

NAIPAUL – COLONIAL AND POST COLONIAL ALIKE

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Abstract: This paper deals with Naipaul's position in the context of post-colonial theory, considering him as a member of the Indian diaspora – two approaches leading to a discussion of his Indianness. After a bio-biographical introduction to Naipaul (the man and his work) a first step would be to determine those elements in Naipaul's writings which allow us to consider him from the point of view of his belonging to the post-colonial literature in general, and to the Indian diasporic writing, in particular. A second step would be to establish the relationship between the biographical and autobiographical elements in Naipaul's travelogues, with a special stress on his Indian heritage: to what extent does Naipaul's Indianness inform his fiction and non-fiction? What triggers the numerous adverse reactions to some of his writings (such as his comments on Islam and the Muslim world, or even on India)? What justifies an unfavourable response such as Derek Walkott's? Is Naipaul's decision to stop writing fully motivated and acceptable?

Keywords: VS Naipaul, Indianness, Post-Colonial Literature, Biography and Autobiography, Indian Heritage

Date: 2001, December 7. Location: Stockholm, Sweden. Event: Nobel Award ceremony.

Awardee: Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul (See Fig, 1). It was on this date and at this particular location that Naipaul delivered *Two Worlds* – his now famous Nobel acceptance speech – to the distinguished guests of the Swedish Academy. Naipaul began his lecture by citing Proust, according to whom “a book is the product of a different self” from the daily self of the person who wrote it. In order to understand it, we should search deep in our souls, try “to reconstruct it there” and then we would probably reach it. It is in the light of this statement that we should approach the biography, or even autobiography, of all those who depend on inspiration:

“All the details of the life and the quirks and the friendships can be laid out for us, but the mystery of the writing will remain. No amount of documentation, however fascinating, can take us there. The biography of a writer – or even the autobiography – will always have this incompleteness.” (Naipaul, *Two Worlds*)

He then continues with a concise presentation of the history of his native Trinidad, the adoptive home of his parents and the other indentured Indian workers in the West Indies. It is like an incursion into the colonial past and postcolonial present, an attempt at self-discovery and self-understanding, an invitation to the two worlds of his childhood – his grandmother's house and the world outside which, by its excluding attitude allowed the new the new arrivals to live their own private lives in their own ways, in their own “fading India”. In the world outside young Naipaul learned the rudiments of his Indian heritage – language, traditions, religion – and by meeting his Indian Muslim neighbours he became aware of the existence of the *other*. But the world outside was much more powerful. Even if the his elders were observing the ancient customs and religion, organizing ceremonies and readings of sacred Sanskrit texts, their “ancestral faith receded”, with a sense of not belonging to the present, and all possible links with India were severed. We are witnessing the colonizing process in a nutshell. Naipaul's Trinidad is a cosmopolitan world, where the Hindu meets the Muslim, the

Africans or other people of African descent meet the whites and the non-whites – English, Portuguese, Chinese – all surrounded by areas of darkness.



Fig.1

Sir V. S. Naipaul receiving his Nobel Prize from His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden at the Stockholm Concert Hall, 10 December 2001.

And here we come to another connection we have been looking for: the writer's motivation of his subsequent trips to India, the source of his Indian travelogues, the essence of the present study. Naipaul testifies to his indebtedness to Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, to Rudyard Kipling and John Masters' books on India and the British Raj, even the romances written by women writers.

(Un-)willingly we have touched upon a few of the concepts we will develop upon: biography and autobiography, the travelogue as literary genre, colonial/post-colonial literature, Orientalism, the backlash of the Empire – all meant to draw a portrait of Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, the Indian who shocked the Indians in his attempt to find his roots in the areas of darkness surrounding him and his world.

