the epistemological premises, ethical axioms and social goals proposed by the dominant ideology, and this study will attempt to discuss how the interlocution of narrative discourses in a set of Conrad's fictions transforms, subverts and rescues the established norms, values and myths of imperialist civilisation" (7). In a note, Parry characterizes Goonetilleke's earlier work on Conrad as claiming that the work merely "represents historical circumstances and reflects prevalent racial attitudes" (134). In *Joseph Conrad: Beyond Culture and Background*, however, Goonetilleke has altered his early position, and his differences with Parry now turn on the very central question of critical purpose. Here he cites period figures like Hugh Clifford only as a means of underscoring Conrad's artistic superiority (41-2); his purpose is to distinguish the artist from his culture and background, and not to locate the various premises that made his work possible.

This is an important argument, and it raises questions about the very purpose of literary study. Goonetilleke's own position is finally obscured by his opening thesis. True, he does not "provide a purely literary analysis" (1) of Conrad's fiction—in that he often discusses factors extrinsic to the text. But to take his thesis at face value would be to expect a book more like Parry's; Goonetilleke proposes "to see Conrad's work as art in the context of relevant historical, political and biographical facts" (1). The fact is that most criticism in our time is concerned to relate text and context. The quarrel continues about *how* that should be done and to what purpose. This book invokes culture and background to show how incompletely they account for what remains a century later an often startling achievement.

MICHAEL COYLE

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One day, in the late 1940s, O. K. Bouwsma, the philosopher from Nebraska, was walking with Wittgenstein in the countryside outside of Ithaca. Wittgenstein brought up the subject of Dostoevski's *Notes from Underground.* Bouwsma remembered the exchange in the following words: "he was puzzled that a man who could so clearly see and understand his own humiliation should not change. One could imagine a man who acted as he did, but who never reflected, should continue in the same old rut. But not him. Such a man would at least come to adjust himself, even by some sort of technique, to avoid such misuses" (O. K.

Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein: Conversations 1945-1951* [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986] 69). I thought of this passage as I was reading Rob Nixon's account of Naipaul. How could this man have remained so resolutely and stubbornly the same over all these years, returning again and again to similar sites, with similar miseries, similar condemnations? Why has he remained so fixed a St.-Sebastian target for generations of colonial and postcolonial criticism? He should, at the very least, have been able to extricate himself from his rut by some variety of silence, technique, cunning or judicious trimming.

Nixon considers, in his last chapter, the possibility that Naipaul, in his post-*Enigma of Arrival* sorties back to India and the American South, may have mellowed and become more gentle in the face of middle age, and the pressure of deaths in his family. But he decides that there is no substantial change, and that the multiple message of his title still holds. The thesis of the book is in that sandwich title: *London Calling* is the top slice, reminding me of the infamous introductory words William Joyce (Lord Haw Haw), broadcast into Britain from Berlin during the Second World War, "Germany calling, Germany calling"; *Postcolonial Mandarin* is the bottom slice, with its own connotations of imperial elitism; *V. S. Naipaul* is the symbolic filling in the middle, an interpellation of imperial mimic-anguish, lost in the steppes of a thousand orientalisms. To rephrase the Bouwsma episode in the idiom of postcolonial impatience with Naipaul: why has he traipsed and troped his ventriloquist way through the Third World in a calumny of ethnocentric generalization, deaf to difference, deferential to the assumed authority of a metropolitan, Anglo-American, First World, neo-imperial, New World Order audience? Put in this stark way, I am not sure that there is any answer which would take specifics interior to Naipaul into consideration.

