V.S. Naipaul

Homelessness and Exiled Identity

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Declaration

I, Roshan Cader, hereby declare that the work contained in this research assignment/thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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Abstract

Thinking through notions of homelessness and exile, this study aims to explore how V.S. Naipaul engages with questions of the construction of self and the world after empire, as represented in four key texts: *The Mimic Men*, *A Bend in the River*, *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*. These texts not only map the mobility of the writer traversing vast geographical and cultural terrains as a testament to his nomadic existence, but also follow the writer's experimentation with the novel genre. Drawing on postcolonial theory, modernist literary poetics, and aspects of critical and postmodern theory, this study illuminates the position of the migrant figure in a liminal space, a space that unsettles the authorising claims of Enlightenment thought and disrupts teleological narrative structures and coherent, homogenous constructions of the self. What emerges is the contiguity of the postcolonial, the modern and the modernist subject.

This study engages with the concepts of "double consciousness" and "entanglements" to foreground the complex web and often conflicting temporalities, discourses and cultural assemblages affecting postcolonial subjectivities and unsettling narratives of origin and authenticity. While Naipaul seeks to address questions of postcolonial identity, his oeuvre is simultaneously entangled within the Anglophone literary tradition. The texts in this study foreground the convergence of the politics of writing and the politics of subjectivity.

Through continuous re-writing of the self, the past and history, Naipaul focuses on the fragmentary, the partiality of knowledge and the obscurity of the present to evince the continuous renewal of subjectivities. His narratives enact deep feelings of despair and melancholy that attend the migrant position in the current age of mass migrations, technological advancement, militarism, and essentialised ethnocentrisms and cultural constructions. In his poetics of exile, he endorses the particular over the universal. His commitment to a "politics of difference" underscores the texts in this study and serves to foreground Naipaul's position of otherness.

Opsomming

Aan die hand van die begrippe, ontheemding en ballingskap —wat beide die ontheemde subjek impliseer—ondersoek hierdie studie V.S. Naipaul se post-imperiale konstruksies van die self en die wêreld. Vier sleuteltekste, *The Mimic Men*, *A Bend in the River*, *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*, getuig van die mobiliteit van die skrywer, sy nomadiese ervaring van 'n wye spektrum van geografiese en kulturele terreine, asook van sy eksperimentering met die genre van die roman. Met verwysing na post-koloniale en modernistiese teorie, belig hierdie studie die posisie van die migrant in die tussenruimte, wat enersyds 'n ondermynende invloed het op die outoriserende diskoers van die Verligtings-paradigma, en andersyds teleologiese narratiewe strukture en homogene self-konstruksies destabiliseer. Wat gevolglik duidelik word is die verwantskap tussen die post-koloniale, die moderne subjek en die subjek van modernisme.

Die studie betrek die konsepte van "dubbele bewussyn" en "verwikkeldhede" ("entanglements") om die komplekse werking te belig van die dikwels teenstrydige temporaliteite, diskoerse en kulturele konstrukte wat postkoloniale subjekte affekteer, asook destabiliserende narratiewe van oorsprong en outentiekheid. Insoverre Naipaul postkoloniale identiteit onder die loep neem, is sy oeuvre ook in die Engelstalige literêre tradisie verwikkel; aldus stel hierdie studie die gepaardgaande politieke diskoerse van literêre komposisie en van subjektiwiteit op die voorgrond.

By wyse van 'n volgehoue herskrywing van die self, die verlede en die geskiedenis, fokus Naipaul op die gefragmenteerde, die partydigheid van kennis, en die ontwykende karakter van die hede. Sy werk herroep die gevoel van wanhoop en melankolie wat spruit uit die posisie van die migrant in 'n konteks van massa migrasies, tegnologiese vooruitgang, militarisime, asook essentialistiese etnosentrisme en kulturele konstruksies. In sy poetika van ballingskap onderskryf hy die partikulêre teenoor die universele. Sy verbintenis tot 'n "politiek van verskil" is grondliggend aan die vier romans waarop hierdie studie fokus, en belig Naipaul se posisie ten aansien van andersheid.
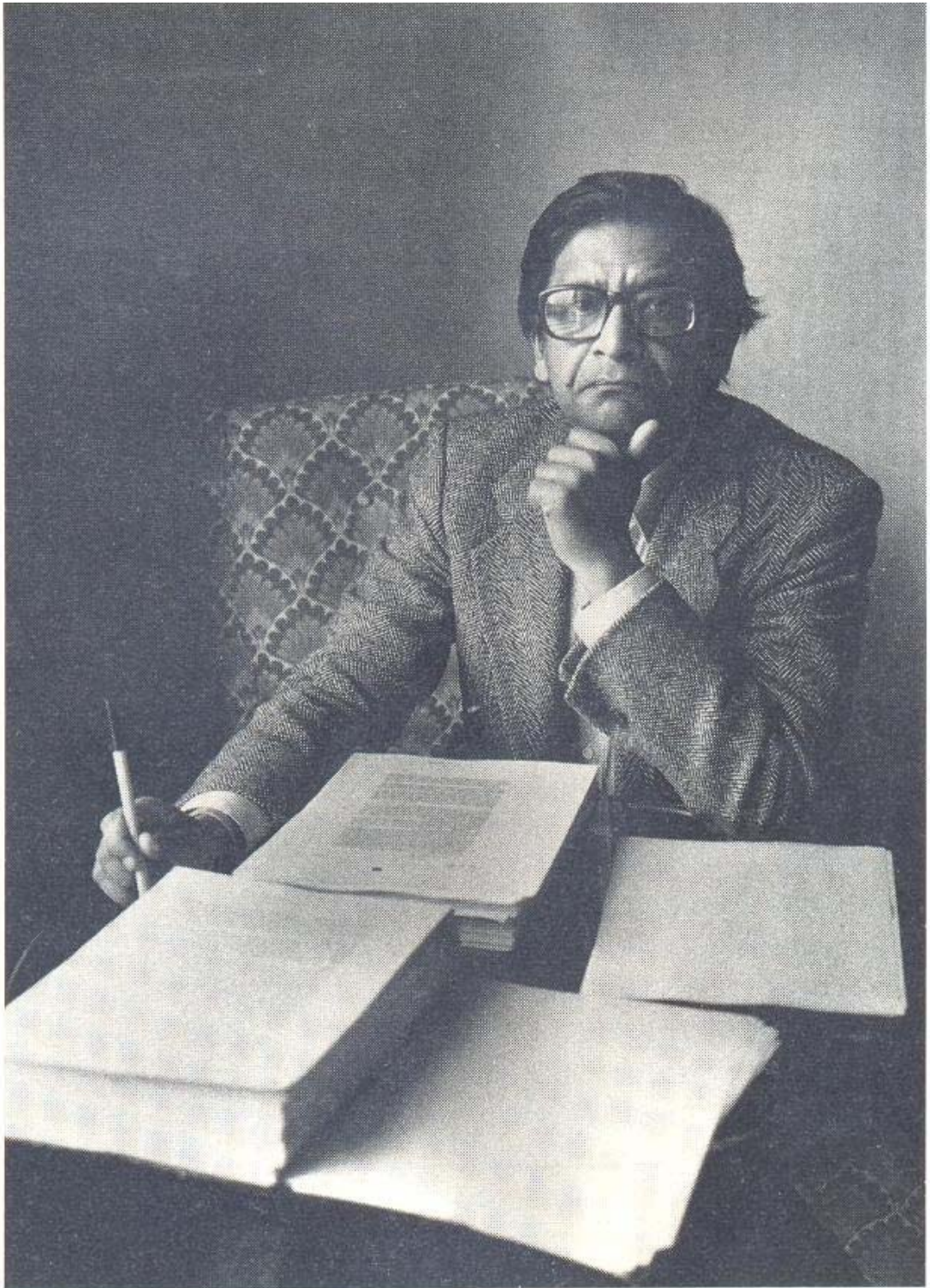
The writer at work: "In the dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied."
(V.S. Naipaul)

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Introduction: Locating V.S. Naipaul

It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home. (Adorno)

The wanderer: He who has come only in part to a freedom of reason cannot feel on earth otherwise than as a wanderer – though not as a traveller towards a final goal, for this does not exist. But he does want to observe, and keep his eyes open for everything that actually occurs in the world; therefore he must not attach his heart too firmly to any individual thing; there must be something wandering within him, which takes its joy from change and transitoriness. (Nietzsche)

Written in response to the large Jewish diaspora following Hitler's dictatorship in Nazi Germany, Adorno's axiom captures the *zeitgeist* of our current age. Displacement, migration and uprootment is the current "language of life", and this sense of homelessness, as Stuart Hall lucidly states, "disturbs the notion that people come from originary whole cultures" ("Re-Inventing Britain" 38).

The purpose of this study is two-fold. In the first place, it aims to study V.S. Naipaul's portrayal of a rootless (exilic) condition from the perspective of his own cultural displacements and minority position (in Trinidad and subsequently in England). His ancestors travelled "the Middle Passage" as indentured labourers from India to Trinidad to work on the sugar plantations in the New World colony. In the early 1950s the young Naipaul won a scholarship to read English at Oxford University, England. Some of these details are captured in his fiction, *The Mimic Men* but also receive attention in his travelogues, *The Middle Passage* and *An Area of Darkness*.

The second aim of this study is to consider the literary context in which Naipaul writes. Much like his central characters, Naipaul is a product of the colonial condition. His education in Trinidad (the Caribbean at large) was in English and based on a colonial British system. The impact of colonisation on the psyche of the colonial subject has been a recurrent trope in Naipaul's oeuvre.

Because of the writer's immersion in empire, his "entanglements"[1] with English culture and society fed through literary ideals, his writings are deeply embedded in the British literary tradition. What is of interest, however, is how Naipaul, drawing upon his own exilic condition, engages in a revisionary practice in relation to this tradition.

The methodological framework to this thesis is indebted to a body of foundational arguments posited by postcolonial theorists, such as Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, as well as the subsequent elaborations of these arguments by writers such as Achille Mbembe and Paul Gilroy.

The postcolonial arguments germane to this study converge with postmodern critiques of Enlightenment thought around the notion of a "politics of difference". Postcolonialism and postmodernism are both concerned with showing how the binary logic in terms of which master/slave relations and master narratives operate fall within fixed dualisms that maintain hegemonic practices. These discourses posit a critique of the binary revealing the ambivalence, hybridity and difference within these paradigms of power that has obvious ramifications in the context of cultural, literary and social studies. In their study *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri assert that a "politics of difference" (139) defies the totalitarian, universalising discourses and structures of power and instead affirms fragmented social identities that serve as a contestation of the modern subject and the modern nation-state. As bell hooks emphasises, a "politics of difference" is heralded amongst postcolonial theorists precisely because its discourse enables the values and voices of the displaced, the marginalised, the exploited and the oppressed to be incorporated (hooks qtd. in Hardt and Negri 141).

The central characteristic of a "politics of difference" - espoused in Bhabha's call for an emergence of the otherness of the other, or in Foucault and Lyotard's quest for the singular over the universal - invites the contingency and construction of the other, the unknowable, to be respected as other and not absorbed into the same. It is my contention in this thesis that the poetics of exile

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[1] My use of the term "entanglements" is adopted from Achille Mbembe's use of the term. In this study, it is used to illuminate the ways in which Naipaul's work is complexly located within the conflicting discourses of the Anglophone literary tradition and the traditions from the colonial periphery. These traditions, with their differing temporalities and significations, are interwoven in Naipaul's writings.

foregrounds the epistemological "limits" of Western modernity: its absolutist practices, essentialised, ethnocentric cultural constructions, its legitimated historicism and traditions stemming from the Enlightenment on the long march of progress. The dissonant voices and histories from the margins, evident in Naipaul's work, re-inscribe a contingency and discontinuity into the appropriative strategies of Western modernity. While writing from within that very moment of modernity of his "entanglements" with Western literary culture, Naipaul is, by virtue of his marginality, the other within.

Naipaul's fragile exilic condition and his dissonant socio-political and cultural history reverberate with history's otherness: the displaced, the marginalized and the minoritarian. Naipaul enters onto the geopolitical stage of the postcolony from a position of otherness. His concern with the postcolonial subject and the postcolonial world (captured in *The Mimic Men* and *A Bend in the River*) and the epistemologies of reading and writing in a diasporic world (explored in *The Enigma of Arrival* and evinced in *A Way in the World* respectively), rests heavily on the acknowledgement and incorporation of the other. The problem is partly an ontological one addressed in the first two chapters of this study where the subject(s) grapple with definitions of selfhood and self-determination. The subsequent chapters reflect the position of otherness in respect of subjects in their given landscapes. The exploration of otherness in Naipaul's works is closely aligned to Naipaul's own condition of exile. What emerges in Naipaul's writing is the subject's alienation but also the inescapable separation between subjects. This sense of the elusiveness of the subject in a world where "entanglement" predominates over familiarity is captured in *A Way in the World* when the narrator entering into a slipstream of memory recognises the unhomeliness of the human condition:

> Most of us know the parents or grandparents we come from. But we go back and back, forever; we go back all of us to the very beginning; in our blood and bone and brain we carry the memories of thousand of beings […] We cannot understand all the traits we have inherited. Sometimes *we can be strangers to ourselves*. (8; emphasis added)

The extract touches upon the effect of uprootment and dislocation, but it also points to Hall's statement of the lack of "originary whole cultures" the diaspora

unveils. The implication for this study of the sentiment it articulates is to open up an exploration of diasporic identities in textual and aesthetic forms.

Naipaul's work reveals the author's extensive literary heritage. In his writing he draws on a tradition of displaced writers (James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Joseph Conrad, among others). This said, the literary influences in his work are difficult to delineate. The texts in this study reflect Naipaul's creative engagement with and revisionism of modernist aesthetics. To capture both the subjectivity and sociality of the colonial condition Naipaul enters the spatial, temporal and cultural territories of colonisation through a literary persona who is either directly or indirectly affiliated with the Western literary tradition. He uses his various literary personas and his "extratraditionalism" to re-inscribe and re-write the English text and English landscape from the migrant's perspective.

In his essay, "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes", Henry Louis Gates Jr. states that "canonical texts of the Western literary tradition have been defined as a more or less closed sets of works that somehow speak, or respond to, 'the human condition' and to each other in formal patterns of repetition and revision" (2).[2] Gates implies that canonical texts respond to other texts in the Western literary tradition, and, so creates a historical corpus of Western Literature. Naipaul enters this literary landscape by inscribing his own displaced, minoritarian and marginal voice onto particular texts from the Anglophone tradition. The move signals a politics of writing in English and within an English literary tradition the migrant figure is compelled to face. As the author-narrator of Naipaul's *A Way in the World* writes, "[l]iterature wasn't a neutral subject […] Background entered into it" (89). Thus, Naipaul's concern with the literary is not simply the text as a reified, aesthetic object devoid of political and personal concerns, but is strongly a material object that is part of the world and interfaces across personal and political boundaries.

Naipaul's recourse to a modernist tradition is enabling in that modernist concerns are contiguous with those of postcolonialism: the demise of national

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[2] This is evident in works of T.S. Eliot who uses Ezra Pound to revise his form and style in *The Wasteland*. Though Naipaul cites Conrad as one of his early literary forebears, Eliot, obliquely and implicitly, occupies Naipaul's texts as an iconic figure. This will emerge in the chapter on *The Enigma of Arrival*.

identity and coherent constructions of self, a disruption of narratives of linearity and continuity and the questioning of reality through complex subject positions and points of view. The modernist subject and the postcolonial subject challenge the Enlightenment idea of "Man" and the literary and aesthetic forms similarly unsettle the telos and continuity and certainty of the realist novel form. It will be evinced that Naipaul inscribes himself onto particular texts within the Western literary tradition from a postcolonial migrant episteme and effectively "opens up" the canon to include its cultural others from the margins of empire.

In the course of the study it will emerge how Naipaul writes to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in *The Mimic Men* and invokes T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* in his elegiac descriptions of the English countryside in *The Enigma of Arrival*. The palimpsest of his writing reflects the indelible links Naipaul shares with the West and his own colonial upbringing. This contiguity between the colonial subject and empire, through the literary domain, is explored and developed through W.E.B du Bois's notion of "double consciousness" (via Paul Gilroy). Some of Naipaul's allusions to a Western literary tradition are oblique and implicit while others are more directly inscribed onto his writing. His engagement with a modernist tradition of writing from a postcolonial perspective signals a shift within the canon itself. The Western literary tradition, by virtue of imperial expansion, is no longer a closed set of works that speak only to each other but begins to acknowledge its link with the colonial figure from the margins of empire.

Chapter one deals with *The Mimic Men*. It explores the uncertainty and ambivalence pervasive of the migrant experience and the postcolonial subject's struggle with his existence and locality in a world that is disjunctive. Like most of Naipaul's narrators, the narrator in *The Mimic Men* exhibits a deep unease with the dislocation and cultural alienation that constitutes the shape of his life and, in turn, influences the form of his narrative. In Homi K. Bhabha's introduction to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, he writes:

> The struggle against colonial oppression changes not only the direction of Western history, but challenges its historicist 'idea' of time as a progressive, ordered whole. The analysis of colonial depersonalisation alienates not only the Enlightenment idea of 'Man', but challenges the transparency of social reality, as a pre-given image of human knowledge. If the order of Western historicism is disturbed in the colonial state of emergency, *even more deeply*

disturbed is the social and psychic representation of the human subject. For the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition. ("Remembering Fanon" xi; emphasis added)

These observations provide the conceptual framework for reading *The Mimic Men* as a narrative that similarly seeks to problematise the essentialised constructions of the subject and the teleological narrative structures of history and how these impact on the representation of the human psyche. Through recourse to Bhabha's observations of Fanon, my reading of *The Mimic Men* opens up the disturbing effects of cultural alienation and dislocation on the psyche as reflected in Naipaul's portrayal of his central narrator.

The Mimic Men offers a critical interrogation of nationalism and nation-building in a newly independent fictionalised Caribbean society. It captures the ambivalence of the metropolis-colony dualism on the colonial migrant who exists in both the colony and metropolis yet, by virtue of his dislocation, belongs to neither. Gilroy's notion of "double consciousness" is apposite in this context in as much as it considers the "intermixture of a variety of distinct cultural forms" (*The Black Atlantic* 7) precipitated through travel.

"Double consciousness" poses a challenge to the reified ethnocentrisms and essentialisms adopted by nationalist discourses both in the West and in its erstwhile colonies. Naipaul is similarly engaged in the rhetoric of nationalistic discourse both in the West and the Third World. Choosing to structure his narrative in the form of a memoir, Naipaul reflects on the sense of dislocation of the colonial subject in the colonial periphery but also the subject's disenchantment with the metropolitan world he had idealised in his fantasy. The narrative elucidates the double discourses and cultural assemblages in which the narrator is located and his feelings of alienation and belonging nowhere. With the loss of home and community, the narrator retreats into a literary world where he can buttress the disorder of his fragmentary life, assert a semblance of order, and atomise moments in his life in order to reach a degree of self-knowledge.

The trope of "double consciousness" offers a way of considering political imperatives conflated with cultural and social concerns. The import of this is that culture can no longer be conceived of as belonging to the bounded sphere of

particular groups. It is part of the public sphere that belongs to all. Gilroy's aim in deploying this trope is to consider the cultural implications of a "politics of difference".

In *The Mimic Men* and elsewhere, Naipaul evinces a grave scepticism in embracing the liberalism of intermixture and creolisation within hybridity theory. His portrayal of cultural dislocation and fragmentation reflects the despair and uncertainty attendant on hybridity. The idea of nationalism, and its acculturative claims upon on the individual in society, offers a tradition of certainty, of belonging and security, albeit premised on an illusion (or rather, a false ideal), which the liminal position, as evinced not only in *The Mimic Men* but also in *A Bend in the River*, cannot claim.

Conflating cultural concerns with the politics of subjectivity, Naipaul inscribes a colonial migrant's perspective on notions of Englishness. In this and in other texts, Naipaul's work follows a tradition of the Western text.[3] Naipaul establishes himself in a Western imaginary but does so in such a way as to unsettle its authorising claims. As a colonial figure and literary migrant, Naipaul chooses "affiliative" bonds (Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* 17) and creates his own literary parentage through a "range of narrative forms that is accommodated neither to Western nor local aesthetics exclusively" (Walder, "After Post-Colonialism?" 195). By encroaching upon canonical English texts through his own sense of alienation, disaffection and resistance to incorporation on any nationalistic level, Naipaul inflects the anguished and overlapping histories between empire and colony. His concerns centre on the colonial subject's engagement with Western forms of modernity, proposed as one of "entanglement" and "double consciousness". The role of literature, in this regard, functions as way of reflecting these "entanglements".

The narrators who feature in this study reveal sensibilities that are fed from a number of sources and cultural traditions. The intellectual seam of my argument is underscored by Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory, which characterises as a problematic

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[3] In *A Bend in the River*, for example, he revisits the Conradian Congo.

colonial representation […] that reverses the effects of the colonial disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority. (*The Location of Culture* 156)

This conception of hybridity as marked by contradiction and contestation is far removed from forms of hybridity theory that embrace a simplistic notion of resistance or subversiveness and render this theory tendentiously ideological and, as some sociologists argue, simply another "universal liberalism that defined modernism" (Friedman 81). Naipaul's range of narrators, from Ralph Singh (*The Mimic Men*) to Salim (*A Bend in the River*), as well as his more autobiographical narrators in *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World* are located in the liminal spaces that capture the authentic hybrid moment. For Bhabha, the hybrid position is one of resistance not because it provides a revolutionary doctrine that opposes the hegemonic doctrine of the colonial power, but because it de-authorises the authority of the dominant discourse and opens up this discourse to difference. As Hardt and Negri elucidate, the criticism levelled at "postcolonial studies" rests in its prefix "post". Postcolonialism is contiguous with the aims of postmodernism. Both discourses "seek liberation from past forms of rule and their legacies in the present" (137). But Naipaul's approach does not rest easily in the liberatory discourse. The writings evince a "double consciousness" in as much as they portray the inextricable "entanglements" between the colonial subject and the intellectual heritage of the West. In this way, Naipaul is as much as a critic of a certain kind of postcolonial theory as he is one of its earliest exponents.

Rather than launch a literary counter attack on the metropolitan centre, as other postcolonial writers such as Kureishi, Rushdie, Achebe and Lamming have done, Naipaul attempts more subtle shifts, which allow for a reading of his literary aesthetics as a palimpsest. Instead of viewing conditions of modernism and postmodernism, colonialism and postcolonialism, in mutually exclusive terms, his condition of restlessness exemplifies the overlaps in time, space, culture and politics that prevent a view of these oppositionary historical and political projects as complete in themselves. This becomes more evident as the study progresses and is explored in chapters two, three and four.

The second chapter in this study deals with *A Bend in the River*, which explores a diasporic African landscape marked by violence in its state of political transition. Following an imperial tradition of fictional travel writers, Naipaul re-writes Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* from an Asiatic migrant perspective. As in *The Mimic Men*, his African fiction features a formerly colonised country on the cusp of social and political change. The recurrent tropes of home and cultural displacements are revisited in the diasporic African landscape. Here, however, Naipaul focuses on how the memory of the past contributes towards the destruction of postcolonial societies grappling with Western paradigms of modernity.

Naipaul's depiction of postcolonial Africa shows a society devastated by dictatorship, civil war and ethnic and ideological purification. By locating his protagonist as a minority figure, Naipaul is able to articulate fraught questions around culture and identity within an emerging national consciousness. *A Bend in the River* plays out the monstrous violence, reflective of the imperial and colonialist models. The violence arises from a universalising narrative that attempts to inscribe the "people" into a nation. Bhabha refers to this as a "pedagogical knowledge" ("Narrating the Nation" 218). Time and history are structured according to a linear, continuist narrative. The telos of the pedagogic disavows those moments that diverge from nationalist prescriptions. Thus, in writing the nation, there are multiple (and often paradoxical) temporalities impinging on the nation all at once. The postcolonial subject is, by virtue of slavery, colonisation and migration, also a hybrid subject – creolised, a melangé. Naipaul's version of Africa reveals the emptiness and the violence related to a fantastical return to a "true", unsullied past that *roots* the nation within a fixed historical and cultural tradition.

A Bend in the River differs from *The Mimic Men* where the narrator offers a personal account of the loss of self in the colonial encounter of metropole and periphery. In the African fiction, Naipaul focuses on how a split subject in the throes of national consciousness re-fashions the past. Naipaul engages with the contested and conflictual histories, epistemologies and multiple locales that shape the African Congo as it attempts to create a sense of national unity. For Naipaul, the imagined Congo's aspiration towards modernity is doomed to mimicry of a colonial order as its African leader attempts to recover Africa's lost past/heritage. The Negritude vision the African leader projects onto the country repeats the violence of

imperialism and colonisation. Of relevance to this argument is Mbembe's critique of Negritude ideals and the notion of "pure origins" captured in nativist discourses. Rather than assert what Africa is and what Africa is not, Mbembe discursively foregrounds the problems of methodology and definition Africa must engage with in order to arrive at a critical, self-reflexive awareness of its own plurality and the multiple discourses that are part of its past and its present. Mbembe's notion of "entanglements" includes the disparate, and contradictory discourses on Africa and questions the "possibility of [an] autonomous African subject" (*On the Postcolony* 9).

While chapters one and two deal with texts that are generically recognisable as autobiographical fiction and narrative fiction respectively, and that gesture towards key modernist texts, chapters three and four deal with texts that do not readily conform to existing generic categories. *The Enigma of Arrival* offers a meditative reflection of the English countryside and is written in such a way that it bends the conventions of the traditional novel genre by imploding the generic codes and conventions between autobiography, memoir and fiction. As the author-narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul destabilises the pastoral English landscape through his presence as a migrant. The text uses themes of cycle and rebirth as a way of illustrating the rise and fall of power through the cycles of nature, death and rebirth. Nevertheless, this is also a literary landscape that is reconstructed through the tradition of English landscape writing and portraiture. In this rural landscape he attempts to trace, topographically and discursively, his sense of belonging in England through fragments of textuality and the corrosiveness of English culture enshrined in its corroding manor and amidst the ruins of empire.

Unlike in *The Mimic Men* where the narrator is disappointed with the urban decay and his belated arrival in England, the author-narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival* settles in an English countryside reminiscent of Hardy and Wordsworth. Entering into landscape with a particular linguistic knowledge, Naipaul invokes a pastoral England, one that he is familiar with through literature. The mood and aura of the novel's setting is deeply elegiac and mournful. The melancholic mood is symbolic of a vanishing England – an idea of England that held a promise of wholeness, homogeneity and grandeur. The author-narrator in the text retreats into this anachronistic image of England, yet has the perspicacity to realise that his own

presence in the English countryside signifies a shift, a topographical and temporal displacement.

Naipaul's affiliation with a tradition of displaced modernist writers is once again foregrounded in *The Enigma of Arrival*. In his earlier writing, Naipaul is centrally concerned with the impact of colonial education and Western discourse on the psyche of the colonial subject, which produce conditions of psychic discord, colonial schizophrenia and colonial mimicry. Naipaul, like his writers and central protagonists, is a complexly (dis)placed colonial figure. In *The Enigma of Arrival* he intones a great sensitivity and warmth towards the English landscape and the inhabitants of Wiltshire. This, however, should not be read as a rejection of his past. In spite of Naipaul's attempts to distance himself from his colonial background, this background always re-surfaces in the autobiographical vein that attaches itself to his writing. This points towards Naipaul's complex and fraught relationship with the past. It is a space that he continuously revisits, and through his continuous re-writing of the past, he re-writes his own subjectivity. Reading Naipaul as a radical subversive who challenges (and shows a resistance towards) Western discourse does not account for the re-visionary aspects central to his work. *The Enigma of Arrival* unsettles the authority of authorial vision. It disturbs fixed notions of Englishness as "natural" or "primordial" and it uncovers the layers of textuality, history and tradition that shape the writer's reading (and understanding) of landscape he has settled in.

