# Ludic Caribbean

## Cultural Representations of Trinidad in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Methodology and Objectives

Long before he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001, Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul had already been a highly controversial personality.[1] Sometimes decried as a neo-colonial writer, a "postcolonial mandarin",[2] Naipaul has also called forth extremely positive remarks. According to Feroza Jussawalla, he would be "the most beloved and widely read British author".[3]

Both opinions are debatable; on the contrary, a certain fact is that V.S. Naipaul represents one of the most prolific contemporary writers.[4] He has published 29 books so far, to which one must add an impressive number of articles, reviews and interviews. Within this literary corpus, Trinidadian themes occupy a privileged place, underlying the majority of Naipaul's writings. I focus on 10 fictional works, namely *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *Miguel Street* (1959), *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), *A Flag on the Island* (1967), *The Mimic Men* (1967), *In a Free State* (1971), *Guerrillas* (1975), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *A Way in the World* (1994),[5] without neglecting, however, important non-fictional works like *The Middle Passage* (1962), *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969), *Between Father and Son: Family Letters* (1999) or the essays and lectures collected in the following volumes: *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles* (1972), *The Return of Eva Peron with The Killings in Trinidad* (1980), *Finding the Centre* (1984), *Reading & Writing* (2000) and *The Writer and the World* (2002).

My purpose is to analyse representations of Trinidad in the aforementioned writings by situating the respective images in a larger discursive context. Naipaul

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[1] An essay discussing the controversy surrounding Naipaul's Nobel Prize is Éric Tabuteau's article, "La Moitié d'une Vie entre Deux Mondes: V.S. Naipaul, Prix Nobel Controversé", in: Judith Misrahi-Barak, *ed.*, *V. S. Naipaul: A World in Tension; Une Oeuvre sous Tension*, Montpellier: Cerpac, 2004, pp. 17-30.

[2] In an influential study on Naipaul's nonfictional works, Rob Nixon writes that "by diversifying into nonfiction he has achieved a reputation of a quite different order, not merely as a powerful imaginative writer, but as a mandarin and an institution" holding conservative views with regard to the Third World; see Robert Nixon, *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin*, New York: Oxford UP, 1992, p. 5.

[3] Feroza Jussawalla, *ed.*, "Introduction" to *Conversations with V. S. Naipaul*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997, p. x.

[4] Cf. Fawzia Mustafa, *V. S. Naipaul*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995, p. 1.

[5] Labelling this group as "Trinidadian fiction" is problematic since in the case of V.S. Naipaul one cannot speak of a clear-cut distinction between his fictional and non-fictional works. Secondly, in many of these "Trinidadian" works, Trinidad is indeed the main setting (with the exception of *In a Free State* and *The Enigma of Arrival*), but not the only one. And thirdly, sometimes we come across a Trinidad in disguise, e.g. in *The Mimic Men*, where the Caribbean island has the name "Isabella", but the features of Naipaul's native place.

makes extensive use of ludic tropes in order to depict his native island; therefore, we can speak of a portrayal of Trinidad as "play-culture". Of extreme complexity, this image should not be interpreted only by means of the concept of mimicry, which has aroused the interest of many critics as the subsequent chapter will point out.

An analysis of Trinidad as sociocultural construct is not an easy task because V. S. Naipaul emigrated at an early age to Great Britain, where he has been living ever since.[6] The situation is even more complicated, for Trinidadian society itself is not a homogenous one, comprising several ethnic groups: Afro-American, East Indian, Creole, white and Chinese, to name just the most important.[7] This happened as a result of colonial politics, which cruelly displaced people, leaving them rootless and with no other reference point than the British Empire. It is natural then that Naipaul's work should reflect a certain tension between diverse worldviews and mentalities, an opinion to which Judith Misrahi-Barak, the editor of the bilingual book significantly entitled *V. S. Naipaul. A World in Tension; Une Oeuvre sous Tension*, subscribes by saying: "What is brought forward through this new selection of essays about a writer already much written upon, is the singularity of vision coupled with the multiplicity of perspectives that shape Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul's oeuvre, as well as the multiplicity of the angles that can be adopted to read him."[8] According to Judith Levy, who adopts a Lacanian approach in *V. S. Naipaul: Displacement and Autobiography*, tension represents a kind of literary catalyser in the case of the writer born in Trinidad; thus, she traces the following pattern: "from the enactment of the split and the severance from the colonial past, through different stages in the quest for origin and for a form in which to find and express self, to resolution – the creation of a myth of origin and the construction of a postcolonial self through the writing of an autobiography."[9]

Miranda's words from the novel *A Way in the World* may be read as Naipaul's confession: "Because of the way I have lived, always in other people's

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[6] Consequently, Naipaul's representations of Trinidad derive from an interplay between self-fashioning and the fashioning of the other, having not only autostereotypical but also heterostereotypical features.

[7] Cf. Peter van Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival: A Quest for National Identity*, London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1997, p. 8 note 3.

[8] Judith Misrahi-Barak, "Introduction" in: Judith Misrahi-Barak, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[9] Judith Levy, *V. S. Naipaul: Displacement and Autobiography*, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995, p. xi. A similar opinion is held by Hédi Ben Abbes; cf. Hédi Ben Abbes, "The Creative Tension of Emptiness in V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*", in: Judith Misrahi-Barak, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

countries, I have always been able to hold two or more different ideas in my head about the same thing. Two ideas about my country, two or three or four ideas about myself. I have paid a heavy price for this. You mustn't rebuke me now."[10] This sounds like an apology on the part of Naipaul in what is his last fictional work set in Trinidad. Indeed, there are serious reasons for rebuking the writer: rather than explore the emancipating possibilities of his hybrid context, he allows the Eurocentric standpoint dominate African and Indian voices. At times, Naipaul nevertheless avoids the dangers of essentialism by stating the following: "Since I went to India I've become interested in the way different cultures have different ways of seeing"[11] or "We all inhabit 'constructs' of a world. Ancient peoples had their own. Our grandparents had their own; we cannot absolutely enter into their constructs. Every culture has its own: men are infinitely malleable."[12]

These constructionist assumptions inform my study, too – Naipaul's representations of Trinidad as "play-culture" are sociocultural and in this way, they reflect the writer's various cultural codes, resulting in an ambiguous picture of his native island. To my mind, only an interdisciplinary approach can do them justice: I have consequently tried to initiate a methodological dialogue between postcolonial/ cultural studies on the one hand and performance studies, play theory, as well as cultural anthropology on the other hand.[13]

The book is divided into three parts corresponding to the three main facets of Trinidad as it appears in Naipaul's writings: firstly, as a childish world; secondly, as a festive place and thirdly, as a playground for the western imagination. The image of Trinidad as a childish space stands at the intersection of the autobiographical genre with the colonial/ Social Darwinist discourse of the so-called "child races". In both cases, we have to do with a cultural construct of childhood whose main stereotypical features are smallness, imitation, irrationality and of course, playfulness. In the second part of my analysis, I focus on the importance of rituals and festivals in shaping up Indian and African identities in Trinidad. Roughly, Hindu rituals are capital means to create diasporic Indias, whereas Carnival is a powerful

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[10] V. S. Naipaul, *A Way in the World: A Sequence*, London: Heinemann, 1994, p. 332.

[11] Ian Hamilton, "Without a Place: V. S. Naipaul in Conversation with Ian Hamilton", in: Feroza Jussawalla, *ed*., Conversations *with V.S. Naipaul*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997, p.19.

[12] V. S. Naipaul, *A Way in the World*, pp. 154-155.

[13] For a more detailed treatment of the concepts of "play-culture" and "cultural representation", see pp. 25-30 of the present study.

symbol of the Afro-Trinidadian community. Nevertheless, they carry the potential of becoming genuine liminal spaces, where ethnic boundaries are transgressed. The third section is devoted to a discourse of play as imagination. In this respect, Trinidad appears as an adventure playground where the Westerner projects his/her desires, sometimes under the mask of scientific respectability. The eye of the European sees the tropical island as an exotic Garden of Eden, as an aesthetic space with strong pictorial and theatrical qualities. But if Trinidad occurs as an artistic, a fictional object, then Naipaul's novels and stories describing it are fiction about fiction, and so have a very important metafictional component. At this stage, since metafiction is also a capital element of postmodernism, I trace back Naipaul's ludic metaphors to the present-day Zeitgeist, pointing out the postmodern elements in his texts dealing with Trinidad.

All in all, one could regard this study as an homage paid to an island that in spite of its size is one of the most significant places on the literary map of the world.[14]

[14] Except for V. S. Naipaul, Trinidad has given the world important writers such as Samuel Selvon, C. R. L. James, Merle Hodge or Earl Lovelace. Another Nobel Prize winner, Derek Walcott, has strong ties to the island, as he has spent many years of his life there; Walcott has massively

### 1.2. Overview of Criticism on V. S. Naipaul

By focusing on the picture of Trinidad in the works of the 2001 Nobel Prize winner, the present book certainly fills an evident gap in Naipaulian criticism. Although Trinidadian themes are of central importance, they have not been properly observed; thus, critics usually prefer to discuss them among other topics (probably intimidated by the mass of writing Naipaul did on Trinidad). So are Suman Gupta, Helen Hayward or John Kuar Persaud Ramphal, who in their monographs analyse some of Naipaul's Caribbean works alongside his writings on Africa, India and the Islam; another feature held in common by the three studies is a special emphasis on the autobiographical aspect of Naipaul's literary texts.[15] A book that deals exclusively with Trinidad is Claudia Ebel's *Der Entwurzelte Hindu: Eine Untersuchung zum postkolonialen Kulturkonflikt in V.S. Naipauls Trinidadromanen* (1988).[16] However, *Der Entwurzelte Hindu* analyses only three of Naipaul's novels, namely *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *A House for Mr Biswas*; it is Dolly Zulakha Hassan who has provided the most comprehensive picture of Naipaul's Trinidadian/ Caribbean fictional as well as nonfictional works in her study entitled *West Indian Response to V. S. Naipaul's West Indian Works*;[17] unfortunately, Hassan is more interested in the (predominantly negative) reaction of Caribbean critics to Naipaul's writings – this is a superb piece of meta-criticism, less of Naipaulian criticism. Moreover, her study is already outdated, as it interprets Naipaul's works up to *Guerrillas* (1975) and *The Return of Eva Peron with The Killings in Trinidad* (1980).

Although no study has analysed the image of Trinidad as "play-culture" in V. S. Naipaul, there are some critics who have tentatively approached the play motif in the Indo-Trinidadian writer's books (yet, without discussing it from a discursive perspective), possibly under the spell of a so-called "ludic turn" characterising the

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influenced local culture, founding the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in 1959.

[15] See Suman Gupta, *V.S. Naipaul*, Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 1999; Helen Hayward, *The Enigma of V.S. Naipaul*: *Sources and Contexts*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; and John Kuar Persaud Ramphal, *V.S. Naipaul's Empty Chapel: His Background, Works and Vision of the Third World*, Markham, Ontario: Sugarcane Publishing, 2003.

[16] Cf. Claudia Ebel, *Der Entwurzelte Hindu: Eine Untersuchung zum postkolonialen Kulturkonflikt in V.S. Naipauls Trinidadromanen*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988.

[17] See Dolly Zulakha Hassan, *West Indian Response to V. S. Naipaul's West Indian Works*, Ann Arbour, MI: UMI, 1989 (1986).

postmodern age.[18] Such is Karl Miller, who has remarked the ludic nature of *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *Miguel Street*:

> The three books which precede *Biswas*, two novels and a collection of stories, were really lovely pieces of work – and play – which could be interpreted in Europe and America as a celebration of West Indian life, and as an unheard-of elegance and civility from the back of beyond.[19]

John Clement Ball adds the story "A Flag on the Island" to this group of ludic novels, noting in *Satire & the Postcolonial Novel. V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie* (2003) that the satiric-ludic element dwindles in Naipaul's subsequent books.[20] Another study concerned with the Naipaulian play motif is Paul Theroux's monograph, *V.S. Naipaul: An Introduction to His Work* (1972), which handles in the first two chapters with the concepts of "fantasy" and "imagination". One could read his account where fantasy receives a negative value, and imagination is largely positive as a feeble echo of the distinction between "fancy" and "imagination" in Samuel T. Coleridge's essay *Biographia Literaria*.[21] Theroux associates play with fantasy, thus degrading it with the help of what Brian Sutton-Smith would call "rhetorics of frivolity":

> Many are fantasists. They play, as Owad does, but they cannot make, and so they don't grow. They are sunk in dreams, 'hungering for the unseen'. In Naipaul's words, their fantasy 'feeds on a private vision of the real world'. The four characters described as creators in the previous chapter also indulged in mild fantasies, but these men had a fundamental scepticism, a gift for self-parody, and an ability to modify these pauses with humour[...] And some of their naming *is* fantasy ('Ralph' Singh, 'Gareth' Ramsumair, the infant K.H.G.D. Biswas, Mr Stone 'Head Librarian' ), but more often it is imagination, actively giving definition to reality by intensifying it ('the Great Belcher', 'the Male', 'Mr God' and 'the She-fox' and 'Garbage')[...]

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[18] See Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. ix and Brian Sutton-Smith, "The Future of Play Theory", in: A. Pellegrini, *ed.*, *The Future of Play Theory: A Multidisciplinary Inquiry into the Contributions of Brian Sutton-Smith*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 291. Cf. also Ihab Hasan's comment that "postmodernism veers toward open, playful, optative, provisional, [...] disjunctive, or indeterminate forms [...]" (Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, 2nd edition, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982, p. 271.)

[19] Karl Miller, "Introduction" to V.S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas*, London: Campbell, 1995, pp. vii -viii.

[20] John Clement Ball, *Satire & the Postcolonial Novel: V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie*, New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 51. For a discussion of play as a constitutive element of satire, see *ibid.*, pp. 32-34.

[21] See Samuel T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, in: Rüdiger Ahrens, *ed.*, *Englische Literaturtheoretische Essays 2: 19. und 20. Jhd.*, Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1975, pp. 51-52.

> Imagination helps a man to become whole. Fantasy, which is the expression of a perverse hunger, destroys and degrades a man.[22]

This is a highly stereotypical account of play; first of all, it connects play exclusively with children (the fantasists "don't grow", thus remaining in a perpetual state of infantilism, precisely because they play) and secondly, it establishes a rigid dichotomy play/work ("they play [...] but they cannot make"). And non-work in a Puritan hierarchy must occupy a low place.[23] The dichotomy work vs. play also appears in Eckhard Breitinger's article on West Indian literature in the following form: "Den westindischen Creolen versteht [Naipaul] als den *homo ludens*, der in der Illusion lebt, ein *homo faber* zu sein oder doch im Begriff ist, ein *homo faber* zu werden."[24]

A book more sympathetic to the play phenomenon in its carnivalesque guise is Timothy F. Weiss's *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V.S. Naipaul* (1992). The study ventures to offer an overview of V.S. Naipaul's work in the light of Bakhtinian theory, but unfortunately, this engagement with Bakhtin's ideas is somehow superficial. However, Bakhtin's concepts filtered through Tzvetan Todorov's understanding, lead to an interesting insight into Naipaul's "art of exile". Actually, the whole philosophical background of the book can be summed up in the following sentences:

> The key idea here is that of dialogue between perspectives and syncretistic transformation. To be on the margins is to be part of yet not part of; in the self's encounter with others, the exile can live a "double exteriority" for he or she belongs to two cultures without identifying wholly with either. The exile can engage in a cross-cultural dialogue and through that dialogue can affirm both his uniqueness and the interrelationship between himself and others.[25]

Except for "dialogue", another important Bakhtinian concept present in this book is that of "carnival". Chapter 1 of Weiss's study discusses Naipaul's earliest fictional works, *Miguel Street*, *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira*, in connection

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[22] Paul Theroux, *V.S. Naipaul: An Introduction to His Work*, London: Heinemann, 1972, pp. 35-36.

[23] For the connection between "rhetorics of frivolity" and the Protestant ethic, see Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, pp. 201-204.

[24] Eckhard Breitinger, "Aspekte der Produktion westindischer Literatur", in: Heinz Kosok and Horst Prießnitz, *eds.*, *Literaturen in englischer Sprache: Ein Überblick über englischsprachige Nationalliteraturen außerhalb Englands*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1977, p. 154.

[25] Timothy F. Weiss, *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V.S. Naipaul*, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992, p. 13.

with the latter concept. Weiss sometimes uses, instead of the terms "carnival" and "carnivalesque", the related notions of "play" and "playfulness", such as in the following statements: "the play of Miguel Street contrasts with its underlying harsh realities"[26] or "[t]he boy's remark shows a certain playfulness and esprit, but it also shows a contamination by the macho street attitudes of the slum".[27] On the whole, according to T. Weiss carnival would be double-faced, ambiguous in these early works.[28] The critic links the works' "double-voicedness" to their author's position as an exile:

> Of all his works, the 1950s novels are perhaps most touched by the "wit and style" of a unique multicultural society whose predominant symbol is carnival, with its celebration of difference yet community .These novels are touched by the theatricality of the Trinidad carnival, with gaiety, outlandish creativity, masks, inversions. At the same time, though, they show the author's fear of a loss of identity through a carnivalistic immersion in the folk; they show an exile's distancing of himself from a society that he has left and must now justify having left. Through the masks of double-voicedness and double perspectives, he expresses both his affection for people and things of the colony and his sense of the colony's limitations and imprisonment.[29]

In Roger Caillois's opinion words like "theatricality" or "carnival" circumscribe the domain of ludic "mimicry";[30] his influence is particularly visible in Harveen Sachdeva Mann's article "Variations on the Theme of Mimicry: Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira*", a narratological study, which starting from the concept of role-playing draws a typology of the characters present in Naipaul's early fictional works – the "fantasist", the "badjohn", the "confidence man", the "cunning, treacherous" trickster, and the "mimic man as artist", to Mann's mind, "the most compelling category of role-playing in Naipaul's canon".[31] Another critic associating mimicry with play is John Mellors, whose essay "Mimics into Puppets: the Fiction of V.S. Naipaul" depicts the writer's involution from the

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 25
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[28] This is the quality *par excellence* of play itself; see the title of one of Brian Sutton-Smith's books: *The Ambiguity of Play.*
[29] T. Weiss, *On the Margins*, p. 44.
[30] See Roger Caillois, *Die Spiele und die Menschen: Maske und Rausch (Les jeux et les hommes)*, Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1982, p. 46.
[31] Harveen Sachdeva Mann, "Variations on the Theme of Mimicry: Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira*", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 30, Number 3, Autumn 1984, in particular pp. 467-468, p. 476 and p. 477.

dynamic early novels, in which "there was promise galore",[32] to the static later books like *The Mimic Man* or *Guerrillas*: "Naipaul's interpretation of history has led him to adopt a more and more determinist view of life. [...] In *Guerrillas* his characters are powerless to surprise the reader. He still allowed some freedom of action to his mimic men, but his guerrillas have become the puppets of historical forces."[33]

However, "mimicry" has been discussed in connection with Naipaul predominantly under its postcolonial aspect: as a cultural process by which the colonised copies the coloniser. A key figure in the debate over the term is Homi Bhabha; his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" starts from poststructuralist premises in order to demonstrate that colonial mimicry produces not only resemblance, but also difference, thus being ambivalent and therefore potentially subversive.[34] Among the examples illustrating Bhabha's point, we find that of "Naipaul's colonial politician as play-actor [Ralph Singh from *The Mimic Men*]".[35]

In John McLeod's opinion, we have to do with two opposing models of mimicry in the case of Naipaul and Bhabha:

> Previously, the notion of mimicry has been seen as a condition of the colonised's subservience and crisis, the measure of their powerlessness. We can find this view at times in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*; its most famous expression is perhaps the Trinidadian V.S. Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men* (1967). But Bhabha refuses the defeatism in Naipaul's work and offers a much more positive, active and insurgent model of mimicry.[36]

Nevertheless, this interpretation is not quite exact; Bhabha himself shows also the positive aspects present in another work by Naipaul, namely *A House for Mr Biswas* whose protagonist is on the one hand, indeed, "the victim of a certain emptying culture which leaves him with only the poor resource of imitating the culture of others while, on the other, he is capable, at least sometimes, of ironizing precisely that culture."[37]

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[32] John Mellors, "Mimics into Puppets: the Fiction of V.S. Naipaul", *London Magazine*, February/March 1976, p. 118.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[34] Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", in: *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994 , p. 86.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[36] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000, p. 55.
[37] In David Punter, *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000, p. 79. Kavita Nandan, too, is of the opinion that a novel like *The Mimic Men* may be

We could say that like mimicry or play the reception of Naipaul's work was ambivalent. Fawzia Mustafa traces this back to the juncture of literature and history in his writings.[38] Therefore, such critics as William Walsh or Alfred Kazin who focussed on the literary aspects of Naipaul's work would constitute the camp of the apologists, whereas the camp of the detractors would be made up of critics attacking Naipaul's ideological affiliations. Among the latter Mustafa names S. R. Cudjoe, Chris Searle or Rob Nixon.[39]

An interesting argument is that raised by Suman Gupta, who reproaches V.S. Naipaul that his writings reveal "a certain superficiality of perception, a penchant for writing *books* as an end in itself, rather than *writing* books as a means of communication".[40] This argument might have been inspired by one of H. Bhabha's essays, "Signs Taken For Wonders", which comments upon Naipaul's fascination with the English book, an embodiment of 'the Western sign', sustaining "a tradition of English 'cultural' authority".[41]

However, there are also critics who emphasise the subversive nature of much of Naipaul's work. For example, Rolf Lass observes the fact that in the novel *The Mystic Masseur*, published in 1957, the Trinidadian writer "challenged the genre's dominant mode of realism which [he] identified as an ally of imperialism".[42] The same novel is mentioned by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, who quote a passage from it as an exemplary postcolonial text which deconstructs literature's claims of being "a process of mimetic representation".[43] Graham Huggan, on the other hand, discusses a more recent novel, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), pointing out a process that he calls "staged marginality", in allusion to Dean MacCannell's

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read "using Bhabha's sense of mimicry as empowerment"; see Kavita Nandan, "Exile in *The Mimic Men*", in: Purabi Panwar, *ed.*, *V. S. Naipaul: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, Delhi: Pencroft International, 2003, p. 126.

[38] Cf. Fawzia Mustafa , *V.S. Naipaul*, Cambridge: UP, 1995, p. 3. A critic like Jean-Paul Engélibert appreciates Naipaul as a writer, not as an ideologue; furthermore, to his mind, Naipaul's literary texts undermine the writer's ideology (see Jean-Paul Engélibert, "L'Ecriture hors l'histoire: *A Way in the World*", in: Judith Misrahi-Barak, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, p. 208).

[39] Cf. Fawzia Mustafa, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-23.

[40] Suman Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

[41] Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken For Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817", in: *The Location of Culture*, p. 105.

[42] Rolf Lass, "'Nigrescent Ganesh': Cultural Nationalism and the Culture of Writing in Chen, Glissant, and V.S. Naipaul", in: John C. Hawley, *ed*., Writing *the Nation: Self and Country in Post-Colonial Imagination*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996, p. 9.

[43] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures, Second Edition,* London: Routledge, 2002 (1989), p. 54.

concept of "staged authenticity".[44] Huggan concludes that "*The Enigma of Arrival* effectively upstages the history to which it claims to pay rich tribute; far from delivering an elegy to naturalised colonial hierarchies, Naipaul's novel effectively stages a worn-out psychodrama of imperial imposture."[45]

A further explanation for the debate surrounding Naipaul's work than that provided by Fawzia Mustafa is the one given by Claudia Ebel, who in *Der Entwurzelte Hindu* works with the tools of Reception Theory. Her basic assumption is that the controversy surrounding Naipaul originates in the following contradictory feature: while Naipaul deals with the subject of the West Indies and of other former colonies, he addresses his work mainly to a Western, particularly British audience. According to Ebel, this contradiction between reader and subject of the work, between two worldviews, has given rise to different perceptions in Britain and in the Caribbean respectively.[46] Therefore, it was possible for British critics to catalogue Naipaul as an "exotic" writer,[47] whereas the West Indian critics viewed him as an epitome of "Englishness".[48]

A more recent study, "Terrified Consciousness" (2002) by Rosie Andreas, initiates a dialogue with Claudia Ebel's work, mentioning the following: "die 'in-between reality' (BHABHA, 1995, 13) der sogenannten 'Trinidadromane' Naipauls jeweils einer östlichen und einer westlichen Leseart zugänglich ist [...]".[49] However, unlike Claudia Ebel, who focussed on three works, namely *A Suffrage of Elvira*, *The Mystic Masseur* and *A House for Mr Biswas*, Rosie Andreas discusses only one work –*The Mimic Men*– in connection with writings by W. Soyinka, W. Harris and D. Porter. The intention of the study is to debate the problem of a fragmentary identity in the context of postcolonialism and postmodernism. Of special interest are Rosie Andreas's observations on play, a notion linked to a post-colonial/modern sensibility. It is regrettable that the critic speaks only in passing about this topic and notices predominantly its negative side:

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[44] See Graham Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, London: Routledge, 2001, p.87.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 90.
[46] Cf. Claudia Ebel, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 67.
[49] Rosie Andreas, *"Terrified Consciousness": Ausdruckweisen postkolonialen und postmodernen Bewußtseins bei V.S.Naipaul, W.Soyinka, W.Harris und D.Porter*, Trier: WVT, 2002, p. 34.

> Dem Spiel als Mimesis der Wirklichkeit fehlen jedoch in *The Mimic Men* die positiven Momente des Spielerischen, das tentative Erproben von Lösungswegen etwa oder die Freiheit des Aufhörens oder Weitermachens. Stattdessen dominieren in der Auffassung von der Anpassung als Spiel die aus der Erwachsenenperspektive unter dem Einfluß des Realitätsprinzips als negativ beurteilten Aspekte der Wirkungs- und daher Nutzlosigkeit des Kinderspiels.[50]

Yet, Rosie Andreas concedes that in general such postcolonial/postmodern works have an ambivalent and hybrid character.[51] According to Helen Hayward, it is exactly hybridity that comes into the foreground of postcolonial studies, superseding the interest in stereotypes, which announces that the debate about V.S. Naipaul is entering a new phase:

> There has been a shift of focus in recent years in post-colonial criticism away from treating literature as the vehicle of damaging stereotypes, and as a site for the elaboration of a rigidly polarized contrast between Europe and other parts of the world, to an interest in discussing the hybrid, heterogeneous and disjunctive cultural identities – both individual and social – which have emerged as a consequence of empire, and in exploring the historical experience of imperialism and its aftermath as a matter of "overlapping domains".[52]

My study, too, even if it points out some ethnic and racial stereotypes in Naipaul's writings, tries to demonstrate the hybrid nature of the extremely contradictory image of Trinidad as "play-culture".[53] In that I draw inspiration from Brian Sutton-Smith's model of play as discursive construct, capable of acquiring a multiplicity of meanings.[54] Nevertheless, before presenting the theoretical background of this thesis, I would like to indicate the place that Trinidad occupies in V. S. Naipaul's work.

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[50] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[51] See *ibid.*, p. 254. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 14, ambivalence is a concept related to hybridity.
[52] Helen Hayward, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[53] Nevertheless, hybridity means above all tension rather than celebration in Naipaul's case.
[54] See page 28 of the present study.

### 1.3. Con-textualising Trinidad

In Helen Hayward's opinion, Naipaul "returns repeatedly to his origins, to tell the story of his life over and over again in a variety of forms."[55] To her mind "[t]his belies his sense that his origins provide unsuitable material for literary treatment; while he often writes dismissively of the unimportance of Trinidad, it has not been unimportant to his literary output."[56] In *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul himself pays homage to his native island: "from the starting point of Trinidad, my knowledge and self-knowledge grew";[57] even if he left it, as the writer confesses a little further ("[b]ut Trinidad itself, the starting point, the center – it could no longer hold me"),[58] Trinidad has remained a constant preoccupation with Naipaul. Therefore, as far as his work is concerned, speaking of the Caribbean or the West Indies instead of Trinidad is quite inappropriate.[59] In an interview from 1968, the author rejected the West Indian label, saying that "I don't know what the word means", to which he added the following: "I have nothing in common with the people from Jamaica [...]. Or the other islands for that matter. I don't understand them. As a writer I have to make a living and I certainly don't believe I can make a living by being regional."[60] His harsh words probably come from a lack of identification with the Afro-Caribbean community, the dominant ethnic group in the West Indies.

Naipaul's first four books have an explicitly Trinidadian setting. The writer made his debut in 1957 by publishing the novel *The Mystic Masseur*, which presents the fortunes of Ganesh, an Indo-Trinidadian young man, who after having studied in Port of Spain returns to the countryside, giving up teaching. There Ganesh earns a fame as a healer and spiritual leader; then, he will also become the political leader of the Trinidadian Hindus, being elected in 1946 as an MLC and awarded an MBE title some time later. *The Suffrage of Elvira* constitutes a kind of sequel, focusing on the

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[55] Helen Hayward, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

[56] *Loc. cit.* She has certainly in mind the following quotation from *The Middle Passage*: "I knew Trinidad to be unimportant, uncreative, cynical" (V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: The Caribbean Revisited*, New York: Vintage Books, 2002 [1962], p. 34).

[57] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 154.

[58] *Loc. cit.*

[59] Dolly Zulakha Hassan's dissertation, for example, is about the West Indian criticism on what she calls "V. S. Naipaul's West Indian works"; she insists on the influence Guyana exerted upon the novel *The Mimic Men* – one reason for that is surely the fact that Hassan herself comes from Guyana (see Dolly Zulakha Hassan, *op. cit.*, p. 2).

[60] Ewart Rouse, "Naipaul: An Interview with Ewart Rouse", in: Feroza Jussawalla, *ed.*, *Conversations with V.S.. Naipaul*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997, p. 10.

1950 elections in a predominantly Indian constituency and the competition among Harban, the Hindu candidate, the Muslim Baksh and Preacher, the representative of the black community. As John Thieme notes, *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* share the same atmosphere with Naipaul's third published book, *Miguel Street* (1959), each depicting "a predatory world in which the trickster rules supreme".[61] Thieme writes that *Miguel Street* nevertheless contrasts with the other two novels, by having the Creole Port-of-Spain of the 1940s rather than rural Trinidad as a setting; consequently, he speaks of a "calypso world" in the case of this collection of interlinked stories which might be read as a loosely structured novel, too.[62] The climax of this group of early Trinidadian works is certainly the novel *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), whose chronotope differs to a certain extent from that of the preceding books, since the circular narrative (beginning with the death of the protagonist) encompasses Mr. Biswas's entire life spanning over forty-six years.[63] Presenting both the country and the city, the novel is more than a biography based on the experiences of Seepersad Naipaul, Vidia's father,[64] becoming a genuine chronicle of Trinidad in the first half of the 20th century.

The travelogue entitled *The Middle Passage* (1962) shows a change of paradigm, placing Trinidad against a Caribbean background; thus, beside a chapter on Naipaul's native island, the book has sections dealing with British Guiana, Surinam, Martinique and Jamaica. From now on, Naipaul's fictional and non-fictional works will present Trinidad in a larger context, fluidizing the boundaries of the island; on the other hand, as Burkhard Müller points out, all regions described by Naipaul in his non-Caribbean novels and travelogues – Great Britain (in *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*, 1963), North and South America (in "The Return of Eva Peron",1980; and *A Turn in the South*, 1989), India (in *An Area of Darkness*,

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[61] John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 34.

[62] *Loc. cit.*

[63] The Bakhtinian notion of "chronotope" refers to "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics", in: Michael Holquist, *ed.*, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 84).

[64] Peter Hughes points out that *A House for Mr Biswas* is not only a re-working of Seepersad's story "They Named Him Mohun", but also a genuine family chronicle, mixing fiction and facts; in his opinion, all writing members of the Naipaul clan – for example, Shiva Naipaul (Vidia's brother) and Neil Bissoondath (Vidia's nephew) – would follow the model of the family chronicle. See Peter Hughes, "Brennpunkt der Illusionen", *Du – Die Zeitschrift der Kultur*, 10, Okt. 1993, pp. 28-29. Another article focusing on Seepersad Naipaul's influence on *A House for Mr Biswas* is Chandra B. Joshi, "'Very Much My Father's Book': Autobiographical Element in *A House for Mr Biswas*", in: Purabi Panwar, *ed.*, *V. S. Naipaul*, pp. 79-92.

1964; *India: A Wounded Civilization*, 1977; *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, 1990), Africa (in the novel *A Bend in the River*, 1979) or the Muslim world (in *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, 1981; and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted People*, 1998) – stand somehow in connection with Trinidad (which is a cosmopolitan place).[65]

In addition to that, the novels and short stories of the 1960s and 1970s do not longer refer to Trinidad as such, but replace it with islands, which either remain unnamed like in the novella "A Flag on the Island" (1967), in the story "Tell Me Who to Kill" (1971) and in the novel *Guerrillas* (1975) or bear fictive names like Isabella in *The Mimic Men* (1967). The relation between these fictional constructs and Trinidad is actually comparable to the relation between Rummidge and Birmingham in the novels of David Lodge: "Rummidge is an imaginary city [...] which occupies, for the purposes of fiction, the space where Birmingham is to be found on maps of the so-called real world."[66] In support of this idea there are plenty of elements: geographical, historical and ethnic. Isabella from *The Mimic Man* (a name probably inspired by the Spanish queen who protected Columbus) is a Caribbean island whose population reflects the multicultural character of Trinidad – we find in this book Africans, Chinese, Indians working on sugarcane plantations and French aristocrats coming from Haiti like in "real" life. Isabella Imperial College where Singh studies and Gurudeva's strike are fictional versions of Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain, and of the 1937 riots led by Uriah Butler, respectively; whereas Froude's chapter on Isabella is an invented reference, parodying the Victorian traveller's observations on Trinidad.[67] On this Trinidadian bulk, there stand some elements suggesting another space, namely Jamaica or Guyana; the most important of these is the allusion to the bauxite industry (which reappears in *Guerrilas*);[68] however, this does not take us far from Trinidad since Naipaul regards the local bauxite loading station as symbolic of his native island: "Port of Spain is a

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[65] See Burkhard Müller, "Man muss das beste Hotel nehmen, das es gibt", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 189, 16/17 August 2002, p. 14. In another interview, Naipaul confesses that by discussing Indian, Caribbean, African, English and Islamic themes, he has "explored the strands in [his Trinidadian] upbringing"; cf. Dileep Padgaonkar, "An Area of Awakening: V. S. Naipaul in Conversation with Dileep Padgaonkar", in: Purabi Panwar, *ed., V. S. Naipaul*, p. 61.

[66] David Lodge, "Author's Note" to *Nice Work*, London: Penguin Books, 1989 (1988), p. 7.

[67] Cf. James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies: Or, the Bow of Ulysses*, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 (1888). See also pages 199-200 of the present study.

[68] See Jürgen Martini, "Rassen- und Klassenkonflikte als Sexualanormalien: V. S. Naipauls 'Guerrillas', in: Karl Kohut, *ed., Rasse, Klasse und Kultur in der Karibik*, Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1989, p. 102.

disappointing city from the sea. One sees only trees against the hills of the Northern Range. The tower of Queen's Royal College pierces the greenery; so does the blue bulk of the Salvatori building. At the bauxite loading station at Tembladora the air was yellow with bauxite dust."[69]

This is an image that also appears in the story "A Flag on the Island"[70] (from the volume with the same title) helping the reader to identify the unnamed island as Trinidad: "Red dust hung in a cloud above the bauxite loading station, disfiguring the city and the hills."[71] The location of the island (Southern Caribbean), the description of the gulf and the American military base are additional arguments that the setting is Trinidadian.[72] There are certain similarities between "A Flag on the Island" and *The Mimic Men* at the narrative level: both are told in the first person, making extensive use of flashbacks. Nevertheless, *The Mimic Men* is based on the Indian Ralph Singh's memoir, in which two London episodes bracket the Isabella part, while "A Flag on the Island" focuses on the adventures of Frank, a former American soldier who almost twenty years later comes back aboard a tourist ship.

Also a first person narrative incorporating flashbacks is the short story "Tell Me Who to Kill" from *In A Free State*, a work juxtaposing several settings (Britain, USA, India, Trinidad, East Africa and Egypt) and genres (short story, novella and travelogue), for which Naipaul was awarded the Booker Prize in 1971. The story has an unreliable narrator, an anonymous madman, who has left his native island for Britain in order to support Dayo, his brother, a fake student. Out of some scattered clues, we can recreate a puzzle-like picture of Trinidad: Dayo's insane brother remembers the Savannah Road, the oilfields, the Indian countryside with its sugarcane areas, poverty and rituals, his Christian uncle who has given up Hinduism (thus resembling the School Manager in "A Christmas Story" from *A Flag on the Island*) and moved to the city.[73]

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[69] *The Middle Passage*, p. 31.

[70] Sudha Rai considers that "A Flag on the Island" is a novella rather than a short story (see Sudha Rai, "Postcolonial Parables of Survival: V. S. Naipaul's *A Flag on the Island*", in: Purabi Panwar, *ed., V. S. Naipaul*, p. 113).

[71] "A Flag on the Island", p. 150.

[72] See *ibid*., p. 149 and p. 169. At the time, Trinidad was part of the Federation of the British West Indies (1957-1962); therefore, the flag alluded to in the title is that of the respective federation (cf. *ibid.*, p. 156).

[73] V. S. Naipaul, "Tell Me Who to Kill", in: V.S. Naipaul, *In A Free State*, New York. Alfred A. Knopf, 1971, p. 68, pp. 70-75, pp. 80-81.

*Guerrillas* is another complex fictional work as far as the narrative techniques are concerned. Metafiction blends with different points of view (omniscient, focalising, first person) resulting in a dense text, open to various interpretations. Basically, it is the story of two white people, Roche and his girlfriend Jane (theirs are telling names, hinting at *Jane Eyre*), coming to a Caribbean island (once again clearly based on Trinidad)[74] in order to help the Creole Jimmy Ahmed with his agricultural commune, an experiment in which some black young men are involved. In the end, Jane dies at the hands of Jimmy and his acolyte, Bryant; her death echoes a real murder that happened on Naipaul's native island, which the writer describes in the article "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad".[75] The relation between "Michael X" and *Guerrillas* is in fact the relation between "reality" and its fictional representation.

The 1980s bring other changes: one can note that the autobiographical and non-fictional elements multiply in Naipaul's writings of the period. Thus, in the first part of the book *Finding the Centre. Two Narratives* (1984),[76] significantly entitled "Prologue to an Autobiography", Naipaul retells the story of the Indian immigration to Trinidad, concentrating on his ancestors, and evokes the figure of his father, Seepersad Naipaul. The novel *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), too, is overtly autobiographic;[77] the Naipaul-like narrator describes the passing of seasons in Wiltshire, a place he continually compares to the Trinidad of his childhood. But Trinidad is equally associated with death, as the final section, "The Ceremony of Farewell", depicts Naipaul's return to his native island, in order to assist at his

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[74] Cf. V. S. Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, New York: Vintage International, 1990 (1975). The landscape of *Guerrillas* is obviously Trinidadian and strikingly similar to the one depicted in *The Enigma of Arrival*: "The landscape of the past existed only in fragments. To see one such fragment I looked at the drying-up mangrove swamp – green thick leaves, black roots, black mud – outside Port of Spain, ignoring the rubbish-strewn highway and the bent and battered median rail and the burning rubbish dump and the dust-blown shack settlement beyond the highway and the shacks on the hills of the Northern Range." (V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, New York: Vintage Books, 1988 [1987], p. 160).

[75] See V. S. Naipaul, "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad", in: *The Return of Eva Peron with The Killings in Trinidad*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980, pp. 1-93.

[76] According to Bruce King, *Finding the Centre* marks a turning point: "From now on Naipaul's books will be more populated with sympathetic characters, and the disillusionments of the past will be recognized as at least in part a projection of his own inner world, a using of previous experience as a guide to other minds and lands" (Bruce King, *V. S. Naipaul: Second Edition*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 137).

[77] The novel, however, parodies traditional autobiographic models (cf. Walter Göbel, "Death, Dislocation and Violence in *The Enigma of Arrival* or Naipaul's Critique of the Enlightenment", in: Rüdiger Ahrens *et al.*, *Violence and Transgression in World Minority Literatures*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2005, p. 220).

sister's burial. Here, we have an explicitly Trinidadian setting (probably due to the strong non-fictional character of *The Enigma of Arrival*), a setting that reoccurs in the following novel *A Way in the World* (1994). The book resembles *In A Free State* in its fragmentary quality and in its mixing of different genres; it reworks themes from an earlier non-fictional work *The Loss of El Dorado. A Colonial History*, namely the stories of Walter Raleigh and Francisco Miranda, two adventurers on Trinidadian and South American soil. Furthermore, *A Way in the World* contains autobiographical as well as travelogue passages, which connect the island not only to South America, but also to Africa. In fact, the wanderings of an Afro-Trinidadian like Lebrun perfectly illustrate Paul Gilroy's concept of the "Black Atlantic", where *routes* replace *roots*.[78]

So far, *A Way in the World* has been the last of Naipaul's novels set in Trinidad.[79] The writer's latest fictional works, the novels *Half a Life* (2001) and *Magic Seeds* (2004), follow Willie Chandran's fortunes on three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. Perhaps these two books constitute Naipaul's symbolic farewell to Trinidad in that they propose a new way in the world.[80]

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[78] Cf. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London: Verso, 1993, pp. 29-30; also see John McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 230. According to Gilroy, C. R. L. James as well as Frantz Fanon would be "the best-two known black Atlantic thinkers" (see Gilroy, *op. cit.*, p. xi); the general opinion that Lebrun is based on C. R. L. James would then constitute a further argument in favour of my interpretation.

[79] Nevertheless, Naipaul has continued to write about Trinidad in non-fictional works like *Between Father and Son: Family Letters* (1999), *Reading & Writing: A Personal Account* (2000) and *The Writer and the World: Essays* (2002).

[80] Purabi Panwar says the following about this phase of Naipaul's literary career: "There is no qualitative progression in his works, and his latest book *Half a Life* is not necessarily his best" – see Purabi Panwar, "Introduction", in: Purabi Panwar, *ed.*, *V. S. Naipaul*, p. 13.

### 1.4. "Play-Culture"

Although Naipaul's writings abound in ludic metaphors from the very beginning, the writer formulated the concept of "play-culture" only in 1971, when, interviewed, he declared the following: "[T]hat seems to be one of Africa's fundamental functions – to keep on being a perpetual colony; a little treasure-house; a playground for people who want a play-culture, a play-industry; a play development."[81] Obviously, play has negative connotations at this stage, being almost a synonym for "colonial", "mimic", even "exotic". However, the ludic tropes present in Naipaul's entire work are open to a variety of interpretations; Trinidad, too, appears as a "play-culture" but its image is highly ambiguous since of all lands, Naipaul concentrates most on his native island, depicting it in complex ways.

The idea of "play-culture", which Naipaul places in a (post)colonial context,[82] may have been taken over from Johan Huizinga's well-known study *Homo Ludens*. According to the Dutch scholar play is an important cultural factor, underlying various domains like language, religion, law, art, science or economy;[83] therefore, epochs of cultural renewal would be particularly playful.[84] Markus Fauser notes that Huizinga's book has come under attack, being criticised for taking into account just one ludic category, namely that of competition (*agôn*). Fauser also writes that Roger Caillois provides a more complete theory of play;[85] indeed, beside *agôn* the French anthropologist acknowledges *alea* ('chance'), *mimicry* ('simulation') and *ilinx*

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[81] Adrian Rowe-Evans, "V. S. Naipaul: A *Transition* Interview", in: F. Jussawalla, *ed.*, *Conversations with V. S. Naipaul*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997, p. 28.

[82] By recontextualization, the overused ludic metaphors of social life as a game or as a drama (cf. James W. Fernandez, *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 227 ) are thus revived.

[83] See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: Versuch einer Bestimmung des Spielelementes der Kultur*, Basel: Akademische Verlagsanstalt Pantheon, Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 3. Auflage, 1940, pp. 7-8.

[84] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 253. Huizinga is nonetheless not the first thinker to have approached the topic of play; Mihai I. Spariosu points out in a series of studies that play has a long history in the West as a philosophical concept closely related to literature going back to the Presocratics through Nietzsche, Schiller, Kant, Aristotle and Plato (see Mihai I. Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989; Mihai I. Spariosu, *God of Many Names: Play, Poetry, and Power in Hellenic Thought from Homer to Aristotle*, Durham: Duke UP, 1991 as well as Mihai I. Spariosu, *The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality, and the Study of Literature*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

[85] Markus Fauser, *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003, pp. 70-71.

('vertigo') as ludic categories.[86] With regard to play and culture, Caillois affirms that the two are parallel worlds reflecting the same human drives and dispositions.[87]

Nowadays, more influential than Huizinga or Caillois is certainly Mikhail Bakhtin, another author discussing the ludic phenomenon in the context of culture. In two capital works, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World,* Bakhtin indicates the related nature of carnival and play. In *Rabelais and His World,* carnival is defined as "life itself but shaped according to a certain pattern of play",[88] while in the book on Dostoevsky we find the following remarks:

> Das Spiel (Würfelspiel, Kartenspiel, Roulette u.ä.) ist seinem Wesen nach karnevalistisch. Das wurde in der Antike, im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance klar erkannt. Die Symbole des Spiels gehörten immer zum Bestand der Karnevalssymbole.[89]

It is obvious from this quotation that Bakhtin subordinates play to the concept of carnival; by operating a carnivalesque (upside-down) movement, Robert Wilson discusses carnival in the context of play. His study entitled *In Palamedes' Shadow* (1990) devotes an entire chapter to these concepts, coming up with the capital distinction between "game" (understood as rule-bound play) and "play" (understood as free play). The two polarities would then define the space of carnival :

> The conceptual complexity of play, constellating a family of previously unrelated or barely related subordinate concepts, is remarkable. Play is free, creative, metaphoric; it is also involuntary, bound, and metonymic. It has been used to describe the highest and fullest human achievements and to measure human potential; it is also, as Gadamer argues, the mode of being of a work of art: to understand art, including literary texts, one begins with play. Play is constructive; it is also destructive (and deconstructive). A concept such as carnival seems torn between these opposite definitions. Bakhtin's linguistic model, of which carnival is a significant part, occupies a position between the two opposed views of play, but it suggests the possibility of

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[86] Cf. Roger Caillois, *op. cit.*, p. 46. See also Brian Edwards, *Theories of Play and Postmodern Fiction*, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998, p. 13.

[87] See Roger Caillois, *op. cit.*, p. 73 ff.

[88] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World, transl. by* Hélène Iswolsky, Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T.P, 1968, p. 7. In the same book, we also come across this relevant definition of carnival: "As opposed to the official feast, [...] carnival celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions", being "the feast of becoming, change and renewal" (*ibid.*, p. 109).

[89] Michail Bachtin, *Probleme der Poetik Dostoevskijs, transl. by* Adelheid Schramm, München: Carl Hanser Verlag , 1971, p. 193.

> mediation as well. It seems evident that an account of play, leading in opposite directions, must bear several senses of the concept in mind.[90]

Influenced by Robert Wilson, Brian Edwards discusses carnival along the same lines. He catalogues carnival as "game", by pointing out its institutionalised nature, its place within medieval culture: "like a game, it was confined by rules, by a social organization that manipulated and contained its rites of reversal."[91] Edwards comes to a conclusion that partially contradicts Bakhtin: "Revolutionary in its zest, [carnival] could also function as a conservative cultural practice by permitting controlled subversions and thereby supporting the status quo".[92] On the contrary, the pole of "play" should be associated not with "carnival" but with the term "carnivalesque", defined by Edwards as "transgressive energy", "rhetorical exuberance" and "difference".[93] The respective pairs of terms (game/play, carnival/ carnivalesque) can be used to describe the relation between ludism and culture; however, they are flexible dichotomies as Brian Sutton-Smith points out in his study from 1997, entitled *The Ambiguity of Play*:

> Play is sometimes defined in terms of the content of forms it takes, such as children's play, games, sports, festivals, and so on, most of which are well-organized entities within human culture and are pursued with great earnestness, while *playful* refers more to a mood of frolicsomeness, lightheartedness, and wit. But there is nothing fixed about the distinction, because play is also usually thought to include the playful. At the same time, there is also a modern tendency to idealize the playful but to say that the more routine forms of games, sports, recreations, entertainments are only play. The duality of play and the playful tends, in these cases, to be assimilated by the duality of work and play, the adult and the child, the serious and the nonserious, the heavy and the light, the corrupted and the innocent.[94]

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[90] Robert R. Wilson, *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game, & Narrative Theory*, Boston: Northeastern UP, 1990, p. 72. The remarkable fact is that this simple distinction can be applied to literary texts – Robert Wilson discusses about an author's "playfulness" and "gamefulness": "The distinction between an author's playfulness and his gamefulness, replicating that between an exuberant activity and a cunningly constructed structure, projects a fundamental opposition within the pathways of human thinking" (*ibid*.., p.72) .

[91] Brian Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[92] *Ibid*., pp. 27-28.

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 28. Peter Stallybrass and Allen White even suggest the "displacement" of the idea of carnival "into the broader concept of symbolic inversion and transgression"; see Peter Stallybrass and Allen White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London: Methuen, 1986, p. 18.

[94] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, p. 147.

Brian Sutton-Smith's book is a capital landmark in play theory, proposing a discursive approach to ludic phenomena; the title itself signals that play does not have a stable, unitary meaning but meanings that are created by so-called "rhetorics" defined as follows: "The word *rhetoric* is used here in its modern sense, as being a persuasive discourse, or an implicit narrative, wittingly or unwittingly adopted by members of a particular affiliation to persuade others of the veracity and worthwhileness of their beliefs."[95] In fact, these "play rhetorics" echo "popular cultural rhetorics":

> The popular rhetorics are large-scale cultural "ways of thought" in which most of us participate in one way or another, although some specific groups will be more strongly advocates for this or that particular rhetoric. The larger play rhetorics are part of the multiple broad symbolic systems – political, religious, social, and educational – through which we construct the meaning of cultures in which we live.[96]

With the help of these concepts, Brian Sutton-Smith explains the interaction of play with other cultural processes. The "popular cultural rhetorics" not only shape the common perception of play but also inform "scientific" play theories, thus acquiring an appearance of objectivity.[97] Following a Foucauldian line of thought, he continues by revealing the complicity of such rhetorics with power and politics:

> It is just possible that the rhetorics, when explicated, will be revealed to be themselves a deceptive gloss over other, far more fundamental cultural disagreements. For example, play's supposed frivolity may itself be a mask for play's use in more widespread systems for denigrating the play of other groups, as has been done characteristically throughout history by those of higher status against the recreations of those of lower status [...].[98]

Sutton-Smith's emphasis on discourse as well as concepts such as "hegemony", "ideology", "dominance", "resistance" or "hidden agendas", which have made career in the fields of cultural studies and of postcolonialism, indicate the indebtedness of

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[95] *Ibid.*, p. 8. According to Sutton-Smith, views of play would have been moulded throughout the ages by seven main rhetorics: of play as progress, as fate, as power, as identity, as the imaginary, of the self, as frivolous. One could reproach Sutton-Smith a certain Eurocentric bias; nevertheless, his discursive approach leads to an understanding of play as part of a complex net of meanings (see *ibid.*, pp. 9-11).

[96] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9 .

[97] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

[98] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

this interdisciplinary study to the *Zeitgeist*. Since symbolic systems constitute the interface between play and culture, questions of representation come to the fore; they will consequently form the subject matter of the next chapter.

## 1.5. Representation

### 1.5.1. Cultural Representations

As Stuart Hall notes, "[t]he concept of representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture. Representation connects meaning and language to culture."[99] A central topic in series of disciplines like cultural studies, postcolonialism, ethnology or xenology, representation has been lately approached from a constructionist point of view, according to which meaning is "constructed in and through language".[100] Within this approach the critic distinguishes between two directions, the semiotic and the discursive: "One important difference is that the *semiotic* approach is concerned with the *how* of representation, with how language produces meaning – what has been called its 'poetics'; whereas the *discursive* approach is more concerned with the *effects and consequences* of representation – its 'politics'."[101] Hall adds that the latter approach "examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented,

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[99] Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation", in Stuart Hall, *ed.*, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage Publications, 1997, p. 15. Homi Bhabha, too, uses the term "cultural representations" in his introduction to *Nation and Narration* (see Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation", in: Homi K. Bhabha, *ed.*, *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 4).

[100] *Loc. cit.* According to Walter Göbel, representation should be the main concern of cultural studies/ "Kulturwissenschaft" (cf. Walter Göbel, "Kulturwissenschaft und Literaturwissenschaft", in: Klaus Stierstorfer and Laurenz Volkmann, *eds.*, *Kulturwissenschaft Interdisziplinär*, Tübingen: Narr, 2005, p. 117); it also occupies a central place in postcolonialism (see Part III "Representation and Resistance" in: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *eds.*, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 85-113). Representation is equally important in literary studies, bridging the gap between text and society: "And with representation we return to literature, or rather we may grasp that self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life. It invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control, the attempt to fashion other selves." (Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 3). The focus on representation allows a certain degree of interdisciplinarity as the title of David Richards's book *Masks of Difference. Cultural Representations in Literature, Anthropology and Art* proves; the respective study also alludes to another meaning of representation, namely theatrical performance (cf. Iris Därmann, "Fremderfahrung und Repräsentation. Einleitung", in: Iris Därmann and Cristoph Jamme, *eds.*, *Fremderfahrung und Repräsentation*, Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2002, p. 12). Therefore, Richards uses the metaphor of the mask to describe the process of representing the Other (see David Richards, *Masks of Difference. Cultural Representations in Literature, Anthropology and Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994, pp. 5-8).

[101] Stuart Hall, "Introduction" to Stuart Hall, *ed.*, *Representation*, p. 6.

thought about, practised and studied."[102] This perspective also indicates the historicity of representation (understood as process) and of representations (understood as products);[103] we find a similar emphasis in Jan Nederveen Pieterse's study *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, where the Dutch theorist focuses on stereotypical representations of "otherness" by means of a method that he brands "comparative historical analysis":

> Historical, because a significant feature of representation of others is their historicity, the fact that stereotypes change over time; comparative, in view of the diversity among stereotypes according to their cultural context; and analysis, on the assumption that these variations tend to correlate with modes of domination, and modes of defiance, which differ according to time and place.[104]

Such assumptions equally inform my analysis of the image(s) of Trinidad as a ludic culture in V. S. Naipaul's works. The way the writer represents his native island is not objectively true, but based on constructs that originate in a variety of discourses and cultures, which does not come as a surprise when we think of Naipaul's hybrid, multiethnic background. Indian and African voices are to be heard, particularly in his fictional works, although they are at times badly caricatured and even marginalized. The writer's predominant perspective is Eurocentric, due to his colonial education; according to Stuart Hall " 'Europe' belongs irrevocably to the 'play' of power, to the lines of force and consent, to the role of the *dominant*, in Caribbean culture."[105] It is therefore very important to take a closer look at Eurocentrism in what follows.

### 1.5.2. Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism (or "Europocentrism"[106]), together with its product Orientalism, is not a purely European affair, as the name might suggest.[107] According to Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria:

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[102] *Loc. cit.*

[103] Cf. *loc. cit.* and Henrietta Lidchi, "The Poetics and Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures", in: Stuart Hall, *ed.*, *Representation*, p. 153.

[104] Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, Amsterdam: Beeldrecht, 1992, pp. 227-228.

[105] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in: Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *eds.*, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory. A Reader*, New York: Columbia UP, 1994, p. 399.

[106] The term used by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*,

> Unter Eurozentrismus soll [...] die mehr oder weniger explizite Annahme verstanden werden, daß die allgemeine historische Entwicklung, die als charakteristisch für das westliche Europa und das nördliche Amerika betrachtet wird, ein Modell darstellt, an dem die Geschichten und sozialen Formationen aller Gesellschaften gemessen und bewertet werden können.[108]

The Eurocentric point of view can be summarised as follows: "To all intents and purposes Europe was presented, in sharp contrast to the non-European world, as the centre of the universe".[109] At this stage, I should mention that the related concepts of "Europe" and the "West" are loose constructs, often criticised for their lack of substance,[110] but which, in spite of their shortcomings, proved indispensable in the field of postcolonial studies. Rhetorics of progress are closely intertwined with Eurocentrism[111] as the following passage from James M. Blaut points out:

> Europeans are seen as the 'makers of history'. Europe eternally advances, progresses, modernizes. The rest of the world advances more sluggishly, or stagnates: it is 'traditional society'. Therefore, the world has a permanent geographical center and a permanent periphery: an Inside and an Outside. Inside leads, Outside lags. Inside innovates, Outside imitates.[112]

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London: Penguin Books, 1995, p. 98.

[107] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 14-15: "Therefore I study Orientalism as a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the three great empires – British, French, American – in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced."

[108] Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, "Einleitung: Geteilte Geschichten – Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt" in: S. Conrad, Sh. Randeria, *eds.*, *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002, p. 12. See also *ibid.*, pp.12-13: "Zwei Annahmen sind konstitutiv für den Eurozentrismus. Zum einen wird die moderne Geschichte als Ausbreitung europäischer und 'westlicher' Errungenschaften – des Kapitalismus, politisch-militärischer Macht, von Kultur und Institutionen – beschrieben, so daß die einzige denkbare Zukunft der Welt in ihrer fortschreitenden Verwestlichung zu bestehen scheint. Zum anderen wird dabei die europäische Entwicklung als eine Erfahrung *sui generis* begriffen, die ganz innerhalb der Traditionen und Geschichte Europas erklärt werden kann. Europa und sein 'Anderes' entwickelten sich demzufolge unabhängig voneinander, bevor die Ergebnisse des europäischen Fortschritts exportiert wurden (Amin 1989). Die Geschichte der Modernisierung erscheint so als eine Geschichte der Diffusion, als ein Transfer von den (nordwest-) europäischen Metropolen in die Peripherie und die Dritte Welt (vgl. die Kritik an diesem Modell von Blaut 1993). Auf diese Weise wird die Komplexität der Moderne am Rand der kapitalistischen Welt (und auch ihre Verflechtungen mit der europäischen Moderne) ignoriert und stattdessen eine universale Transformation traditionaler Kulturen durch den 'westlichen' Fortschritt konstatiert."

[109] S. Chakravarty (1989), as quoted in Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 48.

[110] Cf. S. Conrad and Shalini Randeria, *op. cit.* , p. 12.

[111] Cf. Thomas McEvilley, *Art and Otherness. Crisis in Cultural Identity*, New York: McPherson & Company, 1996, p. 67.

[112] J. M. Blaut (1993), as quoted in Alastair Pennycook, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

This is no matter of wonder since the foundations of Western thought are deeply rooted in the Enlightenment.[113] Consequently, the other important term connected to this period, namely Reason, must necessarily occupy a high rank in colonial discourse. According to James Duncan, the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of the image of the unenlightened Other, which perpetrated well into the twentieth century Euro-American representations of 'Third World' Others as "ignorant, traditional or less rational than themselves".[114] Duncan suggests that the origins of this way of representing the Other are to be detected in Antiquity, in the Greek term *barbaros*:

> One of the earliest recorded instances of reference to the Other is the Greek term *barbaros*. From the seventh to the sixth centuries BC Greeks used the term to designate foreigners, including the respected Egyptians. But by the fourth century BC Greeks used the term in a more limited way to distinguish themselves from people whom they considered to be their inferiors. The Hellenistic Greeks employed the term *barbaros* (babblers, speakers of strange tongues) to convey the idea of subhumanity. As the Greeks linked intelligible speech to R e a s o n [my emphasis], the term designated the non-Greek-speaking Other as irrational and thus less than fully human (Pagden 1982: 15-18). The term 'barbarian' (*barbarus* in Latin) has continued to be used in the discourse of Otherness up to the present, retaining some of the connotations, albeit in modified forms, with which the Hellenistic Greeks endowed it.[115]

The same opposition Reason–Unreason is articulated by one of the agents of Empire, Lord Cromer, who in his book on Egypt contrasts the European, "a close reasoner",[116] with the irrational Oriental.[117] A similar feat is performed in the case of India, as Ronald B. Inden shows: "European discourses appear to separate their Self from the Indian Other – the essence of Western thought is practical reason, that of India a dreamy imagination [...]".[118]

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[113] Cf. Padmini Mongia, "Introduction", in: Padmini Mongia, *ed.*, *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, London: Arnold, 1997, p. 6.

[114] James Duncan, "Sites of Representation: Place, Time and the Discourse of the Other", in: J. Duncan and David Ley, *eds.*, *Place/Culture/Representation*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 45

[115] *Ibid* ., p.44.

[116] Cf. E. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 38.

[117] See also the following remark: "Victorian classifications of difference and cultural superiority lead back to eighteenth-century Enlightenment perceptions of rational man. In the view of the late eighteenth century, the period of early British Empire, the European was the leading exemplum of scientific humanity – which was believed to be humanity in its most achieved form." (Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995, p.81.)

[118] Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India*, London: Hurst & Company, 2000, p. 3.

This process of *othering*[119] plays an important role in colonialism as Alastair Pennycook's study, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*, points out. Pennycook quotes from T. Metcalf's book, entitled *Ideologies of the Raj* (1995), in order to indicate the nexus of *othering*, Eurocentrism and Enlightenment:

> [A]s Europeans constructed a sense of self for themselves apart from the old order of Christendom, they had of necessity to create a notion of an 'other' beyond the seas. To describe oneself as 'enlightened' meant that someone else had to be shown as 'savage' or 'vicious'. To describe oneself as 'modern', or as 'progressive', meant that those who were not included in that definition had to be described as 'primitive' or 'backward'. Such alterity, what one might call the creation of doubleness, was an integral part of the Enlightenment project.[120]

These "constructions of Superiority and Inferiority"[121] can take many forms; Blaut refers to a series of dichotomies specific of Eurocentric thought:[122] inventiveness vs. imitativeness, rationality/intellect vs. irrationality/emotion/instinct, abstract thought vs. concrete thought, theoretical reasoning vs. empirical reasoning, mind vs. body/matter, discipline vs. spontaneity, adulthood vs. childhood, sanity vs. insanity, science vs. sorcery, progress vs. stagnation. At first sight, all these oppositions seem to have nothing in common; in fact, they share the same assumption according to which the positive term must always describe the European, whereas the negative term the non-European.[123] This mechanism has been called by E. Said "flexible positional superiority". As stated by him, "[i]n quite a constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand."[124]

Depicting Otherness as the "Heart of Darkness", in need of "Enlightenment", was the perfect pretext for the colonial project. The Africans, for example, (like children, I should add) were considered by Europeans to be in need of "improvement", of being "civilised".[125] As Homi K. Bhabha sarcastically puts it,

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[119] According to E. Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, p. 83, *othering* is "[t]he characterization or labelling of the Other".
[120] Thomas R. Metcalf, as quoted in A. Pennycook, *op.cit.*, p. 47.
[121] A. Pennycook, *op. cit.*, p.19.
[122] Cf. Blaut, as mentioned in A. Pennycook, *op.cit.*, p. 50.
[123] *Loc. cit.*
[124] E. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 7.
[125] Cf. Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, p. 83.

"[i]nstead of Independence, [the colonised] were offered the 'civilizing mission'; instead of power, they were proffered paternalism".[126]

The promoters of the "civilizing mission", Macaulay, Trevelyan, Bentham and others, saw it best accomplished by means of education in English.[127] Some texts referring to India by Trevelyan and Macaulay, respectively, will prove this point. The first one is part of a speech made by Thomas Babington Macaulay on 10 July 1833, when he was about to become legal adviser to the Governor-General of India:

> To the great trading nation, to the great manufacturing nation, no progress which any portion of the human race can make in knowledge, in taste for the conveniences of life, or in the wealth by which those conveniences are produced, can be matter of indifference. It is scarcely possible to calculate the benefits which might derive from the diffusion of European civilisation among the vast population of the East. [...] The destinies of our Indian empire are covered with thick darkness. [...] It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government, that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. [...] Victory may be inconstant to our arms. But there are triumphs which are followed by no reverses. There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws.[128]

We find in his speech familiar terms like "progress", "civilisation" or "reason", all employed to justify colonising foreign lands not by means of arms, but via culture. However, Macaulay is best-known for his "Minute" of 1835, in which he proposes to "do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect".[129] In response to this suggestion, the Government of India under Lord Bentinck decided that "the great objects of British [rule in India] ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India".[130] The same Eurocentric discourse underlies Sir Charles

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[126] Homi K. Bhabha , "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism", in: Gregory Castle, *ed.*, *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p. 49.
[127] Cf. A. Pennycook, *op.cit.*, p. 80.
[128] From: Jane Samson, *ed.*, *The British Empire*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001, pp. 134-135.
[129] Macaulay, as quoted in A. Pennycook, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
[130] See E. Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, p. 51.

Trevelyan's views on Indian education, published in 1838 under the title *On the Education of the People of India*:

> [The Education Committee's] object is to fill the minds of the liberally educated portion of the people with the knowledge of Europe, in order that they may interpret it in their own language to the rest of their countrymen. For this purpose, while, on the one hand, the pupils are encouraged to acquire the various kinds of information which English literature contains, and to form their taste after the best English modes; on the other, every endeavour is used to give them the habit of writing with facility and elegance in their native languages. [...] Saturated from the same source, recast in the same mould, with a common science, a common standard of taste, a common nomenclature, the national languages, as well as the national character, will be consolidated; the scientific and the literary acquisitions of each portion of the community will be at once thrown into a common stock for the general good; and we shall leave an united and enlightened nation, where we found a people broken up into sections, distracted by the system of caste, even in the bosom of each separate society; and depressed by literary systems, devised much more with a view to check the p r o g r e s s [my emphasis], than to promote the advance, of the human mind. No particular effort is required to bring about these results. They will take place in the natural course of things by the extension of English education, just as the inhabitants of the greater part of Europe were melted down into one people by the prevalence of the Roman languages and art. All that is required is, that we should not laboriously interpose an obstacle to the progress of this desirable change by the forced cultivation of the Sanskrit and Arabic languages.[...] If English is to be the language of education in India, it follows, as a matter of course, that it will be the scientific language also, and that terms will be borrowed from it to express those ideas for which no appropriate symbols exist in the popular dialects. The educated class, through whom European knowledge will reach the people, will be familiar with English.[...] The test of what ought to be taught is, truth and utility. Our predecessors consulted the welfare of their subjects to the best of their information: we are bound to do the same by ours. We cannot divest ourselves of this responsibility: the light of European knowledge, and the diffusive spirit of European benevolence give us advantages which our predecessors did not possess.[131]

The comments made by Trevelyan and Macaulay could refer to other British colonies than India, being informed by a "radical universalism".[132] The European civilisation, especially the British, was credited with having universal relevance;[133] in fact, this aspect of Eurocentrism equally derives from Enlightenment, as Bhabha

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[131] From: Jane Samson, *ed.*, *The British Empire*, pp. 132-133.

[132] A. Pennycook , *op. cit.*, p. 81.

[133] See Metcalf (1995), as quoted in A. Pennycook, *op. cit.*, p.81: "Contemporary European, especially British, culture alone represented civilization. No other cultures had any intrinsic validity. There was no such thing as 'Western' civilization; there existed only 'civilization'. Hence the liberal set

shows.[134] Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria state in their "Introduction" to the study entitled *Jenseits der Eurozentrismus* that:

> [d]ie Aufklärung steht hier für die Durchsetzung des universalistischen Denkens, das es erlaubte, lokale (europäische) Maßstäbe an die außereuropäischen Gesellschaften anzulegen, und das insofern als Legitimation und (sogar emanzipatorische) Motivation des territorialen Ausgreifens diente.[135]

After having taken a look at the main features of Eurocentrism, it is now time to trace them in Naipaul; obviously, Western values impregnate more strongly his non-fictional works than his fictional writings. The latter (at least the earlier novels) even parody Enlightenment doctrines like that of progress.

### 1.5.2.1. "Our Universal Civilization"

The title of the present chapter has been inspired by the name of a lecture given by Naipaul at the Manhattan Institute of New York in 1992. Basically, the speech is structured on the opposition between the "fundamentalist" Islamic world and the "universal civilization", which is trying "to accommodate the rest of the world, and all the currents of that world's thought".[136] We have seen that "universalism" has been accused of being related to Eurocentrism and colonialism;[137] and indeed, in this

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out, on the basis of this shared humanity, 'to turn the Indian into an Englishman'."

[134] Cf. Homi K. Bhabha , "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism", p. 49.

[135] S. Conrad and Shalini Randeria , *op. cit.*, p. 24.

[136] V. S. Naipaul, "Postscript: Our Universal Civilization", in: Pankaj Mishra, *ed., The Writer and the World*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002, p. 516.

[137] However, there is also the contrary view according to which "universalism" is a positive notion and not at all connected with Eurocentrism; see Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa and the Caribbean*, Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2000, pp. xv-xvi: "Universalism is the view that all the people and all human societies share fundamental cognitive, emotive, ethical, and other properties and principles. Clearly, all forms of racism and colonialist ethnocentrism are anti-universalist, for they necessarily assume profound and consequential differences between peoples and/or between cultures. Yet many post-colonial critics and theorists have claimed that colonialism is universalist. [...]Part of the problem is that these critics and theorists seem to have confused universalism with absolutism, on the one hand, and projection, on the other. Absolutism is the view that one culturally particular set of precepts or practices applies to everyone; it is absolute. Projection is the unself-conscious assumption that everyone thinks the same way I do. In contrast, universalism

speech, Naipaul moves dangerously close to Eurocentric positions. Commenting on "Our Universal Civilization", Fawzia Mustafa remarks the dichotomy secular vs. sacred;[138] Naipaul would be the supporter of the secular attitude, which has its origins in Enlightenment.[139]

There are also other critics who have accused Naipaul of being imperialist[140] and Eurocentric. Anthony Appiah has called "the Naipaul fallacy" the habit of describing non-western cultures by "embedding [them] in European culture".[141] Undoubtedly, "Our Universal Civilization" could constitute a convincing argument in favour of Naipaul's detractors. What Naipaul terms "universal civilization" is in fact a Western-inspired culture, based on the values of Christianity and of individualism, as the final passage clearly indicates:

> Because my movement within this civilization has been from the periphery to the centre, I may have seen or felt certain things more freshly than people to whom those things were everyday. One such thing was my discovery, as a child, a child worried about pain and cruelty, my discovery of the Christian precept, Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. There was no such human consolation in the Hinduism I grew up with, and – although I have never had any religious faith – the simple idea was, and is, dazzling to me, perfect as a guide to human behaviour.
>
> A later realization – I suppose I have sensed it most of my life, but I have understood it philosophically only during the preparation of this talk – has been the beauty of the idea of the pursuit of happiness. Familiar words, easy to take for granted; easy to misconstrue. This idea of the pursuit of happiness is at the heart of the attractiveness of the civilization to so many outside it or on its periphery. I find it marvellous to contemplate to what an extent, after two centuries, and after the terrible history of the earlier part of this century, the idea has come to a kind of fruition. It is an elastic idea; it fits all men. It implies a kind of society, a certain kind of awakened spirit. I don't imagine my father's parents would have been able to understand the idea. So much is contained in it: the idea of the individual; responsibility, choice, the life of the intellect, the idea of vocation and perfectibility and achievement. It is an

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involves a self-conscious effort to understand precisely what is common across different cultures-empirically, normatively, experientially. Of course, one might make mistakes. [...] As Kwame Appiah points out, 'It is characteristic of those who pose as antiuniversalists to use the term *universalism* as if it meant *pseudouniversalism*, and the fact is that their complaint is not with universalism at all. What they truly object to – and who would not? – is Eurocentric hegemony *posing* as universalism'."

