

Wilson Harris:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Harris, Wilson, 1921-2018
Title:	Wilson Harris Collection
Dates:	1960-1997
Extent:	11 document boxes, 1 oversize box (4.62 linear feet)
Abstract:	The Wilson Harris collection includes handwritten manuscripts, typescripts, page proofs, and reviews for several of his books, as well as correspondence.
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchases, 1970-1998 (R4815, R6832, R12422, R12443, R13879, R14351); Gifts, 1992, 2004 (G9585, G12410)
Processed by:	Katherine Mosley, 2007
Repository:	The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center

Biographical Sketch

(Theodore) Wilson Harris was born on March 24, 1921, in New Amsterdam, British Guiana (now Guyana), the son of Theodore Wilson and Millicent Josephine Glasford Harris. His mixed ancestry included Amerindian, African, and European. When his father died in 1923, Harris and his mother moved to Georgetown, where his mother remarried. In 1929, his stepfather disappeared in the Guyana rain forests and was presumed drowned. Harris, his mother, and his half-sister then moved in with his beloved grandfather, who died in 1937. Harris attended Queen's College, also in Georgetown, from 1934 until 1938. He worked as a government surveyor from 1942 until 1958 and as part of that work led surveying expeditions from the coastlands into the country's interior.

Harris married Cecily Carew in 1945; the marriage ended in divorce. Harris emigrated to England in 1959, and he met and married Scottish writer Margaret Burns that same year. Since then, he has been a full-time writer, with occasional employment lecturing and teaching creative writing classes at various universities in the United States and other countries. Harris and his wife lived in the Holland Park area of London, England, until 1985, when they moved to the Essex countryside.

Harris's personal experiences with the complex Guyanese landscape and multi-racial culture influenced his writing. His novels, known for their abstract and experimental nature, are full of metaphors and complex symbolism, with an intermingling of time, reality, imagination, memory, and dreams; they have been called "psychical expeditions." Harris's early works were collections of poetry: *Fetish* (1951, under the pseudonym Kona Waruk), *The Well and the Land* (1952), and *Eternity to a Season* (1954). "The Sun: Fourteen Poems in a Cycle" was published along with prose sketches in the journal *Kyk-over-al* in 1955. In 1960, Faber and Faber published Harris's first novel, *Palace of the Peacock*, which used the geography of Guyana as a metaphor for the landscape of the mind. It was followed by three more novels (*The Far Journey of Oudin*, 1961; *The Whole Armour*, 1962; and *The Secret Ladder*, 1963), making up what Harris calls his "Guyana Quartet." *Heartland*, which includes characters from *Palace of the Peacock*, was published in 1964. Harris is also known for his Carnival trilogy, consisting of *Carnival* (1985), *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987), and *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (1990). Harris's concern with cross-cultural parallels is evidenced by *Black Marsden: A Tabula Rasa Comedy* (1972), which is set in Edinburgh, and its sequel, *Companions of the Day and Night* (1975), set in Mexico. *The Age of the Rainmakers* (1971) and *The Sleepers of Roraima* (1970) are reinterpretations of Amerindian myths. *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* (1993) is set in a mental institution with patients representing the world's greatest cultures. In *Jonestown* (1996), the 1978 Jonestown Massacre is interwoven with the fall of the Mayan culture. In addition to his novels, short stories, and poetry, Harris also published essays on colonialism and post-colonialism, as well as studies in literary criticism, such as *Tradition, the Writer and Society: Critical Essays* (1967) and *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (1983).

Harris won the Guyana National Prize for Literature in 1987 and 2002, was created a Knight Bachelor of the United Kingdom in 2010, and won a Lifetime Achievement Prize from the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards in 2014. He died on March 8, 2018 in Chelmsford, England.

Sources:

British Council Contemporary Writers in the UK website,
<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/> (accessed 16 April 2007).

Contemporary Authors Online, <http://www.galegroup.com/> (accessed 23 March 2007)

Contemporary Literary Criticism, <http://www.galegroup.com/> (accessed 23 March 2007).

Durix, Jean-Pierre. "Wilson Harris," *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 117: Twentieth Century Caribbean and Black African Writers, First Series*. Detroit: Gale Group, 1992.

