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## Claire Harris's *She*<sup>1</sup>: The MPD Metaphor and the Post-Colonial Caribbean Woman

IN *SHE*, CLAIRE HARRIS WRITES an epistolary novella in verse in which the central character Penny is caught up in a debilitating struggle both to understand herself and at the same time to take control of her own story, to give it a new shape. What she has forgotten about herself leaves her perpetually surprised, discovering herself in unfamiliar clothing, or in a strange apartment which is in fact her own. And she is driven, compelled, to chase motherhood, even if she has to kidnap someone else's baby. But it is doubtful that Penny knows why this compulsion is so strong. The reader is told by Penny's epistolary confidante and sister Jasmine in the "Introduction" that Penny has been unexpectedly diagnosed with Multiple Personality Disorder, MPD.

Each chapter of *She* is "performed" by Penny, or by one of the five named alter personalities who occupy Penny's "host" personality.<sup>2</sup> And this "performance" quality is further enhanced by the fact that so much of *She* is dramatic monologue or dialogue, as if it were a stage play; indeed it could almost be performed on stage, except for the brief prose interludes. In its dramatic character, it minimizes interpretive commentary by the author and maximizes the immediacy of what takes place. This dramatic dimension of *She* confronts the reader with the blurred edges of the MPD world. Who is speaking now? What should we make of seemingly purposeless behaviour on the part of Penny? We have to work these matters out for ourselves. Penny herself seems not to know about the other voices, who sometimes intrude without warning.

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<sup>1</sup> Claire Harris, *She* (Fredericton: Goose Lane, 2000). Future references to this work will be in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) 27.

Her experience of the “confusion”<sup>3</sup> that accompanies MPD is dramatized for us both by Harris’s extensive use of monologue without explanation or transition, and by her delaying of the story of Penny’s childhood trauma. By suspending the story of how Penny’s baby sister died in a fall down a well, just after being held in eight-year-old Penny’s arms, Harris dramatizes for us the feel of the MPD sufferer’s amnesia: for readers, Penny’s intricately planned projects seem to have no rational purpose, and Penny’s compulsions remain enigmatic until we finally reach the story of Thena’s death. Harris uses multiple genres and logic-defying structure to mimic for the reader the frightening “haziness” of experience for victims like Penny.<sup>4</sup>

But Claire Harris also shows that the mental world of MPD includes not only constant unresolved mystery and frustration, but also dangerous risks. In *She*, after young Penny has self-protectively forgotten the death of Thena, she asks her mother about having a baby sister. Though Penny’s amnesia makes this an innocent question, her mother, who hasn’t forgotten anything, wordlessly forces Penny’s head back hard against the bed’s headboard, causing Penny’s mouth to fill with blood. Harris’s treatment of MPD indicates the seriousness with which she approaches her subject as well as the inventiveness of the literary art she develops to explore it.

Why, then, might Harris choose such a subject? It will be my contention here that Harris in *She* is dramatizing the situation of the post-colonial, or as Harris terms it, the “neo-colonial” Caribbean woman in all of its paradox and irony.<sup>5</sup> To create an effective metaphor for the post-colonial condition, Harris turns to MPD and its trauma/attempted recovery pattern. In particular, the forgetting, the amnesia, which is central to the MPD condition, allows the poet to explore the way a key pair of mental behaviours, forgetting and then recreating one’s story, underpins her view of the post-colonial condition. Ultimately, the MPD metaphor facilitates the poet’s dramatization of the nightmarish feel of daily experience for the neo-colonial woman of the Caribbean. Through the MPD metaphor, Harris shows that women such as her character Penny are trapped by their own self-protective strategies, unable to negotiate effectively the most fundamental of female experiences, motherhood.




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<sup>3</sup> *Rewriting the Soul* 27–28.

<sup>4</sup> *Rewriting the Soul* 35.

<sup>5</sup> Claire Harris, with Leslie Sanders and Arun Mukherjee, “A Sense of Responsibility: An Interview with Claire Harris,” *West Coast Line* 22.1 (1997): 28. Future references to this work will be in parentheses.

