SPACE, HISTORY AND THE INSCRIPTION OF TRANSCULTURAL IDENTITY IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S WRITINGS

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Abstract: The present paper examines the particularities of V. S. Naipaul's articulations of transcultural identity in the postcolonial context of his semi-autobiographical novels The Mimic Men and The Enigma of Arrival. The textual analysis is focussed on the interplay of the geographical, historical and cultural images underlying the self-identification of the postcolonial migrant writer, whose writing becomes inextricably bound up with scrutinizing and inscribing the vagaries of poscolonial and postmodern identity. The paper also highlights the double pull of the utopian and dystopian discourse and imagery deployed in defining a sense of hybrid identity and belonging, in which multiple cultural affiliations, myths and literary traditions eventually fall into place.

Keywords: Postcolonial, transcultural, displacement, hybridity, identity

V. S. Naipaul's arduous journey of (self-)discovery from his native Trinidad to the cultural heart of the former British Empire, which brought him to the pinnacle of literary achievement and international fame, can be read as an exemplary tale of a writer's lifetime struggle to engage the world through times of sweeping historical and cultural change. Naipaul's oeuvre has come to epitomise the most encompassing enquiry into the world's millenary history of displacement and 'mingling of peoples'. It won him the Nobel Prize in 2001 and a knighthood in 1990. At the zenith of his career, he was recognized not only as the most prominent representative of the postcolonial novel, but as the most authoritative analyst of Third World history and politics. Yet his reputation still provokes controversy, as the ideas and positions enunciated in his writing have always instigated widely different responses.

The man whose entire work maps out the displacing experiences of departure and arrival inherent to the movement of peoples in the colonial and postcolonial eras departed this world on 11 August 2018, at the age of 85. The writer often described as 'one of the finest novelists writing in English' made his bid for posterity long ago, in full consciousness that he had definitely arrived – that is he had arrived and conquered his place in British literature from outside in. The present article pays a humble tribute to his impressive human and literary legacy.

Naipaul's writings were seminal in the establishment of the distinctive literary movement emerging from the periphery of the British Empire and catalysed the emergence of Caribbean literature, which opened for his English audience a fresh perspective on a colonial margin until then underrepresented in literary form. He became the most prominent of the Caribbean writers who had migrated to Britain in the 1950s, having 'abandoned their islands in quest of tradition, specifically a heritage of literacy that might provide them with the audience they could never hope to secure at home' (Nixon 20).

Like them, Naipaul felt impelled to choose exile not only by his fascination with English literature and with the idea of becoming a writer, but for the pragmatic 'reasons of publishing, audience and education', which exercised a 'substantial pressure on Caribbean authors of [his] generation to move abroad if they wished to survive as writers' (Nixon 20). It was Naipaul's conviction that his literary ambitions could only be fulfilled away from his constricting colonial milieu and within the propitious atmosphere of the metropolitan centre.

Naipaul construes his exile as a personal quest, whose significance goes beyond the socio-cultural factors underlying the colonial writer's escape to the heart of imperial culture. His coming to London represents the fruition of 'his youthful romance with the idea of becoming a writer' (Nixon 7), of a childhood dream which figures obsessively throughout his fiction, his autobiographical and non-fiction writing. It is a dream bred by his early fascination with English literature and the art of writing, instilled in him by his father Seepersad.

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born in 1932 in Chaguanas, an impoverished rural area of Trinidad, where he lived until the age of six in his mother's family home, as 'an almost fatherless poor relative vulnerable in a squabbling large extended family' (King 7) from which the father was vainly trying to liberate himself. From an early age, Naipaul felt alienated from the enclosed, stifling existence of his family clan and ethnic enclave. To survive the humiliations of his overcrowded, swamping domestic space, which 'left him with a preference for order, style, achievement and solitude', he defended himself by 'creating for himself a mask of superior aloofness' (King 7), an armour of detachment and isolation, accurately described in the portrayal of Anand Biswas in *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961). From the wounding experience of those years 'he learned that to protect himself against the cruelty of others it was best to act superior and incapable of being hurt. In the process he had picked up affectations and a malicious tongue' (King 2). The fear of nonentity which troubles most of Naipaul's characters stems from his childhood experience of a communality which denies individuality and subsumes it to the levelling identity of the group.