[138] See Fawzia Mustafa, *V.S. Naipaul*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995, p. 197.

[139] "Consequently his [*i.e.* Naipaul's] reification of the Enlightenment's near-deification of rationality – a philosophical formulation essential to the secularization of Faith – itself abolishes the recent past and its economic divisions of the world that would help explain why the current posture of 'our universal civilization' may have engendered a counter-hegemonic stance." (*Ibid.*, p.198).

[140] For example, Chris Searle coins up the term 'Naipaulicity', that is, "a form of cultural imperialism" (see *ibid.*, p. 23).

[141] Anthony Appiah, as mentioned in *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

> immense human idea. It cannot be reduced to a fixed system. It cannot generate fanaticism. But it is known to exist; and because of that; other more rigid systems in the end blow away.[142]

Naipaul mentions his movement "from the periphery to the centre [of this civilisation]". What is then this centre? The answer is clear – Naipaul refers to England.[143] However, he wants to discard all accusations of Eurocentrism by dissociating the "universal civilization" from Europe:

> The universal civilization has been a long time in the making. It wasn't always universal, it wasn't always as attractive as it is today. The expansion of Europe gave it for at least three centuries a racial tint, which still causes pain. In Trinidad I grew up the last days of that kind of racialism. And that, perhaps, has given me a greater appreciation of the immense changes that have taken place since the end of the war, the extraordinary attempt of this civilization to accommodate the rest of the world, and all the currents of that world's thought.[144]

Nevertheless, "Our Universal Civilization" is not the only piece to be labelled as "Eurocentric"; there are numerous examples of Naipaul's fictional and his non-fictional works that have attracted sharp criticism – this is also the case with the following passage from *The Mimic Men*, where we find a well-known dichotomy: the rational, orderly European vs. the barbaric and chaotic non-European:

> I have read that it was a saying of an ancient Greek that the first requisite for happiness was to be born in a famous city. It is one of those sayings which, because they deal with the particular and the concrete, like the instructions on a bottle of patent medicine, can appear flippant, except to those who have experienced their truth. To be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder. [...] Now I was to discover that disorder had its own logic and permanence: the Greek was wise.[145]

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[142] V.S.Naipaul, "Postscript: Our Universal Civilization", p. 517.

[143] Cf. *ibid.*, pp.506-507: "But I always recognized, in England in the 1950s, that as someone with a writing vocation there was nowhere else for me to go. And if I have to describe the universal civilization I would say it is the civilization that both gave the prompting and the idea of the literary vocation; and also gave the means to fulfil that prompting ; the civilization that enabled me to make that journey from the periphery to the centre; the civilization that links me not only to this audience but also to that now not-so-young man in Java whose background was as ritualized as my own, and on whom- as on me- the outer world had worked, and given the ambition to write."

[144] *Ibid.*, p. 517.

[145] V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, London: Picador, 2002 (1967), p. 127.

This way of seeing the world had been transmitted to Ralph Singh, the narrator, through the British educational system when he was just a child: "From an early age, almost from my first lesson at school about the weight of the king's crown, I had sensed this."[146] Where the phantom of Eurocentrism lurks, rhetorics of progress cannot be far away – we have already noticed Naipaul's appraisal of the possibility of perfectibility involved by the "universal civilization". A senior fellow of the Manhattan Institute asked him once: "Why [...] are certain societies or groups content to enjoy the fruits of progress, while affecting to despise the conditions that promote progress?",[147] to which the writer gives a reply that sounds as if it were directly taken from the register of Orientalism: "The answer, I believe, is that philosophical hysteria."[148]

However, Naipaul's work is infinitely more ambiguous and cannot be reduced to a single stance. The fact has been remarked among others by Bruce King, who thinks of Naipaul's views as having the effect of a paradox.[149] According to the critic, the relationship of the Caribbean writer to Europe would be ambivalent:

> [H]e blames European imperialism for the problems it left the former colonies, while praising it for bringing peace and modern thought to areas of the world that remained medieval and debilitated by continual local wars. There is a moral honesty in his work, a refusal to sentimentalize England or the former colonies.[150]

On the whole, Enlightenment's influence on Naipaul is plain; in what follows, I will focus on the idea of progress as it occurs in Naipaul's fictional writings, showing that nevertheless the respective works irreverently treat the subject, adding to the overall impression of ambiguity.

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[146] *Loc. cit.*
[147] V. S. Naipaul, "Postscript: Our Universal Civilization", pp. 513-514.
[148] *Ibid.*, p. 514.
[149] Cf. Bruce King , *V. S. Naipaul*, Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993, p. 2.
[150] *Loc. cit.*

### 1.5.2.2. Naipaul's Treatment of Progress

I cannot begin discussing the role played by Enlightenment ideology in Naipaul's fiction without mentioning that Benjamin Franklin, one of the fathers of American Enlightenment, is alluded to several times by the writer born in Trinidad. However, even the comprehensive study written by John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction* (1987), does not pay attention to this intertextual connection. Franklin's autobiography is hinted at in the very first book by V.S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street* (published only in 1959 after *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira*), more precisely in the chapter (or short story) entitled "Titus Hoyt, I.A." after the name of the local teacher, an exponent of the British educational system:

> I also noticed a big thing called 'Time-table'.
> From this I gathered that Titus Hoyt was to rise at five-thirty, read something from Greek philosophers until six, spend fifteen minutes bathing and exercising, another five reading the morning paper, and ten on breakfast. It was a formidable thing altogether.
> Titus Hoyt said, "If I follow the time-table I will be a educated man in about three four years."[151]

This pursuit of education is subsumed under another ideal embodied by Franklin – that of success. All of Hoyt's more or less playful attempts to become famous, like the creation of the Miguel Street Literary and Social Youth Club, are doomed to failure. In the end, nevertheless, he succeeds in having his photograph published in a local newspaper by means of a fake letter written supposedly by one of his pupils.[152] Much closer to that ideal is Ganesh – the protagonist of the novel *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) – who, as we find out from the very beginning, "was to be a hero of the people and, after that, a British representative at Lake Success."[153] Like Franklin, Ganesh is an embodiment of the model "from rags to riches" and equally like Franklin, he is the author of an autobiography, bearing the title *The Years of Guilt*, which appeared at Ganesh Publishing Co. Ltd., Port of Spain and cost only $2.40.[154]

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[151] V.S. Naipaul, "Titus Hoyt, I.A.", in: *Miguel Street*, pp. 76-77. Cf. Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiographie* [ *The Life of Benjamin Franklin* ], Berlin-Grunewald: Herbig, 1954, p. 156.
[152] See *Miguel Street*, p. 80.
[153] V. S. Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1982, p. 11.
[154] See *ibid.*, p. 18.

In a purely Borgesian style, the narrator continues to play the game of invented references: "[t]he book, variously described as a spiritual thriller and a metaphysical whodunit, had a considerable success of esteem in Central America and the Caribbean".[155] A quotation from this imaginary autobiography is reminiscent of Leibnitz's belief in infinite progress:[156] "Everything happens for the best. If, for instance, my first volume had been a success, it is likely that I would have become a mere theologian, writing endless glosses on the Hindu scriptures. As it was, I found my true path."[157] The ways of Ganesh and those of the rhetorics of progress and Enlightenment intersect once more when an Indian industrialist offers thirty thousand dollars "for the cultural uplift of Trinidad Hindus".[158] Needless to say, after cashing the money in his quality as president of the Trinidad Hindu Association, Ganesh does little to "enlighten", to "uplift" the local Hindus.

In the case of T. Hoyt and Ganesh, rhetorics of progress are associated with stories of dishonesty. However, these rhetorics are subverted one more time, as the following excerpt will show; in short, Ganesh starts a newspaper, *The Dharma*, using it as a political weapon against his rival, Narayan. One of the journalists is an unnamed boy, who causes some stir with this article:

> Today the aeroplane is a common or garden sight and it is commonly believed that p r o g r e s s [my emphasis] in this field has only been made in the past forty years. But diligent research is proving otherwise and in this learned dispatch Dr C.V. R. Swami shows that 2, 000 years ago there was –
>
> And in huge black letters:
>
> FLYING IN ANCIENT INDIA[159]

This carnivalesque rewriting of the official history is, unsurprisingly, performed by a Child-Colonised, who appropriates the myth of progress in the name of the

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[155] *Loc. cit.*

[156] Will and Ariel Durant are of the following opinion: "Nichtsdestoweniger wurde die *Theodizee* Leibnizens meist gelesenes Werk, und vielen folgenden Generationen war er als der Mann der besten allen Welten bekannt [...] Wie viele Optimisten des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts sah er in diesem Evolutionsvorgang eine der Grundlagen des Glaubens an 'einen fortwährenden, uneingeschränkten Fortschritt des Universums... Der Fortschritt wird nie zu einem Ende kommen.'" (Will and Ariel Durant, *Kulturgeschichte der Menschheit: Das Zeitalter Ludwigs XIV*, Bern: Francke Verlag, 1966, pp. 688-689).

[157] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 112.

[158] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

[159] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

periphery. Another appropriation is that of the Roman alphabet, which is reused in a playful manner:[160] "[the boy] knew all about cross-headings and used them every paragraph. He put the last paragraph of every article in italic, with the last line in black letter."[161] It does not come as a surprise then that the response of the Adult to this childish subversion is a violent one: "Basdeo, the printer, told Ganesh afterwards, 'Sahib, if you ever send that boy again to have anything print, I think I go wring his neck.'"[162]

The most ardent supporters of the Eurocentric doctrine of progress are Narayan and Indarsingh, Ganesh's competitors over the favours of the Trinidad Hindu community. Thus, Indarsingh candidates on behalf of the Party for Progress and Unity,[163] the PPU, at the 1946 General Elections. After the elections take place, the party just disappears, constituting another example for the fakes associated with the idea of progress. Much more interesting in my view is the following passage from the same novel:

> The Little Bird [Narayan's pseudonym as a journalist writing for *The Hindu*] said : 'I am just a little birdie but I think it is surely a retrograde step for any community these days to look up to a religious visionary [Ganesh]...' [...] Spare inches of the magazine [*The Hindu*] were no longer filled up with quotations from the *Gita* or the *Upanishads*. Now it was all: *Workers' Unite! Each One Teach One, Mens Sana in Corpore Sano, Per Ardua ad Astra,* The Hindu *is an Organ of Progress, I may not agree with what you say but I will fight to the death to defend your right to say it.*[164]

We find here the same Eurocentric manicheism: on the one hand, the "progressive" Western culture epitomised by Latin and Marxist stock phrases and on the other hand, the "retrograde" culture of traditional Hinduism symbolised by the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*. In fact, the conflict between Western culture with its individualistic ethic and traditional Hindu culture is an important theme of what Claudia Ebel classifies as "Trinidadromane" (*The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, *A*

[160] A similar play with the European sign is that enacted by Ganesh's future wife; see comments on it in Bill Ashcroft *et al.*, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 54.
[161] *The Mystic Masseur*, p.183.
[162] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[163] The name of the party is a telling one – it associates the doctrine of progress with nationalism.
[164] *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

*House for Mr. Biswas* ).[165] According to her, the respective clash would end in "cultural shock" and alienation.[166]

An attitude like Narayan's is that one adopted by another "mimic man", Randolph (previously named Choonilal), whose disgust at the "backwardness" of his Hindu fellows makes him convert to Christianity and adopt Western habits:

> I did not have to be 'converted' by the Presbyterians of the Canadian Mission. I had only to look at the work they were doing among the backward Hindus and Moslems of my district. I had only to look at their schools, to look at the houses of the converted [...] Backwardness has always roused me to anger.[167]

The Western Presbyterians are, of course, seen by Randolph, the protagonist of "A Christmas Story"(1962), as "progressive": "But I ought to say in my own defence that it is my deeply held conviction that progress is not a matter of outward show, but an attitude of mind; and it was this that my religion gave me."[168] We have in the case of Rudolph a clear example of what Patrick Hogan terms "purgative mimeticism", where "the mimic seeks to purge every suggestion of indigenous culture from his or her thought and action."[169] Suffice it to mention that he gives up his Hindu name (like the protagonists of *The Mystic Masseur* or *The Mimic Men*). He also gives up the "unhygienic" way of eating without "the proper implements of knife and fork and spoon"[170] and violates the taboos of Hinduism:

> 'Hello, Randolph,' the boy Hori said, pronouncing the name in a most offensive manner.
> 'Good afternoon, *Hori*.'
> He remained impervious to my irony. This boy, Hori, was the greatest of my tormentors. He was also the grossest. [...] But he never had *his* fingers clean, that I knew.
> 'Eating, Randolph?'
> 'I am having my lunch, *Hori*.'
> 'Beef, Randolph. You are p r o g r e s s i n g [my emphasis], Randolph.'
> 'I am glad you note it, *Hori*.'[171]

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[165] See C. Ebel, *op.cit.*, p. 82.
[166] See *ibid.*, p. 82 and p. 201.
[167] V. S. Naipaul, "A Christmas Story" in: *A Flag on the Island*, London: André Deutsch Ltd, 1978, p. 34.
[168] *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.
[169] Patrick C. Hogan, *op. cit.*, p. 320.
[170] "A Christmas Story", p. 36.
[171] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Because of the association of food with progress, rhetorics of progress are trivialised by this Gargantuan boy Hori and brought close to the sphere of the grotesque and parody. A similar process takes place in *The Mimic Men*; as already mentioned, the book emphasises the opposition order (England) – disorder (Isabella/Trinidad). At the end of the novel one can find a surprising embodiment of the ideal of order in the person of the Englishman given the nickname "Garbage" by Ralph Singh:[172]

> Garbage also sits behind a pillar. His hands are all I can see of him. They are long, middle-aged, educated hands: and their primary concern appears to be to convert a plate of meat and vegetables into a plate of acceptable garbage. While chaos comes swiftly and simultaneously to other plates; while meat is hacked and pushed around and vegetables mangled and scattered on a spreading, muddy field of gravy, while knives and forks, restlessly preparing fresh, mixed mouthfuls, probe the chaos they have created, and cut and spear and plaster; those two hands are unhurriedly, s c i e n t i f i c a l l y, maintaining o r d e r [my emphasis], defining garbage, separating what is to be eventually eaten from what is to be thrown away.[173]

The aforementioned scene could bear the grotesque title, *Rationalism on a Plate* or *The Science of Building Piles of Garbage*. It can also be read with the help of imagination as an allegory of the British Empire, which instead of "civilising", "uplifting" its colonies, debases the "margins".[174] Returning to Randolph and "A Christmas Story", I have to say that the Christian convert rises in the social hierarchy up to the position of School Manager and so, his story seems up to a certain point to develop according to the same Franklinian pattern. He has in charge two schools and will build another one. However, there is a change in fortunes and things start going wrong with the new school. There remains just a single solution: to burn down the problematic building. It is interesting to notice that Randolph's religious principles prevent him from accomplishing this deed; the only ones to have the power to break social conventions are once again the "doubly colonised" – his wife and his son.[175]

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[172] For an alternative interpretation of this scene, see John Thieme, *V. S. Naipaul's* The Mimic Men*: A Critical View*, London: Collins, 1985, pp. 23-24.

[173] *The Mimic Men*, p. 268.

[174] This reading seems to be valid since we find a related image in the same novel: the colonial teacher nicknames one of his black boys, "Blue-cart" Browne, suggesting that Browne's future profession will be that of a garbage-collector (see *ibid.*, p. 130). For a comment of this prediction, see also Vivek Dhareshwar, "Self-Fashioning, Colonial Habitus and Double Exclusion: Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*", *Criticism*, 31 (1), 1989, pp. 89-90.

[175] Two feminist critics, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutheford have coined the phrase "double colonisation" which refers to the double oppression suffered by women as a consequence of colonialism and patriarchy (cf. John McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 175). Children, too, may be regarded as

The temporal coordinates of the story are highly significant, bearing the promise of renewal since it is the end of December, the time of the Christian festival as well as of the Roman Saturnalia. Or, in the secular calendar of the British Empire – Boxing Day. The story appears to have a "happy-end" but this surely is a false impression: "And, with lightened heart, made heavy only by my wrestling with the Lord, we went to the races on Boxing Day, yesterday."[176] For Rudolph is a loser in the match with the (British) Lord.

*A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), considered by many to be V.S. Naipaul's masterpiece, exemplifies the cultural conflict inside Trinidadian society in a more nuanced way. In the case of Aryans, "the protestant Hindu missionaries who had come from India and were preaching that caste was unimportant, that Hinduism should accept converts, that idols should be abolished, that women should be educated",[177] traditionalism and the doctrine of progress fruitfully meet each other in a process that resembles what has been defined by P. Hogan as "orthodoxy", namely "open-minded, flexible adherence to indigenous culture, with particular emphasis on large ethical or social principles, rather than on specific customary practices. Orthodox tradition is open to 'modernization' in the sense of rational reform guided by both scientific and ethical principles [...]."[178] This hybrid position is also the one adopted by Mr Biswas and his real counterpart – Naipaul's father, Seepersad.[179]

Nonetheless, a much later novel provides the clue for Naipaul's ambiguous attitude to Europe and the doctrine of progress. Unlike the fictional works discussed so far in this chapter, *Guerrillas* (1975) adopts a more sombre tone. Apparently, there is no talk of progress in this novel and images of regress and decay abound. However, as John Thieme points out, there is an indirect reference to Conrad, in particular to the story "An Outpost of Progress".[180] The reference becomes explicit in an article by Naipaul, bearing the title "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad"(1973), whose theme will suffer a fictional treatment in *Guerrillas*, the novel being published only two years after the respective article. Speaking about

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"doubly colonised" since they belong to the margins of society.

[176] "A Christmas Story", p.54.

[177] V.S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas*, London: David Campbell Publishers Ltd, 1995, p. 110.

[178] P. Hogan, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

[179] "For all his reformist stance in relation to Hinduism, Seepersad's earlier fiction often confines itself to describing the detail of customs and ritual without passing judgement on them". (Helen Hayward, *op. cit.*, p. 20).

[180] See J. Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*: *Uses of Allusion in V.S. Naipaul*, London: Dangaroo Press, 1987, p. 164.

Gale Benson, the source for the fictional Jane – the female protagonist of *Guerrillas* – the Trinidadian writer says that her tragedy "is contained in an African story of 1897 by Conrad, [...] 'An Outpost of Progress,' a story of the congruent corruptions of the colonizer and colonized, which can also be read as a parable about simple people who think they can separate themselves from the crowd".[181] Patterns are reversed – literature no longer imitates reality but viceversa.[182]

According to E. Boehmer, Conrad presents colonialism as haunted by "spectres of European cultural failure".[183] As Helen Hayward puts it, this cultural failure of Europe is exactly what makes Naipaul adopt a contradictory attitude towards European civilisation: "Naipaul generally values its ideals, while at times recognizing a failure to put them into practice."[184] Perhaps, this opinion is too reductive, but at least, it has the merit of advancing a possible explanation for the writer's ambiguous stance.[185]

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[181] V. S. Naipaul, "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad", in: *The Writer and the World*, p. 190. "An Outpost of Progress" would be Naipaul's favourite Conradian story; for this opinion, see M. Banning Eyre, "Ein Ausflug auf den Campus", *Die Zeitschrift der Kultur*, 10, Okt. 1993, p. 46. Moreover, Naipaul's Western characters would resemble the degraded Europeans in such Conradian works as *Heart of Darkness* or "An Outpost of Progress" (cf. Jesús Varela-Zapata, "Not One of Us: Naipaul's Negative Portrayal of Western Characters", in: Judith Misrahi-Barak, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, p. 111).

[182] This evokes Oscar Wilde's opinions expressed in the essay "The Decay of Lying" (see Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", in: *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, with an introduction by* Vyvyan Holland, London: Collins, 1966, p. 992).

[183] E. Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, p. 61. Nevertheless, to Edward Said's mind, "Conrad is the precursor of the Western views of the Third World", such as V. S. Naipaul's (Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993, pp. xvii-xviii).

[184] H. Hayward, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

[185] According to Anjali Gera, "Strange Moves: Girmitya Turns Cosmopolitan", in: Purabi Panwar, *ed.*, *V. S. Naipaul*, p. 26: "[Naipaul] is the mimic man who turns his master's tools both against the master and his own people, the man without a home, the stranger, at home in a homeless universe."

# 2. THE PLAYFUL LITTLE WORLD OF CHILDHOOD

## 2.1. Childhood as Cultural Construct

Above all, Trinidad as "play-culture" is a childish space; nevertheless, critics have paid little attention to the recurrent motif of childhood when discussing Naipaul's writings.[1] According to the writer himself, one cannot analyse a book like *The Mimic Men* without taking into consideration the idea of infantilism; what he says in the Nobel lecture – "[the novel] was not about mimics. It was about colonial men mimicking the condition of manhood, men who had grown to distrust everything about themselves"[2] – confirms the impression that this fictional work is structured around the dichotomy of child and adult.

Obviously, the motif has a double source: on the one hand, Naipaul inserts autobiographical elements into many of his books; on the other hand, infantile representations go back to the racial discourse of Empire. In both cases, we have to do with a culturally constructed image of childhood, whose features are contradictory, although a certain negative perception of this age persists in Naipaul's fictional and nonfictional texts alike. In David Buckingham's opinion, we could regard our contemporary notion of childhood as a historical creation, part of the Enlightenment project with its insistence on taming the 'irrational'. Moreover, the scholar places children in a context of power relations, by emphasising their dependence on adults; this subordination is also visible in the politics of representation.[3] A similar view is held by Jan Nederveen Pieterse, who additionally

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[1] The exception which proves the rule is an article by Michel Pousse, "The Chaotic World of Children in Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* and Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, (15:1), Autumn 1992, pp. 52-60; another study which notices the infantilising influence of school on the colonised in Naipaul's work is John Thieme's book *The Web of Tradition*: *Uses of Allusion in V.S. Naipaul*, London: Dangaroo Press, 1987 (see particularly p. 80). In his article on *Guerrillas*, Jürgen Martini fugitively remarks that the society described in the novel is a childish one – irrational, ridiculous and marginal – , nothing more than a plaything in the hands of the adult colonial powers (cf. Jürgen Martini, *op. cit.*, p. 112).

[2] V. S. Naipaul, "Postscript: Two Worlds (The Nobel Lecture)", in: *Literary occasions: Essays*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, p. 193. In their article "Children's Play and Adult Leisure", Garry Chick and Lynn A. Barnett argue that the "play as imitation" metaphor dominated the anthropology of the first half of the 20th century, being connected to the idea that children get socialised/enculturated by simply copying adult behaviour; see Garry Chick and Lynn A. Barnett, "Children's Play and Adult Leisure", in: A. Pellegrini, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, p. 49. Actually, Naipaul's notion of mimicry stands both for the process of enculturation, "the process of learning and acquiring culture" and for acculturation, "the massive borrowing of cultural components by one group from another group with which it has prolonged contact", since the writer represents Trinidadians as immature people (cf. George H. Schoemaker, "Introduction: Basic Concepts of Folkloristics", in: George H. Schoemaker, *ed.*, *The Emergence of Folklore in Everyday Life: A Fieldguide and Sourcebook*, Bloomington, Ind.: Trickster Press, 1990, p. 2).

[3] See David Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media*,

mentions the affinity of ageism, "prejudices regarding age", with racism, fact leading to a portrayal of the Third World nations as 'immature'.[4] This is a strategy that Naipaul repeatedly uses as the next chapters undoubtedly demonstrate.

Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000, pp. 6-13, p. 33; cf. also Alastair Pennycook, *op. cit.*, p. 60: "Nandy (1983) argues that the modem European concept of childhood came into being in the seventeenth century. Whereas before, children had been seen as a smaller version of adults, now children were seen as an inferior version, one that was in need of strict moral training and education in order to ensure its upward progress to maturity."

[4] See Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, Amsterdam: Beeldrecht, 1992, p.171. Surprisingly enough, postcolonial theory and cultural studies focus on three domains – race/ethnicity, class and gender – neglecting age, although as John Storey observes: "capitalist societies are societies divided unequally along, for example, ethnic, gender, generational and class lines." (John Storey, *Cultural Studies & the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996, p. 3).

## 2.2. Infantilising Stereotypes

Orientalism as well as the colonial Eurocentric discourse, in general, creates racial and cultural hierarchies by means of rigid, stereotypical representations.[5] The following list summarises the characteristics of "East" and "West" within Orientalism:[6]

| *East* | *West* |
|---|---|
| Splendour | Utility |
| Despotism | Democracy |
| Cruelty | Fair Treatment |
| Sensuality | Self-control |
| No self-government | Self-government |
| Artistic | Practical |
| Mystical | Sensible |
| Irrational | Rational |
| Illogical | Logical |
| Intrigue | Straightforwardness |
| Cunning | Trust |
| Lethargy | Activity |
| Depraved | Virtuous |
| Childlike | Mature |
| Exotic | Unexotic |
| Fatalist/passive | Active |
| Mysterious | Obvious |
| Silent | Articulate |
| Weak | Strong |
| Dark | Light |

However, many of these representations, if not all, are reused when referring to colonised people other than the Asians. For example, the epithet "childlike" has also been attributed to the Africans.[7] Therefore Trinidad, whose population is predominantly made of blacks and Asians, constitutes the perfect stage for a cohort of infantilising stereotypes.

The metaphor of the "child-race" goes hand in hand with the Eurocentric rhetorics of progress; the child as well as the colonised embodies the Inferior,[8] who

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[5] Cf. Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism", in: *The Location of Culture*, pp. 66-67.

[6] In Elain Baldwin *et al.*, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, London: Prentice Hall, 1999, p. 171.

[7] See James Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 52: "Some thought of the Africans as a 'child-race' whose development has been permanently arrested at puberty [...]".

[8] However, this equation Child - Inferior is to be found not only in Western cultures. The reputed

must progress towards the standards of the White Adult. But what does it exactly mean for a population to be "childlike"? What are the stereotypical features associated by the Western with children? The image of the child seems to be built around the same black-and-white system, oscillating between "doll" and "demon" as the title of Ellen Pifer's study suggests – *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* – or between "childlikeness" and "childishness":

> Interestingly, the same divide between the Rousseauian view of the 'noble savage' and the view of natives as uncultured brutes applied to the views on children: for some, children were innocent and happy creatures unspoilt by the bonds of society; for others, they were irrational and immature beings in need of strict moral discipline and extensive education. This distinction Nandy describes as 'childlike' or 'childish' [...].[9]

In spite of these contradictions, there is one important stereotypical feature attached to all children. "Zur Welt der Kinder gehört von Anbeginn das Spiel", says Margarete Dierks,[10] giving voice to the common view that childhood and play are synonymous. If children's culture is perceived as a playful culture, then wouldn't the colonised depicted in childlike terms be seen as ludic, too? The infantilising stereotypes circulated by colonial discourse might account, at least partially, for Naipaul's use of play metaphors when describing Trinidad.

In his first travelogue *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies – French and Dutch – in the West Indies and South America*,[11] which at the time of its appearance in 1962 provoked a heated debate in the Caribbean, Naipaul presents some remarks by Charles Kingsley – the Victorian author best remembered for the children's book, *The Water Babies* (1863)[12] – made in connection with Trinidad. If the Victorian draws parallels between this Caribbean island and the world of children

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anthropologist Clifford Geertz mentions the fact that "small children, boors, simpletons, the insane, the flagrantly immoral are said to be *ndurung djawa*, 'not yet Javanese'." And since "to be human is to be Javanese", small children occupy a position at the margins of humanity (Geertz, as quoted in Ellen Pifer, *Demon or Doll. Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000, p. 19).

[9] A. Pennycook, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

[10] Margarete Dierks, "Einleitung", in: *Kinderwelten: Kinder and Kindheit in der neueren Literatur*, Weinheim: Beltz Verlag, 1985, p. 15.

[11] The 2002 edition bears another subtitle, namely "The Caribbean Revisited"; see V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: The Caribbean Revisited*, New York: Vintage Books, 2002 (1962). According to Akhtar Jamal Khan, Naipaul's travelogues would be genuine non-fictional novels; the critic even claims (undoubtedly exaggerating) that "[t]he real achievement of V. S. Naipaul lies in his achievement as an artist of non-fiction novel [...]." (Akhtar Jamal Khan, *V. S. Naipaul: A Critical Study*, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1998, p. 106).

[12] See Marion Wynee-Davies, *ed., Prentice Hall Guide to English Literature*, New York: Prentice

due to his literary formation or simply biased by the Eurocentric discourse is not sure. Certain is nevertheless the fact that the eye of the European selects mainly the childish-ludic features. This island, with "gay and growing little town[s]"[13] like San Fernando, seems infected by a playful atmosphere. Even the white upper-classes are touched by the spirit of play:

> Kingsley, in spite of all his affection for his white hosts in Trinidad, observed: 'French civilization, signifies practically, certainly in the New World, little save ballet-girls, billiard-tables and thin boots: English civilization, little save horse-racing and cricket'.[14]

The remark is also of interest because it enters the problem of mimicry and acculturation, pointing out to the attraction exerted by such foreign cultural phenomena and to their force of penetrating Trinidadian society. Naipaul apparently follows the same lines when he writes about the "booming, vigorous, even frenzied little island", [15] where "the cricketer was [the] only hero-figure".[16] The play of children is used as an emblem of Trinidadian culture not only in non-fictional works like *The Middle Passage*, but also in novels such as *Guerrillas.* The park, where children gather to play, is situated right in the middle of the capital of the unnamed island suggesting Trinidad, and so becomes metaphorically the heart of Naipaul's native place:

> When we were at school we used to come to play there some afternoons. Cricket and football. The white people would watch us. And we would act up for them. When I was in England I met a girl who had been here as a girl. She passed through with her parents and they stayed at the Prince Albert. All she remembered of the place were the little black boys playing football in the park outside the hotel.[17]

Once again, the spectators are the white; all they remember of the local culture is stereotypically reduced to some traits – little, black, childish, playful – that come under the heading "play of children/colonised". But this scene in Chapter 5 is announced from the very beginning of the novel: *Guerrillas* opens with the two main

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Hall, 1990, p. 654.

[13] Charles Kingsley, *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies,* as quoted in V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: The Caribbean Revisited*, p. 69.

[14] *The Middle Passage*, p. 52.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[17] *Guerrillas,* p. 67.

white characters – Jane and Roche – on their way to Thrushcross Grange, the agricultural commune led by the Creole James Ahmed. Here Naipaul uses the technique of the focalizer, so the reader sees through the eyes of the two Westerners – desolating landscapes and then, the first human beings, "naked children playing in the red dust of the straight new avenues".[18]

As I have already mentioned, the scene in Chapter 5 exhibits some main features of Trinidad (and of the Caribbean, in general) as seen by the European visitor: little, black, childish, playful. It is now time to analyse more closely these heterostereotypes.

### 2.2.1. "A Tiny Little Dot on Some Maps"

That smallness is an attribute of childhood sounds like a platitude: children are often depicted as "little men".[19] This must, therefore, stick also to their play.

Discussing various spatial imaginings,[20] James J. Preston first of all names the so-called process of "miniaturization" and gives an example taken from the play activities of children:

> Bachelard's (1964, 1969, 1971) brilliant essays on the imagination draw attention to miniature, a poetics that shrinks and integrates complex phenomena to manageable size. We all remember the worlds of miniature in classics like *Gulliver's Travels* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Miniaturization is an important source of mastery, an expression of the human attempt to

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 3. Interestingly enough, colour does not function here as an attribute overtly defining the children; instead of that, there is a transfer from people to landscape - "red dust". (However, the colour red has racial connotations, too – James Ahmed is a "red", that is a mulatto in the Creole dialect; cf. Jens-Ulrich Davids and Gudrun Perrotton, 'Drei westindische Autobiographien', in: Michael Fritsche, *ed.*, *Besonnte Kindheit und Jugend? Autobiographische Texte aus verschiedenen Kulturen*, Oldenburg: Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg, 1992, p.114). Also interesting is the use of the cliché, "naked children", which reminds us that children, like the primitive, are beings closer to Nature than to Culture. (Taking up clothes is a symbol of enculturation , which will be discussed more in detail later in the present study).

[19] See *Kinderwelten*, pp. 11, 137, etc.

[20] James J. Preston, "The Trickster Unmasked: Anthropology and the Imagination", in: Ivan Brady, *ed.*, *Anthropological Poetics*, Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991, p.79. These 'spatial imaginings' have an important cultural value: "The *spatial* domain of the imagination activates a poetics of *locational transformation*, exercising the psyche by stretching, contracting, and defining physical boundaries. Utilizing spatial properties the individual is able to explore his place in different social and cultural fields, including family, local community, nature, or cosmos. The spatial domain of the imagination determines identity formation, the integration of personality, and the demarcation of geographical, cultural and sacred boundaries. Equally significant, as well as practical, is the use of spatial imagery to create models and maps that orient individuals to the environment" (*loc. cit.*).

> understand and digest powerful natural forces. None of us can forget the myriad miniature worlds constructed during childhood, consisting of tiny people, cars, houses, cities, or sand castles. The child's capacity to create miniature worlds yields important psychological strengths; for miniaturization involves a collapsing of the adult world, the shrinking of overwhelming forces to manageable dimensions, and mastery of complex phenomena. According to Bachelard, miniature is a metaphysics of domination, control, and integration. Visions of miniature represent the human ability to redefine space in acts of imaginative power. [21]

Obviously, Naipaul's Trinidad sometimes takes the shape of such a miniature world. However, there is one question left unanswered: who is more "childlike"? – the coloniser minimising Trinidad by means of infantilising stereotypes[22] in order to dominate, control and integrate it, or the colonised inhabiting such a tiny world?[23] Or is this simply an effect of metafictionality, where any "small world" can become a symbol of the literary text?

From the very first book to the very last book about Trinidad written by V.S. Naipaul, images of smallness abound. Thus, in the foreword to *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), Naipaul writes the following, integrating Trinidad within the larger geography of the British Empire: "although its politicians have taken to calling it a country, Trinidad is a small island, no bigger than Lancashire, with a population somewhat smaller than Nottingham's."[24] This impression lasted for almost forty years, as a sentence from a more recent novel, *A Way in the World* (1994), clearly demonstrates: "A small town [Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad], a small street; but it took time to know."[25] "It took time to know", that is, perception seems to be rather learned, a function of the imperial culture, than natural.

According to Karl Miller, Naipaul speaks of "small lives" led in "small houses".[26] This opinion is reinforced by the reputed postcolonial critic, John Thieme, who remarks the use of the stereotype of the "little man" in *A House for Mr. Biswas* as a strategy of relating the story of Naipaul's father's life to the broader British literary tradition.[27] For Thieme, such a "little man" is a victim of "both his lowly

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[22] We must note the obvious resemblance of the processes of miniaturization and stereotyping - both reduce a phenomenon in order to make it manageable.
[23] This could be just an example of the numerous reversals of the relationship Adult/Coloniser–Child/Colonised, which will be discussed in the present study.
[24] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 9.
[25] *A Way in the World*, p. 13.
[26] Karl Miller , "Introduction", p. xi.
[27] Cf. John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, pp. 68-9: "The mode of the novel also differs from most

social status *and* his colonial situation".[28]

The same stereotype is employed in the case of another character bearing the traits of Seepersad Naipaul, namely in the case of Ralph Singh's father. Chapter 3, Part II, in *The Mimic Men* (1967), a book published six years after *A House for Mr. Biswas*, insists on the respective character, whose main features seem to be smallness, childishness and, why not, playfulness. He has by now attained the highest social rank he could have dreamt of – that of a minor official in the Education Department of Isabella. Pettiness is the best attribute that could define the nature of his job, a job symbolised by the car he uses:

> My father became the possessor of a second-hand motorcar. It was one of those baby Austins of the thirties, quaint even at the time, which we in Isabella, more used to American motorcars, called matchboxes. I believe my father bought his car with an interest-free government loan: his duties in the Education Department required him to travel.[29]

The acquisition of the car can be seen as a step towards 'respectability'; it even gives birth to the small ritual of 'family outing' preceded by what else than "a formal little speech",[30] in fact a burlesque rendition of colonial discourse:

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eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fictional biographies in that it is mock-heroic. Naipaul uses the more recent stereotype of the 'little man' as a means of relating his father's life-story to a broader tradition and, like several British writers who have treated the 'little man' figure, he portrays him in a mock-heroic light. *A House for Mr. Biswas* is not, however, mock-heroic of the kind which makes for diminution of the subject (in the Augustan manner of dressing up mice in lions' skins and thereby rendering them ridiculous), but of a kind employed by twentieth-century writers like H. G. Wells and James Joyce, where the equation between the contemporary 'little man' and his heroic counterpart is not made to diminish the former: Bloom *is* Ulysses or at least his modem day equivalent in a society where the heroic ideal no longer obtains as it once did. For Naipaul, the society in which he grew up was 'a society which denied itself heroes' and so it is appropriate that in *Mr. Biswas* the little man should take over the role of the hero, just as the trickster has in the earlier novels. No satirical diminution is involved. Biswas's mock-heroic quest for his house is typical of the kind of limited grail which the twentieth-century 'little man' pursues.

There are numerous 'little man' references in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. The atmosphere which they create is well summed up when, retiring to his bedroom as a retreat from the depredations of the Tulsis on the day of the house-blessing ceremony at The Chase, Biswas ruminates on his situation in life: 'He didn't feel a small man, but the clothes which hung so despairingly from the nail on the mud wall were definitely the clothes of a small man, comic, make-believe clothes.' […] This is his problem throughout his life: He fails to live up to his idealised image of himself. He has ill-defined aspirations towards a better life, but he remains entrapped in the role of the 'little man', a kind of Trinidadian Walter Mitty whose fantasies revolve around the idea of a metropolitan escape –reading the novels of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli and writing his own 'Escape' stories – or a Samuel Smiles-inspired advancement in the society, even though he feels that his own geographical situation excludes him from such self-help [...]."

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[29] *The Mimic Men*, p. 128.

> He said: 'It is good for all the members of a family to be together from time to time, breaking bread. I feel it strengthens the bonds of the family. The family is the unit which is the basis of all civilization and culture. This was something I learned as a boy from the greatest of the missionaries who came to this island, to whose home, as I believe you know, I was admitted more as a friend than student.' [31]

Unfortunately, his progeny are far from accepting Father's words as sacred: "My sisters were on the point of giggling and I was fearful for my father's sake".[32] This dwarfish father does not compare to "the greatest of the missionaries who came to this island", that carrier of cultural imperialism, the teacher of boys and childish races. Ralph Singh's father has also a playful nature. If this is a complementary or an opposite feature to his little life remains unclear. One can bring arguments in favour of both variants, for example, his ludic creation of an ambiguous 'character' that conforms to and, at the same time, transgresses the limits of his petty condition as an official in the Education Department:

> On the street my father already had the engaging reputation of a bottle-breaker and cafe-wrecker; the arrival of the baby Austin, emblem of respectability and steadiness, turned him into a type of eccentric squire. They called him a 'radical'. On Isabella this was a word of approval; it described an unconventional person or someone who was a 'character'.[33]

The narrator even insists on the ambivalence of the "little man". After the failure of the first and last Sunday family outing, "[t]he baby Austin ceased to be comic and became to us a symbol of indefinable terror. We were happier when it was garaged with some defect. Since then, I might add here, I have looked upon the little-man type in his little car with feelings which, to say at least, are mixed".[34] This could be a good example of *coincidentia oppositorum,* when extremes meet: little comes together with big and the ridiculous with the sublime.

However, in most cases, miniature and magnification are used to produce a contrast; what is little gets even more diminished in comparison to what is big. This is shown by another scene in the same novel by Naipaul. By now, the former official in the Education Department has become the leader of a strike, which gradually turns

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[30]*Ibid.,* p. 129.
[31] *Loc. cit.*
[32]*Loc. cit.*
[33]*Ibid.,* p.128.
[34]*Ibid.,* p.133.

to a religious movement. Like a hermit, Singh's father retires from society and takes the solemn name of Gurudeva. At this point, his son pays him a visit:

> I went with money in my pocket. I had a debt to repay. His camp was in a clearing off a track. It was an ugly clearing, a disfiguring of the woods. He, or the disciples he still had with him, had turned the ground between the tree stumps into mud; and on the mud they had laid passageways of planks and coconut trunks. The land was not cleared all the way down to the sea. A thin screen of woods hid the sea, as though that was a tainted view. At one end of the clearing was his hut, with mud walls and a thatch of carat palms. On a tree stump on a mound was what looked like a toy replica of his hut. The mound had been scraped clean of weeds and grass and had been plastered. T h e t o y h u t w a s o b v i o u s l y a s h r i n e o f s o m e s o r t . S u c h c h i l d i s h n e s s w a s n o t w h a t I h a d e x p e c t e d f r o m G u r u d e v a [my emphasis]. Better the leader of the mob than this wasted, scruffily bearded man in a yellow robe who now, ignoring me, went to his shrine and rearranged his l i t t l e [my emphasis] bits and pieces, his stones and shells and leaves and roots and his coconut. The coconut seemed especially important. He had invented so much. His inventions had been so brilliant. Had the gift now been withdrawn?[35]

Here, the smallness of the colonised is more obvious since Gurudeva is contrasted to the sublime contained in the idea of religion. We could say that his gestures are not perceived by his son (who shares to a large extent the perspective of the coloniser) as "texts", that is to say as cultural products invested with authority.[36] On the contrary, the ritual is described as if it were a child's play and therefore, minimised. The same interplay of miniaturisation and magnification is present in two earlier fictional works by Naipaul, the collection of stories *Miguel Street* (1959) and the novel *The Mystic Masseur* (1957). "Until the Soldiers Came", one of the stories included in *Miguel Street,* presents a case of mimicry in the person of Edward, a Trinidadian working for the American troops deployed in the Caribbean during World War II. In the process of self-fashioning, Edward imagines Trinidad as a dwarfish place, unlike the United States, which gradually emerges as the new authority replacing imperial Britain:[37]

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[35] *Ibid.,* p. 190-191. The toy hut is a variant of the doll's house motif, appearing in *A House for Mr Biswas* (pp. 206-209 and p. 296) as well as in *Guerrillas* (p.53); one could say that the doll's house becomes an emblem of a miniatural infantilised Trinidad.

[36] "Text" as defined by Jurij M. Lotman; see Jurij M. Lotman and A. M. Pjatigorskij, "Text und Funktion", in: J. Lotman, *Aufsätze zur Theorie und Methodologie der Literatur und Kultur, ed. by* Karl Eimermacher, Scriptor Verlag: Kronberg, 1974, p. 324.

[37] In this light, we could interpret the following sentence, previously commented upon, "[i]t was one of those baby Austins of the thirties, quaint even at the time, which we in Isabella, more used to

> One Sunday he said, 'I was stupid to send in anything I paint with my own two hands for Trinidad people to judge. What they know about anything? Now, if I was in America, it woulda be different. The Americans is people. They know about things.'
>
> To hear Edward talk, you felt that America was a gigantic country inhabit by giants. They lived in enormous houses and they drove the biggest cars of the world.
>
> Edward used to say, 'Look at Miguel Street. In America you think they have streets so narrow? In America this street could pass for a sidewalk.'
>
> One night I walked down with Edward to Docksite, the American army camp. Through the barbed wire you could see the huge screen of an open-air cinema.
>
> Edward said, 'You see the sort of theatre they come and build in a stupid little place like Trinidad. Imagine the sort of thing they have in the States.'[38]

To the opposition little vs. big, one can add another one – knowledgeable vs. unknowledgeable. The people living in a "stupid little place like Trinidad" contrast with the gigantic Americans that "know about things"; this complex of inferiority seems to be the result of cultural imperialism. Significantly, at the heart of American culture, there stands "the huge screen of an open-air cinema".[39] The mimic aspires to complete identification with the models provided by the dominant culture: "In about three months Edward made his appearance among us in a sleeveless jersey [like the American soldiers]. He had become a really big man."[40] However, in spite of what the narrator says, Edward remains caught in a state of infantilism and impotence. The fact that he cannot have offspring reinforces the feeling that he is "immature".

Another scene taking place on the background of World War II is the one that opens Chapter 7, in the novel *The Mystic Masseur*. Beharry, a shopkeeper, and his friend Ganesh, "the mystic masseur", are discussing the importance of Trinidad in the context of the conflagration:

> 'But you forgetting that we is just a tiny little dot on some maps. If you ask me, I think Hitler ain't even know it have a place called Trinidad and that it

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American motorcars, called matchboxes" *(The Mimic Men,* p. 128), as pointing out to the shift of power on Trinidadian soil: from now on, it will be the Americans that will have the upper hand, whereas the British (as well as their cultural products) are losing their prestige, shrinking in the Trinidadian imaginary.

[38] *Miguel Street,* pp. 146-147.

[39] Here play (under the aspect of popular culture) appears as an instrument in the service of cultural imperialism. For a detailed analysis of the connection between ludic phenomena and Trinidadian popular culture, see the last part of the present study.

[40] *Miguel Street*, p. 148.

> have people like you and me and Suruj Mooma living on it.'
> 'Nah,' Ganesh insisted. 'It have oil here and the Germans thirsty for oil. If you don't look out, Hitler come here first.'
> 'Don't let Suruj Mooma hear you. She cousin join the Volunteers. The dentist fellow I did tell you about. Dentistry stop paying, so he join up. He tell Suruj Mooma is a nice, easy work.'
> 'Suruj Mooma cousin have an eye for that sort of thing.'
> 'But what if the Germans land here tomorrow?'
> 'The only thing I sure about is that Suruj Mooma cousin go start breaking all sort of world record for running.'
> 'No, man. If the Germans come, what we going to use for money? What about my shop? And the court-house? Is things like that does worry me.'[41]

Caught between magnification and minimisation, the mental map of Trinidad is in danger of falling apart; however, the Western reader would tend to favour Beharry's position, according to which, Trinidad "is just a tiny little dot on some [Eurocentric] maps", and look condescendingly upon Ganesh, who sees Trinidad as the focal point of war. The passage is also interesting because it presents Beharry wondering about what would happen if the Trinidadians were to be subjected to another dominant culture. Would the German culture be like the familiar British culture, or would it shock and make people get defamiliarized with 'natural' things like money, the shop or the court-house? Anyway, the Trinidadians seem accustomed to the change of the dominant culture: Spanish, French, British or American, all had a word to say at various epochs.

These two excerpts, which share the background of World War II, both point to the connection between spatial imaginings and politics. Provincial pettiness is in contrast with imperial grandeur; the empire possesses prestige, authority and power, whereas the 'province' is marked by a lack. The centre of the map is occupied by the metropolis, whereas the colony stands on the margins and therefore, gets diminished. The fact has been remarked by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*: commenting on Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men*, they notice that this is structured around the dichotomy centre vs. margin:

> The Trinidadian writer V.S. Naipaul examines the dilemma of the post-colonial writer in many of his works, but particularly in *The Mimic Men* (1967). Since Naipaul has a pessimistic view of the possibility of escape from this situation, he views the mimicry implicit in the post-colonial condition

[41] *The Mystic Masseur*, pp.112-113.

> and, hence, its literary text, as permanent disabling, because of the disorder and inauthenticity imposed by the centre on the margins of empire. The distinction is between the authentic experience of the 'real' world and the inauthentic experience of the unvalidated periphery. The polarity is repeated in the book in an aggregation of opposites: order and disorder, authenticity and inauthenticity, reality and unreality, power and impotence, even being and nothingness. Clearly, the dominance of the centre and its imprimatur on experience must be abrogated before the experience of the 'periphery' can be fully validated.
>
> The novel's identification of the union of language and power also identifies a geographic structure of power. In imperial terms this can be seen as a geometric structure in which the centre, the metropolitan source of standard language, stands as the focus of order, while the periphery, which utilizes the variants, the 'edges' of language, remains a tissue of disorder. Such geometric opposites are articulated clearly by the narrator, Kripal ('Cripple') Singh in *The Mimic Men*; a novel which incorporates an extreme version of the opposition between centre and margin. The book contrasts the metropolitan centre, which is the location not only of the power which comes from the control of language but also of order itself, with the periphery of the colonial world, in which only the illusion of power exists and in which disorder always predominates [...].[42]

In order to illustrate colonial power relationships, the respective critics have chosen to discuss a school-life episode from the same novel:

> The child's first lesson about the weight of the king's crown is a richly evocative image of dependence and Otherness. Such physical and metaphoric weight – the weight of the crown and the weight of empire – demands and legitimizes power. Such weight represents order as well as power, since order is the essence of imperial authority. On the other hand the disorder of the peripheral corresponds to a fundamental lack of power. [43]

Ashcroft and Co. are right in exemplifying their thesis with the image of the Colonised-Child, because all other attributes – disorder, marginality, impotence and inauthenticity – cluster around the idea of infantilism. Almost all the time, childhood is degraded in *The Mimic Men*, whereas adulthood is regarded as positive:

> [C]hildhood was for me a period of incompetence, bewilderment, solitude and shameful fantasies. It was a period of burdensome secrets [...] and I longed for nothing as much as to walk in the clear air of adulthood and responsibility, where everything was comprehensible and I myself was open as a book.[44]

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[42] B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 87-88.
[43] *Ibid.*, p.88.
[44] *The Mimic Men*, p. 97.

It is obvious that the child's bewilderment originates in the chaos and disorder characterising infantile states; Ralph Singh, the narrator, says the following: "I thought that this absurd disorder, of placelessness, was part of the youth and my general unease and that it would go as soon as left Isabella. [...] Sometimes [...] the sense of place is destroyed, and we are ourselves alone: the young man, the boy, the child."[45] And of course, playacting is close to the infantile chaos: "From playacting to disorder: it is the pattern."[46]

As we have already seen, it is the metropolis that stands in the centre of a map; since the metropolis is the focal point of imperial imagination, it appears clear and magnified, whereas the colonial margins become distorted, chaotic and minimised. These margins, touched by rhetorics of frivolity, seem "petty and ridiculous", as Naipaul confesses in the essay "Jasmine":

> Trinidad was small, remote and unimportant, and we knew we could not hope to read in books of the life we saw about us. [...]The only social division I accepted was that between rich and poor, and any society more elaborately ordered seemed insubstantial and alien. In [English] literature such a society was more than alien; it was excluding, it made nonsense of my own fantasies and more and more, as I grew older and thought writing myself, it made me despairingly conscious of the poverty and haphazardness of my own society. I might adapt Dickens to Trinidad; but it seemed impossible that the life I knew in Trinidad could ever be turned into a book. If landscapes do not start to be real until they have been interpreted by an artist, so, until they have been written about, societies appear to be without shape and *embarrassing.* [...]But no writer, however individual his vision, could be separated from his society. The vision was alien; it diminished my own and did not give me the courage to do a simple thing like mentioning the name of a Port of Spain street.[...]To attempt, with a full consciousness of established authoritative mythologies, to give a quality of myth to what was agreed to be petty and ridiculous – Frederick Street in Port of Spain, Marine Square, the districts of Laventille and Barataria – to attempt to use these names required courage.[47]

What this excerpt emphasises is the fact that the smallness and unimportance of Trinidad is an effect of colonial discourses, "established authoritative

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[45] *Ibid.*, p.166-167.
[46] *Ibid.*, p.200.
[47] V. S. Naipaul, "Jasmine", *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles,* London: Andre Deutsch, 1972, pp. 23-25.

mythologies",[48] propagated by means of an efficient medium – the English literature, a fact noticed also by Helen Hayward.[49] The British critic points out two other interesting passages from Naipaul that could give a clue for the relationship between spatial imagination and empire. They are excerpts from the nonfictional work *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969) and its paratext,[50] the novel *A Way in the World* (1994), which clearly show that only imperial manoeuvres in the region can give it significance and importance; their absence leads to an "end-of empire smallness".[51] However, there is one instance when Naipaul sees smallness in a positive light; but even then, the idea of empire is the one conferring value: "The colony became an imperial amalgam, the Empire in little".[52] Here, Trinidad can be seen as the centre, the quintessence of Empire, an image that is nevertheless threatened by the contrary image of chaos and amalgam.

The final paragraph of the essay "Power?" (1970) apparently argues against colonial rule, which created "unnatural administrative units" like Trinidad and Tobago:

> Trinidad is simply small; it is dependent; and the people born in it – black, East Indian, white – sense themselves condemned, not necessarily as individuals, but as a community, to an inferiority of skill and achievement. In colonial days racial deprivation could be said to be important, and this remains, obviously, an important drive. But now it is only part of the story.
>
> In the islands, in fact, black identity is a sentimental trap, obscuring the issues. What is needed is access to a society, larger in every sense, w h e r e p e o p l e w i l l b e a l l o w e d t o g r o w [my emphasis]. For some territories this larger society may be Latin America. Colonial rule in the

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[48] Here, the terms "mythology" and "discourse" can be used interchangeably; in fact, Naipaul's use of the term "mythology" comes close to the concept developed by Roland Barthes (see Roger Webster, *ed., Studying Literary Theory. An Introduction*, London: Arnold, 1996, p.113).

[49] Helen Hayward, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[50] *Paratext* as understood by Gérard Genette; see Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree, transl. by* Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, *with a foreword by* Gerald Prince, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997 (1982), pp. 3-4.

[51] Hayward says the following: "Naipaul's representation of his native island can be seen to entail conflicting impulses, combining the urge to make Trinidad appear significant with the desire to disown it as 'unimportant, uncreative, cynical' *(MP,* p. 41). [...] Naipaul writes that the purpose of Lebrun's book about Venezuelan [sic] revolutionaries was 'to lift the islands from the end-of-empire smallness in which they had been becalmed since the abolition of slavery, and to attach them once again to the great historical processes of the continent'*(WW,* p. 128).

The description equally serves to define one aspect of the project of *The Loss of EI Dorado,* which concerns itself with moments when Trinidad was touched by history and brought into contact with a wider world - a contact which confers on the island the benediction of significance: 'The idea behind the book, the narrative line, was to attach the island, the little place in the mouth of the Orinoco river, to great names and great events'(*EA*,p.142)." (*Ibid.*, p. 98-99).

[52] V. S. Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado: A Colonial History,* London: Picador, 2001 (1969), p. 352.

> Caribbean defied geography and created unnatural administrative units; this is part of the problem. Trinidad, for instance, was detached from Venezuela. This is a geographical absurdity; it might be looked at again.[53]

As an island, Trinidad is a small territory when compared to the South American continent, to which Venezuela belongs; Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith even consider belittlement to be implied by western conceptions of the island.[54] Thus, one can easily read Naipaul's essay to be symptomatic of a 'nostalgia' for grandeur, for presence, for Empire.[55]

### 2.2.2. The Social-Darwinist Dilemma: Play-Boys or Apes?

Evidently, the diminutive Caribbean space imagined by Naipaul is a construct that perfectly fits the mapping of the colonised as infantile people. Nevertheless, it is in the novel *Guerrillas* where the colonial stereotype of the child-races acquires its most elaborate form. Particularly interesting is the epithet "playboy", describing one of the protagonists, the Creole Jimmy Ahmed. Here Naipaul shows once again his delight in using the pun as a stylistic device. Besides the primary meaning of "rich man who lives only for pleasure",[56] the word connotes childishness and playfulness, like in the following quotation:

> Jimmy looked at Jane. She was interested, smiling, coy, very pink. He said, "I got away in time. I was lucky. Over there the black man can become" – he fumbled for the word – "like a playboy. They make you like a playboy in England."
>
> It was the wrong word. Jane, fumbling after him, worked out what he meant: plaything.
>
> She said, "Playboy. That was the impression the papers gave."[57]

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[53] V. S. Naipaul, "Power?", *The Writer and the World*, p. 140.

[54] See Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, "Editors' Introduction" to *Islands in history and representation*, R. Edmond and V. Smith, *ed*., London: Routledge, 2003, p.10.

[55] Naipaul's proposal of attaching Trinidad to Venezuela has behind it the map of the Spanish Empire with its legendary province El Dorado, which incorporated present-day Trinidad, Venezuela and Guyana.

[56] See the headword 'playboy', in: *Collins Paperback Dictionary & Thesaurus*, Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002, p. 575.

[57] *Guerrillas*, pp. 19-20.

Jimmy's erotic power that subjugates Jane, the white woman,[58] is counterbalanced by his infantilism, the result of a process enacted by the British masters. Once again, the toy metaphor is employed in order to reduce characters to a dwarfish scale. Moreover, Jimmy is the leader of a gang of youngsters, who pretend being involved in an agricultural project, which proves in the end to be nothing else than a fake. Interesting is the association of the two terms, "man" and "boy", to depict the same individual. They create a certain tension, being the mark of a split personality. This uncertainty will last twenty years with Naipaul; we find this hybrid image in a more recent book, *A Way in the World* (1994). There, the writer describes his former colleague, the black clerk in the Trinidadian Registrar-General's Department, as "the long-limbed boy (or man) from St James with the lady's bicycle".[59] It is clear that the clerk's identity is fluid not only in terms of age but also of gender. Likewise, Jimmy Ahmed is attracted by both sexes; when he cannot see Jane, Ahmed takes consolation in the arms of his subordinate, the black boy Bryant.

The stereotype of the childish African has a history that goes back to the dark age of slavery, as another episode from *A Way in the World* clearly points out. After an unsuccessful rebellion against their white masters, the black captives awaiting execution are baptised without instruction, being considered infants by the Church.[60] The same connection between servitude and infantilism is to be found in *The Middle Passage* (1962), the travelogue based on Naipaul's journey to the West Indies. Here, the author regards Trinidad against the background of the Caribbean archipelago. Perhaps, that is why his description of Jamaicans does not differ too much from that of Trinidadians. To reinforce it, Naipaul quotes from an anonymous article saying the following: "Today the black man, unless he has education, is still a 'black boy'. In the civil service respectable men with families are called 'Caleb', and 'Williams' just like that because they happen to be on the subordinate staff."[61] In the respective section devoted to Jamaica, the writer lets other similar representations accumulate, for example, "the grubby doll's houses" or the grotesque image of the dead mule with a broomstick "playfully stuck in its anus".[62] It does not come then as a surprise

[58] Jane's sexual arousal is rendered by means of an accumulation of adjectives: "interested, smiling, coy, very pink". Interestingly enough, colour has in this context both erotic and racial connotations.
[59] *A Way in the World*, p. 28.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 314.
[61] *The Middle Passage*, p. 230.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

that the concluding word of the novel *Guerrillas* is exactly "Massa".[63] Uttered by Jimmy, the word, a corrupted form of "mister" speaks for the character's servility towards his white supervisor.

Naipaul's use of colonial stereotypes when representing the Afro-Trinidadian community may have a racial undertone. He is well known for his critical attitude vis-à-vis the Africans in general, which has given birth to such jokes like the one mentioned by Theroux, a clear example of what one could call 'myths of exclusion': "a banana a day will keep the Jamaican away".[64] However, Naipaul does not reserve these infantilising images for one section alone of the Trinidadian society; on the contrary, he uses them to sketch characters that belong to the East Indian group, too. A good example is the Hindu leader Chittaranjan from an earlier novel by Naipaul, *The Suffrage of Elvira*. Chapter 2 begins by averting the reader about the importance of Chittaranjan, the goldsmith, thus creating a certain horizon of expectation. This impression is strengthened by the Balzacian presentation of his home, known as the Big House, a "solid, two-storeyed, concrete, bright with paint and always well looked after"[65] construction. That is why, when the Hindu leader comes onto stage, the reader cannot feel but disappointment:

> The commotion brought Chittaranjan to his veranda upstairs. The half-wall hid most of his body, but what Foam and Harban could see looked absurdly small and shrivelled. Spectacles with thin silver rims and thin silver arms emphasized Chittaranjan's diminutiveness.[66]

As already seen, smallness has negative connotations in Naipaul's imagery, being "absurd". It becomes apparent in the sequel to the quote above that it is also closely associated with the idea of infantilism: "The awning of Chittaranjan's shop had been pulled back; the ground had already been combed that afternoon by children; and only two toy anvils set in the concrete terrace remained of the day's workshop".[67] On the other hand, his physical handicap may be compensated by his creative potential. In that, the Hindu goldsmith resembles the divine artisan Hefaistos, who in spite of his lameness brings forth amazing things.

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[63] *Guerrillas*, p. 248.
[64] Paul Theroux, "V. S. Naipaul", *Modern Fiction Studies*,(30:3), 1984 Autumn, p. 453.
[65] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 25.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[67] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 29.

Equally, the ironic use of the appellation "Mr." for the protagonist of the novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* signalises that his development has been arrested at an infantile stage. Thus, the omniscient narrator calls him "Mr. Biswas" even if the character is a baby:

> When the midwife came the children were asleep. Some time later they were awakened by the screams of Mr Biswas and the shrieks of the midwife [...] Mr Biswas lost his sixth finger before he was nine days old. It simply came off one night and Bipti had an unpleasant turn when, shaking out the sheets one morning, she saw this tiny finger tumble to the ground. Bissoondaye thought this an excellent sign and buried the finger behind the cowpen at the back of the house, not far from where she had buried Mr Biswas's navel-string.[68]

Later, he is treated like a child by Mrs Tulsi, his wife's mother: "'What is past is past,' Mrs Tulsi said. 'When people are boys they behave like boys. When they are men they behave like men.'"[69] Actually, the critic Karl Miller has interpreted the relationship between Mrs Tulsi and Mr Biswas as symbolising the link between metropolis and colony.[70] Mrs Tulsi's surname, "the old queen",[71] has been brought as an argument in favour of this thesis; to that I would add the family trope, of which the colonial discourse makes use so much.

Nevertheless, Naipaul undermines at times essentialist assumptions about age differences, pointing out that they are cultural constructs. Therefore, any rite of passage, however absurd it may be, can enact a sudden maturation of the protagonists like in the following excerpt from *The Mystic Masseur*:

> It was their first beating, a formal affair done without anger on Ganesh's part or resentment on Leela's; and although it formed no part of the marriage ceremony itself, it meant much to both of them. It meant that they had grown up and become independent. Ganesh had become a man; Leela a wife as privileged as any other big woman. Now she too would have tales to tell of her husband's beatings, and when she went home she would be able to look sad and sullen as every woman should.[72]

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[68] *A House for Mr Biswas,* pp. 15-18.
[69] *Ibid*., p.194.
[70] See "Introduction" by Karl Miller to *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. xix.
[71] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 99. According to K. Miller, it reminds of Queen Victoria (Karl Miller, *op. cit.*, p. xix). Champa Rao Mohan goes even further by describing Mrs Tulsi's house as "a miniature version of the plantation system introduced by the colonizers."– Champa Rao Mohan, *Postcolonial Situation in the Novels of V.S. Naipaul*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004, p. 72.
[72] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 60.

In the previous chapter, I began discussing the theme of infantilism in Naipaul's best-known novel, *The Mimic Men.* There we took a look at the image of the colonised impressed by the King's crown and regarded childishness as an effect of marginalisation. But there are numerous other instances when the stereotype of the child-races reappears, becoming a genuine leitmotif of the book. Like his father, Ralph Singh has a ludic personality. Certain features also anticipate the character of Jimmy Ahmed in *Guerrillas* and I think here in particular at the playboy behaviour adopted by the Hindu student, once he arrives in Britain with a scholarship. Interestingly enough, unlike in the case of Jimmy, it is not the English who send him "to conquer"[73] female trophies. Singh's mask is provided by another colonised, the Maltese Lieni.[74] The first person narrator says about Lieni the following: "in her p l a y f u l [my emphasis] Maltese way she would grab at my crutch, threatening to bite 'it' off",[75] thus giving voice to a Freudian "fear of castration". Symbolically, she lives in the basement of a London boarding-house together with her illegitimate child. Moreover, at the christening, besides Singh, there come only people from the periphery of society: immigrants, a young Cockney or the homosexual Paul.[76]

Naipaul may have been influenced by G. H. Mead's sociological theory, which for the first time interpreted human personality as a play with roles offered by the other.[77] An excerpt from the same novel, when Singh speaks about himself, strongly suggests such a possibility:

> Yet at the time I thought I was simply playing, that in the keeping of trophies and writing-up of experience I was expressing a non-existent side of myself. As though we ever play. As though the personality, for all its byways and wilful deviations, all its seeming inconsistencies, does not hang together. [...] The son-lover-brother with Lieni, the player of private games in public rooms, the sensitive young man with a girl like Beatrice; the brute with the girl who, undressed, had revealed a back of irritating coarseness and had, then, in tearful response to my disgust – how inconsequentially people act in extremity – shown me a picture of her Norman farmhouse.[78]

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[73] *The Mimic Men* , p. 21.
[74] We could read this as an example of "Empire striking back".
[75] *The Mimic Men*, p. 25.
[76] *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
[77] Cf. Peter L. Berger, *Einladung zur Soziologie*: *Eine humanistische Perspektive*, *transl. by* Monika Plessner, Konstanz: Walter-Verlag, 1969, p. 111.
[78] *The Mimic Men*, p. 26. See also *ibid.*, p. 20: "We become what we see of ourselves in the eyes of

Little will change after Singh's return to his native island when from the playboy attitude he shifts to the politician role: "[f]or me politics remained little more than a game, a heightening of life".[79]

However, ludic images in the novel cannot be completely understood without taking into account the different allusions to childhood as well as the underlying discourse of infantile races. The colonial dimension becomes obvious in telling passages like the one at the beginning of Chapter 7, where power mechanisms are revealed behind what is apparently innocent: "with compassion for others there came an awareness of myself not as an individual but as a performer, in that child's game where every action of the victim is deemed to have been done at the command of his tormentor".[80] This control is subtly exerted and therefore, more difficult for the colonised to escape its noxious effects: "even refusal is useless, for that too can be deemed to have been commanded, and the only end is tears and walking away".[81] In a way, this resembles Gramsci's concept of hegemony, because the colonial subject is induced to internalise a certain world view that afterwards seems to be the most natural explanation of reality.[82] Writing, nevertheless, may defamiliarise and help somebody see the internal contradictions of a mental construct, but on the other hand, may have a dramatic impact at an affective level; it is in this light that one could read Singh's confession:

> My first instinct was towards the writing of history, as I have said.[...] It was the shock of the first historian's vision, a religious moment if you will, humbling, a vision of a disorder that was beyond any one man to control yet which, I felt, if I could pin down, might bring me calm.[83]

One cannot be sure and this epistemological uncertainty is emphasised by the use of a conditional sentence that places everything in a purely hypothetical register. Paradoxically, even the feeling of disorder that Singh experiences is not necessarily a consequence of the collapse of generalisations and stereotypes; on the contrary, it

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others".

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 38. See also page 40: "Understand my unsuitability for the role I had created for myself, as politician, as dandy, as celebrant."

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[81] *Loc. cit.*

[82] Cf. Jürgen Kramer, *Cultural and Intercultural Studies*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990, pp. 9-10.

[83] *The Mimic Men*, p. 85.

may be the result of seeing himself through the eyes of the coloniser as a childish being.[84]

Naipaul's idea of infancy in *The Mimic Men* is likely to stem from Piaget's influential study *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*. There, the Swiss scholar explains the prevalence of play among children by the fact that "the characteristics of all behaviours and all thought are less in e q u i l i b r i u m [my emphasis] in the early stage of mental development than in the adult stage, which is, of course, obvious [sic]".[85] Beside the idea of play as something chaotic lacking equilibrium, Naipaul probably borrows the Piagetian concept of symbolic game, a kind of interplay between make-believe and imitation;[86] the title of the novel *The Mimic Men* would then fix the colonised as childish fantasists imitating the coloniser. It is remarkable that Piaget does not attempt to provide a cultural explanation of the type "children play because their culture tells them to do so"; on the contrary, he sees ludic behaviours as biologically determined, therefore, "natural" for an early stage. Moreover, he discovers a certain evolution even within the domain of play, considering its coronation to be the games with rules, because they are more "ordered". In A. Pennycook's opinion, Piagetian psychology provided considerable support to the idea of colonial tutelage, with its adult/child dichotomies concisely expressed in statements like this one: "It is quite possible... that in many societies, adult thought does not reach that of propositional operations which develop between the ages of twelve and fifteen in our milieus".[87]

Clearly, such utterances go back to the doctrine of Social Darwinism affirming the racial superiority of northern European whites and to the famous Haeckelian phrase, according to which "phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny".[88] By superposing the development of an individual on that of its species, the recapitulation theory equated adulthood with the fullest human condition and infancy with the animal past. Of all creatures, it was the ape, which was chosen to symbolise the immature man by adepts of this pseudo-scientific racial theory. It is still common to

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[84] Singh's opinions at other times seem to confirm the latter reading; see *ibid.*, p. 127, p. 166 and particularly p. 84: "from playacting to disorder: it is the pattern".

[85] Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood, translated by* C. Cattegno *and* F. M. Hodgson, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd: London, 1962, p. 147.

[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

[87] Piaget, as quoted in A Pennycook, p. 61.

[88] See Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History*, London: Burnett Books Ltd., 1978, p. 217.

think of children as "little monkeys" since they are regarded as apish beings imitating adults.[89]

An excerpt from *Guerrillas* makes use of similar images:

> 'Twenty, thirty years ago, everybody was lifting weights. You would see people exercising in every back yard. [...] You remember how those b o y s [my emphasis] used to walk?'
> 'Wings,' Meredith said, and laughed. He put down his glass and acted out the posture: squaring his shoulders, raising his elbows, and letting his hands hang loose. 'The g o r i l l a w a l k [my emphasis]. But those were the needs of those days.'[90]

To better understand the meaning of this conversation, one should go back to the story "Until the soldiers came" included in the anthology *Miguel Street* (1959). Its protagonist, Edward, is doing his best in order to be accepted by the American soldiers that are stationed in Trinidad during the war. Beside infantilising features, Naipaul employs animal representations in order to convey his conception of colonial mimicry: "When Edward brought any American friends to his house he pretended that he didn't know us, and it was funny to see him walking with them, holding his arms in the American way, hanging loosely, like a gorilla's."[91] The Eurocentric character of such descriptions cannot be overlooked; as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam point out, "animalization" and "infantilization" are two key colonialist tropes.[92]

Such images also appear in non-fictional works, for example in the travelogue *The Middle Passage* where Naipaul describes the racial tensions in Trinidad with the words: "Like monkeys pleading for evolution, each claiming to be whiter than the other, Indians and Negroes appeal to the unacknowledged white audience to see how much they despise one another".[93] Or he renders the situation in Martinique as "the French colonial monkey-game".[94] It is not difficult then to see why the writer has been called a "postcolonial mandarin", a follower of imperial racial theories.

