Kunapipi

Volume 25 | Issue 2 Article 10

2003

'The Unresolved Constitution': Birth-Myths and Rituals of Modem Guyana: Wilson Harris's The Sleepers o f Roraima and Michael Gilkes' Couvade

Russell McDougall

‘The Unresolved Constitution’: Birth-Myths and Rituals of Modem Guyana: Wilson Harris’s The Sleepers o f Roraima and Michael Gilkes’ Couvade

Abstract

Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a man taking to his bed during his female partner’s pregnancy, or otherwise restricting his diet and behaviour in a ritual manner, was regarded as a poor primitive ‘excuse for paternal indulgence’. This practice, known as ‘couvade’, appeared in Western colonialist discourse as merely another variation on the lazy and stupid savage’ (Swan 313). Modem explanations of couvade are many and various, deriving from feminist, psychological and anthropological discourses and their fusions. But couvade, as I attempt to untangle its relation to colonialism in this essay, is a strategy re-invented for the purposes of reconciliation in narratives of Manichean allergory

RUSSELL MCDOUGALL

'The Unresolved Constitution': Birth-Myths and Rituals of Modern Guyana: Wilson Harris's *The Sleepers of Roraima* and Michael Gilkes' *Couvade*

> **couvade** /ku'vad/ *n.* a practice in some societies by which, at the birth of a child, the father takes to bed and performs other acts natural rather to the mother.
> (*Macquarie Concise Dictionary*, 3rd edn)

Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a man taking to his bed during his female partner's pregnancy, or otherwise restricting his diet and behaviour in a ritual manner, was regarded as a poor primitive 'excuse for paternal indulgence'. This practice, known as 'couvade', appeared in Western colonialist discourse as merely another variation on the lazy and stupid savage' (Swan 313). Modern explanations of couvade are many and various, deriving from feminist, psychological and anthropological discourses and their fusions. But couvade, as I attempt to untangle its relation to colonialism in this essay, is a strategy re-invented for the purposes of reconciliation in narratives of Manichean allegory.

I will be focusing on two texts, each from Guyana, and both named *Couvade*. The first is the opening story of Wilson Harris's *The Sleepers of Roraima*, published in 1970. The introductory note to this story observes: 'The purpose of couvade was to hand on the legacy of the tribe — courage and fasting — to every newborn child' (13). Couvade in Harris's story is the name given a small boy orphaned at birth. He knows nothing of his parents, and there is no record of his birth. This sets him apart from the dominant social reality. His grandfather explains to him the secret of his name. It means 'sleeper of the tribe' (15), and he bears that name because of his ancestry.

His parents had contracted a 'sickness' for which there was only one remedy, 'the ancient remedy of couvade' (17). It required them to undergo 'a season of fasting and seclusion' (17), but they transgressed against the law of their people and ate the forbidden food. That night their enemies attacked and they were never seen again. Their illness (as Harris conceives of it) is a dream of destruction.

Couvade, on the other hand, is a dream of survival. When the boy's parents break the law of that dream they raise a question mark over the identity of their

descendents, as a dying people. Before they disappear they hide their newborn child in a cave outside their village, and it is there that his grandfather finds him, clinging precariously to life. Couvade, as Harris re-conceives it, is a product of an historical fear of annihilation, the indigenous fear of vanishing. In seeking to discover his identity, the boy must re-enter that dream which deprives him of it. He must sift through the images of his ancestry, and surrender all the masks of disinheritance that obscure his identity.

Along the way this dreaming, questing child undergoes a series of initiations. At the Place of the Toucan his grandfather sprinkles his head with dust, initiating him into 'the secret of names' (24). At the Place of the Fish, another initiation occurs, this time 'into the motherhood of the tribe' (27). But his mother metamorphoses into his enemy. Further on, he comes upon the guacharo bird (South American Oil Bird) asleep in a tree, which he is sure is his father. But this evolution from matriarchy to patriarchy also proves false. When finally Couvade senses the presence of both of his lost parents, he is standing on a shimmering bridge.

He thinks that his grandfather has brought him full circle to their old village. In fact, it is the village of their enemies. There are three bridges, a triad that suggests the progressive quest structure familiar from European romance and folktale, but each bridge turns out to be the same as the first, so that the quest narrative is restructured as an overlap.[1] Has the child been dreaming all this time? Perhaps he has never left the cave.