In *A Way in the World*, Naipaul again crosses both generic and cultural boundaries characteristic of the aesthetic and stylistic shifts of his latter writing period. He returns to some of the landscapes he has already travelled to and written about both in his fiction and in his non-fiction. In *A Way in the World* he steps into the slipstream of history. The text opens with Port-of Spain, in Trinidad, shifts to a brutal murder in Africa, re-creates Walter Raleigh's doomed expedition to the Orinoco, visits literary London of the 1950s and describes the invasion of South America, crossing spatial, temporal and cultural boundaries with great ease. The literary, geographic and cultural travels captured in the book suggest something of Naipaul's restlessness. The novel comprises elements of journalism, autobiography, travelogue and fiction. It is captures the poetics of the diaspora germane to Naipaul's oeuvre.

A Way in the World considers the world as a diasporic space where all nations and peoples have at some point been "dispossessed"; a world in a continuous state of flux and "movement" (Naipaul, "Two Worlds" 186). This diasporic consciousness plays itself out in the text through the nonchronological patterning and fragmentary structure – generic ambiguities reflecting subjective indeterminacy and excess. Central to Naipaul's concern in *A Way in the World* is how the existential condition of homelessness is shaped by the author's fragmented and dislocated history.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari have coined the phrase "deterritorialisation" ("What Is a Minor Literature?" 35) to denote what it means to speak and write from the position of a minority, or a nomad, within a dominant discourse and to dismantle its authority, "to steal the baby from its crib [and] walk the tightrope" ("What Is a Minor Literature?" 39). It is an enabling concept in assessing Naipaul's work. The author does not seek to claim a land or a place or territory but rather, as this latter novel shows, seeks to uncover the stories, myths and legends that make landscapes and its people real in a discursive sense. Naipaul's aim lacks overt political purpose but it engages with the politics of subjectivity and the politics of writing.

Before I proceed with my readings of the given texts in the chapters that follow, using the conceptual framework I have provided in this introduction and fleshing out the implications of "double consciousness" and cultural "entanglements" as they are manifested in these texts, I wish to expand first on the significance of exile in respect of Naipaul and his writings. While critics have tended to foreground this condition in responding to its impact on Naipaul as a writer, not all have done so favourably.

The restlessness that underpins Naipaul's work is perceived to be symptomatic of his own nomadic existence. His condition of exile is seen to play a significant role in how he views the societies that have become the subject of his anatomical gaze. In Naipaul's own view, his condition of exile makes him a man who can claim no tradition, no past, no ancestors and no sense of belonging: cultural, national or geographical. He lingers in a liminal space unable to claim any

place (or tradition) as his own. Paul Theroux provides an insightful critique of Naipaul's place and position in his early criticism of the writer's work:

> He is in his own words 'without a past, without ancestors', 'a little ridiculous and unlikely'. His is a condition of homelessness. It has the single advantage of enabling him to become a working resident – as much a resident in India as anywhere else – and allows him a depth of insight that is denied the metropolitan. For the rootless person, every country is a possible temporary home; but for Naipaul, there is no return, either to a past or a place […] Naipaul is the first of his line, without a tradition or a home. (*V.S. Naipaul* 78)

The idea of "home" operates on at least two levels: geographical (physical/spatial locus) and conceptual. On a conceptual level, the notion of home is closely affiliated to culture and society. Nationalism and ideologies of the state seek to create a notion of national belonging that serves to unify the nation, in order to create a singular and united culture, which encourages feelings of belonging, of being "at home". The idea of home, at a more personal and intimate level, is associated with family, with mores, moral and traditional values; this "private" or domestic sphere is shaped by the context in which that "home" is located and vice versa. This boundary between public and the private, as Homi Bhabha claims in "The World and the Home", is not as distinct and absolute as has been endorsed by a world-view based upon a binary logic, but overlaps and opens up spaces that are disjunctive, hybrid and ambivalent. Bhabha uses immigrant identities to show how the migrant figure occupies a liminal space and thereby disrupts the dialectic.

Naipaul carefully constructs for his reader his extranational affiliations through language, religion and the kinds of people in the texts featured in this study. In his seminal essay "Jasmine", Naipaul draws upon, in a very sympathetic way, the dislocation he has inherited through his colonial upbringing, a dislocation that reflects on the relationship between the self and language. Jasmine is a word on a page, but the word held no reality for him. In what has become a Naipaulian theme, words become something for him to play with, and the reality of the word holds only a partial knowledge for him. It is from this "in-between" space, between word and its meaning, between colonial and postcolonial, that Naipaul chooses to focus his anatomical gaze, a position from which he considers the world and from which he writes.

In his critical essay on Naipaul's position as exile, Rob Nixon takes issue with the rhetorical way Naipaul uses his marginalized position, claiming that the notion of "writer in exile" or Naipaul's "willed homelessness" is one that is used with poetic license where "Naipaul can trumpet his alienation while implicitly drawing on a secure, reputable tradition of extratraditionalism" ("London Calling" 11). Nixon's argument is premised on the fact that Naipaul has chosen to remain in England and has been since the 1970s, which raises the question of the extent to which the writer be considered an exile, or without nationality, when he holds a British passport and when, in a material sense, Britain provides Naipaul with a home. Nixon poses some pertinent questions, but what he fails to realise, in my opinion, is that for those who have been long dispossessed of a homeland, the world becomes a place that is transient, and thus the idea of home is always something that is provisional. Furthermore, in an age of mass migrations and transnational movements, the notion of home has become increasingly tenuous and perhaps no longer exists except as an affect of acculturation in the claim of nation and citizen.

Similarly, Nayantra Sahgal takes issue with the way in which the position of exile has been appropriated to signal a lack of home, even if exile is chosen. Her central concern is that Naipaul's exile is located in the former imperial centre. What she fails to recognise in her concern with the semantic shift of the term the "exile" is that through transnational movements the only constant is change; even the linguistic sign of exile undergoes re-vision and re-inscription with the changing landscapes. Sahgal's self-defined position of a nationalist Indian identity and heralding a position of rootedness, of home, belonging and national culture reflects her own unease and difficulties with a world subject to such indeterminacy.

Both Nixon and Sahgal interpret Naipaul's exilic condition far too literally. Naipaul's claims that his exile is prevalent on all levels "literal, existential and transcendental" (Nixon, "London Calling" 3), allows for such attack. Nixon and Sahgal see the West as imbued with status and affluence and better material conditions than the Third World. There is of course truth to their assertions; however, Naipaul's occupation in the West is persistently insecure and estranged. His residency in England might constitute that it is a home in a physical sense, but *how* he occupies that landscape, as the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival*

elucidates, is imbued with unease and insecurity. To push this point further, his exilic condition is also a way of seeing the world, through the position of a nomad, occupying the margins in order to maintain a critical distance from the dominant discourse and culture.

As the image of Nietzche's wanderer evokes, it is a condition of restlessness determined by the lack of absolutes. This vision, some may argue, is nihilistic since one is always combating inertia and aporias of thought. The wanderer, because s/he does not takes sides and sees the futility in committing to any thought or idea or system, is never able to take a position, but rather to see the absurdity in holding a position (thought, ideal, identity) that is so easily trapped within a totalising consciousness. The problem, of course, is how one might speak of a *non*position while holding a position.

In an essay on Desiderius Erasmus, J.M. Coetzee explains that Erasmus, "a critic of clerical worldliness", was unable to choose between "the side[s] of the Lutheran radicals [and] their conflict with the Papacy" ("Erasmus: Madness and Rivalry" 83). Refusing to claim a side in this rivalry, Erasmus sees how both factions seem more alike in their rivalry despite their loudly asserted differences. In *The Praise of Folly* Erasmus, as Coetzee elucidates, occupies the well-established political role of the fool "who claims to criticise all and sundry without reprisal, since his madness defines him as not fully a person and therefore not a political being with political desires and ambitions" ("Erasmus: Madness and Rivalry" 84). Erasmus, then, presents a possibility for the critic of political rivalry to take up a position that is not only impartial but by self-definition removes him from the scene of political rivalry, and therefore occupies a *non*position. The *non*position is a "highly self-aware reflection on the limitations of any project speaking on behalf of madness [the marginalised]" (Coetzee, "Erasmus: Madness and Rivalry" 84).

The role of jester that Coetzee proposes in his reading of Erasmus's *non*position accords with my reading of Naipaul. Naipaul similarly occupies the role of the fool in the literary arena. Naipaul is sceptical of committing himself to a side, not because he lacks the wit or intelligence to do so, but because his intellectual rigour is such that he is aware that to choose a side "is not always to

choose an ally: it is sometimes to choose a foe" (Coetzee, "Erasmus: Madness and Rivalry" 83).

Critics of Naipaul's vision (Said, Cudjoe, Walcott) will object to this assertion, accusing Naipaul of assuming an ideological "whiteness" and unfairly inflecting a Western gaze on the postcolonial societies he writes of. He is, according to these critics, not completely without a side. In an interview with *Newsweek*, journalist Edward Behr posed the following question: "'It might be that a writer born in Trinidad of Indian descent would come out emotionally on the side of the Third World, yet you are its most ruthless critic?'" (38) Naipaul offers a pointed response:

> People love making simple distinctions – left, right, colonialist, anti-colonialist – and if they have trouble fitting you in, they do just the same […] Many people just judge me in a purely Marxist way. It gives them a way of considering the world. (38)

His response signals his commitment to a vision that opposes reductive binary thinking and ideological entrapment. The novels in this study reflect the inability of locating Naipaul's position in the world because he is attempting something outside of these paradigms: a world-view that recognises multiplicities. His central focus is on the overlap of time, culture and ideas that produce civilizations, not from an essential core, but through contact with different people, cultures and their epistemologies. This is not a "cosmopolitan" outlook but rather a vision that carefully assesses the measure of nuance, of flux and movement that is both playful and painful. He uses the novel as a form of social inquiry into social totality and social subjectivities. His literary approach is to take on a literary persona in his work, to re-visit landscapes and re-write them, to re-inscribe from a *different* point of view.

TWO

The Politics and Poetics of Writing:
V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*

The being of man is founded in language. (C.L.R. James)

V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* portrays the states of psychic unease that plays out in the interior monologue of the narrator/protagonist, Ralph Kripal Singh. Singh is a retired West Indian colonial politician, who writes his memoirs while living in self-imposed exile in a private London hotel. Singh writes his memoirs as an attempt at giving his life a sense of order and cohesion. For Singh, "[t]o be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder" (*The Mimic Men* 127). His narrative moves in non-chronological fashion between his life in England and in the West Indies, shifting between the past and the present, childhood and adulthood, fantasy and reality. The narrator delivers these events in a detached, despairing tone to the point where, at the end of the novel, he appears as nothing more than an insecure man living an anonymous, ghostly existence in a transient-style private hotel in a London suburb.

The Mimic Men proffers a view of the postcolonial subject struggling to find a sense of locality and subjectivity within a shifting political epoch. Ralph Singh writes in order to examine the way in which his *subjectivity* has been constituted by the colonial experience and the ramifications of that in a period of postcolonial independence. The very nature of the colonial subject's experience is rooted in uncertainty and uprootment; identity-formation is always contingent and, as Singh, experiences it, fragmentary and haphazard. His narrative is located at the interstices, at the struggle between psychic representation and social reality.

Singh is the tragic anti-hero of Naipaul's more serious fiction following the success of *A House for Mr Biswas*. Comedy no longer serves the maturing writer; it becomes emptied and meaningless. Naipaul turns to face the pathos and tragedy of the colonial condition with a searing and penetrative gaze. The realism and detail

given to the Caribbean landscape and the matrix of social relationships depicted in *A House for Mr Biswas* is replaced with a detail that is more psychological in nature.

As with most of Naipaul's central characters, Ralph Singh is a writer. Unlike Mr Biswas who uses writing as a means of escape from his claustrophobic communal clan identity, Ralph Singh enters the literary arena as an attempt to record the events in his life as a way of creating a sense of cohesion and order, to arrive at some degree of self-knowledge. The bulk of his memories concern his life in Isabella. What is of central concern to Naipaul in his portrayal of Singh is how Singh's subjectivity is constituted through language.

Out of this desolate atmosphere emerges one of Naipaul's most persistent themes in his oeuvre, the theme of loss and abandonment. Naipaul exhibits a deep curiosity with his ancestral Indian past. In his travelogue *The Middle Passage*, he takes a deeper look at the migration of his ancestors who had to travel by sea from the subcontinent to the New World colony. This journey, "the middle passage", essentially a human cargo, transporting indentured labourers and slaves to imperial colonies, evokes the context of slavery, colonisation and uprootment which has a significant impact on the constitution of the self as it is politically and culturally represented. The theme of loss and abandonment plays out through the concerns the novel exhibits in relation to displacement, re-settlement and the construction of "home".

In Naipaul's successful epic, *A House for Mr Biswas*, he explores the impact of re-location on the minority Indian community in Trinidad. Hanuman House (named after the Hindu monkey god) occupied by the Tulsi family represent the Indian communities who have travelled with India in their bags and unrolled it, like a mat, onto the new environment. Mohun Biswas rebels against the restrictive identity imposed on him by his in-laws. Mr Biswas is also a product of the colonial condition; his self is also "split" and overdetermined. As an inheritor of a slave heritage, his sense of self is governed by a primal lack, which he seeks to recover through the acquisition of a home. His quest for a home is as much as a quest for an identity in which he has the power to choose. Singh is similar to Biswas except Singh is located at a later stage of the island's social evolution (Cudjoe 20). The backdrop of the cultural and ethnic absolutism in *A House for Mr Biswas* captured

through the restrictive ideals in the Hanuman House is threatened with rupture and breakdown as the Indian community strives to be both Indian and modern. *The Mimic Men* traces the evolution of the slave descendents at a later stage, at a time of independence. The island is a matrix of polycultural and heterogeneous forms, which prevents the view of culture, politics, race, ethnicity and nationality as mutually exclusive terms. Singh finds himself in an (insecure) liminal position, as British colonial subject, a Caribbean national and an Indian through ancestral affiliation.

In Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* he, similarly, addresses the experience of uprootment on the migrant consciousness and the position of the exiled writer at pains to re-create a lost past: "[to] reflect on that world "[the writer] is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (11). Singh's attempt at psychic representation of the colonial experience is perhaps a narrative of a survivor of the colonial shipwreck who only has broken pieces with which to weave his narrative. His narrative, its form and content, embodies that fracture.

The novel begins with Singh as a student in England in his stark, "multi-mirrored, book-shaped room" (*The Mimic Men* 3). The multiple form of the mirror immediately reflects the pluralized selves Singh encounters. His recognition of his "split" self and the multiple positions he occupies foregrounds the ambivalence and indeterminacy of his subjectivity. It is precisely through his pluralized selves, and the difficulty in (geographically and culturally) locating those selves in the world, that Singh experiences a profound existential crisis.

The indeterminacy and ambivalence surrounding Singh's consciousness is, in part, attributed to his relationship with empire through the colonial text. The narrative never reveals which English university Singh attends or the subject he is doing, but the close affinities between author and narrator allows the reader to entertain the notion that the university is Oxford and the narrator is reading English.[4] The setting and context is significant as it points towards the collusion between the colonial subject, the colonial text and imperial education. Locating his narrator in a

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[4] The biographical details identifying author with narrator are a recurring stylistic feature in Naipaul's oeuvre. In *The Mimic Men* Ralph Singh, like the author, is of Caribbean origins with Indian ancestry, studied at what is very likely Oxford and embarked on a literary career in London.

"book-shaped" room introduces the literary tradition the author is immersed in. Singh, like Naipaul, is writing a book. His narrative attempts to give shape to a colonial migrant's experience of exile and displacement and the effects of colonisation on the psyche of the colonial subject. The role of the nineteenth-century text as a form of acculturation, of mimicry and domination in respect of the colonial subject, has significant ramifications for how Singh perceives of his sense of self and his locality in the world. Literature is not simply an aesthetic practice but has significant impact on the role of culture in society, and the inscription of national identity: instilling a practice of cultural belonging and inclusivity.

The relationship between the imperial centre and its former colony is essentially a relationship of asymmetrical power. Postcolonial theory has convincingly demonstrated the role of the English text as a medium of power, control and domination in which empire was able to extend its power over the colonial subject. As Edward Said postulates in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, "texts and words are so much of the world that their effectiveness […] are matters having to do with ownership, authority, power and the imposition of force" (48). Said, like Frantz Fanon, asserts that a dominant discourse ensures that cultural hegemony is maintained. Discourse, and effectively a text, is not a rarefied object that is suspended "somehow in the air […] without a world" (Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* 34). Rather, Said posits that texts (and discourse) are "worldly" (35); they are "enmeshed in circumstances, time, place and society" (*The World, the Text and the Critic* 35).

The concern that Said raises, then, is how are we, as speakers of a language that is a dominant discourse and readers of texts within that discourse, to interpret the way in which we read a text and are implicated (positioned culturally, spatially and temporally) within its discourse. *The Mimic Men* presents a sustained engagement with these very concerns in the discursive field of postcolonial studies. The tension of Singh's position, like most colonial subjects, as Paul Gilroy elucidates in *The Black Atlantic*, is

> a special political problem that arise[s] from the fatal junction of nationality with concepts of culture and the affinities and affiliations which links blacks [read postcolonial subject] of the West to one of their adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West since the Enlightenment. (2)

The thrust of my argument reflects the complex positions and ideologies that impinge upon the psyche and locality of the postcolonial subject. Edward Said's argument proves valuable in its unveiling of the discourse of power that characterises the conflictual economy of colonial discourse and subjectivity. The neutrality and authority of the West, instituted in the Enlightenment period, is thus questioned. Naipaul's characterisation of Singh, however, shows that despite the asymmetrical power play between the coloniser and the colonised, Singh remains deeply entangled with empire. He experiences a sense of loss and abandonment when the colonisers relinquish official control of the colony. Singh has consciously adopted the West as a parent culture – he shares the West's intellectual heritage, hence his position in the "book-shaped room".

In order for Singh to have a critical and self-reflexive outlook on empire, he must make his narrative *embody* that experience. At the end of his memoir Singh contemplates the various roles he has performed in the city:

> [w]hich I have known as student, politician and now as refugee-immigrant, to impose order on my own history, to abolish that disturbance which is what a narrative in sequence might have led me to. (*The Mimic Men* 266)

What Singh's narrative attempts to do, then, is to test Enlightenment assumptions about culture, value and aesthetics as a universal moral standard and unsettle its linear narrative structure that encourages a view of the subject as a coherent unit (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 10). Furthermore, Singh's self-reflexive position enables him, retrospectively, to note the performativity of his own subjectivity and the changes to his own sense of self, which is at odds with the fixity of the self espoused through Enlightenment ideals.

Naipaul, however, does not lapse into the binary logic of "us" versus "them". Instead, his authorial stance is ambivalently located. As much as he critiques Enlightenment assumptions, he questions the colonial margins' complicity in mimicking models of imperial power. The novel is at once a subversive strategy critiquing the notion of a "unitary", "ordered" and "coherent" English society (stemming from the Enlightenment) but it also critiques the deployment of national unity discourse in the colonies. Relevant to the fictionalised portrait of Naipaul's

Caribbean island is that its independence was not fought for in a Fanonian sense of revolution but was sanctioned by its imperial master. For Fanon, a colonial subject who has not fought for his freedom remains a slave. Singh's choice of exile articulates, as Gilroy asserts of the modern black subject, "a desire to escape the restrictive bonds of ethnicity, national identification and sometimes even 'race' itself" (*The Black Atlantic* 19). While Singh's exilic condition enables him to emerge as a "free man" (*The Mimic Men* 274) at the end of the novel, the novel seeks to interrogate how the colonial subject is able to be truly autonomous when s/he is entangled in the discourses of empire that have shape his/her sense of self.

In *Black Skins White Masks*, Fanon reflects upon the role of language in the colonial relationship between imperial possession of language and the colonial subject's mimicry of that language:

> To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, *to support the weight of a civilization*. […] A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at is plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power. (17-18; emphasis added)

Fanon, of course, is referring to the dilemma of the colonised, and his/her acculturation, through language, in relation to the French coloniser's values and ways of being. Fanon succinctly identifies that language cannot be isolated from the "world" or "culture" in which it is embedded. It is this embeddedness in an imperial language and culture that Naipaul seeks to address in *The Mimic Men.*

It is useful to approach Singh's existential crisis through Fanon's understanding of the phenomenon of language and the colonial subject. In Fanon's essay on "The Negro and Language" he explores how the immersion in an imperial culture and discourse results in a self-division in the colonial subject played out through conditions of schizophrenia, cultural dislocation and alienation. In Fanon's view, the colonial subject inherits an inferiority complex when forced to surrender his/her local culture (language) and accept an imperial discourse. The better acculturated the colonial subject becomes in the "civilising" discourse and cultural standards of the metropole, the closer s/he is to becoming European. Imperial education enforces and encourages such forms of mimicry. Implicit in the act of

mimicry is the desire, of the colonial subject, to appropriate models of power in order to overcome his/her primal lack (of power, of discourse and of presence).

The self-division of the subject is played out in the novel through images of fracture, fragmentation and incompleteness. This disjunctive and fractured consciousness, the novel intimates, is a result of Singh's liminal position in the Caribbean, as part of a minority Indian community, but is also attributed to the impact of metropolitan education (and identity) in the colonies. Singh's initiation into the discourse of colonial authority begins with his first day at school. Singh's dream of the coronation of the King and the "weight of his crown" (*The Mimic Men* 97) articulates the "weight" of imperial authority on the young colonial subject. The image of the crown has a metonymic function in that it (re) places imperial authority in the colony and reveals the mimicry of power the colonial subject performs to imperial models of power. Imperial authority, however, comes from outside, which Singh perceives of as the "real" world. The weight of empire is supported by the colonies. In Singh's imaginary, his condition of colonial mimicry begins with his education. What is telling about Singh's vision of the crown is that it appears to him in a dream, in the realm of the unconscious. The stage upon which this knowledge unfolds is one of disjuncture, uncertainty and ambivalence. Long before Singh comes to London and is disillusioned with metropolitan life, he is (unconsciously) aware that he has been effectively crippled by his imperial education:

> I dreamt that in this city I was being carried helplessly down a swiftly flowing river, the Thames, that sloped, and I could only break my fall by guiding my feet to the concrete pillars of the bridge […] and in my dream I felt the impact and knew that I had broken my legs and lost their use for ever. (*The Mimic Men* 97)

Though the image is cryptic, it captures Singh's psychic terror and his feelings of uprootment, fracture and incompleteness. Throughout, the spirit of the novel is dedicated to revealing the sense of despair and pain incumbent on the loss of self, of home and place resulting from Singh's colonial condition. In this way, Naipaul purposively structures his novel within the Manichean colonial paradigm: centre/periphery, order/disorder, completion/fragmentation, lightness/darkness and being/nothingness, to reflect the colonialist thinking in which Singh's consciousness emerges. The operations of power that govern this paradigm validate Western authority in the colonies. Singh believes that the "real" world lies outside of the

island: "in Liege, […] on the snow slopes of Laurentians, [is] the true, pure world" (*The Mimic Men* 157). By structuring the narrative into this Manichean world, Naipaul is able to give shape to the sense of lack and shame Singh feels is his inheritance as a colonial subject. Singh's narrative embodies his creolised and fragmented colonial upbringing with an idea of the West as "whole", "coherent" and "ordered". Thus, when Singh travels to London, as a young student, he seeks to find what is denied him in the colony: a sense of self, to recover his lack. But Singh's first trip to London is marred. He laments, "[s]o quickly had London gone sour on me. The great city, centre of the world, in which, fleeing disorder, I had hoped to find the beginning of order" (*The Mimic Men* 17).

In *The Rise of the Colonial Novel*, Firdous Azim explains that the nineteenth-century novel form was a "linguistic and philosophical task" that attempted to define its subject as "homogenous and consistent" (10). In *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul writes: "I came to London. It had become the centre of my world and I had worked hard to come to it. And I was lost. London was not the centre of my world. I had been misled; but there was nowhere else to go" (*The Mimic Men* 42). The character of Singh is similarly disappointed when he discovers that his "received models of England and Englishness" (McLeod 19) are a fabrication. When Singh's idea of England as "the centre" falls apart, so does his own subjectivity. Singh's sense of self is inextricably linked to empire. His realisation that London is not the "great city" he had cultivated in his dreams (or rather what had been cultivated for him by Enlightenment ideals) has both ontological and existential ramifications for him: "[c]oming to London, the great city, seeking order, seeking the flowering, the extension of myself […] I had tried to give myself a personality […] But now I no longer knew who I was" (*The Mimic Men* 26).

His inability to locate himself in London is marked by feelings of ambivalence and psychic unease. Fanon addresses the colonial dilemma that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (*Black Skin White Masks* 18). Fanon argues that the colonial subject is only able to speak and therefore, represent itself, through an imperial discourse. Even though Singh speaks the imperial discourse he does not, as he finds out, belong to its esteemed culture. He remains on the periphery living among an immigrant community. One must, then, ask, what *psychological* shifts occur in the mind of the colonised who *speak,* and *write* in the

language of the Other? The merger between one's native language and culture with the discourse of the Other, in Homi Bhabha's understanding, gives way to an estrangement or split in the psyche of the native. But as Bhabha also points out, "splitting" and "doubling" of the colonial subject gives way to an understanding of culture and its concomitant tropes of language, identity and representation as inordinately disjunctive, hybrid and indeterminate (*The Location of Culture* 91).

Though Bhabha asserts a resistance politics immanent within the colonial subject's mimicry of the coloniser's discourse, this is not all that apparent in Naipaul's portrayal of Singh. Singh's dislocated and deracinated experience result in a hybrid consciousness in the colonial figure from a young age. While he is at school, he decides to break up his name into R.R.K. Singh, telling the teacher that he "is correctly reviving an ancient fracture" (*The Mimic Men* 100). He adds to his birth name, Ranjit, an anglicised version, Ralph. He tells the teacher that his birth name, Ranjit, is his "secret name" (*The Mimic Men* 100) and that he is to be called Ralph. His full name is therefore, Ralph Ranjit Kripal Singh. This story is by no means idiosyncratic. His fractured name reflects the fragmented nature of Singh's consciousness. His anglicised name augurs an ideological shift towards Englishness.

This crisis in naming himself, connotes deeply with his crisis in subjectivity. It captures the irony and tragedy of Singh's condition. His sense of self is sundered and split through colonial discourse but also through his cultural dislocation from his ancestral land; his name bears the burden of these fractures. Yet it also reveals an ambition and an insight in Singh. His father has to sign an affidavit to affirm that the son he had sent out into the world as Ranjit Kripalsingh was one and the same, Ralph Singh. The irony is complete. Here, one could concur with Cudjoe who asserts that Singh is a product of the colonial condition and part of the first-generation of freed East Indians, who are able to choose their own identities even if they choose the incorrect one (100). If one were to follow Cudjoe's argument, that Singh is unable to sever the colonial umbilical cord, it follows that Singh forces his father's hand to relinquish his parental control and allows Singh to adopt the West as a parent culture.[5] Yet, Singh's locality in the postcolonial world (London and Isabella) is marked with uncertainty, ambivalence and fragmentation.