Date: May, 2008. Location: Jamaica. Event: the Calabash Literary Festival. Nobel Prize Laureate Derek Walcott launches an unexpected attack upon his fellow Nobel laureate, Sir Vidia Naipaul. The unprecedented attack was dutifully mentioned in *The Observer* as follows: "A wickedly humorous poem by a Nobel prize winner has drawn more blood in a vitriolic feud between literary lions." As surprising as it may seem, Derek Walcott's attack on his Nobel fellow triggers questions that only find answers in Naipaul's writings. Walcott – better known for his narrative poem *Omeros*, deeply indebted to Homer's *Odyssey* – and Naipaul – a similarly fêted novelist and travel writer – fit into the same picture of postcolonial, diasporic writers. What is, then, the reason(s) of such a fierce and apparently unjustified attack? I navigated the net with the declared purpose to find an answer to this question. After having visiting thirty Internet sites at least, I gave up, and decided to stay on the safe side, and not interfere between two giants of world literature.

Nevertheless, *The Mongoose*, is a highly humorous, surprising attack on Naipaul, the man and the writer. It was first read at the Calabash Literary Festival in Jamaica. Walcott attacks Naipaul's writing technique ('each stabbing phrase is poison'), directly addressing two of his novels, *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds*: 'The plots are forced, the prose sedate and silly / The anti-hero is a prick named Willie.'

Such a violent attack by a fellow writer invites to an investigation into the biographical elements in Naipaul's life which could (un)justify it. **Who is, then, Naipaul?**

A biographical account may sound rather dry: eighty years ago, on August 17, 1932, Naipaul was born in Chaguanas, Trinidad, into a Hindu family, belonging to the approximately 145,000 Indians who came to Trinidad between 1845 and 1917. About 85% of them were

Hindus, and only 15% were Brahmins. Writing about the unfriendly reception of the Indians by the local population of Trinidad, Bridget Brereton stresses the humble social position assigned to the new-comers by the “planters, officials, upper-class whites, educated colored and black Creoles and the black working class” once they became aware that the Indians were there to stay. (Brereton, 110) It is in this tropical Trinidadian space with its multi-ethnic population and multicultural atmosphere that we find the explanation of a certain degree of preoccupation with, or obsession of the marginality detected when reading his books, the writer’s feeling that his native island, or the other countries visited, and their inhabitants – Christian, Muslim, or Hindu – are totally irrelevant to the (post-) colonial centre. During his boyhood on the island, Naipaul resolved to get away in five years’ time. He was only twelve then, and he kept his promise. At eighteen, he travelled to England to read literature at Oxford on a government scholarship, never to return. A Knight of the British Empire, Naipaul was conferred the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001.

In *Indians Abroad: A Story from Trinidad*, Namit Arora provides additional information about the Naipauls. Obviously, Naipaul was not a poor Trinidadian of Indian origin. In spite of his documented extraction from the former indentured workers who had crossed the seas for a better, well-paid for job in the colonies of the British Empire, Naipaul’s father was a journalist and a writer. His marriage into the Trinidad based influential family of politicians and writers of Capildeo. Even today, situated about eleven miles away from Port of Spain, the little town of Chaguanas boasts the so-called *Lion House* – Naipaul’s birthplace. Namit Arora lists at least **three recurrent themes** in Naipaul’s writings: (1) “**post-colonial identity and nationalism**”; (2) “**the fiction of history and the history of fiction**” and, (3) “**home and belonging in a world characterized by flux, movement and cultural contact.**” Arora wonders at the extent to which Trinidad informed Naipaul’s view that all those countries he had visited and written about are “half-made – full of rage, hysteria, or mimic men – trapped in narrow identities, short on self-awareness,” and questions the “dysfunction” of Trinidadian society which either “has constrained his way of seeing,” or expanded “his powers of observation and analysis.” The impact of native Trinidad on Naipaul’s achievement as a writer cannot be denied. It is an impact that awoke in him

“the curiosity... for the larger world, the idea of civilization, and the idea of antiquity. It is the island which gave him to the world as a writer, which “had given me the themes that in the second half of the twentieth century had become important; had made me metropolitan in a way quite different from my first understanding of the word.” (EA, 153)

On the other hand, Naipaul discusses the intimate relationship between India and England, an India he equals to an “un-English fantasy”, which the Indians of India could not possibly comprehend. This journey of self-discovery had a well-defined reason:

“I was travelling to the peasant India that my Indian grandfathers had sought to recreate in Trinidad, the ‘India’ I had partly grown up in, the India that was like a loose end in my mind, where our past suddenly stopped. There was no model for me here, in this exploration; neither Forster nor Ackerley nor Kipling could help. To get anywhere in the writing, I had first of all to define myself very clearly to myself” (EA, 169).

