Visions of Interconnection

Ecocritical perspectives on the writings of Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott

by

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis is the work of the candidate alone, and, furthermore, that no portion of the work in this thesis has been submitted for another degree or qualification at any other university or institute of learning.
Abstract

This thesis provides a ‘green’ reading of selected writings from Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott, demonstrating each writer’s profound and sustained engagement with the philosophy, politics and poetics of environmentalism. The environmental ethic evident in the work of Harris and of Walcott has been fashioned in relation not only to personal experiences of lived reality in the Caribbean, but also as a result of prevalent ecological thinking world-wide. In addition, an integral part of the construction of such literary ecology is the formation of dialogues with an earlier eco-literary heritage, especially the inspiration taken from an understanding of ‘green’ Romanticism in the form of the poetry of William Blake and of John Clare.

Part one of the study examines examples from across the corpus of Wilson Harris’s work, tracing the representation of ecologically-conscious interconnected vision from his earliest published writings up until his final novels. Harris textually re-maps journeys of incursion, ethnocentric and anthropocentric, into the forests of Guyana to arrive at a position of redemptive possibility for the history of the land. Part two of the study looks at the formation of Derek Walcott’s environmental ethic through his construction of an ecopoetic body of work, which comprises various modes, tones and genres of writing. Walcott, too, arrives at a representation of ‘interconnected vision’ which demands the re-figuring of relations between humanity and the extra-human world.

This thesis hopes to offer some insights into the reassessment of the Romantic inheritance to literary ecology in general, and, furthermore, to indicate how the processes of ‘green’ reading might be compatible with postcolonial analysis. It is the contention that the cross-cultural nature of the eco-narratives and ecopoetics of Harris and of Walcott locate them very much at the forefront of discussions of cultural ecology both in the Caribbean and beyond.
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Introduction:

‘A New Treaty of Relations’

How must he (Henry Tenby was on the threshold of breakdown) forge a new treaty of relations - between nature and society - avert disaster, heal the rape - rape of himself - constitutional rape, rape of landscape, economic rape?

Crawl back into the interior (there was no other way open to him) crawl back into the womb and BEG the guardians of life who held his tongue in their keeping to blow their trumpet of recall.¹

This study will attempt to demonstrate the development and dissemination of an environmental ethic in the writings of Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott, both in the construction of a philosophy and poetics of being that stresses interdependence with the natural world and, of equal importance, in each author’s literary responses to the history of human environmental destruction.² It

² It is necessary to acknowledge, here, the assessment of the distinct divergence between environmentalism and ecologism as differing not only in ‘degree’ but also in ‘kind’. See, Andrew Dobson, Green Political Thought: Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 3. This study does not intend to use these terms interchangeably in relation to the political positioning of the cultural production of the writers discussed, but rather, employs the term ‘environmental ethic’ to indicate a general attention to ‘green’ issues which does not preclude the deep engagement of the ideology of ecologism that may be contained within it. For instance, it is the intention to indicate a theoretical space for both the ‘environmentalism’ of Walcott and the
will consider the ways in which each writer approaches the histories of colonisation in the Caribbean as legacies of ecological dispossesssion, and how such histories have enabled still-prevalent imperialist ideologies to continue the exploitation of peoples and natural resources in the region. This development of such an ethical orientation in the late twentieth-century texts of Harris and of Walcott takes into account not only intertwined colonial and ecological histories but also forms a direct dialogue with an earlier literary tradition of environmental concern encompassing British Romantic writers as well as contemporaries from the Caribbean. A combination of postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives of Harris’s poetry and prose, and Walcott’s poetry and plays, will attempt to illustrate the centrality of constructions of a cross-cultural literary ecology and to show that the ‘green’ philosophies underpinning the work of Walcott and Harris (informed by modern environmental thinking and a heritage of Romantic ecology) are deeply connected with the reality of lived experience in the Caribbean. This thesis will attempt to provide an overview of the creation of ecologically-conscious writings by both Harris and Walcott, which seek, like the aims of the fictional Henry Tenby, to forge new treaties of relation between humanity and the environment.

This introduction seeks to contextualise such a reading within the history of colonisation in the Caribbean, to situate the work of Harris and Walcott within the tradition of Caribbean environmental writing and within the parameters of ‘ecoliterature’, and to highlight the formative and concordant writers who have

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ideological ‘ecologism’ of Harris within an overarching discussion of ‘environmental ethic’ and ‘ecologically-conscious’ writings.
helped to fashion these visions. In this way, the introduction, and perhaps the study as a whole, hopes to offer contributions towards two of the major discussions in current ecocritical discourse: the debate over potential moments of intersection between postcoloniality and ‘green’ reading, and the constant reassessment of the continuing value of European Romanticism to ecocriticism in general.

At this stage it is necessary to consider the possibilities of viewing inherent contradictions and tensions in combining postcolonial and ecocritical approaches to literary study. Indeed, the principal aims of ecologically-centred literary criticism could be seen, at least on the surface, to be incompatible with the foci of postcolonial analysis. As Greg Garrard identifies that, ‘a recurrent objection […] is that ecocentrism is misanthropic’ and Dominic Head expresses the need ‘to question a perceived drive towards fundamentalism’ in the ecocentric agenda, it is apparent that there is a need to assess both the appropriateness of different modes of ‘green’ reading and the extent to which these could be accommodated within contemporary literary studies.3 Arguably, the tendency, at the ‘deep green’ level, towards a fundamentalism of misanthropy does not preclude the possibility of a spectrum of ‘green’ approaches engendering moments of fruitful intersection and interchange with the field of postcolonial studies. It is useful to consider Dobson’s review of the possible political intersection between socialism and ecologism as this provides a

template for the discussion of possible interactions between postcolonialism and ecologism. Just as political ecology and socialism can be seen to be engaged in a 'converging critique' of the wasteful and inegalitarian outcomes of capitalism, so too might postcolonial and ecocritical modes of analysis provide a similar 'converging critique' of the impact, costs and injustices of neocolonial governance and development.4

Moreover, this study seeks to situate itself primarily as an intervention in the field of U.K. ecocriticism by indicating first and foremost how the scope and understanding of British ecocriticism can be widened and deepened by addressing the political and cultural history of British colonisation and its attendant imperialist legacy. As such, it is not the intention of this thesis to call for a paradigm shift in the focus of postcolonialism, nor to argue for a de-centring of the objectives of postcolonial inquiry by a re-centring of the object of ecologism (the intrinsic value of the 'natural world'), but rather to indicate, in effect through two parallel case studies, how 'green' and postcolonial modes of reading need not be mutually exclusive projects. However, whilst explicitly concerned with emphasising the necessity for ecocritical analysis to address the important issues illuminated by postcolonial discourse, this study will also indicate areas which provide examples of how 'green' reading might bring new light to bear upon debates within postcolonial literary studies. For example, an ecocritical reading of Walcott's poem 'Air' and examination of the potentiality of the Harrisian 'void' in The Dark Jester bring a new angle to the Caribbean cultural debate concerning the supposed 'historylessness' of the region with each

4 Dobson, p.186.
writer giving consideration to extra-human history by reinterpreting the concept of the human absence as an example of nonhuman historical substance (see chapter six and chapter three respectively).

Colonialism, neocolonialism and environmental degradation

Ecocritical studies which attempt to ‘green the field of literary studies’ benefit greatly from a dialogue with examinations of the histories of once-colonised nations. The politics that formalised the mercantile relations between centre and periphery into part of the mission of wholesale, world-wide exploitation must be viewed as a precursory thread to the economics and politics of globalisation. The poison-tree of the present growth of ecological toxicity (evident in the abuse of natural resources, species depletion, rampant industrialism) has its roots embedded deep in the soiled earth of European imperial expansion from the seventeenth century onwards. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said describes the ecological impacts of such expansion - ‘this process was never-ending, as a huge number of plants, animals, and crops [...] gradually turned the colony into a new place, complete with new diseases, environmental imbalances, and traumatic dislocations for the overpowered natives’ - and connects, inextricably, this ‘geographical violence’ to the politics of empire: ‘[the] culmination of this process is imperialism, which dominates, classifies, and universally commodifies all space under the aegis of the metropolitan centre’.  

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5 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), pp. 271-2. This is a connection that has been acknowledged by environmental historians and literary ecocritics. See,
The reality of the many forms of European colonisation over centuries, in a different continent, in the Americas, certainly bears testament to these processes whether it is the incursions into the South American continent by the conquistadors carrying firearms and ‘old world’ disease or the colonial governance of plantation economies. Albert Crosby demonstrates the biological and cultural consequences of the Columbian ‘discovery’ for indigenous populations of Central and South America and charts the role of ‘virgin soil epidemics (rapid spread of pathogens among people whom they have never infected before)’ as outriders for the forces of first Cortez and then Pizarro. The ‘first recorded pandemic’, the smallpox that spread from Europe in 1518, played an essential part ‘in the advance of white imperialism overseas’ as it spread from the islands of the Antilles to Mexico and into Peru. European colonisation, the acquisitive intentions of expansion, brings with it ecological imperialism on two levels. The quest for the mineral riches of El Dorado, an attempt to instigate mining and extraction, and the commandeering of natural resources on a massive scale, which is in turn more quickly enabled by the human catastrophe of the effect of ‘old world’ pathogens in the ‘new world’.

Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 2 - ‘The kind of homogenising capital-intensive transformation of people, trade, economy and environment with which we are familiar today can be traced back at least as far as the beginnings of European colonial expansion’. Also see, Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 87 - ‘imperialism has always brought with it deforestation and the consuming of natural resources’.

Similarly, the demands for sugar production in the eighteenth century led to both the systematic brutalisation suffered by the enslaved peoples of the region and also deforestation and mineral extraction on a massive scale. Richard Grove demonstrates that the drive of plantation economies had a significant effect on the islands of the British West Indies: ‘as sugar production expanded, so the forests disappeared’. Furthermore, the British ideology of aesthetics in landscape ‘improvement’ through clearance not only fuelled the plantation objective but also dispelled the fears of the mysterious and disease-bearing bush: ‘[the] supposed health risks posed by tropical forests provided a further reason for extensive clearing. A common explanation for illness among Europeans was that woodlands exuded harmful vapours which caused fevers and agues’.⁷ Alongside the economic and cultural manifestations of ecological imperialism which lead to deforestation on many islands, such ‘taming’ severely reduced the spaces of ‘interior’ that had enabled possibilities of maroonage and rebellion; ecological degradation became part of a policy of colonial domination: ‘the colonial state justified its actions through a codified and manipulated legal ideology which conferred annexation rights explicitly on those who cleared forest and cultivated land.’⁸ Such policies resulted in direct confrontation between the settlers and indigenous cultures, as seen in the history of St. Vincent, and also removed the havens of shelter and refuge for runaways from the plantations.⁹ Grove warns

⁷ Grove, Green Imperialism, pp. 64-5.
⁸ ibid. p. 265.
⁹ Rita Pemberton, ‘Taming the Woods: Trees and British Environmental Policy in the Caribbean, 1764 - 1945’, (unpublished seminar paper) explores the use of images of the Caribbean forests and the cultural construction of the ‘bush’ by colonial governance and situates this alongside a detailed demonstration that British environmental policy in the Caribbean was ‘characterised by
against critical readings of a simplified equation that seeks to show that colonisation equals only environmental degradation, however, warning that ‘the hypothesis of a purely destructive environmental imperialism does not appear to stand up at all well [...] rapid and extensive ecological transition was frequently a feature of pre-colonial landscapes and states’.10 Pointing to the complexity of many colonial societies, Grove also cites the importance of colonial experiences to the development of ecologically-conscious thinking; the British certainly learnt from their mistakes and a result of the early extensive deforestation on Barbados, for instance, can be seen in the development of preservation schemes in Tobago and St. Vincent.11 Such an imperial ethos of preservation however, should also be questioned to a certain extent. While the developments made in ‘the colonial periphery played a steadily more dominant and dynamic part in the constructions of new European evaluations of nature and in the growing awareness of the destructive impact of European economic activity’12 and led to the setting up of reserve policies, these policies have been shown to be far from satisfactory in terms of their philosophy and execution, being, more often than not, socially and racially exclusive.13 While acknowledging the necessary and

inconsistency and contradiction’. In addition, Dr Pemberton has provided valuable insights into the history of Caribbean forests as sites for the maroonage of rebellious evasion and resistance. 10 Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 7. Here, Grove’s historical caveat echoes the timely reminder to literary ecocritics that there is a danger in the perception of the natural world as a static, constant yardstick against which anthropocentric destructiveness can be measured. See, Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 4 / p. 178.

12 Ibid. p. 3.
13 See, Richard H. Grove, ‘Colonial conservation, ecological hegemony and popular resistance: towards a global synthesis’ in *Imperialism and the Natural World*, ed. by John M. Mackenzie (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 15-50. ‘In these regions forest reserves, game reserves and soil protection schemes have served to erode indigenous “rights” and access to previously loosely defined or “common property” resources. [...] Ignoring often long-evolved relationships between people and nature, the effects of “conservation” have
sincere call for careful examination of the specificities of the colonial and environmental policies and philosophies in the Caribbean, it is nevertheless the case that the history of colonial rule and land management led to significant ecological degradation and was directly implicated in the control of indigenous and enslaved populations.

A direct legacy of manipulations of lands and peoples has meant that, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, once-colonised nations have typically been used as test-sites for economic, political, cultural and ecological exploitation in the era of neocolonialism. Frantz Fanon in ‘The Pitfalls of National Consciousness’ stresses the responsibility, and the failure, of independence governments to break the ideology of domination:

In an under-developed country an authentic national middle class ought to [...] put at the people’s disposal the intellectual and technical capital that it has snatched when going through the colonial universities. But unhappily we shall see that very often the national middle class does not follow this heroic, positive, fruitful and just path; rather, it disappears with its soul set at peace into shocking ways - shocking because anti-national -

- tended to profoundly threaten traditional mechanisms of subsistence and thereby to threaten and alienate whole cultures from their environmental context.’ (p.42). For a similar examination of the socially and racially exclusive attitude of preservationism in South Africa see, John M. Mackenzie, The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988).
of a traditional bourgeoisie, of a bourgeoisie which is stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeois.\textsuperscript{14}

Neocolonialism also manifests itself as ‘partly a planned policy of advanced nations to maintain their influence in developing countries’ as well as the Fanonian ‘continuation of past practices’.\textsuperscript{15} Postcolonial critics have identified the dimensions of ecological degradation that have resulted from the collusion of the new national governments, and economic and political agents of the developed world. John McLeod, in his assessment of Fanon’s \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, recognises that ‘the new nation [is] economically subservient to the old colonial Western powers by allowing big foreign companies to establish themselves […] by continuing to send raw materials abroad for profit rather than feeding the people, by making the nation into a tourist centre for wealthy Westerners.’\textsuperscript{16} In his identification of the roles of multi-national companies, the tourist industries, and governmental abuse of natural resources, McLeod highlights the very aspects of neocolonial ideology and policy that Walcott and Harris see as impoverishing both communities and landscapes in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Frantz Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} (London: Penguin, 1967), pp. 120-121.
\textsuperscript{17} Homi Bhabha also recognises the nexus between neo-imperialist ideology and a deliberate ‘disregard for the independence and autonomy of people and places in the Third World’. He cites Spivak’s contention that it is ‘in the interest of capital to preserve the comprador theatre in a state of relatively primitive labour legislation and environmental regulation’. See, Homi Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 20.
adapted forms of imperialism that have political-ecological consequences of serious magnitude for ‘Third World’ nations. The transfer of many crops to Europe and the enforced reversal (the mass cultivation of industrial crops by ‘newly emerging colonial powers and their state-backed trading companies’) has meant that ‘the North accumulated wealth by gaining control over the biological resources of the South’. Now, neocolonial legal and political frameworks ‘make the Third World pay for what it originally gave’:

The merging trends in global trade and technology work inherently against justice and ecological sustainability. They threaten to create a new era of bio-imperialism, built on the biological impoverishment of the Third World and the biosphere.18

Colonisation in all its forms has robbed the very ‘cradle of biodiversity’ in the tropics and, for Shiva, the site for resisting further economic and ecological impoverishment comes from understanding such histories and articulating new ways of seeing the Earth. The ethical lines for this battlefield of the imagination in the new century of globalisation are drawn between ‘the intrinsic worth and the commercial value of all forms of life’; between those that see the planet as ‘Earth family’ and those that see the potential for a ‘Genetic Mine’.19

Writers from all around the globe who have witnessed the plunderings of a neocolonial ideology of ecological exploitation put into practice by

19 ibid. p. 10.
governments and corporations form a central part of attempts to revision the politics of power through cultural production. Literary ecologism can create visions that question and assess the costs of neocolonial notions of ‘progress’ and ‘development’. Ngugi wa Thiong’o has written what can be considered eco-tragic novels which explore the connections between language and landscape, and demonstrate the human and environmental costs of policies of dispossession at a distance from colonial and then national governments in Kenya.\(^{20}\) Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* and her subsequent creative essay collection, *The Cost of Living*, complement one another in order to provide textual space for consideration of the value of all forms of life and analysis of anthropocentric political violence.\(^{21}\) The writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa provide a profound and poignant example of literary intervention in the face of the machinations of the corporate state. His writings as part of an advocacy on behalf of the Ogoni people brought the abuse of human-rights and anti-environmental actions of oil companies Shell-Dutch and Chevron, acting in collusion with successive governments in Nigeria, to world-wide attention.\(^{22}\)


\(^{22}\) Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Forest of Flowers* (Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1986) and *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (London: Penguin, 1995) are explicitly eco-literary texts which cannot be extracted from the political context of the author’s life and, indeed, death. Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil* (London: Verso, 2003), a text co-written by a member of the legal team who defended Saro-Wiwa, provides excellent analysis of the operations of Shell and the fictions of its creative advertising departments; see, pp. 157-189 for an account of the commercial spin of ‘green wash’. For another analysis of relationship between Shell, the Nigerian government and the role of Saro-Wiwa’s
has stimulated considerable critical debate over the role of his environmentalism which has been seen as 'white cause' exploited by Saro-Wiwa. Such a debate is emblematic of an important challenge facing literary ecocritics who must be aware of the possible exclusivity of 'green reading'. The environmental focus of ecocriticism may not only appeal first and foremost to white metropolitan concerns and sympathies but may also be seen to obfuscate the tragedies and brutalities committed by colonising nations and neocolonial corporate states. William Slaymaker has observed that 'ecocrit and ecolit appear to many academic and literary observers positioned around the margins of the black Atlantic as another whiteout of black concerns by going green'. Understanding the gravity of these possibilities makes assessments of the interconnected vision of writers from once-colonised nations even more important. As with Saro-Wiwa, whose writing in actuality derived much of its power from a demonstration of the inextricable links between human rights issues and ecologism, the two writers from the Caribbean present an uncompromised ecological focus that is profoundly connected to the history of human dispossession and colonial domination.

Writing from the 'periphery of empire' that is the Caribbean, Harris and Walcott, then, address such a history of continuing, adapted and shifting forms of colonial domination (from conquistadorial incursion, through slavery on the

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plantations, and into the independence era), and seek to provide an account of the human dispossession and environmental degradation that they perpetuate.

Writing the Caribbean Environment

From 1492, the post-Columbian Caribbean immediately became a site for the colonising gaze that seemed able to express joy at the beauty of the landscape while simultaneously assessing it as a bountiful arena for acquisitive agendas.²⁵ ‘Nature writing’ in itself, the descriptions of landscapes and natural histories of the Caribbean, need have little to do with the protection of the extra-human world that it portrays. Indeed, it is possible that such writing, in its contemporary guise, fuels the exploitation of the land as part of the neocolonial drive for economic growth; this paradigm is demonstrated by the tourist brochures and narratives that sell sites based on the vision of isolated and unspoilt beauty while, paradoxically, ensuring that such spaces do not remain isolated nor in most cases unspoilt for long. This is the new ‘nature writing’ that, like colonisers’ accounts of beauty before it, is, ultimately, concerned with what the traveller can take (physically, spiritually, commercially) from the landscape.²⁶

²⁵ John A. Murray, ed. The Islands and the Sea: Five Centuries of Nature Writing from the Caribbean (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) includes extracts from Columbus, Cortez and Raleigh amongst others to illustrate this point.
²⁶ See, Polly Pattullo, Last Resorts: The Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean (London: Cassell, 1996) for an insightful and balanced assessment of the tourist industry. Chapter 5, ‘Green Crime, Green Redemption’ (pp. 104-134) assesses specifically the impact of the trade on the environment and demonstrates the ecological example of Butler’s model of tourism’s life cycle: ‘the first phase is the “exploration” of a remote and unspoiled spot. Then come the stages of involvement, development and consolidation as more hotels are built and mass tourism arrives. In time, the high spenders move on and the “product” stagnates [...] social and environmental deterioration begins. [...] What was once poor and unspoiled is again poor but now spoiled’ (p. 8). Also see, Graham Huggan, The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the margins (London and
Appreciation for the natural landscapes and wildlife of the Caribbean, and concern for their fragility in the face of the anthropocentric histories of all forms of colonisation, are apparent from Harris’s earliest writings that appeared in Kyk-over-Al in the forties and fifties (Harris had spent years as a surveyor, mapping and charting the topography and water courses of the Guyanese forests) and also Walcott’s earliest collected poems. Such attention and concern surpass mere ‘nature writing’ and approach eco-literary production; this focus, articulated before the term ‘ecology’ and, indeed, ‘environmentalism’ became common cultural currency, then develops over the course of each writer’s oeuvre to become a profound and sustained engagement with the philosophy of being in the world, and the actualities of environmental crisis. The visions of an interconnected existence that Harris and Walcott offer illustrate clearly that they can be situated within a world-wide eco-literary tradition and, indeed, are two of the most resonant and influential voices concerned with vocalising an environmental ethic in the Caribbean. The critical model for what constitutes an environmentally-orientated text involves a constantly evolving and contested set of criteria. Lawrence Buell sets out ‘a rough checklist of some of the ingredients’ that might be considered:

New York: Routledge, 2001) for an assessment of the logical impossibility of ‘ecotourism’, a phenomenon which ‘attempts to balance the seemingly contradictory agendas of environmental sustainability and industrial development’ and furthermore ‘while touting itself as a “caring” alternative to the mainstream tourist industry, [...] remains largely governed by tourism’s neocolonial relations of power’. (p. 284).

27 Zoologist and naturalist Ernst Haeckel is credited with having coined the term ‘ecology’ in 1866 but it is not until after the publication of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring (London: Penguin, 1962), ‘the founding text of modern environmentalism’ (Garrard, Ecocriticism, p.2), that the word and indeed political / philosophical connotations of it became common cultural currency.
1. The nonhuman environment is presented not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.

2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.

3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation.

4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.\(^{28}\)

Buell’s points are, as they were meant to be, being reassessed, challenged and extended both in the analysis of the criteria he advocates and those important foci that he has omitted; it remains, however, a useful position from which to begin an ecocritical exploration of the writings of Wilson Harris and of Derek Walcott.\(^ {29}\) In envisaging an interconnected history of the Caribbean that attempts to encompass the pre-Columbian, colonial, and neocolonial-globalised worlds, both writers do not merely acknowledge the fact, but address the consequences of a ‘human history [that] is implicated in natural history’.


It is necessary, here, in a study that seeks to situate the work of Harris and Walcott within an extended scope of Buell’s criteria, to address the seemingly oppositional focus of concepts of location and of dislocation within the work of each writer. Such a dialectic can be seen to encapsulate, to some degree, the possible tensions between postcolonial and ecocritical theoretical approaches to literary study. A privileging of the idea of location would seem to be central to many forms of ecocriticism whether in the attention paid to representations of specific landscapes and, indeed, the intrinsic value of the nonhuman subject, or in figuring the place of the human within the extra-human world, and the notion of attuned dwelling. Standing in contradistinction is a significant focus of postcolonial critical theory which privileges the dynamic processes of globalised modernity and is suspicious of any claims of a ‘rootedness’ which might be both racially exclusive and politically atavistic. Homi Bhabha’s determination to ‘unhouse’ static representations of identity and received ways of thinking about the world by problematizing notions of ‘home’ results in a centring of concepts of migrancy and exile which suggests that ‘transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees - these border and frontier conditions - may be the terrains of world literature’.  

That this dialectic can be seen to be expressed within examples from the corpus of Walcott’s and Harris’s writing reveals the possibility of situating the work of each writer within the overlap of these critical spaces and, furthermore, provides a case for an interpretation of ecocritical and postcolonial approaches which need not be oppositional. Walcott’s poem ‘Earth’, for example,

30 Bhabha, p. 12.
encompasses both the centrality of notions of location and those of dislocation in
the twinned and interconnected images of the swift, indicating migrancy and
exile, and the rooted tree, indicating dwelling and attunement through a
conscious act of repossession. Similarly Harris’s poem ‘Troy’ combines the
opportunity to view the concerns of ecological criticism alongside those of the
postcolonial. The figure of Hector is doubly dislocated, fractured in himself and
relocated from the ‘old’ world to be re-figured in the ‘new’ by the poet who
articulates the need for acts of personal and political repossession to be played
out within the specific locus of the colonised landscape of Guyana’s forest.

Elements of ecocritical assessments of the writings of Wilson Harris and
Derek Walcott have appeared in various forms, either as parts of wider,
postcolonial critical studies not specifically concerned with writing and the
Caribbean environment, or as individual essays. Critics have engaged with, for
instance, Walcott’s biophilia and narrative of landscapes, and the concern for the
rainforests and the interactions with the ‘new science’ of quantum and chaos
theories that typify much of Harris’s work. Patricia Ismond’s *Abandoning Dead
Metaphors* provides detailed analysis of Walcott’s double-vision of landscape, as
both ‘possibility’ and ‘negation’, and includes discussion of the poet’s
environmental consciousness. John Thieme also briefly addresses the eco-
political outlook of the play ‘Beef, No Chicken’. Also, Roy Osamu Kamada’s
reading of ‘The Schooner Flight’, explores the tension between seeing visions of
the sublime in the landscapes of the Caribbean and acknowledging the history of
human trauma experienced within them. Hena Maes-Jelinek and Michael Gilkes have both addressed in detail how the Guyanese landscapes have featured in Harris's novels and Andrew Bundy's collection not only gives a comprehensive account of Harris's work but also documents the informing encounters with Amerindian peoples that helped to shape his Guyanese 'geomythos'. Of the essays that featured in the edition of *Callaloo* dedicated to the work of Harris, essays by Al Creighton and Robert Carr both intersect, at some point, with Harris's ecologism.

This study, building on the work which has explored and highlighted moments of environmental significance in the writing of Harris and Walcott, intends to demonstrate more fully the literary development of engaged philosophies of environmental ethic and to show the centrality of both Harris and Walcott to formations of Caribbean literary ecology. It is necessary, therefore, to outline the crucial tenets of each writer's vision of interconnection, essential to the shaping of the respective environmental ethic, and evident in the work that spans over half a century.

Harris's writings serve to narrate the history of the Caribbean back beyond the Columbian mistake - the 'discovery' of the Americas - and also to

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give space to the history of the land that goes beyond purely human utterance. In this two-fold act, Harris is able to bring into focus the pre-Columbian experiences and knowledges of existence and the more-than-human world in the narrative agency of non-human life and landscape. This dual journey is exemplified best in the Harrisian call to see beneath the ‘historic topsoil’ of the Americas; a notion that encompasses a revisioning of total and organic history to access disregarded human understanding which is connected to the history of the earth/Earth.

Harris fashions narratives which can be seen as ‘biocentric’ in that they seek to displace the concept of ultimate human ascendancy in the world. He explores the full range of time and space by unpicking supposedly fixed assumptions about form and being. He considers the full physical scope of the life of the planet and demonstrates the geological truths that the difference between the elements is merely a result of the shifting of time. For example, the history of the motion of tectonic plates is able to confound the concept of country and indeed continent, with landscapes which are continually in a process of transformation on both micro and macro levels. What were once ocean beds eventually become the arena of forests or plains; furthermore, physical status can also be transformed as the admixture of gas and liquid can result in the creation of solid forms (the precipitation of calcite in cavern environments, for instance, creates the dripstone forms of stalactite and stalagmite). Narrating back beyond conceived and supposed origins, historically and geologically, is only one

example of Harris’s desire to de-centre the ideology of an anthropocentric universe. His effacement of the notion of ‘character’ as it appears in standard realist-novel form further balances his biocentric texts, through providing narratives of parallel possibility; many figures in Harris’s novels experience multiple lives, deaths and transformations, positioned undeniably as part of larger nature, fully implicated in the natural history of the cycles and spirals of existence.

For Harris, the sleep of realist fiction is one of the reasons for the lack of imaginative vision which fails to perceive the landscape itself as part of sentient nature and hastens the destruction of a colonising impulse:

> There is a measureless nature to the life of the earth in the midst of catastrophes, drought and famine and flood that we blindly invite, a precarious freedom we need to understand if our cultures are to awake from their ‘sleep’ or ‘obliviousness’ which seems so strong it is called realism.33

Rejecting much social realism in his work, Harris provides visions of interconnection between his human figures and the living landscapes that they inhabit; undergoing a ritual of baptismal awareness by immersion in the extra-human environment, central protagonists overcome the ‘obliviousness’ of

realism and sense the music of the living landscape. Harris's own perceptions of this - 'it seems to me that for a long time, landscapes and riverscapes have been perceived as passive, as furniture, as areas to be manipulated; whereas I sensed [...] that the landscape possessed resonance'\(^{34}\) - shape his ecological imagination which sees a universal unconscious 'extending into voices that echo within the roots of nature as from the ancestral dead, from rivers, from rocks, from birds and other species, from the rhythm of landscapes, skyscapes'.\(^{35}\) Here we are returned to the two-fold drive of Harrisian writing, to narrate total history through interconnected vision, providing a space for extra-human utterance, the voice 'within the roots of nature' and to explore the potentiality of pre-Columbian ancestry; such parallel narrative incisions contribute to the fashioning of 'new ways of seeing' the Earth and considering the human responsibility towards it.

Walcott's visions of interconnection also express the need for the human communities in the Caribbean to understand the total history of the land. Echoing Harris's desire to get beneath the 'historic topsoil', Walcott reveals how an awareness of inextricable links between peoples and landscapes is essential - 'We have not wholly sunk into our own landscapes [...] The migratory West Indian feels rootless on his own earth, chafing at its beaches.'\(^{36}\) The imaginative sinking wholly into landscape is a journey towards redemptive comprehension.

\(^{34}\) Wilson Harris, 'The Music of Living Landscapes' in Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, pp. 40-46 (p. 40).

\(^{35}\) Wilson Harris, 'Profiles of Myth and the New World' in Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, pp. 201-211 (p. 201). In this, Harris fashions, self-consciously, an extension to the Jungian notion of 'collective unconscious' which incorporates the non-human world.

First, it becomes part of a process of figuring the human place within extra-human existence, our place in 'the scheme of things', and furthermore, this 'new way of seeing' is an essential component of taking possession of a colonial history as it was enacted through language and control of landscape: 'Nor is the land automatically ours because we were made to work it [...] the soil was stranger under our own feet than under those of our captors. Before us they knew the names of the forests and the changes of the sea, and theirs were the names we used'. Walcott comprehends that the legacy of colonial history of dispossession in human terms is connected to ecological degradation; human interest is not the only legitimate interest because integral to figuring out the 'scheme of things' is a consideration of the possibilities of interventions in the environment and obligation to non-human history.

The artist who sees with an ecopoetic eye is capable of reading the shapes and translating the sounds of the natural world as they appear as a form of text written across the Earth. Walcott sees the script of the nonhuman world in the silhouetted flight of a flock of blue-winged teal or in the procession of ants crossing the forest floor. His observations and readings of such naturalised script, which become incorporated into his verse, inspire metaphor that moves beyond the usual paradigm of tenor and vehicle. A sense of fidelity to the non-human subject informs the usual metaphorical nature of Walcott's verse: the birds and insects portrayed 'become part of the imagination's topography without ever

37 ibid. p. 11.
losing their naturalistic authenticity - natural fact and metaphor remain one. 38
Walcott’s reciprocal relationship to his nonhuman subjects is, therefore, one of
inspiration but also of obligation. If it is the natural world that inspires the poet’s
eye and creates ‘new ways of seeing’ the life on and of the earth, then that
natural world must itself be related with a faithfulness to its intrinsic value.
Landscapes that can speak of the interconnection of human and natural history
must not just act as ‘framing device’ or provide the poet with the opportunity for
pathetic fallacy; and the Caribbean wildlife, with its own part in ‘the scheme of
things’ is owed a representation beyond that of metaphorical, anthropocentric
vehicle.

The combination of an imaginative ‘sinking into landscape’ and
communion with the utterance of non-human life enables a position of relative
comfort within the dwelling environment; and it is from this position that
Walcott is able to challenge the historical agents of dispossession and suspect
notions of ‘progress’:

‘Progress is something to ask Caribs about.
They kill them by millions, some in war,
some by forced labour dying in the mines
looking for silver, after that niggers; more
progress. Until I see definite signs

38 Peter Balakian, ‘The Poetry of Derek Walcott’, in Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott, ed.
350).
that mankind change, Vince, I ain’t want to hear.

Progress is history’s dirty joke39

Through the sailor Shabine, Walcott provides testament to the destructive power of expansionism in the guise of conquistadorial incursion and colonial plantation economics; throughout the corpus of his work he continues to demonstrate the persuasive power of such hollow notions of ‘progress’ in neocolonial form and illustrates the cultural, social and environmental costs of such brutal and myopic expansionism.

The environmental ethic that emerges from the work of both writers is rooted in a sense of interconnectedness of all existence (human life, non-human life and abiotic environment), and through awareness of the interdependent nature of being, Harris and Walcott explore the idea of a total history of the Americas, pre-Columbian, colonial and neocolonial. The history of ecological degradation in the Caribbean islands and forests of the South American interior are brought into focus as part of this total history, and the writing of both St. Lucian and Guyanese consider the roles of multinational corporations and the tourist industry as they impact upon the environments and societies of the Caribbean. Through the literary fashioning of an environmental philosophy of interconnected being and eco-political analysis of the history of the Caribbean, the range of work from both Harris and Walcott contributes not only to an eco-literary tradition but also to wider ‘state of the earth’ debates with a vision of the

existence that attempts to transform ‘new ways of seeing’ into ‘a new treaty of
relations’ between humanity and the natural world.

Ecocritical thought and Romantic inheritance.

The environmental ethic of Derek Walcott and of Wilson Harris is formed in
dialogue with the colonial history of the Caribbean, prevalent ‘green’
philosophies encompassing the science of ecology, and an awareness of an eco-
literary heritage. It is necessary, therefore, to outline first some of the
instrumental environmental texts and thinkers that will be used to illuminate and
reflect upon the work of Harris and Walcott. It is also necessary to consider the
ecocritical consequences of the poetic inheritance of the environmental ethic of
Romanticism and, more specifically, to consider the influence that poets such as
William Blake and John Clare have upon the writings of the two twentieth-
century artists from the ‘new world’.

Vandana Shiva’s dichotomy of ‘Earth family’ or ‘Genetic Mine’ has
already been cited as an important assessment of ways of seeing the non-human
world, and indeed, figuring the future of the planet, and is useful when
considering Caribbean literary ecology for two principal reasons. Integral to
Shiva’s analysis of the future of globalised trade and the impact on the
environment, is the politics of power relations between the ‘First’ and ‘Third’
worlds. Also, her focus on the human imagination, and on ways of seeing the
world, as central to unpicking ideologies of exploitation in human and
environmental spheres (‘monocultures of the mind’) seems to be in accord with
the constructions of the literary ecology as envisaged by Harris and Walcott.\textsuperscript{40}

The imagination, more specifically the need to revision the place of humanity within the scheme of existence, is the concordant focus of Theodore Roszak's 'green' philosophy. \textit{Where the Wasteland Ends}, published in 1972, constructs an ecological philosophy which questions the paradigm of left-wing versus right-wing politics: for Roszak the key political fact of the post-1968 age is the consolidation of a 'technocratic elite' and he seeks to offer challenges to the myths of progress spread by this technocracy in order to counteract a sense of fracture between human and non-human worlds. The relevance of Roszak's argument to the environmental ethic of Walcott and Harris is several-fold. First, this text examined the products of 'technocratic progress' that are very visible in the neocolonial Caribbean: industrialism and mass tourism. Secondly, it emphasises the importance of a spiritual element to environmental thought that sees such a sense of alienation as psychic as much as sociological: the idea of a psyche (within) and world (without) is presented as a false metaphor which parallels Harris's belief in 'living landscapes' and the total collective unconscious and Walcott's re-figuring of 'the scheme of things'.\textsuperscript{41} In addition, Roszak makes an interesting philosophical counterpart as he places at the centre of his vision for the transcendence of the wasteland of industrial society readings

\textsuperscript{40} In addition to \textit{Tomorrow's Biodiversity}, see, Vandana Shiva, \textit{Biopiracy: the Plunder of Nature and Knowledge} (Totnes, Devon: Green Books, 1998) and \textit{Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology} (London: Zed Books, 1993).

\textsuperscript{41} See, Wilson Harris, 'Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins' in \textit{Selected Essays of Wilson Harris}, pp. 58-66. This essay sees Harris at his most Roszakian: 'We have changed the courses of rivers, we have altered the lie of the land, we have built settlements in river catchments, we have dismembered cultures, the culture of grasses and forests as much as of human tribes and animal species. We clothe ourselves in a technocratic and utilitarian realism when we engage a robot to sow or pick fruit.' (p. 58).
of the poets Blake and Wordsworth. Just as for Walcott and Harris, an understanding of the legacy of Romantic poetics is essential in the formation of a politics of ‘visionary commonwealth’ needed to provide solutions to ‘environmental collapse, world poverty, technocratic elitism, psychic alienation, the death of the soul’. More recently, Roszak has articulated a template for artistic ecology which is again reflected in the writings of Harris and Walcott. In ‘Deep Form in Art and Nature’, Betty and Theodore Roszak assert that connectedness comes from ‘the truth of the imagination’:

> The artist, like a tree, drinks up nourishment from the depths and from the heights, from the roots and from the air, to bring forth a crown of leaves. [...] Deep form reveals the web of vital relationships embedded in all things; its vision of the universe is what Read called a ‘prodigious animism’.

The Roszaks’ expression of ecological artistic attitude is apparent in, for example, the poetic treatment of Walcott’s arboreal subjects and Harris’s extension to Jungian collective unconscious incorporating the non-human.

As well as the ‘green’ insights of Shiva and Roszak, this study will rely on key concepts from James Lovelock’s Gaia Theory. Primarily, the notion of interconnectedness is an essential part of Lovelock’s theory, and from this the

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idea of the literary visions of interconnection is derived. It will be argued that such visions of interconnected being form the building blocks of the environmental ethic of both Caribbean authors. Gaia contends that the Earth can be seen as a single ecosystem or ‘superorganism’ that continually adapts to changing environmental conditions by manipulating the atmosphere to find the optimal chemical and physical properties for life. Furthermore, the self-regulatory nature of this system depends on ‘interconnectedness’, the interaction between life - ‘the active processes of plants and animals [act] as component parts and with capacity to regulate the climate, the chemical composition, and the topography of the Earth’ - and non-life - ‘we have since defined Gaia as a complex entity involving the Earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system’. Lovelock employs the term ‘tight-coupling’ to identify such interconnection between organisms and their material environment and emphasises the centrality of such interconnection to the conception of Gaia: ‘Gaia is the superorganism composed of all life tightly coupled with the air, oceans, and the surface rocks’. Lovelock’s ‘tight coupling’ finds direct literary counterpart in Harris’s belief in a ‘tight-fitting nature’ and, more generally, is reflected in the instances of awareness of such interconnection in the fictions of Walcott and Harris, as they seek to forge new treaties of relation. Indeed, such re-figuring of human and extra-human relations is also present in Lovelock’s theorising:

45 ibid. p. xii.
We need to love and respect the Earth with the same intensity that we give to our families and our tribe. It is not a political matter of them and us or some adversarial affair with lawyers involved; our contract with the Earth is fundamental, for we are a part of it and cannot survive without a healthy planet as our home.\footnote{ibid. p. viii.}

Gaian thinking provides an important template for students of literary ecology, first, as its central ideas and terms can be transformed into useful patterns of analysis for literature of environmental concern, and also, as it has presented a ‘new way of seeing’ the Earth, a ‘holistic’ vision of a top-down science of ecology. Lovelock’s work is a self-consciously literate work, incorporating the environmental utterances of writers like Rachel Carson and Vaclav Havel and even citing Blake’s ‘The Tyger’ as a cultural example of human recognition of the beautiful other. Such intertextuality, when coupled with Lovelock’s declaration that ‘Gaia is significant beyond science’\footnote{ibid. p. xvii.} demonstrates both the connection of his thinking to works of cultural ecology in general, and the value of his writings as a basis for the study of literary ecology specifically.\footnote{Oppositional views of the ‘intertextuality’ of the book caused Lovelock to write The Ages of Gaia (New York: Norton, 1988) as a ‘hard science’ version of the Gaia theory amid accusations from some in the scientific world of cross-over and ‘dumbing down’ in the original. However, as Greg Garrard contends, whatever the controversies of Gaia as science, it provides a vocabulary fashioned in relation to twentieth-century ecological philosophies, is also formed}
in cross-cultural dialogue with eco-prophetic voices of British Romanticism. The
critical positioning of a ‘Green Romanticism’ has been at the forefront of
establishing an eco-literary tradition and it is this tradition that has been
employed by both Caribbean authors in their own literary explorations of
interconnected vision. The interconnected visions created by Harris and Walcott
communicate across oceans and centuries, demonstrating not only the tight
coupling of human and extra-human history in the Caribbean but also the
ecopoetic influences of William Blake and of John Clare upon their own
environmental ethic. The ‘greening’ of the study of Romanticism was the focus
of Jonathan Bate’s *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental
Tradition* and such a focus was expanded and gained a sense of cohesion with a
collection of articles on ‘Green Romanticism’ in *Studies in Romanticism*, both
instances building upon a central pre-text to British ecocriticism, Raymond
Williams’s *The Country and the City*.49 Since these publications, ‘green’ readings
of Romantic poetics, with specific attention to Blake and Clare, have appeared in
critical collections and ‘Readers’, landmark texts examining an eco-literary
tradition and ecocriticism as literary theory, and in monograph form. For

that is of continued use to those seeking to imagine the whole Earth in ‘literary and other media’
(Garrard, *Ecocriticism* p.175).

and New York: Routledge, 1991) for an analysis of Wordsworth and Clare that de-centres the
idea of ‘nature’ as an escape from industrial capitalism and also, Bate’s ‘Editorial’ to ‘Green
Romanticism’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 35 (1996), 353-488. Here, all the articles demonstrate
‘how profoundly the romantics seem to have thought so many of the problems which ecology
thinks. [and] For that reason, Green Romanticism will be at the center of any historically-
393-408, questions the received interpretations of Blake’s antipathy to ‘nature’ and provides a
brief Gaian reading of his poetry; in addition this collection highlights similar ecocritical
assessments of Clare published elsewhere. See also chapters thirteen and fourteen of Raymond
Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973) which explores the
possibility of ‘socialist ecology’ through the writings of Blake and Clare among many others.
instance, Laurence Coupe’s Reader expressly charts a movement from Romanticism to ecocriticism, and opens with ‘Nature as Imagination’, an extract of Blake’s letter to Dr. Trusler espousing a view of nature as revelation: Kevin Hutchings expands upon Lussier’s assessment of Blake; and Bate’s second major ecocritical work continues the examination of the centrality of Clare to ecopoetic tradition.\(^5\) The writings of Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott reveal how the inheritance of such ‘Green Romanticism’ has formed an integral part of the creation of their own eco-narratives and ecopoetics. Primarily, the visions of William Blake both influence and find concordance in the ecological imagination of Wilson Harris, and the ecopoetic eye of Derek Walcott seeks literary kinship with the focussed expressions of John Clare’s verse.

The influence of Blake and of Clare upon the work of two of the major twentieth-century writers from the Caribbean highlights a significant moment of intersection between postcolonial and ecocritical discourse. The positioning of both William Blake and John Clare as politically, and to differing extents, poetically marginal figures in their own time, the provincial labourer and the printer artisan, when coupled with their variants of Romanticism (in respects at a significant remove from the mainstream Wordsworthian version), with an

\(^5\) Coupe’s Reader, carries the axiom of progression in ‘green’ thinking in its subtitle in its title: \textit{The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism}. Kevin Hutchings, \textit{Imagining Nature: Blake’s Environmental Poetics} (Montreal & Kingston and London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), offers an ecocritical perspective on Blake that doesn’t seek to dismiss his thoroughgoing anthropocentrism but balances this factor with Blake’s own cosmology ‘that questions the exclusive rights of humans’ and provides ‘an interesting critical vantage point from which to consider the manifold implications of a contemporary concept [...] that sought to describe all earthly entities as integral and interdependent parts of a dynamic, interactive system or whole.’ (p. 36). For further discussions on Clare’s critical rehabilitation and centrality to ‘Green Romanticism’ see, Jonathan Bate, \textit{The Song of the Earth} (London: Picador, 2000), and \textit{The John Clare Society Journal}, 14 (July 1995) which is devoted to discussions of ‘Clare and Ecology’.
integral anti-imperialist focus and sincere sense of sympathy for the plight of the socially and racially oppressed, allows critical examinations of the pair to be included within the scope of postcolonial analysis, not situated outside it.

Reading the poems of Blake and Clare alongside writing from the Caribbean that explicitly seeks and creates dialogues with such brands of Romanticism not only avoids the risk of re-inscribing cultures of imperialism but might also offer the opportunity to re-assess the postcolonial critical concept of ‘writing back to the centre’. As this study will demonstrate, both Harris and Walcott do, at times, concern themselves with ‘writing back’ and with ‘unlearning the world-view’ and value judgements of the ‘centre’. 51 Walcott directly challenges the imperialistic commentary of J.A. Froude and Harris refashions the expansionist inscriptions of poet, historian and traveller in his creation of the figure-doubles of Donne, Schomburgk and Muir. However, each writer is also capable of ‘writing with’ those voices from the centre which are able to reinforce, complicate and add resonance to utterances from the ‘periphery’. To examine the intertextual nature of the writing of Walcott and of Harris merely in terms of ‘writing back’ is to risk becoming generally theoretically prescriptive and, specifically in this case, could preclude examinations of both the power and depth of these representations of Caribbean literary ecology. Here, such instances of cross-cultural dialogue might provide a critical space where the focus of postcolonial discourse need not be erased nor

displaced but where one of its key processes can be re-assessed through an example of 'green' reading.

At this stage, it is necessary to outline those aspects of Blake’s poetics and those of Clare’s which are revisioned into the formation of the individual literary ecology of Harris and of Walcott, and which are essential to this study’s attempts to demonstrate the importance of a Romantic legacy to ‘green’ writing in the Caribbean.

Opposed to the interconnected vision that Walcott and Harris depict in the various forms of their various texts is the ideology that Blake identifies as ‘Single vision’. For Blake, ‘Single vision’ is, in actuality, the epitome of a lack of vision, a blinkered, reductive way of viewing the world that sees only with the physical eye and not beyond; Blake associates such vision with the Newtonian concept of a mechanistic universe which has no place for spiritual truths and value: ‘May God us keep / From Single vision & Newton’s sleep’. In Blake’s poetic mythology, ‘Single vision’ is the invention of Urizen and at his behest becomes the mechanism of exploitation on many levels. The workers in the satanic mills of England and the slaves in the colonies of empire are all oppressed by the facilitators of ‘Single vision’. Blake’s writing is both

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53 ‘The Visions of the Daughters of Albion’ depicts the ‘Single vision’ of possessive Bromion who is a slave-owner: ‘Stampt with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun; [...] children bought with money, / that shiver in religious caves beneath the burning fires’ (Blake: Complete Writings, p. 190). Again, the key to extinguishing the fires of exploitative lust is found in a vision
ecological and postcolonial in its vision of being in the universe and, as much as the identification of ‘Single vision’ as an exploitative philosophy has obvious relevance to the history of enslavement in the Caribbean, it can equally be seen in continuing neocolonial forms of ‘progress’ and, more importantly, the ideology that drives them. It is both the effects and the ideology of such ‘progress’ that are questioned by Harris and Walcott. Indeed, it is worth noting that Blake himself believed that it would be at the edges of empire, the periphery, where revisioning thought and redemptive vision would become manifest and it is possible to see Harris and Walcott as fulfilling and continuing the prophecy of Blake as it seeks to eradicate exploitative vision.  

The interconnected visions of being that Harris and Walcott articulate owe much to the organic cosmology of Blake which accommodates both microscopic (the ‘Minute Particulars’) and the whole order (the ‘teeming Earth’). Indeed, such an inclusive cosmology of totality, the ‘cosmic organicism that enables [Blake] to imagine "every thing that lives" as profoundly interconnected and interdependent’ is expressly ecological, echoing strongly the Harrisian belief in an extended collective of unconscious:

In such an interrelational universe, indeed (as American

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of interconnected being and awareness of the rights of all humans and non-humans alike: the freed Oothoon declares, ‘Arise, and drink your bliss, for every thing that lives is holy!’

54 See David V. Erdman, Blake: Prophet Against Empire, 3rd edn (New York: Dover Publication, 1977) - ‘In political terms Blake took hope as always from the thought that at the limits of empire, contraries begin. Liberty, when “withered up” from every nation, is reborn “in a dark Land’ […] Or in modern times the Africans began their revolt against the “dark Machines” of the British Leviathan’. (p. 472).
environmentalist Aldo Leopold was aware), even the traditional
distinction between the animate and the inanimate becomes hollow
[...], so that rocks, stones, and grains of sand may be understood as
no less alive than organic, biological entities.\(^{55}\)

The interrelational universe of a Blakean cosmology which creates a necessity of
space for the fly and the lark as well as revolutionary tides, and astrophysical
forces and entities is evident throughout the corpus of Blake’s work. However,
such a vision of interconnection is perhaps most accessibly realised in ‘The Book
of Thel’, Blake’s letter to Dr. Trusler and ‘Auguries of Innocence’ which will be
used, here, as literary ‘touchstones’ for examining the ‘green’ Romantic legacy
embraced by Harris and Walcott.\(^{56}\)

John Clare’s writings are of equal importance in the formation of
Walcott’s and Harris’s interconnected vision. First, Clare’s close observation and
depth of knowledge through poetry of his local flora and fauna enabled him to
see, as Blake, the interrelational nature of being: ‘He wrote of [the Earth’s]
teeming, reciprocal and intricate relationships not just as an observer but as a participant [...] catches the nowness and mutuality of the natural world.'

Clare’s poetry and prose writings exemplify Walcott’s desire to ‘sink wholly’ into landscapes with a vision of the intrinsic value of the non-human beings and of the interconnected nature of human and natural history. Secondly, Clare expresses a sense of frustration at the destructions of ‘progress’ in his time and reveals his concerns over the control and restriction of land rights, in both his poetry and prose. ‘The Mores’ which rages at the enclosures of ‘Each little tyrant with his little sign’ who seems to desire the restriction of access to human and non-human trespassers alike, ‘The hated sign by vulgar taste is hung / As tho the very birds should learn to know / When they go there they must no further go’

echoes the sense of disenfranchisement expressly found in Clare’s journal, ‘Saturday 16 April 1825, Took a walk in the field a birds nesting & botanizing and had like to have been taken up as a poacher [...] - what terrifyng rascals these wood keepers & gamekeepers are they make a prison of the forrests & are its joalors’.

Here, the twin instances of Clare’s dismay reflect both a sense of new infringement and oppression of the acts of enclosure and an anger at the historical class controls of the land. Walcott sees a counterpart in Clare to his own despair at both a history of colonial land control and the neocolonial control

of commercial ownership of the land. Furthermore Walcott picks up on Clare’s sense of isolation and, ultimately exile from his heartland, and such a sense of poetic and personal fracture is developed by Walcott to consider the notion of conditions of exile on several levels: the artist from his society; humanity from the wider natural world; and the history of enforced exile of enslavement in the Caribbean. The poetic power of Clare’s provincialism also appeals, and Walcott senses a cross-cultural connection between the colonial voice and that of the poet-labourer. Consequently, the notion of the centrality of naming the surrounding landscapes and inhabitants in dialectical verse is a means of claiming not only intimacy but a legitimate aesthetic of landscape for those writing from ‘marginalised’ space and one which seems to strengthen the ecopoetic relationship. In his verse, Clare literally provides a voice for his environment - ‘I am the genius of the brook / And like to thee I moan’ - and for Walcott provides an ecopoetic ancestor whose focus and example highlights not only the processes and methods, but also the problems inherent in writing representations of the utterances of the non-human world. This final point is worth some consideration, the understanding of the limits of human discourse and cultural production in attempting to represent extra-human experience is a

60 It is worth noting that the social and economic consequences of enclosure are still being contested (see, Garrard, Ecocriticism, p. 47.), although it is equally important to consider that the reactions of Clare to these processes, regardless of historical debate, remain ultimately those of despair and anguish.

component of the literary ecology of both Harris and Walcott, one which owes much to their readings of and interactions with a ‘Green Romanticism’.  

