking exploitation of Negro slaves as well as of later indentured Indian labourers) as he had ignored his black

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[1] A fair-skinned sister, Pamela, "marries white" and rejects her dark child.

son and kept secret his frequent visits to prostitutes. As he lay dying, Prudence recalls, the self-righteous mask had momentarily slipped to reveal the divided man. Apparently delirious, he had said:

> I thought you knew of my spiritual demise. It started the day I kept telling myself my family - kith and kin - came first. I needed money, respect. Cornered. I must put up a front for you and for society. (p. 62)

and she now begins to see that his life of self-deceit was not simply a personal failing. Her later memory of the political meeting at which the speaker had appeared to be attacking her father in his abuse of those who act as "historian[s] of deceptions" (p. 76) falls into perspective with the realization that the politician, the historian and their public have all been victims of the greater deception of time and history, of "centuries of serfdom" (p. 120); and have been forced to compromise with a self-defeating, divided condition. As Prudence's consciousness weaves backwards and forwards through time (snatches of earlier memories of life in Georgetown alternate with, and are often superimposed upon, her experiences at Tumatumari) we see, with her eyes, a pattern emerging out of all the apparently unrelated events and images in the novel. The break-up of Guyanese society (in the Tenby family) like the decay of earlier Amerindian tribal societies,[1] is linked to the general malaise at the heart of all civilizations past and present: "misoneism", or the unreasoning fear of new concepts and ideas. Prudence remembers, in this respect:

> ... the legends she had read of the fall of civilisations in ancient America. The sudden flight. The role [sic.] call of vanished populations. ... The head of

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[1] Their determination to believe that Rakka (the half-caste, Roi's mistress) is barren comes from their fear of new racial ties.

> ruler or rule severed in a flash. So much so the blow seemed to fuse: to come equally from above as from beneath - heaven's flats, heaven's tall somersaulting. (p. 67, author's italics).

One is reminded of Cristo's experience, in The Whole Armour (1962), of the terrified flight through the forest of whole peoples, all running blindly as if from some fearful disaster. The passage suggests both the universal scale of self-destruction inaugurated by monolithc attitudes - the contradiction between "man who built a world, and the world he built which made him helpless"[1] - and the personal *hubris* of Tenby and Roi Solman, whose symbolic "decapitation" is hinted at in the phrase "the head ... severed in a flash". The "blow" which seems to come "equally from above as from beneath",[2] represents the divine judgement as well as the natural tragedy incumbent on moral blindness or single-mindedness.

For Harris, the new "treaty of sensibility" that will bridge the gulf between history and lived reality; reason and emotion; science and art - a gulf which still permits mankind to exploit nature in the name of progress and so invest in self-destruction - is nothing less than a "new technological age of Compassion". (p.113) Only by learning, in humility, to accept and digest the contrasting nature of things - the paradoxes of which the universe is composed - can Man break free of the one-sided assumptions that have hitherto guided his life. The terrifying nature of reality, in which alien

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 19.

2 The line: "heaven's flats, heaven's tall somersaulting" comes from Harris's early poem "Tropic of Heaven" (Fetish, op. cit., p. 7) where the concepts "beneath" and "above" are used to indicate the opposition - as well as the unity - between "diminished" and "transcendent" Man.

features continually appear to threaten Mankind's orderly, logical advance: the fear of the dark self[1] which Man distances and hides from consciousness at great risk: must finally be faced. Only when this has been done and "authentic Being" achieved, can one begin to perceive the construction of future events going on within the broken, disordered past and present.

The implications of such a philosophy of psychic reconstruction can have far-reaching effects in the field of art or literature. One has only to think of the revolution in psychology caused by Freud's discovery of the autonomous unconscious, or of Einstein's equally revolutionary discovery of the Theory of Relativity; or of the discovery in physical science of "Faustian" matter or "anti-matter", or, in astronomy, of the "black holes" in the universe (caused by imploding stars, beyond which whole new universes may lie) to see how revolutionary Harris's approach to creative fiction may be. For by setting the creative imagination free in an atmosphere where "gains" and "losses" become wholly relative and where no static values exist, the possibilities of change, of new associations and new growth, become almost infinite. An example of this spontaneous free-association of ideas and images occurs at the beginning of "Book Four" ("Brothel of Masks") in what must be considered a remarkable piece of "visionary" writing. The passage is quoted at length in order to convey something of the cumulative effect of the imagery:

> Now to her amazement something she had not bargained for was happening. Through her fingers which she locked across her face like the bars of a cell she discerned upon

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[1] Symbolized in the Greek myth of the Gorgon, Medusa (a symbol often used by Harris) which literally petrifies the beholder; and may be looked at only indirectly, as a reflection.

> the features of Rock an eye appear. Impossible she cried. Then trembling all over until her hands shook and fell as though they carried a new flesh upon them - bruised as it were by their own prisoner of glory - she pointed afresh and said - Why not after all? Why shouldn't there be an eye where a face is? Perhaps she had overlooked it before. Overlooked the pointed eye of time which was coming alive. It filled her with the greatest chronological erection of joy, calendar of fulfilment. The Eye was Clear. Vision like an arrow. Bombardment upon the retina of the womb. Clear as crystal in reality. She knew in some fantastic way it had to do - this Eye - with the resumption of the conversation between old man as well as old woman of history (her father wearing the mask of Rakka's mother) and the waif of the streets (her generation wearing the mask of Prudence and Roi).
>
> At first she could not cease from trembling within the Brothel of Masks - half-solipsis, half-otherness - but as she shook, vibrations were set up which rippled and fled across the basin of the world - Amazon to Orinico - Atlantic to Pacific - a continent bedded in rivers and oceans. It was as if she gained in this way some consolation from reciprocity, from reaction (call it what one would as it flowered into tension, stillness at the heart of things): her father's mask grew tight across his brow like a shell - the shell of the sun in the sky - an intercourse of elements. The father of history was an egg upon which hands and feet were mothered by infinite tragic design - something drawn from the infinitesimal Rock Heart of the Well. Upon it - the skin of the shell - Prudence breathed her inscriptions of tenderness - the curved shell of her lips, a baby's mask of flesh - all the appurtenances of anatomy. In addition she drew to perfection (it was amazing that so much detail could be marked upon egg-shell) the landscape in which he rested - fine microscopic cradle - hills and plains in relief. An imperishable inheritance and vista. Total harmony of intention from a grain of his hair to grass or leaf. (pp. 111/112).

The eye which materializes from the rock is (like the "eye of the scarecrow") the homunculus or inner self which Prudence releases from her imprisoning flesh. The eye-image (representing a deeper and wider sensibility) then seems to proliferate, one image immediately suggesting another; from the "eye of time" to impregnating ("eyed") phallus, penetrating arrow, shining waterfall, eye of a mask and so to a Cosmic eye - the eye of God - which ranges over huge vistas ("the basin of the world") but can also observe

the tiniest detail ("hair to grass or leaf"). Similarly, the shell-image conveys a number of related ideas: a concealing mask, the blinding sun, the "world egg" (with its suggestion of the Son of Man), the tender skin of a baby, a cradle, the horizon itself "cradling" the hills and distant plains. The whole passage, because of this complex interweaving of images and their associations, conveys (before one grasps a particular, rational meaning) the sense of a new growth in consciousness.

Prudence, overcome by this new awareness through which she sees the hypocrisy and self-deceit of her father as part of the general "scandal of history", almost succumbs to an involuntary revulsion - the "mask of solipsis" (p. 113) - which would allow her to avoid the responsibility of her vision. She confesses her own "disparity of understanding", however, and through the exercise of humility, resumes her "conversation with the muse". (p. 114). The "masks" of the past now fall away one by one as we see through to the inner life of Henry Tenby with Prudence's new, compassionate vision. His "shopping expeditions" in the "Brothel of Masks" is symbolic of his double life of outer respectability and secret immorality. By these expeditions (as by his tacit support of the _status quo_) he had contributed to the plight of the "waif of the streets". He had thus mentally "conceived" his divided family even before their actual physical conception and so helped put the future "out of joint". But Prudence's compassionate "eye" recognizes that her father is no more to be blamed than society itself, since there had always been:

> ... unequal forces whether Right or Left weighted arbitrarily by Prejudice, contending for her agonised allegiance in the name of self-interest ... (p. 113).

And her father, like Roi Solman had tried to make up for his lack of vision in practical, economic ways. In Tenby's "paper" on the value of large water conservancy schemes for the Canje area (like Roi Solman's attempt to harness the Tumatumari fall for hydro-electric power) there had at least been the beginning of a search for "a new conception of barren premises". (p. 138). So, for Prudence, what had begun as an act of memory becomes a transforming vision of herself in relation to the hitherto 'dead' past:

> What had started, in fact, with her marriage to Roi, her persistent researches ... into her father's forbidden papers ... what had started as an adventure into the hinterland of ancestors ... suddenly turned into the night of the womb, deadly serious avalanche, jealous feud. (p. 152).

Her facile assumptions about the past shattered, her husband and child dead, Prudence (like Susan in The Waiting Room, 1967), embraces death and descends into the "Well of the Past" experiencing both pathos and majesty, the "innocence and experience irrupting from the fountainhead of nature in all deadly earnestness". (p. 155). She is now ready for re-birth: ready to play the "Great Game" of conception - the "Translation of the Gorgon of History". (p. 155).

Tumatumari, as Joyce Adler has indicated, cannot be judged - or even read - according to conventional standards:

> For example, because the content and form are so completely one, the development of Tumatumari is not novelistic or even literary in any usual sense, unless we are to conceive of the work as a long poem, which in a way it is. Its development is more musical than anything else ... [1]

but because the habit of looking for recognizable "characters" in fiction is a persistent one (coming as it does out of a long tradition of novel-writing which Harris calls "the novel of persuasion")

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[1] Joyce Adler (née Sparer) "Tumatumari and the Imagination of Wilson Harris" Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No. 7 (July, 1969) p. 24.

it is often difficult to accept the disembodied, free-floating consciousness of Harris's central figures. It is this concern for "characterization", one feels, which prompts Joyce Adler's questions about the pragmatic meaning of the novel's implications:

> Is it possible to see the present crisis of mankind rightly, if we view him as one solid mankind only? Doesn't the use of a single figure like Tenby or Roi to represent mankind in successive ages imply that there is but a single human consciousness and experience in each age? Who in the recent period, would represent mankind in the age of colonialism - the man of the British middle-class, for example, or the man of African origin struggling for freedom in Kenya?[1]

This is an important criticism, suggesting as it does the writer's hubris of an artistic, aesthetic concern with "Mankind", rather than with men and women; but it also betrays a pre-occupation with a representation of "events" and "relationships" and misses the implication of Harris's concern with the "carbon", rather than the "diamond" (or even "coal") of personality. If one regards the writer's approach as an "anthropological" (rather than an inner, alchemical) method, one is apt to regret the absence of:

> ... the internal dynamic encounters and interactions of separate people or groups of people with often conflicting experiences, consciousnesses and feelings.[2]

But the point of Harris's exploration of history via the drifting cosmic consciousness of Prudence is that only in "timelessness" or "historylessness" can "time" or "history" be made meaningful: only through a confession of humility and "vacancy" can personality become whole. Human relationships are so complex, so full of hidden potentialities for paradoxical change and reversal, that the consolidation of character (no matter how "true to life") cannot adequately

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1 Joyce Adler, "Tumatumari and the Imagination of Wilson Harris" Journal of Commonwealth Literature, op. cit., pp. 30/31.

