



SPECIAL ISSUE
V.S. NAIPAUL
HIS IDEAS, WORK AND ART

SOUTH ASIAN REVIEW

VOL. 26, NO. 1

SOUTH ASIAN REVIEW

Volume 26, Number 1

November, 2005

Contents

Editor's Column	1
Prologue	3
The Current State of Naipaul Scholarship	5
PROFILE—The Irascible Prophet: V. S. Naipaul at Home	
<i>Rachel Donadio</i>	12
V. S. Naipaul's <i>A House for Mr. Biswas</i> : Poetics of History, Biography, Modernity and Culture	
<i>K. D. Verma</i>	19
"Strangers to Ourselves": V. S. Naipaul's <i>The Enigma of Arrival</i> as Counter-Discursive Life-(Re)Writing	
<i>Elvira Palitano</i>	40
Naipaul in the 1970s: Authorial Preferences and the Symptomatic Reading of Place	
<i>Stuart Murray</i>	58
Tales of Two Worlds: Naipaul after 9/11	
<i>Timothy Weiss</i>	74
Naipaul's Women	
<i>Gillian Dooley</i>	88
<i>Guerrillas</i> : V. S. Naipaul's Images of the Erotic Goddess	
<i>Sanna Dhahir</i>	104
Buried Alive: The Gothic Carceral in Naipaul's Fiction	
<i>Ankhi Mukherjee</i>	113
Frustrated Homelands: V. S. Naipaul and Caribbean Indianness as Despair	
<i>Lisa Outar</i>	126
Returning to the Repressed: Caribbean Slavery as a <i>Leitmotif</i> in Naipaul's Narratives	
<i>Vivian Nun Halloran</i>	153
Deterritorializing Trinidad and India: V. S. Naipaul's Diasporic Travels in India	

<i>Harveen Mann</i>	169
Travel Taking Further: V. S. Naipaul, Travel Writing and the Quest for Postcolonial Identities	
<i>Jacinta Matos</i>	184
<i>The Enigma of Arrival</i> : Inverse Authorship, Textualizing Reterritorialization	
<i>Abdollah Zahiri</i>	196
V. S. Naipaul: From Displacement to Hybridity?	
<i>Judith Levy</i>	211
Reading the Postcolony in the Center: V. S. Naipaul's <i>A Bend in the River</i>	
<i>Masood Raja</i>	224
Rituals of Passivity: Naipaul's Mimetic Book on the South	
<i>Ben P. Robertson</i>	240
Writing for the West: V. S. Naipaul's Religion	
<i>Nicole Gyulay</i>	256
Odd Man Out: V. S. Naipaul and Postcolonial Studies	
<i>Jésus Zapata</i>	266
The Wounded Word: V. S. Naipaul and the Language of Return	
<i>Maureen Shay</i>	284
The Dual Vision: Compassion and Cruelty in the Writings of Naipaul	
<i>Hatice Ovgu Tuzum</i>	298
Naipaul and the Illusion of Identity	
<i>Nandini Bhautoo-Dewnarain</i>	309
Negotiating the Changing World: Migrancy and Identity in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction	
<i>Yu-yen Liu</i>	320
The Look in Ruins: Naipaul's <i>The Enigma of Arrival</i> and the Dialectics of Seeing	
<i>Sangita Gopal</i>	338
The Global Vision of V. S. Naipaul	
<i>Raphael Dallo</i>	358
Out of the Colonial Cocoon? From <i>The Mimic Men</i> to <i>India: A Million Mutinies Now</i>	
<i>Jasbir Jain</i>	375

Ways of Looking: The Global Vision of V. S. Naipaul

Raphael Dalleo
Florida Atlantic University

V. S. Naipaul is a notorious character in Caribbean studies. Despite his stature as one of the most prolific Anglophone Caribbean writers and winner of a Nobel Prize, his attitude towards his place of birth has led to a repudiation of Naipaul by many of the region's critics. From his earliest writings, Naipaul has not shied away from expressing his vision of the region's history as "the history of this West Indian futility" (*The Middle Passage* 28), where "nothing was created" (29). Critics have responded to these sorts of proclamations by showing the assumptions upon which Naipaul's ideology rests. Derek Walcott blames Naipaul's tunnel vision on his "Victorian spectacles" (quoted in Hassan 189). Selwyn Cudjoe explicitly argues that this European world-view impairs Naipaul's ability to truly see certain realities of the islands: "Naipaul chose to see colonial society from the eyes of the colonizer rather than those of the colonized... as a consequence, his work... is of limited value" (*V.S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading* 113, 119). In examining these lenses Naipaul employs, this essay will show the new ways of looking the author develops in the latter part of his career that make his work of more than "limited value" for thinking about the Caribbean.

Beginning with the publication of *Finding the Center* and continuing to his recent *Magic Seeds*, Naipaul has adopted a new way of looking at historical inheritance, a fragmentary and decentered vision less certain of its truth-claims. At the same time, in revisiting the subjects of many of his earlier works, he has found that this new lens allows him to see West Indian history as something other than futility.¹ The major work of this latter part of Naipaul's career, *A Way in the World*, is also a departure for the author, a break in genre and material from anything that he has previously written. *A Way in the World* exemplifies the new Naipaul, adopting a diasporic view to understand

South Asian Review, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, 2005.

from anything that he has previously written. *A Way in the World* exemplifies the new Naipaul, adopting a diasporic view to understand the Caribbean's relationship to Latin America, Europe, Africa, and the United States to understand the Caribbean writer's place in the world.