Part One of this study, ‘Wilson Harris: The World-Creating Jungle’, examines the development of Harris’s ecological imagination over the corpus of his work; poetry, prose and collections of his critical/creative essays. Chapter One, ‘The genesis of interconnected vision’ examines: first, an example of the early prose-fiction of Harris which sets up competing visions of the future of the forest in Guyana; then, Harris’s collection of poetry which explores the interrelational nature of the universe and the intertwined histories of human and non-human in the ‘world-creating jungle’; and finally, offers a reading of Place of the Peacock which serves as a template for the presentation of the interconnected vision depicted in the novels which follow it. Chapter Two, ‘Burning Bright: Forests of the imagination’ examines the final two novels of The Guyana Quartet and traces Harris’s connection to William Blake, not only through repeated epigrammatic references, but also in the deeper and more direct transmission of interconnected vision especially as embodied by Cristo in The

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62 There has been much critical debate over the situation of Romanticism within ecocritical study (especially within British ecocriticism). Hugh Dunkerley - ‘Romanticism - Do We Need It?’ in Green Letters 3 (Autumn 2001), 69-78 - provides a useful synopsis of the debate and calls for careful reconsideration of all positions. It seems that proponents who seek to challenge the centrality of the situation of Romanticism, whilst acknowledging that readings of ‘Green Romanticism’ are at the forefront of the establishment of an eco-literary tradition, also contend that the study of Romantic eco-poetics, and its legacy, is necessarily ‘regressive and exclusive’. This would seem to be an easy paradigm which itself reduces the role that Romantic legacies can play in the ‘important issues of the Modernist debate’ (p. 70). This study aims to demonstrate that the Romantic inheritance of ‘green’ thought embraced by the ‘postcolonial’ writing of Harris and Walcott need not be excluded from the questions of modernity and representation in a globalised world. Perhaps the Romantic legacy of Blake and Clare, refracted through the lens of contemporary Caribbean literature can not only encourage British ecocritics to address colonial histories in relation to literary ecology, but also contribute to the need, articulated by Dunkerley, for ‘a constant reappraisal [...] rather than an easy acceptance’, or equally easy dismissal of the Romantic inheritance (p. 78).
Whole Armour and Russell Fenwick in *The Secret Ladder*. The possession of such vision marks out the figures Harris sees as synonymous with the artist who must offer a way forward for his community, and the analysis of these novels reveals the beginnings of redemptive possibilities of fulfilling new treaties of relation between humanity and the natural world. Chapter Three, ‘Fashioning an Atahualpan form: *The Dark Jester*’ considers Harris’s penultimate novel and the presentation of constantly re-invented technologies of conquest in the Americas and the creation of Atahualpan insight which is at once inspired by the previous incarnations of interconnected vision and which also demands its continuation and proliferation.

Part Two, ‘Derek Walcott: Possessing the Earth’. similarly charts the development of Walcott’s environmental ethic using examples of both his poetic and dramatic writings. Chapter Four, ‘In a green world: The emergence of ecopoetry’ examines Walcott’s early comprehension of the nexus between landscape and language through an exploration of the pivotal poem ‘Earth’ and poems from *The Castaway* as they depict a vision of interconnected total history and espouse a sense of human responsibility toward the extra-human world. Chapter Five, ‘Staging the green world: eco-tricksters and eco-tragedies’ looks at two dramatic representations of figuring the human position within the total history of the universe; ‘Ti-Jean and His Brothers’ and ‘Dream on Monkey Mountain’ are read as ecological allegories and situated alongside the insights of Walcott’s introductory essay ‘What the Twilight Says’. The trickster-hero and the tragic-hero of the respective plays are characters who have sunk wholly into their landscapes and seek to enunciate methods of survival for their communities
struggling against the ‘Single vision’ of colonial and neocolonial governance. This chapter also offers tentative possibilities for the staging of the two plays which, while different in tone and resolution, provide the prospect of envisioning an expressly environmental focus in Caribbean theatre. Chapter Six, ‘The disconnection of progress: The Gulf and "Beef, No Chicken"' follows Walcott’s ecopoetic focus as it enters a phase of most explicit eco-political consciousness. The poems and play discussed challenge the concept of an uncomplicated progress that brings only improvement as they reflect upon the complexities, inherent dispossession and ecological degradation of various instances of neocolonial development. Chapter Seven, ‘The power of provincialism: John Clare and The Bounty’ considers another tonal variation in Walcott’s ecopoetic as this collection marks the culmination of Walcott’s homage to John Clare. The literary connection between the poets is explored and the construction of Walcott’s sustained elegiac exploration of the connections between the landscapes of the world, and the histories of the continents, provides a profound sense of the intrinsic value of all existence through a considered communion with extra-human utterance and attention to the details of the text of the natural world.
Part I:

Wilson Harris and The World-Creating Jungle

Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself
- ‘The Book of Thel’, William Blake

The rainforests are the lungs of the globe.
The lungs of the globe breathe on the stars

- ‘The Music of Living Landscapes’, Wilson Harris
Chapter One: 

The genesis of interconnected vision 

Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated: Forms cannot: 
The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife, 
But their Forms Eternal Exist For-ever. 

- ‘Milton’, William Blake¹

‘Fences Upon the Earth’ 

In April 1911, North America’s ‘first Wilderness Prophet’ embarked, for the first time, upon a pilgrimage to South America and the Amazon basin.² The 74 year-old John Muir, the man responsible not only for the establishment of the Yosemite National Park, but also the one-man think-tank behind Roosevelt’s innovative conservation project and, furthermore, all-round father-figure to U.S. environmentalism, was fulfilling a life-long ambition. The naturalist, activist and writer who had traversed the Americas from the glaciers of Alaska to the sierras of California was searching for a first-hand sighting of the Monkey Puzzle 

² The attribution of the epithet ‘first’ here falls into the trap of expressing the white explorer’s expansionist ideology. It certainly ignores the reality of Native American societies and their claim to primacy with religious prophecies which were inextricably linked to the land.
(araucaria) trees in the rainforests of the south. Amongst the genuine natural observations of wonder at the forest found in his journal are schemes and great plans for this uncultivated landscape: ‘The jungle’s fate in the hands of developers did not seem to worry Muir. He wrote that despite “jarring fevers, dampness of every sort, debilitating heat, etc. thousands of men, young and old rush for fortunes half crazy, half merry, into this rubbery wilderness”.3

With overtones of racial stereotype, he espouses the need for the settler, the white European or North American, to tap fully the economic potential of this rubber kingdom: ‘It means hard work to do more than that on the Amazon, and the people there are not of the working kind’.4 In his promotion of the damming, dyking and deforestation of the area for the settler colony, Muir reveals that his interest in single species discovery is at the cost of a lack of vision for the intricate, interrelated systems of rainforest ecology. His enthusiasm for the Monkey Puzzle was rooted in the longevity of that species (its survival through many geological ages) but his inability to branch out his interest to its habitat as a whole may, ironically, have helped to reduce the chances of its survival. While the magnificence of the Californian landscape was deserving of conserving, the natural resources of the Amazon were to provide a playground for the politically and economically expansionist visions of the very type of settlers who had made the Yosemite National Park Project so essential. In this instance of Muir’s

Amazonian journey we see a moment in which the wilderness prophet of North America becomes advocate of a ‘wilderness-for-profit’ policy in the South.

Some 36 years later, an image of this economic ambassador of the North, in his guise as exploiter not conservationist, appears in Harris’s short prose work ‘Fences Upon the Earth’. Here, we see perhaps the earliest example of Harris’s use of a complex technique of character doubling. Sandra Drake gives a cogent explanation of this appearance of narrative counterparts to figures in Guyanese history that Harris employs throughout the corpus of his work. Examining the notion that ‘naming is an index to identity and to power relations’ and citing the christening of New Amsterdam, she contends that colonial doubling-in-names reinforces a sense of ownership and appeals to a European need for sense of security in ‘far-flung lands’, in this instance with the recall of the Dutch capital. In addition, it would seem that this very case also taps into the trope of expansionist thought that sees the ‘new world’ as a *tabula rasa* upon which the coloniser can write his own history and indeed begin afresh, unbound by mistakes committed in the old world. In the Harrisian narrative of Guyana double-figures from the country’s colonial past emerge and represent not only echoes or reflections of historical personality but also present new ways of reading the history of colonial incursion into the continent. For example, in *Palace of the Peacock*, we are presented with the rapacious figure of Donne,

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5 Wilson Harris, ‘Fences Upon the Earth’ in *Kyk-Over-Al* 32 (December 1985), 86-89. This story was first published in *Kyk-Over-Al* 4 (June 1947), 20-21.


fictional counterpart not only to the Renaissance explorer in the mould of Raleigh but also bringing to mind the poetic voice of the ‘roaming’ John Donne who penned Elegy XIX. In addition, the figure of Schomburgk (the man credited with creating the line of national demarcation and, in fact, identity separating British Guiana from Venezuela, and the man who wrote, pre-empting the dissections of Muir’s perception, at length of not only the ‘resources’ of the colony but also of its future prospects) gets a place in the crew of Harris’s questing boat alongside Donne.\(^8\) Seen as a precursory counterpart to these figures which appear in Harris’s later fiction, the creation of the John Muir of ‘Fences upon the Earth’ seems fitting. He becomes, for Harris and for the reader, the first in a line of geographical explorers and exploiters of the rainforest; one of those who saw the potential of resource in the South American continent and who came to inscribe his own vision upon its tabula rasa. By creating the figure-double, Harris interrogates the supposed virtue of Muir’s environmental prophecy with stark revelation of his racial and colonialist blindspots; he is also able to throw the project of colonial (re)naming into sharp relief.\(^9\)

However, ‘Fences Upon the Earth’ is far from being a mere reconceptualisation of the figure of John Muir. Indeed, the character forms part of a tri-form structure of figures in the forest whose interactions with each other and the landscape make this piece of early writing worth consideration; a level of critical consideration perhaps beyond that which the author himself would


necessarily desire. Harris corresponded with the editors of *Kyk-Over-Al* and expressed his reservations about the inclusion of the piece in a special edition of the journal. These authorial concerns are for the most part understandable; the work seems a little naïve, and to a greater extent lacks much of the narrative subtlety and artistry that typify Harris’s successive poetic prose. However, a deeper analysis of elements of this text is justifiable despite this voiced authorial reservation. ‘Fences Upon the Earth’ is an important literary site to re-investigate as not only does it provide aesthetic flashes of inspiration (displayed to the reader in the same way that the story’s witness-figure is party to ‘flashes of truth’) but also hints at the future eschewal of social realism in his narratives. Furthermore, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, is the centrality of this text, and its creative and critical interplay with the essays collected in *Tradition the Writer and Society*, to hypotheses surrounding the author’s construction of the poetics of the interconnected vision.

The dispute between forest-dweller and the intruder (and observed by the narrator-witness) provides the axis around which the concerns of the piece

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10 Wilson Harris has written to us about the selections of his work from the old *Kyk* series which we included in *Golden Kyk* [...] “I am so glad you omitted the pieces you referred to [...] I would have been happy to [sic] had you left out Fences Upon the Earth”*, *Across the Editors Desk* *Kyk-Over-Al* 35 (December 1986), 3-8 (p. 3).

11 In some way, the naivety of this piece can be seen to reflect those aspects of ecocritical focus which can also be seen to be naively problematic. Here, Harris treats the non-human world as almost timeless and perhaps comes closest to creating a figure who could be defined as a ‘noble eco-savage’. Ecocritics must guard against constructing false visions of timeless harmony on the planet which fail to consider the environment as ongoing process and must be equally aware of the neocolonising gaze which seeks to construct images and specimens of ‘harmonious’ humanity to satisfy audiences looking for visions of a primitivism which purports to embody ‘what once was perfect’ and now points the way to ‘where we have gone wrong’. For discussion of the problems with viewing harmony in ecology, see Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 175. See also, Peter Hulme, *Remnants of Conquest: The Island Caribs and their Visitors, 1877-1998* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) for analysis of such constructions of Amerindian peoples, especially as they pertain to the tourist trade in the Caribbean (pp. 297-302).
revolve and throws up for investigation Harrisian concerns more profound than a mere struggle for ownership of the land. ‘Fences Upon the Earth’ provides more than the surface narrative antagonism between the folk-like figure of the dweller and the figure-double of Muir. It is therefore necessary to examine the presentation of: human beings within the vision of a living landscape; the authorial interrogation of the inadequacies of language and the struggle for written form in relation to the repetition of the witnessed events; and, as a result of these concerns, to look also at this witness-narrator as he presents the panorama of the drama staged within the forest-clearing.

John Muir strides arrogantly into the clearing to attempt to evict the ‘trespasser’ stooping down by the creek. It becomes obvious that Muir, here stripped of all the foliage of ‘green’ sensibility, is possessed by a landowner’s zeal to evict and, indeed, eradicate the footprints of the interloper. Harris reveals that it is Muir’s perception of ownership that is, in fact, perverted: it is Muir who plays the role of real intruder in the landscape of the rainforest. He is an agent of commercial colonisation, ‘the representative of the big mining company from [...] somewhere that has taken huge concessions on this territory to work gold and diamonds’. Harris’s Muir is out of tune with the harmonious ecosystem of forest life, a system to which the target of his rage so clearly belongs. The witness-narrator pronounces, literally, upon the rooted sense of belonging emanating from the forest web of life which provides the very antithesis to the desire to extract mineral wealth from the earth: ‘They [the trees] were so solid, so timeless. One seemed each moment to hear them quietly settling deeper and
deeper; their mighty roots thrusting farther and farther into the ancient earth’. The economic deeds of ownership from which Muir derives his furious ‘rights’ to the land are directly in opposition to the easy power of the dweller in his natural habitat. It is Muir’s desire for mastery over the topography of the forest, competing against the landscape, that signals the imminent collapse of the rhythmic co-operative world of his adversary: ‘He must impress upon him that he was master [...] “I shall drive you off the land. I shall chase you and your people off the land. I shall put up fences. Fences to keep you off”’. The narrator, eavesdropper to this outburst, senses the ‘courting violence’ in Muir that echoes the historical struggles for the South American interior. In this instance, Harris’s fiction reflects the insight of his literary essay ‘The Question of Form and Realism in the West Indian Artist’. Muir is not just a symbol for ecological and economic exploitation of the natural resources of the forest but, indeed, is made to re-enact the centuries-past conquest of the Americas by alien powers. He stands, the intruder in a timeless scene, a replica of the ‘individualism of an alien power’ that accelerated the demise of the Aztec civilisation. From here, we can understand this clash of persons in the rainforest clearing to be an early Harrisian interrogation of part of a cyclic struggle for definition of the position and power of humanity upon the face of the globe:

The structural potential and peril of the world, the structural understanding or growth of the world is related intimately

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12 Harris, ‘Fences Upon the Earth’, pp. 86-87.
13 ibid. p. 88.
to the human being [...] Yet this cosmic frailty brings terrifying
authority into human affairs [...] in terms of understanding and
protection, or in terms of anguish and exposure, depending on
the kind of world we build, the kind of living substance we
realize and cherish.\textsuperscript{14}

The fates of the forest, the folk, the country, and creation itself lie in the struggle
not only for the control of creek water or access to the land beneath the jungle
 canopy, but in a struggle of competing visions of consciousness: differing visions
of the role of being, of dwelling in the land. Muir symbolises the unseeing
community, an image which returns again and again in Harris's fiction. He
suffers a blindness in relation to the truth and the terms of man’s existence within
the natural world: ‘I could have cursed John Muir for his stupidity, for his lust,
for the blindness that lay in the midst of his strength and his ruthlessness.’\textsuperscript{15}
Here, rage veils the eyes of the contractor, he is blinded by the rapacious ‘Single
vision’ of generations, of the conquistador, the coloniser, the company.
Withstanding this cumulative onslaught of the company man is the first
embodiment of Harris’s interconnected vision, the forest-dweller. This figure, a
narrative enigma to some degree, is not granted any formal title by the author,
although for the purposes of this discussion ‘dweller’ seems fitting as it picks up
upon Jonathan Bate’s ecocritical reading of phenomenological elements of

\textsuperscript{14} Wilson Harris, ‘The Question of Form and Realism in the West Indian Artist’ in \textit{Tradition, the
\textsuperscript{15} Harris, ‘Fences Upon the Earth’, p. 88.
Heidegger's philosophy concerned with 'ruralistic' consciousness, of 'being' and 'belonging'. In addition, this borrowing of Heidegger's terminology applied to Harris's man of the forest is fitting given the Caribbean author’s obvious debt to the philosopher.

If Muir is the agent of 'unseeing' forces of exploitation, the dweller embodies the vision of a rhythm of interaction, 'part of the pattern of the dynamic earth' bearing 'the imprint of genius not the dead stamp of industrialization'. It is with this imprint of genius that the dweller can feel the rhythms of existence, the tight coupling of life and non-life, humanity and landscape, which enables the survival of the community:

Life, it would appear, realizes itself in potentiality and peril with the appearance of rhythm. In the 'cumulative force of rhythm' primitive peoples sought to dance 'the sprouting of the corn up out of the earth' or 'to constrain the white cumulus clouds that are slowly piling up

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16 'To be attuned is, for Heidegger, to dwell. “Mortals dwell in that they save the earth. [...] Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from spoliation”. This is in the strictest sense an ecopoetic'. Here, Bate is able to demonstrate the centrality of Heidegger's concept of dwelling and belonging in/to the land to ecocritical study. Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 263. See also Greg Garrard, 'Heidegger, Heaney and the problem of dwelling' in *Writing the Environment*, ed. by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998), pp. 167-181.

17 See C.L.R. James's ‘Introduction to Tradition and the West Indian Novel’ reprinted in Harris, *Tradition the Writer and Society*, pp. 69-75. Also, C. L. R. James, 'Discovering Literature in Trinidad' in *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings* (London: Allison and Busby Limited, 1980), in which James elucidates on the link in thought between Harris and Heidegger concerning the importance of language in man's understanding of being and time. Also in relation to Heidegger, see Michael Gilkes, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*. This seminal study discusses Harris' concern with psychic reintegration of man thrown into existence.

18 Harris, 'Fences Upon the Earth', p. 86.
the sky on a desert afternoon'. 19

The dweller possessed of this innate knowledge of balance is presented as the true owner of the forest. He stands ‘very easy and very quiet [...] by his own hearth, waiting to greet the stranger who is within his doors’ (this is the first depiction of a Harrisian heart(h)land). In actuality the viewer sees a physical fusion between the dweller and his surroundings: ‘dusky as the bark of the tree against which I was standing. [...] His limbs were powerful. They had the perfection of the young trees that stand rooted in the forests, breathing forth an ageless symmetry in their being.’ 20 Here, the dweller strikes the pose of the Haitian vodun dancer an image with which Harris equates balance and harmony in form and being:

He stands like a rising pole upheld by earth and sky or like a tree which walks in its own shadow or like a one-legged bird which joins itself to its sleeping reflection in a pool. All conventional memory is erased and yet in this trance of overlapping spheres of reflection a primordial or deeper function of memory begins to exercise itself. 21

19 Harris, Tradition, the Writer and Society, p. 18.
20 Harris, ‘Fences Upon the Earth’, p. 87.
21 Harris, Tradition, the Writer and Society, p. 51. Here, Harris connects the figure of interconnected vision with the image of the artist as a threshold figure, a conduit for the utterance of his community and at the same time privileged to inaccessible knowledge. Bridging the gap between Earth and cosmos, the artist is able to retrieve the once-communal memory or knowledge for the benefit of the community. This image illustrates both the dancer/dweller/artist’s inextricable connection to the land and his ability to think beyond the miring myopia that leads to the erasure of ‘conventional memory’. The responsibility of the writer extends beyond the boundaries of human community; the artist must be translator for all forms of life.
The dweller/dancer becomes part of his heartland, literally fused with the larger system of life. The ability to think beyond anthropocentrism leads to the erasure of ‘conventional memory’ and ultimate fusion of human consciousness with the living landscape. It is this moment of inextricability from the very trees he stands among which allows him to transcend the volatile provocations of the ‘bitter words’ of the alien power, Muir. Harris directly contrasts Muir’s facile claims to mastery or ownership over the Earth with the dweller’s ‘mastery that had seemed to me so patent and obvious a thing, part of his birthright’. Along with this birthright, the dweller is imbued with the dynamism of the landscape, ‘I remembered those horrible whirlpools one sees sometimes in dangerous rivers’. The dweller, through the momentary passing of his chthonic rage, becomes a twentieth-century example of the Romantic notion of the terrible and moral force of the natural world; the fluvial beds and water courses of the forest resist, and are reactive to the intrusion of Muir’s company designs. This vision of a resistive, redemptive even apocalyptic living landscape is granted to the narrator through his understanding of the rhythm or music of interdependent existence in the jungle gained through observation of the forest dweller.

That which the narrator becomes witness to, therefore, is not a purely temporal argument over use of the forest creek but an instance (and the first instance in Harris’s narratives) of the replaying grand contest for the future of the land; a struggle between the ‘unseeing’ exploitative desire for a vast ring-fenced, rubber-yielding, mineral-rich, production-site world (Genetic Mine) and the ‘pattern of the dynamic earth’, a world of ecosystems of living landscapes (Earth

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22 Harris, ‘Fences Upon the Earth’, p. 88.
family). 'Fences upon the Earth' in its explicit depiction of the grand struggle provides an excellent early example of authorial perception or vision of consciousness concerning the fate of the Earth. Consequently, the narrative mouthpiece for this vision, the witness-narrator figure, is arguably the most important character in the piece; it is through this figure that we can see the beginnings of a learned awareness and development of interconnected vision which is not only imprinted on to the psyches of many of Harris's narrative figures but which drives the radicalising and redemptive energies of his fiction.

The witness-figure is granted an affinity with systems of life in the forest which, although does not ally him completely with the dweller in the narrative, certainly, does set him apart form the discomforting image of John Muir. During his sojourn in the forest he seems to be granted, by the living forest itself, a privileged, enlightened perception as a result of the sympathetic nature of his seeing. His entry to the forest is framed by 'many bright sunbeams [...] clinging like innumerable butterflies to the high branches up at the top of the trees' and marks his entry into a new vision of consciousness marked and bestowed by this blessing of butterfly-light. The sandy soil under his feet contrives to make his approach discreet as if to facilitate his essential role of witness to the encounter between competing visions; and, to make the framing of his perception-altering experience complete, after the exchange he passes again under the enlightening influence of the sun-bright butterflies 'clinging to their precarious perch far up overhead on the tops of the mighty trees of the forest'.

23 ibid. pp. 86-89.
clearing, invites, to a certain extent, comparison with the pictorial framing of the plates of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Here we see Harris’s textual counterpart to Blake’s artistic framing in which the narrator views the dispute between Muir and the dweller as if a reader of Blake’s poems; looking under and through the borders of vegetation which, whilst providing definition and location for the vision, are also integral to the composition beyond it. Just as Blake’s frame is part of the composition of poem/print, so the narrator of ‘Fences Upon the Earth’ standing behind his veil of branches becomes implicated in and indivisible from the conflict he witnesses between, in Blakean dialectic, the ‘Devouring’ perception of Muir and the ‘Prolific’ or providing image of the dweller and his habitat.

The witness acts as precursor to many of the narrator-figures occurring in Harris’s novels (the narrator, the dreamer, the witness) a seemingly threshold-figure who paradoxically derives much of his power of perception from his very liminality. Muir is blind to the beauty of the forest whereas the witness-narrator is gifted with insight or second sight; he becomes, in every sense, a seer - ‘In a flash I saw the truth. I saw a little of the truth behind the miracle’ - his humility in understanding of the ‘thick forest’ refashions him, in this instant, as the visionary witness. It is useful to draw a parallel once more with the ‘The Writer and Society’, as the dweller fuses with the image of the balanced, horizontal vodun dancer; the witness here reflects the seer of the essay. Harris’s use of the Tiresias archetype also provides insight into the power and position lent to such

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25 ibid. p. 89.
liminal narrators in his fiction. The onlooker or eavesdropper, as reflection of the Greek seer, inhabits the edges of the worlds of experience and existence, but is privileged by this very liminality, granted a vision of interrelated consciousness that, while self-effacing and not wholly complete, is, in this instance, an essentially ecological one:

I am thinking of a kind of intense visualization within which one is drawn, or driven, to enter overlapping capacities of nature - one breaks as it were, the spell of the self-sufficient social animal; one breaks through, as it were, the one-sidedness of the self-sufficient social character [...] Tiresias inhabits such an overlap or marginal territory and thereby carries the creative burden of crisis and orientation [...] which may be visualized as the dichotomy of being masculine/feminine, animate as well as inanimate, death/life, positive/negative.  

So too, the witness becomes aware of the totality of being and cycles of existence; the connection between the ‘overlapping spheres’ of human life, non-human life and non-life. Consequently, he becomes the first to possess this understanding, an environmentally-visionary capacity gained by his proximity to the natural world. He sees the world with a radicalised new energy, the possibility of redemptive vision, a manifestation of Harris’s own environmental ethic.

26 Harris, *Tradition, the Writer and Society*, p. 51.
The articulation and dissemination of this focus, however, is revealed as problematic even in this brief narrative. The witness, in giving his testimony, struggles to find the appropriate form and capacity in which to reconstruct his experiences. Throughout the piece the onlooker's observations are peppered with concern about the inadequacies of the language and script with which he must relate the encounter. First, 'And now what words may I use to describe the feelings that came upon me at the sight', then, 'Many happenings in this world defy art or language, and this was one of those happenings', and finally, 'The words I have used are inadequate. Forgive me. I know it was inevitable that it should be so'.

He is Tiresias again, burdened with the 'crisis' of insight; the witness-seer must become narrator as well and is forced to acknowledge the lack of language in describing the experience of the ecological revolutions of nature. It seems here that Harris, through his narrator, is grappling with, in fact pre-empting, one of the essentially problematic elements of ecopoetics and criticism; how to give definition to and representation of the utterances of the non-human world. In this early, short narrative exploring humanity's belonging to, ownership of, and responsibility towards the land, Harris appears, in the final analysis, to come up against resistance to his vision in the very form of his writing - socially realistic prose. Returning once again to Heidegger, who asserts through Holderlin that

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27 Harris, 'Fences Upon the Earth', p. 86-89.
28 See: Bate, The Song of the Earth, p. 72. - 'The potential beneficiaries of an acknowledgement of the rights of nature - the land, the ocean, the polluted air, the endangered species - cannot however, speak for themselves [...] The ecocritical project always involves speaking for its subject rather than speaking as its subject: a critic may speak as a woman or a person of colour, but cannot speak as a tree'. Harris comes close to articulating this problem, perhaps, with his narrator's hesitancy.
‘poetically man dwells on this earth’, it may prove fruitful next to follow Harris’s vision of ecology through an examination of his own collection of poems.

_Eternity to Season_

It is possible to read this collection in the light of the perceived pre-occupations of Harris:

[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.\(^{29}\)

This poetic journey towards totality not only situates Harris again as the successor to Blake, it also further links his concerns with the necessary reintegration of man to his landscape; an attempt to root soul to soil. Blake’s mission to rescue humanity from the tyranny of divided forms and Harris’s interrogation of consciousness divided by the fracture of the history of the West Indies and the South American continent seem to stand together as part of a continuing purpose to remove the barrier to perception that veils ‘unseeing communities’. Both writers envisage alternative forms of consciousness with which to challenge Cartesian notions of duality of mind and body. Blake constructs his ‘spiritual atomism’ as a Romantic-poetic answer, and Harris

\(^{29}\) Gilkes, _Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel_, p. 3.
constructs an ecopoetic in *Eternity to Season* which comes to full fruition in *The Dark Jester* with the explicit opposition of his refashioning of an Atahualpan form.

Harris’s poetic investigation of this Blakean vision of a humanity severed from its spiritual roots necessitates a tracing of the physical and the psychic journey of the human mind. Essential to the survival of human consciousness is a profound (re)connection with the land and the understanding that an anthropocentric notion of survival is indivisible from the survival of all life that comprises the connected systems of being on Earth. Consequently, the poetry fuses the journeyed, mythic-history of human dislocation, dispossession and enforced exile (defeat at Troy, the destruction of Aztec civilisation, crossing the Middle Passage) to the plight of the non-human life on the planet; the perpetuation of being is dependent on a psychic connection with and understanding of the rhythms of the landscape, the cycles of life and indeed the physical survival of the rainforests themselves.

The depiction of this journey towards completeness or totality (of fragmented being and harmony with the land) links the instances of Troy, of the Aztec age and of the Atlantic Trade to the process of ecology of the planet; in addition, it also explores notions of both ‘odyssey’ and ‘homecoming’. *Eternity to Season* therefore can be read as a literary transcription of humanity’s attempt to articulate its way back into the system of nature through an exploration of the notion of mythic-historical homecomings:

Harris uses the Greek myths to reinforce his structure and extend
Meaning [...] the classical story of a man leaving a decayed civilisation (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 older cultures of Europe, mastering the forces, threatening disintegration [...] to final self-discovery.\(^{30}\)

Through Harris’s poetry then, Troy echoes across the South American savannahs and the reflections of its razed ruins lie in the river courses of the forest; European myth is indivisible from the contours of the ‘new world’s’ natural architecture. This indivisibility of man and myth from natural relief recalls the poetics of Holderlin viewed through Heidegger’s lens, and refocused by the ecocritical analysis of Bate. Holderlin, presenting a leitmotif of Romanticism casts his poet as seer (counterpart to Harris’s Tiresias, perhaps) and in his essay ‘Remembrance of the Poet’, Heidegger connects this seer-traveller to the landscape expressing the joyousness in homecoming.\(^{31}\) For Harris, however, this image of a homecoming is disturbed as it is given a discomforting sense of precariousness. Whilst the poetic voices emerging from *Eternity to Season* undergo psychic journeys to articulate homecomings which, in part, contribute to a reintegration of the human consciousness with the landscape and allow some semblance of a state of dwelling to occur, Harris offers no easy vision of agrarian bliss or rustic Germanic dwelling. In the place of the comforting images of ideal

\(^{30}\)ibid, p. 7.

old world ‘volkish’ existence, Harris weaves a vision of a frayed, unravelling tapestry of identity in the post-Columbian Americas. This travelling toward totality (and, related to it, the conception of the ‘seeing organic community’ which can reconstruct the divided human image through self-discovery and awareness of a position within the interdependent system of being) is a developing journey. It involved both moving forward and looking backward, at the history of the peoples and landscapes of the island and mainland worlds that comprise the Caribbean.

Homer, Goethe, Shelley and Jacques Monod, the quartet of voices with which Harris chooses to begin his collection, reflect the shifting tapestry of existence which is framed within the covers of the collection *Eternity to Season*. The course of Penelope’s shuttle mirrors the mass movements of people across the seas (Atlantic and Mediterranean) and, in addition, across Goethe’s ‘loom of time’. This ‘mighty web’ of man’s migration is all contained within the ecosystems of the Earth, Shelley’s human history - ‘the web of human things’ - and is suspended inside ‘Nature’s vast frame’. It represents the history of the whole planet. The transience of one brief existence, human or animal, is, paradoxically, emblematic of the continuity of life as a whole stretching back over aeons. Monod provides a vision of a natural history literally petrified and preserved in the earth: ‘Every living being is also a fossil’. It is these utterances that literally and metaphorically provide the framework of the collection, the interconnectedness of man and nature across space and time.

The poem ‘Troy’ presents the figure of Hector, a cthronic vision of the defeated hero who is as rooted in the ‘gravel and dry earth’ of the plain of Troy
as he is re-figured, across time and continent, in the Guyanese landscape. He is
given the vision to know that in order to be freed he must perish:

So he must die first to be free [...]

[...] a visionary: smarting tears

of the salty earth [...] 

[...] and death waits in the guise of immortality.32

The history of war is linked to natural earth: ‘This is the controversial tree of
time / beneath whose warring branches the sparks of history fall’. The land on
which such battles were played out stands as testament to ‘the barbaric conflict
of man’ (the war at Troy, the conquest of the Americas). This is the conception
of Harris’s organic mythology: Hector, in gaining understanding of the
‘inscrutable history’ to gain the insight/foresight of Tiresias, must subsume
himself into the very vegetation of landscape. Here is a tendrilised, brachial
figure:

The working muses of time nourish Hector

hero of time: small roots move

greener leaves to fathom the earth...

Solid or uprooted in pain, his bright limbs

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p. 11.
must yield their glorious intentions to the secret

root of the heart

This is not the Romantic homecoming, there is no poetic union between soul and soil as envisaged by Holderlin, but a more exacting contract with the earth - the history of the colonised land wracking the body of the defeated hero. Hector’s reconstruction and, indeed understanding of human history, comes through a painful unity with the arboreal:

So Hector knows the trunk of man, the branches of heroes and gods

Foreshadowing the labour of all

Hector’s identification with the land situates him in the position of the dweller. Fused with the trees of the forest it appears as though the role of defeated hero perpetuates itself in the image of the Trojan warrior. Just as the narrative course of ‘Fences Upon the Earth’ leaves a sense of imminent destruction in its wake, so now Harris combines the images of the beaten fighter and the exploited landscape. In this collection, however, another, even more powerful vision of Harris’s ocean-like rainforest emerges:

The world-creating jungle

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33 ibid. p. 11.
34 ibid. p. 12.
travels eternity to season. Not an individual artifice -
this living moment
this tide
this paradoxical stream and stillness rousing reflection.

The living jungle is too full of voices
not to be aware of collectivity
and too swift with unseen wings
to capture certainty35

These stanzas from 'Amazon' reveal that Harris's Hector is a product of a
'world-creating' space, a jungle that is the cradle for life and creates myth; it is a
citadel of living wood within which the interdependence, 'collectivity', of
various forms of life is acknowledged. Here, we have the 'lungs of the globe'
also depicted as 'the storehouse of heaven', the physical and biological
importance of necessity fusing with a spiritual valuation and validation of 'the
living jungle'. Harris presents the essential crucible of life in this poem; the trees
which once whispered their secret to Harris36 reach up in the vodun dancer pose
and, 'tender to heaven the beauty / of the world'. The colours and images of the
forest mirror and connect to the atmosphere above, and indeed the spaces
beyond. As Blake's pictorial rock upon which the unseeing Newton is heavily
seated reflects galaxies in its submarine variety, so too does the poetic reflection

35 ibid. p. 15.
36 Wilson Harris, 'Tell me, Trees! What are you Whispering?' in Kyk-Over-Al, 1.1 (December 1945), p. 10.
of Harris’s jungle connect the microcosm of flower petal displays to celestial orbs of the macrocosmos:

Green islands

and bright leaves lift their blossom of sunrise

And the setting sun wears a wild rose like blood\textsuperscript{37}

Here, then, we have a pronounced expression of authorial ecological philosophy, the interconnection of human life with all life on Earth and beyond. Harris continues to demonstrate understanding of the \textit{modus operandi} of the rainforest ecology and the mythic world it creates within the human psyche with his presentation of the images of forest fire. The poet combines the image of this natural art of the forest’s cycle of regeneration with the spectre of a more serious threat. The forest waits, expectant of the rhythm of balances which ensure its perpetuity - ‘the trees’ black hands are outstretched in patience’ - these trees, mirroring Hector’s gained understanding of the cyclic nature of existence in ‘Troy’, are similarly aware that elements of the system must perish to ensure its overall survival. Alongside this vision of natural destruction and regeneration, however, sits the figure of the ‘massive fury’, a portent, perhaps, of the possibility of man-made destruction of unbalancing proportions. The singed wings of the birds that fly out from this canopy of red flowers and ‘fan the burning air’ at once seem both to escape and to encourage the natural fires. They also flee from the motionless apparition of human interference in the form of the

\textsuperscript{37} Harris, \textit{Eternity to Season}, p. 15.
winged figure of fury; itself ready to disturb ‘The deep spirit of innocence’. This Fury, another imaginative exile from the world of Greek mythology, is however, a slightly more complex figure to consider in the pantheon of Harris’s imagination. She represents, even here, more than just the destructive impulses of man. In ‘Amazon’, as a seeming catalyst for the burning of forests, the fury represents not only conflagrations to come (and the defeat of Hector, the triumph of John Muir) but also, like the forest fire itself, she offers opportunity for imaginative regeneration of vision: the double possibility of destruction and redemption. Harris’s Furies are, on the one hand, the progeny of Blake’s demons of progress forged in the furnaces of the Industrial Revolution and representative(s) of the continuation of technologies of destruction and conquest. He writes:

within the past three hundred years since the Industrial Revolution
we have seen, through the historical lenses that we posses, the action
of man-made instruments and machines in the miring of the globe
on a scale that seems extraordinary, to say the least, when it invokes
comparison with the loss of species and changes in the environments
within millennia prior to what is called the Enlightenment38

These same Furies also offer, however, a certain chance at ecological insight to those caught up in their frenzied storm:

38 Wilson Harris, ‘Apprenticeship to the Furies’ in Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, pp. 226-236 (p. 228).
A one-track mind-set or psychology of brute realism is undeniable in many areas of the globe [...] take stock of revenge-syndromes in ruthless competition and trade [...] the abuse of the elements has set in train changing weather patterns, storm, famine drought. But I am suggesting that the Furies also bring a most searching scrutiny into things [...] they also bring long-neglected keys which are pertinent to a literacy of the imagination [...] Such paradox is native to the genius of creation, it is native to a buried core-response within communities in the womb of space and time and the tasks of regeneration of our age.39

The shade-like presence of the fury in ‘Amazon’ has the possibility of radicalising energy to alter or see beyond the occluding cataracts of the ‘Single vision’ which the modern world has inherited.

The commotion of the jungle continues in its ‘succession of movements, so vast and precise’. Its voices, fires, blossoms, waterfalls, the kinetic energy of all forms and forces of nature, seem to operate in order to create worlds of poetic and mythic imagination. This is the jungle that creates Blake’s ‘tigers of wrath’ and re-figures them in The Whole Armour, the jungle that will play host to the horses of instruction ridden into the continent by the pillaging figure of Francisco Pizarro in The Dark Jester.

The creation of an ecopoetic in this collection sees Harris investigate the forms and status of ‘nature poetry’ itself. As Blake explored and exploded conventional visions of ‘Nature’, landscape and poetry in his own time, the

39 ibid, pp. 235-236.
Caribbean writer, here, attempts to capture the rhythm and movement of a natural world he feels has never truly been captured in its totality. If Blake set out his poetic manifesto for a version of ‘Romantic Ecology’ in *Auguries of Innocence*, then *Eternity to Season* is its twentieth century counterpart, and even the title of Harris’s collection echoes the opening lines of Blake’s verse:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower:
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour⁴⁰

The world of the jungle encompasses creation in all its forms from particles of rock-dust to the wild flowers that connect the poetic voice to the celestial; this forest seems to alter time itself and is able to ‘cut inner and outer / times from each other’. The totality of existence, both spatial and temporal, prophesied by Blake, manifests itself here. As Harris explains, any form of ecopoetry must do more than capture the still-camera-shot moment of static nature:

It is legitimate to conceive of nature poetry as seeking to realise a verbal snapshot of unchanging tree or mental stamp of flower or beast, unchanging in that the poem is convinced it sees nature as it truly is [...] But such exactitude is a fossil apparition. The fire of autumn that

inscribes itself into a dead leaf to look brilliant and
alive is a foretaste of winter, and forecasts the caged,

if not dead, sun\textsuperscript{41}

Language cannot distil the image of nature unless it can capture the potentiality of its recurring rhythms and cycles, the ever-present seed of what is to come; *Eternity to Season* attempts to express this spirit of revolution. The collection does more than capture still-shots of nature, it explores Monod’s contention that every living being is a fossil, traces the statement backwards and ties the history of aeons, and of the land, with the living human history from which they are indivisible.

As an agent of the seeing community of the ‘land of many waters’, the visionary ‘Tiresias’ appears again in this collection and it is here where the most explicit binding of soul to soil can be seen. The seer, visited by the wandering spirit of Odysseus, reveals the inextricable mesh of human and environmental history. The account of travel across the Atlantic by countless slaves unwillingly forsaking the ‘gold coast’ for an iron-fettered existence is related to the mislocated wanderer, himself fully aware of the impact of exile. The colonial heritage sung of in ‘Tiresias’ binds the very landscape itself, at once witness to the history of human bondage with the ‘old slave lanes’ ringed by ‘ancient trees’ and at the same instance finding its own freedom also threatened, the ague of

legacies of dispossession palpable in ‘Chains of fever in bone and bark’. Tiresias, in his role as master of ambivalent experience, becomes the exponent of Harris’s desire for a psychic reintegration of peoples with landscape in the Caribbean through interconnected vision or organic perception. He sees the myriad racial heritage of Cumberland and, in actuality, the nation, and offers a redemptive vision from a history of suffering and fragmentation of being brought about by ecological understanding. The Harrisian counterpart to Blake’s spiritual atomism lies in Tiresias’s awareness of the ‘minute particulars’; the particles of nature which enable enlightenment, re-connection and release for the community:

Freedom is a dusty passage
from sunrise to sunset impregnated with endless
particles that bloom and stress
the visions that are nearest or far
complexity. They unbind master and slave,
owner, ownerless.\(^{42}\)

The old man’s perceptive reading of history and landscape rooted in a ‘cosmic tree in the bowels of the earth’ reveals that ‘Blue sky is in his head / where a bird melts in heaven / and deposits a cloud-feather’. Here, once more, the figure blessed with an interconnected vision, a sight beyond the mundane, connects the

\(^{42}\) Harris, *Eternity to Season*, p. 31.
depths of Earth to the skies; he possesses a comprehension of the totality of physical existence bound to psychological or spiritual understanding.

In the amalgamation of ‘new world’ myths of language and landscape with the wanderers of the classical Greek world, the poet elaborately attempts to turn the brutality of an enforced exile into the creation of a ‘heartland’ for the multi-racial communities occupying the land of the Guyanas. This is achieved through an exploration of totality of vision concerning humanity and its connection to the natural world. It is a vision of the interdependent communities of the human, the non-human and even the sculpture of the living Earth; a vision of life and land ‘neither raw Nature nor romantic symbol of an unspoilt world, but [...] a symbolic chaos out of which all creations are fashioned’. 43 Eternity to Season with its visionary voices and rooted figures of the world of forest-myth presents Harris’s early endeavour to establish, if not a history of ‘joyous homecoming’ out of the fractured memories of exile, exodus and enslavement, then at least to unify humanity to landscape in such a way that the potentiality to ‘dwell poetically’ becomes a reality.

In this conception of Harris’s narratives of ecological imagination, it becomes apparent that the author’s vision of ‘new ways’ of reading the history of the Guyanas is in a state of continuation, an undertaking in progress, or an ‘unfinished genesis’. Over the course of two decades, Harris reworked the collection in significant ways and he even returns to the question of poetic form in the novel that followed The Guyana Quartet. In the postscript to Heartland, the scorched ruin of Stevenson’s resthouse yields fragments of the poems ‘Troy’

and ‘Amazon'; the dancing embers of ash and partially erased script reflect not only Harris’s restless attention to the poems, his constant striving for a form faithful to his vision, but also symbolise the smoke-like diffusion of their images, ideas, visions and power into the world of his novels that follow.44

_Palace of the Peacock_

The tension between the dwelling communities of Guyana and those of intrusion and fracture which is apparent in both ‘Fences Upon the Earth’ and _Eternity to Season_ is the driving force behind the manifold journeys of vision in _Palace of the Peacock_.

The relationship between those figures who see with the occlusion of Newtonian ‘Single vision’, and those who possess the vision of interconnection, provides juxtaposed angles of incision into the forest heartland of the novel and, also, scores out the lines of the template for the following novels of _The Guyana Quartet_. This opposition of views of being in the land illuminates the centrality of ecological thinking to Harris’s writing. In retrospect, it is useful, if not essential, to view the whole corpus of his twenty four novels, poetry and essays as part of a ‘long work’ of sustained and profound voice and vision:

‘Yes, I have completed _The Mask of the Beggar,_’ Wilson Harris wrote in a letter late in 2002, and added, ‘I feel reasonably happy with it. I look back and wonder how I wrote it - it brings the long

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work I have been doing more or less to an "end".\textsuperscript{45}

If, in \textit{The Mask of the Beggar} Harris’s ‘own art and ideas about cross-culturality and ecology comprise the principal substance’ it is from the earliest writings and first novel of \textit{Palace of the Peacock} that such a focus begins. Indeed, as Zulfikar Ghose demonstrates this ‘long work’ is inextricably linked to visions and revisions of Harris’s rainforest heartland, ‘Some of the other novels are set in England and Scotland, adding a superficial variety to landscapes where the action is consistently of a transcendental nature, but even there the rainforest’s dream-world remains a throbbing presence in the background’.\textsuperscript{46}

Evident in \textit{Palace of the Peacock}, then, is the unfinished genesis of an ecological imagination which, on the part of the author, contributes to an understanding of the total history of the land. Such an understanding is indivisible from an interaction with the landscapes of Guyana and awareness of the precarious liminality of human existence:

The people of the Guiana coastland inhabit a narrow boat filled with carefully nurtured earth and anchored at the middle of the boundary line between two great oceans. For the savannah and forest at their backs make up, really, another ocean, as severe, beautiful and monotonous as the huge Atlantic on to which they look. The bulwarks of this ‘boat’ are the anxiously maintained erections of sea-walls,

\textsuperscript{45} Zulfikar Ghose, ‘Reading Wilson Harris’s \textit{The Mask of the Beggar}’ in \textit{Context: A Forum for Literary Arts and Culture}, 14, pp. 8-9, (p. 8).
\textsuperscript{46} ibid. p. 8.
dykes and sluice gates which, on both sides, protect them from
the creeping intrusion of the ocean or from mass attack of flood
water from the jungle rivers. [...] The ocean before them is not the
inviting and familiar meadow that it is for, say the people of the
Eastern Caribbean: an element which, for all its dangers, has become
a cherished part in the design of West Indian life. It is the interior
behind them (the forest, the savannah, the great and dangerous rivers)
that is the significant other part of the Guianese landscape [...] an
endless, regular surface of tree tops (broken occasionally by a loop
of a browny black river) stretching unbearably to the edge of the world.\footnote{John Hearne, `The Fugitive in the Forest: A Study of Four Novels by Wilson Harris' in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No. 4 (December, 1967), 99-112 (p. 100).}

The journey towards awareness of `a total history' in many of Harris’s novels,
and in particular \textit{Palace of the Peacock}, involves voyaging into this ocean
interior of forest space. The crew’s travels into the confluence and then up the
rivers of Guyana into the forest is symptomatic of Harris’s own mission to
narrate the total history of the land. As the crew push further into the interior in
search of the indigenous `folk' (who in this novel represent the experience of the
self in harmony with the universe\footnote{Drake, p .88.}) Harris is simultaneously charting a two-fold
journey: first, back beyond the history of colonialism, the moment of `discovery'
of Americas by Europe, and also, back beyond the boundaries of merely human
utterance. For Harris the human is part of a larger natural world and singularly

\footnote{John Hearne, `The Fugitive in the Forest: A Study of Four Novels by Wilson Harris' in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No. 4 (December, 1967), 99-112 (p. 100).}
\footnote{Drake, p .88.}
human knowledge can only ever be partial. This dual journey or mission as it appears in *Palace of the Peacock* engages, therefore, with the pre-Columbian history of the continent and the non-human natural history of the world. In the depiction of such journeys of interiorisation, Harris engages with the history and ecology of the rainforest in a way that goes beyond the poetic metaphor of Hearne’s forest-ocean. He demonstrates in his fiction how the swathes of forest lands are not merely ocean-like with tree tops undulating in tidal fashion, a counterpart to the brackish Atlantic, but rather have been, and will be, and are the ocean:

The heat-waves upon sand and forest were intense: they re-moulded and shattered everything - rising and falling contours - fluid/solid - water - fire - cauldron of space... *In truth the ocean had once crawled here upon an ancient continental shelf and climbed still higher beyond Tumatumari to its farthest limits - the escarpment of Kaieteur....* [...]

...the heart of the waterfall, ocean as well as continent....

Here, in *Tumatunari*, Harris provides one such instance of eloquent understanding of the life and ages of the planet; ice ages, tectonic shifts, aeons all impact on and mutate the physical states of the Earth. Harris unpicks

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50 Harris, *Tumatunari*, p. 54.
supposedly fixed notions of form and being, and shows a universe in flux. The journey back through time, through the forest of ages, is essential to an understanding of the truth of total, interconnected history: for Harris the forest is ocean just as for Walcott man is fish. In this way his philosophical poetic goes beyond the use of mere metaphor (likeness is pushed to its logical limits and in effect transforms into is-ness) and gives to his readers the power to transform the way they see the history of interconnection of the planet.

*Palace of the Peacock* then, is a narrative that seeks not just to re-map geographical boundaries imposed by the colonial victors of human history, but also one which seeks, above all, to provide a template from which we can re-map our perceptions of the living Earth. The Dreamer at first depends upon the cartographical representations of ‘the lumps of rock that are called nations’ for a sense of assurance. He later becomes aware that the lines of demarcation by Mercator’s hand dissolve rapidly in the face of the enormousness of the extra-human forest. This is an entity that goes beyond the map-makers definition of national boundaries and colonial governance: ‘I pored over the map of the sun my brother had given me. The river of the savannahs wound its way far into the distance until it had forgotten the open land. The dense dreaming forest

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51 See, ‘Natural History: I / The Walking Fish’ in Walcott, *Sea Grapes*, pp. 36-39 The poet contemplates the course of evolution over ‘every geological epoch’ and how all animal life is descended from the stunned form of a fish on the sand: ‘It did not move. I could not look away. / It was here I began’ (p. 36). Here, from Harris and Walcott, are parallel demonstrations of the reality of transformable form and being that lies behind the poetic un-fixing of narrow or static notions of origin; just as the history of the Americas before 1492 needs to be considered so too must the history of human evolution and metamorphosis of the land be understood.

52 Derek Walcott in conversation at The Heaventree Press reading, West Indian Centre, Coventry, 5 March 2004. Speaking of the dangers of nationalism as a divisive force Walcott remarked on the folly of chunks of land being divided into nations, ‘The absurdity of those rocks being called nations. It’s an absurdity we have chosen to forget’.
emerged. The water-courses of the interior defy any other definition than the 'map of the sun' in its role as agent of all life on the planet, and the very landscape itself overtakes the protagonists' attempts to chart or to navigate it. Indeed, the crew become hunted by the very elements of a sentient Earth that seeks to disavow exploitation and inscription:

It was impossible to turn back now and leave the crew in the wild inverse stream of beginning to live again in a hot and mad pursuit in the midst of imprisoning land and water and ambushing forest and wood. (27)

Thus ambushed, those that seek to circumscribe the land out of a self-serving desire for quantification or control are brought to account by the extra-human history of the land. Donne's crew, in their attempts to navigate their craft as they choose along the web of waterways, become emblematic of the colonial and then national governments that seek to steer through select channels of historiography of the Caribbean. In not considering, and then falling foul of, the tidal breaths of the river concourse, and by ignoring the guidance of the Amerindian communities the crew symbolise the guilty inscriptions of Caribbean reality that have ignored pre-Columbian and extra-human elements. As a result Donne's men are seemingly punished for this partial vision, a lack of foresight and of insight. It is this partial vision in negotiating the historiography of the Americas

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that perpetrates the binary opposites and divisive readings which, for Harris, intensify the crisis of vision for communities:

It is very easy for a society to overturn an oppressor, but it is equally easy for those who overturned the oppressor to become the oppressor in turn. If one polarizes the world dreadfully then one is no longer in a position to understand who the oppressor is, how he relates to one, who the oppressed are, how the oppressed relate to one [...] The very uncertainties that lie behind South American history may become a pregnant resource. There are many cultures in South America, Central America which have disappeared; we do not know why or how; we do not know how those cultures came into being.\textsuperscript{54}

Suffering from such a collective blind-spot to continental history, artists need to beware of divisive polarisation in representations of the history of the land whether it be in national, political terms or in terms of the brutalisation of the natural world.\textsuperscript{55} Harris articulates the need to examine the ‘pregnant resource’ of a world that comes from narrating back beyond the easy acceptance of notions of origin. Only then can the partial, polarising views which perpetuate and replicate the cycles of brutality, which have replaced colonial enslavement with neocolonial systems of violence, be countered. It is clear, across centuries of

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{54} Wilson Harris, ‘Literacy and Imagination - A Talk’ in \textit{Selected Essays of Wilson Harris}, pp. 75-89 (p. 85).
\textsuperscript{55} ‘Nothing was settled without a visionary language to re-interpret the ruined fixities of recorded history that baffled gaolers and prisoners alike and kept them divided and in place’ - Wilson Harris, \textit{The Mask of the Beggar} (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2003), p. 85.}
American experience, that those who seek to exploit the resources of the natural world for profit are as guilty as those who seek to program accounts of history for political gain and that such self-serving searching for supremacy leads to indiscriminate savagery, in human and natural terms, whether it be at the hands of Pizarro or John Muir, the figure of Donne or the activities of transnational corporations.