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[5] Edward Said in *The World, the Text and the Critic* lucidly explores the severing of "filial" bonds in favour of "affiliative" bonds of connection where the individual is free to choose a culture, institution,

By writing his memoirs, Singh is "attracted less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied" (*The Mimic Men* 32). It allows him to be more self-aware and self-reflexive of the fact that his subjectivity is constituted through the colonial condition which, in itself, is a condition of "splitting" and "dissembling" (Bhabha, "Narrating the nation" 7). Singh, thus, uses writing as a means to contain and control his life, which he feels is disordered, haphazard and fragmentary. Singh with his aspirations to becoming a writer cannot divorce the literary from the political (Suleri 155). In a collection of essays entitled *Literary Occasions*, collator and editor Pankaj Mishra explains that Naipaul's work exhibits a "mismatch" between his "father's ambition coming from outside, from another culture" and the Indian/Trinidadian community "which had no living literary tradition" (Naipaul qtd. in Mishra x).[6] The presence of the colonial text in the colonies imposes, as Naipaul says, a "vision [that] was alien; it diminished my own and did not give the courage to do a simple thing like mentioning the name of a Port-of-Spain street" ("Jasmine" 47). A writer is a product of his society. Thus, to be an inheritor of a slave society, one must recognise the *inferiority complex* such a society inherits through the Manichean aesthetics of the colonial paradigm. Also, as part of a slave society, one must recognise the "split" and fracturing of the self that renders any belief in a "whole" "complete" subject illusory.[7]

It is the recognition of his "incompleteness" that causes such distress in Singh. It is recognising that the "incompleteness" is complete. The "damaged" colonial migrant has suffered a loss of language, culture and home, which can never

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group or set of beliefs that will provide a new relationship (*The World, the Text and the Critic* 19). Critics have read Naipaul's position as one that is closely affiliated to a Western literary and cultural tradition with the author thereby adopting the West as a parent culture. Naipaul's condition of homelessness and exile supports his affiliative associations by breaking ties with family, class, home, country and traditional beliefs and in doing so, affiliates his voice with a group of displaced modernist writers such as Lawrence, Pound, Joyce, Eliot and Conrad in order to achieve spiritual and intellectual freedom from the constraints of nation and culture. For Naipaul, however, the need of the artist to be a free man is not one of levity but involves a deep sense of melancholia and suffering.

[6] Naipaul has often paid tribute to his father as a source of inspiration. His earlier sketches set in the tropicalised Port-of-Spain, such as the epic tragic-comedy, *A House for Mr Biswas* and the series of short stories, *Miguel Street*, were inspired by the one and only collection of short stories his father had ever written, *Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales*.

[7] My assertion of the "split" colonial subject is informed by Homi Bhabha's reading of the colonial paradigm and the discourses that have shaped it. See Homi K. Bhabha, Foreword."Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition". Furthermore, the notion of the '"split" subject is imperative to understanding the anxieties and aporias that govern Naipaul's narrators as much as the author himself.

be regained. Singh's attempt to "root" himself a "home" in Isabella, modelled on the Roman impluvium, is doomed to be destroyed, illustrating, in Naipaul's typically ironic tone, that the damage to the Self is far deeper, that the idea of home and belonging no longer exists in this time of "the unnatural bringing together of peoples […] which this great upheaval has brought about" (*The Mimic Men* 32).

Singh's position as a colonial politician in Isabella is portrayed as largely inauthentic. Singh is the mimic man who uses imperial models of power and feigns an identity for himself. Singh's shift in career, from businessman to his vocation as a writer is treated more seriously than his previous roles: the colonial dandy, the husband, the businessman and the politician. Initially, Singh appears as a mimic man, along with his childhood school friends, Deschampneufs, Hok, Browne and Cecil, mimicking conditions of manhood. Despite the anxiety and discord that pervades his sense of self, he appears ambitious and successful. Singh, the writer, reflecting on his past selves, sees the inanity in these roles. It is Singh, the writer, who recognises that the colonial subject's life is deeply entangled with the discourse of power, that is, with empire. Singh's despair at his colonial inheritance presents a grim reality for the postcolonial subject who attempts to fashion a way forward beyond imperial authority. Singh's perception of such autonomy is bleak:

> [w]e lack order. Above all, we lack power, and we do not understand that we lack power. We mistake words and the acclamation of words for power. (*The Mimic Men* 6)

Returning to Isabella after his study abroad, Singh becomes part of the "cosmopolitan" middle class on the island. These newly returned *evolués* carry a certain status because they have been to the "outside" world, a world beyond the provincial island, a world associated with status, prestige and value. In Isabella, in the throes of social and political transition, a new discourse is needed to represent the shifting social, cultural and political landscape of the society. Isabella is a highly creolised society, with many dialects, patois and argots. English is, however, the national language.

Singh's view of the island is that its resistance and liberation politics is trapped in a hegemonic discourse. The discourse, in Singh's view, comes from the centre. The postcolonial subject has the use of the word, but power comes from

controlling discourse. That language is power is only true for those who control it. Singh, however, is only able to assess this about his society while he is distanced from it. While located in Isabella, he too is drawn to the "need for a national literature [and culture]" (*The Mimic Men* 266). His exilic lens enables him to assess Isabella and its society, perhaps, more objectively. But it also begs the question: how much of a metropolitan identity has Singh usurped according to which he judges his society?

Singh, who in many ways is and is not Naipaul, harbours an uneasy relationship with both the metroplis and the colony.[8] As Robert Greenberg and Selwyn Cudjoe argue, *The Mimic Men* is a political text born out of a specific historico-political milieu and questions the authenticity of a Caribbean society's psychological, cultural, economic and political independence from its erstwhile colonial rulers. According to Cudjoe, what is of interest to Naipaul about such societies are the terms of engagement with their autonomy, though Naipaul fails, he argues, to evaluate these societies on their own terms, doing so instead through "western eyes"[9]. Cudjoe's materialist reading of Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* stresses the importance of understanding the colonial subject through a subjectivity constituted by and positioned *in relation to* historical and social forces.

Though Cudjoe is a sensitive reader of Naipaul's work, he takes issue with Naipaul's representation of Isabella (and Third World societies in general), failing to see the island in *relational* terms. According to Cudjoe, "Singh […] sees only the behaviour of the colonised people as savage and sympathises entirely with the coloniser" (109). In Cudjoe's estimation, Naipaul fails to "question the assumptions of the colonisers or their ideological formulations of the state" (110).

Here, Cudjoe is aligned with a body of critics who criticise Naipaul's vision of the Third World. Rob Nixon, a former student of Edward Said, presents the most

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[8] Many critics and scholars agree that the character Ralph Singh bears echoes of Naipaul. As explained earlier, there are some shared biographical details between the narrator and the author. However, Singh and Naipaul cannot be conflated. Singh is a colonial figure dependent on Anglophone mimicry to arrive at a sense of self. Through the process of writing Singh's character into a fictional world, Naipaul creates a distance between him and the narrator which allows him to reflect on the character through a distanced and detached authorial gaze.

[9] Cudjoe never actually explains what he means by evaluating the Third World "on their own terms". He accuses Naipaul of inflecting Western standards onto these societies, which is a valid point, but how are these societies to be assessed in the context of their heterogeneity and hybridity which is entangled both with indigenous cultural practices and beliefs as well as Western practices?

recent vitriolic criticisms of Naipaul's oeuvre in his book, *V.S. Naipaul: Postcolonial Mandarin*. Nixon proposes that Naipaul's representation of Third World societies as "primitive", "backward" and "mimetic" is a "limited idiom", and that Naipaul's vision is "trapped in a Victorian, imperialist vision of these Third World cultures" (110). Such critique of the writer heralded by Irving Howe and V.S. Pritchett as "one of Britain's finest" (*Contemporary Authors* 328) is not unusual. Famed scholars and writers, from Edward Said to Derek Walcott, take issue with Naipaul's representation of the Third World as parodies of liberated, modernised states. Cudjoe asserts that in *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul's narrative embodies the negative and unsympathetic feelings he has towards these societies, seeing them only as absurd and "laugh[ing] a little too much [at the developing world]" (110). In Cudjoe's critique of Singh, he asserts that Singh's (and Naipaul) subjectivity is far too ensnared in the mother country, which stunts his development of self-actualisation. Singh is unable to unshackle himself from the colonial yoke.

Cudjoe's critique, however, fails to acknowledge the transitional and disorderly London the young protagonist witnesses during his years of study in the imperial centre, which fuels his existential and ontological crisis. In his book, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, John McLeod, "[focuses] attention upon the heterogeneous, diverse and polycultural character of the city's society and culture" (7). McLeod's study draws upon a body of work conducted by scholars such as Paul Gilroy and Elleke Boehmer that addresses the diversity and heterogeneity of London's spaces constituted through transnational travel and immigration both before and after the Second World War. In his introductory chapter, "London, England" McLeod focuses on three immigrant writers who come to imperial England seeking to find a homogeneous (and an imperious) English culture nurtured abroad, in its colonies, through literature and film. For these literary figures (Naipaul, Lessing and Frame), McLeod points out, "there is a conflict between received models of Englishness" (19) and the heterogeneous, polycultural landscape in post-war Britain. For these writers, London symbolised not only a revered cultural milieu but also an idealised literary world.

In Naipaul's imaginary, the residue of ruin and devastation in post-war Britain along with the influx of immigrant communities is met with despair. Britain is as much a postcolonial space, that is, a space of heterogeneity and hybridity, as its

newly independent colonies. The perceived decline in London encourages a notion that he has come to the city too late. The narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival* muses over this sense of belatedness: "I grew to feel that the grandeur belonged to the past; that I had come to England at the wrong time; that I had come too late to find the England, the heart of empire, which […] I had created in my fantasy" (82).

Singh's psychic unease is attributed to the discourses he is located in and which shapes his subjectivity. He is caught between the discourses of his ancestors that develop his Hindu sensibility and his colonial background develops his sense of Western metaphysics. While McLeod's analysis locates Naipaul's engagement with a destabilised centre and thereby serves to critique the notion of a "unitary" and "ordered" English society (and self), *The Mimic Men* straddles the two worlds of London and Isabella, and locates the liminal space that Singh occupies through cultural dislocations and the effects of slavery and colonisation. Cudjoe's analysis is enabling, in that it locates Singh in relation to the social, political and historical forces that impact politically and psychologically on the colonial subject.

Singh's references to the collusion between empire and education illustrate to what extent he is moored within an English cultural and literary milieu. Stylistically, the narrative adopts a modernist aesthetic and Naipaul's allusions to an English literary tradition highlight the poetics of his writing. David Lodge offers a definition of modern fiction in his book *The Modes of Modern Writing*:

> Modernist fiction is concerned with consciousness, and also with the unconscious and subconscious workings of the human mind […] Modernist fiction eschews the straight, chronological ordering of its material and the use of a reliable, omniscient narrator […] It employs […] a single, limited point of view or a method of multiple points of view […] and tends towards a fluid […] handling of time. (Lodge qtd. in Goldman 68)

These guiding principles to modernist fiction are mirrored in *The Mimic Men* with Naipaul's construction of a highly self-reflexive narrator, and the overlap between the personal and the cultural that is reminiscent of the work of James Joyce, who similarly embraced cultural exile as a condition of writing. Singh's cultural paralysis recalls Joyce's portrayal of Stephen Dedalus. The fragmentary temporal scope of the novel and the repetitive motifs, symbols and images interwoven through the structure of the novel reflect Naipaul's modernist experimentation with the novel

form. Joyce's novel serves as an iconic symbol of the *avant garde* – the newness of the novel form – characteristic of that time.[10] The affinities between *The Mimic Men* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as narratives in which artistic development is premised on disaffection with and alienation from nation and home, show the deep embeddedness of the author in the literary tradition of the metropolitan centre.[11]

Dolly Hassan posits that *The Mimic Men* is based upon real events and historical figures from the Caribbean.[12] Hassan and Greenberg argue that these allusions to real events and characters are indicative of the postcolonial writer's quest to give representation to his world(s). In part, this is true. Rather than serve as a representation for the whole, Naipaul dislocates the text from such a "representative" reality through constructing the narrative as a first-person narrated memoir. The specificity of experience, locale and culture particularises Singh's psychic terror and his cultural and linguistic alienation in the Caribbean and in England. What Joyce achieves in the *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Naipaul achieves in *The Mimic Men*. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus foregrounds his own ontological and existential crisis through cultural and linguistic alienation, "I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an *acquired* speech" (215; emphasis added).

What Joyce depicts in his characterisation of Stephen Dedalus is the necessity of exile in the development of the artist. For the artist to develop s/he must be detached from home, language and national belonging in order to inhabit the realm of the aesthete. As Stephen Dedalus says at the end of the novel:

> I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile and cunning. (281)

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[10] It seems ironic to fix modernist aesthetics into such a categorical and periodising framework since the movement counters this very institutionalisation.

[11] *The Mimic Men* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* focus strongly on the development of the artist. In this way, the novel can be described as part of the Kunstler Roman tradition.

[12] Dolly Hassan asserts that Naipaul draws upon the experiences of notable East Indian politicians, Rudranath Capildeo and Cheddi Jagan, who may have been possible sources for Ralph Singh.

For Joyce the exilic condition is a way of entering the language of the other that enables his level of detachment but it is also a space and place of alienation and isolation. Like Stephen Dedalus, Ralph Singh is also in a place of exile when he begins to write his memoirs. Singh's narrative embodies his feelings of alienation and isolation that his condition of exile and displacement has brought about. Joyce's novel reveals the politics of culture and language and subjectivity, but Dedalus is by no means a universal representation of Ireland, as Singh is no universal "voice" for the Caribbean. In *The Mimic Men* Singh's narrative illuminates his fraught subjectivity and his narrative reveals the racial and ethnic antagonisms in Caribbean society following British independence. He writes from a position of particularity. It is through such a singular and partial vision that he mediates his reality and reveals his split subjectivity, straddling the worlds of Trinidad, England and India.

Singh's self is constituted in discourse but Singh is shaped by *at least two* discourses. Logically, then, without discourse there is no speaking subject. Singh, the narrator, is also a construct of Naipaul, and shares similar traits with the author. Naipaul deconstructs this boundary between narrator and author. Singh speaks for Naipaul, and Naipaul's psychic representation of Singh is constructed from an experience of singularity. Singh's narrative, while not a synchedochial emblem of the whole, enables a formerly silenced narrative voice to emerge from the margins and offer a representation of a society and the psychic terror produced by migration in textual form. Yet, Singh's marginal position refutes any claims to authority or to be speaking on behalf of.

Naipaul's imaginary seems not to extend beyond the despair of a fragmented history. While Naipaul's fellow Caribbean contemporaries such as Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris approach the creolised and fragmented West Indies with a remarkable humanism and liberalism, Naipaul remains interrogative of the authenticity of these ideals.

In his poem, "The Spoiler's Return", Derek Walcott refers to his contemporary as "V.S. Nightfall" (*Collected Poems* 433). Walcott has not shied away from his public criticisms of how Trinidadian-born, V.S.Naipaul has portrayed the Caribbean, Indian and African societies in his fiction and non-fiction. Though sharing similar locales, these Nobel laureates inflect an unequivocal singularity of

difference in their reading of the fractured, hybrid and "unhistorical" Caribbean societies into which they were born.

Walcott's concern begins with Naipaul's critical attitude and "dispiritedness" ("History and Picong…in *The Middle Passage*" 19) evinced in his historical account of the West Indies, *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies, British, French and Dutch, in the West Indies and South America*. According to Walcott, Naipaul makes the islands and its people the subject of his own amusement: "he has chosen some striking ingredients in our society and pointed out how tasteless they are" ("History and Picong…in *The Middle Passage*" 19). Walcott's bugbear with Naipaul is that he seems to follow a tradition of Victorian travel writers, Trollope, Froude and Kingsley, judging the West Indies according to metropolitan cultural standards and values and not on their own merit, perpetuating a colonial stereotype of the colonies in Western discourse.

Walcott's attitude to the Caribbean is shaped by a Negritude intellectualism. The "concept of Negritude and the assertion of the African personality", as used by poets Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor, "restored a purpose and dignity to the descendants of slaves" (Walcott, "Society and the Artist" 23). This intellectual project informs Walcott's aesthetics. Negritude, in Naipaul's view, *essentialises* blackness (this is addressed more pertinently in chapter two, which deals with *A Bend in the River*) and operates on exclusionary practices similar to that of colonisation.

Yet, for Walcott, the diversity of cultures and ethnicities in the Caribbean need not be appropriated into a culture of the same. The hybrid and syncretic nature of the New World, in Walcott's vision, is a place of excitement. Altering the colonial stereotype of the Caribbean as a place without history, or received traditions, Walcott asserts that the diversity of the West Indies contributes to epistemologies that are being re-made: new forms of languages, argots and patois emerge and are valuable in their own right. This is what Wilson Harris refers to in the Caribbean as its "harlequin cosmos of existence" (qtd. in Brydon & Tiffin 12). For Walcott, the hybridity of the archipelagos makes space for newness, which also resists appropriation:

And here they are, all in a single Caribbean city, Port-of-Spain, the sum of history, Trollope's 'non people'. A downtown babel of shop signs and streets, mongrelised, polyglot, a ferment without a history, like heaven. Because that is what such a city is, in the New World, a writer's heaven. ("The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory" 4)

Walcott's heaven is Naipaul's hell. Yet both writers have transformed their view of fragmentation, hybridity and a "historyless" (Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of an Epic Memory 4) past into an aesthetic. For Walcott, the discontinuous historical fragments of Caribbean history and its cultural practices transported to the New World colony is a cause for celebration due to their survival: "Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole" ("The Antilles: Fragments of an Epic Memory" 5). Here, the disparate pieces of the Caribbean (captured in the fragments of the archipelago itself), allows for the world to open up a little more and make space for "newness to enter the world" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 212).

Naipaul inflects a more conservative vision onto the postcolonial world and his birth country, Trinidad. Coming from a minority Indian group, Naipaul's marginal and displaced position encourages his feelings of "shipwreck". The shipwreck motif in the novel connotes to the "middle passage" which is Naipaul's ancestral inheritance, an inheritance of slavery and indenture. While Walcott is engaged in a "politics of transformation", celebrating newness and syncretism, Naipaul's aesthetic focuses on the states of unease and fracture endemic of displacement, uprootment and the sense of loss in the very act of migration and re-settlement. Singh, like Naipaul, inhabits the liminal space produced by displacement with a sense of insecurity and anxiety. In order for Singh to assess his life the act of writing in exile gives him an objective (critical and spatial) distance.

It is important to remember that within postcolonial discourse there are two attitudes towards hybridity and creolisation: celebratory and melancholic. This is reflected in the positions that Walcott and Naipaul hold respectively. Walcott, along with Salman Rushdie, favours the celebratory aspects of the hybrid moment while it is clear that Naipaul's position is melancholic. He nevertheless also provides a sense not only of loss but also of possibility. *The Mimic Men* shows how loss is transformed by literary imagination into art. This is a typically modernist strategy. Perhaps the point of celebration can only be reached by moving through loss

followed by recovery. Despair is also a kind of loving – or, as the older narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* reflects – might move towards it. The cynicism engendered in Singh's attitude reflects a perverted idealism. Singh is hurt by history.

The non-chronological narrative structure is sectioned into parenthesis, into which Singh places the moments he is most active or embedded in life. This allows him, as a writer, to study those moments, retrospectively, through a cross-section: to re-assess his emotions, his actions and reactions. He is able to see the events surrounding the moments through a detached, yet implicated lens. His ability to assess his past, and arrive at a degree of self-knowledge, is enabled by his exiled position. He writes outside of Isabella. Yet, simultaneously, the memoir, within the temporality of the novel, is *being written* about; the past reflected upon from the standpoint of the present. The novel, in an oblique, way, becomes a metanarrative.

The reader encounters both Singh, the character in the novel writing his memoirs and Naipaul writing Singh's character into the story. The overlap in spatial and temporal localities is not limited to the world within the novel. To press this notion of further, Singh's (physical) act of writing the memoir ends with the reader reading the last page. For Singh the object of completion is deferred. The reader, therefore, completes the process of the book that is written. The book only becomes complete with the reader reading and interpreting it. This invests the reading of the novel with the dialectics of power between speech and writing, writer and reader. The narrative's opening of Singh in his "book-shaped room" is reflective of a literary tradition that has given shape to Singh's consciousness but also a literary tradition with which his text will eventually engage. In this way, Naipaul is very tentatively positioned within the margins of his own texts. His texts "speak" to other texts in the Western literary tradition in which he is located, however fraught this position maybe.[13]

With *The Mimic Men* Naipaul completes the novel open-endedly. Singh's memoir is written in the middle of his life. Singh considers writing a book on the history of the British Empire. But the reader is left with the empty question: What is

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[13] *The Mimic Men* speaks to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* but also, perhaps, to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Regarding the latter text, *The Mimic Men* is re-written here not as a room for a female writer but a room for the postcolonial writer.

to become of Singh? And what of Naipaul? Where is the author in this "entanglement"?

Naipaul's oeuvre can be considered as one continuous plot. Preceding *The Mimic Men* he records his first journey to India in the travelogue, *An Area of Darkness*. At the end of his travelogue he describes a dream:

> I had the knowledge that if only out of this I could cut…a specific section of this cloth…then the cloth would begin to unravel of itself and the unravelling would spread from the cloth to the table to the house to all matter, *until the whole trick was undone*. (290; emphasis added)

The dream sequence reveals a continuity of plot in Naipaul's oeuvre. His fiction and non-fiction are not discrete texts existing on their own. Reading his non-fiction illuminates his fiction, and so there is no hierarchy or authority between journalism, autobiography, fiction and historical narratives. In this way, writing is a continuous process and each text is open to re-vision based on both the writer and the reader's epistemologies, epistemologies that grow and change over the years.

Having surrendered the notion of "home" as a geographic and conceptual place, it seems that the literary domain, becomes a mode of "home". Naipaul does not distinguish between its categories, collapsing generic boundaries as he develops his writing. His fragmented past, marked by despair and incompleteness finds a home within the house of letters. In his "Two Worlds" Nobel lecture he says: "[…] everything of value about me is in my books […] I am the sum of my books. Each book […] stands on what has gone before […] at any stage of my literary career […] the last book contained all the others" (182-183).

THREE

Traversing the Literary: Identity and National Discourse in
A Bend in the River

> *On the one hand, [the developing world] has to root itself in the soil of its past, forge a national spirit, and unfurl this spiritual and cultural revendication before the colonialist's personality. But in order to take part in modern civilisation, it is necessary at the same time to take part in scientific, technical and political rationality, something which very often requires the pure and simple abandonment of a whole cultural past. (Paul Ricoeur)*

The epigram speaks directly to Naipaul's narrative fiction, *A Bend in the River*. The novel emerges from Naipaul's travels in the Zaire in 1975. *A Congo Diary* and an article in the *New York Review of Books*, "A New King for the Congo: Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa" form part of the context for *A Bend in the River*, furnishing the detail and setting.

Ricoeur's statement raises important considerations in the postcolonial context, most acutely within Pan-African ideals re-fashioning Africa and Africans as "a people" and continent of pride, self-worth, reason and rationality. The fraught position of the developing African world is caught in an uncertain temporality, grappling with reactionary projections of animism, social anomie and primordial violence. Ricoeur points towards a split in the developing world, as it must actualise itself before its former coloniser in order to partake of the modern, (European) world. For the developing world to forge a national spirit it is also necessary to create a discourse for its ideas of "nation" and "nationalism".

To locate the meaning of Africa and Africans is to recognise that there is an important ideological split between "modernity" and "tradition". In order to create a "national consciousness", governments must *invent* traditions to give permanence and solidity to a transient political and cultural form. Thus, to discourse on the "nation" is also to realise the fictive elements at play in nationalist discourses, which essentially is a discourse of an *imagined community*. As Timothy Brennan aptly phrases it:

> [n]ations are *imaginary constructs* that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role. [T]he rise of European nationalism coincides with one form of literature. – the novel ("The national longing for form" 49)

The rise of the novel coincides with the birth of the "nation". Africa has long been a part of the literature of imperialism beginning in the late eighteenth century and flourishing in the nineteenth century. The ideology of nationalism seeded out of imperialism and formulated its aspirations in the soil of foreign conquest. As Joseph Conrad pointedly writes in the opening to *Heart of Darkness*:

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look at it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea. (10)

In order for British nationalism and nationhood to flourish, "Africa" becomes a necessary construct within those discourses. In other words, Africa becomes a necessary *object* in relation to which the West can define itself, thereby affirming its own identity and (implied) authority. The physicality of the African subject in *Heart of Darkness* perpetuates the racial discourses employed by the West in their representation of the African subject; differences read as primordial, essential and natural. The textual histories constructing discourses of Africa and African identity are located in the disciplines and genres of colonial anthropologies, travel narratives and literary representations, revealing how the histories of colonial narratives locate and imagine the concept of Africa. Europe's sense of nationhood is inextricably linked with its former colonial margins. The notion of modernity as a European invention becomes an essential trope in discourses within which Europe locates itself and constructs the difference of its racial and cultural others.

Walter Rodney's, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, an influential study on the asymmetrical power relationship between Europe and Africa and the necessary underdevelopment of Africa by Europe, considers the historic and colonial roots of Eurocentric perceptions of African anomy. Rodney elucidates the necessary objectification and fethisization of "Africa" as an empirical object of knowledge:

> [t]o be colonised is to be removed from history, except in the most passive sense. A striking illustration of the fact that colonial Africa was a passive object is seen in its attraction for white [ethnologists] who came to study

'primitive society'. Colonialism defines that Africans were no more makers of history than were beetles – objects to be looked at under a microscope and examined for unusual features. (225)

What *A Bend in the River* sets up, in this regard, through its liminally placed protagonist, is a dialogue between Western textual re-productions of Africa and the nationalist discourses adopted by the African nation-states. It is a late twentieth century literary text engaging in a range of discourses and histories, which gives shape to the meaning and idea of Africa. The range of interdisciplinary modes embedded in the text reveals the dense and significant impact between the political and imaginative constructs of Africa.

Naipaul's position in Africa is particular. He enters the African landscape as both a cultural other and as a British national from the colonial margins. His curious liminal position "intersects at both historical and cultural ideas of Africa" (Kanneh 2). His protagonist, Salim, is similarly positioned as a South Asian African who journeys from the east coast to the interior of Africa. Salim's consciousness as both native and settler allows the novel to explore the production of cultural knowledge in a liminal space between identities. This fraught and unsettled angle of vision enables a line of interrogation and insight into ethnographic, historical and literary texts that claim to represent and interpret Africa. The text demonstrates "the difficulties of representing or defining cultural others and the inevitable historical and textual complicities underlying the location and legitimation of otherness" (Kanneh 2).

Naipaul's refusal to name the localities in which his characters are located – the unnamed African town, the villages or rivers – reveal the textual considerations in which the novel is invested. The problem of naming, of locating temporalities and cultures, and the uncertainty of authorial authority, signifies similar theoretical concerns in ethnographic studies. Naming includes ownership and possession, which the protagonist, like the author, feels he is barred from. Names are also signifiers of particular temporalities and cultures, which remaining unnamed, exhibit an uncertain locality in the transitional African state about which *A Bend in the River* is written. In the account of his journey to Zaire in the article "Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa", Naipaul writes:

The Congo, which used to be a Belgian colony, is now an African kingdom and is called Zaire. It appears a nonsense name, a sixteenth-century Portuguese corruption, some Zairois will tell you, of a local word for 'river'. So it is as if Taiwan, reasserting its Chinese identity, were again to give itself the Portuguese name Formosa. (173)

What emerges in this chapter on *A Bend in the River* is how Africa, as a diasporic landscape, is entangled in a number of discourses, temporalities and cultures that are antagonistic with the acculturative claims made on the subject. What the novel offers is a way of assessing Africa that does not ascribe to the unified or unitary but is reflective of the processes of hybridity that produce political antagonisms and unpredictable forces for political and cultural representation. What arises is the effect of an "incomplete signification" of Africa played out in the interstices of nation and cultures, theories and texts, the past and the present in which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated to evoke "the ambivalent margins of the nation-space" (Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* 4).