For three years before his publication of *The Sleepers of Roraima* Harris had been working with the concept that would eventually provide the title for his study of the cross-cultural imagination — 'the womb of space' or 'womb of origins'.[2] Probably he derived that image from a Jungian notion of the collective unconscious — *Man and His Symbols* was published just before this — presenting the womb as the pre-eminent symbol of 'that great source of psychic energy, the unconscious soul' (Chetwynd 188). Harris worked intuitively with that image, and the 'overlap' that I have identified in the short story, 'Couvade' is one aspect of it. The womb of origins for Harris is a 'dichotomy' of masculine and feminine, animate and inanimate, death and life, positive and negative — an image, he says, of the seemingly endless repetition of an historical and philosophical misconception, 'the illusory strength or sovereignty of matter' (1967 50). It is this illusion, he argues, that chains us to a statuesque present and a false future (1967 36). However, the womb expresses for Harris the reverse bearing of that illusion, 'upon an apparent substance of fulfilment on one hand, and an apparent sense of being punished or deprived on the other' (1967 50). Literary proponents of the illusion write the dominant fiction of realism, which Harris believes is capable of changing nothing. Harris, by contrast, hankered after a fiction of implosion: a fiction of 'subjective alteration' which would simultaneously transcend and undermine the scientific pose of objectivity, 'the purity and detachment' of conventional modes of spectatorship (1967 59). To illustrate the

implosive character, the implosive disorientation and freedom of the womb, Harris gives us Tiresias, whose punishment and reward revolves around male/female metamorphosis, and who was able to give Ulysses his only useful counsel in the underworld. 'Tiresias is the embodiment of death as well as life, masculine as well as feminine' (1967 49). Only through figures of such an androgyny, Harris believed, could the writer even begin to create a fiction that might correspond to the wholeness of community. 'Genuine expression', Harris says, is resident only 'in a fluid body' (1967 26).

The overlaps of 'Couvade' are metaphoric as well as narratological. Consider, for example, the pair of 'American sunglasses' that falls from the sky 'in the wake of a passing aeroplane' (18). The glasses are a mask of modernity, but they are also central to the historical dream of extinction experienced by the boy's ancestors. The glasses are a mask of modernity, yet they also belong to the boy's parents, who, in the paintings on the walls of his cave, appear in bird-masks. Thus the mask of modernity 'overlaps' in the 'womb of origins' with the ancestral image of the guacharo bird, or goat-sucker, whose face is a mask like sunglasses. Walter Roth quotes Depons's South American *Voyages* of the early 1800s concerning the cavern of Guacharo, which lies in the mountainous Venezuelan province of Cumana: 'From this cavern issues a river of considerable size, and in the interior is heard the doleful cry of the birds which the Indians attribute to the souls of the deceased, which according to them, must of necessity pass through this place in order to enter the other world' (161). The cargo-cult image of falling sunglasses builds a bridge between earth and sky; and the metaphoric combination of bird (aeroplane) and bridge (eye-scales) elaborates the myth of the plumed serpent-god, Quetzlcoatal, the Mexican god of the winds and 'giver of breath' (Cotterell 188). Roth had noted how this Mexican creator-deity is linked both to the Aztec god, 'Huracan', and to the feathered serpent, Kukulan of the Mayan pantheon (170–71). Harris was fascinated by the nomenclatory 'overlap' of Huracan, Kukulan and the Carib 'Yurokon', for it seemed to hint at unity in the ethnic diversity of the Americas (1972 149). It was this mythological complex that provided him with the intuitive logic for the metaphoric overlaps of 'Couvade' — rainbow, feather, leaf, lizard, fish, star (Quetzlcoatal in his Morning Star guise), 'an endless bridge spanning all the tribes, all the masks of ancestors' (22) — all linked to the womb by the image of the hammock and the sleeper of the tribe.

The last bridge of the child Couvade's quest, the Bridge of Names, is also the bridge of dawn, a birth-place where self and other embrace. There the dream of couvade unfolds into a riddle — the 'birth of compassion', the 'birth of love' (35). The answer to the riddle, the secret of the child's name — that is, the secret of couvade — is endless caution: caution against breaking the law, against vanishing, against division and rigid polarities. Gradually the narrative arc of metaphor breaks down the distinction between mother and father, enemy and

friend, past and future times. This is the secret of couvade, as Harris writes it: that the 'tricks and divisions' that define the colonial order of things are 'one and the same' (24). It is the same conclusion that he reaches, in the same year, in 'History, Fable and Myth' and other non-fiction essays, where his exploration of Africanist and Amerindian and tradition is explicitly 'away from apartheid and ghetto fixations' and toward an 'art of coexistence', which is born of colonialism but houses within it 'the strangest capacity for renewal' (1970b 27).