To show this shift, I examine two world-views explored in *A Way in the World*, which I identify with the myths of Sisyphus and El Dorado.² These images, introduced into Caribbean literature with Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps* and subsequently developed in the fiction of Orlando Patterson and Wilson Harris, reappear in a recent journal issue of Caribbean criticism as emblematic of two strands of realism in the region, social realism and magical realism.³ I argue that over his career Naipaul's writing moves from relying strictly on a Sisyphean way of looking, to complementing that with an El Doradian vision, as part of a general change in his view of the history and the present of the Caribbean and the world. The early, Sisyphean Naipaul depicts in precise detail the absurdities and aporia of the colonial, postcolonial, and neo-colonial world. With *A Way in the World*, he manages to complement this negative, deconstructive vision of the detached exile with a way of looking capable of imagining and producing alternative communities and connections. In this recent work, Naipaul moves away from a view of Trinidad as insular, sterile, and filled with futility, and towards a global Caribbean perspective attuned to history and inheritance. By placing the island into a pan-American and world context, *A Way in the World* suggests understanding the island-nation as part of a web of international and transnational networks, rather than as a marooned shipwreck left behind by history with the end of the British Empire.

A Way in the World and Diasporic Ways of Looking

A Way in the World defies straightforward generic classification. It has been published in the United States as a novel, although the original British version was subtitled a "sequence." Like a collection of related short stories, such as Naipaul's first book, *Miguel Street*, the structure of *A Way in the World* invites the reader to consider how it might, or might not, cohere. It is divided into nine sections, with only a tenuous unity of time or place. Most of the chapters offer first-person reflections from the life of an unnamed narrator whose career as a writer closely resembles that of Naipaul. Three of the chapters break from recounting the narrator's life. These chapters are called "unwritten stories," and relate ideas that the narrator has had for stories about the history of Trinidad and the New World. After the narrator sets up the ideas and experiences that led him to these stories, he drops out of these chapters and the story transpires through dialogue and description, as

though it were "a play or a screen play, or a mixture of both" (*A Way in the World* 163).

Each chapter comes together around a particular character, and his way of looking at Trinidad. Always present to filter all of these observations is the narrator, the Naipaulian alter ego. The autobiographical chapters each center around a fictional character: Leonard Side, Foster Morris, Lebrun, Manuel Sorzano, and Blair. The unwritten stories are about historical figures: Walter Raleigh, Francisco Miranda, and an unnamed revolutionary referred to only as "the narrator," but who is distinct from the narrator of the book. The text interrogates each of these men's view of the world, and their inadequate efforts to represent Trinidad and its environs. Each character contains elements of Naipaul, and seems to represent aspects of his career; *A Way in the World* is a garden of forking paths that Naipaul did or did not take. All of these men share the ambition of finding a language for talking about Trinidad; each is a writer of the global Caribbean, simultaneously bringing the perspective of an insider and an outsider to the task.

The book is narrated from the present, and each chapter travels back in time, either through the narrator's memory and imagination or through documentary historical reconstruction. The sequence follows no discernible chronology. The autobiographical narrative begins in the Trinidad of the narrator's boyhood, and travels to England, the United States, Venezuela, and various parts of Africa, making stops back in Trinidad along the way. The first "unwritten story" is set "going up a highland river in an unnamed South American country" (47); the other two take place "in the gulf of desolation" (245) at the mouth of the Orinoco River, between Trinidad and Venezuela. Much of the action transpires in planes and boats, moving between Trinidad and the South American continent, Africa and the Caribbean, England and North America. *A Way in the World* begins with the narrator returning to Trinidad from London on "a two-week journey by steamer" (3), and ends following a corpse's "ceremonial return...to Trinidad" (379). The action never dwells in any one place; each is a brief stop over, a return or a departure always recalling or anticipating another destination.

From the beginning, on his first return to Trinidad, the narrator realizes that more than just the time he has been away distances him from the island of his birth: "I felt when I arrived...that an age—a vanished adolescence, a forced maturity, England, a book—separated me from the people in the Registrar-General's Department" (30). What separates him from his native Trinidad is what he will call his new "way of looking" (74). One of the earliest theoretical reflections on Caribbean literature, George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*, is built around a strikingly similar notion.⁴ Lamming identifies the importance

to his career of his West Indian "way of seeing": "I do believe that what a person thinks is very much determined by the way that person sees. This book is really no more than a report on one man's way of seeing, using certain facts of experience as evidence and a guide" (56). Throughout his book, Lamming describes how historical and personal circumstances determine one's perceptions. As a descendant of Caliban, the Caribbean writer coming to England brings a peculiar perspective to Prospero's land and traditions. The chapter of *Pleasures of Exile* titled "Ways of Seeing" focuses on "colour as it affects black men living in a white society" (56), and the differences between Prospero's and Caliban's views of the world and each other.

