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The Shadow of Hanuman: V.S. Naipaul and the “Unhomely” House of Fiction

Jennifer Rahim

anthuriumcaribjournal@gmail.com

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The search for habitable forms to house his fictional and non-fictional material has always preoccupied V.S. Naipaul. This concern with the means of narration is largely rooted in his acute awareness of himself as a writer of Indian descent, originating from the West Indian island of Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad’s multicultural composition with its history of colony and location in the mouth of the Orinoco river of Venezuela made it, according to Naipaul, “not strictly of South America, and not strictly of the Caribbean” (Two Worlds” 183). He thereby draws attention to a creative sensibility shaped by having been historically positioned, like his native geography, in-between worlds, on the shifting ground of contentious epistemological battles, socio-political reconstructions, and cultural negotiations between natal and adopted traditions set in motion by Europe’s expansion into the New World. In a reflection on the relationship of a writer with such a background to the literary traditions he inherited as a colonial subject, Naipaul makes the following point about the novel:

It is something that people in my culture have borrowed from other people and the danger is that we tend ... to recreate an alien form, an alien novel, the whole form and concept of life is totally alien to the society. We impose one on the other. My attempt has been, in a way, to dredge down a little deeper to the truth about one’s own situation. (Qtd. in Cudjoe 28).

The creative dredging of “situation” for what might be considered an organically derived aesthetic response to experience, with all its implied ideological tensions and power relations, no doubt brought the early recognition of his complex relationship to the act of narration. Naipaul’s intercultural inheritance meant that he would have been inescapably inserted into the European literary tradition of his colonial education, the influence of a West Indian folk tradition and, of course, the myths of his Hindu ancestral affiliation. In the case of the latter, Selwyn Cudjoe, for instance, posits a credible argument for the author’s “creative transformation of Hindu classical literature” in his early fiction (64).¹ He argues that in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, “the author inverts and destroys” the narrative unity of the *Ramayana* epic of Rama and Sita to capture the “historical reality” of a Biswas and Shama set adrift in the “disunity of the new world” (Cudjoe 64-65). Further, he notes that the benevolent ally of Rama, the monkey-God, Hanuman, becomes, in the author’s remaking, the “slightly sinister” deity that oversees more than adorns the Tulsi’s family-house (Cudjoe 70).

This paper is primarily interested in Naipaul’s figurative evocation of the monkey figure in two texts. In his epic novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Hanuman plays a significant symbolic role in the text’s quest plot. Apart from the statue that crowns the balustrades of Hanuman House, life-size images of the deity adorn its interior pillars and so echo the Chaguanas, Indian-style house of Naipaul’s maternal grandmother where he grew up (“Two Worlds” 187). The figure also appears in his personal essay, “Prologue to an Autobiography” (1982), but more obliquely. There, he describes his posture as he wrote the stories of *Miguel Street* (1959), in the BBC freelancers’ room as a “monkey crouch” (“Prologue” 60). Both texts

invite consideration of the monkey, as a sign of a poetics of consciousness and style, grounded, though not solely contained, in the inescapable Hindu sensibility of his upbringing.

New World writers have always searched for aesthetic strategies to represent the complexity of their diverse, diasporic societies given their long histories of anti-imperial struggle as inheritors of multiple, though not always equally valued knowledge systems and cultural traditions. In the process of developing a literature of their own, the creative turn of writers from subject societies to the belief systems, myths, and folk narratives of their various ancestral pasts has been pivotal in asserting cultural agency against oppressive regimes, as well as for articulating the emergence of new identity spaces formed by cross cultural contact. Much like the ever-popular spider, Ananse, one such folk figure that has been a seminal aesthetic force in the articulation of a New World poetics is the trickster-monkey.