This sensitised him to Western notions of individualism, in which he discovers the fundamental principles underlying the process of identity formation. His novels are rooted in the tradition of the classical English novel's representations of individuals negotiating their position within society and their relationship to the values and beliefs defining the collective social consciousness. Endemically distrustful of groups and group ideologies, Naipaul 'focuses on individuals in societies' and the ways in which 'people create themselves and advance in life' (King 2). If he defines himself as a writer detached from any society and free from any partisan loyalties or group affiliations, it is because he has never quite had the chance to anchor himself in a social space which he could truly consider his own. Considered by many an affectation carefully cultivated to warrant his objectivity, Naipaul's detachment is the manifestation of a chronic sense of homelessness, resulting from his history of social and cultural displacement. Having left the constricting space of his familial and ethnic group in Trinidad, he continued to travel wide and far in search of a society which he could call his own.

It was this deeply felt fear of engulfment in nonentity that bolstered eleven-year-old Vidia's decision to escape his confined colonial space via an English university education. A hard-earned Trinidadian government scholarship took him to Oxford in 1950 to read for a degree in English literature. After his graduation in 1954, he moved to London, where he started working for the BBC, as an editor of *Caribbean Voices*, trying at the same time to start off his writing career. The memory of his initial dislocation, of those years of artistic frustration and material deprivation in London is hauntingly re-echoed throughout his writing. It took the young writer some years to identify his material. Set in the Trinidad of his childhood, his first novels fall back on his experience of colonial life at the rim of the Empire, with its multicultural social mixture, ethnic and racial sensibilities and feelings of marginality, non-belonging, confused cultural identification and mimicry of imperial culture.

As a new arrival to the centre of the metropolitan culture he had dreamt of, he experiences the disorientations and frustrations of the migrant's life, with its sense of alienation, rootlessness, provisionality. In *An Area of Darkness* (1964), he recalls the disappointment and alienation of his self-willed exile in London:

> I was lost. London was not the centre of my world. I had been misled; but there was nowhere else to go…Here I became no more than an inhabitant of a big city, robbed of loyalties, time passing, taking me away from what I was, thrown more and more into myself, fighting to keep my balance and keep alive the thought of the clear world beyond the brick and asphalt and the chaos of railway lines. All mythical lands faded, and in the big city I was confined to a smaller world than I had ever known. I became my flat, my desk, my name' (Naipaul 1964: 45).

But it was from this anonymity of exile that he set out to make his name as a writer, a name which has come to epitomise the very concept of colonial and postcolonial displacement. It could be said that by the time he was twenty-nine he had already written his best work. It was the harvest of a very prolific, if painful, period in his soaring career, when he set a very high standard of intellectual discipline and creative productivity, by which he was to abide all his life.

The desire to travel to India sprung from his weariness of England, but above all from his romantic fantasy of reconnecting to the land of his ancestors, of anchoring himself in a recovered myth of origin. But the visit turned out to be a new disillusionment as Naipaul discovered that India could never provide him with a home any more than England could. *An Area of Darkness* (1964) explains both his emotional relationship to India and his concern about the postcolonial plight of the subcontinent, haunted by communal conflicts and irreconcilable contrasts.

Incapable of sharing the optimism of the new nationalisms and inclined to express his disillusionment and disbelief in unsparingly harsh terms, Naipaul came in for criticism from Caribbean intellectuals, from nationalistic or Marxist critical circles. As Naipaul's writing diversifies and his journalism and non-fiction come to complement the political commitment of his fiction, many have misconstrued his often unfavourable accounts of the Third World 'as ultimately colonialist in their sympathies' (Mustafa 51). The writer's refusal 'to accept a world rigidly divided into an imperialist West and its victimized Others' (King 197), which many took as a proof of equidistance and objectivity, was read by others as a betrayal of his homeland, as a condescending attitude towards Third World self-determination.

Naipaul's recurrent references to his own condition of rootlessness and sense of non-belonging have often been denounced as self-promoting myths meant to give him a romantic aura of postcolonial spleen – the myths of his homelessness and his objectivity Holding that the writer's much invoked displacement is just a self-romanticising pose capitalising on 'the licence of exile', Rob Nixon construes the writer's professed lack of affiliation as 'Naipaul's success in fashioning and sustaining an autobiographical persona who is accepted at face value as a permanent exile, a refugee, a homeless citizen of the world' (Nixon 17). The writer's reiterations of 'the terms of dismissal' (Nixon 109) were regarded as an endorsement of Western prejudice against the Third World, which made his assumption of a paradoxical position as both insider and outsider seem indefensible.