The "way of looking" Naipaul explores supplements Lamming's "way of seeing," overlapping with Lamming's concept but taking it in another direction at the same time.⁵ Lamming's seeing is something intrinsic. He gives the sense that his way of seeing is something beyond his control, and something that will not change. Lamming appears unconcerned with the effects that the seachange of migration might have on his perspective; the West Indian immigrant arrives on foreign shores with his way of seeing intact, carried with him from the islands into the metropolitan setting. He sees England through the eyes of an outsider. Similarly, all of the narrator's observations in *A Way in the World* stem from a Caribbean perspective that never leaves him. But his way of looking is more active than simply seeing. If seeing is passive and therefore static, looking demands participation, and is a more conscious act. The movement and migrations which change his consciousness necessarily alter how he looks at the world.⁶

Although the setting is constantly shifting in *A Way in the World*, the central object of these different visions is Trinidad; it is the pivot around which everything else revolves. In the autobiographical reflections, Trinidad is originary, the beginning and end of the narrator's musings. The island setting is a creation of the narrator's nostalgia, but it is also the place to which the narrator continually returns to try out the new ways of looking he learns abroad. Every chapter marks a new approach to the island, another effort to look upon the island and make sense of its past and present. Just as the autobiographical sections keep returning to Trinidad, the unwritten stories, set in the Gulf of Paria, involve Trinidad as well. Nonetheless, the Trinidad of these stories is not an isolated, insular territory, but an island as part of the surrounding sea. It is Trinidad as guardian of the Americas' "estuary" (177, 185, 220, 223), the gateway to the New World.

⁴ I had grown up with a small-island geography in my head. But the Gulf I had looked out on as a child was far bigger than the island. The

Gulf, with its confused currents, between an island and the estuary of a continental river, had always been part of the fabulous New World. (224)⁷

The narrator's ability to see Trinidad as part of a greater whole lends him a double vision, a "way of looking that contained both the fabulous past and the smaller scale of what I had grown up with" (224). *A Way in the World* comes from that interplay, of the specifically autobiographical and the grand aspirations of history writing, of the real and the imagined, of the sociological and the fantastic, two ways of looking associated in Caribbean literature with the myths of Sisyphus and El Dorado. Bringing the two together becomes for Naipaul a distinctively New World rather than Eurocentric perspective, the ability to imagine the "fabulous past" and see its traces in the often less than fabulous present.

Sisyphus or El Dorado

By invoking the lenses of realism and imagination, Naipaul adds a new perspective on the most productive way of looking at the region's history and present. *A Way in the World* traces the origins of this consideration back to the first recorded outsider to lay eyes on the island of Trinidad, Christopher Columbus. The narrator recounts a game he plays with himself on one of his return trips to Trinidad, in which he drives to "the northeasternmost point of the island, Point Galera, Galley Point" (71), in order to imagine what the island might have looked like when Columbus first saw it:

it occurred to me that, in spite of everything that had happened here, in spite of everything at our backs, what I was looking at was, miraculously, a version of the very first thing Columbus had seen after his crossing of the Atlantic on his third voyage. (72)

The narrator imagines what might have led the explorer to name this Point Galera, what might have caused his "fifteenth-century Mediterranean eyes" (73) to see a galley in the rocks and trees here. He recounts how, "in the nineteenth century... people began to feel that the old maps had got it wrong" (73), and that this point, which did not seem to resemble a galley at all, might not have been the part of Trinidad which Columbus first saw. But standing there, the narrator thinks that he can understand why Columbus called this Point Galera: "I suppose that people had been looking for a galley shape on the island itself... They wouldn't have considered the worn rocks out at sea" (74).

The narrator's ability to look at the island as Columbus might have, as though approaching the island from afar and seeing it with a

"romantic way of looking" (74), allows him to understand the historical circumstances of the explorer's arrival, even while this requires a break from a strictly realist vision that sees only what is there. He admits that "I had never tried to do that as a child: pretend I was looking at the aboriginal island" (74). Instead, it is his travels which allow him to take this perspective: "It was something I had found myself trying to do, on visits, many years after I had gone away" (74). In contrast to his childhood, when he "used to feel... that the light and the heat had burnt away the history of the place [Trinidad]" (74), the adult narrator has found a perspective which allows him to see the presence of that history. This vision, described as "romantic" and "fabulous," is both a look of wonderment, as if seeing the island for the first time, and an acknowledgement of those who have come before him and looked at the island the same way.

This "romantic" way of looking, originally deployed by the conquistadors, is thus the vision of the insider-outsider, in touch with the region but still distanced from it. In exploring realism and imagination as different points of view, *A Way in the World* picks up on a fascination with the "fabulous" central to many Caribbean novels, nowhere more apparent than in Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps*. This pursuit of the fabulous, represented in *The Lost Steps* with the narrator's trip into the jungle and search for El Dorado, comes as a response to the mechanized and hollow modern life that he likens to the condition of Sisyphus, "ascending and descending the hill of days, with the same stone on my back" (9); in this way, the novel establishes these two myths as opposite poles of looking at Caribbean experience. The Sisyphusian way of looking associated with the modern city allows the narrator to see only a sterile, repetitive, unredemable world of empty time that leaves his life devoid of any historical sense.⁸ From this unproductive, anti-historical modern space, the story moves into the jungle interior of Latin America, where after hearing the story of El Dorado, he sees the lost city at every turn. In understanding his trip as repeating the ancient voyages of the conquistadors, every moment of the narrator's quest is intersected by the region's history of exploration and conquest. El Dorado comes to stand in his narrative for all of the dreams outsiders have projected onto the New World, making it a site of new beginnings for those fed up with Sisyphusian modernity.⁹

With the importance of these two myths established in *The Lost Steps*, Kamau Brathwaite's recent essay "MR" argues that Caribbean literary history can be divided into Sisyphusian and El Doradian traditions, associating Sisyphus with social realism and El Dorado with magical realism. Orlando Patterson's *The Children of Sisyphus* becomes emblematic of the sociological tradition. In adopting the lens of realism by taking the myth of Sisyphus as the Caribbean condition,