Interestingly enough, Naipaul makes visible the sources of his infamous imagery. In *Guerrillas*, it is the British Jane who speaks about "those black little

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[89] Cf. Piaget, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[90] *Guerrillas*, p. 135. It should be noticed that "Guerrillas", the title of the book, sounds almost like "gorillas".
[91] *Miguel Street*, p. 149.
[92] See Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 137-140.
[93] *The Middle Passage*, p. 78.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 218.

animals ferreting about in the rubbish dump",[95] thus provoking the indignation of the locals. More pregnant is, however, the dialogue in *The Mimic Men* between Ralph Singh and Mr. Deschampsneufs, which reveals this descendant of a French planter to be "an addict of racial theory":[96]

> He rejected simple racial divisions as a crudity. Instead he divided nations into the short-visioned, like the Africans, who remained in a state of nature; the long-visioned like Indians and Chinese, obsessed with thoughts of eternity; and the medium-visioned, like himself.[97]

The "state of nature" is expressed in the novel by means of animals, other than monkeys. Like apes, parrots are a suitable choice for conveying the idea of imitation: "Next to the house was a Negro barber-shop called The Kremlin – Negro barber-shops liked to attach some remote drama to themselves – with a caged parrot in the doorway".[98] Above all, blacks are compared to horses. There are several instances when this is done; first, the Deschampsneufs name their best stallion *Tamango*, after "that Mérimée story of the African chief, seller of slaves, himself treacherously enslaved, and finally a leader of revolt".[99] Then, in their house, Singh can see paintings that show "people landing on surfy beaches and being taken ashore on the backs of naked Negroes".[100] Here, it is obvious that the coloured are ridden like steeds. Their animality is emphasised by the lack of clothes, marking their belonging to Nature as opposed to Culture. Last but not least, Deschampsneufs junior proves to be an expert not only in horse breeding but also in eugenics:

> We went on to talk about selective breeding. Deschampsneufs laid down the restrictions he would apply. On this subject he was allowed a certain authority. It was known that in the slave days the Deschampsneufs had kept a slave-stud farm on one of the islets off Isabella; the Negroes there were said to be a super-race still. Eden, attempting to clown and perhaps also looking for a tribute to his own superb physique, said, 'Champ, you would let me breed?' Deschampsneufs considered him. 'It would be a pity to let the strain die out,' he said. 'Yes, Spite. I think we will let you breed. But we will have to cross you with a damn intelligent woman'.[101]

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[95] *Guerrillas*, p. 95.
[96] *The Mimic Men*, p. 186.
[97] *Loc. cit.*
[98] *The Mimic Men*, p.159.
[99] *Ibid.*, p. 149.
[100] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[101] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

What appears to be a friendly conversation among schoolmates is in fact the expression of a racial discourse, which regarded slaves as non-human beings to be used for agricultural purposes. The colonised, Nature's children, are in the coloniser's view also stupid, irrational creatures. This is a trait that I want to analyse in the next chapter.

### 2.2.3. Man-Man, the Madman and Other Barbarians

Animals are regarded as illogical; 'barbarians' as beasts. This is not a creation of modern imperialism, but has a tradition that goes back to Antiquity. As James Duncan points out, the Greek term *barbaros* "designated the non-Greek-speaking Other as irrational and thus less than fully human".[102] Foucault himself has remarked what he calls "the animality of madness", a theme surviving the centuries: "The animality that rages in madness dispossesses man of what is specifically human in him; not in order to deliver him over to other powers, but simply to establish him at the zero degree of his own nature".[103] Significantly, the English translation of the title of his study *Histoire de la Folie* emphasises the dichotomy 'madness' vs. 'civilisation'.[104]

Children, too, are considered to be irrational beings.[105] Moreover, like madmen, they occupy a position on the margins of Culture, as an article by Michael Newton clearly points out. Discussing the topic of the Savage Child in Kipling's work, Newton argues that Mowgli stands outside the condition of civilised society,

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[102] Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

[103] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, translated by* R. Howard, New York: Vintage Books, 1988 (1961), p. 74. *Madness and Civilization* is an important work in Lois McNay's opinion because it initiated the first "in a series of sustained and devastating critiques by Foucault of the forms inherited from the Enlightenment and which constitute the foundations of modern Western thought" (see Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, pp. 26-27).

[104] Comparing the marginalisation of madmen to that of the "uncivilised" colonised, Robert Young links the Foucaldian ship of fools to the "enforced migrations" of the slaves; see Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 2001, p. 395.

[105] According to David Buckingham, *op. cit.*, p. 33, children are defined as inherently irrational. See also James J. Preston, *op. cit.*, p. 93: "Animation is not given free reign in American culture. It is generally assigned to the realm of childhood. This is due to a rationalistic worldview that stresses a clear distinction between 'reality' and 'fantasy'. The splitting away of the imagination from the so-called 'real world' renders animation unacceptable for adult Americans, except under controlled conditions."

down on the evolutionary ladder. Very interesting is the fact that Mowgli is described as "demon, ghost, god, child, gun-boy, thief, and pre-historic man".[106]

Madness is an important subject with Naipaul; it should not surprise that is juxtaposed with the idea of childishness and animality. The best example is perhaps the character Man-Man in the homonymous story from the collection *Miguel Street.* His is a telling name ('Man-Man' is an intensifier in the Trinidadian dialect), which instead of connoting manliness and maturity, ironically suggests an infantile animal state.[107] Besides, it rhymes with 'madman'; however, the association is made explicit from the very beginning: "Everybody in Miguel Street said that Man-man was mad, and so they left him alone."[108] He is also a barbarian, a babbler of the imperial tongue, although he manages to cheat his interlocutor, 'the little man':

> And Man-man, looking at me solemnly, said in a mocking way, 'So you goes to school, eh ?'
> I said automatically, 'Yes, I goes to school.' And I found that without intending it I had imitated Man-man's correct and very English accent.

All day long, he does nothing else but write words like 'school' or 'cricket' on the pavement, correcting the mistakes from time to time. In that, he resembles another ludic figure, Ralph Singh's cousin Cecil. An excerpt from *The Mimic Men* shows this: "There was a small figure on the beach stamping on the sand. It was Cecil. He was stamping out his name in huge letters, really enormous letters."[109] There is a strong contrast between the authority of the *Logos* and Cecil's infantilism, here expressed by means of a diminishing image and at other times by the narrator's interventions like the following: "[f]or [him] childhood was the great time; he would never cease to regret its passing away"[110] or "[t]he cinema became Cecil's toy".[111] At least, he uses the English word in order to give himself a voice and an identity; on the contrary, Man-man sees in the ability to write correctly an end in itself and not a means.

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[106] Michael Newton, "Kipling and the Savage Child", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies,* Vol. 15, Nr.1, Autumn 1992, p. 13.
[107] This is also the case with the appellation 'Mr Biswas', as we have already seen.
[108] *Miguel Street*, p. 32. According to Caillois, madness is one of the perils lurking behind playful behaviour (cf. R. Caillois, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59).
[109] *The Mimic Men*, p. 121.
[110] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[111] *Ibid.*, p.179.

Man-man's animal side is epitomised by his canine companion: "The only friend he had was a little mongrel dog, white with black spots on the ears. The dog was like Man-man in a way, too. It was a curious dog".[112] His pet is the terror of the neighbourhood, because it defiles shirts and sheets that afterwards Man-man gets for free. Magically, "Man-man appeared to exercise a great control over the movement of his dog's bowels"[113]. With that, Naipaul enters once again into the twin realms of the scatological and the grotesque. Actually, the grotesque is perfectly fit to express the fusion of the human and bestial natures as Bakhtin indicates in the magisterial work *Rabelais and his World.* The name designated initially those paintings discovered in some Italian caves, representing chimerical personages, half human beings and half animals.[114]

Except for colonial discourse, another reason for Naipaul's interest in madmen is the familial background. His father's psychical troubles received an impressive literary expression in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*. There, the protagonist's irrational outburst coincides with a tropical storm threatening to blow his little barrack away. Particularly interesting is the description of the beginning of the tempest: "Soon it came. Isolated drops, rapping hard on the roof, like a slow roll of drums. The wind freshened, the rain slanted. Every drop that struck the uprights blotted, expanding, into the shape of a spear-head".[115] Madness as savagery is a stereotype confirmed by the use of images suggesting tribal warfare: the beating of drums and the throwing of spears. The same aggressiveness is present in the obsessive motif of the attacking ants. At first, it seems that it is raining with winged insects;[116] then, these regroup and threaten to bring death: "They were not the crazy ants, thin frivolous creatures who scattered at the slightest disturbance; they were the biting ants, smaller, thicker, neater, purple-black with a dull shine, moving slowly and in strict formation, as solemn and stately as undertakers".[117] Biswas is more like the crazy frivolous ants; he retires frightened into a corner, where he is surprised by

[112] *Miguel Street*, p. 34.
[113] *Ibid.*, p.35.
[114] M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, *transl. by* Hèlene Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 32.
[115] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 274.
[116] *Ibid.*, p. 275.
[117] *Ibid.*, p. 276.

his son Anand writing with his finger on the head: "Mr Biswas quickly pretended that he was playing with his hair".[118]

Equally threatening is Bryant from *Guerrillas*, "a young black man in jeans and a striped jersey, small and venomous in appearance, with his twisted face sweated and shiny, deliberately ugly with his pigtails, the pigtails like serpents, signals of aggression".[119] His irrationality is later certified by Jimmy Ahmed: "now he's gone mad with grief, a young boy mad think of it [...]".[120] But the Serpent is above all, one of the Evil's faces.

### 2.2.4. Half Children, Half Devils

In mediaeval bestiaries, the monkey stood for the forces of the darkness. Like the snake, it was regarded as a devilish being, since it was said to mockingly imitate God's creation, Man. Children too, may metamorphose into demons, as for example in William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*, which inverts Victorian myths of innocence and adventure to show another face of infancy, namely one of corruption and animality. However, such a negative representation of childhood is not a creation of the 20th century; we find it in Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden", published in 1899:

> Take up the White Man's burden –
> Send forth the best ye breed –
> Go bind your sons to exile
> To serve your captives' need;
> To wait in heavy harness
> On fluttered folk and wild –
> Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
> Half devil and half child. [121]

The image of the wild native, "half devil and half child" pertains to colonial discourse. It is indisputable that Naipaul has been influenced by it when writing a

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[118] *Ibid.*, p. 275.
[119] *Guerrillas*, p. 29.
[120] *Ibid.*, p. 222.
[121] Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden', in: Elleke Boehmer, *ed.*, *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998, p. 273.

novel like *Guerrillas*. Not only Bryant but also Jimmy has demonic features. According to Harry, another local character, the latter is a 'succubus'.[122] Suggestively, the word 'succubus', denoting a female demon, is used instead of the appropriate term 'incubus'; we have already seen that Jimmy's gender identity is a fluid one. The substance of erotic dreams, this evil spirit speaks for the debasement of sexuality in the past. A vehicle of such racist stereotypes is an excerpt from James Anthony Froude's travelogue about the British Caribbean colonies, entitled *The English in the West Indies; or, the Bow of Ulysses* (1888):

> A missionary told me that a connection rarely turns out well which begins with a legal marriage. The children scramble up anyhow, and shift for themselves like chickens as soon as they are able to peck. Many die in this way by eating unwholesome food, but also many live, and those who do live grow up exactly like their parents. It is a very peculiar state of things, not to be understood, as priest and missionary agree, without long acquaintance. There is evil, but there is not the demoralising effect of evil. They sin, but they sin only as animals, without shame, because there is no sense of doing wrong. They eat the forbidden fruit, but it brings with it no knowledge of the difference between good and evil. They steal, but if detected they fall back upon the Lord. It was de will of de Lord that they should do this or that. De Lord forbid that they should go against his holy pleasure. In fact these poor children of darkness have escaped the consequences of the Fall, and must come of another stock after all. [123]

All possible stereotypes from the register of the racial discourse conglomerate to create the portrait of "these poor children of darkness", the black inhabitants of the West Indies: infantilism, bestiality and evilness. One should notice that the source of this ethnographic description is the missionary, so it is natural for the tableau to receive biblical coloration as expressed in terms like "the forbidden fruit" or "the Fall". Froude's condescension is equally manifest in his parody of the Creole dialect, particularly of the use of the definite article "de". A "child of darkness" is also Bryant, Jimmy's double, waiting in the night to kill his master. Jimmy himself confesses in a letter that he and the boys who work at Thrushcross Grange, the agricultural commune, are "children of hell".[124] In this light, one could interpret his

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[122] *Guerrillas*, p. 24.
[123] James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies: Or, the Bow of Ulysses*, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 (1888), pp. 49-50.
[124] *Guerrillas*, p. 36.

desire to see fire everywhere as based on a demonic impulse. Landscape, too, is hellish:

> The hills smoked, as they did now every day from early morning: thin lines of white smoke that became the color of dust and blended with the haze. Above the settlements lower down, which showed ocher, drought had browned the hills; and through this brown the bush fires had cut irregular dark red patches. The asphalt road was wet-black, distorted in the distance by heat waves. The grass verges had been blackened by fire, and in some places still burned. Sometimes, above the noise of the car, Jane and Roche could hear the crackle of flames which, in the bright light, they couldn't see.[125]

Once again, the perspective is Eurocentric, since Jane and Roche are white Westerners.[126] This passage at the beginning of the novel has a parallel in Chapter 6, when Jane takes a taxi, after visiting Jimmy, with whom she has an affair. Looking out, she observes "the smoking hills, yellow in the mid-afternoon light".[127] More alarming are the driver's red eyes, which make her think: "I've been playing with fire".[128] In this context, the ludic metaphor expresses the Other's devilish nature, urgently needing the coloniser's parental guidance.[129]

In stark contrast to Jimmy or Bryant stands Ralph Singh's father, who is described in the book called *The Missionary Martyr of Isabella* (a Naipaulian invention) as an angelic being. Here is the excerpt, as retold by Ralph: "All of him was hidden except for his white turban, which the sun caught and turned to dazzle; and she thought that she saw an angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth."[130] Moreover, the white lady sees him "riding on his bicycle, as on an ass, to his Sabbath work";[131] this strongly suggests Christ gloriously entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Certainly, other natives are branded as adversaries of faith, reminding us of those who opposed Jesus: "Isabella became an almost Biblical land, full of symbols and portents and marks of God's glory, a land of stoic journeys through scoffing crowds, encounters

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[125] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[126] Obviously, the names Jane and Roche remind one of the protagonists of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. Perhaps, it is not a coincidence that the West Indian Bertha, the "madwoman in the attic", also starts a fire that destroys Rochester's house.
[127] *Guerrillas*, p. 77.
[128] *Loc. cit.*
[129] In *Guerrillas*, a possible incarnation of this parental guidance is Roche, who supervises Jimmy's agricultural project.
[130] *The Mimic Men*, p. 94.
[131] *Loc. cit.*

with khaki-clad officials hostile to the work, and disputations with devious Brahmins in oriental robes seeking to undermine the work".[132] The onlooker's transposition into another age is probably facilitated by the Orientalist assumption that the Asians should be regarded as captives of the past.

The joke is that after eulogising Kripalsingh, the young lady, the missionary's wife, is sent home by her much older husband. Her appreciation of a native may be explained by a secret passion if not by the similar position in the social hierarchy. As a woman, she is also a colonised, even if as a white enjoys certain privileges. On the one hand, we have the unnamed lady and Kripalsingh, both of whom are young and inexperienced; on the other hand, there stands the missionary's patriarchal figure, the teacher of barbarians. Obviously, power is concentrated in his hands: the power of representing and speaking for others. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that he silences Ralph Singh's parent: "But after this [the lady's return to her homeland] in *The Missionary Martyr of Isabella*, there was no more of my father."[133]

### 2.2.5. The Protestant Ethic versus Ludic Idleness

We have already seen that children and the so-called 'infantile' races have something demonic about them; play, too, would be evil in nature according to the adepts of the Protestant ethics. In Max Weber's opinion, capitalism is Puritanism's offspring; actually, an essential part of the Protestant moral code is the emphasis on hard work and financial success, which are regarded as indubitable proves of one's being in a state of grace.[134] Therefore, as Sutton-Smith remarks, religion and the work ethic have played an undeniable role in the denigration of ludic behaviour as "a waste of time, as idleness, as triviality, and as frivolity".[135] Another dichotomy was born: work versus play,[136] relegating the latter to the margins of culture.

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[132] *The Mimic Men*, p. 93.
[133] *Ibid.*, p. 94.
[134] See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, *transl. by* Talcott Parsons, *introd. by* Anthony Giddens, London: Routledge, 1992 (1904-5), particularly pp. 51-53, where Weber focuses on Benjamin Franklin.
[135] Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, p. 201.
[136] Its feeble echo resounds in Ralph Singh's words: "[...] I 'worked hard and played hard'"(*The Mimic Men*, p. 59).

In this context, play belongs to a sphere of idleness and madness.[137] In a previous chapter, I analysed the curious Naipaulian portrait of Man-man, the madman, by pointing out the protagonist's animal nature, which was argued to be an effect of colonial discourse. Now, it is high time to cast light upon the work ethic inherent in this story: "Man-man never worked."[138] The sequel "[b]ut he was never idle"[139] is certainly derisive, because all his activities have a ludic non-utilitarian component. Another character living in Miguel Street is labelled by a similar remark: "And yet Popo was never idle".[140] Obviously, the sentence should be read as one of Naipaul's ironic statements since Popo does not even repair his own house:

> The only thing that Popo, who called himself a carpenter, ever built was the little galvanized-iron workshop under the mango tree at the back of his yard. And even that he didn't quite finish. He couldn't be bothered to nail on the sheets of galvanized-iron for the roof, and kept them weighted down with huge stones. Whenever there was high wind the roof made a frightening banging noise and seemed ready to fly away. [141]

Instead, he chooses to play with children and to do what he poetically calls "the thing without a name".[142] If Man-man is crazy, Popo is a thief; their negative presentation should be seen as a clear signal for an underlying work ethic, which vilifies play. However, it is only in *Guerrillas* that we find a genuine repulsion towards those who do not labour. Jimmy, the playboy, is regarded by Roche as an incorrigible lazy person: "Roche laughed. 'Bathing? Jimmy's been working with you?".[143] The results of Jimmy's and his fellows' idleness are terrible; the agricultural commune has turned into a wasteland:

> They walked between the forest and the dry field, past the furrows where shiny green weeds grew out of the caked earth; past the abandoned red tractor marked *Sablich's*; past the crumbling thatched shed where long-stalked tomato seedlings yellowed in shallow boxes of dried earth; past human excrement laid in two places on the path itself.[144]

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[137] For the association of madness with idleness, see Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, p. 64.
[138] *Miguel Street*, p. 32.
[139] *Loc. cit.*
[140] *Miguel Street*, p. 8.
[141] *Loc. cit.*
[142] *Loc. cit.*
[143] *Miguel Street*, p. 9.
[144] *Guerrillas*, p. 14.

Childish, lazy, irrational and devilish: these are some epithets attributed to the colonised; they render the Empire's subjects as good-for-nothing, possibly even dangerous creatures. Consequently, the 'wild men' must be tamed before they strike back.

### 2.2.6. The Jail and the Movement of Play 'Indoors'

Certainly, the stereotypes propagated by imperial ideologues were an important means of controlling the natives. By infantilising them, these representations relegated the colonised to an inferior place, from where no escape would be possible. Nevertheless, fashioning was not the only instrument in securing the status quo; besides, there was an impressive institutional apparatus. When Sutton-Smith speaks about the domestication of childhood, he has in mind "the greater suppression and rationalization of the irrational [children]"[145] and the process of bringing play 'indoors'.[146]

In the case of the 'child-races', this 'indoors' may also be the jail.[147] The stories in *Miguel Street* are convincing examples for this practice; almost every ludic character ends up in prison: from Bogart, who plays all day long the game of cards 'Patience', to Popo, the creator of the 'thing without a name' or to Morgan, who is accused of pyromania, after his splendid fireworks show. Even Man-man gets into

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[145] Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, p. 151.

[146] The movement of play *indoors* is a component part of a so-called "domestication" of play, which in Sutton-Smith's opinion constituted "the major play event of the past 300 years". By that the New-Zealand anthropologist understands "the increasing control and supervision of play to get rid of its physical dangers and its emotional licenses"; see Brian Sutton-Smith, "Does Play Prepare the Future?", in: Jeffrey H. Goldstein, *ed.*, *Toys, Play and Child Development*, Cambridge UP, 1994, pp. 137-139. This rationalised play metamorphoses into an educational means to the taste of Enlightenment, helping children "progress", as Sutton-Smith argues, "to predictable stages of ever greater maturity" (Brian Sutton-Smith, "Conclusion: The Persuasive Rhetorics of Play", in: A. Pellegrini, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, p. 279). Obviously, Sutton-Smith has been inspired by Foucault's ideas on the confinement of the mad and on the domestication of the "irrational" as expressed in *Madness and Civilization*, even if he acknowledges the French critic's influence in a somewhat oblique manner; see Sutton-Smith, "Does Play Prepare the Future?", p. 137.

[147] In another study, *Discipline and Punish* [*Surveiller et punir*], Foucault even compares the pressures exerted on the madmen to those exerted on children, on the colonised and on prisoners: "Il ne faudrait pas dire que l'âme est une illusion, ou un effet idéologique. Mais bien qu'elle existe, qu'elle a une réalité, qu'elle est produite en permanence, autour, à la surface, à l'intérieur du corps par le fonctionnement d'un pouvoir qui s'exerce sur ceux qu'on punit – d'une façon plus générale sur ceux qu'on surveille, qu'on dresse et corrige, sur les fous, les enfants, les écoliers, les colonisés, sur ceux qu'on fixe à un appareil de production et qu'on contrôle tout au long de leur existence''; Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, Paris: Éditions

trouble, having succeeded in agitating local masses, despite his bad reputation: "The police took away Man-man. The authorities kept him for observation. Then for good."[148]

The most complex character of the book is perhaps Hat, who together with the child-narrator constantly recurs in the *Miguel Street* stories. Like his friends, Hat, too, is undeniably playful in nature. This is signalled from the very beginning of the story bearing his name: "Hat loved to make a mystery of the smallest things"[149] – as Huizinga convincingly argues, mystery and enigma are ludic phenomena.[150] With the children from the neighbourhood, Hat has a terrific relationship: he tells the kids stories and introduces them to the game of cricket. Although the narrator regards him with much more sympathy than other *Miguel Street* characters, Hat himself is described as an illogical person, who enjoys taking 'crazy' or 'impossible' bets, which he usually loses. In that, his gambling resembles what the reputed anthropologist Clifford Geertz, following Bentham, calls 'deep play': "Bentham's concept of 'deep play' is found in his *The Theory of Legislation*. By it he means play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from his utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all."[151] Therefore, Hat's behaviour is 'suspect' from the point of view of the local authorities. He even gets into trouble with the police: "Nothing serious, though. A little cockfighting here, some gambling there, a little drinking somewhere else, and so on."[152] Everything takes an end when Hat almost kills his girlfriend Dolly (a telling name), who has run away with another man. After a short process, he is put in prison. The description of the jail is particularly interesting: "Whenever I went to Carenage or Point Cumana for a bathe, I looked across the green water to the island of Carrera, rising high out of the sea, with its neat pink buildings".[153] On the one hand, we have a burlesque rendition of this British institution, which resembles the Pink House, the picturesque brothel in Miguel Street; on the other hand, the prison island of Carrera can be regarded as a mirror

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Gallimard, 1975, p. 34.

[148] *Miguel Street*, p. 39.

[149] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

[150] See J. Huizinga, *op. cit.*, p. 180 ff. The atmosphere of enigma and of puzzle reappears in a more recent Naipaulian novel, namely *The Enigma of Arrival*, as pointed out by Richard Allen, "The Enigma of Arrival and the Comfort of Influence", in: Purabi Panwar, *ed.*, *V. S. Naipaul*, p. 147.

[151] Geertz, as quoted in Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 106.

[152] *Miguel Street*, p. 161.

[153] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

image of Trinidad. Metaphorically, Trinidad becomes a kind of panopticon under European surveillance, a happy jail, which the narrator leaves, however, without regrets.

## 2.3. Colonial Education

### 2.3.1. The Schoolmaster Syndrome

Besides prison, imperial school was another institution meant to domesticate 'the wild'.[154] As Mangan argues, "[t]he outcome of an adherence to the 'child-race' theory was the Schoolmaster Syndrome"; this means that the Briton was aware of his obligation to "discipline, guide and protect" the "infantile" peoples which he had conquered.[155] Naipaul's writings are populated by memorable teachers – e.g. Major Grant in *The Mimic Men* – who serve the interests of the British Empire. Even native schoolmasters like Randolph, the main character of "A Christmas Story", are deeply convinced that they have the task to civilise the 'backward' Trinidadians; a Presbyterian convert, the Indian Randolph is doubly a promoter of Empire: as teacher and missionary.

In this context, play, too, became disciplined and in its turn, a disciplinary instrument; as such, it gave birth to what Mangan calls 'the games ethic', namely the complex of moral principles which the Victorians believed to underlie sportive activities. According to the respective scholar, the public-school model valuing the play-fields was transferred to the colonies, with the purpose of creating "a universal Tom Brown: loyal, brave, truthful, a gentlemen and, if at all possible, a Christian" since "[i]t was widely believed […] that its inculcation promoted not simply initiative and self-reliance but also loyalty and obedience";[156] this is a movement coming under scrutiny in the following chapter. [157]

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[154] In an interview with Foucault, Deleuze goes even further, by equating all schools with prisons: "Not only are prisoners treated like children, but children are treated like prisoners. Children are submitted to an infantilization which is alien to them. On this basis, it is undeniable that schools resemble prisons and that factories are its closest approximation" ("Intellectuals and Power", in: Donald F. Bouchard, *ed.*, *Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 210).

[155] J. A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986, p. 112.

[156] *Ibid.*, p. 18; see also pp. 110-112 and p. 187. C. L. R. James makes similar remarks when he says the following: "At school we learnt not only to play with the team. We were taught and learnt loyalty in the form of loyalty to the school. As with everything else in those days, I took it for granted. It was only long afterwards, after gruesome experience in another country, that I saw it for the specifically British thing that it was." (C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1983 [1963], p. 42).

[157] Actually, the "games ethic" reflects the belief that play may become an educational means, *paideia* (cf. Robert Wilson, *In Palamedes' Shadow*, p. 8); Brian Sutton-Smith would see in it the manifestation of what he calls "rhetorics of progress", which he associates with an Enlightenment

### 2.3.2. Sports, Courage and Fair Play

The 19th century saw folk-games being 'civilised' and transformed into an educational means, as indicated by E. Dunning and K. Sheard, the authors of *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players.*[158] However, even if Victorian manliness had to be put to the test on the playing fields of public schools,[159] play retained its secondary status, remaining nothing more than a Platonic copy. This becomes clear when one reads a symptomatic poem such as Henry Newbolt's *Vitaï Lampada* (1897), where a cricket match played among schoolmates prepares the protagonists to become heroes in a real battle.[160] 'The Game' is an euphemism for war; in Kipling's well-known novel *Kim* (1901), 'the Great Game' refers to the British military operations in Central Asia, designed to put an end to Russian threats.[161]

The militarist dimension of the so-called 'public school ethos' served the well-being of the Empire.[162] Even in Trinidad, it made its presence felt as conclusively proved by Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men*. One of the most severe teachers is Major Grant; moreover, boys are taught the drill from the very beginning: "And I am in a new school. Cecil[163] is also there. The first morning, the parade in the quadrangle. 'Right tweel, left tweel. Boys on the platform, left tweel, right tweel, left

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credo. In his study *Toys as Culture* (1986), Sutton-Smith has already drawn attention to a key figure of the English Enlightenment – the philosopher John Locke– by giving him credit for a changed attitude toward toys and play. In brief, Locke can be considered the founder of what Birgitta Almqvist terms the "educational toy tradition" (see Birgitta Almqvist, "Educational toys , creative toys," in: Jeffrey H. Goldstein, *ed.*, *Toys, Play and Child Development*, Cambridge UP, 1994, p. 47. However, to paraphrase Sutton-Smith, "rhetorics of progress" are accompanied by "rhetorics of frivolity"; there can exist no progress and no civilising mission without postulating the existence of an Inferior as well as of a Superior (cf. Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, pp. 204-205).

[158] Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players: A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*, Oxford: Martin Robertson & Co., 1979, p. 100 ff.

[159] See for example J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, *eds.*, *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987, p. 4.

[160] To that one should add Duke of Wellington's remark that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton – See Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985, p. 13.

[161] Cf. Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia*, Washington , D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999, p. xxiii.

[162] See John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002, p. 42. Significantly, the most important novel based on the "public school ethos" opens with the lines: "The Browns are a fighting family. One may question their wisdom, or wit, or beauty, but about their fight there can be no question." (Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's School Days by an Old Boy*, *ed. by* Hans Heim, Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1904 (1857), p.1.)

[163] By the way, the name of Ralph Singh's cousin reminds one of the famous imperialist, the Cape Colony Prime Minister Cecil Rhodes.

tweel. To the hall, march! Right and left tweel.'"[164] The respective ethos is expressed in another Naipaulian novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, in a very concise way: school must "form, not inform".[165] In Henry Newbolt's opinion, some could accuse this system of narrow-mindedness, but its merits would be indisputable: "Its defect was that it trained boys only for one kind of career, the career of soldiering and sport. Its great merit was that it made men, and not sneaks or bookworms, and that its direct objects were character and efficiency."[166] According to the highly influential doctrine of "muscular Christianity",[167] to be a man meant to possess moral qualities such as courage or sexual purity, but above all, an athletic body.[168]

As we have seen, Naipaul is not afraid of using infantilising representations when characterising the Trinidadian people. It does not come then as a surprise that his schoolboys do not display any 'manly' values; on the contrary, Ralph Singh, the later dandy and playboy, is haunted even as a child by "indecent" thoughts. When asked the feminine of 'husband', he must whisper the answer into the master's ear, precisely because he is aware of the sexual connotations of the word 'wife'.[169] More relevant is, however, the episode when Singh's headmaster discovers the boy's booklet with photographs of naked women: "Cecil said the book was mine and when I was asked I said it was so. I was not flogged. Instead I was regarded with awe, especially after I had repeated the sentence about not needing the pictures since I had 'used' them."[170] The "use" of the pornographic photos is a clear allusion to masturbation, one of the capital crimes a young man could commit, debasing him to the level of brutes, monkeys or effeminate beings.[171] Therefore, the only possible reaction in this atmosphere of Victorian prudery can only be shock and horror.

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[164] *The Mimic Men*, p. 97.
[165] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 25.
[166] Henry Newbolt, *The Book of the Happy Warrior*, London 1918, as quoted in J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, *eds.*, *Manliness and Morality*, p. 101.
[167] For a discussion of this concept, see Donald E. Hall, *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP,1994. In contrast, Norman Vance's book *The Sinews of the Spirit* makes use of the concept "Christian manliness", which stresses the spiritual side rather than the physical one.
[168] Cf. John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, p. 27 or Jonathan Rutherford, *Forever England: Reflections on Masculinity and Empire*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997, p. 15.
[169] *The Mimic Men*, p. 96.
[170] *Ibid.*, p. 110.
[171] See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity", in: Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman, *eds.*, *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990, pp. 160-170, particularly p.161 and p. 163.

The public school spirit fails to get established at Isabella Imperial,[172] where Singh studies:

> Isabella Imperial had been divided some time before, quite arbitrarily, by a headmaster fresh from England, into houses, the idea no doubt being that the division would encourage team spirit and competitiveness. The idea had fallen flat.[173] But the houses and their emblems, devised by the same master, had remained. They came to life once a year, on sports day.[174]

No longer a carrier of moral values, sport resembles a ritual devoid of any meaning. This is expressed again and again by Ralph Singh: "I felt again the unimportance of my endeavour.[...] The sports began and the grounds were presently a confusion of unrelated and apparently private activities".[175] The sports episode brings to the foreground another 'manly' value, namely courage. Discussing the concept of 'muscular Christianity', David Rosen remarks Thomas Carlyle's notion of heroic manliness, put in words like the following: "A man shall and must be valiant; he must march forward, and quit himself like a man".[176] Singh seems to lack this moral trait, too. Fear paralyses the boy and leaves him unable to enter the school running competition: "But when I came to the residential area in which Isabella Imperial was set, something of the Saturday-afternoon lassitude of silent, wide-open houses made itself felt. My jumpiness returned; I was powerless to check it. [...] My courage ebbed and was replaced by a type of weariness."[177] Interestingly enough, Ralph Singh has had this feeling even at breakfast, when he recalls a 'shameful' dream:

> It was a double dream, the dream within the dream, when the dreamer, fearful for the reality of his joy, questions himself whether he is dreaming and decides he is not. I had dreamt that I was a baby again and at my mother's breast. What joy! The breast on my cheek and mouth: a consoling weight, the

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[172] The school is largely based on Queen's Royal College, Port of Spain, where Naipaul was a pupil. For more details about the history of QRC and about colonial education in Trinidad, see Carl C. Campbell, "New Perspectives on Secondary Education in Trinidad and Tobago 1926-1935", in: Ruby Hope King, *ed*., *Education in the Caribbean: Historical Perspectives*, Mona: University of the West Indies, 1987, pp. 145-162.

[173] The absence of the team spirit is also remarked in a non-fictional text, the travelogue *The Middle Passage*: "[F]or a long time to come, the West Indians will not be able to play as a team. The individual performance was what mattered"(p.36).

[174] *The Mimic Men*, p. 124.

[175] *Ibid.*, p. 125.

[176] Thomas Carlyle, as quoted in David Rosen, "The Volcano and the Cathedral: Muscular Christianity and the Origins of Primal Manliness", in: Donald E. Hall, *Muscular Christianity*, p. 21.

[177] *The Mimic Men*, p. 125.

> closeness of soft, smooth flesh. It had been at dusk, in a vague setting, no lights, in a back veranda, all around a blur of dark bush. My mother rocked and I had the freedom of her breast. A dream? But no, I was not dreaming. What pain then, what shame, to awaken![178]

Passing over the baroque dimension of this passage, in which the borderline between dream and reality is fluid (marked by words such as 'dusk', 'vague', 'blur'), one has to notice again the infantile nature of the protagonist, caught at the stage Freud calls 'oral': it is the mouth and the cheek which replace sight in a tactile euphoria, suggested by the sentence "a consoling weight, the closeness of soft, smooth flesh".

However, Ralph's teacher falsely interprets the boy's abandonment as a gesture of fair play, coming out of a desire to protect his younger rivals: "And on Monday morning my form master said to me, in front of the class, 'That was a very sporting gesture of yours on Saturday. Though I had no doubt you would do the right thing.'"[179] Still, anxiety remains, marking the failure of the colonised to prove his manliness: "[T]he reputation as a sportsman not only endured but was enhanced; and the day became another of my secrets which I feared I might give away in my sleep or under chloroform, before an operation."[180]

In the short story suggestively entitled "The Coward", Big Foot, the protagonist, takes up running, but not in order to show his manly qualities. On the contrary, this happens because he wants to escape being bullied by other boys:

> 'He was thin thin when he was small, you know, and we use to have a helluva time chasing him all over the place. He couldn't run at all.'
> I felt sorry for Big Foot.
> I said, 'How that funny?'
> Hat said, 'You go hear. You know the upshot? Big Foot come the best runner out of all of we. In the school sports he run the hundred yards in ten point four seconds. That is what they say, but you know how Trinidad people can't count time.'[181]

Even as an adult, in spite of his repute as a tough guy, Big Foot remains a coward; when he hears a strange noise in the night, begins to run "for all he was worth".[182] The final proof of Big Foot's immaturity is nevertheless his boxing match with an Englishman pretending to be a champion of the Royal Air Force. Big Foot loses and

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[178] *Loc. cit.*
[179] *The Mimic Men*, p. 127.
[180] *Loc. cit.*
[181] *Miguel Street*, p. 53.
[182] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

he cannot take that like a 'man': "Big Foot was in tears. He was like a boy, and the more he cried, the louder he cried, and the more painful it sounded."[183]

Another story of failure to comply to the public school ethos is that of Hari, the Indian boy in "The Heart", from the collection *A Flag on The Island*. The text starts symbolically with the boy's dropping out of all scout organisations and giving up sports:

> When they decided that the only way to teach Hari to swim would be to throw him into the sea, Hari dropped out of the sea scouts. Every Monday afternoon for a term he had put on the uniform, practised rowing on the school grounds, and learned to run up signals and make knots. The term before he had dropped out of the boy scouts, to avoid going to camp. At the school sports the term before that he had entered for all the races for the under-elevens, but when the time came he was too shy to strip (the emblem of his house had been fancifully embroidered on his vest by his mother), and he didn't run.[184]

Beside the last sentence echoing the sports episode in *The Mimic Men*, one can also remark the mentioning of the scouts. According to John Springhall, Baden-Powell, the founder of the movement, conceived Scouting as a form of training meant to support the young on their way to adulthood and prevent decadence.[185] Manliness is a key word in the short story 'The Heart', too. This becomes apparent in the second paragraph, which links once again gender identity with sports: "Hari [...] had a weak heart [...] was unexercised and fat. He would have liked to play cricket, fancying himself as a fast bowler, but he was never picked for any of the form teams. He couldn't run quickly, he couldn't bowl, he couldn't bat, and he threw like a girl."[186] Moreover, the boy is a coward, permanently terrorised by a couple of Alsatian dogs.

Another key concept is fair play. The game Hari is unable to take part in has come to stand for gentlemanly behaviour as shown by the expression 'it's not cricket'.[187] Certainly, his play with the puppy received as a birthday present 'is not

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[183] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[184] "The Heart", in: V. S. Naipaul, *A Flag on the Island*, London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1970 (1967), p. 123.

[185] John Springhall, "Building Character in the British Boy: the Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-Class Adolescents, 1880-1914", in: J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, *eds.*, *Manliness and Morality*, p. 53.

[186] "The Heart", p.123.

[187] See John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, p. 43. In a review of C.L.R. James's classic *Beyond a Boundary*, Naipaul sees fair play as a capital virtue of cricket, as he writes the following: "Consider now the history of the islands: slavery until 1834, indentured labour until 1917. And then consider the cricket code: gentlemanliness, fair play, teamwork. The very words are tired and, in the West Indian situation, ridiculous, irrelevant. But they filled a need. In islands that had

cricket'. Although Baden-Powell urged Scouts to be patient and kind with animals,[188] Hari tortures the dog, proving to be a 'savage' with nothing of a gentleman in him. At the end, when this dog dies, his tears are not of compassion but of frustration.

The Scout ideals are present also in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*; thus, the protagonist's motto is "paddle your own canoe",[189] taken from Baden-Powell's *Rovering to Success* (1922) and inspired by Samuel Smiles,[190] whose book with the telling title *Self-Help* constitutes a continual source of inspiration to Mohun Biswas. However, he cannot put its message into practice since he meets the resistance of his Hindu family as well as the unfavourable conditions of colonial life.[191]

We have seen so far that the Trinidadians depicted by Naipaul systematically fail to become 'men', either because they reject so-called masculine values or are confronted with insurmountable difficulties, like in the case of Mr Biswas. We would expect then such characters as Indarsingh from *The Mystic Masseur* to be regarded no longer as infantile since they actively embody the public school ethos:

> There was another Indian boy, called Indarsingh, living in the house at Dundonald Street. He was also at the Queen's Royal College, and although he was six months younger than Ganesh he was three forms ahead. He was a brilliant boy and everybody who knew him said he was going to be a great man. At sixteen Indarsingh was making long speeches in the Literary Society Debates, reciting verses of his own at Recitation Contests, and he always won the Impromptu Speech Contests. Indarsingh also played all games, not very well, but he had the sportsman's instincts and it was this that caused him to be held up to the boys as an ideal.[192]

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known only brutality and proclaimed greed, cricket and its code provided an area of rest, a release for much that was denied by the society: skill, courage, style: the graces, the very things that in a changed world are making the game archaic. And the code that came with the game, the code recognized by everyone, whatever his race or class, was the British public-school code […]. With the new nationalism and confidence, the public-school code has become as anachronist as the masters who taught it. What new code will be developed in a society so clearly British-made?" (V.S. Naipaul, "Cricket", in: V.S. Naipaul, *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1972, pp. 18-22). If Naipaul regards cricket as an embodiment of "cultural imperialism" as he insists on its Britishness, Allen Guttmann argues that the diffusion of Western sports all over the globe should be interpreted in the light of another concept, namely "cultural hegemony", which would present the ruled as having "their say"; see Allen Guttmann, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism*, New York: Columbia UP, 1994, p. 6.

[188] See Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship, ed. by* Elleke Boehmer, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004 (1908), p. 108.

[189] V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 101.

[190] According to Allen Warren, "Popular Manliness: Baden-Powell, Scouting, and the Development of Manly Character", in: J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, *eds.*, *Manliness and Morality*, p. 200. The critic sees in the individual values promoted by Baden-Powell a denial of team spirit; see *ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

[191] See *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 75 and pp. 104-105.

[192] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 22.

Nevertheless, he, too, fails to become 'a great man', despite his education. His later conduct follows indeed principles like fair play (he fights a clean election, unlike his rival, the trickster Ganesh[193]) and sports still matter to him.[194] But Indarsingh is immature, popular with children and seen as a boy by adults.[195] At this stage, we suspect that Naipaul might have adopted an essentialist point of view regarding his compatriots, since they appear as infantile people, whatever they do.

### 2.3.3. 'Invented Traditions': Britishness on Dis-play

In *The Middle Passage*, his first travelogue, Naipaul states that the only identity colonial Trinidadians could assume was the British one.[196] All that mattered was the British Empire: "Australia was more important than Venezuela, which we could see on a clear day."[197] This distorted space is matched by a distorted temporality, which gives once again priority to the metropolitan centre: "The England of 1914 was the England of yesterday; the Trinidad of 1914 belonged to the dark ages."[198]

'Invented traditions' certainly contributed to this sense of belonging to the British Empire, besides inculcating values like 'the public school spirit'.[199] Obviously, educational sports constituted a complex of symbolic practices, close to ritual; that is also what Ralph Singh, the main character in *The Mimic Men*, feels and thinks. Before going to the running competition, he notices the ritual nature of the preparations and that embarrasses him.[200] His remarks emphasise the impression of theatricality and display:

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[193] See *ibid.*, p. 201.
[194] Indarsingh talks to people at bicycle, football and cricket clubs. See *ibid.*, p. 192.
[195] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 201.
[196] See *The Middle Passage*, p. 36.
[197] *Loc. cit.*
[198] *Loc. cit.*
[199] According to Eric Hobsbawm, "invented traditions" are constructed ritual complexes, which belong to three overlapping types: "a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour"; Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in: Eric Hobsbawm, *ed.*, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983, p. 9.
[200] See *The Mimic Men*, p. 124.

> I do not wish to claim too much for the playing fields of Isabella Imperial, or rather – to diminish the grandeur and destroy the comparison the plural unavoidably evokes – its somewhat ragged cricket pitch. But it was there that I acquired a certain composure and a certain attitude. I could not at the time formulate that attitude. But it was an attitude, I now see, towards the fact of an audience.[201] And it was this. An audience is never important. An audience is made up of individuals most of whom are likely to be your inferiors.[202]

In this case, cricket also represents a display of authority, of which Singh will later make use as a politician: "The public speaker was only another version of the absurd schoolboy cricketer, self-consciousness suppressed, the audience ignored, at the nets of Isabella Imperial".[203] The same game becomes a symbol of cultural imperialism in *Miguel Street*, where the black character Hat cries ecstatically "White people is God, you hear!",[204] while watching the Trinidadian team play against Jamaica. Here, cricket is not an expression of Trinidadian identity, like for example in C.L.R. James's book *Beyond a Boundary*, but a recognition of Empire's racial hierarchy.

Likewise a display of power on the part of the British is the organisation of the Malay Cup once a year at Christmas. The role of the press is tremendous; the local newspaper continuously reminds everybody that racing is "the sport of kings". *The Inquirer* also tells the story of the Malay Cup, thus placing it on the background of the British Empire:

> It had been given to the Turf Club at the turn of the century by the Governor, Sir Hugh Clifford. Though it was on Isabella that Sir Hugh exercised his first colonial governorship, he regarded all his service in the Caribbean, in Isabella and elsewhere, as exile from Malaya, to which he was devoted; and he spent much of his time in Government House writing a book of Malayan memories called *Coast and Kampong* which, after an unfavourable review by Joseph Conrad, committed him to the further literary exercise of a lengthy correspondence, ripening to friendship, with the as yet known novelist. The Malay Cup was Sir Hugh's parting gift to the island he had liked less than literature.[205]

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[201] In G. P. Stone's opinion, "display" for spectators is "*dis* –play", which loses its playful nature and turns into a type of ritual. (G. P. Stone, as mentioned in: Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, p. 12).
[202] *The Mimic Men*, p. 122.
[203] *Ibid.*, p. 123.
[204] *Miguel Street*, p. 158.
[205] *The Mimic Men*, pp.148 -149.

Unlike other boys, Singh is not impressed by this event but even he is forced to learn a little about it. Puritan undertones can be heard when he says: "I hated racing; I hated the gambling that went with it".[206] Except for sports, school displays imperial insignia such as the portrait of King George V;[207] after many years, Singh still associates his college with the coronation ceremonial, whose emblem, the crown, is of dazzling weight.[208] Ralph is not the only person who is touched by the power of British school symbols; the novel *A House for Mr Biswas* testifies that: "The college had no keener parent than Mr Biswas. He delighted in all its rules, ceremonies and customs".[209] An educational show that enchants him is the Science Exhibition, a smaller version of the Great Exhibition of 1851, similar, however, in its proud presentation of the British Empire's technical achievements. The solemnity of the moment is endangered by Biswas, who is on the point of misusing a microscope, telling his son Anand: "Hide me while I pull out this slide. Just going to cough and spit on it. Then we could both have a look."[210]

Monuments were part of this process of staging the British Monarchy.[211] The headmaster Titus Hoyt from *Miguel Street* uses an excursion to Fort George, the fortification built in 1803, when the French were planning to invade Trinidad, as a means of inculcating patriotic feelings and of introducing the boys to Empire's history. Unfortunately for him, the boys are not too enthusiastic about that and agree to come only when Hoyt tells them that at the top of the hill there is a stream where they could bathe. It is clear that the monument does not inflame the pupils' imagination: "We saw a few old rusty guns at the side of the path and heaps of rusty cannon-balls [...] We got to the top, had a quick look at the graveyard where there were a few tombstones of British soldiers dead long ago; and we looked through the telescope [...]".[212] Moreover, when they discover the absence of the stream, the children get angry. One of them, Boyee even insults the teacher, who is pleading in vain: "Remember, Boyee, you are the secretary of the Miguel Street Literary and

[206] *Ibid.*, p.148.
[207] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 23.
[208] *The Mimic Men*, p. 97.
[209] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 473.
[210] *Loc. cit.*
[211] Cf. David Cannadine, "The British Monarchy, c. 1820-1977", in: Eric Hobsbawm, *ed.*, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 127-128.
[212] *Miguel Street*, p. 77.

Social Club. Remember that you have just attended a meeting of the Youth Association as our delegate. Remember these things."[213]

One of the most important 'invented traditions', connected with school, was Empire Day. Devised by a certain Meath, this half-holiday took place on May 24th, the birthday of Queen Victoria, Empress of India; pupils had to listen to a patriotic address from the headmaster, sing songs like 'Rule, Britannia' and participate in various festive activities emphasising the unity of Empire.[214] Surprisingly, this event is not described in Naipaul's fiction, but we find a feeble echo in the non-fictional work *The Middle Passage*. Reviewing an article by Dr Hugh Springer considering West Indian civilisation to be directly inspired by the Christian-Hellenic values of virtue, knowledge and faith, Naipaul labels it as 'a good Empire Day exhortation' because of 'its unintentional irony' and 'its ignoring of the squalid history of the region'.[215]

An 'invented tradition' presented at large in the hybrid novel *A Way in the World* is May Day. In the context of the imperial school, this festivity had nothing revolutionary about it; on the contrary, it helped make low-class girls whose fathers were in jail 'respectable':

> One day, at a staff meeting in that very hot school with the glare all around, one of the senior teachers, a Presbyterian Indian lady, suggested that we should have a May Day fair, to introduce the girls to the idea. Everybody agreed, and we decided that the thing to do would be to ask the girls to make flower displays or arrangements, and to give a prize to the girl who did the best display.[216]

Although based on an old tradition, May Day becomes a constructed holiday on Trinidadian soil; if in Britain it marks the beginning of spring and Nature's revival, it makes no sense "in that very hot school with the glare all around". Significantly, the idea comes from a Presbyterian Indian lady, a person whose mind has already been colonised. Ironically, the person chosen to judge the floral creations is Leonard Side, who both gives cooking courses at the Women's Auxiliary Association and dresses

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[213] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[214] Cf. J. A. Mangan, "'The Grit of Our Forefathers': Invented Traditions, Propaganda and Imperialism", in: MacKenzie, John M., *ed.*, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986, pp. 130-135.
[215] *The Middle Passage*, p. 63.
[216] *A Way in the World*, p.2.

dead bodies. All of a sudden, the May Day fair and its flower displays receive morbid connotations, prefiguring perhaps the collapse of the British Empire. At any rate, this episode is one of the moments when Naipaul undermines imperial values and practices.

## 2.4. Anti-Eurocentric Voices

### 2.4.1. Demystifying the Familial Idyll

The avalanche of infantilising representations shows a writer under the spell of colonial discourse; nevertheless, Naipaul surprises from time to time by subverting imperial assumptions. This is obviously the case when he attacks the 'family' metaphor, the dominant image for Empire, which depicts England as mother and the colonies as children needing parental guidance.[217] Not that he disagrees with the idea that the subjugated peoples are immature, but he rejects the idyllic view of the colonial sons and daughters bursting of joy and grateful to the metropolis, deeply rooted in the British mind.[218]

On the contrary, Naipaul makes extensive use of the bastard metaphor, which indicates the hideousness of colonial relationships. In the essay 'The Little Bastard Worlds of V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and *A Flag on the Island*', bearing a title inspired by one of Ralph Singh's remarks concerning his native island, Anthony Boxill says the same: "Naipaul is convinced that the history of the West Indies is one of brutality and exploitation and he is too rigorous a thinker to allow himself to glamorize and thus ascribe virtue to slavery or colonialism. The bastard world cannot be dealt with by pretending that it is not bastard."[219]

One of the most shocking images illustrating the mistreatment of the bastard native is to be found in the novel *The Suffrage of Elvira*. The person after whom the district is named was the wife of a planter. According to the legend, she had a Creole illegitimate child that she kills; this is a story which seems to haunt forever Trinidad and its inhabitants:

> Herbert knew all about the ghost of the cocoa-house, but ghosts, like the dark, didn't frighten him. The ghost of the cocoa-house was a baby, a baby Miss

[217] For a discussion of the "family" metaphor, see Ansgar Nünning, "Das Britische Weltreich als Familie: Empire-Metaphern in der spät-viktorianischen Literatur als Denkmodelle und als Mittel der historisch-politischen Sinnstiftung", in: Vera and Ansgar Nünning, *eds.*, *Intercultural Studies: Fictions of Empire*, Heidelberg: Winter, 1996, pp. 91-120; M. Daphne Kutzer, *Empire's Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books*, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000, p. 16; Jo-Ann Wallace, "De-Scribing *The Water-Babies*: 'The child' in post-colonial theory", in: C. Tiffin, A. Lawson, *eds.*, *De-scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 171-184, in particular pp. 175-176.

[218] As pointed out by A. Nünning, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[219] Anthony Boxill, "The Little Bastard Worlds of V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and *A Flag on the Island*", *International Fiction Review*, 3 , New Brunswick, 1976, p. 17.

> Elvira herself had had by a negro servant at the time the cocoa-house was being built. The story was that she had buried it in the foundations, under the concrete steps at the back. Many people, many Spaniards in particular, had often heard the baby crying; some even seen it crawling about in the road near the cocoa-house.[220]

Symbolically, the foundation of the house mirrors the foundation of the colony; it is clear that such myths cannot give birth to a proud nation, certain of its origins and destiny. Bryant, from *Guerrillas*, is another bastard; he is not, however, directly exploited by the metropolitan centre, but by Jimmy, a native, who has gone 'English'. He suffers rape and turns into a murderer, only because he does not have a better family.

Michael X, on whom the fictional character Jimmy is based, provides the connection with another story, this time from the experimental work *A Way in the World*. Chapter 3 has an obvious metafictional dimension as Naipaul is in search of an appropriate narrator:

> To make the narrator a writer or traveller would be true to the actual experience, but then the fictional additions would be quite transparent. Can the narrator be a man in disguise, a man on the run? That would be true about the region. In 1971 Michael X, the Trinidad Black Power man, after he had killed two people in Trinidad, went to Guyana (physically like the country of the narrative) and made for the interior, to hide.[221]

This unnamed narrator, be it Michael X or not, fascinates the two Amerindian boys, who guide him in the jungle, because he supposedly has a house in England. Lucas and Mateo even accept paedophilic perversions in order to be able to accompany the narrator back to Europe. This is just one more cheat in a series initiated by Walter Raleigh's voyage to El Dorado, as the end of the chapter makes clear: "He lifted out the material, fawn-coloured, perished, but recognizably a doublet of Tudor times, new clothes of three hundred and fifty years before, relic of an old betrayal".[222] Instead of helping the natives live better, the Englishmen leave them some clothes, symbols of a 'civilised' world that looks out-fashioned with the passing of time.

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[220] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 131.
[221] *A Way in the World*, pp. 45-46.
[222] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

### 2.4.2. Children with power

Certainly, the image of the powerless Child/Colonised is predominant in Naipaul's work, but moments of resistance against the colonial apparatus are also present. Particularly humorous is Mr. Biswas's friendship with his schoolmate Alec; one of their 'exploits' merits being quoted in full length:

> With this boy, whose name was Alec, Mr Biswas became friendly. The colours of Alec's clothes were a continual surprise, and one day he scandalized the school by peeing blue, a clear, light turquoise. To excited enquiry Alec relied, 'I don't know, boy. I suppose is because I is a Portuguese or something'. And for days he gave solemn demonstrations which filled most boys with disgust at their race. [223]
>
> It was to Mr Biswas that Alec first revealed his secret, and one morning recess, after Alec had given his demonstration, Mr Biswas dramatically unbuttoned and gave his. There was a clamour and Alec was forced to take out the bottle of Dodd's Kidney Pills. In no time the bottle was empty, except for some half a dozen pills which Alec said he had to keep. The pills, like the red bodice, belonged to his sister-in-law. 'I don't know what she going to do when she find out,' Alec said, and to those boys who still begged, he said, 'Buy your own. The drugstore full of them.' And many of them did buy their own, and for a week the school's urinals ran turquoise; and the druggist attributed the sudden rise in sales to the success of the Dodd's Kidney Pills Almanac which, in addition to jokes, carried story after story of the rapid cures the pills had effected on Trinidadians, all of whom had written the makers profusely grateful letters of the utmost articulateness, and being photographed.[224]

This is obviously not an appropriate behaviour for a British school, resembling the transgressive activities pertaining to the medieval school festivals described by M. Bakhtin.[225] We should speak, following Sutton-Smith, about 'hidden rhetorics' or 'hidden agendas', illicit play forms that constitute children's reaction to adult attempts to 'domesticate' their world. Sutton-Smith's concepts are based on a book by James C. Scott, entitled *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), from which I would like to quote the following: "Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represents a critique of power spoken behind the

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[223] Here, colour functions again as a racial/ethic marker, but in an ironic and unexpected context.
[224] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 45.
[225] See M. M. Bakhtin, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse", in: Michael Holquist, *ed.*, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp. 72-73.

back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed".[226]

Mr Biswas and Alec do all kind of mischief: they lay nails on the railway track, smoke cigarettes, tear off their shirt buttons and play marbles, fact reproved by their teacher Lal, who considers the game 'low'.[227] However, the conflict may also be open. When the teacher punishes Biswas to write 'I am an ass' on the blackboard, the kid makes fun of him by outlining contemptuous letters and thus, returns to his desk as a hero. Another forthright conflict between pupil and teacher is described in *The Mimic Men*. This time, the colonial implications are more visible. On the one side of the barricade there stands Major Grant, on the other side, his pupils of African or Indian origin: "A Negro boy with an extravagantly jutting head could, for instance, be Mango to everyone. So now I became Guru. Major Grant gave the name and popularized it.[...] I had learned that the only way to handle the Major was to be brutal in return."[228] His racism transpires in the way he calls the schoolboys: Browne, the black pupil, receives the name of Blue-cart Browne, in short Blue, since Major Grant predicts him the career of a rubbish collector. Browne/Blue always finds an answer to the Major's ironic remarks:

> Browne came to school late one morning.
> 'Late this morning, Blue? Been making rounds as usual?'
> 'As usual,' Browne said. 'There was a lot of trash on Rupert Street.'
> A defeat for the Major: He lived in Rupert Street [...].[229]

Moreover, as the teacher continues his attacks, Browne protests; at first by banging his desk lid, then by walking out of the classroom. There is still one category of children/adolescents with power – that of clever schoolboys who appropriate British ways and employ them in the game of politics. Foam and Lorkhoor, who used to participate in the debates of the Social Club initiated by Teacher Francis, manage the election campaign of the two main candidates in the district of Elvira. These characters from *The Suffrage of Elvira* are matched by a personage in the novel *The Mystic Masseur*, the unnamed boy, who edits a political newspaper and counsels Ganesh, helping the latter win the leadership of the Hindu community.

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[226] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, as quoted in B. Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, p. 115.
[227] See *A House for Mr Biswas*, pp. 45-46.
[228] *The Mimic Men*, p.140.
[229] *Loc. cit.*

All in all, these positive examples do not completely counterbalance the infantilising images present in Naipaul's work, but at least, cast a ray of hope in an otherwise gloomy fictional universe.

## 2.5. The Autobiography of Childhood and Adolescence

### 2.5.1. Trivia

Taking into account that Naipaul left his native island at the age of 18, we could say that Trinidad is practically 'condemned' to be associated in his writings with juvenility. Therefore, Naipaul's Trinidadian works must contain features specific to the literary genre known as the 'Autobiography of Childhood and Adolescence'. Of particular interest are the so-called 'trivia' elements, which contribute themselves to the portrayal of this Caribbean isle as a frivolous space.

According to Richard N. Coe, 'trivia' are "those minutiae of child-delight or torment that are frankly inadmissible in the domain of 'serious' literature"; they have to be inserted into an autobiography so that this could remain faithful to the childhood experience, which is necessarily trivial by adult standards.[230] Such 'insignificant' things are for example the childish toys and games present in Naipaul's early Trinidadian novels and stories, which are partly responsible for the more joyous atmosphere characterising this period of creation. A recurrent motif is that of the jocose dog; at first, it appears in the short story "The Enemy", written in 1955: "My father brought home a dog one day. We called it Tarzan. He was more of a playful dog than a watch-dog, a big hairy brown dog, and I would ride on its back."[231] The image is taken over in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*, inclusively the name of the dog, which has imperial reverberations. In *The Suffrage of Elvira*, we come across the puppy ironically called Tiger; this appellation, too, belongs to a colonial geography, suggesting other British possessions than Trinidad. Interestingly enough, all three texts deconstruct the picture of a happy childhood as they let the spectre of death, embodied by the killed animals, enter the scene. However, there is seemingly no instance that would label these scenes of play as shameful or trivial.

On the contrary, the following games suffer the judgement of the 'adult' eye:

> [Mr Biswas] played at house with his sister Dehuti. They mixed yellow earth with water and made mud fireplaces; they cooked a few grains of rice in

[230] See Richard N. Coe, *When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, p. xii and p. 211.
[231] V. S. Naipaul, "The Enemy", in: *A Flag on the Island*, London: André Deutsch, 1970 (1967), p. 79.

> empty condensed milk tins; and, using the tops of tins as baking-stones, they made rotis.
>
> In these amusements Prasad and Pratap took no part. Nine and eleven respectively, they were past such frivolities, and had already begun to work, joyfully cooperating with the estates in breaking the law about the employment of children. They had developed adult mannerisms. They spoke with blades of grass between their teeth; they drank noisily and sighed, passing the back of their hands across their mouths; they ate enormous quantities of rice, patted their bellies and belched; and every Saturday they stood up in line to draw their pay.[232]

The fragment is very instructive, not only because it shows colonial exploitation in all its cruelty, which is denounced by the auctorial voice, but also because it reminds the reader once again that oppositions of the type adult–child (not to speak of the dichotomies white–black, man–woman) are to a large extent cultural constructs: adult behaviours may be adopted by underage persons. More importantly, the passage shows that childhood is not trivial in itself and that frivolity is a matter of perspective. This is an aspect I would like to concentrate on in the ensuing pages.

### 2.5.2. Changing Points of View

Critics unanimously agree that at a certain moment (usually equated with the writing of the travelogue *The Middle Passage* in 1962), Naipaul's tone changed drastically, becoming more pessimistic and even politically incorrect.[233] According to Charles Michener, who interviewed the writer, Naipaul would have adopted a 'child's view' up to the novel *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961).[234] Thus, the author's benevolent attitude to Trinidad is linked to the childish perspective; indeed, we can detect major differences between the boy's and the adult's viewpoints. This schizoid position is visible as early as 1959 in *Miguel Street* where the narrator passes from delight with the picturesque characters in his neighbourhood to disenchantment:

> A long time. But it was just three years, three years in which I had grown up and looked critically at the people around me. I no longer wanted to be like Eddoes. He was so weak and thin, and I hadn't realised that he was so small.

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[232] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 22.
[233] See for example, Karl Miller's "Introduction", pp. xiii-xvi.
[234] Charles Michener, "The Dark Visions of V.S. Naipaul", in: Feroza Jussawalla, *ed.*, *Conversations with V.S. Naipaul*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997, p. 69.

> Titus Hoyt was stupid and boring, and not funny at all. Everything had changed.
>
> When Hat went to jail, part of me had died.[235]

Significantly, the 'mature' perspective is accompanied by the miniaturisation of the island and of its inhabitants, a process which we have already analysed, arriving at the conclusion that it is the reflection of an imperial geography. A similar association appears in the book *A Way in the World*, whose autobiographical passages rework Naipaul's impressions on the occasion of his first return to Trinidad at the age of twenty-four, after living in England for six years:

> On this return everything I had known, every street, every building, shrank as soon as I saw it. I liked, as I travelled about, to play with this shift of scale, to compare what existed in my memory, from childhood and adolescence, with what existed now, as if suddenly before me. [...] And I felt a double distance from what I had known.[236]

The distance mentioned by Naipaul makes out of the child's view the perspective of an Other.[237] Other have become his compatriots, too, who receive the mark of racial difference; interestingly enough, even the whites in Trinidad do not resemble the Englishmen. Besides having racial connotations, the people's darkness could also suggest that the author-narrator does no longer understand them:

> All the people on the streets were darker than I remembered: Africans, Indians, whites, Portuguese, mixed Chinese. In their houses, though, people didn't look so dark. I suppose that was because on the streets I was more of a looker, half a tourist, and when I went to a house it was to be with people I had known years before. So I saw them more easily.[238]

Even if the narrator clearly considers the 'adult' point of view to be superior, however, he does not eliminate the childish perspective completely out of the picture. Moreover, the two standpoints are juxtaposed, in a hybrid movement, in a play with the shift of scale and with impressions.[239] Naipaul's evocation of his discovery of the

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[235] *Miguel Street*, p. 169.
[236] *A Way in the World*, p. 32.
[237] This seems to contradict Phillipe Lejeune's theory that in an autobiography there must be "identity between the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist*" (Phillipe Lejeune, as quoted in Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, London: Routledge, 2001, p. 2).
[238] *A Way in the World*, p. 1.
[239] See *ibid.*, p. 1 and p. 32.

Trinidadian capital as a country child still retains something of the wonder he experienced at that time:

> Port of Spain was small, really, with less than a hundred thousand people. But to me it was a big town, and quite complete.[...] Frederick Street was the street of the big stores. More interesting to me was St Vincent Street. [...] From the pavement you could see the new machines, the big rollers, the big unwinding ribbons of newsprint, and you could get the warm smell of machines and paper and printing ink. So, almost as soon as I had come to the city, this new excitement, of paper and ink and urgent printing, was given to me.[240]

The fragment can be interpreted by means of Gérard Genette's distinction between 'who sees' and 'who speaks' in a text.[241] Obviously, the boy that was deeply impressed by the greatness of the city is not the one who controls the narrative; the 'mature' Naipaul questions the childish perspective, having the final say. The adverb in the sentence "Port of Spain was small, really" shows the reader that this is an absolute verdict: this is undoubtedly reality.

Another autobiographical novel, *The Enigma of Arrival*, which contrasts Naipaul's unhappy Trinidadian childhood with what he calls his 'second childhood' in England, is once again dominated by the adult, 'initiated' viewpoint. However, if in *Miguel Street* and *A Way in the World* the standpoint of the grown-up could be easily accused of serving imperial interests since it implied a certain distancing vis-à-vis Trinidadians, in *The Enigma of Arrival*, this position has its anti-colonial undertones:

> Thinking back to my own past, my own childhood [...] I found so many abuses I took for granted. I lived easily with the idea of poverty, the nakedness of children in the streets of the town and the roads of the country. I lived easily with the idea of the brutalizing of children by flogging; the ridiculing of the deformed; the different ideas of authority presented by our Hindu family and then, above that, by the racial-colonial system of our agricultural colony.[242]

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[240] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[241] Cf. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980 [1975], p.186; see also Susan Ehrlich, *Point of View: A Linguistic Analysis of Literary Style*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 9.
[242] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, New York: Vintage Books, 1988 (1987), p. 244.

In fact, naïveté and passive acceptance perceived in others lead Naipaul to brand such persons as childish. This is how he describes Bray, one of the servants at the Wiltshire manor; the characterisation introduces a meditation on infancy, concisely expressed in the following sentences: “Children, whose experience is so limited, readily accept an abused condition. Even his play can encourage a child to live with his abused situation: can encourage masochism in someone meant to be quite different.”[243] Certainly, Naipaul would reserve similar terms for the other servants of Empire: the colonised people. Anyway, they suggest a dark vision of childhood, which the playful moments do not succeed in eclipsing.

[243] *Loc. cit.*

## 2.6. Summary

The first main part of this dissertation, entitled “The Playful Little World of Childhood”, deals with the Naipaulian representations of Trinidad as an infantile “play-culture”. They are ambivalent, having a double origin: on the one hand, they go back to the colonial discourse of the “child-races”; on the other hand, they owe much to the conventions of the autobiographical genre. In both cases, childhood is culturally constructed as a negative term standing in contrast to adulthood.

I begin to analyse this image of Trinidad as a childish world by paying attention to its spatial features. Naipaul represents his native island as a dwarfish place, “a tiny little dot on some maps” (see *The Mystic Masseur*), whose symbol is a doll’s house in the novels *A House for Mr Biswas*, *The Mimic Men* and *Guerrillas*; the portrayal is certainly Eurocentric, minimising the colonial “periphery”. As shown by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, “infantilization” and “animalization” are two interrelated colonial tropes, meant to debase the colonised people, casting them as Others. The respective tropes underlay the Social Darwinist pseudoscientific theories, which equated the so-called “primitive” races with children and animals; the subchapter entitled “The Social-Darwinist Dilemma: Play-Boys or Apes” discusses several of Naipaul’s Trinidadian characters (from *A Way in the World*, *Miguel Street*, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, *The Mystic Masseur*, *Guerrillas*, *The Mimic Men* and *A House for Mr Biswas*) in this light. The metaphors of the colonised as children or monkeys express on the other hand Naipaul’s idea of colonial mimicry, that is to say, the servile imitation of the coloniser by the colonised. Many of Naipaul’s Trinidadian characters have not only infantile or animal traits but also an irrational behaviour. All these debasing stereotypes find their way particularly in the novel *Guerrillas*, which equally echoes Rudyard Kipling’s description of the colonised as “half devil and half child” in his infamous poem, “The White Man’s Burden”. Additionally, the infantile Trinidadian characters are playful; their play too is depicted in negative terms as an irrational activity (best described by Clifford Geertz’s concept of “deep play”) and as an expression of idleness (the negative view of play is due to a Protestant ethic of work, according to Brian Sutton-Smith). This “deep play” threatens to disturb colonial certainties; therefore, most of the ludic Trinidadian characters in a book like *Miguel*

*Street* (Bogart, Popo, Man-Man, Morgan and Hat) are put in prison by the imperial authorities. One notices a Foucauldian process of "confining" the Other, also manifested through the "domestication" of all kinds of "wild" or "irrational" play as Sutton-Smith points out.

Therefore, one could easily regard school, another important colonial institution, as an instrument in the British Empire's project of "domesticating" and "civilising" its subjects. Interestingly enough, Naipaul's fiction shows another aspect of play, this time in the service of Empire; as the postcolonial critic J. A. Mangan writes in *The Games Ethic and Imperialism*, the British regarding the colonised as "primitive" and "infantile" adopted a paternal attitude towards them, trying to be their teachers. This so-called "Schoolmaster Syndrome" led to the diffusion of the public-school model and of the sports associated with it. The games were expected to mould the colonised into courageous, loyal, mature people, behaving according the rules of "fair play". Naipaul, however, depicts Trinidadian pupils (in novels such as *The Mystic Masseur*, *Miguel Street*, *The Mimic Men*, *A House for Mr Biswas* or in the short story "The Heart" from the collection *A Flag on the Island*) as systematically failing on the colonial school's playgrounds, which one might understand metaphorically as a failure to become adult and adopt the values of "Christian manliness". The sportive events that the colonial school organises in a novel like *The Mimic Men* are also ritual/theatrical activities that put Britishness on display, inculcating Caribbean children the creeds of Empire; they are, to use Eric Hobsbawm's well-known concept, "invented traditions" (other examples of educational "invented traditions" are to be found in *A Way in the World* and *A House for Mr Biswas*)**.**

Paradoxically, while creating representations of Trinidad that seem to originate in the colonial discourse of the "child-races", Naipaul undermines the Eurocentric perspective by contradicting the propagandistic metaphor of Empire as a happy family with the metropolis as a guiding parent and the colonies as grateful children; he replaces it with the metaphor of the neglected colony, of the "little bastard world", appearing not only in *The Mimic Men*, but also in *The Suffrage of Elvira*, in which the region takes its name from a planter's wife, who killed her illegitimate Creole baby. It is true that the new image is little flattering, as it still infantilizes Trinidad; more positive is the image of child characters like Mr Biswas in *A House for Mr Biswas* and Browne in *The Mimic Men*, who resist colonial

education by courageously confronting their teachers, or Foam and Lorkhoor in *The Suffrage of Elvira* as well as the unnamed teenager journalist in *The Mystic Masseur*, who use and abuse the knowledge provided by colonial education in order to gain respectability.

