

V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*: Narrative Transcending of Order and Disorder

TUOMAS HUTTUNEN

The purpose of this article is to examine the construction of migrant identity in the above mentioned novel by Naipaul. The narrator-protagonist of the novel, Ralph Singh, has no strong bonds to any one discourse or geographical place. He lives amidst, and in between, the often antagonistic cultural discourses that are present in the reality surrounding him. I aim to show how a person who occupies this kind of cultural border area, or liminal space, is capable of creating a new identity for him/herself through the narrative rearrangement of the past. This narrative construction forms into a third dimension, which has its own peculiar temporal and spatial structure and its own logic, which differ considerably from the traditional Western ideology of linear time and causal relationships.

In Naipaul's body of fictional work *The Mimic Men* (1967) represents a change to a more self-reflexive form of writing as compared to his earlier and more satirical works (*The Mystic Masseur* 1957, *The Suffrage of Elvira* 1958 and *A House for Mr Biswas* 1961). It is also his first novel set (partly) outside Trinidad. He also uses the first person narrator for the first time, and the structure of the novel is rather complex with its continuous juxtaposition of separate times, events and places. The self-reflexivity of Singh in his rearrangement of past events almost "gains the formal status of a trope", as Fawzia (101) puts it, with the whole memoir appearing as "a carefully constructed paradigm of an empirically determined state of mind". The trope Fawzia refers to is that of distancing self-reflexive irony. Singh continuously objectifies and distances his past self from his present self through the self-conscious examination of his own past deeds. John Thieme has characterized this change in Naipaul's writing as

corresponding to a shift from Dickens to Conrad, in the sense that *MM* represents a more self-reflexive and contemplative writing, a kind of probing of the Conradian darknesses of the mind as opposed to the more satirical and caricature-like creations of e.g. *A House for Mr Biswas*.

I will begin by outlining a theoretical frame, which sees identity as formed through a narrative process that unites the levels of personal images and official history, as well as the dimensions of imaginary and real, or fiction and historiography. I shall first examine how Stuart Hall and Hayden White connect identity with narration. I shall then bring this subject to a specifically postcolonial context and examine the nature of time and space in narration through the ideas of Homi Bhabha and Fredric Jameson.

Historiography and fiction / real and imaginary – constructing narrative identity

Stuart Hall maintains that people use the resources of history, language and culture in the construction of identity. According to him, identities are constructed within representation:

They arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, the 'suturing into the story' through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (---) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field. (4)

In the kind of narration used for the purposes of self-definition described by Hall above, the aspects of real and imaginary often intermix with each other. Hayden White (1987) has characterized real and imaginary as the referents of historiography and fiction respectively. There is a correspondence between the subjective and the social poles of identity construction, and the imaginary and real referents of narration. The 'real' or historical aspect of a narrative (e.g.

a novel) can be seen as representing the discourses coming to the subject from the outside (the social pole). The imaginary aspect can be seen as representing the subject's own contribution to the construction of identity (the subjective pole). In this way,

narrative is revealed to be a particularly effective system of discursive meaning production by which individuals can be taught to live a distinctively "*imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence*," that is to say, an unreal but meaningful relation to the social formations in which they are indentured to live out their lives and realize their destinies as social subjects. (1987 x) (emphasis added)

In other words, in narration used for self-definition the subject creates a relationship between him/her and reality, and this relationship represents identity. Since this relationship is created by the subject through narration, it is necessarily partly imaginary, or rather a mixture of the imaginary and the real. As described by White (1987 x), narration is a process which produces meanings by substituting the extra-discursive entities (real or imaginary) that are its referents with conceptual contents. In another words, through narration the subject produces meaning to the surrounding reality.

Homi Bhabha brings all this into the postcolonial context. He describes cultural space and the social and psychological poles that create it as forming a "double time" (145). In the same context (147) he defines the two sides of this double time as *pedagogical* and *performative*. The pedagogical pole, which is represented by Western historiography and ideology, is discourse which comes to the subject from the outside. This Western discourse has linear temporality and the events in it proceed via logical causal relationships to construct a certain version of reality. The performative pole is the discourse produced by the subject in normal everyday life by plotting and ordering experiences to give them meaning, i.e. the production by the consciousness of memories, images, etc.