The Children of Sisyphus is remarkable for its intensely realistic portrayal of the poverty of the inhabitants of Kingston's most infamous ghetto of the time, the Dungle.¹⁰ The El Doradian tradition, on the other hand, comes in novels like Wilson Harris' *Palace of the Peacock*. Where the Sisyphian world Patterson creates is a static one, marked by futility and beyond redemption, for Harris, remembering El Dorado means seeing Caribbean history not as stasis, but rather creation; not a void, but rather a site of possibility.¹¹

Brathwaite suggests that the Sisyphian tradition of realist protest writing is simply "Caliban using Prospero's language to trace him in great detail, in a way, but not getting/going beyond that into the image of Sycorax & 'beyond' even that unto Setebos at the mud of the making of nature & its transcription into human consciousness" ("MR" 11). Brathwaite's notion of tracing Prospero has three possible meanings here: either tracing Prospero's books, that is copying his style; or tracing Prospero's figure, that is representing Prospero as the cause of the present situation; or, in Jamaican parlance, to trace meaning to course.¹² Yet perhaps these three meanings are not entirely incompatible. As in *The Tempest*, Caliban's attempts to curse Prospero have generally come in Prospero's language; by analogy, attempts to write protest literature have generally relied on the genre of social realism to trace oppression in great detail. Eventually, Caliban comes to find that Prospero's way of looking, social realism, cannot represent certain things. Getting beyond realism implies a broadening of vision, a move away from protest towards pondering subterranean relations and imaginative solutions. The sociologically precise writing of Sisyphus records the shipwreck; Brathwaite looks towards the imaginative vision of El Dorado to chart historical correspondences and future possibilities. While Naipaul's early career clearly relies on a Sisyphian point of view, *A Way in the World* is remarkable for its imaginative coupling of these two ways of looking.

From Sisyphus to El Dorado

The way of looking Naipaul employs beginning with *The Middle Passage* (1962) until at least *A Bend in the River* (1979) is clearly Sisyphian. Brathwaite's argument, that protest literature is locked in an unproductive dialogue with the colonial past, a dialectic without synthesis, is a familiar one. He adds an original twist, suggesting that protest literature's limitation is its dependence upon the techniques of social realism. Although few would consider Naipaul a "protest writer" of the same order as Patterson, their "journalistic" or "naturalistic" discourses are based on similar poetic assumptions: in charting the injustices of colonialism in great detail, the writer never offers an

alternative vision. These ways of looking, while perhaps motivated by different ideological positions, produce a common vision.¹³

The similarities between their descriptive styles are striking. Patterson's paints a portrait that assaults the reader from the novel's opening pages:

On the left side of the road would be the miserable little huts of Back-O-Wall, sluttly and grimy with the tiny little peep-holes beneath the old zinc ceilings. Through them half-naked children too hungry to play, and shrivelled, atrophic old men with their black guns, too weak to move, would be peering... Then farther down, right there beside the hollow path where they dumped the carcasses of dogs and pigs. (6)

In equally relentless detail, Naipaul depicts a similar scene from the Dungle in *The Middle Passage*, his first depiction of the "children of Sisyphus" without the filter of fiction and the novel:

Hovels of board and cardboard and canvas and tin lie choked together on damp rubbish dumps behind which the sun sets in mocking splendour... Filth and rubbish are disgorged everywhere; everywhere there are puddles; and on the rubbish dumps latrines are forbidden by law. Pigs and goats wander as freely as the people and seem as individual and important... Against such a view lay a dead mule, its teeth bared, its belly swollen and taut. It had been there for two days; a broomstick had been playfully stuck in its anus. (216)

Both passages put before the reader's eyes an impoverished world of dirt, decay and death. Barely human people wander amidst animal carcasses, refuse, and excrement, all portrayed with the realism of a photograph.

Such physical descriptions are common in Naipaul, whether he turns his gaze on landscapes or people. Naipaul's descriptions of landscape might be called naturalistic: the values of the society and culture are represented through their usually static and oppressive physical surroundings.¹⁴ In *A Bend in the River* and *In a Free State*, the landscape is chaotic bush, just like Naipaul's rendition of African history, but in *The Enigma of Arrival*, by contrast, ordered and manicured gardens are characteristic of British civilization. In describing the Kingston Dungle, Naipaul emphasizes the abject chaos, filth, and hopelessness which mark the life of poor Jamaicans. By investing so much energy in description, Naipaul manages to skip over moralizing clouds the writer's ability to be true to reality; these descriptions are simply the unromanticized truth.¹⁵

Even in *The Middle Passage*, with minimal excavation, we can see the limits of this type of realist discourse. It is the mode of representation that Naipaul refers to in *A Way in the World* as "descended in form from Victorian travel journals," a way of looking of which "Trollope and Charles Kingsley and Froude" (75-76) are the exemplars. Although *The Middle Passage* begins with an epigraph from Froude, in trying to trace this Victorian genre of travel writing, Naipaul already acknowledges that there are aspects of West Indian reality which remain blindspots for this way of looking. The above-cited passage describing the Jungle begins with this disclaimer: "The slums of Jamaica are beyond description. Even the camera glamorises them" (*The Middle Passage* 216).¹⁶ This appears to be a paradox; Naipaul calls the scene "beyond description," and then spend the rest of the paragraph describing it. Naipaul is still uncomfortable with his position as objective observer, afraid that the pose of objectivity will fail to get at the truth of what he is describing. As Naipaul refines his aesthetic, he will no longer foreground the inadequacies of his discourse: in *The Loss of El Dorado* or in the African-set novels, he gives up on trying to represent the unrepresentable Africans, slaves, or Amerindians, and as a result, his writing becomes more seamless. Yet these margins will return to encroach on the center in *A Way in the World*, in the form of the "unwritten stories"; those stories which the author has never been able to write, and even now, he feels he can only "partly" work out (47).