2 Ibid., p. 31.

convey this continual flux of possibilities. Prudence is shown, therefore, as changing, not merely "in interaction with memory alone"[1] - through a recollection of the past in tranquility, as it were - but through a genuine immersion (under great emotional and physical stress) in the contradictory nature of her inner experience and apprehension of life. This entails a shattering of previous assumptions - a symbolic death of the personality - as she falls and is impaled on a rock at the bottom of the waterfall. Tenby and Roi, far from being three-dimensional representatives of "mankind in successive ages",[2] are made to embody certain universally-held, but one-sided, attitudes of mind. They are spokesmen for all ages dedicated to the consolidation of symmetrical values such as "gains" and "losses" or "strength" and "weakness"; and their objective materialism is no less unbalanced than the primitive, fetishistic subjectivity of the Amerindian folk who are as much imprisoned by an "organismic" stasis as their civilized counterparts are by an "organizational" stasis. We need to place Harris's view of the crisis of mankind within this context; for only then does the full significance of Prudence's rôle as representative of a new sensibility begin to emerge. Her marriage to the engineer, Roi, suggests the necessary wedding of art and science (as her subsequent loss of both husband and child reflects her need of "arousal") which is only a prelude to the real peril of authentic selfhood: the "adventure into the hinterland of ancestors" (p. 152), the search for "the hidden lapis, the buried unity of man". (p. 63).

The alchemical references in Harris's work, his concern for

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1 Joyce Adler "Tumatumari and the Imagination of Wilson Harris" Journal of Commonwealth Literature op. cit., p. 31.

2 Ibid., p. 30.

a "revolution of sensibility" which he expresses as:

> ... an extension of the frontiers of the alchemical imagination beyond an opus contra naturam into an opus contra ritual ... the utilization of ritual as an ironic bias ...[1]

serve to explain both his complex, enigmatic use of language (in which scientific as well as natural, philosophical and aesthetic images abound) and his constant juxtaposition of apparently opposed concepts. The "Great Game" of conception which Prudence learns to "play", is reminiscent of the dangerous "game" of the alchemists whose secret, experimental rituals for the transubstantiation of gold (couched in deliberately opaque, ambiguous language) had both a revolutionary scientific and religious, heretical meaning. Alchemy was, indeed, like magic, a blend of art and science. One is reminded of Herman Hesse's The Glass Bead Game[2] which may be seen as an alchemical activity in which Joseph Knecht, the hero, receives his initiation into the Mysterium Coniunctionis of Higher Truth via the ancient Taoist hexagrams of the I Ching.

Harris's vision of a "phenomenal reality" - an all-embracing, quasi-scientific consciousness (like that Einsteinian absolute, the constant speed of light, which is not contingent on circumstance) which is capable of transcending apparent paradoxes; his reference to this new consciousness as a product of "the medium of Art and Science"[3] also reminds one of Arthur Koestler's theory of the

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[1] Wilson Harris, "The Native Phenomenon" CommonWealth, op. cit., p. 148.

[2] First published as Der Glasperlenspiel (Fretz & Wasmuth, Zürich, 1943). In Hesse's work there is also a frequent and significant linking of mathematics and music.

[3] Wilson Harris, "The Phenomenal Legacy" Literary Half-Yearly, Vol. XI No. 2 (July, 1970) p. 6.

dissociation (because of the explosive growth of the brain) between Man's emotions ("old brain") and reason (neo-cortex), and the need to heal, scientifically, this "split mind" which creates a "delusional streak" and widens the gap between technological progress and emotional development:

> To hope for salvation to be synthesised in the lab may seem materialistic, crankish or naive; but to tell the truth, there is a Jungian twist to it - for it reflects the ancient alchemists' dream to concoct the elixir vitae. What we expect from it, however, is not eternal life, nor the transubstantiation of base metal into gold, but the transformation of homo maniacus into homo sapiens.[1]

Joyce Adler mentions the view of the physicist de Broglie that "man has need of a 'supplement of soul'", a necessary adjunct of Being which "the spiritual or intellectual guides of humanity"[2] must awaken in him before it is too late; and sees Harris's Tumatumari as a response to this call.

In Harris's work one is indeed aware of a widely-ranging sensibility, a continually expanding vision which not only reflects, but welds harmoniously together, revolutionary, religious, artistic, psychological, philosophical and scientific attitudes of mind. One is aware of an intensely individual intelligence which nevertheless reflects and incorporates the dynamic religious humanism one finds in (for example) Buber, Tillich, Koestler or Gurdjieff (as in the worl of Hesse or Conrad or Yeats) as well as the psychological insights of Jung, Heidegger, Eliade and Merleau-Ponty. Harris's creative, heterogeneous sensibility seems capable of almost limitless expansion. In the following, and final, chapter of this study,

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1 Arthur Koestler, The Ghost in the Machine (Hutchinson 1967) p. 339.

2 Joyce Adler, "Tumatumari and the Imagination of Wilson Harris", op. cit., p. 31.

we shall look at Ascent to Omai (1970) and Black Marsden (1972, Harris's most recent novel) in which his peculiarly syncretistic vision reaches outwards still further and serves to illustrate his own view of the novel as "a kind of infinite canvas".[1]

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[1] Wilson Harris, from an interview recorded in Kas-kas, University of Texas, U.S.A. (1972) p. 52.

THE EXPANDING VISION

(I) Ascent to Omai (1970)

This novel, perhaps Harris's most complex and ambitious work, is a daring attempt to articulate "a philosophy of history which is original to [the West Indies] and yet capable of universal application."[1] It is an attempt to escape from the prison of history by healing the cleavage between "linear", historical conventions and the "discontinuous" art of the imagination. Convinced that "the sterility of West Indian politics and intellectualism"[2] comes from the inertia produced by a repetition of "ceaseless catalogues of injustice",[3] the self-defeating tendency to enbalm the facts of the Middle Passage and of the exploitation of the West Indies; Harris is concerned to uncover and explore those "gateways" in West Indian and Caribbean history - residues of myth, fable, folk-culture - which reveal subtle, latent possibilities and perspectives. His own attitude to history, therefore, rejects the "dead" time of the historians: the catalogues of deeds "that measure man as a derivative industry-making animal, tool-making animal, weapon-making animal":[4] and looks instead towards a reappraisal of history in the light of an intuitive logic which deals with the latent, unpredictable impulses affecting present andfuture. Historical time becomes relative, factual events become symbolic, linear, thematic development becomes cyclical. Ascent to Omai,

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1 Wilson Harris, Lectures (1970), op. cit., p. 28.

2 Ibid., p. 29.

3 Ibid., p. 28.

4 Ibid.

like James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake (1939) is:

> ... a strange book, a compound of fable, symphony, and nightmare ... a dream which has freed the author from the necessities of common logic and has enabled him to compress all periods of history, all phases of individual and racial development, into a circular design, of which every part is beginning, middle and end.[1]

It is a "novel-history" in which the West Indian hero's quest for an inner reality and Truth of experience - a new "El Dorado" - constitutes a complex, liberating and universal theme. V.S. Naipaul, writing in The Loss of El Dorado (1969) with a historian's sense of time as a linear, unbroken series of events, chronicles the greed and cruelty of the Spanish, Dutch, French, Portuguese and English during their exploitation of the West Indies: the sordid realities of the El Dorado myth. Harris, however, relies on his own, profound sense of the "omens of capacity" latent within apparently static events to explore, not the sordid facts - the loss of El Dorado - but the creative possibilities of the myth. The novel becomes an "infinite canvas" upon which static planes no longer exist, and the reader is freed from an artistic tradition which coerces and "captures".[2]

The clue to Harris's approach to the novel comes in an epigraph at the beginning:

> ... there is no ground of alternatives but to recover the "dangerous" chasm, the "forbidden" ascent and seek a new dimension of feeling - a new oath of humanity. (p. 9)[3]

and this is precisely what the hero, Victor, attempts to do in his ascent to Omai. The overt plot of the novel can be quite briefly summarized, although, as we have seen, this apparent simplicity of the story in Harris's novels is always deceptive. Victor, who has

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1 J. Campbell & H.M. Robinson, A Skeleton Key to Finnegan's Wake (Faber & Faber 1947) p. 13.

2 Cf. Harris's view of the liberating effect of Denis Williams's painting. Page 274 of this study.

3 All quotations are from the 1970 edition.

made and lost a fortune in the gold and diamond fields of the Guyana interior, is climbing a hill overlooking a river, in search of his dead father's old, abandoned claim. During the climb, he is bitten by a tarantula spider and, feverish and in great pain, has hallucinations. His mind goes back to his Albouystown childhood and we discover that when his mother died in giving birth to him, his father (a welder by profession who had tried his luck as a pork-knocker), driven by grief, had become a drunkard and lecher, finally burning down both the welding shop and his own home. The young Victor had then run away to sea. Now, forty years later, as the past unfolds ("the curtain parted upon a stage whereon his play SOUL was in progress", p. 28), Victor gains deeper and deeper insight into his own life: his love/hate relationship with his father and his longing for an unknown mother. The novel ends as Victor, in a brief moment of illumination, sees his father fighting the flames of the fire he had himself started, forty years ago; in his hands the petticoat of his dead wife - the only thing he had managed to save. Victor is suddenly flooded with a sense of great knowledge and compassion.