Maes-Jelinek, Hena. "Dream, Psyche, Genesis: The Works of Wilson Harris,"
<http://www.ulg.ac.be/facphl/uer/d-german/L3/whlife.html> (accessed 4 April 2007).

Maes-Jelinek, Hena, editor. *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*. Sydney, N.S.W.: Dangaroo Press, 1991.

Scope and Contents

The Wilson Harris collection includes handwritten manuscripts, typescripts, page proofs, and reviews for several of his books, as well as correspondence, primarily letters written by Harris to Michael Thorpe. The collection is organized in three series: Series I. Works, 1968-1993, undated; Series II. Reviews, 1960-1990; and Series III. Correspondence, 1978-1997.

The Works series is arranged alphabetically by title. Most works are represented by handwritten drafts in notebooks, composite typescript and handwritten manuscripts, final typescripts, and page proofs. Among the works present are *The Age of the Rainmakers* (1971), *The Angel at the Gate* (1982), *Ascent to Omai* (1970), *Black Marsden* (1972), *Carnival* (1985), *Companions of the Day and Night* (1975), *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (1990), *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987), *Jonestown* (1996), *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* (1993), and *The Sleepers of Roraima* (1970). In addition, there is a photocopy of the published essay Harris wrote for *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series* in 1992. Many of the manuscripts include Harris's notes or annotations explaining his creative process, or what he referred to as the "re-visionary process." For example, page proofs for *Angel at the Gate* and *Carnival* contain his annotations referring to other drafts of those works. Harris included a photocopy of his article "Literacy and the Imagination" with *Carnival* materials since he felt it illumined a

strand regarding inner guide-lines, or intuitive clues.

Series II. Reviews consists of clippings of reviews of works by Harris, as well as a 1960 radio transcript of John Connell's review of *Palace of the Peacock*.

Series III. Correspondence is comprised of Harris's letters to poet and literary critic Michael Thorpe; the letters date from 1978 to 1997.

Related Material

Other materials by Wilson Harris in the Ransom Center are located in the Ronald Christ, Joseph Jones, John Lehmann, and Robert E. McDowell archives. A portrait bust of Harris by Suzie Jones Sarrett is located in the Center's Art Collection.

Index Terms

People

Harris, Margaret Rose.

Thorpe, Michael.

Subjects

Authors, Caribbean.

Caribbean fiction (English)

Experimental fiction.

Guyanese fiction.

Document Types

Notebooks.

Series I. Works, 1968-1993, undated

<i>The Age of the Rainmakers</i> (1971)	Box 1 Folder
Handwritten manuscript, in notebook, undated	Folder 1
Composite handwritten and typescript manuscript, 23 and 24 June 1969, 23 July 1969, 6 August 1969, 27 and 29 October 1969, and undated	Folder 2-3
Final typescript, typesetting copy, undated	Folder 4
Page proofs, 1971	Folder 5
<i>The Angel at the Gate</i> (1982)	
Handwritten manuscript, in eight notebooks, undated	Folder 6
Handwritten manuscript, in eight notebooks (continued)	Box 2 Folder 1-3
Final typescript, with printer's marks, undated	Folder 4
Page proofs, 1982	Folder 5
<i>Hambone</i> review, photocopy, 1986	Folder 6
<i>Ascent to Omai</i> (1970)	
Handwritten manuscript titled "The Ruined Porknocker," with "Alternative routes the novel could have taken which were abandoned," undated. Includes some revised typescript pages.	Folder 7
Handwritten manuscript (continued)	Box 3 Folder 1-2
Typescript with handwritten revisions, 17 May 1968	Folder 3
Typescript, undated, and carbon typescript, 29 October 1968, both with corrections. Typescript also includes printer's marks.	Folder 4-5