We have thus approached the concept of Indianness which – considering India’s huge territory, and its ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity – turns to be difficult to define. We shall always find ourselves in the danger of leaving aside all those who – from certain ethnic, religious or linguistic reasons – do not belong to that particular majority we call ‘Indian’; and in the case of India, we are talking about millions of people.

In “Prologue to an Autobiography” Naipaul develops on his beginnings as a writer and the pressures all the “upheavals and moves” exerted on him, and comes to the conclusion that the discovery of the subject amounts to half a writer’s work, and that his life was

“varied, full of upheavals and moves: from grandmother’s Hindu house in the country, still close to the rituals and social ways of village India; to Port of Spain, the negro, and G.I. life of its streets, the other, ordered life of my colonial English school, which is called Queen’s Royal College, and then Oxford, London and the freelancers’ room at the BBC. Trying to make a beginning as a writer, I didn’t know where to focus.” (FC, 26-27)

The beginning of Naipaul’s writing career – when he was almost twenty-three – was materialized in his first novel, *Miguel Street*, published in 1959, after *The Mystic Masseur*. It was written in only six weeks, in 1955, when Naipaul was working part-time for the BBC Caribbean Service, and sends the reader back to the writer’s memories of his childhood and neighbours in Port of Spain:

“Every morning when he got up Hat would sit on the banister of his back verandah and shout across,

‘What happening there, Bogart?’

Bogart would turn in his bed and mumble softly, so that no one heard, ‘What happening there, Hat?’

It was something of a mystery why he was called Bogart; but I suspect that it was Hat who gave him the name. I don’t know if you remember the year the film *Casablanca* was made. That was the year when Bogart’s fame spread like fire through Port of Spain and hundreds of young men began adopting the hardboiled Bogartian attitude.

He was the most bored man I ever knew.”

(*Miguel Street*, 1)

His next novel, *The Mystic Masseur* was published in 1957. Its tone was similar to that of *Miguel Street*, but was set among rural Indians in Trinidad. It told the story of Ganesh, a chancer who progresses from failed teacher to masseur to entrepreneur, ending up as an author and politician. The success of the novel cannot be doubted. The *Sunday Express* critic called *The Mystic Masseur* “the deftest and gayest satire I have read in years.” The *Sunday Times* reviewer called Naipaul “a sophisticated and witty young Trinidad novelist who immediately takes a front-line place in the growing West Indian school” (French, 179). Other reviewers were not so enthusiastic, as Diana Athill who opined that the favourable reception of the book was due to a passing British interest in new writing from the colonies, and particularly the West Indies; at the time, “it was easier to get reviews for a writer seen by the British as black, than it was for a young white writer, and reviews influenced readers a good deal more than they do now.”

Naipaul’s third novel, *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), was awarded the Somerset Maugham Award. This satirical novel revolves around the election process in Trinidad, and describes the almost *commedia del’arte* circumstances informing the democratic process and the consequences of political change. It is also an incursion into multicultural Trinidad, insisting on the effects the election process may have on the various ethnic groups of Trinidad, which include not only Naipaul’s co-nationals – the Hindus – but also the Muslims, and the Europeans:

“Democracy had come to Elvira four years before, in 1946; but it had taken nearly everybody by surprise and it wasn’t until 1950, a few months before the second general election under universal adult franchise that people began to see the possibilities.” (SE, 1)

The Suffrage of Elvira was followed by *A House of Mr. Biswas*. Worldwide acclaim followed its publication in 1961. As it is the case with Naipaul’s novels in which autobiographical elements prevail, it is about the Indo-Trinidadian protagonist Mohun Biswas’ strivings for success, his failures, and his final achievement of owning his own house despite his unhappy marriage. Over and over again, Naipaul is using a personal, postcolonial perspective to view a vanished colonial world, his father’s world.