Obviously, childhood is such an important theme in Naipaul's Trinidadian fictional works also because they are largely autobiographic. As already stated, the conventions of what Richard N. Coe calls "the autobiography of childhood and adolescence" require a certain distance on the part of the adult narrator, who judges the childhood experience as trivial. In fact, critics have argued that Naipaul's benevolent attitude towards his native island is linked to the child's perspective, whereas his negative representations come from an anglicised adult point of view. Thus, in *A Way in the World* and *Miguel Street* the narratological tension resulting from the double perspective of the child "who sees" and of the adult "who speaks" (to use Gérard Genette's terms) gives rise to the description of a fluid space changing in size, which demonstrates once again that the image of Trinidad as a miniature world, discussed at the beginning of this part, is not objective since even perception is culturally/discursively constructed.

# 3. FESTIVE TRINIDAD

### 3.1. Prelude

Generally, play occupies a marginal position in the Western cultures, as we have already seen.[1] It is commonly associated with children and stands for non-serious or even foolish practices. Obviously, this debasement of play is not a universal phenomenon: Hindus, for example, consider play, *lila*, to be the divine activity *par excellence*, conferring it an important religious function. It does not come as a surprise then that we find echoes of this viewpoint in Naipaul's works since the Indian background undeniably shaped the writer's imagery. Afro-Trinidadians' perspective on play, too, differs from the Occidental dominant outlook because they regard carnival and its 'abnormal' characters as powerful means to create a new national identity in a post-colonial world. All these tensions resulting from different interpretations mark Naipaul's writings and although the Eurocentric standpoint prevails, one can still retrace play's positive connotations.

In fact, *lila* and carnival become emblems of Naipaul's native island. As such, they contribute themselves to the feeling that Trinidadian culture is to a large extent performative and festive, a 'play culture'. More importantly, their analysis dissipates the impression that ludic activities are just mimicry, devoid of power; on the contrary, festivals have the potential to define communities or may be used as expressions of authority. In what follows, I will focus on these aspects, particularly insisting on play's capacity to function as an ethnic marker. This will hopefully lead to a better understanding of the mosaic of peoples living in Trinidad and of the prevailing interracial relationships. Naipaul presents an island where the different ethnic groups are fighting over supremacy in a genuine "race of races", although everything and everybody are "crazily mixed".[2] With Naipaul, there is unfortunately no celebration of hybridity, which remains at least suspect.

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[1] However, it is true that postmodernism seems to have operated a "ludic turn", bringing play to the fore.

[2] As Sutton-Smith points out, ludic rhetorics of identity are never far from rhetorics of power: "Typically communities demonstrate both their power and their identity through sporting success or festival occasions. [...] It is difficult to distinguish the rhetoric of power from the rhetoric of identity. The purpose of most conflicts, contests, and expressions of power is to prove the superiority of one's own identity, community, and traditions. In a general way, however, sports and contests are rhetorized as expressions of competitive power, while parades and celebrations and other mass spectacles are rhetorized as expressing traditional identity and community"; Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, pp. 91-92. This fusion of ludic power and identity is manifest in Naipaul's representations of Trinidad, too; nevertheless, as Mihai Spariosu, another important contemporary

### 3.2. Lila or Hindu Play

In what is perhaps Naipaul's best novel, *The Mimic Men*, there is a scene of crucial importance,[3] namely the moment when Ralph Singh visits his father, who has taken the name of Gurudeva and is living as a Hindu hermit in a forest. Gurudeva's ritual gestures are associated with the idea of play through words like "toy hut" or "childishness"; that may be interpreted as emblematic for *lila*, a central concept in Hinduism, which confers a sacral aura to playfulness.[4] However, there lurks the danger of cross-cultural misunderstanding because a European reader would rather see these epithets as a confirmation of the backwardness of Hindu society, a definitive proof of its infantilism. Indeed, Ralph, the narrator, an Indian whose mind has been colonised by the British school, seems to adopt this Eurocentric position and to condemn his father. David R. Kinsley, the author of a study on *lila*, entitled *The Divine Player*, is well aware of such misinterpretations:

> Religion, for example, has been compared to play in that both involve make-believe, or pretending. The conclusion drawn from such a comparison is often a negative one: that religion represents a childish stage in man's upward evolution to adulthood as a species. I think the comparison between the make-believe world of play and the "other" world of religion is valid, but I think that the real significance of the similarity lies in the fact that in both play and religion man exercises and is captured by his world-creating, imaginative faculty. And I am indeed reluctant to call this faculty a vestigial aspect of man's racial childhood.[5]

Social Darwinism with its racial hierarchies and recapitulation theory may still underlie comparisons between play and religion as David R. Kinsley points out.

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play theorist, indicates, mentalities of power may be replaced with irenic principles emphasising peace. Spariosu argues that this is possible only in a liminal world (cf. M. Spariosu, *The Wreath of Wild Olive*, p. 72); in that he borrows ideas from the reputed anthropologist Victor Turner, who writes that festivals like carnival are playful/borderline spaces (cf. Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1988, pp. 123-138). Victor Turner's ideas about performativity and liminality are relevant to postcolonial theory since their impact on Bhabha's notions of mimicry, hybridity and "Third Space" cannot be overlooked.

[3] I have already discussed the respective episode from another perspective on page 58 of the present study.

[4] This description of Hindu rituals is not the only moment when Naipaul associates religion and play; he uses this comparison to describe Christian ceremonials, too. See V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 50.

[5] David R. Kinsley, *The Divine Player: A Study of Krsna Lila*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979, p. ix.

However, the scholar decidedly refutes such racist assumptions, by saying that play has different connotations in many cultures: "in many traditions play *is* an appropriate religious expression".[6] Moreover, even so-called 'high religions' have various ludic aspects.[7]

Once again, Naipaul apparently confirms accusations of Eurocentrism: in many of his writings – either travelogues and essays on India or fictional texts like "A Christmas Story", which has a Trinidadian setting – Hindu practices suggest backwardness and paralysis. Nevertheless, *lila*, in its double form, God's play as well as religious drama,[8] is an important Naipaulian motif, constantly recurring in his writings from his very first published novel *The Mystic Masseur*, in which Leela is the name of the trickster Ganesh's wife.[9] But it is only in an essay written in 1998 that Naipaul openly admits the importance of religious drama in shaping his view upon world and his literary tastes. Here, in "Reading and Writing", he nostalgically recollects one type of *lila*, namely the *Ramlila*, centred on the story of Rama, one of Vishnu's *avatars*:

> One of the first big public things I was taken to was the *Ramlila*, the pageant-play based on the *Ramayana*, the epic about the banishment and later triumph of Rama, the Hindu hero-divinity. It was done in an open field in the middle of sugarcane, on the edge of our small country town. The male performers were barebacked and some carried long bows; they walked in a slow, stylised, rhythmic way, on their toes, and with high, quivering steps; when they made an exit (I am going now by very old memory) they walked down a ramp that had been dug in the earth. The pageant ended with the burning of the big black effigy of the demon king of Lanka. This burning was one of the things people had come for; and the effigy, roughly made, with tar paper on a bamboo frame, had been standing in the open field all the time, as a promise of the conflagration.[10]

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[6] *Ibid.*, pp. ix-x.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. x.

[8] See William S. Sax, "Introduction", in: William S. Sax, *ed.*, *The Gods at Play: Lila in South Asia*, New York: Oxford UP, 1995, pp. 3-4.

[9] H. S. Mann says the following about her: "Līlā, Sanskrit for 'pretense', 'disguise', or 'imitation', gives Leela her name and character; following Ganesh's financial successes, she starts imitating a more affluent class, donning saris and jewelry, feigning fatigue and the need for a holiday." (Harveen Sachdeva Mann, *op. cit.*, p. 472).

[10] V. S. Naipaul, "Prologue: Reading and Writing, a Personal Account", in: V. S. Naipaul, *Literary Occasions: Essays, introduced and edited by* Pankaj Mishra, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, p.7. Naipaul's description of the ritual may symbolically suggest the latent conflict between Indians and Africans in Trinidad by its emphasis on "the burning of the big black effigy of the demon king of Lanka" and by the warlike quality of the episode. On the contrary, Derek Walcott places Ramlila in a hybrid context, regarding it as a piece in the multicultural Trinidadian mosaic. Walcott's Nobel Lecture (1992) opens with the description of this festival; although more a spectator than a participant, the Afro-Caribbean author writes admiringly about the event: "They were not amateurs

As a child, Naipaul felt closer to this Hindu drama than to Western media like cinema: "And though as theatre it was crude, and there was much that I would have missed in the story, I believe I understood more and felt more than I had done during *The Prince and the Pauper* and *Sixty Glorious Years* at the local cinema."[11] Moreover, it gave reality and excitement to the *Ramayana*, "the essential Hindu story", which was "like a moral education for us all";[12] Naipaul even argues that "[*Ramayana]* lay below the writing I was to get to know later in the city, the Andersen and Aesop I was to read on my own, and the things my father was to read me".[13] However, the Hindu epic influenced Naipaul not only as a reader but also as an author. Thus, there are numerous allusions to it in various Naipaulian works dealing with Indo-Trinidadian characters but above all in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*. The protagonist, Mohun, takes contact with the *Ramayana* as Pundit Jairam's disciple; this is not extremely pleasant or inspiring: actually, for a badly conducted *puja*, the morning ritual, Mr. Biswas has to learn a dozen couplets from the epic by heart.[14] Even at the most difficult moments of his existence, when he suffers a mental breakdown, Mohun Biswas finds refuge in the invocation of the names of the divine Rama and his wife Sita.[15]

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but believers. There was no theatrical term to define them. They did not have to psych themselves up to play their roles. Their acting would probably be as buoyant and as natural as those bamboo arrows crisscrossing the afternoon pasture. They believed in what they were playing, in the sacredness of their texts, the validity of India, while I out of the writer's habit, searched for some sense of elegy, of loss, even of degenerative mimicry in the happy faces of the boy-warriors or the heraldic profiles of the village princes. I was polluting the afternoon with doubt and with the patronage of admiration. I misread the event through a visual echo of History–the cane fields, indenture, the evocation of vanished armies, temples, and trumpeting elephants–when all around me there was quite the opposite: elation, delight in the boys' screams, in the sweets-stalls, in more and more costumed characters appearing; a delight of conviction, not loss. The name Felicity [the name of the village] made sense." (Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory", in: Derek Walcott, *What The Twilight Says: Essays*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998, p. 67). In the name of a poetics celebrating the island's ethnic diversity, Walcott also states the following: "I was entitled like any Trinidadian to the ecstasies of [the Indian villagers'] claim, because ecstasy was the pitch of the sinuous drumming in the loudspeakers. I was entitled to the feast of Husein, to the mirrors and crêpe-paper temples of the Muslim epic, to the Chinese Dragon Dance, to the rites of that Sephardic Jewish synagogue that was once on Something Street. I am only one-eight the writer I might have been had I contained all the fragmented languages of Trinidad." (*Ibid.*, p. 69). Thus, in Walcott's opinion, the different festivals of Trinidad are genuine liminal spaces that could reunite all ethnic groups, contributing to the creation of more elaborate human identities.

[11] *Loc. cit.*
[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[14] See *A House for Mr. Biswas*, p. 50.
[15] *Ibid.*, p.270 and pp. 276-278.

Nevertheless, there are many other allusions to *Ramayana* that are not so obvious; Naipaul makes use in particular of proper names that have a mythical echo, belonging to the sphere of the Hindu epic. Although the name of the protagonist hints at another group of stories, namely those centred on the god Krishna, who bears the surname of *Mohun*, 'the Beloved', Biswas could be said to identify partially with the hero Rama. First of all, Rama descends from Raghu, a king from the solar dynasty,[16] but Raghu is also the name of Biswas' father. Unlike the godlike king, who is said to have saved the earth by taking it out of the abyssal waters, the latter is a simple peasant. This is an ironic reversal of the myth; the Trinidadian Raghu is obliged to dive into a lake in order to look for his son Mohun, who is thought to have drowned. Everything takes a tragic turn: "Lakhan brought up Raghu unconscious. They rolled him on the damp grass and pumped water out of his mouth and through his nostrils. But it was too late."[17] Except for Raghu, there are also other indicative names: Ajodha, the name of Mr. Biswas' uncle, reminds one of the city where Rama was born whereas Hanuman House and its backyard Ceylon[18] suggest the war which the hero led against the demons in Lanka.

One of the most significant parallelisms between *A House for Mr Biswas* and the *Ramayana* is the idea of exile: Rama and his consort Sita must leave the city Ayodhya and take refuge in the forest; likewise, Mr Biswas and his wife Shama are sent by the Tulsis family to a remote village with the telling name of 'The Chase'.[19] In fact, Naipaul considers the episode of exile in the *Ramayana* to be extremely important. According to him, it had strong emotional connotations: "Everyone around me would have known the story at least in outline; some people knew some of the actual verses. I didn't have to be taught it: the story of Rama's unjust banishment to the dangerous forest was like something I had always known."[20] Consequently, this episode becomes an emblem for another exile: that of East Indians to Trinidad.

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[16] See the headword "Raghu" in: Victor Kernbach, *Dictionar de mitologie generala*, Bucuresti: Editura Albatros, 1983, p. 590.
[17] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 30.
[18] See *ibid.*, p. 90.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 135.
[20] V. S. Naipaul, "Prologue: Reading and Writing", p. 8.

### 3.2.1. Trinidad as Site of Displacement

#### 3.2.1.1. East Indians in the West Indies

As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue in their seminal work *The Empire Writes Back*, "a major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement";[21] in particular the relationship between place and self comes under scrutiny. We find this theme in Naipaul's writings dealing with Trinidad, too: it is on the Indian diaspora that the author chooses to focus, obviously because he was born in the respective community. Naipaul's essay "East Indian" from 1965 retraces the steps of those poor people coming from the provinces of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to embark in Calcutta for Trinidad, hoping to lead a better life there. The following passage explains the system of indenture under which Indians emigrated:

> Slavery had been abolished in the British islands; the negroes refused to work for a master, and many plantations were faced with ruin. Indentured labourers were brought in from China, Portugal and India. The Indians fitted. More and more came. They were good agriculturalists and were encouraged to settle after their indentures had expired. Instead of a passage home they could take land. Many did. The indenture system lasted, with breaks, from 1845 until 1917, and in Trinidad alone the descendants of those immigrants who stayed number over a quarter of a million.[22]

However, instead of fulfilling their dreams, the Indians in Trinidad were to remain utterly destitute. As the passage above makes it clear, indenture was a kind of second slavery. This cruel system is echoed in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*, which gives us a glimpse of colonial exploitation:

> Every Saturday [Raghu] lined up with the other labourers outside the estate office to collect his pay. The overseer sat at a little table, on which his khaki cork hat rested, wasteful of space, but a symbol of wealth. On his left sat the Indian clerk, important, stern, precise, with small neat hands that wrote small neat figures in black ink and red ink in the tall ledger. As the clerk entered figures and called out names and amounts in his high, precise voice, the

[21] Ashcroft *et al.*, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 8.

[22] "East Indian", p. 39. In the same essay, Naipaul characterises Hindu rituals in Trinidad as follows: "It is the play of a people who have been cut off. To be an Indian from Trinidad, then, is to be unlikely and exotic. It is also to be a little fraudulent" (*ibid.*, p. 41).

> overseer selected coins from the columns of silver and the heaps of copper in front of him, and with great deliberation extracted notes from the blue one-dollar stacks, the smaller red two-dollar stack and the very shallow green five-dollar stack. Few labourers earned five dollars a week; the notes were there to pay those who were collecting their wives' or husbands' wages as well as their own. Around the overseer's cork hat, and seeming to guard it, there were stiff blue paper bags, neatly serrated at the top, printed with large figures, and standing upright from the weight of coin inside them. Clean round perforations gave glimpses of the coin and, Raghu had been told, allowed it to breathe.[23]

Clearly, the scene is predominantly presented through the eyes of Raghu, Mr Biswas' father. A simple labourer, he is deeply impressed by the display of authority on the part of imperial officials; unlike the rough dirty indentured Indians, they seem "important", "neat", "precise", and aware of their power, expressed in gestures of "great deliberation". Nevertheless, it is the money on the table that incites Raghu's imaginations, fact understandable when one takes into account a labourer's financial problems. Consequently, this moment of collecting wages is narrated at a slow pace and details accumulate. We learn the colour of Trinidadian dollars and get to know even technical details like the breathing of coins. Later, the omniscient narrator makes plain Raghu's obsession with money:

> These bags fascinated Raghu. He had managed to get a few and after many months and a little cheating – turning a shilling into twelve pennies, for example – he had filled them. Thereafter he had never been able to stop. No one, not even Bipti, knew where he hid these bags; but the word had got around that he buried his money and was possibly the richest man in the village. Such talk alarmed Raghu and, to counter it, he increased his austerities.[24]

Cheating himself, Raghu substitutes quality with quantity as his bags full of money are not worth too much. Yet he succeeds in deceiving the other villagers, who after his death search frenetically for the hidden fortune. In vain, of course. On the other hand, the episode may allude to the Western perception of East Indians as avaricious people: according to Dennis Bartels, "[m]any accounts by plantation owners, plantation managers, colonial officials, and Christian missionaries characterised East

[23] *A House for Mr Biswas*, pp. 21-22.
[24] *Ibid.*, p.21.

Indians as (1) industrious and hardworking; (2) thrifty to the point of greed, and (3) lacking in Christian morals".[25]

Even long after 1917, which marked the official end of the indenture system, the great majority of the Indo-Trinidadians continued to live in precarious conditions as a fragment from *The Mimic Men* demonstrates:

> I was driving with Cecil's father one day along a country road. We were in the area of swamps. Sodden thatched huts, set in mud, lined the road. It was a rainy day, grey, the sky low and oppressive, the water in the ditches thick and black, people everywhere semi-naked, working barefooted in the mud which discoloured their bodies and faces and their working rags. I was more than saddened, more than angry. I felt endangered. My mood must have communicated itself to Cecil's father, for at that moment he said, 'My people'.[26]

This is a watery world, made up of swamps, 'sodden' huts, mud and rain, where everything seems to sink, thus accentuating the feeling of oppression suggested by the low sky. Furthermore, the scene points to the hard work as well as the poverty of Indians: the labourers wear rags and live in wretched dwellings. Very interesting is the remark 'My people' made by Cecil's father, the rich Indian who runs the local Coca-Cola factory. This is an acknowledgement of his ethnic background; nonetheless, the class divide is stronger. Just moments later, when some Indian loaders curse Cecil's father because they had to stop their lorry abruptly to let him pass, he rages and keeps on saying: "They make me shame. They make me shame."[27]

Nevertheless, the hardships which Indians encountered in Trinidad do not offer a complete explanation of the traumatic experience of displacement. The shock comes from the leaving of the native country, too, an action that receives strong religious connotations. As Naipaul confesses, "[t]o leave India's sacred soil, to cross the 'black water', was considered an act of self-defilement".[28] The image of transversing the defiled sea becomes emblematic for displacement; consequently, the book edited by Frank Birbalsingh, *Indenture & Exile*: *The Indo-Caribbean*

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[25] Dennis Bartels, as quoted in Cheddi Jagan, "Indo-Caribbean Political Leadership", in: Frank Birbalsingh, *ed.*, *Indenture & Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience*, Toronto: TSAR , 1989, p. 17.
[26] *The Mimic Men*, p. 105.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[28] V. S. Naipaul, "East Indian", in: *Literary Occasions*, p. 43.

*Experience*, stands under the motto "*[f]or all who crossed the kala pani*".[29] It is a motif that finds particular resonance in *The Mimic Men*, in which the Hindu hermit Gurudeva retires to the forest, trying to ignore the impure ocean: "The land was not cleared all the way down to the sea. A thin screen of woods hid the sea, as though that was a tainted view."[30]

In Naipaul's opinion, not only the surrounding sea is tainted, but also Trinidad's soil; this belief is explicitly present in the following statement taken from the autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival*: "[...] I was to learn that the ground was bloody, that there had been aboriginal people there once, who had been killed or made to die away".[31] Returning to the essay "Reading and Writing" and to the symbolic episode of the *Ramlila*, the reader finds the same evocation of the local Amerindian tribes:

> The country town where I was born, and where in a clearing in the sugarcane I had seen our *Ramlila*, had an aboriginal name. [...] This was more than a fact about aborigines. It to some extent altered my own past. I could no longer think of the *Ramlila* I had seen as a child as occurring at the very beginning of things. I had imaginatively to make room for people of another kind on the *Ramlila* ground.[32]

The knowledge that the East Indians were not the first on Trinidadian soil has profound effects at the level of ethnic identity. History, as invocation of the past, is no longer a celebration of origins and Naipaul cannot forget those people who, although exterminated, are still somehow present in the consciousness of all Trinidadians. The absent origin may be another cause for the pervading sense of void in novels like *A House for Mr Biswas* or *The Mimic Men*. It also explains the confusion of those who hear that Naipaul is "East Indian. From the West Indies";[33] besides, the *Ramlila* and other Hindu rituals appear out of place on an island haunted by the spectre of the 'Red Indian'.

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[29] Frank Birbalsingh, *ed.*, *Indenture & Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience*, p. 4. Moreover, another study of the Indo-Caribbean world, *India in the Caribbean*, begins with an evocation of this crossing, which resulted in a temporary lost of caste; to regain his status, the immigrant had to organise purification ceremonies (see David Dabydeen, 'Preface', in: David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, *eds.*, *India in the Caribbean*, London: Hansib, 1987, p. 9).

[30] *The Mimic Men*, p. 191.

[31] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 354.

[32] "Reading and Writing", p. 19.

[33] "East Indian", p. 35.

### 3.2.1.2. Symbolic Ethnicity: the Fragments of a Civilisation

"Reading and Writing" is in many respects an important essay, all the more because it reveals Naipaul's attitude towards the South Asian subcontinent and its culture. Here is what he says:

> Even if I had not found words for it, I had believed as a child in the wholeness of India. The *Ramlila* and our religious rites and all our private ways were part of that wholeness; it was something we had left behind. This new idea of the past, coming to me over the years, unravelled that romance, showed me that our ancestral civilization – to which we had paid tribute in so many ways in our far-off colony, and had thought of ancient and unbroken – had been as helpless before the Muslim invaders as the Mexicans and Peruvians were before the Spaniards; had been half destroyed.[34]

In Naipaul's view, the *Ramlila* stands for a ritualised ancient Indian civilisation slowly collapsing. This is not a very appreciative perspective as the writer uses the word 'helpless' in order to characterise his native culture. Actually, Naipaul's estrangement vis-à-vis Indian practices is a consequence of displacement, which may take the form not only of 'dislocation' but also of 'cultural denigration', *i.e.* "the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model".[35] In the case of the Trinidad-born author, this supposedly superior cultural model is obviously Eurocentric, making display of Enlightenment values.[36] According to Naipaul, the Indo-Trinidadians' way of living was part of "the instinctive life of an old, ritualistic Asian culture".[37] Here occurs the idea of a ritualistic culture with "its ritualized days",[38] an image that constantly recurs in his writings; the ritual symbolises a static civilisation, which cannot progress.[39] Calling this culture "instinctive" is another sign that

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[34] "Reading and Writing", p. 24.

[35] B. Ashcroft *et al.*, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 9.

[36] In Stephanos Stephanides' opinion, "[t]he theme of the Indian darkness, so prevalent in Naipaul, coincides with the Orientalist and enlightenment discourse of Western modernity, in which India came to illustrate, as Halbfass shows, 'the theme of the eclipse and suppression of natural light superstition and ritualism.'"(Stephanos Stephanides, Karna Singh, *Translating Kali's Feast: The Goddess in Indo-Caribbean Ritual and Fiction*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000, p. 51.)

[37] Scott Winokur, "The Unsparing Vision of V. S. Naipaul", in: Feroza Jussawalla, *ed.*, *Conversations with V. S. Naipaul*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997, p. 126.

[38] See V. S. Naipaul, "Prologue to an Autobiography", in: *Literary Occasions*, p. 81.

[39] As we have already seen, Hindu rituals are associated with the idea of backwardness in such fictional works like "A Christmas Story" or *A House for Mr Biswas*.

Enlightenment assumptions orient the writer's perspective. In fact, Naipaul distinguishes in an interview from the 1980s between "self-aware, highly civilised societies" and barbarous "ritualised cultures"[40] like his own culture, thus demonstrating that "Reason" is a central term. The last chapter of the autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), significantly entitled 'The Ceremony of Farewell', records the narrator's alienation towards his native culture, which has to be sacrificed in the name of rationalism:

> We were immemorially people of the countryside, far from the courts of princes, living according to rituals we didn't always understand and yet were unwilling to dishonour because that would cut us off from the past, the sacred earth, the gods. Those earth rites went back far. They would have been partly mysterious. But we couldn't surrender to them now. We had become self-aware. We would have accepted; we would have felt ourselves to be more whole, more in tune with the land and the spirit of the earth.[41]

Once again, there is a conflict between an earlier emotional perspective and the more recent rational point of view;[42] very interesting is the use of the personal pronoun 'we' – rather than interpret it as the plural of majesty, one can regard it as a recognition of the narrator's ties with the Indo-Trinidadian community. Indeed, the 'we' repeatedly occurs in this section, when Naipaul speaks about his compatriots: in fact, in the play with the pronouns 'I' and 'we', one can read a dialectical movement between estrangement and belonging:

> Where there had been swamp at the foot of the Northern Range, with mud huts with earthen walls that showed the damp halfway up, there was now a landscape of Holland: acres upon acres of vegetable plots, the ridges and furrows and irrigation canals straight. Sugarcane as a crop had ceased to be important. None of the Indian villages were like the villages I had known. No narrow roads; no dark, overhanging trees; no huts; no earth yards with hibiscus hedges; no ceremonial lighting of lamps, no play of shadows on the wall; no cooking of food in half-walled verandas, no leaping firelight; no

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[40] Bernard Levin, "V.S. Naipaul: A Perpetual Voyager", in: F. Jussawalla, *ed.*, *Conversations with V.S. Naipaul*, pp. 93-94.

[41] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 351.

[42] The influence of Seepersad Naipaul on his son is undeniable as Vidia admits in the same book: "The other, internal irony was that my father, though devoted to Hindu speculative thought, had disliked ritual and had always, even in the 1920s, belonged to the reformist group the pundit didn't care for and dismissed now as hypocrites"( *The Enigma of Arrival*, p.351). However, father and son, although rejecting what they consider to be superstitious practices, are fascinated by rituals: Seepersad's book *The Adventures of Gurudeva* fastidiously presents such ceremonies; Vidia, too, sees them as 'mysterious', thus emblematic for an 'enigma of arrival' that defies all rational knowledge.

> flowers along gutters or ditches where frogs croaked the night away. But highways and clever-shaped exits and direction boards: a wooded land laid bare, its secrets opened up.[43]

Here, the 'I' marks the narrator's distance to his native island; although Trinidad looks very European, 'a landscape of Holland', criss-crossed by highways – Western symbols of civilisation – the otherwise rationalist writer paradoxically regrets the Indian old ways evoked in novels like *A House for Mr Biswas* or *The Mimic Men*. This nostalgic mood is in total contradiction with Naipaul's Enlightenment ideals: reason and technological progress turn the country into a wasteland, by destroying its secrets. Then, suddenly, the distance disappears as the narrator identifies himself with other Indo-Trinidadians by means of the pronoun 'we':

> We had made ourselves anew. The world we found ourselves in – the suburban houses, with gardens, where my sister's farewell ceremony had taken place – was one we had partly made ourselves, and had longed for, when we had longed for money and the end of distress; we couldn't go back. There was no ship of antique shape now to take us back. We had come out of the nightmare; and there was nowhere else to go. [44]

This is a culture in transition, which has lost its 'wholeness' and integrity – process obviously linked to displacement, here symbolised by the "ship of antique shape". It is a movement that cannot be reversed: there is no way back to India for Trinidadian Hindus, so they have to adapt. The ship is also an allusion to a work by Giorgio de Chirico constituting a major source of inspiration for Naipaul's novel, as the author confesses: "among these paintings there was one which, perhaps because of its title, caught my attention: *The Enigma of Arrival*. [...] The scene is of desolation and mystery: it speaks of the mystery of arrival. It spoke to me of that, as it had spoken to Apollinaire".[45] This painting gives birth to a reverie about a traveller who after visiting a Mediterranean city,[46] wants to return home, only to find out that all ways are blocked: "Above the cutout walls and buildings there is no mast, no sail. The antique ship has gone. The traveler has lived out his life".[47]

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[43] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 352.
[44] *Loc. cit.*
[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.
[46] The Caribbean Sea has always been regarded as the Mediterranean of the New World; therefore, it is very tempting to consider the respective city to be an allusion to Trinidad.
[47] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 99.

However, in spite of the decay of the old culture and even if taken out of its proper context, ritual continues to retain its symbolic power:

> My sister Sati had no liking for ritual either. But at her death there was in her family a wish to give sanctity to the occasion, a wish for old rites, for things that were felt specifically to represent us and our past. So the pundit had been called in, and on the terrazzo floor of my sister's veranda symbolical ceremonies had been played out on an earth altar, laid with a miniature pyre of fragrant pitch pine and flowers and sugar which, when soaked with clarified butter and set alight, made a sweet caramel smell.[48]

These are "symbolical ceremonies", which have the capacity to represent ethnicity, "us and our past"; that comes close to what Herbert J. Gans calls "symbolic ethnicity", which "is characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant tradition, or that of the old country; a love and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behaviour."[49] Thus, this type of ethnicity is peculiar to diasporic communities, like the Indians in Trinidad, who pick up some fragments of the parents' culture, investing them with meaning. According to Gans, this phenomenon appears among the descendants of the immigrants, usually in the third generation:[50] this is also the case with Naipaul, whose grandparents migrated to Trinidad. The respective Naipaulian excerpt makes it plain that long after they forgot their language[51] and adopted modern ways, Indo-Trinidadians still think of rituals as ethnic markers, as links with their history and the country of origin. However, "symbolic ethnicity" will eventually disappear, too; consequently, we may read "The Ceremony of Farewell" as its obituary.

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 351. In Naipaul's earlier novels, however, the stress lies on the degradation of Hindu rituals rather than on their capacity to evoke the past; thus, commenting on the initiation and the marriage ceremonials described in the novel *The Mystic Masseur*, Champa Rao Mohan states the following: "In Trinidad they [the East Indians] can no longer be good Hindus, they can act like good Hindus. The Trinidad Indians also exhibit a tendency typical among people who are victims of what Sushanta Goonatilake calls "Cultural schizophrenia" or the tendency among the colonized, to legitimise their actions in either cultural frames to suit the demands of the situation. […] In every sphere of the lives of the East Indians–their dress, language and food habits–their cultural confusion becomes apparent." (Champa Rao Mohan, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26).

[49] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity", in: John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, *eds.*, *Ethnicity*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996, p. 146.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

[51] Significantly, the pundit is using an English translation of the *Gita* scriptures; see *The Enigma of*

### 3.2.1.3. Rituals as Cultural Memory

Rituals come to the fore in Naipaul's writings dealing with the Indo-Trinidadian community; this may be explained not only by the predominance of a Eurocentric standpoint labelling Third World cultures as primitive and ritualistic, but also by the visibility of such performative acts,[52] as well as by their persistence and capacity of survival, as shown in "The Ceremony of Farewell", the final section of the autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival*. In John Edwards' opinion, the symbolic language of festivals survives the communicative aspect of a culture: the descendants of a particular group may display ethnic symbols but "do not often want to learn the ancestral language".[53]

The distinction between symbolic and communicative language/ethnicity resembles to a certain extent Jan Assmann's differentiation between cultural ('kulturelles') and communicative memory ('kommunikatives Gedächtnis'). According to the German Egyptologist, they are both ways for a community to remember its past. Whereas communicative memory refers to individual recollections, which are orally transmitted and do not go back very far (at most 80-100 years), cultural memory, whose main forms are rituals as well as festivals, commemorates a mythical history placed in an absolute past.[54]

Obviously, "The Ceremony of Farewell" presents a link to the past that is enacted by means of cultural memory. Therefore, the India which these ceremonials evoke has a mythical aura, being no longer the land that the indentured labourers knew at first hand. Even the aged Hindu, some distant relation of Naipaul, who begins to speak about old times, carries no reliable memories of India and of the first Indian immigrants to the New World:

> History! He had run together the events of 1498, when Columbus had discovered the island for Queen Isabella on his third voyage; 1784, when the Spanish authorities, after three hundred years of neglect, and out of a wish to protect their empire, opened up the island to Catholic immigration, giving

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*Arrival*, p. 349.

[52] Cf. Herbert J. Gans, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

[53] John Edwards, "Symbolic Ethnicity and Language", in: John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, *eds.*, *op. cit.*, p.228.

[54] See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1997, pp. 48-59.

> preference and free land to people who could bring in slaves; and 1845, when the British, ten years after slavery had been abolished in the British Empire, began to bring in Indians from India to work the land. He had created a composite history. But it was enough for him. Men need history, it helps them to have an idea of who they are. But history, like sanctity, can reside in the heart; it is enough that there is something there.[55]

The passage also makes clear that the past is extremely important in creating identities; as Naipaul puts it: "[history] helps them to have an idea of who they are".[56] Besides, history is more of the heart than of the mind, a subjective experience rather than an objective recollection of facts.

"Prologue to an Autobiography" (1982), too, conveys the feeling that beyond people's direct memories the past turns into myth. At that borderline, everything is blurred: this is the period of the 'dark ages', when there appears the phenomenon baptised 'the floating gap' by Jan Vansina. If the ethnographer places the respective gap 80 years before the present moment (thus corresponding to what Jan Assmann considers to be the limits of communicative memory),[57] Naipaul finds darkness already in 1919, so just about 60 years before the moment of writing:

> But Chaguanas, where I was born, in an Indian-style house my grandfather had built, had no dates. If I read in a book that Gandhi had made his first call for civil disobedience in India in 1919, that date seemed recent. But 1919, in Chaguanas, in the life of the Indian community, was almost unimaginable. It was a time beyond recall, mythical. About our family, the migration of our ancestors from India, I knew only what I knew or what I was told. Beyond (and sometimes even within) people's memories was undated time, historical darkness. Out of that darkness (extending to place as well as to time) we had all come. The India where Gandhi and Nehru and the others operated was historical and real. The India from which we had come was impossibly remote, as imaginary as the land of the *Ramayana*, our Hindu epic. I lived easily with that darkness, that lack of knowledge. I never thought to inquire further.[58]

Here, one can easily see the limitation of communicative memory to represent the ancestors' land; obviously, cultural memory exemplified by the history book and *Ramayana* takes the upper hand, creating an ambiguous image. Naipaul goes on by recounting his meeting with a dying aunt in 1972. Discussing with her, the writer

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[55] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 353.
[56] In that, Naipaul comes close to Jan Assmann's idea, according to which, collective memory helps define group identity; see J. Assmann, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[57] See J. Assmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

finds more about the origins of his father's family; the moment is of crucial importance as it symbolises the passing away of the last person able to retell memories of India. There is a crisis at the level of communicative memory, further heightened by Naipaul's incapacity to speak Hindi, his aunt's language:

> When I was a child we hadn't been able to talk. I could follow Hindi but couldn't speak it. She couldn't speak a word of English, though nearly around her was bilingual. She had since picked up a little English; and her death-bed talk, of caste and blood, was in this broken language.[59]

This crisis is illustrated by the fictional work *The Mimic Men*, in which Ralph Singh after visiting Gurudeva is approached by his father's female companion: "She spoke to me in Hindi: 'Have you come then for a sight of him?' She used strong religious associations: *darshan*. I did not wish to lie. I said nothing […]."[60] Significantly, when addressed in Hindi, Singh remains silent (this is certainly different from the silence of his father, the saint, who "has given up the world"),[61] then after a while, responds in English. The loss of the mother tongue may explain the protagonist's estrangement; likewise, in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*, the use of Hindi is a sign of intimacy and tenderness, whereas the use of English shows distance and rejection.[62]

### 3.2.2. The Might of Ceremonies

#### 3.2.2.1. The Family Fortress

Commenting a scene from *A House for Mr Biswas*, Claudia Ebel remarks that Naipaul satirically presents Hindu rituals as inefficient gestures of no substance at all. Nevertheless, this is just one side of the coin; indeed, the critic notices that rituals have the important function of founding collective identity, although she abandons this argument from the very beginning, leaving the impression that ceremonials are

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[58] "Prologue to an Autobiography", p. 89.
[59] "Prologue to an Autobiography", p. 93.
[60] See *The Mimic Men*, pp. 191.
[61] *Loc. cit.*
[62] See *A House for Mr Biswas*, pp. 96-97.

largely powerless means of expression.[63] Thus, even a novel like *The Enigma of Arrival*, which presents the Indo-Trinidadian community of the 1980s with its modern ways, emphasises the role played by rituals in bringing people together; the death rites celebrated in the honour of Sati, Vidia's sister, constitute the occasion of a family reunion, gathering brothers spread all over the globe.[64]

Naipaul pays special attention to Hindu death rites in other novels as well. The well-known *A House for Mr Biswas* is a genuine encyclopaedia of Hindu life, presenting ceremonies in great detail; here, there occurs the feeling that rituals are intricately linked with family. Every time a person expires, for example Raghu, Hari or Mr Biswas himself, all relatives come to mourn the dead one. This is more than a religious duty; it is also an opportunity to come together as the following quotation indicates: "Her sisters did not fail Shama [Mr. Biswas' wife]. They all came. For them it was an occasion of reunion, no longer so frequent, for they had all moved to their houses, some in the town, some in the country."[65] This passage, too, shows that Hindu festivals take place more and more seldom in Trinidad. As Naipaul explains, this is the result of leaving the village because the town is a creolised space. According to him, the family and the village were the basic elements of an Indo-Trinidadian identity; Naipaul speaks about these two forms of social organisation in the Trinidad section of his travelogue *The Middle Passage*:

> Living by themselves in villages, the Indians were able to have a complete community life. It was a world eaten up with jealousies and family feuds and village feuds; but it was a world of its own, a community within the colonial society, without responsibility, with authority doubly and trebly removed. Loyalties were narrow: to the family, the village. [66]

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[63] See Claudia Ebel, *op.cit.*, pp. 142-143.

[64] See *The Enigma of Arrival*, pp. 343-354, particularly pp. 346-347, and p. 351. The episode echoes another scene in the same book, namely the scene when Naipaul leaves Trinidad for the first time: "The family farewell was the last of the big Hindu or Asiatic occasions in which I took part – those farewells (from another era, another continent, another kind of travel, when a traveler night indeed never return, as many of us, or our grandfathers, had never returned to India) for which people left their work, gave up a day's earnings, and traveled long distances to say good-bye. And not really to say good-bye, more to show themselves, to be present at a big clan occasion, to assert membership of the clan; in spite of the fact (or because of the fact) that there were now such differences between various branches of the extended family, and conversation was already touched with condescension or social nervousness on the one side or the other." (*The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 107).

[65] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 564.

[66] *The Middle Passage*, pp. 79-80.

The novel *The Mystic Masseur* is another good example illustrating the overlapping of family and village life; the crucial moments in the existence of an individual, expressed through so-called "rites of passage" like marriage or burial,[67] acquire a communal dimension, becoming public events. Naipaul's novel repeatedly depicts Fourways, the village where Ganesh the protagonist lives, caught in the fever of ceremonial preparations:

> Although it was nearly half past eleven when his taxi got to Fourways that night, the village was alive and Ganesh knew that Mrs Cooper was right. Someone had died. He sensed the excitement and recognized all the signs. Lights were on in most of the houses and huts, there was much activity on the road, and his ears caught the faint hum, as of distant revelry. It wasn't before he realized that it was his father who had died. Fourways seemed to be waiting for the taxi and the moment people saw Ganesh sitting in the back they began to wail.[68]

Ironically, the village comes to life when somebody has died. There is a gradation in terms of perception; at first, the festival is "a distant revelry", its sounds feeble, then Ganesh hears the mourning villagers. The climax is reached when Ganesh enters his house: "The house itself was chaos. He had hardly opened the taxi doors when scores of people he didn't know scrambled towards him with outstretched arms, bawling; and led, almost carried, him into the house which was full of even more mourners he didn't know or remember."[69] This image of the overcrowded house is a Naipaulian leitmotif that suggests the traditional Indian family structure as clan, which reunites at least three generations and tens of individuals under the same roof.[70] All these unknown relatives, such as the Great Belcher, reappear at another solemn occasion, Ganesh's wedding; once again this is a festival, in which the villagers can take part:

> Fourways was nearly as excited as the wedding as it had been at the funeral. Hundreds of people, from Fourways and elsewhere, were fed at Ramlogan's. There were dancers, drummers, and singers, for those who were not interested in the details of the night-long ceremony. The yard behind Ramlogan's shop was beautifully illuminated with all sorts of lights, except electric ones, and

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[67] Cf. Arnold van Gennep, *Übergangsriten (Les rites de passage), transl. by* Franz von Klaus Scomburg and Sylvia M. Schomburg-Scherff, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1986, pp. 15-16.
[68] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 28.
[69] *Loc. cit.*
[70] See also *A House for Mr Biswas* and *The Mimic Men*.

> the decorations – mainly fruit hanging from coconut-palm arches – were pleasing.[71]

Unlike Afro-Trinidadians like Laura, whose eight children have seven fathers,[72] Indians are represented by Naipaul as people who value the sacred bond of marriage, even if some like Mr Biswas play with the idea of committing adultery, an idea receiving expression in his literary attempts. Moreover, to think of marrying outside the Hindu community was inconceivable fifty years ago, when Seepersad Naipaul was writing the following lines to his son: "These [Hindu] girls have become so ultra-modern that they make no distinction between Negroes, Mussulmans or any other people."[73] This stance besides being obviously racist signals the closed character of the Indo-Trinidadian community and its endogamous nature. Endogamy explicitly appears in the fictional work *The Mimic Men*, where Ralph Singh has an incestuous relationship with his cousin Sally:

> No word was spoken. We simply came together; and nothing again was to equal that sudden understanding [...] I could not conceive of myself with a girl or woman of another community or even of families like my own. Here for me was security, understanding, the relationship based on perfect knowledge, in which one body of one flesh joined to the body of the same flesh, and all external threat was diminished.[74]

Except for Sally, Ralph knows no other Indian woman; however, all his affairs with persons of other races end up in failure. His family, too, does not accept Ralph's marriage to an Englishwoman:

> I hadn't, I must confess, informed my mother of my marriage; nervousness had always been converted into fatigue whenever I sat down to write that letter. Sandra believed that my mother knew; and the mutual dismay of the two women – precipitated by my easy remark to Sandra: 'Oh, look, there's my mother' – might be easily be imagined. Yet not easily: we are a melodramatic race and do not let pass occasions for public display. Picture, then, Sandra in her carefully chosen disembarkation outfit coming face to face with a conventionally attired Hindu widow. Picture her mistaking the raised arms and the first wail for a ritual of welcome and, out of a determination to meet strange and ancient customs half-way, concealing whatever surprise and bewilderment she might have felt; then, the wail

[71] *The Mystic Masseur*, pp. 54-55.
[72] *Miguel Street*, p. 81.
[73] V.S. Naipaul, *Between Father and Son: Family Letters*, *edited by* Gillon Aitken, New York: Vintage Books, p. 122.
[74] *The Mimic Men*, p. 168.

> broken only to be heightened, the gestures of distress converted explicitly into gestures of rejection, realizing the nature of her reception, hesitating in her already tentative approach to the frenzied figure of my mother, and finally standing still, the centre now of a scene which was beginning to draw a fair audience of dockworkers roused from the languor, passengers, visitors, officials, the crews of hips of various nations.[75]

The passage is extremely interesting, all the more since the address to the reader has a postmodern dimension and gives the text a pictorial, even theatrical quality. Besides, this is a reworking of the motif of the ritual culture; from a postcolonial perspective, it is remarkable that the white woman reading the scene as an exotic gesture of welcome, at first so self confident, loses her determination and begins to hesitate. No longer a conqueror, Sandra is on the defence. The performance given by Singh's mother has symbolic value, marking in fact Ralph as an outcast. Nonetheless, he is not afraid for the society in which he lives has become more and more flexible: "The sanctions my mother had invoked on the docks were not important. We were a haphazard, disordered and mixed society in which there could be nothing like damaging exclusion [...]".[76] Excluded from the traditional Hindu community, Ralph takes refuge with the group of young professional Indians who live in the city.

Naipaul expresses the same idea of closed community in his Nobel Lecture, where he evokes the image of his grandmother's house in Chaguanas, Trinidad. The corrugated-iron gate signifies the border between two worlds, which are sharply separated: the world at home and the dark world outside.[77] Home is described in the following way:

> It was a remnant of our caste sense, the thing that excluded and shut out. In Trinidad, where as new arrivals we were a disadvantaged community, that excluding idea was a kind of protection; it enabled us – for the time being, and only for the time being – to live in our own way and according to our own rules, to live in our fading India. It made for an extraordinary self-centredness. We looked inwards; we lived out our days; the world outside existed in a kind of darkness; we inquired about nothing.[78]

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[75] *Ibid.*, p. 54.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[77] See also *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 111 and *The Mimic Men*, p. 167.
[78] V.S. Naipaul, "Postscript: Two Worlds (The Nobel Lecture)", in: *Literary Occasions*, p. 187.

The house in Chaguanas constituted the model for Hanuman House in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*; this fictional work conveys the same feeling of closed community by means of an impressive description:

> Among the tumbledown timber-and-corrugated-iron buildings in the High Street at Arwacas, Hanuman House stood like an alien white fortress. The concrete walls looked as thick as they were, and when the narrow doors of the Tulsi Store on the ground floor were closed the House became bulky, impregnable and blank. The side walls were windowless, and on the upper two floors the windows were mere slits in the facade. The balustrade which hedged the flat roof was crowned with a concrete statute of the benevolent monkey-god Hanuman. From the ground his whitewashed features could scarcely be distinguished and were, if anything, slightly sinister, for dust had settled on projections and the effect was that of a face lit up from below.[79]

The perspective seems to be that of an outsider and has something of a Kafkian novel: Hanuman House is "an alien white fortress"; the impression of inaccessibility is magnified by the accumulation of such terms as "concrete", "thick", "narrow", "bulky", "impregnable", "blank", "windowless" or "mere slits". The house imposes as a space where royalty and the divine combine; at the same time, it is the architectural version of the *Ramlila*, suggesting a stage where the monkey-god Hanuman, Rama's brother-in-arms, enacts a divine performance. One can easily remark that light effects, too, contribute to the spectacular dimension of this episode, creating a 'slightly sinister' face out of stone. The religious significance of the house is emphasised by its role as a temple where villagers are admitted from time to time on solemn occasions. Obviously, the building is a receptacle of power and authority; that is why it establishes itself in the minds of the inhabitants of Arwacas as the centre of the local Hindu community. This is an inspiring place where old Indians can dream of their land of origin, as the following excerpt shows:

> In the arcade of Hanuman House, grey and substantial in the dark, there was already the evening assembly of old men, squatting on sacks on the ground and on tables now empty of Tulsi Store goods, pulling at clay *cheelums* that glowed red and smelled of ganja and burnt sacking. [... ]And every evening they came to the arcade of the solid, friendly house, smoked, told stories, and continued to talk of India.[80]

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[79] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p.77.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 185. The house must be understood as a symbol of presence counteracting the effects of displacement; that is why Biswas longs to possess one (see Constantin von Barloewen, "Auf der Suche nach Metropolis: zur Kulturphilosophie V.S. Naipauls", *Neue Rundschau* 1982: 4, p. 138).

Very interesting is the image of the friendly house, which stands in stark contrast to the hostile building at the beginning of Chapter 3. This is clearly the perspective of the insider, who takes refuge under the solid arcades of this symbolic dwelling. The latter point of view creates the effect of ambiguity – on the one hand Hanuman House stands for the tyranny of communal life (expressed for example in the destruction of Savi's doll house[81]), on the other hand, for an ideal age when the family was one, kept together by the memorable Tulsi festivals.

### 3.2.2.2. Forms of Protest and Resistance

Beside (re)producing collectives, ceremonials play another important role: they may be appropriated by the colonised as forms of protest and resistance. This is particularly true of the *asvamedha* ritual enacted by Ralph Singh's father, who becomes the leader of a strike that ends into a religious movement. The rite is described from a Eurocentric perspective, being presented as a shocking, even barbarous ceremony:

> About a week we heard that the horse had been found. It was dead. That was all we heard at first, and the news surprised no one. But what I next heard chilled and sickened me more strongly than ever the sensation of rawness and violence: rubbery raw flesh, tainted holy oil. It was more than a death. A charcoal burner had found the animal, garlanded with marigold and faded hibiscus, on a freshly prepared platform of beaten and plastered earth. Heart and entrails had been torn out; but there were flowers on the animal's mane, flowers woven into its tail; and the coat had been brushed as though by proud grooms. At the centre of the platform, on a smaller, shallow platform of its own, were the remains of a fire, still fragrant with burnt sugar, pitchpine, butter and cocoa. Banana suckers had been planted at each corner of this smaller platform; and at each corner a swastika had been traced out in flour. *Asvamedha*: to myself alone I spoke the word. It filled me with unexpected awe and horror. An ancient sacrifice, in my imagination a thing of beauty, speaking of the youth of the world, of untrodden forests and unsullied

[81] See *A House for Mr Biswas*, pp. 206-209. The doll house which Mr Biswas buys for Savi may symbolise the former's aspiration to have a house of his own; therefore, the scene also stands for a clash between two cultures with their different family structures: the Indian extended family, on the one hand, and the Western nuclear family, on the other hand. (According to K. A. Lynch, northern Europe was characterised by the predominance of nuclear households; see Katherine A. Lynch, *Individuals, Families, and Communities in Europe, 1200-1800. The Urban Foundations of Western Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003, p.13.)

> streams, of horses and warrior-youths in morning light: now rendered obscene.[82]

The two platforms suggest the idea of staging as they constitute an improvised theatre where the religious drama takes place. Death and life meet in this description, in which a corpse is beautifully decorated by 'proud grooms'.[83] At the same time, the passage exemplifies Ralph Singh's disillusionment with Indian traditions[84] and surprises a process of demystification; actions that have a mythical dimension, being placed somewhere at the beginning of the world in *illo tempore*, turn out to be obscene. Moreover, the association of this sacrifice with youth may be explained not only as an allusion to the ritual's mythical quality but also as the result of the colonial view, according to which the so-called 'primitive' peoples were immature.

However, the *asvamedha* ritual is a gesture of profound symbolism, with a tremendous effect on the colony's imaginary. In fact, that remains the most powerful deed of the movement initiated by Gurudeva, as Ralph Singh confesses: "That event was not the exodus from the city, the march away from the troubled docks of both strikers and volunteers. It was the killing of Tamango. That was the movement's most famous deed, as central to it as the race-course suicide was to the suffragette movement in England."[85] The parallel to the suffragette movement is significant, as both anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal actions are protests on behalf of the marginal. The anti-colonial message of the ritual is evident since the race-horse Tamango has been a favourite in the Malay Cup, the sportive event instituted by the local British Governor, Sir Hugh Clifford.[86] It also constitutes an assertion of Hindu power, a challenge to the British Monarchy as *asvamedha*, "the Aryan ritual of victory and overlordship [...] risked only by the truly brave", was memorably performed after the defeat and expulsion of the first European conquerors of India, the Greeks.[87]

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[82] *The Mimic Men*, pp. 150-151.
[83] For a similar ambivalent scene, associating death and life, see *A Way in the World*, p. 4.
[84] As a child Ralph Singh dreams of being the leader of an ancient Aryan band of warriors; later, the dream vanishes when confronted with the reality of the *asvamedha* ritual.
[85] *The Mimic Men*, p. 152.
[86] See *ibid.*, p. 149 and p. 152.
[87] *Ibid.*, p.153.

### 3.2.2.3. Symbolic Violence: Gender and Caste

We have seen so far that rituals confer coherence to the life of the Indo-Trinidadian community and may even serve anti-colonial purposes. Nevertheless, their power has its dark sides, too; like other symbolic means, they may be used and abused. Thus, in Naipaulian novels such as *The Mystic Masseur* or *A House for Mr Biswas* there are moments when rituals become expressions of authority, helping legitimise social inequities among Hindus. This is obvious with regard to the prevailing relations between men and women, on the one hand and between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, on the other hand. Particularly interesting is the description of Raghu's funeral in *A House for Mr Biswas*:

> Bipti was bathed. Her hair, still wet, was neatly parted and the parting filled with red henna. Then the henna was scooped out and the parting filled with charcoal dust. She was now a widow forever. Tara gave a short scream and at her signal the other women began to wail. On Bipti's wet black hair there were spots of henna, like drops of blood.
>
> Cremation was forbidden and Raghu was to be buried. He lay in a coffin in the bedroom, dressed in his finest dhoti, jacket and turban, his beads around his neck and down his jacket. The coffin was strewed with marigolds which matched his turban. Pratap, the eldest son, did the last rites, walking round the coffin.[88]

Here, the entire ceremony codifies gender hierarchies, exerting a special form of violence on women, namely what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence". According to the French scholar, this is a subtle form of control exerted through the symbolic means of communication and knowledge;[89] the mythical-ritual system ratifies and amplifies women's position of inferiority and exclusion because men are the ones who possess the so-called "symbolic capital".[90] Therefore, the scene presents Hindu women as marginal beings, a kind of chorus, whose role is to mourn the dead one. Moreover, Bipti seems to lose her life together with her husband – she will remain forever a widow – and even her body is affected, looking as if it were bleeding. On the contrary, men occupy a central position: the princely dressed Raghu and his

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[88] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 31.

[89] Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculine*, Paris: Seuil, 1998, p. 7. For a discussion of the concept of "symbolic capital", see also Pierre Bourdieu, *Sozialer Sinn. Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft [Le sens pratique], übersetzt von* Günter Seib, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987 (1980), pp. 205- 221.

[90] Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculine*, pp. 48-49.

eldest son, who is performing the last rites. This gender hierarchy is finally sealed with a photo, on which one can see the two elder brothers standing on one side of the coffin, whereas Bipti, her daughter and the youngest son crowd on the other side.[91]

This state of things appears natural in a society which relegates women to its periphery; as Naipaul mentions in the same novel, for Hindu women, "ambition, if the word could be used, was a series of negatives: not to be unmarried, not to be childless, not to be an undutiful daughter, sister, wife, mother, widow."[92] Apparently, the strong Mrs. Tulsis contradicts this image of the subjected woman, but at a closer look, we understand that she has a prestigious position just because her husband has died.[93] Little by little, the leadership is taken over by her sons as they grow up. Together with Hari, the family's pundit, the two sons, whom Mr. Biswas mockingly calls "the gods", stand at the centre of each symbolic occasion, be they family reunions or the morning *puja*. However, as Hari dies and Shekhar, the eldest brother, marries a Presbyterian girl and moves out of the house, Owad, the younger "god" remains the undisputed head of the family.[94] His return from England constitutes the occasion for a family celebration like "an old Hanuman House festival":

> The sisters announced their intention of staying awake all that night. There was so much cooking to do, they said. The children fell asleep. The group of men around the pundit thinned; the pundit fell asleep. The sisters cooked and joyously complained of overwork; they sang sad wedding songs; they made pots of coffee; they played cards. Some sisters disappeared for an hour or so, but none admitted she had gone to sleep, and Chinta boasted that she could stay awake for seventy-two hours [...][95]

The sisters' subjection is so profound that not only do they cook and stay awake – unlike their husbands – but also compete with each other, trying to prove who is the most hardworking. The festival continues for a whole week and they have to feed family and strangers as well.

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[91] Cf. *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 32.
[92] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[93] Ramabai Espinet criticises Naipaul and S. Selvon for adopting the stereotype of the Indo-Caribbean woman as "a family-oriented docile creature of decorum and modesty." See Ramabai Espinet, "Representation and the Indo-Caribbean Woman in Trinidad and Tobago", in: Frank Birbalsingh, *ed.*, *Indo-Caribbean Resistance*, Toronto: TSAR, 1993, p. 47.
[94] See *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 515. The loss of a game of cards symbolically questions his leading position; that is why Owad blames Anand, his partner ( cf. *ibid.*, p. 526).
[95] *Ibid.*, p. 511.

But ceremonies are an expression of the Hindu caste system, too, confirming the special position occupied by Brahmins; sometimes the privileges that a Brahmin enjoys are temporary, vanishing at the end of the ritual as the following passage from *A House for Mr Biswas* points out:

> He seldom went there except when Tara's husband, prompted by Tara, held a religious ceremony and needed Brahmins to feed. Then Mr Biswas was treated with honour; stripped of his ragged trouser and shirt, and in a clean dhoti, he became a different person, and he never thought it unseemly that the person who served him so deferentially with food should be his own sister. In Tara's house he was respected as a Brahmin and pampered; yet as soon as the ceremony was over and he had taken his gift of money and cloth and left, he became once more only a labourer's child – *father's occupation: labourer* was the entry in the birth certificate F. Z. Ghany had sent – living with a penniless mother in one room of a mud hut.[96]

The fragment presents once again a female character as a servant; Biswas on the contrary, a man and a Brahmin, is served and respected. Even if he does not convert the symbolic capital which he possesses into money, being the son of a labourer (thus lacking prestige from a Western point of view), his status is high enough to be accepted by the respectable Mrs Tulsi as a match for her daughter, Shama. Biswas' prestige is especially effective with people belonging to lower castes, such as Ramchand, the man with whom his sister Dehuti has run away. When Biswas pays them a visit at their place in Port-of-Spain, Ramchand regards this as an honour and is delighted. However, at this stage Mr Biswas realises the absurdity of the respect paid to him:

> Mr Biswas had never questioned the deference shown him when he had gone to Tara's to be fed as a Brahmin and on his rounds with Pundit Jairam. But he had never taken it seriously; he had thought of it as one of the rules of a game that was only occasionally played. When he got to Ramchand's he thought it even more of a game. The hut indicated lowness in no way. The mud walls had been freshly whitewashed and decorated with blue and green and red palm-prints (Mr Biswas recognized Ramchand's broad palm and stubby fingers); the thatch was new and neat; the earth floor was high and had been packed hard; pictures from calendars were stuck on the walls, and in the veranda there was a hatrack. It was altogether less depressing that the crumbling, neglected hut in the back trace.[97]

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[96] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

Being a Brahmin seems to Biswas no more than a game, probably because he is influenced by Western ideas. Anyway, he is more impressed by the display of material possessions and Ramchand's efforts than by his own status as a Brahmin; he even envies the latter since he would rather live in this neat house than in his crumbling hut together with his mother. To quote Chinua Achebe, one could say that Biswas lives in a society "in which status and its symbols are not earned but ascribed".[98]

A Brahmin character who completely fructifies his symbolic capital is Ganesh, the protagonist of the novel *The Mystic Masseur*. Besides converting this type of capital into economic wealth – he sets up a genuine business with the help of his charisma as a man of God – Ganesh establishes himself as the ultimate authority concerning every kind of problem which confronts Fourways, by presiding over the local *panchayat* or council of elders. Later, with the help of tricks, he becomes the leader of the entire Indo-Trinidadian community and secures his leadership by means of religion. Unlike Indarsingh, his Westernised rival, Ganesh uses traditional symbols; thus succeeds in winning the respect of his compatriots and together with it, the local elections. To sum up, Hindu rituals and festivities are performative acts that may be regarded as an important facet of Trinidadian 'play-culture'. As my analysis has pointed out, they are powerful means of defining/defending Indianness and of establishing hierarchies of gender as well as caste; therefore, although these rituals are part of a dislocated culture, they are more than staged illusions as Naipaulian criticism has predominantly argued so far.

### 3.2.3. God's Game, Fate, Orientalism

As *lila*, play acquires a metaphysical dimension in Hinduism; that is why the Anglo-Caribbean author, despite his condescension towards the parents' religion, seems to be obsessed with metaphors of a ludic universe. What he says in *A Flag on the Island*, "[t]he world isn't a frightening place, really. People are playing a lot of the time. Once you realize that, you begin to see that people are just like yourself. Not

[98] Chinua Achebe, "What Has Literature Got to Do with It?", in: John Thieme, *ed.*, *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, London: Arnold, 1996, p. 24.

stronger or weaker",[99] and in *Miguel Street*, "the world not real at all",[100] goes back to Indian spirituality[101] rather than to the Shakespearean "All the world's a stage/And all the men and women merely players".[102] This ontological idea of human existence as play is something that fascinates Naipaul, even if he tries to escape its allure; in an interview from 1977, the writer confesses that Hinduism for him is more an emotional attitude, which reason must control:

> I have to admit at the same time, that a lot of Hindu attitudes, the deeper attitudes, are probably also mine – that I probably do have a feeling about the vanity of human action and human life. I have developed a kind of speculative mind which is leading me into very strange and fairly disquieting paths now. I'm trying to control it. I regard it as part of my bad blood coming to the surface when I start playing with ideas of time and space.[103]

Obviously, the control has not been very strict since many images testifying a Hindu sensibility pervade Naipaul's works. One of the most significant aspects under which this cosmic play appears is God's sporting with His creation. A recurrent image is that of the dancing Shiva, who during his performance creates, then destroys the universe in a cyclical movement. This circular pattern also underlies *The Enigma of Arrival*, where beginnings bear the promise of death and ruin; it is an idea coming from Hinduism as Naipaul indicates in the following quotation: "I dreaded change both here and on the driveway; and that is why, meeting distress halfway, I cultivated old, possible ancestral ways of feeling, the ways of glory dead, and held on to the idea of a world in flux: the drum of creation in the god's right hand, the flame of destruction in his left."[104] Shiva's dance ends with the burning of the world; actually, this myth receives a burlesque note in an older story "The Pyrotechnicist" from *Miguel Street*, in which Morgan, the fireworks-maker, ignites his house, thus staging what he calls "the Cosmic Dance or the Dance of Life".[105] The respective myth made such a powerful impact on young Naipaul that he asked his sister Kamla in a letter from 1952 for a statuette of Siva Natarajan – 'the dancing Shiva' – alongside

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[99] "A Flag on the Island", p. 228.
[100] *Miguel Street*, p. 76.
[101] For a short presentation of the related concepts of *maya* ('illusion') and *lila* ('play'), see Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies*, pp. 102-105.
[102] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, *ed. by* Cynthia Marshall, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004, Act II, Scene 7, Lines 139-140.
[103] Charles Wheeler, "'It's Every Man for Himself' – V. S. Naipaul on India", in: *Conversations with V. S. Naipaul*, p. 42.
[104] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 54.

Gandhi's autobiography, a history of India and English translations of the Hindu epics and dramas.[106] Interestingly enough, the idea of the cosmic dance fascinates even European aristocrats like the French Deschampsneufs in *The Mimic Men*[107] or the English landlord in *The Enigma of Arrival*; this does not show, however, an opening towards other cultures since Hindu themes are appropriated as aesthetic objects: "[The landlord's] Krishna and Shiva were names and in his poems they were like Greek divinities, given the color of antique sculpture, literally touched with night-blue, the color of wantonness, the promise of pleasure (and beauty and Keatsian truth) that made the senses reel."[108] This cannibalistic act is imperialist in its essence as Naipaul points out: "[M]y landlord's Indian romance [...] was rooted in England, wealth, empire, the idea of glory, material satiety, a very great security."[109]

Krishna's dance with the *gopis* ("milkmaids") is another aspect of the divine *lila*, the motif appearing in *The Mimic Men* under the form of a painting. Once again, we have to do with a colonial gesture of appropriation, as the picture adorns the antechamber of Lord Stockwell's house. On it, Ralph Singh can see "Krishna, the blue god, upright, left leg crossed in front of the right, flute at his lips, wooing a white milkmaid".[110] The racial connotations are obvious, all the more because the Indian Singh falls in love with the "transparent" Stella, Lord Stockwell's daughter, with whom he has an affair; however, I would not go so far as John Thieme in interpreting the scene as a hopeless admission on Singh's part of his own weakness when facing the Western coloniser.[111] In my opinion, everything is more ambiguous: the god/goddess who plays with his/her creation is not fully above it and in control. A second important allusion to Krishna's play with the world is made in *A House for Mr Biswas*; this is signalled from the very beginning of the novel when Biswas receives the surname Mohun, which "means the beloved, and was the name given by the milkmaids to Lord Krishna."[112] The title of the chapter, too, "Pastoral", indicates that this may be the world where Vishnu's avatar spent his childhood as a cowherd in playful delight.[113] Little Biswas is given a calf, of which he must take care, but

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[105] *Miguel Street*, p. 59.
[106] See *Between Father and Son*, p. 206.
[107] *The Mimic Men*, p. 222 and p. 225.
[108] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 212.
[109] *Loc. cit.*
[110] *The Mimic Men*, p. 246.
[111] John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 125.
[112] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 17.
[113] See David R. Kinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 112 ff.

prefers to amuse himself in the stream whose "delights seemed endless".[114] Mohun's game may be seen as a symbolic rendition of the creation of the world (the infinitely enchanting river suggesting the primordial waters); like the divine play, Biswas's pastime has tragic consequences: death enters the stage destroying the idyllic atmosphere when Raghu drowns while searching for his son. Krishna's divine play is counterbalanced by the idea of cosmic dance, which is enacted at Mr Biswas' birth: "Jhagru, the barber, brought his drum, and Selochan did the Shiva dance in the cowpen, his body smeared all over with ash."[115] Thus, this double godlike performance (Krishna's and Shiva's) underlying Chapter 1 emphasises the importance of the *lila* theme.

In connection with the respective topic there stands the notion of fate, according to Naipaul.[116] If world's destinies are in the hands of gods, then man is not able to do anything to change them: consequently, although his family knows that Mohun will cause a lot of trouble, the catastrophe cannot be stopped once it has been predicted by the pundit's horoscope. Reading this part, one thinks of the Greek tragedies and their oracles. Indeed, fate or at least belief in fate seems to rule the lives of Indians in Trinidad as the following excerpt from the same novel makes clear:

> Bipti's father, futile with asthma, propped himself up on his string bed and said, as he always did on unhappy occasions, "Fate. There is nothing we can do about it."
>
> No one paid him any attention. Fate had brought him from India to the sugar-estate, aged him quickly and left him to die in a crumbling mud hut in the swamplands; yet he spoke of fate often and affectionately, as though, merely by surviving, he had been particularly favoured.[117]

The excerpt is significant because it suggests that belief in fate induces a passive acceptance of external circumstances, however unjust they may be. Although the statement "Fate. There is nothing we can do about it" looks like a logical cause-and-effect relationship, one may easily demonstrate that this is rather a discursive construct than something natural: Calvinists, for example, in spite of their doctrine of predestination are usually described as doers, hard-working people. Regarding

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[114] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 24.
[115] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[116] For an interpretation of the Naipaulian novel *Guerrillas*, linking the idea of fate to a ludic universe, see John Mellors, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
[117] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 15.

Indians as passive people is a Eurocentric point of view; so, the aristocrat Deschampsneufs tells Ralph Singh the following: "You fellows from the Orient and so on, ancient civilization etcetera, you are the long-visioned types. You give up too easily." On the contrary, Westerners would be the doers, just because they are not very philosophical.[118]

Images of fatalist, passive people are quite frequent in Naipaul's fiction, receiving an Orientalist coloration. A favourite device is presenting such characters playing games of chance:[119] on the one hand, we have the Indian Bogart, from *Miguel Street*, whose first nickname was Patience, "because he played that game from morn till night";[120] on the other hand, there is the Chinese shopkeeper who takes refuge in gambling after his wife has died of pleurisy. Here is his unhappy story narrated in the local Trinidadian dialect by the protagonist of *The Baker's Story*:

> And now, look at my crosses. As soon as the woman dead, the Chinee man like he get mad. He didn't cry or anything like that, but he start gambling like a bitch, and the upshot was that one day, perhaps about a month after the old lady dead, the man tell his children to pack up and start leaving, because he gamble and lose the shop to another Chinee feller. I didn't know, I suppose they begin to feel that I was just part of the shop, and the old man not even saying that he sorry he lose me.[121]

On the whole, Naipaul's concept of play-culture cannot properly be understood without taking into account Hindu ludic discourses centred on *lila*. Nevertheless, the writer is much influenced by Orientalist assumptions; that is why his presentation of Indian practices and beliefs comes close to what M. L. Pratt calls

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[118] *The Mimic Men*, pp. 185-186.

[119] Sutton-Smith reunites games of luck and the play of the gods under the same heading "Rhetorics of Fate"; undeniably, he adopts a Eurocentric position (even if unintentionally) by saying that: "One can see how the passivity or receptivity of the Hindu in face of the metaphysical universe at play could mingle quite easily with the Hindu ontological sense of the individual mind at daydreaming play. Play could then be thought to be mainly a phenomenon to be experienced top down rather than actively manipulated bottom up." – see Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, p. 57. As Don Handelman and David Shulman indicate in their study *God Inside Out: Šiva's Game of Dice*, New York: Oxford UP, 1997, p. vii and p. 4, Shiva's favourite game is indeed that of dice (and the universe is his dice match); however, from this image of the playful god to that of the passive, fatalist Indians, waiting to be ruled by the Western nations, there is a long way that only a perverted logic can follow.

[120] *The Miguel Street*, p. 1.

[121] "The Baker's Story", in: *A Flag on the Island*, p. 140.

"autoethnography",[122] namely the description of one's own culture by means of the coloniser's categories.

[122] See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 7.