The traveler persona Naipaul adopts during the middle period of his career goes hand-in-hand with the Sisyphean way of seeing. This persona, standing at a remove from his surroundings, observing rather than participating, becomes the dominant form of narration for all of Naipaul's writings in this time period, whether fiction or non-fiction. Gordon Rohlehr, in a 1980 interview, notes for example that "A lot of [Naipaul's] recent work has a kind of journalistic finish" (106). After his early experiments with narration and form, during the late 1960s and 1970s, Naipaul uses either omniscient narration, as in "In a Free State," journalistic objectivity, as in *The Overcrowded Barracoon* and *The Return of Eva Perón*, or the icily detached first person of *The Mimic Men* and *A Bend in the River*. Perhaps the best example of the vision of history which Naipaul adopts during this time period is the only explicit attempt during his career at writing a book of history, *The Loss of El Dorado*.

A Way in the World's Poetics of El Dorado

In *A Way in the World*, the narrator describes the process behind his own attempt at writing Trinidad's history, a historical study closely resembling *The Loss of El Dorado*:

Historical documents...gave me a sense of a crowded aboriginal Indian island, busy about its own affairs, and almost without relation to what I had known. A sense, rather than a vision: little was convincingly described in those early documents, and few concrete details were given. In my mind's eye I created an imaginary landscape for the aboriginal people. (213)

To write a historical account of the New World, the narrator cannot rely on historical documents entirely, because of what they leave out. Straightforward history gives this "sense," but other ways of looking are needed for the proper "vision." Imagination must be called upon to fill in the details, the aporia, and the other stories that have never been told. *A Way in the World* has this imaginative vision. The narrator acknowledges that he has acquired this distance abroad: "It was easier in London, separated by many years and some thousands of miles from that ground-level view...to feel the truth of the other, aboriginal island. From that distance, from that other side, as it were, the landscape of the aboriginal island became fabulous" (215). In transit, in the movement back and forth between London and the New World, the narrator discovers the El Doradian way of looking which allows him to convey the history of Trinidad.¹⁷

By using this other vision to supplement a realist way of looking, the elder narrator can write the "unwritten" stories, which eluded European travelers to the New World, as well as the younger Naipaul. These "unwritten" stories enact the imaginative reconstruction of the world of the Amerindians and African slaves during colonialism which Naipaul had never before attempted. They are that which the poetics of Sisypus, social realism, obsessed with Prospero's empiricism, cannot properly see. While *The Loss of El Dorado* looks at only the dearth of documentation about the lives of these peoples, *A Way in the World* follows Wilson Harris' lead in using the imagination to fill in the gaps left by European history. *A Way in the World* illustrates this evolution, away from reliance on a western view of history, and towards imaginative reconstruction. Instead of the journalistic Naipaul, who assumed his descriptions of the world to be precise and unproblematic, this imaginative vision requires the admission of its own incompleteness, the realization that Amerindians possess "ideas I couldn't enter, ideas of time, distance, the past, the natural world, human existence" (213-4).

The central figure in each of the three "unwritten" stories lacks this crucial self-awareness. In the first story, a re-writing of Carpenter's *The Lost Steps* and Harris' *Palace of the Peacock*, the revolutionary figure traveling into the Guyanese interior fails to realize that in his project, he is retracing the steps of generations of European conquerors before him. As a result, he also fails to understand that his way of looking upon the Amerindians is no different from those European ways of looking. These are what Naipaul refers to as "certain historical ironies" (48). The revolutionary traveler is called only "the narrator," yet he is allowed no chance to narrate; the narrator of *A Way in the World* will not surrender the privilege of telling this story. He thus creates a disjunction between the narrator of the larger text, who narrates this story, and his creation, "the narrator," who is narrated. The narrator can see and describe the Amerindians; "the narrator," trapped in European ways of looking, cannot. We can have a passage in which the narrator describes: "a woman comes down the zigzagging yellow ramp with a basket of food for the man with the shotgun: various things in tins and wooden bowls, separately tied up in cloth." Yet this description could not have been given by "the narrator," who sees only "blank faces, the stoniness of the staring people" (49). "The narrator" is in his own mental world; as he eats, rather than considering the people around him, he loses himself in abstraction, "thinks of all the world's staples" (50). He not only finds it "impossible to enter [the Amerindian] way of perceiving" (58); in the end, his complicity with his European predecessors is made explicitly. His is only the latest betrayal of the Amerindians.

"A Parcel of Papers, a Roll of Tobacco, a Tortoise," the unwritten story of Raleigh's second trip to the Guyanas, plays with the historical fact that while Raleigh's troubled and troubling account of his trip has become a central document in the history of the region, the account of the Amerindian who accompanied Raleigh back to England has never received equal hearing. This retelling portrays Raleigh as progressively losing his grip on reality, as he becomes obsessed only with writing down his confused narration of his voyage (209-210); at the same time, Don José, the silenced Amerindian, gives an even and thoughtful version of the same events, making him a much more reliable informant. *A Way in the World* readily accepts his account over Raleigh's: as the narrator puts it, "the narrative is now his" (188), even if that is not how European history will remember things.