There is a Naipaul from the inside, and a Naipaul from the outside. It is primarily to the Naipaul from the inside that Wittgenstein's reflection on the underground man applies. I'm not sure how much the outside is worth without some sense of Naipaul's inside space. After batting the Dostoevski question around for a while, Bouwsma and Wittgenstein came up with a possible answer: "we got round to discuss Smythie's (Oxford librarian, friend of Wittgenstein) suggestion that the author of the *Notes* was trying to give himself a character. W. could understand that. That would be like trying to give oneself a style" (69). This business of style and character fits Naipaul quite well. He always felt that he had to create both elements for himself in order to stave off the perceived insignificance and invisibility of an obscure colonial upbringing and to find a centre for himself as a man and as a writer. The ambiguities that attached to the notion of London as this imperial, professional centre, containing within them the possibility of a private centre, has haunted his reflections on and off for the last forty years. His raft has been his writing; his landfalls have often had for him a scorched-earth, fragile, threatening feel, a bit like the landlessness imposed on Melville's Bulk-

ington by a fate that bound together his concern for truth and his fear of destruction. Naipaul has been the most nomadic of writers, staring at people and places with need, appetite, contempt and intermittent compassion; through it all, he clings to words in a kind of velcro crucifixion. He has always had an ordealist view of his life as a predicament and as a project, one that has deepened into interpretative conviction over the years. If he has forged identities, he has never faked them. What has been consistent is this desire and necessity to give himself, through a style and a particular set of relations and attitudes to the Trinidad/Third Worlds of his mind, a character.

There have been difficulties for him which, again, Wittgenstein took up in his Ithaca walk with Bouwsma and Dostoevski: "No one can write objectively about himself and this is because there will always be some motive for doing so. And the motives will change as you write. And this becomes complicated, for the more one is intent on being 'objective', the more one will notice the varying motives that enter in" (71). This variety of complication and difficult attention to motive has characterized the texture and the tension of almost everything Naipaul has written. Naipaul represents, arguably, as subtle a phenomenological narrative of the frames of mind and emotion that went along with the dismantling of classical empire in the post-war period as anything we find in Memmi and Mannoni. This interregnum space of decolonization was a disturbed one that stretched identities and confusions across the whole spectrum of possibilities from the colonial to the post-colonial; histories, populations were collapsing in on each other. Naipaul took notes from the undertow/underground features of these events; he was very much a reflection of those large-scale movements that he reflected on. He has left very little behind him; memories, obsessions and anxieties have remained with him.

This is not Nixon's Naipaul; in my view, a full defense of the man would need to see the novels and the travel writings together. Nixon puts the novels to one side, on the grounds that it has been so long —if one excludes *Enigma of Arrival* as a species of meditation/autobiography—since he expended much energy with fiction. *London Calling* is a strong and vigorous examination of Naipaul's non-fiction viewed from the chilliest of postcolonial outsides. He starts off by noting the divided response to Naipaul, split between the society he writes *for* and the societies he writes *about*; the one that gives him his income and his knighthood and the ones that give him his materials. In the Nixon brief, Naipaul has used a word and a condition valorized by high modernism—exile—as a license to devalorize colonial and post-colonial societies. He has coined, over his career, a set of code words of contempt with which he patrols and diminishes underdeveloped, underresourced, overpopulated, revolutionary, fundamentalist, terrorized, traumatized, culturally different, coping and not-coping, marginalized societies: words like barbarism, primitivism, simple societies,

mimicry, parasitism. Nixon's Naipaul is thus adding biased commentary to the injuries that imperial and corporate power continues to inflict on already afflicted peoples. These words all go back to racist, nineteenth century discourse. They were the categories of classification and control at the root of empire. They are, essentialy, gunboat locutions, carrying venom in their histories, and poison in their present uses. This gives Naipaul abroad the cordite whiff of Margaret Thatcher at home. Nixon does a responsible job of tracking down the way these loaded rhetorical terms do a certain kind of work in Naipaul, for Naipaul. I am glad he has done it, if only to give us a one-stop source for the chorus of opposition that has continuously, often understandably, accompanied his most scattershot and impromptu opinions about the Third World. He presents the argument for the prosecution with conviction, marshalling most of the appropriate evidence.

