V. S. Naipaul's "Fin de Siècle": "The Enigma of Arrival" and "A Way in the World"

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> The Short Twentieth Century ended in problems, for which nobody had, or even claimed to have, solutions. As citizens of the *fin-de-siècle* tapped their way through the global fog that surrounded them, into the third millennium, all they knew for certain was that an era of history had ended. They knew very little else.
> ERIC HOBSBAWM, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*[1]

SPANNING THE SECOND half of this "short century" of unparalleled achievement and horror, V. S. Naipaul's works have focused on extremes that have shaped the age, from colonialism and its persistence in the mentality of marginalized peoples of former European empires, to the disorder of decolonization in newly independent states in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, to the ideologies of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, whether Black Power in the West Indies, Peronism in South America, Mobutism in Africa, or Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East. Two recent novels, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *A Way in the World* (1994), although recalling previous works, depart from them in important ways and occupy a new space that could be termed *fin de siècle* with its particular sense of ending, mood, and moral quality. These novels emphasize memory's power to reach beyond the shortsightedness of the times and to reinterpret and understand anew in the face of fracture and breakdown in today's postcolonial, multicultural societies. They are *fin de siècle* not in the negative connotation of excess and decadence, but rather in a neutral sense of a transition period in which endings and beginnings are mixed together. Beneath the mood of calm, there rustles a certain question or anxiety. These novels are about

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the dead, about those who have died (a brother and sister, Jack the Waldenshaw farm worker, Blair the Trinidad diplomat and international consultant), as well as things that have ceased to be (the narrator's colony-engendered myth of England, a Trinidad of rural ethnic communities, European colonies and empires). Yet they are also about beliefs to live by in this *fin de siècle* where old ideologies have collapsed and a sense of insecurity and uncertainty are the dominant moods of societies around the world. Throughout his long career, Naipaul has explored the themes of the times; *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World* explore the vacuum that the passing of empires has created. These novels lament a loss, but at the same time they project a moral, intellectual vision in a landscape where old orders have crumbled and where societies have become increasingly divided and directionless. The world today has indeed changed radically from the colonial epoch in which Naipaul began his career nearly fifty years ago; the breadth of his experiences and writings, and the changes that he himself has undergone during that period, give these novels a credibility and solidity. Perhaps it is only now, with this wealth of experience, that Naipaul's work can project a moral vision at a moment when the world is without guideposts.

I Early Fiction and Works: 1962-83

Naipaul's 1950s fiction—*Miguel Street* (1959), *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958)—presents a conflict between colony and metropolis, especially in terms of the divided desires of the characters and the ways in which those desires are limited or refused by the circumstances of the colony. This fiction shows that extreme *raison d'être*, that state of marginality, that is the island colony when it functions only as a distant appendage of something else, whether that something else is an American or a European otherness. Naipaul views the colony through a filter, or mask, of humor, irony, and satire, which distances him from the colonial world of his youth and thus allows him to consider it from a double perspective. But as the narrator of *A Way in the World* retrospectively comprehends, this rhetorical position also has an undesirable side-effect on the

author as man and on a society that must come to grips with its colonial identity: the "idea of comedy . . . hid from us [Trinidadians] our true position" because it tended to cover over the pathos (81).[2]

In these works, then, desire and human relationships occur circumscribed within the buffeting realities of the colony-metropolis equation. It defines the ways in which characters can (and, above all, cannot) make their way in the world and earn for themselves a measure of self-worth. The colony of Naipaul's early fiction has its supportive relationships—these early works convey a feeling for family and community that critics of Naipaul often overlook—but the colony-metropolis equation, with its black-and-white, unequivocal assignment of values, is always there as the final determiner and measuring stick of possibilities and achievement. The equation shapes Naipaul's ambitions and his ways of looking at the world, and even in works written decades later, the reader hears echoes of those West Indian colonial circumstances—as in the opening of *A Bend in the River* (1979), where Salim says matter-of-factly: "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it" (3).