The last "unwritten story," that of Francisco Miranda, follows the form of the Raleigh story, the action moved along almost exclusively through long passages of dialogue. The narrative is overtly monologic; the voices, whether Miranda's, Hislop's, or someone else's, are all European. This discourse elides the presence of the slaves, referring to

them obliquely when speaking of "human turpitude" (276). Yet the shadows at the margins undermine the central narrative. Francisco Miranda's daily routine is constantly interrupted by the incomprehensible rumblings of the slaves around him, speaking in their native African tongues that he cannot understand. Later, "where there had been Africans in the grounds, speaking an African language, there were now Chinese" (329). In Miranda's writing, these figures appear fleetingly and are quickly forgotten; for the more sophisticated writer of the story, they linger as the unrepresentable margins of European discourse. Their presence reminds us of Miranda's way of looking's inability to represent New World reality. As Miranda himself notes,

There were no Negroes in Tom Paine or Rousseau. And when I tried to be like them [Paine and Rousseau] I found it hard to fit in the Negroes. Of course, I knew they existed. But I thought of them as accidental to the truth I was getting at. I felt when I came to write that I had to leave them out. (341)

If he cannot understand or account for the majority of the inhabitants of Trinidad, how can he expect to represent them, either in writing or as the leader of their revolution?

A Way in the World does manage an attempt to represent these subaltern subjects. In indicting Raleigh's and Miranda's representations of the past as lies and partial truths, Naipaul is implicitly recanting his own use of their narratives in writing *The Loss of El Dorado*. That was the younger, immature Naipaul. As he notes in *A Way in the World*,

when I first read about Miranda and began to look at his papers, I too, but in my own way, thought of him as a precursor. I saw him as a very early colonial, someone with a feeling of incompleteness, with very little at home to fall back on, with an idea of a great world out there, someone who, when he was out in this world, had to reinvent himself. I saw in him some of my own early promptings (and the promptings of other people I knew). I feel now that I was carried away by a private idea of an ancestry. (252)

The use of the past tense here shows the naiveté of the younger narrator, who earlier worked for the government copying colonial documents (22), rather than imagining anything outside of these documents. The older writer can see Miranda for the mimic man of Europe that he was, and can distance himself from that position. This marks a remarkable new way in the world for Naipaul.

In *Resistance and Caribbean Literature*, one of Naipaul's sharpest Caribbean critics, Selwyn Cudjoe, explains what he sees as the complicity of social realism with this Eurocentered view of historical

process: "V.S. Naipaul does not see any sense of possibilities for these small forgotten islands which have been stranded in time. In order to do so he must recognize their capacity for creativity" (244). For Cudjoe, the successful writer shows the creativity of the Caribbean people and their intimate internationalist connections to world historical movements. Cudjoe juxtaposes Naipaul with the "critical realism" of Wilson Harris and Alejo Carpentier:

In an attempt to discover the 'essence' of Caribbean experience, these novels [of Harris and Carpentier] contain social analyses of that reality...the final central concern of the writers of magical realism (i.e., critical realism) is their crying need to understand the 'inter-historical' meaning of the Caribbean experience; to reconcile the alienation separating man's condition in his society and the objective reality of his existence. (265-6)

This "inter-historical" meaning Cudjoe celebrates in Harris and Carpentier is their ability to look at the Caribbean as part of the historical and global processes of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.

It is this global vision of Caribbean history that Naipaul manages in *A Way in the World*. This latest work shows Naipaul no longer looking backward at a history of European and British colonialism, but looking outward from Trinidad to its ongoing relationships with the rest of the world. In "MR," Braithwaite stresses the importance of El Dorado as a way of looking which acknowledges and emphasizes the links between the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas, especially Latin America, noting that "Sisyphus is collateral to the English-speaking Caribbean & that Eldorado is mainly the concept of the French & Hispanic or generally mainland 'Caribbean'" (2). Just as *A Way in the World* links Trinidad's history to that of Venezuela, the islands have always had exchange with the mainland, whether through trade, migration, or their common experience of American intervention under the Monroe Doctrine. In this way, the El Doradian way of looking complements a strictly realist vision to creatively uncover some of the hidden dynamics of globalization that have created the interactions and overlaps that characterize the cultures of the New World. Like the author's own itinerant wandering, Naipaul's writing has always kept moving, searching for new forms, structures and style to better represent the postcolonial world. In *A Way in the World*, by complementing his Sisyphian realism with an imaginative, El Doradian vision, Naipaul has found a new way of looking at the experience of the global Caribbean.