Both the Western pedagogical and the performative produced by the subject represent one way of producing meaning by plotting

experiences of reality via different logics. However, although they are both present in the consciousness of the subject, these two discourses cannot be united within each other's areas. This results in an ambivalent attitude for both of them, a kind of in-between state. The constructing or narrating of identity happens in this ambivalent cultural space, which produces in the narration "a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations without a centered causal logic" (Bhabha 141).

Bhabha emphasizes the temporality of this cultural situation. Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, writes about space and distances in connection with the multiplicity of cultural discourses. Like Bhabha, he maintains that the world surrounding the subject consists of differing realities that cannot be united. However, the subject can observe these realities simultaneously, despite the fact that it is not possible to unite them:

The new modes of perception seem indeed to operate by way of the simultaneous preservation of just such incompatibles, a kind of incommensurability-vision that does not pull the eyes back to focus but provisionally entertains the tension of their multiple coordinates[.] (Jameson 372)

With this incommensurability vision the subject has to act in a jungle of differing realities, just as is the case with Bhabha's pedagogical and performative. Like Bhabha, Jameson sees that this situation creates a new "aesthetics of information" (375): "[T]he obligation to disregard items in other columns or compartments opens up a means of constructing false consciousness which is tactically far more advanced than older and more primitive tactics [.]"

In other words, the subject can combine or close off parts of these incommensurable realities in his/her observation, or narration. This is comparable to Bhabha's model of producing narration by a process that alternates from one cultural and social dimension to another without causal relationships (141). According to Jameson this kind of new consciousness "is a new way of defusing information, making representations improbable, discrediting political posi-

tions and their 'organic' discourses" (Jameson 375). This kind of consciousness is capable of constructing a more harmonious identity by combining components from different realities, or different dimensions of spatial and temporal logic. The disturbance caused by the simultaneous presence of incommensurable realities or discourses can be cured.

The Mimic Men - between two imaginary worlds

The incommensurable realities that surround Singh as a child are divided into the Aryan past of his race, the circumstances on Isabella and the influences coming from the West (Britain and London). He does not experience his life on Isabella as real, but lives in a fantasy world that is two-fold. It consists on the one hand of the Aryan past which he reads about in books, and on the other hand of the influence of the colonizing culture, which is especially present at school. The past that is not real comes to mean more to him than the actual circumstances on the island. He dreams alternately of an escape to the glorified past of his race and to a future in the metropolis (London), and sees his current presence on Isabella as an unhappy "shipwreck", a temporary situation.

The school remains a private area that shuts out the reality of the island:

We had converted our island into one big secret. Anything that touched on everyday life excited laughter when it was mentioned in a classroom: the name of a shop, the name of a street, the name of street-corner foods. The laughter denied our knowledge of these things to which after the hours of school we were to return. We denied the landscape and the people we could see out of open doors and windows, we who took apples to the teacher and wrote essays about visits to temperate farms.(95)

Despite the attempt to suppress them, reality and surrounding circumstances on the island merge in the images of the narrator.

He sees his mother leading a cow in a landscape that is a mixture of English gardens and Isabellan villages of mud and grass (89), or distinctly remembers having taken an apple to his teacher, although this is impossible in reality, because there are no apples on Isabella (90). Here the discourses coming from Britain (apples and gardens) and Isabella (villages of mud and grass) respond to Jameson's incompatible realities and Bhabha's pedagogical and performative discourses. As stated before, they cannot be united at the time of observation, but they are united here in Singh's narration and the remembrance or image of what happened. Memory forms a kind of third space and produces a strange mixture of discourses that does not correspond to 'reality' as either of the original discourses understands it. This mixture of realities is the only version that Singh has. As he states: "The editing is clearly at fault, but the edited version is all I have." (90).

Singh's fantasies are constructed according to the Western formula which he has adopted from the heroic tales of Aryan war leaders and from British and European history books. These stories, and subsequently Singh's fantasies, are in the sphere of Western ideal narration. This type of narration contradicts Singh's actual every-day experiences and activities on Isabella. The Western histories correspond to Bhabha's pedagogical discourse coming from outside. Actual everyday reality on the island and the giving of meaning to events and their experiences corresponds to the performative mode, the discourse produced by the subject. Singh tries to live in a fantasy world and deny the reality of the island, but fails, as that reality, which he confronts every day, mingles with his fantasies. These realities of fantasy and actuality are, to use Jameson's term, incommensurable.