A House for Mr Biswas (1961) defines the colony-metropolis equation in terms of an internal exile engendered by the gap between the protagonist's desire and his life's responsibilities and limitations. Biswas feels a sense of not-belonging; he fits neither in the Tulsi family circle nor in the Trinidad community. For him, England is where life is to be found, not on a West Indian island-colony far from the currents of modernity; Biswas dreams of living the life of the metropolitan other, the other as the success and dignity that the colony is denied and with which the world beyond is imbued. A commemoration to the frustrations, qualified achievements, and, above all, survivalist spirit of his father, Seepersad Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) completes Naipaul's initial retrospectives on the colony. With *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* (1963) and *The Mimic Men* (1967) he turns to face his own feelings of exile and disenchantment with the very metropolitan world that Biswas dreams of entering.

Naipaul's works between 1962 and 1983 fall into essentially three groups of journalistic and literary publications: works about India and religious fundamentalism (*An Area of Darkness* [1964], *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles* [1972], *India: A Wounded Civilization* [1977], *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* [1981]); works with the metropolis as their setting or subject matter (*The Mimic Men, Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*); and works that ponder the state of affairs in former colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean—*In a Free State* (1971), *Guerrillas* (1975), *A Bend in the River*, and *The Return of Eva Perón; with the Killings in Trinidad* (1980). Several of these works treat ideologies and extremism, as do other works such as *The Loss of El Dorado: A History* (1969), which do not fit neatly in any of the groups above. In the first group, Naipaul ponders his Hindu and Indian heritage, something he began to explore indirectly in *A House for Mr Biswas.* In *An Area of Darkness,* he continues this exploration. The question becomes, what does he share with these Indian others? Before departure he believes in the idea of a certain, special India, a spiritual land; on arrival, however, he experiences neither connection nor exhilaration but the weight of the country's impoverishment and a despair at its immense problems. The journey becomes torturous; each time he looks outward he is forced to look within and to question his own identity. In *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles* and *India: A Wounded Civilization,* the author shifts from personal reflection to an acerbic critique of the religious extremism of India. These critiques will be refashioned in later essays and books about other former colonies and developing societies. Ideologies of various sorts become the target of these writings, such as *The Return of Eva Perón; with the Killings in Trinidad* and *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey.*

The Mimic Men and *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* elaborate an urban dehumanization and a sense of belonging nowhere. Informed by the author's experience of the enervating aspects of life in the metropolis, these novels tell complementary stories of exile and alienation. Ralph Kripal Singh of *The Mimic Men* is a political exile from the Caribbean island of Isabella and an intellectual exile from his youthful, colonial vision of the

metropolis as centre of the world. Mr. Stone, a retiring London office worker, "a gentle, endearing man . . . of no particular consequence," feels cut off from nature, people, and personal meaningfulness (*Mr Stone* 101). In the absence of community, the two protagonists become increasingly fragmented individuals who withdraw into aestheticism and fantasy. If, as Ralph Singh claims, the former colony is flawed by its lack of order, so too is the metropolis flawed by its numbing order and depersonalization, as the daily life of Mr. Stone well illustrates. For the protagonists of these dark novels, the only escape lies in the realm of the imagination, where history, with its disappointments and horrors, can be momentarily blocked out. Singh daydreams of returning to an England of "sheep . . . in Soho Square" and of retiring to a cocoa estate on an island where colonialism maintains what he imagines to be its orderly, benevolent tutelage (*Mimic Men* 52, 81); Stone, conversely, loses himself in the contemplation of the Knights Companion project, a wishful return to the valiant camaraderie of King Arthur and the Round Table. These are novels about a moral vacuum, possibilities exhausted.