### 3.3. Black Carnival

In his study entitled *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V. S. Naipaul*, Timothy Weiss devotes the first chapter to the idea of carnival. Inspired by Bakhtin, who regarded the novel as a carnivalesque genre with a polyphonic form, the critic living in Hong Kong reunites under this label only three of the early Trinidadian fictional works, namely *Miguel Street*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *The Mystic Masseur*, which he describes as being "touched by the theatricality of the Trinidadian carnival, with gaiety, outlandish creativity, masks, inversions" on the one hand, but exemplary of Naipaul's "fear of a loss of identity through a carnivalistic immersion in the folk" on the other hand.[123] However, Timothy Weiss does not offer a complete picture of the respective topic in the work of the Anglo-Caribbean author since he sacrifices facts for the sake of an idealistic approach that he will later call "translational";[124] therefore, rather than analyse Naipaul's use of carnival as a racial marker, an epitome of the Afro-Trinidadian community, he prefers to point out the hybrid even utopian dimensions of this theme.[125]

Indeed, the Naipaulian carnival-motif has its positive aspects, too, but they gradually disappear after the publication of Naipaul's first travelogue *The Middle Passage* in 1962, which warns of possible interracial bloody conflicts in postcolonial Trinidad.[126] Beginning to regard his black compatriots more and more as Others, Naipaul distances himself from the Trinidad Carnival with its mixture of European and African elements. Thus, if in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, Naipaul is still able to identify himself with carnivalesque characters, speaking about "my normal clowning self",[127] and depicts Indian protagonists like Mr. Biswas in such terms as "buffoon" and "clown",[128] later he associates Carnival almost exclusively

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[123] Timothy Weiss, *On the Margins*, p. 44.

[124] Cf. Timothy Weiss, *Translating Orients: Between Ideology and Utopia*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 11.

[125] Nevertheless, the critic remarks in passing the "black" Carnival motif in some of V. S. Naipaul's essays. See T. Weiss, *On the Margins*, pp. 138-139 and pp. 141-142.

[126] The early 1960s, when Trinidad became independent, mark the tensioning of interethnic relations; here is what a local says about the 1950s: "We knew we religion, we knew we was Hindu, we just went because we friends were that [Pentecostal] and we had fun, and we parents never told us anything [i.e., not to go]. Not like these days when they say not to mix. Back then it was more freer." (Aisha Khan, *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity among South Asians in Trinidad*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, p. 20).

[127] *Between Father and Son*, p. 25.

[128] See *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 101, p.195, p.225, p. 310, p. 339, and p. 528.

with black Trinidadians in novels like *The Mimic Men, Guerrillas* and *A Way in the World* or in short stories like "A Flag on the Island". "Black" Carnival appears in these fictional works as a festival born out of the African slaves' nightly pastimes, the background of failed revolutions and of irrational outbursts, be they mystical or sensual.

### 3.3.1. Afro-Trinidadians

The black slaves who made "the middle passage" from Africa to the Caribbean came from the western parts of the continent. A Trinidadian statistics from 1812 shows that they were Igbos (39,4%), Mandigoes, Yorubas, Alladas, Kongos and Asantes;[129] although they belonged to different ethnic groups and lost their mother tongues, Africans in the New World succeeded in preserving many of their customs,[130] which were later integrated into Carnival activities. Afro-Trinidadians were soon to surpass other ethnic groups in number after the year 1783 when Spain promulgated the *Cédula de Población* allowing Catholic planters together with their slaves to settle down on the island.[131] Blacks continued to constitute the largest community in Trinidad up to the 1990s when they ceded their leading position to East Indians. Consequently, the former controlled all post-independence governments before the 1995 elections, thus reinforcing the feeling of exclusion experienced by Naipaul and the entire Indian community.

Geographically, blacks are concentrated in the north of the country, around the capital Port of Spain; in fact, Afro-Trinidadians' strong urban character differentiates them from their Indian compatriots, who live predominantly in rural central and southern Trinidad, being employed in agriculture.[132] Naipaul's novels generally reflect this "divide" and the professional structure of the island, which not long ago was still taboo- and stereotype-ridden as pointed out in "The Baker's Story", for example.[133] In spite of the growing fluidity of social borders in present-

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[129] Hollis U. Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago*, Ann Arbour, Michigan: University of Michigan, Diss., 1993, p. 11 ff.
[130] *Ibid*., p. 23.
[131] Peter van Koningsbruggen, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.
[132] Sally Lloyd-Evans and Robert B. Potter, *Gender, Ethnicity and the Informal Sector in Trinidad*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002, p. 59.
[133] "The Baker's Story", pp. 144-145.

day Trinidad, stereotypes still loom large, affecting the two major groups' mutual understanding. Since Naipaul is an outsider to the Afro-Trinidadian community, it does not come as a surprise then that he will use many heterostereotypes, some of them indisputably racist. The Negro as ludic person, forever happy, a buffoon and an idler, is a stock figure in colonial discourse; unfortunately, Naipaul's presentation of Carnival is massively influenced by these unflattering representations, which I analyse in the following pages.

### 3.3.2. Fashioning the Black

Before analysing the theme of Black Carnival as it appears in V. S. Naipaul, one should be aware of the historical process of fashioning the African. Eurocentric representations depicting the coloured as ridiculous people may easily be used in the context of carnival, which itself is considered to be a frivolous festival by many.[134] In fact, the caricature, Naipaul's main strategy of rendering Afro-Trinidadians laughable, seems to stem directly from colonial times; as Lemuel A. Johnson argues, Westerners' response to "the idea of blackness in human form" from the Middle Ages up to the 20th century was largely a scornful one:

> The Negro, insofar as he was black and physically different, became an incarnation of the incongruous and the antithetical. He was seen as an apt metaphor for esthetic and ethical caricature. Insofar as he was black, he was a metaphor for darkness and for the unholy. So he became the Devil [...]. To the extent that his features and behavior were comically different he became a Buffoon. But these same features, "black-skinned, blubber-lipped, flat-nosed," could also be perceived as uncomfortably close caricatures. Seen in this light he became as negatively decorative and as slightly obscene as a Gargoyle [...].[135]

The African was reduced to some physical traits, hideously exaggerated; according to Stuart Hall, who follows Fanon, we could speak of an "epidermalization" of the

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[134] Sutton-Smith nevertheless points out the relativity of such beliefs: "While in modern society one can still find the "official" fool in various places on the fringe of society, there have been times and there are still places where the fool has almost the position of the wisest person." Moreover, Sutton-Smith finds a potentially transgressive dimension with the clown or the trickster, who "is so frivolous he can invert frivolity" (Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, p. 211).

[135] Lemuel A. Johnson, *The Devil, the Gargoyle, and the Buffoon: The Negro as Metaphor in Western Literature*, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971, p. 19.

racial look, in which "exclusion and abjection are imprinted on the [black] body".[136] Naipaul's writings abound in such grotesque images, dismembering the bodies of the coloured. Repugnant details are overemphasised; consequently, in the novel *The Mimic Men* we find "acrid-accented" Africans, whose sweat has an "acrid smell" – "the old *bouquet d'Afrique*".[137] The same novel particularly insists on the "kinky", short hair, a racial marker commonly used in colonial times; here is a relevant remark made by Browne, Ralph Singh's former schoolmate: "[Browne] dismissed it in his brisk, self-satirizing way as 'a Negro's beard' [...]. He then said that in his three years in London he had never been to a barber-shop. It had been no problem; hair like his never really grew long."[138] Browne's complex of inferiority is clearly induced by colonial discourse, which is best exemplified by aberrant works like John Campbell's *Negro-Mania* (1851) with the pompous subtitle of *Being an examination of the falsely-assumed equality of the various races of men, demonstrated by the investigations of Champollion, Wilkinson, Roselini, Van-Amringe, Gideon, Young, Morton, Knox, Lawrence, Gen. J. H. Hammont, Murray, Smith, W. Gilmore Simms, English, Conrad, Eider, Pritchard, Blumenbach, Cuvier, Brown, Le Vaillant, Carlyle, Cardinal Wiseman, Bruckhardt and Jefferson*. In it, we find pseudo-scientific comments meant to prove the irreducible otherness of the African people such as the following: "The genuine Negroes have very little growth of hair on the chin, or even on other parts of the body. In a full grown lad of seventeen, there was not the smallest appearance of beard, nor of hair on any other part except the head. I never saw hair on the arms, legs, or breasts of Negroes, like what is observed on those parts in Europeans."[139] Equally, this emphasis may be explained by the author's desire to infantilise the blacks, who appear as retarded in their evolution towards maturity.

Another fragment from the novel *The Mimic Men*, besides introducing the "beard" motif, focuses on the lower lip of the coloured character:

> It was an unfortunate characteristic of Browne's – until in his thirties he grew a beard – that he always appeared to be smiling nervously. The skin from his

[136] Stuart Hall, "The After-life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why *Black Skin, White Masks*?", in: Alan Read, *ed.*, *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, London: ICA, 1996, p. 20.
[137] *The Mimic Men*, p.21 and p. 211.
[138] *Ibid.*, pp. 204-5. See also p. 159, p. 202 and p. 231.
[139] John Campbell, as quoted in Lemuel A. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

> lower lip to the tip of his chip was curiously taunt and corrugated; it was as though he was holding back a laugh. At the very tip of this chin, accentuating the smile that wasn't a smile, was a wart; from a distance this looked like a drop of water and suggested that Browne had just washed his face and not bothered to dry it. All this gave him the comedian's appearance which his parents had exploited.[140]

With his moist face and lips, Browne resembles Jimmy, another black West Indian, this time from the novel *Guerrillas*; once again, the carrier of racist impressions is not the omniscient narrator, but the white Jane, who says: "It was awful. That moustache, those wet blubber lips. Liver-colored lips, pink on the inside. And the driver and the car."[141] But the fragment from *The Mimic Men* is also extremely important because it makes allusion to the colonial stereotype of the "happy Negro",[142] which is shown by Naipaul to appear in the writings of the Victorian authors visiting the Caribbean: "Froude, in 1887, 'seeing always the boundless happiness of the black race', could only warn that 'the powers which envy human beings [sic] too perfect felicity may find ways one day of disturbing the West Indian Negro.'"[143]

As might be expected, the image of the happy, buffoon-like black is fully exploited in *The Mimic Men*; accordingly, Singh remembers "how at school Browne, being seen with a Tarzan book, explained in his clowning way to the master, 'I only read books of commonsense, sir.'"[144] Reading the Tarzan book and finding the story commonsensical in spite of its racial hierarchies, which confirm the white man as Lord of the Jungle, are marks of an alienated black consciousness, caught under the spell of Eurocentric ideas. This process of internalising Western values is most obvious in the case of Browne's father, who is presented as the main responsible for letting his son transform into a clown conforming to colonial stereotypes:

> Above this cabinet was a large photograph of a Negro man and woman, a girl, and a much bedecked boy whose tight chin with water-drop wart revealed

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[140] *The Mimic Men*, p. 159.
[141] *Guerrillas*, p. 158.
[142] The stereotype is so powerful in the mind of an imperialist like Froude that the historian denies even the devastating effects of slavery, which he impertinently minimises (cf. Froude, *op. cit.*, p.50).
[143] *The Middle Passage*, p. 48. See also *ibid.*, p. 69, for a reference to Charles Kingsley. Moreover, Jimmy in *Guerrillas* writes that "I am beginning to feel that we are an incurably frivolous people and as a nation we seem resigned to giggling our way to oblivion" (*Guerrillas*, p.160), which echoes Sandra's judgement in *The Mimic Men*: "Inferior natives, inferior expats. Frightfully inferior and frightfully happy. The two must go together." (*The Mimic Men*, pp. 71-72).
[144] *The Mimic Men*, p. 111.

> him as Browne the comic singer, all standing before a painted backdrop of a ruined Greek temple. Browne's father followed my eyes. He was past pride; but in his look there was that satisfaction which comes to the old and foolish who feel they have done a lot by living long.[145]

Certainly, the black boy in front of the Greek temple (symbol of the European culture) signalises the West Indians' colonised mind; this scene actually presents a so-called "coon show", which is described at large somewhere else in the same novel. There, of course, the protagonist is once more Browne, who sings, whereas his delighted parents sit in the audience. Later, the performance constitutes a source of painful memories as the following passage makes it clear:

> [Browne's] past as a clown and a singer of coon songs tormented him, and he used me as his confessor. But I could not wash him clean. I remembered his success too well. I remembered his delight – the delight of the dancing boy in toy suit with a bowtie and straw hat and cane and painted red lips – and I remembered his parents' delight, and my envy of his fame.
>
> *I like cake, I like honey,*
> *I am not the boy to refuse any money.*
> *I can sleep on a cotton bale*
> *Or roost up a tree.*
> *Tell you what it is, boys:*
> *Nothing hurts me.*
>
> He blamed his parents – I remember his father, in a heavy brown suit, leaning forward in his folding chair, and giving his cackling, squelchy, feminine Negro laugh, like a man about to spit – but he ought to have blamed our innocence.[146]

Even Singh, who comes from a Hindu family, is impressed by the show and envies his schoolmate, so the guilt of Browne's parents is apparently minimised; nevertheless, that does not make Browne's father appear in a positive light. On the contrary, the father's own concerto of noises stands for the abnormality of the "feminine" black race; furthermore, words like 'to roost' or 'to cackle' suggest an ornithological world epitomising the subhuman nature of Africans. Browne's role as

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[145] *Ibid*., p. 161.

[146] *Ibid*., p. 155. In fact, Browne's coon show becomes a leitmotif; here is another rendition of it: "Browne was also famous. He knew many funny songs and whenever a song was required at school he was asked to sing. At our concerts he wore a straw hat and a proper suit with a bowtie; people applauded as soon as he came on. His biggest hit was a song called 'Oh, I'm a happy little nigger'; his miming during this song was so good that people jerked forward on their seats with laughter and often you couldn't hear the words. I deeply envied Browne his fame and regard. For

a coon-singer is well-anchored in slavery: hence, his song speaks about the black slaves' labours on cotton or cocoa plantations. His cane, too, may allude to the main plant cultivated in Trinidad and in the Caribbean, out of which sugar is extracted. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, the author of *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* is of the opinion that a slave took up the role of a performer because the white masters expected him to work as well as to entertain. Perversely, the black slaves' singing was regarded as an argument in defence of slavery; after all, this was said to permit and sustain the Negroes' state of happiness. Such a happy slave is Uncle Remus – the character created by Joel Chandler Harris– an old man full of folk wisdom and satisfied with his condition.[147] A Naipaulian text where we have references to Uncle Remus and to coon shows in general is the short story "A Flag on the Island". Of particular interest is the scene, in which White (short for Blackwhite), an Afro-Caribbean writer, meets Bippy, Tippy and Chippy, representatives of 'Foundationland'; having decided no longer to compose protest novels, but to write about a black man falling in love with a black woman, White faces his sponsors' disapproval:

> 'Mr White, that's not a story.'
> 'It's more like the old-fashioned coon show. The thing we've been fighting against.'
> 'You'll have the liberals down your throat.'
> 'You will give us the sack. Mr White, look at it from our point of view.'
> 'Calm down, boys. Let me talk to him. This is a strange case of regression, Mr White.'
> 'I'll say. You've regressed right back to Uncle Remus, right back to Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox.'
> 'Do us another *Hate* and we'll support you to the hilt.'[148]

Here we have another confirmation of the dependency of the black entertainer (now a writer) on the white world: in this case, he is threatened with the suppression of all financial aid. Therefore, the writer must abandon one stereotypical part – the coon-singer – in order to conform to another one as a protest writer.[149] Above all, this is a telling scene, which indicates the nefarious influence of stereotypes, showing that

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him the world was already charted." ( *The Mimic Men*, p. 99).

[147] Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*, pp. 132-166.

[148] "A Flag on the Island", p. 220.

[149] Also the Trinidadian writer Samuel Selvon points out the stereotypical nature of the black literature of protest; see Samuel Selvon, "Three into One Can't Go – East Indian, Trinidadian, Westindian" in: David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

slavery has not completely disappeared, having changed to more subtle forms of subordination. Slavery is also the subject of the next chapter, in which I focus on Naipaul's assumption that Trinidadian carnival goes back to the period when blacks were in bondage to their European masters.

### 3.3.3. Carnival and Slavery

The 1970 essay "Power" presents in a concise form Naipaul's ideas about Trinidad Carnival, which underlie the writer's later fiction. Here, the words defining this festival are: "Black Power," "lunacy," "revolt," "religious gesture," but above all, "slavery". In Naipaul's opinion, "[t]he islanders themselves, who have spent so long forgetting the past, have forgotten the darker origins of their Carnival. The bands, flags and costumes have little to do with Lent, and much to do with slavery."[150] Indeed, various observers in the first half of the 19th century noticed black processions during Carnival making clear allusions to slavery as the participants used to carry a long chain.[151]

It is the Spaniards led by Columbus who brought this evil to the Caribbean; thus, the Admiral wrote the following about the native people in his journal: "They should be good servants and intelligent, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them."[152] In the next years, the Amerindian population was so cruelly exploited up to the point of being completely exterminated; therefore, their dwindling numbers had to be reinforced with another contingent of slaves, this time from Africa, where the Portuguese had already been present.[153] A so-called "triangular trade" was established: a ship coming from a metropolitan country exchanged metropolitan goods for slaves in Africa, and then made "the Middle Passage" transporting these slaves to the West Indies; after selling the Africans to the Caribbean planters, it returned to the mother country, loaded with sugar or other products.[154]

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[150] "Power?", p. 134.
[151] See Carlton R. Ottley, *Slavery Days in Trinidad: A Social History of the Island from 1797-1838*, Port of Spain: By the Author, 1974, p. 142.
[152] Columbus, as quoted in Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492- 1969*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1970, p. 31.
[153] Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, p. 41 ff.
[154] *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

Like indenture, slavery constitutes an important theme in Naipaul's writings; moreover, what the author born in Trinidad seems to suggest is the fact that it did not disappear with the promulgation of the Emancipation Act in 1834. Ironically, in the novel *Guerrillas* the agricultural camp organised by Jimmy Ahmed with the help of some black boys is supported by Sablich, an ancient firm specialised in slave trade.[155] Even the planters' descendants are still treated with respect by the new black middle class, as the following fragment from the same novel shows:

> Mrs. Grandlieu was of an old planter family. She was an elderly brown-skinned woman; and at her cocktail parties and dinners she always did or said something to remind black people of the oddity of their presence in her house, where until recently Negroes were admitted only as servants.
>
> Mrs. Grandlieu's accent was exaggeratedly local. She spoke the English her servants spoke; it was part of her privilege, and her way of distancing herself from the important black men, some with English accents, whom she asked to her house. At these gatherings Mrs. Grandlieu always managed to say "nigger" once, as if only with a comic intention, using the word as part of some old idiom of the street or the plantations which she expected her guests to recognize. She might say, of something that was a perfect fit, that it fitted "like yam fit nigger mouth"; and the black men would laugh. Once Jane heard her say, of someone who talked too much, that his mouth ran "like a sick nigger's arse."
>
> Yet the people who considered it a privilege to be in Mrs. Grandlieu's house, assumed an exaggerated ease there, laughed with her at her antique plantation idioms, and avoided the racial challenge that she always in some way threw down [...].[156]

Mrs. Grandlieu, who has a telling name alluding to the imposing dimensions of her property, is openly humiliating her black guests. Here, language with its racist idioms helps her in this symbolic power game, which appears to be extremely effective in spite of the fact that Mrs. Grandlieu is not "pure-blooded" (since some ancestor of hers had an African mistress). The same prestige is enjoyed by the planter family Deschampsneufs in the novel *The Mimic Men*; that makes Singh's English wife Sandra pronounce "[t]he island's phrase", namely "'The Niger is a tributary of that Seine.'"[157] As one can easily notice, the planter families are of French origin both in *Guerrillas* and in *The Mimic Men*, which is explainable by Trinidad's peculiar

[155] See *Guerrillas*, p. 36. Sablich is also mentioned in *The Loss of El Dorado* on page 316 as a Trinidadian planter who ordered a whole cargo of slaves without ever paying for it.
[156] *Guerrillas*, pp. 46-47.
[157] *The Mimic Men*, p. 84.

history. If the Spaniards instituted slavery in the Caribbean, the French were those who finally imposed it on a large scale in Trinidad. The latter came in the 1780s and 1790s mainly from Santo Domingo and Martinique, two islands burning with revolutionary fever; the more slaves the French immigrants had, the more land they received.[158] Except for slaves, the French also brought Carnival with them. According to the author of the study *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, Hollis U. Liverpool, the season of festivities in Trinidad lasted from Christmas Day to Shrove Tuesday: "Besides house visits and drives around the city, the French would disguise themselves with masks, tinsel and paint and hold elaborate balls, dinners and 'fêtes champêtres.'"[159] A hint to these celebrations is made in *The Mimic Men* when Singh, leaving his native island, receives from his friends a book as a present: "It carried all their stylish, evolving signatures. *Fête Champêtre: The Paintings of Watteau and Fragonard*. I felt that the choice of book had been left to Deschampsneufs."[160]

The enslaved, too, had their festivities. They were not accepted in the houses of their masters, but held nocturnal meetings, at which they danced accompanied by African drums; one planter, Mrs. Charmichael, affirmed that the Trinidadian slaves' amusements were "comprised in the one word, dancing."[161] These practices gave birth with Naipaul to the motif of the "world of the night," underlying nonfictional works like the essays "Power?" and "The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro" or the book *The Loss of El Dorado* as well as the historiographic metafiction *A Way in the World*. The last novel is also the most elaborate from a literary point of view among the above-mentioned writings; of particular interest is the section "In the Gulf of Desolation. *An Unwritten Story*," which combines two narrative threads. In the foreground there stand the exploits of Miranda, the South American revolutionary who lived in Trinidad for a while, whereas the background is occupied by the black rebellion of 1805. It is remarkable that Naipaul uses anti-colonial techniques here by giving voice to the otherwise silent African slave and to his "unwritten" story.[162] As it soon becomes obvious, there is no co-ordination between the two revolutionary movements; moreover, Miranda looking outside a window sees the black slaves as

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[158] See V.S. Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado: A Colonial History*, pp. 112-119.
[159] Hollis U. Liverpool, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
[160] *The Mimic Men*, p. 194.
[161] Hollis U. Liverpool, *op. cit.*, p. 203. In Naipaul's novel *A Way in the World*, even the female slaves' work is regarded as "dancing" (see *A Way in The World*, pp. 303-304).
[162] See also *The Loss of El Dorado*, p. 272, where Naipaul speaks about "the silence of the serfdom".

others:

> These Africans in the grounds of Government House looked neglected. In the hollow red eyes of one man could be seen signs of a rainy-season fever. He was doomed, and so perhaps was one of the men with him.
>
> That idea of doom, of another kind of life, coming to Miranda even while he was looking at the eyes of the Africans, re-established distance between him and the men he saw, and returned him to himself and the setting: the downpour coming, the wet, rotting window sill with disagreeable drifts of black-and-white lizard droppings in the eaten-away parts of the wood: the lizards now seen to be active everywhere around him, pale yellow creatures, almost transparent, like little crocodiles but with enormous lidless eyes.[163]

Noticing the distress of the black slaves, some of whom are about to die after the long journey from Africa on pestilential ships, Miranda is apparently sympathetic to them; however, this mood does not last. Miranda is overcome by a feeling of disgust, expressed in an acute perception of the "disagreeable" elements of this tropical setting: the rain that lets everything rot and above all, the lizards. Once more, the Africans are represented in a subhuman register: the lizard's eyes and the eyes of the enslaved overlap.

No longer willing to suffer the yoke of servitude, the African slaves in Trinidad rebelled: "Once, in December 1805, this fantasy of the night overflowed into the working day."[164] The event is rendered in an imaginary dialogue between Miranda and the English governor of Trinidad; General Hislop, whose rule has a shaky fundament, speaks fearfully about the blacks' nocturnal carnival that gave birth to the uprising:

> These Negroes believe that during the day they're in hell. Literally. Did you know that? A strange kind of hell, where it doesn't matter what they do or what is done to them. When the sun goes down the real world begins for them. Everything changes then. As soon as night falls, and you know that in these parts night comes in five minutes, things balance out for them. We become ghosts. They become kings and queens and dauphins and grand judges. They wear crowns and have the whips. That's what their sorcerers tell them. They believe that in the night the power is theirs. It was one of the things that came out at an inquiry we had earlier this year. You live in a place for ten years, you think you know it, and then you find out that all the time you've been standing on quicksand.[165]

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[163] *A Way in the World*, pp. 257-258.
[164] "Power?", p. 134.
[165] *A Way in the World*, p. 266.

This excerpt also introduces an important Naipaulian theme, namely imitation. What the slaves actually did in their fantasy world was to copy the nobles; as the writer states somewhere else, these carnivalesque amusements were "a mimicry in the Negro yards of white entertaining."[166] Indeed, their parties reflected European society as shown by the dauphin titles clearly indicating the French influence; this is a process which Frantz Fanon admirably described in his classic of postcolonial literatures *Black Skin, White Masks*, being apparently inspired by the Carnival metaphor.[167] The African's schizoid attitude is present in this Naipaulian fragment, too, since the slave lived in two completely different worlds – those of the day and of the night. However, what seems to be just innocent playfulness to Miranda, who says that in Venezuela they always knew that "the Negroes liked dressing up and playing games", poses a potential threat that Hislop recognises: "One day they were going to kill all the white people. And then, when there was only one colour [...] they were going to go to church to take communion and then they were going to eat pork and dance. [...]You might say it's a game, but they were going to kill people and burn houses and fields."[168] Especially this mock-communion disturbs the white planters, who see *obeah* in it; actually, magic and poison were two of the most feared weapons at the black sorcerers' disposal.[169] In addition, the panic-stricken Governor becomes obsessed with images of fire: "After all the evidence at the inquiry, after hearing those simple-looking people talking very calmly about murdering people as though it was a continuation of their king-and-queen play at night, I saw the island and the

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[166] *The Loss of El Dorado*, p. 272.

[167] This aspiration towards whiteness is expressed as follows: "Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly *white*. I wish to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*." (Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks, transl. from the French by* Charles Lam Markmann, New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1952], p. 63). This is also Jimmy's attitude in *Guerillas*; indeed, *Guerillas* hints at Fanon, when Jimmy Ahmed complains that "it's always a case of black faces white masks [...]"(see *Guerrillas*, p. 81). However, Naipaul misreads Fanon, overlooking the postcolonial critic's calls to action (cf. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 223-232).

[168] *A Way in the World*, p. 267. According to Roger D. Abrahams, "[t]he designation of these all-night performances as plays was only one of the black uses for the term, possibly fastened on by whites because it departed so fully from their own usage"; see Roger D. Abrahams, *The Man-of-Words in the West Indies: Performance and Emergence of Creole Culture*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1983, p. 52.

[169] Poison is a motif that appears not only in *The Loss of El Dorado* or *A Way in the World* but also in *Guerrillas*, where a planter, Mrs. Grandlieu's father-in -law, dies of it; see *Guerrillas*, p. 127. On the contrary, belief in *obeah* is a recurrent theme in the novel *The Suffrage of Elvira*.

town going up in flames."[170] Finally, under the influence of the French landowners, he orders the black leaders to be horribly punished: tortured, hanged, decapitated.[171]

On the whole, by presenting in works like *The Loss of El Dorado* or *A Way in the World* the pains and the humiliations that blacks and Creoles suffered during slavery, Naipaul proves to be receptive to colonial abuses; unfortunately, his portrayal of contemporary Afro-Trinidadians is not that sympathetic, as we will see in what follows.

### 3.3.4. Clownish Revolutionaries

As already mentioned, the metaphor of the carnivalesque revolution appears in Chapter 8 of the experimental novel *A Way in the World*, which presents the rebellion of 1805 born out of the slaves' nocturnal entertainment. The same book juxtaposes this historical episode with another one taking place more than one hundred years later, namely the strike of 1937, when the destitute oil workers led by Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler protested against their miserable working conditions. The insurrection is described in terms of fun: after the "excitement" of the strike, Butler became "bored."[172] Indeed, what Naipaul laconically says about it, seems to coincide with ideas about festivals as "time out of time",[173] according to which everything eventually returns to normal: "A policeman was burned alive in the oilfield area. The atmosphere would have been like that of 1805 or 1831, when there was talk of a slave revolt. And then, as happened in the slave days, passions died down, and people returned to being themselves."[174] Even the killing of the policeman has a farcical note: "[H]e was to become, in fact, in calypso and folk memory, a special sacrificial figure, as famous as Uriah Butler himself, and almost as honoured." Moreover, "the place on the road where he was burned was to become known as Charlie King Corner: a little joke about a sanctified place."[175] In prison Butler, too, acquires carnivalesque features: "The man who had gone in as a revolutionary came

[170] *A Way in the World*, pp. 277-278.
[171] *Ibid.*, p. 314.
[172] *A Way in the World*, p. 107.
[173] See Alessandro Falassi, "Festival: Definition and Morphology", in: Alessandro Falassi, *ed.*, *Time out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987, p. 4.
[174] *A Way in the World*, p. 79.
[175] *Ibid.*, p. 80. This unfortunate policeman is alluded to in *Miguel Street*, where he is presented as the father of Big Foot, a local rogue; see *Miguel Street*, p. 52.

out as a clown, a preacher with a grey beard, a fly whisk, a fondness for suits."[176] The mood is carried forth by Butler's disciple Lebrun (a fictional creation), who has "a sense of his audience," for which he performs.[177]

Another novel based on historical events is *Guerrillas*, in which the protagonist, Jimmy Ahmed, closely resembles Michael Abdul Malik, also known as Michael X, the Trinidadian Black Power leader. So, when the latter is characterised by Naipaul in such terms as "Carnival figure," "dummy Judas to be beaten through the streets on Good Friday", "racial entertainer", "jester,"[178] it does not come then as a surprise that Jimmy turns to be a clownish revolutionary, leading a revolt that is more of a carnival. Although the time and place of the story are not named, it soon becomes clear that this is Trinidad in the year 1970 when "[a]fter the Carnival there were Black Power disturbances," as Naipaul writes in the essay "Power?".[179] The reader is introduced to this racially charged atmosphere from the very beginning of the novel *Guerrillas*: "They drove to the hot city at the foot of the hills, and then across the city to the sea road, through thoroughfares daubed with slogans: *Basic Black, Don't Vote, Birth Control Is a Plot Against the Negro Race*."[180] This city is a place where everybody seems to dance or to perform. Thus, Roche, the white South African, meets on his way to work all kinds of picturesque characters like the young blind beggar crying "Help de poor! Help de blind!", whose chant "was a performance" and "had a theatrical, even comic, quality."[181] Like Hislop in *A Way in the World*, Roche experiences "a feeling of apprehension" when faced with the clownish natives; later, caught in traffic, he restlessly watches out for "the abrupt stops and starts of the route taxis, the bare arms of the drivers making dancer's gestures outside their windows" as well as for "the cyclists, and especially for the exhibitionists among them [...]."[182] Obviously, Roche's perception is guided by the stereotype of the Trinidadian as a good dancer; even West Indians like Harry de Tunja, of other origin than African, are thought to be experts in the art of dance: "Jane said, 'But, Harry, I thought you would be a marvellous dancer.' 'In Toronto,

[176] *A Way in the World*, p. 80.
[177] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[178] "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad: Peace and Power", p. 155, p. 159 and p. 162.
[179] "Power?", p. 134.
[180] *Guerrillas*, p. 3.
[181] *Ibid.*, p. 110.
[182] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

you know what they call me? Calypso Harry. Up there as soon as you tell people where you come from they think you're crazy about music.'"[183] This carnival atmosphere seems to infect outsiders, too: Roche, holding an unimportant position as supervisor of Jimmy Ahmed's commune, becomes himself "a kind of buffoon figure to many,"[184] a man with "a satyr's laugh".[185]

If in real life Black Power protests had a duration of three months (between February and May 1970), coming as a prolongation of Carnival,[186] the revolutionary events of *Guerrillas* are concentrated within a few days for the sake of dramatic tension. Significantly, they begin on a Sunday, which may be Dimanche Gras when the masquerade begins,[187] with Jimmy Ahmed's procession in memory of his friend Stephens, killed by the police.[188] The revolt soon turns to burlesque: in the police station there is "some kind of kiddies' carnival going on"[189] (once again, an infantilising stereotype), and participants themselves "feel they're just taking a chance, and that when the show is over somebody is going to go down there and start dishing out licks."[190] Retrospectively, Jimmy realises he was only "a joker", "a billy goat" that was "fighting it out for nothing at all, just amusing the crowd."[191] This motif of the scapegoat, of the "dummy Judas to be beaten through the streets on Good Friday," is also embodied by Merry (short for Meredith), who enjoys a ministerial position for a very short time: "[...] that was when they [the government] were dressing Merry up to throw him to the crowd."[192] Down in the crowd, Merry suffers terrible humiliations: "They strip him naked. Joseph say somebody even put a knife to the man's balls – excuse me, Jane. Then they give him a piece of palm branch and make him run for his life."[193] Finally, like in the case of the 1970 Black

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[183] *Ibid.*, p. 124.
[184] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[185] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[186] For a discussion of the Black Power protests in Trinidad see Tony Thomas, "Mass Upsurge in Trinidad", in: Tony Thomas and John Riddell, *eds*., *Black Power in the Caribbean*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971, pp. 3-7; and Ivar Oxaal, *Race and Revolutionary Consciousness: A Documentary Interpretation of the 1970 Black Power Revolt in Trinidad*, Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1971, in particular pp. 22-40.
[187] See Errol Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre*, London: New Beacon Books, 1997 (1972), pp. 84-85; and Peter Mason, *Bacchanal! The Carnival Culture of Trinidad*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998, pp. 33-38.
[188] This funeral procession echoes a real-life event, namely the funerals of Basil Davis in Port-of-Spain on April 9, 1970 (see Ivar Oxaal, *Race and Revolutionary Consciousness*, p. 23).
[189] *Guerrillas*, p. 187.
[190] *Ibid.*, p. 184.
[191] *Ibid.*, pp. 222- 224.
[192] *Ibid.*, p. 185.
[193] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

Power protests in Trinidad, everything comes to a stop when the American army intervenes in support of the local government.

Generally, the slave rebellion and the oil workers' strike in *A Way in the World* as well as the revolt in *Guerrillas* are presented by Naipaul in similar terms: after a fanciful outburst of energy and emotions, there follows the return to reality. This is undeniably the pattern of a festival.[194]

### 3.3.5. Religious Hysteria

One of the words reserved by Naipaul for black politics is "hysteria"; connoting femininity and irrationality, "hysterical" is a degrading term, which perfectly fits colonial discourse as it makes the other appear inferior to the rational male Westerner. Two clownish black politicians, Merry from *Guerrillas* and Lebrun from *A Way in the World* are labelled with the respective epithet: about the latter's speech, the auctorial voice says that "there was hysteria there, as well, the hysteria of the islands, expressed most usually in self-satire, jokeyness, fantasy, religious excess, sudden spasms of cruelty."[195] Religion is a key word here;[196] actually, Carnival itself has a religious as well as an illogical nature in Naipaul's opinion. In the essay "Power?" he describes this festival as an apocalyptic expression of lunacy, based on "a vision of the black millennium."[197]

The carnivalesque rebellion in *Guerrillas* has plain religious aspects: "Everybody [is] carrying a piece of palm branch or coconut branch. The Arrow of Peace."[198] The symbolism makes one think of the entrance of the Messiah to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, a week before Easter; moreover, the Arrow of Peace, a sign resembling a contracted "AIA," hints at the slogan "After Israel Africa,"[199] which in the novel is propagated by Doctor Andy Byam. Paradoxically, Byam is a

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[194] The motif of the revolution as carnival appears in other contemporary English-speaking authors as well. I will mention here Graham Swift's novel *Waterland* and Earl Lovelace's book *The Dragon Can't Dance*.

[195] *A Way in the World*, p. 129.

[196] It is natural for a writer influenced by Enlightenment ideals to disregard "religious excesses."

[197] "Power?", p. 135.

[198] *Guerrillas*, p. 172.

[199] *Ibid.*, p. 165. Somewhere else, in the essay "Power?", Naipaul speaks about "the old-fashioned preacher who has said for years at street corners that after Israel it was to be the turn of Africa" (see "Power?", p. 136).

white from the American South, so what Naipaul seems to suggest is a new slavery of the spirit, a perpetuation of the *status quo*, which contrasts with this apparently anti-Eurocentric, pan-African message. In *Guerrillas* Pan-Africanism is exemplified by fashions imported from Jamaica, as well: the reggae music or the dreadlocks. [200] This particular hairstyle, nowadays emptied of any religious significance, was at the time a mark of belonging to the sect of Rastafarians, in which Naipaul sees once again a confirmation of the marriage between black racial politics and religion. Commenting on this type of politics in the extremely important essay "Power?", Naipaul mentions the figure of the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, whom Rastafarians worshipped as God, in spite of their disappointment that he looked "like a Hindu, mild-featured, brown and small."[201] He is a personage that made a deep impression on Naipaul, appearing in the novel *The Mimic Men* at first as the incarnation of African hopes, then as a helpless man, standing alone somewhere in an English railway station.[202]

The black Trinidadians' renewed interest in African things is also manifest in another scene from *Guerrillas*, which describes a Shouter Baptist ritual:

> A fat barefooted woman, with three elderly women attendants in white, was preaching, shouting, chanting. *And Mary lay dong, and de chile lay dong*: they were the only words that were clear, and she spoke them again and again between passages of gibberish. [...] It was a private frenzy. [...] The marchers were in two columns of three. The woman in front was middle-aged; she held her candle upright and worked her hands and hips in an easy grinding way. The man was youngish; whenever he stamped his left foot he seemed about to collapses, but it was his own variation of the march: it was what he was allowing his body to do, this quivering descent, this mock half-fall. They stamped and stamped, digging their feet deeper into the sand. The woman sweated prodigiously; great circles of sweat had spread from under the arms of her white bodice. She held herself erect; her pumping elbows and her stamping feet created their own rhythm. She marched like a leader. The man beside her marched like a clown. The white blindfold emphasized his broad forehead, his heavy, ill-formed lips and his sagging jaw. The bells rang and rang. And though about the chief bell ringer, stylish in a black gown with a yellow sash, there was something of the showman, pleased to draw a crowd, [...] all eyes were on the marchers, on those repetitive steps [...].[203]

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[200] This happened during the Black Power protests in Trinidad, too. Cf. Selwyn D. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972, p. 367.

[201] "Power?", p. 135.

[202] See *The Mimic Men*, p. 160 and p. 273.

[203] *Guerrillas*, p. 117-118. An article pointing out the African background of the Shouters cult is George Eaton Simpson, "The Shango Cult in Nigeria and in Trinidad", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 64, Nr. 6, Dec. 1964, pp. 1204-1219.

The ritual nature of the event is emphasised through repetitions such as "[t]hey stamped and stamped" or "[t]he bells rang and rang." In fact, the episode presents all of Naipaul's ideas about Carnival and black religiosity in a concise form: this ceremony is obviously an expression of "the hysteria of the islands", nothing more than "a private frenzy", and "gibberish" (here, we come once again upon Enlightenment's insistence on the importance of rationality). It also feeds on Carnival: the participants are showmen, and one of them is even depicted as a "clown." He is an animal-like character, with all the stereotypical features of the "brutish Negro", a "broad forehead", "heavy, ill-formed lips" and a "sagging jaw". Likewise, the middle-aged woman is a grotesque figure, abundantly sweating, which reminds the reader of "the old *bouquet d'Afrique*" mentioned in *The Mimic Men*. Very interesting is the fat barefooted woman, who not only chants and shouts but also preaches; by that, she enters an entire gallery of Naipaulian black characters who give talks on religious and racial topics.

The "preacher" motif goes back to the novel *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), in which the name of the leader of the black community is precisely Preacher; he is a "visionary,"[204] and a biblical character as indicated in the following description: "A tall negro with high frizzy hair, long frizzy beard, long white robe; haloed in the light of the headlamps; walking briskly at the edge of the road, stamping his staff, the hem of his robe dancing above sandalled feet."[205] The "preacher" occurs in other fictional works, too: in *Miguel Street* as the crazy Man-Man or in the short story "A Flag on the Island" as Priest, who sells insurance policies. Resembling Preacher from *The Suffrage of Elvira*, Priest is "[a] tall bearded man, white-robed and sandalled [...] leading a little group of hymn-singers, six small black girls in white gowns."[206] Browne himself, the black leader in *The Mimic Men*, is a Christ-like figure, a "redeemer of the race."[207] More recent is, nevertheless, Naipaul's portrayal of Butler in *A Way in the World*: a buffoon, Butler – the possible historical source of inspiration for the respective motif – is presented as "a preacher" and "a kind of messiah" as well.[208]

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[204] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 75.
[205] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[206] "A Flag on the Island", p. 175.
[207] *The Mimic Men*, p. 220.
[208] *A Way in the World*, p. 80. According to Rita Christian, Preacher from the novel *The Suffrage of*

To sum up, I should say that Naipaul links Carnival to the Black Power movement, which had religious as well as apocalyptic characteristics in his opinion. Religion is treated from Enlightenment's standpoint favouring secularity and reason; therefore, what the writer considers to be the illogical aspects of Carnival gets debased.

### 3.3.6. The Feast of the Senses

Carnival appears as an explosion of irrationality, not only of religious but also of animal nature. According to Naipaul, it is a manifestation of corporeality, constituting an occasion for people to lose control and give free rein to their senses.[209] In colonial times, the festival was disregarded by the upper class, gaining the less flattering epithet of *jamette* (a word that comes from the French 'diamètre'), that is "below the diameter of respectability"[210] as it was taken over in the last half of the 19th century by "singers, drummers, dancers, stickmen, prostitutes and badjohns",[211] who celebrated in African backyards. The backyard of the brothel belonging to Henry, a black West Indian from "A Flag on the Island," constitutes the background of a fete, in which prostitutes, people of the slums and steel-band players freely take part:

> There was a little open shed at the back. [...] In this shed two or three people now began to dance. They drew watchers to them; they converted watchers into participants. From rooms in the houses on Henry's lot, from rooms in other back-yards, and from the sewerage trace at the back, people drifted in steadily to watch."[212]

The mentioning of the sewerage trace reinforces to a certain extent the impression of lack of respectability: so, these people seem to be the scum of their society. The

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*Elvira* resembles Uriah Butler; see Rita Christian, "'Coolie' Come Lately: Incompleteness and the Making of *The Suffrage of Elvira*", in: Judith Misrahi-Barak, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[209] See Stephen Schiff, "The Ultimate Exile", in: F. Jussawalla, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Although a Hindu, Naipaul comes close to a Puritan position by rejecting Carnival; as Richard Bauman notes, "[t]he Quakers, […] saw the festival means we have identified–immoderate feasting, excessive drinking, singing, music, dance, sexual license, maypoles, athletic contests, and so on–as carnal indulgences, idle, wasteful, sinful pleasures of the flesh." (Richard Bauman, "The Place of Festival in the Worldview of the Seventeenth-Century Quakers", in: Alessandro Falassi, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97).

[210] Hollis U. Liverpool, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

[211] Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962*, Kingston: Heinemann, 1981, p. 135.

[212] "A Flag on the Island", p. 180.

episode is also the place where Naipaul states once more his ideas about Carnival as a religious fantasy: "Each dancer was on his own. Each dancer lived a private frenzy. Women among watchers tore twigs from the hibiscus hedges and from time to time, as though offering benediction and reward, beat the dancers' dusty feet with green leaves."[213] Since the scene happens during the war, Carnival becomes more of an underworld, being illegally celebrated; therefore, "in an instant the yard was transformed" when the police made their appearance: the steel-drums changed into dustbins again, the girls "put on spectacles," and everybody sat "in neat rows." The explanation given by Henry to the police inspector provokes laughter: this is "the old Adult Education class," where "[e]ach one teach one."[214] The respective innuendo emphasises the atmosphere of lasciviousness characterising this episode; indeed, what we have here strikingly resembles racist judgements made by white Trinidadians, who scandalised by Carnival, declared: "It is an acknowledged fact that the animal organs of the African race are far more developed than their intellectual ones."[215] Naipaul may be easily accused of borrowing his images from colonial discourse because he presents many Africans as people obsessed with sex, who either commit rapes like Jimmy in the novel *Guerrillas*, or do not take marriage seriously like Laura in *Miguel Street*, with her eight children from seven fathers.[216]

Beside prostitutes, the steel-band players are other interesting characters to be found in this Carnival scene from "A Flag on the Island":

> The steel-bands sounded nearer, and then through a gate in the corrugated iron fence at the back of the lot the musicians came in. Their instruments were made out of old dustbins and on these instruments they played a coarse music I had never heard before. [217]

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[213] *Loc. cit.*
[214] *Loc. cit.*
[215] See Hollis U. Liverpool, *op. cit.*, p. 373.
[216] See *Miguel Street*, p. 81. Somewhere else, in the novel *The Suffrage of Elvira* (p. 58) a character says that "'[o]nly Hindu and Muslim getting married.[...] The negro people don't get married so often. Most of them just living with woman. Just like that, you know.'" Hans-Georg Löber proposes slavery as an explanation for the loose marriage bonds within the Afro-Trinidadian community, because that was a time when black families were arbitrarily separated; moreover, the white masters provided no model of morality as they had mistresses (cf. Hans-Georg Löber, *Persönlichkeit und Kultur auf Trinidad: Ein Vergleich zwischen Afrikanern und Indern*, Saarbücken: Verlag der SSIP-Schriften, 1976, pp. 61-63).
[217] "A Flag on the Island", p. 179.

These musicians, too, bore the stigma of indecency applied by the upper classes.[218] Not only did they shock cultivated ears with their "coarse music" when they appeared for the first time in the 1930s and 1940s, but they were also regarded as rough men, prone to violence. Big Foot, the protagonist of the story "The Coward" in *Miguel Street* is such a person: "It was people like Big Foot who gave the steel-bands a bad name" for he "was always ready to start a fight with another band".[219] Big Foot himself becomes a priest when he plays his instrument:

> You would have thought that when he was beating his pans and dancing in the street at Carnival, Big Foot would at least smile and look happy. But no. It was on occasions like this that he prepared his sulkiest and grimmest face; and when you saw him beating a pan, you felt, to judge by his earnestness, that he was doing some sacred act.[220]

This intensity of feeling is matched by an intensity of sound according to Naipaul, who in the travelogue *The Middle Passage* writes about Carnival these words: "If there are more than three, dancing will begin. Sweat-sweat-dance-dance-sweat. Loud, loud, louder. If the radio isn't powerful enough, a passing steel band will be invited in. Jump-jump-sweat-sweat-jump."[221] The steel-bands together with the radios would make Port-of-Spain "the noisiest city in the world,"[222] an opinion which is echoed in the novel *Guerrillas* by the following remarks: "The hidden city roared and hummed, with ten thousand radios playing the reggae, as they so often seemed to do. [...] The same concentration of sound, the same steady beat of people and traffic and radio music which, dulled during the day, at night became audible."[223]

This is too much for Naipaul; wishing to have nothing more to do with the national festival of his native island, the writer confesses: "I have never cared for dressing up or 'jumping up' in the streets, and Carnival in Trinidad has always depressed me."[224] Naipaul's attitude to Carnival entirely explains the predominantly negative image of this fete that one can find in his writings.

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[218] See Errol Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-51 and Keith Q. Warner, "Carnival and the Folk Origins of West Indian Drama," in: Abiola Irele, *ed.*, *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature, Vol. 1*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004, p. 140.
[219] *Miguel Street*, p. 50.
[220] *Loc. cit.*
[221] *The Middle Passage*, p. 50.
[222] *Loc. cit.*
[223] *Guerrillas*, p. 27.
[224] *The Middle Passage*, p. 198.

### 3.3.7. Carnival: Self-Image or Heterostereotype?

Carnival has the power to bring people together and so create alternative identities in a post-colonial society; Naipaul proves to be aware of it when he writes in the short story "A Flag on the Island" that "'Carnival [is] coming, Frank.[...] Some people corporate in one way, some in another.'"[225] However, Naipaul seems not to accept Errol Hill's opinion, according to which Carnival is a national ceremony able to unite the different sections of the Trinidadian society,[226] since the former sees this festivity as standing for the black community alone. Consequently, Naipaul's image of Carnival coincides with his image of Afro-Trinidadians: amusing, fantastic, playful, purposeless, irrational, immoral as well as animal. In that, the writer comes close to racist positions, in spite of the fact that he shows genuine sympathy for the suffering slaves; furthermore, Naipaul does not indicate Carnival's potential as a means of resistance (even though he suggests that the night performances of the enslaved posed a potential threat to the white), forgetting that West Indians "stroke back" by helping the festival spread in Britain, Canada and the USA.[227]

It is clear then that Naipaul's representations of Carnival and of the Afro-Trinidadian community have heterostereotypical features, being far from how people of African origin regard themselves. There is nowhere to be found in Naipaul such a remark about Carnival like that made by Derek Walcott in the essay "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?": "The carnival mentality seriously, solemnly dedicates itself to the concept of waste, of ephemera, of built-in obsolescence, but this is not the built-in obsolescence of manufacture but of art, because in Carnival the creative energy is strictly regulated to its season."[228] Carnival as creative energy also appears in the well-known novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* by the Afro-Trinidadian writer Earl Lovelace, who describing the black slums of Port-of-Spain says: "Carnival it is that springs this hill alive."[229] Since Lovelace seemingly alludes to the 1970 Black Power protests in this novel, the comparison between *The Dragon Can't Dance* and Naipaul's *Guerrillas* becomes inevitable.[230] Nevertheless, their treatments of the

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[225] "A Flag on the Island", p. 182.
[226] Errol Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[227] See *ibid.*, p. xxii.
[228] Derek Walcott, "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?", in: *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott, compiled and ed. by* Robert D. Hamner, Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993, p. 55.
[229] Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1998 (1979), p. 3.
[230] This comparison has been suggested by John Skinner, who affirms the following, without

event are strikingly different; whereas Naipaul sneers at the impotence of the clownish Jimmy, Lovelace presents the people of the Hill as dignified men, who in spite of being imprisoned, are still able to exclaim: "[W]e played a mas' [...]. We played a dragon."[231] Lovelace agrees with Naipaul that Carnival is a black celebration; however, he shows the Indian Pariag as aspiring to take part in the festival and to commune with the others[232] – this is obviously an attitude foreign to Naipaul.

elaborating on his idea: "It is instructive, finally, to compare *The Dragon Can't Dance* with V. S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas* (1977), also set in Trinidad during the same period of unrest and violence. The contrast between Naipaul's fastidiously detached account of his psychopatic political activist, Jimmy Ahmed, and Lovelace's more sympathetic portrait of the pathetically inadequate Fisheye speaks volumes for the temperamental differences between the two writers. Such a comparison may also provide a final reflection on "home" and "away" in terms of positive or negative emotional involvement with the Caribbean."; John Skinner, *The Stepmother Tongue: An Introduction to New Anglophone Fiction*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, pp. 176-177.

[231] Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, p. 178.

[232] See *ibid.*, p. 201.

## 3.4. Liminal Spaces

### 3.4.1. The Race of Races

Although Naipaul makes use of Enlightenment values when treating both main Trinidadian ethnic groups, which has as consequence an emphasis on their supposed backwardness, his portrayal of East Indians is much more positive than that of Afro-Caribbeans. While he completely rejects Carnival, Naipaul is sometimes nostalgic about Hindu rituals and festivities, adopting Indian attitudes, as we have already seen. The interethnic tensions in the region surely constitute an important reason for the writer's reserve towards Afro-Trinidadians; rather than present a "callaloo" or a "rainbow" nation, happy in its diversity, Naipaul concentrates on the conflicts between the different Trinidadian communities. In *The Middle Passage* he alludes to this conflictual state of things by means of a pun: "[Charles Kingsley] had gone to the [horse] races, he says, 'to wander *en mufti* among the crowd.' He was greatly taken by their racial variety, and the engraving which accompanies the chapter shows a group of Trinidadians – Negroes, Indians and Chinese – at the races."[233] Here, Naipaul plays with the two meanings of the word "race": "contest" and "class of people"; however, this ludic metaphor does not hide the writer's anxiety, who warns that "[i]n the Negro-Indian conflict each side believes it can win," but "[n]either sees that this rivalry threatens to destroy the Land of the Calypso."[234]

The same pessimistic mood characterises the novel *The Mimic Men*, in which the ludic metaphor of the contest suggests the potential civil war: "A court had developed around us. There was competition to serve; and among these helpers there was, as we knew, murder in the wings."[235] After gaining independence,[236] the islanders, incited by their politicians, turn against each other; that the politicians are responsible for the troubles is an idea that appears in *The Middle Passage*, too.[237] Nonetheless, unlike those black ministers who "promised to kick the whites into the sea and send the Asiatics back to Asia," thus generating "the frenzy of the street-

[233] *The Middle Passage*, p. 45-46.
[234] *Ibid.*, p. 81.
[235] *The Mimic Men*, pp. 211-212.
[236] Gaining independence is presented with the help of another ludic metaphor as a contest between Britain and its colony with no stake at all : "It was as though, in a tug-of-war contest, the other side had suddenly let go" (see *ibid.*, p. 218).
[237] See *The Middle Passage*, p. 77.

corner preacher,"[238] the Indian Singh is a moderate person. In a scene that reminds of the biblical episode when Jesus told Peter to drop the sword, Singh stops a follower from taking revenge:

> One poor man had brought a stone stained and sticky with blood and fine hair, the hair perhaps of a child. What could I do with his evidence, his witness? I tried to get him to enter my mind, to ride with me to the end of the empty world. His grief made him, as it made others, receptive. It was night. I took him to the garden of the Roman house and asked him to drop the stone. He was glad to obey. The link between us was more that the link of speech.[239]

But this lack of response as well as the fact that Singh is forced to resign from the cabinet signals that "the Asiatics" are the victims in this racial war: there are even "tales of Asiatic distress, of women and children assaulted, of hackings, of families burnt alive in wooden houses."[240] This is an island where the blacks have got the upper hand; as Naipaul says, "What the Calypsonian Sparrow predicted quite recently has already come to pass: '[S]oon in the West Indies/ It will be 'Please, Mr Nigger, please'.'"[241] In *The Mimic Men* the situation is anticipated by another metaphor with a ludic content: a black man wins a slogan competition, in which Singh and his schoolmates have taken part, precisely because he is a black man. Or at least, this is the conclusion of Deschampsneufs, the descendent of a planter family: "Just now they will have foolish black men like that one running the place. Not because they brilliant and so on, but because they foolish and they black."[242]

This symbolic civil war in *The Mimic Men* represents an escalation when compared to the humorous ethnic politics described in *The Suffrage of Elvira*. This earlier novel presents the electoral competition in County Naparoni, "the smallest, most isolated and most neglected of the nine counties of Trinidad."[243] Here, we find a society split not only along racial lines into Afro-Trinidadians and East Indians but also along religious lines. The three main political organisations are, therefore, the black party led by Preacher, the Hindu party supporting Harbans and Baksh's Muslim party. The tailor Baksh is depicted in little flattering terms as a betrayer of the East Indian community, who pursues his own financial interests. Going to ask

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[238] *The Mimic Men*, p.216.
[239] *Ibid.*, pp. 263-264.
[240] *Ibid.*, p. 263.
[241] *The Middle Passage*, p. 75.
[242] *The Mimic Men*, p. 145.
[243] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 7.

Baksh to join him, Harbans is deeply impressed by the Muslim leader: "Baksh frightened him a little. He didn't like the solid square face, the thick eyebrows almost meeting at the bridge of a thick nose, the thick black moustache over thick lips. Especially he didn't like Baksh's bloodshot eyes. They made him look too reckless."[244] The obsessive repetition of the word 'thick' and such attributes as 'black moustache,' or 'bloodshot eyes' make a bandit out of the Muslim tailor; this stereotypical figure is a cultural construct as Naipaul will later admit in the novel *A Way in the World*: "I understood at some stage that [Nazaralli Baksh] was a Mohammedan. This didn't at first make him less close; but then, with Indian independence, and the religious partition of the subcontinent, the idea of difference began to attach to him, though I never stopped going to him for my clothes."[245] Clearly, the excerpt is an example for politics leading to hatred and division.

More threatening than a Muslim can only be a black Muslim – Haq from the novel *The Suffrage of Elvira* is described as follows: "a fierce black little man who wore a bristle of white beard and whiskers and whose eyes flashed behind steel-rimmed spectacles when he spoke of infidels."[246] Naipaul's suspicion still lasts; thus, in a more recent novel, *A Way in the World*, he mentions the Arab-style black Muslims who wanted to overthrow the Trinidadian government at the beginning of the 1990s. Their rebellion resembled the slave revolts of the past and was to contaminate the blacks living around the capital – for six days looting gangs devastated Port-of-Spain.[247]

In brief, instead of celebrating the ethnic diversity of his native place, Naipaul has a distrust for other communities than the Hindu one; this is obvious not only in Naipaul's works dealing with Trinidad, but also in his writings on African or Asian subjects.

### 3.4.2. Hybrid Festivals

Paradoxically, the conflict-ridden island presented by Naipaul is also a hybrid place, a liminal "Third Space"[248] where the various ethnic groups mix and borrow from

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[244] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[245] *A Way in the World*, p. 13.
[246] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 13.
[247] See *A Way in the World*, pp. 37-40.
[248] See Homi K. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences", in: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth

each other. However, when Lorkhoor, a character from the novel *The Suffrage of Elvira*, preaches "the unity of races and religions", Hindus, Muslims and Afro-Trinidadians feel offended.[249]

Hybridity predominantly has negative connotations in Naipaul's writings; thus, the Hindu Gold Teeth interprets her husband's death as a divine punishment for having prayed to Christian things: "'It is all my fault,' she cried. 'My own fault, Ma. I fell in a moment of weakness. Then I just couldn't stop.'"[250] Even though Naipaul, the atheist, is ironical at this point, he really seems to think that hybridity may lead to catastrophe, as in the case of Jimmy Ahmed from the novel *Guerrillas*. Indeed, Ahmed, half black and half Chinese, is caught between two worlds, neither accepting him. The ones call Jimmy a *hakwai*, that is "the Chinese for nigger";[251] the others see him as non-African. The black journalist Meredith says that Jimmy played "the banana-skin game" at school, unlike himself: "You would drop the banana skin and if it fell one way you were going to marry a fair-skinned person, and if it fell the other way you were going to marry a yellow person with freckles. [...] I never played that game at school. [...] It sounds to me more like a Chinese game."[252] This in-between position probably explains why Jimmy finally fails to become the leader of the revolution that he initiated.

Another reason for Naipaul's rejection of hybridity is his fear that the East Indians, particularly the Hindus, might be assimilated like the Spaniards or the indigenous Carib population. This motif appears in *The Suffrage of Elvira* – in which the Spaniards are described as "a reserved lot, more negro than Spanish now"[253]– in *A House for Mr Biswas*[254] and in *The Mimic Men* as well:

> We drove along narrow rough roads into the valleys of our eastern hills. We went through purely mulatto villages where the people were a baked copper colour, much disfigured by disease. They had big light eyes and kinky red hair. My father described them as Spaniards. They were a small community,

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Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *eds*., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, p. 208.

[249] See *The Suffrage of Elvira*, pp. 74-75.

[250] "My Aunt Gold Teeth", in: *A Flag on the Island*, p. 21. Gold Teeth is actually based on a real-life person nicknamed "Gold Teeth Nanee" (cf. V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1964, p. 30); in Purabi Panwar's opinion, she represented a kind of epitome of India to Naipaul as a boy; see Purabi Panwar, *India in the Works of Kipling, Forster and Naipaul: Postcolonial Revaluations*, Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000, p. 107.

[251] *Guerrillas*, p. 20.

[252] *Ibid.*, pp. 201- 202.

[253] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 10.

[254] See *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 242; there, "Spanish" is "a euphemism for a red-skinned Negro."

> exceedingly poor, separate even in slave days and now inbred to degeneracy, yet still distinguished by an almost superstitious fear and hatred of full-blooded Africans and indeed of all who were not like themselves. They permitted no Negroes to settle among them; sometimes they even stoned Negro visitors. We drove through Carib areas where the people were more Negro than Carib. Ex-slaves, fleeing the plantations, had settled here and intermarried with the very people who, in the days of slavery their great tormentors, expert trackers of forest runaways, had by this intermarriage become their depressed serfs. Now the Caribs had been absorbed and had simply ceased to be.[255]

Despite a ferocious fight against outsiders, the Spaniards lost their "purity" of blood. It is with horror that Singh regards the process of creolization which they undergo; consequently, biased by colonial prejudices, he describes the mulatto villagers as ugly, degenerate people.[256] On the other hand, the passage conveys a positive message (possibly unintended), too: the hunters and the hunted may pass over former disputes and form a new community, as it happened with the Caribs and the blacks.

Naipaul's fear is up to a certain extent justified, as the following passage shows:

> Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, owned a Bible; the Hindus and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe. Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights. Someone had told them that Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, was being honoured; they placed small earthen lamps on their money-boxes and waited, as they said, for money to breed. Everybody celebrated the Muslim festival of Hosein. In fact, when Elvira was done with religious festivals, there were few straight days left.[257]

If the first impression is of perfect harmony, a more attentive reading reveals a hierarchy of prestige; hence everybody celebrates the Muslim festival of Hosein, whereas only some celebrate the Hindu festival of lights. What remains unspoken is that "everybody celebrated Carnival." Even John W. Nunley's study *Caribbean Festival Arts* regards the festival of Hosein (or Hosay) and Carnival as representative for Trinidad and the West Indies.[258] Yet, in comparison with Hindu rituals, Hosein,

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[255] *The Mimic Men*, pp. 130-131.

[256] According to Ania Loomba, hybridity (understood as miscegenation) was "a nightmare" to the Western colonisers; see Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 121.

[257] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 74.

[258] See John Wallace Nunley, *Caribbean Festival Arts*, Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1988, pp. 34-35.

which commemorates the battle of Karbala and the deaths of Hasan and Husein,[259] is mentioned just in passing by Naipaul. There is a brief allusion to it in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*, which contrasts with the detailed description of the festival in Seepersad Naipaul's story "The Adventures of Gurudeva".[260] Actually, the trickster Gurudeva in the writings of Vidia's father, is very likely to have constituted a source of inspiration for the creation of the scoundrel Mungroo. In *A House for Mr Biswas*, we learn that "[i]t was Mungroo who had organized the young men of The Chase into a fighting band, ready to defend the honour of the village on the days of the Christian Carnival and the Muslim Hosein."[261] Stick-fighting appears here as a hybrid practice that has the potential to transgress ethnic as well as religious boundaries, for it becomes part both of Carnival and of Hosein; however, Mungroo's meanness debases this ritual game.

As *A House for Mr Biswas* indicates, Hindu ceremonies do not enjoy a high level of participation on the part of non-Hindus, who stand aside as spectators.[262] On the contrary, Carnival, in spite of its African core, is depicted in earlier Naipaulian

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[259] See the article "Trinidad and Tobago", in: Martin Banham, Errol Hill and George Woodyard, *eds.*, *The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994, p. 225. A book that discusses the Trinidadian version of this festival in connection with its South Asian models is Frank J. Korom's study entitled *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

[260] See Seepersad Naipaul, "The Adventures of Gurudeva", in: Seepersad Naipaul, *The Adventures of Gurudeva and Other Stories, with a foreword by* V. S. Naipaul, London: André Deutsch, 1976, pp. 44-49. A short presentation of the Hosein festival appears in Naipaul's travelogue *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, too; unsurprisingly on Naipaul's part, Hosein as well as Islam are depicted in negative terms, reflecting a process of othering: "Muslims were part of the small Indian community of Trinidad, which was the community into which I was born; and it could be said that I had known Muslims all my life. But I knew little of their religion. My own background was Hindu, and I grew up with the knowledge that Muslims, though ancestrally of India and therefore like ourselves in many ways, were different. [...] What I knew about Islam was what was known to everyone on the outside. They had a Prophet and a Book; they believed in one God and disliked images; they had an idea of heaven and hell – always a difficult idea for me. They had their own martyrs. Once a year mimic mausolea were wheeled through the streets; men 'danced' with heavy crescent moons, swinging the moons now one way, now the other; drums beat, and sometimes there were ritual stick fights. The stick fights were a mimicry of an old battle, but the procession was one of mourning, commemorating defeat in battle. [...] The doctrine [of Islam], or what I thought was its doctrine, didn't attract me. It didn't seem worth inquiring into; and over the years, in spite of travel, I had added little to the knowledge gathered in my Trinidad childhood." (see V. S. Naipaul, *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981, pp. 11-12). This contrasts with Madhari Kale's view of the festival as a means of resistance against the British rule: "in celebrating Hosay, which Norman called Mohurrum, Trinidadian Indians were indicating that they were not merely laborers, however much their employers and governors sought to confine them to that role." (Madhari Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, p.152).

[261] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 166.

[262] See *ibid.*, p. 387 and p. 564.

works as a festival where various ethnic groups commune. The short story "The Mourners" from 1950 presents a middle-class Indian family, whose son Ravi has recently died; the pictures that his parents took of him at the previous Carnival contrast with the sadness of the present moment.[263] In fact, the story might be interpreted as a requiem for an entire culture, since the members of the respective family have abandoned Hindu ways of life in favour of Westernised and Creole forms.

Certainly, the only work written by Naipaul that associates Carnival with success is "The Baker's Story", published like "The Mourners" in the collection *A Flag on the Island*. Its plot can be summarised as follows: a black boy from Grenada starts working for a Chinese baker who has a shop in Trinidad's capital, Port-of-Spain, until the day when the baker's wife dies. The unnamed black character is then forced to leave, so he opens a bakery of his own in the village of Arouca; nonetheless he is not able to sell the bread that he makes, because the villagers distrust him, being influenced by racial prejudices. Ingeniously, the black baker contacts a Chinese, called Macnab, to sell the products for him:

> This boy was half black and half Chinee, and, though he had a little brown colour and the hair a little curly, he could pass for one of those Cantonese. They a little darker than the other Chinee people, I believe. Macnab I find beating a steel pan in somebody yard – they was practising for Carnival – and I suppose the only reason that Macnab was willing to come all the way to Arouca was because he was short of the cash to buy his costume for the Carnival band.[264]

Mentioning Carnival is full of symbolism; on the one hand, the author clearly associates the feast with hybridity – Macnab is half Chinese and half African. Yet, unlike another Afro-Chinese, Jimmy in *Guerrillas*, Macnab is not a pariah; accepted everywhere, he epitomises the positive aspects of a hybrid identity. On the other hand, the baker's hiding behind a Chinese face constitutes a play of masks that resembles Carnival itself. Very encouraging is the fact that the black character does not wear a white mask, thus departing from those Africans present in Fanon's writings. Moreover, the baker becomes a kind of stage director:

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[263] See "The Mourners", pp. 59-61.
[264] "The Baker's Story", p. 145.

> I put [Macnab] in front of the shop, give him a merino and a pair of khaki short pants, and tell him to talk as Chinee as he could, if he wanted to get that Carnival bonus. I stay in the back room, and I start baking bread. I even give Macnab a old Chinee paper, not to read, because Macnab could scarcely read English, but just to leave lying around, to make it look good. And I get hold of one of those big Chinee calendars with Chinee women and flowers and waterfalls and hang it up on the wall. And when this was all ready, I went down on my knees and thank God. And still the old message coming, but friendly and happy now: 'Youngman, you just bake bread.'[265]

The baker pays attention to some details – accent, dress, decorum – of crucial importance since they function as ethnic markers. These markers will inspire the audience/customers to believe that they are really in a Chinese shop. Interestingly enough, God addresses the black baker with the appellative "Youngman": this is a further instance when Africans are regarded as people under age, of whom the coloniser must take care. Nevertheless, the black baker 'writes back' to the (white) Lord in that he calls his shop "Yung Man"; this parodic name, which sounds Chinese, is in fact the affirmation of a postcolonial identity. Working together with the Trinidadian Chinese and later, even marrying one of them, the baker succeeds in founding an entire chain of 'Yung Man' establishments. A certain regret still remains, for the black baker enters his shops from the back; however, "every Monday morning [he] walking brave brave to Marine Square and going in the bank, from the front."[266] So far, "The Baker's Story" has not been surpassed by other Naipaulian works in its celebration of Carnival and hybridity.

[265] *Ibid.*, p.146.
[266] *Loc. cit.*

### 3.5. Summary

Naipaul creates the image of Trinidad as a "play-culture", a performative culture, also by focusing on the rituals and festivals of his native island, which become genuine ethnic markers. Thus, whereas Hindu ceremonies epitomise the Indo-Trinidadian community principally in novels like *The Mystic Masseur, A House for Mr Biswas, The Mimic Men* and *The Enigma of Arrival,* Carnival comes to stand for the Afro-Trinidadian group particularly in *Guerrillas*, "A Flag on the Island", *The Mimic Men* and *A Way in the World* (to that one could add non-fictional works such as *The Middle Passage* and *The Loss of El Dorado* or the essays "Power?" and "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad").

Even if Naipaul was born in the Indo-Trinidadian community, his description of it is not based on autostereotypes, being clearly influenced by Orientalist assumptions since he depicts many of his compatriots as fatalist, backward people. Naipaul's writings on the respective community are examples of what M. L. Pratt calls "autoethnography" in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation,* that is, the description of one's culture by means of the coloniser's categories. However, the Hindu *lila* ("play") in its double form –as religious drama and God's play with the world– still fascinates the westernised "rational" Naipaul, although the writer is not at ease with that, feeling he has to fight against his "bad blood". In the essay "Reading and Writing" from 1998, Naipaul finally admits his indebtedness to one type of *lila,* namely the *Ramlila* (i.e. the religious drama enacting the story of the Hindu hero Rama), which had formed his literary tastes before the Western books did and provided ideas for the celebrated novel *A House for Mr Biswas*. But *Ramlila,* by the story of exile it contains, is also symbolic of the displacement of the Indo-Trinidadian community, as Naipaul argues. According to B. Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back,* the problem of place and displacement is "a major feature of post-colonial literatures"; therefore, I devote a subchapter to the image of "Trinidad as Site of Displacement". At this stage I analyse the indenture motif in novels like *The Mimic Men* or *A House for Mr Biswas*, which present the coming of Indians to Trinidad to work for little money on the sugar plantations. Not only Enlightenment prejudices, but also this process of displacement may clarify why Naipaul represents the Indo-Trinidadian community as a ritual culture; models of "symbolic ethnicity"

(by Herbert J. Gans and by John Edwards) explain that diaspora groups cling to the symbols of festivals, long after they have forgotten their mother tongues. In fact, rituals and ceremonies remain the main carriers of Indianness in Trinidad (that is obvious in a more recent novel, *The Enigma of Arrival*); to use Jan Assmann's terms, Indo-Trinidadians remember their place of origin by means of "cultural memory", not of "communicative memory". Consequently, in the next subchapter, "The Might of Ceremonies", I emphasise the role such performances play in helping Naipaul's Indo-Trinidadians retain their ethnic identities; thus, festivals and rituals appear as occasions of strengthening family bonds (e.g. in *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Enigma of Arrival* or in *A House for Mr Biswas*, which opposes the Hanuman House –the "fortress" of the Tulsi family, kept alive by festive occasions, reuniting several generations inside its walls of sculpted stone that stage the *Ramayana* epic– to the Western house pursued by Mr Biswas). The respective performances may even become means of protest against colonial rule like in the case of the *asvamedha* ritual enacted by Gurudeva in *The Mimic Men*. On the other hand, many of the Hindu rituals described by Naipaul support gender and caste hierarchies (for example in *The Mystic Masseur* and *A House for Mr Biswas* rituals strengthen male Brahmin authority), being expressions of what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence". The final part of the chapter devoted to the image of Indo-Trinidadians in Naipaul's fiction points out "the divine player" motif originating in Hindu spirituality; once again, Naipaul misreads Indian discourses by presenting his Hindu compatriots in an Orientalist fashion as passive, fatalist people, who believe that the playful and arbitrary will of the gods cannot be changed (see particularly *Miguel Street*, *A House for Mr Biswas* and *The Mimic Men*).