After leaving the island, Singh tries to create a meaningful relationship between himself and the surrounding discourses by sensitively responding to various kinds of false identities which he thinks other people see in him. In other words, he tries to define himself through other people, to get rid of his fantasies and the feeling of aimlessness and disorder. Later he describes these attempts to find himself as "roles".

Adopting roles

Bhabha (89-90) discusses the adoption of roles by persons with a postcolonial past via the notion of *mimicry*. According to him, this mimicry describes well the tendency of the colonized to imitate roles typical of the culture of the colonizer (in this case, those of student, dandy, husband and politician). These roles adopted by the colonized are metonymic, meaning that the person tries to express his/her whole identity by adopting a feature he/she recognizes as representative of the colonizing culture as a whole. Singh throws himself into the roles listed above and thinks every time that he has found order and stability for his life, or that he has finally been able to find a harmonious identity, although the truth is that these roles represent only a part of his identity and consciousness. His identity is so dispersed that it cannot be expressed via one role. The result is that every role is followed by breakdown.

Singh describes the birth of his role as dandy as follows:

In London I had no guide. There was no one to link my present with my past, no one to note my consistences or inconsistencies. It was up to me to choose my character, and I chose the character that was easiest and most attractive. I was the dandy, the extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship. (20)

A couple of sentences later, he contradicts himself by admitting that he did have a guide; it was actually Lien, his landlady, who created his role as a dandy. He states that he just did not see this at the time, which implies that, with the help of his writing, he was already beginning to discern meaningful relationships among the dispersed experiences and events of his past. A little later he writes that he had tried to adopt a personality as so many times before, but that he no longer knew who he was. All his life, Singh has been trying to become what he imagines others see in him. In other words, he has defined himself through others (and on a more general level through Western discourse): He has "this feeling of being adrift, a cell of perception, little more, that might be altered, if only fleetingly, by

any encounter." (27). Each encounter drags out of him a role of the kind he thinks is being expected of him.

At this stage, Singh is not capable of creating a third space, a synthesis of his incommensurable realities or discourses. He moves from one role to another, all the time experiencing the same feeling of meaninglessness, uncertainty, disorder and being outside everything. This feeling leads him to "this switching back and forth between one world and another, one set of relationships and another." (154). As a child on Isabella, he had experienced feelings of not belonging and of disorder, and had longed for the order of the metropolis. Soon after arriving there, he again begins to feel disorder and wants to go back to the certainties of Isabella, to which he now thinks he belongs. Once again, this sense of belonging proves to be false, as his political career on the island shows. The adoption of roles is repeated many times and always followed by similar consequences, as is the travelling back and forth between London and Isabella.

The detachment resulting from the ambivalence in his relationships to the discourses around him leads to a situation where Singh becomes incapable of action on his own initiative and where he keeps on drifting from one event to another as a kind of outside-observer of his own life and doings. Every action he makes is in reality prompted by someone else. As Singh himself realizes during the process of his writing, the dandy-figure is actually created by Lieni the landlady, the initiative for marriage is taken by Sandra, and he is pushed into politics by Browne.

Order and disorder

The life-situation on Isabella is connected by Singh with disorder (118). The metropolis is associated with order, which can be explained by the fact that he has received his information of the outside world from school books that come from England. These are naturally compiled to contain carefully chosen events that are presented in a certain light via developmental linear time and precise

causal relationships. He leaves for London, but is disappointed to discover that London and the life there are not as well constructed and pure as the books had given him to understand. Singh marvels at the "physical aspect of the city" (18), its solidity, light and order. But the ideal of the city he had created on Isabella remains with him, and this he cannot find in the real London. He tries to find "the god of the city", which is this ideal, by pronouncing the names of famous buildings at the sight of them, but all in vain. He soon begins to long for the "certainties" of Isabella that he had previously dismissed as "shipwreck" and "chaos", because he cannot find in the metropolis the order he saw to be missing from the disorder of Isabella (27).

Singh's longing for order is also apparent in his interest in the history of Western culture, especially the history of Rome, Roman literature and the Latin language. After all, the Romans were reputedly a very organized people, and they lie at the heart and origin of Western culture. To Singh, Western discourse, culture and history also appear as firmness and solidity. This is symbolized by the Roman-type house of stone he builds on Isabella, the solidity of which he constantly emphasizes. As a child on Isabella, he had feared that the family's wooden house would tumble down (146). This clearly symbolizes the chaos and uncertainty of the island, but one should not forget the common analogy between one's inner self and a house. In Singh's case, the inner self kept constantly tumbling down.