Notes

1. During this last phase, *Finding the Center* returns to the African material Naipaul fictionalized in *A Bend in the River*. *Beyond Belief* visits the same Islamic countries as *Among the Believers* to tell the story in a more diffused and decentered style; *India: A Million Mutinies Now* becomes Naipaul's latest meditation on the ancestral homeland that he first discussed in *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Wounded Civilization*; and *A Way in the World, Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds* tie all of these sites together as Naipaul's most geographically ambitious novels.
2. In my earlier essay "The World, the Text, and the Caribbean Writer: Representation in the Work of V.S. Naipaul," I identified Sisyphus and El Dorado as two styles Naipaul deploys. I am convinced that my current effort to think about these two myths as "orientations" or "ways of looking" is more in keeping with both Naipaul and Braithwaite.
3. This journal edition was republished in 2004 as *Sisyphus and Eldorado: Magical and Other Realisms in Caribbean Literature*, edited by Timothy Reiss.
4. *The Pleasures of Exile* is not the only work of Caribbean anti-colonial writing invoked by *A Way in the World*. The presence of Lebrun, a Marxist historian who according to *A Way in the World* wrote "one of the first books of the Caribbean revolution" (*A Way in the World* 108) and who returns to Trinidad to on the eve of independence to participate in nationalist rallies in Woodford Square and advise the new government, is clearly meant to invoke C.L.R. James.
5. In "Reflections on Exile," Edward Said calls his approach to diaspora "contrapuntal," and discusses the "plurality of vision" (186) that this critical way of being gives the exile.
6. Stephanie Jones writes about *A Way in the World*'s affinities to the diasporic perspective put forward in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, describing its "negotiation and ultimately implicit collapsing of the (closed, teleological, linear) politics of diaspora 'identity' as construed in opposition to the (open, anti-teleological, spatially networked) politics of diasporic 'identification'" (88). Jones discusses how *A Way in the World* critiques the politics of sameness from the perspective of difference: "Naipaul's text implicitly denies the possibility of a positively loaded definition of diaspora," offering, like Gilroy, diaspora as a deconstructive alternative to "indigenous and national identities" (91).
7. Edouard Glissant argues that seeing the Caribbean as estuary is a particularly Caribbean way of looking at it, and allows one to appreciate the region's fertility: "The Caribbean Sea is not an American lake. It is the estuary of the Americas. In this context, insularity takes on another meaning. Ordinarily, insularity is treated as a form of isolation, a neurotic reaction to place. However, in the Caribbean each island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea. It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining. A Caribbean imagination liberates us from being smothered" (139).
8. Carpentier's depiction of the modern experience of time as emptied of historical content echoes Walter Benjamin on "homogeneous, empty time"

("Theses on the Philosophy of History" 261) as opposed to "Messianic time" (263). Carpenter's novel appeared contemporaneously to some of the major works of the Frankfurt School, as the common experience of World War II lead all of these thinkers to similar critiques of the Enlightenment project.

9. Ironically, in the "Valley Where Time Had Stopped" the narrator realizes that the limits of the romantic El Doradian vision as well. He learns that no place lies outside of world historical events; that the New World is as intimately connected with modernity as the Old: "I was amazed to learn that this city of Enoch, still without brass- and metal-workers... was only three hours from the city as the crow flies. ... The fifty-eight centuries separating the fourth chapter of Genesis from the current year *back there*, could be spanned in one hundred and eighty minutes, returning to the epoch some identity with the present—as though this were not the present, too" (233-4). His attempt to return to Santa Mónica de los Venados fails precisely because the village is a dynamic, changing place; the water level in the river has risen, making it impossible to find the right entrance, and his native "wife" has taken another husband, making return undesirable anyway. The trip into the jungle, and the failed return, allows the narrator to produce a connection between himself and history, a link which he brings back with him to the modern world. The historical consciousness he finds in the movement between the city and the jungle provides a perspective beyond a vision of a static world of eternal absurdity and isolation. This dual vision comes from combining the romantic view of the region's newness and possibility with the historical acknowledgment of the predecessors for that perspective.

10. Victor Chang writes that "Patterson's depiction of the area is charged with such energy, forcefulness and authenticity, that it remains imprinted on our memory, an assault on our senses" (xi). Mark McWatt adds: "Patterson's vivid, nauseating pictures of squalid Jamaican slum life, together with the curious inexplicability of the actions and attitudes of his characters tend to make the reader into a passive observer of an alien spectacle" (36).

11. In the essay "The Two Faces of Eldorado: Contrasting Attitudes Towards History and Identity in West Indian Literature," Mark McWatt begins with a discussion of *The Loss of El Dorado* before going on to give a genealogy of the presence of El Dorado as a theme in the Anglophone Caribbean. He contrasts the presence of El Dorado in Naipaul's text, which takes as its premise that "there were two moments when Trinidad was touched by 'history'" (*The Loss of El Dorado* 14), with *Palace of the Peacock*. Whereas Naipaul sees the myth of El Dorado as unfulfilled, and therefore looks upon the Caribbean as a place abandoned by history, Harris draws from myth the energy to look upon Caribbean history not as failure and futility, but rather as an intimate part of world historical processes: "These ideas and attitudes inform positive) and becomes instead a necessity for creativity, for the imaginative re-creation of past worlds, 'lost' worlds and tribes, and ultimately the re-creation individuals and peoples across time and space" (McWatt 38). These "two faces" of El Dorado bring different eyes and allow new ways of looking at the Caribbean.

12. See the glossary at the end of *Lionheart Gal* for this definition of "trace."

13. Belinda Edmondson makes a similar argument in *Making Men*. She points out that, regardless of political beliefs, writers as seemingly disparate as Naipaul, C.L.R. James and George Lamming all wrote in the style of nineteenth century Victorian England; that is, the style of social realism.

14. Patterson, too, has been described as a naturalistic writer. Avis McDonald notes that after the publication of *The Children of Sisyphus*, Orlando Patterson "was hailed as a 'Caribbean Zola'" (62).

15. For a discussion of Naipaul's view of writing as a road to truth, see Lillian Feder's *Naipaul's Truth*.

16. Gordon Rohlehr mentions the photographic quality of Naipaul's style: "I think that what unifies the late and early Naipaul is that the eye of the writer functions as a very selective camera which severely chooses its images and what it is going to photograph" (102).