However, Naipaul's professions of impartiality and detachment, his self-definition as a displaced writer who does not 'have a side, doesn't have a country, doesn't have a community; one [who] is entirely an individual' (quoted in Gorra 72) have also been interpreted as a mark of his credibility: 'Naipaul came in the 1970s to seem something like the White Man's Brown Man', whose 'attacks on that world – attacks by someone with *his* biography –…must necessarily carry the note of truth' (Gorra 72). If his pronouncements on the postcolonial world have elicited such widely different responses and interpretations, such heated debate over the writer's genuineness or disingenuousness proves the harsh complexity of his representations of postcolonial disorder, rife with unpalatable truths about the decolonised spaces and the plight of West Indian or East Indian diaspora. Bruce King argues: 'Naipaul's work has complexities that confuse 'either-or distinctions'' [and] gets its strengths from indulging in contradictions, having the best of many worlds' (King 206). And whilst Naipaul's writing undoubtedly has a political edge, the critic warns against the danger of politicised criticism of his work: 'It takes a blinkered ideologist to turn an anti-colonialist into a pro-colonialist' (King 200).

The ultimate impulse behind Naipaul's literary and documentary writing is to fathom the nature and meaning of the world he inhabits and to communicate the vision engendered by his intellectual, emotional and artistic enquiries and experience:

> […] his interest lies less in imperialism per se…than in the restlessness it has left behind. The original sin of the Empire is implicit in everything he writes, but for him its "wound", in Mr Biswas's words, is "too deep for anger or thoughts of retribution"…and his analysis is symptomatic, not causal' (Gorra 71).

The most painful wound which Naipaul's life and work epitomise is that of the geographical and cultural displacements inflicted by Empire. His personal experience of displacement, first as a colonial subject in Trinidad and later as an expatriate in England and a postcolonial pilgrim to the dispossessed margins of the former empire constitutes the raw material of his writing, which 'replicates the restlessness, dissatisfactions, migrations of people and rapid social and cultural changes of the present world' (King 5). The most accurate expression of Naipaul's literary creed is articulated by Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, an exiled would-be writer/historian who endeavours 'to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples…which this great upheaval has brought about' (Naipaul 1969: 32).

His entire work originates in his programmatic and encompassing engagement with the legacy of colonialism and decolonisation, which 'have altered the world for ever' (King 5). The sense of displacement and in-betweenness underlying both his worldview and his writing is emblematic of the homelessness of those un-homed by the Empire. Gorra defines Naipaul's life and creation as iconic of the problematical imperial legacy: 'And as that walking paradox, that seeming oxymoron, an East Indian West Indian, he is himself the greatest embodiment of that "deep disorder", a writer brilliant but not whole, whose entire career is a mark of imperialism's deforming power' (Gorra 71).

As shown above, this interpretation of Naipaul's representativeness for those displaced by Empire is believed by many to have been sustained by the author himself, who fashioned his aura of an irredeemably rootless, homeless exile while enjoying the comfortable existence of a metropolitan writer. This line of argument exemplifies an indefensible case of biographical fallacy. Whether or not Naipaul's self-projection as a displaced, unanchored individual, alienated from any geographical or cultural location should be taken at face value is an extra-literary argument which cannot have an import on the ideational and aesthetic appreciation of his creation.

Displacement is figured as the defining condition of colonial subjects and postcolonial migrants, the inheritors of a complex history of dislocation through conquest, enslavement, indenture, or migration. All of Naipaul's characters bear the wound of multiple layers of geographical and cultural displacements and hybridizations. This historical affliction becomes manifest in the sense of alienation of those transplanted in plantation colonies or in the traumatic relocation of postcolonial immigrants, exiles or political refugees. The human tragedy at the core of Naipaul's novels stems from the foreboding that no one ever really reaches home, that actuality always falls short of fantasy. Naipaul's characters are invariably people 'who have had their wholeness broken by the absence of a home' (Gorra 64). This absence of home is the metaphor of incomplete identity and the central trope of his writing 'about unhousing and remaining unhoused…cut off from a supporting world' (Mukherjee 5). Paradoxically, the freedom of migration, with its impermanent house whose 'centre will not hold', is equally paralyzing. Naipaul's genuine experience of displacement has been distilled as the truth of a deeply private vision of the human condition at the core of his art: 'His books portray individuals in an inhospitable world' (King 206). The historical and human truth of Naipaul's writing has been endorsed by the Indian cultural critic and theorist Homi Bhabha, who reads Naipaul's early novels as a celebration of heroic human resilience. He confesses that his 'influential views of hybridity derive from his reading of Naipaul' (King 202).