Mbembe encourages a reading and understanding of the African postcolony through awareness of its *hybrid* nature. In *On the Postcolony* he claims that postcolonial African regimes have not "invented what they know of government from scratch" (24). Epistemologies that shape Africa are fed from a number of different sources, overlapping temporalities, cultures and traditions which become "entangled over time to the point where something has the look of 'custom' without being reducible to it and partakes of 'modernity' without wholly being included in it" (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* 25).

It is imperative, then, that the systems used to understand Africa must themselves be hybrid, since "Africa" as an object of knowledge is already irrevocably damaged, already entered and changed by Western influences. Thus, the challenge of reading texts which deal with African cultural material and its knowledge is caught up with the needs of reading other anthropological, literary and historical texts which construct the codes and framework for this knowledge (Kanneh 29). What is being called upon is not simply a reversal to indigenous forms of knowledge systems in which Africa can locate a sense of its past preceding its painful history of invasion. In order to understand postcolonial Africa, it is necessary to engage in a range of discourses on and about the idea and meaning of Africa that engages these various disciplines and critically analyse them in order to return a

sense of agency and sovereignty to the African subject by deconstructing these myths of passivity and primitiveness.

The formation of postcolonial nation states and the genesis of national consciousness in colonial African countries are located within the discourses of pan-Africanism, Negritude and Marxism. These discourses, as Mbembe elucidates, "intended to disclose […] the 'truth' about the identity of Africa and Africans" to establish a set of praxis that would affirm a sense of African selfhood ("Subject and Experience" 3). Marxism and Nationalism, as practised in Africa during the twentieth century, are the source of two discourses on African identity: Afro-radicalism and nativism. The homogenising and essentialising aims embedded within these discourses fail to consider Africa and Africans as a heterogeneous entity.

In her counter-critique of nativism, Benita Parry argues that nativism is not what Negritude is accused of: that is, "a recovery of a pre-existent state", but rather a "recognition of the multitude of blackness" ("Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism" 93). Parry claims that "black became a signifier for oppression", but attempted to resist the "essentialising definition" placed on people of "African origins" ("Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism" 94). While Parry may counter the essentialising claims in nativism, asserting that within these discourses blackness or Africanness is considered in its multiplicity, the problem remains that identity is *strategically* essentialised in its plurality. "Race" and ethnicitys are accepted as fixed signs of black identity. What these discourses enshrine are dogmatic practices and doctrines limiting, instead of opening up, African epistemologies.

The problem with these discourses is that African authenticity and identity appeals to an essentialised, homogenised African subject. African selfhood is located in a long, historical past reliant on fragile and partial memories in its reconstruction in the present. While the social and political contexts of these discourses are located in the decolonising aims of the twentieth century, the critical theory employed by Pan-Africanists such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, W.E.B. du Bois, Haille Sellassie and Marcus Garvey were developed in and influenced by Western critical theory. While the discursive arguments proposed by the Negritude and Pan-Africanist movements are seductive in returning a sense of agency to the African subject and

authenticity of its African knowledge systems, the *hybrid* nature of these frameworks must be kept on the postcolonial agenda.

Since the Roman Empire, European nationalism has also made acculturative claims on its subject. In the work of Ernest Renan, who asks the turbulent question "What is a Nation?", historical research shows the internal divisions within European nations. Historical tracings of European nations, ethnic and cultural intermixture substantiate the claim for Renan, "that there is no pure race and that to make politics depend upon ethnographic analysis is to surrender it to a chimera" (Renan 14). The range of characters chartered in Naipaul's fictionalised portrait of Zaire are ambivalently placed at the margins of their groups and within their social structures. The characters are of mixed blood, marginally located in their groups or tribes or their "origins" displaced through travel, migration or relocation. What arises out of the multiply placed and displaced peoples poses a challenge to and a contestation of the acculturative claims on the subject by the discourses of nationalism. African nationalism is the subject of Naipaul's attacks. African nationalism has superseded European nationalism, in that Europe is its model of power. It is the model of national discourse deployed among "the people" as one that is the subject of Naipaul's postcolonial narrative encounter.

A Bend in the River offers a representation of a culture struggling with diverse values and with a breakdown of established traditions in its attempt at modernity. The unnamed African country modelled on Mobutu's Zaire is bloody, lawless and threatening: "[t]he bush muffled the sound of murder, and the muddy rivers and lakes washed the blood away" (*A Bend in the River* 60). Concurring with Helen Hayward, influencing the novel is the traditional image of Africa in European literature, as the negation of European civilisation, the site of a reversion to savagery, African atavism and the rawness of human brutality (*A Bend in the River* 172). With Europe's retreat from the African country, the author implies that a lost ideal of order has left the country with the imperial power. The novel focuses on the intense physicality of the African landscape, its secrecy and impenetrability to the repeated invocation of an African history without narrative structure. In this way, *A Bend in the River* deliberately writes itself against and alongside Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with the canonical text becoming a sustained metaphorical reference in *A Bend in the River*:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. (*Heart of Darkness* 48)

You felt the land taking you back to something that was familiar, something you had known at some time but had forgotten or ignored, but which was always there. You felt the land taking you back to what was there a hundred years ago, to what had always been there. (*A Bend in the River* 9-10)

The mystification of *A Bend in the River* lies in its constant engagement with cliché – the obscurity, the timelessness, the violence, the impenetrability of the African forest and the African native (Hayward, *The Enigma of V.S. Naipaul* 173). The pointless violence, as in the futile murder of Father Huismans, whose head is spiked and then put on display, echoes an episode in *Heart of Darkness*. In *Heart of Darkness* it is Kurtz who orders the barbaric display; in *A Bend in the River*, the brutality is ascribed to the uncontrolled African rage (Hayward, *The Enigma of V.S. Naipaul* 172). The echoes of Conrad in *A Bend in the River* signify the trope of canonicity and a cultural reality that moors itself to Naipaul's oeuvre. Yet, at the same time, the novel insists on "re-examining and dismantling the origins and meaning of the cliché away from the dominating stance of 'foreign fantasy' that originates in the colonial metropolis" (Kanneh 2). In this way, the novel's aims are profoundly textual, exhibiting ethnographic concerns through a literary aesthetic. Using images of radical otherness Naipaul invests his novel with a reading around the ethics of otherness. The traditional image of Africa as the "unassimilable" and "impenetrable" in European literature is appropriated in *A Bend in the River* to question whether it is ever possible to know the other without making appropriative claims on the subject.

In his essay, "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes", Henry Louis Gates Jr. states that "canonical texts of the Western literary tradition have been defined as a more or less closed sets of works that somehow speak, or respond to, 'the human condition' and to each other in formal patterns of repetition and revision" (2). This is evident in works of T.S. Eliot who uses Ezra Pound to revise his form and style in *The Wasteland*. Indeed, Naipaul uses a tradition of displaced writers in his own texts that respond to and engages with these canonical texts. In *The Mimic Men* he writes to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and he

invokes Eliot's *Four Quartets* in his elegiac descriptions of the English countryside in *The Enigma of Arrival*. The palimpsest of his writing, which will be further explored in the following chapter, reflects the indelible links Naipaul shares with the West and his own colonial upbringing. In the previous chapter, I explored this notion through W.E.B du Bois's notion of "double consciousness" (via Paul Gilroy), following the assertion that the discourse and identity of the colonial subject shares affinities with its colonial parent: the intellectual heritage of the West.

The double position of the colonial subject, affecting Naipaul's consciousness, is as prevalent in the colonial subject in Africa who is similarly positioned, attempting to achieve a balance between his/her total identification with "traditional" (authentic) African life and his/her merging with, and subsequent loss, in modernity (alienation) (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* 12). This opens up the split and fragmented nature of Africa, as both empirical object and as a site of contestation. The precarious temporality in which Africa finds itself as it grapples with modernity and definitions of self encourages a reading of Africa, through various textual considerations, that open up these contested spaces and conflictual locales to reveal the ambivalence and uncertainty constitutive of the nation-space.

While critics such as Edward Said and Rob Nixon challenge Naipaul's portrayal of Africa, implicating him as a "witness for the western prosecution [of the Third World]" (Said, "Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World" 56) or attacking him on grounds that he "can trumpet his alienation while implicitly drawing on a secure, reputable tradition of extratraditionalism" (Nixon, "London Calling" 11), their criticisms fail to account for the re-visionary aspects in Naipaul's oeuvre and its impact on both the "canonical" texts in the Western literary tradition and the "non-canonical" texts produced by the margins of empire. These critics align Naipaul with a Western literary tradition, which of course, his oeuvre supports. In *A Bend in the River* Naipaul enters the Western literary tradition as an outsider through his displaced protagonist who, in some ways, echoes Naipaul's similarly dislocated position. He engages with the "human condition", as it is textually represented, from this uncertain and ambiguous position of cultural (and colonised) other. In this way, his engagement with the canonical texts opens them up to new readings. His position serves as cultural interlocutor and thereby destabilises the very authority of these canonical texts.

Through the trope of the river, travel and displacement become ways in which the literary text traverses *between* and *across* cultural, geographic and literary boundaries. The river evoked in *A Bend in the River* is the same river upon which Marlowe journeys to the interior of Africa in his search for Captain Kurtz, though Naipaul *ironically* reverses the journey Salim makes, from the east coast to the interior, where Marlowe travelled from the west up the Congo River. Africa, as a whole, is represented by postcolonial Zaire, geographically located in Central Africa, which metonymically and spatially represents the "heart" of Africa and is used to "portray an 'essential' Africa in both texts" (Kanneh 4).

The trope of the river as a symbol of movement has important ramifications for the cultural, ethnographic and textual considerations the novel is invested in. In much the same way as Paul Gilroy uses the image of the ship as "a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" (*The Black Atlantic* 4), as an open signifier of a syncretic Black Atlantic world, where "a continuous circulation of Black political, philosophical and cultural identities meet in dialogue with the modern West" (Kanneh 62), the image of the river in *A Bend in the River* points to similar cross-cultural contacts, exchange and movement of ideas and people. Evoking the same river as in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Naipaul enters Conrad's text, thereby "translating" the canonical text through his displaced, marginalised position *outside* of the text. The river becomes not only a geographical space of convergence, contact, and hybridity but also has a literary location in which Naipaul can enter Conrad's earlier representation of the Congo.

The intertextuality between Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Naipaul's version of postcolonial Zaire enables a dialogue *between* the two novels *in* and *across* cultural and temporal localities. Whereas intertextual references between *The Mimic Men* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are oblique and implicit, the intertextual references between *A Bend in the River* and *Heart of Darkness* are direct and explicit. Thus, Naipaul adopts a self-consciousness position of writing over Conrad's version of the Congo. Naipaul self-consciously reverses the journey Conrad makes into Africa (Conrad coming from the west to the centre of Africa by sea, whereas Salim journeys from the east coast to the centre by land). Not only is Naipaul attempting to make Conrad a witness to his version of the African Congo

but also by entering the landscape and the text from an alternative route he shows that there are multiple interpretations to a literary text even if they are contiguous in some ways. This, of course, opens Conrad's text to re-vision through the unlikely figure of the colonial migrant.

In the novel, the meaning of Africa is presented as lying behind the presence of the African landscape, protected by magic, the bush and the river: "[t]he river and the forest were like presences, and much more powerful than you" (*A Bend in the River* 9). As Kadiatu Kanneh elucidates, the "hidden" or "lost" meaning of Africa is projected as lying somewhere behind the presence of the African forest and makes African modernity seem impossible to imagine (8). To make "the land […] part of the present" (*A Bend in the River* 9), "the deep forests" (*A Bend in the River* 10), "this land of rain and heat and big-leaved trees – always visible" (*A Bend in the River* 47), the *visibility* of the encroaching bush must be annihilated. The precarious temporality of modernity in Africa relies on European order and is perpetually threatened by violence and rage. The violence and rage, the novel intimates, is historically part of the country, "the accumulated anger of the colonial period and every kind of reawakened tribal fear" (*A Bend in the River* 75) but also emanates through "some old law of the forest […] something that came from Nature itself" (*A Bend in the River* 90). These intimations echo the familiar colonial rhetoric of the timelessness of Africa, the emptiness of village life and the primitive savagery that energises the destruction of order (Kanneh 9).

The colonial rhetoric employed in the novel serves as a means by which to critique the authority of that rhetoric. Naipaul constructs a version of Africa and the West in a dialectical framework precisely to reflect how these two (seeming) opposites are represented within colonial structures of knowledge. Unlike other African writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Naipaul, in *A Bend in the River*, uses the dislocated and displaced narrative voice of Salim who is quite *self-consciously* situated *within* the preoccupations of European historical understanding.

What *A Bend in the River* attempts in this regard, which makes the novel highly re-visionary and contestatory, is to set up a "war of interpretation" (Kanneh 7) that will undo and dismantle the authority of Western discourse. This is evident in Naipaul's

portrayal of the Belgian priest and self-made ethnologist, Father Huismans, who embodies the history of ethnology in Africa and colonial structures of knowledge. Ethnology in Africa has often constructed Africa as "other" both racially and geographically. As Talal Asad argues, in reading other cultures, the ethnologist typically writes about a population that is disempowered. For Asad, then, ethnology is associated with, "the unequal power encounter between the West and the Third World […] an encounter in which colonialism is merely one historical encounter" (Asad qtd. in Kanneh 7). The non-European becomes the object of the European anthropologists gaze – fixed, evaluated, interpreted. Father Huismans is both missionary and ethnographer and he interprets the "bush and river" as a "wonderful place of new things" (*A Bend in the River* 70). Father Huismans is a witness to the changes in Africa and he has a need to preserve the *essential* Africa: "[t]rue Africa he saw as dying or about to die. That was why it was so necessary, while that Africa still lived, to understand and collect and preserve its things" (*A Bend in the River* 72). He collects African cultural artefacts and takes them back to the *lycée*, the European-styled school, on the margins of the town. In Father Huisman's museum of African masks, "the war of interpretation" unfolds around an African carving. To Father Huismans the carving is "imaginative and full of meaning" (*A Bend in the River* 69), but Salim counters this celebration of the artwork, seeing it as an "exaggerated and crude piece, a carver's joke" (*A Bend in the River* 69). Father Huismans represents the force of European history that appropriates Africa according to its own logic, while Salim reveals another reading of the masks that disrupts and disturbs the narrative certainty of European history. These two contested readings of the masks are pitted against each other to reveal the contested histories and interpretation of histories that underlines the ethnographic understanding of things.

In Father Huisman's museum, the masks, taken out of the "timeless" forest become open to interpretation, to being "readable", and thus become contested cultural artefacts. In order to be assigned a value by the European interpreter the masks have to be fixed into a traditional African past, which is under threat by modernising aims. In this way, the value of African artefacts becomes embedded within European discourse. The "primitive art" is appropriated by the European and becomes fetishized and thereby essentialised. With Father Huisman's murder, his masks are stolen by an American student and shipped to America, where they

become the colonialist's artefact. In this *ironic* way, Africa remains essentialised within the dominating discourse.

Salim's insistence on "reading" the masks from another point of view suggests that the meaning of the masks is rendered inconclusive (Kanneh 9). Salim notes that the masks were not as old as they appeared in Father Huismans' museum. By offering an alternative "reading" of the masks, the novel begins to deconstruct the authority of Western anthropological and ethnographical discourse, in which Africa has been "empirically" determined and examined. Through Salim's displaced position, colonial discourse becomes subject to contestation and its authorising authority displaced through the novel's implicated, yet detached protagonist: "from an early age I developed the habit of looking, detaching myself from a familiar scene and trying to consider it as from a distance (*A Bend in the River* 17).

Salim's dislocated position enables him to enter into colonial discourse from an estranged position – the unfamiliar familiar – in order to question the implicit master narratives that have given shape to Africa. This distancing presents a kind of privileged observation through Salim's own radical cultural displacement as an East Indian exile in Zaire. Situated precariously on the edges of European colonial civilisation, trading European goods with the African interior, Salim is able to comment on the gaps between colonising and colonised cultures. His narrative, however, does not lapse into a transcendent understanding of pre-colonial African societies but is transfixed on the mystery of the doomed, deep forest.

In Selwyn Cudjoe's reading of *A Bend in the River*, he argues that Naipaul fails to "understand the cosmology of the African world" (195) and limits the reader to Salim's own narcissistic perception and interpretation of the African subject. The novel's eschewal of "understanding the cosmology of the African world" is strategic. By setting up a "war of interpretation" the novel proposes that knowledge is mediated and partial, thus disrupting any claims to its authority. Naipaul's displaced narrative voice, echoed through Salim, allows him to critique his own authority to represent. Naipaul tackles the imaginary and metaphoric constructions of "Africa" but feels uneasy about claiming to know "Africa" choosing rather to view Africa within historically located debates around theories of race, nation and culture. In this, Naipaul's stance on Africa is similar to what Levinas proposes as a

"justice, which respects the alterity of the other" (qtd. in Young 14). The risk in this proposition is that by claiming that the other is, literally, unknowable, that it lies outside of knowledge, confines the other to "inarticulate expressions of mysticism or *jouissance*" (Young 6).

The many echoes of European classics in the novel, from Pliny to Virgil, form part of a cultural order and literary evaluation of Africa, which Naipaul at times seems to admire. Salim asserts that knowledge of his past would have no historical context had it not been for the Europeans: "[a]ll that I know of our history and the history of the Indian Ocean I have got from books written by Europeans […] Without Europeans, I feel, all our past would be washed away" (*A Bend in the River* 13). Those in the nativist camp would argue that this is the source of Africa's falsification by the outside world. In Anthony Appiah's terms, this is the "Naipaul fallacy" – "understand[ing] Africa by embedding it in European cultures" (qtd. in Gates 15).

Following Sara Suleri's assertion in her essay, "Naipaul's Arrival", the invocation of a European literary tradition highlights Naipaul's "uncanny ability to map the complicity between postcolonial history and its imperial past" (156). Allusions to a literary tradition indicate the authority of the written text and the preservation of knowledge which follows. Salim's narrative voice opens up a rare space within African literature of the East Indian African immigrant experience. His position as both immigrant and African de-essentialises African identity and unsettles the assimilationist tendencies within nationalist discourses adopted in Africa in the twentieth century. As Suleri asserts, the novel should not be read as merely an "impulse to autobiography" but as a "political gesture" (156). By marrying the personal with the political, valuing the singularity of experience above the universalist claims, Naipaul uses the literary form as an "archive" approaching a range of interdisciplinary modes to narrate, from its interstices, the contemporaneity and juxtapositions of the modern world.

Travel and displacement become the modes through which to assess the contemporaneity of the modern in Africa without a sentimental or nostalgic longing for a past dislocated from the particularity of geographical place:

> I was homesick, had been homesick for months. But home was hardly a place I could return to. Home was something in my head. It was something I had lost. And in that I was like the ragged Africans who were so abject in the town we serviced. (*A Bend in the River* 124)

Through his deracination, Salim realises that in order to have a liberating present, he must make a break with his past. The past, like home, is seen to exist only in his mind. Indar, who is Salim's intellectual guide, encourages the attitude that the only way to free oneself from the past is to reject it. The modern world is considered highly transient and the notion of "home" with its affiliations to a nostalgic past, a sense of tradition and belonging no longer exists in a world of dispossession and displacement:

> 'We have to learn to trample on the past, Salim […] Everywhere the world is in movement […] and the past can only cause pain […] It is not easy to turn your back on the past […] It is something you arm yourself for, or grief will ambush and destroy you'. (*A Bend in the River* 164)

Through Indar, Salim begins to construct an idea of home and belonging, roots and traditions as imagined spaces in his consciousness. His aversion to home as a (conceptual) place of roots, historic foundations, traditions and belonging enables Salim's survival in the novel. Indar fails to heed his own advice and becomes a lost, alienated immigrant figure in the London metropolis, dreaming of returning to his imagined ancestral home in India. The past, however, is positioned in a more complicated way in the novel than mere forgetting. Salim critiques Ferdinand's view of the past that is simple erasure: "[f]or Ferdinand, the colonial past had vanished" (*A Bend in the River* 187). The colonial past is associated with trauma and pain, which the colonised subject would rather forget. What the novel intimates is that African national discourses achieve their authenticity by reverting to mythical and historical tales of an unbroken line of ancestors that provide a seamless narrative of presence and unity. This reversal to historic foundations and roots is an imagined construct of a lost past, a past that is, in fact, irretrievable and incites *imaginative* constructs of African nationalism.

Travel as a mode of "translation" in the novel seeks to challenge not only the assimilationist tendencies proposed by the modern African nation-state but the cultural, historical and temporal gaps within those narratives. By reflecting on the African country's heterogeneous past, "[and] how many changes had come to it!

Forest at the bend in the river, a meeting place, an Arab settlement, a European outpost, a European suburb, a ruin (*A Bend in the River* 306), Naipaul foregrounds the complicated relationship between "colonial domination and indigenous self-understanding" (Kanneh 48). Through his narrative, Naipaul explores the impact of Black diasporic thought on African knowledge and racial theories that creates an ideological split within the psyche of the colonial subject. Such theories, however, also unveil African diasporic and black identities as historically textured and politically determined constructs that are reliant on particular understandings of time, race and memory (Kanneh 48).Indar and Salim's conversation about the location of modern Africa remains unknowable and uncertain, "Europe in Africa, post-colonial Africa. But it isn't Europe or Africa" (*A Bend in the River* 161) is revelatory of Africa's hybrid nature. This undecidability in understanding or locating modern Africa for both Salim and Indar reflects the deep ambivalence that surrounds the present Africa as it becomes increasingly more entangled in European discourse in its drive towards modernity while simultaneously asserting its *difference* from Europe through claims to its ancestral past.

The nationalist discourses the "Big Man" decrees seek to "produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress" (Bhabha, "Nation and Narration" 1). This reversion to a primordial African past perpetuates an essentialised Africa and African identity. In this, Naipaul attacks the *model* of power the newly independent African state follows. The desire (for power/autonomy), itself, is mimetic as it seeks models for itself. "The Big Man" carries an impressive staff carved with a symbolic fetish, representative of the power of the African chief. Like Mao, he collects his thoughts in a little green book which he sells to the general populace and has a youth brigade marching and shouting slogans at various rallies.

The problem within nationalist discourse, which Naipaul problematises in the novel, is the essentialisation of Africa by Africans. The divide between Africa and Europe remains essentially othered. "The Big Man's" drive to modernising Africa is developed within a racially determined model. "The Big Man" takes on the nationalist mantle, wearing the "old clothes of empire", as it were, and cloaking his people more fully with an old dependency. The category of the African *race* is taken at face value and the need to create a "nationalist pedagogy" (Bhabha, *The Location*

of Culture 214) is dependent on a coherent definition of the subject who can be acculturated and become a signifier of national unity.

But Salim's liminal position reveals the anxious control of a subject that keeps slipping out of sight. Zabeth, Indar, Ferdinand, Yvette and Raymond remain unknowable to Salim. He comments that their personalities have a "dissolving quality" (*A Bend in the River* 181). Caught between the inability truly to know the other and the impulse to write (represent) the subject, Naipaul's novel captures the fraught uncertainties and ambiguities assailing the position of authorial authority within a shifting temporal, political and cultural epoch. Representing the subject requires him to not only reflect on the constitution of identities but also where those identities (subjectivities) are located in time, space and place.

Through the figure of Zabeth, the relationship between time, modernity and the African subject plays out curiously. Zabeth trades goods with the "outside" world and brings these back to her village. European modernity comes in the form of pots, pans, enamel basins and razor blades. Though Zabeth is curiously located as different to the rest of her tribe, her authenticity as an indigenous African woman is not doubted. When she moves between village and town, she is actually moving in and out of measurable time; "in and out of history itself" (Samantrai 55). Her movements cross the temporal boundaries of the "timelessness" of the village (ahistorical and repetitive) to progressive change and forward moving time in the town.

From an ethnological perspective, Zabeth is not a "simple villager" or cultural synecdochial symbol of the whole. Her movement between and across temporal and spatial boundaries present important questions in the field of ethnography. Where is Zabeth to be located? She inhabits a largely "authentic" indigenous life but she also has contact with the "outside" world and brings her village into contact with that world through the various European goods she takes back to her village. Zabeth's world is influenced and contaminated by Western modernity that hybridises that world. While Zabeth is essentially located in the tribal world of an African life protected by ancestors, she wants her son to have an education which is symbolic of the march of progress which the African country is in the throes of establishing.

Ferdinand is symbolic of the new man of Africa. His "mixed tribal heritage" (*A Bend in the River* 53) alienates him from the indigenous Africans in the town. In order for him to emerge as "authentically" African he *performs* a series of identity-effects from the young, modern new man of Africa to the "indolent forest warrior" (*A Bend in the River* 60). Ferdinand's education also places him in a different temporality to the world his mother inhabits. Following Mbembe, then, it is apparent that postcolonial countries are, in reality, a "combination of several temporalities" taking effect simultaneously. Metty, Salim's "half-caste" servant, part Arab and part African, is also a "wanderer", displaced at the town in the bend in the river. Metty is a slave descendant from the east coast of Africa who undertakes the journey to the interior of Africa to work as Salim's shop assistant.

These liminal identity positions fit uneasily and disjunctively within the nationalist, pedagogic discourses of continuity and homogeneity. Their hybrid identities are antagonistic with the homogenous essentialised claims placed on the African subject within national discourse. Ferdinand remains elusive to Salim because his subjectivity does not fit the essentialised role assigned to the African characters in the novel. These are the "neat" and "tidy" representations of Africa and Africans that fall into a stereotype and can therefore be packaged and comprehended. The characters who do not fit easily into the pedagogical categories (Ferdinand, Indar, Metty), remain illusive and elusive. Yet, their "excesses" can still be accommodated within the novel form. These are kinds of "incommensurabilities" which the novel is able to foreground without making appropriative claims on its subject. As Bhabha espouses:

> [a]s literary creatures and political animals we ought to concern ourselves with the understanding of human action and the social world as a moment when *something is beyond control but it is not beyond accommodation*. ("The World and the Home" 12; original italicised)

Though the president is somewhat stereotypically represented as a tyrannical and corrupt leader, his self-fashioning is indicative of the reform movement he seeks to produce in the country. He begins as an army officer and eventually changes his dress style to resemble the African chief. He is portrayed as "the modernizer and […] the African who has rediscovered his African soul" (*A Bend in the River* 159).

The president's self-fashioning reflects the performance, spectacle and artifice of identity yet, he pre-scribes his identity as authentic, located in a traditional and indigenous historical past. His African identity presupposes the modern idea of progress and enlightenment while insisting on African difference at the same time. African cultures become understood as national cultures through a discourse of modernity that fundamentally informs constructions of African identity. The president's cult of authenticity, re-enacted through his statues of the black Madonna and child, his image as the African chief, are symbolic of grafting one model of power onto another. This mode of reform reveals the disjuncture and interlocking of discourses and cultures, which create further "entanglements" between Africanist and European ideologies that produce a schizophrenic society.