In a Free State, Guerrillas, A Bend in the River, and *The Return of Eva Perón; with the Killings in Trinidad* transmute the author's travels and sojourn in Africa, the Caribbean, and South America during the 1960s and 1970s. Depicting societies devastated by dictatorship, civil war, and ethnic and ideological purification, these works ponder a potential for social breakdown and chaos that has come with rapid decolonization, Cold War rivalries, and the impotence of Europe to respond to crises in former colonies; they document a socioeconomic slide that began in the 1970s and accelerated during the 1980s, the dead-end decade of the Third World.[3] There is an aspect of the grotesque and monstrous in Naipaul's works of this period. Bobby of *In a Free State* is beaten up and humiliated; Jane of *Guerrillas* is sodomized then hacked to death; Father Huismans of *A Bend in the River* is beheaded. This violence mirrors the times: between 1945 and 1983, about 20 million people died in over 100 major wars, military actions, or conflicts, the majority of which occurred in the Third World.[4] During the 1970s, then, Naipaul wrote troubling works about

this period of struggles for spheres of influence and cultural, socioeconomic change and breakdown. Recent events in countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have shown that Naipaul, although he has often been attacked for his gloom and doom portrayal of the Third World, did not exaggerate the potential for violence and horror.

II *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*

Although an emphasis on the constructive, regenerative power of memory begins in *Finding the Centre: Two Narratives* (1984)—in the "Author's Foreword" and "Prologue to an Autobiography" especially—it is with *The Enigma of Arrival* that Naipaul establishes definitively this direction, reflecting on relationships and cultural difference from perspectives no longer dominated by colony-metropolis or Third World-First World dualisms. He banishes old demons, so to speak, liberating himself from a certain rigidity of identity as a writer about former European colonies and contemporary crises in the Third World and from a certain rhetoric that accompanied that identity. But *The Enigma of Arrival* seems just as much an ending as its does a beginning of something new; death and commemorative farewells constitute a key element in the novel, as do recollections on growing up in Trinidad, on becoming a writer, and on the changes that have occurred in Trinidad, England, and elsewhere in the world during the past half-century.

The novel is comprised of five sections, with the first focusing broadly on myth and on the construction of individual identity. The narrator, an Indo-Trinidadian in his forties, describes the idyllic corner of the English countryside to which he has come to escape the metropolis and overcome the fatigue of his peripatetic life as an international writer. Like Thoreau at Walden Pond, he finds at Waldenshaw a "safe house in the woods"; he experiences a sense of a "second childhood," seeing in the landscape and the people a scene commensurate with his schoolboy (colonial) fantasy of the England of Shakespeare, Gray, Wordsworth, Hardy, and other literary masters.[5] He enters a mythology of Englishness, with which Naipaul, as a youth in colonial Trinidad, became enamored, but from which he was ultimately barred

("Jasmine" 23-29). He describes the pleasures of his walks and encounters with the personages of Waldenshaw, two of whom, Jack a farm worker and Jack's father-in-law, particularly interest him because they seem remnants of another, "better" age: "Of literature and antiquity and the landscape Jack and his garden and his geese and cottage and his father-in-law seemed emanations" (21). The narrator admires Jack's robustness and innate dedication to the land, and he incorporates him into an idyll of the England of long ago, the Old England to which Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* daydreams of returning.

The second section, "The Journey," consists of a thinly veiled account of the author's professional life during the past four decades. Through journeys of various sorts (for example, the narrator's journey, as a young scholarship student, from Trinidad to England; return journeys to the West Indies; journeys as part of his work as a novelist-journalist to Central and South America, Asia, and Africa; the writer's journey of words), he makes his way in the world. Overcoming his colony-bred sense of what it means to be a writer in English, he finds his subject matter in the "great movement of peoples" taking place during the second half of the twentieth century, in the consequent cultural collisions, and in his own life as a "version" of this upheaval and sociocultural evolution (141, 146-47).