The overriding feeling permeating their stories of displacement is a chronic sense of being disconnected from the space they inhabit, of a lack of cohesion between man and place. This fracture between individual and social identity is most potently conveyed in *The Mimic Men* (1967), whose main leitmotif is the observation that in the Caribbean space there is 'no relationship between man and landscape'. While it is true that 'perceptions of landscape are culturally informed' (Georgescu 496), for Naipaul all landscapes are historically defined, especially by their hegemonic or marginal status in the scheme of macro-history. The sense of incongruity between the individual and his environment is symptomatic of 'the problematic process of access to an image of totality' (Bhabha 73) resulting in the discontinuities and fragmentariness of colonial identity. Like the author himself, the novel's narrator longs for an unadulterated wholeness, a plenitude of the self – construed both spatially and temporally. In flight from his unhomely (post)-colonial space, he yearns to create a place to call home. It is the quest for a home that both mirrors and shapes his identity. Home and identity are inextricably linked to the core meaning of existence, which explains 'the way in which the relation between home and homelessness provides the central metaphor of all Naipaul's work' (Gorra 64). The recurrent images of house building, home-leaving, decaying houses and comfortless habitation constitute a core motif of his writing.

His father's story of home searching, nostalgically evoked in *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) is complemented by the more complicated exilic experience of the son's figure, thinly disguised as Ralph Singh, the homo-diegetic narrator of *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul's most compelling anatomy of exile as an ontological condition. Many of the events and moods depicted in Singh's would-be memoir mirror aspects of Naipaul's own childhood, of his loneliness as a student at Oxford and as a struggling writer in London. King compares it to two classical models: 'It is a Caribbean East Indian rewriting of *A Portrait of the Artist* and of *A la recherche du temps perdu*' (King 75).

The novel illustrates Naipaul's dialectic of displacement, underlying his observation that any illusion carries the seeds of disillusion, and actuality invariably taints the purity of fantasy. The fascination with the metropolitan centre soon turns into the disappointing aimlessness of the migrant. One of the book's key metaphors warns against the idealisation of imagined spaces: 'All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of reality' (*Mimic Men*, 10). Singh's mood is reminiscent of the insecurities and frustrations of Naipaul's first years in London as an aspiring writer, actuated by the same determination 'to leave more behind', but succumbing to a sense of being adrift in an alien and alienating city: 'I felt all the magic of the city go away and had an intimation of the forlornness of the city and the people who lived in it' (*Mimic Men* 7).

Singh disenchantment with the wide world and its centre of order is metonymic of the immigrant's sense of being stranded between the rejected home on the margins and the impossible home of the centre. He envisages his first journey to the metropolis as 'a greater shipwreck'. His arrival is perceived as 'a sombre beginning', made sour by the disorientations of migration, metaphorised as the ever-eluding 'god of the city', receding under the 'lead of reality': 'Coming to London, the great city, seeking order, seeking the flowering, the extension of myself that ought to have come to me in a city of such miraculous light, I had tried to hasten a process which had seemed elusive. I had tried to give myself a personality….Shipwreck.' (*Mimic Men* 27)

The double pull of the two islands, that of his birth and that of his exile, is manifest in his alternating nostalgias for either the tropical or the metropolitan setting, representing what he dichotomously calls 'the island and the world'. The myth of a place is seen as no more than a verbal and imagistic construct, which always proves insubstantial and inconsistent with reality. 'I had longed for largeness. How, in the city, could largeness come to me?' (*Mimic Men* 28) Always longing for the absent island, he will always be 'of the island and not of the island', a condition associated with Naipaul himself. After a failed enterprise as a housing developer and then political leader in his Caribbean island, he has no choice as to accept his fate as a political refugee in London, where he makes a surrogate home in the impermanent setting of a guesthouse.