If Donne exemplifies such partial, rapacious attitudes to the history of the land and seeks domination over everything he encounters, then there are also counterpoints of sensitivity to the living landscapes of the forest (moments that arrest the progression and incursion of ‘Single vision’) embodied foremost in the figure of Vigilance, but also, progressively, conjured up by the Dreamer on his own journey towards interconnected vision. These figures represent the totality of sight that Harris demands in order to see the true complexity in history of the Caribbean communities, and to heal the fracture of polarised, programmed ideologies. It is necessary, therefore, to follow the courses of the intruding ideology of Donne and the resistant interconnected viewpoints within Palace of the Peacock and, also, to consider the concluding ascent of the Falls and its revelation of the evolution of Harris’s ecological vision.

Donne’s declaration that he is ‘the last landlord’ marks him out as the emissary of colonial, masculine and anthropocentric violence brought deep into the heartland - ‘I tell you I fight everything in nature, flood, drought, chicken hawk, rat, beast and woman.’(22) - and, as brutal representative of attempts to convert his crew to his conquistadorial method: “‘Rule the land,” he said, “while you still have a ghost of a chance. And you rule the world’”(23). The persuasive
power of an easy violence of superiority as method diffuses amongst all the crew to a lesser or greater extent. Wishrop, perhaps more than most, bears the mark of Donne’s tutelage. As miner turned murderer he ‘had dared to kill what he had learnt to hate’ and ‘overwhelmed by a final spasm of murderous fury’ he shoots ‘the poor Arawak woman, his muse and benefactress’. In this way, Wishrop becomes the focus for the collective need for violence in the crew as they progress; the strange affirmation that they receive from his vehemence indicates that there is something redemptive in the violence of death and its spectre that accompanies them into the forest: ‘they fed upon his brief confessions and ravings as the way of a vicarious fury and freedom and wishful action they had known’(57). Wishrop reflects the ever-present violence inherent in a nature that is ‘red in tooth and claw’, part of the cycle of existence. However, the possibility of redemptive violence is balanced on both sides, first by Donne’s brutal mastery through might and then through instances which reveal the sacrilegious nature of unnecessary and overweening displays of destruction.

As the search nears its conclusion, the crew take the sighting of parrots on the wing as a good omen and daSilva believes that one of the flock is the very bird, belonging to his mistress, which he used to feed by hand. Cameron, succumbing to a moment of needless sport, as a jest to bait daSilva, flings a stone aimlessly:

The stone had cut air and flesh and it fell. But on fluttering upon the water it recovered itself instantly and wings flashed and soared. The whole flock rose in swelling protest higher and higher until all dwindled
in the sky at the top of the wall

“Miss,” Cameron cried.

“You wounded it,” Donne said quietly. (89)

This needless moment of aggression, like that of the marksman who downs the albatross, exacts a heavy payment in compensation. DaSilva’s intense identification with the bird leads him to believe that he himself has been harmed:

“‘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 we. You murderer!’” In the scuffle that follows, Cameron is equally needlessly stabbed; there is to be no life-in-death or opportunity for redemption for the Harrisian mariner. Indeed, the punishment for Cameron’s moment of destructive impulse seems to ensure the disaster of the mission; the good omen of the parrot is, through the violence of mastery, transformed into the omen that seals the crew’s fate. This episode is a microcosmic example of the effect of Donne’s desire for complete control of the land; the act of violence against the bird here is magnified and becomes a struggle between human crew-members which, ultimately, dooms them all. The myopic destruction of the living landscape spirals into the violence of human self-destruction.

The crewman Vigilance stands at one remove from the violence of mastery and desire for control, positioned at the bow of boat, his encounter with the same flock of parrots contrasts starkly in effect: ‘A dense flock of parrots wheeled and flew and a feather settled on Vigilance’s cheek with a breath of life’. (85) This is the first of a series of moments of blessings that occur
throughout *The Guyana Quartet* and which befall Harris’s figures bestowed from the ‘world-creating jungle’. From this feather-kiss from the birds of the forest, Vigilance undergoes a baptism of natural awareness and ecological understanding; the history of the land is laid open to him and he sees it in full with heightened senses and critical insight:

> They wheeled closer and nearer until he saw the white fire of feathers - around their baiting eye, giving them a wise inquisitive expression and look - and the green fire on their bubbling wing as they rose from the stream and the cliff and the sun [...] Nevertheless he was the one most alive and truly aware of everything. He saw differently and felt differently to the way the herd slept in the innocent stream of death [...] Vision and idea mingled into a sensitive carnival that turned the crew into the fearful herd where he clung with his eye of compassion [...] The light of space changed, impinging upon his eyeball and lid numerous grains of sound and motion that were the suns and moons of all space and time. (85)\(^5^6\)

Vigilance achieves the Blakean sense of comprehension of interrelation between microscopic and macrocosmic, and Harris here echoes and remoulds the opening

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56 This episode mirrors the experience of awakening undergone by Tiresias in *Eternity to Season*, the deposited ‘cloud-feather’ that brings insight. In addition, Harris expands upon the idea of the fallen parrot feather as symbol and tool of interconnected vision and sustainable survival in ‘Music of Living Landscapes’: ‘They [Amerindians] baited their fisherman’s hook with a rainbow feather from a macaw or a parrot [...]. Feather from a wing and eager fish were united, it seemed, into an orchestra of species and a sacrament of subsistence they (these ancient peoples) had long cultivated’ in, *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, p. 41.
Vigilance, ‘shrewd of eye, reading the river’s mysterious book’(25), is the figure most predisposed to such visionary awareness of total history of the land, as his role of lookout confirms. Throughout the voyage and, in actuality, the course of his own life Vigilance has not merely seen but read the landscape: ‘The past returned to him like the pure fictions of rock he had never wearied spying upon since childhood’(69). Only by heeding his cry do the crew avoid the semi-submerged points of ambushing rock: ‘They bowed and steered in the nick of time away from the evasive, faintly discernible whose meek moon-patch heralded corrugations and thorns and spears we dimly saw in a volcanic and turbulent bosom of water’(32). Indeed, it is Vigilance’s ability to read the river’s own ‘mysterious book’, to translate the history of the land as it appears to narrate itself that culminates in his anagnoristic moment of interconnected vision. The insight of Vigilance, his ability to read the ‘pregnant resource’ of natural and human history, seems to be placed by Harris in opposition to the Donne-like imposition of the partial polarisations and self-serving simplifications of ‘Single vision’.

The Dreamer negotiates his own journey of perception between these two visions of the history of the land. He is driven partly by the conquistador’s ‘one-track mind-set’ but also, at the onset of the mission, has the opportunity to embrace an interconnected vision:

I stopped for an instant overwhelmed by a renewed force of
consciousness of the hot spirit and moving spell in the tropical undergrowth. 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.(28)

This moment of passing contact with the living landscape generates paralysing fear rather than the liberating comprehension experienced by Vigilance. The Dreamer seems, at this point, aware of the need to assert a form of dwelling consciousness but, seeing with partial vision, is hindered by his inability to articulate fully this desire. In fact, such a need is similarly realised but frustrated in the minds of all the crew. The words of Cameron - ‘You realize these Mission folk is the only people who got the real devil of a title to this land’(41) - are taken up by the Dreamer who is at the beginnings of understanding that Arawak history is the legitimate and connected history of the community dwelling in the land - “‘We’re all outside of the folk”, I said musingly. “Nobody belongs yet....”’ - and attempts to assert a connected vision of unity: “‘And somebody,” I declared, “must demonstrate the unity of being, and show ...” I had grown violent and emphatic ... “that fear is nothing but a dream and an appearance ... even death ... “ I stopped abruptly’. (52) The disruption of expression is a clear reflection of the Dreamer’s, as yet, partial understanding of the total history of the forest lands. He moves towards comprehension of totality and away from the conquistadorial vision of Donne as he gives himself up to Vigilance’s perception and guidance. The Dreamer gains access to his sensitive reading of history
through landscape, he is able to look over the ‘crowded’ but overlooked history of the Amerindian presence in the Americas which is demonstrated through the post-Columbian emptiness and silence engendered by genocidal invasion. The treatment of the Arawak woman who accompanies Donne’s crew seems symptomatic of the atrocities suffered by indigenous populations and, furthermore, her actions and reactions reinforce the centrality of pre-Columbian and extra-human understanding. Like Hector from ‘Troy’, she is a figure who seems to fuse with the landscape itself, becoming the true reflection of the riverflow and agent of its swirling energies:

> The sudden dreaming fury of the stream was naught else but the ancient spit of all flying insolence in the voiceless and terrible humility of the folk. 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. (62)

She becomes the very resistive utterance of the land summoning the swell of the War Office rapids and, as waterway, land, woman, Arawak, harmonises the interconnected history of a ravaged Guyana. Everything that has been savaged by

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57 ‘I looked over his dreaming shoulder into the savannahs that reached far away into the morning everywhere [...] One had an intuitive feeling that the savannahs - though empty - were crowded.’ (111)
Donne and his antecedents and offspring is brought to account in the battering rapids. She becomes the ‘pregnant resource’ of the continent that has been coerced and brutalised by the crew at their own cost. Implicit in the actions of the Arawak woman as river-rapids is a narrative reaction to the extensive memory of betrayal in the Americas which has stemmed from the furious vision of Donne, Pizarro, Cortez. This memory is addressed in Harris’s ‘long work’ from *Palace of the Peacock* to *The Mask of the Beggar* as the nameless artist testifies, ‘The atrocities perpetrated on Native Americans were dismissed as though they had never occurred: atrocities perhaps worse than the Holocaust. Four hundred treaties were signed with Native Americans. All were broken. Business reasons, land grabbing, etc.’

The destruction of the works of art of the communities of Aztecs and Incas that were an integral part of the colonial atrocities extinguishes the possibility of learning from the ‘pregnant resource’ of total history - ‘Many of their so-called savage arts - which were grounded in fear and cosmic emotion - could teach us much about the perils of humankind. But they were destroyed in a lust for gold and land. Even as today many foreign artistic premises are stricken in a lust for oil’.

Harris demonstrates how the destruction of European expansion into the Americas from the sixteenth century was inextricable from the ecocidal urge for control and exploitation of the land, and reveals the replicated urges of violence and desire for control in contemporary economic-military incursions in the Middle East.

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58 Harris, *The Mask of the Beggar*, p. 98.
59 Wilson Harris, ‘The Brutalisation of Truth’ (as yet unpublished).
Donne’s mission culminates in the ascent of the falls and the moment of revelation that it yields. All the narrative possibilities, patternings and repetitions of many lives, many deaths, many women, many voyages are brought together to a point of unity and constancy under the guidance of the living Earth. Awareness of the sentience of the landscape itself is paramount to the understanding of interconnected history. The momentary glimpse of this view of interconnection in heaven-on-Earth that comes thorough the landscape and waterways ultimately escapes Donne however; he is one who remains ‘oblivious to the sentience of the earth and the threshold such sentience provides into parallel universes of the imagination through a tree of life existing long before we arrived in our present shape and form’.  

His conquistadorial mindset is unable to bear the pressure of a vision of heaven and the parallel universes of the imagination that come through interconnected vision of the history of the landscape; the core of his ideology of control and commerce is shown to be truly empty: ‘He was a ruler of men and a ruler of nothing. The sun rose into the blinding wall and river before him filling the stream and water with melting gold. He dipped his hand in but nothing was there.’

Donne attempts to comprehend this vision of creation and parallel universes - ‘A longing swept him like the wind of the muse to understand and transform his beginnings [...] he longed to see the atom, the very nail of moment in the universe’ - but is utterly overwhelmed. The narrow one-track vision of self-serving mastery, the seeing with ‘Single vision’ results in the vastness of divinity shattering him psychically and physically:

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60 Wilson Harris, ‘Theatre of the Arts’, (p. 8).
His teeth loosened in their sockets and he moved his tongue gingerly along them. He trembled as he saw himself inwardly melting into nothingness and into the body of his death [...] he looked into himself and saw that all his life he had loved no one but himself. [...] he saw something but he had not grasped it. It was his blindness that made him see his own nothingness and imagination constructed beyond his reach.

(107-8)

The inward, self-consuming nature of Donne’s partial vision, figures as the counterpoint to Vigilance’s blessing; Donne’s blindness makes him unable to fulfil the Harrisian need for a visionary pact of awareness and supplication - ‘Each day is a voyage into forbidden realms, a conversation with messengers of deity, with angels in the Blakean sense.’

Without the inspiration of interconnected vision, Donne’s voyage through landscape and into the forbidden realm of deity is impossible.

The quest for understanding arrives too late in Donne’s consciousness and the possibilities of interconnection elude him at this moment of intense narrative expansion; with the ascent of the falls, the opening up of worlds seems exponential as the tail-feathers of Harris’s peacock fan out and the many eyes depicted on them become the celestial orbs and universal proportion of creation and re-creation. Such cosmological expansion, paradoxically, works in conjunction with elements of narrative contraction. Harris conflates the

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61 Wilson Harris, ‘Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition’ in Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, pp. 184-195 (p 193).
consciousness of all the missionaries and will therefore not allow any simplified polarisation between the fates and deserts of Donne and of the Dreamer and the rest of the crew. All are subsumed within a collectivity of being, 'one undying soul', and readers become aware that the journey into the interior, the process of the Dreamer's journey to awareness of interconnection has also been the interior journey of the universal human soul, a Jungian journey of the 'collective unconscious'. Such spiritual collectivity becomes the means by which Harris attempts to further the psychic reintegration of 'the whole man' from the 'broken individual'. This is essential for the formation of his ecological imagination, and furthermore, delineates the extension of such concepts of collectivity of the soul towards the extra-human elements of the history of a living Earth:

Jung by and large applied his concept to the human psyche and faculty.
I sense the collective or universal unconscious extending into voices that echo within the roots of nature as from the ancestral dead, from rivers, from rocks, from birds and other species, from the rhythm of landscapes, skylines, etc.

Such psychic reintegration and understanding of totality of interconnected existence that moves beyond narrow anthropocentrism is manifested in Palace of the Peacock by the recovery of the voice of Carroll as part of the undying human

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62 With such a conflation here, Harris refuses, even after juxtaposing Single and interconnected vision, to resort to polarisation and gives primacy to a sense of collective responsibility for the state of the Earth rather than assuming a position of superiority and self-congratulation.
63 Wilson Harris, 'Profiles of Myth and the New World' in Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, pp. 201-211 (p. 201).
soul: 'Carroll was whistling. A solemn and beautiful cry [...] tremulous, forlorn, distant, triumphant, the echo of sound so pure and outlined in space it broke again into a mass of music. It was the cry of the peacock' (113). Alongside Vigilance he is the other figure or facet of the soul who has the ability to hear and replicate the music of the living landscape and to sense the many voices that fill the jungle, as depicted in 'Amazon', itself a dreaming theatre aware of collectivity. It is with Carroll's music and Vigilance's eyesight that the dreamer is finally given access to interconnected vision and glimpses the moment of divinity through landscape:

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. Across the crowded creation of the invisible savannahs the newborn wind of spirit blew the sun [...] (112, emphasis mine)

The Dreamer achieves vision of interconnected being by seeing, as Blake demands, *through*, not *with* the eye, and is seemingly able to banish the spectre of the 'Single vision' of colonial and anthropocentric mastery and exploitation.64

*Palace of the Peacock* affirms that the living landscape of the jungle is not merely 'the store-house of heaven' which tenders up 'the beauty of the

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64 This Life's dim Windows of the Soul
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
And leads you to Believe a Lie
When you see with, not thro', the Eye

world but is in fact the key to unlocking visions of divinity and total history of the universe even beyond the Earth. Here we have an interesting Harrisian refashioning of ‘green’ philosophy in respect to the biosphere. It is not only true that the survival of virtually all life on the planet is dependent on the thin slice of potentiality in the layers of fungal topsoil - ‘the store-house’ - but that the essentiality of this thin crust is itself a microcosmic reflection of the biosphere; the thin layers of landscape and atmosphere that are precariously positioned between the rock and fire of the Earth’s centre and core below, and the vast vacuums of space above. There is very real reason to believe that the unlikely conditions that created this precarious biosphere with its psychical multivocality and physical diversity, have, in actuality, created a vision of heaven itself. By returning to the ‘Author’s Note’ to the novel, we see the focus that Harris places on the ability of the human self to attune to the total history of the planet that may, in the construction of dialogues with extra-human utterance and pre-Columbian memory, resolve the crisis of vision that fuels the one-track mind-set of brutal modernity: ‘My intuitive interpretation of such recombinations is that a hidden capacity slumbers in nature and everywhere to address a labyrinth of healing in a conflict-ridden age.’ Indeed, in order to unlock such hidden capacity of nature, the Dreamer undergoes an interior journey towards awareness

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65 Harris, Eternity to Season, p. 15.
66 ‘It remains the sobering fact that […] civilisation continues to depend on a few inches of topsoil for its very existence. The activity in and around that soil provides the material to sustain life and the environment to give it meaning. The earth is very forgiving of our abuse. But it will not forgive forever.’ - Graham Harvey, The Killing of the Countryside (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 194. See also, Lovelock, Gaia, p. 37: ‘The most essential part is probably that which dwells on the floors of the continental shelves and in the soil below the surface.’
of interconnection. He moves to the threshold of understanding which would enable him to forge ‘a new treaty of relations’ between nature and society, and, in the novels that directly follow *Palace of the Peacock*, a series of significant figures must replicate the Dreamer’s travels in landscape in search of Tenby’s treaty which might provide the resolution that seems to be contained within Harris’s ‘world-creating jungle’.
Chapter Two:

Burning Bright: Forests of the Imagination

Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition against the Revoluted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America, from the year 1772 to 1777: elucidating the History of that Country, and describing its Productions, viz. Quadrupeds, Birds, Fishes, Reptiles, Trees, Shrubs, Fruits and Roots; with an Account of the Indians of Guiana and the Negroes of Guinea.

- The full title of Capt. J.G. Stedman’s Narrative\(^1\)

‘I went out to map the land and the land mapped me’

- Wilson Harris\(^2\)

Wilson Harris’s narrative voice comes out of this jungle in which he worked and across which Stedman had ranged some century and a half before. The apparent

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desire or necessity to chart, to explore, to quantify and to conquer this web of waterways situates the efforts of Harris and his team working on behalf of the British government within a tradition of envoys sent into the heart of the jungle. Indeed, his writing, attitude and sensitivity to his landscape can be seen to invert the work of his conquistador antecedents. The ancient alveolar rainforests of the South American continent have long been the location for the gaze of colonial greed and ecological exploitation. Treasure-seekers, explorers and hunters from the British Isles all gasping in their thirst to be first, faster, better, have journeyed to the colonies since the time that England’s own forests were harvested and transformed into ocean-riding vessels, agents of trade and colonisation. From Walter Raleigh and his obsession with the ‘discovery’ of the riches of El Dorado, through to the martial exploits of officers cast in the mould of John Gabriel Stedman, to the journal of huntsman and glory merchant Charles Waterton it seems that all the colonising thrill-seekers must transcribe the accounts of their travel and travails upon their return.3 It is as if the apotheosis into a vision of true hero of the ‘barbarous’ jungle, one who can conquer and tame the wild, can only be completed by representation in a ‘cultured’ medium: when the inked marks of the traveller’s experience are evidenced for all to see against the pulpwood of paper sheets. This becomes example of the progress of ‘culture’ literally written across the face of defeated and transformed ‘nature’. Successive governments, colonial and then nationalist, also continued the plunder of natural resources. The opening up of land to foreign companies through logging and mining

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concessions by the Hoyte and the Jagan administrations has led to a situation in which, ‘The interior of Guyana is now under threat as never before [...] a situation reminiscent of the colonial age, when the country was dominated by foreign-owned sugar and mining companies’.4

The novels that comprise Harris’s *The Guyana Quartet*, in effect, rework the plunder-journeys of these explorers by seeking to give agency to the forest and its inhabitants, human and non-human, and provide narratives of more than purely economic catalogues of resources and productions; an alternative to the colonial visions of the pick-and-mix stall of flora and fauna in the South American jungle. They display an artistic attitude to landscape and history of the Caribbean that reveal the dual endeavours of Harris’s narratives: to narrate the forest-land back beyond the moment of Columbian history (the crime of ‘discovery’); and also to narrate beyond the boundaries of human utterance and anthropocentric discourse: ‘The Wilderness comes into its own as extra-human territory which unsettles the hubris of a human-centred cosmos that has mired the globe since the Enlightenment’5 Harris’s novels therefore seek to investigate how communities exist within space of all life; the reintegration not just of the broken form of man to a spiritual wholeness, but that man in his community and, furthermore, that community’s connection with the land. *The Whole Armour*, published in 1962, illuminates the power and potentialities of the symbiotic relationship between land and inhabitants; it is a narrative which provides no

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5 Harris, *Jonestown*, p. 97.
easy simplification of the co-operation and competition drives in the ‘human natures’ and, indeed, ecological systems that it presents. *The Secret Ladder*, published in 1963, meanwhile, interrogates the effect on the human inhabitants of their various attempts to control, utilise or exploit the land. It is these two texts above all, that explicitly evidence Harris’s desire to respond to the narrative of Stedman. In *The Secret Ladder*, a river cartographer, Russell Fenwick, like Stedman attempts to control unruly human elements within the interior, while in *The Whole Armour*, it is the image of Stedman’s tigers which re-emerges.

It is worth noting that amongst the engravers commissioned to produce illustrations for John Gabriel Stedman’s narrative was William Blake. Here we find Blake’s iconic and allegorical *Europe supported by Africa and America* alongside other drawings of life on the plantation and in the jungle. While it was not Blake who cut the impression of *The Jaguar; or Tiger of Terra Firma* and *The Tiger-Cat of Surinam* it is not tenuous to suppose that such pictures by his fellow artisan etched themselves onto the mind of the Lambeth poet and later found expression in *The Songs of Experience*. In fact, the details of Stedman’s own encounter with the indigenous wild cats of the forest may also have influenced Blake. Stedman narrates his own Crusoe-like moment on the coastal fringe of the South American forest. Here, the protagonist is faced with the moment of colonial anxiety; the realisation that he is not alone. His power, that of musket and of map, is matched by an indigenous, feral power, a source of awe and alarm:

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6 Stedman, p. 394 / p. 52.
This animal [...] very fierce, strong and dangerous; some of them measuring, from the nose to the root of the tail, not less than six feet: and let us not forget the print of that enormous tyger’s foot, seen by myself in the sand⁷

In place of the ‘savage’ footprint of Friday is the evidence, stamped upon the sand, of the natural predator of the rainforest. In the words of the army captain seeing the animal in its natural habitat - ‘The tyger-cat is a very lively animal, with its eyes emitting flashes like lightning; but ferocious, mischievous, and untameable, like the rest of its kind⁸ - it is possible to see the original energy with which Blake imbues his own feline subject, the beast of ‘experience’:

Tyger, Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?⁹

Stedman’s tiger, through Blake’s poetic rendering, becomes part of the poet’s organic perception. Blake’s personal and ecological vision of a ‘spiritual atomism’ covers the microscopic and the macrocosmic; it can encompass individual flowers, grains of sand, caterpillars and skylarks as well as giants, elemental forces, meteors, and revolutionary tides and it ranges from the streets

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⁷ ibid, p. 49.
⁸ ibid, p. 51.
of his home city, to the Sussex coast, on to Guyanese rainforests and beyond. It is
the totality of Blake’s vision, its poetic revolutionary potential in general and the
imaginative possibilities of its individual images,10 that provide for Harris a
desire and a need to realise Blake’s eco-prophecy; the effect of Blake’s
constructed mythologies of being are in evidence throughout the Caribbean
writer’s work. However, it is with the specific image of the tiger that we are
given perhaps the clearest example of Harris’s debt to Blake. Harris can return
the tiger of Guyana, which had been transported prosaically by Stedman to his
readership in the colonial metropolis, back into the forests of the Amazon. In his
fiction Harris turns the tiger of wrath into an agent for instruction.

Accepting the Guyana Prize in 1987, Wilson Harris gave an address
which can be seen as a pivotal moment in his construction of the philosophy that
has guided his life and work; a manifesto for a vision of interconnection. In this
address, using poetic anecdote, he attempts to cross the seeming gulf of
environmental problems of modernity and a reading of the Romantics:

There is no short cut to solutions of famine, to the pollution of
the globe, to authoritarianism and rigged elections in the so-called
third world, to nuclear peril [...]. Yet creative solutions do exist, and
such solutions hinge, I believe, in significant part on a profound literacy
of the imagination11

10 For example, ‘Auguries of Innocence’ which ‘harnesses highly abstract metaphysical concepts
(“World” and “Heaven”, “Infinity” and “Eternity”) to mundane experiences of material nature.’
Hutchings, p. 58.
11 Wilson Harris, ‘Guyana Prize Address’ in Kyk-Over-Al 38 (June 1988), 24-35 (p. 27).
For these solutions, Harris returns to the rainforest and to Blake’s tiger. On one occasion, leading a surveying expedition into the interior, Harris narrates the instance of one of his crew picking up an anthology of English poetry found amongst Harris’s belongings. He knew these men intimately but sensed a lack of curiosity about the world in which they dwelt, the forest, the night sky, the cosmos. Aware of his own luxury of intellectual posturing about such concepts he explains, ‘It wasn’t that they didn’t respond to all this but felt such response - had they confessed to it - would have been a measure of weakness. I was reminded of people who fear their dreams and therefore say they never dream’.12

One crew member on thumbing through the leaves to Blake’s *The Tyger*, at first finds the poem incomprehensible:

[He] commented ‘tigers do not burn’. We had seen leopards and tigers in the forest. Furthermore he did not understand what ‘forests of the night’ could mean. My first impulse was to tell him that it was a difficult poem and perhaps he should leave it alone. And then I was struck by an illustration that I felt might help him to relate to Blake’s imagery. I had with me a book on pre-Columbian art [...] I explained that the Aztecs believed that the cosmos was governed by certain leaping tigers or jaguars - these were suns, curious suns - and that vast aeons of time would move or give way to new dimensions with the appearance of a new sun or tiger. This was a rough, perhaps crude way of explaining

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12 ibid. p. 28.
a remarkable myth but it helped to throw a new light, as it were, into Blake’s lines. I went on to suggest that if he looked around into the sky and the river and the rainforest and the interwoven tapestry of the landscape he would gain a threshold into the meaning of ‘forests of the night’. For that tapestry enhanced the constellations, the stars which came so close to the tops of the trees at night above the clearing we had cut in the forest.

We were camped not far above a waterfall. Take a stroll and look into the waterfall. You will see lights streaking through, striped reflections like a tiger leaping through. And remember the tiger is one of the most ancient myths and symbols of the South Americas. [...] All this bears upon a cross-cultural dialogue in Blake’s lines with ancient Mexico and South America. Blake would have been unconscious of this but here one perceives the mystery of the universal imagination.  

This is the ecological imagination of Wilson Harris, an author whose utterance comes out of the jungle, but also represents ‘a voice of somebody who took into the jungle with him [both literally and metaphorically] Plato and Socrates and Shakespeare and the stories of Quetzalcoatl, the Macusi bone flute, and the civilisation of the Incas. So he had his own melting pot - when he was sitting in the bush with his crew’.  

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13 ibid. p. 29.
Cristo’s Flight

William Blake can be seen as a constituent part of this melting pot, most explicitly in Harris’s novel *The Whole Armour*, where the effect of Blake’s tigers upon the imagination of Harris is transposed to the edges of the Pomeroon tidal-river community depicted. The image of the tiger/jaguar from the forest passes, a dream-like mask, over the visages of the members of the disparate, dispossessed, multi-racial village. The symbiotic relationship between the human inhabitants and the natural expanses of water and wood which surround them is not without a sense of endangerment and precarious liminality. The threat of being washed away by the powerful natural elements, the unpredictable nature of alluvial strips of land, give the forest and its rivers both literal and metaphoric force.\(^\text{15}\) As a product of this ‘world-creating jungle’, a vision of the tiger emerges. It is a beast of mythic proportions, the Aztecs’ leaping cat, the subject of rumour and speculation in the community, and the power of this image, this icon of the actual tiger seemingly takes possession of each character in turn.

Magda, attempting to save her son Cristo from the authorities, ‘was moving as if she had truly invoked the unpredictable style of a great cat - soft and feline and meticulous - that left neither trace nor scratch.’\(^\text{16}\) Indeed, Magda is not only concerned about the threat of official arrest for her son but also well aware of the possibility of meeting the actual tiger of the forest as they escape; as a

\(^{15}\) See, Hearne, p. 100.

\(^{16}\) Wilson Harris, *The Whole Armour* in *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1985), p. 265. All subsequent references to texts in this volume will be given, parenthetically, after quotation.
result, Harris constructs a doubling of image between the woman and the beast, with Magda assuming tigerish attributes to combat the tiger itself. This is one example of the pervasive hold the image of the jaguar has over the mindscape of the locals and emphasises the territorial threat it exercises over the local landscape. At different stages, all the central figures of the novel assume the mask of the tiger or, by contrast, are possessed by it. Members of the community become either transfixed into positions of submission and paralysis, or energised into a ferocity of determination to extinguish this physical and spectral double image of the stalking tiger. Peet, as chosen leader of an abortive hunt, an expedition into the interior, tracks the tiger into its lair in an attempt to rid the human community of this perceived physical threat, and to exorcise his own personal demons - a 'tiger of death' an 'incestuous tiger' - imaginings that seem to be inextricably linked to this beast of the Guyanese rainforest:

Peet knew he had failed in some profound inexplicable way and he returned with his mind full of the gnawing spirit of disaster [...] The tiger had bitten him, he said, not a woman-tiger, a *man-tiger* it was. He had followed it to its lair, he said, and it as not the bloody mother he feared (311)

Furthermore, it is the whole of Peet’s and Magda’s community that lives in the shadow of this forest presence:

The visitation of the tiger was a feature that accompanied everyone’s
growing years, descending from the head-waters of the Venezuelan Cuyuni across the jungled Guyana watershed into the half-settled Pomeroon, prowling always on the frontier between changing fantasy and the growth of a new settlement (262)

The tiger becomes the all-encompassing symbol for the cyclical nature of being that Harris presents. It is unavoidable, seeming to appear at moments of both birth and death; an emissary of the rainforest, shadowing the personal lives of its human neighbours who are haunted by the physical reality of the cat and the equally powerful rumours and illusions that its mythic legacy has created.

The tiger, ever-present embodiment of all life in the forest, is also part of the vision of the living land. The native cat appears as part of the very landscape itself, seeming to accelerate the crumbling of the coastal fringe of habitable land. The tidal movements of feral energy pass from Harris’s tiger into the ‘land of waters’ and back again:

Behind their backs the waves had begun to quake and leap in all directions and the subdued subterranean roar of the vital repression of the surf began to invade their stranded senses […] The water hissed and swirled hungrily (260)

Such a vision of a hostile topography, while providing a contrapuntal vision to the tiger of instruction leaping through the waterfalls of the interior that Harris had revealed to his workers, is still indivisible from the mythology of the land,
indivisible from the scripted destiny of the characters which it threatens to overwhelm with its ferocity. This is Harris’s ‘world-creating jungle’ and, even at the height of the elemental turbulence of the sea-storm, it seems as if the tiger, the forest and the ocean in actuality, write the fates of all those cohabiting along the Pomeroon river: the lives of the villagers are etched ‘partly in a fiction of waste-land and partly in the rebellious drama of the sea’ (261)

It is the success of the younger generation, like Vigilance, carefully reading their roles in the drama that the landscape directs, that marks a point of departure and understanding for the characters in the struggle to exist psychologically and physically, or environmentally. The sense of entrapment felt so keenly by the older generation, typified by Magda and Peet (fighting the landscape, hunting the tiger), is contrasted sharply with the concluding hopes and visions of Cristo and Sharon.

At first, the educated college boy, Cristo, returning (and finding himself in a nightmarish world of confusion, accident and mistaken identity) can consider nothing but escape from the insular, incestuous community, its law-makers and the oppressive force of the overbearing landscape of his homeland. However, after his hallucinatory, draining and yet redemptive flight from the police, and through the rainforest (following the historical footprints, tracking the courses of Raleigh, Stedman, Waterton and Schomburgk), Cristo arrives at a position of relative comfort with his own place in the scheme of the forest. In this reconceptualising and revisioning of European incursions of conquest and exploration deep into the heart of a continent, Cristo is forced to interrogate both his multiracial ancestry and the concepts of geographical belonging and
dispossession, realising the painful irony of his slave ancestry and presence in this ‘new world’: “I’m a black man [...] from Africa. I’m no confounded Carib. What the hell am I doing here? I should be safe at home across the sea”’ He gave a little glancing laugh’ (341). Only through this initiatory, insightful journey can Cristo come to embrace the forest as his ‘heartland’. His circular voyage into the ocean-like jungle depicted by Harris as an emblematic counterpart to the historical one-way route across the Middle Passage; a journey of fracture and dislocation replaced by Cristo’s journey to acceptance.

On his return, with a newly focused sight with which to read the history of the land, it is Cristo’s body that becomes the site of the questing, inquiring gaze of Sharon. Paradoxically, it is through the killing of the elusive tiger, though not the eradication of the spectre of its influence, still in evidence upon the sands of the coastline, that Cristo’s vision for a new way of life and acceptance of the ambivalent landscape can be read further. On his return he stands dressed as a Mexica warrior of the most revered order, the complete image of a ‘new world’ Coriolanus: his insight/new-sight is disseminated to his lover through the fusion of his battle-marked body with the cured and treated skin of the tiger that covers it. The lines of Cristo’s own scars dissolve into the tiger stripes and become the contours of the map of Guyana; through this the history of land can be traced and comprehended by Sharon:

Her fingers travelled across the map of Cristo’s skin, stroking the veins in every ancestor’s body. It sought to establish the encounter with the lost soul of all generations, the tiger roaming through the
trackless paths [...] From Sharon’s tower of perception the landscape had come alive. (309)

In this way, Harris brings the young couple ‘back to the land’. They are made aware of being part of an organic community, a totalising system of life and death cycles; they become aware of the ‘almost stifling freshness of the earth, the smell of a mingling of roots and leaves and branches all turning into a web of cognition that entered their blood’ (319). Harris presents his characters with the heightened senses and critical perception of interconnected vision. They are able to re-read the history of colonial imposition and the fracture of enslavement in the light of their symbiotic relationship to the land, and can also chart the way to a new future:

we have begun to see ourselves in the earliest grass-roots, in the first tiny seed of spring [...] we’re reborn into the oldest native and into our oldest nature, while they’re [the older generation] still Guyana’s first aliens and arrivals (333)

Cristo’s jungle epiphany, his new-found identification with the land, enables him to get beneath the ‘historical topsoil’ of Pomeroon existence and ‘to know we’re all mixed up, East, West, North, South, every race under the sun’ (333) and to realise that the power to transform this communal experience of being lies in this vision of organic community:
What we possess comes from the ground up - coconut, copra, plantain, banana, wood-grant [...]. [...] There’s a whole world of branches and sensation we’ve missed, and we’ve got to start again from the roots up even if they look like nothing. Blood, sap, flesh, veins, arteries, lungs, heart, the heartland. (334)

After his battle with the guiding tiger-spirit and his somatic reconstruction (re-membering) at the hands of the medicine men, Cristo is reborn with the internal imprint of the forest and the paw print of Blake’s tiger stamped across his imagination. He emerges as a South American counterpart to the vision of the emanation of the giant, Albion. This spiritual and organic entity encompasses, for Blake, the history, topography and life-forms of the British Isles. Harris’s equivalent, the embodiment of his heartland, emerges with the visionary-heroic figure of Cristo synthesised with his surroundings: blood, sap, torso, trunk, veins, creepers all intertwined. 17 Through this image, Harris narrates his own mythology of his own nation in the mould of Blake’s vision of Albion. Cristo comprehends the totality of existence or ‘oneness of life’; reads the whole history of the Earth, a history that pre-dates merely the era of European colonialism and provides a moment of energised redemptive possibility. If Albion is the mythic symbol for Blake’s green and pleasant homeland, then

17 Harris’s narrative description here of the synthesised Cristo (reflecting also his own Hector) is reminiscent of Blake’s pictorial vision, the engraving of Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion, described by Marilyn Butler ‘where blood pulses through Albion’s veins, and fibres representing the nerve-system not only come to view but merge with the tendrils of plants to suggest the oneness of life. See, Marilyn Butler, ‘Blake in his Time’ in William Blake ed. by Robin Hamlyn and Michael Phillips (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), pp. 15-25. p. 24. See also, Hutchings, pp. 117-118 for a similar discussion of the illustrated plates to ‘Milton’.
Cristo becomes Harris's postcolonial myth-hero with the interconnected vision that sees beyond, in one moment, the 'Single vision' of his parents' generation and the Newton's Sleep that Blake ('prophet against empire' in every sense) had identified as guiding the commercial concerns of colonial conquest in his own time.

Cristo, in taking responsibility for his life and the land, espouses the Blakean need for escape from the tyranny of divided consciousness and, through his manifesto for the future, is allowed to free himself from the 'mind forged manacles' that bind the imaginations of his neighbours. However, the world of The Whole Armour only offers conclusions of discomfort as Cristo's vision alone is not enough to release him from fatal reparation demanded by the rest of the, as yet unseeing, Pomeroon community. He and Sharon are not left, as the lovers on the 'Eve of St. Agnes', romantic runaways allowed to make their own way into the uncertain storm of the future, but must stay in the forest, to face certain and dire consequences. Coupled with this presentation of personal anguish, Harris offers no easy vision or resolution for the community's future: bound-over on one side by the history of colonial control of the Pomeroon land and, on the other, by a flash of premonition for the future rapacious economic incursions into his rainforest heartland: 'an American company was exploring for oil. Firing seismograph soundings and so on' (338). This is the predating threat of the corporate conquistadors; expansionist 'exploring' replacing the firing of the musket with the sound of speculative technology seeking mineral wealth. It is no longer Raleigh's quest for gold but the search for fossil fuel (a quest for an
underground El Dorado of oil) that now wields economic power over much of the landscape of the once-colonised nation.

Fenwick’s Sight

The Secret Ladder returns readers to the concerns of ‘Fences Upon the Earth’ and considers the interaction between the ‘dwelling’ and the ‘intruding’ communities living in the land. Fenwick’s mission continues the succession of human predators entering the forest and seems to fulfil the requirements for economic progress proposed by John Muir. The surveyor also finds himself as a twentieth-century counterpart to Stedman in his role as enforcer of government process and, similarly, attempts to control the unruly members of his jungle team and the elements he has been sent to pacify or circumnavigate.

Harris’s interrelational depiction of these communities, the tensions between them, and within them, echo the natural struggles of all life in the forest, the ebb and flow of co-operation and competition. The dwelling community under the direction of the ancient figure of Poseidon are a seemingly feral band, subsisting off the land and directly linked to a history of revolt and uprising, descended from the Maroons: ‘Now everyone saw him as the black king of history whose sovereignty over the past was a fluid crown of possession and dispossession’ (369). This community, living in uneasy acceptance of the harshness of the land, has striven to work with the cycles of the life of the river-scarred rainforest: ‘the inhabitants wrestled with themselves to make a living within their uncertain ground which was continuously threatened by an erosive
design’(368). Here, the narrative rendering of Fenwick’s vision of the river-life echoes almost perfectly Hearne’s description of narrow-boat existence and dependence on the crumbling land. Despite the sense of precarious struggle and the undeniable links to the history of Maroonage (psychological, physical and political) in the interior, the comrades of Poseidon feel deep connection with the land that has proved to be an exacting but secure protector. This connection contrasts sharply with the experiences of Fenwick’s team, reluctant to spend any longer than necessary in the ‘jungle’ and whose outlook is mercantile if not mercenary. Chiung’s relation of his encounter exemplifies the difference between the dweller and the intruder: ‘They get offended and say they got honest uses for everything they own. They not whoring gamblers like me. The land was their soul which they would never sell’ (441-442).

Fenwick’s men, armed with theodolites and armoured in oilskin coats, explore the branches of the Canje on behalf of the government, continuing the incursions of conquistadors and prefiguring the seismic soundings of corporate power heard by Cristo along the banks of the Pomeroon. Throughout their monitoring, quantifying and measuring of the landscape, the work-team are haunted not only by their inner demons of anxiety but feel hunted by their surroundings. A sense of moral force emanates from the river-world of the Amazonian forest, the ‘collectivity’ of the jungle reciprocating the inquiring, penetrative gaze of its very watchers, human ‘self’ watching extra-human ‘alterity’ but seeing only ‘self’ reflected, distorted in the murky eddies of the water:
Someone would have to take over Weng’s shift, the boredom of it, the monotony of watching the river and being watched in turn by one’s reflection [...] No rest days came, the river’s cycle was ordered by a succession of devils, galvanic crooked leaden fingers, the shattered spokes in a wheel. (360)

This is a Blakean vision of tyrannical industry in the wilderness, a Sisyphean venture perhaps, the vast relentlessness of the task in danger of crushing its participants: ‘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’ (360). The exact reasons for the need to map and chart exactly the waterways of the Canje are obscured from the workers and their team-leader, however, and this very murkiness of objective, of result, and of consequence sends ripples of mistrust through the followers of Poseidon and Fenwick alike:

Fenwick burst out. ‘I’m doing a plain job here. That’s all. I haven’t the ghost of an idea what use will ultimately be made of it all [...] if the government finds the vast sums of money they would need for all this - these poor farmers will be compensated.’ (381)

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18 See, Drake, pp. 57-59 for a discussion of the image of the wheel as a narrative agent in Harris’s fiction which ‘resonates against a rich mythological and psychological background from numerous traditions’ (p. 58). See also the considerations of the important distinction in Blake’s cosmology between natural cycles, ‘open, intertwined and complex’ and the restrictive, closed, mechanistic paradigms of Newtonian and satanic mill-technology in, Hutchings, p. 93.
Jordan articulates the dwelling community’s fear of a redistribution of workable land and wealth, along racial lines; the factional dispute on the riverside is reflected in the racial make-up of Fenwick’s emblematic crew and the population of Guyana as a whole:

They may be living hand-to-mouth but this wasteland [...] And to make it worse they believe because they black you want to punish them, and the crafty East Indian man on the Courantyne savannah going to get what they lose (382)

The disputed ownership of the shorelines of the river catchment, the tensions between Fenwick’s reluctant intruder-group and Poseidon’s dwellers encapsulates the history of the land: colonisation, enslavement, emancipation. This history of racial-political tension is played out in the microcosm of Fenwick’s task and reveals a struggle for the future of the landscape as well; the tiny swirls of avarice evident in Muir’s impotent rage have, in this later novel, gathered into dangerous currents of economic necessity that threaten to overwhelm land and inhabitants alike. These upheavals and struggles for the future of a landscape are witnessed by figures on both banks/sides of the river-dispute. It is worth looking in more detail not only at Harris’s portrayal of Poseidon but at the central relationship between Bryant and Catalena, and also at the primary witness-figure, Fenwick himself.

Poseidon, for the workers in the forest as much as for his own followers, fulfils the role as figurehead for the ‘seeing community’ that Harris presents. His
direct lineage from the runaway slave, a survivor of the plantation system, coupled with his own survival over decades in the harsh conditions of the forest make him a mythic presence in the novel:

Rumour had created a tortuous and labyrinthine genealogy for Poseidon, the oldest inhabitant of the Canje. His grandfather had been a runaway African slave who had succeeded in evading capture and had turned into a wild cannibal man in the swamps (369)

A recipient of a heritage that is as occluded as the waterways he traverses, the constructed myth of eco-savage ancestry results in Poseidon being treated with some caution throughout the encounters between the groups. His existence in the interior provides an interesting counterpoint to Cristo’s flight through the forest; he becomes part of Cristo’s vision which retraces the history of the ‘land of many waters’ in an effort to see afresh the cycles of life and humanity’s part in natural system: ‘Nature’s vast frame’. In this way, Poseidon also forms part of Harris’s endeavour to retrace the history of the Caribbean beyond the instances of European colonial imposition and the great Columbian mistake; Poseidon provides a bridge across the chasm of time that links Cristo and his new sight with the ‘folk’ sought by the crew of Donne’s expedition.

In addition, the novel also throws up a dim reflection of earlier incarnations of the symbiosis of the human and non-human in Harrisian poetic. Poseidon fuses with the natural vegetation of his surroundings and becomes another ‘organic being’ emblematic of the environment in which he operates; its
history, topography, zoology and mythologies: ‘The strangest figure [Fenwick] had ever seen had appeared in the opening of the bush, dressed in a flannel vest, flapping ragged fins of trousers on his legs’ (370), ‘His ancient feet - webbed with grass muck - were bare... and his hands were wreathed in a fisherman’s writhing net of cord (all twined veins and knuckles [...] )... The living cords seemed to grow along his arms and body until they turned matted as thick hairy straw upon his chest’ (394).

Reminiscent of the figure of Hector from *Eternity to Season*, Poseidon too encapsulates the fracture of the Caribbean’s slave history and must undergo years of suffering in order to become fused with the living landscape; acceptance into this land comes through trial and the struggle to survive within it. However, Poseidon is presented as a man who comes out of the forest, who possesses interconnected vision, mirroring the re-emergence of Cristo in *The Whole Armour*. With the introduction of Poseidon and his dwelling ‘organic community’ as a continuation of Cristo’s epiphany of ecological utterance, as living proof almost, Harris reveals that the descendants of the slaves in the former colony have been naturalised, and naturalised through a willingness to work with, to sense afresh their surroundings, instead of replicating patterns of subjection. Poseidon’s followers no longer have to feel isolated from the landscape through a sense of genealogical mislocation (as felt by Cristo, ‘I’m no confounded Carib’) but have accepted and been accepted by the interior of South America and, indeed, have become representatives of it.

Poseidon himself represents this belief of belonging in the new ‘heartland’ forests. If Harris is aware that Poseidon is the ‘symbol of the
Unconscious, the buried, dark self which Man ignores at his peril’,¹⁹ then the old man also speaks as the unconscious voice of the ancestry of the land itself, a dwelling voice which threatens to ensnare Fenwick: ‘The truth was he could not shake off the conviction of a dual net of ancient spirit and helplessness [...] Poseidon had found in the air and on the earth they walked upon’ (398). He joins the Harrisian parade of entangled, frustrated eco-heroes (the aboriginal dweller, Hector, Vigilance, Cristo) as a mortal yet mythic counterpart to Blake’s giant Albion, fused with the landscape through painful experience and now under threat from new, penetrative technologies of conquest. However, the image of the emblematic figure of the indigenous landscape gives way to an alternate, somewhat surprising, image: ‘The old man’s hair was white as wool and his cheeks - covered with wild curling rings - looked like an unkempt sheep’s back’ (370-371). This image is not a reversion to simple animalisation of the descendant of enslaved peoples, not merely a racist allusion seeking to infer the sub-human, bestial nature of black people, however, and Poseidon is not cast by Fenwick and his crew as a double of Aaron the Moor. It is an image which emerges from Fenwick’s inaccurate reading of the old man and his surroundings: ‘This was no god of the swamps, no leviathan of the depths, he protested. This was an old bent artifice of a man, clothed in the changing witness of age and lamb’s snow’ (371). Fenwick is not confronted with a tigerish Cristo but a lamb-like figure of seeming vulnerability and docility and, as a result, fails to see the innate connection between Poseidon and the rhythm of the living landscape. Fenwick cannot see what Bryant senses, that Poseidon’s way of life means ‘“The old man

is no slave [...] He freer than you and me"" (395). The paradox of the apparently feral figure of the man of the swamps being domesticated in Fenwick’s metaphoric gaze prefigures the violent act of sacrifice that Poseidon, the fisher of his own band of men, will make. He is granted possession of ‘divine pride and human fallibility’ (398) that makes him the leader of his community, a leadership that Fenwick struggles to emulate amongst his own crew.

Alongside Cristo the tiger, then, we have Poseidon the lamb; another symbol of the all-encompassing nature of Harris’s ‘world-creating’ forests of the imagination. In this subtle echo of Blake, the author inquires whether the crucible that created the tiger of Cristo’s vision can also produce the saving act of Poseidon’s sacrifice. Harris provides a ‘new world’/new-world order equivalent of Blake’s wonderment at the variety of divine creation that is essentially ecological.

The dwelling community becomes a sacrificial lamb in the face of the upheaval of new technologies that demarcate the rights of those seeking to live on and off the land. However, its reaction to the technologies of measurement that begin the encounter between the two bands is far from passive. Poseidon’s men are not led willingly to slaughter like the sheep herded thorough the streets of Blake’s London on their way to Smithfield but rather become guerrilla activists, forest-luddites20 fighting for their way of life. The wrecking band that destroys the gauges of the intruders is cast in the role of indigenous

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20 The term ‘luddite’ has come, recent times, to be associated with supposedly backwards thinking in relation to technology and ‘progress’; in this instance its use is not intended to be pejorative but rather, as E.P. Thompson utilised it, as a recognition of valiant attempt to preserve a threatened way of life and livelihood.
environmental protest group: ‘[Fenwick] knew now - in the light of a morning inspection - that Poseidon and his following had delivered their first blow […] The gauge at the creek-mouth had been wrecked and burnt to cinders’ (399). This damage to the property of the developer-intruder can now be seen as the *modus operandi* of eco-activism; even Fenwick (perhaps beginning to fulfil his role as witness as well as intruder) understands the aims of the group’s methods as ‘non-violent direct-action’: ‘I was bloody angry about that. But it doesn’t constitute violence as I understand it. It’s more a witness of protest, the spirit of protest. It should make us stop and think rather than fall on them and smash (427).

In this way, Poseidon can be read, in different ways, as an emblematic leader of political protest. On the one hand, the limited conflict in the interior can be read as a specific political parable of 50s/60s Guyana. But, in addition, Harris’s presentation seems to prefigure instances of conflict around the globe, echoing moments of written resistance to eco-colonisation; conflicts not just in jungles of Amazonia but in Nigeria and Indonesia and South Asia. These episodes of destruction and disassembly of the ‘enslaving’ technologies of measurement foreshadow Harris’s poetic conjuring of Pizarro’s technologies of destruction in *The Dark Jester* and the subsequent action that is proposed by his creation of the ‘Atahualpan Form’.

The death of Poseidon at the unwitting hands of Bryant, the crewman most sympathetic to the cause of the old man’s followers, marks the cohesion of

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22 For instance, Ken Saro-Wiwa in the Ogoni region of Nigeria and Arundhati Roy’s contribution to the protest against mass dam projects in the Narmada valley.
his relationship with Catalena, set up in unfortunate opposition to Poseidon. Bryant’s ‘choice’ or attempt to protect her seems to determine the future of the land; on the one hand it shatters the core of resistance to the swamp surveyors and yet, on the other, it sets up a new potential for the realisation of a ‘seeing community’. In the place of the ancient Poseidon, the relationship between Catalena Perez and Bryant creates a young couple with the ‘new sight’ or organic perception reminiscent of Cristo and Sharon: ‘Bryant urged Catalena to push on into the smell of the earth’ (456).

Catalena, arriving on what is, in effect, her prison-ship, is revisioned by Harris into an Andromeda of the river-world. She is anchored to the rock of her husband’s mercantile brutality and, threatened at every turn by the snapping monstrosities of male desire that assail her from the shifting, binding matrix of waterways that serve only to increase her sense of entrapment. Nevertheless, while Harris presents a vision of the landscape as hunter, transfigured through the gaze of male rapists, the narrative also provides a sense of deep connection between Catalena and the natural terrain of the rainforests. She is the symbol of the nation, and like the Arawak woman in Palace of the Peacock, the site upon which the struggle for differing visions of nationhood is played out: ‘Catalena Perez becomes a metonym for the processes of a development predicated on [the forest dwellers] disenfranchisement […] her body the terrain on which the nightmare rebirth of men and men’s communities, and thus the nation, will be remapped’.