The couvade narrative as Harris uses it is clearly an allegory of decolonisation; and its topography is necessarily the same as that of the colonial adventure. Recently, Charles Nicholl has shown how the language and symbolism of Ralegh's *The Discoverie of Guiana* coded his quest for El Dorado as an allegory for the esoteric processes of alchemy, a chase after the chimera of the Philosopher's Stone (319ff). The colonial quest after gold, then, was mapped ironically as an interior journey of purification in search of wholeness and renewal. It was a quest after the fifth element, which would be released from chaos only when the other four were finally broken down, and the corrupt and divided nature of matter redeemed. Harris's interests in alchemy and in depth psychology, which had led Jung to an intensive exploration of the esoteric symbolism of alchemy, are well known. *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), his first novel, drew heavily upon the alchemical association of the peacock's tail with the rainbow as a bridge between earthly and heavenly planes. The imagery that he gives to 'Couvade' — rainbow, feather, leaf, fish, and so on — derives from the same alchemical archive, and has the same ancestry as that of Ralegh's *Discoverie of Guiana*. The children of colonialism, if they are to discover their true identity, must transform the penalty of the European quest after gold into the prize of the Grail, which is a symbol of reconciliation. Writing and reading, for Harris, are a process of transformation, like alchemy's Great Work, and the child Couvade is a postcolonial figuration of the Philosopher's Son, that mysterious child of alchemy who symbolises the birth of wisdom from the Hermetic Vessel (or uterus, as the alchemists conceived it) of the Great Work.

The publication of *The Sleepers of Roraima* in 1970 coincided with the declaration of Guyana as a 'Co-operative Republic' and the severing of all ties to the British monarchy. The transformation theme at that time, after the racial violence of the '50s and '60s, was politically and socially urgent. Dominated by Afro-Guyanese, the ruling People's National Congress offered a socialist shield against the Indo-Guyanese economic ascendancy by organising the country into co-operatives. Police and military intimidation assisted this political regime of ethnic repression; and electoral fraud and media manipulation ensured its continuation (Colchester 33). In 1972, to further its agenda for cultural revolution, the government commissioned a young playwright, Michael Gilkes, to provide the nation's gala entry in the first Caribbean Festival of Arts. Inspired by Harris, and entitled *Couvade: A Dream-Play of Guyana*, this is the second text that I

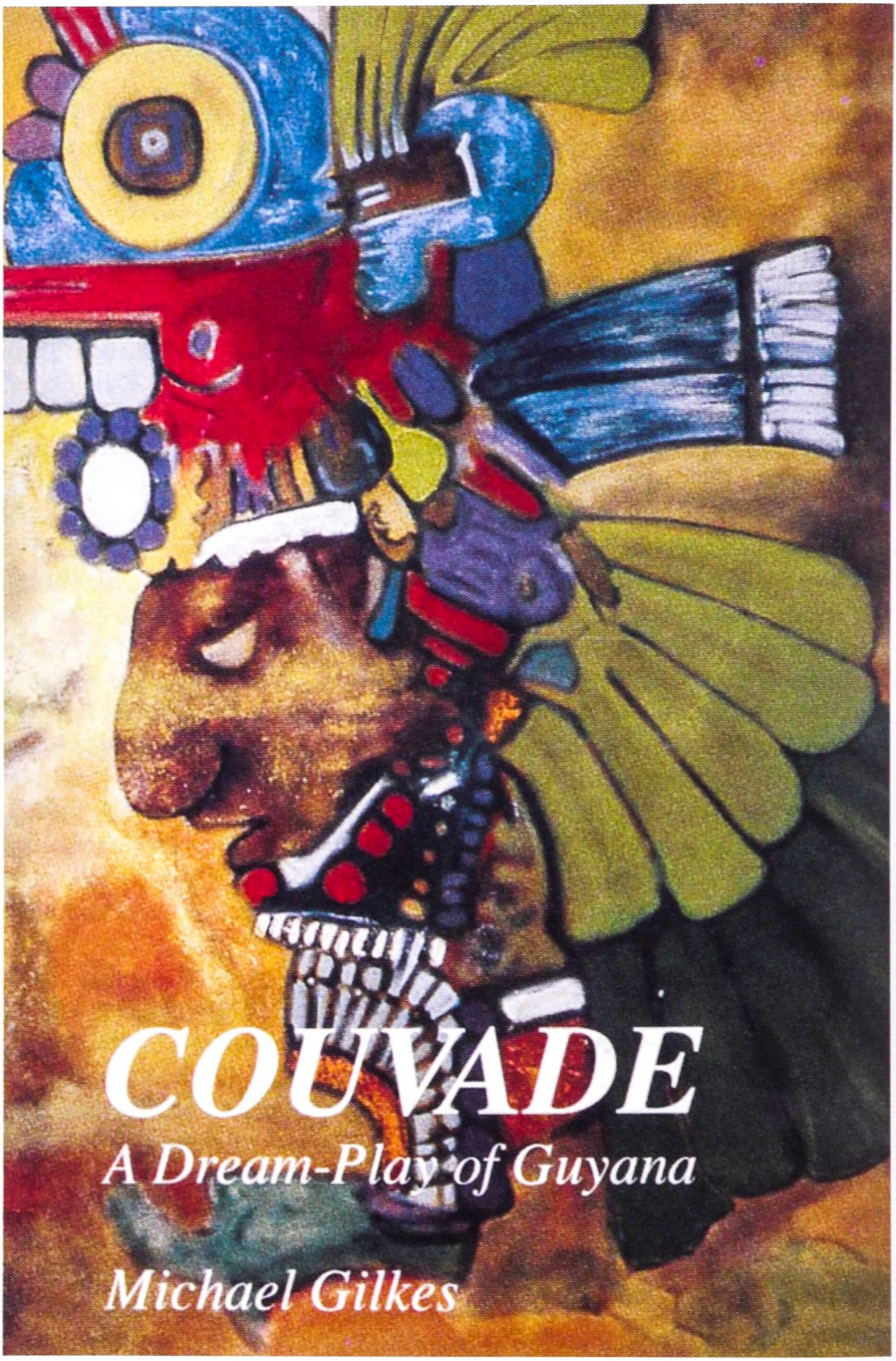
wish to consider.[3] It extends the quest motif of Harris's re-invention of the Carib myth and ritual of couvade precisely into the contemporary social and political domain that I have just outlined.