Ultimately, the only home available for him, as for many of Naipaul's protagonists, is the writing table and the act of writing, which grow to accommodate the worlds and cultures the migrant carries within and eventually accepts as the multicultural historical heritage upon which his identity is predicated. The writing table becomes the symbolic centre of Singh's sense of order and selfhood, mirroring the comforting assuredness of the writing self. 'By this re-creation the event became historical and manageable; it was given its place; it will no longer disturb me […] to impose order on my own history.' (*Mimic Men* 243) The city of his final exile becomes the point of origin of his ambitious synthesis of macro-history, encapsulating and explaining all the forces which have shaped the micro-history of individuality. Eventually, the displacement of exile inaugurates the healing process of replacement in the in-between space of cultural hybridity. As in Naipaul's case, the former imperial city is the site of a distancing, balancing and ordering perspective on colonial subjectivity and identity formation, crystallised and illuminated in a kind of historiographic memoir: 'A more than autobiographical work, the exposition of the malaise of our times pointed and illuminated by personal experience.' (*Mimic Men* 8). The character's epiphany of his liberating vocation is recognizably that of 'a Naipaul-like figure who has made writing his life and who is writing about the world really is writing about himself and his discontents' (King 77).

A more transparently autobiographical epiphany of the postcolonial writer's transnational and transcultural identity informs *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987). The book figures the writer narrator's striving to discover a site of identity in the reconciliation of opposites, in recasting his pluralistic cultural inheritance into a different kind of wholeness. It dissects the thinly disguised progress of the writer towards a more mellowed perspective on postcolonial identity as dependent on a multicultural synthesis of unity in diversity. His enquiries into the political history of the postcolonial space give in to self-scrutinising reflections on the meaning of his journey through the world and its bearing on his personal and artistic identity.

The writer's notorious despair of the incoherence between man and landscape is superseded by the urge to seek for coherence in the landscapes within, defining for his emotional affiliations and subjective sensibilities: 'A writer after a time carries his world with him, his own burden of experience, human experience and literary experience (one deepening the other); and I do believe – that I would have found equivalent connections with my past and myself wherever I had gone' (*Enigma* 10). Naipaul's assessment of the realities of the postcolonial space becomes less embittered and more likely to discern a sense of order in the turbulent flow of historical change: 'The relation of the writer's self to his work is now accepted as the answer to the problems of marginality, exile and insecurity that characterized Naipaul's earlier books' (King 136). This qualified sense of plural belonging, of an identity inhabiting multiple layers of history and cultural traditions stem from a new stance in his contemplating the worlds within. As King notes: 'Recognition that the problems of Trinidad, India and England are similar and that all life is subject to change was followed by a new mellowness' (King 136).

This new self-awareness is foreshadowed in the inward-looking, self-conscious 'Prologue to an Autobiography', in his book *Finding the Centre* (1984), which enounces the writer's need for self-reassessment: 'it takes thought (a shifting of impulses, ideas and references that become more multifarious as one grows older) to understand what one has lived through or where one has been' (Naipaul 1984: 12). And *The Enigma* is simply the transcription of this thought, with its 'shifting impulses, ideas and references' and its power to reposition the self's progress through time and space. It is a work of the self's cross-cultural synthesis, which draws together the multiple strands interweaving in the writer's ordering sense of being in the world and reflects upon their bearing on his construction of personal and artistic identity. An act of identity-narration, the book represents the long-expected fruition of Naipaul's restless quest for the essence of his identity, which he seeks to discern in the intertexture of his life and work, of public and private history. Recasting the modernist *Kunstlersroman* in the post-imperial ethos of cultural dislocations and relocations, it offers a more balanced part in his lifetime attempt 'to create a meta-narrative which would explain the various influences on how it came into being' (King 137). This metafictional text acquires the dimension of such a 'meta-narrative', an *opus magnus* which aligns individual destiny with global history.

Naipaul constantly foregrounds the interaction between the conceptual, intellectual, imaginative knowledge of English landscapes and the sensorial discovery of a palpable reality. Naipaul structures the story of this new discovery as a parallel between the emotional geography of the colonial's imagination and his first-hand experience of that geography, between his youthful romance of England and his mature, but no less emotionally coloured perception. Knowledge precedes experience, seeing becomes remembering, sensation and memory merge in a Wordsworthian atmosphere of 'emotions recollected in tranquillity'. The actuality of his iconic English surroundings is rendered familiar by the memory of 'the reproduction of the Constable painting of Salisbury Cathedral in my third-standard reader. Far away in my tropical island, before I was ten. A four-colour reproduction which I had thought the most beautiful picture I had ever seen.' (*Enigma* 12)

In his remapping of the landscape on the memory of childhood fantasies, of the youth's exile and the writer's unsettled life, the author-narrator embarks on a process of (self) discovery, involving a multifarious archaeology – geographical, geological, historical, architectural, linguistic and literary, all of it filtered through memory. In their synthesis lies the meaning of his life and work, and their intersection marks his place in the world. it is his adopted tradition of English literature that bridges the spaces of past and present, of departure and destination: 'So much of this I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerves of a stranger, and yet with a knowledge of the language and the history of the language and the writing, I could find a special kind of past in what I saw; with a part of my mind I could admit fantasy' (22). Every sight and human gesture is fitted into the idealised mindscape of literary memory.