To this thin stratum of meaning Harris adds layer upon layer of historical, psychological and mythological significance. As one ventures deeper into the novel, images proliferate in an astonishing way to produce reverberations of meaning. Victor is an everyman figure who, early in the novel, comes to represent the people of an "Old" as well as "New" world: post as well as pre-Columbian Man. Like Prudence of Tumatumari (1968), he seems to be the soul of Caribbean Man seeking, in the "well of the past", the means of a new birth. "Omai" is an Amerindian root-word with multiple meaning used to suggest the "peak experience" of the mystics - the unpredictable flash of spiritual illumination. "Omai" is also the mythical

El Dorado, the "lost worlds" of Roraima and Atlantis: a place which exists and does not exist - a "hill of cloud". Victor's ascent of the hill has an archetypal significance: one thinks of Moses' ascent of Sinai, the "eight-fold path" of the mystics, Dante's hill of purgatory. There are echoes of a symbolic retracing of the Middle Passage. Certainly Victor's father is an ancestral figure peculiarly Caribbean:

> A man of no definite origin ... fresh from slavery, fresh from the factory, rum-soaked labour ... and he (Victor) felt his eyes being welded too, soldered too by frustrated divinities (copulation of idols - Africa, Asia, Europe) ... (p. 31).

He is representative of Caribbean Man, but also of Man in general. His name, Adam, suggests the original/Inner man - the "Archanthropos" or "Imago Dei" who is judge of living and dead, as well as the "Anthroparion" of the Greek alchemists - the homunculus or miniature self one sees reflected in the eye of another. One is reminded of the symbolic tenants of The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965), the Anthrops, who represent "a golden centre of inspiration" in spite of being slum dwellers. Adam is a scarecrow figure, ragged pork-knocker, "fallen man" (like the "ruined millionaire" of T.S. Eliot's East Coker) the father in whose eyes Victor needs to see himself reflected:

> One day he would meet the ruined pork-knocker face to face, doppelgänger of the heartland ... (p. 19).

Victor's quest is symbolic not only of Caribbean Man's search for ancestral origins, but also of Mankind's longing for a pre-lapsarian world. And there are deeper echoes, such as the suggestion, in the appearance of the spectral pork-knocker as a "tabula rasa", a döppelgänger with a "faceless face", of a regressus ad uterum from which, as in mythology, the hero is reborn. The use of memory as a means of acquiring the necessary self-knowledge for this painful

regeneration is a vital process of the inner alchemy which helps Adam's son, Victor, to come to a new understanding of himself. By going beyond History and its crass realities, by achieving a "new dimension of <u>feeling</u>", Victor, the new Caribbean Man,gains insight and so breaks out of the prison of History. A new direction is now possible.

In the novel the "melting pot" of the Caribbean is symbolized (with a significant shift of metaphor to emphasize a purposeful, creative reconstruction) by the <u>welding</u> shop, the factory where Adam works and from which he emerges at the end of each day covered with black charcoal stains. A man gilded with "black gold": "El Dorado". Victor's search for the "ruined Eden of this Father/Son, God/Adam, Osiris/Christ figure is a search for a unity of life, now lost. In the first chapter Victor has a glimpse of "a frail, multiform conception of unity, terrestrial and transcendental" (p. 22), and as the novel proceeds, this vision is "imploded" in various ways. First a rapport is established between living and dead, past and present. Victor is struck by a falling stone dislodged from above by the doppelgänger, and in this state of "unpredictable arousal" is bitten by a tarantula. Harris captures the sense of Victor's very real panic:

> Had he been pushed or stung? BITTEN BY TARANTULA. OH MY GOD. Senses grown dim. Elongated. Telescope of pain. Faint pole to pole. Tripod of ice to tripod of fire. OH MY LEGS. (p. 25).

as well as the symbolic meaning of the "spider transubstantiation" - the idea of the trickster/shaman's initiation of the neophyte in a <u>rite de passage</u>. The initiate enters a trance-state or limbo in which arcane knowledge ("gnosis") is acquired as part of a process of

inner "becoming":

> The shock of inoculation (deliverance and protection), translation of the jaw of the spider, eye of the spider, with the omnibus of ascent, healing waterfall, imbued him with a brooding mirror and conception ... (p. 26).

Victor is now aware of a "gateway" or "time-lag" of consciousness as the frontiers of memory are pushed back. The first memory-image to return takes the form of a "hallucinated spear" which "flew and arched into the fourth milestone or door in his side" (p. 28) - the memory of being prodded in the side, as a child, by his drunken father. Like Christ (who was also victim and victor) he now carries an Amfortas wound of suffering, humility and compassion. Later on, the aeroplane flying overhead (inside, in a timeless limbo, a cosmic/fantasy trial - his as well as Adam's - is being held) which, glinting in the sun, dazzles Victor's eyes, is a reminder of his childish efforts at father/self identification, when, hidden from view, he had trained the sun's rays from a mirror into Adam's eyes as he emerged from the welding shop. At this point the reader has the curious impression of looking forward into the past from the present and backward from the present (, Adam's claim has as its headboard a piece of metal from the wrecked plane) into the future (the plane is heading for disaster on Omai). Past, present and future now co-exist.

It soon becomes clear that the "cosmic trial" with which Victor is now obsessed (like the "Anancy Trail", p. 23, which he has undertaken to follow) is the painful, introspective confrontation with himself which he has always put off:

> It was in fact, a profound bitter question of confronting the legacies of the past in which he and all men were involved through parent and friend, employer or employed, trader or trade, captor or captive, etc., etc. (p. 45).

It is not only the actual trial of his father, Adam, who had set fire to his workplace and home forty years ago, but also the trial of the Caribbean - indeed of the "revolutionary" claims of the whole Third World. Victor is both judge and defendant, for the trial is an attempt to re-define the inner perspectives and feelings which have produced a particular attitude to history and identity:

> For the truth was since he felt himself and the prisoner now truly in the same abnormal, ill-defined dock, it became clear to him how subversive such a feeling was, half-suicidal even, half-consenting to doom like Mayakovsky's cloud in trousers. (p. 53).

This reference to "The Cloud in Trousers", a work by the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky who used his poetic gifts to champion the Revolutionary Movement and who unaccountably shot himself in 1930 when the Movement was at its height; is at first puzzling. Harris is as unlike Mayakovsky the "agitator and bawling ringleader", the "roaring lion" of the Revolution[1] as it seems possible to be. But in fact he is proposing an ideology no less subversive than that of Mayakovsky's Marxist socialism: the rejection of all one-sided biases and the incurring of "a necessary burden of authenticity" (p. 96) which would make possible the re-discovery of a transcendent reality - a "higher" court of judgement. Adam cries:

> I challenge the constitution of this court. Too one-sided I say. How can it have personal authority over me when it cannot feel ...? (p. 59).

Harris's poem, "Fetish"[2] is used by the defence as evidence of the "new experimental source of wealth" present in "the rubbish of civilizations" (p. 72). For the poem which is about the genuine, sacramental and creative potential existing within apparently absurd

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1 See Vera Alexandrova, A History of Soviet Literature 1917-1964 (Doubleday 1964) p. 61.

2 Title poem of the collection Fetish (Guiana 1941), op. cit.

and irrelevant ornament, mirrors the Caribbean condition of "historylessness" and "rootlessness" in which possibilities for real growth nevertheless exist. The poem, like history itself, if looked at from a conventional, pragmatic angle is:

> Fortuitous and meaningless really. If viewed, on the other hand, as an omen of grace, it possesses, within every cloak of darkness, a frail light ... And it also brings alternatives within history ... (p. 76).

The main object of the "trial", therefore, is the re-appraisal of history through the compassionate, creative reconstruction of the past; and the judge records not only the facts of the case, but also:

> ... the other silent voices he felt beneath everyone and everything: mute sensations ... that returned to address him as if he, himself, were on trial, and what had not been said then was endeavouring to be heard now. (p. 78, author's italics).

Incidents and memories of Victor's childhood now return with added significance. He realizes that he had in a sense "died" many times as he had outgrown each stage and "prison house" of life. The ripples caused by the stones which he had thrown into the Albouystown canal as a child now become significant of his inner development: each ripple is an "epitaph", each with a name reminiscent of a particular childhood memory or impression. There is actually a diagrammatic representation (p. 90) of this growth-image, labelled "Factory of the Gilded Man" (El Dorado) which suggests the cyclical, rather than linear, progress of history. The "Factory of the Gilded Man" also represents the circular action of the beams of light radiating outwards from a central lighthouse. It is:

> A revelation of unruined consciousness that went to the heart of the human brain or hell on earth by, as it were, persisting through and within all ruined personality, like a salutary lighthouse within and beyond desolation or claim, fortress or wall. (p. 50, author's italics).

It is also a reminder and symbol (as in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, 1930) of the order and permanence at the heart of chaos:

the buried, inner self which makes spiritual regeneration possible.

The novel (again, like Finnegan's Wake) is a strange echo-chamber in which language is used to create multiple meaning; although Harris relies on complex imagery and symbolic associations of ideas rather than on verbal and linguistic mutations, as Joyce does. The language is at once diffuse, its long sentences radiating in many directions; and compact, with allusion and metaphor packed tightly together:

> The voluminous hill or coat to which he clung, sanctification of motherhood, intercession of motherhood, turned to limbo in his side: mirror in his side: whose exploding venom coiled around him like magnesium - acid flame, blue lightning, welder's mask, visor and tool, tarantula. (p. 31).

Here the hill becomes his dead mother's petticoat, an early "mask" (or "epitaph") behind which he hid as a child and which he now learns to reject because of a new-found self-awareness - the wound in his side. The burning pain of the spider's poison recalls the blue welding-flame wielded by his "masked", visored father whom he now begins to see with more compassionate eyes. It is typical of Harris's writing that even a blade of grass can reflect a whole universe of deprivation:

> A blade of grass pricked him. He plucked it, chewed it like a rag - daydream - pillow, green flag, cradle (porknocker's barrel floating in cloud, oceanic tub, ailing subsistence, middle passage). (p. 33).

This multiplicity of images, like the odd, fragmented appearance of the writing, is aimed at a deeper level of response in the reader who has to enter, as it were, into the novel's alchemical process of creating "a new experimental source of wealth". Adam's plea: "I sought to unmake myself to make something I had lost before I was born" expresses not only the alchemists' attempts to create by synthesis the aurum non vulgi from a formless prima materia ,

but also the artist's desire to break down existing rigid linguistic conventions so as to re-create a New Universe of Art - a "new dimension of feeling". There is, however, an undeniably esoteric level at which the novel's language functions. Images and ideas recur which appear to reflect Harris's own interest in the ancient hermetic art of memory. The "vicars of reality" for example, gain in significance if (following Harris's own inclination for making odd puns) one refers to the "Decans" of hermetic tradition - the gods of the Egyptian cosmos, sacred images or horosoopes which could exert demonic/chthonic influence over human life. The orderly arrangement of striking images and emblems in the diagram of the "Factory of the Gilded Man" is reminiscent of the sixteenth century memory theatre of Giulio Camillo, and is related to the divine "ladders" and "scales" of hermetic art. In Ramon Lull's Liber de Ascensu et Descensu Intellectus (1512), for example, there is one such "divine ladder" the first step of which is labelled Lapis (stone) and the last, Deus (God or Ultimate Wisdom). In Harris's diagram the first "epitaph" or circle is also labelled "stone" and the final one, "Madonna" (Mother of God or Ultimate Compassion). The whole thing gives the effect of the ripples caused when Victor throws a stone into the canal, and serves as an apt image of Harris's technique in the novel, where, as in the work of James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, intricate patterns are constructed from simple ideas which seem to radiate outwards. The diagram is a mandala,[1] and, like the rings on a cut tree trunk, a measure of growth. It is also a useful key to the images used in the novel.