What emerges as "authentic" is retrieved from a long, ancestral past. Here, the past within national discourses is fixed to a static point of origin; it is perceived as a linear continuity. In his attempt at tracing the historical and philosophical routes of the discourses on Africa, Mbembe captures the unsettling temporalities African states are enmeshed in and which they must consider in order to emerge as thoughtful, autonomous subjects. Mbembe adopts a poststructuralist view of time as a non-teleological rhizomorphic, made of a series of (dis)continuities and sudden ruptures. Such a view of time, which threatens the continuity narratives of national discourses, recognises the different stages of development in a "nation" – from "primitive" to "civilised" – which disrupts nationalist ideologies of unification and homogeneity. Similarly, Bhabha's approach to the disjunctive temporality of modernity and narrating the nation asserts that the totalising consciousness of "continuist, accumulative, temporality of the pedagogical" sits in contradistinction with "the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative" (*The Location of Culture* 209).

The domain, a symbol of the new Africa, is built on the ruins of a former European suburb. For the indigenous Africans, the domain is considered a space that will enable their children to progress forward into the modern world. Through the image of "'the domain" the novel elucidates the inextricable "entanglements" between Africa and its European counterpart. The domain is the locus of modernity and place of prestige and status for the young African students who attend the only

education centre like it in central Africa. The institution seems to be a way for the African leader to instil a sense of self worth and pride in the African people. However, the institution is foreign-funded and many of its teachers come from Europe or have been educated there. The site of "the domain" is a contested space. To make Africa "modern" on its own terms appears to create an artificial authenticity from what is in fact a space of multiplicities and pluralities.

What the novel asserts is that the systems of knowledge in Africa come from *outside* of Africa. Pan-Africanism, Marxism and nationalism are discourses developed in the West. "No critical theory", Henry Louis Gates writes:

> be it Marxist, feminist, poststructuralist [...] escapes the specificity of value and ideology, no matter how mediated these may be. To attempt to appropriate our own discourses by using Western critical theory *uncritically*, is to substitute one mode of neo-colonialism for another. (15)

In the essay, "Travelling Theory", Said asserts that theories can become totalising and reified. Ideas, especially if they are clear and effective, become popular; however they also run the risk of becoming "reduced, codified and institutionalised" (Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* 239). Naipaul's images and diasporic identities in *A Bend in the River* do not always fit into "tidy" packages. It is in this way that literature is able to accommodate what is "untidy" or "unanswerable" in historical and social situations (Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* 241). Bhabha, in a similar vein, inflects the acategorical in his work. His theories of ambivalence, alterity, hybridity and cosmopolitanism are seductive. So too is Said's call to awaken critical consciousness so that the aporias of thought be made transparent, that reification and calcification of ideas and ideals be critiqued so that fluidity and flux prevails. These are the current codes of methodological and epistemological thought that characterise scholarly thinking in the twentieth century. What must be kept on the postcolonial agenda for the discursive construction of diasporic identities and a critique of national assimilationist discourses is the codification and institutionalisation of the very discourse: its methodologies and epistemologies within the domains of culture and subjectivity, that seek to liberate and open up emerging identities within Africa.

Both Bhabha and Said's methodologies strive to be *non-totalising*. The aporia within this is that their ideas are seductive, engendered with great possibilities, but through over-use they are veering close to becoming institutionalised. Said has always been a vitriolic critic of Naipaul's identification and sympathising with the Western world. Said's close analysis of Naipaul's work problematises the authority that the Western world has imparted on Naipaul.

Naipaul, like Salman Rushdie, has been positioned as a representative voice of the Third World. Yet Naipaul's writing carries the complexities of experience and existence that cannot be easily packaged. The writer shows the problematic of authorial authority in his body of work. His use of irony and allusion serves to deconstruct the very texts that he writes. In this regard, Said falls into his own "ideological trap" (*The World, the Text and the Critic* 241). The problem we are faced with as scholars who use theory to support our arguments is: at what point do these theories become totalising, used less critically, but rather to support our discursive theoretical positions?

Mbembe recognises that Africa is a "moving object" ("Subject and Experience" 17). Part of existence in a global diaspora that shapes our existence and experience in the modern world is the uncertainty that ensues from multiple points of contact and the migrant experience of inhabiting several worlds simultaneously. Africa is a space and place that is in continuous negotiation and contestation. In the social sciences new avenues are being researched that will open up the epistemologies and methodologies one is able to use, but it is the language, within these disciplines, that ends up becoming its own prison. Mbembe, the historian, pushes the envelope on the current thoughts on Africa and what it is needed to open up an engaging and enabling discourse on and with Africa:

> We must develop a technique of reading that is at the same time an aesthetics of overture and encounter, and that is not limited to the social sciences alone. This reading must be closely linked *to the archive of the present*, which, aside from philosophy, embraces history and politics, an entire body of visual, chanted, painted, imaged and spoken texts. Arising from day-to-day experience and nourishing it in turn, these texts are part of the recent memory of African societies. In reading them we can grasp the power of falsification that exists within memory insofar as it bears witness to the experience that the contemporary African subject has of power, language and life. ("Subject and Experience" 8; emphasis added)

Mbembe's vision of a future diasporic Africa is attainable, I believe, through traversing the literary. As I have illustrated with Naipaul as author and through his text *A Bend in the River*, the literary becomes an archive, and an epistemology that contains a corpus of the social, cultural and historical woven into the fabric of the novel. It opens up spaces for the *fragile* memory of an imagined place and space, the partial histories and fraught certainties that shape one's existence and experience in the world. The literary, in fact, *is* the "archive of the present".

These cross-disciplinary approaches suggest that epistemologies are undergoing a shift in consciousness. There is a need to open up theoretical discursive arguments to the more contingent and partial aspects of culture, language, history, and politics that are constitutive of our social processes.

FOUR

Literary Traditions and Re-writing England in
The Enigma of Arrival

A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments
History is now and England
(T.S. Eliot)

Situated in the historical, "heart" of the country in Wiltshire, *The Enigma of Arrival* is a sustained meditation on landscape, literature and history and their determinations on the writer and the writing process. Written retrospectively, and divided into five sections, the autobiographical novel is an account of the writer's ten-year residence in the village of Waldenshaw. The inhabitants become the subject of his intense scrutiny and the writer similarly inflects an inward reflection on the significance of his presence in the village, his vocation as a writer, and distinctions between his younger self, armed with his ambitions to become a writer, and his more mature self who is an accomplished writer, yet also more vulnerable to his own human frailty and those around him. The narrative is grounded in cycles of seasonal change, decay and ruin, death and rebirth, and the constancy of flux and movement.

Allusions to an English literary (and aesthetic) tradition and Naipaul's palimpsest inscriptions in *The Enigma of Arrival* form the framework to this chapter. In his study on Naipaul's earlier body of work, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V.S. Naipaul's Fiction*, John Thieme conducts a similar study on the use and significance of literary and cultural allusion in Naipaul's oeuvre. The function of allusion, Thieme posits, is to locate the writer in relation to the tradition to which the writing alludes. In T.S. Eliot's essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Eliot asserts that for a writer to be traditional, a writer must "write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with […] the whole of the literature of Europe [and] the literature of his own country […] and of the timeless and the temporal together" (Eliot 38). For Eliot, then, a writer must be able to transcend the boundaries of time in his/her writing, simultaneously being conscious of his/her own place and time and know where s/he fits in. Tradition must flow through the writer's work to be considered valuable, revisionary, inventive, imaginative and, though

Eliot does not explicitly state it, for a writer to enter the hallways of posterity and be assimilated into an esteemed literary canon. By alluding to an English literary tradition in *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul imaginatively revisits a time he associates with England's past, its grandeur, power and wealth, but also, through his own *contemporaneity*, notes the changes affecting England through urban growth, modernisation and its postcolonial history which the writer, himself, symbolises: "I felt that my presence in that old valley was part of something like an upheaval, a change in the course of history of the country" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 14).

What is problematic about Eliot's definition of "tradition" to the writer coming from the colonial world is that the inherited tradition is a Eurocentric one. A writer from the colonies does not inherit the myths and assumptions of a Western tradition: its canons of taste and value that create a sense of cultural belonging. *The Enigma of Arrival* begins with the link the writer has to the landscape through literature: "the river was called the Avon; not the one connected with Shakespeare" (3). Re-tracing the landscape through his linguistic knowledge the writer reflects a need to become acculturated and assimilated into the landscape: "[l]ater - when the land had more meaning […] I was able to think of the flat wet fields […] as 'water meadows' […] and the low smooth hills […] as 'downs'" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 3). Yet, this sense of acculturation and assimilation is thwarted. The native English descriptions for the natural landscape are bracketed off, signalling a distance that prohibits Naipaul from assimilating those signifiers.

In an earlier essay "Jasmine", Naipaul reflects on the relationship between the word (signified) and its contextual meaning (signifier). Using Wordsworth's poem, "Daffodil" to illustrate his point, Naipaul reflects on the political and cultural ramifications of speaking and *writing* in English and the gap that exists between the colonial world and empire through discourse. Naipaul quite *self-consciously* situates himself within the preoccupations of European thought in order to address the dialectic between empire and colony. For him, the choice to be a (colonial) writer writing in English is to engage with the politics of language itself and the cultural and social contingencies surrounding it. In "Jasmine", he pointedly writes: "[e]very writer is, in the long run, on his own; but it helps in the most practical way, to have a tradition. The English language was mine; the tradition was not" (48).

The Enigma of Arrival is an attempt at claiming the inheritance of an English literary tradition. The writer of *The Enigma of Arrival* revisits England to write of Englishness as he observes it over the twenty years that he has lived there. It is also a mature writer returning to his first observations of England captured by his younger self. *The Enigma of Arrival* epitomises the writer's "entanglements" not only with an English literary tradition but also within his own writing – a form of meditation on the writer and his subject matter. It offers a re-vision of one of his earlier books about the metropolis, *The Mimic Men*, albeit written from a perspective of maturity and experience. Indeed *The Mimic Men* can be seen as a companion piece to *The Enigma of Arrival*. Both bear similar marks of thematic continuity and share key elements of construction. A significant link between the two texts is their attitude towards the writing process as a means to clarify thought, order events and rediscover truths.

The complexity in *The Enigma of Arrival* rests in its ambiguous and ambivalently placed narrator who at once is and is not Naipaul. The autobiographical "I" in *The Enigma of Arrival* lures the reader into reading the narrator as Naipaul; however, Naipaul creates a distance between his perceiving self within the narrative and the writing self. As J.M. Coetzee astutely observes in his review of the novel *Half a Life* (2001), the vein of autobiography in Naipaul's oeuvre runs deep, but "the Naipaul selves do not have a simple relationship to the author: they are in a process of *self-creation* and *revision*" ("The Razor's Edge" 5; emphasis added). This indeterminate space between the writing self and the perceiving self lends itself to obscuring the referent, Naipaul (who remains the enigma), and instead, enables the writer to focus more strongly on the development of the artist/writer who is complexly located in a liminal space. What the indeterminate "I" in *The Enigma of Arrival* elucidates is of a paradoxical nature. It, at once, aims to identify who is writing, or observing or travelling, yet simultaneously, recognises that "autobiography can distort; facts can be realigned. But fiction never lies: it reveals the writer totally" (Naipaul qtd. in Jones 96).

Though very little is said in *The Enigma of Arrival* about the narrator's childhood in Trinidad, the journey of self-discovery begins with his arrival in England at the age of eighteen with the specific intention of becoming a writer. By re-tracing the development of the writer/artist *The Enigma of Arrival* aligns itself to

the tradition of the Kunstler Roman. Here, Naipaul traces the development of the artist/writer at a time in his life when he is faced with ill health and death and surrounded by images of decay and ruin. In the opening scene, the writer's setting becomes visible to him through the falling snow that "dusted the bare branches of the trees; outlined disregarded things […] so that piece by piece […] [a] […] rough" portrait of the landscape and setting around him is unveiled (*The Enigma of Arrival* 4). The aura of mystery and enigma captures the "generic ambiguities" (Beecroft 73) of *The Enigma of Arrival. The Enigma of Arrival* is the interplay and interweaving of various elements of fiction, non-fiction and fictional-autobiography. The collapse in generic boundaries echoes the difficulties in locating the writer within a social, political, cultural and literary tradition.

If the English book, as Homi Bhabha asserts, is a "metaphoric writing of the West" communicating "the immediate vision of the thing, freed from the discourse that accompanied it, or even encumbered it" (*The Location of Culture* 105), then Naipaul re-imagines the West and re-attaches England to its history and confronts it with the realities of its own decline (Walker 67). In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul re-constructs a historic England in order to test his own assumptions and beliefs fostered through received notions of Englishness The setting of *The Enigma of Arrival* is significant if we are to follow Raymond Williams' assertion of the "country" as "both nation and part of the land; 'the country' can be the whole society or its rural area" (*The Country and the City* 9). Thus, the symbolic weight and the literary and cultural signifiers surrounding Naipaul's location in the countryside enables the writer to explore the English landscape, "reinhabiting the roles of explorer of and settler in rural Wiltshire" (Coetzee, "The Razor's Edge" 6), and through his own ambivalent postcolonial migrant perspective debunk the myths surrounding notions of Englishness and its literary tradition.

Using a Western literary tradition to uncover historical England, the writer re-maps notions of Englishness from the perspective of the migrant's "double consciousness" and in this way, re-writes and re-inscribes the English pastoral through his own curious position as a British national and a Trinidadian-Indian immigrant. In doing so, he forges a link between empire and colony that extends the tradition of Western literature beyond the English country gardens and manors or the

metropolitan spaces of London, and *links* the histories of imperial England with its colonial counterpart.

My assertion of Naipaul's authorial vision as one that deconstructs notions of Englishness to reveal England's constructed history and that causes the dominant discourse "to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 113), invests the reading of the work within Bhabha's hybridity theory. While Naipaul is a transcultural subject and occupies a liminal position that deconstructs notions of power within the dominating discourse, his position is far too complex to simply be aligned as an "oppositional discourse" that heralds difference and subversion.[14] There is a sense of deep despair and melancholia that attends Naipaul's vision that does not signal the celebratory and convivial aspects of Bhabha's hybridity theory as an oppositional and subversive discourse. Naipaul's view of history and time is cyclical and millennial and his vision remains detached from the revolutionary aspects of postcolonial discourse.[15] Naipaul's extended view of time and history sees how empires rise and fall. In this way, Naipaul evades becoming trapped in the dualism, choosing instead to make the dialectic of cultural politics his subject.

Helen Hayward's analysis of *The Enigma of Arrival* accounts for the writer's immersion in an English literary tradition as a way of reflecting his "reverence for an *idea* of England and its literary culture, but also a sense of betrayal that England has not lived up to its expectations" ("Tradition, Innovation and the Representation of England" 52; emphasis added). Hayward's argument rests between two readings, Helen Tiffin's admiration and Derek Walcott's attack of Naipaul.

Tiffin reads Naipaul as a radical subversive through his portrayal of an empire rotting from within and by writing about the self he defies the "coloniser's construction of the colonial subject" (Tiffin qtd. in Hayward, "Tradition, Innovation and the Representation of England" 52). For Tiffin, the writer of *The Enigma of Arrival* shows all reality to be constructed. This is enacted in the form and content of *The Enigma of Arrival* by combining the elements of fiction, autobiography and

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[14]Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi are some examples of postcolonial writers who embody the celebratory discourses of hybridity theory and the heraldry of difference.
[15] This allows Naipaul to become villainised among many postcolonial theorists and writers who see his vision as far too conservative and counter-revolutionary.

history, and thereby "destabilis[ing] the naturalised claims of history and fiction [in Western discourse]" (Tiffin qtd. in Hayward, "Tradition, Innovation and the Representation of England" 52). In his review of *The Enigma of Arrival*, Walcott argues that, through allusion to a Western literary tradition, Naipaul is signalling his arrival into the English literary canon. Underpinning Walcott's attack on Naipaul has been his Trinidadian contemporary's failure to defend the oppressed and victimised Third World, to "reject his own soil" ("The Garden Path" 28).

Naipaul's affiliation with a tradition of displaced modernist writers is once again foregrounded in *The Enigma of Arrival*. Naipaul's "entanglements" with the literary context of empire have long been part of his oeuvre. In his earlier writing, Naipaul is centrally concerned with the impact of colonial education and Western discourse on the psyche of the colonial subject that produce conditions of psychic discord, colonial schizophrenia and colonial mimicry. Naipaul, like his writers and central protagonists, is a (dis)placed colonial figure. In *The Enigma of Arrival* he intones a great sensitivity and warmth towards the English landscape and the inhabitants of Wiltshire. This, however, should not be read as a rejection of his past. Furthermore, reading Naipaul as a radical subversive who challenges (and shows a resistance towards) Western discourse does not account for the re-visionary aspects central to his work. *The Enigma of Arrival* unsettles the authority of authorial vision, it disturbs fixed notions of Englishness as "natural" or "primordial" and it uncovers the layers of textuality, history and tradition that shape the writer's reading (and understanding) of the landscape he has settled in.

T.S. Eliot exhibits a similar concern with the layers of history and language that shape a writer and the writing process. In "East Coker" Eliot imaginatively revisits this small English village where he once lived and offers a cyclical view of history and the temporality of material achievement. Eliot uncovers a long historical past as he imaginatively reconstructs a time of life in "East Coker" that is buried in the layers of history inscribed onto the landscape:

> The association of man and woman
> In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie –
> A dignified and commodious sacrament.
> Keeping time,
> Keeping rhythm in their dancing
> As in their living seasons. (16)

He resurrects the pastness of the past and brings it into the present time. Eliot conveys a consciousness of language (and literature) by alluding to the medieval language of Chaucer. This serves as a way of linking him to a tradition of writers from the past, which he invokes in the poem through physical contact with the land itself. By invoking a form and style of writing and speech from the past and seamlessly weaving it into contemporary language, Eliot comments on the notion of time as one of unending cycles of return and points towards a world that is in constant flux and movement.

Using a form of pastoral romanticism, and referring directly to a range of writers including Hardy, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Grey, Naipaul's narrative captures the mood, tone and imagery that makes it resonant with an English literary sensibility. Yet there is a deep sense of insecurity and anxiety that attaches itself to the writer of *The Enigma of Arrival*. Recurrently, the writer refers to his locality in the pastoral landscape as one of "strangeness" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 8), "out-of-placeness" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 13), he is "an oddity" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 13), and "an intruder" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 347) in the landscape. While the quintessentially English setting and tone of the text might appear to signal the author's arrival into an English literary canon, he by no means occupies that space with a sense of security or confidence. Rather, his awkwardness reveals how he is entangled in Western discourse and its English literary tradition and has an embattled relationship with it.

Few other postcolonial writers have located their narratives within rural England to address the shifting English cultural and political landscape from a migrant perspective. Closest to Naipaul in this regard is Kazuo Ishiguro whose novels are often located in quintessential English settings (*Howard's End* and *A Pale View of Hills*, which is set partly in Japan and partly in the English countryside) and whose writing can similarly be described as a re-writing of canonical English texts. For these writers the term postcolonial is limiting if it implies that an oppositional discourse exists only for historically and geographically contested sites linked to the "colonies" outside the imperial centre. In an article by M. Griffith entitled "Great English Houses/New Homes in England? Memory and identity", Griffith's links Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* with Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival.* In both

texts, these writers refer to English country houses as a resonant symbol of "Englishness" and attempt to "address issues raised by the 'end of empire' as it is experienced in Britain during the process of adjustment and transition to new political and social realities" (Griffith 2). Both texts make explicit reference to the England of empire and problematise the idea of Englishness and how it is constituted (Griffith 2). Both Ishiguro and Naipaul employ the condition of exile as a way of looking at the landscapes around them. For both Ishiguro and Naipaul, the notion of home, of beauty and the manor, is a *constructed* English ideal that erodes and corrodes from within.

These writers' trajectories differ from other writers, such as Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi. Kureishi's settings engage more with the "empire within Britain" and he uses a comic mode to give expression to the Anglo/Indian experience in England. Kureishi, unlike Ishiguro, Naipaul or Rushdie, is *from* the imperial centre and his thematic concerns around identity often seek to subvert the dominant culture's hold over the discursive construction of the subject. In Naipaul's trajectory, he is, as Suleri identifies, part of an older, "dying generation" of writers who experience a "linguistic and cultural crisis" with the "end of empire" and this emerges as an "ideological ambivalence" in Naipaul's oeuvre (150). Kureishi, who is part of a younger generation of writers, does not feel the same sense of linguistic and cultural crisis that is part of Naipaul's imaginary. Kureishi was born in England, has inherited English as his mother tongue, and is able, therefore, to appropriate elements of pop culture and British cultural politics into his work without the need to explain. Kureishi's trajectory addresses the new "imperialism-in-reverse" (Clement-Ball 7) in London's spaces. As his young, hybrid protagonist, Karim, in *The Buddha of Suburbia* acknowledges: "They [ex-colonialists] were exhausted now; their Empire was gone; their day was done and now it was our turn" (Kureishi 250).

In *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul engages with the demise of imperial authority and his own implication in that process. What makes it particularly experimental is Naipaul's use of the autobiographical "I", notwithstanding the subtitle "A Novel in Five Sections". The epigram to Homi Bhabha's "Signs Taken For Wonders" is taken from Robert Southey's *Letters from England* and reads:

> [a] remarkable peculiarity is that they (the English) always write the personal pronoun I with a capital letter. May we not consider this Great I as an unintended proof how much the Englishman thinks of his own consequence? (*The Location of Culture* 102)

As John Walker asserts the imperial "I" is "a crystallisation of imperial authority; its power, to name and assign meaning" (68). The "I" of the English language is itself a political and culturally contested space for it embodies a sense of power, centrality and authority. What Naipaul attempts in *The Enigma of Arrival* is an appropriation of the "Great I" and its reconfiguration as "a space of opposition *and* as a space of translation and negotiation" (Walker 68). This plays out in the ambiguous positions Naipaul occupies in the text as narrator, protagonist and writer. These generic ambiguities (the blend of autobiography and fiction and the narrative techniques employed within these genres) make *The Enigma of Arrival* a particularly postmodern body of work.

The autobiographical "I" is a rhetorical strategy that enables Naipaul to reflect on his vocation as a writer and his acute sense of self-reflexivity admits that the "I" is both artificial and imaginative. It opens up a space for the writer to reflect upon the truth of his observations and how these perceptions shift through the process of writing. However, the blending of personas in *The Enigma of Arrival* is, as Simon Beecroft suggests, indicative of the "I" that is "suffused under a web of textuality that (within the world of the text itself) categorically does not allow for any stable position outside" (80).[16]

It seems fitting then that Naipaul himself remains enigmatic and elusive to the reader. The reader imagines a Naipaulian-like figure embarking on one of his many walks in the Wiltshire countryside, but the text offers no information regarding who he lives with, who cooks his meals or which of his friends from the metropolis pay him a visit. Though the narrative indicates he is a writer, not one of

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[16] To maintain a level of clarity, I will refer to Naipaul as the writer in this essay, though the term "narrator" is equally as fitting for this autobiographical novel. The ambivalence of the author/narrator reveals to what extent Naipaul is caught in the cleft between Romanticism and Modernism. It reflects an instance of a doubling consciousness. Similarly, Eliot, who heavily criticised the Romantic tradition, invokes the desire for transcendence through Nature, a sensibility many Romantic poets such as Shelley and Wordsworth sought. In this way, Eliot can be considered a post-Romantic. Naipaul, who draws upon a tradition of displaced modernist writers, occupies an "in-between", hybrid and ambivalent position as a postcolonial migrant who is entangled in number of literary traditions. He shows an immersion into a Romantic tradition in *The Enigma of Arrival* through his elegising of the landscape but exhibits a modernist sense of detachment and self-reflexivity.

the titles of the books he has written is ever mentioned except the metanarrative that leads to the title of *The Enigma of Arrival*. In fact, Paul Theroux's book, *Sir Vidia's Shadow*, is more informative on Naipaul furnishing the details Naipaul chooses to omit in the autobiographical novel. Naipaul provides knowledge about the secret lives of those who inhabit the pastoral village of Waldenshaw: (Jack, Pitton, the Phillipses, Allen and the landlord) while he remains veiled between the weave of his own prose.

This complex view of the subject and the author of a text and the authority of the author to represent the self are quintessentially modernist concerns similarly addressed by writers such as Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. Naipaul engages with these modernist concerns but through the prism of his own cultural experience and knowledge. Naipaul effectively challenges the authority of the author and the text and reveals to what extent the postcolonial writer is often problematically located within these "in-between" and indeterminate spaces. This is more than a mere oppositional posture to the authorising claims of a dominant discourse or an attack on the imperial "I". It points towards an "entanglement" the writer shares with these modernist writers who similarly appropriated cultural and/or religious imagery outside of their own Western tradition. This is visible, for example, in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which is imbued with mysticism derived from both Christian doctrine and spiritual practices from the East.

What Naipaul echoes in respect of Eliot's writings, specifically texts such as *Four Quartets* and *The Wasteland*, are fragments of memory, of landscape and the literary. Both Eliot and Naipaul inflect a backward looking gaze into imaginary landscapes of the past though writing in the present. They are both only able to evoke fragments of the landscape and fragments of memory, because the space in which they are working, thinking, and writing is fragile and tenebrous – a space of liminality. As Naipaul writes in *The Enigma of Arrival* "seeking a synthesis of my material, my worlds, my own developing way of seeing, I thought of my present book and returned to live in the past" (189). The past is an imaginary landscape in both Eliot and Naipaul's work. If Eliot serves as an icon of the displaced modernist imaginary, Naipaul, with his complex and particular migrant background, serves as icon of the displaced postcolonial imaginary. Naipaul's imaginary echoes but also differs from the modernist imaginary. Eliot is able to draw upon a secure tradition

of Eurocentrism, in spite of the catastrophes of the war and its dislocatory effects upon society. Eliot critiques modernity but he does so from within his position as a European, thereby interpreting European society to Europeans.

Naipaul's position differs. He comes from outside that position. As a colonial figure with an Indian migrant sensibility, Naipaul carries within him a particular cultural episteme. Naipaul, like the great modernist writers, pursues conditions of exile and shows a commitment to transcending the boundaries of identity defined by nationality, ethnicity and religion. His entangled Trinidadian-Asian migrant history coupled with a sense of Western metaphysics shapes his attitude towards the world and is reflected in the entangled discourses he is located in and that unfold in his writing. Discourse and textuality become a way in which Naipaul accesses the colonial rhetoric employed to construct notions of Englishness but also notions of otherness. As much as the autobiographical "I" in *The Enigma of Arrival* allows Naipaul to discourse on his own subjectivity, it also allows him to discursively address the mythologies of empire. For Naipaul, the ontology and metaphysics of subjectivity is located within discourse and the act of writing enables deeper knowledge and self-understanding:

> [w]riting is more than a way of enriching one's day. Not to write is not to contemplate; not to contemplate is to fail to extract the full meaning of one's experience; it is to allow life and time to run meaninglessly past. The contemplation that goes with writing, and the clarity it requires, make for calm. It is for me the equivalent of religion. ("Naipaul's Antwort" 38)

Though Eliot's *Four Quartets* is never directly evoked in *The Enigma of Arrival* there are striking similarities in the literary and stylistic effects Naipaul shares with Eliot and the modernist techniques Eliot introduced to the Romantic English literary tradition.[17] In *Four Quartets*, Eliot uses a range of the "I" voice for different effects. According to Andrew Kennedy's analysis, there is the "I" that authenticates personal experience as well as a state of reaching beyond the personality, there is the editorial "I" of the poet who self-consciously enters his own poem, there is the empirical "I" that neutralises the personal tone of "East Coker" and the masked and compound doppelganger "I" of "Little Gidding" that exhibits a seeming loss of identity (166). Kennedy's analysis of Eliot's various modes of

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[17] It is not only Eliot who challenged the traditions of Romanticism and Victorianism within English letters. My evocation of Eliot in this context is presaged by his narratorial strategies deployed in *Four Quartets* which colludes with Naipaul's shifting autobiographical mode.

