

## The Traveler and His Hushed Companion: Problems of Narration in *An Area of Darkness*

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An intriguing aspect of V. S. Naipaul's first book on India, *An Area of Darkness*, is the combination of autobiography with travelogue. Numerous critics, however, have noted that this is a travel book that is more about the traveler than the country he visits. In a review appearing soon after the publication of *Darkness*, V. S. Pritchett observes that the narrator in the text is "one of those disturbed egotistical travellers who hit upon their necessary enemy [India in this case]" (361). *Darkness* is indeed more about its narrator/protagonist than India or any Indian. The traveling narrator's self centers as the text's primary focus where India is merely a setting, a proving ground to test the self's strengths and weaknesses.

In his earlier and first travel book, *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul did use autobiography with travelogue. Describing a seven-month voyage in the Caribbean, *Passage* recounts his visit to Trinidad (his childhood home) and the other Caribbean islands. Though the traveler/narrator in *Passage* is unmistakably the author Naipaul, the text is relatively free from an attempt to identify roots. *Passage* pronounces that the Caribbean is characterized by "grossness" and "illiteracy" (28), and its author's success in liberating himself from the constrictive effects of these is manifest in the work. In *Darkness*, Naipaul travels in India for about a year, records his unsavory impressions of the country, and also stops at his ancestral village to meet with blood kins—the village from which his grandparents migrated to Trinidad as indentured laborers many decades ago. *Darkness* intrigues the reader because when combining autobiography and travelogue, the text exposes a narrative self that is delving into its roots and resisting their influence. At the same time, this rather sensitive self places strict limits on what is to be revealed, on itself as well as on the country being described.

Consequently, the narrator in *Darkness* habitually contains all other selves to advance only his own point of view. While the majority of Indians in the book are prevented from articulating themselves, the suppression, curiously enough, occurs even in the narrative self itself because the muted presence of another accompanying traveler can be detected in the narrative from time to time. This weak self never appears individually; subsumed within the stronger voice of the narrator, the feeble self can be noticed in the *We* voice the narrator infrequently employs in the text. He identifies this “other” self as that of his “companion,” but such recognitions occur seldom in the text. Gradually, it becomes clear to the reader that this companion is a woman. Facts about Naipaul’s trip to India reveal that the companion was his first wife, Patricia Hale.<sup>1</sup> The *Darkness* narrator, however, never acknowledges her as such, leaving his readers confused about his mysterious “companion.”

The reader first becomes aware of her presence in the prologue called “A Traveller’s Prelude: A Little Paperwork” when Naipaul is fighting the onerous battle with the Indian Customs to secure a liquor permit. No mention of her occurs in the first three chapters of the book; then she is present in the fourth chapter called “Romancers.” The narrator and his companion find lodging in New Delhi as paying guests in this chapter. The following three chapters are on Kashmir; the narrator uses the *We* voice quite often in the fifth and seventh chapters. Evidently, his companion is with him in them. But she is not acknowledged in the remaining four chapters of the book, nor in the epilogue called “Flight.” Even with biographical clues, which establish her as the narrator’s wife, the companion remains a mystery in *Darkness*.

Paul Theroux, drawing attention to the marginalized companion in *Darkness*, argues that Naipaul excludes his wife with such brusque indifference from *Darkness* and the score of other books he has written because the relationship was never smooth (310–16). Naipaul, Theroux implies, was condescending toward Hale, who accepted the abuse in good grace. According to Theroux, the few cursory mentions she receives in the prelude to *Darkness* are the only ones she gets in Naipaul’s four-decade long writing career that began soon after their marriage and still continues after her death in 1996. Occasioned by a crisis in a

long-standing mentor-disciple relationship, Theroux's account portrays Naipaul as an ogre, contemptuous of his wife, of Africans, and in particular of white liberals in the third world.<sup>2</sup>

However, the companion's presence in *Darkness* can be detected on more occasions than those noted by Theroux. Especially in the chapters about Kashmir, where the narrator shifts mode and takes a great deal of interest in the people and landscape of the valley, the companion is acknowledged by the narrator many times. Besides, it would be a mistake to think that whatever mention "the companion" merits in *Darkness* occurs because of Naipaul's magnanimity, as Theroux would have us believe. It would be an equal mistake to conclude that her presence in the text is merely accidental, that she appears as a result of an authorial slip. Naipaul, by his own account and those of others, is an extremely careful writer, who prepares his manuscripts through a process of diligent revisions.<sup>3</sup> Some of the appearances of the companion, in fact, are quite indispensable in the narrative. Curiously, though, nowhere does he include her opinions on what he has to tell about India. One of Naipaul's reasons for merely mentioning the companion without giving her a voice is that some of the events he describes in the text would fail to illustrate his notions on India if she is not in them. Even when she serves no such function, which seems to be the case in the Kashmir chapters, the narrator cannot risk her voice being heard because her views can prejudice those of his own on what is being told.