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[1] A symbolic representation of psychic unity. It is interesting to notice that William Walsh, writing on Patrick White's The Solid Mandala, a novel also concerned with the concept of psychic balance, finds that: "The structure of the novel is composed of similar movements or concentric circles". ("Patrick White's Vision of Human Incompleteness", Journal of Commonwealth Literature July 1969, No. 7, p. 131).

Unfortunately, towards the end of the book, Harris appears to enter as omniscient author. There is a thinly-disguised address to the reader (very much like D.H. Lawrence's much-quoted digression, in Lady Chatterly's Lover, on the novel as a life-enhancing art) in which the "vicarious" novel, the "novel of manners", is firmly repudiated:

> The truth is, I believe, that the novel has been conditioned for so long by the comedy of manners, it overlooks an immense poetry of original and precarious features ... (p. 96).

This creates something of the atmosphere of the lecture-hall, especially as there is (for purposes of clarity, one supposes) a repetition, with explanatory notes relating to the diagram of the "Factory of the Gilded Man", of long extracts from earlier chapters in quote-marks:

> The third movement or horizon of the dance of the stone (popularly called Iron Mask) has also been previously adumbrated in this novel as (see page 110) - "this uncanny illumination within potencies of disaster ..." (p. 119).

There is evidence here of a certain exegetical impatience, and one feels that this sort of thing can serve only to distract the perceptive reader, and may, perhaps, finally exasperate an uncomprehending one. It is as if in attempting to write:

> ... a kind of novel or novel history in which the spectre of time was the main character, and the art of narrative the obsessed ground/lighthouse of security/insecurity (p. 83)

Harris expands his fictional horizons still further, but comes up against the limitations of language. One is aware of the novelist attempting, as it were, to elucidate for the reader a work which he himself has begun to suspect might be too difficult to follow:

> Wherever, therefore, in this book I or my characters speak of vicars of reality, vicar of this or that lighthouse, it is intended as a confession of abstinence - of scrupulous care, illumination rather than unexplored gloss or conscription of taste or manner upon like/unlike material. (p. 96).

Language, for Harris, is a complex possession, "a vision of consciousness", a medium which "continuously transforms inner and outer formal categories of experience",[1] and one suspects that the ideal readers of his work would have to be rather like the readers described by Herman Hesse who:

> ... no longer read what lies on the paper in front of [them], but swim along in the stream of the stimulations and ideas that come to [them] from what [they] have read. They can come from the text, they can even arise merely from the shape of the type.[2]

And Harris clearly realizes that the attempt to set language free in this way: to use it to enhance vision, rather than to convey intellectual meaning, brings penalties as well as rewards. As his own creative vision expands, so the language is continually stretched to accommodate and evoke the images and ideas conjured up in his mind:

> The curtain parted upon a stage whereon his play SOUL was in progress. Porknocker's Boudoir. Theatre of adventure. Victor trained his encrusted eye. Geological and emotional tapestries. Tragedies. Million year old psyche. Curtains of comedy. War paint. Love paint. Black blonde resources. Blonde black milchcow. Negro. Indian. White. He felt the humiliating burden of possession and dispossession: metallic loves, conscripted loves, threadbare loves - uncanny deprivations, manipulations - darkness-upon-darkness - light-upon-light - wholesale/retail crown - scalp or wig. Absurd mistress. Matriarchal advocate. (p. 28).

The simultaneous concentration of language and expansion of imagery makes this, a representative passage of the novel, extremely difficult to comprehend except as an invitation to "swim along in the stream of stimulations and ideas" that come to us as we read. Kenneth Ramchand regards this novel as:

> ... Harris's most concentrated attempt so far to give sensuous reality to a number of ideas we can infer from the work.[3]

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1 TWS, op. cit., p. 32.

2 Herman Hesse, "On Reading Books" (1920) quoted in Theodore Ziolkowski, The Novels of Herman Hesse, op. cit., p. 196.

3 Journal of Commonwealth Literature Vol.vi No. 2 (Dec., 1971)p.105.

and goes on to say that:

> If Mr. Harris's novel seems difficult, the difficulty as Dulan Barber wrote in Tribune (12 June 1970) is 'not that he is obscure, at all, but that our viewpoint is so much narrower than his'.[1]

Harris himself, in this novel, certainly seems to be aware of the difficulty facing the reader, and appears to be chafing somewhat against the barrier of language: the essential intractability of words as a medium for his constantly expanding vision. Earlier, he had written:

> The constitution of history as it affects the Caribbean and the Guianas is one which the creative writer is profoundly qualified to explore, I believe, provided he can suffer again through his work the ancestral torment of finding his tongue seized again as if he had become a dumb thing without voice or language.[2]

This suggests the need for a renewal of authority of the writer's voice, a re-appraisal of imagination: and it is significant that, before he produced Black Marsden (1972), his most recent work (and, like The Waiting Room, [1967], a new departure) he wrote two volumes of short stories, The Sleepers of Roraima (1970) and The Age of the Rainmakers (1971), which are explorations of vestigial Carib myths and legends. These stories, many of which portray a young child undergoing an initiatory rite, seem to represent another *reculer pour mieux sauter* (as did The Eye of the Scarecrow, 1965), another attempt at self-renewal in terms of extending the historical scale and of re-vitalizing language and symbol. According to Mircea Eliade, the importance of myths and legends is related to their value as methods of awakening inner resources through a genuine recovery of the past by *anamnesis*. As he puts it: "a true historiographic *anamnesis* finds expression in the discovery of our

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[1] Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. vi No. 2, op. cit., p. 105.

[2] Wilson Harris, "The Unresolved Constitution", op. cit., p. 44. My underlining.

solidarity with these vanished or peripheral peoples." In this way, "man enters deep into himself".[1] Harris's interest in the vestiges of Carib myths and legends as precisely such a fertilizing process was already made clear in his 1970 Edgar Mittelholzer Memorial Lectures (entitled "History, Fable and Myth"): and in The Age of the Rainmakers (1971) he underlines this as his aim in the short stories:

> The profound necessity remains therefore to begin to unravel these contradictions within oneself and, by a continuous relativizing [sic] process, extend one's horizons beyond the terrifying partiality of an age into a conception of the native as a curious host of consciousness.[2]

The stories themselves constitute a kind of re-sensitizing process in which the known history of the Carib tribes is "sabotaged" from within by Harris's creative re-construction of myth and legend. A "host consciousness", generally dismissed as superstition and primitive savagery by historians, is imaginatively unearthed, and a gateway opened on to a primordial ab-original time. The language, too, in keeping with the theme of initiation of young children into the true history of the tribe, is simpler, more direct, fed, as it were, from a native landscape of images, especially since events are often related from the child's point of view. It is not my intention to discuss these stories in detail, but it is clear that they represent a return to a "First Cause" (or ancestral time) and serve an apodictic purpose for the writer, offering a breathing space, a means of freeing himself, as it were, from the weight of "dead" time. They also represent, therefore, a necessary activity. As Mircea Eliade observes:

> Whatever the gravity of the present crisis of the novel, it is none the less true that the need to find one's way

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1 Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, op. cit., p. 136.

2 Author's note, p. 38.

> into "foreign" Universes and to follow the complications of a "story" seems to be consubstantial with the human condition and hence irreducible. It is a difficult need to define, being at once desire to communicate with "others", with "strangers", and share in their dramas and hopes, and at the same time the need to know what can have taken place.[1]

This reculer pour mieux sauter, however, is only a stage in a more complex process - the oeuvre itself - and the writer himself admits that there is a subtle connection between these stories and Palace of the Peacock (1960)which he did not, at the time, recognize:

> Even when actually working on Yurokon [one of the stories in The Sleepers of Roraima, (1970)] I did not intellectually grasp the connection. But the intuitive correspondence was there nevertheless. It is, in fact, more than an intuitive correspondence. It is, I believe, an objective validation of landscape-in-depth - the shock of great rapids and complex landscapes and forests - playing through memory to confirm perspectives of imperilled community and creativity reaching back into the Pre-Columbian mists of time.[2]

Indeed, Harris (in the same talk) clearly regards the reconstruction of the Carib myths and legends which his two collections of short stories represents as:

> ... an objective parallel whereby it may be possible to test and validate the intuitive authority of a work of the imagination ...[3]

Having, as it were, re-established his considerable authority to speak through "the revitalised fauna and flora of legend, in an age of renascence when perspectives into the past reopen afresh":[4] having constructed yet another rung in the unique ladder or scale with which he seeks to discover an "inward dialogue and space" within the novel, Harris expands his range still further with Black Marsden (1972).

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1 Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, op. cit., p. 101.

2 "The Native Phenomenon" Common Wealth, op. cit., p.144, my underlining.

3 Ibid., p. 144.

4 Wilson Harris, Lectures (1970), op. cit., p. 32.

(II) Black Marsden (1972)

The novel appears to be a complete departure from Harris's previous fiction. To begin with, the setting is Scotland and the ancient cathedral city of Edinburgh rather than the Harris heartland of the South American rain-forest; although the latter is, inevitably, present, if only in the background: the hero's step-father, we are told, "vanished in the heartland of Brazil". (p.64). Harris's symbolic language is as audaciously allusive and surrealistic as ever:

> He clapped his hands again beneath the cloth of his flesh - clapping a hidden church or choir or theatre he carried in his lusty camera. I saw now as he clapped that Knife, sharp as bone or sin, had stepped forth from him. And that Jennifer too had stepped forth from him naked as a sea-shell. (p. 21).

> He was filled all at once with a sense of the callouses of infinity (the kiss of gloved hand upon booted foot), numb climax, freezing danger ... Had he as private of space who had conquered the stars achieved his goal, or as the world's forgotten boot computerized an infinite desolation and an infinite stairway into the ambiguous family of man? ... (p. 49).