"Ivy" focuses on empire and on the late twentieth-century relationship between former colony and metropolis, symbolized by the relationship between the narrator and the landlord. The two men are inversely related, at "opposite ends of wealth, privilege, and in the hearts of different cultures" (191); the declining empire, of which the landlord's acedia is a symbol, has played an important part in the rise of the narrator's fortunes—has carried him to England, provided him with a university education and opportunities as a writer from the colonies, and rewarded him with the means to rent a cottage at Waldenshaw. The narrator's presence there exemplifies the "great movement" of former colonial peoples that has redefined the cultural space of England and other European countries.

"Rooks" and "The Ceremony of Farewell" treat death and renewal. The narrator falls ill—at least partly, it would seem,

from a melancholy for Waldenshaw's disappearing pastoral world; for like the landlord, he is troubled by an *idée fixe*, his colony-bred idea of an England that matches the idyll that he once found, or imagined he had found, at Waldenshaw. There is always "some kind of exchange" in the individual's life, he points out, and he himself has had to pay for his sojourn in the woods with the sense of decay and loss that now dominates his thoughts and blocks his creativity (88). After his sister's death, he returns to Trinidad and is struck by the changes that have occurred there: the "sacred world" of the Indian villages of his childhood has vanished, and the island has been transformed, remade in an industrialized, late twentieth-century image. He is pained by both an intimate loss and the seeming loss of a past, but at the same time he is released from an idea—about the former colony, about the metropolis, about his self and his relationship to others—that has held him in its grips. His violent dreams cease, his melancholy dissipates. With a new dedication to "life and man as the mystery, the true religion of men, the grief and the glory," he becomes again a "doer"; "faced with a real death, and with this new wonder about men," the narrator concludes, "I laid aside my drafts and hesitations and began to write very fast about Jack and his garden" (354). Here, as in *A Way in the World*, Naipaul places his belief in the individual: in this *fin de siècle* of worn-out, discredited ideologies, it is the individual who has the capacity to touch an authenticity and to transform the spark of life into some act, into some manner of being in the world, that gives life to others.

The Enigma of Arrival records the death of a mentality and mythology and responds to change in a postcolonial world. Especially in terms of human relationships, the novel is post-colonial, which is to say three things: first, old boundaries are disappearing and the colony-metropolis and Third World-First World dualism no longer defines the self and its relationship to others; second, the values to which the self is attached have less to do with national identity and its exclusivity than with values that are broadly associated with inclusion in the human condition at the end of this century; third, the self more readily acknowledges its diversity, its hybrid, constructed nature—a notion particularly

germane to West Indian and Caribbean writers whose societies have been creations of the mixing of cultures. The postcolonial self is, to use Édouard Glissant's term, a "Tout-monde," a protean stew of elements.[6]

The narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* is a mélange of cultures and civilizations: Hindu, West Indian, English, American. His allegiances have been formed not only by his ethnic heritage but also by his experiences as an intellectual and writer—by his travel and life around the world—in the Caribbean, South America, Africa, Asia, England, and the U.S. He retains ties with Trinidad, where he was born and grew up, and with England, where he has studied and lived, off and on, during his adult years, but these ties do not fix his identity. Rather, the community to which he pledges his allegiance is a hybrid construction, at once rooted in Caribbean culture—in its cosmopolitan spirit—and in humanistic traditions of India and Europe. One component of this broad allegiance is the narrator's attitude towards England and Englishness, as exemplified by his understanding of the landlord and Jack. Although the narrator recognizes the landlord's attachment to the old England of empire, he views him not with the disdain of a former colonial but with the understanding of a person who is himself troubled by change and loss. The narrator comprehends the ironic imprint of the landlord (and empire) on his own self and destiny—and conversely, now in the late twentieth century, the equally ironic imprint of former colonials and other emigrants on England's identity and destiny.[7] With these people—emigrants of dismantled twentieth-century empires—and with Jack, the narrator shares a sense of life's unpredictability and sweeping changes; in Jack, who owns neither the cottage in which he lives nor the garden in which he toils, Naipaul creates a basic symbol of the underlying human condition at the end of this century of extremes and the individual's responsibility to construct a self-identity and sense of belonging.