What he has to say about India and Indians, it is useful to keep in mind, is heavily laden with orientalist stereotypes. I have demonstrated *Darkness's* orientalist leanings elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> There I have argued that Naipaul's *Darkness* reverberates with echoes of *Heart of Darkness* and of the Africanist discourse Conrad employs in it to depict the African continent and its inhabitants, a discourse that in the Indian context is better known as "Indology." Certainly, Naipaul, to validate his orientalist and other assumptions about India, can create some of the scenes in *Darkness* where the companion is alluded to only if she is in them.

The companion first appears when Naipaul is scrambling from one official's desk to another to obtain a liquor permit in "A Traveller's Prelude: A Little Paperwork." At one point his "companion slumped forward on

her chair, hung her head between her knees and fainted" (21). The incident underscores the oppressive nature of Indian bureaucracy, but there is yet another reason, a reason that reinforces Naipaul's orientalist construction of India. The clerks in whose office the companion faints express sympathy, but do not immediately respond to the narrator's cry for "water." The narrator begins to think, "It was worse than impatience. It was ill-breeding and ingratitude" (21). A messenger does bring water a little later, and the narrator realizes why water was not forthcoming when he shouted for it earlier: "I should have known better. A clerk was a clerk; a messenger was a messenger" (21). This incident prepares the reader for a later chapter in the book, "Degree," where Naipaul shows how caste governs the Indian society by assigning a strictly defined function to each individual.

It is pertinent to note that Naipaul's attack on caste derives from a major thrust in Indological accounts. Virtually all Indologists had something to say about caste.<sup>5</sup> Caste seemed to them an extremely abusive practice that denied the vast population of India any prospect of social and economic advancements. Western civilization, in contrast, promised an abundance of such opportunities. This critique of caste proved quite useful not only in the re-educating the natives of colonial societies but also in recruiting personnel for colonial administration in Europe. Robert Inden, in his penetrating study of Indology, examines the different theories of caste that were developed by Indologists and employed by colonial authorities. Inden identifies Hegel as the earliest critic of caste, who called it "the most degrading spiritual serfdom" (428). Since Indology permeates Naipaul's views on India, not surprisingly, Naipaul too describes caste in Hegelian terms and sees it as "a brutal division of labour" in *Darkness* (34).

Indeed, Naipaul never misses an opportunity to condemn caste in *Darkness*, as well as in *Wounded*; in the latter, he offers a more studied analysis of the social custom. Quoting *Gita*, he mentions in *Darkness* the rationale of caste as sanctioned in Hindu scripture:

'And do thy duty, even if it be humble, rather than another's, even if it be great. To die in one's duty is life: to live in another's is death.' . . . And the man who makes the dingy bed in the

hotel room will be affronted if he is asked to sweep the gritty floor. The clerk will not bring you a glass of water even if you faint. (47)

Naipaul's ordeal in securing a liquor permit from Indian customs familiarizes the reader of *Darkness* to the red tapes in the Indian bureaucracy as well as to the fragmented nature of Indian society: that all Indians strictly adhere to the conventions of their castes. Inordinate delay in bringing water to a fainting woman because it is not the job of a clerk but of a messenger, who is a notch lower than the clerk, amply illustrates the cruelty of caste. Thus, Naipaul is able to underscore the fact that the draconian rules of caste make no exception even for a crisis, and the female companion's presence in the scene is imperative to make that point.