Nixon is a great advance on the Punch-and-Judy, morality play dimension that has always dogged considerations of Naipaul. The cross-over frictions of the empire-colony debates and those of the Cold War, added to major changes in the intellectual formations that had sustained most of nineteenth and twentieth century European political and philosophical cultures, have had the effect of complicating the ideologically contrastive geographies of East versus West, and those that the Brandt Commission called North versus South. Naipaul has remained a lone bobber in this sea of crosscurrents, trying to remain aloof, apart, aware of complicity and not unaware of the necessity—aesthetic and ethical—of style, character, and posture as a salvage technique of boundary and self-identity.

It is probably too easy to underestimate the private energies that have gone into this task for him as a professional writer dependent for his livelihood on his writing. Nixon and the rest of us have it easier when we read him from established university positions, with all kinds of scholarship and resources available to us to contextualize and evaluate him. It is easier for us to make sense of Naipaul in England—not Naipaul's own England—by reference to historians and sociologists like E.P.Thompson, Stuart Hall, Perry Anderson, Raymond Williams and Paul Gilroy. He clearly avoids many Englands in favour of traditional, often fictional representations of English culture, especially those flecked by the ruins of empire. It is obvious that Stonehenge and Thomas Hardy engage his imagination in a way that Black British culture does not. He has not, as we say in academic conversation, kept up. He has also, even in his travel writings, continued to have his novelist's eye, looking for the event, object, place or person that will resonate inside the signifying, symbolic, emotional space that makes up the sensibility of V. S. Naipaul. The optics of this novelistic gaze have taken a solid theoretical pounding in post-structuralist, postmodernist, postcolonial and feminist quarters in the last twenty years, but it remains difficult to see how Naipaul, in any incarnation, even one in

which he immersed himself in Foucault and Bakhtin before lighting out once more for his favourite territories, could adjust to, let alone accommodate these proscriptions. Again, this is not to say that his optics, in their totalizing, essentialist, orientalizing, imperial, male dispositions, should not be framed or critiqued from the optics of Said, Spivak, Trinh T. Minh-ha. But we should be aware of this collective postcolonial phenomenon as a cognitive assault on aspects of the epistemologies of empire that emerged later in the day than Naipaul's imperial beginnings and that these updated, revisionist optics have had available to them all kinds of vocabularies, distances, and institutional habitats. Some very heavy modern equipment is available to us in getting a fix on Naipaul.

Nixon takes advantage of this equipment and uses it to good effect, spurred on by his sense of the status of Naipaul's opinions in the postcolonial skirmishes of an emerging world order. I believe this is to exaggerate his importance as an analyst and cleric-mandarin of empire, and to underestimate his role as an itinerant symptom of an important moment in one of its dying phases, from one of its Caribbean expressions. He has been, for the most part, in a figure I have already used, a lone bobber in choppy, unmarked seas, writing his non-expert self into Third World elsewheres. He has become, ironically, the subject of considerable academic attentions, much of it quite expert in many areas. Rob Nixon, for instance, in placing Naipaul's travel books into a crossroads of genre scholarship embracing the conventions of traditional travel writing, ethnographic narrative and autobiography, draws on the academic cards of Renato Rosaldo, Michael Fischer, George Marcus, Paul Rabinow, James Clifford, and Johannes Fabian.

By the end of a successful book, it is hard to avoid the feeling of collectivist, entrenched and theoretically triumphalist forces being brought to bear on Naipaul as a quarry; quarry in the double sense of a prey being tracked down and a piece of property being mined. It is an odd mix, an ironic, enigmatic one, particularly at home in the modes of production that the modern academy encourages. I would have to say, though, that Rob Nixon, in spite of my regret that he excludes the fiction and flattens the larger ideological landscapes through which Naipaul moves as a participant as much as an observer, has written a book that subsequent writers on Naipaul will have to take into consideration.

JACK HEALY