Corrected page proofs, 1969	Folder 6
<i>Black Marsden</i> (1972)	
Handwritten first rough working draft, 4 April 1971	Folder 7
Handwritten draft pages, in notebook, undated	Folder 8
Handwritten and typescript manuscript, undated	Box 4 Folder 1-2
Final typescript, with printer's marks, undated	Folder 3
Corrected page proofs, 1972	Folder 4
<i>Journal of Commonwealth Literature</i> review, tearsheet, August 1974	Folder 5
<i>Carnival</i> (1985)	
Handwritten manuscript in three notebooks, 13 November 1983, undated	Folder 6-7
"Miscellaneous abandoned typescript and holograph material," typescript and handwritten pages, undated	Box 5 Folder 1
Typescript and handwritten manuscript "A," 9 and 28 October 1982, undated. With typescript note from author on "re-visionary cycles in the composition of <i>Carnival</i> ," April 1991.	Folder 2
Corrected bound page proofs, 1985	Folder 3
"Literacy and the Imagination: A Talk," photocopy from <i>The Literate Imagination</i> , 1989	Folder 4
<i>Companions of the Day and Night</i> (1975)	
Handwritten manuscript in four notebooks, undated, 24 January 1974	Folder 5-6

Typescript with handwritten revisions and insert pages, undated	Folder 7
Final typescript, typesetting copy, undated	Folder 8
Corrected page proofs, 1974	Box 6 Folder 1
<i>The Four Banks of the River of Space</i> (1990)	
Handwritten manuscript in eleven notebooks, undated	Folder 2-6
Typescript and handwritten manuscript, undated. With note from author regarding drafts, April 1991 (*oversize removed to box 12)	Box 7 Folder 1-3*
Corrected final typescript, 6 May 1989	Folder 4
Corrected page proofs, 1990	Folder 5
<i>The Infinite Rehearsal</i> (1987)	
Handwritten manuscript, undated	Folder 6-7
Typescript and handwritten manuscript, 3 July 1986	Box 8 Folder 1
Corrected page proofs, 1987	Folder 2
<i>Jonestown</i> (1996)	
Typescript and handwritten manuscript, 24 May 1994, undated	Folder 3
Typescript and handwritten manuscript, with miscellaneous pages, July 1994, undated	Folder 4-5
Revised typescript, undated	Folder 6-7
Photocopy revised typescript with printer's marks, undated. With photocopy of typescript "Notes and Queries" regarding manuscript and handwritten answers, undated	Box 9 Folder 1-2
Corrected page proofs, 1996	Folder 3

"Literacy and the Imagination: A Talk"--see folder 5.4	Folder
<i>Resurrection at Sorrow Hill (1993)</i>	
"Early stages of composition," handwritten drafts in ten notebooks, undated, 15 June 1992	Folder 4-7
"Miscellaneous drafts," handwritten and typescript pages, November 1992, undated. With photocopy letter to Charles H. Rowell of <i>Callaloo</i> , 19 October 1994, and typescript of excerpt published in <i>Third Text</i> .	Box 10 Folder 1-4
Corrected final typescript, undated, November 1992	Folder 5
Corrected page proofs, 1993	Folder 6
<i>The Sleepers of Roraima (1970)</i>	Box 11 Folder
"Couvade," typescript and miscellaneous handwritten pages, undated	Folder 1
"I, Quiyumucon," handwritten manuscript in notebook, undated	Folder 2
"I, Quiyumucon," corrected typescript, undated	Folder 3
"Yurokon," typescript and handwritten manuscript, undated	Folder 4
Final typescript, undated	Folder 5
Corrected page proofs, 1970	Folder 6
"Wilson Harris," photocopy essay in <i>Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series</i> , Volume 16. With letter from Margaret Wilson to Joseph and Joan [Johanna] Jones, 3 October 1992.	Folder 7

Harris, Wilson, 1921-2018

Series II. Reviews, 1960-1990

Review clippings, 1960-1990, and radio transcript of *Palace of the Peacock* review by John Connell, 13 October 1960

Box 11
Folder
8

Harris, Wilson, 1921-2018

Series III. Correspondence, 1978-1997

Letters to Michael Thorpe, 1978-1997

Box 11 Folder
9-10

Harris, Wilson, 1921-2018

Box 12 Oversize Materials

Index of Correspondents

- *Callaloo* (Charles H. Rowell)--10.4
- Edwards, Paul Geoffrey, 1926-1992--11.9
- Evans Brothers Ltd. (W. Knock)--11.10
- Harris, Margaret Rose-- 11.7, 11.10
- Jones, Joseph Jay, 1908- --11.7
- Jones, Johanna--11.7
- Thorpe, Michael--11.9, 11.10
- Thorpe, Elin--11.10