In *The Enigma of Arrival*, then, the old dualistic demarcation between colony-metropolis (or Third Word-First World) that has dominated human relationships in Naipaul's work has lost its force and no longer dominates the consciousness of the author

or his personages. Naipaul embraces a postcolonial humanism that does not deny the shaping power of place and culture but goes beyond national and regional boundaries in its allegiances to life and human struggle. The world today is becoming, as Glissant argues in an interview with Bernard Rapp, a *créole* world of branching communities, of mixing and hybridity that defies borders. Emigration, global trade, educational exchanges, and telecommunications have reshaped the late twentieth century, and it is this world to which Naipaul's novel is germane, a world whose imperative, Julia Kristeva argues, is to recognize the stranger, the other, within ourselves (250). Naipaul continues to explore this recognition in later works such as *A Turn in the South* (1989), *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990), and *A Way in the World.*

A particularly hybrid work, *A Way in the World* mixes autobiography, fiction, dramatizations of historical events, and "unwritten" stories that grow out of Naipaul's travels in and reflections on the West Indies and Africa during the 1960s. The novel's second chapter, "History: A Smell of Fish Glue," and its final chapter, "Home Again," recount the book's most compelling story, that of Blair, a Trinidadian who rises in governmental ranks and becomes a diplomat and international consultant in sub-Saharan Africa. As in *The Enigma of Arrival,* it is death, Blair's murder in an African banana plantation, that inspires Naipaul to express simply and movingly the memory of another's life and one's difficult, often awkward efforts to touch an honesty about one's self and relationship to others.

A Way in the World treats an issue that all of Naipaul's works have focused on: cultural space. Particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, his works criticized the exclusions and violence brought about by ideological agendas, such as Black Power in the Caribbean, *authenticité* in Africa, and Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East; if independence can mean only this narrow marking-off of territories, which inevitably menaces groups that do not fit within the definition of the respective cultural or national entity, then the world is going to continue to live by convulsions of cruelty and violence in the name of an illusive ethnic or national purity. In "History: A Smell of Fish Glue" and

"Home Again," *A Way in the World* considers postcolonial identity and cultural space in the Caribbean and Africa; these chapters show how one person, whose career has been carried along by a fundamental change of power in his West Indian island society, breaks down the ideological barriers that have put him in a special category, albeit a privileged one. Blair does not give up, or cover up, his particular ethnic identification, but he does learn to "remake himself," constructing a cultural space shaped by individual integrity rather than classification and ideological agenda. From this perspective, *A Way in the World* illuminates both what cultural space means and does *not* mean to Naipaul.

The setting of the chapter requires a short explanation. The East African country and president alluded to in "Home Again" is based perhaps on Uganda or on Tanzania and the legendary Julius Nyerere, who during the 1960s and 1970s became "the conscience of black Africa"; his special brand of African socialism, "Ujamaa," was considered a "textbook model of Third World development" (see Lamb 363). The campus-compound, with its motley of expatriates employed by the African government, foreign foundations and aid agencies, recalls the internationally populated Domain of *A Bend in the River*, both works providing a context in which to examine questions of changing cultural boundaries and social development in the years immediately after African colonies' acquisition of independence.