"speaking" through his poems can well be transposed onto Naipaul's narrative strategy. With Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* the "I" is a grammatical construct in which to discourse about the subject. The "I" is still a form used to express the experiences of the writer but one who moves beyond the self and the personality; it becomes a form of meditation to which the various stages of the self can be expressed but also whereby the "self strips itself from all the attributes of selfhood" (Kennedy 168). As Eliot writes in "East Coker":

> So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years –
> Twenty years largely wasted/ Trying to learn to use words,
> and every attempt/ Is wholly a new start, and a different kind of failure […]
> And so each venture/Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate. (21-22)

Eliot remains masked in this extract even though it reads much like a confessional or autobiographical piece of poetry. The speaker in the poem reveals a sense of frustration at the ineffability of the self, yet, the speaker continues to locate the words that can illuminate fragments of the self to the self with the knowledge that there is a perpetual darkness or unknown in the otherness of the self. For Naipaul, his oeuvre is testament to a similar unknowing of the other that includes aspects of one's self. What Naipaul adds to the modernist aesthetic is a postcolonial perspective on the self. Writing is the primary mode through which he is able to reflect on the self but is also a way in which to engage in dialogue with a tradition of writers' preceding him.

The Enigma of Arrival offers a meditation on the writer/artist who is concerned with the metaphysical questions of life and pivots on the concerns of giving expression to the self. However, his own cultural experiences and knowledge make his experience of the self and loss of identity and fracture symptomatic of his colonial displacement and homelessness is markedly different to Eliot's experiences of exile and relocation. Eliot is an inheritor of a Western discourse, of which Naipaul has had access to only through literature. Unlike Eliot, he is not born into its culture; he has had to learn about it in an abstract manner:

> [s]o I was used to living in a world where the signs were without meaning, or the meaning intended by their makers. It was of a piece with the abstract, arbitrary nature of my education, like my ability to 'study' French or Russian cinema without seeing a film, an ability which was […] like a man trying to get to know a city from its street map alone. (*The Enigma of Arrival* 142)

When the writer first arrives to the village of Waldenshaw he expresses a difficulty in "seeing" the place to which he has escaped; the landscape is blurred not only by the falling snow but through his own romantic images and linguistic knowledge he had acquired from his colonial education in Trinidad. The greatest obsession the writer exhibits is to penetrate the landscape through intense scrutiny and gradually begin to read the landscape accurately, in spite of the lies of representations – the crudely coloured Constable reproductions or the pictures of the fat cows on condensed milk cans – images of England transported to the colonies as part of the imperial project of fixing England as a "sign of beauty and object of desire" (Griffith 6).

The autobiographical novel is divided into five sections and each section is mapped with a palimpsest of meaning. The first section, "Jack's Garden", is a meditation on a simple man named Jack, who lives in one of the cottages on the manor and seems to carry a symbolic weight of what the writer perceives as "authentic" Englishness. Naipaul's extensive reference to signs of a settled notion of Englishness (in the form of his allusions to Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Hardy) emerges from the landscape itself. In this section, Naipaul introduces the other main characters, such as the elusive landlord, the Phillispses, Brenda and Les, and Pitton, the gardener.

"Jack's Garden" begins in the pastoral countryside of Wiltshire where the writer sojourns as a solitary wanderer on one of his many walks through the meadows and downs and "barrows and tumuli" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 8) imbibing the picturesque landscape. In Wiltshire, he is among the very paragons of English history and antiquity: Stonehenge, Salisbury Plain and West Amesbury. The mood and tone is melancholic and elegiac and the natural landscape is idealised. The feel and tone of the opening section captures the sensibility of the Romantic poets. Romanticism and elegising the English pastoral is deeply evoked in the opening chapter to reflect the way in which the writer sees the landscape and its inhabitants with the "literary eye or with the aid of literature" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 17).

In this section, the writer sees Jack (and his father-in-law) as "part of the landscape" (12), a "remnant of the past" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 14). Jack and his

father-in-law are seen as belonging to some old peasantry and fit the landscape. They are "emanations [of] literature and antiquity" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 21). The writer sees Jack's father-in-law as a "Wordsworthian figure […] the subject of a poem Wordsworth might have called 'The Fuel Gatherer'" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 15). Jack and his father-in-law represent an idea and way of life the writer associates with his idealised image of England.

This view of England conforms to the Romantic image of England where nature is elevated and seen as sublime and mystical. Jack and his garden is admired because it represents an ideal of Englishness and offers the writer a sense of continuity between England's past and its present. However, Naipaul's location as the belated colonial migrant fractures this continuity. Naipaul evades giving details of the specificity of time: the date or year of his arrival in the village. Instead, temporality is recorded through the seasonal changes he observes in his new location. Naipaul plays on the notion of his belatedness by signalling his arrival to Wiltshire in the winter season. In the Romantic tradition, autumn is the season often favoured by the Romantic poets. This belatedness signals that he is entering the Romantic tradition as a late comer, as the postcolonial figure who is not *of* or *from* the imperial centre but an *outsider* and therefore only a substitution.

As John Walker asserts, Naipaul's critique of empire is disturbing because it presents the great icons of Englishness: Shakespeare, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Camelot, Wordsworth, Hardy, Tennyson, Constable, Waterloo, Trafalgar, Goldsmith, and Gray and creates an aura of nostalgia for England's past at a time when the frailty of Britain's position in the world is all too evident ("Unsettling the Sign" 70).

For the writer of *The Enigma of Arrival* his idealised image of England captured in this historic landscape is undergoing change, which the narrative embodies through its discourse of fracture and decay. The landscape is subject to change, threatened by an encroaching modernity and urban growth and the decline of Empire itself. Thus, the writer feels that he has "come into a world past its peak" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 23). England's grandeur no longer exists. Jack and his father-in-law, though appearing to belong to the landscape also "live among ruins, among superseded things" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 13). This recounts a similar

image in Eliots' "The Burial of the Dead" from *The Wasteland* in which "heap[s] of broken images" (23), signify England's demise and the crisis in Western culture after the war.

The Enigma of Arrival is propelled through the juxtaposition of what the writer first perceives and how this perception becomes refined through the act of writing. Throughout *The Enigma of Arrival*, the author creates a tension between the perceiving self and the writing self. Through the writing process, the writer is able to refine or revise his earlier perceptions: qualifying, validating or disputing them. The effect on the narrative is to create an aura of ambivalence and ambiguity around the notion of representation and the role of the writer in re-presenting reality. This ambivalence is more than likely informed by his own displaced colonial history.

The tension is an important one since the writer seeks to inhabit an England of the past but it is also an imaginary England he seeks to reconstruct through his evocations of Tennyson's "larks […] in sightless song" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 20), or the sheep shearing as a ceremony "out of an old novel, perhaps by Hardy […] or a Victorian country diary" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 12). The writing self, enabled by a greater clarity of vision, observes the fraudulence in what the perceiving self sees as the English idyll, obviously influenced by the writer's literary knowledge, and corrects the vision:

> So much that had looked traditional, natural, emanations of the landscape, things that country people did […] now turned out not to have been traditional or instinctive after all. (*The Enigma of Arrival* 49)

The writer revises his earlier observations and sees that the quintessential wild English garden is a constructed one. This has obvious consequences on the notion of Englishness and the construction of its national identity. The garden and the manor, Jack and the landlord are signifiers of the English landscape and of English identity. These signifiers, however, are placed in a context of ruin and decay to denote the changes taking place in England. Jack's death, which is obliquely hinted at when the smoke from his chimney one day stops rising is reflected in the way his garden runs wild. The planting of annuals, the tending of geese and maintaining the hedges and the fruit trees is not traditional to the Wiltshire community but rather, as the writer observes, "part of Jack's way" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 49). Its demise reflects the

inevitably of change and flux. There is a degree of instability that Naipaul foregrounds through these observations that point toward the constancy of flux and change portrayed through the motif of death, decay and ruin.

By returning to and revising his observations Naipaul thwarts any chronological logic in the narrative and destabilises any authorial authority implicit in the genre of autobiography. In *The Enigma of Arrival* the writer re-traces the same events and places and reconsiders them from a fresh perspective (Hayward, *The Enigma of V.S. Naipaul* 50). Time, in the narrative, is measured through seasonal changes offering, in itself, a promise of cyclical return. Like Eliot's "Burnt Norton" the style of *The Enigma of Arrival* functions with the circular pattern of return. This pattern of return is reflected in the writer's own writing. *The Enigma of Arrival* depicts a re-writing of the development of the writer, which Naipaul first explored in *The Mimic Men*. However, in the latter autobiographical novel, his "second arrival" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 95) in England he is able to return to the books he has written and reflect on the process of writing them.

The section, "The Journey" is a reversal of time and place from the cottage in Waldenshaw and focuses on the writer's younger self, departing from Trinidad in the early 1950s. This section of the book is furnished with much autobiographical material from the author's past and traces his physical and literary journey from Trinidad to England though it gives little information about his actual childhood in Trinidad. In its own self-effacing way, it signals the writer Naipaul has become. "The Journey" traces his artistic development as a writer and how he arrives at his subject. It also marks the sense of fracture and deracination that Naipaul feels he has inherited as part of his colonial condition:

> [t]he worlds contained within myself, the worlds I lived in: my subject turning out to be a version of the one, that unknown to me […] after I had left home […] and found myself […] among the flotsam of Europe after the war. (*The Enigma of Arrival* 161)

"The Journey" seeks to account for the sense of fracture resulting from the writer's immersion in a colonial education system coupled with his ambitions to become a writer in the metropolitan centre. He sees his education as the genesis to his psychic discord and his ability to learn through abstractions compounds his feelings of separation from life as a man and life as a writer: "the idea of abstract study had

been converted into an idea of a literary life in another country […] My real life, my literary life, was to be elsewhere" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 126).

This section of the book provides a historical background to the writer's metropolitan literary life. The tone reflects a deep disenchantment with the metropole that is not evident in the bucolic mood that characterises the Wiltshire sections of the book. This section begins with a commentary on the surrealist painting by Giorgio de Chirico, which supplies the title to the book, a title given to the painting by the poet Apollinaire. The metanarrative, or allegorical fable, contained within this section provides the key to understanding the narrative. Naipaul imagines a traveller who arrives on the quay of a foreign city and is drawn into the city's intrigues but is gradually overwhelmed by a sense of purposelessness, a feeling of helplessness and an awareness of betrayal and danger. He imagines the tale ending with the traveller's

> [f]eeling of adventure [that] would give way to panic. He would want to escape, to get back to the quayside and his ship. But he wouldn't know how. I imagined some religious ritual in which, led on by kindly people, he would unwittingly take part and find himself the intended victim. At the moment of crisis he would come upon a door, open it, and find himself back on the quayside of arrival. He has been saved; the world is as he remembered it. Only one thing is missing now. Above the cut-out walls and buildings there is no mast, no sail. The antique ship has gone. The traveller has lived out his life. (*The Enigma of Arrival* 107)

The allegory of this tale with the writer's shared context of displacement and arrival contextualises Naipaul's experience in England. In the tale, a traveller voyages to an adopted culture but soon this voyage turns to a nightmare of loss and betrayal, which he hopes to escape from through an act of remembrance and the dream of return, only to discover that return is impossible.

The third and fourth sections, "Ivy" and "Rooks" respectively, are a chronological continuation of the first. Naipaul focuses on the elusive landlord and his "accidia" which mirrors the deterioration of England's wealth and former glory. In the "Ivy" section of the book, Naipaul reflects upon the many changes befalling the manor, its rotting trees and the ruins scattered within the manor. Paying close attention to the gardens in the manor allows the writer to reflect upon the myths that shape English identity. As Rudyard Kipling stated, "our England is our garden"

(Kipling qtd. in Helmreich 2). There is an intrinsic trace of national identity that is inscribed onto the landscape. According to Roland Barthes, "myths are innocent…not because its intentions are hidden […] but because they are naturalised" (Barthes qtd. in Helmreich 2). The garden can seem to be a place without politics and its meanings seem commonplace and obvious. However, as Barthes warns, "the most natural object contains a political trace" (Barthes qtd. in Helmreich 2). Anne Helmreich points out in her study *The English Garden and National Identity*, that the garden became constitutive of national identity and formed part of an invented tradition that implied a continuity with the past and the exclusive practices of Englishness (3-4).

For Naipaul, revisiting this rural part of England with these notions of Englishness in place, he revises his earlier assumptions, seeing the gardens now as constructions and part of an invented tradition. Similarly, the manor is presented as a symbol of England's former power and prestige, but slowly the writer revises his initial observation and sees that the manor was

> [n]ot old. It had been built […] to look old. Like a reconstructed church […] it was part of the taste of the time for a special idea of the past, the assertion – with wealth and power of unbelievably extensive empire – of racial and cultural virtue. (*The Enigma of Arrival* 221)

The manor is a reminder of that former glory, and the crumbling estate, the ivy which strangles the trees and the scattered ruins within the estate signify a vanishing England of yore. For the writer, the manor occupies an ambivalent space. It feeds into his received models of Englishness and thereby affirms particular notions of Englishness. At the same time, he sees through its constructedness and thereby displaces the centralising authority of the image. The writer sees loss of imperial power as precipitated by an encroaching modernity and England's loss of authority by "the very kinds of people who, in the great days, would have given of their best […] now, sensing an absence of authority" seek to "hasten decay, to loot, to reduce to junk" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 355).

In his critique of Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, Salman Rushdie takes issue with the idea conveyed by the writer that "the British have lost their way because of an 'absence of authority, an organisation in decay', that the fall of the manor encourages ordinary folk to hasten decay, to loot, to reduce to junk' is an

unlikeable, untenable one" (*Imaginary Homelands* 150). It is unclear whether Rushdie is opposed to the prescience of Naipaul's vision of the demise of the British Empire or the complicity of the British in their own unravelling following "the end of empire". What emerges most persistently in Rushdie's attack on *The Enigma of Arrival* is its melancholic tone. Such a critique is unfair at most since Rushdie's work has always favoured the levity, hence his approval of Naipaul's hugely successful, *A House for Mr Biswas*. In *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul accounts for his shift from the comic mode:

> I took refuge in humour – comedy, funniness, the satirical reflex, in writing, as in life, so often a cover up for confusion.
> In order to do more of [the difficult writing][…] it was necessary for me to acknowledge more of myself. (167)

The shift to tragedy and melancholia that encompasses much of Naipaul's latter writing is a recognition of the "cultural disorientation that accompanies the collapse of imperial certainties" (Gilroy, *After Empire* 125). The sadness, which attends Naipaul's recognition, rests in his profound idea of Englishness. As Ian Baucom elucidates:

> [t]o admit to the artifice in the landscape, to admit to the constructedness of this England, is to admit to the inventedness of his own identity. For Naipaul is one of those strange creatures which the British empire seemed so adept at producing: a colonial subject more rigorously English than the English. (266)

In order for Naipaul to give expression to his own "entanglement" with empire and its subsequent loss of power and identity, it is necessary for him to reconstruct and retrace the country house (and consequently the landlord and the garden) as a moment in England's cultural history that is both a fetish and a cultural artefact and thereby serves as one of England's myths that feed its national identity.

By returning to an imaginative space of imperial dominance, Naipaul links the history of empire with his own colonial background. In Edward Said's essay, "Jane Austen and Empire", Said elucidates how the country house (*Mansfield Park*) extends beyond its own domestic space; it signifies both Englishness and empire and the wealth of the country house and its privileged institution of discourses of cultural discipline is funded and maintained by colonialism:

> Austen […] synchronises domestic with international authority, making it
> plain that the values associated with such higher things as ordination, law,
> and propriety must be grounded firmly in rule over and possession of
> territory. She sees clearly that to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and
> rule an imperial estate in close, not to say inevitable association with it. What
> assures domestic tranquillity and attractive harmony of one is the
> productivity and regulated discipline of the other. (104)

Naipaul's inclusion of the manor serves as a reminder of England's former hegemony and moral economy, its imperial project of identity formation and class privilege. The landlord, who similarly occupies a position of fascination for the writer forms part of the English elite whose sense of security and worth is maintained by their class position. As the writer recognises, the landlord's "anchor was his house, his knowledge of his social worth" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 232). With England's history of greatness diminishing, a sense of melancholia ("accidia") befalls the landlord. In an enlightening study, Gilroy terms this condition "postimperial melancholia" which is a "neotraditional pathology, the morbidity of heritage" (*After Empire* 109). The sense of melancholy and loss of England's greatness are the tropes oft pursued in the romantic and postromantic tradition of English literature. England exhibits an inability to forget its canons of greatness and unable to forget its loss. This sense of nostalgia for the past evokes the image of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History turning a resentful back on the present and a teary eye toward the image of a vanishing England.

Naipaul's writing reflects a similar attachment to the imperial loss of power. The writer is sympathetic to the landlord's "accidia" because he identifies with him. He sees their contingent histories as interlinked:

> [a]n empire lay between us. This empire at the same time linked us. This
> explained my birth in the New World, the language I used, the vocation and
> ambition I had; this empire in the end explained my presence there in the
> valley, in that cottage, in the grounds of the manor. But we were - or had
> started – at opposite ends of wealth, privilege, and in the hearts of different
> cultures. (*The Enigma of Arrival* 208)

Here, the writer acknowledges his own postcolonial migrant history as effecting changes onto the rural landscape and England in general. Yet, Naipaul avoids the revolutionary posture of the postcolonial migrant figure that forces a recognition on England of a society now in the throes of political, social and cultural transition through the presence of racially and culturally different people. Naipaul represents

the rural landscape and its inhabitants as suffering from a sense of loss and nostalgia (evinced through the landlord's "accidia") for its imperial past.

The final chapter, "A Ceremony of Farewell", reveals the significance and importance of the narrative. The central motif in this section is death. The writer returns to Trinidad for his sister's funeral. Returning to England after the funeral, the writer begins writing *The Enigma of Arrival*. Naipaul views history as cyclical and sees the world as governed only by flux and change. While his narrative demythologises notions of Englishness, he is unable to view this change as fixed or static: "I had lived with the idea of change, had seen it as constant, had seen a world in flux, had seen human life as a series of cycles that sometimes ran together" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 57). What Naipaul iterates is not simply the loss of empire but of a world that is in constant movement and flux; with death there is always the promise of return.

FIVE

On History and Homelessness:
A Way in the World

Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious. (Benjamin)

A Way in the World (1994) presents itself as the life and art of V.S. Naipaul through an interlocking series of journeys. Its focus is strongly on memory and cultural locations in the author-narrator's search for selfhood and understanding the effects of inheritance. Naipaul is no longer dominated by the colony-metropolis or Third and First World dualisms (as illustrated in *The Mimic Men* and *A Bend in the River*). This text follows his achievement in *The Enigma of Arrival* in which the author begins a shift in the novel genre to produce a discourse that is situated in the indeterminate spaces between fiction, autobiography and non-fiction. With his development as a writer/artist in a career that spans nearly fifty years, his more recent literary representations embody and express – in both form and content – his syncretic, mixed world background.

A Way in the World is a more overtly hybrid work than *The Enigma of Arrival*, combining the elements of fiction, autobiography, memoir, journalism, essay and historical documentation. In the narrative Naipaul performs the various roles of author, narrator, character, explorer, traveller and historian, and his prose slips easily in and out of the consciousness of the many characters represented in the text.[18]

Relying on archival information such as letters and historical documents and catalysing these pieces of historical fact with personal memory and the writer's art of fantasy and creation, Naipaul partially reconstructs the lives of the fictional and historical figures in the text, providing only fragments of their stories, which are cut off from a larger historical perspective. The intertextual resources in *A Way in the*

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[18] Naipaul's stylistic approach resembles certain modernist writers. One thinks specifically of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Eliot's *The Wasteland*.

World come from other sources, such as historical documentation and personal memory. This text reveals to what extent Naipaul's sense of general history is entangled within a discourse of Western historicism. He relies on historical documentation from European libraries, and he maintains a modernist textuality as a stylistic feature within his writing. He uses his literary imagination to fill in where the historical text cannot. He represents the characters retrospectively (they are near to death or depicted at old age). It is through the fragment that Naipaul elucidates his point about history, time and memory as fragile links that constitute the uncertainty and disjuncture of the social present.

A Way in the World is concerned with the pursuit of origins and genealogy in that the author revisits his native homeland, Trinidad, and "re-writes" *The Loss of El Dorado*.[19] He reverts back to a long, "fantastical" past in the New World colony (the Caribbean and South America) and reconstructs a time of the aboriginal inhabitants who occupied the land prior to the arrival of the slaves from Africa and the indentured labourers from Asia and China. His continuous return to imaginary landscapes of the past can appear to be an inconsolable lamentation for loss and a childish fantasy of return to a mythical "whole" past. In as much as Naipaul constructs a notion of an Adamic world prior to colonisation, this nostalgic longing for an unsullied past is persistently undermined through the writer's diasporic consciousness.

In his "Two Worlds" Nobel Lecture Naipaul writes: "The world is always in movement. People have everywhere at some time been dispossessed" (186). The statement points towards the constancy of flux; that every nation is diasporic and hybrid and that the notions of "whole" communities and "pure" origins are constructs. If one abandons a metaphysical view, and listens to history, one finds that there is no essential core or essence but that these narratives have been fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.[20] By inhabiting the text in the guise of an "archaeologist"[21] Naipaul delves into history through an "archaeological process" (Hayward, "Tradition, Innovation, and the Representation of England" 76)

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[19] Hayward provides a sustained argument on *A Way in the World* as a re-visiting and recapitulation of themes addressed in an earlier historical account of the islands and South America entitled *The Loss of El Dorado*.

[20] This is the approach to history posited by the Frankfurt School, Nietzsche, Foucalt and a position taken up by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*.

[21] Helen Hayward similarly uses the metaphor of "archaeology" in her reading of Naipaul's text as a historical fiction that re-writes *The Loss of El Dorado*.

to trace cultural inheritances and collective memories that are history and so begins to re-map and re-trace both Trinidadian history and his own subjectivity.

The book begins with a seventeen-year old Naipaul working as a second-class clerk in the Red House of Trinidad's Registry Office. The place is a literal repository of the island's history and the point from which the associations within the text radiate: "All the records of the colony were there, all the deaths, births, deeds, transfer of property and slaves, all the life of the island for the century and a half of the colonial time" (*A Way in the World* 21).

In this way Naipaul sets the theme and tone for the historical explorations and archaeological processes that will explore the various strata of a complex and wounded past. He begins by citing the nationalist agitation that takes place at Woodford Square. Woodford Square is symbolic of the changes that will overtake Port-of-Spain as Trinidad moves towards independence. He refers to this as the "sacrament of the square":

> There was an immense chain of events. You could start with the sacrament of the square and work back: to the black madmen on the benches, the Indian destitutes, the plantations, the wilderness, the aboriginal settlements, the discovery. And you could move forward from that exaltation and that mood of rejection to the nihilism of the moment. (*A Way in the World* 40)

For Naipaul there is a sense of melancholy and loss that attaches itself to the destruction of the square. He positions his thoughts of the past along a continuum between past and present and the shaping forces each extends upon the other. For Naipaul, the historical past is a place of trauma and this trauma continues into the present perpetuating violence and destruction. The "sacrament of the square" takes place in his native homeland at a time of decolonisation. Colonial history repeats itself through the former colonised revolting against themselves in the name of a national identity and a continuity of history founded on an untenable paradigm of progress measured in a linear temporality of Western discourse.

The destruction of the square is a pivotal moment for Naipaul who returns to Trinidad after several years spent in London. The political rallies that take place at the square marks the rise of a new political movement, which he feels alienated from; it also marks the erasure of a group of homeless people, many of whom were

indentured immigrants from India, to whom the square was a place of refuge. By choosing *not* to align himself with a political party, and criticising any such belief in causes that corrupt, Naipaul's fraught location can be described as a *nonposition*. As explained in the introductory chapter, the politics of the *nonposition* is not to not have a position. It is to exist within the liminal spaces of the social and political arena and question the assumptions and motives that incite revolution and change.[22]

The revolutionary struggles and imperialist conquests in *A Way in the World* serve to illustrate Naipaul's point that revolutions are morally ambiguous. The belief in the cause itself becomes trapped within a totalising consciousness. The rationality that seeds the revolution also contains an element of irrationality that makes it subject to tyranny and domination and it is this aspect of the new liberationist politics that Naipaul takes issue with:

> [t]he new politics, the curious reliance of men on institutions they were yet working to undermine, the simplicity of beliefs and the hideous simplicity of actions, the corruption of causes […] where always 'something inherent in the necessities of successful action […] carried with it the moral degradation of the idea'". ("Conrad's Darkness" 170-171)

Naipaul's critique of the new liberationist politics is its reliance on a Marxist paradigm, which as Young argues, is merely a "negative form of the history of European imperialism" (2). The black liberationist politics in the Caribbean and Africa as represented in the text serve to foreground the violence that underpins these discourses as a repetition of the same. As with all nationalistic models of power, these discourses seek to appropriate the other into the same. Moreover, in the attempt to revolutionise its (Third World) history, there is an erasure of a past, especially where that past is associated with pain and trauma.[23]

The author of *A Way in the World* begins his research of history in London in the British Museum and the Public Record Office. It is at this distance from the island that he is able to give imaginative scope to the island beyond its colonial New

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[22] As I assert in the introduction, Coetzee's reading of Erasmus in the essay, "Erasmus: Madness and Rivalry", influences my assertion of Naipaul's *nonposition*.
[23] This is illustrated in Chapter three.

World origins and re-construct the aboriginal island that has now been completely eradicated. Slowly he knits together a larger historical view of the island invaded by Columbus, then Raleigh and Miranda. He sees the island through a refracted lens of intersecting realities, which, he as writer/artist, is able to penetrate, and makes "[the] world lose some of its substance; reality [becomes] fluid" (*A Way in the World* 209). This flux in his vision prevails and it is necessary to his authorial quest to maintain this fluidity of worlds in order to see its patterns of repetitions, its continuities within discontinuities.

The characters in the book resemble Blair who comes "trailing all the strands of his complicated past" (*A Way in the World* 25) and the book enacts a vision of "train[ing] [one's] self to look through the surface reflections to what lay below" (*A Way in the World* 109). This archaeological process of unearthing history maps the trajectory of the book:

> You could see the low gable marks of early, small buildings against higher walls. You could look down, in fact, at more than Spanish foundations: you could look down at red Amerindian soil.
> There had been blood here before […] Amerindian chiefs […] had surrendered their land to the Spaniards […] A short while later an English marauder came raiding [and the Spanish] were themselves now put to flight; and, in the jail […] the last aboriginal rulers of the land, held together on one chain, scalded with hot bacon fat, and broken by other punishments. (*A Way in the World* 41)

The passage evokes, with great pain and tenderness, the historical trauma that has taken place within the New World colony. By re-membering the traces of the aboriginal inhabitants, whose fragmented histories Naipaul discovers through his own historical research on South America and Trinidad, he re-maps Trinidadian history, extending it beyond its immediate British colonial history. What gives his writing a moral and ethical charge, through the narrative are the forgotten memories and lost histories of the marginal groups that are textually inscribed into *A Way in the World*.

