

Racial harmony through imaginative creativity in Wilson Harris’ *Palace of the Peacock*

Deisamisumer

Research Scholar,
Department of English,
North Eastern Hills University,
Tura Campus, Tura, Meghalaya, India

Abstract

Racial harmony lies at the heart of Harris’ narratives and it gained him recognition as a writer who creates a new form in his novels by bringing the reconciliation among races through creative imagination. As a Guyanese writer, Harris’ characters represent the multi-ethnic make-up of Guyanese society which consists of a mixture of races such as African, Amerindian, Portuguese and European. This paper seeks to study Harris’ greatest work , *Palace of the Peacock* which is the core of the author’s imagination in bringing unity among races through the consciousness of imagination while examining the central theme of the novel, ideal of unity – unity which is free of cultural and racial ties, embodies a new state of consciousness. After analysing the central theme of the novel an attempt will be made to demonstrate Harris’ ability for positive approach in desiring for “Golden Age” where there is a sense of “Oneness” among races and nations with reference to *Palace of the Peacock*.

Keywords- *Reconciliation, Multi-ethnic, Creative imagination, Golden Age, Oneness*

Introduction

Harris has been considered as a writer who created a new perspective of looking at cultural conflicts by imposing racial harmony as a major theme in his novel, *Palace of the Peacock*. While other Caribbean writers depict the state of fragmentations and cultural conflicts, Harris turned up as a writer who tries to bring reconciliation among races and nations through his work. *Palace of the Peacock*, the first of Wilson Harris's many novels, was published in 1960, just one year after his arrival in Britain from Guyana. In a richly metaphorical style, the book sets out the themes Wilson continues to develop in his writing to this day - the ability of the imaginative consciousness to create worlds where

disparate cultures and traditions are fused. Prior to the history of his own country and its multiracial society, Harris presents multi-faceted characters and thereby reflects a true Guyanese culture.

The novel explores the duality of men's nature and the imagination to transform as well as renewal of a man. The novel is the core of the author's imagination, the ability to recreate. In the novel, the captain as well as his crew represents the multi-racial culture which constitute modern Guyana. Though the crew die one after the other, they are reborn through the imagination process of the narrator. "the whole crew was one spiritual family living and dying together in a common grave out of which they had sprung again from the same soul and womb as it were". The *Palace of the Peacock* is consisted of four books. The first book is entitled "Horseman, Pass By". This part sets the basic plot of the novel – the upriver journey of a multiracial crew to the Guyanese heartland.

They are led by Donne, a callous skipper. The main purpose of the multiracial crew is to find an Amerindian people that Donne can use for his plantation. The second book of the novel is entitled "The Mission of Mariella". In this part, the crew discovers that the Amerindian village of Mariella is already deserted. They also find an old woman – probably of the same name – which they force to act as their guide for their journey. The old woman seemed magical as well since she exhibits the mystifying characteristics of a native which is unfamiliar to the crew.

In the next novel entitled "The Second Death", the crew travels further through a rainforest and a nameless river in order to find the Amerindian people. They encounter various obstacles along the way and their journey becomes a quest to safety. Most of the crew dies and their conflicting relationships worsen in the last part – "The Paling of Ancestors". This is where Donne reaches the waterfall and sees that the resurrected crew and the folk are united in the Palace of the Peacock.

In brief, *Palace of the Peacock* is a recollection about a crew of mixed-race employed by Donne to voyage up a river into the interior of Guyana in search of a community of Amerindians as labourers for his despotic and materialistic design to rule the land. During their search, they learn of a preceding voyage in which the crew had drowned. As they journey deeper into the jungle, they become increasingly argumentative as their anticipation of finding the Indians grows to the point that their own sense of presence depends upon finding them. The Indians come to represent a physical correlative to their projection of the other as an external object and antithetical agent, while their failure to locate them represents their failure to feel themselves validated as a presence in the jungle. Without possession of a physical correlative to their projection of otherness they cannot exert their identities in the environment and instead experience emptiness or a lack of presence - a sense of absence of self shortly before their death.

At the end of the novel, the characters are rediscovered in the '*Palace of the Peacock*' - a vision of universal community formed from a structure of individual but interdependent identities.

The narrator who recalls the voyage is also contained within the Palace and therefore represents a composition of memory. Indeed, the 'death' of the crew is preceded by an original material death suggesting that the narrative is a reinterpretation of the previous drowned crew in light of the self-knowledge gained in the Palace. Donne's 'brother' initiates the narrative, but reference to him ceases once the experiences of other crew members are related. Donne too disappears at the end. He is not observed in the Palace. The narrator speaking from within the palace is a conflation of Donne and the brother as his spiritual alter-ego; however, the omniscient perspective is not attributable to a particular subjective position.

Among all the events, the most defining moment in the novel is its ending – when the journey of the crew and Donne seemingly ends in an abstract presentation of the expedition leader's submission to both consciousness and imagination. As an end to their journey upriver, Donne who was originally a symbol of absolute power seemed to surrender to a dream signifying his multiple but coexisting identities. His once total identity and concrete goal signified by the sun metaphor was shattered into a constellation signifying the collaboration of the Amerindian folk with the multiracial crew.

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