What, then, are the characteristic features of MPD? As psychologist Judith Herman explains it,<sup>6</sup> the adult MPD patient has self-protectively forgotten a traumatic incident from childhood by separating into different personalities, or “alters,” some of whom will take over the memory of the trauma without the conscious knowledge of the “host” personality.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the alters themselves may or may not know of each other. While this “fragmenting” of the self may be initially helpful for the traumatized child, it leads to a life with many unexplained ellipses. Stretches of time cannot be accounted for. Why one is where one is, or is dressed as one is become enigmas. MPD is deceptive also. Frequently misdiagnosed, it can go on well into adult life without detection, with some sufferers endlessly repeating incidents from early life, perhaps in the hope of a more satisfactory conclusion.<sup>8</sup> When finally MPD is recognized, treatment involves bringing the traumatic incident to the surface and assisting the “fragmented” personality to become unified, if possible. The patient must be encouraged in “the re-creation of an ideal self,” which, as Herman says, “involves the active exercise of imagination and fantasy.”<sup>9</sup> As we will see, the MPD features of forgetting and later, more consciously, attempting to reconstruct one’s past are central to the structure of *She*.

That Harris would choose such a metaphor is not difficult to understand given that recent women authors of the Caribbean make use of it with some frequency, though never with the level of detail and thoroughness in the symbolic treatment of it that Harris provides. From autobiography to full-length novel, authors such as Maryse Conde, Angela Barry, and Edwidge Danticat<sup>10</sup> point to the quixotic nature of the self under racial oppression. The three depict such phenomena as the precipitate transformation of personality (Conde), the presence of contrasting female character pairs who come close to functioning as “alters” (Barry), and even (in Danticat) the use by central character Sophie of the strategy referred to as “doubling.”

These authors, like Harris, create metaphorical situations in which MPD or MPD-like characteristics represent the convergence of political and social oppression on the one hand with the psychological and emotional

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<sup>6</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997) 102.

<sup>7</sup> Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul* 27.

<sup>8</sup> Herman, “Trauma and Recovery” 110–11, 114, 121, 123–24.

<sup>9</sup> “Trauma and Recovery” 202.

<sup>10</sup> Maryse Conde, *Tales From the Heart: True Stories From My Childhood*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Soho, 1998); Angela Barry, *Endangered Species and Other Stories* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2002); Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

make up of a marginalized woman on the other. Maryse Conde reports her childhood perplexity over her educated parents' "alienation."<sup>11</sup> Proud, successful, and speaking impeccable French, why would they take so much satisfaction in their superiority to the French menials who waited upon them? At the same moment that Conde discovers her parents' indeterminate sense of self, at once both proud and self-doubting, so also does Conde discover her own capacity for sudden transformation to meet a political reality she has only just discovered. Writes Conde: "As a result, I woke up a completely changed little girl. From a model child, I became a child who answered back and argued."<sup>12</sup> In short, for Conde, the marginalized self seems to contain its own opposite, an opposite which can appear with the pathological suddenness of an "alter" in an MPD patient. For Conde, the emphasis is on the powerful impact of her early awareness of racial difference; its force can destabilize identity.

But for recent Caribbean women writers such as these, the metaphor of the fragmented personality is neither limited to naïve experience nor to childhood. In Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie survives her mother's "testing" of her virginity by deliberate "doubling," by imagining herself elsewhere living out a kind of parallel existence. Sophie is driven to separate her consciousness from her body through imagination in order to protect herself from the possibility of even greater psychic damage brought on by her mother's abuse. And Julia in Angela Barry's "Endangered Species" is a middle-aged woman, an assertive and educated activist who mourns the death of her old friend Milly, an apolitical, nurturing woman who had always needed Julia's political guidance. Grief brings Julia near to total breakdown, so near, in fact, that Barry has Julia adopt the voice and sentiments of Milly: "Milly's words coming out of Julia's mouth!"<sup>13</sup> Julia and Milly, it is suggested, are but parts or "alters" belonging to one individual. For Barry, oppression demands a combative political stance from women which can push a more traditional female role into near oblivion. Such demands can deprive women of conventional matriarchal power, even as women like Julia appear strong and self-sufficient in their political commitment. Barry stresses the deceptive gains among Black women who turn to political activism to challenge inequality.