A more prolonged presence of the companion occurs in "Romancers" (83–98). In this chapter, the narrator and his companion have come to Delhi and find accommodation as "paying guests" in Mrs. Mahindra's house. When her contractor husband, upon his return home, disapproves of his wife's playing host to paying guests, the narrator and his companion are swift to act on the hint and move out. At the end of the chapter, they depart from Delhi and arrive in Kashmir on train. The seeing and knowing *I* rather subtly becomes *We* in "Romancers;" the consciousness in that voice, however, is the habitual *I*'s. Mrs. Mahindra is the focus in this chapter. Her gauche manners and prying habits testify to the vulgarity of India's rising middle class. To exhibit her shameless "craze for foreign" (85), to what extent she would go to satisfy that "craze," Naipaul has her invade her guests' room, presumably with no forewarning, when as he recalls, "*we* lay stripped below the ceiling fan after breakfast" [my emphasis] (87). That her call is brazenly intrusive and crassly covetous of a taste for the "foreign" Naipaul shows in this incident. Mrs. Mahindra doesn't hesitate to position herself at the center of the room. She sits on the bed and wants to know the prices of stockings and brassieres:

She sat on the edge of the bed and talked. She examined this stocking, that shoe, that brassiere; she asked prices. She lured us

out to watch the painters at work; she held the material against the paint and asked whether they went well together. (87)

Mrs. Mahindra intrudes on her guests at a very private moment, which cannot be created without the *We* voice; thus *We* is essential in this chapter. More important, Mrs. Mahindra's interest in brassieres cannot be made plausible without her guest who uses brassieres.

A major motif in Naipaul's travel-writing, which almost always treats third-world countries, is the apish imitation of the west in decolonized societies, what Naipaul calls "mimicry."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, the harshest condemnation of such mimicry appears in *Passage* when he castigates the two major Trinidadian ethnic communities, the African and the Indian, for their mutual hatred toward each other but shared fascination for the white: "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" (80). Similarly, a substantial part of *Darkness* is devoted to the excoriation of Indian mimicry, the prime example of which is the class of "Boxwallahs" or privileged Indians occupying cushy positions in British business firms and living mostly in Bengal (58–62). According to Naipaul, the boxwallahs illustrate another instance of tasteless third-world mimicry. Naipaul is quick to add that more often than not mimicry is a survival skill among Indians, who belong to a country that has been invaded by many conquerors—in other words, mimicry is not superficial to the Indian culture. He writes,

It is the special mimicry of an old country which has been without a native aristocracy for a thousand years and has learned to make room for outsiders, but only at the top. The mimicry changes, the inner world remains constant: this is the secret of survival. (56)

Later in the text, when Naipaul observes that India's "Hindu experience of conquerors was great; Hindu India met conquerors half-way and had always been able to absorb them" (209), he firmly implies that mimicry is the path to this desired synthesis. Mimicry, according to him, is more than just vulgar imitation; it exists at a fundamental level in the Indian

psyche and has enabled the Indians to please their masters for centuries. The entire project of Indian nationalism, Naipaul does not hesitate to declare, began as a “mimicry of the British” (211).

Naipaul is aware that mimicry is a “harsh word” to use to describe the pretentious tendencies of India’s wealthy and elite. He insists, however, that “mimicry must be used because . . . no people, by their varied physical endowments, are as capable of mimicry as the Indians” (57). Mrs. Mahindra’s voracious appetite for foreign consumer goods is indicative of the same mimicry that makes her uncouth enough to inquire into the brassieres of her foreign guests. To portray that vulgarity, Naipaul has no choice but to acknowledge the presence of his “companion” in “Romancers.”

The *We* voice that gains prominence at the end of Part I in the chapter “Romancers” is sustained also in Part II, in the chapters about Kashmir. Indeed, the frequent movements between the *I* and the *we* in the narrative might appear rather inconsistent to readers. The only pattern in these shifts is that the significant actions are always performed by the *I*. *I* is the one to rent a room at Hotel Liward and settle the terms with Mr. Butt and Aziz for a three-month stay (102–3), but *We* moves in after three days (104).<sup>7</sup> Later, in the concluding pages of the Kashmir chapters, it is time for *us* to make preparations for travel again (179), but *I* is the one to perform the departure rituals. In the bus taking them out of town, “*Our* own seats had now been secured, *our* bags placed below the tarpaulin on the roof of the bus” (181). *We* even “shook hands with Aziz and Ali and went inside” (181). Between the seated *We*, *I* is the one who “pushed out some rupee notes” through the window to Aziz to pay the correct fare of the tonga-wallah (182). *I* is the one who ponders Aziz’s loyalty as Aziz takes the rupee notes: “He took them. Tears were running down his cheeks. Even at that moment *I* could not be sure that he had ever been *mine*” (182).