The play's full title derives from Harris's 'Couvade', where the boy questor, not yet understanding the secret of his name and demoralised by the tricks of otherness, speaks as though 'repeating the lines of a sad play, a dream-play of history' (28). The play begins with the ritual incantation of a Black Carib shaman, calling forth 'the dream of Couvade' — which is explicitly a dream of power.[4] A traditional image of couvade, the hammock is a permanent fixture of the set. A woman enters, her racial visage clearly suggestive of a mixed ancestry, Indo and Afro-Guyanese. She is visibly pregnant. Her partner, Lionel, has a hangover and is not enthused by her efforts to turn him out of his hammock. He wraps himself within it like a foetus in the womb, totally encased. He is an artist, and he has been up late, drinking and arguing about politics with his friends, and painting long into the night after their departure.[5]

Lionel's hangover is directly linked to political argument and is a symbolic reflection of the crisis in which Guyana found itself as a consequence of colonialism, unable to manage its independence, diseased by its past, corrupt and racially prejudiced. But his hangover is linked also to the creative effort that follows the drinking and argument. Quite literally, he sees *through* his hangover. In January 1970, the year that he published the story that inspired the play, Harris was invited by the newly formed National History and Arts Council to deliver the Edgar Mittelholzer Memorial Lectures. Almost certainly Gilkes would have attended these lectures. In any case, they were published a little later that year. The process of shamanism, Harris said, resembles a nervous breakdown. The shaman appears in the community at times of crisis, in a 'creative attempt to *see* through or break through a hang-over of the past', the diabolic burden of colonialism. The Caribbean artist, he implied, must be the shaman of the modernity, to see Guyana through to independence (1970b 22).

Arthur is a socialist, who disapproves of Lionel's painting. He enthuses about the Folk, and Roots, but regards ancestry and myth as irrelevant bourgeois fantasies. His is a politics of race modelled upon Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask*. Lionel counters that argument with the Harrisian call for 'the renascence of a new corpus of sensibility that might translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures' (1970b 8).[6]

Artist and politician appear each as an analogue of couvade, each labouring over his own cultural revolution: the artist is unable to complete his painting, and the new nation exists only as the empty rhetoric of the politician's obsession with colour. In the heat of their argument, Lionel lunges to retrieve a book from Arthur, who swings it away from him and accidentally delivers a sharp blow to the stomach of Lionel's pregnant partner, Pat. As she doubles up in pain, the possibility of miscarriage looms large. The figure of the Dreamer appears, the



Cover illustration of *Couvade*. Original cover , 'Confrontation', painting by Aubrey Williams.

exact image of Lionel, cross-legged in his hammock. The Dreamer's name is Couvade. 'He dreams us all', says the Shaman. 'When he awakes, we die' (32). But Lionel's dream is a nightmare, every night without change: the nightmare of birth continually denied. In it, he sees himself dreaming, but cannot wake up.