Nevertheless, Naipaul's representations of the Indo-Trinidadian community are much more positive when compared to the image of Carnival and of the Afro-Trinidadians, which heavily relies on colonial stereotypes. An analysis of the ways colonial discourse represented black people makes it clear that it is this discourse that influenced Naipaul in choosing his images of Afro-Trinidadians as clownish people, entertainers in "coon" shows, possessing caricatural racial attributes (hair, skin, lips, etc.). As Jan Nederveen Pieterse notes in *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, a slave took up the role of a performer because the white masters expected him to work as well as to entertain; perversely, the black slaves' singing was regarded as an argument in defence of slavery since it was said to

express their state of happiness. In Naipaul's opinion, "black" carnival originates in slavery, too; however, the slaves' nocturnal pastimes are regarded by Naipaul in *The Loss of El Dorado* and *A Way in the World* as having been an imitation of the French aristocracy's dances, constituting a space of secrecy, magic and poison, a genuine "world of the night", threatening to irrupt into daylight. Carnival has a revolutionary potential then, but Naipaul suggests that it only leads to failed revolutions like in the novel *Guerrillas*, in which Jimmy, the Black Power leader, appears as a clown. Naipaul equally associates Carnival and the Afro-Trinidadians with mysticism and religious hysteria, the stereotype of the black as "preacher" being a recurrent motif in some of his Trinidadian fictional works: *The Suffrage of Elvira*, *Miguel Street*, *The Mimic Man*, "A Flag on the Island", *Guerrillas* and *A Way in the World*. Another colonial stereotype in Naipaul's works is that of the African as a sexually promiscuous being; consequently, Naipaul portrays Carnival as a disreputable feast of the senses (in "A Flag on the Island" Carnival is even associated explicitly with prostitution). All in all, the Eurocentric character of Naipaul's representations of Afro-Trinidadians is indubitable, even if he sympathetically presents their suffering as slaves in *A Way in the World* and *The Loss of El Dorado*. These representations stand in stark contrast to the image of Carnival in Derek Walcott's essay "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" or in Earl Lovelace's novel *The Dragon Can't Dance*, in which the festival is a creative space fit for a dignified postcolonial identity.

By concentrating on Indians and on the Afro-Caribbean population, Naipaul's fiction reflects the multiethnic character of Trinidad; however, rather than celebrating hybridity, Naipaul regards interethnic relationships on his native island as potentially leading to conflict, for example in the novels *The Mimic Men* and *Guerrillas* as well as in the travelogue *The Middle Passage*, where the apparently harmless ethnic competition from *The Suffrage of Elvira* takes radical forms. To describe this state of things, he uses another ludic metaphor, that of the contest between the different races, as expressed, for example, by the pun of "the race of races" (*The Middle Passage*). Naipaul's fiction is traversed by a feeling of anxiety that Indians will be losers in this ethnic competition, which probably constitutes a further reason for the extremely negative image of Afro-Trinidadians. Trinidad is a liminal space, a borderline between different cultures; its festivals too have a liminal character. They may separate people by reinforcing ethnic (Hindu or African) identities, or on the

contrary, may bring people together by allowing them to construct hybrid personalities (cf. Victor Turner, Mihai Spariosu or Homi Bhabha). The last possibility is unfortunately present only once in Naipaul's Trinidadian fiction, namely in "The Baker's Story" (from *A Flag on the Island*), in which a play of masks and fluid identities (Chinese and African), inspired by Carnival, leads to the black protagonist's success.

# 4. THE PLAYGROUND OF THE IMAGINATION

### 4.1. Play and Imagination

In Naipaul's writings Trinidad is presented not only as a childish-festive space, but also as a genuine arena of the imagination. If the Naipaul-like narrator in *A Way in the World* toys with impressions and with ideas,[1] the English Jane adventurously allows herself "to play with the images [...] set floating in her mind" by the native Jimmy.[2] These are just two instances when Naipaul uses the metaphor of the play of imagination, a metaphor going back to Francis Bacon's *Essays*; by equating literature with play, the rationalist Bacon expressed his distrust for the fictional genres, which he subordinated to science.[3]

Julius Elias notices that the analogy between art and play "has been asserted, for better or worse, in an extraordinary variety of ways."[4] Some have equated art and play, seeing in them mere entertainments; others, following Aristotle, have considered both to be expressions of an 'as if' aspect of human existence. The scholar mentions that "[t]he most important theory in the entire history of this topic is found in the aesthetic writings of Friedrich Schiller."[5] Celebrating the freedom of art and imagination, the Romantic thinker once exclaimed: "With beauty man shall o n l y p l a y, and it is w i t h b e a u t y o n l y that he shall play," adding that "man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and h e i s o n l y f u l l y a h u m a n b e i n g w h e n h e p l a y s."[6] According to Sutton-Smith, "[t]he associations of play with literature are even more diverse and heteroglossic than those with the visual arts" taking four basic forms: "First, there is the view all literature is to some extent play; second, there is literature with playful content; third, there are play forms that are themselves literature; and fourth, literary metaphors or tropes can be a form of play."[7]

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[1] See *A Way in the World*, p. 1 and p. 43.
[2] *Guerrillas*, p. 69.
[3] See Rüdiger Ahrens, *Die Essays von Francis Bacon: Literarische Form und moralistische Aussage*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1974, particularly p. 41 and p. 45.
[4] Julius A. Elias, "Art and Play", in: Philip P. Wiener, *ed.*, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, Volume I, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973 (1968), p. 99.
[5] *Ibid*, p. 105.
[6] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters, ed. and transl. by* Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967, p. 107. Imagination is nevertheless subordinated to Reason; thus, Mihai I. Spariosu states that "in Schiller, aesthetic play is the orderly *als ob* activity of the imagination under the direct guidance of Reason, and in this he remains the spiritual heir of Plato and Kant" (see Mihai I. Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn*, p. 65).
[7] Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, pp. 135-136.

However, adventure, too, may be regarded as a special form of the play of the imaginary. Thus, the psychoanalyst Paul W. Pruyser is of the opinion that adventurous thinking represents another facet of the illusionistic world besides cultural needs, symbols, imaginative entities or playing.[8] The ludic dimension of adventure has been noticed by postcolonial critics as well: in Daniel Bivona's opinion, empire was "a privileged realm of play, a play denied an outlet in the English workplace."[9] It was Africa, above all, which incited Westerners to engage a colonial game, for it appeared as a space of leisure.[10] In this context, Paul S. Landau considers Edgar Rice Burroughs to be the main responsible for fixing "the image of Africa in the American imagination as a jungle playground for masculine innocence."[11] Likewise, Trinidad, surrounded by the mythical aura of the New World, has been a playground for the Western imagination throughout the centuries subsequent to Columbus's discovery.

Therefore, in this chapter I focus on the adventure and the ludic literary elements present in Naipaul's Trinidadian work. Adventure and literature are not that different as they may seem; thus, adventure's exotic background is the result of an aestheticising process that transforms the subjugated populations into actors in a colonial show. Moreover, the writings of such explorers as Columbus, Wyatt or Raleigh indicate an obvious literary influence. On the whole, by representing Trinidad as a fictional space of adventure, ready to be consumed and enjoyed by the Western reader, Naipaul apparently situates himself once again on Eurocentric positions; nevertheless, the writer's postmodern approach to myths and canonical genres contributes to the ambiguity of his work, which at times succeeds in transmitting an anti-imperialist message.

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[8] Cf. Paul W. Pruyser, *The Play of the Imagination*: *Toward a Psychoanalysis of Culture*, New York: International Universities Press, 1983, p. 65.

[9] Daniel Bivona, as quoted in Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990, p. 7. This opposition is remarked also by Victor Turner who says that "the industrializing Third World societies [...] represent the granaries or playgrounds of metropolitan industrial societies." (Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982, p. 30).

[10] As Jean de la Guérivière points out, there were even games based on Stanley and Livingstone's discoveries; see Jean de la Guérivière, *The Exploration of Africa*, *transl. from the French by* Florence Brutton, Woodstock: Overlook Duckworth, 2003 (2002), pp. 124-125. According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*, p. 111, Africa became "a vast recreational area, an ideal setting for boys' adventures", echoing "the stabilization of colonialism" in that region of the world at the beginning of the 20th century.

[11] See Paul S. Landau, "Introduction: An Amazing Distance: Pictures and People in Africa" in: Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin, *eds*., *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 4.

## 4.2. Adventure

Hans-Otto Hügel, the editor of the dictionary *Handbuch Populäre Kultur*, sees *Robinson Crusoe* as the first modern novel of adventure, different from medieval romances, with profit and planning replacing risk.[12] Of the same opinion is Martin Green who considers Defoe's book to be a literary archetype; according to the critic, the novel "was recognized as the most edifying and improving kind of adventure, the one that had the most to do with work and the least to do with war, and so was the one most recommended by teachers and preachers and incorporated into moral culture."[13] In fact, the emphasis on work would represent a mark of the novel's modernity: whereas the adventure tale is an expression of the mercantile imagination, the older genre of romance embodied what Green calls 'the military imagination.'[14] Alfred Clemens Baumgärtner presents a slightly different historical account of adventure literature, distinguishing among three periods: in antique stories like the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, adventure motifs have a mythico-magical component; later, the knight romances of the Middle Ages, although still retaining fantastic elements, depart from the previous models in that their heroes can choose freely their ventures. This freedom of choice is also an important feature of modern adventure stories, but in this case the protagonist is no more an ideal hero; on the contrary, he appears with all his weaknesses, fact anticipated by the picaresque literature in the 16th century.[15]

As constitutive features of the genre, Baumgärtner names the suspenseful action, the strange exotic landscape, the hero's confrontation with dangerous, exceptional events, which, nevertheless, remain in the sphere of reality. The pattern would be the following: the protagonist (or protagonists) freely decides to go to an attractive foreign world, full of surprises, leaving behind the security of his home country.[16] According to Robert Dixon some recurring plot functions define the British adventure novel:

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[12] Hans-Otto Hügel, "Abenteurer", in: Hans-Otto Hügel, *ed*., *Handbuch Populäre Kultur: Begriffe, Theorien und Diskussionen*, Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2003, pp. 91-93.

[13] Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 1990, p. 2.

[14] Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, pp. 50-51.

[15] See Alfred Clemens Baumgärtner, "'Dem Traum folgen...' Das Abenteuer in der neuren Kinder- und Jugendliteratur," in: Otto Schober, *ed*., *Abenteuer Buch: Festschrift für Alfred Clemens Baumgärtner zur Vollendung seines 65. Lebensjahres*, Bochum: Verlag Ferdinand Kamp, 1993, pp. 24-27.

[16] *Ibid*., pp. 21-23.

> Typically, a group of English adventurers plans a journey into unexplored regions to revive their flagging spirits and fortunes. At or near their destination they encounter a relatively advanced white, or partly white, civilisation presided over by a queen, and living in caves or underground. In addition to this fictional lost race, the adventurers also meet more realistic native peoples who are often divided into warring factions. If one of the Englishmen falls in love with a native woman of either the lost or the native race, she usually dies. Generally speaking the lighter her skin the greater her chances of surviving. In the end, having established order, the Englishmen get what they came for – usually some form of wealth – and depart.[17]

Discussing W. H. Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, Martin Green, too, notices similar elements: the love of a native princess, the exotic background and above all, the treasure which may be in the form of "gold, jewels, carvings (packed in chests, often)."[18] All these various components are to be found in Naipaul; however, in a distorted way. Therefore, one can say without a doubt that the writer born in Trinidad must be regarded as an author of antinovels of adventure.

### 4.2.1. Native Romancers

Not only Westerners but also the colonised have dreams of adventure: this is at least what Naipaul suggests. However, if this capacity to fantasise about foreign exotic lands appears as a universally shared anthropological constant, European books seem to be the primary nourishment for Trinidadians' imagination.

A particularly interesting case is that of young Eden, a black character in the novel *The Mimic Men*, who wants to go to Asia:

> Eden said he wished to join the Japanese army: the reports of their rapes were so exciting. He elaborated the idea crudely and often; it ceased to be a joke. He recognized this; in his conversation he sublimated the wish to rape foreign women into a wish to travel. [19]

At this point, one can notice the stereotype of the black rapist, which is also to be found in *Guerrillas*; on the other hand, the excerpt indicts European adventurers

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[17] Robert Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Race, Gender and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction, 1875-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 62.
[18] Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, p. 29.
[19] *The Mimic Men*, p. 162.

since Eden's exotic reveries are of bookish origin. Being stirred by *Lord Jim*, Eden dreams "of a remote land where he, the solitary Negro among an alien pretty people, ruled as a sort of sexual king."[20] This is a fantasy of power that may be put into practice only in an Eastern 'remote' world with infantile features: the land must be neither in Europe, where Eden would be at the periphery of society, nor in Africa, where he would remain indistinguishable from the rest of the population and so devoid of any prestige. Actually, behind this dream, there stands Eden's unconscious desire to get rid of his African identity which is incompatible with deeds of adventure:[21] "His deepest wish was for the Negro race to be abolished [...]."[22] This is sensed by his white schoolmate Deschampsneufs who questions Eden's motives of going abroad in an almost Hamletian way: "'To see, or to be seen?'"[23] – that is to be a conqueror like Caesar (who once said *veni, vidi, vici*) or just part of the decorum in a colonial spectacle?

Equally bookish are the sources for the romantic fantasies of the main protagonist in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*:

> To satisfy the extravagant lettering tastes of his shop keepers [Biswas] scanned foreign magazines. From looking at magazines for their letters he began to read them for their stories, and during his long weeks of leisure he read such novels as he could find in the stalls of Pagotes. He read the novels of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli. They introduced him to intoxicating worlds. Descriptions of landscape and weather in particular excited him; they made him despair of finding romance in his own dull green land which the sun scorched every day; he never had much taste for westerners.[24]

Here, the ludic character of the adventure space is plain: Biswas begins reading foreign magazines in order to find inspiration for his job as a sign painter, but this soon metamorphoses into a leisure activity. The 'intoxicating worlds' of the novels impress Biswas above all by their landscape descriptions, which teach him to see the Trinidadian landscape anew as boring and 'dull'; these books are 'intoxicating' for they addict the sign painter, making him despair. Circularly, Biswas's quest for new exotic landscapes leads him to avoid westerners because their background resembles

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 163.
[21] In that, he resembles another character from the same novel, Hok, who aspiring to be like Perseus is ashamed of his black mother.
[22] *Loc. cit.*
[23] *The Mimic Men*, p. 162.
[24] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 74.

the sunburnt scenery of his native island. Moreover, Biswas finally thinks of moving away, becoming "increasingly impatient at living in the back trace."[25] The idea of addiction is reinforced by the following remarks: "He stayed in the back trace and read Samuel Smile. He had bought one of his books in the belief that it was a novel, and had become an addict."[26] After that, Biswas tries some simple electrical experiments, but as they get more complex, he is forced to abandon them:

> His interest in electrical matters died, and he contented himself with reading about the Samuel Smiles heroes in their magic land.
>
> And yet there were moments when he could persuade himself that he lived in a land where romance was possible. When, for instance, he had to do a rush job and worked late into the night by the light of a gas lamp, excitement and the light transforming the hut; able then to forget that ordinary morning would come and the sign would hang over a cluttered little shop with its doors open on to a hot dusty road.[27]

The foreign world is a 'magic land,' completely opposed to the home country, whose landscape rarely receives romantic touches. A significant image, suggesting voyage and adventure, is that of the open doors that permit the view of a road; however, even the road, which to a Western reader might offer the promises of a mysterious, Oriental desert, stands in Biswas's eyes for desolation and poverty. Obviously, Naipaul ascribes exotic connotations to the respective road as he goes on by telling about the protagonist's job as a bus conductor:

> There were the days when he became a conductor on one of Ajodha's buses which ran in competition with other buses on a route without fixed stops. He enjoyed the urgent motion and noisy rivalry, and endangered himself needlessly by hanging far out from the running-board to sing to people on the road, 'Tunapuna, Naparima, Sangre Grande, Guayaguayare, Chacachacare, Mahatma Gandhi and back,' the glorious Amerindian names forming an imaginary route that took the four corners of the island and one place, Chacachacare, across the sea.[28]

The road becomes the stage for a happy competition, whose participants are the playful singing natives of a place with names that no Englishman can pronounce. Of course, the route is in the imagination; its glory might be the glory of such past expeditions as Raleigh's. At this point, Biswas, the adventurer, becomes the object of

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[25] *Loc. cit.*
[26] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 75.
[27] *Loc. cit.*
[28] *A House for Mr Biswas*, pp. 75-76.

European scrutiny (exactly like Eden in *The Mimic Men*). Actually, the scene has probably been inspired by Owen Rutter's cruise book *If Crab No Walk*; indeed, Naipaul mentions in *A Way in the World* the British traveller's remarks concerning Trinidad's public transport: "The trains are all right, but the buses are a joke."[29] A joke, that is to say just another piece in the Trinidadian curio cabinet.

Biswas's sense of adventure is stirred by things other than literature, too: by a Japanese coffee set[30] or by his excursion to Port of Spain where he sees the blacks as weird people with weird customs: "Mr Biswas had never lived close to people of this race before, and their proximity added to the strangeness, the adventure of being in the city. They differed from country Negroes in accent, dress and manner. Their food had strange meaty smells, and their lives appeared less organized."[31]A moment "of deep romance" is when Biswas, together with his brother-in-law Ramchand, looks down at the ships in the harbour: "He had seen the sea, but didn't know that Port of Spain was really a port, at which ocean liners called from all parts of the world."[32] This is an inspiring vision of the larger world, which is denied to the protagonist. However, literature remains the basic stimulus; in its imaginary realm, Biswas is able to dream that he leaves his native island. It is no surprise then to learn that the story which he is writing has the symbolic title of *Escape*.[33]

Resembling Biswas, Singh from *A Mimic Men* is also an unsettled man; yet, unlike the *Sentinel*'s journalist, Ralph has the possibility to see other horizons. Snow in particular fascinates him. This natural phenomenon dominates the first chapter that has London as a setting: "Snow. At last; my element. And there were the flakes, the airiest crushed ice. More than crushed: shivered. But the greater enchantment was the light. Then I climbed up and up towards the skylight, stopping at each floor to look out at the street."[34] After the initial moment of delight, there comes the disenchantment; as Singh says somewhere else: "All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of the reality."[35] In fact, it is fear that destroys Singh's feeling of adventure; this is made plain when he confesses that his sexual relationships with European girls were a failure: "Both of us adrift in London,

[29] *A Way in the World*, p. 75.
[30] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 137.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 299.
[32] *Loc. cit.*
[33] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 330.
[34] *The Mimic Men*, p. 4.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the great city, I with my past, my own darkness, she no doubt with hers. Always at these moments the talk of the past, the landscapes, their familiar settings which I wished them to describe and then feared to hear about."[36] Not only his journeys in the imagination, but also his travel to Europe are a disaster: "Everything of note or beauty reminded me of my own disturbance, spoiling both the moment and the object."[37] All these remarks are an expression of Singh's insecurity; that is why he wants to leave everything behind, even at the price of returning to his Caribbean island: "I abolished all landscapes to which I could not attach myself and longed only for those I had known. I thought of escape, and it was escape to what I had so recently sought to escape from."[38]

Don José, the Amerindian character from the novel *A Way in the World*, when forced to accompany Raleigh to London, has the same sensation of instability. He feels like a child "falling into the sky, falling into the sea";[39] later, Don José tells Fray Simón the following with regard to his fear of the oceans:

> I've thought about that. And I think, father, that the difference between us, who are Indians, or half Indians, and people like the Spaniards and the English and the Dutch and the French, people who know how to go where they are going, I think that for them the world is a safer place.[40]

Actually, the three novels analysed here (*The Mimic Men*, *A House for Mr Biswas* and *A Way in the World*) point out that the most important impediment for non-Westerners to enjoy their adventures is the uncertainty of their exploits' outcome. On the contrary, European explorers and voyagers believe to live in a safer world and have at least the hope of returning to the protection offered by their homelands. This is made clear in the novel *Guerrillas*, too, where the English Jane is described in such terms: "She knew only what she was and what she had been born to; to this knowledge she was tethered; it was her stability, enabling her to adventure in security."[41] In order to emphasise this idea of invulnerability, Naipaul compares Jane to a fortress – "Adventuring, she was indifferent, perhaps blind, to the contradiction between what she said and what she was so secure of being; and this indifference or

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[38] *Loc. cit.*
[39] *A Way in the World*, p. 190.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 205.
[41] *Guerrillas*, p. 18.

blindness, this absence of the sense of the absurd, was part of her unassailability"[42] – and to a sea anemone "waving its strands at the bottom of the ocean, [r]ooted and secure, and indifferent to what it attracted."[43] There is peril in her stay on the Caribbean island, and Jane senses that; thus, she says that the black boys of the slums might become dangerous "if you start playing with them."[44] However, she, together with the reader (who has classic models of adventure tales in mind), expects all insecurity to be only temporary. This conviction is expressed at the moment when Jane, caught in a "dizzying mood",[45] has an adventurous "little delirium":

> She had driven through the city many times and had long ago ceased to see it. Now, in the excitement that amounted to stupor, the feeling of a dissolving world, she found herself catching at details: the top galleries of old-fashioned Spanish-style buildings overhanging pavements where ragged beggars sat vacant, beside old women selling muddy-looking cakes and colored sweets and sweepstakes pinned to boards. In this sense of being transported out of a stable world into something momentarily unstable, lay the adventure. She had been half prepared for it. What she hadn't been prepared for, what gave her little twinges of alarm, was this feeling of a sudden descent into the city itself, until then unknown, unexplored. And yet, with another part of herself, she continued to be amused by the absurd motorcar and her position in it, by the glances that the car and she in it and Jimmy with her were getting. Such a misunderstanding; so absurd.[46]

What Jane experiences seems to be the enactment of a well-known script: she is after all, "half prepared" for this "momentarily" adventure and has the faith that she will eventually return to her "stable world". Therefore, she feels excited and has the power to be amused. Her impression of a "dissolving world" and of a sudden descent into this strange unknown city (with a Spanish atmosphere like Trinidad's capital), echoing Don José's fall into the sky and into the sea, is nevertheless quite disturbing. Jane's dreaming is interrupted by a remark made by her black lover Jimmy: "Now, they've all gone. Canada, England, America. Australia. They've all gone."[47] If Jimmy refers to the white tennis players that have abandoned this unnamed Caribbean island, one can read his words as an elegy for the British Empire. Outside imperial confines, the island is more and more unpredictable; Jane ends by being

[42] *Loc. cit.* .
[43] *Guerrillas*, p. 15.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 70.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

killed. Speaking about Jane's real counterpart, Gale Benson, Naipaul says that "in her madness there was an element of middle-class play" but at the moment when she was stabbed, "all the lunacy and play fell from her."[48] Evidently, by introducing a female adventurer instead of a male one, and then by letting her die, Naipaul rewrites the traditional adventure story. In this light, the distance between Westerners and non-Westerners appears much diminished.

### 4.2.2. Exploring Death

Depicted as a rational being, the explorer is seemingly better equipped to survive than a character like Jane in *Guerrillas*. And yet, Naipaul systematically depicts the failure of Western attempts at taming the wild New World; sometimes he conveys this idea in cruel ways. The following article is a sample of Naipaulian black humour taken from the novel *A House for Mr Biswas*:

> DADDY COMES HOME IN A COFFIN
> *U.S. Explorer's Last Journey*
> ON ICE
> *by M. Biswas*
>
> Somewhere in America in a neat little red-roofed cottage with four children ask their mother every day, 'Mummy, when is Daddy coming home?'
> Less than a year ago Daddy – George Elmer Edman, the celebrated traveller and explorer– left home to explore the Amazon.
> Well, I have news for you, kiddies.
> Daddy is on his way home.
> Yesterday he passed through Trinidad. In a coffin.[49]

The author uses in this case a special form of parody, namely "travesty", which treats a "high" subject in a "low" style.[50] If the subtitle, *U.S. Explorer's Last Journey*, and its addition ON ICE, makes one think of Scott's or Franklin's mythical incursions into the polar regions, the diminutive "Daddy" places this "heroic" action into a minor register. Very soon it becomes obvious that Naipaul presents the explorer as a

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[47] *Loc. cit.*
[48] "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad," p. 143.
[49] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 314.
[50] Cf. Lorna Sage, "Parody" in: Roger Fowler, *ed.*, *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 138. The opposite of "travesty" is "burlesque".

corpse needing to be refrigerated;[51] the sacral character of death is thus violated. The anti-imperial message is clear for the paternal coloniser has expired; on the other hand, the motif of the orphan children reminds of another Naipaulian theme, that of the bastard.

In the novel *The Enigma of Arrival* we find a further "explorer of Death": the character based on the Chirico painting, whose feeling of adventure gives way to panic, as he knows that he approaches the end of his life.[52] The traveller resembles to a certain extent Naipaul himself, who paints his room in the English cottage "a deep mauve", a colour evoking the funeral processions in the writer's native land:

> My elementary school in Port of Spain was in a street, Victoria Avenue, that ended in a cemetery. Nearly every afternoon after school I saw the horse-drawn hearses and the mourning procession on foot passing the high, rubble-filled wall of the cemetery, named Lapeyrouse after the French explorer La Pérouse by our late-eighteenth century French settlers (fleeing the effects of the French Revolution in Haiti and the other French islands). The horses that pulled the hearses to Lapeyrouse were covered with a reticulated pall, black or mauve. As a result, mauve – purple– was never for me the color of power and pomp; it was the color of death.[53]

Ironically, the cemetery's name commemorates another unfortunate explorer, La Pérouse, who disappeared (together with his two ships *La Boussole* and *L'Astrolabe*) somewhere in Pacific waters. The graveyard's "rubble-filled wall" as well conveys the idea of shipwreck and ruin. In contrast to *A House for Mr Biswas*, in which the Lapeyrouse Cemetery comically constitutes the place where the *Sentinel*'s reporter finds inspiration for his articles,[54] *The Enigma of Arrival* shows the burial ground as an elegiac space that gives rise to thoughts about the ephemeral nature of existence. On the whole, these explorers' deaths prefigure the tragic destiny of an entire gallery of Naipaulian Western adventurers.

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[51] "On ice" also has the informal meaning of 'stopped' or 'delayed' (see the heading "Ice" in: Philip M. Rideout, *ed. et al*., *The Newbury House Dictionary of American English*, Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 2000, p. 430); therefore, it ironically suggests the failure of the expedition.

[52] See *The Enigma of Arrival*, pp. 98-99.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

[54] See *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 357.

### 4.2.3. Myths of the New World

#### 4.2.3.1. Columbus and the Garden of Eden

In *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul confesses that the idea behind his book *The Loss of El Dorado* from 1969 "was to attach the island, the little place in the mouth of the Orinoco River, to great names and great events."[55] Columbus himself was the first on a list that surprises through its Eurocentric character; the "little" place called Trinidad had to be attached to Old World myths in order to appear less ridiculous. The Admiral is a recurrent presence in Naipaul's writings where he gets associated with the motif of discovery and with that of the Terrestrial Paradise.

Naipaul depicts Columbus as "a man of medieval Europe,"[56] who on his third journey to the West Indies thought to have sighted the entrance to the Garden of Eden:

> When at last he came into the Gulf he found that the water was fresh. It was this that encouraged him to announce his most startling discovery. He had discovered, he wrote Ferdinand and Isabella, the approaches of the terrestrial paradise. No river could be as deep or as wide as the Gulf of Paria; and, from his reading of geographers and theologians, he had come to the conclusion that the earth here was shaped like a woman's breast, with the terrestrial paradise at the top of the nipple. The fresh water in the Gulf of Paria flowed down from this paradise which, because of its situation, could not be approached in a ship and certainly not without the permission of God.[57]

As Robert Foulke says, Columbus's vision was more literary than scientific, being influenced by two traditions of the time: cosmology and embellishment.[58] Cosmology led to the Biblical setting, embellishment to the presentation of Trinidad as the home of "aboriginal village gardens as fair as those of Valencia in the spring."[59] Remarkably, the landscape is eroticised and feminised; however, it may not be possessed without divine permission, thus remaining a forbidden fruit. Soon it becomes obvious that Naipaul dispels this idyllic image of discovery – the novel *A Way in the World* makes it clear that Columbus was at the time of his third voyage a

[55] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 155.
[56] *Loc. cit.*
[57] *The Middle Passage*, p. 31.
[58] See Robert Foulke, *The Sea Voyage Narrative*, New York: Routledge, 2002 (1997), pp. 74-75.
[59] *A Way in the World*, p. 76.

desperate man: "Things had gone badly for him. He hadn't on his two previous journeys found much gold, and the colony he had founded on Haiti had gone wrong. Now, third time lucky with the sighting of new territory, his thoughts were of religion and redemption […]."[60] Therefore, his exploration constitutes an address to God from whom the Genovese was expecting mercy:

> […]Columbus in 1498 [was] complaining in his journal about his bad eyesight and bad health and bad luck, pleading in advance for the sympathy of his sovereigns. As he picked his way along the indentations of this strange Gulf, partly salt, partly fresh, he saw himself sailing between the island he called The Trinity and another island (really the South American continent) which he called the Land of Grace. He was offering place-names as prayers, and exaggerating the wonder of what he saw. He had already almost lost his dream of the New World; he knew that things had gone very wrong with the little Spanish colony he had left behind on the island of Haiti. And at the end of this third journey he was to go back in chains to Spain.[61]

A broken man, Columbus resembles the English adventurer Raleigh and the revolutionary Miranda, whose stories end tragically. All of them once visited the Gulf of Paria; inspired by the three men's sad destinies, Naipaul baptises these waters the Gulf of Desolation. Moreover, if Trinidad is a paradise, it is so only for some privileged, as pointed out in the novel *The Mimic Men*. Significantly, those who regard the island in this way are the aristocratic Deschampsneufs and a white man enjoying his stay on the tropical beach. The latter says: "'[A]ll my friends they go abroad and come back and say what a wonderful time they had. But I note they all come back. I tell you, boy, this place is a paradise.'"[62] Calling Singh "boy" is an attempt to consolidate imperial hierarchies; at a symbolic level, this appellation has as a counterpart Deschampsneufs's gesture of giving Singh two fingers, thus avoiding to shake hands and to recognize the Indian as his equal. This is a racially charged atmosphere, full of memories of slavery: the beach is bordered by a former coconut estate.[63] Particularly interesting is the final part of the meeting between Singh and this anonymous white man:

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[60] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 237-238.
[62] *The Mimic Men*, p. 193. Martin R. Dean traces back the image of the Caribbean as paradise to Thomas Morus's *Utopia*; cf. Martin R. Dean, "Die Schrecken des Anfangs", *Du – Die Zeitschrift der Kultur*, 10, Okt. 1993, p. 32.
[63] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

> He lifted his hand to his forehead to push back the loose hair. I studied his veins. They were like the map of a river. Whitey-pokey: I had learned to read that word. The Niger was a tributary of that Seine, in paradise. Fresh air! Escape! To bigger fears, to bigger men, to bigger lands, to continents with mountains five miles high and rivers so wide you couldn't see the other bank, to journeys that took two days and a night. Goodbye to this encircling, tainted sea![64]

Amused, the white man on the beach uses the term of abuse "whitey-pokey" to characterise the Caucasian race, but that does not alter his awareness of the important position that he occupies in the West Indian society. To emphasise the white man's authority, Naipaul employs the metaphor of the forehead as a map; the map is tellingly associated with the head since it is through Reason that the Westerners try to chart and tame the world. This geographical object alludes not only to slavery (the Niger as a tributary of the Seine standing for Africans' servitude to French planters in Trinidad) but also to the Orinoco, whose mouth has a multitude of branches. One should not oversee the fact that the respective episode starts with the image of the great watercourse:

> Afterwards I went for a walk on the beach. The coast here was wild and untidy. The water at times frothed yellow with mud. The beach was littered with driftwood and other debris from the mighty South American rivers which, in flood, pushed their discolouring fresh waters as far north as this. The sand was black and pebbly and sharp. Another cloudy day, the clouds as dirty and ragged as the sea and the beach.[65]

The yellowish water that invades the Gulf of Paria, which made Columbus once think of it as a geographical impossibility signalling the entrance to the Garden of Eden, is here hyperbolically described as contaminating the whole universe: even the clouds get "dirty and ragged." In a way, the presence of the mighty river both at the beginning and at the end of the meeting scene conveys a sensation of circularity; besides, a panic-stricken Singh exclaims: "Fresh air! Escape! […] Goodbye to this encircling, tainted sea!" Here, Columbus's Paradise is more like a prison; Singh sees the Admiral as directly responsible for this state of things: "I wrote that violence in the Americas was not new. It had come with Columbus; we had lived with violence

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 193.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

ever since."[66] This opinion is echoed in Naipaul's essay "Columbus and Crusoe," in which the author states that "the Indies, the source of [Columbus's] gold, where he thought he had discovered the Terrestrial Paradise, had become, largely through his example, *anus mundi*."[67] Once again punning, Naipaul implies that instead of developing into an *axis mundi*, a centre of the world, the West Indies decayed to the status of a miserable periphery because of the Europeans' greed. The exploration of this region is intricately linked with its exploitation. Another scene from the same novel *The Mimic Men* subverts the myth of the idyllic New World by foregrounding racial inequities; the white master abuses the black boy Eden, who is stereotypically depicted as a buffoon, incapable to understand technical devices:

> Eden whipped his fingers at the master, demanding to answer. 'Hush!' the master said. 'We are getting news from Adam. Yes, Eden?' 'It generates electricity, sir.' The master went wild. He threw the device on the floor. Then he took up everything within reach on the long lab bench and let it fall. 'Let's drop it. This and this and this and this. Let's drop everything.' He dropped two or three light bulbs; he was like a man suddenly indifferent – to his personal safety. 'It generates electricity, sir. You get this to generate electricity, Eden, and I will give you my salary for the month. For the month? I'll give you my salary for the rest of the year. For the rest of my life. I will give you my pension. I will work for you in the evenings. I will send my children to an orphanage and divorce my wife.' So it had gone on, the agitated red man railing at the placid black boy, until glass shattered on the floor – a test tube or a light bulb; and as it shattered, the master bellowed: 'I will work for you in your garden.' He had saved it for last, not only the familiar pun on Eden's name, but his statement, white man to black boy, of what he considered Eden's true role, that of garden-boy or yard-boy. It was cruel; it went too near the truth; Eden's background was of the simplest.[68]

Two meanings of the word "garden" are juxtaposed in this excerpt. On the one hand, we have the biblical dimension, conveyed through such names as Eden or Adam; in this racial context, the two names connote primitivism. The white master, exasperated that his "civilising" mission does not succeed, disregards the boy; nevertheless, by losing his temper the master contradicts the image of the rational coloniser who is conscious of "the white man's burden". On the other hand, the

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[66] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

[67] "Columbus and Crusoe," in: *The Writer and the World*, p. 301. Speaking about the medieval Genoese, in general, and Columbus, in particular, Ruth Pike says that "their religion [...] was adapted to their commercial policy"; see Ruth Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure: The Genoese in Seville and the Opening of the New World*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966, pp. 13-14.

[68] *The Mimic Men*, p. 146.

Garden of Eden turns to be not a realm of felicity, situated in *illo tempore*, but the agricultural plot on which a slave had to labour. Very tragic is the fact that long after the abolition of slavery in 1838, the master still sees Eden as a "garden-boy". The destruction of the Terrestrial Paradise as a result of slavery is a motif that appears somewhere else in *The Mimic Men* under the following form: "we walked in a garden of hell, among trees, some still without popular names, whose seeds had sometimes been brought to our island in the intestines of slaves."[69] No wonder that Singh wants to escape the place; interestingly enough, even Singh's departure from his native island Isabella (a name that has been inspired by the Spanish queen who sponsored Columbus)[70] hints at the discovery of the New World:

> I thought of Columbus as hour after hour, day after day – with no pause at night, as I had been half-expecting – we moved through that immense ocean. The wind whipped the crests of the waves into rainbow-shot spray. The sunlight grew paler and faded; the rainbows disappeared. I thought of that world which, as I was steadily separated from it, became less and less discovered, less and less real. No more foolish fears: I was never to return.[71]

The "rainbow island" disappearing behind the horizon suggests that this voyage is a discovery in reverse; reversed is also the myth of Columbus. The Admiral loses his heroic aura, being presented by Naipaul in little flattering terms as an ill old man, obsessed with gold, who transformed what he believed to be the Garden of Eden into a "garden of hell".

#### 4.2.3.2. El Dorado

The story of the gilded man and his amazingly rich tribe is the second myth that transforms Trinidad into a fabulous land; it underlies Naipaul's non-fictional work *The Loss of El Dorado: A Colonial History* and constitutes one of the most important sources for the novel *A Way in the World*. Even in *A House for Mr Biswas* there is an

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[69] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[70] In John Thieme's opinion, the name of the island would have been inspired by the three offshore islands of Conrad's *Nostromo* known as "The Isabels"; see J. Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p.111. The reference to the story of Columbus is nevertheless undoubtedly stronger; see for example *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 353.

[71] *The Mimic Men*, p. 194.

ironical reference to the El Dorado legend:

> And when Mr Biswas was working on a feature article for the magazine section of the *Sunday Sentinel* – RALEIGH'S DREAM COMES TRUE, said the headline, 'But the Gold is Black. Only the Earth is Yellow. Only the Bush Green' – when Mr Biswas looked for the place where he had spent his early years he saw nothing but oil derricks and grimy pumps, see-sawing, see-sawing, endlessly, surrounded by red No Smoking notices.[72]

What the excerpt points out is the ongoing exploitation of the colonised lands by the Western powers; however, if Raleigh's search for gold had a mythical dimension, things are laid bare in this case. There remains only the grimness and monotony of some pumps that seem to keep on functioning for ever, as stressed by means of the repetition "see-sawing, see-sawing". Naipaul's words from *The Loss of El Dorado* perfectly apply to the situation: "The New World as medieval adventure had ended; it had become a cynical extension of the developing old world, its commercial underside."[73] On the other hand, the fragment brings Raleigh's name to the fore, indicating what Naipaul says somewhere in his historical book – "the Spanish Empire was over and the El Dorado legend was fixed: it was Ralegh's."[74] The stories of the Spanish governor Berrio and that of Sir Robert Dudley who had paid a visit to Trinidad shortly before Raleigh were simply forgotten.[75]

Naipaul notices the selectivity of imperial history, which concentrated on heroic deeds, leaving aside brutality:

> History was a fairy-tale about Columbus and a fairy-tale about the strange customs of the aboriginal Caribs and Arawaks; it was impossible now to set them in the landscape. History was the Trinidad five-cent stamp: Ralegh discovering the Pitch Lake. History was also a fairy-tale not so much about slavery as about its abolition, the good defeating the bad. It was the only way the tale could be told. Any other version would have ended in ambiguity and alarm.[76]

Equally reductive is Raleigh's book about his journey of 1595 in its suppressing of

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[72] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 40.
[73] *The Loss of El Dorado*, p. 91.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[75] Naipaul describes Captain Wyatt's narration of Dudley's voyage as a romantic adventure inspired by bookish sources: on the one hand, by the stories of knight-errantry, on the other hand, by *The Spanish Tragedy*. See *The Loss of El Dorado*, pp. 30-42, and *A Way in the World*, p. 209-210.
[76] *The Loss of El Dorado*, p. 353.

hideous details. The fictional dialogue in the novel *A Way in the World* between Raleigh and his surgeon transmits a clear anti-Eurocentric message. The latter, speaking as if he were a contemporary postcolonial critic, indicts his captain for his lack of humanity: "That journey of 1595 had begun with murder; it had ended with a massacre of your people and the stench of death in ships.[...] As for all the deaths, you didn't have to explain – people always die on expeditions."[77] Raleigh's cruelty is masked by the dreamlike world present in his book, whose title, *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana, with a Relation of the Great and Golden City of Manoa (which the Spaniards call El Dorado) and Other Countries, with their Rivers adjoining, Performed in the year 1595 by Sir Walter Raleigh Knight*, contains the whole story according to Naipaul.[78] Raleigh's narrative has an obvious utopian dimension, as it presents "a kind of Arcadia where he could be king of the Indians, ruler of a golden empire",[79] and "and untouched paradise on the rivers [...] where the Indians lived in beautiful meadows and didn't know the value of the gold and diamonds by which they were surrounded".[80] In that, it anticipates the dreams of another adventurer on Trinidadian soil, General Miranda, who, living two centuries after the English explorer, wished to erect a new Platonic republic in South America.[81]

Curiously enough, the Gulf represents a borderline between the real world and the realm of fantasy; thus, the surgeon tells that what Raleigh writes about the Trinidad side is correct and very clear, but the river side appears as a strange land, "beautiful, but only like a painting".[82] One should notice that the captain describes the foreign country in exotic terms, reducing it to a bewildering aesthetic object. Besides exoticism, playfulness informs this adventure. By going back to El Dorado in 1618 Raleigh is said to have accepted the rules of an impossible game:[83] "If he finds gold, everything will be forgiven. He will be executed if he doesn't find gold,

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[77] *A Way in the World*, p. 177.
[78] See *loc. cit.*
[79] *A Way in the World*, p. 158.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 174.
[81] *Ibid.*, p. 243.
[82] *Ibid.*, p. 169. Charles Nicholl remarks the mixture of geography and fantasy present on Raleigh's map of the region; see Charles Nicholl, *The Creature in the Map: A Journey to El Dorado*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1995, pp. 15-20. As Earl E. Fitz puts it, "[t]he European discovery and conquest of the New World produced a wealth of narratives that, in surprising contrast to their intended aim–to report as accurately as possible what the explorers were encountering–often blurred the tenuous distinction between fiction and non-fiction." (Earl E. Fitz, *Rediscovering the New World: Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991, p. 24.)
[83] See *ibid.*, p. 158 and *The Loss of El Dorado*, p. 76.

or if he disturbs the Spaniards. Guyana is Spanish territory."[84] Sometimes exoticism and playfulness meet; for example, when Raleigh amuses himself with a tortoise or with the Amerindian José, the two most important things (except for tobacco) that he brings back to England, half hoping they will save his life.[85] José is aware of his master's state of mind: "The old man was in a very playful mood."[86] But Raleigh's game ends tragically: the adventurer is executed. More importantly, as José confesses, Trinidad, Guyana and the entire world "changed forever".[87] For the worse, Naipaul would add.

#### 4.2.3.3. Crusoe's Shipwreck

If in *The Loss of El Dorado* Naipaul connects the quest for gold to Robinson Crusoe's story (Tobago, Trinidad's sister-island, would have been Defoe's isle visited by man-eating Caribs, and Berrio's soldiers the Spaniards saved by Crusoe),[88] in the essay "Columbus and Crusoe" the writer links Defoe's character to the Admiral born in Genoa. Both are exposed as people acting according to mean impulses; one is obsessed with riches, the other enslaves Friday, but basically their stories are aspects of the same fantasy, "the dream of total power".[89]

When it comes to Naipaul's fiction, Robinson Crusoe's myth is of lesser importance than those of Columbus or of Raleigh. We find allusions to cannibalism in the story "A Flag on the Island", and in *Guerrillas* the relationship between the Creole Jimmy and Roche, his white supervisor, might be interpreted as a mock re-enactment of the relationship between Friday and Crusoe. Nevertheless, I consider

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[84] *A Way in the World*, p. 158.

[85] The chapter is ironically entitled "A Parcel of Papers, a Roll of Tobacco, a Tortoise" stressing the meagre result of Raleigh's expedition in search of El Dorado; on the other hand, the title tells a story of exploitation. As Naipaul notes in *A Turn in the South*, Europeans considered the region mainly in terms of material benefits; interestingly enough, names of places became names of commodities: "The word 'tobacco' is thought to have come from Tobago, the dependency or sister island of Trinidad. And before 'Virginia' became the word in England for tobacco, tobacco was sometimes called 'Trinidado', after the island of Trinidad, part of the Spanish Empire since its discovery by Columbus in 1498. Tobacco was a native Indian crop. But after the discovery and plunder of Mexico in 1519-20 and Peru fifteen years later, the Spaniards were interested only in gold and silver, they were not interested in tobacco. It was the English and the French who went to Trinidad to load up with tobacco." (V.S. Naipaul, *A Turn in the South*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989, p. 278).

[86] *A Way in the World*, p. 202.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

[88] See *The Loss of El Dorado*, p. 27.

[89] "Columbus and Crusoe", p. 304.

the shipwreck motif to be the most important hint to Defoe's story. Unlike Crusoe, a man who imposes his will, Jane is described as a weak person, who depends on others for comfort and security. Out of England, she becomes shipwrecked: "She was among people who didn't understand her language; and she was adrift."[90] Equally devoid of power is the Indian Singh who even as a child feels like a castaway:

> China was the subject of Hok's secret reading. Mine was of Rajputs and Aryans, stories of knights, horsemen and wanderers. I had even read Tod's difficult volumes. I had read of the homeland of the Asiatic and Persian Aryans, which some put as far away as the North Pole. I lived a secret life in a world of endless plains, tall bare mountains, white with snow at their peaks, among nomads on horseback, daily pitching my tent beside cold green mountain torrents that raged over grey rock, waking in the mornings to mist and rain and dangerous weather. I was a Singh. And I would dream that all over the Central Asian plains the horsemen looked for their leader. Then a wise man came to them and said, 'You are looking in the wrong place. The true leader of you lies far away, shipwrecked on an island the like of which you cannot visualize.' Beaches and coconut trees, mountains and snow; I set the pictures next to one another. It was at these moments that I found the island most unbearable.[91]

The fragment is extremely interesting as it juxtaposes the theme of shipwreck with that of displacement; consequently, one could say that this is a postcolonial reading of Crusoe's myth. Significantly, we have here another fantasy of power since Singh dreams of becoming the leader of an Aryan warrior band. If Crusoe becomes master despite the harsh conditions of his environment, Singh cannot picture himself as a leader on his native island, needing a remote land that has the traits of an imaginary world or "paracosm".[92] This remote land has a completely different geography: its landscape does not include beaches or coconut trees, but mountains and snow, fact that explains Singh's fascination with the respective meteorological phenomenon.

Actually, shipwreck becomes a leitmotif in *The Mimic Men*; it reappears in the episode where Singh is on the point of being lynched by a gang of boys led by his cousin Cecil:

> And I only thought: the sea, the sand, the green waves, the breakers, the quaint ships with sails, the morning music. Not my element, and I was ending

[90] *Guerrillas*, p. 95.
[91] *The Mimic Men*, pp. 104-105.
[92] Cf. David Cohen and Stephen A. MacKeith, *The Development of Imagination: The Private Worlds of Childhood*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 1. Obviously, the contrast between Crusoe and Singh echoes the opposition between adult and child.

> here. And I had a vision of the three of us shipwrecked and lost, alien and degenerate, the last of our race on this island, among collapsed trees and sand, so smooth where no one walked on it.[93]

The scene is rich in symbolism: the idyll suggested by this beautiful maritime landscape stands in stark contrast with the drama implied by the fight. Cecil's black servant is excluded since this conflict seems to be a purely Indian affair; once again, the reference to ethnicity evokes the idea of displacement.[94] Nevertheless, the excerpt receives supplementary connotations, reminding of William Golding's well-known novel *Lord of the Flies*, which was published in 1954. Martin Green regards the book as an "anti-Robinson", that is a retelling of the Crusoe story, "satiric, anti-adventurous, designed to arouse moral anxiety and inhibit triumphal action – to check our instinctive egotism, political or personal".[95] Besides the tropical setting, *Lord of the Flies* and *The Mimic Men* share the atmosphere of corruption culminating in crime, made explicit by means of such epithets as "alien and degenerate". Furthermore, the remark that these Indian young men are "the last of [their] race on [the] island" reinforces the pessimistic mood: they resemble Golding's juvenile characters who are fleeing a nuclear cataclysm rather than the happy boys present in two 19th century classics – R. M. Ballantyne's *Coral Island* or Jules Verne's *Deux ans de vacances*. The fact that Naipaul's heroes are not Westerners makes this episode susceptible of being read as an imperialist statement on the degeneracy of the "inferior" races. Yet, Naipaul's overall treatment of Columbus, Raleigh and Crusoe, the three mythical figures of the New World, is clearly anti-Eurocentric.

### 4.2.4. Visitors to the Island

Himself a voyager and an author of travelogues, Naipaul makes frequent references to other travellers, being interested in the perpetually changing "outside vision" of his native island; in the novel *A Way in the World* he presents a chronological list of the Western accounts of Trinidad, which starts with the sixteenth-century writings of John Hawkins and Walter Raleigh, continues with the early nineteenth-century

[93] *The Mimic Men*, p. 176-177.
[94] John Thieme notices the image of the collapsed tree, "a vivid symbol of Singh's sense of New World abandonment"; see John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 129. In fact, this is the only comment vis-à-vis the beach scene that the reputed critic makes; although his book focuses on intertextual elements in Naipaul, Thieme misses the hint to William Golding.
[95] Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, p. 3.

novels of Captain Marryat, the writings of the Victorians, the imperial cruise books, and ends with the travelogues of post-war writers like James Pope-Hennessy and Patrick Leigh Fermor.[96]

Although in this novel Naipaul admits that the Western perspective constitutes only "one side of a civilization",[97] he has often been accused of adopting an entirely Eurocentric standpoint; thus, Rob Nixon is of the opinion that Victorian travelogues – such as James Anthony Froude's *The English in the West Indies* (1887), Anthony Trollope's *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1859), or Charles Kingsley's *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* (1871) – have exerted a tremendous influence on Naipaul's Caribbean travel book *The Middle Passage*. According to Nixon, there are several reasons for this Victorian affiliation – Naipaul's colonial education, his desire to belong to a British tradition that would grant him security, his envy of the Victorians' authoritative tone as well as Naipaul's admiration for their moral and political comments.[98]

Froude makes his appearance even in the fictional work *The Mimic Men* as a visitor to the Devil's Cauldron, "a hot sulphur lake". At this point, we find an extremely negative image of blacks: they are represented as idle, living worse than during slavery and letting the bush spread. The naked young man that he meets at the lake would be a palpable proof of the Africans' barbarity; the fact that he is washing his only pair of clothes is nevertheless a mute indictment of Empire, and contradicts the stereotype of the dirty, lazy black. Asians, too, occur in Froude's imperial catalogue, but they are regarded as thrifty, industrious as well as picturesque people.[99] According to John Thieme, this episode is based on Froude's visit to the Blue Basin, a waterfall in northern Trinidad;[100] the main difference is that in Froude's book *The English in the West Indies* the incident receives lapidary treatment as the historian seems to be more fascinated with "the possibilities of

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[96] See *A Way in the World*, p. 102.
[97] *Loc. cit.*
[98] See Rob Nixon, *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin*, New York: Oxford UP, 1992, pp. 50-51. Barbara Korte, too, accuses *The Middle Passage* of Eurocentrism; nevertheless, she notes that Naipaul's attitude changed in the 1980s: "*The Middle Passage* conveys the image of a traveller who is clearly distanced from his native country. About two decades later, Naipaul's *Finding the Centre* (1984) suggests another attitude. Naipaul now acknowledges that his relationship to the Caribbean has been important for his personal development and his development as a writer" (Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations [Englische Reisebericht]*, *translated by* Catherine Matthias, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000, p. 177).
[99] See *The Mimic Men*, p. 81.
[100] See J. Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 121.

adventure".[101] However, the devilish nature of the lake in *The Mimic Men* makes one think of another Trinidadian sight, namely the Pitch Lake, which Patrick Leigh Fermor once described as follows: "The Pitch Lake of Trinidad sounds satanic, and, indeed, it is; but not in the seething, Phlegethontic fashion that one might suppose. It is the blankness, the emptiness, the boredom of this expanse that fills the observer with horror."[102] Because of this hellish image, the episode might even be read as conveying an anti-colonial message; at least, it contradicts Froude's idea of Trinidad as a beautiful Garden of Eden (where snakes lurk, it is true), completely safe to the adventurer.[103]

Not only travel writers, but also tourists are important to Naipaul; the writer even sketches a theory of Trinidadian tourism in the novel *A Way in the World*. Here, he connects this social phenomenon to technological progress: "I suppose visitors, tourists, began to come in number when steam replaced sail."[104] Furthermore, Naipaul distinguishes between two types of tourists: on the one hand, the visitors at the turn of the century came for the sights and the glorious history of the place; on the other hand, after the First World War the tourists "came for the sun, to get away from winter and the Depression [...] to be in places that were unspoilt, places that time had passed by, places, it might be said, that had never been discovered."[105]

In the novel *Guerrillas* (1975), the airport has already replaced the harbour as the main access gate to the island (a process mentioned in *The Enigma of Arrival*[106]); beside the road between the airport and the capital there are basketwork and raffiawork stands, "tourist enticements".[107] Yet, the harbour scenes abound in earlier Naipaulian writings; in *A House for Mr Biswas* we come across the natives' impressions of foreign cruise ships: "It was the tourist season and the harbour was full of ships from America and Europe. Mr Biswas went aboard German ships, was given excellent lighters, saw photographs of Adolf Hitler, and was bewildered by the

[101] James Anthony Froude, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
[102] Patrick Leigh Fermor, *The Traveller's Tree: A Journey through the Caribbean Islands*, London: John Murray, 2005 (1950), p. 164.
[103] See Froude, *op. cit.*, p. 78 and p. 83. The discovery of a dead python in the Blue Basin adds to Froude's feeling of adventure, having nothing frightful in it.
[104] *A Way in the World*, p. 73.
[105] *Loc. cit.*
[106] See *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 154, where Naipaul writes the following: "Passenger ships no longer went to Trinidad or anywhere else; Trinidad was an airline halt, its airport the scene of matter-of-fact departures and arrivals."
[107] *Guerrillas*, p. 169.

Heil Hitler salutes. Excitement!"[108] In this excerpt Biswas's state of mind is expressed by means of free indirect discourse; the journalist is also deeply impressed by the luxury on American ships, which contrasts with the poverty of Trinidadian life.[109] A parallel episode is the one when Owad, Biswas's brother-in-law, leaves the island on board of another German ship:

> Finally they went to the wharf. Only new-born babies and their mothers stayed behind. The Tulsi contingent stared at the ship; and the ship's rails were presently lined with in-transit passengers and members of the ship's company, getting an unusual exotic glimpse of Port of Spain harbour. The word went around that well-wishers could go aboard and in a matter of minutes the Tulsis and their friends had overrun the ship. They stared at officers and passengers and the photographs of Adolf Hitler, and listened attentively to the guttural language around them, to mimic it later. The older women kicked at decks and rails and the sides of the ship, testing its seaworthiness. Some of the more susceptible took in turns to sit on Owad's bunk and weep. The men were shyer, and more respectful before the might of the ship; they wandered about silently with their hats in their hands. Whatever doubts remained about ship and crew vanished when an officer began giving out presents: lighters to the men, dolls in country dress to the women.[110]

This is an instance when tourism allies with imperialism; the passengers are getting "an unusual exotic glimpse of Port of Spain harbour." The stigma of otherness is applied to an entire family, just because they are Hindus, and live on a tropical island. Moreover, Owad's relatives suffer a process of infantilization, as they receive trifles – lighters and dolls – from an officer of this mighty ship that makes the natives shy. However, the relation centre-periphery is called into question, for the Tulsis are not only objects of sight, but also spectators, staring at the passengers and the photographs of Hitler; to them, the German language is exotic, that is why they will mimic it later (resembling parody, mimicry does not seem here to be a recognition of European superiority). There is a certain degree of distrust toward the German ship since the Tulsis' opinion is based on stereotypes. These stereotypes of the Germans as brutal people who like drinking underlie the final part of the episode:

> The passengers' gangway was drawn up. Then there were shouts, raucous, unsustained singing, and three Germans with bruised faces and torn and dirty clothes came staggering along the wharf, comically supporting one another,

[108] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 312.
[109] See *ibid.*, p. 313.
[110] *Ibid.*, pp. 346-347.

> drunk. Someone from the ship called to them harshly; they shouted back and, drunk and collapsing though they were, and without touching the rope-rail, they walked up the narrow gang-board at the stern. All the doubts about the ship were re-excited.[111]

Ironically, roles are reversed; the reader is no longer amazed by the odd inhabitants of this tropical island, but watches a show provided by some comical Europeans (it is true, nevertheless, that at that time the British regarded the Germans themselves as Others, so we cannot consider the fragment to be really anti-Eurocentric). The Germans' drunkenness also suggests that Trinidad is nothing more than a place where Westerners come for pleasure and vice; in that, they resemble Frank, the American protagonist of the story "A Flag on the Island", whose exploration of the island is actually a journey through different bars. Frank comes on board of the Moore-McCormack liner, whose description warns that this is a commodified world:

> Here on this Moore-McCormack liner everything was Moore-McCormack. In my white cabin the name called to me from every corner, from every article, from towels, from toilet paper, from writing paper, from table cloth, from pillow-cases, from bed sheets, from blankets, from cups and menus. So that the name appeared to have gone deep, to have penetrated, like the radiation we have been told to fear, the skin of all those exposed to it, to have shaped itself in living red corpuscles within bodies.[112]

The name of Moore-McCormack, mentioned in *The Enigma of Arrival* too,[113] is personified: it calls to the passenger from all corners of his cabin; it even penetrates bodies and becomes a part of them. The otherwise conservative Naipaul might have had in mind the Marxist notion of fetishism when he wrote these lines;[114] indeed, the Moore-McCormack products receive a supernatural quality (that is why Frank later says "Man had become God."[115]), but rather than impart the Holy Spirit's benediction, they emanate a nefarious radiation, impossible to escape from (the last words of the story are precisely "Moore-McCormack, Moore-McCormack"[116]). No

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[111] *Ibid.*, pp. 347-348.
[112] "A Flag on the Island", p. 151.
[113] See *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 149.
[114] Cf. Allan M. Williams, "Toward a Political Economy of Tourism", in: Alan A. Lew, C. Michael Hall and Allan M. Williams, *eds.*, *A Companion to Tourism*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing LTD, 2004, p. 62: "This partial detachment of exchange value from material production conditions results in tourism commodities becoming 'fetishised' (Watson and Kopachevsky 1994), as 'sacred' objects or experiences."
[115] "A Flag on the Island", p. 151.
[116] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

wonder that the exploration itself of the island becomes a commodity: "The shipping company had arranged trips and excursions."[117]

The Western tourists are relevantly depicted as people gaily dressed "as if for carnival", looking for pleasure and fun.[118] This prefabricated adventure, which is anticipated by the image of the advancing jungle in Frank's mind,[119] has an obvious ludic character. Thus, Frank, the narrator, says about two tourists, husband and wife, that they are "playing as a team."[120] Furthermore, among the island souvenirs there are "toy steel-drums" and "market-woman dolls in cotton". Frank's remark that the small directory of the island is "full of the number of dolls" alludes to the transformation of this Caribbean island into a whorehouse at the Westerners' disposal,[121] echoing what the Scottish pamphleteer McCallum wrote at the beginning of the 19th century, namely that Europeans in Trinidad looked for nothing else than billiards, drink and sex.[122] The nexus play-adventure-pleasure-colonisation is of tremendous importance; therefore, I am going to analyse it in the following chapter devoted to various Trinidadian spaces of leisure.

### 4.2.5. Leisure Realms: the Estate, the Beach, the Club

In his study *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (1997), Richard Phillips writes the following: "With elements of a recognisable world, recombined in a different order and located somewhere off the edge of the map, on or around the margins of the known world, the geography of adventure corresponds to what drama critic Victor Turner (1969, 1982) calls a liminal space."[123] The quote indicates that

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[117] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

[118] See *ibid.*, pp. 151-153. According to Edward M. Bruner, whereas tourists play in "a zone of leisure and exoticization", natives must work for the former; to his mind, the Westerners' game is basically an imaginative one: "International mass tourism has precipitated one of the largest population movements in the world, in which literally millions of temporary travelers from the industrialized nations seek in the margins of the Third World a figment of their imagination–the exotic, the erotic, the primitive, the happy savage."; Edward M. Bruner, "Tourism in the Balinese Borderzone", in: Smadar Lavie & Ted Swedenburg, *eds.*, *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, Durham: Duke UP, 1996, pp. 157-158. Erik Cohen, too, regards tourism as a "play at Reality", adopting an "as if" or illusionistic mode (cf. Erik Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004, p. 91).

[119] See "A Flag on the Island", pp. 150-151.

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

[121] See *ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

[122] As mentioned in *The Loss of El Dorado*, p. 173 and p. 214.

[123] Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure*, London: Routledge,

the spaces of adventure have a ludic nature since "[i]n industrial societies, liminal (more precisely, liminoid) spaces tend to be associated with leisure, for example in the material landscapes of the beaches and theme parks (Shields 1991; Warren 1993) and the metaphorical landscapes of popular adventure stories [...]."[124] One of Naipaul's books that best exemplifies the association of play and adventure is certainly *A House for Mr Biswas*; there, a former Trinidadian estate house belonging to some French planters constitutes the setting of Chapter 3, which is significantly entitled "The Shorthills Adventure". The novel presents the respective estate as a realm of pleasure and aristocratic sports, embellished by exotic plants:

> In the grounds of the estate house there was a cricket field and a swimming pool; the drive was lined with orange trees and gri-gri palms with slender white trunks, red berries and dark green leaves. The land itself was a wonder. The saman trees had lianas so strong and supple that one could swing on them. All the day the immortelle trees dropped their red and yellow bird-shaped flowers through which one could whistle like a bird. Cocoa trees grew in the shade of the immortelles, coffee in the shade of the cocoa, and the hills were covered with tonka bean. Fruit trees, mango, orange, avocado pear, were so plentiful as to seem wild. And there were nutmeg trees, as well as cedar, *poui*, and the *bois-canot* which was light yet so springy and strong it made you a better cricket bat than the willow. The sisters spoke of the hills, the sweet springs and hidden waterfalls with all the excitement of people who had known only the hot, open plain, the flat acres of sugarcane and the muddy ricelands. Even if one didn't have a way with land, as they had, if one did nothing, life could be rich at Shorthills. There was talk of dairy farming; there was talk of growing grapefruit. More particularly, there was talk of rearing sheep, and of an idyllic project of giving one sheep to every child as his very own, the foundation, it was made to appear, of fabulous wealth. And there were horses on the estate: the children would learn to ride. [...] Shama left for Port of Spain full of enthusiasm. She wanted to be part of her family again, to share the adventure.[125]

The vegetation offers a genuine symphony of colours – white, red, orange, green; nevertheless, this is a false beauty, a constructed wilderness, which masks the fact

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1997, p. 13.

[124] *Loc. cit.* See also note 19 on page 171: "As the metaphorical relationships with literally liminal processes (tribal rites of passage) become stretched, the term liminal is less accurate, and liminoid is preferable (Turner 1982). Liminoid spaces are often associated with leisure and leisure time, themselves products of industrialisation, with its spatial and temporal divisions between work and play, and its mass-consumption of leisure activities and products." The liminal quality of adventure is equally manifest in its ambivalent politics: "Slowly changing, the geography of adventure is always associated with conservative constructions of geography and identity, yet always associated with the possibility of change, the dream of something and somewhere else." (Richard Phillips, *op. cit.*, p.169).

[125] *A House for Mr Biswas*, pp. 376-377.

that all this wealth has been accumulated by exploitation. The trees are in fact plantation trees, meant for metropolitan markets. Having bought the Shorthills estate, the Tulsis, an Indian family, dream of leading an idle life full of relaxation and playfulness, exactly like their Western predecessors. In this context, the cricket field, the swimming pool as well as the horses are just some elements emphasising the leisure character of the place. A pastoral fantasy (paralleling that of the French planters in *The Loss of El Dorado*[126]) is manifest in the wish to raise sheep, which contrasts with the Indian tradition of keeping cows; the idea of adventure even makes the Tulsis imagine themselves as Hindu Tarzans swinging on the lianas of this jungle-like estate. However, it becomes obvious that the family cannot take care of the Shorthills estates; they let the cricket field degrade, fill in the swimming pool and cut down the beautiful trees in order to sell their fruit. If Biswas condemns the Tulsis for ruining the estate, one should avoid regarding the Indian family as barbarians, because it is impossible for poor people to preserve what has been built with slaves' help.

Pleasure seems to be a European privilege at this stage. It is only later that Indians climb the social ladder, joining the upper classes. Such a *nouveau riche*, Singh from *The Mimic Men*, has the dream of living on an "old cocoa estate, one of our rundown former slave plantations" since "[t]here is no finer house than the old estate house of the islands."[127] His vision mingles with royal metaphors: the cocoa pods turn "imperial purple" and he sees himself as the Aztec Emperor Montezuma, who drank "the true cocoa". Once again, the labourers on the estate, "[n]ot yet 'the people'" are just decorum, "arcadian figures", whose suffering is not seen by the planter: "So the days would have passed, literary labour interdigitating with agricultural; and that word agriculture would have acquired its classical associations and lost its harsher island significance."[128] Finally, with the capital that he accumulates after building Crippleville, a residential neighbourhood on the site of an ancient citrus plantation, Singh makes his dream come true. He erects a Roman House at Crippleville, a mimic version of an estate house, a space of pleasure where parties take place: "There were calls from the pool for balls, for games."[129] The inaugural party soon gives voice to Western resentments toward this rich Indian; an

[126] See *The Loss of El Dorado*, p. 196.
[127] *The Mimic Men*, p. 33.
[128] *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.
[129] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

American, the lover of Singh's wife starts destroying the house acting as if he were drunk. In a fit of rage and despair, Singh drives away until he reaches "the ruins of the famous old slave plantation, the overgrown brick walls of the sugar factory, the bricks brought as ballast in the eighteenth-century ships from Europe".[130] Symbolically, the estate house also marks the limit of a journey; the message seems to be that the scars of the past cannot be completely erased. This idea is stressed by means of the image of Alexander stopping "because he had no more worlds to conquer".[131] Unlike the Macedonian, Singh still has to fight against the representatives of the imperial powers present on his island; actually, the building of the Roman house constitutes a climax, because from this moment on Singh suffers a long series of defeats until he is forced to leave his home country.

A very interesting variant of the estate house motif can be found in the novel *Guerrillas* where Mrs. Grandlieu, the descendant of a planter family, lives in the posh neighbourhood called the Ridge. (The Ridge might be based on Cascade, a suburb of Port of Spain situated on the slopes of the Northern Range, which began as a sugar plantation, but is nowadays a residential area for the middle and upper classes[132]). The Ridge is also home to the Englishwoman Jane and to her white friend from South Africa, Roche. However, a sense of impermanence distinguishes the two from Mrs. Grandlieu, and this is to be seen in the architecture of their houses: whereas the French lady lives in an "old timber house, with its worn decorative woodwork, its internal arches of fretwork arabesques that caught the dust, its mahogany-stained floor springy but polished smooth, the hard graining of the floorboards standing out from the softer wood", Jane and Roche inhabit one of the new houses, which "while they lasted, would only be what they were now; concrete shells."[133] The geography of the place metaphorically expresses the social hierarchy of the island; up is the rich Ridge, down "the decaying city".[134] The location of the Ridge also induces its inhabitants a certain feeling of security and control; thus, even during the Black Power rebellion in the city, the Ridge remains undisturbed. From there, Jane sees the fires below, but does not hear the explosions, as "the sound

[130] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[131] *Loc. cit.*
[132] See Lesley Gordon, *Trinidad & Tobago*, 3rd ed., Singapore: APA Publ., 2000, p. 228.
[133] *Guerrillas*, p. 51.
[134] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

didn't carry up to the Ridge."[135] The panoramic view of a city whose voice has been silenced by Westerners, is actually the result of an imperialist technique, where the white subject becomes what Marie Louise Pratt calls 'the monarch-of-all-I-survey'.[136] This is a strategy upon which one comes in another Naipaulian novel, *The Suffrage of Elvira*; there, from the Elvira Estate, "you get one of the finest views in Trinidad".[137] It does not come as a surprise that the Indian Harbans "didn't care for the view", for this is a perspective reserved only for Europeans.