The order Singh sees in the discourse coming from the West and the disorder he sees in the circumstances of Isabella and in his own actions again respond to Bhabha's pedagogical and performative respectively, as well as to Jameson's discontinuous realities. Those dimensions where Singh sees order (the Aryan past, the metropolis) are provided from the outside. They are realities which function through linear developmental time and causal relationships that effect the selecting of events to be included in them. In the performative dimension, which he produces himself and observes in the surrounding reality (Isabella) he sees no order or logic of the kind present in the realities found in books.

To sum up, the socio-cultural circumstances and contradictory affiliations of his childhood have led Singh to a state of uncertainty and disorder, which prevents him from assimilating to his surroundings. The influences coming from London and from the descriptions of a glorious origin in Asia are stronger than anything the chaotic island without history can offer, and Singh is torn between them. He appears detached from his actual circumstances and lives in a fantasy which causes him to become incapable of real action. As he grows older, the fantasies about belonging to London prove to be false, and his confusion increases as he realizes he is doubly excluded; excluded both from the life on Isabella and from that in London. He does not belong anywhere, but is passively adopting false roles he thinks others expect of him. There appears to be no connection between himself and his deeds, rather he appears to be an objective observer of his own involuntary actions.

In the following section I shall examine how Singh, through the process of his writing, builds a new consciousness that is "tactically far more advanced than the older and more primitive tactics of lying and repression" and that can be used "to exclude not merely older kinds of syntheses but even the therapeutic estrangement effects that used to result from confronting one piece of evidence with a seemingly unconnected one" (Jameson 375). It can be said that, so far, Singh's tactic has been one of "lying and repression", since he has tried to express his whole identity via just a part of it, and that he should learn to get rid of the feeling of "estrangement" resulting from this tendency.

Reconstructing the past - narrating a new order

Instead of the original plan of writing the history of the Caribbean region, Singh begins to write down his own memories. He is startled by the "formlessness" of his experiences (243), but soon realizes that, through writing, the events in his memory become "historical and manageable" (243) as they are being re-created and retrieved. By this means, the events find their place and cease to disturb and create dispersion. It becomes his goal to "impose order on my own history,

to abolish that disturbance which is what a narrative in sequence might have led me to." (243). In other words, he does begin to write a history, but a personal one. In addition, he abandons the idea of writing down his memories and experiences in temporally linear order, or via causal relationships that point to some premeditated objective. This would mean the Western idea of narrativity and order, which is something that Singh, with his dispersed identity and affiliations, has never been able to discern in his own undertakings. The order he is aiming at now has a different logic of time and place.

During the writing process Singh's impressions of his own actions alter. He had placed his marriage and his political career, the active part of his life, in "parenthesis". He had felt that they were "aberrations, whimsical, arbitrary acts which in some way got out of control." (183). Now he begins to doubt whether any action is after all totally arbitrary or dishonest. He also begins to doubt whether personality is formed from other people's views and ideas, as he had thought it was when he kept adopting roles that others had seen as fitting for him (183). The writing becomes an end in itself; the recording of a life becomes an extension of that life (244).

In the anonymous suburban hotel where Singh writes his book, he finds, for the first time, a concrete order which exists in observable reality and not in books or private images. This order he sees in small things, like an accurate timetable, regular dinner and breakfast times, the unchanging order of the scarce furniture and the overall constant tidiness of the hotel. It is remarkable that, as he begins to create order for his own past and memories, he also begins to see order around him for the first time. This implies that, as he begins to achieve a meaningful relation to his memories, through producing a new meaning to his past actions via narration, he also achieves one to his actual present life and surroundings.

After arranging his past into a narrative, Singh feels that he is at the beginning of a new life (250). He feels ready for fresh action, this time the action of a free man (251), who has defined himself and is free of other people's views. As Nightingale (119) notes, it is at the beginning of the writing process that Singh first learns to see

some truth and meaning in his undertakings (marriage and politics) that he was previously unable to find. It can be deduced that, at this stage, he began to understand the nature of the roles he had adopted; that they were not wholly arbitrary, and that they after all represented parts of his identity. Now at the end of the process, he once again sees them as dishonest and arbitrary (251). This is because he now, after having created a past of his own and consequently a more harmonious identity, emphasizes the faulty side of the roles that were forced upon him from the outside. Lindroth (529) sees Singh as having moved from the area of mimicry to that of mimesis, the authentic creative action. Through his narrative he has freed himself from the repetitious cycle of roles.