But such passages are related to the bizarre dreams and flights of fancy which the hero experiences and co-exist with an unusually (for Harris) lucid and straightforward narrative style which serves to counterpoint the realistic level with the fantastic level of the story:

> Harp arrived a few days later. I was the only one in and I ushered him into the sitting room. He insisted he had had a late breakfast at his hotel and all I could persuade him to have was coffee. ... He could hardly have been more than five feet two inches tall. His legs were short and his arms long. He wore a long white overcoat - semi-military, semi-medical. (p. 45).

The novel's sub-title, "a tabula rasa comedy", hints at the author's wish to create a New Art, and conjures up the mercurial spirit of alchemy. Indeed, the bearded "Doctor Black Marsden", tramp, conjurer and shaman, is an ambiguous, Merlin-figure represent-

ing both the hero's personal (and archetypal) shadow and the creative, magus-like activity of the author himself. The novel occasionally pokes fun at some of the permissive society's favourite obsessions - one of the characters observes drily:

> The post is free ... Once you lick the right stamp. Anything, everything goes into it. This morning I received a book (from whom I haven't the slightest notion) entitled... How to Fuck.(p.44).

But although there is more evidence than usual of Harris's strangely austere, ironic humour, this is not a humorous novel, except in the special sense in which a novel like Herman Hesse's Steppenwolf is. The novel certainly appears to be something of a departure, but despite its unexpected setting, its unusually straightforward narrative style, a closer examination reveals familiar psychological themes, now in a wider context. An epigraph from James Hogg's The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner:[1] "I have two souls ... the one being all unconscious of what the other performs": is a reminder of the "doubles" in Harris's fiction from Donne and the Dreamer of Palace of the Peacock (1960) to the young boys in the short, autobiographical sketch, "Kith and Kin".[2] It also echoes the victor/victim theme which runs throughout Harris's work. The quotation from Kurt Wiltig's The Scottish Tradition in Literature[3] which discusses the "Caledonian Antisyzygy" - a condition that gives to Scottish literature an "intense pre-occupation with

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1 First published in 1824. The story concerns two brothers who appear inimical (but also complementary) to each other. Each seems to be the other's doppelgänger.

2 Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. vii No. 1 (June, 1972). (Vide footnote 1, p.382)

3 See epigraphs on pp. 9/10 of the novel.

character" where "the problem of a strangely subjective vision of reality is dominant"[1] - further explains Harris's interest in, and response to, a Scottish locale.

As this study has shown, the Syzygy - the conjunction or opposition of contrasting psychic elements - holds a deep fascination for Harris and is germane to his work. His interest in that precarious point at which known and unknown, past and present, reality and fantasy meet is consistent with his refusal to accept any apparent stasis of opposites such as the concepts of victor/victim or conqueror/conquered, whether within Scottish or Caribbean historical conventions. The theme of Black Marsden is concerned, therefore, not only with the self-integration of the hero, but also with the possibility of a "digestion of catastrophe" within a historical and temporal gateway:

> ... a 'vacancy' in nature within which agents appear who are translated one by the other ... reappear through each other, inhabit each other, reflect a burden of necessity, push each other to plunge into the unknown, into the translatable, transmutable legacies of history.[2]

This is a philosophy of history as sweeping and as paradoxical as W.B. Yeats's theory of "gyres",[3] but one which is incorporated into the novel easily and naturally, without any sense of strain.

Marsden is a tramp, a "half-frozen spectre of a man" (p.11) whom Clive Goodrich (widely-travelled and wealthy, having won the football pools) discovers lying in a corner of Dunfermline Abbey in winter; and whom he invites to stay in his big house in Edinburgh.

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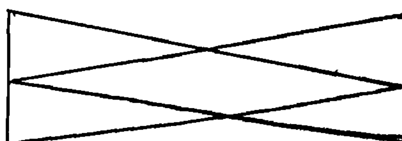
1 See epigraphs on pp. 9/10 of this novel.

2 Wilson Harris, "Interior of the Novel", op. cit., p. 146.

3 The "gyre" is an hour-glass shaped double cone, the widest expanse of one cone containing the tip of the other, so as to represent the cyclical movement of Cosmic time, thus:



Soon, thanks to Goodrich's generosity, Marsden's friends begin to arrive. They are Jennifer (called "Gorgon"), a beautiful, but derelict nightclub entertainer, an obscure musician ("Harp") and a beggar ("Knife"); and they soon reveal themselves to be aspects of both Marsden and Goodrich, changing their names and shapes and acting as spiritual guides appearing in and out of Goodrich's dreams. They belong to Marsden's "open-ended circus of reality" (p. 13) and appear to represent certain psychic elements. There is a suggestion, in Jennifer's name "Gorgon", of the emotional "petrification" produced by an obsession with sexuality and the cult of beauty. In a sudden illumination, Goodrich sees Jennifer as "the beautiful Gorgon plain as a fashion plate wired to a guillotine in a glossy magazine studio". (p. 14). She is contrasted with his elderly, down-to-earth housekeeper, Mrs. Glenwearie, who is "a woman with a heart of gold". Jennifer's rôle is, however, ambiguous, for she also symbolizes the positive, creative element of sexual love, just as Knife represents the double-edged nature of violence in which victim and victor are <u>both</u> affected. Harp's rôle is that of the unpredictable, buried correspondences within events which often provide sudden changes and reversals in apparently static events. This is illustrated by Harris's reference to the Scottish legend of the "Piper's Warning" - the music which was played by a captive piper at the risk of his life to warn his master of an enemy ambush. The piper was killed, but his master heard the music and saved himself. During Goodrich's visit (with Knife as guide) to "Namless" town, he hears this same music, but it has now been converted into its opposite meaning by the hill-folk. The "Piper's Warning" now means that the way is clear and that there is no danger.

"Namless" (a "nameless", imaginary place reminding us of the "land that is nowhere" of the Secret of the Golden Flower) where "everything is turning inside/out" (p. 71), is, in fact, a testing ground for Goodrich - "a laboratory of startling contrasts" where Marsden, as "director-general", is attempting to demonstrate "the repudiation of self-conscious ideologies". (p. 82). At another level, since Marsden clearly represents Goodrich's dark, "other self" (Goodrich says "I knew him though I had not seen him before" p. 11), "Namless" is also Goodrich's mind which is undergoing a strange and subtle transformation through its possession of hitherto unacknowledged elements:

> This was the beginning of my curious and ambivalent friendship with Doctor Black Marsden ... I was in process of projecting from within myself upon him - as he simultaneously projected his mysterious frame of associations upon me - an assortment of instruments ranging from a knife to a harp. (p. 12).

On yet another level, the "tabula rasa comedy" of "Namless" of which Marsden is director-general is simply the play which, with Goodrich's financial support, Marsden and his friends plan to produce for the Edinburgh festival. It is to be an ironic "tabula rasa drama" (like the novel itself) in which there will be:

> ... this dawning thread of complex consciousness woven into every intensity of fabric - complex shores and biases of memory. Easter Island enigma of birth - every lighthouse of soul - on the shores of Scotland and around the globe. (p. 60).

The diary in which Goodrich records his (real as well as imagined) experiences, is - again like the novel - a "tabula rasa": a "diary of Namless": (p. 94) "an invaluable place where trials are conducted". (p. 31). It is an attempt to construct "a new eye of the Scarecrow" (p. 94), and as each "guide's" rôle ends, a new "I" steps forth from the old Goodrich.

Goodrich's rôle as patron undergoes a subtle reversal through contact with Marsden and his "familiars". As he gains self-confidence and self-knowledge through his trial in "Namless" and his relationship with Marsden, Jennifer and the rest; he finds himself becoming indebted to Marsden:

> Over the past months he had given clothing, food, money to Marsden but it was Marsden who symbolized the Bank from which he had drawn rather than the beneficiary to whom he had given. He was indebted to Marsden as the most signal contradiction in his life - a shared community of goods and dreams. (pp. 54/55).

He finally realizes that he is "equally riddled with the malaise of the twentieth century - with a bankruptcy of authority" (p. 99), and when Jennifer comes to him for help (she is pregnant and wants only the financial security of a "neutral establishment" ,p. 97, where she may have, and keep, her baby for herself), he is tempted to usurp Marsden's position as her guardian, but hesitates to undertake what seems to him a daring, Promethean role:

> For a long time he had had his eye on a flaming pink cravat and a scarlet shirt but every time he ventured into Princes Street to buy these, shoehow he couldn't summon up the courage. (p. 105).

The prospect, however, of being the sole possessor of Jennifer's confidence and gratitude - "of buying something made of flame, made of fire" (p. 106) is too much to ignore. He purchases the flamboyant shirt and tie and prepares for his new rôle of "underground bridegroom of fate". (p. 107). But Goodrich has unconsciously succumbed to the <u>hubris</u> of pride: the desire to turn his new relationship of trust with Jennifer into "a ready-made flamboyance". (p.106) When he finds that Jennifer has already confessed all to Marsden, that their arrangement is no longer a secret, he suddenly sees himself as a victim of ingratitude and, in a fit of pique, orders them both to leave. He relents, but it is too late. They have vanished for ever.

Harris is advocating a broader, more compassionate view of life in which Man's "realistic" right hand knows what his "visionary" left hand is doing; and the book's message is that disaster awaits any endorsing of one-sided, static biases. The change must come from within, however, and one needs to be aware of the "Nameless Other" (p. 100) inside oneself:

> ... a pattern of far-flung devious subconscious intelligences at work through the day-to-day normal situations of each individual in society. (p. 103).

This is the symbolic meaning of Marsden/Goodrich's inner "tabula rasa" theatre through which an open-ended view of the world, an acceptance of the "condition of marvel" (p. 12) becomes possible. It is a private drama of consciousness, but with universal significance; and Goodrich discovers "in his private theatre or premises all the elements of crisis which plagued a civilization". (p. 104). The novel deals with the paradoxical nature of history and society in which "everybody claims he is being pushed. Nobody ever does the pushing but everybody is being pushed." (p. 73), as well as with the opposition of inner, psychic forces - the syzygy - and the writing, therefore, conveys and mirrors the shifting significance of events, emotions and characters. The narration constantly occilates between first and third person, often on the same page, suddenly changes from past to present tense (at the beginning of chapter ten), and often creates a surrealistic effect:

> Goodrich stared into the mirror in his sitting-room which caught the reflection of the sky outside the window and also the furniture inside the room so that it seemed to rain the very objects around him .... As I stared into the mirror - as into a private page in my innermost book - I was immersed in that still rain of shared toys and objects dispersed into the sound of a passing car, aeroplane, the rattle of a windowpane. (p. 58).