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23 Carr, p. 134.
As with the readings of Poseidon, it is possible to provide a parallel reading, to run alongside Carr’s contention, in which the Portuguese woman becomes metonym for the wider, deeper history of the land which precedes the realisation and anxieties of nation-state determination. If Cristo’s claw-scars and tiger-striped body provided one cartographic representation of the history of the land of Guyana, then ‘the long red mark’(414) scarring Catalena’s legs redraws the boundaries of that map along the lines inflicted by the exploitative ‘unseeing’ brutality of nation and society. Indeed, even in the evidence of her suffering, Catalena continues to be a spectacle for titillation and a site for economic exploitation under the gaze of Fenwick’s crew, ‘She appeared in an instant to be the most designing theatrical figure of a prostitute’, and the welts across her body are ‘the colour of brutal lipstick’(414). Her body, like the ocean-forest itself, is the arena in which men’s competing desires are played out; the connection between the treatment of Catalena and that of the land is made explicit, first in her reaction to Fenwick and then, in his fantasised speculation about her past: ‘She shrank away more desperately than ever […] half-crouching […]. Inexplicable as a wild flower or a blade of grass […]. Nature was arbitrary and mysterious (413). Catalena appears, in turn, animalised and idolised in Fenwick’s paradoxical perception; the scared, cornered beast and the inscrutable, delicate mystery. It is as if she has been sculpted in feral beauty out of the landscape itself, the ‘world-creating jungle’. However, ironically, it is through the brutal treatment meted out not by ‘wild, savage lands’ but by the wild savagery of men’s hands that positions her thus. For Fenwick, Catalena is a source of anxiety as well as excitement, he sees the effects of his own desire reflected in her actions and fear.
Here, the fear of woman’s unpredictability - ‘something almost hysterical’ - contributes to the anxiety conjured by the unpredictable nature of the river flow. Additionally, in the reflected fear of Fenwick’s lust, Catalena mirrors the reciprocating river, seeming to interrogate Fenwick as he sought to quantify it. This narrative parallel of Catalena and the landscape continues and, in actuality, her utterance, when it comes, is as chthonic as that of Poseidon. Imbued with the force of the interior, her flash-flood words ‘struck them with lightning surprise’, and create ‘a jungle of implications’ (415). Fenwick and Jordan fail to hear the voice of Catalena as it beats a percussive accompaniment with the music of the living landscape.

These men, unable to see beyond the ‘Single vision’ of mechanism and of oppression in their drive to pacify, assess, commodify and objectify the utterances of the woman and/as jungle, uncover a simultaneous source of fear and desire:

If women have been devalued and denied cultural participation through their naturalization, the downgrading of nature has equally been perpetuated through its representation as ‘female’ [...] Many have remarked on the analogies between the domination of nature and the oppression of women²⁴

It is possible, therefore, to view Harris’s *The Secret Ladder* in the light of Soper’s ecofeminist analysis, as the successive attentions of the male figures seek both to feminize the forest and to naturalise Catalena. The masculine authorities in the novel repeats patterns of brutal exertion of control fuelled by anxiety, uncertainty and aggression:

His [Jordan’s] 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 […] 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. (418)

This is one example of the recurring image of troops of butterflies in Harris’s fiction which anchor the natural world to the soil of myth-history of the Americas. Just as the Aztec tiger slinks through the pages of *The Whole Armour*, the image of the butterfly, here, invokes the souls of thousands of deceased Aztec warriors: ‘eternal sun-dancers, returned to the earth as butterflies […] great drifting clouds of them, gorgeously, languidly, displaying; sauntering in companies’.25 Again Harris’s transfiguring eye sweeps across the continent and sweeps aside the restrictions of the purely contemporary narrative sphere; the strength and conviction of his vision illuminating the connectedness and spiritual

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interdependence of human and non-human life-forms. Here, we are reminded of the 'sun-bright' mirage of winged creatures that first inspired the witness-narrator of 'Fences Upon the Earth'. In addition, while Jordan succeeds in destroying the form of one creature, he cannot eradicate totally the luminous spectre of the butterfly's wings. They are reborn and airborne once more in *The Dark Jester*, the 'spirit of their design' resurrected into the image of Chaos and quantum science positioned to redress the unseeing destruction of creature and habitat and fashioned by Harris to realign exploitative thought with the transformative power of an ecological imagination.

The crewman Bryant, of all the figures in Fenwick's crew, is most attuned to the music of living landscape as represented first by Poseidon and then by Catalena. It is he who, by the conclusion of the novel, is positioned as exponent of Harris's interconnected vision. Bryant's ordeal that leads to redemptive possibility in *The Secret Ladder* mirrors that of *The Whole Armour's* Cristo. In this respect they become intertextual counterparts. In his own paradoxical battle, it is Cristo who kills the ever-present tiger, totem of the forest and as a result inherits the visionary mantle. Similarly, it is Bryant with his keen sense of kinship to Poseidon (seeing his own ancestry and sharing, or at least understanding, his plight) who is responsible for the old man's death and, perhaps precisely because of this, is obliged by Harris to carry the vision of interconnected existence into the future. As Catalena and Bryant escape the Furies of revenge and leave the midst of the surveying operation, the relationship

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26 Here, Harris provides narrative fulfilment of Blake's poetic philosophy: 'Forms Eternal Exist For-ever'.
between the intruders and the landscape is altered subtly. Prior to this moment, the treatment of Catalena, the treatment of the natural world, was a matter of aggressive desire for penetration and subjugation of the interior, a desperate need to impose and to order and to conquer. While the novel does not allow simplistic comforting vision of the future for the couple (paralleling the discomfort of Cristo’s and Sharon’s fate), it does seem to afford the appearance of reintegration, and, reveals the sense of unity with each other and the environment that the couple possess:

Time for Bryant and Catalena to appear to run and make swift love on every trail across the earth; while Fenwick grew to believe they had put their foot and escaped upon another rung in the secret ladder. The land was the mystery in which he would never chart where they had vanished. (463)

Fenwick realises, in his role as observer, of land and of the communities in conflict, that he can never truly trace the steps of the couple from this moment on, nor indeed truly quantify or assess the shifting levels of the water-land forests. The novel’s explorative preoccupation is the various readings and misreadings of the nature of landscape and the nature of its inhabitants, imposed by the figures in the arena of action, and these readings come most notably from Russell Fenwick himself. As leader of a troop into the interior he follows the missions of the fictionalised Donne and the historical Stedman, but is a figure possessed of a vacillating liberal conscience (contrast his system of governance
with that of the one-man strong-arm, think-tank Jordan). This factor also allies him to Harris's earlier witness figures: the narrator of 'Fences Upon the Earth', the resurfacing Tiresias, and Francisco Bone from *Jonestown*, all of whom become implicated and yet remain at one remove, distanced from the events that surround them. Fenwick is, like the other Harrisian witnesses, asked to interpret the history of the forest land and the political and environmental abuses it bears as scars. Each character is involved in a process of remapping the history of the land from a privileged position of insight, asked by the author to provide textual charts that are born of the understanding of the need to draft narratives, to delineate the contours that move beyond examinations of purely human existence and to chart courses that explore the depths of 'prehistory' beyond the conventional colonial readings.

Remaining wary of simplistically accommodating biographical readings of Harrisian fiction, it is nevertheless possible to draw parallels between the repeated construction of his witness figures and the experiences that have shaped the author. Indeed, it would not be incongruous or surprising to find Harris's declaration quoted above - 'I went out to map the land and the land mapped me' - forming in the mouth of Fenwick himself. Michael Gilkes has noted that 'Fenwick's lack of self-knowledge, his need for spiritual re-birth' is affected, and to an extent redressed, by the act of gauging the river, mapping the land. In actuality it becomes apparent that the act of scrutinising the river and its pictographic symbols prove self-defeating and counterproductive - 'The truth is you poring over them chart and tide-map and God knows what too hard' (366) -

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27 Gilkes, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*, p. 84.
and yet, such eye-straining attention to the details of his mission also seems to elevate Fenwick as witness to the state of seer, another returning Tiresias figure, who descends into a forested Hades to achieve his privileged insight:

He liked to think of all the rivers of Guyana 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. (367)

He has the vision that realises the steps of necessary progression to reintegration; both his own personal, psychic recovery of form and also the necessity to circumvent the linear philosophies of time and space in order to unravel the ‘mystery’ of the history of the land.

Harris’s depiction of Fenwick’s struggle to arrive at this realisation of the need for reassessment of the condition of existence provides instances of multiple misreadings and misunderstanding prompted by the constant shifting lights, silts and sands of river-forest. For example, the inability to translate or interpret the music of the living landscape, typical of Harris’s witnesses, here afflicts Fenwick when confronted by Poseidon’s outburst: ‘Fenwick found himself at a nightmare loss for words [...] He was ashamed of his ignorance especially as he had sensed that Bryant understood all that the old man was saying’ (373). This inability to comprehend the representative utterance from the jungle is coupled with Fenwick’s ambiguous attitude to his task. Despite the
hard-headed attitude he cultivates to his work and the dedication to the efficiency of the project, he admits to being out of his depth and even begins to question the appropriateness of logical, mechanistic (imperialistic and exploitative) modes of thought that, hitherto, had been an essential part of his philosophy:

"Plain wholesome understanding of history and facts and possibilities is important, Bryant. Take the unadorned facts of science, the plain economic structure of society shorn of worshipful emotion, shorn of this fiction of freedom you claim Poseidon alone possesses [...]."

Fenwick stopped abruptly, trying to dam the flood of expression. He was filled with mounting uncertainty and an excess of misgiving. (396)

Fenwick’s psychological boundaries of thought are remapped by the environment in which he operates. Harris demonstrates the landscape actually altering the mindscape of the human ‘intruder’; the mechanistic quantifying mind-set seems somehow inappropriate in the face of the extra-human history of the rainforest. Fenwick does, however, undergo a baptism of awareness, an anagnorisis of ecological inspiration, as a result of these doubts and misreadings:

He emerged at last out of the tunnel of the bush of night and stopped, startled by the spectacle of the open sky - the vast proliferate illumined jungle of the Milky Way. The stars had been sown like dense brilliant seed within the supporting shadow of the earth. He remained looking up until the crowded illusion expanded and turned diffuse and remote - no
longer a painted fall or view, but an everlasting frail bombardment out of the greatest unimaginable distances: each needle of light took its rooted stand as if to prick his eyes where it had been aimed with timeless precision of the ages at him, alone, of all the creatures in the world. (432)

Bathed in the constellations’ glow of the clear night sky, Fenwick begins to perceive the connectedness of being. He is granted vision, as if the sharpness of starlight removes the cataracts of uncertainty clouding his mind. Once more we are presented with the vision of interconnection calling to mind the eco-prophecy and totality of perception possessed by William Blake. These are the ‘forests of night’, the home to the tiger, and a place upon which Blake’s stars also ‘threw down their spears / And water’d heaven with their tears’.28 There is room for all creation in Blake’s cosmology, and Fenwick here understands the totality of organic perception, all creatures on earth, connected to the heavens:

He shivered with the visionary tattoo of every branch and constellation, conscious of the threads which bound him to their enormous loom. [...] The heavens had been thronged in the beginning with all the planted creatures on earth (not excepting man), Fenwick mused. They were all glowing in proud perennial creation up there as if their material being had grown into the loftiest tradition. (432)

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28 Blake: Complete Writings, p. 214.
Like Vigilance and Cristo after his reconstruction, Fenwick now begins to see things afresh and he is granted the 'new sight' of redemptive possibility, a possibility which enables 'new ways' of reading humanity's place on the planet. Fenwick's original desire to unify his own men and to bring the forest dwellers round to his classifying way of thinking is replaced by an understanding of the need for psychic reintegration. This reintegration is not merely of the human heart and human head, but of the whole human world with wider cycles of life. The Harrisian cosmology of being, fused with an environmental ethic, is worked out and worked through the entirety of *The Guyana Quartet* and must, like Blake's cosmology before it, have room for the tiger and the lamb, the human and the butterfly.
Chapter Three:

Fashioning an Atahualpan form: The Dark Jester

Peru, Patagonia, Amazonia, Brazil: Thirty-two Nations,
And under these Thirty-two Classes of Islands in the Ocean
All the Nations, Peoples & Tongues throughout all the Earth

- ‘Jerusalem’, William Blake

The journey towards an encompassing history of the Americas upon
which the reader of Harris’s The Dark Jester is invited, begins with another
vision framed by the latticed leaves of the ‘world-creating jungle’ from Eternity
to Season:

I came upon Atahualpa’s ghostly form in a strange adventure [...].
This mingling of emotions, unpredictable passion, uncanny
normality, clothed me in a variety of sensations that astonished
me. I was here... I was elsewhere... I saw myself differently for
a moment in a jungle of worlds in which I peered at myself through

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a latticed window of leaves... ²

The dreamer-narrator garlanded in his vision reflects the witness-seer figures of earlier works; a twenty-first century counterpart still striving for complete comprehension of and ability to conjoin the fractured elements of the existence over which he casts his attentive eye. The panoramic sweep of the South American continent provides the arena for the spectacle of a revisioning of history within the mind of the dreamer; the forested interior itself becomes internalised in the psyche of the narrator as landscape becomes part of the authorial dreamscape. ³ It is from this Janus-faced position of ‘interiorisation’ and observation (implicated and yet still liminal, looking at the self and at all alterity) that the dreamer is directed in contemplation of prophecy, purgation and redemption through a process of revisioning: of landscape, of history, of consciousness. The adumbrate figure of the Dark Jester provides a not unproblematic right of access and guidance across different planes of consciousness and through the shadow plays of history, myth and cosmology that the narrative offers.

The epigraph to the novel, ‘Fragment of a Dream’, offers the dreamer’s own reading of the two-fold dialogue and dialectic that follows: the dialogue between the dreamer and the Jester overarches the dialectical encounter between

² Wilson Harris, The Dark Jester (London: Faber and Faber Limited. 2001), p. 1. All subsequent references to this text will, throughout this chapter, appear parenthetically after the quotation.
Pizarro and Atahualpa. The Inca ruler and the Spanish Conquistador become sculpted by Harris into figurines of thesis and antithesis, of the possibilities of existence, and it is out of these that the dreamer attempts to tease a synthesis for an ecological philosophy of being in the world. If the dialogue with the Jester provides the commentary to the actions in the cosmic-theatre of the novel, the epigraph also makes the explicit link to the theatre of biological life on Earth, in which all human history has been played out. Echoing Monod's epigraph to Harris's poems, the interconnected nature of life across time is reiterated: 'I knew myself in the shape I now possess, as curiously related to live fossil organs invisibly suspended and linked across ages'. This thread of linkage is spun out into a total web of life and the history of that life in the realisation of an attendant 'spark or particle' of 'tight-fitting nature'. Here, the dreamer is made aware of the possibilities of 'new science'. The Quantum and Gaia theories offer Harris new ways of seeing the potentiality of salvation from fragmented being (self) and reunification with the natural world (other); a totality of community and consciousness. These new ways of seeing must be harnessed to the redemptive faculty of authorial imagination however. It is this visionary capacity that can span the 'chasms between human spirit and animal nature' (vii). An agent of this imagination, Atahualpa, appears robed in the garment of all life and visits the dreamer like one of Blake's angels at Felpham. He cuts through the air of cynicism to become one of a returning host of Harris's ghosts of the 'unfinished genesis of the imagination' which, in this novel, is at its most profound level deeply ecological. The dreamer can, thus inspired, inquire: 'what is history? Is it
an account of events set out and approved by a dominant culture? Or does history
possess another door, other doors, to be opened’ (1).

The dominant culture of twenty-first century globalisation (neocolonial
‘Single vision’) appears to be fast slamming shut and barring doors of inquiry.
Aspects of modernity play out again a repeated performance of the injustices of
colonial incursion: ‘The divide between West and East is akin to a chasm
between Conquest and pre-Conquest ages’ (x). The ghost of Atahualpa arrives
and, with its potentiality of new vision, will provide the key to reading a multi-
levelled history of the Americas and, indeed, the globe. *The Dark Jester* offers an
interrogation of, if not a full negation of, machinations of continuing empire and
the relentless progress of ‘conquistadorial science, a science that claimed a
triumph over all things’ (3).

The Technologies of Conquest

The apparatus of the conquest of the Americas and the destruction of the Incas
emerges from Harris’s text and, refracted through the lens of myth and
modernity, leaves its imprint upon the pages of history. The dreamer views
nature’s raw materials processed into the weapons, maps, charts, ships, currency
and icons of religion, transfigured by the hands that use them into the tools of
exploitation and annexation. Even the reality and mythology of the horse is
broken down/in and instructed to march in step with the measure of ideological
imperialism. The conquistadorial employment robs these instruments and beings
of their possibility of variant forms: ‘A bow or a ship, or a camera, or a sword, or
a knife, or an axe are not singular or same objects. They are instinct with pluralities'. Pizarro’s ‘Single vision’ of purpose and instinct to violence reduces these forms to mere technologies of conquest, a precursor to the phenomenon of the unthinking tourist, the wielder of the camera that views and records the ‘sights and spectacles’ of the modern world, opened up to travel for the rich:

Take the camera. Disadvantaged peoples become pawns of the camera. Their ills are made visible to millions of viewers and then they fade from the news. The camera becomes the weapon with which we shoot an animal or a savage and bring him home as a trophy in the television box.

The dream-book of The Dark Jester presents the technologies of conquest of the sixteenth century but connects them across space and time with the ‘weapons’ of the present. The dream-prophecy demands that plurality of form be returned to the fabricated, the manufactured and the subdued, all under the auspices of an (Atahualpan) interconnected vision. The work-horse must be unbridled, the ship steered towards different waters and the camera refocused into ‘an extension of

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5 ibid. p. 257. Here, Harris’s insights are congruent with ecocritical assessments of the role of the camera and film in representing the non-human world. See, Karla Armbruster, ‘Creating the world we must save: the paradox of television nature documentaries’ in Writing the Environment, pp. 218-238.
the caring eye’. 6

This vision, however, remains a mere particle of redemptive possibility in the courses of this narrative and the dreamer must watch, sometimes involved sometimes isolated, as the machinery of Pizarro’s conquest parades its victory over the expanses of his rainforest continent:

Neither saw the mystery of wood and iron converted by a spark.
Nor did they see the life of the land and water, the garden, the arteries of space and time. They saw nothing but reptilian gold, that fascinated them. (11)

Pizarro and his Bishop, brandishing the iron sword and the golden cross, become the ancestors of Harris’s ‘unseeing communities’, lighting the centuries old fiery ‘Wound’ of physical destruction and psychic disintegration with the rapacious transfiguration of nature and art into technology of conquest. As one subdues the landscape and physical obstacles of the continent, the other works on the destruction of indigenous psychological rhythms of existence. The dreamer witnesses Harris’s symbol of missionary zeal, the Bishop, construct a wilfully reductive reading and record of the Inca belief systems. Replicating the binary modes of thought that had ensured and bolstered the European sense of

6 Harris, ‘The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination’, p. 257. The concept of a ‘caring eye’ has itself also been problematised. The objectives of the nature writer or documentary-maker can serve to merely re-inscribe the imperialist gaze. Tropical travelogues are ‘poised between the fiction writer’s desire to invent new worlds and the scientist’s need to verify the known world’. In this way, even ‘caring’ representations of the tropical zone can ‘recollect exotic (mis)adventure’ and also ‘reinstate authority in Western science’s name’ - Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, Tourists with Typewriters (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 81.
superiority (civilisation and savagery, holiness and heresy) he exploits the faultlines in the spiritual totality of his hostage:

‘Prophets have predicted [...] the end of the Inca age, the end of barbarism’ [...] He spoke softly with his eye on the Cross above his heart. [...] ‘Nature is a devil’ [...] ‘Tell the Inca so. Tell him that nature and natures which fall outside of the Orthodoxy of the Church lead to pagan devilries. There is only one way to worship, to find God. We have fought Crusades to make this clear’. (47)

This vision of nature, of religion, of the past and of the future is seen through the distorting lenses of ‘technologic glasses that Bishops have worn two thousand and more years ago’ (69). The certainty the Bishop has in his own vision marks him out as prophet of falsity: ‘All true Prophets - true in their uncertainties - are spiritually, gropingly sighted’ (69). His history of crusades to domesticate nature’s ‘animal spirit’ to the will of doctrine becomes another powering force of the imperialist conquest: ‘The Bishop, unknown to himself, except for frail inner hearing, frail inner seeing, had latched on to Pizarro. Latched on to a mercenary code’ (51). It is a code that provides a deeper level of colonial invasion, at the Bishop’s insistence, under false promise of redemption, salvation from death by fire, the spiritual resolve of the son of the Sun is broken. (Here, Atahualpa’s
conversion through coercion presents a tragically Orwellian moment of the instance of execution.)

The myopia of Harris’s conquistador, his inability to see the sculpture of living landscape, his obliviousness to its music is epitomised in Pizarro’s avaricious attitude to mineral wealth especially. His vainglorious desire for kingdoms of gold is shown to be emblematic of his disregard for what Harris views as the Inca’s spiritual connection with the Earth. Pizarro, in taking the religious icons of natural gods of the forest (the Serpent, the Bird) crafted from the ore of the earth, melts the art of gold and creates the gold of Money, destined to fill the coffers of European merchants and monarchs: ‘Pizarro saw each work of art as nothing more than a material body which he could melt all together into a monument of quick Money’ (52). The Spaniard becomes cast in the mould of icon for the future of global trade, the molten art of the Inca begetting the wealth of the ‘Gold Standard’ of the modern world. The centuries-old European El Doradon dream conceives a legacy of imperial havoc, of displacement and extraction:

El Dorado was painted in gold. Dark flesh painted in Inca gold. Within a global trading system a glitter on flesh preserves the allure of material value, the high price to be earned in buying and selling works of art that can labour,

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cut cane, create dams and canals. (99)

This is the depiction of a past and present furnace-technology of destruction and betrayal that dissolved all the treaties made with Atahualpa, and liquefied Inca resistance: ‘He had been promised his freedom for gold. This would have signified the continuing life of the Kings but he had witnessed instead Pizarro’s conversion of his promise into the technology of death’ (52). The fraudulent alchemist reverses the art of pure gold into the base metal of lethal duplicity and, with ‘Single vision’, ignores the multiple possibilities of physical forms.

As the dreamer traverses the ladder of time suspended over the forests of Peru he becomes aware of the multiplicity of the purveyors of technology of conquest, the masters of conquistadorial sciences:

The year is 1519. Historic fact or fiction? It could equally be 1900 or 2000. Cortez, who is known to Pizarro, is destined to pass Palenque [...] I had secured a ladder leading into the pyramid of Palenque from the forested Sea out and above in space [...]. An indivisible ladder, it seems, in my Dream that mixes past and present tenses as rungs on which one steps. (81)

There dawns the realisation that after Pizarro, after Cortez, ‘Other Captains of gold and of land would take his place’ (91). The seizures will continue and the dreamer seems powerless to halt the expansion of exploitation; the death of Atahualpa ‘seemed nevertheless pertinent to the whole human race seeking a
new understanding of environment in catastrophic circumstances’ (94). The ‘fortressed mind’ of Cortez and company, unyielding to the beseeching voice of the dreamer across the Void, not listening to the ‘voices of nature that arise in a variety of forms from planet earth’ (95) seem bent on implementing an enslaving system of being, a mechanistic vision which nullifies the imagination. The Jester releases his birds of warning which peck at the attentive ears of the dreamer: ‘They were a warning [...] a warning of a kingdom of machines in which I would become an individual machine ruled by a collective machinery... without philosophy... without originality’ (96). Harris’s vision of a mechanistic universe of conquest echoes the ‘wheels without wheels’ technology of Urizen against whose ‘cogs tyrannic’ the artist of imagination toils. Pizarro, Cortez and the Bishop follow in the tradition of Urizen and would create undying empires of tyranny. Harris, then, once more comfortably assumes the mantle of William Blake, for Blake not only sought redemption and emancipation for the industrial workers of Albion but also for the slaves of the ‘new world’:

When the Slave Trade Bill was finally passed in 1807 he attributed the victory to a conjunction of the rising of ‘Africa’, and the ‘well timed wrath’ [...] of his friends [...] who ‘cut his strong chains, & overwhelm’d his dark machines in fury & destruction. 8

In this dream-book Harris picks up on motifs of such Blakean fury with Pizarro’s ‘invention’ of Money from the smouldering residue of art, reflecting

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8 Erdman, p. 429.
Blake’s annotation to *The Laocoon* (the Harrisian incarnation of the Trojan seer is to emerge in this narrative as a warning prophet for a new age): ‘Where any view of Money exists, Art cannot be carried on, but War only’.\(^9\) *The Dark Jester* provides the narrative theatre space for the war between the divisive impulse of Pizarro’s economics and the Atahualpan form (embodying both defeat and a myriad of potentialities). This conflagration viewed from liminal (outer/inner) space consumes not only the Inca ruler and the cruciform corpse of the conqueror, but threatens to engulf the land itself: ‘The burning continues to this day and the forests are denuded, the seas are poisoned’ (103).\(^10\) Urizen’s philosophy, the technology of conquest brought to the Americas by the soldiers and priests of Europe, ultimately threatens not only the indigenous cultures they sought to subdue but the very balance of the natural world itself.\(^11\)

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\(^9\) Blake: Complete Writings, p. 776.

\(^10\) Specific instances of ecocide in recent Guyanese history are consciously brought into focus by Harris here, mirroring the concern of ‘The Music of Living Landscapes’ - ‘Trees are felled like dumb creatures. River catchments are impoverished. The muse of nature within the consciousness of peoples is threatened. A deadly cyanide over-spill seeped into the great Essequebo River of Guyana in 1995’ - in, Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, p.44. The Omai Mining disaster, a result of the ambition of ‘Single vision’ in making ‘a quick buck’, lead to environmental disaster on such a massive level that it became known as the Exxon Valdez of the mining industry. The spillage was largely a result of cost-cutting measures and inadequate safety provision and led to the discharge of colossal amounts of cyanide-laced toxic waste into the Omai and Essequebo rivers (see, Colchester, pp. 76-86). This, the country’s worst environmental disaster, came just over a year after concerns were raised over the liberties being taken by the Mining Sector: ‘operations have the sole objective of maximising profits, without concern for the natural resources consumed or impacted by the activity. Standard techniques to prevent pollution have not been applied and mitigatory measures have largely been bypassed’ - Guyana. National Environmental Action Plan (Guyana: [n. pub.], 1994), p.34.

\(^11\) Harris, writing some ten years before the publication of this novel, prefigures its concern: ‘The legacies of missionary endeavours, missionary churches in South America from the age of the Spanish Conquest into the twentieth century become unbearably static unless they encompass imprints born of the seas the missionaries and conquistadors have crossed, born of the forest and rivers they have penetrated and sometimes ravaged for gold, imprints that are woven into a geography and art of Being. The planet on which we live - however mapped or raped or circumscribed - remains a living surrogate of a theatre of infinite particularities and vestiges of creation, a planet at risk.’ Wilson Harris, ‘In the Name of Liberty’, in, Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, pp. 212-221 (p. 215).
The tygers of wrath called the horses of instruction from their mangers,

They unloos’d them & put on the harness of gold & silver & ivory

The horses had not been seen on the American continent for some eight thousand years until the arrival of Columbus. Then, under Spanish saddles of instruction, they hastened the destruction of the peoples who had venerated them as returning gods. The arrival of these horses signalled for the Inca and other Amerindian peoples a destructive capability bested in speed only by the smallpox brought over the Atlantic aboard the same ships. Harris is able, in his dream-vision of this beast of burden, to combine the ecological history of the world (the biological expansion of Europe and her domesticated animal attendants) with the religious history of the indigenous cultures of South America and the mythic history of the classical world. In this way he presents an image of the animal form and spirit of nature alive with possibility and meaning; symbols of victory and defeat, of creation and destruction, of technologies of deceit and the true forms of nature. In the utterance of Harris’s Cassandra we observe the ‘Horse-god’ and ‘Horse-enemy’ (30). The plurality of animal form is offered up to the continent as the Bishop is able to comment as part of his interrogation, questing for understanding and power: ‘Horses are unfamiliar to you but you seem to know them as gods returning home’ (47). However, it is as part of Pizarro’s

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12 Blake: Complete Writings, p. 281.
13 See, Crosby, pp. 182-187.
trappings of conquest that these godlike animals actually return: ‘the technology of the Horse’ (35). This is the image of the horse of war, the machinations of the conqueror creating the ultimate weapon pregnant with treachery but bearing victory for its architects. This narrative echo of Troy’s devastation resounds through the forests of Peru. As the Trojans accepted their gift from the gods with open arms, so too the Inca are ridden down by the image of their returning deities. Horses decked out in Urizen’s gold plundered from the caverns of the Inca themselves, become witnesses to atrocity, implicated yet blameless, at once, the very emblem of conquest coupled with an awareness of the pain of defeat. The dreamer sees this ‘photogenic picture [...] buried in animal memory’ (9), an animal spirit harnessed by human passion:

They have come a long way, these horses, they were once in the Americas (whatever the Americas were called in those days) and were forgotten by the people of the Americas. They moved into Troy’s Wooden Horse and into mercenary iron cavalries around the world. (10)

Forced witnesses to human conquest around the globe and across the ages, co-opted to the cause of technologies of death and mindscapes of expansion, Harris’s creatures weep for the full misery of their unblinkered visions: ‘The horses weep [...] weep tears like blossom of clouds that are the weather of heaven and the foundation of new sorrows’ (10). Equine tears do not just lament
past missions of destruction but fall like petals for the acid rain of sorrows still to be committed by ‘mercenary iron cavalries’ of expansionism.

Pizarro’s technology of war does not possess the organic totality of vision with which Harris gifts Atahualpa. His unseeing perception fashions war machines - map, ships, and horses - out of the dead wood of ‘Single vision’; unaware of the living rhythms of the Earth he carves his horses from the ‘mercenary iron’. Oblivious, he cannot see ‘the mystery of wood and iron converted by a spark’ (11), the spark of an imagination possessed of Atahualpa and the pre-Columbian civilisations of the rainforests who see the interconnectedness of organic and inorganic matter:

One remembers that the ancient Arawaks saw wood as a garment upon flesh-and-blood. The Arawak shamans created flesh-and-blood from the wood of a cherry tree. It is a question surely of imagery and vocabulary. We may abide with a crude story-line that wood becomes flesh-and-blood. Or we may deepen the imagery to imply the genesis of carving, carven wood becomes a garment upon naked consciousness, living consciousness, even as Timehri rock is a garment upon living time.14

Harris’s thoughts on the ecological vision of the ancients in relation to the art of Aubrey Williams reflect the artist’s own preoccupations. The Guyanese painter

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was himself concerned with artistic ecology and spoke with no small sense of Harrisian foreboding about the progress of technologies of destruction:

The Maya, the greatest civilisation of their time [...] produced a technology and cosmology from which we are still learning today; these people vanished in a very short space of time leaving only tarnished artefacts due, I feel, to their inability to cope with their technology and the changes of their achievements engendered within the metabolism of their living environment and ecology; exactly the position we find ourselves in today. 15

The Atahualpan Form

Navigating the circularity of time, traversing the myths of disparate civilisations and demonstrating Harris’s belief in the regenerative power of the Imagination, the Inca ruler, (as hero, as history and as symbol) offers up for examination a vision of redemptive possibility. Aware of and sensitive to the living Earth, the ‘flesh-and-blood’ nature of wood he can rework and, therefore, reverse the technologies of death with an art of life. Despite his physical death at the hands of the Bishops, his power of the imagination as a restorative, revisionary reading of existence, spurs Harris’s refashioning of an admixture of myths and histories.

Atahualpa can open the doors of history in the dream-vision inspired by the Jester:

‘Atahualpa,’ he said, ‘reversed the Wooden Horse, he reversed the absolute material of Wood in his art of gold [...] He read backwards in time to see what was once there [...] Thus it was that he reversed the endemic ruse of history’. (12)

Atahualpa presents an alternative history of the pre-Columbian America for the dreamer and Jester to witness. His emergence as a ghost in the dream-world of the novel necessitates a re-assessment of history, through the imaginative exploration of his story as told by post-Conquest historians ‘dwelling on facts’ and as unseeing as Pizarro who ‘did not read the meaning in events that could have changed the world’ (51). Pizarro’s world, the world of standard historical investigation is typified by a ‘Single vision’, an inability to see plurality of possibility and experience, whereas Atahualpa’s world, translated to and then by the dreamer, offers an organic vision of totalities of consciousness. This reconceptualisation of an Inca world-view connects the ‘tight-fitting’ workings of the Earth to the imaginative process. Harris’s dream-vision proposes that the fiery ‘Wound’ of divided consciousness, binary thinking, power relations and the exploitation of a passive Earth, can be healed by the possibility of the ‘Atahualpan form’: ‘We are accustomed to Western terminologies but it is time we broke through the material of conquistadorial technologies and philosophies. Atahualpan form rather than Cartesian form […]’ (16). The divisive heritage of
Cartesian thinking viewed as implicit progenitor of the European adventure of
empires, and Pizarro’s technologies, actually extended overseas the prophetic
warnings of Blake:

For Bacon & Newton, sheath’d in dismal steel, their terrors hang
Like iron scourges over Albion; Reasonings like vast Serpents
Infold around my limbs 16

The poet-printer’s desire is to reconnect the divided consciousness of the people
in order to unite populations against all forms of barbarism and exploitation.17

The Dark Jester, with its creation of the alternative Atahualpan form, sees
Harris in harmony with Midgley and Blake, and becomes part of the discourse of
the present not only in its recovery of lost history but also in its ability to speak
ecologically. Harris contends that the Atahualpan form can, under authorial
guidance, halt the creation of these deserts of thought, monocultural sight being
the twenty-first century incarnation of ‘Single vision’. It is the role of the poet to
piece-together through recovery of myth-memory, the lives of the people and the
life of the land; indeed, to bridge the chasm in which the dreamer finds himself
‘between human spirit and animal nature’ (1). Wilson Harris, with this novel
further situating himself as the poet of rainforest, brings radicalising energy to

16 Blake: Complete Writings, p. 635.
17 Contemporary philosophers of ‘green’ political thought see a direct line between these cares
and concerns of Blake’s vision and present ecological and humanitarian crisis. As Harris
enunciates, this is a very real problem of the imagination, of how we see the world, and the
challenge becomes a matter of visionary realignment as well as material readjustment. Echoing
Vandana Shiva, Mary Midgley surmises, ‘No picture should be allowed to become an
the exploration of time and history and the need to articulate future possibilities; the dual mission of incorporating pre-Columbian and extra-human experience. The dreamer-narrator, having been witness must now turn historian-prophet imbued with the new ways of seeing intuited from the Atahualpan form:

How can we know - in a post-Conquest world - what Atahualpan form was in a pre-Conquest age? Intuition. We neglect this at our peril. If it all goes a while world is lost. A sea is lost. A sea of the Imagination. [...] I listened with new ears, new eyes in my Dream. And I heard and saw the strange muted and muffled cry of the Bird [...] It was singing a mysterious mutual cry as of several voices in one (19-21)

The dreamer hears the ‘world-creating jungle’ with its collectivity of voices. With his vision cleared, Atahualpa must fall into the cycle of sacrifice for survival: ‘I am alive!’ I cried. ‘Atahualpa has brought me to the brink of freedom though he is doomed’ (41). Atahualpa, like Hector of Eternity to Season must die in order to see afresh, or at least in order to pass on the secret of his redemptive reading to others. The far-sight of Atahualpan interconnected vision parallels the Harrisian interpretation of the function of nature poetry; the challenge is to free from ‘fossil’ or static presentation the potentiality of life. Representing the rhythms of cyclic nature is more important than capturing a ‘verbal snapshot’ of still-life nature. This poetics of language parallels the weapon/camera with which animal spirit and animal form are presented to the detached reader or viewer. Harris refuses to play the part of tour-guide around the museums of man pointing
out the artistic taxidermy of Natural History and of 'animal nature': 'Every fiction you create - Bird, Serpent, whatever - must take you through into Atahualpa's living father, the Sun. Or else each animal will idly endure and form portraits and other dead emblems in museums' (42). The author will not allow his readership to be duped/doped, eviscerated and stuffed by imaginative sawdust of the centuries-long process of cataloguing of the natural world to Imperial forms and measurements, nor to the anthropocentric science of classification. Harris's art requires attention to ecological science as the Atahualpan form extends thinking and discussion of consciousness beyond the purely human. Again the words of the dreamer - 'Each animal will strike' I said, 'when we take them for granted in museum pieces' (42) - echo Harris in his desire to dilate the Jungian collectivity of unconscious. The history of the Earth is more than the history of human visitors and human vanquished, and reading this history requires attention to the details of non-human life and the music of living landscapes; all of which fall beyond the remit of the supposed 'finality of human discourse'.

At his moment of death and transfiguration - 'his last (or was it his first?) instant' - Atahualpa typifies the Harrisian construction of interconnected vision. Beyond human discourse, aware of the rhythms of the living Earth, he emerges from the scaffold construction of corporeal death: 'Atahualpa was ascending not to his death but to assume the wings of a Bird and to wear the mask and colour of music on his brow' (85). Bearing a similarity in sight to Tiresias, the Atahualpan form connects the musical rhythms of the forest to its peoples, at the deepest

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18 For discussion of the imperialist nature of Victorian 'Natural History' involving, killing, cataloguing and naming of species, see John M. Mackenzie, The Empire of Nature, pp. 35-41.
level of memory. His totality of organic vision reads the history of the Americas, reads the dispossession of races, and reads the abuse of the collective land which contains all the voices of continent and centuries:

The Man-Bird rose and flew ungainly, even forbiddingly, but full of instinctive promise for lost, apparently lost, peoples around the globe [...] and it flew with the wing of art through Oblivion to the Conquest, beyond the Conquest, into the fleet of the Middle Passage, running from Africa to America, into the market places for the arts of flesh (101).

Harris, then, presents the various Atahualpan forms as bearing the seeds for the regeneration of disconnected, binary modes of being; as he attempts to reverse the technologies of conquest, he is himself the inverse Wooden Horse who carries the potential to offer readings of history and prophecies of the future that can alter the exploitative world orders. The Atahualpan ‘reversed-Trojan Horse’ echoes the vision of Harris’s Christ the redeemer whose donkey (another form of Trojan horse) carries on its back the potential overthrow of accepted or static world vision. In *The Dark Jester*, Harris offers an Atahualpan, ecological equivalent to the Christian saviour figure:

Can we begin a re-generation of ourselves through and beyond

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the frames and fortresses - so easily set ablaze and alight with
weaponries [...] for a cessation of War that continues to seize us
around the globe and in our hearts?

Perhaps Atahualpa is closer to us now than we realize. He
draws closer to us as each year passes (68).

The author proffers the question: will humanity as part of the interconnected web
of life on Earth take up the readings and visions of the dreamer, translator of
Atahualpa, or instead, live up to the name of Harris's 'Children of Waste' and
feel the greenhouse 'fury of the Sun which has unwittingly come closer to us
through our wastage of the living earth'? (68).

Atahualpa, in his moment of death (and rebirth), attunes himself fully
with the music of the living landscape; he encompasses the ecological vision
echoing across the body of Harris's writing throughout the twentieth century. He
mirrors Hector, (the defeated, the slave) transforming into the figure of the Green
Man in the 'new world'; his shamen piece together the fragments of fleeing
Cristo into a totality of comprehension; he can hear the music of the living rocks
of Tumatumari; and his pre-Columbian history is of central importance to
Harris's re-figuring of and fusion of history and landscape as the theatre of
forest. These are the rainforests which Harris himself surveyed, mapped, was
mapped by and which continue to offer up to him visions of both catastrophic
probability and redemptive possibilities.
The Dream-Ship of Prophecy

The dreamer and the Jester traverse ages, continents and physical and astral forms in their dream-ship of the imagination. The journeying from Earth to the stars is the elevated platform from which the dreamer is able to piece together the apparitions in his dream into a series of prophetic visions. He is able to re-conceptualise the craft of conquest (agent of deforestation, of slavery, of World Trade) and reveal the myriad of possibilities beyond those of disconnection, death, and destruction. Pizarro's ships of conquest, whose construction ensured the destruction of the Green Man in the 'old world' and the transformation into the water-borne holding pens that took the enslaved to a 'new world', all appear, under the control of oblivious captains: 'The Seas rose as I dreamt of a Sailing Ship. I heard the Seas' Voice speaking to the Captain of the slave-ship. But there was no response from Crew or Captain' (101). The sailors of the fleets of colonial history are unaware of the voices of collectivity, the music of the seascape, which, in storms and gales, rings out its warning. On another plane, the dreamer and the Jester stand on the bridge of the alternate ship. Heeding the warnings of both history and the elements, they reveal the 'Ships of life sailing beneath Ships whose trade is Death', offering the moment of potentiality that could steer the craft of his dream prophecy towards new horizons.

To challenge the technologies of conquest, and to comprehend more fully the Atahualpan form of possible redemption, The Dark Jester presents a system

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20 Here, the journey of the dreamer into space and towards comprehension of totality provides a fictional counterpart to a defining moment in the human conception of the planet, and thus ecological thinking, the pictures of the whole Earth taken from space.
of ‘spiritual atomism’. From particles and atoms, through to the building blocks of temples, fortresses, civilisations, to satellites and planets, Harris, bending ‘laws’ of time and space, provides a conception to match Blake’s own inclusive mythology of the cosmos. The dreamer forces the reader to see truly the possibility of heaven in the many grains of sand, and the eternity latent in every hour:

The Ship floated on space and on stone-moving water [...] I had been blown into gentle particles and I knew [...] how Atahualpa gazed on to the sea of Lake Titicaca. He scanned the seas of memory, in which land appeared to be water, water land, trees living rock, valleys hills and mountains, in an instant (63)

The macrocosmic and the microscopic are, for Harris, embodied in the ‘new sciences’ of ecology and Chaos theory. Images of totality and interconnectedness of life and consciousness parallel concepts of non-linearity and fractal shaping, (of the clouds, skyscapes and landscapes) and the mapping of multiple histories. These theories become for the author paradoxical, contradictory and complementing jests towards conventional ‘conquistadorial science’. Writing in new ways highlights the spaces in between conventional thinking, it can ‘depict reverses in accepted habit in exploring the enigmas of universality’. 21 The Jester himself is the ultimate embodiment of these alternate visions of understanding

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reality. First, he embodies the waves and particles of quantum physics and Chaos:

The Jester [was] laughing soundlessly like a gathering storm on a butterfly’s wing [...]. The Storm beat on the window. Hail fell so strong it seemed to belong to other ages, not to this. I heard the Jester’s voice breaking like a wave. It spoke within the elements. (40-42)

Harris employs the iconic motif of the butterfly-effect to suggest the exponential possibilities of the Jester’s imaginative powers: as standard ideas of causality are exploded, the most fragile motion can create amplified reaction, just as lost histories can be revisioned with radicalising, revolutionary effect. Secondly, the Jester in the broad sweep of his influence, covers the totality of creation:

I am The Dark Jester,
I fold my cloak around mysteries
I have watched stones move and flowers walk
And pulled a star from a madman’s ear.
I know the close company of tears and laughter,
Winds and storms and great whales and oceans.
[...] I have run with wolves in the dark of night And gathered what lies at the end of rainbows.\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{22}\) Margaret Rose Harris, ‘The Dark Jester’ (preface to novel).
Regardless of the potency of the Jester in his traversing of the dream-world of the novel, it is left again to the witness-figure, the dreamer, to attempt to process, comprehend and articulate these ‘new ways of seeing’; he must fulfil the role of poet-prophet with interconnected vision, one who can draw up Harris’s new treaty of relations with his insight.

Throughout the course of the dream-vision of the novel, the dreamer finds the fable images of the Classical world in the forest-cities of the Inca. Once more, we see Greek mythology refracted through the dream-history of the Americas. Laocoon and Cassandra, prophets of the fall of one civilisation return, to articulate further possibility of destruction. El Dorado is ‘the Troy of the Americas’ and Cassandra emerges from Atahualpa’s retinue of ‘Chosen Women’ and sees the technologies of conquest: ‘She saw into them, despite everything, with marbled blazing eyes. [...] Horse-enemy she knew’ (30). Priam’s daughter, in the ‘new world’, is destined to remain unheard. She becomes another seer standing ‘on the threshold of Conquest’ (31). It becomes clear that the narrative is not set within fixed cycles of repetition, however:

‘Prophecy plays again in re-visionary terms. The threshold of Conquest moves across thousands of years and the stakes need to be assessed and re-assessed.’

‘Re-assessed,’ I cried. ‘Yes, this is different. Atahualpa is different’. (31)
In order that the Troy of the Americas is not destined to burn, and burn eternally, the dreamer must articulate his vision-prophecy. In his futile attempt to save the Inca ruler, he finds himself fused into the form of Laocoon: ‘I was Laocoon. And yet not fully the terrible Prophet that he was I doubted the role I thought I played. How could I play such a role without the profoundest understanding of the resources of Prophecy’ (33). The self-doubt of this ‘Atahualpan Laocoon’ becomes as constricting as the spitting sea-serpents sent by Pallas Athena to silence Virgil’s priest of Neptune. Indeed, perhaps there is a sense of duplicated futility in the contrapuntal instances of the serpents that squeeze the life of the visionary Trojan and the effective silencing through destruction of the Incas’ own Serpent gods who could do nothing to save their peoples from the Spanish incursions. As result of his impotent prophecy the dreamer, in Laocoon guise, cannot rescue Atahualpa from his transfiguring fate; he is however left, at least, with the trace elements of the profound understanding he seeks. The Dark Jester continues the authorial quest for a fitting medium in which to translate the language of the visionary and of extra-human experience. If short story and poetic anthology are not wholly suitable forms for Harris to convey the truth of his art, the revisioned history of his world, then early on in his dream-vision, the dreamer realises the inadequacy of such forms for conveying the truth of the Atahualpan form:

A naïve impulse rose to my lips and I cried: ‘Let me write your biography!’ It was a lame proposal...(3)
He continued speaking but I was unable to translate what he was saying. I needed to work *through* Dream into vestiges of thought (17).

It is these vestiges of thought that separate the dreamer from earlier incarnations of Harrisian narrators. He is approaching the necessity of ‘man born with the subtleties of ages’ (Harris’s introductory Mayan Proverb); aware of particles of redemptive truth and edging closer to the dream-book medium with which to make them whole. Even if he cannot translate fully the prophecy and possibilities of the Atahualpan form, Harris’s Dreamer rises, in his dream-book-ship, to the level of environmental awareness that embodies the multiform interconnected vision of Harris’s literary ecology.

The dreamer’s emanation from the landscape of the Americas marks him as the giant-poet of prophecy and redemptive possibility. The dreamer, towards the novel’s close, tracing the footsteps of the pre-Conquest South American ruler, is able to robe himself in the landscape itself; as narrator he is a product of the ‘world-creating jungle’ as well as its interpreter. Like the re-membered Cristo, he understands the totality of organic being; the spectacle of the interrelated web of being is made clear with the gift of ecological vision from within the forested space of the heartland: ‘I walk in shoes of mist, I wear rock and water. Rock melts, water becomes solidity or a desert. My bone and my garments fuse in world theatre (108). The dreamer leaves the reader (in his moment of waking) a living embodiment of the Atahualpan form, a rainforest narrator, equal to the Homeric rhapsodos or the bard of Albion. Harris has his eco-prophetic figure, an incarnation of Laocoon and Tiresias, and a definite
descendant of William Blake possessing regenerative and imaginative possibilities for the reading of history, ecology and extra-human consciousness.

The ‘new ways of seeing’, the radicalising, galvanising energies present in the fiction are brought about through authorial weaving of thought-threads of new science and mythic readings of ‘forgotten’ histories and memory. The poetic flap of Blake’s butterfly-winged words refract across time and space and create the storm of Harris’s contemporary ecological imagination. In his attempt to show the interrelated nature of all discourse, he breaks down barriers not only between notions of human and non-human being, but also between the supposedly exclusive disciplines of human knowledge. Wilson Harris’s narrative fusion of science (his personal history of land surveys, interest in ecology, fear for global crisis) with imaginative art, and indeed the art of the imagination, culminates in the fulmination of utterance that resounds with both the wisdom of all his ancestors and imperatives for future generations.
Part II:

Derek Walcott: Possessing the Earth

There was a time my bit of ground
Made freemen of the slave

- 'The Lament of Swordy Well', John Clare

For imagination and body to move with original
instinct, we must begin again from the bush.

- 'What the Twilight Says: An Overture', Derek Walcott
Chapter Four:

‘In a green world’: The emergence of ecopoetry

Who recognizes a cage for what it is? Not canaries of careful Reason who value well-fortified shelter, but skylarks whose song needs the space and sunlight beyond the bars.

- Theodore Roszak

Possessing the language of the land

The deep connection between art and the landscape of the St. Lucia in which Derek Walcott spent his formative years can be exemplified by the life and ideals of one individual:

To interview him I had to learn his milk route and where he was likely to stop to play the piano. Walcott has mentioned Hunter Francois as a poet who was a government minister as an example of his St. Lucian context, and indeed Hunter Francois is very

1 Theodore Roszak, Where the Wasteland Ends, p. xxvi.
much St. Lucia.²

This poet was encouraged to publish only at the insistence of Walcott and, in turn, he affected Walcott deeply, through his connection to the land as much as through his verse. In addition, he was influential in the inspiration and support he provided for Walcott’s friend, Dunstan St. Omer (whom he instituted into the Ministry of Culture) and also for Walcott’s brother, Roderick, who was appointed as Director of Culture while Francois held office as Minister of Education. In order to obtain an interview with him, Bruce King had to learn the rhythms of Hunter J. Francois’s life, a life of dairy farming and music making after he ‘eventually withdrew from politics, turned environmentalist’ and ‘purchased a bay which he wanted to keep from being developed’.³ The poetry of Francois, his love of the St. Lucian landscape, coupled with an environmental ethic of resistance makes an interesting foreground to the development of Walcott’s own poetry over the decades. In his ‘Note’ to Francois’s collection *First and Last Poems* Walcott hails his friend for his quiet, insistent utterance:

> This is an important phase for the islands. When you speak of importance people think of public buildings and paved streets. I mean it is time to hear the voice of the West Indies. H.J. Francois does not use the public address system, he is not even a modern, but a voice turned down to a compelling whisper. […]

³ ibid. p. 65.
This whispering poetry, in harmony with the non-human utterances of land and wildlife, provides the voice of the West Indies and, in actuality, can be seen to be perhaps the island’s first example of ecological nature poetry. Indeed, Francois uses folkloric representatives of the natural world to make his point in Aesop-like fashion:

“He’ll never bray” said the he-ass to the she  
“No diaphragm Ho! Ho!”

“He’ll never crow” said the cock to the hen  
“No voice-control you know!”

“Methinks I see the moral” thought  
The rabbit in the bush -  
“For I alone can twitch my nose!  
You have your talent, hush.”

The rabbit-thoughts of the poetic persona evident in this poem titled ‘Criticisms’ work in tandem with Francois’s direct action on behalf of the land to present one example of his dedication to the protection of the environment; actions and a

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4 Hunter Francois, *First and Last Poems* (Castries: [n. pub.], 1949), p. i.  
5 ibid. p. 33.
dedication that magnify his whispers beyond the scope of any megaphonic barrage of public address. However, it is in the poem ‘Infidel’ that the truly ecological nature of this Caribbean verse emerges. Here, the subject of the poem, whilst in tune with orthodox religion of the church with its ‘old familiar prayers’, ‘The old organ, and the old chanting’ is unable to find solace from ‘A restless frustration and longing, like a muted murmur / of many waters / About the secret caverns of the soul’. This restlessness comes, in part, from an obliviousness to the music of the native landscape. It is the lack of psychic integration with the living landscape that crowns the subject an ‘Infidel’ as he exits the church into ‘the beauty of the night’. The natural world, with humanity as an undeniable and integral part, offers up a panacea to his sense of psychic fracture and transience:

Everywhere soothing and maddening,
Glistening along the flutter of coconut leaves -
Moonlight like broad day, but lovely, lovely and soft!
Moonlight that lights up the soul of a man
   And leaves him panting like a tired child -
With a thousand insects chirping, singing,
Unseen birds of the night,
And then from afar,
The varied chorus of radios mixing and meeting,
Swelling the ample pulse of the great, vibrant beyond,
Heaping on the matchless beauty of the night
   The matchless beauty of sweet sound -
Thus attuned, the ear of the person of faithful vision and hearing (rustling with coconut leaves, keeping time with the tunes of insects and radios) provides a deep sense of awareness of interdependent existence and humanity’s place within the scheme of things. However, the infidel, dislocated from the language of landscape, unable to connect to sounds of the natural world, incarcerates himself, a careful canary, within the man-made edifice of caged reason:

But he saw not these things…

Only he saw […]

Within four walls of reason,

Beneath a roof of despair!…

There are echoes of the voice of John Clare in this poem, more so than any other in the collection First and Last Poems. ‘Infidel’ bears the imprint, almost forms the inverse, of Clare’s ‘I Am’, written in the Northampton Asylum, with its subject longing for an integration with the totality of life that had hitherto been his right and privilege, and seeking a state of equilibrium with the world which orientated its speaker, and humanity, between the heavens and the Earth:

I long for scenes, where man hath never trod

A place where woman never smiled or wept

There to abide with my Creator, God;

And sleep as I in childhood, sweetly slept,

\[\text{ibid. p. 25.}\]
Untroubling, and untroubled as I lie,

The grass below - above the vaulted sky.7

Francois’s roaming infidel clearly lacks the insight and understanding of Clare’s eco-prophetic prisoner and creates his own self-inflicted asylum of dejection in his unseeing ignorance. The very fact that Clare’s philosophy in life and in verse was so in tune with his own native landscape makes the sense of psychological and environmental fracture which he expresses in the face of the systematic processes of dispossession that he suffered seem all the more tragic. The parliamentary acts that forced him off the land, from subsistence farming to wage-slave labour, and his years in High Beech and Northampton, constituted distressing acts of enclosure of the poetic mindscape that sought to soar lark-like without the constraints of ‘a glass cage all around’, witnessed years before at Holywell Hall with its ‘canarys that were fluttering about’.8 Prefiguring both his own fate, ‘Beneath a roof of despair’ and the twentieth-century warning words of Roszak, John Clare’s vision of harsh imprisonment of wildlife makes for a poignant counterpoint to both Hunter Francois’s ability to effect some environmental changes at a personally political level and Derek Walcott’s own ability to sweep across the continents poetically, and literally, which enhances the focussing of his art at both local and global levels. Indeed, if Francois transfigures the poetry of harmony of being, then Walcott inherits the vision of both the old and ‘new world’ ‘lost voices’ that articulate the need for connection

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7 John Clare: The Oxford Authors, p. 361.
with indigenous landscapes. The poetic and, indeed, biographic resonances of both the St. Lucian cowherd bard and the Northamptonshire lyric labourer, in different ways inform Walcott’s poetic growth and transition, from crafting ‘nature poetry’ through the organic process of poetic growth, arriving at a point where, it can be argued he has cultivated an ecopoetic body of work.