Returning to *Guerrillas*, one should say that this apparent security enables the inhabitants of the Ridge to create a leisure world revolving around Harry de Tunja's bar with its "atmosphere of extravagance and holiday".[138] Jane and Roche's house, too, has a ludic dimension: exploring it, the Englishwoman discovers traces of games: "A few scratches and black scuff marks on the baseboard in the empty back room hinted at games, a child or children; but that was all."[139] In the garden of the house, Jane finds a children's house; the fragment is extremely significant, having a parallel in a much later novel *The Enigma of Arrival*, which presents an Edwardian house, surrounded by a "toy settlement", "child's play by an adult or adults", a "gratuitous expression of great wealth in this corner of the estate".[140] In both novels playfulness is plainly allied with imperialism, standing for a life without any worries; on the other hand, these children's houses contrast with the central buildings, which epitomise authority. In *Guerrillas* the toy hut is actually "a replica of many shacks in the city"; opening its door, Jane does not see a child, but a native, who looks dangerous and smells like an animal.[141] This wild man is also an infantile character resembling the youngster Byrant:

> She thought of Bryant in the hut at Thrushcross Grange, with his aggressive pigtails. He, like the man asleep in the children's hut, had issued out of the city and the plain below, which from this height could be seen all at a glance. Down there, in the garden, the scale had altered; it was like being taken, for a moment, into the intricate life contained in that view.[142]

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[135] *Ibid.*, p. 176.
[136] According to Pratt, "the monarch-of-all-I-survey" trope confers an aesthetic quality as well as "density of meaning" to the landscape mastered by the European seer (cf. Mary Louise Pratt, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-205).
[137] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 9.
[138] *Guerrillas*, p. 45.
[139] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[140] *The Enigma of Arrival*, pp. 194-195.
[141] See *Guerrillas*, pp. 53.
[142] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Tellingly, once Jane is on the steps of her house, the perspective changes, and she is again in control; on the contrary, down in the garden, she was in peril of being cannibalised by the city life. As long as Jane does not leave the Ridge, she will survive. Indeed, the Ridge is "self-contained, shut off from the city";[143] in order to isolate themselves even more from the rest of the world, the people living on the Ridge use louvers of redwood that produce total darkness inside the houses.[144] An equally exclusive place is the Prince Albert hotel:

> The Prince Albert was still, in spite of renovations and additions in concrete, and in spite of its internal iron pillars, like a grand old-fashioned estate house, an affair of timber and polished floors, with an open verandalike lobby. Once it had been barred to black people and received tourists from the cruise ships coming down from the north, sightseers only in those days, before the beaches were discovered. Now it had an air of having been passed by; the tourists went to beach hotels; the Prince Albert had become local. The uniforms of doorman and waiters were not as crisp and starched as they would once have been [...] But to Jimmy the name, Prince Albert, still had a wonderful sound, still suggested privilege and splendor.[145]

The architectural features of the Prince Albert make it look like Mrs. Grandlieu's "grand old-fashioned estate house": lots of timber and little concrete or iron. Even if the hotel is decaying, it still fascinates the Creole Jimmy, extracting its magical aura out of a colonial past, when the Prince Albert was the segregated domain of the whites. Although it is not situated on a height like the Ridge villas, the hotel nevertheless occupies a central position, thus constituting the perfect place from where the Westerners can observe the childish natives playing in the park;[146] trying to acquire the same powers of controlling others through his gaze, Jimmy says the following: "In public places these days I always prefer to sit with my back against a wall. It's a simple precaution. Remain observable in public places. Never sit with your back to a door."[147] Ironically, Jimmy mistakes 'observable' for 'observant'; hence, instead of being able to change hierarchies in a postcolonial world, the native still remains a clownish character to the delight of European visitors, preparing "a

[143] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[144] See *ibid.*, p. 39.
[145] *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.
[146] See *ibid.*, p. 67.
[147] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

face and a mood" for the white Jane. Several details make the reader notice certain similarities between the Prince Albert in this unnamed city and the Queen's Park Hotel in Port-of-Spain, described in *A House for Mr Biswas*: both are aristocratic places, located near parks. Moreover, the black doorkeepers at the Queen's Park Hotel are regarded like Jimmy as aesthetic objects: "In the whitewashed bays on either side of the hotel entrance two doorkeepers of a rare blackness stood in stiff snow-white tunics. The effect was severe but picturesque." The two doormen also have "a statuesque pose".[148]

The above-mentioned fragment from *Guerrillas* shows one more important aspect, namely the Westerners' increasing interest for another space of leisure –the beach. Henry from the story "A Flag on the Island" is of the opinion that the American soldiers did not come to fight or defend anybody, but just to have fun; scandalised, he exclaims: "That bay over the hills, the only one you people leave us. I don't know, you people say you come here to fight a war, and the first thing you do you take away our beaches. You take all the white sand beaches; you leave us only black sand."[149] Black sand for black people; this is just one form of racial segregation, as we have already seen. Anticipating the tourist invasion, the American soldiers consider their stay on the Caribbean island as "an interlude", "a holiday";[150] paradoxically, it is they who "brought the tropics to the island",[151] thus constructing an artificial paradise.

Copying once more the colonisers' habits, Indian members of the middle-class have beach houses built. Miss Logie, the head of the Community Welfare Department, possesses such a house in a village that has the telling name of Sans Souci; sympathetic with Biswas's numerous family, she offers them an unforgettable holiday on her property: "Never, as from the windows of that Buick, did North Trinidad look so beautiful."[152] Transformed into tourists, the native family see their island with other eyes: "Never had water seemed so blue; never had sand shone so golden; never had bay curved so beautifully; waves broken so neatly. It was the perfect world, the curve of the coconut trees repeated in the curve of the bay, the curl

[148] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 469.
[149] "A Flag on the Island", p. 172.
[150] *Ibid.*, p. 187.
[151] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[152] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 483.

of the waves, the arc of the horizon."[153] The picturesque nature of the scene is emphasised by all those curves that create the illusion of a serpentine "line of beauty".[154] However, as Jay Appleton remarks in *The Experience of Landscape*, the observer must be safe, outside the frame, in order to enjoy the spectacle;[155] consequently, after Miss Logie leaves the Biswases alone, they grow shy as well as insecure, timorous of the noisy sea and wind. This holiday at the beach house resembles Singh's holiday that he spends together with his rich relatives; in *The Mimic Men*, the sea appears in the same way as a threatening element. There is "an element of venturesomeness" about Singh's trip to the beach;[156] yet, the adventure ends with a tragic episode, which sounds like a warning for white tourists:

> Then I heard. People were drowning. There in that infernal devouring element people were drowning. The fishermen sat on the roots of coconut trees and mended their nets and stripped lengths of canes for their fishpots. Their lean Carib-black faces were like masks. I imagined myself drowning. And in this imagining I became detached; feeling no anger against the fishermen who, as I could hear now, were talking among themselves in their patois; feeling only the feebleness and absurdity of any attempt to rescue those persons, already bodies, hidden in that turquoise water beyond the breakers. The visitors, the people on holiday, were frightened; the locals were as calm as the fishermen.[157]

Here, the native population gets the upper hand; although they are described as theatrical people, wearing masks, the fishermen are in fact the real spectators of a terrifying show –the drowning of three tourists. The visitors are frightened, whereas the local people remain calm; later, they even show hostility towards the tourists, waiting to be paid for the wasted fish. This unfriendly atmosphere is symbolically rendered by means of some animals: the dogfish wanting to devour dead bodies, the pariah dogs, and the vultures watching from the coconut trees;[158] therefore, water, earth and air, all seem to prepare unpleasant surprises for the inattentive visitors. In the novel *Guerrillas*, too, Naipaul subverts the image of the beach as a pleasure space; what brings an element of danger into the picture is once more the native

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[153] *Ibid.*, p. 483-484.
[154] Cf. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape", in: W. J. T. Mitchell, *ed.*, *Landscape and Power*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 22.
[155] Jay Appleton, as mentioned in *ibid.*, p. 16.
[156] *The Mimic Men*, p. 114.
[157] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[158] See *ibid.*, p. 119.

population, like in the story "of the rape of a white girl at the beach by a gang":

> The girl had bled and shrieked and fainted. One of the men had then run to a brackish creek in the coconut grove and had tried, using his cupped hands alone, to bring water to the girl.
>
> The boy from whom Jimmy had first heard the story that Monday morning – and in the boy's voice could be detected the accents of the women of the back yard where he lived – the boy had told the episode of the water as part of the lunacy and terror after the event. But to Jimmy it was the most moving part of the story, and it had stayed with him, in a setting that had grown as stylized as a tourist poster: the soft light and blurred shade below the coconut palms, the white sand, the sunlit breakers, the olive sea and blue sky beyond the crisscross of the curved gray coconut trunks, the bleeding girl on the front fender of the old Ford, the cupped hands offering water, the grateful eyes, remembering terror.[159]

The setting contains almost all those exotic elements that Naipaul calls "colonial or holiday motifs" – "beaches, market women, coconut trees, sun, big-leaved trees" (the market women are absent since the protagonists are non-Westerners).[160] Not only the serpentine line of beauty, but also the soft light and blurred shade make the landscape appear as a picture reflected in a Claude mirror; however, its commodification transposes this panorama from the realm of the picturesque into that of the "posteresque". The beautiful scenery starkly contrasts with the gruesome deed; at this point Naipaul employs another racial stereotype, that of the black man raping a white woman, later inspiring Jimmy to sodomise Jane. Frantz Fanon indicates that the black man's desire to be loved by a white woman originates in a wish "to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*";[161] nevertheless, he warns that the image of the blacks as sexual beings is just a reductive cliché.[162] The episode actually reflects Westerners' uncertainties in a world that they cannot longer dominate. Likewise uncertain is Harry from the same novel; the holiday feeling that he is sharing with Roche and Jane at his beach house as they are lying in hammocks is disturbed by the thought that on the beach there takes place a "nonsense" ritual;[163] very interesting is the location of the house, echoing that of the Ridge –somewhere on a cliff, above that beach invaded by natives.

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[159] *Guerrillas,* p. 60.
[160] See *The Enigma of Arrival,* p. 151.
[161] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* p. 63.
[162] *Ibid.,* p. 177.
[163] *Guerrillas,* p. 119.

What the beach villas and the estate houses have in common is their exclusivity: at first, reserved for the whites, later for the members of the upper classes regardless of colour (nevertheless racism still persists and non-whites are not welcome as the novels *The Mimic Men* or *Guerrillas* make it plain). This is the atmosphere of a club. Speaking about Kipling, Naipaul regards the British author, as "a kind of club-writer", whose club was the entire India, an "artificial, complete and homogenous world [which] did not require explanations".[164] Naipaul's judgements on Kipling may apply to all Westerners' in Trinidad; the novel *The Mimic Men* presents them as people leading idle lives in holiday houses, running from party to party. The leaders of Isabella's Turf Club (based on a real institution) are undoubtedly the French planters: "always a Deschampsneufs on the committee of our Turf Club, always a Deschampsneufs prominent in the *Cercle Sportif*".[165] Wendy, a member of that French family, has the power to introduce people to this exclusive environment; she is able to deny them access to it, too, even if the rejected people are Europeans like Sandra, Ralph Singh's wife. Memorable is the scene in which Wendy Deschampsneufs totally ignores Sandra as they meet in a night club.[166] The racist character of the *Cercle Sportif* is made plain when the institution organises a fancy-dress ball, at which some people turn up "as African tribesmen with spears and little beards".[167] Browne, the black politicians, reacts to the affront; however, his reaction looks more like a compromise. He signs deportation orders for several expatriate civil servants (but not for the slave owners' descendants), and allows the "racial clubs" to continue to exist, provided they are "not maintained in any open or hidden way by public funds".[168] In short, Westerners are depicted by Naipaul as people enjoying good lives, playing in leisure realms, which are genuine artificial paradises. By leaving these protected spaces, they are in great danger; some, like Jane, even die.

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[164] V.S. Naipaul, "Theatrical Natives", p. 158. Although in this essay Naipaul criticises Kipling for having exoticised India by turning it into a club and a theatre house, he does the same in other works like *An Area of Darkness*; however, M. Keith Barker agrees with Naipaul in noting the theatricality of the Raj, but sees in it a subversion of imperialism: "the British Empire, built on illusion [...] and theatre from the beginning, was doomed from the opening act." (see M. Keith Barker, *Colonial Power, Colonial Texts: India in the Modern British Novel*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 58 and p. 92).

[165] *The Mimic Men*, p. 80.

[166] See *ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

[167] *Ibid.*, p. 231. Likewise, the Tennis Club in *Guerrillas* is a racist institution, allowing no blacks; moreover, its members prefer playing tennis than "fighting for the mother country" (see *Guerrillas*, pp. 68-69).

[168] *The Mimic Men*, p. 232.

### 4.2.6. Exotic Sceneries

#### 4.2.6.1. Aestheticising the Other

Adventures are unthinkable without an exotic background; as recent criticism has shown, exoticism goes hand in hand with imperialism, since it domesticates "the foreign, the culturally different and the extraordinary", making it comprehensible and predictable, yet not completely devoid of its capacity to offer surprises.[169] Influenced by Edward Said, the scholars Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo say the following on this topic: "Imperialism is the expansion of nationality. Exoticism, in turn, is the aestheticizing means by which the pain of that expansion is converted to spectacle, to culture in the service of empire, even as it may also act to change the originating national culture."[170] A spectacle, the foreign culture appears to the coloniser's gaze as utterly theatrical and picturesque. According to James Duncan the emphasis on vision was an imperial technique, born out of the Enlightenment belief in Reason: the world could be best possessed and understood by means of a mimetic mode of representation.[171] A similar point is made by Raymond Corbey, who under Foucault's inspiration says the following with respect to the "ethnographic showcases" (the world fairs and international expositions) of the period 1870-1930:

> Fitting cultural Others into narrative plots, we suggested, was a way the citizen's panoptic eye /I dealt with their wondrous, disturbing difference without annihilating this difference completely. These plots came with the illusion of the panoptic position of an omniscient spectator, functioning as another strategy of power – the illusion that 'To see is to know'.[172]

W. J. Mitchell, too, notices the connection between vision and landscape on the one hand, and Empire on the other hand. Discussing Jay Appleton's book *The Experience of Landscape*, Mitchell writes that "[t]he picturesque structure of [the] observer's visual field is simply a foregrounding of the scene of 'natural representation' itself,

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[169] See Graham Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, pp. 13-14.

[170] Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo, "Introduction", in: J. Arac and H. Ritvo, *eds.*, *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nationalism, Exoticism, Imperialism*, Durham: Duke UP, 1995, p. 3.

[171] See James Duncan, "Sites of Representation", pp. 41-43. Therefore, exoticism seems to be a tamed and rationalised form of the play of the imagination.

[172] Raymond Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930", in: Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh, *eds.*, *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*, London: Zed

'framing' or putting it on a stage."[173] In Naipaul's case, the leisure spaces previously commented upon, besides offering protection to Westerners, also help "frame" and consequently, tame the natives. This becomes apparent in the short story "A Flag on the Island", where the object of scrutiny is not a "natural" landscape, but the culture itself of that unnamed tropical island resembling Trinidad. With the help of a metonymy (which substitutes the Coconut Grove Bar for the entire island), Naipaul expresses his view that local culture has become a commodity for American tourists: "Ice-cubes in the fridge, and at the same time they getting the exotic old culture. The old Coconut Grove even have a board of governors."[174] Henry's words sound quite strange as they freely mix Creole forms with "high" terms like "culture" or "exotic"; similarly hybridised is his Caribbean environment: "You see the place is like a little New York now."[175] The fragment is another sample of Naipaulian pessimism, as it suggests that this is a one-way process, since the former colonised will always be dependent on imperial powers, with no possibility of striking back. The Coconut Grove is obviously a leisure space, a club,[176] whose artificiality is emphasised by "[h]undreds of plastic blooms";[177] during World War II a whorehouse for American soldiers and the setting where different Carnival activities took place, the Coconut Grove later becomes an increasingly respectable institution, being discovered by ethnographers:

> Officers came from the base with their wives, to look at the dancing. So did some of the island's middle class. Men with tape recorders sometimes appeared in the audience. And in the midst of this growing esteem, Henry

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Books Ltd, 1995, p. 76.

[173] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape", p. 16.

[174] "A Flag on the Island", p. 213. Fanon surprises this process in the following words: "The national bourgeoisie will be greatly helped on its way toward decadence by the Western bourgeoisies, who come to it as tourists avid for the exotic, for big game hunting, and for casions. The national bourgeoisie organizes centers of rest and relaxation and pleasure resorts to meet the wishes of the Western bourgeoisie. Such activity is given the name of tourism, and for the occasion will be built up as a national industry" – Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth (Les damnés de la terre), preface by* Jean-Paul Sartre, *transl. by* Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press, 1978 (1961), p. 153. A similar process, which could be described by means of such terms as "touristification" (cf. E. M. Bruner, *op. cit.*, p. 177) or "sight sacralization" (cf. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, New York: Schocken, 1976, pp. 44-45), is obvious in the following passage from *The Mystic Masseur*: "Presently the American soldiers began to pour into Fuente Grove and the village children had their first chew of gum. The soldiers came in jeeps and army lorries, some in taxis with girl-friends. They saw elephants in stone and were reassured, if not satisfied, but when Ganesh took them on a tour of his temple–he used the word 'tour'–they felt they had their money's worth." (*The Mystic Masseur*, p. 160).

[175] *Loc. cit.*

[176] See *ibid.*, p. 171.

[177] *Ibid.*, p. 214.

> became more and more miserable. He was a character at last, mentioned in the newspapers. The looser girls faded away; and more *wabeens* appeared, so expensive as to be indistinguishable from women doomed to marriage. Henry reported one day that one of his drummers, a man called Snake, had been seized by somebody's wife, put into a jacket and tie, and sent off to the United States to study music.[178]

The domesticating function of exoticism is plain at this point: from a drummer with a dubious name, it makes a student of music, who wears "presentable" clothes. However, if science and Reason seem to command the process, at a closer look other drives are revealed: Snake is discovered by "somebody's wife", which alludes to Western erotic fantasies. Thus, Henry's bar continues to be in a masked way a brothel, although an expensive one. Besides, it is a theatre house where the audience comes from the United States; in the end, there remains no trace of authenticity in the shows at the Coconut Grove as the following excerpt indicates:

> Men and women in fancy costumes which were like the waiters' costumes came out on to the stage and began doing a fancy folk dance. They symbolically picked cotton, symbolically cut cane, symbolically carried water. They squatted and swayed on the floor and moaned a dirge. From time to time a figure with a white mask over his face ran among them, cracking a whip; and they lifted their hands in pretty fear.[179]

The spectacle is only "a fancy folk dance", staging fake emotions. The "pretty fear" of the actor-slaves makes one think of an aestheticisation of history and its cruelties; on the other hand, the white mask might be read as a further allusion to Fanon, signifying a state of mental subjection that has an economic background –the actors resemble the waiters through their standardised costumes. Consequently, the show is not meant to lead its audience to catharsis but to increase their appetite as well as the profit of the bar. The black performers look like the theatrical Africans in Dickens's essay "The Noble Savage", who, as Jeff Nunokawa remarks, are objects of exhibition, "comprehended by the frame of the picture, or the space of the stage".[180] By pointing to these frames, Naipaul nevertheless succeeds in debunking the constructed (therefore arbitrary) character of the imperial gaze, which embraces the

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[178] *Ibid.*, p. 204.
[179] *Ibid.*, p. 211.
[180] Jeff Nunokawa, "For Your Eyes Only: Private Property and the Oriental Body in *Dombey and Son*", in: Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo, *eds.*, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

entire island: The Coconut Grove is just a point on a map that points to "the beauties of the island, now fully charted."[181] Parallel spaces are the reception building with its display of souvenirs and local books, as well as the Hilton Hotel whose murals "sought to exalt the landscape and the people which [its] very existence sought to deny";[182] their glamour masks a place of work and exploitation.[183] The bauxite loading station "disfiguring the city and the hills"[184] stands in the harbour as a warning sign, overseen by tourists.

The image of the unaesthetic harbour starkly contrasting with the tourist illusion occurs in the novel *The Mimic Men*, too:

> As we drew nearer the docks the island of the travel poster vanished. Hills, palms and fishing boats in the morning grey gave way to the international paraphernalia of a dockside; tall warehouses bounded and shadowed our view of cranes, asphalt and a small locomotive. Here and there a near-naked Negro in spectacularly ragged khaki shorts lounged in a parked lorry.[185]

Moments before, as Singh's ship was entering the port, economic injustice was still concealed from view by an aura of exoticism. On board, there gathered an audience for the panorama provided by the natives; here is the episode as narrated by Singh:

> [I] stood against the rail with the camera-clicking visitors who threw pennies into the clear water and watched the Negro boys dive for them, the pink soles of their feet like luminous fins. The boys also dived for oranges, apples, anything thrown into the water. The grey-green bay was still and in shadow; far away, in the early morning haze, fishing boats were going tinily about their tasks.[186]

The rail is the borderline that separates the Western travellers from this improvised stage; symptomatically, the tourists do not see the black boys' precarious condition, but integrate them into a picturesque landscape reminding one of the hazy paintings of a Turner. There emerges a play of contrasts between the shadowy bay and the boys' pink luminous feet. Photography, another visual mode of representation, is an

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[181] "A Flag on the Island", p. 155.
[182] *Ibid.*, p. 157.
[183] See also *The Mimic Men*, p. 243.
[184] "A Flag on the Island", p. 150.
[185] *The Mimic Men*, p. 53.
[186] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

act of control "located in the domain of signs";[187] by placing the natives somewhere below in an aquatic environment, it symbolically recreates colonial hierarchies, giving voice to racial prejudices, according to which, the Africans belong to a subhuman, animal world (the black boys' feet looking like fins is an allusion to that). However, the episode points out that domination is not exclusively semiotic, as it is clearly anchored in an economic network. The infantilised natives, dispossessed of complex identities and of land,[188] are forced to accept the roles and the dirty money offered by Westerners, so that they might survive. Metaphorically, a rotten orange is thrown to the boys; this is a gesture that provokes Singh's indignation. Although at times Singh dreams of being a planter, he cannot accept this situation: later, as a politician he stops the practice. The politician's act is nevertheless ephemeral. Faced with the pressures of a globalised world, the island can maintain little resistance: "In the recent tourist publicity for Isabella I see that the diving boys are again presented as a feature."[189]

The distinction between observer and observed is not that solid in Naipaul; "the amazing distance"[190] between Europeans and the inhabitants of the New World may be transgressed. An interesting example is Lord Stewart of Chichester, who occurs in the novel *The Mystic Masseur* as a man who tries to imagine himself as another (to paraphrase Paul Ricoeur).[191] Regarding Hinduism as a source of religious inspiration, Mr Stewart learns Hindi; his appearance, too, mimics that of Buddhist monk, since he wears "a yellow cotton robe" and has "a staff and a bundle".[192] His desire to be other makes Mr Stewart a ridiculous being, having no authority with the locals; in spite of all his efforts to be accepted by the Indians living in Trinidad, he fails, impressing Ganesh through his loneliness. Stewart cannot communicate with his Hindu fellows as he "translates" their culture in an erroneous manner: his clothes are perhaps appropriate for Kashmir but not for Trinidad; moreover, he misreads

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[187] Paul S. Landau, "Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Administration in Africa", in: Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin, *eds.*, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

[188] See Robert J. Gordon, "'Captured on Film': Bushmen and the Claptrap of Performative Primitives", in: Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin, *eds.*, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

[189] *The Mimic Men*, p. 52. Even the word "fin" suggests economic subjection, as it has the slang meaning of "5-dollar bill".

[190] The French essayist Montaigne uses these words in "Of Cannibals" to characterise the perceived distinction between the inhabitants of the Old World and those of the New World (cf. Paul S. Landau, "Introduction", p. 3).

[191] See Paul S. Landau, "Introduction", p. 6.

[192] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 36.

Ganesh's worries as a metaphysical concern with "the indefinite".[193] Like a Western adventurer or tourist, Stewart casts the Indians into aesthetics forms, making them subjects for his paintings and sculptures. He is actually a hybrid, whose enthusiasm for Hindu spirituality is only matched by his habit of drinking tea. Though he leaves Trinidad to join the British army, Steward is nonetheless closer to a "participant-observer" rather than to a traditional ethnographer, who looked but did not mix with the indigenes.[194]

The borderline between Western spectators and native actors is even more fluid in the short story "A Flag on the Island" and the novel *Guerrillas*. In the former narrative a tourist noticing the wire-netting fence between the reception building and the city makes the following remark: "'It's like the zoo.'"[195] To that, her husband responds: "'Yes,' [...] 'They might even throw you some nuts.'"[196] The reply signalises the ambiguous nature of the borderline: instead of regarding the native population as exotic creatures, the Western tourists themselves are in danger of being animalised by the Other's gaze. The final part of the story is in fact a grandiose performative episode, with local people and tourists alike dancing "as on a flat stage, stretching to infinity",[197] all boundaries falling apart; unfortunately, everything returns to the old state of things as soon as the hurricane threatening to destroy the island calms down.

If this story contains the promise of a hybrid utopian community with no class or race distinctions, *Guerrillas* presents a contraction-ridden society on the verge of revolution. Westerners like Roche and Jane, although retaining colonial modes of perception are no longer in control. This becomes obvious in Chapter 9 from *Guerrillas* when Roche enters the black neighbourhood, which is described as "a picturesque area", the object of the paintings done for the tourist trade; ironically, the white man is not the seer, but the seen: "Roche concentrated less on the boy than on the yard from the boy had come: perhaps the boy's friends were there, watching."[198] The same feeling of impending attack is shared by Roche's girlfriend Jane as she has the city panorama in front of her. From what we know about

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[193] See *ibid.*, p. 39.
[194] See Robert J. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 226.
[195] "A Flag on the Island", p. 153.
[196] *Loc. cit.* Punning as always, Naipaul might also mean "crazy people" by "nuts" – insanity and animality overlap.
[197] "A Flag on the Island", p. 233.
[198] *Guerrillas*, p. 101.

exoticism, her strategic location on the Ridge should enable her to dominate the view, reading it in aesthetic terms. Indeed, the picturesque character of the scene is not to be ignored since special emphasis is placed on the colours of the late afternoon. She notices "smoke haze and pink cloud rising from the edge of the sea to blend with the glory of gray and red and orange clouds" as well as "an amber light" that falls "on the brown vegetation of the hills."[199] Yet Jane sees in the surrounding vegetation "strangeness and danger"; curiously enough, woodland is personified, suggesting "wild disordered men tramping along old paths [...] like aborigines recognizing only an ancestral landscape and insisting on some ancient right of way", "[w]ild men in rags, with long, matted hair, wild men with unseeing red eyes";[200] the repetition stresses the Englishwoman's panic. Undoubtedly, the response is totally anomalous, for the natives, "the aborigines" should evoke pleasant, holiday associations to a European mind. The view is a spectacle – "the whole surface was dramatized"[201]– but it is far from those exotic shows meant to delight imperial eyes. The episode is anticipated by another one in Chapter 1 when Roche and Jane go together to Jimmy Ahmed's agricultural commune on behalf of the Sablich company. The support provided by the respective company is nothing more than a masquerade, an exercise in public relations; Roche's position, too, is insignificant. He is no longer as powerful as the estate overseers of former times; however, on his arrival, "[e]verything was exposed, lit up, and open for inspection: the boys, their faces, their clothes, the narrow beds, the floor below the beds."[202] But the "boys" do not take this inspection in earnest: "As if in a parody of nineteenth-century plantation prints, which local people had begun to collect, the boys, with sullen downcast eyes, as though performing an unpleasant duty, were planting tomato seedlings which, as fast as they were set in their dusty little holes, quailed and drooped."[203] This is a picturesque scene in reverse, a parody of a plantation print, whose characters are not some happy blacks, but boys with "sullen downcast eyes". The natives' eyes are in this case expressing subjection, avoiding confrontation. Bryant's eyes, too, avoid confrontation at this stage; nevertheless, they are infinitely more threatening:

[199] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[200] *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.
[201] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[202] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[203] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

> And the boy on the next bed said more loudly, and in an abrupt tone, not looking at [Jane], his shining face resting on one side on his thin pillow, his close-set bloodshot eyes fixed on the back doorway: 'Give me a dollar.'
>
> His face was oddly narrow, and twisted on one side, as though he had been damaged at birth. The eye on the twisted side was half-closed; the bumps on his forehead and his cheekbones were prominent and shining. His hair was done in little pigtails: a Medusa's head.
>
> She took out a purse from her shoulder bag and offered a red dollar note, folded in four. Raising his arm, but not changing his position on the bed, still not looking at her, he took the note, let his hand fall on the bed, and said, 'Thank you, white lady.' And then there was nothing more to do or say. She walked back past the beds, feeling the silence behind her, and went out into the sunlight, stepping from the concrete floor of the hut onto red, hot clay.[204]

The figure of speech used here is the ekphrasis, defined according to W.J. T. Mitchell as "the name of a minor and rather obscure literary genre (poems which describe works of visual art) and of a more general topic (the verbal representation of visual representation)."[205] It often happens to find references to paintings in Naipaul's writings (thus, *The Enigma of Arrival* is based on a Chirico picture);[206] the painting alluded to in this excerpt from *Guerrillas* might easily be *Leonardo's Medusa*, which presents Gorgone's severed head lying in a pool of blood. Her face exactly like Bryant's has a hideous aspect – bumpy and twisted. Her hair – a crowd of serpents – looks like Bryant's pigtails; furthermore, the boy's speech too is just "a hiss", wonderfully realised by means of the alliteration "Sister" (significantly, Jane acknowledges only the appellation "white lady").[207] The red colour of the dollar note as well as of the "hot clay" seems to imply the tragic end of the monster slain by Perseus; consequently, the scene apparently confirms colonial hierarchies with the European as victor, who demonstrates his indubitable superiority towards the monstrous feminised natives, keeping the colonised at distance by not communicating with them.[208] However, at this point we have a genuine dialectic of

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[204] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[205] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other", *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 152.

[206] In *A Way in the World*, Naipaul confesses that as a debutant writer he would write descriptions of landscapes and tableaux; see *A Way in the World*, p. 26. Chapter 5 of Tobias Döring's *Caribbean-English Passages*, entitled "Turning the Colonial Gaze: Caribbean-English Ekphrasis", points out Naipaul's use of Chirico's painting in the novel *The Enigma of Arrival*: "his narrative appropriation of the title painting serves to subvert the authority over iconographic traditions and, like his deconstruction of the mythic English landscape, undermine their cultural validation" (Tobias Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 142).

[207] See *Guerrillas*, p. 11.

[208] According to W.J.T. Mitchell, ekphrasis symbolises the relationship Self-Other: "The 'otherness'

the gaze: on the one hand, Westerners control the exotic panorama; on the other hand, their subjects are capable at any time of looking back with their poisonous Medusa-like eyes. In fact, the death proclaimed here is Jane's.[209]

### 4.2.6.2. Landscape and History

Accused of siding with the Victorians, Naipaul surprises when he de-centres the Western gaze. His position is nevertheless not always anti-Eurocentric; for example, he adopts a Western perspective when he remarks in an essay interspersed with Enlightenment ideas the picturesque nature of Hindu rituals, which he keeps at arm's length: "There is beauty in ritual, but when it goes, it goes."[210] Or he shocks by declaring the eastern section of Port-of-Spain to be an "aesthetic collapse."[211] The description of the beach in the story "A Flag on the Island" conveys the same message:

> The village had grown. It had spread down almost to the beach, a rural marine slum. [...] Morning, dark and turbulent, revealed the full dereliction of the beach. Fishing boats reclined or were propped up on the sand that was still golden, but there were also yellow oil drums on the beach for the refuse of the fishermen, whose houses, of unplaster hollow-clay bricks and unpainted timber, jostled right up to the limit of dry sand. The sand was scuffed and marked and bloody like an arena; it was littered with the heads and entrails of fish. Mangy pariah dogs, all rib and bone, all bleached to a nondescript fawn colour, moved listlessly, their tails between the legs, from drum to yellow

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of visual representation from the standpoint of textuality may be anything from a professional competition [...] to a relation of political, disciplinary, or cultural domination in which the 'self' is understood to be active, speaking, seeing subject, while the 'other' is projected as passive, seen, and (usually) silent object." These remarks perfectly characterise the scene in *Guerrillas* with Jane as the seer and Bryant as the seen/silenced Medusa; about this mythological figure, W. J. T. Mitchell says the following, remarking her ambiguity: "To conservatives, Medusa was a perfect image of alien, subhuman monstrosity – dangerous, perverse, hideous, and sexually ambiguous: Medusa's serpentine locks made her the perfect type of the castrating, phallic woman, a potent and manageable emblem of the political Other. To radicals like Shelley, Medusa was an 'abject hero,' a victim of tyranny whose weakness, disfiguration, and monstrous mutilation become in themselves a kind of revolutionary power" (see W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other", p. 157, pp. 175-176). *Guerrilla* presents Bryant in a rather negative light, thus bringing him close to the former position.

[209] This death might symbolise the fall of the British Empire. Nevertheless, the collapse of an empire means the rise of another one; the unnamed former colony in *Guerrillas* does not enjoy more freedom, being controlled by Americans.

[210] V.S. Naipaul, "Introduction", in: Bridget Brereton and Winston Dookeran, *eds.*, *East Indians in the Caribbean: Colonialism and the Struggle for Identity. Papers Presented to a Symposium on East Indians in the Caribbean, The University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad, June 1975*, Millwood, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1982, p. 5.

[211] See Adrian Rowe-Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 38. Paradoxically, in *Guerrillas* and in *The Middle Passage* the slums are still regarded as picturesque, though "oddly beautiful".

> drum. Black vultures weighed down the branches of coconut trees; some hopped awkwardly on the sand; many more circled overhead.[212]

The criteria guiding this Hemingway-like passage are aesthetic; it is above all as an artistic failure that the beach and the slums are presented to the reader. Poverty remains in the background. What Frank says – "I never thought you could destroy the bay"[213] – is nothing else than an indictment of the local population, which does not take into account social factors as the shortage of dwellings or the fishermen's low wages. One could argue that these are Frank's ideas not Naipaul's, but even in those non-fictional or semi-fictional works where the writer makes use of his own voice, Naipaul practically takes the Afro-Trinidadians out of their economic and historical contexts, judging them according to artistic criteria. There is a certain nostalgia for Empire in his words: "all the colonial landscape was being trampled over and undone; as though, with that past, the very idea of regulation had been rejected."[214] As the novel *A Way in the World* indicates, Naipaul undoubtedly decries the disappearance of the landscape of his childhood expressing "the beauty of the natural world" as well as constituting "the perfect tropical landscape".[215] *The Enigma of Arrival* gives voice to one more regret: that for the fabulous landscape of Raleigh's time.[216] The repulsion felt at the view of the slums derives in fact from Naipaul's rejection of the black community living on his native island: "the hill landscapes I had known [...] were so altered, so much a place now where I was without my bearings, so much the landscape now of other people, that I preferred for many years to stay far away".[217]

On the other hand, the novel *A Way in the World* contains lines that show the connection between landscape and history; they are important since they reveal that there exists no atemporal essence of beauty to which only Europeans may gain access.[218] The Naipaul-like narrator's journey to the north-easternmost point of Trinidad is a real incursion into the past with vegetation taking over the function of geological layers. If near the road there stand coconut trees, reminders of slavery, after passing by the disused lighthouse celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen

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[212] "A Flag on the Island", p. 231.
[213] *Loc. cit.*
[214] *A Way in the World*, p. 35.
[215] *Ibid.*, p. 213.
[216] See *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 158; cf. also *A Way in the World*, p. 209.
[217] *A Way in the World*, p. 35.
[218] See for example *ibid.*, p.73 and p. 102.

Victoria and the centenary of the British conquest of the island from the Spaniards, the narrator comes across unknown vegetation: "I couldn't have put a name to the trees. They were not part of the imported vegetation we knew very well, like the coconut, mango, breadfruit, bamboo. The trees on the rocks flourished where they did because they were native to those rocks, the Point, the island, the continent."[219] But these aboriginal trees also evoke the aboriginal island and its inhabitants – this is a vision which contrasts with that of Columbus's (postcolonial versus colonial): "It occurred to me that from that side, the ocean side, that first, fifteenth-century Mediterranean view might still exist; whereas from my position on the rocks I was looking at a remnant of the aboriginal island."[220] This is an attempt at anchoring the island in a history that colonial education has always tried to erase; as Naipaul confesses, his history book at school had a short chapter about the Caribs and the Arawaks: "Perhaps very little was known about those people; perhaps Captain Daniel didn't have much to play with."[221] At any case, "no teacher or anyone else" suggested looking at the aboriginal island as an imaginative exercise.[222] The remark contributes to the ambiguous nature of Naipaul's writings, which adopt Victorian attitudes, but at the same time undermine European adventure myths, attacking those Westerners who look for pleasure and exoticism.

[219] *Ibid.*, p. 70.
[220] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[221] *Ibid.*, p. 208.
[222] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

## 4.3. The Postmodern Game of Writing

### 4.3.1. Neo-Baroque Labyrinths of Mirrors

So far, this chapter has pointed out to the construction and the subsequent deconstruction of Trinidad as a playground for Westerners; by subverting the adventure genre, Naipaul comes close to other 20th and 21st century authors willing to re-write traditional stories in a postmodern fashion. In fact, postmodernism itself represents an important ludic source, being well-known that Ihab Hassan, one of the key theoretician of the movement, ranges play alongside anarchy, absence, dispersal, schizophrenia, immanence, etc. as a capital contemporary category.[223] Before focussing on the postmodern elements in Naipaul, one should however be aware that the answer to the question "What is postmodernism?" remains far from clear: Simon Malpas warns that there are "postmodernisms" as well as "postmodernities".[224] Certainly, we can find in Naipaul's writings allusions to a commodified world as the one described by Fredric Jameson in his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) – in the short story "A Flag on the Island", for example, tourist play goes along such lines – but we also come across postmodern playfulness of another type, manifest in self-consciousness, experimentation or parody.[225] Although Naipaul's first four novels (*Miguel Street*, *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *A House for Mr Biswas*) belong to the realist tradition,[226]

[223] See Ihab Hassan, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-268.

[224] Cf. Simon Malpas, *The Postmodern*, London: Routledge, 2005, in particular pp. 6-7: "As a means of thinking about the contemporary world, the post-modern has been defined in a huge variety of different ways: as a new aesthetic formation (Hassan, 1982, 1987), a condition (Lyotard, 1984; Harvey, 1990), a culture (Connor, 1997), a cultural dominant (Jameson, 1991), a set of artistic movements employing a parodic mode of self-conscious representation (Hutcheon, 1988,2002), an ethical or political imperative (Bauman, 1993, 1995), a period in which we have reached the 'end of history' (Baudrillard, 1994; Fukuyama, 1992; Vattimo, 1988), a 'new horizon of our cultural, philosophical and political experience' (Laclau, 1988), an 'illusion' (Eagleton, 1996), a reactionary political formation (Callinicos, 1989), or even just a rather unfortunate mistake (Norris, 1990, 1993). It evokes ideas of irony, disruption, difference, discontinuity, playfulness, parody, hyper-reality and simulation. It has been, for some, a radicalisation of modern art that has pushed avant-garde experimentation to new limits, and for others a democratisation of cultural studies that has allowed critics to pay as much attention to, and place as much value in, popular entertainment as it does the old masters. For others still, postmodern art and culture are simply surface phenomena generated by much more far-reaching social, political or philosophical transformations that have taken place in the modern world."

[225] See Brian Edwards, *Theories of Play and the Postmodern Fiction*, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998, p. xiv.

[226] From a structural point of view, *Miguel Street* is the most experimental of the group, juxtaposing a series of sketches that vaguely evoke the technique used by James Joyce in *The Dubliners*; the other three novels can be interpreted as belonging to a first postmodern wave, dropping modernist

beginning with the novel *The Mimic Men* and many of the stories in the collection *A Flag on the Island*, one detects more and more experimental features, making a Baroque texture which at times reminds of writers like Borges or John Fowles. Naipaul's novel *Guerrillas*, in particular, resembles Fowles's book *The Magus* in its use of the godgame motif.[227] Thus, the adventure space of the former Caribbean colony in *Guerrillas* appears as a maze, an image loved by (neo)Baroque artists:[228]

> The roads of the former industrial park were narrow and overgrown at the edges, and parts of the rough, graveled surface were eaten away. The land, part of the great plain, was flat; but now the areas of low bush were fewer, and they lay between sections of secondary forest. There were still many roads; but one turning was like another, and it would have been easy for a stranger to get lost. Since they had left the highway there had been no signs for Thrushcross Grange.[229]

The labyrinth epitomises the hidden dangers lurking behind Westerners' backs (we could compare the Minotaur at the centre of the Cretan maze with Jimmy, who acquires animallike features and lives at Thrushcross Grange, surrounded by this net of confusing roads); without the Ariadnic thread of colonial certainties, Jane dies, after losing her sense of orientation, as shown by the following remarks: "She awakened to darkness; she was momentarily confused. [T]he city and the flat land

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experiments in favour of a realist narrative method.

[227] R. Rawdon Wilson takes over the name of "godgame" from John Fowles, defining this category as follows: "A godgame signifies a gamelike situation in which a *magister ludi* knows the rules (because he has invented them) and the character-player does not. A godgame occurs in literature when one or more characters creates an illusion, a mazelike sequence of false accounts, that entraps other characters." The critic notes that "the godgame constitutes an emblem of the postmodern obsession with uncertainty, ambiguous perception, and cognitive entrapment", but at the same time has a transhistorical nature, also appearing in baroque fiction (R. Rawdon Wilson, *In Palamedes' Shadow*, pp. 123-126).

[228] According to Gustav René Hocke, the world of mannerism (Hocke prefers the term 'mannerism' to 'baroque') is symbolised by a labyrinth, in particular by a labyrinth made up of mirrors; see Gustav René Hocke, *Die Welt als Labyrinth: Manier und Manie in der europäischen Kunst*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957, pp. 7-8 and pp. 98-104). Discussing the image of the labyrinth, Omar Calabrese, connects it to "the pleasure of loss and enigma" (Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, *transl. by Charles Lambert, with a foreword by* Umberto Eco, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992 [1987], p. 140); significantly, Naipaul has written a novel entitled *The Enigma of Arrival* (Naipaul's novel, however, reflects the trauma of displacement rather than pleasure). Except for the labyrinth, other neo-baroque elements in postmodernism are theatricality, illusion, self-reflexivity, multiplicity, surprise, conceit as well as dynamism and ephemerality (see Cristina Degli-Esposti, "Introduction. Postmodernism(s)", in: Cristina Degli-Esposti, *ed.*, *Postmodernism in the Cinema*, New York: Berghahn Books, 1998, p. 8; and Angela Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2004, pp. 15-29).

[229] *Guerrillas*, p. 6.

remained as unknown as it had been on that first day […].”[230] Roche, too, lets himself defeated and manipulated by Meredith, a local journalist and politician; the latter’s apparent vulnerability during the riots is actually a device meant to confuse the reader, for Meredith controls the game from the very beginning. Coming onto the porch of Harry de Tunja’s beach house, where Jane and Roche are spending a quiet Sunday afternoon, Meredith has theatrical gestures: he acts out his entrance,[231] sits “as on a stage”[232], then leaves “acting his exit as he had acted his entrance […].”[233] But here the foreign spectators do not dictate the terms of the play any longer, being closer to Nicholas Urfe from Fowles’s novel *The Magus* than to the Western heroes of colonial times;[234] moreover, Meredith is a real magician. In spite of the fact that Jane finds him disgusting, she says: “I can’t get over his looks. He mesmerizes me. When he was sitting down on that low chair I thought he looked like a wistful little frog.”[235] The racial Other is paradoxically a mixture of animality and Reason; in this Baroque game, appearances always deceive. Jane’s first impression of Meredith is that of a “tamed” native:

> To Jane, not looking in those early days for what was restful, and even then having no taste for the political or economic complexities that Meredith liked to analyze, Meredith was “suburban.” And Meredith, holding a doll in one hand, and leading his infant daughter to the garden gate to wave good-by to Jane after her first visit, did appear too domesticated and settled: Roche could see that. Jane also decided that Meredith was boring; and then she decided that he was ugly.[236]

However, the doll in Meredith’s hand rather than show an infantilised black prefigures his role as a manipulator, which becomes obvious at Harry’s beach house, when Meredith suggests playing an imagination game. Everybody has to think how a perfect day would look like; the game is a good occasion for Meredith to humiliate Jane, to whom he tells that a woman is completely dependent on her male companion, and Harry as well as Roche, whom he accuses of being unable to escape

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[230] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[231] *Ibid.*, p. 131.
[232] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[233] *Ibid.*, p. 145.
[234] Tellingly, the protagonist of Fowles’s novel, who is tricked by the rich Maurice Conchis, has a name similar to that of the French writer Honoré d’ Urfée, author of the 17th century Baroque novel *L’Astrée* (see the 1976 foreword to John Fowles, *The Magus*, New York: The Modern Library, 1998 [1965], p. xix).
[235] *Guerrillas*, p. 146.
[236] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

their limited condition, as they lack creativity: "Roche read: *The life being described is the life the speaker lives or a life he has already lived. The setting may change, but no one will make a fresh start or do anything new.*"[237] Later, Meredith gives Roche a final blow as the journalist prepares the Sablich's employee a trap, forcing him to admit that supporting Jimmy Ahmed's agricultural commune has been nothing more than a farce. This happens in a radio studio that Meredith has carefully prepared, depriving it of air-conditioning, and consequently, letting a perspired Roche suffocate.[238] This is clearly a competition controlled by Meredith; at its end Roche cannot but regret that as a white, he has not concentrated on the racial attributes of Meredith's body: "Roche could see the bump of Meredith's navel below his vest. It was like noticing a secret. […] Roche thought: Yes, that was my mistake. I should have looked for that first. That, and the waist band."[239] No longer capable of countering with solid arguments, Roche goes back to Jane's racist prejudices. This is a victory for the locals, but a small one since Roche is only a minor official; the American businessmen still rule the island.

*Guerrillas* is a novel interspersed with Baroque playfulness; therefore, except for labyrinths and godgames, mirror palaces are to be found in it. An excerpt from a letter written by Jimmy Ahmed is particularly significant:

> I know that in life a man has always to keep on picking himself up when the count reaches nine. That is the test of a man, not when he's on his feet but when he's down, but I've picked myself up too often and I've nothing to show for it. The corridor of time is now a room of mirrors, it just shows me forever picking myself up, and this time I want them to count me out.[240]

The ludic atmosphere suggested by the box metaphor does not make the episode less tragic. This is an existentialist message of despair, indicating the absurdity of one's life; the mirror walls form a genuine labyrinth from where there is no way out, no access to a higher and better reality, as simulation and repetition are the only tools of which Jimmy disposes. The image also resonates with the frequent presentation of the island as a prison, since it clearly conveys a feeling of entrapment. However, when we think of those Westerners entrapped in the novel, it becomes apparent that

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[237] *Ibid.*, p. 144.
[238] See *ibid.*, p. 197, p. 200 and p. 203.
[239] *Ibid.*, p. 209.
[240] *Ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

the fragment points to a condition affecting all humans rather than only the former colonised. Of course, the mirror is a constant reminder to Jimmy that he is a black, therefore, an oppressed man; likewise, it has the respective function in "The Baker's Story", where the protagonist theatrically addresses his (probably white) readers/spectators:

> Look at me. Black as the Ace of Spades, and ugly to match. Nobody looking at me would believe they looking at one of the richest men in this city of Port-of-Spain. Sometimes I find it hard to believe it myself, you know, especially when I go out on same of the holidays that I start taking the wife and children to these days, and I catch sight of the obzocky black face in one of those fancy mirrors that these expensive hotels have all over the place, as if to spite people like me.[241]

The mirror (like the bakers' imaginary addressees) seems to shout back in the racist terms mentioned by Fanon: "'Dirty nigger!' […] 'Look, a Negro!'"[242] But the unnamed baker is closer to Meredith than to Jimmy; he is a powerful character, whose hard-won money opens the doors of select hotels for him. On the other hand, the mirror stands for self-consciousness, which in the baker's or Jimmy's case, acquires agonic traits. Paradoxically, the same mirror, which symbolises self-reflexivity, may also lead to confusion and disorientation. Frank, the American protagonist of the story "A Flag on the Island", views the Caribbean city that he explores with the eyes of a drunkard. At a certain moment, this gaze becomes self-reflexive:

> The mirror was steamed over. I cleared part of it with my hand. For the first time that day, that night, that morning, I saw my face. My face, my eyes. My shirt, the doorman's tie. I was overwhelmed. The tribal subconscious. Portrait of the artist. I signed it in one corner.
>
> 'Yes. When all is said and done, I think you are pretty tremendous. Very brave. Moving among men like a man. You take taxis. You buy shirts. You run houses. You travel. You hear other people's voices and are not afraid. You are pretty terrific. Where do you get the courage?'
>
> A hand on my elbow.
>
> 'Leonard,' I whispered, turning.
>
> But it was Henry, a little firmer than he had been so far that evening, a little more rallying, a little less dejected.[243]

[241] "The Baker's Story", p. 135.
[242] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 109.
[243] "A Flag on the Island", p. 224.

Confusion and disorientation is emphasised by means of the steamy mirror, which allows the "tribal" subconscious to speak. Ironically, the subconscious is equated with primitivity, reminding of colonial discourse's insistence on the irrationality of the non-Western world. The fragment has something Conradian in it as it presents a so-called "civilised" man losing his analytical capacities in the midst of "wilderness". The mirror constitutes exactly the opposite of the baker's looking glass – it articulates a native voice, speaking to a white: this is at least the preliminary impression before one is aware that the voice belongs to the black barkeeper Henry. And the voice has nothing pleasant to say, as it denounces the American tourists' "courage" based on their belief that they can buy everything. The allusion to Joyce should not be missed: the mirror is also a "portrait of the artist".[244] This intertextual relationship contributes to the perception of the story as fiction about fiction; in this context, the mirror fits well the postmodern play with metafictional self-referentiality. As such, it reappears in another Naipaulian work, namely in the novel *The Mimic Men*, which presents Ralph Singh's first accommodation in London as "a tall, multi-mirrored, book-shaped room with a coffin-like wardrobe",[245] which reminds one of Borges's labyrinthine universe as a library. The mirrors on the walls indicate an unstable schyzoid personality, typically postmodern in its lack of orientation:

> How could I fashion order out of all these unrelated adventures and encounters, myself never the same, never even the thread on which these things were hung? They came endlessly out of the darkness, and they couldn't be placed or fixed. And always at the end of the evening the book-shaped room, the tall window, myself sitting towards the light or towards the mirror.[246]

Here, there reappears the motif of Ariadne's thread, now irrevocably lost. Singh's fluid self matches this palace of mirrors, a background that has something dreamy about it; significantly, adventures (or their memories) come out of the darkness as if they were floating. The labyrinth of mirrors motif overlaps that of the world of

[244] Furthermore, the mirror is also a labyrinth as Frank resembles Stephen Dedalus, named after the creator of the Cretan maze.
[245] *The Mimic Men*, p. 3.
[246] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

dreams, where knowledge is not possible; later in the same novel, we come across the idea of the dream within the dream in a paragraph that I have already commented upon.[247] This idea clearly has its Baroque sources (suffice it to think of Calderón de la Barca's 17th century drama *Life is a Dream*), being dear to postmodern thinking. As we have already seen, dreams play an important part in *Guerrillas*, too, where Jimmy occurs as a "succubus";[248] they are also to be found in *The Enigma of Arrival*, mixing with memories.[249] Consequently, memories are no longer reliable, testifying a genuine epistemological crisis; as Brian McHale notices, postmodernism means a turn from epistemology (since absolute knowledge is something utopian) to ontology, manifest in an increased preoccupation with possible worlds.[250] Naipaul seems to agree with McHale when he writes the following: "[O]ut of work that came easily to me because it was so close to me, I defined myself, and saw that my subject was not my sensibility, my inward development, but the worlds I contained within myself, the worlds I lived in [...]."[251] Paradoxically, the worlds the writer contains within himself, contain him at their turn, thus making the distinction between different ontological levels almost impossible; Naipaul's words might constitute the perfect accompaniment for many of René Magritte's or M.C. Escher's works of art.

Besides producing uncertainty and anxiety, the labyrinth of mirrors also translates all human activities into a visual register as performances; obviously, the Baroque metaphor of the world as a stage (entering a fruitful intercultural dialogue with Hindu ideas) has been a further source of inspiration for Naipaul to create such theatrical environments as the one in *The Mimic Men*. It is in the respective novel that we find the most extensive references to famous dramas; however, other Naipaulian fictional works, too, contain hints at theatre plays, in particular at Shakespeare's. The next chapter is therefore devoted to this intertextual component, which creates a curious metafictional effect. In their theatricality, Naipaul's writings are neo-Baroque; as metafiction, they are postmodern – the two predicates do not exclude each other.

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[247] See *ibid.*, p. 125.
[248] *Guerrillas*, p. 24.
[249] See *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 165.
[250] Cf. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, London: Methuen, 1987, p. 10.
[251] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 147.

### 4.3.2. Intertextual Theatricality

The very title of the novel *The Mimic Men* signalises the importance of the theatre metaphor in the book. Its connection to a Baroque universe should not be underestimated since Ralph Singh is both an actor-politician[252] and an extravagant dandy who enjoys making display of himself.[253] Even the moment when Sandra leaves him acquires theatrical features:

> I held a shoe and studied the worn heel, the minute cracks in the leather. I touched the dress. I was light with whisky; the gestures seemed suitable for a moment of private theatre.
>
> It was only later, minutes later, when the ceaseless splash of the fountains became unbearable and the feeling of relief I was stimulating suddenly vanished, that I knew that the gesture, however self-regarding and theatrical, of handling Sandra's abandoned shoes and dresses, yet held something of truth: as that other gesture, in London of the magical light, on the day of my first snow, of holding the creased photograph of an unknown girl and wishing for an instant to preserve it from further indignity.[254]

At first sight, this appears as a narcissistic scene in a "private theatre" where the observer is at the same time the observed. Nonetheless, narcissism makes way for what seems to be a cathartic process leading to truth; the movement is from individualism to solidarity with the Other (in this case, a gender other). Significantly, by approaching humanity, Singh gradually detaches himself from his Roman House, the artificial paradise he has created on a former estate plantation; thus, "the ceaseless splash" becomes insupportable (on the other hand, the "playing" fountain may be regarded as a symbol of the ephemerality of life). Clearly, there is more than frivolity and blank parody in Singh's performance and this is made plain in another section of the same novel:

> So we brought drama of a sort to the island. I will claim this as one of our achievements. Drama, however much we fear it, sharpens our perception of the world, gives us some sense of ourselves, makes us actors, gives point and sometimes glory to each day. It alters a drab landscape. So it frequently happens – what many have discovered – that in conditions of chaos, which

[252] See *The Mimic Men*, p. 215.

[253] According to Kristiaan P. Aercke, *Gods of Play: Baroque Festive Performances as Rhetorical Discourse*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 2, "the ethos of the Baroque era and its sensibility was crystalized most succinctly in the majestic, splendid festive performance, that is, in *the festive expression of the spirit of play*, at the court of the absolute ruler."

[254] *The Mimic Men*, p. 200.

> would appear hostile to any human development, the human personality is in fact more varied and extended. And this is creation indeed![255]

Although Singh may not be a reliable narrator as he himself admits the subjectivity of his writing and of his opinions,[256] drama has positive connotations at this stage. It is neither the exotic show put up for Western spectators nor the make-believe game of those natives infantilised by colonial discourse; here, drama is literature, a creative play of the imagination overcoming the hardships of an absurd chaotic world.

In addition to general considerations about the dramatic genre (which in the short story "A Flag on the Island" take the form of such laconic and somewhat paradoxical remarks as the following: "'The perfection of drama. No scenery. No play. No audience. Let us watch.'"[257]), one discovers explicit references to plays and dramaturges belonging to the British canon. For example, in *The Mimic Men*, Shaw is alluded to:

> 'A father,' she had said to me at our first meeting, 'is one of nature's handicaps.' She had also said on that occasion that she wanted to be either a nun or a king's mistress. I had been impressed by this and made to feel not a little inadequate; but awe had been converted into sympathy and something like affection when I came across the sentence in one of Bernard Shaw's plays. To a similar source I attributed her remark about fathers, though I had never been able to trace it.[258]

Singh's awe is the awe of the colonised in front of their Western masters; however, Sandra undergoes a process of demystification as her supposed profundity is exposed as being nothing else than pastiche and literary cannibalisation. Thus, Sandra's manner of speaking perfectly matches Singh's bovarysme, who confesses that reading led him to frequent prostitutes.[259] Once again the phrase "mimic men" applies not only to "Third World" people, but also to Westerners.

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[255] *Ibid.*, p. 234.
[256] *Loc. cit.*
[257] "A Flag on the Island", p. 227.
[258] *The Mimic Men*, pp. 43-44.
[259] See *ibid.*, p. 27.

### 4.3.2.1. Shakespearean Allusions

Yet, allusions to Shakespeare are naturally more common in Naipaul's fiction, as the Bard of Avon constitutes the mythical centre of the British literary canon. The novel *A House for Mr Biswas* announces from the very beginning an engagement with Shakespeare, the "Prologue" suggesting a parallel between King Lear and Mr Biswas as "unaccommodated men".[260] The Indian protagonist of Naipaul's book possesses a *Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare*, "a work of fatiguing illegibility", bought "for the sake of *Julius Caesar*, parts of which he had declaimed at Lal's school".[261] What the quotation shows is the transformation of literature into an educational medium, meant to convey the message of Empire. However, the imperial subjects are able to "write back"; thus, Biswas ironically uses the volume in a completely unconventional way, creatively putting down names. The failure of the colonial project is to be seen in the fact that the names of which Biswas thinks for his child are not English, but Indian: "Krishnadhar Haripratap Gokulnath Damodar Biswas."[262] As if revolted by this "impertinence", "the endpaper blotted atrociously."[263] The *Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare* serves Biswas's purposes even later, when he writes a letter to a disrespectful doctor: quotes from *Measure for Measure* mix with passages from the New Testament and the *Gita*, all resulting in a hybrid construct that relocates Western texts.[264]

Another Shakespearean hypotext[265] underwriting Naipaul's works is *The Tempest*: Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin regard Jimmy from *Guerrillas* as a Caliban-like character who "will not threaten the house, however much he may be allowed, indeed encouraged, to huff and puff."[266] In Naipaul's novel, the critics see

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[260] Cf. *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 11 and John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 68. N. Ramadevi gives the following interpretation to the "Prologue": "The words very clearly suggest that it is a novel about the necessity to establish one's self and one's individuality in a society, which has no rule or pattern"(N. Ramadevi, *The Novels of V. S. Naipaul: Quest for Order and Identity*, New Delhi: Prestige, 1996, p. 52).

[261] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 154.

[262] *Loc. cit.*

[263] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

[264] See *ibid.*, p. 464.

[265] For a definition of the terms *hypotext* and *hypertext* see Gérald Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 5: "By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary."

[266] Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, *Decolonising Fictions*, Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1993, pp. 112-113. James R. Lindroth sees allusions to *The Tempest* even in *The Mimic Men* where Singh would be a magician like Prospero (James R. Lindroth, *op. cit.*, p. 528).

another example of "writing back" at the "canonically interpellative English works"; comparing Naipaul to Randolph Stow, they state the following: "Naipaul, who re-sites a number of English canonical texts in a Caribbean setting, exposes their authority as relative and contingent, but is far less 'optimistic' than Stow of the ability of the postcolonial text to escape the pre-texts of Europe."[267] In other words, contestation does not lead to transgression. Speaking about this process of "writing back", Keith Green and Jill Lebihan attempt to define it: "One way in which attention is drawn to the Eurocentric bias of literature and literary analysis as it is taught in Western educational institutions is through a process of engaging in a dialogue with canonical texts, showing their omissions and preferences."[268] According to Green and Lebihan, there are certain ways to do that: "By criticising with an eye to representation of cultural difference [...], [b]y rewriting certain features to satirise the original" and "[b]y bringing back to prominence characters who are often forgotten."[269]

We find these strategies in the story "A Flag on the Island" where the Shakespearean connection is very obvious. If *The Tempest* opens with Alfonso's vessel caught in the middle of a storm, Naipaul's story shows the Moore-McCormack liner running away from the hurricane Irene to that unnamed southern Caribbean island looking like Trinidad. Once on safe ground, the Moore-McCormack tourists meet the first messengers of the local culture – H.J.B. White's books, which are ostentatiously displayed, catching the visitors' attention:

> The book he picked up was called *I Hate You*, with the sub-title *One Man's Search for Identity*. He opened the book greedily and began moving his lips. '"I am a man without identity. Hate has consumed my identity. My personality has been distorted by hate. My hymns have not been hymns of praise, but of hate. How terrible to be Caliban, you say. But I say, how tremendous. Tremendousness is therefore my unlikely subject."'
>
> He stopped reading, held the book out to the assistant and said, 'Miss, Miss, I would like to buy this.' Then, indicating one title after the other: 'And this, and this, and this, and this.'[270]

[267] Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
[268] Keith Green and Jill Lebihan, *Critical Theory & Practice: A Coursebook*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 276-277.
[269] *Ibid.*, p. 277.
[270] "A Flag on the Island", p. 154.

In addition to literature's commodification and its transformation into an exotic product (significantly, the American's attitude towards local art is greediness, which takes the form of an obsessive desire to buy all books), H.J.B. White's resemblance to Caliban is another interesting aspect offered by this excerpt. An inhabitant of the Caribbean, he is a Caliban by place of birth; as Stephen Orgel states, "Caliban's name seems to be related to Carib, 'a fierce nation of the West Indies, who are recorded to have been *anthropophagi*' *(OED)*, from which 'cannibal' derives; and Caliban may be intended as an anagram of cannibal." He goes on by saying that "[t]he implicit assumptions in the choice of the name are clear enough; and they are Prospero's assumptions."[271] Therefore, Prospero has been lately interpreted as a coloniser who subjects the native populations, depicting them in negative terms.[272] Departing from the original, H.J.B. White is not a native Indian, but a coloured person, since Trinidad's aboriginal people have been completely wiped out; however, we find hints at cannibalism as in the following dialogue between Frank and another American visitor: "'The natives are excited,' a tourist said to me. 'Yes,' I said, 'I think there is a good chance they will eat us. We look pretty appetizing.'"[273] H.J.B.'s identification with Caliban has been preceded by his dressing like Shakespeare during Carnival;[274] his wish to belong to the Western world is matched by his aspiration to whiteness, as reflected in the change of his name from Blackwhite to White. The wish ends with H.J.B. White realising that only a marginal position is reserved to him in a Eurocentric system of values; this atmosphere of defeatism is nevertheless dispelled up to a certain extent by his hate of the Western readers, reminding of Caliban's well-known protest against Prospero – "You taught me language, and my profit on't/ Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!"[275] or:

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[271] Stephen Orgel, "Introduction" to William Shakespeare, *The Tempest (The Oxford Shakespeare)*, edited by Stephen Orgel, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987, p. 25. According to William M. Hamlin, "allegations of American cannibalism began with Columbus, and persisted – perhaps with good reason – through the sixteenth century and beyond; they contribute substantially to what Howard Mumford Jones has called the 'anti-image' of the New World" (see William M. Hamlin, *The Image of America in Montaigne, Spenser, and Shakespeare. Renaissance Ethnography and Literary Reflection*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, p. 13).

[272] A book reuniting several articles that discuss Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in a postcolonial context is *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader, edited and with an introduction by* Peter Childs, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999.

[273] "A Flag on the Island", p. 150.

[274] See *ibid.*, p. 188.

[275] *The Tempest*, 1.2. 362-364.

> This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,
> Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
> Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give
> me
> Water with berries in't, and teach me how
> To name the bigger light and how the less,
> That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,
> And showed thee all the qualities o'th'isle,
> The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile–
> Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
> Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats light on you!
> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which first was mine own king, and here you sty me
> In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
> The rest o'th'island.[276]

The new flag replacing the Union Jack, which gives the name to the story "A Flag on the Island" is an affirmation of the colonised people's rights to own their land, echoing Caliban's claim. Unfortunately, it lacks any substance, being regarded even by the islanders as not real when compared to the old colonial symbols.[277] Equally, H.J.B. White's protest is not that forceful as it could be since it is inspired by a Western foundation, which exerts a tremendous control on the local culture. When a new possible source of financial support, the rich Leonard, appears, (Black)white tries to emancipate himself with the magnate's help from the domination of his three masters (Bippy, Tippy and Chippy) acting like Caliban who ends by serving Stephano instead of Prospero. However, Blackwhite does not exemplify Mannoni's "dependency complex"[278] because he is not a native desperately needing a ruler – on the contrary, his subjection is not something natural or biological, but the result of economic processes, as the story makes it clear.

"A Flag on the Island" introduces a further allusion to another Shakespearean play, namely *The Merchant of Venice*, as Blackwhite is the author of a book entitled *Shadowed Livery*.[279] This is also a metafictional joke, since *Shadowed Livery* is the title of Naipaul's first book, which remained unpublished. On the other hand, *The Shadowed Livery* is the name of the travelogue written by the fictive character Foster Morris from the novel *A Way in the World*; thus, Naipaul symbolically situates

[276] *The Tempest*, 1.2. 331-344.
[277] "A Flag on the Island", p. 157.
[278] See Keith Green and Jill Lebihan, *op.cit.*, p. 278.
[279] See "A Flag on the Island", p. 221.

himself between Blackwhite and Morris, between the West Indies and Europe. The respective title comes, as Naipaul points out, "from *The Merchant of Venice*, from the speech of the Prince of Morocco, one of Portia's suitors,"[280] beginning as follows: "Mislike me not for my complexion, / The shadowed livery of the burnished sun, /To whom I am a neighbour and near bred."[281] Obviously, we have here to do with a process of "writing back" to the canon, for Naipaul is aware of the representation of cultural difference, indicating the racist assumptions underlying Shakespeare's play. The Prince of Marocco's failure must be understood as a result of Eurocentric techniques of othering, which doom non-Western people as "unsuitable".

Also an Other is Shylock, the Jewish money-lender, from whom a boarding-house owner in *The Mimic Men* borrows his name. Nonetheless, rather than occupy a marginal position in society like Shakespeare's character, Naipaul's Mr. Shylock is the "possessor of a mistress and of suits made of cloth so fine [Singh] felt [he] could eat it";[282] moreover, Singh regards him as an authority, copying his gestures. Therefore, Mr. Shylock from *The Mimic Men* is the Shakespearean character's opposite – a coloniser, not a colonised. Mechanisms of power and subjection are not on display in the early Naipaulian fictional work *Miguel Street*, where Chittaranjan, the Indian lawyer defending Hat, recites Portia's speech about mercy, to which the judge retorts: "'All this is interesting and some of it even true but, Mr Chittaranjan, you are wasting court's time.'"[283] Yet, beside a comical aspect, the fragment has a serious dimension, subverting once again the British Canon; following a Platonic logic, the judge should conclude that Beauty, Good and Truth are the same, but he says that Portia's speech is only partially true.

Significantly, the two Shakespearean plays most alluded to by Naipaul are *The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice*, which is natural for a post-colonial writer concerned with topics such as othering, exclusion or subjection.

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[280] *A Way in the World*, p. 82.
[281] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (*The New Cambridge Shakespeare*), *edited by* M. M. Mahood, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987, 2.1.1-3.
[282] *The Mimic Men*, p. 3.
[283] *Miguel Street*, p. 167.

### 4.3.2.2. The Theatre of the Absurd

A feeling of chaos, absurdity and anxiety underlies Naipaul's fictional works of the 1960s and 1970s. It may be argued that it derives from the marginal condition of the colony; indeed, such passages from the novel *The Mimic Men* as the following would lead to that conclusion: "I speak of course of territories like Isabella, set adrift yet not altogether abandoned, where this controlled chaos approximates in the end, after the heady speeches and token deportations, to a continuing order. The chaos lies all within."[284] An opposition is implied between the chaotic world of the former colonies and the stable metropolitan centre; however, this reading does not exhaust all possible interpretation that one could give to the respective emotional content. That is even more obvious since Western characters, too, feel the absurdity of their lives: Roche from *Guerrillas* is aware of the meaningless of his position[285] and experiences a sensation "of being physically lost in an immense world."[286] This frame of mind is present in another Naipaulian fictional work from the 1960s, namely the story "A Flag on the Island", where the American Frank's interior monologue is composed in a similar vein:

> Then I saw that I too, putting away briefcase, papers, letters, passport, was capable of my own feeble assertions. I too had tried to give myself labels, and none of my labels could convince me that I belonged to myself.
>
> This is part of my mood; it heightens my anxiety; I feel the whole world is being washed away and that I am being washed away with it. I feel my time is short. The child, testing his courage, steps into the swiftly moving stream, and though the water does not go above his ankles, in an instant the safe solid earth vanishes, and he is aware only of the terror of sky and trees and the force at his feet. Split seconds of lucidity add to his terror. So, we can use the same toothpaste for years and end by not seeing the colour of the tube; but set us among strange labels, set us in disturbance, in an unfamiliar landscape; and every unregarded article we possess becomes isolate and speaks of our peculiar dependence.[287]

The fragment reworks themes developed by the Existentialist school of thought: anxiety (or *Angst* to employ a Heideggerian term) and "the propensity to self-

[284] *The Mimic Men*, p. 209.
[285] See *Guerrillas*, p. 97.
[286] *Ibid.*, p. 210.
[287] "A Flag on the Island", p. 152.

expression", a power "which saves [all Existentialists] from nihilism, taking refuge in despair and surrendering to the inauthentic, 'fallen' world" as Richard Sheppard states in his dictionary article on Existentialism. Commenting on Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Sheppard writes that men "feel that they have been thrown into a world of reified fragments which say nothing; into a world of men who talk past each other; and into a time-stream of disconnected present moments without past or future",[288] ideas which are expressed in Naipaul's story by means of the moving stream and of the oxymoronic unfamiliar landscape of domestic objects.

Existentialist assumptions of a meaningless world intersperse those plays belonging to what Martin Esslin calls "the Theatre of the Absurd"; however, the critic sees a major difference between Existentialist writers like Sartre or Camus and dramatists such as Ionesco or Beckett – "the Theatre of the Absurd" pushes things to their limits as this school "has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being."[289] In fact, a novel like *The Mimic Men* occupies a mid-position between "the beautiful phrasing and argumentative brilliance of both Sartre and Camus", on the one hand; and "the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought" characterising the Theatre of the Absurd, on the other hand.[290] The polished prose of Naipaul's novel is short-circuited by moments of nonsense (the rhyme *Who comes here? A Grenadier* becoming an obsessive leitmotif) and pantomime.[291] Particularly interesting is the following episode from *The Mimic Men* describing Cecil, Ralph's cousin, and his valet:

> Cecil still behaved as though smoking and drinking were vices he had discovered and patented. He visited degraded Negro whores. Pleasure for him appeared to lie in an increase in self-violation; he was like a man testing his toleration of the unpleasant. I believe in his high spirits less and less. But he communicated these to some of his friends and he communicated them especially to a Negro man of about forty whom he had attached to himself as a bodyguard-companion-valet. He called this Negro Cecil. It might have been

[288] Richard Sheppard, "Existentialism", in: Roger Fowler, *ed.*, *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, pp. 62-63. Besides being an existentialist motif, chaos is also a postmodern theme as expressed in Ira Livingston's book, *Arrow of Chaos: Romanticism and Postmodernity*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

[289] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, London: Penguin Books, Third Edition, 1980 (1961), p. 25.

[290] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[291] As Martin Esslin points out, the Theatre of the Absurd is based on "'Pure' theatre; i.e. abstract effects as they are familiar in the circus or revue, in the work of jugglers, acrobats, bullfighters, or mimes [;] Clowning, fooling, and mad-scenes [;] Verbal nonsense [;] The literature of dream and fantasy, which often has a strong allegorical component." See *ibid.*, p. 328.

