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Tal transposición respondió en buena medida a una concepción racializada de la historia según la cual los esclavos de Haití, por ser negros y de origen africano, no podían representar ideales tan magnos como la Libertad y la Historia Universal—así, con mayúscula.

No empece su crítica profunda a la construcción hegeliana de la “historia universal”, Buck-Morss está lejos de repudiar tal concepto. Al contrario, en el segundo ensayo que compone su libro, titulado precisamente “Universal History”, la autora reclama la necesidad de recuperarlo, si bien transformándolo de manera que Occidente no sea concebido como el eje único y absoluto de una historia universal. De concretarse su llamado a radicalizar el concepto de la “historia universal”, la historia de Haití y de los esclavos que lucharon por la libertad—por la de ellos, sin duda, pero metafóricamente también por la de muchos otros humanos—jugaría, seguramente, no el papel marginal que ha ocupado hasta ahora en los relatos históricos, sino un papel central y determinante. Ello, entre otras cosas, porque entonces los esclavos rebeldes de ese diminuto y, hoy en día, empobrecido país caribeño pusieron a prueba, machete y tea en mano, los límites de las ideas de la Ilustración, las cuales siguen, en el presente, moldeando muchas de nuestras nociones acerca de lo que implica ser humano.

#### Referencia

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.

**Gillian Dooley. 2006. *V.S. Naipaul: Man and Writer*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press. 184 pp. ISBN: 978-1-57003-587-6.**

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**T**his book about Naipaul is the best introduction to nearly all of Naipaul’s work which has been published in book form. It is a judicious, comprehensive and skilful work that illuminates this

controversial writer while focussing on what makes Naipaul important—his writing not his political views or inclinations.

This is a short work of twelve chapters. Starting with an introductory chapter that briefly discusses Naipaul's life and his views on writing it is then organized chronologically. *Miguel Street*, *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* are examined as “apprentice pieces”: Dooley discusses each work in turn and then provides some valuable comments on Naipaul's development as a writer. The next chapter is devoted to *A House for Mr Biswas*, and two other works are discussed in single chapters. Usually Dooley's analysis proceeds by grouping two or three works (fiction and non-fiction are treated separately) in a chapter, with the final chapter of analysis devoted to Naipaul's last three novels, *A Way in the World*, *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds*. In her conclusion she draws together the strands of her argument and analysis.

The chronological method is suited for following Naipaul's development as a writer—his search for new material and new forms to express himself and what he sees as a too often simplified version of reality. Dooley elucidates Naipaul's anti-ideological and highly critical attitudes to what he sees as this persistent simplifying and shows how it works in his fiction and appears more overtly in his non-fiction. She does not avoid the various criticisms of Naipaul but tends, quite rightly, to show how often these are based on the work being examined not closely enough or the confusion between fiction and non-fiction. In discussing *Guerrillas* she also mentions his long piece “Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad” using the same material but discusses it in the following chapter. This is one case where the non-fiction is much better than the fiction and Dooley seems to miss a trick here by not examining them together and explaining why this should be so. Part of the reason is, she has already pointed out, that Naipaul was not a dramatic writer and tries to be so here. She is, however, quite prepared to point out Naipaul's inconsistencies and absurdities. Two examples will suffice. On pages 31 and 32 she shows with subtlety how Naipaul's desire to demonstrate that he, or rather *A House for Mr Biswas*, has no universal significance is merely wrong and slightly perverse. Later in the book she comments on *Reading and Writing: A Personal Account*: “One has the impression with these pieces that Naipaul's fascination with his own career is beginning to border on obsession” (p. 120). Anyone who reads *A Writer's People*, published after her own book was, can only be struck by the aptness of this comment.

The three works chosen for special treatment are *A House For Mr Biswas*, *In a Free State* and *The Enigma of Arrival*. In any discussion of Naipaul's work *Mr Biswas* would merit special treatment. It is the one thing about Naipaul that finds almost universal agreement. Dooley