Lionel's increasingly feverish devotion to his painting and his indifference to his pregnant partner chart his passage toward psychological breakdown. The climactic moment of the play arrives with a ritual masque, three dancers, individually attired in Arawak, West African and Southern Indian costume.[7] The dance creates the impression of a circle continually breaking and re-making itself in the image of a mandala, a Jungian symbol of psychic order and the reconciliation of opposites and, —for the artist — of an opening of the door to spontaneous or intuitive experience. The Dreamer rises from the stage floor in a flood of light to symbolise the new self and the new society. It is Lionel. A gigantic replica of the canvas that we saw him painting at the beginning of the play, 'The Robe of Ancestors', descends from the ceiling behind him. He reverses into it, apparently dissolving into the world of his own spirit. The canvas falls like a robe to enfold him in a womb of space. But he emerges covered with blood. We hear a hideous cry of anguish and we witness the artist clawing at his face, self-mutilating, pulling thick paint in streaks down his cheeks so that he appears tiger-like. His birth, like that of Guyana, is a miscarriage and a travesty of violence. The first decade of the republic, beginning with a presidential proclamation of the birth of New Guyana Man, was characterised by extensive electoral fraud and political repression, and the socialist revolution led ultimately to economic ruin. The stage blackout on the tiger reveals the new nation as a community of strangers.[8] When Pat finds Lionel curled up on the stage, she says — 'He was like a stranger. Someone we didn't know at all' (56). The stripes on his face are black, red and white — the colour bands of racial division.

Gilkes must have known from reading Harris that there are three stages of alchemical symbolism (Gilkes 1975 7). The first is the *nigredo* stage, blackness symbolising the undiscovered or unknown territory. In the second, the *albedo* stage, whiteness represents the dawn of a new consciousness. And the third is the *cauda pavonis* stage, where the colours of the peacock or rainbow prophesy the variable possibilities of fulfillment. It is this third stage, according to Harris, that is fundamental to the Guyanas and the Caribbean: the stage of the 'host native', whereby an inner erosion of the character of conquest occurs and a threshold sensibility emerges (1970b 20). In Gilkes's play, however, this is precisely what does not occur. The poor rainbow of black, red and white stripes that marks Lionel's face at the climax of the third section of the play suggests a travesty of progress toward enlightenment; and the violent image of the tiger substitutes for the peacock as the symbol of a severely subscribed destiny.

It is clear that the racial division is a colonial legacy. Indeed, the image of the tiger recalls one of the most controversial events of Caribbean history —

Governor Edward Eyre's swift and violent retribution for the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica, which predates Guyana's declaration of independence by a century. Frederick Harrison, a member of the Jamaica Committee that sought to bring Eyre to trial for murder, spoke then of 'the tiger in our race' (qtd in Dutton, 350). The tiger is an image of Englishness in the guise of its colonial Other.[9]

In the final section of the play, Lionel is recovering in hospital from his breakdown, his eyes thickly bandaged. Art, he has decided, is an illusion. But this is the view of an artist whose muse is annihilated, and a reflection of worn-out sensibilities — which is why Lionel, as he utters these diseased platitudes, appears as a prisoner in his hospital bed, with a mosquito net hanging white and ominous over and around him rather than the Robe of Ancestors. He has a bad case of anaemia; and the white mosquito net around his bed is the sign of a collapse of space, and the blood infection of his muse. This section of the play is ironically entitled 'The Child of the Vessel'.[10] Clearly there will be no birth of wisdom in Lionel's hospital bed and his Great Work, like the chimera of El Dorado, remains an empty dream of the past. Guyana's birth wish, the dream of a golden age, is blighted. The general elections are a week away, and the society is trapped in a net of violence.

In the final scene, the lighting holds each of the characters in their own contained and static space, so that they speak from isolation.[11] Lionel, with the bandages removed from his eyes, is caught within an inverted cone of light inside the mosquito net. He squats on his bed in the foetal position of the Dreamer, condemned to the freeze-frame of a fake birth.

After the blackout, the stage gradually brightens to reveal a baby's crib. Is there a baby in the crib? Has Pat given birth to her child. The symbolism is so overdetermined that it is hard to tell. The Ashanti Priest turns toward the crib. 'Sleep, Couvade', he says, 'and dream our dream' (65). The Black Carib Shaman ends with the same words. However, the stage directions do not in fact confirm the presence of a child, and the imagery of Lionel's bloody miscarriage as an artist must cause us to doubt the survival of Pat's baby also. The play is left unresolved because the constitution of Guyana was itself, at the time of its composition, profoundly unresolved.