> the man's real name; it might just have been Cecil's fancy. The Negro was illiterate and penniless and seemed to have no family. He depended entirely on Cecil and I got the impression that when they were together in public they liked playing a very dramatic master-and-servant, gangster-and-henchman game. I believe they both saw themselves acting out a film; the smallness of their activities must have been a continual frustration to them. I thought they were both unbalanced.[292]

The couple reiterates the theme of the double and of the mirror, for both are called Cecil (a name that, as I have already indicated, has an imperial undertone, alluding to Cecil Rhodes). By their master-and-servant game, they remind of Beckett's characters: Cecil and Black Cecil could be Lucky and Pozzo in their youth (Black Cecil is nevertheless illiterate, differing from the scholar-like Lucky);[293] they enact a farce, which gives the impression that they are high spirited, thus trying to hide "the smallness", the absurdity of their activities. Yet, this attempt to escape the frustration of every-day life by performing makes the two Cecils similar to another Beckettian couple, Vladimir and Estragon who "have to fill time with action",[294] while indefinitely waiting for that mysterious personage Godot. The motif of the unfulfilled waiting appears in the story "A Flag on the Island", for example, where tourists and natives dance together waiting for the storm (and the end of everything) to come: "We danced and waited. We waited and danced. Benediction never came."[295] The waiting is endless like the stage on which it takes place, "a flat stage, stretching to infinity before our eyes."[296] After the threat of the storm is gone, this stage becomes the background of a pantomime, as if taken from a silent movie, with Blackwhite, the local writer begging to be forgiven: "He, once the pursued, now became the pursuer. Pablo, Sandro and Pedro fled before him, as did Bippy, Tippy and Chippy. He pursued them; they evaded him and often the six came together. On the stage stretching to infinity the chase took place, pursuer and the six pursued dwindling to

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[292] *The Mimic Men*, p. 171.

[293] As David Bradby argues, "Pozzo and Lucky are linked by the classic interdependence of master and slave. They are tied to one another by the rope knotted around Lucky's neck, which Pozzo manipulates like a dog-leash" (David Bradby, *Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot'*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001, pp. 29-30).

[294] David Pattie, *The Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 74. Instead of concentrating on the elements that *The Mimic Men* borrows from the Theatre of the Absurd, James R. Lindroth prefers to analyse the influence of the Theatre of Cruelty on the novel (cf. James R. Lindroth, "The Figure of Performance in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 30, Number 3, Autumn 1984, pp. 519-529).

[295] "A Flag on the Island", p. 233.

[296] *Loc. cit.*

nothing before us. The sun was bright; there were shadows."[297] The infinity of the stage contrasts with the characters' smallness; the same sense of being overwhelmed by a hostile world is to be found in the following passage from *The Mimic Men* recording Singh's meditations:

> My sense of drama failed. This to me was the true loss. For four years drama had supported me; now, abruptly, drama failed. It was a private loss; thoughts of irresponsibility or duty dwindled, became absurd. I struggled to keep drama alive, for its replacement was despair: the vision of a boy walking on an endless desolate beach, between vegetation living, rotting, collapsed, and a mindless, living sea. No calm then: that came later, fleetingly. Drama failing, I knew frenzy. Frenzy kept me silent. And silence committed me to pretence.[298]

Here, drama is a means of combating the feeling of absurdity and despair, spatially expressed through the image of the "endless desolate beach". The human presence is challenged by a personified world, which lives, rots and collapses in a perpetual cycle; the "living" sea (echoing the image of the river in which the child bathes) is also "mindless" suggesting a universe devoid of all purpose, where "existence" precedes "essence".[299] All in all, the topics derived from Existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd remarkably intertwine with colonial themes in Naipaul's Trinidadian writings, adding a further dimension to the notion of Naipaulian theatricality.

#### 4.3.2.3. From Theatre to Cinema

Cecil's game, besides being an epitome of an absurd life, has an evident cinematic aspect (he and his black companion see themselves as "acting out a film"). The Theatre of the Absurd and cinema do not exclude each other; in fact, as Martin Esslin points out, the former has been massively influenced by the latter, in particular by the

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[297] *Ibid.*, p. 234.
[298] *The Mimic Men*, p. 241.
[299] Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essays on Phenomenological Ontology, transl. and with and introduction by* Hazel E. Barnes, New York: Philosophical Library, 1956, p. 443.

silent film comedy.[300] This may be explained by postmodernist literature's penchant towards popular culture, whose main representative is cinema; as a writer living in a postmodern age, Naipaul freely mixes "high culture" (theatre) with "low culture" (cinema). Cecil and his black valet effectively try to perform in a film as they climb up on the stage of the cinema bought by Cecil's father: "They were caught in the line of the projector and threw enormous shadows on the screen. He fired one shot into the floor and one at the ceiling. 'Get out! Take your money back and get out.'"[301] The ontological borderline between two different worlds – that of the novel and that of the film – becomes fluid as Cecil becomes an actor himself, indistinguishable from the actors on the screen. At the same time the respective cinema, "Cecil's toy," represents a realm of popular culture and economics: "It was "Coca-Cola all over again: unlimited access to a delight for which the rest of the world had to pay."[302] Therefore, when Cecil throws away the spectators, he challenges his businesslike father; after the death of his parent, Cecil goes unsurprisingly bankrupt. What the quotation also shows is an incipient Americanisation of the British colony.

As Naipaul points out in the travelogue *The Middle Passage*, popular culture has been the most important carrier of American values; above all, there stand the Hollywood films: "Nearly all the films shown, apart from those in the first-run cinemas, are American and old. [...] In its stars the Trinidad audience looks for a special quality of style."[303] Later he caustically adds that "[i]n the immigrant colonial society, with no standards of its own, subjected for years to the second-rate in newspapers, radio and cinema, minds are rigidly closed; and Trinidadians of all races and classes are remaking themselves in the image of the Hollywood B-man."[304] The nefarious influence exerted by these cultural imperialist media has been a recurrent motif with Naipaul since his first published book, the novel *The Mystic Masseur*, appeared. Whereas in *The Mystic Masseur* the Hollywood Hindus inspire Ganesh to adopt certain attitudes and ways of dressing,[305] in the story "A Flag on the Island" Selma, a former prostitute, now rich, realises her dream of being like Norma Shearer in the film *Escape*.[306] The unnamed Trinidadian protagonist of the story "Tell Me

[300] See Martin Esslin, *op. cit.*, pp. 335-336.
[301] *The Mimic Men*, p. 179.
[302] *Loc. cit.*
[303] *The Middle Passage*, p. 54.
[304] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[305] *The Mystic Masseur*, pp. 117-119.
[306] See "A Flag on the Island", p. 178 and p. 229.

Who to Kill" is an extreme case; a madmen, he not only models his life after Hollywood films, but also interprets everything from a cinematic perspective as in the final passage, which blurs the borderline between Trinidad, England and the world of the movies:

> I have my own place to go back to. Frank will take me there when this is over. And now that my brother leave me for good I forget his face already, and I only seeing the rain and the house and the mud, the field at the back with the pará-grass bending down with the rain, the donkey and the smoke from the kitchen, my father in the gallery and my brother in the room on the floor, and that boy opening his mouth to scream, like in *Rope*.[307]

Allusions to *Casablanca* with Humphrey Bogart, one of the American films loved by Trinidadians,[308] are to be found in *Miguel Street*, whose first chapter entitled *Bogart* introduces a Trinidadian character adopting the actor's tough pose, and in *The Mimic Men*, which describes Sandra's departure as follows: "For me it was a moment of another type of drama: the aeroplane the cinematic symbol: Bogart in *Casablanca*, macintoshed, alone on the tarmac, the Dakota taking off into the night."[309] Here, Singh, the narrator, identifies himself with his American model; thus, although a spectator, Singh does not turn the object of his gaze into an exotic product that requires distancing. Consequently, he is in a position of inferiority, a "mimic man".

Jackie Stacey, however, indicates that whereas film studies consider the spectator to be a passive instance, a victim of the visual media, cultural studies regard him/her as an active viewer, conscious of what he/she sees.[310] The critic notices three attitudes adopted by British female spectators in relation to American films: "escapism", "identification" and "consumerism". In general negatively connoted, these attitudes have their positive side, too, according to Stacey; thus, escapism meant escaping "*from* the hardships, dangers and restrictions of wartime Britain," identification may in some cases offer "a source of fantasy of a more powerful and confident self," and consumption is "a site of negotiated meanings".[311] We could use her arguments to show that a character like Bryant from *Guerrillas*, who takes refuge in the world of cinema, identifying with Sidney Poitier, should not be regarded as another example of mimicry, but as a man looking for a powerful

[307] "Tell Me Who to Kill", pp. 107-108.
[308] See *The Middle Passage*, p. 54.
[309] *The Mimic Men*, p. 199.
[310] Jackie Stacey, as mentioned in John Storey, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
[311] *Ibid.*, pp. 69-72.

black model.[312] Moreover, for the Indian diaspora in Trinidad cinema constitutes an important means of preserving ethnic identity as the following passage from *The Mimic Men* points out:

> He [Singh's grandfather] was not interested in the cinema and photographs of Hollywood stars in a private house would have struck him as hopelessly vulgar. But the Indian actors in his back veranda were on a level with the religious pictures: together they were an act of piety towards his past, a reverencing of the land of his ancestors.[313]

A profane medium, film receives sacral qualities, as it helps Singh's grandfather keep in touch with his homeland. This is an act of resistance against Western assimilative processes; a similar act appears in the novel *The Suffrage of Elvira*, where the Indian teenager Lorkhoor grows a moustache after seeing a film with the Mexican actor Armendariz: "In the film Armendariz spoke American with occasional savage outbursts in Spanish; it was the Spanish outbursts that thrilled Lorkhoor."[314] English as hegemonic language is here subverted by Spanish "outbursts"; significantly, these outbursts are "savage", implying a binary opposition "civilised America"- "barbarous Mexico". Additionally, cinema constructs an intercultural space, stimulating one's creativity; as Naipaul confesses in The *Enigma of Arrival*, he "lived imaginatively in the cinema, a foretaste of that life abroad."[315] This is a statement prefigured in the novel *A House for Mr Biswas* by the description of the local cinema: "The entrance to the London pit was through a narrow tunnel, as to a dungeon of romance."[316] In spite of the imperial atmosphere implied by the name "London pit", the colonial spectator feels like the protagonist of an adventure, a position denied otherwise.

An analysis of cinema's influence on Naipaul cannot be complete without a discussion of those metaphors and techniques taken from the sphere of motion pictures. Singh from *The Mimic Men* has the impression that "a celestial camera" records all his movements, which gives him the feeling of being "marked"[317] (at this stage Orientalist stereotypes representing Indians as passive fatalist people are

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[312] See *Guerrillas*, pp. 30-31.
[313] *The Mimic Men*, pp. 105-106.
[314] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 75.
[315] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 116.
[316] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 447.
[317] *The Mimic Men*, p. 101.

detectable). Another interesting image from the same novel is that of the memory-film, appearing when Singh recollects his school days: "I hated my secrets. A complying memory has obliterated many of them and edited my childhood down to a brief cinematic blur. Even this is quite sufficiently painful."[318] Curiously enough, Singh himself signalises that he is an unreliable narrator presenting a distorted view of his native island. Memory is not something biological, but cultural; consequently, it is under the spell of colonial discourse. The "jumping" film allows Singh to remember offering his teacher an apple instead of a local orange; after the king's crown, "the terrors of the arithmetic" come to his mind. The film dissolves into a dream of "being carried helplessly down a swiftly flowing river, the Thames", with Singh symbolically becoming a colonised Ophelia, a marginal creature whose impotence is underlined by the dream's conclusion: the London Bridge breaks Singh's legs, leaving him a paralytic for the rest of his life. The next sequence, which shows Singh marching at a new school, suggests that he has overcome the paralysis of his body, but not of his spirit corseted by colonial education.[319] The island is therefore dramatised; a similar process takes place when Singh goes to a cheaper cinema for the one-thirty show on Saturday – the tropical storm that interrupts the projection soon transforms into a spectacle in its own right:

> The rain drummed on the corrugated-iron roof: that sound, comforting to us in the tropics, which people from other zones detest. Above the rain and the drumming came the sound of thunder, obliterating the soundtrack. The heavy curtains over the open exits flapped and the rain spattered in. The rain went on, gust upon heavy gust crashing from one end of the roof to the other. Soon the floor of the cinema was running wet. We willingly gave up the film. Our tropical days were even; we enjoyed it when they were dramatized. But then I thought of our house and the dangers of rain. On the screen the film ran on, but the exit curtains had been pulled back by those who preferred to watch the rain, and the picture was faint. The soundtrack was inaudible. The diminished, pointless gestures of the actors gave pleasure to a rowdy few.[320]

This natural performance eclipsing the film on the screen might be regarded as another example of exoticism; obviously, the narrator has a Western audience in mind to which he tries to explain the particularities of the tropical climate. He actually creates a picturesque image perfectly fitting the cinematic representations of

[318] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[319] *The Mimic Men*, p. 97.
[320] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

the "Technicolor island" welcoming Singh on his first return to home.[321] However, although an imperial lackey, the Indian character does not view the scene with Western eyes; to do that, he should enjoy a feeling of security, as we have already pointed out. This is not the case as Singh becomes deeply involved, worrying about his house, exposed to the dangers of nature. On the contrary, the "rowdy" few oppose more resistance than Singh to the imperial centre since they enjoy the Western actors' diminution.

The filmic character of two other of Naipaul's fictional works, the story "A Flag on the Island" and the novel *A Way in the World*, is even more explicit; thus, Naipaul confesses that "*A Flag on the Island* was specially written for a film company. The story they required was to be 'musical' and comic and set in the Caribbean; it was to have a leading American character and many subsidiary characters; it was to have much sex and much dialogue; it was to be explicit."[322] As the eroticised island lies at a Westerner's feet, exoticism plays here too an important role, but by self-irony it is deconstructed up to a certain point. In *A Way in the World* the auctorial intention of imagining a film is again stated forcefully: "At one time I thought I should try to do a play or a film – a film would have been better – about the Gulf."[323] It should have focussed on Columbus, Raleigh and Miranda: "Separate stories, different people, changing style of clothes, but the episodes would have developed one out of the other, as in a serial."[324] It is in the first place the Raleigh story that abounds in cinematic details, beginning as follows:

> Perhaps a play or a screen play, or a mixture of both – that is how it came to me, an unrealizable impulse, along time ago: the first set being a view in section of the upper decks of a Jacobean ship, the *Destiny*. The time, 1618. The setting, a South American river, grey when still, muddy when rippled. It is almost dawn. The sky is silver. The two-tiered set is in semi-gloom; but the tropical light is coming fast. The pre-dawn silence is broken by the sound of a heavy splash. A man has jumped overboard. After a while there are shouts from the decks of the ship, and the sound of running feet.[325]

The effects of light and shadow, the grey tonality reminds one of Impressionism; the setting is clearly meant to be picturesque. Nonetheless, rather than celebrate

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[321] See *ibid.*, p. 31.
[322] See the foreword to the collection of stories *A Flag on the Island*, p. 7.
[323] *A Way in the World*, p. 237.
[324] *Loc. cit.*
[325] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

European imperialism, this tableau presents local opposition to the colonial project: the man running away is an Indian, who takes refuge to the forests of Trinidad. The spectator is located on the ship; surprisingly, the ship does not control the panorama, the island and its inhabitants. This might be Raleigh's perspective, the gloomy perspective of a defeated man. Also interesting is the hybrid form chosen by Naipaul: here, drama, film and novel fuse in a postmodern mixture. To sum up, the performative Trinidadian culture appearing in Naipaul's writings draws on multiple sources: ritual, exoticism, theatre and last but not least, cinema, a genre belonging to popular culture.

### 4.3.3. Popular Culture

Clearly Naipaul's works are not devoid of techniques directed against the Western canon;[326] one way of "writing back" beside intertextual parody becomes manifest in his concern with popular culture.[327] Nevertheless, popular culture should not naively be interpreted as definitely anti-Eurocentric (even if it initially opposed high culture, the traditional centre of Western thought, challenging the latter's authority[328]). Therefore, opinions celebrating the freedom one finds in the playful nature of popular culture[329] are to be read with circumspection. Films, TV and radio programmes may metamorphose into instruments of cultural domination, as we have already seen. Advertising too, "the official art of capitalism,"[330] cannot be overlooked; in *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul suggests that the Trinidadian advertisements of the time (the 1960s) reflected the coloured middle class's desire to

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[326] In Harold Bloom's opinion, Shakespeare would constitute the centre of the Western canon; see Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994, p. 45 ff.

[327] According to Linda Hutcheon, the interest in popular culture is a postmodern symptom; if Marxist critics like Terry Eagleton or Frederic Jameson regard it as part of a process of commodification, Hutcheon notes that postmodernist texts "*use* the invasive culture industry to challenge its own commodification processes from within" (see Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, New York: Routledge, 1988, pp. 19-20).

[328] Cf. Steven Connor, "Introduction", in: Steven Connor, *ed.*, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004, p. 3.

[329] For example in the editors' introduction to Norman F. Cantor and Michael S. Werthman, *The History of Popular Culture Since1815*, New York: Macmillan, 1968, p. xxiii.

[330] See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*: *An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1990, p. 63.

whiten and Americanise.[331] The 1970s brought about a new racial consciousness leading to gestures of self-assertion, for example the Black Power clenched fist displayed on the billboards lining the road to Jimmy's farm, Thrushcross Grange, in the novel *Guerrillas*. Unfortunately, these post-colonial symbols are misused as advertisements, being financed by Coca-Cola, the American bauxite company, airlines and stores.[332] In *The Mimic Men*, Coca-Cola puts up a 'quiz' and as Singh narrates: "Tickets for this 'show' were allotted to schools throughout the island; there was always a rush for them." Capitalism allies with colonial education, proving to possess protean abilities: "My grandfather had put it to the education authorities that such tours of modern industrial plant were educational; and in spite of the passionate but unimportant opposition of my father the authorities agreed."[333] The ludic nature of the show is plainly no guarantee for freedom.

Popular culture is as John Storey argues "a major site of ideological struggle; a terrain of 'incorporation' and 'resistance'; one of the sites where hegemony is to be won or lost."[334] Consequently, popular press may develop into a medium circulating anti-imperial messages;[335] this is the case with the Trinidadian newspaper the *Sentinel*, where Biswas works at first as a sign-painter, later as a journalist writing sensational articles: "It was not long before he developed a feeling for the shape and scandalizing qualities of every story."[336] Their phantasmagoric titles shock: "FOUR CHILDREN ROASTED IN HUT BLAZE. *Mother, Helpless, Watches*", "WHITE BABY FOUND ON RUBBISH DUMP. *In Brown Paper Parcel*. Did Not Win Bonny Baby Competition" or "FAMOUS NOVELIST SAYS PORT OF SPAIN WORLD'S THIRD WICKEDEST CITY";[337] a reader of popular literature, Mr Biswas initiates a competition, "touring as the Scarlet Pimpernel, in the hope of having people come up to him and say, 'You are the Scarlet Pimpernel and I claim the *Sentinel* prize.'"[338] These stories are to a large extent subversive, touching taboo themes, for example that of white people killing and abandoning their children. Not only Biswas's article on the explorer George Elmer Edman, already discussed upon,

[331] See *The Middle Passage*, p. 59.
[332] *Guerrillas*, p. 4.
[333] *The Mimic Men*, p. 90.
[334] Storey, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[335] According to John Fiske, the politics of popular press "lies in its oppositionality to the normal, the official" (Fiske, as quoted in Storey, *op. cit.*, p. 79).
[336] *A House for Mr. Biswas*, p. 310.
[337] *Ibid.*, pp. 311-313.
[338] *Ibid.*, p. 314.

but also the story entitled "SCARLET PIMPERNEL SPEND NIGHT IN A TREE. *Anguish of Six-Hour Vigil*"[339] parodies Western myths and heroes. The carnivalesque character of these narratives is matched only by a Trinidadian cultural form – the calypso – to which Naipaul makes extensive allusions, particularly in the collection of stories *Miguel Street*.[340] The queerness of the newspaper soon begins to disturb certain sensibilities: "Under Mr Burnett's direction the *Sentinel* had overtaken the *Gazette* and, though some distance behind the *Guardian*, it had become successful enough for its frivolity to be an embarrassment to the owners."[341] It is wartime and patriotic zeal is needed instead of "troubles": "The *Guardian* responded to the war by starting a fighter fund: in a box on the front page twelve aeroplanes were outlined, and as the fund rose the outlines were filled in."[342] But Burnett jokes: "'Let's face it,' he said. 'Editorials from Port of Spain didn't have much effect in Spain. They are not going to stop Hitler either."[343] So, he concentrates on other things: the West Indian cricket tour of England or "a drawing of Hitler which, when cut out and folded along certain dotted lines, became a drawing of a pig."[344] Sacked, Mr Burnett is said to have travelled to America, accompanying an Indian circus, "made up of dancers, a fire walker, a snake-charmer and a man who could rest on a bed of nails."[345] The rumour emphasises once again the carnival-like nature of popular press as well as the fact that Mr Burnett sympathises with non-Westerners, feeling better among them than with his "civilised" compatriots. Censoring affects the *Sentinel* from now on, stifling Mr Biswas's creativity. In fact, moments like these, while adding new elements to the image of Trinidad as play-culture show that popular culture can become an effective means of resistance.

[339] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 315.
[340] For the use of the calypso in Naipaul, see Thieme,*The Web of Tradition*, pp. 14-33.
[341] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 352.
[342] *Loc. cit.*
[343] *Loc. cit.*
[344] *Loc. cit.*
[345] *Ibid.*, p. 354.

### 4.3.4. Playing with Language

The idea of language being structured as a game was first expressed by the founder of modern linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure, who often used the chess metaphor.[346] Ludwig Wittgenstein, another important 20th century thinker, took over the game metaphor, coining the word "language-game", by which he pointed out the arbitrariness of verbal communication, demonstrating, as Brian Edwards notes, "the instability of concepts such as truth, knowledge, understanding and meaning", thus encouraging "specific activity in its dividedness, particularities and fallibility against the hegemonic claims of tradition, canonicity and institutional authority."[347] Later Lyotard appropriated the concept of "language-game" to attack so-called meta-narratives, discourses passing as universal truths; in Lyotard's view, "incredulity towards metanarratives" would best describe postmodernism.[348] Although Derrida radically differs from Wittgenstein, by totally destabilising language (in *Of Grammatology* Derrida says the following: "One could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as the limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of ontotheology and the metaphysics of presence"),[349] Brian Edwards regards both as representatives of "an active and open-ended linguistics".[350]

Naipaul explicitly uses the idea of play of language particularly in the novel *The Mimic Men*:

> And I will record the private game I played from the beginning. It was the game of naming. I would begin a speech: 'I have just come from a meeting at the corner of Wellington and Cocoye Streets ...' Dull streets of concrete-and-tin houses; but it gave me pleasure to name them, as it gave me pleasure to name documents and statements after the villages or towns where they had been outlined. So I went on, naming, naming; and later, I required everything – every government building, every road, every agricultural scheme – to be labelled. It suggested drama, activity. It reinforced reality. It reinforced that sense of ownership which overcame me whenever I returned to the island after a trip abroad: do not think I was exempt from that feeling. Drama

[346] See Brian Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
[347] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[348] See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, *transl. from the French by* Geoff Bennington *and* Brian Massumi; *foreword by* Frederic Jameson, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984 (1979), p. xxiv and pp. 9-11. David Harvey finds a similar distrust of meta-theories in Lyotard as well as in Foucault; see David Harvey, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-47.
[349] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, *transl. by* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1997 (1967), p. 50; see also Brian Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
[350] Brian Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

> buoyed me up in my activity, and there was drama in that naming. Administration had been unobtrusive before. Now we, chief actors, however powerless, however futile, were public figures, remarked on wherever we went. There was drama in that power game, from which I had withdrawn. There was one level at which divisions and alignments were public property; there was another level at which it was possible to pretend that they didn't exist. Drama walked with; it was not displeasing. I will claim it as an achievement, though the consequences for me were far from pleasant.[351]

By this "game of naming" Singh resembles God creating the world; this is a clear example of what Derrida calls "logocentrism",[352] the belief in the might of speech, which possesses divine qualities, above all an absolute meaning. At first sight, this is language with power, as it "reinforces" reality, helping Singh to become the symbolic owner of the island. In the activity of labelling, the Indian politician comes close to his former colonial masters, who placed special emphasis on Reason; however, unlike them, Singh feels to be on display, nothing more or less than an actor. At this stage, doubts about the force of politics as rhetorical game appear: after the positive beginnings, there follow moments when Singh is aware of his powerlessness and futility; then, once again, he paradoxically describes his activity as a power game.[353] This is an aporia echoing other self-contradictions of the colonial politicians' behaviour; Singh signalises that local politicians adopt multiple identities – on the one hand they belong to a certain ethnic group, be it Indian, African or Creole; on the other hand, they deny divisions in the name of a nation still awaiting to be born. One could argue that this instability at the level of the self defines the post-colonial condition; however, language itself is destabilised, losing its referential aspect, through the use of ambiguity. This representational crisis is even better expressed by another episode from the same novel, when Singh comments on the process of decolonisation: "It has happened in twenty places, twenty countries,

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[351] *The Mimic Men*, pp. 234-235.

[352] Derrida sees writing as a means of countering "logocentric repression"(51); interestingly enough, he associates the destabilising force of writing with linguistic play and theatre as opposed to the absolute (and absolutist) claims of speech. We could therefore interpret Singh's metamorphosis from an orator into a "mimic man" or an actor as reflecting his gradual awareness of the empty character of language and representation (cf. Derrida, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51 and pp. 304-305).

[353] To paraphrase Sutton-Smith, this is a fragment where the complex significance of play stems from three different rhetorics – that of play as imagination (drama might be equated with the process of writing, during which the God-like writer conjures new worlds; thus drama becomes a pleasant means of abolishing "the tedium" Singh associates with his tropical landscape), as power (Singh speaks of a "power game")and of play as frivolity (the politician-actors are seen at the same time as futile characters). These overlapping discourses lead to ambiguity, opening the text to multiple interpretations; a reading trying to prove that Singh is just a frivolous character is therefore too restrictive.

islands, colonies, territories – these words with which we play, thinking they are interchangeable and that the use of a particular one alters the truth. I cannot see our predicament as unique."[354] Singh's attempt to generalise by extracting the common features in the post-independence history of the former colonies is undermined by a curious remark containing a ludic metaphor, which raises serious questions about the validity of language. At any rate, the respective remark acquires metalinguistic dimensions, as the narrator analyses the words that he is employing; this self-reflexivity is to be found again in the following statement, whereby Singh describes his own work: "This man, this room, this city; this story, this language, this form."[355]

Writing about postmodern texts, Robert Rawdon Wilson notes their self-awareness as well as their openness; the latter quality is manifest in the post-structuralist metaphors of the labyrinth and the network or in devices such as the pun, the riddle, the puzzle and the paradox.[356] In addition to the paradox, the pun is one of Naipaul's favourite figures of speech, occurring in his less experimental works too.[357] Sometimes these puns contribute to the negative portrayal of Trinidadians as the following dialogue between an Indian boy and a leading member of the local African community shows:

> The people of Elvira called Mr Cuffy 'Cawfee'. Lorkhoor, a stickler for correctness, called him 'Coffee'. Mr Cuffy preferred 'Cawfee'.
>
> 'Heard the latest?'
>
> 'Ain't hear nothing,' Mr Cuffy said, looking down at the ruined black boot in his hand.
>
> 'Propaganda, Mr Cawfee. Blackmail and blackball.'
>
> Mr Cuffy regarded Lorkhoor suspiciously; he thought his colour was being mocked.[358]

If Lorkhoor is less aware of language, the affected one, Mr Cuffy realises that English "blackens" him, relegating Africans to the periphery of society, where the evil things reside. However, his response is not a symptom of paranoia; if Lorkhoor's

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[354] *The Mimic Men*, p. 209.
[355] *Ibid.*, p. 85.
[356] See Robert Rawdon Wilson, "Slip Page: Angela Carter, In/Out/In the Post-Modern Nexus," in: Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, *eds.*, *Past the Last Post. Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf , 1991, pp. 109-110.
[357] An interesting variant is the acrostic/political slogan that appears in *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 200: "GANESH is/Able/Nice/Energetic/Sincere/HOLY" (by writing the word "HOLY" in capital letters, Naipaul ironically signals that this is Ganesh's main attribute, which confirms his success as a "mystic masseur"). Other ludic elections are to be found in the novel *The Suffrage of Elvira*.
[358] *The Suffrage of Elvira*, p. 76.

is not a mocking tone, then, the omniscient narrator certainly laughs at Mr Cuffy, reducing him to the colour of his skin. A process of dehumanisation takes place, symbolically expressed by means of the "ruined black boot." Another character rendered ridiculous with the help of puns is Morgan in *Miguel Street*:

> This Morgan was more like a bird than a man. It was not only that he was as thin as a match-stick. He had a long neck that could swivel like a bird's. His eyes were bright and restless. And when he spoke it was in a pecking sort of way, as though he was not throwing out words, but picking up corn. He walked with a quick, tripping step, looking back over his shoulder at somebody following who wasn't there.
>
> Hat said, 'You know how he get so? Is his wife, you know. He fraid she too bad. Spanish woman, you know. Full of blood and fire.'
>
> Boyee said, 'You suppose that is why he want to make fireworks so?'[359]

The joke is that Morgan, the fireworks-maker, later charged with pyromania, looks like "a match-stick" and has a wife "full of blood and fire", who beats him. Morgan is anything but a "normal" man: "more like a bird" or "a boy with an old man's face".[360] We detect here those colonial discourse practices – animalisation and infantilisation – which label the colonised as an "Inferior". Nevertheless, literary models are also at work, the fragment having the quality of a limerick;[361] actually, we find allusions to nonsense verse in other Naipaulian works too, for example in the novels *A House for Mr Biswas* and *Guerrillas*. If *A House for Mr Biswas* presents "a squat Negro with catlike whiskers" singing "*There was a man called Michael Finnegan/ Who grew whiskers on his chin again*"[362] – a stereotypical view (the happy animallike black) reinforced by the remark "His gaiety depressed them all" – *Guerrillas* indicates that nonsense reigns even at the centre of Empire, being epitomised by that "beautiful politician" who teaches Jane limericks, "the passion-killing erotic rhymes."[363] We find the same view in *The Mimic Men* where the obsessive repetition of the rhyme *Who comes here? A Grenadier* might be seen both

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[359] *Miguel Street*, p. 62.
[360] *Ibid*., p. 67.
[361] It is not a surprise that the first known limerick, beginning with the line "There was a sick man of Tobago" (see John Lehmann, *Edward Lear and His World*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1977, p. 16), makes reference to Trinidad's sister-island as the Caribbean archipelago stands for nonsense and Europe for reason. (For an extensive treatment of nonsense and its playful characteristics see Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988).
[362] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 550.
[363] *Guerrillas*, p. 92.

as a symptom of the narrator's madness[364] and a symbol for the crisis of the English language. Tellingly, it is a representative of the British high classes, young Lady Stella, who teaches Singh poems from *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book*; not only the Indian politician, but also Stella appear as childish.[365] English is taken off its pedestal, being presented as a carrier of nonsense; moreover, cultural essentialism is denied, since those rhymes, now appearing to be "meaningless", "were made up in the eighteenth century and were about real people" as Lady Stockwell, Stella's mother, remarks.[366] Even if "the fairyland"[367] of nonsense resembles up to a certain point Circe's island, as it distracts Singh's attention from the problems of his homeland, it could equally be regarded as a potential transgressive space allowing two people come together in spite of their different social positions.

Like Mr Cuffy in *The Suffrage of Elvira*, Blackwhite from the story "A Flag on the Island" is deeply aware of his condition as a man imprisoned by the English language: "You know, Frankie, I begin to feel that what is wrong with my books is not me, but the language I use. You know, in English, black is a damn bad word. You talk of a black deed. How then can I write in this language?"[368] To that the American Frank responds "' I have told you already. You are getting too black for me.'" The pun rather than provoke laughter confirms the undemocratic nature of English, which is structured around black-and-white binaries. According to the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, post-colonial writing re-places language (and identity) by two basic means, abrogation and appropriation. In order to counteract the negative influence of metropolitan English, Blackwhite makes use of both strategies. Trying to write in the local patois, "not English, not French,"[369] is appropriation, namely, that process "by which the language is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience".[370] At the same time, we find a movement of abrogation as "notions of centrality and the 'authentic' [are] themselves necessarily

[364] In that Singh resembles Biswas, whose flow of thoughts is short-circuited by nonsensical remarks (see *A House for Mr Biswas*, pp. 302-309).
[365] See *The Mimic Men*, pp. 251-252.
[366] *Ibid.*, p. 249.
[367] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 251.
[368] "A Flag on the Island", p. 204.
[369] *Ibid.*, p. 205.
[370] Bill Ashcroft *et al.*, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 38. The book analyses several instances when Naipaul uses appropriation, by leaving certain words untranslated (the example given is the Hindi word "hubshi" in the story "One Out of Many"; in my opinion, *The Suffrage of Elvira* is nonetheless the most abundant in untranslated words among Naipaul's fictional works) and by switching codes and transcribing the vernacular like in *The Mystic Masseur* – see Bill Ashcroft *et al.*, *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 64-65 and pp. 71-72.

questioned, challenged, and finally abrogated."[371] Nonsense becomes in "A Flag on the Island" a tool to destabilise English and create english(es):

> Blackwhite spoke of the need to develop the new island language. He said he had already done much work on it. He had begun to carry around with him a few duplicated sheets: a glossary of words he had made up.
> 'I make up new words all the time. What do you think of *squinge*? I think that's a good word.'
> 'A lovely word,' Mr de Ruyter said. 'What does it mean?'
> 'It means screwing up your eyes. Like this.'[372]

In fact, Blackwhite's invented words such as *squinge* (possibly a coinage derived from 'squint' and 'large') have the same nonsensical appearance like Lewis Carroll's portmanteau-words in *Through The Looking Glass*, which Jean-Jacques Lecercle describes as examples of "linguistic *creativity*", and "instances of *otherness* within language, being irregular linguistic monsters, which it is impossible to assimilate within the system", "both within and without *langue*, on the uncertain frontier between *langue* and the other side of language, the remainder [i.e. 'the repressed linguistic free play']."[373] Even if Blackwhite does not finish his project of creating English anew as Mr de Ruyter's offers him a scholarship to study philology in England – thus Blackwhite gives up playing with language for "the Oxford and Cambridge game"[374] – an important step towards a postcolonial identity has been taken. The local writer has realised that language (and together with that imperial authority) is to be subverted and transgressed. This metalinguistic consciousness perfectly rhymes with the metafictional strategies adopted by Naipaul in his writings, which will constitute the subject of the next chapter.

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[371] *Ibid*., p. 40.
[372] "A Flag on the Island", pp. 206-207.
[373] See Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 48 and p. 50. Another critic dealing with the linguistic play in Lewis Carroll's works is Robert D. Sutherland, who notes that "[t]wo separate aspects of Carroll's play must be distinguished: first, his use of linguistic symbols as mere counters to be conjured with, or manipulated, without particular regard for their potential or established conventional significance; second, his exploitation of linguistic phenomena (and of the underlying theoretical principles) to create situational humour in his fiction and to provide a commentary on the nature of language itself"; see Robert D. Sutherland, *Language and Lewis Carroll*, The Hague: Mouton, 1970, p. 21. A book discussing the play theme in general as it appears in Lewis Carroll's writings is Kathleen Blake's *Play, Games and Sport: The Literary Works of Lewis Carroll*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.

### 4.3.5. Metafictional Constructs

We have already seen that Naipaul's writings establish complex intertextual relationships with literary works such as adventure stories, plays or travelogues. In his study *The Web of Tradition* John Thieme completes this list with allusions to Trinidadian calypsos, picaresque novels, H. G. Wells's, Conrad's as well as Froude's works. It becomes apparent that the image of Trinidad in Naipaul owes a lot to various narratives; rather than objective, this image is a fictional construct, a collage created out of other fictional texts. In fact, the majority of Naipaul's novels and short stories are highly metafictional, signalising that they are fiction about fiction. In this context, we can easily interpret a title like *The Mimic Men* as a warning that Naipaulian characters belong to the realm of literature, being the result of mimesis. The respective novel consciously exposes the process of writing itself to readers making them co-authors:

> Create the scenes then. Imagine Browne, the leader, in his shabby journalist's suit, energetic, enthusiastic, frequently breaking into the local dialect, for purposes of comedy or abuse. Beside him set myself, as elegant in dress as in speech: I knew my role. Imagine the public meetings in squares, in hall. Imagine the tours along dusty country roads in the late afternoon and at night, the headlights illuminating the walls of sugar-cane on either side.[375]

This is only the beginning of a paragraph whose main stylistic device is the anaphora "imagine" by which the reader is addressed. The text soon transforms into a kind of recipe with instructions as the following: "Add an enlivening detail", "[a]dd the smell of Negro sweat", "[f]ill the Roman house with people once again", "[s]uppress all rowdiness and strenuous gaiety", "[r]ember the cold kitchen and the terrazzo of empty rooms where a lost girl, pure of body, walked about, thinking of other landscapes", etc.[376] The metafictional aspect of the episode is evident: not only is this a novel about theatricality, but it also raises questions about how author, text and reader interact. One can find similar questions in the novel *Guerrillas* where two characters are writers: Roche and Jimmy. Roche's book relates his experiences in South Africa, where he suffered imprisonment and torture; interestingly enough, Jane

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[374] "A Flag on the Island", p. 207.
[375] *The Mimic Men*, p. 210.
[376] *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211.

does not fall in love with Roche himself but with a phantom, "the implied author":[377] "He had made little impression on her at their first meeting. But later she had read his book, and she had then approached him through his book. And this was soon to strike her as strange, that she should have assumed from his book and the experiences he described in it that she knew him."[378] Or: "It was immediately clear that she had her own idea of the kind of book he had written. And she was anxious to put herself on the side of this imaginary author."[379] It is very tempting to read this remark in the light of reception theory, as Jane's interpretation seems to be the outcome of her "horizon of expectation",[380] departing from the auctorial intention. On the other hand, Jimmy is the author of a book that complicates the plot of *Guerrillas*, introducing the "story-within-a-story" pattern. Ontological levels are blurred, and the fictional worlds of *Guerrillas*, of Jimmy's book, of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* as well as of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* overlap: in short, Jimmy writes about himself as if he were Heathcliff, but the perspective is that of a white woman, Clarissa, who is based on Jane.[381] This play with viewpoints resonates with the motifs of the mirror and of the maze, which I have already discussed. Caught in this labyrinthine bookish universe, the Western readers-adventurers are unable to offer satisfactory interpretations anymore; thus, when Jane faces Jimmy, she sees him in the following way: "His eyes were small, black and blank; that, and the mustache, which suggested a mouth clamped shut, made him seem buttoned up, tense, unreadable."[382] As a blank, unreadable character, Jimmy eludes all attempts of being catalogued; Roche too is not capable to understand the local population, and that

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[377] According to Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 71: "Whether we call this implied author an 'official scribe,' or adopt the term recently revived by Kathleen Tillotson – the author's 'second self' – it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects. However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner – and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values."

[378] *Guerrillas*, pp. 43-44.

[379] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[380] According to Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory", in: H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, transl. from the German by* Timothy Bahti, *introd. by* Paul de Man, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p. 23: "A literary work [...] awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the 'middle and end', which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text."

[381] Besides *Wuthering Heights* and *Clarissa*, Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* as well as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* are other English novels alluded to in *Guerrillas*; for a discussion of Naipaul's book indebtedness to his literary models, see for example John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing Back to the Canon*, London: Continuum, 2001, pp. 85-88.

[382] *Guerrillas*, p. 10.

makes him feel unsafe: "I must say I feel more and more at sea here. I can't read these people."[383]

We find this mixture of different fictional levels in *The Mimic Men* as well; particularly interesting is the interpenetration of the novel's narrative with the story of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*. Deschampsneufs senior proudly confesses to Singh that an ancestress of his had an affair with Henri Beyle/Stendhal; according to the French aristocrat *Le Rouge et le Noir* would allude to her:

> He began to read from the book: '*Et comment moi m'en aller? dit Julien d'un ton plaisant, et en affectant le langage créole.*' Mr Deschampsneufs's accent was suitably broad. 'Suddenly, you see, that fellow Beyle throws in a reference to creole French. For no reason at all. It's a big moment in his story, and goes and does a thing like that. And then he puts in, in brackets, mark you: *Une des femmes de la maison était née à Saint-Domingue. – Vous, vous en aller par la porte, dit Mathilde, ravie de cette idée*. For no reason at all. That bit of dialogue in creole French. Just for a private joke. And the joke was that he had exchanged those very words in the house of Clémentine Curial with that woman whose picture you see there.'[384]

The excerpt indicates how fiction represents "reality", playing with autobiographical details, yet leaving them hardly detectable. The fragment also hints at the origins of the French-Trinidadian high classes who came mainly from Saint-Domingue, chased away by the Haitian Revolution. Although a member of aristocracy, Clémentine Curial is given the voice of the servant in *Le Rouge et le Noir*, as she bears the stigma of her birthplace. This debasement reminds of the marginalisation of another Creole, Antoinette Cosway, in Jean Rhys's well-known novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Very interesting is that *Le Rouge et le Noir* influences even Singh's perception of his native island:

> Our attention in class had been drawn to Stendhal's cleverness in making Julien, right at the beginning of the book, mistake water on a church floor for blood. This had seemed to me crude. But now, full of the closeness of Stendhal, I looked at the red sky and saw blood. And yet was glad I was leaving. Do not dismiss melodrama and style: they are human needs. How easy it is to turn that landscape, which we make ordinary by living in it and becoming part of it, into the landscape of the battlefield.[385]

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[383] *Ibid.*, p. 174.
[384] *The Mimic Men*, p. 188.
[385] *The Mimic Men*, p. 190.

Besides suggesting a link between landscape and identity (the red sky reflects Singh's state of mind), the quotation has a metafictional content, too. Here we detect an opposition between the ordinary landscape of every day life and the special landscape of fiction; obviously, literature "defamiliarizes" reality, pointing out that the latter is a construct.[386] The sky reddens echoing Stendhal's image of the bloody water; furthermore, its colour may be read as an allusion to the "rouge" in the title of that French novel, which symbolises the military career (that is why the island receives a martial character, metamorphosing into "the landscape of the battlefield").

This metafictional self-reflexivity does not however draw history out of the picture; Linda Hutcheon regards what she labels "historiographic metafiction" as a genre embodying "typically postmodern contradictions". She defines it as follows: "By this I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages [...]."[387] An even better definition is this one: "Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historio*graphic meta*fiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past."[388] Timothy Weiss remarks the concern with history in *The Mimic Men*, saying that the novel "picks up the theme in its protagonist Ralph Singh, who has ambitions of writing a history of empire. By telling his story, Singh also writes a history of a West Indian struggle for independence and postindependence disillusionment."[389] Weiss does not develop this idea, focussing instead on two of Naipaul's non-fictional works *The Middle Passage* and *The Loss of El Dorado*, in which he detects an attempt to deconstruct the 'metahistory' or the colonial history of the Caribbean.[390]

Although allusions to the socio-historical context abound in Naipaul's writings, it is *The Mimic Men* and *A Way in the World* above all that deal with the topic of historiographic representation. Story and history are close to each other: "By this re-creation the event [of watching a snowfall] became historical and manageable; it was given its place; it will no longer disturb me."[391] The event becomes structured,

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[386] See the entry "Defamiliarization" in: Marion Wynne-Davies, *ed.*, *Prentice Hall Guide to English Literature*, p. 453.
[387] Linda Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[388] *Loc. cit.*
[389] Timothy Weiss, *On the Margins*, p. 77.
[390] See *ibid.*, p. 86.
[391] *The Mimic Men*, p. 266.

that is to say history, through writing: "And this became my aim: from the central fact of this setting, my presence in this city which 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."[392] One can note the postmodern technique of discarding History in the name of his/her-stories, concentrating on the particular rather than on the general. Secondly, Singh is aware that representing the past implies narration and a proper plot. Therefore, the order imposed by history/writing is something provisional, a convention; thus, we can read Singh's statements in the light of Linda Hutcheon's ideas about historiographic metafiction: "[T]he familiar humanist separation of art and life (or human imagination and order *versus* chaos and disorder) no longer holds. Postmodernist contradictory art still installs that order, but it then uses it to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning [...]"[393] Naipaul's art is certainly contradictory as the following passage shows:

> As I write, my own view of my action alters. I have said that my marriage and the political career which succeeded it and seemed to flow from it, all that active part of my life, occurred in a sort of parenthesis. I used to feel they were aberrations, whimsical, arbitrary acts which in some way got out of control. But now, with a feeling of waste and regret for opportunities missed; I begin to question this. I doubt whether any action, above a certain level, is ever wholly arbitrary or whimsical or dishonest. I question now whether the personality is manufactured by the vision of others. The personality hangs together. It is one and indivisible.[394]

This excerpt makes clear that the novel *The Mimic Men* is an example of work in progress, resembling two other Naipaulian fictional texts, "A Christmas Story" and "The Night Watchman's Occurrence Book", written as diaries. Here we come across a contradictory stance – even if in the end Singh affirms the coherence of his self, the changing view of the past indicates that his personality is relatively fluid. In Linda Hutcheon's words, "[t]he search for unity (narrative, historical, subjective) is constantly frustrated."[395] Singh's fragmented personality is textually represented by means of a parenthesis: significantly, the time he spends on his native island is

[392] *Loc. cit.*
[393] Linda Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[394] *The Mimic Men*, p. 199.
[395] Linda Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

bracketed by the London chapters (paradoxically, the marginal and the central overlap). This plot may find an explanation in the following paragraph from the same novel: "In the active period of my life, which I have described as a period in parenthesis, marriage was an episode; and it was the purest accident that I should have entered politics as soon as this marriage came to an end. Cause and effect, it seemed to many; but the obvious and plausible is often wrong."[396] Singh abandons the traditional chronological plot wishing to suggest that there are no longer case and effect relations. As Hutcheon puts it, "[a]ny certainties we do have are what [Victor Burgin] calls 'positional', that is, derived from complex networks of local and contingent conditions."[397]

An even more fragmented book is *A Way in the World*, Naipaul's latest novel set in Trinidad and the West Indies. This work too crosses what Hutcheon calls "the most radical boundaries", "those between fiction and non-fiction",[398] combining elements of travelogue and autobiography with "unwritten stories." There are three chapters in the novel bearing the subtitle "An Unwritten Story", which rework the historical materials present in an earlier non-fictional book, *The Loss of El Dorado*. About the respective non-fictional work Naipaul once wrote a metafictional confession (appearing in the novel *The Enigma of Arrival*): "The historian seeks to abstract principles from human events. My approach was the other; for the two years that I lived among the documents I sought to reconstruct the human story as best I could."[399] However, Naipaul succeeds in pursuing this aim much better in the novel *A Way in the World*, which, at the same time, deconstructs the myths of Columbus, Raleigh and Miranda. I have already discussed aspects of these "unwritten stories" in the previous chapters of the present study; yet, I would like to insist at this stage on Naipaul's play with fictional techniques, which makes one aware of history's narrative character. Perspectives change, as narrators and forms do: we find dialogues, letters (by its allusions to the epistolary novel, *A Way in the World* comes close to another Naipaulian fictional work, namely *Guerrillas*), interior monologues. In these "unwritten stories" we can detect a certain instability of point of view, another feature of historiographic metafiction. As Hutcheon says: "On the one hand, we find overt, deliberately manipulative narrators; on the other, no one single

[396] *The Mimic Men*, p. 42.
[397] Linda Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
[398] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[399] *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 101.

perspective but myriad voices, often not completely localizable in the textual universe."[400] For example, *A Way in the World* exposes Raleigh's book to be a mixture of fantasy and reality omitting important facts that would cast a dubious light on the English explorer; Naipaul's novel also presents minor characters (a surgeon, an Indian) who give birth to counter-discourses contesting official history. A particularly interesting scene is that having the "Indian" (who is actually half Indian, half Spanish) and Fray Simón as protagonists. The paragraph is introduced by some sentences which transform the story into a cinematic event, with the narrator joining the audience: "We stay with those Indian eyes. When we next consider them they are calmer, even self-possessed. Let us stand back a step or two."[401] The hybrid Don José is telling the priest, who writes a history of the Spanish Empire, about his adventures on board of Raleigh's ship; imperial history marginalises the Indian, erasing Don José's personal story as the following excerpt indicates:

> Fray Simón is reading back from his notes.
>
> '"And witness says that after these gifts were handed over, the surgeon asked for news. A letter was handed over to the general. And when the letter was half read, the general, whose name at the time witness thought to be Milor Guateral, looked at the deck and the sea and the sky, and then at the birds flying above the rock known as The Soldier, and then he looked at the deck again and began to cry silently, in the presence of all, for the death of his son." And so?'[402]

The notes describe the meeting between Raleigh and Keymis, who delivers the former bad news as the El Dorado expedition has disastrously failed. This is a moment narrated in three ways: by the omniscient narrator, by Don José and by Fray Simón, the historian. The omniscient narrator focuses on the rock formation, The Soldier, lying between Trinidad and the South American continent, which he invests with tragic symbolism: the rock is a place where pelicans live and die.[403] Likewise, Don José thinks of doom.[404] However, no word is lost on the Indian's thoughts and emotions in Fray Simón's account: Don José is reduced to a dry word – "witness". It is the task of the postmodern/postcolonial writer to recuperate subaltern voices.

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[400] Linda Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
[401] *A Way in the World*, p. 180.
[402] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[403] See *ibid.*, p. 179.
[404] See *ibid.*, p. 190.

### 4.3.6. Postmodernism/Postcolonialism

Certainly, the image of Trinidad in Naipaul's writings owes a lot to "the spirit of the age", in particular to postmodernism's playfulness. To ludic metaphors such as the labyrinth or the playhouse, one should add self-reflexivity and intertextuality, which warn the reader that the respective image is to a large extent a fictional construct. However, if Naipaul's works abound in postmodern techniques, are they also postcolonial? The question is justified, although Kwame Anthony Appiah notes that "the *post* in postcolonial, like the post in postmodern is the *post* of the space-clearing gesture".[405] There is a debate going on: critics like Gayatri Spivak, Linda Hutcheon or Frank Davey point out the similarities between postmodernism and postcolonialism, regarding both as attacks against "the imperialist subject"/"the subject of humanism" best expressed by means of an elitist Modernism, as well as revalorizations of the Other;[406] on the other hand, Helen Tiffin remarks postmodernism's Eurocentric character[407] while Stephen Slemon notes that in spite of its postmodern rhetorical features (fragmentariness, hybridity, decentering, decanonization, self-reflexivity, irony, elements of popular culture, etc.), a postcolonial novel like Neville Farki's *Tarzana Clayton* "retains a recuperative impulse towards the structure of 'history' and manifests a Utopian desire grounded in reference", searching for the native "'[...] as historical subject and combatant, possessor of another knowledge and producer of alternative traditions' (Parry 34)."[408]

It is true that Naipaul deconstructs the European canon in many ways; however, this subversion is generally not accompanied by a recuperation of native voices. Thus, in the story "A Flag on the Island", for example, Blackwhite, the black Caliban, succeeds in re-writing Western texts up to a certain point, but in the end he is silenced. Naipaul's position towards Indian and Amerindian characters is substantially different. We have already seen that Don José from *A Way in the World* is allowed to speak and contest imperial history; we could say therefore that in

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[405] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern", in: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *eds.*, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, p. 119.

[406] See Linda Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire", in: Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, *eds.*, *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, pp. 168-170.

[407] Helen Tiffin, "Introduction", in: Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, *eds.*, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

[408] Stephen Slemon, "Modernism's Last Post", in: Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, *eds.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

Naipaul’s last novel set in Trinidad and the Caribbean, postmodern techniques begin to serve a postcolonial agenda.

### 4.4. Summary

We have seen so far that Trinidad as "play-culture" is a childish place as well as a festive island. There is a further aspect of Trinidad in Naipaul's fictional works: that of the playground of the imagination. Firstly, here come Western adventurers searching for exoticism and pleasure (cf. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Daniel Bivona, Paul S. Landau) and secondly, it becomes a kind of playground for the writer's literary imagination (see Sutton-Smith). Therefore, this section has two main chapters: one devoted to Trinidad as an adventure playground and another one devoted to Trinidad as a literary, metafictional space clearly based on postmodern elements. The two aspects of the play of the imagination have nevertheless much in common: thus, exotic people are aestheticised, being regarded as theatrical.

The chapter on adventure starts with some definitions of the colonial genre of the adventure novel as provided by Martin Green, Robert Dixon, Hans-Otto Hügel or Alfred Clemens Baumgärtner. Very important in this context is the idea that the modern colonial adventurer controls his adventure, returning safely as well as victoriously to Europe. Nonetheless, Naipaul subverts this genre by presenting his Western adventurers as insecure characters, who either die or return home as broken men; consequently, his Trinidadian novels such as *A House for Mr Biswas*, *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas* and *A Way in the World* become genuine "anti-novels of adventure". Having found so many colonial stereotypes in Naipaul's works, one is amazed to come upon these anti-colonial techniques (contributing to the overall impression of ambiguity); in fact, Naipaul undermines the adventure myths of the New World associated with Trinidad –that of Columbus and the Garden of Eden, that of Walter Raleigh's expedition to El Dorado, or that of Crusoe– by showing the cruel underside of economic exploitation. Nowadays, the exploitation of the island is continued in Naipaul's opinion by American businessmen or by Western tourists and officials who come to live in genuine leisure realms like the hotel or the club, which put a barrier between them and the local population. Theories on adventure, tourism and exoticism (as those by Edward M. Bruner, Richard Phillips, James Duncan, Raymond Corbey or W. J. T. Mitchell) are relevant since they cast light on the (neo)colonial process of turning native life into a picturesque show, as it appears in Naipaul's Trinidadian fiction, above all in the novels *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas*, *A*

*House for Mr Biswas* as well as in the novella "A Flag on the Island". Interestingly enough, although he indicts the exoticisation of his native island, Naipaul himself judges at times his compatriots according to aesthetic criteria.

The second main chapter of this part is devoted to the ludic image of Trinidad deriving from a postmodern literary discourse; even if in this case too, Trinidad is aestheticised, at least, Naipaul's postmodern image of his native island partially defies colonial conventions, by "writing back" to the British Canon. Once again, the impression of ambivalence and ontological uncertainty is reinforced by means of the neo-Baroque/postmodern ludic metaphors of Trinidad as a labyrinth or a palace of mirrors (in *Guerrillas*, *The Mimic Men* and "A Flag on the Island")**.** Moreover, the realist illusion is sometimes destroyed by metafiction and intertextuality: rather than reflecting "real" people, Naipaul's Trinidadian characters stand out as largely fictional, as allusions to Shakespeare's dramas, to the Theatre of the Absurd or to cinema multiply (not only in *The Mimic Men* but also in *A House for Mr Biswas*, *Miguel Street*, "A Flag on the Island", *A Way in the World* or in the story "Tell Me Who to Kill" from *In a Free State*). Besides rituals and exoticism, this theatrical intertextuality equally contributes to the image of Trinidad as a "play-culture" or performative culture. If allusions to theatre stand side by side with allusions to cinema, that is explainable by Naipaul's interest in popular culture, another ludic domain. His puns and play with language further add to the image of Trinidad as a metafictional construct. In fact, novels like *The Mimic Men* and *A Way in the World* might be described in Linda Hutcheon's words as "historiographic metafiction" since they relativize the writing of history by means of self-consciousness. On the whole, these postmodern techniques in Naipaul's fictional works serve a postcolonial agenda since they question European canonicity and absolutist values. To be fully postcolonial, the author born in Trinidad must, however, attempt to recuperate subaltern voices, indifferent of their race, gender, class or age.

## 5. Conclusions

As I have pointed out in the "Introduction", Naipaul's reputation is highly controversial; however, rather than trace this back to a dispute between critics who analyse the ideological elements of his writings and scholars interested purely in literary matters, or to a different reception in the West Indies, on the one hand, and in Europe, on the other hand, I indicate the intrinsic ambivalence of Naipaul's fictional and non-fictional works themselves. This aspect has probably been forgotten by Naipaulian criticism (in spite of such influential essays like Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author", which calls to one's attention the fact that any literary text is ambiguous, a collage of different discourses) that preferred to concentrate on such stock phrases and concepts as mimicry, operating in a reductionistic fashion. My analysis of Trinidad as "play-culture" has benefited from Brian Sutton-Smith's ideas of play as (at least partially) a semiotic construct standing at the intersection of various discursive levels.

Naipaul's texts, too, constitute an arena where several discourses meet, confront each other and overlap, leading to an imagery open to a multiplicity of interpretations. But literary criticism should be more than a metalinguistic exercise, a game with glass beads; its true role is perhaps to dissect images and opinions circulated by such popular media as the novel, and their impact on society as well as on mentalities, thus gaining a political dimension. Naipaul's works have been and will continue to remain highly influential, not the least due to their author's awards, foremost the Booker Prize and the Nobel Prize. Therefore, it is important to show those representations that have much in common with colonial, Eurocentric stereotypes, without neglecting, however, the contradictory features of the majority of Naipaul's writings. Distorted, local voices are still present in his texts dealing with Trinidad; the critic's mission is to recuperate them, even if Naipaul's works have to be read against the grain.

By focusing on Trinidad and on the play imagery, I touch two central aspects of Naipaul's writings, the most elaborate to my mind. It is natural then that they are equally the most ambivalent of all. Naipaul's category of "play-culture" proves to apply to Trinidad since the writer's native island is predominantly, even obsessively, described as a ludic space. To this image there contribute many sources (the Social

Darwinist theory of the "child-races"; the idea of play and of childhood as something ridiculous; the idea of play as an educational means; the conventions of the autobiographical genre; the Hindu concept of *lila*; Afro-Caribbean conceptions of Carnival; the Enlightenment view of "ritual cultures" as "primitive"; metaphors of play as contest; exoticism and adventure; postmodern playfulness) located in different discourses and cultures –Western (colonial, Protestant, literary) as well as native (African and Indian)– which let Naipaul's Trinidadian novels and short stories appear as hybrid fictional texts in spite of the predominant Eurocentric perspective. In fact, owing to their richness in meanings, ludic images wonderfully suit polysemous literary works. Consequently, one could say that V. S. Naipaul's ambiguity is, to paraphrase Sutton-Smith, the ambiguity of play.

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## 7. Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit, eine Studie zu den Repräsentationen von Trinidad als Spielkultur, untersucht das Bild, das der berühmte, aber auch umstrittene Schriftsteller V. S. Naipaul von seinem Heimatland durch fiktionale Mittel kreiert. Der Hauptakzent liegt auf Naipauls Romanen und Kurzgeschichtensammlungen *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *Miguel Street* (1959), *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), *A Flag on the Island* (1967), *The Mimic Men* (1967), *In a Free State* (1971), *Guerrillas* (1975), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) und *A Way in the World* (1994); jedoch auch folgende nicht fiktionale Schriften, die Trinidad erwähnen, werden in Betracht bezogen: *The Middle Passage* (1962), *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969), *Between Father and Son: Family Letters* (1999), *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles* (1972), *The Return of Eva Peron with The Killings in Trinidad* (1980), *Finding the Centre* (1984), *Reading & Writing* (2000) und *The Writer and the World* (2002).

Wie man aus dieser Aufzählung feststellen kann, beschäftigt sich die große Mehrheit der Naipaulschen Werke mit Trinidad; die südlichste aller Karibischen Inseln ist außerdem in diesem Kontext wichtig, denn sie wird zu einer Art Zentrum in Naipauls literarischer Welt. Auf diese Weise bleiben auch seine Romane und Reiseberichte über Afrika, Indien, die Muslimischen Länder, England oder die zwei Amerikas im engen Kontakt mit Trinidad, das wegen seiner ethnischen Vielfalt, ein kosmopolitischer Raum ist.

Umso unverständlicher wirkt deshalb die Absenz jener Studien, die sich auf Naipauls Trinidadbild konzentrieren; in dieser Hinsicht füllt meine Untersuchung eine wesentliche Lücke der wissenschaftlichen Forschungsliteratur über V. S. Naipaul. Obwohl manche Kritiker die Frage des Naipaulschen Leitmotivs des Spiels am Rande berührt haben, waren ihre Analysen zu einseitig. Die Spielmetaphorik, die sein Gesamtwerk durchzieht, ist aus einer diskursiven Perspektive zu betrachten, die alle semantischen Nuancen und den historischen Hintergrund dieser Bilder einbezieht. Eigentlich ist der diskursive Ansatz der gemeinsame Nenner einer interdisziplinären Methode, die sowohl kulturwissenschaftliche und postkoloniale Fragestellungen, als auch anthropologische und ludistische Konzepte in sich vereint. Mithilfe dieses Ansatzes wird bewiesen, dass das Trinidadbild in Naipauls Schriften

nicht eine objektive Widerspiegelung der „Wirklichkeit“, sondern ein soziokulturelles Konstrukt ist, das aus „kulturellen Repräsentationen“ („cultural representations“) besteht, um einen Begriff zu verwenden, den u. a. Stuart Hall und Homi Bhabha selber benutzen, wenn sie über die Arbitrarität der Sprache schreiben. Weil die jeweiligen Repräsentationen aus unterschiedlichen Diskursen stammen, konstituieren sie ein sowohl komplexes, als auch zweideutiges Bild von Naipauls Heimatinsel. Man könnte behaupten, dass seine Werke über Trinidad ein Spannungsfeld darstellen, indem westliche Diskurse – entweder koloniale oder postmoderne – mit einheimischen Stimmen – hinduistische und afrikanische – aufeinanderprallen.

Die vorliegende Untersuchung ist folgendermaßen strukturiert: Auf die „Einleitung“, die einen Forschungsbericht enthält, die Ziele der Arbeit präzisiert und theoretische Konzepte erklärt, folgen drei Hauptteile, die den wichtigsten Facetten von Trinidad als einer Spielkultur entsprechen.

Zunächst beschreibt Naipaul sein Heimatland als einen spielerisch-kindischen Raum. Offensichtlich hat das Motiv eine doppelte Herkunft, die für Ambivalenz sorgt. Naipaul fügt viele autobiographische Elemente in seine Romane ein: Folglich ist Trinidad, der Hintergrund von Naipauls Kindheit, praktisch „verurteilt“, aus der Perspektive des jetzt in Großbritannien lebenden Erwachsenen als kindisch und trivial zu erscheinen. Eine andere Quelle dieser Repräsentationen ist der Diskurs des British Empire, der sozialdarwinistische Theorien über die so genannten „Kindrassen“ („child races“) in eine politische Rechtfertigung des Kolonialismus verwandelt hat. In beiden Fällen hat man mit denselben Phänomenen zu tun: Alter, ebenso wie Rasse, Klasse oder Geschlecht, wird gemäß der Machtverhältnisse in einer bestimmen Gesellschaft soziokulturell konstruiert. Das Kapitel fängt mit einer Analyse der räumlichen Merkmale von Trinidad als einer infantilen Welt an. Zu diesem Zwecke untersuche ich den Miniaturisierungsvorgang, der in Naipauls Trinidadromanen stattfindet. Als ein zwergenhafter Ort, symbolisiert durch ein Puppenhaus in den Romanen *A House for Mr Biswas*, *The Mimic Men* und *Guerrillas*, bietet die Insel eine passende Umgebung für eine ganze Reihe von verkleinerten Figuren (z. B. Chittaranjan in *The Suffrage of Elvira* und Gurudeva in *The Mimic Men*). Diejenigen Kritiker, die Naipaul eine imperialistische Mentalität vorgeworfen haben, könnten teilweise Recht haben, weil viele seiner fiktionalen Gestalten, insbesondere Man-Man in *Miguel Street* oder Jimmy Ahmed und Bryant

in *Guerrillas*, – „halb Teufel und halb Kind“, wie Rudyard Kipling sagen würde – groteske Persönlichkeiten besitzen, die aus einer Mischung von Irrationalität, Tiernatur und Kindlichkeit bestehen. Spiel wird in diesem Zusammenhang zur negativen Quintessenz des Verhaltens der Einwohner von Trinidad, zu einer frivolen, von den Protestanten vehement abgelehnten Handlung. Laut Brian Sutton-Smiths Studie *The Ambiguity of Play* haben die post-aufklärerischen westlichen Kulturen versucht, dieses „irrationale“ Spiel der Kinder/Kolonisierten zu zähmen. Das kann man gut in Naipauls Fiktion erkennen, z. B. wenn die spielerisch-unangenehmen Bewohner von *Miguel Street* (Bogart, Popo, Man-Man, Morgan und Hat) ins Gefängnis gehen müssen oder wenn die trinidadischen Schüler in *The Mimic Men*, *The Mystic Masseur*, *A House for Mr Biswas*, „The Coward“ (*Miguel Street*), „A Christmas Story“ und „The Heart“ (*A Flag on the Island*) mithilfe einer „zivilisatorischen“ viktorianischen „Game“-Ethik indoktriniert werden. Allerdings gibt es auch Kinderfiguren, die positiv erscheinen, wie Mr Biswas und Anand in *A House for Mr Biswas*, Foam und Lorkhoor in *The Suffrage of Elvira*, der anonyme jugendliche Journalist in *The Mystic Masseur* oder Browne in *The Mimic Men*, der sich der imperialen Autorität widersetzt. Außerdem unterminiert Naipaul die koloniale Metapher des British Empire als glückliche Familie, indem er Trinidad als eine „Bastardwelt“ („bastard world“) in *A Way in the World*, *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas* und *The Suffrage of Elvira* porträtiert. Der Zweideutigkeit seiner Bilder entspricht auf der narrativen Ebene eine gewisse Spannung zwischen der Perspektive des erwachsenen anglisierten Erzählers und der Perspektive der kindlichen Reflektorfiguren, vor allem in *Miguel Street* und *A Way in the World*.

Naipaul beschreibt Trinidad nicht nur als eine spielerisch-infantile Gesellschaft, sondern auch als eine festlich-performative Kultur, die er aber von einem überwiegend rationalistischen Standpunkt aus beurteilt. Jedoch beinhalten seine Romane, Geschichten und Essays Spuren hinduistischer oder afrikanischer Diskurse, die den einheimischen Feierlichkeiten eine zentrale Bedeutung verleihen. Während die diasporische indische Kultur in Trinidad das Spiel, *lila*, in ein rituell-religiöses Schema integriert, betrachten die Afrokariber den Karneval als ein Symbol des Widerstandes und als Verkörperung einer postkolonialen Identität. Auf jeden Fall werden sowohl hinduistische Zeremonien als auch „schwarze“ Maskeraden zu ethnischen Merkmalen („ethnic markers“) in Naipauls Schriften, insbesondere in den Romanen *The Mystic Masseur*, *A House for Mr Biswas*, *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas*,

*The Enigma of Arrival* und in einigen Kurzgeschichten aus dem Volumen *A Flag on the Island*. Außer Ethnizität unterstützen solche Ritualien soziale Hierarchien, wie z. B. in *The Mystic Masseur* und *A House for Mr Biswas,* indem sie Frauen und Nicht-Brahmane marginalisieren; auf diese Weise widerlegen sie die verbreitete Meinung unter Naipauls Kritikern, dass sie phantasievolle aber ineffektive Handlungen wären. Obwohl der Autor viele Stereotype aus dem Register des Orientalismus verwendet, sind seine indo-trinidadischen Figuren verständnisvoller porträtiert als die afro-trinidadischen Gestalten. Offensichtlich liegt das daran, dass Naipaul in einer aus Indien stammenden Familie geboren wurde. Deshalb beschwört er gelegentlich die alte hinduistische Lebensweise mit Nostalgie, z. B. in *The Enigma of Arrival*. Im Gegensatz dazu erscheint der afro-trinidadische Karneval in Naipauls Romanen und Kurzgeschichten wie *Guerrillas, A Way in the World, The Mimic Men,* „The Coward" (*Miguel Street*) und „A Flag on the Island" als eine lächerliche, irrational-mystische Orgie, die koloniale Vorurteile bestätigt. Insgesamt ist Naipauls Trinidad eine stark polarisierte Gesellschaft, in der die feierlichen Momente ganz selten hybride, multikulturelle Räume entstehen lassen.

Drittens muss man feststellen, dass Naipaul Trinidad als einen Spielplatz der (westlichen) Imagination skizziert. Einerseits ist es ein Raum, wo europäische oder amerikanische Figuren Abenteuer und Exotik suchen; andererseits ist es eine Bühne, wo fiktionale Trinidader zur Schau gestellt werden, um metropolitanische Leser zu unterhalten. Obwohl der Schriftsteller manchmal ästhetische Kategorien verwendet, wenn er seine Mitbürger beschreibt, was nicht weit vom kolonialen exotizierenden Diskurs entfernt ist, erschüttert Naipaul aber denselben Diskurs dadurch, dass er das heldenhafte Bild von westlichen Abenteurern parodiert. Daher werden seine Trinidadromane *A House for Mr Biswas*, *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas* oder *A Way in the World* zu veritablen „Anti-Abenteuerromanen", die fundamentale eurozentrische Mythen wie die von Columbus, Walter Raleigh und Robinson Crusoe angreifen. Viele seiner westlichen Gestalten kehren als gebrochene Menschen nach Hause zurück. Andere, z. B. Jane aus *Guerrillas* oder der Forschungsreisende George Elmer Edman aus *A House for Mr Biswas*, müssen sogar mit ihrem Leben büßen. Diejenigen, die überleben, wohnen in abgeschlossenen luxuriösen Umgebungen – auf einem Landsitz, in einem Klub oder in einem Hotel – getrennt von der armen einheimischen Bevölkerung.

Exotik, Abenteuer und Literatur sind als eng verwandte Seiten desselben Spiels der Imagination zu verstehen. Folglich beschäftigt sich der zweite Teil dieses Kapitels mit Naipauls spielerischen Motiven literarischer Herkunft, die zum Trinidadbild beitragen. Vor allem werden postmoderne Elemente untersucht: die neobarocke Labyrinthmetapher in den Romanen *Guerrillas* und *The Mimic Men* oder in der Kurzgeschichte „A Flag on the Island"; die intertextuale Theatralität, die nicht nur *The Mimic Men* sondern auch *A House for Mr Biswas, Miguel Street, A Way in the World* und „A Flag on the Island" durchzieht; Naipauls Interesse an Trinidads populärer Kultur (z.B. in *Miguel Street, The Mystic Masseur*, *The Mimic Men, Guerrillas* und in der Kurzgeschichte „Tell Me Who to Kill" aus dem Werk *In a Free State*) sowie sein Spiel mit der Sprache und der Metafiktion, das in „A Flag on the Island", *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas* und *A Way in the World* gipfelt.

Es stellt sich die Frage, ob diese postmodernen Merkmale auch postkolonial sind. Zwar relativieren sie den eurozentrischen Standpunkt, aber in Naipauls Fall unterstützen sie dennoch keine postkoloniale Agenda, die den Kolonisierten eine Sprache verleihen würde. V. S. Naipauls fiktionale Schriften bleiben im besten Sinne ambivalent. Deshalb muss man zusammenfassend feststellen, dass ihre Zweideutigkeit der Doppeldeutigkeit des Spiels entspricht.