Multiculturalism is the main feature of *The Mimic Men* (1967). The protagonists are an unusual mixture of races: Indian (Singh), Chinese (Hok), French (Deschampsneuf), African (Browne). The basic problem is identity, which inevitably leads to the question of race, and the multiple and sometimes unpleasant problems of living in a society which is better described by its heterogeneity. Is there a certain specificity of such a multicultural, multi-ethnic population? Have the indigenous populations simply disappeared? There is only one solution left to them: to imitate masters in both in dress and attitudes. Interviewed by Shankar Israel, Naipaul referred to his concept of “mimicry” which he discovered at work in all the postcolonial societies he wrote about: “The people I saw were little people who were mimicking upper-class respectability. They had been slaves, and you can’t write about that in the way that Tolstoy wrote about, even his backward society – for his society was whole and the one I knew was not.”

Naipaul was awarded the Booker prize for *In a Free State* in 1971. The structure of the volume is not so unusual if we consider his later travelogues: Naipaul includes three short stories – the title of the third one is in *In a Free State* – into a framing narrative. Its structure is symphonic, in that its different movements are working towards a not so clearly stated main theme, which could be the price of freedom.

The following novel, *Guerrillas*, was published in 1975. Commenting on the success of the novel, Peter Ackroyd considered it “a powerful and thoughtful novel,” and Anthony Thwaite commended “a brilliant artist’s anatomy and emptiness, and of despair.” His life-long friend Anthony Powell mentioned the book in a letter to Naipaul: “It is a splendid book. How absurd of some reviewers to compare it with Graham Greene. If his name is to be mentioned at all, that should be only because your novel is a contrast to the sentimentality, phoniness, and falseness of feeling with which his works almost always abound.” (French, 351).

A Bend in the River (1979) was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1979. The setting of the novel is an anonymous post-independence African nation, and its narrator is an Indian Muslim shopkeeper whose comments on the recent developments in Africa are those of a distant outsider. Some of the reviewers of the novel recognized him as “a magnificent novelist,” and *A Bend in the River* has been described a “full-bodied masterpiece.” Some others were less enthusiastic and criticized the opinions and viewpoints expressed in *A Bend in the River*. The same Wheatcroft accused Naipaul of neo-colonialism, and of an “ancestral communal resentment” against blacks, while Whitaker mentions Naipaul’s tendency of ascribing a “mysterious malevolence” to the Africans. Reviewing the novel in his volume *V.S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*, Cudjoe considers *A Bend in the River* to be “a close depiction of the gradual darkening of African society as it returns to its age-old condition of bush and blood”; such a pessimistic view is a clue to the writer’s “inability to examine postcolonial societies in any depth.” Following the protagonist’s passage to free himself from “the constricting ties to his society’s past,” the novel examines “the homeless condition of the East Indian in a world he cannot call home.” Last but not least, Raja does not consider him to be a postcolonial writer; to the contrary, Naipaul is “cosmopolitan” in that he offers an “inside view of formerly submerged peoples” for target audiences that have “metropolitan literary tastes”. (Raja, 2005)

The autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) is set in England, and contains Naipaul’s considerations on the contradictory perception of his place in the English countryside: first seen as frozen and unchanged, dominated by the mystical presence of the Stonehenge site, the surroundings of Naipaul’s cottage in England gradually unfold as constantly changing, where the inhabitants go on living their ordinary life isolated from the world beyond. Naipaul also analyses his own changing of places – Trinidad replaced by New York, New York replaced by Oxford – and the subsequent understanding of his own positioning in an entirely new environment.