Such a subtle tide-shift in poetic emphasis can be evidenced by a reading of the poem ‘Missing The Sea’, from The Castaway collection, alongside the poem ‘Earth’, in Sea Grapes. Patricia Ismond, in her comprehensive study, explores Walcott’s complex relationship with landscape as indicator of negation and possibility, and isolates ‘Missing The Sea’ as ‘an early instance of a focal idea in Walcott, of the organic bond between the self and the landscape which it inhabits’. The pencil is paralysed when the connection between man and the sea which inspires it is severed. The artist appears caged within padded walls that dull the senses and mute creative vision: ‘a deafening absence’, ‘a thick nothing’. This is not a glimpse of an unseeing, unhearing ‘infidel’ but rather of one removed to surroundings which inhibit and restrict vision. Like Clare of ‘The Flitting’ who ‘left his home of homes’ and ‘native fields’, Walcott’s voice issues from the coastlines of his island. He has been in prolific conversation with the roar of the oceans and here, at a remove, is forced into producing an uneasy monologue. This sense of estrangement from the Harrisian understanding of a

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9 King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 364. The author relates how ‘talking of influences on Walcott is like talking of baking powder when you taste a cake’. However, in terms of an analysis of Walcott’s emerging ecopoetic eye, the influence of Francois and Clare should be noted above all others.

10 Ismond, p. 67.
'heartland' reveals how important a deep sense of connection with landscape proves to be for Walcott's poetic voice:

First, we have not wholly sunk into our own landscapes, as one gets the feeling at funerals that our bodies make only light, unlasting impressions on our earth [...] The migratory West Indian feels rootless on his own earth, chafing at its beaches. [...] For imagination and body to move with original instinct, we must begin again from the bush.11

This assessment of the condition of a 'migratory West Indian' psyche grafted onto the trunk-stump of the 'new world', echoes the utterances of Harris in his determination to narrate the total, pre-Columbian and extra-human history of the Americas. For Walcott, any profound freeing of the imagination necessitates replication of Cristo’s journey, back to and through the bush; only in this way can a rooted sense of belonging through an understanding of interdependence with the land be achieved in the face of the dispossessing, enslaving history of the peoples of the Caribbean. The need to reach below the 'historical topsoil' of the land and to sink deeper than the chafing sand of the beaches becomes the focus of the poem which is central in any discussion of Walcott’s creation of an ecopoetic: 'Earth'.

This poem articulates, over the course of one revolution of the Earth upon its axis, the awakening of the human subject to the rhythms of the natural world

which it inhabits. Day and night are present here, not set up in facile opposition to one another but as part of a continuum: time and space and environment as an ongoing process. The ultimate provider of life, the sun, gives photosynthesising energy to the subject attuned to his/her surroundings. This energy, or reflexive understanding of existence passes into the tidal motion of the ‘new moon rising’ as the poet presents the complementary power of the diurnal and nocturnal. In the midst of this process of time’s revolutions the human subject grows towards a sense of belonging on and in the Earth:

Let the day grow on you upward
through your feet
the vegetal knuckles
to your knees of stone,
until by evening you are a black tree; ¹²

This poetic amalgamation of the human body with the ‘vegetal’ world, the transition from human form towards the arboreal, echoes ‘Troy’ from Harris’s *Eternity to Season*. The figure, like Hector, must subsume itself within the very landscape, becoming stone and wood, an earthly trinity of animal, vegetable and mineral compositions of the planet. The rooted tree, belonging deep in the soil, recurs throughout the poetry of Walcott; a natural emblem for the sense of belonging that has had to be cultivated in the ‘new world’, and which nonetheless

provides no sense of exacting defeat typified by Harris’s Hector but rather signals the potentiality for ascendancy through the insight into the oneness of life and an interconnected artistic vision.¹³

As the heat of the poem’s day passes into dusk, an alternate image of the connection of human to non-human darts across the page:

feel, with evening,

the swifts thicken your hair,

the new moon rising out of your forehead,

and the moonlight veins of silver

running from your armpits

like rivulets under white leaves.¹⁴

Here, embodied in the swift (a bird set to return to stitch together the poem Omeros) the idea of the centrality of flight, and notions of migration to the firing of the imagination can be seen. The inspiring swifts encourage the growth of foliage in the figure and, correspondingly, the thoughts and visions of the poet. This pair of images, tree and bird, will return throughout Walcott’s body of work to a reveal, in ecological images, a double-consciousness of the West Indian

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¹³ This poem marks a striking instance of Caribbean eco-literary fulfilment of the Roszaks’ description of ‘deep form’: ‘The artist, like a tree, drinks up nourishment from the depths and from the heights, from the roots and from the air, to bring forth a crown of leaves’. See, Coupe, p. 226.

¹⁴ Walcott, Sea Grapes, p. 87.
poet. On the one hand we have the vision of the man rooted in his environment, with knowledge of the indigenous landscape and life, creator of a culture that can only come from interaction with the local; and on the other, the vision of an artist whose swift consciousness criss-crosses the surface of the Earth, aware of the connected nature of the continents, in history and art. In this way Walcott, with images of local and global connected conscious and conscience, provides in ‘Earth’ a poetic template for an environmental ethic. In addition, this poem reveals Walcott’s desire to attune and, with its gentle yet insistent imperative, have others attune themselves with the awareness of the natural world that Francois also urged in ‘Infidel’. It is through this awareness of the position of the human within the scheme of things, an awareness of the macrocosmic (the twinned orbs of sun and moon) and the microscopic (swifts and ants) that the poetic persona as human archetype can think beyond the containing and constraining historical roofs of despair and orientate itself, as Clare sought to do, with ‘grass below’ and above, ‘the vaulted sky’.

This orientation is only possible through the opening up of body and imagination to the natural systems of the earth, the music of the living landscapes, lunar and solar cycles:

Sleep, as ants

cross over your eyelids.

You have never possessed anything

as deeply as this.
This is all you have owned
from the first outcry
through forever;

you can never be dispossessed.\textsuperscript{15}

Walcott's being, fused with the landscape, inspired by swift-flight, is lulled to sleep by the percussion of an insect march, John Clare's 'pismires' playing their part in the orchestra of the organic. These sleep-inducing ants offer an assurance that connection with the earth is not merely concerned with the conscious 'awake' mind but is enmeshed in all states of natural existence; it is in the realm of dreaming senses that humanity has 'never possessed anything / as deeply'. Here, Walcott's vision of earthly belonging echoes, not just the eco-narratives of Wilson Harris as dreamer, but the discourse of 'green' philosophy as well. Theodore Roszak explains the centrality of the dream-conscious to the discovery or recovery of notions of congruence with the processes of the environment:

[[... what should we make of this irrepressible need for sleep? Perhaps it is the claim upon us of another dimension of experience - a longing for alternative consciousness built into the circadian rhythm of all animal life [...] We in the contemporary west may wake each morning to cast out our sleep and dream experience like

\textsuperscript{15} ibid. p. 87.
so much rubbish. But that is an almost freakish act of alienation\textsuperscript{16}

The importance in ‘Earth’ then, of dream-time as part of the process of belonging is essentially concerned with connectedness, and furthermore can be seen to provide a site for resistive energies directed against the ideologies of colonialism and forms of neocolonialism. It is interesting to note, at this stage, how the plantation economies of many Caribbean Islands (the first of the punitive cash-cropping systems that destabilised economies across the globe for the benefit of competing forms of Western capital expansion) provided the source of the stimulant anti-sleep drugs that fuelled destructive expansion: ‘It is no mere coincidence that coffee, tea, and chocolate - the repertory of stimulant beverages to which western society has become habituated […] entered our society simultaneously with the scientific revolution.\textsuperscript{17} In actuality, the contrast of sleep deprivation in the workings of the plantation system were marked and harsh. The stimulants willingly consumed by slave owners to ensure wakefulness and to spur on the machinations of empire were harvested by those slaves and indentured labourers who were forced to go without rest in order to process those very stimulant cash-crops.

It is possible here, to see the role of the fruits of the slave trade and read ‘imperial expansionist ideologies’ as the bastard offspring of the scientific revolution, and also to see Walcott, poet of the plantation Caribbean, urging a return to possession of the earth in the sleeping and waking states of our lives.

\textsuperscript{16} Roszak, pp. 80-84.
\textsuperscript{17} ibid. p. 84.
Reading ‘Earth’ through the tinted lens of Roszak’s philosophy of connectedness, the importance of uncaging poetic vision is again revealed; an uncaging that comes from intimacy with the environment and circadian rhythms of animal life. Here, Walcott’s call to reconnect in waking and sleeping bring to mind the revolutionary lines of Guyanese poet Martin Carter: ‘I do not sleep to dream, but dream to change the world.’ Walcott’s vision is of a revolution of the psyche necessary to heal the fractures of historical amnesia and a sense of geographical dislocation. Indeed, Carter, himself hearing the muted voices of dispossession, sees a communication with the land, as witness to human barbarity, as essential to any psychological integration or completeness for the once-colonised:

The night when I left you on the bridge
I bent down
kneeling on my knee
and pressed my ear to listen to the land

[...] 

listening to the land
and all I heard was tongueless whispering
as if some slave wanted to speak again.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{18}\) *Hinterland: Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain*, ed. by E. A. Markham (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 1989), pp. 75-76.
Possession of one’s history, therefore, is inextricable from communion with the land: the connection of Homo Sapiens to the Earth was articulated ‘from the first outcry’ of primal language cementing the mutuality of soul and soil. The possession that Walcott envisages is not acquisitive in the sense of a possession of ownership or power hierarchy but rather the mutual sense of belonging derived through comfort with the scheme of being - a possession of intimate knowledge of one’s surroundings and of the self within the ecosystem of total existence; of the heartland; of the ability to dwell poetically, to be long and belong in a place. Following the examples of Clare and Francois, Walcott counsels a way of interconnected and attuned living: the ability to sink wholly into the native landscapes. In this way his writing transcends notions of ‘nature poetry’ or even of ‘postcolonial romanticism’ and arrives at ecopoetry.

It is necessary to examine, in some detail, these critical terms in relation to the literature of Walcott and to assess the parts that contribute to the whole body of Walcott’s ecopoetic. Critics have, to a great extent engaged with use the of landscape poetry and the inheritance of Romanticism in the development of Walcott’s poetry. As seen in ‘Earth’ the concerns of dwelling become coupled with Walcott’s early mission of ‘naming’ and claiming a legitimacy for the Caribbean landscape and vegetation. Indeed, Walcott’s intimate knowledge of Caribbean flora and topography would seem to place him in such a tradition of nature poetry:

19 See, Ismond, pp 52-102 and Kamada, pp. 207-220.
There was the nationalist task of avoiding the European prejudices that nothing of value really existed in the New World. This was partly a matter of what Walcott would later describe as naming, the giving of the local landscape a value as authentic and worthy as that of Europe.  

This in turn has led to informed readings of Walcott as 'nature poet':

Again [his] gift is in part due to tension between his ear for creole rhythms and English diction. Sparks are generated between the two in each Walcott line, never mind poem or book. I also think he is a nature poet and firmly in the Romantic tradition which is edifying in these days.  

However, the term 'nature poetry' is not sufficient to define wholly Walcott's engagement with the environments of the Caribbean and beyond. There is perhaps something limiting about the term 'nature poet' in a postcolonial world of global modernity; the connotations of an apolitical detachment seem unavoidable. It would appear that a simple transfer to the term ecopoet as denoting a modern version of nature poet aware of the ecological crises of the twenty-first century is also somewhat lacking. Jonathan Bate warns of the problems inherent in such a facile transfer and the conflation of notions of poetics and political engagement:

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20 King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 42.
21 'Letter' by Fred D'Aguiar, qtd. in King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life p. 456.
Ecopoetry is not synonymous with writing that is pragmatically green: a manifesto for ecological correctness will not be poetic because its language is bound to be instrumental, to address questions of doing rather than to ‘present’ the experience of dwelling. We will, then, need to hesitate over the complex of intersections and contradictions between ecopoetics and ecopolitics. 22

Bate’s analysis is rightly cautious in its hesitation about the conflation and subsequent possibility of obfuscation of ‘green’ terminologies. However, when considering the history of the Caribbean the very ‘experience of dwelling’ (Bate’s ecopoetics) is indivisible from the politics of land ownership (Walcott’s possession). This intersection of ecopolitics and poetics is noted by Bate both in his analysis of Brathwaite and his connection of imperialism to ecocide. 23 It is useful then to consider Walcott’s poetry as the marked signpost of Bate’s cross-road of contradictions between politics and poetics. It is impossible to talk of ecopoetics in the postcolonial world without figuring the political history of that world as inextricable:

The landscape [Walcott] writes about is necessarily politicized; his own subjectivity is intimately implicated in both the natural beauty

22 Bate, The Song of the Earth, p. 42.
23 ibid. p. 76 - ‘Is it a coincidence that imperialism has always led to environmental degradation?’ In relation to Walcott, it is helpful to combine Bate’s conclusion with that of J. Scott Bryson, who acknowledges one possible intersection of the political and poetic in the definition of ecopoetry - ‘Ecopoetry is a subset of nature poetry that, while adhering to certain conventions of romanticism, also advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues’. Bryson, p. 5.
and the traumatic history of the place; he must directly acknowledge
the history of St. Lucia and the Caribbean, the history of diaspora,
of slavery, of the capitalist commodification of the landscape.²⁴

Possession of, or integration with the land, politically and psychically, is a
necessity for the Caribbean artist. It is also essential, then, that critical definitions
of the term ecopoetry which correctly ‘should probably remain fluid at this point
because scholars are only beginning to offer a thorough examination of the
field²⁵ should also take into account the histories of colonialism and many still
prevailing imperialistic ideologies. If examinations of ecoliterature in general can
encompass the ecopolitical resistance to ‘Single vision’ notions of exploitative
progress evident in the era of globalisation, then it would seem problematic that
ecopoetry be all too easily divorced from such notions. There can be little critical
distance forged or forced between readings of what Walcott does with his
ecopoetry in challenging or problematizing the history of the land in the
Caribbean and, for instance, what novel writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o has been
doing in Kenya for decades as has, more recently, the environmental focus of the
writing of Zakes Mda in South Africa.²⁶

For Derek Walcott this act of repossession of the ‘heartland’ is
inextricably linked to the processes of crafting language, the art of poetry. Here,
then, the poet through his vision and verse implicates himself in the act of
reclamation. It is impossible to ‘sink deep’ or dwell in the land without first

²⁴ Kamada, p. 209.
²⁵ Bryson, p. 5.
fashioning a poetic language of Caribbean aesthetic. In actuality, this poetic act of naming can be considered to be part of the creation of landscape itself and, furthermore, essential to its survival: 'To name a place is to allow that place its being [...] Ecopoetics reawakens the pre-scientific magic of naming'.

Walcott’s Crusoe-construction of poetic bonfires along the coastlines of the Caribbean allow the regeneration of indigenous vegetation through language, the clearing of textual space for the breadfruit and mango to flourish alongside the culturally alien imports of apple and pomegranate. His Adamic utterances herald the connection between poetry and landscape in the ‘new world’. His is ‘the song that names the earth’ and becomes part of the chorus which is ‘the place where we save the earth’. Such poetic naming as part of the process of ‘dwelling’ deeply becomes Walcott’s mission in reclaiming the language of the land. This chapter will examine the development of his multi-faceted ecopoetic through the collection, *The Castaway* to chart the full emergence of an ecopolitically-conscious poetic and Walcott’s arrival at the profound sense of possession of the ‘Earth’.

*The Castaway*

‘The Flock’ presents a sensitive example of the connectedness of the poet to his natural landscape. Inspired by the peregrinations of the duck flock, the mind of the poet embarks upon a journey of artistry. His processes of contemplation, of

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27 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 175.
creation, of naming, encompass many ages and encircle the globe, shadowing the repeated movements of generations of ‘blue-wing teal and mallard’. While here it might appear difficult to defend the poet from charges of anthropocentricity, so clearly delineated is the sense of the subjective poetic-mind, that what we are shown is the place of that subjectivity within both the wider scheme of existence and the history of thought, art and life. Despite the appearance of this poem as an instance of Walcott’s tendency to ‘cull his imagery from the natural setting (sea, swamp, forest)’ it is not an indiscriminate nor wholly self-serving execution. Indeed, it is the mastery of metaphor that positions the poem in its ambivalent situation between the predominance of human discourse and the extra-human world - ‘Before the poem is over the birds have become part of the imagination’s topography without ever losing their naturalistic authenticity - natural fact and metaphor remain one.’ Moreover, the natural world is never subordinated ‘as a framing device but [is] a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history’.

The winds that shoot the spear-head formation of ‘volleys of blue-wing teal’ from the reed-beds, also fire the imagination of the awakened poet, whose instinct, like that of the birds he views, has been sharpened by the whetstone-turning of the seasons which ‘hones their sense’ and provides him with a dawning ‘of images migrating from the mind’. At one level, this presentation of the projection onto the natural world of the poet’s anxiety would seem to de-centre the importance of extra-human history. However, Walcott actually

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29 Ismond, p. 69
30 Balakian, p. 350.
31 Buell, p. 7.
presents an intermeshed portrayal of the human mind as an integral part of wider existence; the necessity of migration as part of the continual battle for survival of the flock is indivisible from the need for the imagination to make similar essential journeys of understanding. Bound by the same circularity of night/day and change of seasons as the ducks’ flight, the poet can interrogate not only the natural history of the Earth but also the human representation of that history. The self-reflexive nature of the poem far from de-centring the natural, in this case, avian, world is able to situate human art as part of ‘natural history’ through a sense of reciprocity with the migratory patterns of birds; the poet’s emanating thoughts join the flock and navigate the globe in tandem with them. This is the attuned poetic mind which also engages with the differing human poetic discourses that have sought to assess the wider web of being. In this way, the poet simultaneously traces the migration paths of the birds of inspiration and the history of human understanding through the writing of script and the creation of art. ‘The Flock’ can be read as an involved poetic dialogue with both Romantic representations of the natural world and also more recent ecocritical assessments. The Keatsian images give way to the world of Ted Hughes towards the conclusion, although both remain held in place by the circumnavigation of the orbital flight of the flock.

Walcott’s winter presents the ghostly figure of the silent knight-errant in monochrome landscape:

Skeletal forest, a sepulchral knight

riding in silence […]
in iron contradiction crouched
against those gusts that urge the mallards south.
Vizor’d with blind defiance of his quest,
it's yearly divination of the spring.32

This figure is poetic inspiration thwarted, resisting the currents of time and season, suffering in stasis, a sort of poetic death-in-life, the withered-sedge of creative power in need of renewal that comes with understanding of the history of the natural world. The 'skeletal' forest landscape evokes both the deciduous nature of forest life and death-like status of the unseeing, unconnected poet. In place of Keats's pale wanderer spellbound by desire, the poetic persona here awaits release from the paralysis of 'blind defiance' through a sense of communion with the land. The inability of the infidel-knight to hear the sounds of the Earth and the shoots of spring can lead only to an inflexible, entrenched view of the world and humanity's place within it. Although the disappearance of the flock leads to poetic inspiration suffering its own winter, the journey 'through such silence' (echoing the paralysis of 'Missing The Sea') the thought-birds of inspiration return, settling on the 'branched mind' of the poet. These words/birds become indicators of the spring of revision and reappraisal, their flight marking out the path for reassessment of the 'marble attitudes' of history and the 'frozen giant minds' that carve unseeing colonial knights out of the ice of imperial histories. Ismond describes how Walcott 'makes in this poem one of his

sustained critical deconstructions of the traditional metaphors of Western culture'. This critical deconstruction goes further, moreover, to counsel the reassessment of all history through a desire or necessity to acknowledge the ‘inhuman cries’ of the seals as much as to critique the ‘iron contradiction’ of the unseeing nature of colonial expansion for which the sepulchral knight becomes an emblem.

‘The Flock’ points the way to new understandings of the world and highlights courses of thought and art that seek to divert the ‘inflexible direction of the world / as it revolves upon its centuries’. The alternative world-view suggested by the birds in patterns of yearly flight encapsulates this desire to acknowledge the notion of the extra-human utterance or indeed presence on the Earth as inspiration for human understanding of its own position and as creative impulse. Here, the poet draws parallels with Ted Hughes with whom he ‘shared his interests in landscape [and] environment’. The process of poetry and the flight of the flock become conjoined; first, with: ‘pages of torn birds are blown across / whitening tundras like engulfing snow’ and then, with the ‘whirring flock’ that flies across Walcott’s ‘cold sky’ of the page to harmonise the rhythms of seasonal nature with the poet’s vision of the totality of ‘natural history’. The winter’s sky of the poet’s page is marked by the silhouettes of the birds in flight and the text is created. Similarly, Hughes in his poem ‘The Thought-Fox’ sees connection with the natural world as stimulus for the imagination and the creation of poetic text:

33 Ismond, p. 80.
34 King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 535.
35 Walcott, Castaway, p. 15.
Sets neat prints into the snow
Between tress [...] 
Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed.\textsuperscript{36}

Here, the fox’s revealing prints, uncovering the dark mud concealed by the winter’s snowfall, are the printed word on Hughes’s page; both poets see the textual marks in the figures of the natural world that inspire; indeed, they are necessary to the creation of art. Hughes’s paralysis - ‘the clock’s loneliness / And this blank page’ - is thawed by the presence of feral energy as Walcott’s imagination is freed from the irons of history by the migratory inspiration of the flock. In actuality, ‘the black wings’ of inked inspiration that fly across to produce the printed page supplant the earlier image of inscription upon the land: the horse of instruction steered by the deathly knight with its ‘hooves cannonading the snow’. This image is of the thumped imprint of an unseeing text forced upon a landscape bereft of the possibilities of spring’s visionary renewal and the poet’s ‘sense of season’.

‘The Flock’ frees Walcott’s own ‘exultant larks’ from the incarceration of anthropocentric thought and allows the poetic ‘clear eye’ to greet the natural

world ‘as a blessing’. This poetic ‘clear eye’ is the environmental ethic of the ecopoet; it appears in ‘The Thought-Fox’ as the threshold to new understanding - ‘an eye/ A widening deepening greenness’ - the glint of the feral fox’s eye becomes synonymous with the ‘greening’ of the poet’s own visions. For Derek Walcott, the ‘clear eye’ becomes the medium of expression for fathoming humanity’s place in the scheme of life. The poet is made aware of the ambiguous nature of the human eye/poetic I: it can be witness to and perpetrator of destruction of the environment and as much as it can be Adamic creator of the natural world. Such awareness comes out of dialogue with the work of Hughes:

[Hughes’s] rage is concern, not a prehistoric, macho blustering, and its genius is feminine, that of the female we call Mother Earth

[…] That is wolf-watching. That is the sunt lacrimae rerum that glitters in the eyes even of beasts. Our own eyes are harder than those of the beasts. We are the real predators.37

The responsibility of the poetic eye to assess humanity’s position within, and treatment of the natural world, becomes the focus of The Castaway, most explicitly in the poems that form ‘A Tropical Bestiary’. The title of this group suggests the dual mission of Walcott’s ‘clear eye’. First, the collective portraits of the wildlife of the region would appear to be part of the attempt to sink ‘wholly’ into landscape, to possess the language of the land, through the creation

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and legitimisation of a Caribbean aesthetic. In addition, the poetic eye of an environmental ethic can be seen to address the previous representations of colonial classification found both in examples of prosaic naturalist notebooks and the ‘curiosity’ museums of taxidermy. 

The fate of the transported ‘Ibis’ is metaphor not only for the loss of desire in life but, more importantly, for the effects of dislocation from natural habitat and, by extension, for forms of enslavement. The observation of the ‘Blanching’ of the bird’s ‘rare vermilion’ into faded pink documents the anguish of captivity, resulting in paralysis and the decaying transformation into a silt-trapped ‘stilted heron’. It becomes reduced to conformity, its flames extinguished, with the ‘ashen herons of the heronry’. Despite the poet’s assertion that this process is ‘Pointing no moral’, it is difficult not to relate this fade from the fire of life and freedom to other instances in the corpus of Walcott’s work. The creature’s being forced to fade into pink stands as a pigmented representation of colonial power; it becomes iconic, prefiguring the “‘flamingo colours” of a fading world’ of the British Empire from the poem ‘Veranda’. The ‘marble attitudes’ of imperial doctrine which ‘kept an empire in the red’ and drew the pink maps of British domination sought to bleach out the

38 See, Thieme, p. 158, for a description of Walcott’s fear that ‘St. Lucia will remain uninscribed, except in the inferior mode of the “naturalist’s notebook”. Also, see Walcott’s Another Life:

I saw, as through the glass of some provincial gallery
the hieratic objects which my father loved:
the stuffed dark nightingale of Keats,
bead-eyed, snow-headed eagles,
all that romantic taxidermy


39 Walcott, Castaway, p. 19.
40 ibid. p. 38.
complexity of the multifaceted histories in their colonies. In the same way that the reader, here, must view the ibis in captivity (and is, more often than not, coerced in the modern era into seeing nature through the iron bars of the cage or the lens of the camera), so too does viewing history from the books of hegemonic imperial discourse blanch the colour and art from the subject as well as muting its multivocality.

Nations who have ideas of dominating the future, or of hallowing the past, do it under the name of the alleged force called history [...] there are too many people who are horrified at the idea of what would turn out to be the bad taste of the Greeks, because our concept of Grecian sculpture is [...] bleached-out [...] That is a ruin sanctified by time; and people who behold ruins sanctify them through the eyes of history. 41

The envoy of the dominating nation in ‘Ibis’ is ‘the green swamp-traveller / Who catches it to watch the plumage fade’; a figure who seeks to control, to assess, to quantify the inhabitants and landscape of the colonies around the globe. The ambivalence of the colour ‘green’, set by Walcott (ever aware of the tincture of words upon his canvas-page) in direct opposition to the range of draining reds of the plumage of the quarry, pertains both to the territory stalked through and also to the hunter himself; the green landscape reflecting onto the face of the figure. It could be the ironic intention of the poet here to bring to mind the fevers and

agues that struck down so many colonists in the hostile jungle-worlds they sought to exploit. The traveller in his attempt to ensnare and capture is as out of place in the swamp as the ibis will be in confinement.\textsuperscript{42}

The poem alludes to notions of the enslavement of the animal world and, although it does not seek to directly equate this with the history of human slavery, it does portray a forced migration (at odds with the sense of freedom presented in ‘The Flock’) for the ibis as it is taken across the Atlantic in a state of captivity. The poem, then, does address the role of colonial Natural History and zoo construction as an important part of the imperial system of wholesale exploitation of the natural world and the neocolonial systems of commercial capital, such as the trade in tourist dollars, that require such systems to continue to operate.\textsuperscript{43} The fate of the ibis, then, could be the fate of the islands’ history doomed only to be seen from a distance and with faded imagination but for the eye of the poet. Ecopoetry restores a faithful vision of the history of the Earth; human history is seen as indivisible from natural history. The poetic ‘clear eye’ of environmental concern can re-colour the icon of the ibis as history but must also attempt to release the creature itself from cages of ‘reason’. Here, Walcott echoes Harris in his call for art that can visualise the truth of the history of the world and not some eviscerated, saw-dust stuffed representation of it. Poets must do more than paint the faded bills of dead toucans, and Walcott, in ‘Ibis’, starts

\textsuperscript{42} In addition, it is difficult here not to note the irony in the depiction of the ‘greenness’ of such anti-ecological practice.
\textsuperscript{43} In actuality, the poem’s description of the fate of the ibis has the ability to resound outside of its boundaries of intention as it calls to mind modern zoo practice intended to forestall such inevitable fade in the plumage of birds caged in hostile habitats through the addition of artificial red colour-dyes to the administered feed.
the journey of understanding and possibility that runs its course through ‘Tropical Bestiary’.

‘Lizard’ and ‘Man O’ War Bird’ continue the poetic search for comfort within the scheme of the whole of existence and the sense of responsibility to the non-human world by giving respective views of the natural world through the microscopic and then the panoramic lens of the ‘clear eye’. In the first instance, we see contemplation of the problematic role of human intervention in ‘nature’s law’ and then, we are provided with a vision of the insignificance of the human form, a mere speck-grain of sand in the cosmos.

The image of ‘the heraldic lizard, magnified / Devouring its midge’ presents the workings of the bio-web and food chain, a hierarchy of predation that seems natural. However, even this presentation is disingenuous; we witness these workings of existence through the lens of human art. Not only is the lizard ‘magnified’, it is also ‘heraldic’, an emblem of the island - ‘Jounalao’ 44 - an anthropomorphic symbol for a human world-view similar to readings of the ibis as ‘hieroglyphic of beak-headed Egypt’. From the outset of this brief poem about the possibilities of human intervention in the natural order, the poet never lets the reader forget that even the seemingly disassociated act of viewing is necessarily implicated; it is a form of intervention, of ‘reading’ the natural world. Coupled with this subtle interpretation of reading the landscape’s inhabitants, is the direct dilemma of interference in specific instances of life and death. The subject finds himself a Poseidon-like deity of the puddles:

44 See, Walcott, Omeros, p. 4.
Last night I plucked
‘as a brand from the burning’ a murderous, pincered beetle
Floundering in urine like a shipwreck shallop
Rudderless, its legs frantic as oars
Did I, by this act, set things right side up? 45

The speaker’s sense of doubt as to his right to mete out justice at the risk of transgressing the order of divine creation - ‘Rightening the beetle damns creation’ - is made explicit, but also draw parallels with Walcott’s comprehension that humankind has flaunted its self-appointed role as God by making replications of heaven and hell on earth: evident in the ability to ‘make and unmake heaven’. 46 Moreover, it is the sympathy of a shared mortality and not a sense of power over non-human creation that moved the speaker to intervene. Seeing human temporality mirrored in the beetle’s death-throe ‘fight / With nothing’ the awareness of the connectedness of all life in its finiteness becomes unavoidable. The beetle and its reluctant saviour are bound together by a mortality that will not heed ‘Mercy’s ‘strange laws’. In this way the speaker’s uneasy resignation to ‘Withdraw and leave the scheme of things in charge’ would at once appear to be a fatalistic admission of the ultimate futility of the power of humans to affect the cycles of life and death and, at the same time, an affirmation of and admission of the human possibilities of such agency.

45 Walcott, Castaway, p. 20.
‘Man O’ War Bird’ repositions the assumption of human predominance in the scheme of things and presents a vision of the expansiveness of ‘that blue wildfire’ sky; the poet is viewed against this backdrop and viewed from the circling eye of the frigate bird. Indeed, the poem operates through examinations of notions of circularity. The circuiting motion of the flight of the frigate enacts in its focus-aim the cycle of predation as it threatens to seize the tern. The tern is itself predatory, despite being prey, mirroring the unfortunate yet ‘murderous beetle’. In the scheme of things, what goes around comes around. The ‘O’ of the bird’s name is then picked up not only in its ‘round eye’ and consequently, the eye of the poet but also in the circle of sun that they are viewing. The bird’s-eye-view of the world acts as inspiration for the poet’s vision. The man-of-war bird intervenes effortlessly to adjust the poet’s own sense of the sphere of existence and the astrophysical spheres that constitute the cosmos. Inverting the uneasy intervention of the speaker of the previous poem, the bird lends the poet a sense of balance:

Rightens, by its round eye, my drift
Through heaven when I shift
My study of the sun […]

In that blue wildfire somewhere is an Eye
That weighs this world exactly as it pleases

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47 Walcott, Castaway, p. 20.
The natural world, here, affects human perception of both itself and the totality, the non-human other. The poet’s weighing of the ‘world’s scales’ has been tilted by the frigate bird and under its guiding eye his imagination is freed from the cage of anthropocentric ‘careful Reason’ and he is able to ‘shift [his] study’ from the vision of a purely human-centred cosmos. The observation of the soaring flight and pivoting rolls of such a bird plays a pivotal role in the uncaging of Walcott’s world-view and indeed, poetic voice. The man-of-war bird acts as poetic counterpoint to the Albatross of Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner and, rather than being bound round the speaker’s neck as testament to the debt he owes the natural world, the frigate emerges from the Caribbean coastline and glides out over the seascape to inspire the young Walcott.48

The frigate bird my phoenix [...] 

[...] came sailing 

through a tree’s net, to raise 

its emblem in the cirrus, 

named with the common sense 

of fishermen: sea scissors, 

*Fregata magnificens*,

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ciseau-la-mer, the patois

for its cloud-cutting course;\textsuperscript{49}

This creature becomes the emblem for finding a personal poetic voice and contributes to Walcott's secure sense of place within the 'scheme of things'. Taken under its wings he is able to dwell in the land/seascapes with the native flora and fauna of his environment, and is able to possess truly all the languages of his 'heartland'. These poems indicate the reciprocal relationship between the ecopoet and the natural world; the human figure cannot escape the often problematic responsibility towards the natural world and equally, he needs to be able to open himself up to its influences, to hear the music of the living landscape, and the song of the earth in order to fully understand the interconnected nature of being. Walcott's inspiration is freed only when he can see with the eye of the flock or frigate, and view the visions of the world that migrate across continents and circle the beaches of the Caribbean.

The whale, in turn, becomes signifier of the beauty of God's creation and Walcott's understanding of the precarious state of such creation in the modern world. As with the divine pupil at the centre of the frigate's 'Eye' in the sky, here the whale's existence is both testament to the hand of God and a celebration of the diversity of life:

Once, the Lord raised this bulwark to our eyes,

\textsuperscript{49} Walcott, \textit{The Arkansas Testament} (London and Boston: Faber and Faber Limited, 1987), pp. 21-24. The bird also appears in the cover illustration to this edition further highlighting its perceived centrality to the construction of Walcott's vision.
Once, in our seas, whales threshed,
The harpooner was common. Once, I heard
Of a baleine beached up the Grenadines, fleshed
By derisive, antlike villagers: a prize
Reduced from majesty pygmy-size.
Salt-crusted, mythological,
And dead.\textsuperscript{50}

The celebratory praise of ‘the blue whale’s crystal jet’ is tempered with the recurring sense of mortality. ‘The Whale, His Bulwark’ becomes a lament for species depletion in the contemporary world; the harpoon of humanity piercing the biosphere and unbalancing the scales of the world’s ecosystems. In this way, Walcott provides poetic vanguard of protest and dismay at the regrettable and avoidable loss of life to the human economy.\textsuperscript{51}

The image of the beached bulwark is transfigured with the poetic eye into the ‘Tarpon’, the final poem, in dialogue with the poems that precede it in the sequence, to interrogate notions of death (human and non-human), cycles of life, natural laws and the centring of man in the whole of existence through the

\textsuperscript{50} Walcott, \textit{Castaway}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{51} Here, Walcott’s verse reflects the groundswell of progressive opinion across the globe in the 1960s and early 70s which led to the formation, in 1971, of the environmental group Greenpeace and its early campaign to ‘save the whales’. In addition, this poem brings into focus how ecological concerns are contested in the contemporary Caribbean. As a former whaling nation, St. Lucia has recently voted for the resumption of whaling at the I.W.C. The bribery and vote-buying on the council by Japan has lead to the co-opting of Caribbean nations into the lobby calling for the resumption of whaling, not only on the grounds of supposed economic growth, but also with the largely false claims that whales in the Caribbean sea are depleting fish stocks on a significant level: in actuality, it is only the sperm whale which consumes any consequential number of fish, and these are mostly deep-sea fish not caught by fishermen.
creation of verse. In the place of the blue whale, representing the dearth of (and death of) a species, here, the poetic ‘eye’s lens’ focuses on the ‘gold eye’ of a single drowning fish. Through the observation of this second instance of a gaping fight with nothing, Walcott examines the human understanding of the finiteness of being. Indeed, the very process of bearing witness through detailed examination of the fish ‘thudding the dead sand’ becomes part of Walcott’s process of dwelling in his native land. The understanding of flora and fauna (the sinking wholly into landscape) necessitates the comprehension of the essential mortality of all life; this studied awareness through language is part of the processes of figuring humanity’s place within the scheme of things. It provides a further challenge to anthropocentric modes of thought. Robert Pogue Harrison analyses the human desire to transcend finiteness that results in a destruction based solely on the presumption of supremacy:

Nature knows how to die, but human beings know mostly how to kill as a way of failing to become their ecology. Because we alone inhabit the logos, we alone must learn the lesson of dying time and time again [...] when we do not speak our death to the world we speak death to the world.52

‘Tarpon’ exemplifies the poet’s ability, through possession of the language of the land, to speak human death to the world as it observes death in the non-human

world. In actuality, Walcott has presented 'death the leveller' throughout the sequence, pairing a keenly felt sense of human mortality with instances of non-human death: the deceased boy who told of the beached baleine and the final throes of the aged human figures alongside the midge that becomes the lizard’s lunch. As an integral part of Walcott’s poetic discussion of the comprehension of total mortality is the tension between youth and age, innocence and experience, seen in the figure of the son and his dismay at the fisherman’s actions:

For every bloody stroke
with which a frenzied fisherman struck
its head my young son shook his head.
Could I have called out not to look
simply at the one world we shared?53

Presented here are complexities of deep dwelling; the tension between the need for survival and sustainability. The elder Walcott can articulate the difference between the historical harpooners and the Cedros fisherman who knows his prey intimately - a catch that ‘against the light looks just like what / the grinning fisherman said it would: / dense as frost glass but delicate’ - but to the child, the witnessing of death arouses no such sense of beauty in the scheme of things, the natural law of the Earth, nor the history of dispossession from the bounty of the land. Instead there is only sadness at seeming cruelty. In an ecopoetic echo, Ted Hughes articulates a similar tension decades later in his personal poetic

53 Walcott, Castaway, p. 22.
remembrance of a walk in the westcountry. ‘The Rabbit Catcher’ contrasts Sylvia Plath’s anger at the death of the individual animal and his own more ambivalent sympathies:

You saw baby-eyed
Strangled innocents, I saw sacred
Ancient custom. You saw snare after snare
And went ahead, riving them from their roots
And flinging them down the wood. I saw you
Ripping up precarious, precious saplings
Of my heritage, hard-won concessions
From the hangings and the transportations
To live off the land. You cried: ‘Murderers!’  

Walcott and Hughes are aware that the history of the land, its exclusive ownership through enclosure or colonialism, is effaced when the dispossessed have the means to live off the land. Poaching and fishing become expressions of a non-exclusive possession, a self-sufficiency coming out of use of natural resources which enable politically independent existence.

Like all the creatures in ‘Tropical Bestiary’, the tarpon is the focus for the poet’s visionary eye as he assesses the interplay between ‘Godhead, beasthood and verse’. The fish, even in the death that provides life for the fishing community, becomes a vessel for the travels of the poetic imagination: ‘Dead,

and examined in detail, a tarpon’s bulk grows beautiful.’ Walcott’s bestiary seeks to reveal the ‘design’ in the natural world. The creatures depicted in the colours of life and death as part of a cyclical pattern provide a counterpoint for the dead science and science of death that went hand in hand with the expansion of empire. The assertion that human history is part of the totality of natural history is made insistently evident in these poems with Walcott’s ecological eye creating verbal-pictorial descriptions of his native setting. However, Walcott’s creation is not intended to produce pin-boards of butterflies or namesake-creatures which serve as emblems of human possession over the natural world. Rather, he reveals the beauty of a love of the natural world that can set the guiding, interconnected vision of the poet (as spokesman for the community) free from the reductive science of empire and dominance that supposes an objectivity in that science. Walcott in his poetic construction of an alternative bestiary of the tropics questions the supposition of such objectivity, aware of his own subjectivity in terms of race and species, and the history of colonialism coupled with the capitalist commodification of the landscape. He explores the interplay of human and animal in the theatre of the natural world and examines the complexities of dwelling and survival, sustainability and responsibility.

This exploration of Walcott’s narration of the history of the land and possession of its language through a representation of its flora and fauna is furthered by reading ‘The Almond Trees’. Here, the connection between peoples and the landscape (interrelational human history and the history of the environment) is depicted by the ‘frieze / of twisted, coppery, sea-almond trees’. The trees have borne the brunt of the elemental forces of nature’s ages, and have
also borne witness to the migrations of populations to the islands: Amerindian, European, African, Asian. They now stand in the place of the man-made testaments of rocky ruins and museum documents, bulwarks to the amnesiac Atlantic, just as much symbols of an interconnected past as those hegemonic emblems are symbols of a history of power and dominance:

There’s nothing here
this early;
cold sand
cold churning ocean, the Atlantic,
no visible history,

except this strand
of twisted, coppery sea-almond trees

For the poet, they become extra-human ancestors of the islands: ‘trying to describe the absence of history, tradition, ruins, I saw the figures of ancient almond trees in a grove past Rampanalgas on the north coast, as a grove of dead, transplanted, uprooted ancestors.’ By naming and reading his native landscape afresh, the ecopoetic eye allows for repossession/reclamation of an inclusive history to become a possibility. Such a fusion of the human form and humanity’s history with the trees as history of the land enables the poet to nurture

55 Walcott, Castaway, p. 36.
56 Derek Walcott, ‘The Figure of Crusoe’ in Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott, pp. 33-40 (p. 39).
a many-layered vision of history and of contemporary modernity in the Caribbean. The trunks and limbs of the weathered trees speak the history of the enslaved in the islands; history from the bottom up, from root to tip:

Aged trees and oiled limbs share a common colour!

Welded in one flame,
huddled naked, stripped of their name,
for Greek or Roman tags, they were lashed
raw by wind, washed
out with salt and fire-dried,
bitterly nourished where their branches died,

their leaves’ broad dialect a coarse,
enduring sound
they shared together.\textsuperscript{57}

Classical slave-names grafted onto the trunks of African identities constituted acts of pruning, denial of personhood, by the blades of British irony. And Walcott here connects this version of naming with the classifying, quantifying mind-set of the imperial gaze as it looks down upon all the victims of its exploitation. The system of slavery and shipment, and centuries of colonialism, cannot however suppress the utterance of Caribbean history. The communality of

\textsuperscript{57} Walcott, Castaway, p. 37.
the voice of the land echoes across the beaches and coves - an ‘enduring sound’ - from the tongues of the descendants of the enslaved and the sea-almond’s ‘broad dialect’ rustling as witness to imperial brutality. This poem provides the clearest example, perhaps, of Walcott’s fidelity to Hunter Francois’s vision of humankind listening to the land. Such a fidelity in vision requires the poet, as well as possessing history through exploration of landscape, to address notions of exploitation in the modern world. The ‘forked limbs of girls toasting their flesh’ also provides an image of the beach as a site for neocolonial interest. The economic ownership and partitioning of the land for the tourist industry (motifs which reappear in *The Gulf* and *Omeros*) is hinted at in the arena of sunbathers ‘in scarves, sunglasses, Pompeian bikinis, / brown daphnes’. As Katie Jones argues, the allusion to the story of Daphne, ‘the story of her attempted rape and metamorphosis, together with the fiery heat of the sun on the beach, brings to mind the sufferings endured on the middle passage’. 58 However, it also presents the possibility of a new spoilation; devastation of the landscape at the ravaging hands of developers.

As if to echo Walcott’s own journey throughout *The Castaway*, the poem concludes with the image of one woman seeking sanctuary from the heat of the day under the shadows cast by almond trees:

One sunburnt body now acknowledges
that past and its own metamorphosis

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as, moving from the sun, she kneels to spread
her wrap within the bent arms of this grove
that grieves in silence, like parental love.\textsuperscript{59}

The woman seeks respite from the ‘acetylene air’ through connection with the living landscape just as the poet seeks to comprehend the heat of history and to understand his place within ‘the scheme of things’ by sinking wholly into the same landscape. Walcott provides, in this final image, a poetic ecosystem of mutuality and reciprocity; the human form can find shelter from a parental nature while, at the same time, the ecopoetic eye must articulate humanity’s responsibility to protect the Earth itself.

\textsuperscript{59} Walcott, \textit{Castaway}, p. 37.
Chapter Five:

Staging the green world: eco-tricksters and eco-tragedies

Let the wind come, sea come, let the hurricane blow. It will blow the sand from the heart of many a man and change this world…

- ‘The Sea at Dauphin’

The overture to the collection *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* acts as blueprint for the ecopoetic vision that carries over from the poetry and into the drama of Walcott’s early career. Again, we see that possession of the history of the Caribbean is inextricable from an understanding of the language of the landscape and a sense of fidelity to the vision of that totalising history, both human and extra-human. The essay ‘What the Twilight Says’ focuses the lens of Walcott’s ecological vision upon the human communities of the ‘new world’ and his notions of interconnection, and the use and abuse of ‘folk artistry’. Walcott presents a vision of the circadian circus of his heartland as human action operates across night/day boundaries:

Light in our cities keeps its pastoral rhythm, and the last home-going

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1Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, p. 72. Throughout this chapter all subsequent references to this collection will appear parenthetically after the quotation.
traffic seems to rush through the darkness that comes from suburban swamp or forest in a noiseless rain [...] the dusk was a raucous chaos of curse, gossip and laughter; everything performed in public, but the voice of the inner language was reflective and mannered, as far above its subjects as that sun which would never set until its twilight became a metaphor for the withdrawal of Empire and the beginning of our doubt

(3-4)

This is not, however, a Roszakian vision of complete alienation of humanity from the rhythms of the Earth as, despite the neon-life of the 24-hour city, Walcott brings into focus the part that the natural landscape and the awareness of environment as a process plays in the revolutions of time. Twilight becomes synonymous with the withdrawal of empire and the self-doubt of the independent community. The plays that follow this overture illuminate the necessity for a deep connection to language of landscape and vision of true (not-for-profit) folk art. The plays provide a stage for the development of the removed ‘voice of the inner language’ of doubt into a communal language attuned to the history of dispossession in the West Indies. This act of imaginative repossession is brought to fruition, once more, by comprehension of humanity’s place in the ‘scheme of things’. Walcott’s plays ‘Ti-Jean and His Brothers’ and ‘Dream on Monkey Mountain’ continue the construction of an artistic cosmology of being that demonstrates a place for the microscopic and macrocosmic; from insect life to the guiding astronomical solar and lunar forces. For communities to truly dwell
in the ‘new world’ requires an understanding of extra-human history that can be brought about, or staged, by the artist of ecological vision.

Walcott’s artistic journey to begin again from the bush, like that of Harris, demonstrates that human culture evolves from interaction with the non-human world: ‘Where have cultures originated? By the force of natural surroundings. You build according to the topography of where you live’.² Here, in his essay ‘The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?’, the environment is represented as continuum once again; cultural construction is seen to be part of a natural process, of the interdependent history of evolution. Walcott emphasises the seamless nature of this history, encouraging us to trace back the journey of the origin of species and demythologising the fracture of superiority between man and animal by questioning our prejudices at viewing the imitating apes of the zoo-world:

In the imitation of apes there is something more ancient than the first human effort [...] there is no scientific distinction between the last ape and the first man, there is no memory or history of the moment when man stopped imitating the ape, his ancestor, and became human. Therefore everything is mere repetition ³

² Derek Walcott, ‘The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?’ in Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott, pp. 51-57 (p. 56).
³ ibid, pp. 53-54.
So, the act of imitation, human and animal is an act of reciprocity extended over aeons; there is a circularity in the caged apes that ape human gesture, possibly in attempt to ensure their survival. Indeed, mimicry is essential to survival:

Mimicry is an act of imagination, and, in some animals and insects, endemic cunning. Lizards, chameleons, most butterflies, and certain insects adapt the immediate subtleties of color and even of texture both as defense and as lure. Camouflage, whether it is in the grass-blade stripes of the tiger or the eyed hide of the leopard, is mimicry, or more than that it is design. What if the man in the New world needs mimicry as design, both as defense and as lure. We take as long as other fellow creatures in the natural world to adapt and then to blend into our habitats, whether we possess these environments by forced migration or by instinct.4

Both the interdependence between all forms of life and their vegetative habitats and the artist and his heartland are revealed here.5 Walcott, at one stroke, naturalises the act of culture creation in the Caribbean, answering critics of his hybrid voice and presents a tightly coupled vision of art and landscape

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4 ibid, p. 55.
5 Interestingly, the notion of the reciprocal imitation of humankind and the animal world (the ‘mere repetition’) has been evidenced in the performance and rehearsal of these plays - ‘In Dream the animalization is in the symbolism and workshops were devoted to doing animal mannerisms which were later incorporated into the characterization. Errol Jones, for example, did workshop exercises with his body and voice imitating apes’ - Bruce King, Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama (Oxford and New York: Clarendon, 1995), p. 82.
legitimised by the very theories of science that sought to animalise the enslaved.\textsuperscript{6} This expression of interconnected being is echoed in ‘What the Twilight Says’, where the journey back to comprehension of being or dwelling in the world through cultural construction has been sold out to the neocolonialism of profiteering: ‘the folk arts have become the symbol of a carefree, accommodating culture, an adjunct to tourism, since the State is impatient with anything which it cannot trade’ (7). ‘Ti-Jean’ and ‘Dream’ seek, then, to rebalance the scales of culture/profit and provide a vision of fidelity in folk art that emanates from the history of dwelling in the landscape of the Caribbean. Possession of one’s history comes from an inclusive embrace of multiplicity and totality, and here Walcott reveals his commitment to the human history of multiple ancestry in the Caribbean: ‘[...] so that mongrel that I am, something prickles in me when I see the word Ashanti as with the word Warwickshire, both separately intimating my grandfathers’ roots, both baptising this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian’. This often quoted extract is seen as symbolic of Walcott’s mission of repossessing and reclamation of his history and culture. Moreover, the passage continues to include the extra-human history of the land as part of the process of total comprehension:

The power of the dew still shakes off our dialects, which is what

Césaire sings:

Storm, I would say. River, I would command. Hurricane, I

Would say. I would utter “leaf.” Tree. I would be drenched

in all the rains, soaked in all the dews. (10)

The connection between the language of the poet and the language of the land is an indivisible bond for Walcott, as for Césaire, and the cultural utterance of the islands must come from the forces of their natural environment. Examining the words of Aimé Césaire in more detail, in actuality, further reveals the responsibility of this attuned artist-figure listening to the land and delineates more clearly his role in society. The voice of the poet resounds with elemental forces surrounding the landscape: ‘I would rediscover the secret of great communications and of great combustions […]'. Whoever would not understand me would not understand the roaring of the tiger either’.7 Walcott’s collection of essay and plays leaves no doubt as to the rumblings of discontent and discomfort that he feels at the commodification of both art and landscape reshaped to conform to the industry of Euro-tourism. Indeed, in an uncanny echoing of Walcott, the negative effects of the plague of Western and Northern travel, producing stilted views of once-colonised cultures, has been expressed by Roszak:

And then there is the tourism that goes out from the cities of the

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affluent societies like a non-stop attack of locusts [...] there are few governments that have the stamina and self-respect to hold out against the brutal pressure to turn their land and folkways into a commercial fraud for the opulent foreigners who flatter themselves that they are ‘seeing the world’

‘What the Twilight Says’, as overture to the play-texts that follow it, growls in articulate distress at the false journeys into history represented by these performances of possession for profit, and the author illuminates the hypocritical stance of those who posture and prostitute the land and the history of enslavement in the name of either ‘artificial rage or commercial elation’.