Underpinning Gilkes's play is Harris's sense of history, fed by a birth wish and authenticated by a post-colonial redefinition of the Carib ritual of couvade. There is an ethical dimension to the operation that Harris performs on ritual, releasing its traditional social meanings and energies into new and inventive contexts where questions of social control and social value are re-negotiated. Harris was seeking a gateway to a new anthropology, and with it a new model of character for a new conception of the arts. He was fascinated by the formal kinship of the gaps and holes in Henry Moore's sculptures with those of ancient Amerindian sculpture (1981). He applied that same sense of space to the body of history, in order to visualise through them what he called 'the psychological

womb', where a new relation might gestate between self and other, past and present (1981 45–46).

But here is a problem. There is a residual sense in Gilkes's play and, to a lesser extent, in Harris's story of Couvade, that women exist only to give birth, even as the potency of reproduction is given over to metaphoric processes that do not require women particularly. The possibility of reading this as a masculinist appropriation is completely obvious. We need to remember that the rituals of couvade occur within contexts of reproductive technology that are culture-specific; and we need to be wary of the ideology that reproduction is exclusively female, since that is what underpins Western anthropology's long history of misreading couvade. Yet, the masculinist tendency seems confirmed by Harris's regarding of the holes in the body of history as a psychologised imagery of potency that requires penetration if it is not simply to implode. (The metaphoric overlaps to which I alluded earlier are, in this sense, a consequence of Harris's deliberately 'exploded womb' of origins — the cave of couvade pulled out into landscape.) The lack of resolution in Gilkes's play serves a political symbolism that is problematic precisely because it forecloses interest in the outcome of the female character's pregnancy, whether or not there is a child in the cradle, and whether it is alive or dead. Harris and Gilkes have adapted the birth rituals and myths of Guyana to a post-colonial vision that imagines a new constitution of social relations, with the capacity to break the cycle of racial antagonism and violence and shift the shape of the colonial legacy. But that same constitution positions women predominantly as childbearing, it fetishises if not pathologises pregnancy and, in Gilkes's case at least, it allows race and ethnicity to obscure a meaningful role for gender in the processes of reconciliation.

Gender and sexuality in Harris's writing constitute an enormously complex and much larger topic than the scope of this paper will allow. But as it would be negligent entirely to evade these in the present discussion, I cannot avoid two final considerations, which are in fact the two most divisive considerations of Harris's writing among post-colonial scholars. First, there is the deliberately contradictory social biology of Harris's symbolic universe where intercourse is so inherently paradoxical that assault is difficult to disentangle from embrace. This myth-and-psychology derived attitude, separating sex from the materiality of the body, arguably produces a very de-natured and (in a Foucauldian sense) de-regulated idea of sexual power. Second, cross-culturalism is suspect with many post-colonial theorists, contaminated by a Jungian universalism that undermines its attempt to address the marginality of displaced and divided peoples. Gayatri Spivak, for example, regards cross-culturalism as the new Orientalism (qtd Lawrence, 12). Yet others maintain that the only way for a culture to be progressive and dynamic is through bastardisation.[12] In fact, as Margaret Kumar suggests, post-colonial theory and cross-culturalism function as collaborative 'markers' of the discourse of cultural hybridity (Kumar 82–92). It is important also to

differentiate cross-culturalism from multi-culturalism, the latter being a kind of reactive pluralism, in Harris's view, that limits the possibilities for change. As Mette Jørgensen says, 'To Harris multiculturalism is a perverse cross-culturalism in its insistence on cultural separation or purity of cultures' (online). It is the separation of cultures, in his view, that blocks productive dialogue.

Both aspects, the social biology and the cross-culturalism of Harris's symbolic universe, derive from the Jungian imaging of the womb. As I have suggested, Harris draws deeply upon Jung's rebuttal of Freud's Oedipus/Electra model of sons yearning after their mothers and daughters yearning after their fathers, preferring the spiritual rather than the sexual explanation: a desire for 'rebirth or transformation of consciousness' (online).[13] The fertile womb attaches to Jung's archetype of the Great Mother, a personification of the feminine principle in its most nourishing aspect that is linked by a unity of opposites to the devouring grave. This is the positive image of the unconscious, but is also a paradoxical image in itself, simultaneously signifying both fullness and emptiness. For Harris, the future centres very precisely on this image of the 'paradoxical womb', without which there can be no birth wish to balance the death wish of colonialism. Thus, while acknowledging the social value of modern technologies of birth control, he seeks a complimentary sacramental vision that recognises the drive toward extinction as one aspect of the price that has been paid for this 'dislodged fertility'. The agency that he ascribes to the womb derives from a double apprehension of woman in the arts, as having both a 'hidden status' and capacity in pre-Columbian myth and a 'debased faculty' in modern fiction (1983 46–47). The quality of that agency is the 'universal host capacity to sustain contrasts' (1981 47) — a conception of cross-culturalism as the way to reconciliation that is grounded in Jungian psychology and alchemy, where the ideal state is a coincidence of opposites, not excluding masculine and feminine elements.