Naipaul's last three novels – *A Way in the World*, *Half a Life*, and *Magic Seeds* – were written over a span of ten years. As controversial as most of Naipaul's writings, *A Way in the World* (1994) was short-listed for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. At the publisher's specific request, Naipaul called the book *a novel*, though his suggestion for a subtitle was *sequence* (Gussow, 1994), and a number of his reviewers preferred Naipaul's subtitle (Warwick, 1997).

Long-listed for the Booker prize, *Half a Life* (2001) is set in three continents: India, Africa and Europe (London, Berlin and Portugal). It follows the destiny of Willie Somerset Chandran, the son of a Brahmin father and a Dalit mother who goes all the way from India to England to finally become a writer and ends up in Berlin after having spent 18 years in Africa. The sequel to *Half a Life* is *Magic Seeds* (2004), which is also set in India and Europe (Berlin and London). The same protagonist returns to India, gets involved with the communist guerrillas, and finally returns to London to join a suburban, upper-middle class neighbourhood, with all its frustrations, and a pervading feeling of claustrophobia.

Travel and essay writing constitute **the second dimension** of Naipaul's work, extending over a span of half a century, an impressive total of nineteen titles which cover not only the writer's native Trinidad, the Caribbean Archipelago and India, but also Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas. In his essay, *Our Universal Civilization*, Naipaul writes: "I was travelling from the periphery, the margin, to what to me was the centre; and it was my hope that, at the centre, room would be made for me" (22). This statement is followed by the confession that his decision to live and write in London was a practical one, in that it had a "commercial organization" and a desire for new creative "stimuli" that was unavailable in 1950s Trinidad (22). It is a conviction repeated by the narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival* who realizes that his "literary life... was to be elsewhere" (EA, 108).

The Middle Passage (1962) is the outcome of Naipaul's voyage to Trinidad, British Guiana, Suriname, Martinique and Jamaica in 1961. One interesting detail about the book is that – besides his own comments on the countries visited, he also sends to other travel writers, such as Sir Patrick Michael Leigh Fermor, the famous British author of travel books who was once married to a Romanian descendant of the princely Cantacuzino family. Writing about the book, Sybille Bedford came to the conclusion that its essence resides in the "perennial conjunction of historical misconduct with present and intrinsic human weakness"; it describes and explains "the spiritual chaos and material shortcomings of modern life in some post-slaveholding societies." (Bedford, 1963)

All the recurrent themes of his travelogues are announced in this first travel book: slavery and race, colonialism and post-colonialism, the position of the South Asian Other in the countries of adoption. More than once Naipaul-the-traveller has been compared to Conrad. Just like his famous predecessor, Naipaul was a globe-trotter who managed to capture the extent to which a foreign culture – with its repository of customs and traditions – is assimilated or not into a larger whole.

Two years later, *India: An Area of Darkness: A Discovery of India* was published. It is a detailed, rather gloomy and heavily pessimistic account of the writer's first voyage to India, the first travelogue of his Indian trilogy. The anecdotal and descriptive style of the narration is heavy with the acute disillusionment of the author and the feeling of not belonging.

The second volume in the trilogy, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, was published in 1977. It was the outcome of his second visit to India, during the Gandhian Indian Emergency period (26 June 1975-21 March 1977). There is no sentimentality in this portrait of 20th century India, the product of centuries of foreign occupation and oppression, be it the four hundred years or so of Muslim rule, or one century and a half of British occupation. More than that, this trip to India is another adventure in self-discovery:

“An inquiry about India – even an inquiry about the Emergency – has quickly to go beyond the political. It has to be an inquiry about Indian attitudes; it has to be an inquiry about the civilization itself, as it is. And though in India I am a stranger, the starting point of this inquiry – more than might appear in these pages – has been myself.” (*IWC*, xi)

India: A Million Mutinies Now (1990) is the third of Naipaul’s Indian trilogy and a more optimistic account of the author’s encounters, a reconciliation with his ancestral land, now “a country of million mutinies,” a country profoundly marked by visible signs of self-awareness and an incipient intellectual life, heretofore completely neglected:

It closes the cycle, and is a more optimistic account of India than the other two. Naipaul witnesses the eccentricities of Indian daily life, over and over again commenting on the Indians’ particular way of coping with the obvious poverty and disorder unusual to a Westerner’s eye. It is a more optimistic book than the other two. In the last chapter, *The House on the lake: A Return to India*, the author summarizes his experience during his third visit to India, this being a reconciliation with the past and a kind of unexpected way of asking for forgiveness.