‘Ti-Jean and His Brothers’

The journey toward comprehension of human positioning and the quest to reclaim the folk art of the islands from the ‘prostitutions of a tourist culture’ (26) begins with ‘Ti-Jean’ and Walcott’s (re)creation of a true autochthonous art with characters imbued with the connectedness of vision that holds the potentiality of renewal for human society and its relationship to the natural world. The play

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8 Roszak, Where the Wasteland Ends, p. 17. Here Roszak employs an explicitly apocalyptic vision of Butler’s tourism model. The locust clouds of the sun-seekers not only exhaust the previously ‘unspoiled’ spaces, but also believe in the personal benefits of doing so. As a counterpart to Roszak’s image, Graham Huggan reveals that the processes of such tourism, in the long run, must be self-defeating as well as all-consuming - ‘As a global enterprise dependent on international capital and worldwide communications systems, tourism contributes to the sameness of a world whose differences it needs to make its profits. Tourism thus requires the other that it repeatedly destroys’ (p. 178).
provides an important environmental focus through its cast of characters: the mother and her sons as the typical dwellers in the forest attempting, in their poverty, to exist symbiotically; the figure of the apparently demonic Bolom; and the forest creature chorus which encircles the action of the piece. Indeed Frog, Bird, Firefly and Cricket, within the textual space of the play, serve to give voice to the human history and legend of Ti-Jean through the ‘cricket cracking a story’.

Here paradoxically, by inversion of powers of expression, Walcott’s art gives an agency to the non-human life of the forest by granting the animal characters the voice with which to narrate. Interconnection of human and extra-human life is marked then at the very opening of the play as the creatures of the wood become witnesses and narrators to the human action that develops. In this way we are reminded not only of Harris’s construction of the witness-narrator figures, but also of his effacing of the concept of human character as it fuses with the animal image or mask. The animal masks and imitative stage direction of Walcott’s creatures (see footnote 5, above) coincide with Harris’s vision of a re-centring of a human centred cosmos through art, as human and non-human being are fused together in the landscape. These witness-figures of the play’s setting emanate from the childhood of Walcott himself - ‘Walcott would remember the folk tales and magical rural vision of nature with talking animals and insects told him by his Aunt Sidone […] [they] would later find expression in such plays as ‘Ti-Jean and his Brothers’⁹ - and it is possible also to hear the echo of Hunter Francois once more in the Aesop-like use of folkloric beast fable. In addition, we see again the playwright’s comprehension of the totality of existence just as in the poem

‘Earth’. The prologue, indeed the play itself, is framed by the forces of the microscopic and macrocosmic: the cricket and firefly must operate under the influence of the elemental power of the moon as they narrate the drama about how to gain possession of the necessary wealth for survival and of the history of the heartland.

The Mother advocates survival through attuned living, through listening to the extra-human collectivity in the forest and through an understanding of human mortality and place within the cyclical system of life and death. Absolute, ignorant and overweening trust in the superiority of physicality, the power of force over the landscape, bending and hacking the forest at will, are not enough:

GROS JEAN

[...] Look, feel this arm, but to split trees is nothing. I have an arm of iron,

and have nothing I fraud.

MOTHER

The arm which digs a grave

Is the strongest of all.

Your grandfather, your father,

Their muscles like brown rivers

Rolling over rocks.

Now they bury in small grass,

Just the jaws of the ant
Mother, in her attempt to safeguard her eldest, realises that even human strength and energy that seems to come from the force of the landscape itself will end up being returned to that land, processed as ant food or fertiliser for the ‘small grass’. If Gros Jean refuses the insight of survival gained by figuratively sinking into Walcott’s landscape and by replicating the reciprocity of imitation between human and non-human forms in life, then he will, undoubtedly and literally, sink into the soil in death. Mother again urges Gros Jean to realise his insignificance against the total history of the Earth:

> When you go down the tall forest, Gros Jean,
> Praise God who make all things; ask direction
> Of the bird, and the insects, imitate them…
> There always is something stronger than you… (103)

Gros Jean, however, rejects the option of harmonising with the choral creatures of the forest, kicking out at the frog and cricket - ‘Get out of my way, you slimy bastard! [...] Jump out under my foot, cricket, you know you have no bones!’ (106) - and, in this way he recreates the vision of a hierarchical, anthropocentric scheme of existence rather than a scheme of existence that sees all the biosphere as interdependent and interconnected; as he embarks on his forest voyage of survival he clearly lacks interconnected vision and replicates the ignorance of
Francois’s infidel. Gros Jean’s world-view, then, is a version of ‘natural law’ that privileges power-over rather than power-with; he subscribes to a free-market vision of life on the planet where ‘might is right’ and everything will settle in the position of power relations. He falls for the devil’s trap of subscribing to a vision of Social Darwinism in which consumption is the key - ‘they all eat each other, and that’s the natural law [...] Eat and eat one another!’ (108) - and which leads directly to his own demise and which would, ultimately, seal the fate of his community. Gros Jean’s philosophy of being through action and word can be read not only in terms of political and artistic resistive vision in the Caribbean, but also ecologically. If he ‘represents an adversarial stance towards colonial subjugation and can be identified both with the leaders of the slave revolts and with artists espousing an oppositional attitude towards European aspects of Caribbean culture’¹⁰, it is also possible, in the light of the exploration of Walcott’s vision of the scheme of existence and connection with landscapes of the Caribbean, to read Gros Jean as a compromised figure. Like Harris’s John Muir, he believes in human supremacy as proof of a God-given right to power over animal creation which leads inevitably to an unsustainable plundering-process of the natural resources of the planet.¹¹

Mi-Jean has also been critically identified with the neocolonial psyche: ‘the acculturation and psychological brainwashing of Eurocentric Caribbean

¹⁰ Thieme, p. 60.
¹¹ The concept of a neocolonial ‘eat or be eaten’ ideology is critiqued in Ngugi’s novel Petals of Blood. That indictment of how the systems of continuing economic enslavement also perpetuate incarceration of the imagination, and force peoples into accepting the ‘eat or be eaten’ notion as the only choice given by the corporate state, parallels Walcott’s dramatic vision of such divisive thought.
intellectuals'. Placing his faith for survival of the self/family/community in the idea of abstract learning, the playwright reveals the duplicity of such modes of thought when they do not interact with the realities of Caribbean existence. It is possible to develop the critical understanding of the Eurocentrism of Mi-Jean’s attempted resistance into an understanding of his anthropocentric thought as well. In fact, it can be argued that this is as much the reason for his failure in the face of the Devil’s challenge as is the belief in a neo-colonial learning. He too believes in the hierarchy of being:

**MI-JEAN**

Bird, you disturbing me!

Too much whistling without sense,

Is animal you are, so please know your place. (115)

His inability to listen to the voice of the extra-human life of the forest, to hear the music of the living landscape, enables the Devil to manipulate him; his assurance in the spiritual and intellectual wisdom of humanity as the supreme life-form is turned against him:

**PLANTER**

...A man is no better than an animal. The one with two legs makes more noise and that makes him believe he can think.

It is talk that makes men think they have souls. There’s no

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12 Thieme, p. 60 and see also, King, *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, p. 140.
difference, only in degree.

[...] 

[Embracing him] Descendant of the ape, how eloquent you have become! ...And yet, poor shaving monkey, the animal in you is still in evidence (127-130)

First, Mi-Jean’s failure to realise his evolutionary ancestry, his lack of perception in understanding that ‘there is no scientific distinction between the last ape and the first man’, and that human history is indivisible from natural history, ends his part in the drama of survival. In addition and coupled with this, is his denial of spiritual life of all creation, a kind of species fascism that proclaims that ‘we alone are God’s chosen’ (a belief in human exclusivity in possession of the soul) which finally leads to the silencing of his pompous pronouncements and occludes his vision of society’s future.

The eponymous hero of the play, Ti-Jean, who does manage to vex the Devil, has his hand strengthened by both the support he receives from those creatures that his brothers rejected, and the wisdom of maternal advice:

MOTHER

Instinct be your shield,

It is wiser than reason, (133-134)

The attributes of an animal nature, so dismissed by Mi-Jean’s philosophy and overpowered by Gros Jean’s belief in human fortitude, are, instead, given
primacy by Ti-Jean. The instinctive bond, shared with the animal world, the desire for survival that is evolutionary, is what, in Ti-Jean’s vision, can bend the bars of a myopic caged reason which until his battle with the Devil has incarcerated the self/family/community. This Roszakian release marks the diminutive brother out as being in possession of interconnected vision; he has the perception to read the history of the Earth as a history of interrelation and to view the fates of all the species in the piece as interdependent. In addition, his act of blessing all creation in the forest places him in the image of the Romantic witness to the power and beauty of nature, the ecological anagnorisis of the Ancient Mariner which turned him into a witness-narrator compelled to advocate the responsibility of man toward the natural world. His blessing unaware of the ‘water-snakes’ that ensures his personal redemption is echoed in Ti-Jean’s conversation with the chorus in his journey toward the redemption of his community:  

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**TI-JEAN**

*[Kneels among the CREATURES]*

Oh, I don’t know, you have your own beauty.

Like the castanet music of the cricket over there.

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O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware
CRICKET
Crak, crak. Now say something nice to the firefly.

FIREFLY
How can he? I don’t look so hot in the daytime.

TI-JEAN
But I have often mistaken you at night for a star.

[...]

God bless you, small things.

It’s a hard life you have,

Living in the forest. (135-136)

Indeed, Ti-Jean can only succeed in beating the Devil with the assistance of these smaller creatures, a survival bred by belief in co-operation:

DEVIL
Come here, frog, I’ll give you a blessing. [The FROG hops Back, hissing] Why do you spit at me?

[...]

Firefly, firefly, you have a bit of hell behind you, so light me home.

[Roars at the CREATURES] Get out, get out, all of you… (151-152)
Here, then, the creature-chorus become more than mere witness-narrators and attain a significant degree of agency in the outcome of the duel between visions of existence.

It is possible to read Ti-Jean as an ecological trickster figure, in the tradition of the Caribbean Anansi, both in the way that he outwits the Devil and also has to attune himself to his environment in order to survive. If Ti-Jean can be read as ‘Green Anansi’, the Devil, in all his guises, is agent of the corporate state (born during the first expansions of empire, nurtured through the post-independence eras and coming to full force of life in the twenty-first century) with its eat or be eaten philosophy. Ti-Jean has the confidence of vision not to play by the Devil’s rules - ‘Who with the Devil tries to play fair, / Weaves the net of his own despair’(156) - and therefore provides a possible template for resistance to continuing colonialism of transnational corporations. He offers up a vision that rejects the notion of ‘running to catch up’ with World Bank

14 The notion of ‘Green Anansi’ originally comes from the Second Annual Work Plan (June 2003 - May 2004) of the Caribbean Regional Environmental Programme (CREP). One of the primary aims of the Programme is to raise environmental awareness, building initiatives amongst a population for whom due to ‘persistent poverty in the region, global environmental issues such as climate change and loss of biodiversity are not priorities’. In the light of the Programme’s desire to ‘creatively link the local priorities to the global issues’ (p.19), the following reading of ‘Ti-Jean’ is a tentative attempt to synthesise the figure of ‘Green Anansi’ and Walcott’s drama, and to suggest the possibility of Walcott’s work forming an important part of the ‘Raising Environmental Awareness’ work. <http://crep.ccanet/sawp.html>

Wilson Harris, similarly, has also formulated the potentiality for an image of an Anansi-figure to possess inherent ecological dimensions and implications. See, Harris, ‘Guyana Prize Address’, p. 26: ‘Anancy is a spider-grotesque that energises the imagination to map hidden or frail interrelationships in nature even as it points through the Middle Passage into Africa’. Harris’s spider possesses both interconnected vision and the energy to create such vision in others; indeed, it is possible to imagine the legs of Harris’s inter-continental spider as being the rungs on ‘the secret ladder’ which lead Fenwick to understand the interrelationships in nature at the conclusion of The Guyana Quartet.
economics or desperation for inclusion in WTO schemes.\textsuperscript{15} Through this Ti-Jean/'Green Anansi' figure exists the potentiality to castrate the exploiting organs of the goat of globalisation in the new century and to cook up a curried feast of interconnected resistance. Such a reading of ecological resistance could also provide new possibilities for the presentation of the figure of Bolom. Bolom has been read as 'a new Caribbean artistic consciousness',\textsuperscript{16} 'the foetus of Caribbean aspirations',\textsuperscript{17} and 'the unborn nation'.\textsuperscript{18} It is also possible to add another suggestion, that if Bolom is the strangled nation state, then the umbilical cord of infanticide was pulled taut by the systems of corporate colonisation after independence that had not allowed the nation state to breathe; Bolom, in this incarnation must be resuscitated by Ti-Jean's visionary potential of ecological imagination, an imagination that can free the nation state from the reductive thought of uncaged reason and the 'Single vision' of systems of global capital.

Regardless of such a seemingly imposed contemporary reading of Walcott's mid-twentieth-century play, what remains is the vision of Ti-Jean, a figure who rescues his community from torpor of enslavement on many levels through sensitivity to the natural landscape and ecological understanding of the interconnection of all existence. He is able sink deeply into the landscape and to sing the song of the land - 'Sing, Ti-Jean... Listen, / All around you, nature/ Still

\textsuperscript{15} See Vandana Shiva's repeated assertion that the WTO elevates trade rules above environmental and national concerns and her belief in a bio-imperialism of further exploitation of the South by the North, Shiva, \textit{Tomorrow's Biodiversity}, pp. 35-36.
\textsuperscript{16} Thieme, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{17} Lloyd Coke, 'Walcott's Mad Innocents', \textit{Savacou} 5 (June 1971), 121-124 (p.122).
\textsuperscript{18} King, \textit{Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama}, p. 140.
singing’ (162) - and finally, to reaffirm his believe in a collectivity in the living jungle:

TI-JEAN

Come then, little brother. And you, little creatures.

Ti-Jean must go on. Here’s a bundle of sticks that

Old wisdom has forgotten. Together they are strong,

Apart, they are all rotten. (164)

Albert Ashaolu contends that ‘the play contains at least six built-in allegories: the allegory of the artist, and historical, political, moral, Christian, and class allegories.’¹⁹ It is possible, perhaps, with the new critical tools available, to add to that list a sustainable reading of an ecological allegory.

‘Dream on Monkey Mountain’

It is also wholly possible, as a counterpart to ‘Ti-Jean’ and, indeed, as part of an examination of the emergence of an ecopoetic in Walcott’s work, to read ‘Dream on Monkey Mountain’ as ecological allegory as well. This psychodramtic vision ‘is intended to be a product of the collective consciousness of all the characters’,²⁰ and moreover, can be read as a dramatic vision of a collective

²⁰ Thieme, p. 70.
human consciousness, indivisible from the extra-human history and topography of the land: like ‘Ti-Jean’, ‘Dream’ becomes a testament to the interconnected nature of dwelling and being. ‘A Note on Production’ and the stage direction to the Prologue of the play-text set up such a reading immediately. The play develops in the very dream-time of potentiality that was established in the poem ‘Earth’ from *Sea Grapes*. Undeniable possession of the living Earth comes through the revolution in psyche and vision which is as powerful in our sleeping as our waking lives. Dreaming ‘to change the world’, as Makak does in this drama, is the echo of Martin Carter and the further continuation of Walcott’s environmental ethic. Just as the human subject fuses with the living landscape in ‘Earth’ under the guidance of alternating lunar and solar influences, so too does the action of the play unfold in dramatic counterpart under the wire-suspended disc of Walcott’s stage directions: ‘Reversed, the moon becomes the sun’ (212).

A series of circular images at the opening of the ‘Dream’ becomes the continuation of the ecopoetic eye from *The Castaway* collection. Here, we are presented with the moon and drum. The nocturnal celestial orb (the agent of tidal, psychic and physical forces) and the earthly stretched-skin disc (the signifier of human cultural creativity) between them keep the rhythms of the planet in balance. These twinned discs that signal the life-force of the planet are illuminated by Walcott’s agent of vision on stage. The eye of the *Fregata magnificens* in the skies above the coastline becomes refocused into the bulb in the rafters of the theatre which connects all three symbols of circularity and
guiding vision: ‘A spotlight warms the white disc of an African drum until it glows like the round moon above it’. (212)

This moon is the image of Ti-Jean, the trickster, with the insight of an ecological imagination to guide communities: ‘God made him the clarity of the moon to lighten the doubt of all travellers through the shadowy wood of life’ (166). The apotheosis of the attuned dwelling figure which concluded ‘Ti-Jean and His Brothers’, casts its enlightening influence upon the commencement of Makak’s course. In addition to continuing the influence of Ti-Jean’s insight, this opening directorial comment brings to mind the utterance of Harris and his positioning of the intellectual and artist towards a society. The moon is guided down to action of the ‘Dream’ by the dance of the figure who ‘rises during the lament and touches the disc of the moon’ (212). The pose of Harris’s Vodun dancer from ‘History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas’ is struck here by Walcott’s figure of Baron Samedi.21 He dances, rising like a pole, or tree, or stilt-legged wading bird, to bridge the gap between the cosmos and the biosphere of Earth. It is in this moment of ritual contact, an alternate spark of creation and inspiration to Michelangelo’s Adamic finger-tip reach, that all the motion of the dreamscape play with its competing and complementing vision of being flows.

Again, Walcott presents his audience and readership with oppositional visions of the histories of the landscapes of the Caribbean, as entities with inherent, integral value, or as sites for commodification; the choice to cherish or

to exploit. Symptomatic of the exploitative ideology of colonial superiority is the figure of Corporal Lestrade, a product of the ‘Single vision’ of manipulation of human and natural resources for the state in its various, changing forms. He lacks the insight of interconnection between species, and is blind to the evolution of human from ape, choosing instead to place his faith in a racism of Social Darwinist ideology and hierarchical positioning:

Now there were various tribes of the ape, it had gorilla, baboon, orang-outan, chimpanzee, the blue-arsed monkey and the marmoset, and God looked at his handiwork, and saw that it was good. For some of the apes had straighten their backbone, and start walking upright, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind, and that was the nigger (217).

First then, in his self-assured rhetoric, Lestrade echoes the misguided belief of human superiority demonstrated so fatally by Mi-Jean, and, furthermore he is positioned as neocolonial parrot-successor to the scripted colonialist histories of the Caribbean. In contrast, the figure of Felix Hobain seems imbued with the knowledge of human ancestry, and the essential truth in his simian nickname, Makak, can be seen to invert centuries of animalisation of Black people and instead reveal a profound awareness of, and proximity to, the natural world; an integrated spirit of being which is shown to be the true vision of the indivisible, total history of the Earth.
It is the figure of Makak who is central in any discussion of 'Dream' as ecological allegory. Again, visionary potential, or the potential of true vision, is integral to this hero-figure: 'I does see things. Spirits does talk to me. All I have is my dreams [...] I fall in a frenzy every full-moon night' (225). Such a sight-beyond issues from the very landscape of Monkey Mountain. In actuality, Makak, identified with the 'morne', is viewed by the state authorities as a troublesome individual, as latent with the smouldering potential for a visionary, revolutionary eruption of the psyche as the rock-range itself is considered physically volcanic. He is another figure who can hear the music of the living landscape. The appearance of the female apparition is obvious to Makak precisely because it is not in tune with the rest of the jungle’s collective of voices:

Till then I feel I was God self, walking through the cloud.

In the heaven on my mind. Then I hear this song.

Not the blackbird flute,
Not the bull-frog drum,
Not the whistling of parrots
As I brush through the branches, shaking the dew (227)

Here we have Walcott’s orchestra of the organic; once again it creates a heaven of the biosphere and Makak’s vision, the level of attuned existence that Hunter Francois urged, fuses his body to the landscape. He joins the family of human
forms conjoined to their environments through both visionary capacity and physical bond: the figure in ‘Earth’; Hector; Cristo; Blake’s Albion:

I see this woman singing
And my feet grow roots. I could move no more.
A million silver needles prickle my blood,
Like a rain of small fishes.
The snakes in my hair speak to one another (227)

Makak is the very image of the forest dweller who subsists off the land in sustainable fashion. Where he extracts from the land, it is for the profit of survival not exploitation; the figure of the charbonnier provides an interior imagistic counterpart to the ocean and shoreline existence of the fisherman from ‘Tarpon’. Makak is in full possession of a landscape to which he has been tied in hermitage: ‘I have lived all my life / like a wild beast in hiding. Without child, without wife, / People forget me like the mist on Monkey Mountain’ (226). Again, the presupposed connotation of this notion of bestial savagery resulting in dwelling isolated from human community can, in fact, be read as another example of the visionary knowledge of natural history through proximity and connection rather than animalised alienation. Makak, isolated hero-figure dwelling in the morne, is representative of a version of environmental ‘maroonage’; he provides an alternate vision of the history of the interior of the islands and, furthermore, of how to survive in the land. On the one hand then we
have Makak the dispossessed, the isolated, the mad-man of the interior, out of step with the rest of the community, and on the other, we have the potentiality for true vision of a form of attuned living, interconnected history, and a sustainable future for the Caribbean. Walcott certainly views Makak as the frustrated warrior figure:

My Makak comes from my own childhood. But there was no king, no tribal chief, no warrior for a model in those stories. So the person I saw was this degraded, humble, lonely, isolated figure of the woodcutter. I can see him for what he is now, a brawling, ruddy drunk who would come down the street on a Saturday when he got paid and let out an immense roar that would terrify all the children in the street [...] this was a degraded man, but he had some elemental force in him that is still terrifying; in any other society he would have been a warrior. 22

Such a representation echoes other such characters from the literature of Walcott’s contemporaries. The Bolos and Fisheyes of Earl Lovelace’s fiction are positioned similarly, caged by conditions that frustrate the possibility for rebellion and suffering psychological impotence in the face of the enslaving systems of the colonial and neocolonial world that temper the spirit of awesome revolution. 23 In addition, we are reminded of the figure of Poseidon in The Secret

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Ladder, the ancestral eco-hermit, turned leader of rebellion on the Canjeriver
whose redemptive rage runs through the novel and indeed sparks the spirit that
catches the fire in Bryant, Catalena and Fenwick as it illuminates the potentiality
for future psychic renewals of perception of the world’s total history.

Makak’s potential for renewal of the collective spirit is also evident in his
capability of healing the physical form of the sick man. The transformative power
of the attuned being ‘from the Forestiere quarter’ is announced by Moustique -
‘Look, I know an old man, he been living in the forest, he know all the herbs,
plants, bush. He have this power’ (246) - and such power of the landscape
emanates through the ritual of the healing:

I see you all as trees,
like a twisted forest,
like trees without names,
a forest with no roots!
By this coal in my hand,
by this fire in my veins
let my tongue catch fire,
[...]  
sing out you forests,
and Josephus will sweat,
the sick man will dance,
sing as you sing
in the belly of the boat.

You are living coals,
you are trees under pressure,
you are brilliant diamonds

In the hand of your God. (248-249)

Makak’s song advocates both the interconnection of human and non-human life and the mutual interdependency (‘tight coupling’) of life and non-life on the planet. Animal, vegetable and mineral are all seen as connected in the history of the geological formation of the planet’s surface. The dead matter of the forest becomes forced into the rock formations of potential energy to fuel the living. The coal lump alight in the hand of the woodsman becomes the very image and essence of all carbon-based life on the planet (another instance where ‘natural fact and metaphor remain one’); the pressure of ages has transformed wood into rock as the pressures of a history of enslavement and dispossession form the human coals into ‘brilliant diamonds’. As in ‘The Almond Trees’ the history of human community from ‘the belly of the boat’ up to independence and beyond is equated with the fate of the forest of trees that covers the island. It is the power of Makak’s interconnected vision that fuses human to non-human in the cycle of existence and that calls upon the power of the total environment as ongoing process in order to seek redemption for the human form of Josephus, himself representative of a disconnected human society needing inspiration and guidance from the extra-human history of the Earth.
Makak’s call to the Earth for help and, in actuality, his visionary ability to read and articulate its collective history, which ensured the survival of the sick man, then in turn, becomes a contested site for the dispute between Makak and Moustique concerning the possibilities for their own future survival. The exchange between the pair after the healing scene becomes a debate over the commodification of a true vision of existence and over notions of fidelity to a folk art of essential and inherent worth:

I see a sick man with snake bite, and a set o’ damn asses using old-time medicine. I see a road paved with silver.

I see the ocean multiplying with shillings. (253)

Moustique sees, in Makak’s power, the need and the opportunity to manipulate a dispossessing system of capital that has incarcerated himself and his friends: ‘you will have to sell your dream, your soul, your power, just for bread and shelter. That love of people not enough, not enough to pay for being born, for being buried’. Moustique’s plan for survival then, his proposal to hawk the ‘dream’, is derived from a pragmatism of necessity, born out of impoverishment, not out of cynical acquisitive desires. It is possible to see Moustique as a desperate, failing trickster-figure, the negative image of Ti-Jean as he fails to ask the correct questions and attempts to play by the devil’s impossible rules; in this way, he weaves his own net of incarceration and despair. Here Walcott equates Moustique’s attempt to play by rules that will ensure his demise with the self-
destructive selling out of folk art to the commodification of neocolonial systems of economic exploitation.

In contrast, the visionary Makak sees his healing power as an extension of his integrated spirit or true vision of the interconnected nature of being. The power comes from the landscape and the light of the moon, an extra-human force that affects the rhythms and cycles of human life: ‘You don’t understand, Moustique. This power I have is not for profit’ (254). The debate is exemplified in the way that the image of the moon is perceived. For Makak, it is the motivating force of his awareness of the possibilities emerging from interconnected vision, a catalyst of and a symbol for the potential of his dream. For Moustique, however, the white-disc representation of the moon is a signifier of the ‘eat or be eaten’ world: ‘But I look at that moon, and it like a plate that a dog lick clean, bright as a florin, but dogs does chases me out of people yard when I go round begging’ (254-255). This is the perception of the lunar satellite ‘bright as a florin’, that despite its celestial positioning above the atmosphere of the living Earth, Moustique has been conditioned to view as yoked into the human system of trade and exchange; it is a site that is to be licked clean by the dogs of consumption. Moustique’s crisis of vision is that he sees only the flat, pale white disc, not the total sphere of influence. He sees merely the image of a coin-moon with illusory light emanating from an admixture of baser metals that seek to shine like the true silver of moonlight but can only represent the out-of-reach illusion of wealth-for-all promised by the systems of neocolonial capital and ‘Single vision’. Indeed, Moustique’s lack of comprehension of the potentialities of Makak’s art casts him
in the role of a myopic merchant unable to remove occluding commercial cataracts and unable to see extra-human history as integral to cultural production and human action. He becomes, like Blake’s troublesome sometime employer, Dr Trusler, one who has ‘fall’n out with the Spiritual World’. Moustique’s perception of the moon is akin to the merchant’s eyes that see only a world of commodities:

Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way.²⁴

If Moustique is positioned as viewing the scheme of things as would a new world Trusler, albeit through the desperation of necessity, it is possible to hear the authorial voice of Walcott echoing the call of Blake in his letter. Just as Blake refuses to alter the proportions of his engraved art to fit the reductive desires of an ‘Eye perverted by Caricature Prints’ so we see ‘Dream’ becoming the dramatic utterance of a writer who will not caricature his art or indeed compromise the cultural production that is born of the contours of Caribbean realities.

²⁴ Blake: Complete Writings, p. 793.
Moustique, by sheer persistence and the insistence that the only way forward is to play by the rules presented by a diabolical system, is able to yoke and blindly lead Makak and his complete vision to the marketplace:

MAKAK

[Rising] All right, all right. But don’t take more than we need.

All right, which way now?

MOUSTIQUE

[Spinning around blindly, he points] This way, maser.

Quatre Chemin Market! (255)

However, Moustique pays the price for the cheapening of Makak’s dream-vision through opening it up to the market; it costs his own life, and the consequent dulling of Makak’s senses. By trying to play the devil’s game - eat or be eaten - on the devil’s uneven playing field, Moustique is hacked down underneath the booted feet of the competitors he is accused of robbing and under the gaze of the unmoved Corporal:

CROWD

Kill him! Break his legs! Beat him! Kill him!

[They beat him to the noise of sticks rattling, tins banging and screaming women. The CORPORAL stands apart …] (271)
In addition, this episode also reveals the power of the state to regulate the perception of its citizens operating in the market place; the ability of a colonial or neocolonial system of governance to alter reality for its own end, the will of the ruling elite is expressed thought the machinery of state violence:

CORPORAL

Well, the law is complicated and people very simple. [To a VENDOR] Morning. That’s a nice pawpaw, sir.

VENDOR

Oui, mon corporal. [They move on]

CORPORAL

You see?

INSPECTOR

That was a melon.

CORPORAL

I know. But in the opinion of the pistol, and for the preservation of order, and to avoid any argument, we was both satisfied it was a pawpaw. (260-261)
Here, the Corporal is able to establish a control of language that ensures control of people’s ability to see the truth of being. The fruit of the land can be anything the state wants it to be. Therefore the control of land and life issues from a control of the language of definition and leads to a control of popular perception of the world. In the Corporal’s assertion that melon is pawpaw, it is possible to view Walcott’s ecopoetic mission to legitimise the language of the flora and fauna of the Caribbean being unravelled by the threat of pistol-wielding bandits intent on holding interconnected visions of history to ransom.

As Makak turns fugitive from such rough justice he, like Cristo, flees into the bush; back to his interior heartland - ‘I know this forest. Smell it. Smell it, it speaks to your blood. [...] I can read the palm of every leaf. I can prophesy from one crystal of dew’ (288). Here, then, Makak is cast in the role of tragic eco-hero, who in a delirium caused by the pressure of punitive government and weight of expectation of his art of vision, turns back to his affinity with the natural world as solace and for the potential it provides for psychic renewal for the self and the community. He becomes the poet of the microscopic, weeping for a future of futility for the globe seen in the tear-drops of dew on the leaves of the forest. It seems that mindscape and landscape are again interconnected in visions of despair; Makak becomes, like John Clare of Walcott’s The Bounty, one ‘who wept for a beetle’s loss, for the weight / of the world in a bead of dew’. Indeed, Clare himself saw with eco-prophetic potency the connection between microscopic and macrocosmic. Like Makak, he knew ‘all the signals of insects’

of his English heartland and saw the ravaging effects of profit-driven exploitation of the land and its people. He regards each dew drop as the potentiality born of each new day, an opportunity for a revisioning of humanity’s self-assured superiority over the natural world and, like Makak, he too suffers a maddening crisis of vision as his interconnected philosophy is torn bit-by-bit into a fragmented ideology of partition, extraction and dispossession. Clare, through affinity to his native environment, fuses his poetic voice to the utterance of the landscape in his vision of ‘The Lamentation of Round-Oak Waters’ and his sorrows are seemingly reflected in his immediate surroundings:

The grass all dropping wet wi dew
Low bent their tiney spears
The lowly daise’ bended too
More lowly wi my tears\(^{26}\)

Clare isolates the source of his cares in the figures of authority who exploit the land for economic benefit; those who ordered the felling of the weeping willows at the brook’s edge:

‘But sweating slaves I do not blame
Those slaves by wealth decreed
No I should hurt their harmless name

\(^{26}\) John Clare: The Oxford Authors, p. 18.
To brand ‘em wi’ the deed
Altho their aching hands did wield
The axe that gave the blow
Yet ‘t’was not them that own’d the field
Nor plan’d its overthrow²⁷

Here, in illuminating the dual exploitation of land and labour by the plutocracy, it is possible to see the philosophy of Clare converge with that of his ecpoetic descendent Walcott. Just as Clare identifies the power behind the act of destruction of the line of willows, so Walcott in his depiction of Moustique’s attack at the hands of the market vendors reveals how it is Lestrade, the agent of the corrupt corporate state, who is really responsible, albeit at one remove. Clare and Walcott are well aware of the policy (both colonial and provincial) of imperialist dispossession at a distance:

‘Their foes and mine are lawless foes
And L-ws thems--s they hold
Which clipt-wing’d Justice cant oppose
But forced [and] yield to G--d
These are the f--s of mine and me
These all our Ru-n plan’d
Altho they never felld a tree

²⁷ ibid. p. 23.
Or took a tool in hand\textsuperscript{28}

Again we are reminded of the Corporal's demonstration for Inspector Pamphilion of the laws that clip the wings of true justice. It is the merchants of the world market that have seen and still see the Earth as a mining site for extraction, who continue 'To lay the greens and pastures waste', that force those figures possessed of the language of the land, into maddening crises of vision. The contest between such rapacious 'Single vision' and the dew-drop divinations of the interconnected philosopher is the particular concern of John Clare, and is refracted and enacted through the pages and stagings of Derek Walcott's 'Dream'. Makak's microscopic dew-drop crystal orb becomes another rounded image in the succession of sun, moon, spotlight, that all hold sway over the course of the drama. The dew-drop is the aqueous equivalent of the grain of sand in which Blake saw the eternal Earth. It possesses intratextual, intertextual, and extra-textual significance as it not only creates a pathway through to the world of John Clare but becomes a central motif for Walcott's own drama of true vision in history and in art. Again, 'Dream' is connected back to 'What the Twilight Says' with its introduction of the baptismal dew which soaked Aimé Césaire and fused him with his landscape. In addition, the importance of the image of the refreshing potentiality of the dew to the visionary potential of the play in performance and production also concerned Walcott. For the run of 'Dream on Monkey Mountain' at the Mark Taper Forum (27 August - 11 October, 1970) the playwright

\textsuperscript{28} ibid. p. 21.
provided a note to director Michael Schultz elucidating the symbolism of the piece. Not only did it state that ‘Moustique is a materialist, degraded by the profit motive; he moves instinctually to the market’, but, out of a concern that his own ecological vision would be missed in translation to stage he was emphatic that the ‘actor should think of a forest in the morning, still, grass-growing, dew. Not surprisingly Walcott felt such implications were lost in the acting’.  

In this way, it is possible to see the contests of vision continuing out of the leaves of the play-text and onto the wooden boards of the theatre space: Single/interconnected, Moustique/Makak, Director/Author. But it is, perhaps, in Makak’s image of the balanced scales that we see these opposing visions weighed up most succinctly:

One will sink, and the other rise, like the gold and silver scales of the sun and the moon, and that is named progress. (306)

At once these scales would seem to be balancing gold and silver imitations of sun and moon, of night and day, but they can also be read as actually balancing how such entities are perceived. Walcott creates a dream-drama that weighs the balance of competing vision of the living Earth; on one hand we are presented with the coin-scales of a progress that seeks to commodify the intrinsic value of earthly life that has been created and sustained by solar and lunar forces, and, on the other, we have a vision that attempts to integrate human consciousness back

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29 King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 259.
into the landscape, to sink deeper than the chafing surface sand or topsoil to fully comprehend human and natural history as indivisible.

This then is Walcott's journey through the boundaries of an anthropocentric philosophy of art and of life; he is paralleled in this artistic course by the return journey of Makak, travelling back to his heartland. Makak, who has sunk wholly into the interior, and listened to the music of the living landscape - 'Look how the trees have opened their arms. And in the hoarseness of the rivers, don't you hear the advice of all our ancestors' (300) - but, who has been frustrated in his attempts to share his vision of ecological imagination with a wider community still yoked into playing the games of neocolonial devils. The tragic figure of a broken spirit (like Clare, like Cristo) returns to his hermitage, a true dweller in possession of the language of the land that could provide the renewal of psyche for his community and its continuing, sustainable survival. Such renewal will only become a reality if that whole community is prepared to make the journey back to the bush, towards acceptance, to arrive at the awareness that the green shoots of the present are a result of the deep roots of origin:

MAKAK

Lord, I have been washed from shore to shore, as a tree in the ocean. The branches of my fingers, the roots of my feet, could grip nothing, but now, God, they have found ground. Let me be swallowed up in the mist again, and let me be forgotten, so that when the mist open, men can look up, at some small clearing with a hut, with a small signal of smoke, and say, 'Makak lives there. Makak lives where
he has always lived, in the dream of his people.’ Other men will come, other prophets will come, and they will be stoned, and mocked, and betrayed, but now this old hermit is going back home, back to the beginning, to the green beginning of this world.

Come Moustique, we going home.

CHORUS
I going home, I going home,
I going home, I going home,
I going home, I going home,
To me father’s kingdom . . .

[Makak and Moustique are walking back towards the Mountain]

Curtain (326)

Within the individual dramas of ‘Ti-Jean and his Brothers’, ‘Dream on Monkey Mountain’ and the overture of ‘What the Twilight Says’, it is apparent that Walcott has constructed a unified vision of a continuing battle for and of the imagination of the peoples of the Caribbean. His examination of competing visions of art and existence, - How do we see ourselves in the world? - presents the dual images of tragic frustration and of progressive trickery in the face of dispossessing systems of neocolonial control of resource and capital. The plays that form this collection resound with the eloquence to speak to contemporary
readerships and audiences around the planet as we exist in a modernity that offers only a continuation of colonial modes of exploitation through globalisation. Walcott’s drama that demonstrates that the central contest now is a contest over visions of the Earth reflects the concerns of Vandana Shiva once again, the ‘ethical conflict between intrinsic worth and commercial value of all forms of life has become a major issue in negotiations...’ Our choice, as a reading of the ecological allegories of Walcott makes clear, is essentially a choice between seeing the biosphere as ‘Earth family’ or ‘Genetic Mine’. In the light of this, it is essential that we examine these dramas of the eco-trickster and the eco-tragic as important motifs in contesting sites of cultural production in the new millennium. While an ecocritical assessment of these texts can be useful as regards examinations of Walcott’s developing ecopoetic and environmental ethic, it is the future staging of them that may provide the real outlet for the potential for a cultural ecology and, in actuality, an unleashing of an ecological imagination which will ‘let the hurricane blow [...] blow the sand from the heart of many a man and change this world...’

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Chapter Six:

The disconnection of progress: *The Gulf* and ‘Beef, No Chicken’

‘Progress is history’s dirty joke’

- ‘The Schooner Flight’¹

The insistence that peoples and cultures are shaped from the landscape in which they dwell has been central to the formation of Walcott’s ecopoetic vision throughout *The Castaway* and *Dream on Monkey Mountain* collections. The writer’s assertion of the symbiotic relationship between the human and extra-human history of the land, this interconnection of being, is echoed in the conclusion of the essay ‘The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory’:

The Caribbean is not an idyll, not to its natives. They draw their working strength from it organically, like trees, like the sea almond or the spice laurel of the heights. Its peasantry and its fishermen are not there to be loved or even photographed; they are trees who sweat, and whose bark is filmed with salt.

However such understanding is at once indivisible from a sense of threat to this organic system of the workings of society. The facets of a homogenising modernity (corporate industrialism and mass tourism) again present a threat to the vision of diversity and sustainable interrelation in the Caribbean:

but every day on some island, rootless trees in suits are signing favourable tax breaks with entrepreneurs, poisoning the sea almond and the spice laurel of the mountains to their roots. A morning could come in which governments might ask what happened not merely to the forests and the bays but to a whole people.²

The works that encapsulate the authorial fury of dismay at the disconnection caused by the progress of such modernity mark important moments in the development of Walcott’s ecopoetic. Having struggled with humanity’s position within the ‘scheme of things’ and having imbued certain figures with the redemptive possibility of interconnected vision, Walcott’s vision becomes, in starkly contrasting ways, explicitly ecopolitical in its denouncement of the commercial carving up of the Caribbean territory. First, it is worth examining the collection of poems The Gulf, and then the dramatic work ‘Beef, No Chicken’, which provides an interesting focus, through Walcott’s caustic irony, for discussions of the seemingly paradoxical notion of the eco-comic. Indeed, as these two works synthesise and a character from the play has been dubbed ‘an

apocalyptic prophet of ecological doom' it is just as easy to see this description as characteristic of the voice of *The Gulf* poet himself.⁢³

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*The Gulf*

This collection foregrounds a sense of personal isolation, that of the itinerant poet removed from his 'home' communities in the Caribbean, against the backdrop of the more totalising sense of the estrangement of humanity from its natural surroundings. The disillusion experienced by the poetic persona when confronted with the machinations of neocolonial development exemplifies the ecological concerns of 'The Antilles' and, focusing upon the dwelling environments of urban communities as well as the rural, interrogates the creation of 'wastelands' through visions of polluted extra-human landscapes mirrored in the depiction of an isolated human mindscape.

The poem 'Ebb' positions in full focus the by-products of industrial modernity as the poet centralises the poison-scurf that remains visible on the surface of the rivers and the surf-edged coastlines. This is in stark contrast to the end-product of such marine and mineral extractions which, in their emigrations, serve not only to swell the rates of consumption of the developed world, but also 'the ever-ready bank accounts' of the neocolonial regime.⁴ This lament on the dubious heralding of notions of industrial and commercial progress signals, for

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³ This quotation refers to the character of the Deacon: Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, p. 131.
the poet, disruptions on a sacrilegious scale, both to the bounty of the natural world and to the ‘scheme of things’ central to Walcott’s vision of harmony and balance. The debris from the effacing oceans is washed up on the shorelines of Trinidad. The poem recalls Walcott’s assessment of the amnesiac Atlantic, which becomes the watery grave of countless Africans in the first phases of empire and European expansion, erasing the sins of the enslaving forces, and it intimates that now the very same expanses of water are masking the processes of deleterious drilling. The catalogue of unquantifiable human tragedies that resulted directly from the privileging of profit on the part of the traders on board the Zong for instance was all too conveniently disguised by the veil of the waves. The same mechanistic desire for revenue is now, post abolition, counted in the cost of the slick-choked, suffocating marine creatures washed up on the coastlines, a continuing testament to an economic ideology that cuts corners to cut cost and is still willing to sacrifice human and extra-human vitality to balance the books.

The seep of industrial wastage leaches into the poet’s awareness and results in a pervading sense of futility at the repetitive cycle of existence in which humanity is increasingly alienated from environment and the history of the land.

Year round, year round, we’ll ride
this treadmill whose frayed tide
fretted with mud,

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leaves our suburban shoreline littered
with rainbow muck, the afterbirth
of industry.  

This Blakean vision of a bleached hell, its furnaces quenched with a sense of bleak futility, is where wheels-without-wheels continue the punitive machinations of enveloping industry. Walcott’s vignette mirrors Roszak’s identification of the spiritual disconnection resulting from the ‘orthodox consciousness of urban-industrial ideology’; in the realm of the peddlers of ‘Single vision’ the bonds of interdependence have been cut and ‘Alienation was man’s fate’. The ebb-and-flow rhythms of the natural world, the cycles of the seasons, have been replaced by a depiction of a ‘treadmill’, Sisyphean vision of human endeavour and existence. The moon can now only control a ‘frayed tide’ and the lunar influence that so inspires the poems of The Castaway and the protagonists of the Dream on Monkey Mountain plays is now muted by polluted monotony. It becomes ‘the washed-up moon [...] her radiance thinned’ and as Rohlehr notes as a ‘symbol of romance, is unattainable now’. Indeed, in the scramble to construct the ‘new industrial city’ of independence, its celestial influence is lost behind the opacity of the derricks’ fire-smoke; its reflection no longer kaleidoscopes over the surface of seas blotted and blotched with patches of oil. The ecological muse within the poetic persona is cast adrift and the poet

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6 Derek Walcott, The Gulf (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), p. 37. From here, throughout this first section of the chapter, all references to this collection will appear in parentheses after the quotations.

7 Roszak, pp. 75-76.

sees all moments of respite disappearing under the chain-links of continuing urban construction.

This tarnishing of the natural world through the adherence to the false progress of ‘Single vision’ is further exemplified in this opening poem of the collection:

through a dark aisle

of fountaining, gold coconuts, an oasis

marked for the yellow Caterpillar tractor.

We’ll watch this shovelled too… (37)

The ecopoetic persona stands once again as witness to the dulling influence of corporate and governmental commercialism, the golden radiance of the natural fruit of the Earth is to be uprooted by the lumbering yellow machines of construction. Between the churned earth of deforested land and the contaminated pools of oiled water, Walcott both implies the erosion of governmental care and concern and reveals the physical and psychological effects upon landscape and citizens respectively, of policies of progress prepared to scythe through the ‘last sacred wood’.

In actuality, Walcott in this poetic lamentation at the grim prospects for the natural world as early as the start of the seventies, prophesies much of the environmental destruction that was to befall the island in the following decades:
In recent years Trinidad had become rich, the envy of the West Indies, through its oil. It had also become increasingly corrupt as oil contracts, even gasoline stations, were a source of percentages, pay-offs, and patronage\(^9\).

King here describes the Eric Williams regime greedily swallowing wholesale the benefits of neocolonial collaboration with King Oil which acted as backdrop to Walcott's sense of disillusion and distress. The corruption of the Williams' government which is hinted at in the vision of ecocide in 'Ebb' is compelled to reveal its capacity for human persecution in Walcott's poem for Jean Miles, 'The Silent Woman'. Just as the oil seeps were increasing and spreading across the Gulf of Paria off the west coast of the island, the gulf of estrangement between politicians and the people was expanding on land. The promise of a healthy post-independence relationship had been polluted by the abuse of power. 'The executives in business suits, the dealers in shrugs and smiles' were fully implicated in the 'final silence' of Miles, who has since been recognised as the legitimate voice of protest and 'of public service'. Her treatment and hounding to

\(^9\) King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 292. In actuality, the environmental impact of the oil extraction business in Trinidad and Tobago, from the time of Walcott's prophetic poem up to the start of the new millennium paints a grim picture indeed. In 1979, off the shores of Tobago the collision of the Atlantic Empress and the Aegean Captain resulted in the spilling of approximately 90,000 tons of oil, 'one of the largest oil spills ever recorded'. In addition, between 1993 and 1995 'the mean number of reported oil spills to the marine environment was 215 per annum [...] suggest[ing] pollution inputs [...] of about 120,000 barrels of oil per annum'. The multinational energy companies which have developed most of the heavy industry on the shores of the Gulf of Paria are also responsible for the establishment of world scale petrochemical plants and the resulting ammonia effluents that have ensured the destruction of much marine life in the gulf. Statistics and quotations taken from: John B. R. Agard and Judith F. Gobin, 'The Lesser Antilles, Trinidad and Tobago' in Seas at the Millennium: An Environmental Evaluation ed. by Charles R. C. Sheppard, 3 vols (New York and Oxford: Pergamon, 2000), I, pp. 627-641 (p. 638).
death was a price that the regime was more than willing to pay to ensure progress for the project of neocolonial collaborations.¹⁰

‘Ebb’ traces the development of Harrisian fault-lines in the imaginative vision of connection and reveals the wrecking of the spirit of sustainable living in Walcott’s islands. Such a vision, exemplified by Ti-Jean and Makak and represented by the free migrating spirit of personal odyssey found in *The Castaway* is frustrated here:

We’ll watch this shovelled too, but as we file through its swift-wickered shade there always is some island schooner netted in its weave

like a lamed heron
an oil-crippled gull
a few more yards upshore (37)

‘The Flock’ of blue-winged teal has been effectively grounded, alongside the lamed herons and ‘oil-crippled’ gulls, and the schooner of poetic inspiration is becalmed as a result of the effluents and accidents of industry. The waves of pollution presented here mute and suppress the music and rhythms of the living landscape. The limp and broken flapping of the tarred wings on the beach and the deadened protest of the silence of Jean Miles replaces the soaring and singing hope of the ecological imagination. ‘Ebb’ presents a lament for the landscape,

life and minds that suffer at the hands of corrupting, exploitative progress. Walcott, once more, presents an ecopoetic insight into Shiva’s battle of the imagination that is taking place in the era of neo-colonisation and globalisation. The ethical conflict between intrinsic worth and commercial value of all forms of life is captured here, and in the poet’s awareness of the sheer beautiful, vulnerability of life, the poet mourns the progress that hastens the destruction of God’s creation. Beauty is becoming a reminder of what is being lost rather than a celebration of what exists:

For safety, each sunfall,
the wildest of us all
mortgages life to fear.

And why not? From this car
there’s terror enough in the habitual,
miracle enough in the familiar. Sure . . . (38)

The poem ‘Air’ considers the history of the continental Caribbean; the ‘terror’ and ‘miracle’ inherent in life on Earth is now transposed from Trinidad, and the lament on the profiteering politics that bulldozes constructs of interconnected dwelling, to the interlaced relationship of human history with the rainforest heartland of Guyana.
This poem of disconnection presents the vision of a natural world which refuses to allow human supremacy; it is hostile natural landscape which overwhelms the poet:

The unheard, omnivorous
jaws of this rain forest
not merely devour all,
but allow nothing vain;
they never rest,
grinding their disavowal
of human pain. (69)

The poet, an emissary of human interest and perception, struggles to comprehend the enormity of the extra-human history of the landscape. Just as the rainforest world will not indulge any human extravagance of sentiment or behaviour - allowing ‘nothing vain’ and disregarding pain - the ecopoetic spirit of connection seems to be denied also. The landscape is ‘unheard’, a signal perhaps of the unconnected poetic spirit, and the empathetic gulf between human and the non-human life of the continent seems unbridgeable. The present fault-lines in the imagination exacerbated by the human world of mechanistic progress have translated to the poetic perception of the history of the land. Indeed, Walcott’s presentation of a threatening nature, a predatory landscape, in this poem is of particular note to an assessment of his development of ecopoetic voice. At once, we are presented with a degree of poetic honesty in the treatment of his subject;
Walcott’s reaction to the vision of a relentless nature reveals the confrontation between a frail humanity and a vast force of non-human life that seems far-removed from the endangered world that environmentalism urges a responsibility toward. And yet, we are given a view of a world that is essentially ecological, regardless of the poet’s sense of dread. The forest lands of ‘Air’ are as far from the realm of human interest as possible. Even if the poet is concerned for the fate of humanity in the land, he clearly demonstrates that the universe itself is certainly not human-centred. This paradoxical sense of prominence and irrelevance that the human subject experiences in the face of the history of the land furthers the sense of disconnection from a landscape that seems to embody nullification.11

The forest, then, appears to be not merely restricting human dominance but actually seems to be erasing history through the destruction of races of humanity:

Long, long before us,
those hot jaws like an oven
steaming, were open
to genocide; they devoured
two minor yellow races, and
half of a black;
in the word made of flesh of God
all entered that gross, un-

11 See, Ismond, pp. 57-102.
discriminating stomach (69)

Here, the full complexity of Walcott's vision becomes apparent and the jungle landscape acts as arena for human-perpetrated atrocity. The imperialist words of *The Bow of Ulysses* which introduced the poem now leach into its heart. The hierarchy of race, and Froude's ideology of sentiments and semantics that sought to efface indigenous history, emerges through the conjuration of a vision of hostile topography: 'The natural graces of life do not show themselves under such conditions. There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own.'\(^{12}\) The landscape draws a veil over colonial missions of destruction of 'minor' races and shrouds global historical injustices in enveloping silence. The ecopoetic persona struggles with this vision of Froude's forests that have been killing-fields colluding with the conquistadors. As the leaf-canopy cloaked the daggers of the Europeans so the very air and humidity of the rainforest - 'a censer / of swung mist' - carries with it the incendiary missionary incense of conversion and conflagration:

but nothing; milling air,

a faith, infested cannibal,

which eats gods, which devoured

the god-refusing Carib, petal

by golden petal, then forgot,

and the Arawak

who leaves not the lightest fern-trace

of his fossil to be cultured

by black rock (70)

The greed for the gold-leaf of Eldorado has resulted in an erasure of Native American history within the forest heartlands on a scale to rival the middle passage of dislocation for the enslaved Africans.

Walcott here is in harmony with Wilson Harris's concept of a pressure of fossil history, of a dispossession that forced diamonds out of coals, that has been denied to the Amerindian peoples. However, the Harrisian vision of a 'world-creating jungle' in 'Amazon' is tempered by Walcott's own masking and negating forest. For Harris, the rainforest is the site of communality and interconnection between human and non-human life - 'too full of voices not to be aware of collectivity' - and a site which emanates a force of natural justice to counteract the inhumanity of anthropocentric and colonialist injury. It is the location of mythic-historical communal knowledge which needs to be recovered for the betterment of all the life on the planet. It becomes Cristo's refuge, Poseidon's power-base and the fount of Fenwick's epiphany. As a seeming contrast then, Walcott's vision is of an occluding space of uncertainty if not

13 See discussion of charbonnier Makak above, and also: Paula Burnett, 'Opening New Doors: A Glimpse of Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott' in Theatre of Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean, pp.61-82. 'The living man bears within him his history; the black man of today's Caribbean bears the compressed and combustible energy of historic suffering and labour; the living people of the past have produced in the living people of today not only the potentially revolutionary fossil of the coal image, but also the crystalline beauty of the diamond image; extreme negatives can be very close to extreme positives, in the laws of physics as in metaphysics' (p. 65).
outright complicity. Replacing Harris's forest, pregnant with the creative potentiality of maroonage, 'Air' depicts an abortive natural force of historical violence in the Americas. It is clearly too simplistic to situate this difference of poetic emphasis with the respective island and mainland upbringing of Walcott and Harris and instead it is, perhaps, more useful to examine this perception of natural geography in conjunction with his representation of the Ocean. Harris's creation-cradle of the ocean-like forests of the South American continent become explicitly, in this poem the 'vague sea' of erasure and censure. Just as the effacing waves of the amnesiac Atlantic wash over the details of the genocide and dislocation of enslavement and indenture, so the relentless growth and adaptations of the foliage of the forests cover the barbarism of conquistadorial conduct.