Through narrative these stories become part of a collective memory, history's trauma inscribed onto the bodies of the tortured Amerindian chiefs. Through the fictional-historical narrative, the literary becomes what Achille Mbembe, in a call for new ways of reading and writing refers to as an "archive of the

present" ("Subject and Experience" 8). Naipaul no longer needs fictional characters to stand in for real subjects of history. His narrative allows them representation. In an echo of Benjamin, he returns the dead to the living. The memory of the dispossessed, marginal Amerindians captures the ethics of memory, the obligation to remember. It is the past claimed, and re-figured into the present moment, bringing to light those silenced and dispossessed from history but whose narratives, whose lives should not be deadened by history, and silenced by the dominant discourse. There is an element of redemption in this. Shoshana Felman (on her reading of Walter Benjamin) writes that redemption is a discontinuity, a disruption:

> It names the constant need to catch up with *the hidden reality of history* that always remains a debt to the oppressed, a debt to the dead of history, a claim the past has on the present. ("Benjamin's Silence" 211; emphasis added)

Naipaul frames the narrative within the context of revolutionary struggles focusing predominately on revolutionary leaders. He evokes three historical figures: Columbus, Raleigh and Miranda and places their narratives alongside seemingly peripheral and random characters: Blair, Lebrun, Leonard Side. The chapter, "New Clothes" functions as the leitmotif for each of the stories in the book. It captures the image of the revolutionary figure as an inherently doomed character, a "carrier of mischief" (*A Way in the World* 46) travelling through a mythical, Arcadian landscape untouched by change and external contact:

> [in] this scene […] almost everything belongs – except for the narrator himself, the clothes and canvas shoes of Lucas and Mateo and the tins and […] cardboard boxes in the carriers' loads. A hundred years before, the narrator thinks, everything in this scene would have belonged; and a hundred years before that. (*A Way in the World* 54)

"New Clothes" presents itself as a prototype of the narrative structure for *A Way in the World*. Naipaul refracts the story, offering the reader information as to how the writer constructs his narrative, the assumptions he makes; as well as creating stories within stories, fragments of which are linked to other stories in the book. Each story carries with it verbal echoes of the others and plays out the historical ironies particular to the New World colony, making its history both ridiculous and complex, a trajectory which the narrative will pursue.

The setting of the chapter, "New Clothes", is an unnamed South American country, an Amerindian no man's land. The setting adds to the danger and mystery of the narrative and the narrator equally becomes a man of mystery. Naipaul vacillates between making him a man "on the run" (*A Way in the World* 46) or a revolutionary. "On the run", then, serves as the title for a subsequent chapter on the Marxist revolutionary, Lebrun. The climax of the chapter resides in its ending – a historical twist, in which the narrator, a revolutionary of the 1970s, meets the Amerindian chief who shows him a chest of clothes from Tudor times, " new clothes of three hundred and fifty years before, a relic of an old betrayal" (*A Way in the World* 67). The clothes are the remainders and reminders of Walter Raleigh's expedition to South America and whose narrative the reader encounters in "A Parcel of Papers, A Roll of Tabacco, a Tortoise". In this way, the narrative compresses the temporal scope, connecting a long historical past (of the 1500s) with a more immediate postcolonial past. The central focus of the revolutionary figure as "mischief maker" can be seen in the context of Naipaul's scepticism in the efficacy of political actions and causes. In the chapter "On the Run" Naipaul criticises the racial/political revolutionary discourse of African authenticity and Black Nationalist politics. For him, it is "no more than the old imperialist attitude turned inside out" ("Prologue to an Autobiography" 88). Similarly, the prototypal story of "New Clothes" echoes this sentiment - it is an old story dressed up in new clothes.

With *A Way in the World* the notion of "entanglements" and "double consciousness" is employed differently in comparison to his deployment in the earlier texts in this study. Unlike in the previous chapters, where I elucidated Naipaul's "entanglement" with a Western literary tradition, notably Joyce, Conrad and Eliot as reflective of the writer's immersion within a Western intellectual heritage, the intertextual resources in *A Way in the World* are historical records. It is an imperial history which Naipaul seeks to unearth in order to think through colonisation. These records, the author-narrator in *A Way in the World*, tells the reader, are Spanish and British accounts of the history of the West Indies, and a record of *their* imperialist missions.

For critic Selwyn Cudjoe, this is merely Naipaul locating himself within the ideology of the dominant discourse to affirm its power and decry a sense of loss at its passing (226). My conjecture at this assertion is that Naipaul occupies this

position in order to critique Western culture from within. His "double consciousness" makes him both a modern subject (a subject of modernity as well as its modernist critique) and a (post)colonial subject. Through this disruptive position, *A Way in the World* engages with issues of history (and modernity) retrospectively and from standpoint of the slave. By doing so, Naipaul inflects a disruptive view of modernity and history that challenges the telos of continuity and progress measured by Enlightenment thought and asserts the incommensurabilities in history which Enlightenment rationality and universality cannot tolerate or contain.

A Way in the World is primarily concerned with history and homelessness. Naipaul offers alternative ways of reading and writing history in an attempt to think beyond foundational narratives and nationalistic discourses. In this way, his condition of homelessness is affirmed as a position that enables one to think more critically of the modern world. Here, it is useful to evoke the Frankfurt School as providing a methodological framework in which to think through the conditions and shaping force of colonialism on the construction of subjectivities marked by historical trauma.

Naipaul traverses his way through *A Way in the World* of recorded history, embarking on a Benjaminian trail of history as a "monadic" moment that interrupts the "homogeneous course of history" (Benjamin 263). In this way, his view of the historical is non-teleological or non-totalising; it departs from a traditional historical narrative that "[tells] the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary" (Benjamin 263).

The narrative structure of *A Way in the World* enacts what Walter Benjamin asserts in "Theses of the Philosophy of History" is the role of the historian. Benjamin asserts that a new historicist approach to reading history is necessary to escape the appropriative claims made on the subject by a dominant discourse. The trajectory of difference implied by Benjamin's assertion is mirrored in the trajectory of *A Way in the* World mapped onto the landscape:

> [a]s soon as you tried to enter that idea [of a recent wiped out past], it ramified. And it ramified more and more as your understanding grew: different people living for centuries where we now trod, with our overwhelming concerns: different people with their own calendar and

reverences and ideas of human association, different houses or huts, different roads or paths, different crops and fields and vegetation (and seasons), different views, speeds, reasons for journeys, different ideas of the ages of man, different ideas of the enemy and fellowship and sanctity and what men owed themselves. (208-209)

The recurring "different" serves as a constant, stabilising element that holds together the diachronic tendencies of the sentence, its fracture and fragmentation, and "provides a stable framework on which to hang its propensity for diversification" (Hayward, *The Enigma of V.S. Naipaul* 78). The repetitive echo of "different" serves as a chain that links the apparently random, disparate elements together and so creates continuities within apparent discontinuities. The implication is that Naipaul restores a sense of otherness to historical memory.

A Way in the World becomes an enactment of what Homi Bhabha espouses, through Michel de Certeau, that "beginnings require an originary non-place" (Certeau qtd. in Bhabha, "The World and the Home" 146). The circular and repetitive patterns in *A Way in the World* persistently play into and question the foundationalist narratives that inform each of the stories in the text. As Bhabha urges in *The Location of Culture* (1994):

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between spaces' provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1-2)

For Bhabha, like Naipaul, the destination and fate of the colonial subject cannot be accessed by simply returning to "indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 9).[24] In Bhabha's view, the present "can no longer be simply envisaged as a synchronic break or bonding with the past and the future" (*The Location of Culture* 9). Here, Bhabha's argument reflects an influence by the Frankfurt School:

> […] unlike the dead hand of history that tells the beads of sequential time like a rosary, seeking to establish serial, causal connections, we are now

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[24] This is the problem with the discourses of Negritude and nativism, which I illustrated in the chapter, *A Bend in the River*.

confronted with what Walter Benjamin describes as the blasting of a monadic moment from the homogeneous course of history, 'establishing a conception of the present as the "time of the now"'. (*The Location of Culture* 41)

These thinkers (Naipaul, Bhabha, Benjamin, Certeau), though writing at different points in history, express a yearning to move beyond a limiting and deadening passage of time enshrined in its linear temporality. Each is an émigré – a traveller, a refugee, a restless spirit. What emerges in this study is a reading of history, through homelessness, that opposes the singular (undisputed) narratives of Western historicism.

The fragmentary structure of the text is an intrinsic feature of its counter reading of history. The fragments of textuality and history and its partial representation of human lives reflect the writer's personal history of uprootment and displacement. The colonial figure as deraciné in Naipaul's oeuvre has often been read in the context of homelessness, and with Naipaul's strong individualistic focus, as exile. While some may balk at the idea, Naipaul conveys a "postcolonial humanism" that as Timothy Weiss asserts, "does not deny the shaping power of place and culture but goes beyond regional and national boundaries in their allegiances to life and the human struggle" (116).[25]

With his colonial background, Naipaul is immersed within Western history and historicism, and ensnared in its telos of historical tradition and representation, and its constructions of a coherent, unified self.[26] It therefore becomes imperative to consider the marginal and minoritarian position, which Naipaul occupies and from which he narrates. It begs the question: how does one escape this telos? And, who provides the models for this? The Frankfurt School, notably, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, provide an enabling framework in which to approach the representation of history in *A Way in the World*. Their thought can be located within

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[25] To categorise Naipaul as a "postcolonial" writer is, for me, limited and restrictive. He is a writer of international and global imagining. I use Weiss's description to delineate the moment out of which he writes, which is the time of empire and the effects of its decline in its erstwhile territories. Likewise, to label Conrad an imperialist writer, or Woolf a feminist writer is to limit the reach and scope of what these writers achieved with their writing and the boundaries they crossed, or rather dismantled. The same can be asserted of Naipaul.

[26] This is the general thrust the argument proposed in Chapter One. Through writing about the self and revisiting the shame and awkwardness of the past, Naipaul attempts to eschew a position of victimisation and transfigures the trauma of history into an aesthetic form that requires self-reflexivity.

an existentialism of homelessness and the role of the migrant thinker to think outside of narratives of continuity and construct new ways of narrating that echo the spasmodic, dislocatory and disjunctive.

My recourse to the Frankfurt School lies in their questioning and debunking of Enlightenment thought that has shaped the march of progress and the effects of modernity. The Frankfurt School, writing in response to the rise of fascism after world war one, perceives of fascism as a symptom of European imperialism. As Robert Young elucidates, "fascism […] can be explained quite simply as European colonialism brought home to Europe by a country that had been deprived of its overseas empire after world war one" (7). For Adorno and Benjamin, Enlightenment thought is based upon reason and rationality, but within reason is unreason, and within rationality lies irrationality. This explains the tyranny and atrocities of the two world wars, based upon fixed ideas of nation and nationality, ethnicity and race. The Frankfurt School thereby offers a critique of Western culture that can be similarly explored in the atrocities of colonisation, slavery and apartheid. These violent acts seeded out of a "noble" mission. How then is one to live in this world after such terrible wars, displacement and absolutist thinking practices?

In Ashraf Jamal's article "The Third Space: On Restless and Redemption", he presents the unrest of spirit and the virtues concomitant with the condition of homelessness, of flight and displacement that has become the conditions of living in fin de siècle. Jamal links the Frankfurt School (Adorno and Benjamin) with the postcolonial theorist, Homi Bhabha, and investigates the "nomadic" lines of flight each of these thinkers encounters, transgresses and transcends to forge news way of thinking, of seeing, of being in the world. Jamal's move, in an echo of the thinkers he addresses, is a deconstructive one; he locates his thought within the negative construction, where "restlessness and despair is [the] condition which predates the catastrophic impact of the Second World War" (113) and where one is impelled to "think in flight" and forge thought "in a manner that is provisional and contingent" (107). In Jamal's reading of Adorno's *Minima Moralia* he asserts that Adorno, as writer, "sets up house" in the books he writes in order to "render darkness visible" (108). Jamal continues:

> For Adorno, the refuge is the 'text', a house of words in which he 'sinks', shiftless […] in which the 'disordered' room upon room of words mirrors his own disorder. (Jamal 108)

Jamal's reading of Adorno's work is enabling in my reading of Naipaul who echoes a similar sense of despair, melancholy and disorder as that of the writers of the writers of the Frankfurt School. The historical trauma marked by the events of World War Two, the flight, fight and terror it produced, and the influx of colonial migrants to the imperial centre following the end of World War Two, continues to have ramifications on present-day society in the image of homelessness.

Naipaul has recurringly explored his uprooted and chaotic New World background and beneath *A Way in the World* is a palimpsest of his other writings. This continuous re-visiting of thematic concerns portrays a dogged insistence to extract the full meaning of out of one's past, to make experience meaningful. Writing, for Naipaul, thus becomes a form of meditating on the past; it enables him to "order" the excesses and disorder of his hybrid, fractured background and expose it to acute self-reflection. As Ralph Singh confesses in *The Mimic Men*, "in that dream of writing […] I was attracted [to] the calm and order [which the writing would bring]" (32). Is this redemption, then, a future hope in the recovery of meaning through the act of narration?

One can question whether, for Adorno, as much as for Naipaul, the house of literature has become a "home" for the writer. The structure of *Minima Moralia*, like Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History", is shaped by fragments, seemingly disconnected and loosely linked pithy statements. Jamal writes: "Itinerant passions fragment the spine of the narrative" (108). It is the aphorism, with its highly charged detail, yet broken off from a larger historical ("stablising") context that illuminates the fracture and restlessness of the émigré. The fragment points to the corrosiveness of the writing itself (Jamal 109). The writing begins to fragment from within, and so the writer "is not even allowed to live in his writing" (Adorno 87).

The patches and fragments that make up the stories in *A Way in the World* mirror this corrosive fragmentation evinced in Adorno and Benjamin. The fragmented and disparate elements in *A Way in the World* insistently require that the reader, by means of tracing connections within and across sections of the text,

furnish the coherence of the narrative structure, which the text's fragmentation obscures. It is the reader, then, who is drawn into a moral and ethical position of re-membering. It is this moral and ethical charge that Naipaul inflects in *A Way in the World* as a consequence of which the grand narratives of history are displaced, and the liberty of history is opened to re-interpretation, and historical moments are blasted out of the "empty" course of history, and impregnated with tensions, paradoxes and contradictions that urges a reading of history filled with these disparities and places an urgency on alternative ways of reading, of remembering history.

Rather than view the past or history in homogenous terms, the new historical approach, which returns the ethics to history, is enshrined in Benjamin's "monadic" moment:

> [t]hinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it cystallizes as a monad. (262-263)

What Benjamin elucidates is that thoughts are not seamless but contradictory and work in opposition. It's *difference*, then, that constitutes the present moment. The present is momentarily suspended from a "universal" or as Benjamin terms it, a "homogenous, empty time" and collective memories from the past are re-visited and brought to the present moment, re-structuring and re-figuring it. For Benjamin, in order to intervene with a dominant discourse, the task of the new historicist is to disassociate one's self from the *accustomed* thinking (Felman, "Benjamin's Silence" 213).

A Way in the World is a text underscored by movement and flux, returns and repetitions. Naipaul locates the text in his native homeland yet the text extends beyond the island to Africa, England, India, Europe and America. As a New World colony, the tiny island of Trinidad has links with each of these countries through its imperial and colonial history. Thus, for Naipaul, assessing the links with these countries is intrinsic to assessing the history of the island and its impact on his own subjectivity.

The narrative is situated at the very geographical borders, frontiers and gulfs of the island and mainland's territory. These geographical locations illustrate the point where boundaries collapse and are zones of cross-cultural contact that gesture to a world which is always in movement, and where people are dispossessed, and their lives are shaped by traumatic historical events such as slavery, indentured labour and imperial expansion.

In *A Way in the World* Naipaul inhabits an "in-between" space, not only by virtue of his own culturally displaced, minoritarian and exiled position, but also because he locates himself within geographic margins quite strategically. As Bhabha elucidates in *The Location of Culture*, to exist on the borderlines of society and culture is to inhabit a liminal space. This "in-between" space is marked by restlessness and flux but it is also a site of "newness", a space of possibility:

> [t]he borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation […] it renews the past, re-figuring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (*The Location of Culture* 7)

Bhabha posits a non-teleological structure of the past and the present. He instils a sense of contingency and disjuncture prevalent to both of these temporalities since both are subject to imaginary re-constructions and there exits an interplay between the past and the present upon which memory functions as a structuring link, but which, in itself is fragile and tenebrous. The sense of possibility and newness, endemic of a hybrid, liminal position, is not expressed in Naipaul's narratives as a liberatory discourse but rather with a sense of loss and melancholia. Within this "borderline work of culture" Naipaul's narratives capture the uncertainty of the present moment. His obsessive return to the past, in itself fraught, disjunctive and mythical, is an attempt at re-tracing old maps of nominal histories and fragile memories in order to construct a present that is imbued with more self-awareness of one's inheritance.

In "Unsettling the Sign" John Walker identifies that Naipaul's writing is "inextricably linked with the postcolonial and the postmodern" (81) in its active creation and "synthesis of the worlds and cultures" that, as Naipaul says, "made

[him]" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 172). From such a position, Naipaul is able to launch a trenchant attack on foundationalist perspectives that attempt to separate "one world from another" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 172), stir people to the "fraudulence and chaos of revolution" (*The Enigma of Arrival 1*69), bring to fulfilment the "wish to destroy a world judged corrupt and too full of pain […] rather than improve it" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 175) and offer "a communal rhetoric of sentimentality and anger" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 177). In *A Way in the World* this theme is re-visited. "Political fervour" and "racial righteousness" is presented as the way of "redemption" and Naipaul asserts that such politics is simply "grafted on to the mood and passions of more extreme and more marginal and more publicised black causes" (*A Way in the World* 36). This lack of self-reflexivity is risible to Naipaul.

Throughout *A Way in the World* Naipaul links religious and political fervour illustrating that these causes begin with an abstract idea of racial freedom, but devolve into a simplified or purified politics of racial righteousness (Jones 50). This is how Naipaul assesses the revolutionary politics of Lebrun, the fictional Trinidadian-Panamanian Marxist, an "impresario of revolution"(*A Way in the World* 107) and a "hidden black prophet" for African authenticity (*A Way in the World* 130). Lebrun initially seeks a more universal politics but eventually his position becomes reduced to "the man of true African or black redemption" (*A Way in the World* 130). It is through Lebrun's character that Naipaul reveals "a profound distrust in the absolute narratives of racial vindication" (Jones 88), and attacks the reversal to historic foundations based on myths and nostalgic longings of homelands of "purity" and "wholeness".

The division between the Africans and the Indians in Trinidad is a recurring thematic in Naipaul's writing but in *A Way in the World* it receives special attention, perhaps as a way of attempting to quell the cacophony of racial insults hurled at the writer from postcolonial critics and scholars world-wide. The autobiographical opening to *A Way in the World* begins with Naipaul's six-year absence from Trinidad and the sense of alienation and estrangement he feels upon returning. He returns to an island marked by a "new kind of politics" (*A Way in the World* 28), a rise in black nationalism, which "was more like religion" (*A Way in the World* 29) and "in some such way every black or African person from my past altered [a]nd I felt a double distance from what I had known" (*A Way in the World* 32).

As I argued in chapter two, the politics of African authenticity and nativism is faulted because it functions as an imperialism-in-reverse. There is, however, an underlying sensitivity towards the minority Indian population that Naipaul feels the need to protect. From his childhood in Trinidad he is highly affected by the impoverished and destitute indentured Indian immigrants who live in Woodford square: "[t]hese people were without money, job […] without the English language; without any kind of representation" (*A Way in the World* 19). Later, when the author-narrator takes up his job at the Registrar-General's office, these homeless Indians are no longer there. It is this sense of eradication, of forgetting and forgetfulness, which Naipaul fears. The aborigines are similarly struck from historical memory because they lack representation; they lacked a discourse of power. Because he sees history as repeating itself, the promise of redemption immanent in the revolutionary movements of Black Nationalism presents itself as a threat to the marginal Indian population who, in some ways, have supplanted the aborigines and, in Naipaul's imaginary, face a similar threat of being eradicated.

Indian expulsion and eradication is again taken up in the chapter "Home Again". The author-narrator is "loosely connected with the local university" (*A Way in the World* 343) in the East African country. Naipaul criticises African tyranny masked as social reform. The same racialist agitation that divides the Indian and African population in Trinidad mirrors itself in the African country which "was full of a special hate […] for the Asian and Indian community" (*A Way in the World* 348). Naipaul quickly elucidates that the racial divide between the Indians and the Africans rests in the belief of an essential, primordial origin, where race/ethnicity are not perceived as constructs but as real, fixed identities. He elucidates the possible "entanglements" between the Indian and Swahili culture prevalent on the coast of Africa. According to the author-narrator's historical research he learns that a Victorian explorer published a map "said to be based on old Hindu texts, giving Sanskrit names for the rivers, lakes and mountains of Uganda […] but people didn't carry this kind of history in their heads" (*A Way in the World* 348).

In this final chapter, the figure of Blair receives special attention. Blair is first introduced in the chapter "History: A Smell of Fish Glue", where he and the author-narrator work in the Registrar-General's office. In a changing political

landscape in Trinidad, Blair rises up the ranks and is employed as a foreign financial consultant by the president of the East African country. Initially, the author-narrator judges Blair to hold similar political values as Lebrun. Ironically, Lebrun, the revolutionary figure who seeks a universal politics, is swallowed up by his own restrictive racial politics. Lebrun fails to acknowledge the racial agitation between the Indian and African population but sees the conflict as a class disparity.

Blair, however, thwarts the author-narrator's prejudgement, through his openness and willingness to recognise the paradoxes within himself: "[w]e are all tribalists and racialists [Blair] said; we could all easily fall into that kind of behaviour if we thought we could get away with it" (*A Way in the World* 364). Blair shares a story with the author-narrator of a moment of racial lapse, where he hurls an insult at an Asian couple. Blair exhibits a degree of self-reflexivity and Naipaul interprets the story as "a statement, made without excuse or apology, that after the passion of his politics he could now be another kind of man, ready for new relationships" (*A Way in the World* 365). In the author-narrator's eyes, Blair has broken out of his allegiances to an ideology and a narrowly defined cultural group and adopts a more personal, human set of values. It is this vision that enables Blair to admit his racist lapse and to take a stand against corruption in the East African country (Weiss 121). Blair's integrity, however, is threatening to the African government and he is brutally murdered.

Naipaul plays on the historical ironies of Blair's murder. Firstly, it points towards an inability to conceive of the African state as being able to transform itself and eschew its violent, brutal and corruptive methods of governance. Thus, Blair's murder reflects that history will continue repeating itself in the form of barbarity, violence and war. Secondly, Blair's death in Africa plays on the back-to-Africa politics of the 1970s when many Caribbean Africans wished to return to their ancestral land as a part of a homecoming and reclaiming of their "historic" and ethnic "roots". It is ironic that Blair should die in Africa when his own political position transcended this form of ideology. The narrative becomes a eulogy for Blair and the author-narrator imagines a "ceremonial return" (*A Way in the World* 369) where Blair's body is returned to Trinidad and "laid out in Parry's chapel of rest" (*A Way in the World* 369). The ending of the book returns to its beginning where the reader first encounters the hybrid figure of Leonard Side in Parry's Funeral Parlour,

in Port-of-Spain. The circularity within the narrative structure and the connections Naipaul creates between seemingly unrelated events and characters reflects an approach to history and narrative that is non linear but circular and repetitive. In this way, he debunks a binary logic (reflected in his critique of Black National politics). Through a circular pattern of construction he shows how humans are, in some way, interconnected.

The structure of the narrative weaves in upon itself reflecting how history and themes repeat themselves. The text functions by juxtaposing apparently fragmented material and encourages a seeking out of connections: continuities in apparent discontinuities. Along with this sense of repetition, the book provides a framework in which to hang both synchronic and diachronic forces of history and time that operate simultaneously.

The book opens with an epigram taken from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. The subtitle of *A Way in the World* is entitled "A Sequence". This serves as structural thematic that links the various stories through a "chain of events" (*A Way in the World* 40), that are "held together by one chain" (*A Way in the World* 41). As Stephanie Jones elucidates, within the narrative are a "number of separate but internally coherent anecdotes, as well as a formation of stories feeding into and out of one another to generate more diverse and open, half-hidden and slowly revealed connections" (87). The poem which begins the volume serves to highlight the constancy of flux and movement but also the repetitions within those movements:

> And year by year our memory fades
> From all the circle of the hills.
> Till from the garden and the wild
> A fresh association blow,
> And year by year the landscape grow
> Familiar to the stranger's child.

The sequence of lines of the poem as Naipaul uses them is inverted. The poem as Tennyson intends addresses the way in which new people arrive and the memory of the people who once lived there fades away. In Naipaul's inversion, it is the memory of the people who once lived there that fades away and new people arrive. The inversion corresponds to Naipaul's view of history in Trinidad and his progressive alienation from his native homeland.

It is important to understand Naipaul's construction of the past as fractured and incomplete. This uprootment from history endemic to his diasporic consciousness plays itself out as a haunting by the past. He reiteratively describes his past as "areas of darkness". In "Prologue to an Autobiography" he writes, "I grew up with two ideas of history, almost two ideas of time" (88). This illustrates the sense of fracture he experiences resulting from his colonial condition. Recorded history, a history of dates, belongs to Western discourse, and his personal, ancestral history is perceived as "mythical" ("Prologue to an Autobiography" 88) – devoid of time, cut off from history. In the autobiographical sections to *A Way in the World* the chapter "Passenger: A Figure from the Thirties" laments this lack of a long traditional past: "as a child I felt that history had been burnt away in the place where I was born" (*A Way in the World* 110).

The erasure of the past is perceived to be part of his inheritance, "I thought that the feeling of the void had to do with my temperament [...] of a recent Asian-Indian immigrant community in a mixed population. But I feel again now that I was responding to something that was missing, something that had been rooted out" (*A Way in the World* 73). Further in the narrative he reiterates this point: "[w] e didn't have a past. For most of us the past stopped with our grandparents; beyond that was a blank" (*A Way in the World* 79). In assessing the development of postcolonial literatures, Derek Walder asserts that memory and identity are important actors within the lexicon. Walder imports the Derridean notion of "under erasure" as a means of assessing the trauma of the colonial past and the recovery of identity and one's sense of self through memory ("'How is it going, Mr Naipaul?'" 18). Walder is careful to assert that identity is never a stable or timeless and that the act of "erasure" itself is never complete, as there are always visible traces left behind. In Naipaul's claim that the Caribbean has no history, Walder argues that he is actually referring to a loss or erasure of history, of histories through slavery, indentured labour and the inability to represent loss ("'How is it going, Mr Naipaul?'" 17-18).

The inability to represent loss is enacted in Naipaul's melancholia. His writing reveals an "entanglement" with empire, modernity and the metropolitan writer. Within this tradition is a very particular view of history and tradition which Naipaul, the colonial migrant figure, has felt excluded from. The melancholic mood

of his later writing reveals a wounded past, and an unrecoverable loss, which he is at pains to represent, but the act of narration, of re-presentation, is inherently flawed by its unretrievability. Some critics might assert that Naipaul is pathological in his obsession towards the past. Yet, one must then question if it is ethical to forge a present that does not account for the incommensurabilities of the past. In other words, when does forgetting and forgetfulness obscure the present? Where does retrieval of the past begin or end? Certainly, the rules of engagement in the current age of mass migrations has set the wheels turning and in the realm of literature there has been an unprecedented flow of narratives emerging from a body of postcolonial writers, both inside and outside of the metropolitan centres, that challenge the construction and hegemony of Western discourse.