*We*, however, is not always speaking in the Kashmir chapters. The companion is absent page after page. One instance is worth recalling. The narrator is sick with colds a few times and is quite upset once when Mr. Butt and Aziz submit to him an estimate of the cost of a proposed trip to Amarnath, a Hindu shrine. They pacify him in no time by knock-

ing off several needless expenses. As the Liward crowd gather around the convalescing narrator's bed, the companion is nowhere to be seen. The distraught narrator is quite content in being comforted by the Liward staff alone. Whether the companion accompanies the narrator later in his trek to the sacred cave is also not known.

Though the narrator never describes the companion or allows her to express an opinion, he recognizes her presence often in the Kashmir chapters. Then this part of *Darkness* appears to be a manifest shift from the rest of the text. The 183 pages or so that Naipaul writes about Kashmir in *Darkness* is perhaps his best writing about India. The memorable characters of the book appear in its Kashmir part, most of whom include the Liward personnel: Aziz, Mr. Butt, and the cook. There are also Rafiq and Laraine, the Muslim musician keen on making a debut in the sitar world, and an American woman in search of eastern mysticism. Their tempestuous romance ends in a marriage, a disastrous union because Laraine leaves India soon after and never responds to Rafiq's letters.

Indeed, the Kashmir chapters of *Darkness* read more like a novel than a piece of travel-writing. The Kashmir episode, one might say, is a realist section in a text that is primarily naturalist and is heavily laden with description. Edward Said has noted that in the orientalist traveler's representation, the orient, with its narrative potential, tends to overthrow the descriptive mode that the orientalist traveler imposes on it (239–40). The Indians in Naipaul's Kashmir delight the reader because they are real people whose lives the narrator depicts truthfully enough. Though he doesn't completely give up on his orientalist impulses, he does grant the orient the power to resist those enquiries. Such an instance in which the orient subverts the orientalist's attempt to gain complete access to the orient occurs in *Darkness* when the narrator, while departing from Kashmir on the bus, frankly admits that he has not been able to earn Aziz's loyalty or figure out the true motives of his actions. As a result, Aziz gains contour and the power to frustrate Naipaul's quest to know him. Because of the same mode of realism used in the Kashmir chapters, the narrator recognizes his companion's presence frequently in them, using the *We* voice and allowing Aziz and the other Kashmiris a relatively greater role in the narrative.

The companion, on the other hand, is never allowed to speak on her own anywhere in *Darkness*. She is a mere presence in the chapters that include her, where she never has an opinion to express. These mere acknowledgements of the companion preclude her a say in the narrative. The first two of her appearances enable Naipaul to expose aspects of the Indian government and society. When that purpose is served, she is shoved into an unlit region that Naipaul refuses to illuminate to his reader. While the companion has a stronger presence in the Kashmir chapters, she is never seen interacting with any Indian or speaking or acting on her own. Buried in the narrator's point of view, the companion, in fact, fares worse than the Indians in these chapters because she is nowhere described or heard. No reference of her is made in the concluding four chapters following those on Kashmir, nor is she accompanying the narrator in the epilogue called "Flight," which recounts his return journey to London. In the first of these four, chapter eight called "Fantasy and Ruins," Naipaul censures the Indian addiction to "Englishness." An analytical piece, "Fantasy and Ruins" echoes "Degree," an earlier chapter in which Naipaul has ridiculed the Indian "mimicry." The remaining three chapters, "The Garland on My Pillow," "Emergency," and "The Village of the Dubes," consist of strong narrative elements. The *We* voice is used on occasion in these chapters, but the narrator includes in it his other travel companions, strangers he makes acquaintance of on the way. This *We*, frequently used during travel in South India where the narrator makes acquaintance of a Sikh, generally performs ordinary actions such as boarding a train or dining in a restaurant. "Flight," the epilogue to *Darkness*, firmly implies that the narrator's experience in India was that of a single individual, of *Darkness's* narrator/protagonist's. With overtones of existential uncertainty, the narrator, who is an exile also in England, struggles to assess his Indian experience:

It was a journey that ought not to have been made; it had broken my life into two . . . It was violent and incoherent; but, like everything I wrote about India, it exorcised nothing. It was only now, as my experience of India defined itself more properly against my own homelessness, that I saw how close in the

past year I had been to the total Indian negation, how much it had been the basis of thought and feeling. And already, with this awareness, in a world where illusion could only be a concept and not something felt in the bones, it was slipping away from me. (266–7)

The unreality of his Indian experience urges the narrator to question his self. Travel in India first and foremost was a quest for the self, which has no room for the experience of the companion though she shared in that same experience.