If Conde hints at MPD symptomology to delineate the social and psychological impact of racial marginalization, Danticat and Barry use it in the main to represent the effects of gender discrimination. But Claire Har-

<sup>11</sup> Conde, "Family Portrait," in *Tales from the Heart* 6.

<sup>12</sup> "Family Portrait" 7.

<sup>13</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* 192.

ris in *She* undertakes both of these; Penny's childhood trauma involves the intertwining of gender and race oppression, and, as Danticat does in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Harris dramatizes the complicity of women and families in transferring the damage of oppression to subsequent generations.

Harris's use of MPD as a metaphor for the condition of the neo-colonial Caribbean woman is at once part of a shared perspective among these writers and at the same time a remarkably thoroughgoing and original perspective on the mental landscape of one such woman, Penny, the fragmented figure at the center of *She*. Only Harris develops both the pathology of and the recovery from MPD: the forgetting and the re-imagining of the self after fragmentation has been faced. And she discusses both these features in her essays.

For Harris in her essay "Poets in Limbo,"<sup>14</sup> "wholeness" (118) and "the authentic self" (116) have been lost during slavery, and the resulting "cultural framework" is "schizophrenic" (117). She sees post-colonial Caribbean black people as living in a cultural "continuum" (116) controlled by notions of "class" (117). Harris writes, "While the middle classes [of Trinidadian Blacks] were playing Brahms, the working classes with skill and genius were evolving the steelband and calypso" (117). She asserts that "aspects of the self have become separated [as] a function of Black history and experience in the Americas" (120–21). However, writing of herself and other Caribbean poets, she says, "Our academic heritage is . . . very close to that of any British writer of our generation . . . Only when formal training [is] over [can] we begin to educate ourselves" (117). And perhaps most resonantly, she writes, "We remain, therefore, poets whose sense of the art is essentially rooted in the English tradition. When we turn away, that is what we turn from. What we turn to we have essentially to make ourselves" (118). And this is perhaps her most concise statement of the centrality of "forgetting" and then "recreating" one's own story in her thinking on the issues of colonialism and identity.

Clearly then, she sees the post-colonial condition in terms of an MPD-like fragmented identity, torn apart by oppression and a European tradition of classism. That she uses the term "schizophrenic" is especially telling; as Hacking points out, schizophrenia, in which one hears the voices of others in one's head, has sometimes been considered as closely related to MPD.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Claire Harris, "Poets in Limbo," in *A Mazing Space*, ed. Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli (Edmonton: NeWest, 1986). Future references to this work will be in parentheses.

<sup>15</sup> Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul* 134, 138.

And finally, Harris emphasizes the need to create one's history, one's culture, after turning away from the British culture of the schools. Post-colonial women have the difficult task of "rewriting" their stories as MPD sufferers must, and as Harris implies, not recognizing one's connection to all Africans in the diaspora may be as divisive to the self as attempting to discover a more African self when one has been trained all one's life in British values, perspectives, and culture ways (118). Harris's essay includes a taste of the paradoxes that permeate *She*, as well as image and detail that anticipate her use of the MPD metaphor in her novella of 2000.