The question which Naipaul raises and which his text, *A Way in the World*, foregrounds is this: how does one include Other histories without appropriating them into a model of sameness, while writing in a dominant discourse? In other words, Naipaul subtly inflects that his own consciousness is ensnared in Western discourse, by virtue of the language in which he writes and his education. In *A Way in the World* he draws attention to:

> What was the basis of the writer's attitude? What other world did he know, what other experience did he bring to his way of looking? How could a writer write about his world, if it was the only world he knew. (27)

Here, Naipaul positions his highly self-reflexive approach to writing, and though he is described as a "detached writer" whose writing transcends regional and national allegiances, the writer himself is aware that he is located within a particular socio-cultural and political milieu which impacts on how he sees, reads and writes the world. This singularity of experience obviously makes each writer particular yet, at the same time, there is, as Naipaul's oeuvre attests to, a need for the impersonality of the artist, a need to have artistic freedom, where the artist's position cannot be claimed by caste, clan, nationality.

To write within the limits of caste/clan and nationality is parochial, at least, and restrictive to the artistic vision. But no writer can claim to be without a tradition. As illustrated in the chapter on *The Enigma of Arrival,* the artist/writer writes in relation to a tradition, and here, Naipaul claims the inheritance of an English literary

tradition. Similarly, he writes from the position of a colonial Asian-Trinidadian migrant, a position underscored by exclusion, difference, othering and that plays itself out in his narratives through states of psychic unease and a restless anxiety. This accounts for the stylistic shift in his writing, the turn from comedy, which he feels masks "anxiety or hysteria, the deeper root of comedy" (*A Way in the World* 96). Comedy emptiness itself. It loses significance in the context of historical trauma and colonial shame.

History displays patterns of repetition but the moral and ethical charge that encompasses these narratives of the revolution is that human lives are affected by it. Naipaul presents these fictional and historical revolutionaries as complex and ambiguous individuals and in many ways shows sympathy towards their failed attempts at success. Naipaul humanises these revolutionary figures; they are not simply flat, two-dimensional figures in a history book, but doomed men who carry their impending downfall with them.

In the chapter "A Parcel of Paper, A Roll of Tobacco, A Tortoise: An Unwritten Story", Naipaul refers to Raleigh's meagre score in the Orinoco and his doomed search for gold. Within the narrative, the surgeon serves as a ventriloquist dummy in which Naipaul engages in conversation with Raleigh, in old age, quite defeated. Through the surgeon he [the author-narrator] "tells" Raleigh, "[y]ou stirred things up, here in the Gulf, and you went away. You left a lot of people to face the consequences" (*A Way in the World* 173). Similarly, Lebrun manages to escape any accountability for his actions in Africa and the Caribbean, "never having to live with the consequences of his actions, always free to move on" (*A Way in the World* 155). In the chapter on Miranda, "In The Gulf of Desolation: An Unwritten Story", Naipaul echoes Miranda's General Hislop when he says, "[its] easy to look back at the past. It's not so easy to be clear-sighted about the present. We don't always know what we are doing now. We can just get dragged along" (*A Way in the World* 263-264). This final comment reflects the disjuncture of the present moment. It urges that the present calls for a critical moment of self-reflexivity because it is so fraught, it is so new, it requires detachment to review, reflect, meditate – to resist "getting dragged along".

By evoking the figures of history such as Columbus, Raleigh and Miranda, Naipaul places their teleological history as the voice of the victors (the dominant discourse); it is their records and journals he is reading and through which he constructs the narrative; it is their legacies left behind and become part of school syllabi. Yet, Naipaul's persistence in an archaeological process of discovery, of seeking "routes" within "roots" (Clifford), allows his narrative to bear witness to the dispossession and eradication of the earlier inhabitants in South America and Trinidad, the Amerindians, an indigenous, aboriginal community whose memory and history has been forgotten and almost eradicated.

In J.M.Coetzee's reading of *Half a Life* (2001), he posits that Naipaul shows a concern with the forces of history on the cultural, social and political realities of Third World societies and maintains an "allegiance…to the real, to real history as borne by real people" (Coetzee, "The Razor's Edge" 5). Coetzee, too, notes the new literary motif Naipaul brings to his more recent writing and describes it as:

> [a] mode of writing Naipaul has perfected over the years, in which historical reportage and social analysis flow into and out of autobiographically coloured fiction and travel memoir: *a mixed mode* that may turn out to be Naipaul's principal legacy to English letters. ("The Razor's Edge" 5; emphasis added)

One could question the importance of this "mixed mode" that Naipaul introduces to the English literary tradition. The definitive address of this mode of writing lies in its deployment of the fragments of textuality, memory and history that informs the shape and content of the narrative to deliver only partial narratives, "enigmatic" re-presentations, "half lives" in an estranged and pluralistic world. For Naipaul the novel is essentially a Western literary form and comes with "assumptions about society [and] an idea of history" but for a displaced migrant figure where the "past had been torn away and history is unknown […] the borrowed form of the novel" is able only "to deliver a partial truth" ("Reading and Writing" 25).

In his essay "On Being a Writer" he reflects on themes posited earlier in the chapter on *The Mimic Men*. Being a reader and writer in the English language, Naipaul has often accounted for the incongruity between the words he read about and his own experience in the world as a migrant figure. Language, as literature, is not neutral. Cultural background affects the way in which language is used. Joyce

demonstrates this through his character's adaptation to the English language in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Naipaul's concern lies in the meaning of the word: "Garden, house, plantation, gardener, estate: these words mean one thing in England and something quite different to the man from Trinidad" ("On Being a Writer" 3).

The autobiographical vein that attaches itself to Naipaul's narratives serves to identify the singularity of Naipaul's experience and the subject of his writing, and so his writing embodies "the worlds I contained within myself, the worlds I lived in […] my subject turning out to be a version of me" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 161). Naipaul is not writing in opposition to a Western literary form, he is revising that form to make it embody his diasporic experience of the world precipitated by empire, something which the metropolitan novel is not able to do. In order for him to render the truth of his experiences he has to go a step further, to "define myself as writer or narrator; I had to reinterpret things" ("On Being a Writer" 3). Here, Naipaul illustrates that the autobiographical material is necessary to his writing; but implied in this act of defining the writer or narrator is an understanding of his sense of self as subject to re-interpretation as he acquires new knowledge, as he re-figures the past and renews his position through the process of writing. Thus, the "I" is never fixed or stable but in a constant process of renewal through narrative.

As evinced in *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul does claim, and his writing can be located in the long literary and classical European traditions of cosmopolitanism and internationalist imagining, but there is a dogged undercurrent of anxiety, powerlessness and futility that undermines this position and that intervenes through Naipaul's position as other (Walder, "After Post-Colonialism?" 198). What Derek Walder posits, and it is an argument which I closely follow, is that Naipaul's persistence in writing from the position of other confronts the labels of "post-colonial" or "commonwealth" writer (and literature), and its codification and institutionalisation. By generating a continuous re-writing of the same stories from different perspectives and within different genres reflects Naipaul's stance on identity as complex and unresolved.

As I have argued in previous chapters, Naipaul's re-writing or over-writing of texts in the English literary tradition, specifically a displaced modernist tradition,

reflects his "entanglements" with the West and his own emergence as a displaced modern subject born out of empire. With *A Way in the World* specifically, there is less direct recourse to writers from an English literary tradition save for the chapter, "New Clothes" in which the nameless narrator, an agent provocateur, carries echoes of a Conradian explorer in an Arcadian mythical landscape much like Conrad's *Nostromo* and portrays the figure of the revolutionary as a "carrier of mischief" (*A Way in the World* 46) in an echo of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*.

In "Reading and Writing" Naipaul asserts that for Conrad, "the discovery of every tale [is] a moral one" (10). The same can be said of Naipaul's work. Conrad, one of Naipaul's literary forebears to whom he pays tribute to in his essay "Conrad's Darkness and Mine", offers some assistance in reading Naipaul's position. As Pankaj Mishra explains, Conrad enables Naipaul to understand his peculiar situation and predicament: "the predicament of the colonial exile who finds himself working in a world and literary tradition shaped by empire" ("Introduction" xiv). This theme is pervasive throughout Naipaul's writing, but he veers away from perceiving and constructing these traditions in a reductive binary logic. In the essay on Conrad, Naipaul assesses Conrad's work as follows:

> Nothing is rigged in Conrad. He doesn't remake countries. He chose, as we know, incidents from real life […] And what he says about his heroine in Nostromo can be applied to himself. 'The wisdom of the heart having no concern with the erection or demolition of theories any more than with the defence of prejudices, has no random words at its command. The words it pronounces have the value of acts of integrity, tolerance and compassion'. ("Conrad's Darkness and Mine" 173)

These words may well apply to Naipaul too. His writing is concerned with delivering a truth, and an honesty of perception and interpretation. Like Conrad, Naipaul is concerned with the materiality of the world and eschews affiliation to causes or political rhetoric. To assign Naipaul as a postcolonial writer is to perform a disservice to his work. His identity, as it emerges through his various writings, is an identity that is always in process. As Derek Walder claims, "he is more interested in pursuing the question of his own voice through a range of narrative forms accommodated to neither Western paradigms nor local aesthetics exclusively" ("After Post-Colonialism?" 195).

Beneath *A Way in the World* is a palimpsest of Naipaul's other narratives. In different form, he has written about these events in books as varied as *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969), a history of the Spanish conquest, and *Mr Stone and the Knight's Companion* (1963), the first of his books to be set in England. For the maturing writer it is important to re-visit stories he has written earlier, re-looking and re-thinking his earlier perceptions and experiences. *The Loss of El Dorado* was one of Naipaul's least successful books. According to Naipaul, both *The Loss of El Dorado* and *Mr Stone and the Knight's Companion* are books that "cost me a lot of pain […] they didn't come out well because I was a prisoner of a borrowed form" (Naipaul qtd. in Gussow 2). Gussow posits that *A Way in the World* stands as a "corrective" to these earlier failures (2).

With this text, Naipaul begins to question what constitutes postcolonial literature. With his development as a writer and his increased distancing from national or regional allegiances, the autobiographical vein in his writing and his obsessive return to themes and places explored in his former writing, offers a paradoxical answer. On one level, Naipaul is careful to locate himself, his narrators and characters within the particularity and singularity of their worlds. Concurrently, Naipaul shows an obsession towards the past and the construction of history and juxtaposes seemingly "whole" societies with fractured, diasporic ones. His narrative articulates and enacts what James Clifford espouses, in the context of diaspora, as "human difference articulated in displacement, tangled cultural experiences, structures and possibilities of an increasingly connected but not homogeneous world" (*Routes* 2).

Through the lives of the various characters Naipaul reflects on different histories and memories that link their stories together over the centuries. By extracting only a fragment of their lives, at the moment before their death, Naipaul allows for the act of narration of their stories and allows for an exchange between the living and the dying. According to Shoshana Felman, in medieval paintings, the archetypal site of narration is the deathbed, where the dying man (the original narrator) reviews his life (evokes his memories) and addresses the events and lessons of the past to those surrounding him ("Madness and Philosophy" 207). Here, Naipaul as writer performs that task.

Naipaul's increased melancholia and despair reflects his view that the world we inhabit is in a terrible state of loss because of the inability to reflect on the past, to claim the past and re-figure it in the present. Hence history repeats itself. What he offers with *A Way in the World* is a lesson in reading and writing that is, to borrow Edward Said's term, contrapuntal. In his melancholic way, he restores hope to history by showing an-other way that does not presume an essence, or a definitive truth but rather an unhallowed chain of history, one link no larger than the other.

SIX

Conclusion:

Naipaul's Melancholia

The life of the mind only attains its truth when discovering itself in absolute desolation. (Hegel)

This chapter seeks to interpret Naipaul's sense of despair and melancholia that animates the narratives in this study. As this study has shown, Naipaul's restless and nomadic existence is reflected in the vast geographical terrains mapped through the key texts of this study. Yet the mobility of Naipaul's narratives does not function within a historical location alone but also within a literary location "crucial to the writer's anxious embodiment of the politics of postcolonial arrival" (Suleri 157). Suleri foregrounds the predicament of the colonial exile moored to an English literary tradition. Concomitantly, Achille Mbembe elucidates in an African context that, African (read postcolonial) modes of writing the self are inextricably linked with the politics of subjectivity and self-determination *and* with the modern philosophy of the subject ("African Modes of Self-Writing" 240).

As a migrant figure, *triply* displaced, Naipaul's struggle for cultural locality is a pervasive thematic which this study has attempted to elucidate. Working through notions of homelessness and placelessness, within a determinate historic-cultural context, proved to offer only a partial understanding of the author's art. The "double consciousness" of the colonial migrant along with his "entanglements" in a number of cultures and temporalities, yields to a fragmented, rhizomorphic and creolised view of subjectivity through diasporic ways of thinking. I have argued that the plurality and dissembling nature of the (post)colonial subject and the challenge this subject poses to Enlightenment thought is similarly reflected in the modern subject portrayed through literary, aesthetic and philosophical movements.

Naipaul's writing can be located within the traditions of modernism, yet by virtue of his particular cultural location he enters that tradition from outside a Western episteme. As the colonial migrant figure, he is both denied inclusion in a

Western cultural and literary tradition premised upon his racial and ethnic position as other, yet he also claims that tradition through his colonial background. He internalises his presence in the imperial centre as symptomatic of empire's decline.

As a product of the colonial condition, his subjectivity can be constituted within the birth of empire. Yet the canon of modernist writers, with which Naipaul's texts engage, similarly respond to the crisis of Western culture following the demise of Empire and the impact of modernity on English culture, society and politics. The crisis is internally reflected in their writing.[27] In as much as these writers are located within an Anglophone literary tradition, and are the icons of the modernist aesthetic movement, their work is similarly engaged in critiquing empire: its logocentrism and Enlightenment ideals.[28] Since Naipaul sees himself to be part of the West and from the colonies, the crisis of Western culture: (its fragmentation, partiality and plurality), is reflected in the constitution of his own subjectivity.

Naipaul's engagement with a displaced modernist tradition is symbolic of the cultural and literary seepage that occurs between the colony and periphery through imperial expansion. Modernist literature in this way is an enabling approach since modernist writing draws upon literary traditions outside England. Eliot's poetry is not only influenced by Ezra Pound but also by the French Symbolist movement captured in the works of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Laforgue. The pessimism, nihilism, despair and the autonomy of art are largely concerns endemic to the French literary tradition, which became part of the Anglophone modernist literary tradition explored by writers such as Eliot, Yeats and Conrad, to name a few. This seepage of cultural and literary influences is not strictly limited to the influence of the French literary tradition on Anglophone writing. Amartya Sen foregrounds the influence of Bengalese poet, Rabindranath Tagore's poetry on Yeats and to a lesser degree, Pound.[29]

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[27] This is evident in the works of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce's "stream of consciousness" writing in *Mrs Dalloway* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, respectively. Eliot, Conrad, Woolf and Joyce's (all marginal writers in their own ways) works respond to the larger historical and social changes affecting English society: a split and fractured subjectivity, and an alienated consciousness. These English writers in effect interpreted English culture and society from their own fraught and marginal positions.

[28] This is especially evident in Woolf's writing. She addresses the limits of a realist mode of writing in her seminal essay, "'Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown': formalist or feminist?" See Goldman, *Modernism 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse*.

[29] The fact that Tagore's poetry was later dismissed by certain Western writers as repetitive and remotely spiritualist is a matter for an extended study.

Naipaul, as a colonial migrant, also becomes an interpreter of English culture and society through his curious position of cultural other; simultaneously he is also an interpreter of the Third World. One should not mistake this interpretation for the author's sense of authorial authority presiding dogmatically over the text. He occupies his texts through a hybrid of personas consistently unsettling the authorial "I" in his writing and thereby challenging the notion of authority. This study has argued that Naipaul's intertextual references and counter-readings of historical records challenges historicist accounts and homogenous and essentialised constructions of the subject. His narratives do not only reflect the multiplicity of realities and the plurality of the subject but, the form and shape of his narratives, embody the experience of the modern and the postcolonial subject.

The texts in this study have focused on the author's more "serious fiction", marked by a distinctive shift from comedy to tragedy. This stylistic shift signalled a move from Naipaul's realist mode of writing, particular to the nineteenth century novel genre, to an increased modernist aesthetics. This stylistic shift accounts for the despair and melancholy particular to Naipaul's latter writing period and reflects similar intonations by modernist writers whose narratives capture the crisis of Western culture after empire. What this study has attempted to elucidate is that Naipaul's writing forges a link between the modernist subject and the postcolonial subject connected through empire.

To forge this link Naipaul uses writing as an integral part of self-definition for historical re-construction. The central narrators/protagonists in this study are writers involved with the written word in some way. Writing serves as a means of acute self-reflexivity on the self and the world. Naipaul's continuous rewriting of the past reflects a self that is in continuous renewal. It also ensures a sense of posterity – where one lives through one's writing, one is remembered through one's writing. In this way, Naipaul's narratives have a moral charge.

This study began with the autobiographical fiction *The Mimic Men*, which reflects upon the disenchantment new arrivants experienced in the imperial centre. Received notions of Englishness do not match the heterogeneity and creolisation in the metropolitan centre. Simultaneously, the protagonist aligns his own subjectivity

with that of the West. By virtue of his colonial education, and being a product of empire, his indictment is that he is ensnared and entangled in Western discourse – "doubly conscious" of the West as an intellectual heritage and the particularity of the amalgam of cultural assemblages of his Trinidadian-Indian background. Naipaul's concern is with the binary constructions of power between the colony and metropolis and he explores the embeddedness of the colonial subject in an imperial language and culture through the politics of writing and the politics of subjectivity. What *The Mimic Men* articulates is the "split" and "double" position of the migrant colonial subject that gives way to an understanding of culture and its concomitant tropes of language, identity and representation as inordinately disjunctive, hybrid and indeterminate. These tropes are re-enacted in the narrative structure of the text.

A Bend in the River constructs a dialogue between Western textual re-productions of Africa and nationalist discourses adopted by the African nation-states. This chapter elucidates Naipaul's portrayal of Africa as a diasporic landscape, entangled in a number of discourses, temporalities and cultures that are antagonistic with the acculturative claims made on the subject. What the novel offers is a way of assessing Africa that does not ascribe to the unified or unitary but is reflective of the processes of hybridity that produce political antagonisms and unpredictable forces for political and cultural representation. It offers a representation of a culture struggling with diverse values and with a breakdown of established traditions in its attempt at modernity. The traditional image of Africa as the "unassimilable" and "impenetrable" in European literature is appropriated in *A Bend in the River* to question whether it is ever possible to know the other without making appropriative claims on the subject. As a literary text, *A Bend in the River* is able to accommodate what is irreducible about identity, culture and subjectivity. The literary becomes an epistemology that can house what is incommensurable without making appropriative claims on the subject. In contrast, methodologies used to discourse on the postcolonial subject become limiting and institutionalised since their practices, codes and conventions are located within the very discourses they are seeking to challenge.[30]

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[30] See Shoshana Felman's argument on "Madness and Philosophy or Literature's Reason". She posits that Foucault and Derrida are only able to discuss madness by using a discourse that suppresses madness. To circumnavigate this bind, they turn to literature, to fiction. Felman argues that thought and madness cannot directly communicate the other, each must pass through fiction ("Madness and Philosophy" 222).

The autobiographical thread that attaches itself to Naipaul's writing locates his narrator or author-narrator within a historical-socio-politico-cultural milieu. Naipaul's writing can be positioned within the preoccupations of Western thought, and he employs colonial rhetoric in order to debunk its myths and deconstruct its implicit assumptions. By self-consciously occupying that position he reflects an awareness of the discourse he is located in, but through new ways of reading and writing, evinced in *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World* he challenges the construction of these discourses and the historically, socially and culturally contingent forms it produces.

The Enigma of Arrival epitomises the writer's "entanglements" not only with an English literary tradition but also within his own writing – a form of meditation on the writer and his subject matter. It is an attempt at claiming the inheritance of an English literary tradition and is perhaps Naipaul's most autobiographical work in this study in which he lays claim to an English literary heritage even though that position is marked by an anxiety and insecurity. *The Enigma of Arrival* proposes the constructedness of Englishness and sees an empire in decline. Naipaul mourns this loss of empire for his own sense of self is inextricably linked with that of empire. Whatever (false) illusions existed for a return to a sense of wholeness and coherency is thwarted.

A Way in the World plays itself as out as one of Naipaul's most hybrid and experimental texts that surely warrants the term *avant garde*. For Naipaul, his subjective indeterminacy cannot be accommodated in the generic novel form, so he implodes these categories to make the novel form embody his own experience of fragmentation and obscurity. In this text, Naipaul focuses on how history tends to repeat itself. The text approaches history as a dialogue between past and present and reveals that there is an ethical and moral duty to remember the past, and those marginalised by historical events.

Through his counter narratives of historical memory, Naipaul offers a different way of reading and writing. He locates himself within Western textuality but reads these narratives from a new historicist approach. In doing so, challenges the dominant discourse and historical narratives of continuity, reading history as disruptive, and non-teleological, focusing on the "big" and "small" moments in

history concurrently. This way of reading and writing does not favour the victorious in history nor the victims, but presents multiple versions of realities and histories occurring simultaneously. In *A Way in the World*, historical memory forms the structuring theme where Naipaul juxtaposes canonical historical narratives alongside personal memory. The autobiographical vein that runs through Naipaul's writing is a political gesture, whereby the personal and the political overlap. Naipaul points toward the fictiveness of the self, identity, nation and nationality but his impulse to autobiography suggests that the "constructs" have real and meaningful affects on the body.

The trajectory this thesis has followed is that of Naipaul's nomadic existence and his condition of homelessness and placelessness. The poetics of exile foregrounds not only Naipaul's individualistic position but also the indeterminate space he occupies. Such detachment and estrangement within the familiar enables his counter- readings of history that forms a central part to this thesis. His narrative captures the opening epigraph to this study taken from Adorno's *Minima Moralia*. For Adorno, homelessness is an existential condition; to think as an émigré requires estrangement and detachment from familiarity. As bereft as this line of thinking might be, it suggests the continuous plight, or responsibility an individual has on society. In order to exist as an ethical subject, the individual is required to think "against the grain" of the dominant ideology and to remember history through its fragments and fractures.

While critics admonish Naipaul's sense of despair and melancholy, often interpreted as despair for a vanishing England and metropolitan prestige, this study argues that Naipaul's despair and melancholy stem from an engagement with the past and with history. In this way, his narratives are closely aligned with a Jewish reflection on "suffering, contingency and finitude" (Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing 242). Instead of erasing the shame and awkwardness of his colonial past, Naipaul works with those hidden recesses of memory and historical archives to resurrect the nominal and partial histories and restores an ethics to memory. Quoting Hegel, Adorno writes: "'[if] today the subject is vanishing, aphorisms take upon themselves the duty 'to consider the evanescent as essential'" (16). It is through Naipaul's partial reconstructions of the past that he includes memories and histories that veer close to being forgotten.

Throughout his oeuvre Naipaul maintains a position of otherness. This is not difference as a radical concept that perpetuates binary codes or through reified cultural constructions of difference sanctioned by multiculturalism. Naipaul's sense of otherness is oblique and complex. He sees subtle differences between subjects and patterns in history, where there is a link, but also a difference that cannot be represented or assimilated, and which remains unknowable.

It might seem an odd turn to evoke Hegel as the introductory epigraph to this closing chapter. Though Hegel's thought is itself trapped in binary modes of thinking, this epigram points to the emptying of the mind from any fixed or reified ideologies. Of course, to exist in such a world governed by a collapse in certainty, profound ambivalence and ambiguity, is the truth of the world in which we live but it is also a difficult space to occupy. One need only consider Paul Gilroy's *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?*[31] Located in the London metropolis, Gilroy elucidates a morbidity of heritage that plagues English culture in what he terms "postimperial melancholia".

Gilroy's study reveals that the fixity, absolutism and cultural and ethnocentric essentialisms continue to shape current British politics. In many ways, Britain continues to other its immigrants (those who are born to immigrant families are still considered to be "aliens"). While such cross-cultural contact and creolisation has produced novel forms in music, art and literature, Britain remains unable to accommodate its cultural others without trying to appropriate them into the same. The problem is paradigmatic of a racially determined model. Even though poststructuralist theory has convincingly deconstructed the fabrication of

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[31] In *After Empire: Melancholy or Convivial Culture*, Paul Gilroy attempts to seek an explanation for the failure of British nationalism to accommodate its heterogeneous and cosmopolitan culture. Instead, British nationalism is marked by a rise in racism, ethnocentrisms and xenophobia. Gilroy posits that with the end of empire Britain is suffering from a defeat following imperial decline. Imperial decline is measured by the vast immigrant population shoring up in the metropolitan centre. Accordingly, the fracture and heterogeneity reflected in the diverse groups inhabiting the city is interpreted by the nation-state as a loss of a coherent and distinctive national culture. Simultaneously, Britain's history of empire is a source of shame. If the imperial project was about "spreading" its "noble, civilising mission", then how did this "redemptive" cause turn into such barbarity and chaos? (Gilroy, *After Empire* 98). This unresolved question presents itself as a moral dilemma in the nation-state, questioning its moral legitimacy. But rather than face this loss, these feelings are "diminished, denied, and then, if possible, actively forgotten" (Gilroy, *After Empire* 98). Gilroy terms these failures by the British nation-state as "postimperial melancholia", defined as an *inability to forget* its (England's) past grandeur and its canon of greatness (*After Empire* 109).

race/ethnicity/class/nationality, these institutional practices continue and perpetuate struggles between groups seeking selfhood and sovereignty.

If Gilroy, a generally optimistic cosmopolitan theorist, finds it difficult to see the lightness in the world after empire, how is Naipaul expected to? In as much as Naipaul critiques notions of Englishness, he similarly critiques postcolonial societies in perpetuating the follies of the West. Politics in Africa and the Caribbean, as this study has shown, revert back to an essentialised view of race and the myths of primordial origins. Such obsession with uniqueness and difference perpetuates a difference of the same. Seeking recourse to Achille Mbembe, once again, it is more instructive to think of "temporalities that are simultaneously branching out toward several different futures, and in doing so, open the way for the possibility of multiple ancestries" ("African Modes of Self Writing" 258).

Mbembe's rhizomorphic, non-teleological approach is well suited to Naipaul's vision. But to think in this way, requires that one read and write *differently*, and that one *remembers* the past in its multiplicity and fluidity. The past is also a space and a place of suffering. There is a silence around the memory of past trauma, which is what events such as the Holocaust, slavery, apartheid and colonisation were. This operations of power continue to haunt our present in different guises. Why then does history repeat itself? The question is one of memory. By refusing to acknowledge one's ancestry and refusing to remember an act that arouses feelings of shame, those who have been wounded by history choose to forget and forge a new present that denies the pains of the past.

Critics of his work, most notably Rob Nixon, Edward Said and Nayantra Sahgal, take issue with Naipaul's position of exile and homelessness on a conceptual level, and he has become somewhat of a scapegoat for these critics. What they fail to recognise, by assessing his work in such a binary way, is that he is attempting to create new forms in which to narrate history that makes *remembering* a political and poetic act. Naipaul works through loss and shame and grief. For him, this loss is unrecoverable but transformation can only occur through recognition that the loss and damage is permanent. It is out of this sense of desolation, of emptying the mind of the dominant ideologies, of maintaining homelessness as his existential condition, that he is able to reflect a partial and dim light onto the world.

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