Eight years later, Naipaul published two further volumes: a travelogue – *A Congo Diary* – and a volume of essays – *The Return of Eva Perón and the Killings in Trinidad*. Writing about the latter volume of essays, Selwyn R. Cudjoe notes that *Killings in Trinidad* picks up four themes from Naipaul’s earlier work: (1) the attack on Caribbean Black Power; (2) the attack on sympathetic white liberals; (3) the concept of colonial mimicry; and (4) “the inability of individual colonial subjects to free themselves from the debilitating effects of their past”. (Cudjoe, 167) For Cudjoe however, the essay “added nothing new to the ideas he had presented in earlier works” (170). Cudjoe is thinking of ideas like those in the 1970 essay, “Power?” where Naipaul argues that “in the islands the intellectual equivocations of Black Power are part of its strength. After the sharp analysis of black degradation, the spokesmen for Black Power usually became mystical, vague, and threatening.” (248)

As controversial as all his public statements on Islam, *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* was published in 1981, and is a traveller’s account of a six month journey that took him all the way from the UK to fundamentalist Iran, to separatist Pakistan, and as far as Malaysia and Indonesia. Naipaul’s idea was to approach traditional, pre-Islamic nations – Iran, Pakistan and the other east-Asian nations – leaving behind the traditionally Arab world, and dealing only with what he called “the converted people”. As it is always the case with Naipaul’s travelogues, we are listening to a choir of voices – not always in harmony – expressing their views on Islam: clerics, like Ayatollah Sadegh Khalkhali, and lay men, even Communist, such as Bezhad – in Khomeini’s Iran; scholars and students of Islam of Indian origin in contemporary Muslim Pakistan, to which the shepherds in the mountains added an ancient, pre-partition, and even pre-Islamic dimension; the conversations with Malaysian Anwar Ibrahim, a follower of Ayatollah Khomeini, striving for the awakening of his people; poets and Koranic scholars in Indonesia, doing their best to reconcile Islam with the old traditions of the country.

In 1989, Naipaul published *A Turn in the South*, a rather surprising departure from previously exotic locations, in his attempt to understand the problems of the American South, made easier by the writer’s Caribbean background. In this case he deals with the African Americans – the Blacks – of the American South, and the book may be seen as a new understanding of the author’s perception of the South. Naipaul’s conclusion is surprisingly optimistic: far from the racial violence the South identified with, Naipaul discovers striking similarities between the Caribbean island-states and the states of the American South, pointing to parallels between the histories of the two, and highlighting those differences brought about by slavery and, eventually, freedom. The value of the book resides not only in his memories of his own culture and its history, but also in the thoughts and ideas of the

people he meets – which is valid for all his other travelogues. The writer focuses not so much on the difficulties he faces as a traveller in the Southern States; he is mostly interested in those particular events and ideas which have shaped this part of the USA.

Meanwhile, Naipaul had allowed Gillon Aitken to collect all his correspondence with his father, and the other members of his family during his three years stay at Oxford. The book, *Between Father and Son: Family Letters*, was published in 1999, and is a moving epistolary collection which offers an insight into the tight family ties within a Trinidadian Hindu family, on the Oxford student community, and on the literary community of Trinidad and London during mid-twentieth century.