Though Naipaul mentions several members of his family in *Darkness*—Gold Teeth Nanee, Babu, Jussodra, and the unforgettably wretched Ramchandra—he is scrupulously silent about his wife. Unrecognized as family, the companion appears in the narrative strictly according to the narrator's needs. Such a stifling suits the text's orientalist tendencies, for orientalism inevitably entails a suppression of the point of view of the other. Indeed, orientalist accounts tend to be monologic as well as narcissistic.<sup>8</sup> Almost an inseparable adjunct to orientalism, monologism suits the orientalist traveler exceedingly well because he is keener on “describing” than “narrating” what he sees. Whatever narration occurs in this bid to “represent” the orient occurs not about the orient but about the narrator, a process that results in self-exposition. Hence, most orientalist travelogues that “tell a story” portray—in a narcissistic move, so to speak—the successive stages of awareness in the self of the narrator who performs actions only to “know” the orient. The self, thus, revolves around its own perceptions and rejects all contrary impressions.

The self's interest in itself can be illustrated once the narrator crafts a dialogue in which he becomes an Indian speaking to outsiders. The conversation becomes a dialogue with the self; dialogism, however, doesn't occur in it. In the beginning of “Degree,” the narrator mentions the anecdote of a Sikh who has been away from India for many years and who is in tears upon his return home because he sees the extent of Indian poverty. Poverty in India, Naipaul claims, brings the “sweetest of emotions” in Indians (44); poverty itself, he observes, is ignored in the process. In this discussion on poverty, Naipaul himself becomes an Indian and says, “This is our poverty, which in a hundred Indian short stories

in all Indian languages drives the pretty girl to pay the family's medical bills" (44). Soon he offers an imaginary dialogue to suggest the two points of view on poverty, those of the Indian and of the outsider:

India is the poorest country in the world. Therefore, to see its poverty is to make an observation of no value; a thousand newcomers to the country before you have seen and said as you. . . . Our own sons and daughters, when they return from Europe and America, have spoken in your very words. (44)

Peggy Nightingale indicates that Naipaul uses the first person plural in these passages to speak in "a voice with which to condemn himself and all who follow him in expression of anger and sensibility [toward the Indian poverty]" (85–86). Nightingale argues that the narrator uses *Our* to mean that of himself and of an Indian, thus proclaiming his own Indian identity. Naipaul also uses *You* here to mean the reader as well as himself, and this "complex manipulation of point of view" Nightingale suggests, "expresses brilliantly Naipaul's own inner turmoil—his sense of belonging and not belonging" (86).

When Naipaul appropriates the reader's as well as other travelers' voices, he tries to prove why it is necessary to preserve his original point of view so it would not lose its sensitivity to the Indian squalor. Though it is hard to miss the irony in the rhetorical *Our* and *You*, Nightingale is content to grant Naipaul the unique ability to be an Indian and an outsider at the same time though the move is a preemptive bid to silence points of view the narrator doesn't endorse.

The voices Naipaul employs to demonstrate his "sense of belonging and not belonging," on the other hand, somewhat resemble Bakhtin's notion of the "double-voice" in novelistic discourse. Though not regarded as a novel, *An Area of Darkness*, does suggest fictional qualities in its story of the seeking and rejecting self that are hard to ignore.<sup>9</sup> The stamp of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* can be seen not only in Naipaul's title but also in that pursuing self who, in treating India, shows Marlowe's sensitivity toward Africa. Indeed, Naipaul's attempt to be both an Indian and the outsider is reminiscent of Marlowe's bid to speak for both Africa and Europe at the same time. Naipaul, in his narrative, struggles hard to