A great deal of attention has been focused on Harris's re-working of the cannibal trope of colonialist discourse through the technology and metaphoric gateway of the Carib bone-flute.[14] This needs referencing to his writing of couvade, however, which more immediately illustrates the postcolonial impetus of his placing of birth myth and ritual into history. The trajectory of that placement, through Gilkes' 'Dream-Play of Guyana', took Harris's quest explicitly into the contemporary social and political sphere and focused cross-culturalism as the key to national destiny.

NOTES

[1] Harris's explorations of synchronicity began with his first novel and have evolved into great complexity over many years of writing. In essence, he believes that the capacity for change relies upon our recognition of an 'inner objectivity' of events and actions, one of the key premises of which is the 'overlap' of seemingly unlike categories and images — 'comedy of coincidence'. See, for instance, 'Comedy and Modern Allegory', 3.

[2] The first appearance in Harris's writings of this term is in *Tradition, The Writer and Society*, 50. Further references are given in the text.

[3] Michael Gilkes's *Couvade: A Dream-Play of Guyana*, first published in 1974 (Longman), was reprinted in 1990 by Dangaroo Press with an Introduction by Harris praising it as 'one of the most significant plays to have come out of the twentieth century Caribbean' (n.p.). Further references are to this latter edition and are given in the text.

[4] The Black Caribs provide one of few instances where anthropologists and cultural theorists have examined the rituals of couvade as a reproductive technology within a culture-specific context. Janet Chernela comments on the couvade of the Garifuna (Black Caribs of Honduras): 'The care taken by the husband is not imitation of wife's childbed, it is imitation or enactment of infancy. Father becomes son. The Garifuna couvade is a reversal not of gender but of generation. Moreover, a male does not become a man until he has a child. In this sense, the birth of the child is identical with the birth of the man. Through the couvade, therefore, a man experiences his own birth as a full male' (65).

[5] Lionel emerges from the hammock wearing sunglasses. In Harris's 'Couvade', as I have already indicated, sunglasses serve as mask to overlap ancestry and modernity. This is the intertext for considering Lionel's sunglasses as linking him potentially to the souls of his ancestors, and identifying him therefore both as a possible conduit to Guyana's dreaming (like the Shaman of the previous scene) and an agent of its future.

[6] Arthur's likening of the mutual suspicion of Africans and Indians to the itching of an amputated limb supplies an ironic reference to Harris's play upon the idea of the phantom limb in his writing about limbo dancing. Human spiders he calls those dancers, who manoeuvre their bodies spread-eagled under the ever-lowering bar of the Middle Passage to break and re-make themselves symbolically in the image of the New World ('reassembly of dismembered man or god' [Harris 1970b 8]).

[7] In 1970, the three largest ethnic groups within Guyana were: Indo-Guyanese, 52%; Afro-Guyanese, 42%; Amerindian, 4%. Based on information from *Statistisches Bundesant* (Landerbericht Guyana), 19.

[8] Tigers, of which there are many in Guyana's indigenous folklore, were often associated with the trumpeter bird, whose sighting traditionally warns of the approach of strangers. There is no evidence of any real tigers in the jungles of Guyana (Roth 367, 275).

[9] See Sujit Mukherjee: 'Particularly when we recall the nature and range of human qualities attributed to the tiger by Anglo-Indian writers of fact as well as of fiction — memory, cunning, vengefulness, to mention only three — we shall realise that the tiger represented some enduring spirit of India that the British felt that they had failed to subjugate' (12).

[10] Readers of Harris will recognise the allusion to the Bush Baby spectre arising from the Carib cooking pot, an image of reconciliation and resurrection that corresponds to Jung's 'immortal or archetypal child of dreams' (1970b 20).

[11] This fragmented stage image recalls Kenneth Ramchand's discussion (quoted by Harris in 'The Unresolved Constitution', 43) of how 'the relative unawareness of the characters' in West Indian writing provides an 'expressive dislocated image' which plunges the reader (or audience) into 'the very debated substance of the work'.