But why should we believe that it is the postcolonial condition Harris aims to discuss? Is *She* not just a story of a woman with a mental disorder? What should we make, for example, of the late appearance of the alter Ka'ci, a Native American woman of the Carib Nation? Why would Harris include this section at all, with its many Carib words and its mythic style? Ka'ci, though, explicitly recalls the coming of the first Europeans to the islands, and the especially destructive effect on the women. Ka'ci sees that under colonization women become commodified, feeling themselves easily replaced by women with lighter complexion:

I aim

to please like corn coconut palm  
always available  
in a lighter version (99)

Ka'ci, who appears only once in *She*, functions in part as an analogue at the societal level for the fragmentation Penny experiences within herself, and even for the divisions within Penny's family in her childhood. Just as Ka'ci recalls "the Carib woman," "the mixed blood," and "the negro" (99) as being new divisions within island culture following colonization, so do Penny's alters reflect in their costumes and language use a spectrum of culture ways, from European tailoring through flowing ethnic gowns, and from Penelope's very proper British English through the vivid island dialect of mAri and rie. A similar divide grows up between Penny's family after she is sent at age six away from home to attend a school deemed superior by her parents. Harris's parallel patterning in which the self, the family, and society at large all show similar scarring from colonial influence certainly suggests that the tenor of her MPD metaphor is indeed the post-colonial condition.



What exactly does the MPD metaphor tell us about cultural amnesia, about the conscious or unconscious “forgetting” of the actual experience that helps to define identity, or about the rewriting of one’s “story” when that story has been appropriated by the colonizer?

To take up the matter of “forgetting” first, let us consider the details we are given near the end of *She* about the child Penny’s traumatizing involvement in her baby sister Thena’s death. “Forgetting,” or losing awareness of one’s actual subordinate relationship to an oppressive colonizer’s culture can have devastating consequences in *She*. For example, in the search for a “good” education (115), which, judging from Penny’s poems and letters was one with a British curriculum like the one Harris herself attended, Penny’s parents create what is for Penny a most painful separation from her family. Penny envies her brothers their many games with each other at home. The aunt’s house where she must stay is like a prison to her; her every-other-weekend escapes are like “parole” (115). This separation occurs, it would seem, as Harris says elsewhere, because “everyone in Trinidad wants their children to get on in life. And the way to get on in life is by cutting out all that stuff [island dialect]” (“Sense” 30). Young Penny suffers silently in her exile, which she interprets as punishment for some unidentified inadequacy on her part. After the birth of baby Thena, the young Penny is jealous of her, and attempts to reclaim her parents’ love and attention by becoming the perfect “mother” to Thena. To some extent this strategy succeeds, until the fateful day when eight-year-old Penny approaches the uncovered well with the baby in her arms, and the baby “leaps” (115), and is later retrieved, dead, from the bottom of the well. The exclusiveness of her parents’ grief and the enigmatic circumstances of the baby’s fall combine to form an unbearable burden of guilt in little Penny. The death of Thena constitutes the traumatic incident which must be forgotten, and which signals the arrival of Penny’s alters to take charge of the lost memory.

In symbolic terms, the parental generation initiates neglect or “forgetting” of their true subordinate relationship to the colonizer by sending Penny away to be schooled in the British tradition, the presumed key to later economic success. Ironically, however, it is not the parents, but the child who appears guilty of the crime against her own family, her own group, symbolized by her possible culpability in the death of her own sibling. That the baby dies in a fall down a well may hint at a less than conscious desire to retaliate out of jealous anger against her group by burying one of her own in the obscure depths of all that is forgotten. Thus, Harris dramatizes the unpredictability and the irony of the ways that a “forgetting” of one’s story can occur. Such betrayal seems to emerge suddenly, triggered by little more than what appear to be good intentions. And Penny’s pain and hor-

ror at the possibility that she might have contributed to this betrayal of her own family and group is such that she must forget the incident to survive at all. For Harris, the post-colonial condition involves the devastating consequences of more than one generation of accumulated compromises and “forgettings.” Both Thena and Penny are victimized seriously by divisions within the family which spring up as a result of the parental pursuit of a “good” education for one of their children. Two daughters are lost, while the family believe they have lost but one.