The poet allows for no easy condemnation of a vicious nature, nor abdication of responsibility for destruction, however. The design and executions of genocidal planning remain the arena of human affairs, the state and church as orchestrators of a purely human form of ultimate violence. Despite its veiling role, the rainforest remains 'unconverted' by the missionary zeal of European acquisition and perhaps remains fiercely unconquerable also. Ismond notes that the poem 'zeroes in on the failure of Christianity, the main instrument of their more recent, civilizing experiment. It too, like other faiths before it, failed to tame the forest, and was totally ineffectual in this setting'. 14 Here we are presented with another example of the quantifying mindset that is inappropriate and, indeed, frustrated when confronted by the pre-Columbian and extra-human

14 Ismond, p. 64.
history of the land. The subtle acquittal for the forest, ‘open to genocide’ and yet not perpetrating it, has therefore opened up the possibility of further challenges to the machinations of the colonial ideology of subjugation and exploitation. The words of Froude may have infused the poem but it is these very words that the poet problematises in his treatment of perception of the rainforest land:

there is too much nothing here.

In one sense therefore we have the poet seeming to conclude by creating a ‘nothing’ (sense of anxiety and isolation) out of something (the multitude of voices from the histories, myths and species of the rainforest). At the same time, however, the poet critiques this assertion of nothingness in two ways, challenging both ethnocentric and anthropocentric readings of the history of the land.

First, the poet ironises the dismissive assessments of the Caribbean made by J. A. Froude. Walcott exposes this reductive view of history as distorted by the imperialistic ‘Bishops’ glasses’ of The Dark Jester. He demonstrates that Froude’s aim is out. In addition, after the very poem in which the extra-human landscape asserts itself as dynamic and fearsome, it becomes clear that the concluding thoughts of the poet seek to problematise the concept of an anthropocentric world-view that seeks to elevate human existence above all other. Indeed, ecocriticism contends that the notion of barren ‘wilderness’ is as much a human construct in need of demythologising in just the way that
postcolonial thought has held up the notion of ‘paradise’ for inspection. Where it is tempting to see ‘nothingness’ in a landscape, closer ecological inspection reveals the complex interaction of indigenous species within particular habitats; total ecosystems functioning as what appears to the anthropocentric view as nothing but a ‘wilderness’. Walcott encapsulates the environmental reality and the common human delusion perfectly in his paradox of ‘too much nothing’ here.

‘Air’ explores this history of uncertain and at times uneasy symbiosis between human and non-human life in the Americas; how people ‘draw their working strength from [the region] organically’. Furthermore, the poem critiques human historiography, how we read and have read marginalised life, and demonstrates the ‘Single vision’ inherent in Froude and inherited by viewers of a human-centred cosmos. The fault-line in the imagination that severs human history from the total history of interconnection is here, undeniable and at its most profound, yet the possibility of reconnection is also present. The image of the rainbird, inextricable from the history of Native America, sings a song of unity in creation:

> but only the rustling cries
> of a rainbird, like a hoarse
> warrior summoning his race
> from vaporous air
> between this mountain ridge

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15 See, SueEllen Campbell, ‘Magpie’, in *Writing the Environment*, pp.13-26. ‘Take it as given that “wilderness” is nearly as much a cultural expression of desire as “Eden” (p. 21).
and the vague sea

where the lost exodus

of corials sunk without trace - (70)

From under the humid exhalation of the rainforest, the very air upon which a sense of connected history can be recovered, the call of the bird conjures the lost, effaced history of the land and the sea. This vision of human and non-human life in ‘call and response’ reveals that the music of the living landscape does not remain completely ‘unheard’, and instead, offers the potential for a recovery from the deep sense of disconnection and isolation with which the poem began.

The series of poems that comprise ‘Guyana’ begin to chart that journey back from such a sense of personal dislocation in the world to a form of reconciliation with the human position in the ‘scheme of things’. The sweep of poetic vision moves from forest, to city, to nation, to continent as it considers the fusion of human history with the land. The inextricable link between human development, and the development of thought and art that depends on the contours of dwelling topography, again reveals the common concerns of Harris and Walcott. In this poem, the St. Lucian artist explores the contention long held by his Guyanese counterpart - ‘The human being for Harris is part of nature, part of the mysterious cosmos, first and foremost, as Walcott sees.’16 ‘Guyana’ engages with Harris’s ideas, poetry and prose to create a vision of synthesis in ecopoetics. Such a connection between the writers is revealed in the portrayal of the surveyor at work. This composite figure of Harris’s influence, issuing not just

from his own work in the forests but also from the figure of Russell Fenwick, combines with the poetic persona of Walcott’s The Gulf to travel along the various and shifting lines of the differently mapped concepts of the nation of Guyana. The surveyor’s script turns from text to life as the forest ants crawl over his charts. Here, the flurry of microscopic insect activity sets up the human subject as deity, ‘a new god arriving over Aztec anthills’. However, this is no realm for the human-god to exploit as he wishes; rather, his godhead, granted by virtue of size alone, demonstrates Walcott’s interest in the connection between power and responsibility in the scheme of being and the web of life. ‘Guyana / I’ renders the human subject ‘Ant-sized to God’ despite being ‘god to an ant’s eyes’. The procession of ants that grant possession of the earth to Walcott’s subject in ‘Earth’ here not only mark out humanity’s position in the scheme of existence but also contribute confusion to the marks on the chart that seek to bring the natural world under control.

The insect life of the forest combines with the extremities of heat which has ‘sucked his brain pith-dry’, and the dumbfounding relentless ‘merciless idiocy of green, green...’ to disorientate the surveyor and frustrate his task of classification and measurement. Quantifying modes of thought and of assessment of the land are again shown to be counterproductive in the arena of the forest-ocean. Attempts to bring the vastness of landmass under control, step by steady step, lead only to furthering the sense of human isolation. The view through the eye of the theodolite is dizzying:

His vision whirls with dervishes, he is dust.
Like an archaic photographer, hooded in shade,
he crouches, screwing a continent to his eye. (71)

Walcott’s ecopoetic eye, the circle of the moon and iris of the Man O’ War bird, are displaced by the inverting lens of instruments of calculation. This technology creates a crisis of vision for the surveyor in his attempt to understand the workings of the natural world, a crisis which affects the poetic persona of the whole collection. The rhythms of the living landscape deny quantifying thought to the point of the erasure of not only the results of measurement but the very concept itself:

The vault that balances on a grass blade,
the nerve-cracked ground too close for the word ‘measureless’,
for the lost concept, ‘man’, (71)

In addition, like the forest-vista of ‘Air’, the environment denies the historiography of ‘man’ as a self-elevated and separate entity; the individual man becomes lost in the maze of vegetation and the notion of his superiority disappears also. The rhythms of the environment as a continuing process reveal the shortcomings of mechanistic representations and reading of time. The cyclic time of the rainforest which, as Harris perceives, ‘travels eternity to season’ cannot be forced to move within the angled fractions of the surveyor’s timepiece, revolving ‘too slowly for the fob-watch of his world, / for the tidal markings of the five-year plan’.
The shouldering of his redundant science of ‘Single vision’ signals for the surveyor the moment of potentiality for reconnection, as the poem moves further into the interior, ‘a shape dilates towards him through the haze’. This emanation, seemingly a product of the breathing forest, represents a manifestation of the ecological imagination of Harris, and by extension, of artistic inspiration. It is by this indistinct apparition, symbolic of the profound influence of Harris, that Walcott is lead through the Guyanese writer’s own heartland. In the search for a reconnection of being the human subject is guided through the tour of forest, town, country and continent that offers a possibility for artistic redemption from the dislocating condition of blinkered modernity.

‘II / The Bush’ and ‘III / The White Town’ see this agent of reconnection and possession drawing the poetic persona back to his art and the inextricable link between landscape, life and the lines of Walcott’s verse. Again we see the avifauna - ‘grackles and flycatchers’ - of the Caribbean shaking dew-drop words from their feathers, and like ‘The Flock’ creating the ‘tension of arrows’, to direct the poet to surrender to the rhythms of the Earth:

Dark climbed their knees until their heads were dark,
The wind, wave-muscled, kept its steady mowing
Thoughts fell from him like leaves. (72)

Walcott’s poetic human subject guided by Harris’s spectre becomes fused with the forest itself, the sinking wholly into landscape, beginning again from the bush in order to reach the comprehension of true possession of total history. As the
swifts thickened and strengthened the foliage of understanding in 'Earth', now
the subject sheds his leaf-thoughts in an act of repossession. Paralleling the
journey into the bush undergone by the surveyor (another echo of the Cristo
reconstruction) is the psychic and intellectual course that is run; the voyage into
the interior initiates an internal journey of enlightenment:

The act of poetry as defined here consists in a process of
self-discovery in which one is guided by the natural, organic
principles of one’s being, as against being mind-directed. This
does not mean, however, a jettisoning of the mind: the latter is
still in responsive attendance, taking direction from the organic
rhythms and flow of the natural, elemental body/earth.17

Ismond’s analysis here, highlights the ecological nature of Walcott’s attempts to
reconnect. The beginning of repossession comes from the land itself,
orchestrating Walcott’s poetic exploration of interconnection that enables healing
of the fractured mindscape of dislocation. ‘III / The White Town’ continues this
process of understanding the history of the land through a transference of the
authorial gaze to the urban environment of Georgetown and to the importance of
fellow writers to the refinement and renewal of Walcott’s ecopoetic vision. This
catalogue of artists - Harris, Mayakovsky, Mittelholzer and Denis Williams -
functions as an epic roll-call of heroes, the very souls of Caribbean art that, like

17 Ismond, p. 91.
the poetic persona of Walcott's surveyor-poet-protagonist, are bound to the soil of the land:

pebbles of consonants rattling his parched gullet,

there was the poet howling in vines of syntax

and the surveyor

dumbstruck by a stone; (73)

These writers are, it becomes apparent, equally directed by the landscape of their heartland, they too are fused with the elements of the Earth itself. We see here, therefore, the connection between poetry and ecology in these attempts to dwell in the land and the undeniable voice of poetry that speaks with the sparks of striking pebbles and that writes with the spider-creep of looped and twisting vines. There is, however, no romanticising of the relationship between art and the land here, no denial of violence or hardship, exemplified in the grisly death of Mittelholzer, but also recalling the town's own fractious recent history. The sense of fracture between human and extra-human history still pervades, although with the common strength of fellow artistry, the surveyor figure, has been positioned alongside the possessing agent and apparition of poetry on the brink of a climactic moment of discovery and redemption that necessities the journey back beyond the Columbian history of the Americas and back beyond human utterance:

18 ibid. p. 92.
They wait.

All of us wait

‘IV / The Falls’ furthers the challenge to standardised and limited historiography of the region and marks the concern and preoccupation with a poetic of the land that engages with the Amerindian legacy throughout the Americas. The Kaieteur Falls are the site of the legendary sacrifice of Kaie, an Amerindian chief who sought to placate Makonaima and earn respite for his beleaguered tribe:

Their barrelling roar would open like a white oven
for him
who was a spirit now, who could not burn or drown

Walcott’s poetic subject follows the trajectory of Kaie’s corial, twinned acts of supplication for communal security and for knowledge of communality. As Walcott’s figure descends into awareness of pre-Columbian history he seeks to reconcile the clamour of the contemporary urban world with the crashing history of the falls and the memory of mythic legacy that it asserts with its roaring chorus.

Surely in that ‘smoke that thundered’ there was a door -

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19 For example, the concentration of Book Four of Omeros which far from being digressional is absolutely essential to the contours of the poem and its inclusive reach.
but the noise boiled to the traffic of a white town
of bicycles, pigeons, bells, smoke, trains at rush hour
revolving to this roar.
He was a flower,
weightless. He would float down. (74)

Here, 'IV / The Falls' is in dialogue with the filmic representation of such instances of indigenous human self-sacrifice in the form of Steve McQueen installation 'Carib's Leap'. The dual screen projections of - to the front - modern human existence in Grenada and - to the right hand side - the seemingly weightless falling through space and time of barely distinct figures, demonstrated a similar 'enfolding of one temporal moment on another' and succeeded in re-instituting the myth-history of Amerindian suicide into onlookers' perceptions of Caribbean history and 'everyday' reality. While the near silence of McQueen's film certainly contrasts with the crashing falls of Walcott's words, the sibilance of the film's tidal sounds, in actuality, complements the sounds of Kaieteur as it makes its way to become part of the seascape that surrounds McQueen's vision of the island of Grenada. In this poem, the ecopoetic eye becomes aware of the totality of the history of the land with the fusion of Walcott's quest for comprehension with the Amerindian history of sacrifice; the right-angled

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20 A viewing of this and 'Western Deep' formed the counterpart to Harris's Guyana Prize acceptance speech at a one-day Conference entitled *The Amerindians: Quantum Leaps* - University of Warwick 17 May 2003.
positioning of ‘Carib’s Leap’ screens also require the viewer to activate a seeing eye to physically connect the vision of Amerindian history with the presentation of modernity.

Steve McQueen’s film provides a counterpart to Walcott’s vision of the Guyanese falls which also incorporates Harrisian concepts of interconnection. The appearance of a door in the face of the water-wall replicates the opening up of insight to Donne at the culmination of *Palace of the Peacock*. Here, the ‘noise of a thunderous waterfall’ embraces the ascending character ‘in misty arms’ which reveal gateways to glimpses of universal revelation. In Harris’s novel as in Walcott’s poem we see the potential of redemptive vision in features of the living land. That by sinking into the landscape, here literally, Walcott’s poetic subject attempts to ‘begin again’ with the revelation of myth suppressed by rigid, effacing readings of history. The painting ‘Kaituk (Kaieteur Falls)’ by Aubrey Williams is contemporaneous with the ‘IV / The Falls’ and depicts the door of water seeming, paradoxically, to rise up out of the mist of the falls’ relentless descent; Williams’s composition complements the vision of both writers, capturing not just ‘the smoke that thundered’ of Walcott’s words but also the Harrisian elemental view of Kaieteur as the falls become the flowing quicksilver of *Palace of the Peacock*. The cumulative constellation of the various visions

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22 Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, p. 100
23 A reproduction of Williams’ ‘Kaituk (Kaieteur Falls)’ 1970, can be found in Dempsey, Tawadros and Williams, eds. *Aubrey Williams* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1998), p. 36. Harris’s novel *The Age of the Rainmakers* gives an account of Kaie’s sacrifice and situates it as a moment of collective rebellion that crosses the age of Kaie with the guerrilla resistance of the character Paterson. Here, the waterfalls become the key to political and cosmic challenge to the authority of states and gods respectively; the landscape of the natural world is the point of revelation and the arena in which the violence of past/present struggles is played out and clemency from the forces of control is sought. Wilson Harris, *The Age of the Rainmakers* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1971), pp. 15-33.
by these artists of the Caribbean reflects and illuminates the power of a specific aspect of the living landscape upon the essentiality of recovery of myth and history in the Americas. The land is agent of revelation as it, interpreted through artistic design, speaks of interconnection and the indivisible nature of existence. This poem reveals Walcott’s weightless supplication to the force of the landscape’s history; in order to comprehend the totality of being the ‘Guyana’ series moves from forest, to town, to interior, to continent.

This climax in understanding in the face of Kaieteur then imbues the following poem with a surety that points towards resolution for the crisis of confidence in vision that suffuses the collection The Gulf. The doorway to comprehension appears again in Walcott’s image-map of the continent with ‘the falls reciting its single flower’. The insight of the poetic eye can now appreciate more fully the desire for a truly inclusive catalogue of history - the recorded tomes, the thoughts of the ‘lexicographer’, and the submerged realities of the ‘naked buck’ and the ‘Amazonian Indian’ - all the life of a landmass that operates ‘Between the Rupununi and Borges’. Walcott synthesises these dual expressions of continental history with the combination of ‘natural fact and metaphor [that] remain one’:

One hefts a pen, the other a bone spear;
between them curls a map,
between them curl the vigorous, rotting leaves,
shelves forested with titles, trunks that wait for names -
it pierces knowledge, the spear-flash! (75)

Walcott’s seamless poetic weaving of these supposed disparate realities of the land conjures a vision of indivisibility and presents a unified ‘knowledge’ of total history for the reader with which the poetic subject, continuing his journey across a continent, interrogates the previous partial, imperialistic and anthropocentric readings of the Americas.

‘V / A Map of a Continent’ explicitly navigates its readers to a position of ecological understanding; furthermore, it operates as an example of the very formation of ecopoetry itself. In the poem Walcott must synthesise the realities of book and buck to challenge partial historiography and to create a map of inclusive continental history and examination of interconnected existence on Earth. The vision of the falls and the acceptance of guidance from the miasmic spirit of imagination (from the first poem in the sequence) has taken on the aspects of Harris, Borges and other literary voices of the land and, with an awareness of the multiple histories and the coherence of total interconnection of being, replaces the Froudian view of the ‘nothing’ continent. From waiting ‘at the edge of the world’ like the naked buck, like the spirits of companion poets who wait in the whitetown, we are privileged with a view that recentres a continent in time and space:

Between the Rupununi and Borges,

between the fallen pen-tip and the spear head

thunders, thickens and shimmers the one age of the world (75)
The dislocation of a modernity that had becalmed poetic inspiration in ‘Ebb’ is blown away and the Odyssean traveller seems set to continue the course of navigating the total history of the Americas and the ‘one age of the world’.

However, and ultimately, ‘Guyana’ concludes with a poetic-self uneasy and barely reconciled with troublesome urban experience. The roar of the rainforest and the music of the living landscape can offer no solace upon return. In ‘VI/ A Georgetown Journal’ the poetic subject is unable to complete his vision of interconnection once removed from the ocean-forest:

As the prose of polemics grows, spreading lianas of syntax
for the rootless surveyor,
the thunderous falls have been measured,
the thickening girth of the continent has been buttoned
till a man knows his weight to the stone,
his worth to the inch,
yet he imagines he hears in his hair
the rain horses crossing savannahs
and his pores prickle like water. (77)

Georgetown offers the ‘motionless green of the canals’ in place of the crawling, squalling greens of the grasses of the savannah and the varied hues under the canopy of the interior. Indeed, the polluted urban-blight stifles, and the city becomes a suffocating wasteland into which the poor sink and above which the wealthy rise:
The towns are clogged at their edges,
a glutinous dialect chokes the slum's canals
and the white, finical houses
lift their lace skirts, stepping over the creeks. (77)

The ecopoetic vision of interconnection between urban and rural, language and landscape, human and non-human is thwarted. Ti-Jean’s moon is as unattainable now as it was in ‘Ebb’ - its guiding influence occluded by the smogs of industry and disillusion. Although Walcott’s sense of spiritual fracture dominates (the gulf between the artist and his human community and then between the human community and extra-human history seems profound and unyielding) the poem concludes with a final attempt at psychological re-integration, a seeking spirit of inspiration sent out to narrow the gulfs of the whole collection. Through the image of the heron, the bird whose ‘foot pronounces “earth”’ Walcott’s ecopoetic eye ascends searching for the intersections between the multiplicity of lives on the planet:

What if impulsive, delicate bird,
one instinct made you rise
out of this life, into another’s
then from another’s, circling to your own?
You are folded in my eyes,
whose irises will open
to a white sky with bird and woman gone. (80)
This play-text, perhaps more than any other from Walcott’s corpus of work, exemplifies the artist’s perception of the gulf or void between humanity and its extra-human environment. The world of the play demonstrates how human consciousness is pulled out from the landscapes it has been sinking into. The neocolonial destruction of interconnected thinking and disruption of symbiotic dwelling manifests itself in the churning up of earth and the burning up of woodland that complete the disfiguring re-figuration of the contours of the land of rural Trinidad. Hand-in-hand with the highway construction business must go the destruction of the forest and Walcott’s play is able to overlay the image of the increasing, widening road-scheme with the profound sense of loss for the old rhythms of life of the Couva community that was once insulated by the foliage of the now fast-receding forest. From the outset, as Sumintra departs from Otto’s employ, taking with her the ‘authentic ingredient’ in his roti service, she announces ‘this is the dawn of a new technology. Because when that highway open next Saturday is every man for she self.’ She admonishes Otto for his resistant attitude to the bribes of the council that would speed up the process of road building - ‘because you too stubborn! If you had corporate with the Corporation, you could had a get a lickle piece of the action’.24 As Otto understands and Walcott’s poetic dexterity makes clear, there can, literally, be no co-operation with the company, the very word ‘co-operate’ itself must be

24 From here all page numbers in parenthesis after quotations will be taken from ‘Beef, No Chicken’ in Derek Walcott, Three Plays (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), pp. 103-207 (p. 108).
assimilated into ‘corporate’ just as the proprietor himself would be silenced and enveloped by the system of corruption had he accepted the backhanded offer of the colluding company and council. Otto’s steadfast stance is one of disillusionment at the pace of change reflected in the replacing of the old country road with the highway that promises an unquestioning vision of progress:

I have a prophecy: you could call it Hogan’s Law. The more road you build, the more cars you have; the more cars you have, the more highways you build. The more highways you have, the faster you go, but the one question is “Where the hell you going?” So, goodbye, old road. That road used to go wherever it mind take it. Sometimes, in the afternoon, when it had no traffic, the warm road would lie down and roll over on his back, like a pothound warming his belly in the sun. The road was honest, I was like the road. (196)

The highway, as symbol of social change, connecting the peripheral villages of the island to the urbanised centres is a device employed by other West Indian artists to similar effect. The road as signifier for change and a new connection between urban and rural, as signifier of the ‘opening up of territory’ in the era of neocolonial governance appears in works by Sam Selvon and Earl Lovelace.  

Selvon’s *A Brighter Sun* sees the protagonist, Tiger, and his work as surveyor, paralleling the prospects for himself and his community: road-building as *Bildungsroman*. The same tension between destruction of what was and the idea of personal and political progression is evident in Lovelace’s *The Schoolmaster*, where the newly-opened road brings not quite what people were expecting (the same concerns of freedom of movement and its consequences are, interestingly, the pre-text of *The Dragon Can’t Dance*). In addition, V.S. Naipaul addresses the impoverishment resulting from the deforestations of progress in *A House for Mr Biswas*: the
The road becomes indicator of a conception of modernity that acts wittingly as an agent of deforestation across the island. With the destruction of the forests, the communities own sense of history is threatened also:

Mr. Eldridge Franco, B.A. Doubtful. Have them parked on one side of the road. Where the silk cotton tree was. He have the whole class looking down in the hole, teaching them about the past. Well, history is a deep hole. [Singing stops] Last week that big tree gave them shade and strength. Today them poor schoolchildren standing there in the blazing sun with all their roots gone. (119-20)

The landscape that has acted as benefactor to generations of human inhabitants of Couva, can no longer provide a sense of historical belonging and leaves them exposed to the ‘blazing sun’; here the children, in an image contrapuntal to the women seeking shade in ‘The Almond Trees’, appear to be punished for the myopia of their elders and political leaders who fail to appreciate the interconnected history of human and extra-human occupants of the biosphere. In this instance, Walcott’s drama appears to echo a typical moment in ecopoetic tradition, the lament for the felled tree. Just as Wordsworth and Clare write their elegies to the ecological and cultural impoverishment caused by such acts, Walcott’s description of the reaction to the absence of the Samaan tree perhaps most closely resembles William Barnes’s ‘Vellen o’ the Tree’ where the poet

systematic mismanagement of land, extraction and logging for profit, at the Shorthills estate, is shown to lead to ecological and social disaster.
reflects on the shade and space for sustenance that his ‘girt elem’ provided his Dorset community:

Aye, the girt elem tree, so big roun’ an’ so high
Where the mowers did goo to their drink, an’ did lie
In the sheade ov his head, when the zun at his heighth
Had a-drove em vrom mowen, wi’ het an’ wi’ drith [...] An’ we cut, near the ground, his girt stem a’most drough,
An’ we bent the wold head o’n wi’ woone tug or two;
An’ he sway’d all his limbs, an’ he nodded his head,
Till he vell away down like a pillar o’ lead: [...] Zoo the girt elem tree out in little hwome groun’,
Wer a-stannen this mornen, an’ now’s a-cut down.²⁶

In fact, the Barnes lyric also echoes the opening to Omeros where the necessary destruction of the laurier-cannelles is lamented, and carried out with a sense of regret, even shame:

“This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes.”

Philoctete smiles for the tourist, who try taking
His soul with their cameras. “Once wind bring the news

to the *laurier-cannelles*, their leaves start shaking
the minute the axe of sunlight hit the cedars,
because they could see the axes in our own eyes.

Wind lift the ferns. They sound like the sea that feed us
fishermen all our life, and the ferns nodded ‘Yes,
the trees have to die. So, fists jam in our jacket,

cause the heights was cold and our breath making feathers
like the mist, we pass the rum. When it came back, it
gave us the spirit to turn into murderers.\(^\text{27}\)

Here, the attitude to destruction of the natural world is revealed as part of the
sustainable attitude to dwelling in the landscape as typified by the fisherman
from ‘Tarpon’, those that ‘draw their working strength from [the land]
organically’ and far removed from the rapacious progress that sees mass
destruction of vast areas of woodland in ‘Beef, No Chicken’.

The importance of the tree, or in fact the collective forest, as habitat for
non-human life is also given space for expression in Walcott’s play. In Act II,
Franco notices the absence of night-time moth activity as a result of the
construction companies’ work, although he continues by reasoning, aware of the
invasive forces of ‘nature’ thwarting his appreciation of ‘culture’: ‘but I’d need
repellent because light attracts moths. Of course there aren’t many moths since

\(^{27}\) Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber Limited, 1990), p. 3.
they levelled the forest. On the other hand, the less moths the better. I read a lot you see'. (175)

This then is the driving tension throughout the play, the desire for people to progress or better themselves and the resulting corrupting destruction, natural and cultural. It is useful to consider the features and figures in the text that represent this spirit of 'progress' and those that become emblems for a spirit of ecological resistance and a philosophy of interconnection. In addition, it is worth examining the production history of the work and its critical reception which can lead to a generic exploration of the concept of the 'ecological comedy'.

The ideology of expansion at any cost is revealed in the drive of corporate commerce as a force that will silence the music of the living landscape by any means. The actual departure of Sumintra, the 'Couva canary' and 'little brown lark' of Otto's 'Auto Repair and Authentic Roti' is replicated in the silent seasons that will blanket the surrounds of the village after the fate of the countryside and the fate of the shop are sealed - 'One farewell performance, before the bulldozer mash up or the damn bank manager repossess'. These sweeping forces of bank and bulldozer squeeze out the resistance of the community between them. The big money of Big Business changes the balance of local political power. From a situation where one man, one vote, provided some, albeit limited, agency and dignified personal political participation, the arrival of Mongroo Construction has Disneyfied the process with a sense of sneering disenfranchisement:
FRANCO

So vote nay or vote abstain, in the Mickey Mouse Borough Council

All of us in, and what difference it makes? We are crushed by a monolith.

To these big corporations we are just Mickey Mice.

OTTO

I am not no Mickey Mouse!

FRANCO

No, you make more noise, so you’re Donald Duck. (127)

Such disenfranchisement is implemented by those figures in the community who represent or are beholden to Mongroo Construction Company, builder of highways and shopping malls, represented first and foremost in the action of the play by Mongroo himself. He cuts short Franco’s recital of ‘The Deserted Village’ - another of the ecopoetic legacies picked up by Walcott - declaring ‘Goldsmith, tinsmith! Look this ain’t no time for poetry.’ The notion of dwelling poetically in landscape and community cannot be entertained by the relentless, centuries-old ideology of industrial expansion and the carving up of land whether it be by enclosure acts or by road-widening schemes. The perpetrator of such divisive development attempts all the equivocating tricks of his trade, ranging from persuasion to coercion in order to sell his vision of the future of the land, arguing away corruption as the process of progress and the end that would justify the means - ‘All over the world this happening, man. Bribery is
the first stage of economic development'. The Mayor supports Mongroo in his accusation of ludditism, a convenient charge to any who question commercial progress, aimed at Hogan:

MAYOR

[...] I want to get up and hear car horn, not cow horn, I want to hear traffic jam blowing, not sheep, I want to see industrial smoke, not trash fires, I want to fight pollution, to be a mayor with real problems, not who animal knock down who fence, because progress and pollution go hand in hand, and I would feel proud to be a part and parcel of twentieth-century issues and problems, blight, crime, scandal. Welfare, all that! [...] Shit! That, to me, is vision. (167)

Mongroo and the mayor seek to peddle their dream of the future for the land and for the people they purport to represent with blinkered, 'Single vision' that masquerades as far-sighted insight.28

The schoolmaster Eldridge Franco occupies the position of the middle ground, a character who on the one hand allies the idea of Mongroo’s vision of progress with his own pompous ideas of civilising and standardising the language of the people of Couva, but who is also inextricably linked to the community and willing to act on their behalf, if only to secure the attentions and

28 Indeed, the Mayor, burdened by his own official duties, likens the chain around his neck to the Ancient Mariner’s Albatross, although this episode furthers the view of the unseeing Mayor, ridiculed by Walcott, who through his mis-quoting fails to learn the lessons of the Mariner. Nor does he understand the grave consequence of wilful and negligent destruction of the natural world - 'You remember Albert Ross? The poem we learn in school? [...] this chain is an Albert Ross round my neck.' (191)
affections of Euphony. This expediency reveals itself in confused ambivalence to
the tension between forest and the road, between progress and history:

Yes. I was a city boy. I had contempt for the country, I called it
bush, and so on. But when my ailing mother needed a change of air
and I applied for a transfer to a rural school, I chose Couva. The leaves
of the forest were my dictionary. They cut it down. My mother died.
You know. Sad, sad. They are pulping our forests to print editorials
which our commentators mispronounce [...] they call me fussy, but with
Couva waiting in the dawn of technology, my dear, I feel destined for
greater things. We must take risks! (123)

In one instance he is able to join the chorus of the council that rounds on Otto
Hogan and denounces him as intransigent and obsolete - ‘Just sign the blasted
contract and forget! Your soul is a little bird crying in the forest, Otto. You’re
living in the past’ (128). He ridicules Otto’s ethic of protest, seems to have
swallowed and parroted the spin of corporate collusion, and yet, he is also
willing to play the part of the spirit of the road to confound and confuse the work
of the corporate state:

[He walks towards the door, shudders, straightens himself, puts a
clenched fist to his lips and discreetly coughs. All the dogs in the
county explode with barking. He steps back, then plunges into the
night with a scream. Then shouts, barking, gunshots. Silence] (144)
Franco participates in this capacity as a figure of resistance in the play then as well. Otto, Cardiff Joe, Deacon, Limer and Euphony all to some extent fulfil this role through a combination of interconnected vision and direct action, combining in such a way that we can see them bearing the mantle of environmental ethic.

Otto Hogan himself is the primary figure in the association of uncompromising resistors. In the first scene of the play he enters having endured the dogs and guns; later, he sends Franco, dressed as an old woman, to become ‘the Spirit of the Road’ and scourge of the road-builders. From this early stage we are introduced to the double meaning of utterance of ‘the Spirit of the Road’ the tension that drives:

SUMINTRA

Mr. Hogan? Why you dress up so?

OTTO

Ahmm, it had Carnival party last night.

SUMINTRA

[Coming around the counter]

Because is you who harassing them workmen expanding the highway!

The Spirit of the Road. So is you, Mr. Otto! (108)

Yet, if Otto’s creation of the spirit of the road as resistance has an impact, Sumintra points precisely to the other ‘spirit of the road’, that ideology of corrupt ‘progress’ that has demanded the expansion and drives the philosophy of ‘every
man for she self’. Otto fully understands this ideology, driven by the bank and
the company that refuse him credit until his ‘co-operation’ is secured. Now,
having played the part of the Spirit, energised by interconnected vision, he is able
to read the signs, literally and metaphorically, of the effects of this industrial
capitalism and proves to be an isolated, interrogatory voice:

Couva been changing right on the edge of the cane fields. Everywhere
I looked I should’ve seen the signs. My head was too busy inside some
old car to notice. But coming back I see, though LU FATT small Chinee
take-away fry-rice? […] So how about OTTO AUTOMATIC CHICKEN, neon
sign, day and night? Two exclamation points and a big red cock. I ain’t
know from where. Meanwhile, them caterpillar tractors from Mongroo
Construction eating dirt and shitting cement. Big four-lane highway
through Couva. Going where? I ask you. Quo fucking vadis? (125)

Otto’s ire, recalling the yellow caterpillars of the elegiac ‘Ebb’, becomes
transformed into the direct action of sabotage through the creation of the Spirit
and a declaration of intent which will involve Franco and Euphony and Cardiff
Joe all rallying to the cause of this unlikely ‘eco-warrior’: ‘From tonight Franco
will be the Mysterious Stranger. Is war! From now on, you hear me? War!’

Despite this, however, with the discovery of Euphony’s hat at the scene
of the haunting Otto is forced at penpoint to relinquish his powers of protest and
sign the council’s contract or face legal process; he is forced to become ‘one of
the boys’ who makes their ‘bread honestly by legalized crime.’ At the last, and
despite not being able to prevent the opening of the highway, Otto does keep his political integrity, tearing up the Mongroo contract preferring ‘a sound sleep to a fat deal’; this action is prompted by the words and deeds of Cardiff Joe who takes up the baton of resistance in the race to decide the future of the community.

Alwyn Davies, alias Cardiff Joe, instigates the direct action in the second act, reinforcing the resistance of Otto in the first. He is the returning hero, another world-travelled Odysseus of Walcott’s world. Indeed, Franco, as suitor to Euphony is most disturbed by his appearance and seeks to mock his decade-delayed return: ‘I travel in books. I didn’t go chasing my arse all over the ocean, like Odysseus’. However, Joe’s travels have heightened his insight into the connection of continents through the music of the living landscape:

I’d come out of the mines, and the hills of Wales, they’d be there, green and quiet as that hymn you used to sing in chapel right here in Couva... the years passed over the hills. Winters and green-throated summers that looked like the hills around Couva [...] Then, when I took to the sea and saw half the world, it was the same thing (178)

This insight helps to bolster the flagging Hogan, in the throws of defeatism - ‘Ah, but to what use and what end, Alwyn boy? [...] I had a sensa values [...] Tomorrow the new road opening regardless.’ (179) - through his lyrical rage:

29 Alwyn brings to mind not just the King of Ithaca from Walcott’s The Odyssey: A Stage Version, but also the figure of Shabine from ‘The Schooner Flight’ in The Star-Apple Kingdom (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), pp. 3-20.
CARDIFF JOE
Done a fair bit of travelling in my time.

Seen deserts, volcanoes, icebergs, the lot,

But never seen anything more boring than cement.

OTTO
How the place look to you after ten years away?

The old sawmill dismantled, where we used to swim.

They drained the river where we used to fish.

CARDIFF JOE
I went for a walk early at sunrise.

Bloody place is going to look like everywhere else.

Shopping malls, plazas, clover-leaf overpass,

neon in the sunshine, and the old houses looking
just like the old people, pushed away to the side.

...

All that I could take, countrysides change,

But when that change brings corruption,

It’s that I won’t permit. The moral poison. (180)

With such disdain for the ideology of ‘progress’ and its destruction of the natural
world Joe takes the direct action of Otto’s group to another level. Joe makes sure he is seen by the council of cronies laying fuse wire as a ruse to delay the opening of the highway and terrify the morally-poisoned corporate-backed politicians. At the event, Joe still eschews violence itself, his weapon in Otto’s war is merely the threat of violence and, although this pushes any principle of peaceful protest and non-violent direct action to their limits, he does emphasise, incisively, the disparity between his act and the violence committed by the developers against the community and the landscape:

Everybody complains. Nobody does a bloody thing. Blow it up and start again [...] It would make a hole in the highway bigger than the old silk cotton. Let them worry [...] it would still be safe. Just a hell of a noise. I wrote the Mayor a note. I spent all night laying wire in the seams, covering it. The governments promise progress, but do they ever ask the people the kind of progress they want? If they want the kind that destroys the people, be it a new highway or a new bomb? (201-202)

Euphony is Alwyn’s Penelope. As Otto reminds her it is ‘Ten years you been sitting down cobwebbed in a corner, your bridal gown turning yellow, waiting’.

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30 The pair here seem to represents the dual images of ‘Earth’ - the tree and the swift - the rooted resisting, Otto, is strengthened by the return of his friend, the migrant-traveller, Joe. In this way the characters can also be seen to act as representations of Walcott’s own double consciousness - both aspects are far from irreconcilable and deeply committed to the varied landscapes of the globe.
She remains confident that her hero will return to her and the community - 'I know the Lord will send him to solve all our problems'. As well as being cast in the role of the wife-in-waiting Euphony’s identity, in the mind of her fiancé, is fused with the very image of the landscape itself. She has ‘the face that’s never changed like those hills’ and despite this clearly being a case of beauty and, indeed the passage of time, being in the eye of the beholder - Alwyn refuses to acknowledge the fact that his betrothed has ‘had to open up the sides a little’ on her mildewed dress - provides another instance of a character in a Walcott drama being fused with the local landscape and bestowed with insight as a result. In actuality, we have here a comedic counterpoint to Harris’s tragic presentation of Catalena Perez; in the place of a brutalised woman upon whom male desire for expansion is inscribed and mapped, Euphony here provides the chart to navigate Alwyn back to his community and environment at a moment of crisis. Instead of gambling and prostituting his wife for economic gain, Alwyn acts as he does both inspired by her love and on behalf of a belief in a beauty, both human and extra-human. He will not disconnected Euphony from her environment and as a result speaks of them as inextricable.

The playwright gives to Euphony her own scene of activism. She is not left passive, but possesses similar insight into the machinations at the Town Hall and the arguments used by the developers: ‘The trouble with Science is that it does prove everything [...] If you take away mystery from Couva, aren’t you taking away its spirit?’ (143). Here she articulates the Harrisian concern that

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31 Walcott’s Penelope is similarly described in naturalistic terms as the unyielding ‘green pine that never sways on its hill’ - The Odyssey: A Stage Version, p. 123.
science, like religion before it, can be put to use to give supreme legitimacy to any cause. The science of progress that takes away the spirit of the Couva community is the same as the technologies of destruction and 'conquistadorial science' in *The Dark Jester*. Euphony stands alongside both Otto and Alwyn at this moment and her insight leads to resistance through direct action also. With the hold-up at the restaurant she notes 'Ay-ay, we progressing! Crime comes to Couva' but proceeds to persuade the bandits to rob the payroll van of the road workers to further delay the opening of the road. Her deft manoeuvring here is followed up by threats in emphatic style:

EUPHONY
I’m a Christian woman; but I don’t make joke!
So, let me give you young atheists a warning:
I come from Toco village, bush-medicine country;
I know spells, *mal-cadi*, cross-eye, and fits,
so I’m an African, too, and between them two religions
I could stand up right here and bend a blight on you
that would make a dog scream anytime you appear;
I could double-cross your eye, I could cave in your chest
til no hot flannel, cold leeches, or compress could fix it. (150)

Drawing on the fear of obeah, she utilises the still present power of the spirit of ‘old’ Couva that the developers are trying to eradicate. Walcott gives the final lament for the passing of the community to Euphony. She regrets the loss of
a human sense of community within the wider environment; it is a lament for a dwelling space about to be filled in, a space in which she was able to read the passing of time and life in the patterns of the Earth and sky:

What will happen to my poor little parlour, with the tables neat and waxed tablecloths with flowers on them? And the wind off the yard tinkling the bamboo-bead curtains? You know when I liked it best? When no-body was in it. [...] I used to lean one arm on the windowsill and watch the pasture opposite. The clouds passing over, making different shadows. What go happen? Tomorrow, this time, the task force go be trampling all over it. Now it belong to the bulldozers. (205)

The Spirit of the Road takes on a life of its own, over and above the masquerade played out by Otto and Eldridge and the attempts of Alwyn and Euphony to disrupt the building scheme:

[A huge shadow crosses the stage]

CEDRIC

[Into a microphone] It’s an old woman, in a large black hat, in old country skirts, hobbling patiently against the glare of the headlights and the impatient honking horns, crossing from where the old silk cotton had died towards the bush on the other side, and on the wrong light too. She’s gone, but she’s here. No camera can capture her shadow. The spirit of the countryside. (204)
No longer under the control of Otto’s company it is as if their combined ecological insight has animated the landscape itself. Echoing Walcott’s own instructions to begin again from the bush, that the way back can in some sense point the way forward, the spirit turns and heads into whatever remains of the forest. ‘Beef, No Chicken’ concludes with the lyrics of the Limer and action of the Deacon, the artist and the preacher, examples of the ‘leaders’ of the community.32 Prefiguring the actions of Walcott himself this pair issue the ultimate warning about the dangers of the inextricable woes of cultural assimilation and environmental crisis:

DEACON

Pretty soon there’ll be no country left. Nowhere to walk, nowhere to sit in the shade, whole place one big concrete suburb. Oh! Yes! It’s about McDonaldizing everything, it’s Kentucky Frying everything, it’s about going modern with a vengeance and televising everything, it’s hamming up everything, traffic-jamming up everything, it’s about neon lighting up everything, urban-blighting everything. I’m warning you. I seen it with my own two feet. (204)

[...]

LIMER

32 Deacon, an itinerant vagabond, seems to be gifted by Walcott with the possession of a prophetic wisdom akin to Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner; and Limer plays the part of musical commentator and chronicler of the community, functioning as a bard or rhapsodos figure, echoing Billy Blue from Walcott’s The Odyssey.
This morning as usual I get up sad,
I was worried about the future of old Trinidad ...

[The DEACON, in a corner of the parlour, switches off
the channel. Light and a flickering pattern. He leans against a
wall. In the darkness the TV set glows like a bomb. A dog barks]

[Fadeout]  (205)

Bruce King reveals how ‘the warning in [...] Beef, No Chicken about the
effects of international capitalism and tourism on the West Indies turned out to
be a ccurate’. 33 And t he a ction of t he p lay certainly makes a n o minous a rtistic
prefiguring to the sale of the land between the iconic hills of the Pitons, for hotel
development, in 1989. In 1990, in an article for the Star, Walcott denounced the
government’s desire to treat the land as economic resource rather than something
of intrinsic cultural and natural value calling it an ‘argument of whores!’.
In addition, the writer was part of the ‘St. Lucia Environmental and Development
Association’ which secured the backing of Greenpeace and the ‘Organisation of
American States’ in its opposition to the Jalousie project.

Indeed, in this regrettable instance of life imitating art, Walcott’s own
utterance echoes strongly the utterance of his characters in the play of a decade
earlier:

33 Bruce King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 489.
34 ibid. p. 509. See also, Pattullo, pp. 2-4.
Walcott wrote angrily in the *Star* (26 August) that the sale was like selling your mother’s breast... [he] concluded that if something needed to be done to earn money they could place the contractor, the foreign investors, their St Lucian associates and their apologists, eternally in the live sulphur pits and boiling lava, which were the tourist sights of Soufrière.\(^{35}\)

Poetically, at least, Walcott does exactly this. At the conclusion of *Omeros*, led by the Greek poet, he witnesses the villains of his piece in the ‘Pool of Speculation’ under the ‘horned peaks’ of the pitons:

the ancient forge

of bubbling lead erupted with speculators
whose heads gurgled in the lava of the Malebolge
mumbling deals as they rose. These were the traitors who, in elected office, saw the land as views for hotels and elevated into waiters the sons of others, while their own learnt something else.

\(^{35}\) ibid. p. 490.
and sucking faces that argued Necessity
in rapid zeros which no one else understood
for the island's profit. One had rented the sea
to offshore trawlers, whose nets, if hoisted, would show
for thrice the length of the coast.\(^{36}\)

It is worth examining in some detail the relatively brief production history of ‘Beef, No Chicken’. The mixed reviews and reception the various stagings of the play have received can illuminate, not only an assessment of the comedic success of the play, but also audience expectations of dramatic comedy and insights into the under-explored and seemingly paradoxical concept of eco-comedy.

The three significant productions of the play in the Caribbean seem to have elicited divergent critical reactions. The Trinidad Theatre Workshop production of 1981, directed by Cecil Gray, was compared unfavourably to the Stage One production directed by Earl Warner, in Barbados, 1985. The second TTW staging of 1987 (produced by Brenda Hughes) was deemed to be an improvement on the first Little Carib effort, but still ‘lacked the energy’ of the Stage One production. While the perceived improvement in the productions of ‘Beef, No Chicken’ have, in part, to do with some significant authorial rewrites. Judy Stone also attributes the relative successes to the directorial handling of the tone of the performances - ‘perhaps the vital difference [...] was that Cecil Gray

strove to emphasise the comedy, and play down the tragedy, while Earl Warner
never lost sight of the tragedy, and the comedy as a result was all the richer and
more poignant'. Indeed, Warner’s own introduction to the production
programme sheds light on his aims of ‘seriocomedy’:

It is a delicate process to take a tragic situation and shape from it
a hilarious comedy without crudity and insensitivity to the subject matter.
The success of this comedy as literature and theatre testifies to the power
of Walcott’s acute and masterful craft.

The play is a kaiso, a seriocomic ballad on real social experience.
Yet, finally, the pathos within the given situations is never lost, and the
ambivalence of progress is illuminated.38

The play, as text and as production, has been seen as only a partial
success by some critics. John Thieme believes the play ‘lacks the comic force’ of
other Walcott plays, relying too much on ‘forced puns’ and he is uncomfortable
with the blend of humour and pathos, deeming the satire ‘over-obvious’,
believing that the farcical nature of the comedy ‘has the effect of occluding the
social criticism’.39 Similarly, King reveals how ‘The Guardian thought it a
“slapstick elegy” in which “slick insights tickle the conscience for the price of a
smile”, with too many issues, not enough plot, and a lack of characterization. Not

37 Judy Stone, ‘Warner’s Beef, No Chicken: An Inspired Production’, in Critical Perspectives on
Derek Walcott, pp. 369-371 (p. 370).
38 ibid. p. 370.
39 Thieme, pp. 130-131.
Such reactions, rather than being used merely to corroborate opinions that ‘Beef, No Chicken’ was only partially successful, can themselves be interrogated with the aim of understanding the expectations of theatrical and literary critical audiences when faced with a work of art that does not submit to easy identification as either a comic text or as a text which can be considered as ‘protest literature’. In actuality, the charge that the drama tackles ‘too many issues’ perhaps reveals more about the critic’s perspective and belief about the boundaries of comedy than the play itself. ‘Beef, No Chicken’ presents, albeit within the realm of a caricatured community, a constellation of realities - social, political and cultural - on page and on stage, which may not be reduced to an easy conclusion or a neatly tied-up culmination of character and event. It is interesting to note that the playwright rejects the use of the typical dramatic device of the marriage ceremony to bring about a comic resolution, as the conjugation of Euphony and Alwyn serves only to further the sense of destruction for the community as a whole through both the Deacon’s address and the bride’s lament.

‘Beef, No Chicken’, then, is an important example of a work of literature that can be seen to extend the boundaries, if not rewrite the map, of expectation for ecologically-conscious art. In addition to confounding critical expectation, Walcott’s play also forces the ecocritic towards some degree of reflexivity, urging a reassessment of the form and function of eco-literary discourse and ecocriticism. tragedy, Romantic elegy and apocalypticism are all modes more-

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40 King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p.488. (Excerpt taken from an article reviewing the 1988 production which was part of the Black Theatre Season at the Shaw theatre.)
than-familiar to any ecocritical assessment of art and society, but perhaps there is a cultural and a political space for works that deal with environmental destruction in a way that more closely approaches the environmentalists’ everyday reaction to global crisis. There is the realisation that outrageous disbelief and frustrated rage are in many cases redundant and incapacitating when they are experienced as isolated reaction. However, when combined with a grimly observed sense of absurdity, perhaps they become more energised.\textsuperscript{41}

It could be, then, that Derek Walcott is reflecting accurately reactions to the destruction of the planet in the sense that the text of the play is not arrested by the paralysis of tragedy (nor is it in any sense sanctimonious); rather, it chooses, as do its characters within the story-world, to adopt a bleak ironic humour that fires alongside anger and continued, but not unexpected, disappointments at the workings of the corporate state.\textsuperscript{42} The Harrisian galvanising, resistive and redemptive possibilities of the ecological imagination find an arena for expression in Walcott’s comedy to such an extent that it is more than possible to defend ‘Beef, No Chicken’ against the accusation of a ‘lack of depth’ or indulgence in a humorous tone which denies the capacity for social


\textsuperscript{42} This sense of irony seems typified in Walcott’s introductory Cast Note - ‘SETTING: Couva, a town in central Trinidad, in the present. Couva is a real town, but the characters are surely fictional in this farce.’ (107) (emphasis added)
criticism.\textsuperscript{43} Even more than ‘Ti-Jean and His Brothers’ and ‘Dream on Monkey Mountain’ before it, this play opens up significant space for the dramatic expression of ecologically-conscious art and allows the ecopoetic vision of interconnection and an understanding of the inextricable history of people and landscape to stand in opposition to the disconnection wrought by the progress of corporate modernity’s ‘Single vision’.

\textsuperscript{43} King, \textit{Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life}, p. 400; Thieme, p. 131.
Chapter Seven:

The power of provincialism: John Clare and *The Bounty*

Convinced by the power of provincialism,

I yielded quietly my knowledge of the world

- ‘Hic Jacet’

While the influence of John Clare’s poetry on the work of Derek Walcott over the course of his writing life is certainly marked, his importance to many twentieth century poets writing in the English language has also been noted. Seamus Heaney highlights the linguistic precedent set by Clare that has been echoed in the imaginative poetics of ‘post-colonial nation languages, poetry that springs from the English which sets them at cultural and perhaps political odds with others in possession of that normative “Official Standard”’. In addition, Jonathan Bate’s *John Clare: A Biography* concludes with a literary afterlife of Clare, assessing the reflection of Clare’s image and the resonation of his poetic voice in the work of other writers, and stressing the importance of Clare as ‘the

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poet’s poet’ who inspires and stimulates the creations and compositions of others.³

While it is necessary to be aware that Clare’s poetic influence is only one among many - ‘talking of influences on Walcott is like talking about baking powder when you taste a cake’⁴ - Clare has special significance in the light of this stimulation to write that he seems to compel in others generally, and the essential place he holds in the formation of that part of Walcott’s writings that is expressly ecological. It is useful to consider instances of literary, temperamental, and even ideological compatibility and sympathy between the Helpston poet and his St. Lucian counterpart, and to investigate the moments of intersection across the continents and centuries that culminate in Walcott’s pivotal evocation of John Clare in his collection of 1997.

As well as Clare’s linguistic importance as a ‘precursor’ called out of the past by ‘the need for a new kind of poetry in the present’⁵ and the fact that the creative contortions and constructions of the colonial poet and those of the English ‘peasant’ are, to some degree, formed in tension with the metropolis; the local emphasis of Clare’s poetry of place is reflected in Walcott’s own search for self-realisation and legitimisation of the Caribbean aesthetic in poetry. There is a vernacular parallel in the effect of Clare’s naming of the flora of his surroundings and the intentions of Walcott in legitimising the flora of his islands. Clare is responsible for, in effect, transcribing in his verse the oral history of Northamptonshire by his utilisation of local names for flora and fauna and, if he

⁴ King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 364.
⁵ John Clare in Context, p. 145.
does not ultimately succeed in legitimising such vernacular language of vegetation within the poetic canon of the nineteenth century, then at least he is able to offer up such a history of the language of the natural world for view to the readers of his poetry at that time. For decades Walcott’s concern has been to legitimise the language of tropical flora in a similar way, and he has sought to provide space for the mango and breadfruit to be cultivated as literary fruits.

This provision of textual space for the images of Caribbean trees - the Samaan tree in ‘Beef, No Chicken’, the laurier-cannelles of Omeros and the arboreal catalogue in ‘The Bounty’ - is also connected to dismay and fury at the needless destruction of individual trees themselves and wider deforestation in the name of progress. Walcott’s ecopoetic address to the trees of his heartland and the lament for their destruction echo strongly the tragic sense of loss that Clare suffered as the landscape of his world was enclosed and his favourite Elm trees felled. Indeed, the anger of Walcott at the Pitons development is equalled not in Clare’s letter to John Taylor, which displays a hesitant self-consciousness in mourning, but rather in his poem ‘The Fallen Elm’:

Thoust sheltered hypocrites in many a shower

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6 Clare’s utilisation of the vernacular in plant-naming extends its usefulness beyond his own time: Douglas Chambers reveals the importance of Clare’s writings to historians of both language and botany - Douglas Chambers, “‘A love for every simple weed’: Clare, botany and the poetic language of lost Eden’, in John Clare in Context, pp. 238-258. p (239); and it is also noteworthy that Clare is the most prevalent poet quoted in the most comprehensive cultural history of British plants - Richard Mabey, Flora Britannica (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1996).