Hayden White (1973 31-38, 1978 1-25) sheds light on this process by which the subjects endow the world and their experiences of it with meaning. He argues that narrative discourse is itself a kind of model of the processes of consciousness, that the mind functions according to the same kind of logic as that through which semantic meaning spreads in narrative. To describe the functioning of these figurative moves, he introduces the notion of *tropology*. Tropology works via the semantic relationships implied by linguistic tropes. Narrative is the product of efforts by the consciousness to come to terms with problematical areas of experience. The four "master tropes" of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony in the realm of language correspond to the successive stages of the consciousness in its effort to produce meaningful relationships between experiences, and consequently a harmonious identity.

The tropological process can be briefly outlined as follows. At the metaphorical level of consciousness, no ordering of the elements within perception (e.g. experiences or memories) has been made. There appears to be no meaningful connection between them, and the subject is in a state of bewilderment. He/she does not know what to make of the experiences under observation. At the next level, the metonymic, there occurs an integration of these elements of reality (or experiences of it) within different orders, classes, species etc. This is fitting, because the metonymic relationship requires that some kind of connection between the experiences thus ordered be

known. Now the subject begins to discern meaningful relationships between his/her experiences; they become understandable and make sense. At the synecdochic level, these classes and orderings are then re-examined to find out how much the previous metonymic classifications fail to take account of certain features of the experiences thus classified. Again there is a correspondence, because the trope of synecdoche requires a relationship of the part to the whole to be known. Different parts of the `wholes` formed at the metonymic stage are here being re-examined to find out whether all their features really fit in. The subject realizes, that some aspects of the experiences that seemed totally understandable at the metonymic level do not make sense after all. The categories have to be re-arranged. Finally, at the ironic stage there appears self-reflection in the attempt to determine how much this way of ordering reality and experience, this one way of looking at things, is the product of the subject's own needs, and why it could not be ordered otherwise.

These, according to White, are the stages which consciousness goes through in the process of giving meaning to reality and the experiences of it. This ordering is the action the subject performs when confronted by the often antagonistic social, cultural and political discourses of surrounding reality, or when re-arranging past experiences for the purposes of self-definition. In other words, by plotting experiences as in a narrative the subject gives meaning to his/her world.

It is illuminating to present the above described development of Singh via this concept of tropology. Singh is creating order by producing meaningful relationships between his experiences through narration. It was noted above that the order Singh creates through this re-arrangement of past experiences is not similar to the logico-developmental order of the Western mode of historical discourse. Rather, his order can be seen as functioning through the logic provided by White's idea of tropology. As this tropological process advances, the subject gradually forms re-arranged "domains of experience" (White, 1978 5).

As indicated above, according to White no substantial ordering or integrating of experiences in the memory has happened at the metaphorical stage. When Singh begins his memoir, he is at this

stage and continually complains about the arbitrariness of his experiences and the lack of order in the surrounding circumstances (e.g. 36). In the course of his writing, he proceeds to the metonymic level. Metonymy by definition refers to a known relationship between entities. Gradually, Singh learns to discern truth and meaning in his undertakings, for instance in his roles as politician or husband. He has learned to integrate his experiences, to "assign them to different orders, classes, genera, species" (White, 1978 6). It follows that he begins to question the arbitrariness and whimsicality of his actions and to question whether his personality is formed through the vision of others (183). He realizes that his roles had not been wholly arbitrary, but that there had been a connection, an understandable relationship between himself and them; they presented a part of his identity. The metonymic stage reduces phenomena so that a part of them becomes to stand for the whole. Singh now discerns relationships between his experiences and roles: he realizes that there is a connection, after all. He then moves to the synecdochic level. Synecdoche refers to the relationship of a part to a whole. At this stage the subject begins to examine to what extent the previous ordering fails to take account of certain features of the experiences thus ordered. Now Singh once again sees his roles as fraudulent (251), because he now understands that they only represented a part of his identity, only a part of the whole, and that the previous metonymic relationship appears imperfect when examined in more detail. His roles represented in the end only a part of his identity, but now he integrates these parts into the whole domain of experience, which is his re-arranged past. At the last stage, the ironic, the subject achieves a certain level of self-reflexivity and becomes capable of discerning to what extent some particular way of ordering experiences is meant to serve his/her own interests and to what extent it differs from some other ways of ordering experience. Singh does now realize that the order he imposes on his history will have to be other than that of the traditional Western narrative sequence, which would only produce more disturbance in his life (243).