His living as a tenant on an Edwardian estate is emblematic of his 'reversed colonisation' of English culture. While fascinated by the estate's antiquated perfection, whose tranquil solitude suits his mood and temperament and feels almost like home, the narrator self-consciously meditates on the wonder and incongruity of his presence there: 'overwhelmed by the luck of the near-solitude I had found in this historical part of England, […] I had seen everything as a kind of perfection, perfectly evolved' (51). However, he understands that his habitation of the estate epitomises the ineluctable reality of historical 'flux and the constancy of change' (51):

> But more than accident had brought me here. Or rather, in the series of accidents that had brought me to the manor cottage…there was a clear historical line. The migration, within the British Empire, from India to Trinidad had given me the English language as my own, and a particular kind of education. This had partly seeded my wish to be a writer in a particular mode, and had committed me to the literary career I had been following in England for twenty years' (52).

The writer's eventual building of his own house in the English countryside is the symbol of his existential, historical and literary rooting in the synthesis of hybrid personal and artistic identity. Naipaul's harmonisation with the English landscape inscribes his 'claim to have come, eventually taken root, and in his own way, conquered' (King 147). *Enigma* 'is not really a story of accumulation and assimilation', but rather of cultural hybridisation, as it 'implies that Naipaul and other former colonials are now part of, and inheritors of, the English literary tradition' (King 147).

The integrative vision of the book resides in its inverted historical symmetries. Its allegory of the colonial's reversed conquest 'continues a history that started with the English conquest of India' (King 147), to which the writer confers a liberating sense of closure and poetic justice. The author's longstanding desire to formulate his hybrid identification is actualised in this work of cultural synthesis: 'Ever since I had begun to identify my subjects I had hoped to arrive, in a book, at a synthesis of the worlds and cultures that made me […]. I felt in this history I had made such a synthesis […of…] the worlds I contained within myself' (144, 147). The shards of Naipaul's worlds, scattered by the winds of an 'impure time', fall back into place to reconstruct the wholeness, writer's heritage, eventually 'exalted into design' and found complete.

Thus Naipaul's 'rhetoric of displacement' (Nixon 21) yields to a mellowed meditation on the re-placement of postcolonial identity in the mould of its multicultural heritage. His multiregional, multicultural affiliation both to the centre and the periphery of the post-imperial space remains the incontestable truth of his writing. But the ultimate allegiance defining Naipaul is to his art. He grafted his (post)colonial material on the English literary tradition, appropriating it and opening it to fresh dialogical possibilities. Naipaul's writing 'takes on the aura of a mission whose goal has been to find a way to make one part of the world readable to another' (Mustafa 1). English literature, a valuable part of his colonial inheritance, which his father taught him to revere and emulate, is Naipaul's true home of the spirit. His fables of displacement, resonating with a Dickensian tenderness for the dispossessed and a Shakespearean glimpse of the tragedy of 'unaccomodated man', rightfully make Naipaul 'heir to such universalizing writers as Dickens and Shakespeare' (King 202).

The writer belongs in the symbolic home of Henry James's million-windowed 'house of fiction', a metaphor for the novel's 'vast and teeming building', in which 'Naipaul has pierced many windows…entering it through the very act of throwing up the sash on the "portion of the earth" that he, like Mr. Biswas, has claimed for himself' (Gorra 86). The critical recognition of Naipaul's right to inhabit the great tradition of James's house, 'a metaphor whose biblical echoes make it above all a figure for the idea of a canon', gives us the true measure of the exceptionality of 'Naipaul's myth – the Trinidadian Hindu who became a great British novelist, who built a house of his own' (Gorra 91). King similarly places Naipaul's home in the tradition of great British literature: 'if I understand *Enigma*, Biswas's children, after much hard work and learning to adapt what they have found in their journeys, do have a house, and it is in the very heart of the English literary tradition which has been reconverted and redesigned to tell and celebrate their story' (King 148). And his literary home acknowledged his achievement by the title of 'one of the finest living novelists writing in English.'

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