7 King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 367.

8 ‘Maybe the world has always been threatened but it seems to me the older I get, the more fragile the world is, especially a lot of it. So being in St. Lucia and to still see virgin forests […] makes you, I think, cherish greatly what is there’. Derek Walcott, quoted in conversation responding to questions after a reading, 5 March 2004, West Indian Community Centre, Coventry. Excerpt taken from the transcription of the evening’s discussion, owned by Heaventree Press.
That when in power would never shelter thee
Thoust heard the knave supply his canting powers
With wrong illusions when he wanted friends
That bawled for shelter when he lived in showers
& when clouds vanished made thy shade amends
With axe at root he felled thee to the ground
& barked of freedom - O I hate that sound
Time hears its visions speak & age sublime
Had made thee a deciple unto time
--It grows the cant terms of enslaving tools
To wrong another by the name of right
It grows a liscence with oer bearing fools
To cheat plain honesty by force of might
Thus came enclosure -

The destruction of the elm and the spectre of enclosure are counterparts to Walcott’s Samaan and Almond trees which provided shade and shelter but proved obstacles to the advance of neo-colonial notions of ‘progress’. The two poets are bound together in differing landscapes by both the vision and memory, and the reality and consequences of loss in both human and natural terms. The history of colonialism which saw Caribbean islands being divided up piece-meal

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and continually contested by rival European powers contributes to a history of land manipulation and disenfranchisement that parallels the enclosure acts in Clare’s Britain. If poems like ‘The Fallen Elm’ and ‘The Mores’ attest to the fact that Clare’s landscape has been politicised and he is positioned as an enmeshed observer and poet-witness, the same can be said of Walcott, who ‘is unable to detach [the] landscape from its history of colonialism and all the attendant consequences of that history [...] he must directly acknowledge the history of St. Lucia and the Caribbean, the history of diaspora, of slavery, of the capitalist commodification of the landscape’\(^{10}\). Walcott, like Clare, cannot have the luxury of being distanced from the impact of the human intervention that shapes his landscapes.

It is little wonder then that Walcott seeks authorial kinship with Clare through his homage in ‘The Bounty’, but the two points of most direct poetic parallel concern attention to close observation, an ecopoetic eye fixed with local focus and, perhaps more surprisingly in the case of Clare, the idea of the globalised world and the effects of imperialism.\(^{11}\) It is Clare’s love of the smallest creatures in the scheme of existence that draws Walcott’s attention. The corpus of Clare’s poetry (mirroring Blake’s cosmology that makes as much space for the butterfly and the lark as it does for the sun and the revolutionary tides of the moon) addresses explicitly the status and plight of the badger, the hedge sparrow, the field cricket and the snail living under the shadow of varying

\(^{10}\) Kamada, pp. 208-9.
\(^{11}\) It is also interesting, although incidental, to note that Defoe’s story of *Robinson Crusoe*, a favourite of Clare as a boy, is the very narrative that Walcott re-imagines and revisits throughout *The Castaway* collection and essays of that period some century and a half later (perhaps there is something of a shared self-identification with the figure of Crusoe, the isolated, embattled observer and survivor).
degrees of anthropocentric interference. Clare’s joy in the minute particulars of
the varying nesting habits of the crow family or the documentation of the
carpentry skills of the green woodpecker mark him out as the most important of
nineteenth century ecopoetic voices, championing as he does the notion of
equity in the value of non-human life in the natural world. Walcott, in turn,
levels the hierarchy of an anthropocentric universe in his verse with attention to
the industry of ants running intertwined with the travels of the soul of his mother,
Alix. The ability to give praise in the face of the erosion of landscape, the loss of
life and lifestyle and to find ‘awe in the ordinary’ is the lead that Walcott follows
from his muse in ‘The Bounty’, a poem which is at once microscopic in its
encompassing gaze, but which also looks out over wider horizons.

It is tempting to contrast the worldliness of Walcott, the international poet
laureate stitching together Europe, the Americas and Africa in his travels as well
as his verse, poet of the sea, of exile, migration and diaspora, with the insularity
of John Clare who lived for most of his life within two villages, two asylums and
only saw the sea on one occasion. But it would be wrong to assume that Clare’s
concern for life and for liberty ended at the fenland’s horizon. It has been argued
that Clare ‘was not detached from [...] major national and international events in

12 Margaret Grainger, ed. The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare (Oxford: Clarendon

13 He presents, through his writings, ‘a more impartial, biocentric - or biosphere-centred - view in
which the non-human world is considered to be of intrinsic value’ a stance equitable with the
‘deep ecology’ philosophy of modern ‘green’ discourse as opposed to the view, one of
enlightened self-interest, that preservation of the natural world is desirable for a stockpile of
resources for exploitation or for the ‘aesthetic pleasure and spiritual inspiration’ it provides
(Dobson, p. 20). Clare’s love of the actualities of lived experience for the non-human life of the
planet, coupled with his fury at the needless destruction of the natural world throws the ecopoetic
moment of Coleridge’s Mariner somewhat into relief - it almost seems as if the moral lesson of
that poem takes up a more human-focussed position of ‘enlightened self-interest’ when compared
to Clare’s depictions of the natural world.
some timeless, rural backwater\textsuperscript{14} and it is clear that Clare’s sojourns in the capital and the company he kept certainly brought him into contact with political discussions on the subject of the Atlantic Slave Trade as well as the human effects of slavery in the Caribbean. The correspondence with Thomas Pringle, the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, who acted as literary editor and publisher to Clare for a while, is of special interest. Pringle sent Clare anti-slavery tracts and it is likely that Clare had read Pringle’s South African poems comprising meditations on landscape, wildlife and the indigenous population.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, this relationship reveals Clare’s principles and sympathies concerning the colonial trade in trafficking humans - ‘I have a feeling on the broad principle of common humanity that slavery is not only impiety but disgraceful to a country professing religion’.\textsuperscript{16} Alongside this dialogue with Pringle, there is evidence that Clare was considered for, or considered contributing to, a couple of anthologies on the subject. This not only demonstrates Clare’s awareness of issues of international bearing but also reaffirms his sympathy for the plight of the enslaved - ‘I am sure Slavery is an abominable traffic & a disgrace to Mahomedism much more Christianity & they who sanction it cannot be

\textsuperscript{14} Roger Sales, \textit{John Clare: A Literary Life} (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 39.


Christians for it is utterly at variance with religion & nature.\textsuperscript{17}

Clare’s sympathetic support for the Anti-Slavery movement is in keeping with his consistent consideration for the plight of the disenfranchised within society. There is a non-hierarchical quality to Clare’s recurrent expressions of concern for the persecuted and exploited. Sympathy abounds in equal measure for the pursued fox, the savaged badger, the abused community of gypsies and the black beggar outside St. Paul’s cathedral:

I remember passing St. Pauls one morning where stood a poor Affrican silently soliciting charity but the sincerity of his distress spoke plainer then words I felt in my pockets but I had only four-pence in all and I felt almost ashamed to receive the poor creatures thanks for so worthless

\textsuperscript{17} ibid. p. lii. Clare was also later to utilise the language of abolition to describe his own wretched state in the asylum, a ‘slave ship from Africa’. Any connection Walcott may perceive between the peripheral colonial voice and the utterance of the English ‘peasant’ poet seems to be borne out in the actions and interventions of Pringle himself, who also acted as promoter and editor for the former slave Mary Prince and was instrumental in producing her narrative \textit{The History of Mary Prince: a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself}. As editor and prefatory framer of Prince’s narrative, Pringle has been accused by some postcolonial critics of heavy-handed intervention and even of making truncating qualifications and ‘corrections’ which seem to shape her authorial voice to his aims. For instance, Moira Ferguson in her comprehensive introduction to the narrative suggests, alluding to Pringle’s editorship, that ‘in numerous senses Mary Prince’s hands were tied’ and that he had the desire to ‘launder’ her utterance - \textit{The History of Mary Prince: a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself}, ed. by M Ferguson (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 10 / p. 14. Roger Sales contends that such narrative framing and mediation from ‘patrons and philanthropists’ had the effect of distancing writers from their readership and that, furthermore, writers from the peripheries of the empire, whether peasants from Northamptonshire or former slaves from the colonies, were lead by editorial strings in the processes of ‘cultural mediation’ which isolated the personal narrative or poetic voice from the immediate reader (here, he illustrates his case by examining the treatment of Phyllis Wheatley: Sales, p. 17-18). However, it is altogether possible that the literary criticism of such mediation/interference on behalf of the editors is misplaced. Just as Clare desired some element of formalisation from his editors (see: Bate, \textit{John Clare: A Biography}, pp. 563-575 ), and John Taylor especially had to contend with the climates of economics and taste in reading, Pringle’s concern’s had to extend beyond care for the unadulterated utterance of Mary Prince. In fact, Pringle’s framing and footnotes form an interesting dialogue with Prince’s words and his qualifications and own voice, when it does eclipse his author’s, demonstrate the essential ethics of his aims as publisher: \textit{The History of Mary Prince} for him was first and foremost a historical narrative to be disseminated as widely as possible and not an expressly literary one.
a pittance and passed him but his looks spoke so feelingly that even a
trifle would be acceptable that I ran back a long way and put the
dourpence into his hand and I felt worse dissapointment when I saw the
poor creatures heart leap to thank me and the tears steal down his cheeks
at the gratification of the unlooked for boon for his thanks and surprise
told me he had met with little such charity as mine - and I determined the
next day to get my pocket recruited if possible and give him a shilling and
my first walk was to St Pauls but the poor africcan was gone and I never
saw him again -

Clare’s relation of the encounter transcends the conventional account of pity-
induced guilt-given charity, not only with the depth of feeling and compassion
evident in Clare’s attempted second return, but also in the concluding awareness
of the precarious nature of subsistence suffered by the disappearing beggar.
While this would appear to be the only documented example of Clare’s
interaction with a member of Britain’s nineteenth-century black population, and
there is no evidence to suggest that these instances of sympathy were connected
to any condemnation of the machinery of imperialism as a system in the Blakean
sense, it is clear that this compassion for the suffering of the enslaved is sincere.
In t he l ight o f th e r elationship w ith T homas P ringle, and C lare’s o wn st rident
feelings on the cruelties of the slave trade, coupled with the critical readings of
his use of poetic language by Heaney and Paulin, it appears that Clare can be

18 John Clare By Himself, ed. by E. Robinson and D. Powell (Manchester: Fyfield Books and
Carcanet, 2002), p. 149.
connected not only to the world of Walcott’s poetry in the present but also linked to the history of those islands. In his own lifetime the English provincial poet could see well beyond the horizons of Helpston, and, in his literary afterlife he is once again connected with the concerns of the Caribbean.

Although William Blake, like Clare, never visited the region, there is a curious symmetry in the awareness of slavery that was brought to each writer primarily by their respective working relationships, with John Gabriel Stedman and Thomas Pringle respectively. Just as Wilson Harris imaginatively reconnects Blake with the forests of the night in Guyana, Derek Walcott brings John Clare back poetically to the intertwined natural and human histories of the islands. The literary interactions of Stedman, Blake, Harris and of Pringle, Clare, Walcott, form twin triangles connecting ecopoetics, landscape and the history of enslavement in the Americas.

‘The Bounty’

The ‘quasi-religious’ tone in praise of the natural world, rather than merely marking a departure from the more overtly political tone of environmental dismay that typified ‘Beef, No Chicken’ and The Gulf, rediscovers the thread of Walcott’s early poetry which realised a sense of spirituality through the observation of nature. ‘The Bounty’ sees an assured Walcott, in the culmination of his ecopoetic voice, having the final words over detractors who had explicitly
ridiculed a young poet's vision and levelled accusations of heresy. While the sense of outrage at the desecration of the Earth's resources for human profit is muted here, Walcott’s eye narrows in focus to examine the beauty of a natural world of intrinsic value; this poem, too, emphasises the notion of a shared planet and of an interdependent total history which supersedes any sense of human superiority or hierarchy of being. The poet explores the environments and landscapes of Europe and the Caribbean, overlaying the intersecting histories of continents with a profound sense of love for individual creatures.

Between the vision of the Tourist Board and the true
Paradise lies the desert where Isaiah’s elations
force a rose from the sand. The thirty-third canto
cores the dawn clouds with concentric radiance,

The poem opens with the familiar condemnation of the ‘Single vision’ of the engines of profiteering progress, governments willingly pushed by IMF directives into the veneration of tourism as the ultimate source of revenue

19 In a parody of the 14 year-old Walcott’s poem, Father Jesse, decries the association of nature and spirituality in cruel fashion:

'The lines of our young poet fail
To take this critic's heart by storm--
They've been poisoned in the head and tail!
Youth would have none to speak of God,
Except the tree, the ant, the sod!

[...] This was a criminal attempt to crush Walcott's youthful love of nature', King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 39.

20 Derek Walcott, The Bounty (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1997), p. 3. From here, throughout the chapter, all references to this collection will appear in brackets after the quotation.
regardless of the cost. By implication, the ‘vision of the Tourist Board’ is a false conjuration, involved in marketing, selling and packaging a particular climate and landscape with its attendant ecosystems as ‘paradise’ for the wonderment and consumption of the paying visitor.\textsuperscript{21} The ‘true paradise’ is the vision of natural and human landscapes enveloped in natural light - ‘And what’s beautiful often turns out to be what’s poor: the colours of galvanised shacks near the blue sea [...] the spiritual beauty of the place: you have a sense of the celestial in that light, a radiance without edges’. The spiritual significance of interconnected dwelling, humans within the history of the land, is undeniable and constantly under threat - ‘You don’t violate that unless you’re a barbarian, because the place communicates its own votive aura. You wouldn’t put a McDonalds’s in Monument Valley. But it’s very easy to exploit the Caribbean because these violations happen in the name of progress’.\textsuperscript{22} ‘The Bounty’ provides Walcott’s counterpart to the Harrisian vision at the foot of the falls in the \textit{Palace of the Peacock}; ‘true paradise’ is a glimpse of divinity gained through the vista of the natural landscape.

\textsuperscript{21} Evelyn O’Callaghan, \textit{Women Writing the West Indies, 1804 - 1939: 'a hot place belonging to us'} (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) explores the history of the dual marketing of the Caribbean as simultaneously a place of picturesque beauty and a dangerous wildness from the nineteenth century to the present. Also, Michael Manley has warned that - ‘The vacation industry is clearly here to stay. But the question which we dare not ignore is whether we, the Caribbean people, are going to have the wit and the will to make it the servant of our needs. If we do not, it will become our master, dispensing pleasure on a curve of diminishing returns while it exacerbates social divisions and widens that legacy of colonialism’ in his foreword to Patulloo, \textit{Last Resorts}, pp. ix-x. Walcott echoes Manley’s concern: ‘This is how the islands from the shame of necessity sell themselves; this is the seasonal erosion of their identity, that high-pitched repetition of the same images of service [...] with a future of polluted marinas, land deals negotiated by ministers, and all of this conducted to the music of Happy Hour and the rictus of a smile.’ ‘The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory’ in Walcott, \textit{What The Twilight Says: Essays}, pp. 65-84 (p. 81).

As Walcott's verse follows the contours of his mother's journey from life into death, he employs the figure of Clare as his Virgil-like guide through the 'votive aura' of the history of the land:

Frost whitening his stubble, he stands in the ford
of a brook like the Baptist lifting his branches to bless
cathedrals and snails, the breaking of this new day,
and the shadows of the beach road near which my mother lies,
with the traffic of insects going to work anyway. (3)

Clare shepherds Walcott's visions of the history of the life of the land, like an attuned minister, seeming to direct the poem from within with the same care as he steers insects out of harm's way:

Torn, wandering Tom, stoat-stroker in his county
of reeds and stalk-crickets, fiddling the dank air,
lacing his boots with vines, steering glazed beetles

with the tenderest of prods... (3)

Indeed, Walcott's Clare is equally attuned to the landscapes of the Caribbean as he is to his own 'dank' country and 'the mists of the shires'. Walcott's meditation on Clare becomes an exegesis on the cross-fertilisations of Empire in
human and natural terms, the forced migration of Africans across the middle passage, the ecological migrations of plant seeds across the same oceans, and the intertwined history of their arrival in the Caribbean - 'bois-pain, tree of bread, slave food, the bliss of John Clare'. The memory of Clare serves as catalyst for memory of the brutal brand of internationalism and globalisation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In contrast to the exile of the enslaved and the far-reaching, ocean-going exploitative voyages of expansion charted by those in the slave trade, Clare demonstrates the true power of provincialism; his unblemished soul remains anchored to the waterways of the Northamptonshire countryside - 'but his soul safer / than ours, though iron streams fetter his ankles.' Walcott transposes the image of Clare from the meadows to the shade of the trees on coasts of the Caribbean:

[...] My mother lies

near the white beach stones, John Clare near the sea-almonds,

yet the bounty returns each daybreak, to my surprise,

to my surprise and betrayal, yes, both at once.

I am moved like you, mad Tom, by a line of ants;

I behold their industry and they are giants. (4)

Walcott then, in communion with Clare and the living landscape concludes poem i of ‘The Bounty’ by returning his focus to the minutiae of life, the industry of ants which situates them as i t d i n ‘Guyana / i’ within a defined scheme of
existence that considers their efforts as important as human endeavour. There is a sense of solace to be found in the ceaseless activity of the ants as agents of the living landscape with its continuing cycles of life and death. Clare and his ants accompany Walcott in his elegy and acknowledgement that the world still turns despite the poet’s grief at a mother’s passing.

Poem ii displays again Walcott’s perception and construction of a cosmology of total natural history. Plant life from both temperate and tropical zones is caught under the influence of the sun’s arc:

the golden bell
of allamanda, thorns of the bougainvillea, and that is
their bounty! They shine with defiance from weed and flower,
even those that flourish elsewhere, vetch, ivy, clematis,
on whom the sun now rises with all its power,
not for the Tourist Board or for Dante Alighieri,
but because there is no other path for its wheel to take (5)

Walcott here creates a garden of the world; vegetation stitches together the landscapes of the old and the new worlds as the sea swift pulls continents together in Omeros. The sun illuminates the earth not to provide the cheap paradise print of postcard or brochure but because it is explicitly operating

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23 cf. John Clare: ‘I have spents almost whole days on sundays in observing the never ceasing travel & labour of ants & was often very much suppised to see early in the spring multitudes of ants in ceaseless travel’. Grainger, ed. p. 320.
outside of human dictation and programming. Although 'The Bounty' is intimately concerned with human bereavement, it situates that sense of personal loss within an acknowledgement that 'human interest is not [...] the only legitimate interest' and presents the extra-human environment as 'a process rather than as a constant or given'.

Consideration of the processes of the mind - the wheels of thought in lines of verse - spin out of this contemplation of the process of Earth's orbit of the sun as the poem observes the connection between the poetry and language of grief that leans towards madness. For Walcott the turning of rhymes and lines under the strain of enormous human grief, consciously situated within the enormity of extra-human, history places significant pressure upon the sanity of his poetic subject - 'as I watch these lines grow and the art of poetry harden me / into sorrow as measured as this [...] No, there is grief, there always will be, but it must not madden'.

Walcott, witness to the experience of Clare, is driven to reflect on the connection between grief, madness, verse and death; this series of poems becomes not only a poetic exploration of his own grief and concerns about strains on his sanity but also an empathetic exercise, a reminder of the treatment of Clare and the perceived reasons for his mental ill-health. It has been demonstrated that on Clare's admission to the Northampton asylum, the belief that his writing had contributed to his incarceration, that poetry was a vicious addiction, was made explicit. Sales asserts that 'The medical men who certified Clare in 1841 believed that his condition was hereditary, although aggravated or excited by his addiction to

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24 Buell, pp. 7-8.
25 King, Derek Walcott: Caribbean Life, p. 257.
poetry. Poetry and addiction are connected yet again’, and Bate reveals that the notes intended to clarify the reasons for Clare’s admission cited the fact he had suffered ‘insanity […] After years addicted to poetical prosing’. 26

That poetry can be an addiction, and a fatal one at that, is a notion that has preoccupied Walcott, notably in ‘The Schooner Flight’ where Shabine acknowledges the perilous nature of the poetic craft:

As I worked, watching the rotting waves come
past the bow that scissor the sea like silk,
I swear to you all, by my mother’s milk,
by the stars that shall fly from tonight’s furnace,
that I loved them, my children, my wife, my home;
I loved them as poets love the poetry
that kills them, as drowned sailors the sea. 27

Shabine’s insights come around again with this evocation of Clare in The Bounty, Walcott’s poetic persona insistent in his determination to resist being similarly overwhelmed:

No, there is grief, there will always be, but it must not madden,

26 Sales, p. 105; Bate, John Clare: A Biography, p. 466. In addition, Roy Porter’s essay “All madness for writing”: John Clare and the asylum’ provides a necessarily sceptical look at the value of speculation over Clare’s state of mind and reminds us of both the extreme financial pressure and ‘cultural fantasies associated with the myth of poetic genius’ that equally could have led to Clare’s condition and then his institutionalisation and subsequent treatment, both medical and critical. In John Clare in Context, pp. 259-278 (p. 264).
27 Walcott, The Star-Apple Kingdom, p. 5.
like Clare, who wept for a beetle’s loss, for the weight
of the world in a bead of dew on clematis or vetch,
and the fire in these tinder-dry lines of this poem I hate
as much as I love her, poor rain-beaten wretch,
redeemer of mice, earl of the doomed protectorate
of cavalry under your cloak; come on now, enough! (5-6)

The third poem of the collection continues this conversation with John Clare and
furthermore extends it to those creatures of the ‘doomed protectorate’; as Clare
hears the murmur of ‘bounty abiding’, it is the bounty of Walcott’s own creature-
chorus (the same minute players that aided Ti-Jean and that failed to move
Hunter Francois’s ‘Infidel’) and can be heard:

‘In the bells of tree-frogs with their steady clamour
in the indigo dark before dawn, the fading morse
of the fireflies and crickets, then light on the beetle’s armour, (7)

This is the Harrisian music of the living landscape and it compels Walcott to
understand the cyclical rhythms of the natural world, and of life and death: to see
‘praise in decay and process’, to acknowledge the intrinsic value of the non-
human world, and to experience a sense of ‘awe in the ordinary’. Such ecopoetic
vision reveals the interrelation of microscopic and macrocosmic in the schema of
the poem, echoing poem ii, as Clare wept 'for the weight / of the world in a bead of dew', Walcott sees 'the sun contained in a globe of the crystal dew'. The crystal of dew from which Makak prophesied has, in its reflections, been transfigured into a vessel for the sun, carrier of the agent of its own creation. It is this vision of interconnection, of the massive and the minute, the sun in the dew, the conversations of ants and men, that consolation must come. The language of total history, and of extra-human expression, provides the key to understanding the human position in the scheme of things, our relation to the divine:

If I took the pulpit, lay-preacher

Like tender Clare, like poor Tom, so that look, Miss!

the ants come to you like children, their beloved teacher

Alix, but unlike the silent recitation of the infants,

the choir that Clare and Tom heard in their rainy county,

we have no solace but utterance, hence this wild cry. (9)

Through these lines the grieving speaker elucidates a sense of the human paradox, a profound feeling of isolation, and deep awareness of being part of a larger whole. The unease at the orthodox belief of individual afterlife is expressed - 'But can she or can she not read this?' - alongside a sense that human life and death are part of nature's cycle. It is through death that human subjectivity, and the anthropocentric gaze, become subsumed into objective
nature - ‘The dead are no longer watchers of nature’s deaths and renewals, but gathered up into nature itself’. 28

This notion of observing nature’s deaths and renewals connects Walcott’s vision with Harris’s narratives. The multiple deaths and rebirths of Donne, Cristo, Atahualpa all efface the centrality of notions of individual character and linear human life-story. Harris’s human figures are part of larger nature, incorporated, literally, into the landscapes and the cycles of seasons (eternity to season); and Walcott here, contemplating the passing of his mother’s life produces a similar vision of human history that is indivisible from the history of wider nature, a nature of deaths and renewals.

Across white feathery grave-grass the shadow of the soul
passes, the canvas cracks open on the cross-trees of the *Bounty*,
and the Trades lift the shrouds of the resurrected sail.

[...]

Faith grows mutinous. The ribbed body with its cargo
stalls in its doldrums (9)

The singular death of Alix Walcott leads to contemplation of the multiple deaths of Caribbean history. Her soul passes upon the very Trade winds that made a

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grave of the Atlantic, and over the memory of the deaths onboard the slave ships. The recollection of insurance scams, of throwing the sick and dying overboard, is superimposed with Walcott’s preoccupation with the Trades that also led to relocation of botanical specimens across the oceans. Again, Walcott is seeing the struggle of the enslaved peoples of the Caribbean replicated in the survival and endeavour of other natural life-forms: ‘plants bob in the oceans’ furrows, their shoots dip and lift’. Walcott also hints at the transformation of trees into the timber that made the vessels of trade and colonisation: ‘the ribbed body with its cargo’. The destruction of England’s forests as part of the mission of empire contains within it an integral sense of unwilling sacrifice. The ‘cross-trees’ provides a sense of the natural world as witness to human barbarism on a colossal scale and, furthermore, to the act of the killing of a god. The cross-trees here continue the images of poem iii where extra-human history bears witness to the crucifixion: Walcott’s crown of thorns is the bougainvillea, ‘the feathery palms’ nod ‘entry into Jerusalem’ as the ass carries ‘the weight of the world’ on his back (8). There is a definite connection between the destruction of the natural world and a pervasion of religious doom.29

29 The weight of this image - the ‘cross-trees’, a sense of the irreligious, needless destruction - subsumed but implicit in the metaphors of Walcott’s elegy, is made explicitly by Harris: ‘To destroy our rainforests now is to place our civilisation upon another hill of Calvary. The three crosses fashioned from trees become the eloquent masts of a sinking ship’ - Wilson Harris, ‘The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination’, in Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, ed. pp. 248-260 (p. 258).

Harris’s tree is transfigured from the constituent part of the ancient rainforests of the South American continent, to lopped and fastened timber crosses on the hill in Jerusalem, to the construction of the galley, breaking and sinking under the weight of the ocean’s undivided attention. In this tri-form shifting of the life of the tree, Harris brings into focus not only a sense of present ecological fragility but also the history of colonialism and the question of humanity’s place on the earth and beyond. Harris reveals utmost sensitivity to the interconnectedness of life on Earth - to cut down the respiratory regulation system of the globe is to position ‘our civilisation’ as the crowd watching the crucifixion of the son of God - we become guilty bystanders in a display of self-inflicted destruction. From here, Harris’s image of the tree evolves
‘The Bounty’ is more concerned with returning to the ecopoetic consideration of humanity within the scheme of existence, than with the apocalyptic visions of overweening human destructiveness. As a result, the spectres of religious and environmental doom are subsumed within the desire for benediction, for blessing and for giving thanks for life and the bounty of the world, even at the same time as acknowledging bitterness at personal loss. However, just as the individual human soul is disseminated into the landscapes of the world, the anger of grief must move towards consolation; such consolation comes from the vision of interconnection between human and non-human history and indeed, the giving-way of the human self:

Nothing is trite

once the beloved have vanished; empty clothes in a row,

but perhaps our sadness tires them who cherished delight;

not only are they relieved of our customary sorrow,

they are without hunger, without any appetite,

but are part of earth’s vegetal fury; their veins grow

with the wild mammy-apple, the open-handed breadfruit,

their heart in the open pomegranate (13-14)

again and becomes the ‘eloquent masts’ of the sinking ship. An echo of the slave ship crossing the Middle Passage to the Caribbean; the eloquence of the age of enlightenment and industry thrown into relief by the practices of eighteenth century economics and exploitation. This time, Harris reminds us, the ship (constructed and steered by the same impulses of capitalist economics) is of a size to transport the totality of humanity in a self-crafted vessel, its cargo an agent of its own destruction. Or, in other words, Harris puts us all in the same boat.
The now familiar aboresence of Walcott’s ‘Earth’, here transforms ancestors into the seeds of life on Earth in every form, in a way ‘both affirming and terrifying. The dead enter nature and generously offer their bounty, as it were to the living [...] At the same time, the sense of human identity is dissolved [...] [denying] any conventional Christian idea of an individual afterlife’.  

If the dead offer the bounty of the living Earth in a transfigured afterlife of the soul in the landscape, consolation comes, for Walcott, through the glimpse of divinity that comes in this offering.

The vision of ‘true paradise’ beyond that of a myopic Tourist Board is provided in the awakening of extra-human life, the wake for Alix Walcott:

In spring, after the bear’s self-burial, the stuttering crocuses open and choir, glaciers shelve and thaw

[...] squirrels spring up like questions, berries easily redden, edges delight in their own shapes (whoever their shaper).

But here there is one season, our viridian Eden (15)

The awakening of spring becomes an image of communal life after death, the vernal turned into permanence by the loss of a mother and the grief of a son. Attendant upon such fixing of the motions of the Earth’s cycle is a typically

30 Breslin, p. 275.
The paradoxical sense of discomforting triumph; this Eden ‘is that of the primal garden that engendered decay’. Time itself has been arrested by the death:

There is no change now, no cycles of spring, autumn, winter,
nor an island’s perpetual summer; she took time with her;
no climate, no calendar except for this bountiful day. (15)

Despite the disquieting effects of the poem’s suspension of the laws of life and time, this denial of environment as ongoing process, what remains in the constant ‘bountiful day’ is a picture of divinity with Walcott’s typical fusion of tropical and temperate landscapes of North America, South America and Europe. This is a vision of paradise described as the mixtures of the landscapes and wildlife of the world. In the way that Harris conjures a vision beyond human utterance and existence - ‘the very nail of moment in the universe’ - at the escarpment of the Falls in Palace of the Peacock, Walcott’s access to the divine is granted by the contemplation of loss: both writers provide differing moments of insight into the same vision of heaven in the biosphere.

The catalyst for this moment of insight is a sensitivity to the beauty and fragility of the landscapes of the world, their inhabitants, and the script and chorus created by the extra-human world to be read and heard by the poet:

As poor Tom fed his last crust to trembling birds,
as by reeds and cold pools John Clare blest these thin musicians,
let the ants teach me again with the long lines of words,
my business and duty, the lesson you taught your sons,

to write of the light’s bounty on familiar things

that stand on the verge of translation themselves into news: (15-16)

There is a reciprocity in Walcott’s poetry that culminates in acts of mutual blessing. Alongside John Clare blessing the music of the wind in the reeds, Walcott provides the portrait of natural abundance which constitutes nature’s blessing to humanity:

the crab, the frigate that floats on cruciform wings,

and that nailed and thorn-riddled tree that opens its pews
to the blackbird that hasn’t forgotten her because it sings. (16)

It is this sense of communion with the extra-human utterance which establishes ‘The Bounty’ as a sequence as both an elegy for the death of one person, an individual part of the living earth, and, equally, a poem of thanksgiving for the whole. Such reciprocity is most clearly revealed in the closing lines, where the utterance of the poem’s speaker becomes incorporated into the insistence of continual birdsong. Walcott’s words and the blackbird’s song fuse, and in doing so, bear witness to the passing of a human soul and offer an ecopoetic prayer to the beauty of interconnected history.

Of the two images from the poem ‘Earth’ that Walcott has returned to repeatedly, one occupies central relevance to the collection *The Bounty*. If the
swift was the dominant motif of *Omeros*, the tree assumes centrality here. The tension between the rooted West Indian poet and playwright who has sunk deeply into the landscape in order to understand its, and his own, existence is placed at odds directly with the jet-setting, ocean-crossing, migrant academic and poet-laureate in the poem ‘Homecoming ii’. Here, Walcott returns to his sense of discomfort at notions of homecoming. The tension between the world of the swift flier and the perceived duty of the rooted tree highlight the charge that the poet has forgotten and forsaken his native landscapes. The belligerent trees of St. Lucia admonish the poet for deserting them and for failing to represent their history:

> The blades of the oleander were rattling like green knives,
> the palms of the breadfruit shrugged, and a hissing ghost
> recoiled in the casuarinas - they are as alien as olives -
> the bougainvillea’s lips divided, its mouth aghast;
> it was on an ochre road I caught the noise of their lives,
> how their rage was rooted, shaking with every gust (32)

This poem disrupts the vision of interconnection and problematises the notion of easy communion presented in ‘The Bounty’ sequence. The poet is aware that he may have failed in his task to legitimise a Caribbean aesthetic of vegetation and landscape, and to ‘begin again from the bush’, for it is his very words and books which elicit the sharp sense of betrayal from the threatening trees. He feels ‘their fitful disenchantment with all [his] turned leaves, / for all the years while theirs
turned to mulch, then dust.’ Furthermore, Walcott ironises his own ecopoetic mission to stitch the landscapes of Europe, Africa and the Caribbean together and to claim a global connection of arboreal and faunal worlds. This mission, when held to account by the agents of extra-human histories that he feels he has neglected, is made to sound hollow by their reply:

I said I was sure

that all the trees of the world shared a common elation

of tongues, gommier with linden, bois-campeche with the elm.

“You lie, your right hand forgot its origin, O Jerusalem,

but kept its profitable cunning. We remain unuttered, undefined,” (32)

The poet here holds up for inspection the processes and problems of representation of and fidelity to a homeland landscape. Are we really meant to question the ethics of Walcott’s career and to be lead to believe that he has been making money out of the history of the land - ‘profitable cunning’ - to the extent that he can be considered as exploitative as the fictional Mongroo or the actual Jalousie? Whether or not this is the case, the self-consciousness of the ecopoet demonstrates that there may be no easy distinction between those who exploit the land for profit and those who profess to represent it but leave it ‘unuttered, undefined’. Such a degree of reflexivity here reveals not only the problems of the uneasy homecoming and the venture of ecopoetry and ecocriticism itself, but also the extent to which Walcott, in spite of the utterance of the trees in this poem, engages with both environmental concerns and the ethics of representation.
Such sustained interaction with the politics and poetics of environmental issues is evidence against the slightly dismissive charge of ‘almost-New Age romanticism’ in relation to the history of the land and its peoples.31 The concept of a living landscape, acknowledging the part that extra-human history plays in the total history of St. Lucia, remains of central and profound importance:

As writers all of us live in the presence of the elements, close elements [...] and I don’t know how people don’t, can’t write about, because they don’t bother to, because it is not just bush, it is not just scenery [...] and no matter what Pacifean writer you read they avoid it and they write about the human experience [...] but there is something very redemptive about the landscape with the shacks up above it.32

This then is Walcott’s sense of interconnected history, of the human place in the landscape, and like Wilson Harris, he urges new ways of seeing the environment and of overcoming ‘Single vision’. On reading Walcott there is the definite sense that he has set out on an eco-poetic mission with redemption as its aim. He is consciously and carefully constructing a poetic power out of provincialism, influenced by the example of Clare’s life and works, a figure to whom these lines from Walcott’s Another Life could equally apply:

31 King, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, p. 607.
32 Walcott in conversation, West Indian Centre, Coventry, 5 March 2004.
But drunkenly, or secretly, we swore,
disciples of that astigmatic saint,
that we would never leave the island
until we had put down, in paint, in words,
as palmists learn the network of a hand,
all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines,
every neglected, self-pitying inlet
muttering in brackish dialect

Conclusion:

The intratextual fashioning of models of interconnected vision over the corpus of the writings of Wilson Harris and of Derek Walcott reveals the guiding environmental ethic of each writer. Furthermore, the development of such vision provides examples of the role and responsibilities of the artist within the human societies and the extra-human environments of the Caribbean. Those figures who inherit this vision and the understanding of the interrelational nature of the universe attempt to heal the collective suffering of a crisis of vision, to point a way forward for the communities which they represent, and also seek to re-forge the ‘treaties of relation’ broken by exploitative, conquistadorial history and anthropocentric destruction.

Wilson Harris’s representation of visions of interconnection, in his poetry and fiction, contributes to a desire to identify the psychic fractures of historical dispossession and provides a literacy of the imagination to counteract the torpor of enslaving ‘mind forg’d manacles’ which continues in the present. The collections of critical essays from Tradition, the Writer and Society through to The Womb of Space, including Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination, all contribute to the moulding of a profound ecological imagination which has, in turn, informed, reflected and expanded upon the presentation of interconnected vision in Harrisian fictions, bearing the potentiality for redemption from exploitative modes of thought and action. The catalogue of figures possessed of this insight all become involved in
imaginatively and, indeed, sometimes literally (mirroring Harris's own experiences) re-mapping the history and topography of the Guyanese rainforests.

The narrator of 'Fences Upon the Earth' witnesses a microcosm of the history of the interior as a succession of human displacement and ecological plunder, and understands this space is a site for competing visions of the future of the land. This story sets up the template for Harris's ecological imagination in the works that follow it: the uneasy position of the witness who must articulate his vision; the process of the journey into the interior and towards interrelational comprehension; the clash, both ideological and political, between dwelling and intruding forces; and the history of post-Columbian colonial dispossession that is replicated in the machinations of neocolonial and corporate states. The visions of interconnection that suffuse Eternity to Season are dispersed through a collection of masks and voices which issue from the 'world-creating jungle' and refigure a mythic, human history of the world within the ecological history of the planet. The three novels discussed from The Guyana Quartet demonstrate the development of interconnected vision as embodied by figures such as Vigilance, Cristo and Fenwick. However, these moments of re-visionary knowledge (Vigilance's far-sightedness, Cristo's re-membering of total history, and Fenwick's baptism of awareness) prove to be frustrated. The instances of ecological inspiration are too brief and too easily thwarted to successfully challenge the history and the present reality of a relentless progress of mechanistic and divisive thought and practice. A literacy of the ecological imagination finds more clear and developed expression in the dream-book of The Dark Jester. Harris is able, in this novel, to suggest an Atahualpan philosophical
form, born of the interconnected vision that ranges beyond Columbian history and exclusively human utterance. Such a form at once desires the acknowledgement of, rather than the erasure of, histories of suffering of colonised peoples, and also seeks to unlock imprisoning dualistic representations of oppressor and oppressed; this form of being is, in turn, situated within a holistic vision of the living landscapes of a sentient Earth with the attendant and essential understanding that human knowledge can only ever be partial. In this way, Harris’s writing can be seen to make an important eco-literary contribution to the re-figuring of Gaia theory within cultural production.

The development of a consistent, yet evolving, vision of interconnection makes it possible to talk of the inherently ecologically-conscious nature of Harris’s ‘long work’ that encompasses all his writing from the earliest example in Kyk-Over-Al to his final novel, The Mask of the Beggar. It is in this novel that the author leaves us with the potentiality of the Atahualpan form figured through the cross-cultural utterances of Lazarus/Quetzalcoatl, a voice which both denounces the continued destruction of the technologies and the ideologies of conquest which continue to work in many guises, and one which demands that human consciousness be held to account for its violence towards the nonhuman world:

‘The world will be driven on his return to nurture the species it has murdered, the birds, the snakes, the fish, the whales, the seals, the lambs, the sheep, the tigers, the butterflies…’ He listed an interminable series of
destroyed or threatened species.¹

This prophecy of Atahualpan understanding positioned at the conclusion of Harris’s ‘long work’, not only brings back into focus the animal-figures and animal-masks of his preceding novels but also echoes the inclusiveness of Blakean cosmology and synthesises this with contemporary ethic of environmental responsibility.

Derek Walcott’s ‘Earth’ introduces a pair of images which exemplifies the double-consciousness of Walcott’s ecopoetic writings. The arboreal human form which is rooted in the earth of the Caribbean as an act of possessing history provides a central instance of the poet’s call to sink wholly into landscape as an imaginative act of re-possession. Coupled with this, the image of the circling sea-swifts signify the centrality of notions of the history and ecology of the whole Earth, and of other continents, both in their own right and as they have impacted on Caribbean experience. This combination of local and global histories of the land contribute an understanding of ‘total’, interconnected history.

This double-consciousness builds upon the environmental focus of Walcott’s essays from the What the Twilight Says collection and upon the considerations of the collection The Castaway which seeks to figure the place of the human within the wider scheme of existence. By close observation and reading the inscribed ‘texts’ of the wildlife of the Caribbean, Walcott’s poetic personas also develop the insight of interconnected vision. Through an understanding of the reciprocity of the human and non-human world, Walcott’s

¹ Harris, The Mask of the Beggar, p. 111.
ecopoetic eye seeks, like the Harrisian protagonist, the reintegration of the human subject within extra-human existence. Such focus results in both the challenge to anthropocentric modes of thought and the revisioning of the human sense of responsibility toward the non-human world which emerges in *The Gulf*. This collection, more explicitly eco-political, addresses the effects of industrial modernity upon the landscapes of the Caribbean, the pollution witnessed on the shorelines and the deforestation in the areas of the interior of Trinidad and Guyana is seen as the result of an unthinking progress which the poet sees as the legacy of colonial exploitation across the Americas.

There is a parallel model of development in evidence throughout the plays of Walcott examined. The ecological allegories of ‘Ti-Jean and His Brothers’ and ‘Dream on Monkey Mountain’ provide the platform for the sustained examination, in ‘Beef, No Chicken’, of the tension between the desire for economic development and the costs of that development for the community and its environment. The characters of Ti-Jean and Makak possess the insight of vision which sees the indivisibility of human and natural history, and are able to use this sense of interconnection and the inherent value of the natural world to contest the vision for the future of the land with the agents of the corporate state (the Devil, Lestrade) who see only in instrumental terms. ‘Beef, No Chicken’, like *The Gulf*, signals a significant engagement with the specificities and realities of policies of ‘progress’ in the Caribbean which, by the control and manipulation of natural resources, have dispossessed already impoverished and marginalised communities. In this play we see the active power of interconnected vision
disseminated throughout the cast of characters in their direct attempts to thwart the corruptions of neocolonial governance.

Walcott’s dramas of eco-political resistance demonstrate, above all, the versatile contours of his literary ecology. The respective folkloristic and farcical natures of ‘Ti-Jean and His Brothers’ and ‘Beef, No Chicken’ reveal the effective employment of the comic mode in the construction of ecologically-conscious writing, and, furthermore, combine with the eco-tragic mood of Makak’s story (and indeed, the tone of many of the poems studied) to offer a varied and profound representation of the philosophy and politics of ecology in the Caribbean.

The diversity of Walcott’s writing in relation to the environment is in evidence in his most recent works. The Bounty continues the thread of the author’s ecopoetic which, as well as considering the total history of the Caribbean, also acknowledges the heritage of ‘green’ thought through the formation of dialogues with an earlier eco-literary tradition. Indeed, the vision of interconnection, here, develops into an elegiac contemplation of the abuses of ascendant human designs over the non-human world, and the redemption for such control which is inherent in the close observation of, and empathy with, that world. The image of John Clare guides this poetic contemplation and the image of the same poet resurfaces again in Tiepolo’s Hound. In this poem the focus on the life and work of Camille Pissarro, combined with Walcott’s own integral illustrations to the poem, heralds a new phase in the artist’s meditation on the place of humanity within the ‘scheme of things’. Walcott moves towards consideration of the interconnections between his writing and the pictorial art of
Caribbean and European history. Again he returns to the inherent problem of responsibility towards the non-human subject of human artistry (painters along with poets can provide the vision of interconnection that creates an ecopoetic):

His paintings have the meditative progress of a secular pilgrim, praising its larks and elms,

ricks for their shade, aspens for their light grace, voluble poplars. Their modesty overwhelms,

their gratitude. Studying his paysages you feel the fevered bliss that shook John Clare and Edward Thomas, Langland. Whatever the age is, it lies in the small spring of poetry everywhere.²

The sinking wholly into landscape here, through the paint-brush and poet’s pen, provides another way in which Walcott, in his most recent work to date, comes to consider the minute particulars of all nature within the panoramic sweep of many landscapes.

The development of an environmental ethic through parallel representations of interconnected vision in the writings of Harris and Walcott is fashioned through the synthesis of the heritage of ‘green’ Romanticism and

responses to contemporary processes of ecological degradation in the Caribbean and further afield. The visionary potential of the totality of Blake’s cosmology of being, and his reaction against the ‘Single vision’ of exploitative political practices, intersect with the centrality of Clare’s care for, and observation of, the non-human world alongside the sense of possibilities, poetic and political, inherent within his dialect and provinciality. These examples of Romantic ecology both engender the constructions of literary ecology in the Caribbean, and provide continuing inspiration for the continuing development of Harris’s and Walcott’s corresponding responses to modern environmental issues.³

The shared inspiration of ‘green’ Romanticism specifically, and an understanding of eco-literary tradition in general, is one of the essential convergences in the concordant visions of Harris and Walcott. This study has been primarily concerned with emphasising such moments of intersection between the writers in order to situate their writings at the forefront of Caribbean literary ecology. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that to compare Harris and Walcott is to compare two authors whose overarching environmental ethic in writing can also be seen to be divergent in both approach and, indeed, conception. Most marked, perhaps, is each author’s method of forming ‘new ways of seeing’ the history of the Earth; while Harris rejects realism in novel

³ Perhaps such a synthesis can provide an important marker for the objectives of U.K. ecocriticism as opposed to its U.S. counterpart. British ecocritics need to address the colonial inheritance of the history of environmentalism in once-colonised nations, and to acknowledge the part that processes and results of colonisation played in shaping the landscape of both the colonies and the British Isles. What was going on abroad, responses to ecological imperialism during the ages of empire, is as important as the writing from the metropolitan centre, to contemporary formulations of literary ecology and ecocriticism in Britain. In this way, the cross-cultural dialogue between writers from once-colonised nations and Romantic poets is all the more relevant. The dual anti-colonial and ‘green’ ethics of Blake’s and, to a degree, Clare’s brand of Romanticism becomes an even more important literary site for investigation.
writing, Walcott's poetry derives much of its power from close, naturalistic, observation of the non-human subject. For Harris, any sense of identification with notions of a fixed, human 'character' merely reinforces anthropocentric modes of thought, and effaces the diversity of the many ages of the world and the many utterances beyond the human. It is necessary to challenge the easy acceptance of the realist novel-form which not only acknowledges the partiality of human consciousness and discourse, but which can heal the crisis of vision which results in the inability to view a total history of the Earth.

For Walcott, this seeing afresh comes from a refocusing of the ecopoetic eye, a widening of human vision to encompass the details of a non-human world too often overlooked. The effacing of human character and subjectivity is not essential, but there is a need for an alteration to modes of thought and a need to fashion an inclusive history of being which centres a sense of human awareness and responsibility.

If Harris constructs a narrative series of journeys into the rainforest interior in order to unpick fixed notions of being which result in the realignment of a human-centred cosmos, Walcott's desire to 'begin again from the bush' is an exercise in assessing the human part within the total history of the Earth and an attempt to figure how humans can co-exist alongside the extra-human world.

There are, therefore, essential differences in scope and positioning of each author's environmental ethic. On the one hand, Wilson Harris seeks to decentre human subjectivity through a series of narratives that form one 'long work' which can be seen as an example of literary 'ecologism'. On the other hand, Derek Walcott's varied literary contours of mood and mode of writing
which seek to reassess human subjectivity and urge a sense of responsibility perhaps come closer to being an example of literary ‘environmentalism’. A further stage of research would be necessary in order to interrogate in more detail the foundational differences in the philosophical, political and poetic constructions of Harris’s and Walcott’s environmental orientation. Such analysis would need to consider, in depth, the divergence between the Heideggerian elements of Walcott’s representations of dwelling on and working with the Earth and the Harrisian visions of a version of Jungian ecologism. Moreover, having established the potential of an overarching ‘green’ reading of these examples of Caribbean texts, the next phase of research, building upon this study, would also need to be discriminatory with regard to the very definitions and compositions of environmentalism which are presented within the works. For instance, a closer inspection of the divergence between issues of ‘animal rights’ and issues relating to topography, land use and land control could prove productive in assessing the exact composition of each writer’s environmental ethic.

In giving an overview of the various modes of and approaches to environmentalism, from the holism of the Gaia theory to the postcolonial, social ecology of Vandana Shiva, this thesis has intended not to conflate all types of environmentalism, nor to efface any differences in emphasis, but rather to indicate how elements of theories that lean towards the ‘intrinsic value’ of the nonhuman world (Lovelock) could be read alongside elements of theories which necessarily focus more on the ‘instrumental value’ (Shiva) in order to demonstrate the full ‘green’ spectrum of Caribbean literary ecology. Further study would, however, enable a sustained examination of the differing nuances
of, and moments of divergence within, the various forms of environmentalism and, in this way, would prove profitable in figuring more clearly delineated analyses of the respective formation of each writer's individual environmental ethic.

In the tracing of the development of interconnected vision in the works of these two authors, detailed examinations of some significant works have had to be omitted. Ideally, for instance, an analysis of The Far Journey of Oudin could have completed the study of ecocritical perspectives of Harris's The Guyana Quartet and would have offered the opportunity of demonstrating another example of the Harrisian redemptive and revisionary journeying into the interior; coupled with this, a discussion of the interplay between the history of agriculture, power-relations and ecology in Guyana would be possible. Likewise, had there been the space to include the novels comprising The Carnival Trilogy, a fuller sense of the steady development of Harris's vision of interconnection, from its genesis until the completion of the 'long work', would have been possible. An examination of Walcott's Another Life would have drawn together the connection between the poet's early identification of spirituality with landscape and later eco-political consciousness, and, perhaps, more fully articulated his personal purpose of sinking wholly into the landscapes of St. Lucia. Similarly, a detailed exploration of Omeros, an epic work of ecopoetry, is certainly desirable as this poem provides the sustained focus of Walcott's ecopoetic eye as it stitches together the landscapes and myths of 'old' and 'new worlds', and situates such a figuring of interconnected vision alongside an assessment of the political, personal, ecological and artistic consequences of an all-enveloping tourist trade.
It is the hope that readings of these writings might provide the material for future research building upon the work of this thesis.

The scope of this study has been such that there has been little room to situate the works of Harris and of Walcott within the wider context of Caribbean eco-literary production over the course of the last century. The work of Edward Kamau Brathwaite provides a most significant model of eco-literary and ecocritical work to compare with the writings of Harris and Walcott. While *Mother Poem* demonstrates the interconnection of the human and environmental history of Barbados, it is *History of the Voice* which is pivotal to discussions of the formation and possible modes of Caribbean ecocriticism. Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* provides one major instance of a narrative which defines a gendered aspect to visions of the landscapes of the Caribbean, and, more recently the poetry of Grace Nichols’s has been described as ‘holistic’ in its approach to the intertwined histories of women and the land in Guyana. Furthermore, the work of Pauline Melville has been employed as a platform from which to discuss notions of ‘ecowomanism’ in the Caribbean. Many other novelists, playwrights and poets from across the Caribbean address similar issues of the eco-political

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history of the region and consider: the anti-ecological practices of colonial rule; the effects and costs of neocolonialism in terms of deforestation, relocation of communities; and, the consequences of mass tourism. Sam Selvon’s early novels parallel the concerns expressed in both Naipaul’s *A House for Mr Biswas* and Lovelace’s *The Schoolmaster* that the rate of development brings the seeds of unforeseen tragedy and merely reinforce existing power structures without contributing any lasting economic benefits to impoverished communities. The most explicit condemnation of the tourist trade in the Caribbean is found in Trevor Rhone’s play *Smile Orange* and in Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place*. Ecocritical examinations of the effects of globalisation upon Caribbean should perhaps start here with these works that accord with Butler’s exhaustive, and Roszak’s rapacious, visions of tourism.

It is the consistent attention to issues and philosophies of ecology that Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott have articulated over the many decades of their writing, and, furthermore, the fact that ideas and images from their work have been disseminated to the younger generation of writers concerned with the environmental ethic in literature, that situates the work of this pair of authors as central to any discussions of Caribbean eco-literary discourse. Indeed, as historian Richard Grove has argued that much of the early, formative

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7 Trevor Rhone, ‘Smile Orange’ in *Old Story Time and Smile Orange* (London: Longman, 1981); Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (London: Virago, 1988). This brief overview of examples of eco-literary production has merely sketched a map of the field of ‘green’ writing from the Anglophone Caribbean. Much important work, both creative and critical, pertaining to ecology and culture, has been formulated by Francophone writers like Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau.
environmental thinking came from the islands of the Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and William Blake believed that it is at the limits of empire that political revolutions begin, it is possible to see a contemporary equivalent in the literature discussed in this study. It is more than possible that the writings of Wilson Harris and of Derek Walcott can prove to be influential not only in re-forging ‘new treaties of relations’ with the extra-human world in the Caribbean, but can also prove to be essential, on a global level, to wider discussions of relationship between literature and the environment, art and ecology.
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