Finally, as we noted earlier, Harris imagines Penny’s adult self partitioned, logically enough, into fragments distinguished from each other largely by their cultural character: her alters represent a spectrum of personalities marked to a greater or lesser degree by British culture ways or by Black Trinidadian culture. This fragmentation, both of individuals and of island culture, is then the inheritance of the post-colonial condition, as Harris sees it. Penny, therefore, has lost sight of what Harris terms “the authentic self,”<sup>16</sup> knowledge of which would grow in part from what Harris terms “the roots you make,” or the story you create, as she says, “out of both a memory of the African experience and out of the western experience” (“Sense” 32). And she follows this remark with an observation about the inexperience of Blacks in the diaspora with Africa; such a “memory” is usually not available. Penny has become a gallery of different performers, some sounding like the colonizer, and others in revolt against colonial conventions, Penny meeting different situations with different fragments of herself. So severe is her condition that by the end Penny’s life has become chaotic, and is close to total psychic disintegration. Thus Harris registers symbolically her sense of the potential suffering of the post-colonial condition.

However, Harris sees amnesia as both necessary for Penny’s childhood survival, and at the same time, as pathological and destructive in the long run. Furthermore, Harris does not disagree that parents who want economically secure adult lives for their children are correct about the path to that end. Harris faces the paradoxes turned up by her exploration without softening them. For the poet, the post-colonial condition is always “a high-wire act” (“Net” 72), a precarious situation with “no easy solutions” (“Limbo” 24).




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<sup>16</sup> In “Limbo” 116; in “Sense” 30; and in “Working With/out a Net,” in *Cross/Cultures 2, Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English Canada*, ed. Geoffrey Davis (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990) 74. Future references to this last work will be in parentheses.



If “forgetting,” MPD’s amnesia, plays a key role in the aetiology of the post-colonial condition, no less important is the matter of recreating or rewriting one’s story the way MPD sufferers must to regain health. And indeed, a great deal of *She* is about the very subject of rewriting one’s own history, of finding ways to take control of the meaning of one’s own experience. Writes Penny to Jasmine, “help then, send some story I can / use” (70), and:

Perhaps among our childhood’s rubble  
 In that bruised eden at lopinot or floating  
 A bright feather above the middle passage’s miasmas  
 Find a tale shield before a small soul (72)

Subsequent to these requests come Ka’ci’s story of the first Europeans, and Ms. Lancer’s story of the death of Thena, both stories of the damaging results of colonial influence.

Further, Penny and her alters mail and fax letters to sister Jasmine constantly, perhaps in an attempt to capture a more detached perspective on her/their own experience. Penny’s intricately planned and successful break-in to steal her doctor’s notes on her case from his office may be yet another effort to prevent others from fixing her identity by means of their access to her story. And her repeated attempts to experience motherhood, first by trying to have her own child, and later and more successfully by kidnapping a baby, demonstrate quite clearly the often-noted MPD sufferer’s attempt to repeat and correct earlier traumatic experience. Penny seeks to “rewrite” her story by proving herself the good mother she thinks that she had failed to be to Thena. And the issue of how to be a good mother resonates for the post-colonial condition in a broader context: how should new generations be taught? What story will be right for them? Penny seeks such a story for the kidnapped baby Charlie.

Just as Harris sees the matter of forgetting parts of one’s story in an ironic perspective, so also is her view of “making” one’s “roots” similarly complex. Just as a temporary “forgetting” of colonial history helps black parents to give their children a European education to secure their economic futures, so also can the making of one’s past or story be a temporarily liberating experience. And as we have seen with the matter of temporary forgetting, so also can liberation through creativity become very quickly a debilitating experience, as Harris dramatizes it. The “high-wire act” seems inescapable.

Attention to the problem of “making” one’s “roots” or creating one’s story intensifies in the middle of the novella, at the point at which two of

Penny's alters, Penelope and mAri, collaborate in the kidnapping of a Black baby from its adoptive parents, a white couple representative of brutal and inhumane values. To reclaim a Black child from a white family, especially one with a sordid family culture, is symbolically to reunite future generations of post-colonial Blacks with Black culture and Black forbears. It is to reject colonial influence, to assert Black "roots," and the need for Black children to be connected to those roots. For Penny, of course, having a baby in her care gives her the chance to reclaim her own personal story, to revise her own past so as to be able to believe herself a good mother after all, and one with a "story" for her child. New pressure to create those roots, to "make" the story, ironically comes home with the coming of the baby Charlie. Paradoxically for Penny, along with the opportunity to begin to heal the divisions within herself comes the problem of making a story for another also. The burden has doubled, despite the optimism of this episode.