The essence of *Reading & Writing: A Personal Account* (2000) is found in two essays which form the core of the book. The volume was reviewed by Laura Ciolkowski in *The New York Times* (September 10, 2000). The reviewer insists on (1) Naipaul's progress "whose struggles with the modern novel and its 'metropolitan assumptions about society' ultimately force him to clarify his own literary project" and (2) "Naipaul's relationship to India and the complex literary and cultural inheritance that has been the catalyst for his life's work." According to Laura Ciolkowski, there is a close relationship between the two essays, because Naipaul comes to see that the world of the modern novel is predicated upon the magical disappearance of his own colonial past: "Unlike the metropolitan writer I had no knowledge of a past. The past of our community ended, for most of us, with our grandfathers; beyond that we could not see."

The Writer and the World: Essays– (2002) is another collection of essays that cover Naipaul's fierce and sometimes much debated criticism upon and understanding of the countries visited, such as India, his native Trinidad, Zaire. In his extensive review to the same volume of essays, Algis Valiunas (2002) agrees that *The Writer and the World* is one of those works incapable of making its readers happy, that it takes "a very cold eye to take in and render a world as hard and bitter as this one," a quality which Naipaul has cultivated all along his life.

A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling (2007) is a collection of essays in which Naipaul discusses how other writers – such as Flaubert, Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh, and Derek Walcott – have influenced his own writing. The publication of the book attracted criticism in British literary circles for its ungentle treatment of several notable authors, and in particular of Anthony Powell's novel-sequence *A Dance to the Music of Time*, especially since Powell was an old friend of Naipaul's. In his review of the book, Radhakrishnan Nayar comments on Naipaul's critical insights and "sovereign contempt for authorities and schools," and stresses the idea that "he [Naipaul] is really telling us how he got the language and the ways of seeing that have made his books the most provocative and cruel literary analysis we have of the post-colonial situation."

CONCLUSIONS:

Thus far I have completed a bibliographical survey of Naipaul's fifteen works of fiction and nineteen works of non-fiction. From *The Mystic Masseur* to *Magic Seeds*, his fiction is a life-long search for an identity. Whatever the title, the author finds himself in his books, which obsessively take the reader to his native Trinidad – *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, *Miguel Street*, *A House for Mr Biswas*, *The Mimic Men* – but also to London, Berlin, India or Africa. His characters are of are either Indo-Trinidadians or Indians. On the other hand, the non-fiction books are journeys of (self-) discovery. Whether they are set in the Caribbean islands, in Africa, India, or America, Naipaul reveals himself as an Indo-Trinidadian, whose Trinidadian background explains his particular stance as regards the countries visited. We may question – to cite Namit Arora again – the extent to which Trinidad made Naipaul see the societies visited as "half-made, full of rage, hysteria, or mimic men,

trapped in narrow identities, short of self-awareness.” Arora proceeds by asking: “Did the dysfunction of his own society in early/mid-20th century constrain his way of seeing, or did it expand his powers of observation and analysis?” (Arora, 2011)

In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul confesses his indebtedness to the island which had given him, first, the world as a writer, then the themes of importance in the second half of the twenty-first century, and – last but not least – had made him metropolitan “in a way quite different from [his] first understanding of the world.” (EA, 153, qtd. in Cudjoe: 1988, p. 218) In *Our Universal Civilization*, Naipaul himself comments on some essential, defining features of the Indians in Trinidad, on their indebtedness to ancient rituals and holy texts and epics, cultural markers which helped them understand “the wholeness” of their world and “the alienness” of the world at large. In what follows, we can see Naipaul explaining his family’s propensity for literature. What is interesting is that Naipaul thinks his father’s intimate wish to become a writer came to him with his acquisition of English:

“[...] in spite of the colonial discouragements of the place, an idea of the high civilization connected with the language came to my father; and he was given some knowledge of literary forms. Sensibility is not enough if you are going to be a writer. You need to arrive at the forms that can contain or carry your sensibility; and literary forms – whether in poetry or drama, or prose fiction – are artificial, and ever changing.” (OUC, 1990)

The social adjustments they had to face went along with the writer’s “personal intellectual growth” (Naipaul, 1990). The extent to which his Indian-Trinidadian background and the difficulties mentioned above inform his understanding of the Other and find way into his three Indian travelogues will be discussed further on.