suppress points of view adverse to his own, ostensibly to eschew dialogism as much as he can. The tendency is consistent with most orientalist studies, which, according to Said, are characterized by “[t]he defeat of narrative by vision” (239). While the orientalist views the orient “panoptically,” the orient itself, Said indicates, exerts a “diachronic” pressure that seeks to overthrow that obtrusive vision (240). The orientalist contains this energy by imposing his “monumental form of encyclopedic or lexicographical vision” on the orient (Said 240), his prior knowledge of the orient. Naipaul states years later in an interview that his readings played a crucial role in shaping his vision of India in *Darkness*. “*An Area of Darkness*,” he notes, “is an extraordinary piece of craft—an extraordinary mix of travel and memory and reading,” thus admitting that his memory and reading about India formed his vision in *Darkness* (*The Paris Review* qtd. in Nixon 61).<sup>10</sup>

When Naipaul speaks in two seemingly opposed voices, dialogism is missing in that conversation because he is in firm control of both points of view. Dialogism, it is useful to note, is something Naipaul avoids perhaps even consciously in his early travel writing. He says in an interview his fiction and non-fiction “come out of two entirely different segments of the brain,” that “fiction begins on the typewriter” while the “other has to be done very carefully, so it’s done by hand, because it’s very planned . . .” (Jussawallah 82). He adds in the same interview that the travel writer has “got to be alert to the various pressures, all the temptations to draw social lessons” (82). Such lessons, Bakhtin would say, derive from “social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)” (272)—a process Naipaul does his best to wipe out in *Darkness*. Of the two key features that shape every writing according to Bakhtin, “the centripetal and the centrifugal”—also the centralized and the decentralized—(272), Naipaul is keen on de-emphasizing the latter. He confines his work within the bounds of the former, preventing his utterance from interacting with living heteroglossia and limiting the utterance within what Bakhtin calls the “normative-centralizing system of a unitary language” (272). Naipaul’s double-voiced utterances fail to achieve dialogism because the genre of autobiography and travel-writing that he has developed remains a rhetorical genre after all. Bakhtin’s comment on

such double-voiced discourse is helpful in understanding why this genre fails to achieve any dialogic impulse:

Double-voiced, internally dialogized discourse is also possible, of course, in a language system alien to the linguistic relativism of prose consciousness . . . in those systems there is no soil to nourish the development of such discourse in the slightest meaningful or essential way. Double-voiced discourse . . . remaining as it does within the boundaries of a single language system . . . is not fertilized by a deep-rooted connection with the forces of historical becoming that serve to stratify language, and therefore rhetorical genres are at best merely a distanced echo of this becoming, narrowed down to an individual polemic. (325)

In spite of the crystalline prose in which *Darkness* is written, the text does not succeed in portraying a credible India for that very reason.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the problem exists deep in Naipaul's text, which is distinctively monologic. A dialogue implies the presence of the other, but the other is not the other when both speakers are products of the same consciousness. As a result, dialogism fails to occur in such a conversation because it grows out of a single consciousness, what Bakhtin would call a "unitary" consciousness. In Bakhtin's words,

The internal bifurcation (double-voicing) of discourse, sufficient to a single unitary language and to a consistently monologic style, can never be a fundamental form of discourse: it is merely a game, a tempest in a teapot. (325)

Though Naipaul includes many Indians as well as his companion in *Darkness*, he does not allow them their own voices. The companion never speaks and is described only once by him in the narrative when she performs the fainting act in the office of the Indian Customs. Even on that occasion the reader manages to get just a blurry image of her. Paradoxically, the narrator himself is an Indian; his companion, on the other hand, is white. While their identities can suggest complex points of view to the text, the narrator doesn't permit that potential to thrive. The tactic is consistent with the "sexist blinders" of orientalism (Said

207). The orientalist is masculine, while the orient is feminine with strong resemblance to the irrational elements in western civilization—to “delinquents, the insane, women, the poor” (Said 207). The companion, in spite of her non-Indian identity, thus, is conflated with the orient itself; not surprisingly, she dwells a realm as shadowy as India itself in *Darkness*. For *Darkness* can admit of no other point of view than that of the all-knowing and all-seeing *I* of its narrator. If Naipaul grants his travel companion a say in the account he offers, she gains power over the narrative. Two narrative *Is* are not likely to see eye to eye on the people and society the text describes. Interacting with them and the fellow traveler, the companion’s *I* is likely to suggest other perspectives on issues, disagreeing on the reportage, leading to a dialogic account, and upsetting the exclusive vision of the domineering traveler. Hence, both she and the majority of Indians remain merely passive participants in his narrative, whose sole focus is the narrator’s own self.