The effect here is reminiscent of an Escher[1] print, where "foreground" and "background" are meaningless since the outline of one figure, as one looks at it, immediately becomes the boundary of another. References to the writings from the "Philokalia", Apeulius' Golden Ass, Stevenson's Amateur Emigrant, Hindu weddings in Demerara, the Women's Liberation Movement are boldly and effortlessly juxtaposed to serve a common theme: "to define and redefine the nature of community beyond conformity to a status of hubris" and, by revitalizing the imaginative life, "to re-assess blocked perspectives and to begin to digest as well as liberate contrasting figures." (p. 54).

Harris is well aware of the difficulties involved in attempting to embody such a philosophy in his fiction. As the hero, Clive Goodrich says, "It's one thing to evoke a magical commonwealth (all races, all times). It's another thing to prove it." (p. 46). And this novel - a "new eye of the Scarecrow"(p.94)[2] is only another stage in an exploration which must continually be going on, a slate upon which:

> Clive Goodrich is given existence and other buried traumatic existences as well wrestling one with the other to express a caveat or unknown factor, an intuitive fire music within the hubris of assured character, assured rites of passage into death or namless town.
>
> My name is Clive Goodrich. Yet a name is but a cloak and sometimes à strange denuded nameless "I" steps forth. A denuded "I" who is absorbed by the mild spirit of an afternoon like this, or the mild ripple of a breath of wind upon the stretch of water near at hand overshadowed by trees. (p. 94).

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1 The Dutch artist Maurits Cornelis Escher (1898 - 1972) specialized in intricately worked, visual paradoxes.

2 Like The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965), this novel is also "an open dialogue within a free construction of events". (The Eye of the Scarecrow, p. 13).

Asked in an interview why he chose to set Black Marsden outside Guyana, Harris replied:

> ... in the earlier novels a certain kind of development is occurring, and that development runs into this new novel. ... The point one has to bear in mind is that the apparition of landscape as it comes into the earlier novels is an apparition which I would think makes clear, in fact, that there is no absolute ritual vessel within which the creative imagination functions.[1]

Black Marsden, informed by Harris's continually expanding vision, his wide-ranging interest, insight and compassion, is an alchemical vessel in which contrasting ideologies, images, cultures and landscapes are distilled to create a new and original wealth.

Any study of Harris's work is necessarily incomplete, for the writer's vision is expanding all the time. He is already at work on another novel, and on a critical study of the development of certain "perspectives" within the twentieth century novel. A development he sees as a:

> ... kind of imaginative alteration of the manner of the novel ... through which one is alerted to visualize new sources of the imagination.[2]

It is a development which is also taking place within his own work, and this study, therefore, can serve only to indicate something of the complex nature of Harris's vision; and to demonstrate the continuing exploratory, associative activity of his remarkable imagination.

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1 Kas-kas, op. cit., p. 51

2 Ibid., p. 55.

THE CARIBBEAN SYZYGY -

The Importance of Mittelholzer and Harris.

The work of Mittelholzer and Harris reflects the two main currents within the Caribbean novel as a whole: the two opposite facets of the Caribbean writer's concern with racial inheritance and personal identity. Mittelholzer is concerned with the deprivation and division inherent in a condition of racial and cultural admixture; while Harris regards this same condition as a process of catalysis: the starting-point for genuine, new growth. These opposed attitudes, however, serve to complement each other; for they are really the opposite poles of a dichotomy: what may, for convenience, be termed the Caribbean Syzygy. Discussing the question of "reality" in American writing, Lionel Trilling notes that:

> ... in any culture there are likely to be certain artists who contain a large part of the dialectic within themselves, their meaning and power lying in their contradictions ... they contain both the yes and the no of their culture, and by that token they are prophetic of the future.[1]

The importance of Mittelholzer and Harris is of this order. Mittelholzer's work may be said to contain the "no" and Harris's the "yes" of the Caribbean reality. An understanding of Mittelholzer's maimed attempts to achieve psychic wholeness - his deliberate use of schizoid heroes to project his own split condition - is, I suggest, an essential step towards understanding (for example) the peculiar nature of V.S. Naipaul's irony and despair or the eloquent rages of George Lamming. For in their work (as in Mittelholzer's) one finds the European presence as an ambivalent, disorientating factor.

The cultural presence of the Old World is always a necessary ingredient in George Lamming's writing, and his stance is one of _confrontation_ with the white world. Caliban and Prospero must be brought

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1 Lionel Trilling, _The Liberal Imagination_ (Mercury Books 1964) p. 9.

together again within a new horizon:

> ... for it is only when they work together in the context of that horizon that the psychological legacy of their original contract will have been annulled.[1]

Once the ghosts of the past have been thus confronted and - hopefully - exorcised, "each can return to the Skin without any inhibitions imposed by the exterior attributes of the Castle."[2] The need for exile and the urge to juxtapose cultural and racial qualities of "blackness" and "whiteness" runs through a great deal of Caribbean writing. Lloyd Brown finds the West Indian novel significant "largely because of the West Indian's unique position vis-à-vis the African past and the Western present."[3] Arthur Drayton argues that:

> The consideration of the European factor in West Indian literature brings us back, therefore, to the urgency that characterises the sociology behind that literature.[4]

and finds that:

> Vidia Naipaul is a curious casualty of the European factor, with restricted possibilities of further contribution, not technically but philosophically, to West Indian literature.[5]

Certainly it is in the work of V.S. Naipaul that the West Indian's sense of inner division, of self-alienation, receives its

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1 George Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile (1960) p. 159.

2 Ibid.

3 Lloyd W. Brown, "The Crisis of Black Identity in the West Indian Novel" Critique Vol. XI No. 3 (1969) p. 99.

4 Arthur D. Drayton, "The European Factor in West Indian Literature" Literary Half-Yearly Vol. XI No. 1 (Mysore 1970) p. 95.

5 Ibid.

most precise and disturbing expression. There is a constant drift towards social and personal disintegration, and images of flight or shipwreck are prominent. In Naipaul's work, the need is not to confront Europe, but to preserve and protect the self against the disorganized, disintegrative elements in the world at large. Unable to graft himself safely on to a suitable parent-body, the writer must be concerned to avoid damage to the self. Naipaul is finally unable to identify himself with the West Indies, with Europe and the Old World or with India. His work reflects this resignation to rootlessness:

> In a year I had not learned acceptance. I had learned my separateness from India, and was content to be a colonial, without a past, without ancestors.[1]

In spite of their differing response to Europe and to the problem of racial and cultural identity, however, Lamming and Naipaul are spokesmen for a shared malaise: the intensely felt crisis of identity in which there is "something missing"[2] which makes "a true communication with a society ... non-existent and impossible".[3] This overriding necessity to establish one's identity and to preserve the individual's psychic balance in a threatening, divisive world, is, as we have observed, Mittelholzer's central concern; and the importance of his work may be seen in the complex psychological condition which it so accurately represents, and of which it is a symptom. For this condition of psychic incompleteness is at the centre of Caribbean fiction. The Caribbean novel is, above

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1 V.S. Naipaul, An Area of Darkness (1964) p. 252.

2 G. Lamming, "The Negro Writer and his World" (vide footnote 2, p. 29 of this study).

3 V.S. Naipaul. From an interview recorded in Transition No. 40 (Accra, December, 1971) p. 62.

all, concerned with the problem of identity; and V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming may be considered important and accomplished exemplars of one main development in Caribbean fiction which can ultimately be traced back to the work of Edgar Mittelholzer. This is the aspect of Caribbean writing in which the writer, aware of his cultural and racial schizophrenia, unable to ignore or accept the Old World biases he has inherited, adopts a position either of revolt against or acceptance of this inherited historical, cultural and genetic "taint".

The importance of Harris's work lies in the fact that it suggests the possibility of a response to the West Indian cultural and historical reality which is neither a revolt against, nor a passive acceptance of, a divisive situation. Both revolt and acceptance, the products of this cultural schizophrenia, tend to be stock responses and are prone to stasis. As Derek Walcott puts it:

> Once we have lost our wish to be white we develop a longing to become black, and those two may be different, but are still careers.[1]

Harris suggests an alternative response which, in refusing to be subject to sterile ideological biases, allows for a re-interpretation of both history and cultural identity. By pointing to the subtle

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[1] "What the Twilight Says: An Overture", Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays. (Jonathan Cape 1972) p. 20. In fact, by describing himself as "the mulatto of style. The traitor. The assimilator" ("What the Twilight Says", op. cit., p. 7), Walcott invokes the image of the "trickster", the shaman who acts as catalyst in the rite de passage. Like Harris, he accepts "mongrelism" as a means towards a deliberately catalytical art, regarding his ambivalent heritage as a poetic strength, since it provides, as it were, the negative and positive poles between which the creative spark jumps.

correspondences (heterogeneous elements, rather than uniform identity)[1] within the West Indian historical and social situations, he witnesses for an openness to genuine, creative change. In fact he frequently extends the boundaries of the Caribbean to include South America and the Third World, and attempts to demonstrate the far-reaching correspondences which, for him, give a truer picture of history:

> To gain an historical aspect of this correspondence in the modern Caribbean one has to visualize Che Guevara, for example, as the new tenant of memory within the hollow monument of Cortes - the new tenant of revolution subsisting upon a devolution or breakdown of historical premises which has been the fate of Latin America, in a sense, since the conquest of Mexico. ... It is ironic that Cortes was a revolutionary of sorts - the unwilling father of Latin American guerilla action - when he overthrew the tyranny of Montezuma. This is no apology for the bestiality of the Spaniards - the rape of a people and the sack of a culture. Yet in that sack is tied up the solipsistic idealism of the old crusader and the new revolutionary.[2]

Such a wide, compassionate and open-ended view of history, one which refuses to set up stereotypes or implacable factions or blocs, allows for a genuinely creative, visionary response to "reality". It is an attitude that derives from an acceptance of diversity, of bastard origin, not as a "taint" - a wrong to be righted - but as a valuable source of new growth. Harris's dedication to the task of psychic reconstruction, his deep awareness that without contraries there can be no progression, links him (and through him, the Caribbean novel) not only with South America and the Third World: with writers like Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez and Amos Tutuola : but also with the visionary aspect of the European tradition of the novel, with prophetic and apocalyptic figures like Blake or Eckhart. In

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[1] One is again struck by the correspondence of this view with the fact of Harris's profoundly mixed racial ancestry which includes European, African and Amerindian elements.