At this hopeful moment in the narrative, two sharply contrasting alters, Penelope and mAri, uncharacteristically join forces in a creative effort of remarkable originality and exuberance. The narrative of the kidnapping created by these two very different collaborators, one a highly Europeanized personality, the other a representative of island culture, includes three different versions in three different European genres. No guidance is offered to sister Jasmine or to readers of the novella, as to which version is to be preferred or why. A new concern for and sensitivity to the forms of western narrative and the limits of those forms accompanies the start of Penny's maternal responsibilities as a Black mother of a Black child.

By juxtaposing a realist, a comic, and a romantic version of the story of the kidnapping, Claire Harris dramatizes Penny's new awareness that western genres will always seem inadequate for conveying the story of reclaiming the new generation from the colonizer, for creating post-colonial "roots." While the realist version, with its linear character emphasized by numbered events, brings forward the carnality of the father's predatory sexual relationship with the nanny, everyone's neglect of the crying baby, and the potential for violence once the affair is discovered by the wife, its realism may over-determine motivation and over-simplify character and moral meaning. As mAri says of Ms Lancer's story of the death of Thena, "mzzz lancet like tings neat an' linear, she like explanashun, make she feel like she in charge. In trut' she know bettah dan dat" (115). And while the comic version allows human behaviour to appear in its more randomly impulsive and absurd character, it excludes the possibility that evil might prevail, and depicts inhumane behaviour as lacking any serious consequences. Finally, neither humane nor inhumane behaviour is the concern of the romantic version. Here, a disembodied male force at one with nature, or imagined

as a predatory beast, substitutes for an actual male character. The woman becomes a kind of icon, "striding" on the "river's bank," and no baby appears at all (61–62). The three hardly seem to bear any relationship to each other at all. Harris's juxtaposition of the three versions emphasizes the particular limits of each of these forms; how much each one excludes is evident only when all three are present. As Harris has argued in her essay "Why Do I Write," "The forms my work takes reflect the refusal to accept boundaries, even the boundaries of genre."<sup>17</sup> She goes on to state that "to mirror the profound disharmony of a world [in which there is racism] ... genres would have to dissolve."<sup>18</sup>

Despite its serious themes, the ebullient mockery of much of this section of *She*, however, suggests an abundance of creative vitality, including freewheeling ventures into a fantasy world in which an airplane pilot "flaps his wings" and "wiggles his ears" (62). Harris seems to be characterizing this moment for Penny, who has finally attained motherhood, as one marked by an exuberant feeling of triumph, and it is not long after this that Penny is finally able to write "i think i love me," surely a triumph for someone who has suffered as Penny has (78). But ironically, at almost the same moment, one of the alters reports to Jasmine that "yuh ent know is how long she [Penny] sit here an' de chile ent feed / plenty talk buh is penelope and miz lancet wha look aftah chile" (78). And Penny's failure to feed the baby is symbolic of her obsessive preoccupation with having no "story" for the baby. She recalls her own childhood: "one ancient aunt or another drunk on the tale its telling," but she adds sadly, "here no aunts no stars / not a one" (70).

The business of "making" one's "roots" seems for Harris, then, to include moments of creative exhilaration and liberation, which are almost immediately undercut by a near-desperate search for materials from which to construct a "story." The critique of western genres offered in this section suggests the excitement and sense of anticipation with which new "mother" Penny (in the guise of mAri and Penelope) turns away from the British tradition. That two such culturally contrastive alters can join hands in the effort to secure the baby Charlie for Penny suggests the possibility of healing the cultural divisions which face Black Caribbeans, as well as the possibility that Penny herself can overcome her personal fragmentation. But new difficulties arise as Penny discovers that "what we turn to we have essentially

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<sup>17</sup> Claire Harris, "Why Do I Write?" in *Grammar of Dissent: Poetry and Prose by Claire Harris, M. Nourbese Philip, and Dionne Brand*, ed. Carol Morrell (Fredericton: Goose Lane, 1994) 32.