So in the process of writing Singh finds, or creates, meaningful relationships between his memories and experiences. Consequently,

he now also sees in his present surroundings an order he had not discerned when he began writing.

Time and space in the new order

Singh has spent his life looking for a remedy for the disorder and restlessness he feels. Now he has achieved order by creating it himself. But this order and its temporal structure do not work purely according to the traditional laws of Western fictional or historiographic discourse, which sees time as a linear continuum along which events are placed so that causal relationships can be discerned between them. Singh's order has a logic different from that of the histories of the Aryans, the histories of Rome, or the descriptions of London and Britain. Compared to these, his order seems to connect temporal dimensions and places quite arbitrarily.

When Singh writes in his London hotel about the fear he had experienced as a child of their house tumbling down on Isabella, he combines in his mind the houses surrounding him in London and the houses typical of Isabella, which he wants never to see again. He then reflects on his own thoughts:

Certain emotions bridge the years and link unlikely places. Sometimes by this linking the sense of place is destroyed, and we are ourselves alone: the young man, the boy, the child. The physical world, which we yet continue to prove, is then like a private fabrication we have always known. (154)

Here Singh is observing two different times and places, two different realities, imaginary (memory) and real (present perception), at the same time and as a result experiences a feeling of placelessness. This happens because, as noted in the earlier discussion of Bhabha and Jameson, these different dimensions or realities cannot be properly united in the observation although they are both present in it, because they somehow seem to occupy the same space. The result is that Singh in a way moves to a third space, which is neither that of past images of memory (Isabella) or that of the present observation of actual reality (surroundings in London), but a mixture of these two. This process

causes one dimension of the three-dimensional "physical world" of perception to vanish, and the dimension of the imaginary past to emerge instead. This results in a "private fabrication" which is precisely the mixture of the differing realities of the actual and the imaginary. The personal history Singh is writing is this kind of "private fabrication". This history forms into a kind of area of the mind, where incommensurable realities can be united. At the same time he is writing his identity anew, refiguring his life story.¹ This dimension also corresponds to Jameson's new aesthetics of information, which combines incompatible discourses without a feeling of estrangement (375).

Singh does not begin his narrative from his childhood, but from his first arrival in London. He writes:

Yet less than twenty years after Mr Shylock's death, with this journey to London which I feel is final, sealing off such experience and activity as were due to me, my present mood leaps the years and all the intervening visits to this city - [---] - leaps all this to link with that first mood which came to me in Mr Shylock's attic; so that all that came in between seems to have occurred in parenthesis. (10)

When Singh arrives in London for the last time, he instantly compares the new arrival and the new accommodation to those of the first time. As he does this, the past becomes part of the present.²

¹ Hannah Arendt has stated that, to be able to properly answer the question "who?" is to tell the story of a lifetime. This story will describe the actions of this "who", and the person will be defined by what her/his actions have been. According to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, it follows that the identity of this "who" must be a narrative identity. He goes on to explain: "[This] identity rests on a temporal structure that conforms to the model of dynamic identity arising from the poetic composition of a narrative text. The self [---] may then be said to be refigured by the reflective application of such narrative configurations." (246) In other words, as with Hall, White, and Bhabha the defining feature of this identity is its narrativity. It follows that the temporal structure of a narrative discourse created by a person, e.g. a novel, is congruent with the structure of the identity of this person. Also, the person becomes both the reader and writer of his own life. "[a] story of a life continues to be refigured by all the truthful or fictive stories a subject tells about him/herself. This refiguration makes this life itself a cloth woven of stories told." (Ricoeur 246). This is exactly the case with Singh. He is refiguring his past and himself through his narrative of mixed history and fiction.