[12] See, for example, A. Sivanandan, Interviewed by Ahilan Kardigamar, *Lines* (online) http://www.lines-magazine.org/Art_Aug02/sivanandan.htm. Acessed August, 2002. Also Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam beyond Violence*, 12.

[13] 'Carl Gustav Jung — His Early Work', http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A625628#footnote4.

[14] See for instance Russell McDougall, 'Walter Roth, Wilson Harris and a Caribbean/Post-Colonial Theory of Modernism'.

WORKS CITED

Chernela, Janet 1991, 'Symbolic Inaction in Rituals of Gender and Procreation among the Garifuna (Black Caribs) of Honduras', *Ethos*, 19.1, pp. 52–67.

Chetwynd, Tom 1974 [1972], *Dictionary for Dreamers*, Paladin, London.

Colchester, Marcus 1997, *Guyana's Fragile Frontier: Loggers, Miners and Forest Peoples*, Latin American Bureau/World Rainforest Movement, London and Moreton-in-Marsh.

Cotterell, Arthur 1979, *A Dictionary of World Mythology*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

Dutton, Geoffrey 1967, *The Hero as Murderer: The Life of Edward John Eyre*, Collins Cheshire, Melbourne.

Fanon, Frantz 1968, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markham, Grove Press, New York.

Gilkes, Michael 1990 [1974], *Couvade: A Dream-Play of Guyana*, Dangaroo Press, Aarhus.

——— 1975, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*, Longman Caribbean, London.

Harlow, T. (ed) 1928, *The Discoverie of the Large and Bewtifuyl Empyre of Guiana, by Sir Walter Ralegh*, Argonaut Press, London.

Harris, Wilson 1985, 'Comedy and Modern Allegory', typescript of address given at the Italian Association of English Studies Conference, Turin, October.

——— 1983, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut.

——— 1981 [1970],'The Phenomenal Legacy', *Explorations*, Dangaroo, Muldelstrup, Denmark, pp. 144–150. (First published in *The Literary Half-Yearly*, XI.2, 1970, pp. 1-6.)

——— 1970, 'Interior of Novel: Amerindian/European/African Relations', *National Identity*, ed. K.L. Goodwin, Heinemann, London.

——— 1972, 'The Native Phenomenon', *Common Wealth*, ed. Anna Rutherford, Dangaroo, Aarhus.

——— 1970a, 'Couvade', *The Sleepers of Roraima: A Carib Trilogy*, Faber and Faber, London, pp. 15–36.

——— 1970b, 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guyanas', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 16.2, pp. 1–32.

——— 1967, *Tradition, The Writer and Society*, New Beacon, London.

——— 1986, 'The Unresolved Constitution', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 14.1&2, pp.43–47.

——— 1960, *Palace of the Peacock*, Faber & Faber, London.

Jørgensen, Mette 1966, 'Borderlives and Limits: Autobiography's Crossing and the Prodigal's Tale', (online) http://www.litteraturhistorie.au.dk/arbejdspapirer/pdf/arb%20papir%20nr%206.pdf. Accessed: August 2003.

Jung, Carl 1964, *Man and His Symbols*, Aldus Books, London.

Kumar, Margaret 2000, 'Postcolonial Theory and Cross-Culturalism: Collaborative "Signposts" of Discursive Practices', *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 1.2, pp. 82–92.

Lawrence, Bruce B. 1998, *Shattering the Myth: Islam beyond Violence*, Princeton UP, Princeton, N.J.

McDougall, Russell 1998, 'Walter Roth, Wilson Harris and a Caribbean/Post-Colonial Theory of Modernism', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 67.2, pp. 567–91.

Mukherjee, Sujit 1987,'Tigers in Fiction: An Aspect of the Colonial Encounter', *Kunapipi*, IX.1, pp. 1–12

Nicholl, Charles 1996, *The Creature in the Map: Sir Walter Ralegh's Quest for El Dorado*, Vintage, London.

Roth, Walter 1915, *An Inquiry into the Animism and Folklore of the Guiana Indians*, 30th Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology, Government Printing Office, Washington.

Sivanandan, A. 2002, Interviewed by Ahilan Kardigamar, *Lines* (online) http://www.lines-magazine.org/Art_Aug02/sivanandan.htm. Acessed August.

Statistiches Bundesamt 1989, (Landerbericht Guyana), Wiesbaden.

Swan, Michael 1961 [1958], *The Marches of El Dorado*, Jonathan Cape, London.