Four personages of "Home Again"—the narrator, Richard, De Groot, Blair—represent positions, or ways in the world, during this period of African decolonization. The narrator, a West Indian writer and thus himself a former British colonial, is skeptical and finally critical of the East African state's policies: "The country was a tyranny," he laments; "[b]ut in those days not many people minded" (*A Way in the World* 356). Richard, an Englishman who works for the governmental planning department and who attempts to tutor the narrator in the politics of the new African state, enthusiastically supports the country's president, his special brand of socialism, and the idea of sub-Sahara Africa taking its own road of development. In contrast with Richard, who is a man with a cause, De Groot, an African but of New Zealand parentage, is a man singularly without a cause; his

intellectual passion for the continent has carried him beyond easily assigned ideologies: "to be always in Africa, to migrate nowhere else" is his "principal ambition" (369). Akin to Father Huismans of *A Bend in the River*—though not a captive, like him, of an Africa of the past—De Groot is passionately, intellectually engaged; the continent draws out his wonder and his interest in other people, and it becomes in this largest sense his home. The narrator learns much from De Groot, who lives within the experience of Africa rather than in an ideological position that he must defend: "he had no special cause; people looking for a man with a cause found him incomplete," the narrator explains (370). Blair, a former Trinidadian governmental minister, ambassador, and UN's representative, serves as a consultant to sub-Sahara African countries. The earlier chapter, "History: A Smell of Fish Glue," recounts Blair's and the narrator's making of acquaintance when both were student clerks at the Registrar-General's Department in Port of Spain; in "Home Again," Blair and the narrator meet again unexpectedly in East Africa, and it is this meeting that dramatizes the chapter's insights about cultural space, change, individuals, and ideology.

Throughout his career Naipaul has been outspoken about the intellectual's right and obligation to be critical—critical of one's own community and country, even when such criticism is least appreciated—if one is to avoid being swept away by the ideology of the day and abetting its errors and injustices. As Naipaul explains in an interview in *L'Express*, when he began his career in the 1950s and 1960s, it was assumed that a writer from the Caribbean should not criticize his own country or other developing countries: "I was told one day that criticism was a luxury reserved for citizens from advanced cultures. Obviously, if you come from a developing country, you don't have a right to the critical faculty. [On m'a expliqué, un jour, que l'autoanalyze était un luxe réservé aux ressortissants des cultures avancées. Évidemment, si vous venez d'un pays défavorisé, vous n'avez pas droit à l'esprit critique]" (Interview with Pasquier 52).[8] In "Home Again," the issue of criticism, political correctness, and intellectual responsibility becomes the point of falling out between the narrator, who sees abuse of power in the East African country,

and Richard, who chooses to ignore it or interpret it differently. For the latter, to criticize the country's president or any aspect of his ambitious project is to harm Africa and to side with reactionary, neocolonial forces; to criticize is to repeat, in other words, colonialist discourse with its diminution of the non-European. Richard represents an inverted colonial Manichaeism, with the repressed guilt of the European transformed into silence and inaction in the face of corruption and tyranny during African decolonization. Even though Richard is politically correct in his views of sub-Saharan Africa and is right about Europe's lingering colonial attitudes and its misunderstanding of the continent, his version of international cooperation turns into a three-monkey show because it refuses to see, hear, or do anything contrary to its ideological fix or anything that might displease the powers of the East African state. For the narrator, it is particularly irksome that Richard and others overlook the racist attitudes to which a narrow conception of Africanness can lead: "The country was full of special hate. It was for the small Asian or Indian community who, as elsewhere in East Africa, were mainly traders and shopkeepers and made a closed group" (358). During the 1970s, it was often this group that got kicked around in countries of the region, as in Idi Amin's Uganda where 30,000 Asians, most of them born in the country, were ordered to leave in 1972 (Meredith 229).

It is, above all, the narrator's encounter with Blair and the story of the latter's transformation from civil servant to leader to diplomat and foreign consultant that give this chapter its interest. The narrator immediately associates Blair with the political movement of the blacks in Trinidad and with a related anti-Indian sentiment and "falsity" in relationships between Trinidadians of African origin and Trinidad Indians. Initially, then, Blair would seem to represent another of the ideological figures typical of Naipaul's middle period; he would seem to be linked as well with the erasure of history taking place in the decolonization of the East African country. In the new ideology of Africanness, cultural connections between Indians and Africans are allowed to fade from society's memory, even though these connections go back centuries. "There would have been an Indian

element in the mixed Swahili culture of the coast. But people didn't carry this kind of history in their heads," the narrator laments (358-59).