skillfully analyses the novel and brings out its qualities. Her treatment may not add anything new but this is in any case difficult to achieve with this particular novel. The second and third choices, however, may raise a few eyebrows. The clue lies in the chapter title—"Finding the Correct Form: *In a Free State*." Dooley lays out clearly the evidence that Naipaul was determined to find the right, or at least a better, form for his long fiction for some time, believing that the nineteenth century form of the novel was not suited to his intention. It is slightly surprising, and Dooley is perhaps too polite to point this out, that Naipaul who had studied English Literature at Oxford University presented this as an epic, indeed unique search, not seem to know or acknowledge that much of twentieth century fiction had much the same object—perhaps it is an example of Naipaul's contrary nature that he eschewed the models already there and in a very Naipaulian touch thereby denied their existence. *In a Free State* marks the beginning of Naipaul's search for a form which will match the demands of his material in the way that the nineteenth century novel matched the demands of the social and political world of nineteenth century Europe. As a work she makes no great claims for its quality. What she has done is to identify it as an important stage that allows Naipaul to write *The Enigma of Arrival* (and *A Way in the World*). In these "sequences" (his preferred term) Naipaul more successfully in the first conveys the dislocations of the contemporary world. Dooley quite rightly sees *The Enigma of Arrival* as a masterpiece.

The one book by Naipaul published after Dooley's work reveals one aspect of his writing that she does not deal with: his critical writings. *A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling* (2007) shows him at his best and worst. His discussion of Flaubert and why *Salambo* is bad and *Madame Bovary* a masterpiece shows him at his best. His discussion, however, of other West Indian writers is condescending and he manages to convert Derek Walcott into an inferior twin of himself—Walcott would later respond in an even more offensive fashion by attacking Naipaul in doggerel. Both came out of this exchange with damaged reputations. Worst of all is his discussion of Rahman Khan's *Jeevan Prakash* [*The Light of Life*]. On the basis of an English translation of a Dutch translation of only part of a work Naipaul has chosen to pronounce on Khan's qualities as a writer and the failings of Indian writers in general. It is quite probable that his low opinion of Khan's work is merited; what critics have pointed out is how slender the evidence for this judgment is and how sweeping and ignorant his dismissal of Indian writers. It is this tendency of Naipaul's in less considered mode (that is, neither in his fiction nor non-fiction but usually in interviews and slighter pieces) to set himself up as an authority on matters on which he is less of an expert than he thinks that leads one to agree with Linton Kwesi Johnson's blunt but

fair assessment “he talks a load of shit but still writes excellent books.”

Patrick French’s *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V.S. Naipaul* (2008) reveals a great deal of the hard work that Naipaul put into his writing: its revelations about his personal life tell us little about his quality as a writer; its literary judgments are often flawed. In one respect French’s biography supplements Dooley on literary matters: his description of Naipaul’s links with his fellow West Indian writers in London and his continuing connection with Trinidad helps to place him firmly within West Indian writing. Dooley’s concentration on Naipaul obscures the extent to which many of his West Indian contemporaries were experimenting with form for much the same reasons that he was seeking to escape the traditional novel. Wilson Harris is the most notable of these but Sam Selvon’s *Lonely Londoners*, Edgar Mittelholzer’s *A Morning at the Office*, Lindsay Barret’s *A Song for Mumu*, for example, remind us how widespread that need to seek new forms was. As Lloyd King points out in the best review of French’s book (in the *Trinidad and Tobago Review* [December 2008]) French is weak on Naipaul’s West Indian context and thus fails to understand much including the significance of *The Middle Passage* in forming opposition to Naipaul among West Indians (Though Dooley may suffer similarly her superiority as a critic excuses much). French, however, explains why Naipaul was so insistent on wanting to escape the label of West Indian writer: one critic he quotes amalgamated (and hyphenated their names) Selvon, Mittelholzer and George Lamming into a composite West Indian writer (few critics are as good as Dooley but one requirement for any critic should be reading the work; anyone who thought Selvon, Lamming and Mittelholzer were the same type of writer had obviously not read them). Dooley had commented that Naipaul’s “dislike [of being labelled in any way] arises from a personal fear of being subjected to such imposition” (p. 35). French’s biography also helps us to understand why certain events appear in *Guerrillas* and *A Bend in the River* and disrupt both novels. Dooley, without alluding to Naipaul’s private life and probably not knowing the details, analyses the failure of both novels, explaining why the latter novel is not the masterpiece that some contemporary critics mentioned by French thought it was. If you want to see how good Naipaul is compare *Guerrillas* with Robert Antoni’s *Carnival*—the worst novel of a great writer is better than the over-praised work of a lesser writer, despite similarities in their maladroit handling of themes of race and sex. If, however, you wisely wish to resist that suggestion and want to read a book that explains and encourages you to read Naipaul’s best work Gillian Dooley’s book is the place to start.