[2] Wilson Harris, "The Native Phenomenon" Common Wealth, op. cit., pp. 146/147.

fact with all writers, artists and thinkers whose concern is with the universal malaise of one-sidedness and for whom creative imagination is a calling. It is possible to describe his work as "difficult" or "confusing", but unwise to ignore its importance; for, as Lévi-Strauss has remarked:

> By regarding the hysteric or the artistic innovator as abnormal, we accorded ourselves the luxury of believing that they did not concern us, and that they did not put in question, by the mere fact of their existence, an accepted social, moral, or intellectual order.[1]

Harris's attitude to "reality" is "irrational", but only because he recognizes that within apparently unalterable events there are subtle correspondences which are truer than the facts, that a new vision of reality, a new consciousness, needs to be conceived. Like Gabriel García Márquez, Harris regards "reality" as magical: a fluid, shifting medium which:

> ... makes for a profoundly revised canvas - a thread of self-judgement one embodies in the communication of new form through old static inheritances ... 'magical reality' ... is radical in perspectives. Indeed, it is a kind of 'unconditional love', and the tasks of creativity become enormous ...[2]

This reference to "unconditional love" as part of the process of the creative imagination reflects the "matriarchal" aspect of Harris's work (counterbalancing, as it were, the strongly "patriarchal" bias one finds in Mittelholzer's) and illustrates his approach to fiction as a reconstructive, liberating art. An art which, by incurring "a necessary burden of authenticity, obscurity or difficulty at the same time",[3] is concerned not only to redress the balance of the Caribbean Syzygy, but also to heal the divided consciousness of Man.

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1 Introduction to Totemism (Beacon Press, Boston, U.S.A. 1963)p.2.

2 Letter from Wilson Harris dated 6 February, 1973.

3 Wilson Harris, Ascent to Omai (1970) p. 96.

APPENDIX ONE

The Six "Chatham" MSS.

(i) Description:

The MSS. fall into three distinct groups (designated, for convenience, A, A1, A2; B, B2 and X) as shown in the following chart.

MS.	Description of Title Page	Format of Text	Pagination	Annotations, Deletions etc.
A	"THE ALONENESS OF MRS. CHATHAM By Edgar Mittelholzer" followed by author's Farnham, Surrey address and telephone no. Typed. Pencilled note top right hand corner "(105,000 words)".	235 typed, double-spaced quarto sheets. (Top copy)	1/235 (page numbers 220/235 appear on labels affixed to the top of each page).	Text lightly annotated. Mainly pencilled instructions to compositor (not in author's hand) re format of chapter-heads.
A1	Carbon-copy (No. 1) of A.	235 typed, double-spaced quarto sheets. First carbon-copy of A.	1 - 219// 341 - 56	None.
A2	Carbon-copy (No. 2) of A.	235 typed, double-spaced quarto sheets. Second carbon-copy of A.	1 - 219// 341 - 56	A pencilled total of words. Grand total "(163,794)" shown on p. 356. Part of texts of other works - "The Wounded and the Worried" (a novel) and "A Swarthy Boy" (autobiography) on reverse sheets of text.

MS.	Description of Title Page	Format of Text	Pagination	Annotations, Deletions etc.
B	"THE ALONENESS OF MRS. CHATHAM By Edgar Mittelholzer" Typed, followed by pencilled note: "(Page 177 to End)" MS. Pages 1/176 missing.	163 typed, double-spaced quarto sheets (Top copy).	177 - 339	Lightly annotated. Each chapter (after chapter eight) shows the number cancelled and altered twice. Deletions on pp.198, 199, 202/206, 212, 213, 223, 334/336.
B2	"THE ALONENESS OF MRS. CHATHAM" By Edgar Mittelholzer" Typed. pp. 170 to end missing.	169 typed, double-spaced quarto sheets (second carbon-copy).	1 - 169	Heavily annotated. Numerous deletions and additions in author's hand. Dates of revision occasionally pencilled (in author's hand) in margins and at chapter headings. Part of texts of "Soap Bubbles in Middenshot" and "The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham" - comedies - on reverse pages of text.
X	"THE ALONENESS OF MRS. CHATHAM By Edgar Mittelholzer" Typed. Hand-written note, in ink, at top right-hand corner, "(78,000 words)". Address stamped underneath: " FROM JOHN FARQUHARSON 8, HALSEY HOUSE RED LION SQUARE LONDON, W.C. 1. "	203 typed, double-spaced quarto sheets (Top copy)	1 - 77// 80 - 104// 108/ 111 - 120	Lightly annotated. Pencilled instructions to compositor and textual addition in ink (on page 1) not in author's hand. Author's pencilled MS. annotations on reverse pp. 207, 208.

(ii) Commentary:

A detailed, textual comparison of the MSS. with the novel itself confirms that MSS. A, A1 and A2 represent the published version of The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham (1965). MS. A appears to have been used as the copy-text. The pencilled instructions to the compositor and the fact that the MS. is the top copy (and therefore has the clearest type) support this assumption. All emendations and alterations in the MS..A text are reproduced in both MSS. A1 and A2.

MS. B2, the second carbon-copy of MS. B, shows many deletions, including the cancellation of the entire text of chapters nine and ten. The consequent alteration of chapter numbers to accommodate the shorter text is reflected in both B and B2, where each chapter number affected has been appropriately altered. Revision in these MSS. follows what appears to be a general principle of "tightening up" the work by a reduction in the narrative and by the deletion of scenes in which minor characters appear or in which Mrs. Chatham has long, introspective monologues. MSS. B and B2, then, can be considered as one MS. which has undergone extensive revision, and in which seven pages (pp. 170/176) are missing. The fact that the annotations of MSS. B and B2 are accurately reflected in MSS. A, A1 and A2 suggests that the latter are a revised version of the text of MSS. B and B2; the dates of revision of which begin (as pencilled notes) at 30 November, 1962 and end at 10 May, 1963. MSS. B and B2, therefore, almost certainly represent an earlier version of the published novel.

The peculiarity of the pagination of MSS. A1 and A2, where p. 210 is followed (without a break, however, in the continuity

of the textual narrative) by p. 341, throws additional light on the relationship between MSS. A, A1 and A2 and MSS. B and B2. The text of MS. B ends on p. 339, at a point in the novel's plot equivalent to p. 218 in the shorter version of MSS. A, A1 and A2. In the latter, a final chapter (headed "Coda") of seventeen pages begins on p. 219. This "Coda" appears in MS. A with the pagination: 219// 341/356, where there is a break in the sequence (though not in the text, however,) at 219. Now this seventeen-page "Coda" is missing in MS. B, the text of which seems curiously incomplete since there is no dénouement of the plot. It is therefore likely that the "Coda", which contains the novel's dénouement, was originally part of the MS. B text. In fact it looks very much as if MSS. A, A1 and A2 have somehow incorporated the "Coda" of MS. B but (in the case of MSS. A1 and A2) retained most of the "Coda's" original pagination which, if it were a part of MS. B, would be 340/356.

One possible explanation is that Mittelholzer was simply careless in re-numbering the pages of the "Coda" when he re-typed it during revision, not discovering his error until he had finished. He then corrected MS. A, the top copy (and the copy-text), sticking on labels with the correct page numbers, overlooking or ignoring the need to correct the pagination of MSS. A1 and A2. This explanation, which requires an assumption of carelessness on the part of the author (who appears to have been, in fact, meticulously careful about his work), also ignores the fact of the missing "Coda" of MS. B and the discrepancy between the pencilled grand total of 163,794 words on the final page of MS. A2 and that of 105,000 words on the title page of MS. A. Since we know that MS. A represents a shortened version of the novel, very likely a revised version of MSS. B and B1, then the

figure of 163,794 words which appears on p. 356 of MS. A2 may, in fact, refer to MS. B. Indeed, this suggests that the "Coda" of MS. B was incorporated in MSS. A, A1 and A2. An explanation which would account for this discrepancy in the totals shown, the peculiarities of pagination of MSS. A, A1 and A2 as well as for the missing "Coda" of MS. B, might run as follows:

MS. B2 is a second carbon copy, so there were originally three sets of MS. pages numbered 340/356 (the "Coda") attached to MSS. B, "B1" and B2. In re-typing the final version, Mittelholzer got as far as p. 219 (p. 340 of MS. B) in the new MS. A and then decided simply to transfer the rest of the "Coda" of MS. B (pp. 341/356) - which would of course be in triplicate - to MSS. A, A1 and A2, in order to save time, effort and expense.[1] He then detached the entire "Coda" of MSS. B, "B1" and B2, transferring the required pages 341/356 to MSS. A, A1 and A2 in turn. Since MS. A was to be used as the copy-text, he carefully corrected the pagination by affixing labels with the right numbers (i.e. pp. 220/235) to the "borrowed" pages of MS. B. Mittelholzer then discarded the now redundant pages he had earlier re-typed (numbered 340) of the original "Coda", overlooking or ignoring the need for re-pagination of MSS. A1 and A2. The total of 163,794 shown on p.356 of MS. A2 would therefore represent the total words in the longer text of MS. B whence that particular page had been taken.

The play, "The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham", part of the text of which appears on the reverse sheets of MS. B2, provides a clue to the approximate date of MS. X, with which it has a good deal in

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1 The fact that EM did use the reverse sides of other MS. texts (see chart above) in preparing new MSS. suggests that he felt the need to economize on paper.

common. Both are set in Barbados (where Mittelholzer lived from 1953 to 1956) and their texts show a very close correspondence. The dramatis personae are identical, Ralph and Joyce St. James and Mr. Hallam, a solicitor, appearing only in these two versions. The plot of the play is a comic inversion of that of MS. X, and even certain phrases and colloquialisms are common to both. Autobiographical evidence suggests that the version of MS. X is the earlier of the two. Mittelholzer's diary has the following entry on 12 September, 1955: "did WIR [his code for "work in rough"] and 2 pages of new play (Mrs. Chatham)." So it seems the play was being composed during 1955. On 23 February, 1955, however, the entry is "Rc. statement from bank (Mrs. Chatham. U.S. $ 582-16)." Now this is the type of entry Mittelholzer used to record payment of copyright dues for published work; so it would seem that a version of the novel had been completed prior to the play and published in America, or at least purchased by a publishing company.[1]

This may be the version of MS. X which would, in that case, be the earliest extant version of the novel. The MS. is undated and carries the rubber-stamped address of a literary agency.[2] The detailed instructions to the compositor pencilled on p. 1 of MS. X, where even the type to be used for chapter numbers is clearly specified as "48 point Bodoni Bold Condensed Arabic" certainly suggests that the MS. was being prepared for publication at some stage. There is also internal evidence to

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[1] EM's U.S. publishers have been unable to provide any information about such a publication, and the death of Mrs. Marion Saunders (EM's New York agent) in 1967 has greatly reduced the chances of finding any records of the transaction.