The chapter's twist is that Blair turns out to be someone different from the narrator's prejudgment of him. Describing the cultural milieus in which he and Blair had grown up, the narrator recounts: "That all-African village in the north-east [of Trinidad], isolated for some generations, without Indians or white people, would have had its own subterranean emotions, its own faith and fantasies. Blair no doubt felt the same about me; my Indian and orthodox Hindu background might have seemed to him even more closed" (26-27). It is openness, though, that distinguishes Blair, a willingness to look at the contradictory elements within himself and the reflex of prejudice or closed-mindedness that narrow allegiances can foster. "We are all of us tribalists and racialists," he observes; "we could all easily fall into that kind of behaviour, if we thought we could get away with it" (375). To illustrate the point, Blair relates a embarrassing personal experience: in New York, while he is waiting in line to purchase a railway ticket, an Asian couple at the head of the line takes an inordinately long time, primarily because they cannot speak English well enough to communicate their intentions to the clerk. The wait drags on until Blair eventually blurts out, "What's the matter with that damned Jap?" at which point, the "white man" in front of Blair turns around and looks at him "with great disregard." This trivial anecdote, the narrator comments, leaves everything between the lines: "Blair and I had grown up surrounded by rougher racial manners and hearing much worse things about all races. But this was more than a story Blair was telling against himself. This was a story to tell us where he had got to; . . . it was like 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" (375).

Blair has sufficiently broken out of the ideological cast of his background and time to be capable of recognizing his own prejudice and racial reflex. He develops a new sense of boundaries and the possibilities to step beyond them; his allegiances become less to an ideology and a narrowly defined cultural

group than to a personal integrity and sense of human values that belong to no one group. The same critical capacity that enables him to admit a racist lapse also enables him to take a stand against corruption in the East African state. The country's officials expect Blair, because of his black West Indian ethnic background, "to put a squeeze on the Asian community"; when he begins to look into the more serious smuggling of ivory and gold, the trail leads dangerously to important people in the President's political party (376). Blair is murdered; he had apparently gotten too close to a source of the problem, the smuggling being "as much a drain on the country's resources as the dealings of the harassed [Asian] businessmen in the capital" (376). Does his "betrayal" in the sub-Saharan African country that he sought to assist, in some way invalidate Blair's life and achievement, the narrator wonders? Evidently for him the answer is no.

"Home Again" eulogizes a certain way in the world: the way of experience—of looking, questioning, and reflecting on life. This is set against the way of ideology. The past can reveal, day-to-day experience can reveal; the way out of this century of extremism, then, is through history, memory, and a concrete experience of living among cultural others, especially those about whom we carry prejudice and automatic responses. Of Blair's integrity and openness, the narrator surmises:

> [He] might have come to the realization that the character he had been presenting to the world . . . was in some essential way false to himself. He might have been granted another vision of his isolated community living in the debris of old estates; he might have taken their story back and back, to unmentionable times. And he might have decided then—like me as a writer—to remake himself. (373)

These are the experiential values that have become prominent in Naipaul's *fin de siècle* works: faithfulness to one's "essential" self, the use of history and memory to revise one's perspectives on self and community, and the power of self-creativity through writing, reflection, and dialogue with others. This is not to say that these values are totally new to Naipaul's works; they can be found from the beginning, but here at the *fin de siècle* they take on a special focus and a moral quality.