<sup>18</sup> "Why Do I Write?" 29.

to make ourselves" ("Limbo" 118). Says Ms Lancet, "here we trying to chink the worl' with callaloo fried plantain barefoot rice an' foo-foo" (*She* 81), suggesting that the filling up of holes or "chinks" in the framing of a past with daily customs is indeed a challenge. Just as MPD patients must reinterpret or "rewrite" their traumatic histories with the help of psychiatric professionals in order to be able to live with their own stories, so, in Harris's view, do post-colonial people have to recreate their sense of their "roots" to carry on with the business of life and parenting.



As if in answer to Penny's demands, now so importunate that she must assure sister Jasmine that she isn't "bullying" her (77), a new alter, Ka'ci, the Carib woman of the colonial period, appears with a "story." Among the most obscure of all the monologues in *She*, Ka'ci's speech, with its many Carib words and phrases, partially excludes the reader, leaving her story of the coming of the first Europeans to the islands one which must be pieced together by the reader. Indeed, the function of so much Carib language in the section may be to emphasize the remoteness and mystery of Ka'ci's world and its values when compared to the post-colonial condition. And Ka'ci's English style is highly metaphorical, coming from an oral world in which stories are "sung" as a community act. She can recall a unified community in harmony with nature before the coming of the Europeans who bring brutal death and destruction. But she disappears as quickly as she came, perhaps because her story is not usable in the divided world Penny must cope with. In brief dialogue with Penny's alters, her voice remains mythic, remote, as if to emphasize the breadth of the divide between the pre- and post-colonial worlds, a chasm which cannot be bridged by desire alone. In "Poets in Limbo," Harris quotes poet Dionne Brand: "When you grow up black anywhere in the western world, there is an uneasiness .... It is as if there is nothing behind you" (117). And in her own poem "Translation Into Fiction," she writes of an African mask: "now I wake wordless to your / mystery come empty to your altar ... / You are left a fiction."<sup>19</sup>

After Ka'ci's monologue, the alters respond with their story of Thena's death. But as we know, the divisions within Penny's family, and the pain and guilt the story carries for Penny have made it impossible for her to recognize it as part of her own experience, though, as we have seen, both this and Ka'ci's are stories of the destructive impact of colonial influence.

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<sup>19</sup> *Translation Into Fiction* (Fredericton: Goose Lane, 1984) 25.

By placing these two stories in close proximity to each other near the end of *She*, Harris dramatizes the inadequate alternatives Penny and other post-colonial people face in their quest to “make” a usable past. The consequences of this state of affairs is that by the end Penny is much weakened and largely absent, her alters struggling chaotically with each other for control. When one’s “roots” can neither be faced nor rewritten, Harris sees the individual as simply disintegrating into ever smaller fragments.



Harris, then, uses the MPD metaphor to underscore the ironies and paradoxes of the post-colonial condition, one in which, like the sufferer of Multiple Personality Disorder, the individual is left with partial selves, but no “authentic self” (“Limbo” 116). For Harris in *She*, seeming solutions to the problem of the loss of the “authentic self” are likely to extort devastating and unforeseen costs, or to result only in a more profound awareness of deprivation.

Yet the conclusion of *She* is not totally dark: by the end, sister Jasmine has finally understood and come to Penny’s rescue, and as Jasmine explains in her “Introduction,” Penny has now been properly diagnosed. Now the recreation of her story can be conducted with professional guidance. For Harris, awareness of the treacherousness of the post-colonial condition may be as important as proper diagnosis is for MPD patients, and this would be true not only for black Caribbeans, but for white readers who may imagine that the crime of European imperialism is over and done with.