[2] John Farquharson Ltd., 8 Halsey House, Red Lion Square, London, E.C. 1. Enquiries have revealed no trace of this MS. in their records on EM which begin in October, 1955.

suggest that MS. X was written between 1953 and 1956 - the period of Mittelholzer's residence in Barbados.[1] According to Mrs. Jacqueline Ives:

> Edgar planned out the fictitious days in many of his novels so that they matched the real days; he checked his diary to make the weather match correctly.[2]

She asserts that the snow-covered landscape described in the "Coda" of the novel represents the actual weather conditions at the time of composition of the passage. Mittelholzer lived on the Maxwell coast of Christchurch parish in Barbados, the precise area in which Mrs. Chatham lives in the version of MS. X. This is also the locale of the play which we know was under composition in Barbados during 1955. In the text of MS. B there is a conversation between Jasmine Lessier and Mrs. Chatham which reveals that Jasmine and Alva Lessier (a minor character in both MSS. B and A) have an incestuous relationship. This conversation is omitted in MS. A. The theme of incest is, however, central to the plot of the MS. X version, where Alva (who is here the principal male character) has sexual relationships with both his sister, Jasmine, and his sister-in-law, Maggie. In fact these incidents are used by the author to illustrate the "naturalness" and total honesty of the Lessiers in matters of sexual ethics. The incestuous relationship, of which only a trace remains in MS. B and which has disappeared in MS. A, provides an interesting link, therefore, between the MSS. Another such link is the reference, in MS. B, to "out-for-play", an improvised version of cricket especially popular among Guyanese children, and peculiar to the West Indies. This

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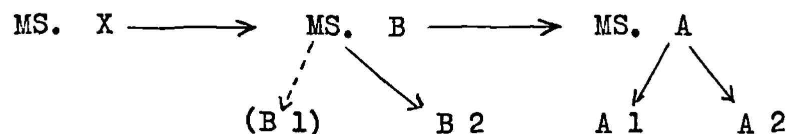
1 Mrs. Roma Mittelholzer, EM's first wife, has told me that she has no knowledge of this MS., nor can she recall EM ever mentioning work on a play with this theme.

2 Jacqueline Ives, "The Idyll and The Warrior", op. cit., p. 69.

game is played by the Lessiers and described in some detail in MS. X. In MS. B the reference to "out-for-play" is deleted, and is absent from MS. A, where there is only a brief description of a game of "bat-and-ball" - also present in MS. B.

The gradual disappearance of references to a particularly West Indian game like "out-for-play", as the novel moved from a West Indian to an English setting (like the de-emphasizing of Alva, the sex-orientated West Indian, to make way for Harpo, the Anglophile with ultra-conservative views); echoes Mittelholzer's own movement (psychologically and physically) away from a West Indian ethos towards England as his cultural home.

Indeed, all the evidence suggests that, of the six MS. versions of the novel, the earliest is the "West Indian" version of MS. X, and the latest the published, "English" version of MS. A, with MS. B representing an intermediate version, English-based, but still containing traces of the "West Indian" version. A diagrammatic representation of the MSS. in terms of their relative order of composition may therefore be expressed as follows:



FACSIMILES OF

"CHATHAM" MS. PAGES

Chapter ~~Sixteen~~ ~~15~~ 14

~~Again we are struck by her strength: a strength as represented by resilience of spirit, steadiness of resolve, the lack of romantic imbalance. A woman weaker than herself would have yielded to the~~ ~~interesting situation presented to her by the advent of the Lessiers and their oddness as individuals, would have used this situation as an excuse for relaxing her policy of aloneness; might have let the male attractiveness of Harpo's personality and his hints at an unusual outlook on life lure her into phoning the cottage on some pretext or even dropping in on them, perhaps with the excuse of discussing some point of interest~~ ~~in one of the two books with Herbert. But nothing like this occurred.~~ She carried on as before, and after a week had passed without even catching a glimpse of any of the Lessiers, she told Whitley when she ran into him and he asked after her general welfare: "Oh, I'm pretty much the same, Whitley. Self-sufficient but trying hard not to be self-satisfied. Why aren't you in London to-day?"

"Felt a little seedy when I woke this morning," he said, avoiding her gaze. He had been tinkering with his car as she passed in the lane with Bramwell on her return from her afternoon walk. "Thought I'd better take the day off, just to be on the safe side."

"May I ask after Susan?"

He gave a weak smile and replied: "You may. Much the same. No change in the general situation, if you know what I mean." He had lowered his voice automatically. He threw a troubled glance at the house.

~~She stared at him an instant as though steeling herself, then asked.~~ "You didn't try what I suggested, I suppose?"

~~He fidgeted and lowered his gaze.~~ "I told you it would be no use."

"Did you try, though?"

He shrugged. "In a kind of a fashion."

~~She shook her head, smiling in a schoolmistressly way.~~ "A kind of a fashion. What an ugly expression! But this is wicked of me. Interfering."

Chapter ~~Nineteen~~ 17

... She smiled and said: "It was a lesson to me in another way, too. Sit down, and don't mind my garrulity. It's something I must say."

He laughed and sat, saying: "I like to hear you talk, Sheila."

She did not sit, though. She paced about and talked, in a fever of articulation. Threading a path between the little tables with their cacti and tradescantia and cyclamen and other specimens of the indoor plant-world, she told him: "What happened last night made me realise forcefully that though we might reach a high point in our development -- and I know that your wife is highly intelligent; she has intellect and character; she's no weakling; you can sense it when she's present -- well, in spite of reaching such a stage of development, we can still be enslaved to our physical selves. I'd been blinding myself to that fact. Because sex doesn't trouble me much, I was inclined to think that other women must be like me; that they could control themselves if they wanted. Now I realise that this is a smug, stupid attitude. Temperaments differ so much, as Susan herself pointed out. What happened last night was so entirely foreign to me. It was quite outside of anything I'd grown up with." She chuckled and smiled at him. "And oddly enough, Whitley, not long before what happened last night I was thinking the same thing -- but of the other side of the coin, so to speak."

He frowned. "Don't get you. How do you mean the other side of the coin."

"I mean that only the evening before, I was telling someone that I found something I'd read too far removed from anything I'd grown up with -- that I couldn't accept it. I said it was too foreign to me; it was not a part of my conditioning as a child and young woman. But this had to do with the spiritual side of things -- not the physical. So the conclusion I've had to come to is that I'm so utterly green on both counts. I'm at some kind of mid-way stage -- a drab limbo of ignorance and insensibility.

. . .

She did not reply, and she smiled and seemed to be waiting for him to go on, as though she had taken it for granted that he had asked the question rhetorically. But he repeated it. "Come on. Tell me. How is it you come to be like this?"

She said: "I was pretty sure you weren't asking me that seriously." Then she frowned. "Why do you seem so worked up? You speak as if you have a chip on your shoulder."

"We'd better be off. Let me take you home."

He engaged the self-starter, but she put her hand on his arm and said: "Wait a moment. Get what you want to get said off your chest, Mr. Lessier. I'm sure you brought me here to tell me something specific. You've roused my curiosity. I want to hear what's bothering you."

The engine had started to purr, but he switched it off. "I'm always doing impulsive things like this. I told you I live alone, didn't I? I do live alone. I don't beg anyone for their company -- or their companionship. I shouldn't have asked you what I did. It was a stupid question."

"I agree. How the devil would I be able to tell you how I came to be what I am! I'm just what I happen to be -- as we all are."

He nodded, and for a minute or two they sat in silence, both of them staring out at the field and listening to the wind in the barley blades. Each had an air of chastisement recently suffered - though in his case it was chastisement still being endured. His face twitched ...

...

She had no sooner gone out of view behind them round the bend when they heard the whistle, followed by a high, quarking laugh.

"Playing truant again, it seems," murmured Sheila. "Not the first time by any means. I daresay the school has given her up as a bad job."

~~"No, not the first time," he said, nodding - and she glanced at him sharply. "How do you know?" she asked. "About her playing truant?"~~

~~"Because I have eyes," he snapped. "A filthy manifestation~~ There's an example of the filthy effeteness in the system of child-control in this country."

"She's a pretty bad case, I admit."

~~She gave a little sigh of perplexity. "I wish you'd be more explicit."~~

~~"I agree," he said, as though she had not spoken, "that she seems a born mess - but at least, her parents could have taken her in hand and made her not quite so obnoxious [sic] to the neighbourhood. But how could you expect them to?~~ "The psychologists tell ~~them that~~ parents they must be lenient and soft towards their children. Children must be allowed to express themselves. You mustn't slap them, you mustn't even scold them, poor little delicate dears. Give them affection -- lots and lots of affection -- and let them feel the whole big world belongs to them to kick around as they please. When they spit out foul language, smile and say how naughty Johnny! Nice boys don't do that! And for God's sake, don't ever tell them they ~~are~~ 're in the wrong. If you do, they'll develop a guilt complex -- and before long they'll start coshing old people and attacking night-watchmen and breaking into shops to steal what they can. And when they find themselves in a scrape, put the blame squarely on yourself in the juvenile court. Don't ever let them hear that they had any part in what happened. It will only damage their poor minds a little more and encourage them to continue coshing and stealing."

"Not at all. I mean it, I'm interested." He gave her hand another squeeze. "I want to hear you talk. Comforts me in a peculiar way."

She gave him a longish stare, as though probing for something else behind his words, seemed, at length, satisfied that he was sincere, and smiled. "Yes, I believe you are interested -- and comforted. It's the loneliness you've escaped from over in your home that makes this seem worth while. I know so much about loneliness. I've been telling Archie that."

"Now it's aloneness -- and you like it better." He glanced at her quickly and added: "I'm teasing."

"Yes, I like it better -- though it does frighten me when I think about it too much. It's as if I'd set out on a long journey through an unexplored region, and I want to look back and ask myself if I've done right in putting the familiar scene behind me. But never -- and I mean this -- never once do I feel I should turn back. I want to go on. I'm eager to go on. I want to discover what's ahead of me."

~~Silence came upon them again.~~ After perhaps five minutes, just holding hands, each at one end of the settee, a big space between them, they glanced at each other, and Whitley smiled and said: "This is good. Wish I could fondle you again like the other night. Shall I?"

She hesitated, then shook her head slightly. Said that she did not think it would be advisable. It would get him roused, and she did not want to go to bed with him. He did not press the point. Only nodded. Said again that this was good. Pleasant. And after another drink, they agreed it was time for bed, and he left, each wishing the other all that was good for the new year. (Let them ponder on what may happen in 1961) Briefly!

APPENDIX TWO

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