In *L'Express* interview, Naipaul spoke of the importance of an independence of spirit and the critical faculty, without which a writer will become merely a mouthpiece of an ideology. "People compel us to speak of them in a particular way. And, then, you lose touch with yourself. Conversely, if you write in keeping with [your] innermost self, you escape the traps of falsehood. [Les autres nous imposent de parler d'eux sous un certain jour. Alors, vous vous perdez vous-même. A l'inverse, si vous écrivez en accord avec votre moi profond, vous échappez aux pièges du mensonge]" (55). We can read *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World* from the perspective of this citation, for both seek, at the dead end of this century of ideologies, to plumb something precious that cannot be turned into a category or a classification. Neither novel proposes a new plan of living nor a new vision of the world, but rather, each exercises a long memory that has the capacity to measure and comprehend from new perspectives. Both are moral works in the sense that their stories incarnate certain values such as integrity, critical thinking, and independent-mindedness, and a willingness to encounter the individual as individual. Whereas the popular notion of multicuturalism implies a deductive approach to "otherness," a willingness to discover the individual as individual implies an essentially inductive approach; whereas the former notion is "politically correct" and, thus, inevitably false, the latter is personal, grounded in particular experiences of living and reflecting on one's life. Naipaul reminds us today that life and man—the *individual*, like Jack, like Mrs. Phillips, like Blair—are the mystery. A way in the world where individuals would encounter and discover individuals would re-open an imaginative space in which mystery could be brought back to life, saved from the ideologies that have fixed the world into camps and categorizations.

NOTES

[1] Hobsbawm argues that this century, which began with the "Great War"—a war leading to an even greater war, the industrialization of genocide, the deployment of atomic weapons, and a long Cold War of ideologies—came to a symbolic close with the tumbling of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of the Soviet Union. This "short century," Hobsbawm elaborates, was distinguished above all by its extrem-

ism, by a prodigious escalation in destruction (as well as production) and by a horrific brutality and inhumanity when measured by almost any standards. An estimated 187 million people—one-tenth of the total world population in 1900—were "killed in wars or allowed to die by human decision" during the century's course. Our age of prodigious progress has well demonstrated, Hobsbawm concludes, that human beings "can learn to live under the most brutalized and theoretically intolerable conditions" (12-13).

2 See Weiss's Chapter 1, "Carnival" (21-45), which considers the aspect of masks in Naipaul's early fiction.

3 In 1970, countries of the North averaged 14.5 times the gross national product per capita of those of the South; by 1990, the difference had widened to 24 times the GNP per capita. See *World Tables 1991* (World Bank), qtd. in Hobsbawm 609.

4 See *1985 Report on the World Social Situation* (UN); qtd. in Hobsbawm 608.

5 Fifteen years prior to the publication of *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul used the phrase "second childhood" during an interview with Ian Hamilton: "I was eighteen, when I came [to England], and in a way, I have grown up here. I've had a second childhood, a second becoming aware of the world. I've grown out of one attitude and begun to understand the world from another point of view in my maturity" ("Without a Place," 39).

6 "Tout-monde" is a term almost impossible to define. One of the numerous definitions that Glissant gives is the following: "le Tout-monde, c'est le monde que vous avez tourné dans votre pensée. . . . le monde où vous cherchez cette personne qu'à la fin vous allez rencontrer dans son partage, est-ce une femme est-ce un homme un vieux corps un enfant. Et le Tout-monde est ce monde-là, où vous cherchez sans partage" (177). ("The 'Tout-monde' is the world that you turn around in your thoughts. . . . the world where you look for the person who, in the end, you are going to find divided into different identities—a woman, a man, an aged body, a child. And the 'Tout-monde' is that world where you look without these divisions" [Author's translation]). See also Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant.

7 Ashis Nandy makes a related point: it is, ironically, the former colonial people who now safeguard the metropolis. Nandy comments: "the Indian society has held in trusteeship aspects of the West which are lost to the West itself" (74); and questioning the applicability of the concept of "West," Nandy adds, "For all we know, the Occident may survive as a civilization partly as a result of [an] ongoing revaluation, perhaps to an extent even outside the geographical perimeters of the West" (xiv).

8 Author's translation.

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