17. Sandra Pouchet Paquet has also noticed the metaphor of El Dorado in discussing *A Way in the World*. In a recent essay, she makes the intriguing suggestion that Eric Williams' *Documents of West Indian History* can be considered as a precursor and intertext to the contemporary West Indian historical novel, particularly George Lamming's *Natives of My Person*, Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *Sea of Lemnis*, and Naipaul's *A Way in the World*. She explains that all four of these texts present a method of writing Caribbean history which emphasizes fragmentation and discontinuity, and avoids the hierarchical and linear formulations of European history writing. *A Way in the World* in particular follows this "postcolonial" method in its deployment of parodic and mythic language rather than the "objective" discourse of traditional histories ("Documents of West Indian History" 770). Pouchet Paquet ultimately concludes that what makes these texts postcolonial is their location at the intersection of history and fiction, uncovering fiction as a "ideologically and culturally conditioned way of reading history" and history "as an ideologically and culturally conditioned artifice" (770). She develops these ideas further with respect to *Finding the Center in Caribbean Autobiography*.

Works Cited

- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1968. 253-264.
- Brathwaite, Kamau. "MR." *Annals of Scholarship* 12.1/2 (1997): 1-28.
- Carpenter, Alejo. *The Lost Steps* [1953]. Trans. Harriet de Onís. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001.
- Chang, Victor. Introduction. *The Children of Sisyphus*. By Orlando Patterson. London: Longman, 1964.
- Cudjoe, Selwyn. *Resistance and Caribbean Literature*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1980.
- . *V.S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1988.
- Dallo, Raphael. "The World, the Text, and the Caribbean Writer: Representation in the Work of V.S. Naipaul." *Atlantic Literary Review* 3.3 (July-September 2002): 1-14.

- Edmondson, Belinda. *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999.
- Feder, Lillian. *Naipaul's Truth: The Making of a Writer*. New York: Rowman, 2000.
- Ford-Smith, Honor, ed. *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women*. Toronto: Vision, 1987.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Caribbean Discourse*. Trans. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1989.
- Hassan, Dolly Zulakha. *V.S. Naipaul and the West Indies*. New York: Lang, 1989.
- Jones, Stephanie. "The Politics and Poetics of Diaspora in V.S. Naipaul's *A Way in the World*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 35.1 (Spring 2000): 87-97.
- Lanning, George. *The Pleasures of Exile*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960.
- Leavis, I.R. "Travelling Through Colonialism and Postcolonialism: V.S. Naipaul's *A Way in the World*." *English Studies* (2002): 136-148.
- McDonald, Avis. "Writing Down Babylon: Movement and Stasis in Orlando Patterson's *The Children of Sisyphus*." *SPAN* 29 (October 1989): 62-76.
- McWatt, Mark. "The Two Faces of Eldorado: Contrasting Attitudes Towards History and Identity in West Indian Literature." *West Indian Literature and its Social Context: Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Conference on West Indian Literature*. Ed. Mark McWatt. Cave Hill, Barbados: U of the West Indies, 1985. 33-47.
- Naipaul, V.S. *The Loss of El Dorado*. New York: Penguin, 1969.
- . *The Middle Passage*. New York: Vintage, 1962.
- . *A Way in the World*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- Patterson Orlando. *The Children of Sisyphus*. London: Longman, 1964.
- Pouchet Paquet, Sandra. "Documents of West Indian History: Telling a West Indian Story." *Callaloo* 20.4 (Fall 1997): 764-776.
- . *Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Identity and Self-Representation*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2002.
- Reiss, Timothy, ed. *Sisyphus and Eldorado: Magical and Other Realisms in Caribbean Literature*. Trenton: Africa World, 2004.
- Rohlehr, Gordon. "The Space Between Negations: Gordon Rohlehr Interviewed by Selwyn Cudjoe, 6 May 1980." *The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays*. Port of Spain: Longman, 1992. 97-128.
- Said, Edward. "Reflections on Exile." *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000. 173-186.

Out of the Colonial Cocoon? From *The Mimic Men* to *India: A Million Muminies Now*

Jasbir Jain
University of Rajasthan

...one saw the psychological significance of freedom. It does something to a man's way of seeing the world. It is an experience which is not gained by education or money but by an instinctive re-evaluation of your place in the world. ...And again one felt the full meaning, the full desecration of human personality which is contained in the word: colonial. (George Lanning, *Pleasures of Exile*, 65)

Between the colonial experience and that of freedom, lies a whole process of a "re-evaluation" of one's place in the world, an internal transformation of the self from servility to responsibility, from obedience to initiative as well as a changed relationship with the world outside, the once imperial masters, and with the feeling of helplessness and vulnerability. It demands a constant reviewing of history and historical mistakes. Freedom does not imply merely the relocation of power but, in order to be meaningful, it calls for a change in one's attitude to power. The question is not merely can the "master" adapt himself to a relationship of equality but also can the erstwhile colonial, characterized as inferior, brutal and barbaric, bring about a change in his relationship with (a) himself (b) with the erstwhile master and work outside the categories of exclusion and oppression.

Naipaul has come a long way from the early struggles of a BBC freelancer in London to the present position of a Nobel Laureate. But have the colonial positions been discarded? The post-Babri masjid pronouncements¹ his affiliation with the Hindutva ideology² and the arrogance which he displayed during the Neerwana Conference in 2002, each one of them in its own way connects up with the undercurrents in his India travelogues and those of the Islamic world, his thinly disguised biographical sketch of his father through Mohan