This identity-building does not happen in Naipaul’s second book on India, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), written thirteen years later in the wake of Indira Gandhi’s emergency. *Wounded*, in many ways, is more orientalist than the earlier text, but Naipaul bestows India a measure of ability to rule its own destiny. India in *Wounded* is largely static; yet it is capable of making “a new mutinous stirring” (167). Certainly, the most dialogic book Naipaul has ever written about India is *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, which so far is his last book on the subject. The title derives from the motif of mutiny with which *Wounded* ends—mutiny being India’s attempt to seek a modern destiny. True to that title, Naipaul’s last book on India resonates with polyphonic voices, including the narrator’s own voice, of many Indians who tell the narrator stories of their individual mutinies, of their rise in a modern society from humble beginnings.

## Notes

- 1 This biographical information is taken from Jussawallah (xix).
- 2 Theroux indicates that *Mimic Men*—the novel Naipaul was writing during his stint in University of Kampala, Uganda, where both writers met in 1966—suggests echoes of his relationship with Theroux, especially the younger writer’s

## The Traveler and His Hushed Companion

- “feelings of desire” for Pat Naipaul (59), which figures as the young American’s extra-marital affair with the British wife of Ralph Singh, the narrator in *Mimic Men*. But the portrait of Naipaul that Theroux draws in “Africa” of *Sir Vidia’s Shadow* is easily recognized as the author of Naipaul’s African fiction—of *In a Free State* (1971) and *A Bend in the River* (1979). The representation of Africans in these works—undisguised racism, according to many scholars—is consistent with the attitudes Naipaul reveals to Theroux.
- 3 “I have got to spend several months ‘playing’ before a book emerges,” he tells an interviewer. “The last book I was doing I thought I would finish quickly. This turned out to be 14 months” (Jussawalla 12). He reveals to another interviewer that when writing *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, he “filled 15 notebooks working 15-hour days seven days a week for five months” (Jussawalla 129).
- 4 See my article in the *South Carolina Review*.
- 5 Almost every Indological pronouncement on “caste” begins with an explanation of the very etymology of the term itself. Of Portuguese origin, the word, Indologists often point out, is somewhat inaccurate in signifying the social system it wants to signify. The difficulty stems from Indology’s attempt to convey through “caste” the two Indian terms denoting it, *jāti* and *varna*, which are not synonymous (see Hocart 27–34; Dumont 21–22; Quigley 4–12). Later Indological reports do consider this problem, however; the best of its kind is Declan Quigley’s (4–12).
- 6 Rob Nixon argues that Naipaul’s censure of mimicry in postcolonial cultures resembles Frantz Fanon’s disdain of the same in *The Wretched of the Earth* (137–39). Nixon, however, maintains that Naipaul was not influenced by Fanon on the issue because “*The Middle Passage* predates the English edition of Fanon’s text. Moreover, the novels that Naipaul wrote in the 1950s contain intimations of his theory of mimicry” (200–1). It escapes Nixon that Naipaul has reading knowledge of French and that it was unlikely he would be unaware of the work of another Caribbean dealing with issues of decolonization. Fanon receives a mention in Naipaul’s *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted People* (276). The Marxist thinker, along with Che Guevara, is named by Shahbaz, the Pakistani left activist, as his revolutionary mentor.
- 7 All emphases in the quotations in this paragraph are mine.
- 8 I have discussed these issues in *Darkness* in my earlier critique of the text.
- 9 It is pertinent to note that Bakhtin views both travel-writing and the biography as genres not dissimilar to the novel. Bakhtin, in fact, sees them, along with “the confession, the diary . . . the personal letter and several others,” as the novel’s building blocks (321).
- 10 It is reasonable to assume that Naipaul’s views on India derived substantially from his readings in anthropology and history. Mell Glusow tells us that when Naipaul was writing *Wounded*, he consulted “a tall stack of books about India” (22).
- 11 See Nissim Ezekiel, C. D. Narasimhaiah, Sudha Rai, and Ashish Roy.

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