² This temporal and spatial jump responds to one of the features listed by Rosemary George as typical of migrant literature. She states (183) that, in this literature, no event or place is recorded except in terms of its difference or similarity to earlier events of a similar nature. According to her, this kind of structure results in the narrative present functioning

The novel abounds in these kinds of temporal and spatial jumps. For instance, on page 38 there is discussion of Singh's hair. First an Isabellan barber, then Lieni in London before that, then Lord Stockwell in London and then back to Isabella. At the beginning of section five in part two (153) Singh describes the house of his mother's family on Isabella when he was a child. This is followed by discussion of the house of his own family, the house in London in which he is writing now, the houses he had seen in photographs when he came to London for the first time, the other houses in their street on Isabella, and his grandparents' house as it was when he came back to Isabella from London. There is order and logic in the narration, but it is structured so that all the time there are two or more times and places present. The sign 'house' is defined by corresponding past and future signs (houses) that represent various temporal, spatial and cultural dimensions, as well as various cultural discourses to which the person has some kind of affiliations. This kind of temporality is "the doubleness in writing that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic" as Bhabha (141) puts it. Also, these events "stem from different zones of time or from unrelated compartments of the social and material universe" (Jameson 373).

The third dimension as narrativization of the self

Bhabha (37) speaks about a third space (*a Third Space of enunciation*) that can be achieved by moving through the realms of pedagogical and performative.³ According to him, all texts are written in

mainly as a frame that is placed around multiple layers of memories (184). George (171-197) defines a sub-category in the field of postcolonial writing that she calls *immigrant literature*. According to her, the characteristic features of this type of literature include the following: "disregard for national schemes", "narrative tendency towards repetitions and echoes", a detached relationship to the surrounding discourses and the continuous examination of the present in close relationship to the past and the future. All of these features are to be found in Singh's narration.

³ Bhabha's third space is comparable to the "third time" formulated by Ricoeur (245): "The mimetic activity of a narrative may be schematically characterized as the invention of a third time constructed over the very fracture whose trace our aporetic has brought

this contradictory and ambivalent cultural space, which proves the originality and purity of all cultures to be an illusion. Singh and his text of contradictory discourses fit well with this statement.

According to White (1978 3),

(---) the discourse is intended to *constitute* the ground whereon to decide *what shall count as a fact* in the matters under consideration and to determine *what mode of comprehension* is the best suited to the understanding of the facts thus constituted. (original emphasis)

The mode of comprehension Singh chooses in order to gain an understanding of his own activities and identity is that of a personal history, constructed as a third dimension, which mingles two discourses and the notions of time and logic belonging to them.

I have tried to show how Singh starts at the stage of dispersion caused by the cultural situation and history of his home island and how this dispersion only gets worse as he leaves to study in London. Only as he writes his memoir does he gradually begin to achieve a meaningful picture of himself and the surrounding world. I have also tried to describe the peculiar logic and temporality of Singh's narrative, or "mode of comprehension", as White would describe it. Singh's is a narration used for the purposes of self-definition and therefore it does not follow the traditional Western ideas of linear time dotted with events defined by causal relationships between them. In this case all the time dimensions exist in the same space, are present at the same time, and events are defined along the principle of similarity to each other. In the postcolonial context of large and frequent geographical, as well as cultural, mobility this leads to texts that often appear highly fragmented with their swift changes of setting and time.

With reference to the citation from White on the previous page, Singh's narrative has "constituted" a ground on which things like a

to sight." The aporia, or irresolvable contradiction, in question can be seen here as the difference between the personal time of memories and the official, objectivated time of historiography.

mixture of English garden and Isabellan mud and grass village shall "count as a fact". He also grows to understand that the "mode of comprehension" best suited for understanding facts thus constituted is not "a narrative in sequence" (243). With his mixture of real and imaginary, and of discourses coming from outside and those originated by himself, Singh has created Bhabha describes as a "third cultural space". It would seem that the most correct description of Singh's situation at the end of his writing process is presented by Nana Wilson-Tagoe:

Singh's illumination appears in the end not an admission of defeat but a triumph of assessment, a personal sense of history *which overcomes the illusion of order and continuity and transcends the disintegration of defeat and failure* (67) (emphasis added)

In other words, he transcends both the effects of disillusionment with the order promised by Western discourse, and the effects of the feeling of disorder caused by his postcolonial displaced origin. This he gains by the narrative re-arrangement of the past. The antagonistic components of migrant experience cannot be done away with. The question is how to cope with them, how to create a meaningful relationship between these incongruous experiences.

University of Turku

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