Understandably, given the long history of trans-Atlantic slavery, African-derived origins of the monkey-myth have enjoyed some prominence in the New World imagination. Henry Louis Gates, for instance, notes that it has enjoyed a significant place in the mythologies and rhetorical practices of the African diaspora, inclusive of the Caribbean. He argues that the trickster topos which appears as a monkey, sometimes as a black small man, is the Pan-African relative of the divine trickster/linguist of the Yoruba tradition, Esu-Elegbara, also known also known as the crossroads God, Legba in the Fon tradition.² Monkey myths, however, display diverse origins and cross-cultural links. Josè Piedra's study "From Monkey Tales to Cuban Songs: On Signification" draws attention to this fact, arguing that the "extraordinary Monkey" in New World traditions has appeared "under many guises, names and cultural origins" that derive from not only African, but also "Egyptian, Celtic and Indian mythologies."³

This transcultural character of the monkey topos, therefore, consciously or unconsciously marks the collective mythopoetic imagination of the diverse ethnic groups that comprise the Americas. All these worlds and their traditions constitute a psycho-cultural dialectic of imagination and form what Harris would call the voices of "a murmuring vibration in the Shadow-organ of space," where he argues one "could hear one's voice issuing from the body of a stranger" (Wilson *Four Banks*, 153).⁴ In exploring V.S. Naipaul's deployment of the monkey-figure, this paper gives focus to the literary uses of the Hindu deity, Hanuman, its Asian relative. Yet in doing so, it is cognizant of the author's positioning as a diasporic Indian whose cultural sensibilities have been impacted upon by several mythological traditions. Monolithic or ethnocentric readings of the monkey topos will no doubt limit the interpretative possibilities of New World writers whose imperial histories have ideologically and aesthetically un-housed them in more ways than one, and whose social milieus require that they simultaneously engage several cultural histories, geographical spaces and narrative traditions in their search for stylistic strategies to accommodate the complexity of their worlds.

The aesthetic outcome of this experience of displacement Homi Bhabha sees manifested as the "unhomely" in today's "House of Fiction." ("The World and the Home" 141). Foremost in

his mind is the experience of writers whose fictions “negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions” that pivot around agonising ancestral dislocations, fragmentations and inevitable renewals that are “paradigmatic” of the postcolonial experience. Bhabha’s interpretation of Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*, for instance, points to the text’s “tragic-comic failure to create a dwelling place” for the protagonist as evidence of “the *shock* [italics mine] of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world” (142). He calls the resultant blurring of the borders between private and public space, past and present time, inside and outside positions “the unhomely moment” which “creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow” (“The World” 141-42). In other words, it is an occasion of existential crisis and collapse when the self recognizes its shadow (self) as not quite the same, as altered by the presence of an Other/other.⁵ In the turmoil of that recognition “another world becomes visible (“The World” 141), and makes absolute returns to old identities and cultural spaces impossible. It is therefore in the context of such destabilizing processes of change and the struggle to make a place for oneself in an uncertain world that this examination of Naipaul’s textual evocations of the monkey totem is read.

Nowhere does Naipaul express his intellectual and spiritual terror of the world he inherited more cogently than the parallel he creates between himself and the story of exile enacted in the Ramlila. In *Reading and Writing* (2000), he writes: “the story of Rama’s unjust banishment to the dangerous forest was something I had always known. It lay below the writing I was to get to know later in the city, the Anderson and Aesop I was to read on my own, and the things my father was to read to me” (12-13).

That theme of exile therefore existed as the subtext of all the writing he was exposed to, and one could assume, would later write. It is manifested most acutely as a fear of abandonment and annihilation echoed, for instance, in Mrs Tulsis’s pronouncement after the birth of Biswas’s daughter Savi that his children, “would survive: they couldn’t be killed” (*House* 533). It surfaces again in the final chapter of *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), “The Ceremony of Farewell,” where Naipaul recalls the puja he attended for his deceased sister, Sati. In the midst of loss and death, an almost unbelievable realization of survival dawns that simultaneously discloses the pre-existent cloud of terror and doubt: “We had made ourselves anew. ... There was no ship of antique shape now to take us back. We had come out of our nightmare; and there was nowhere else to go” (*Enigma* 317).

Cudjoe’s careful analysis of *A House for Mr. Biswas* as a reinvention of the *Ramayana* epic to represent the “ambiguity of a new social situation” (65), is therefore corroborated by Naipaul’s personal affinity to the Ramlila and gives further credence to the author’s methodology of mythological reconstruction as a means of narrating New World experience. Interestingly, however, while the Rama/Biswas, Sita/Shama reversal is noted, along with the “scarcely” distinguishable “whitewashed features” of the Hanuman statue perched on the Tulsi’s mansion (*House* 81), Cudjoe does not draw attention to the deity’s role as storyteller. According to Philip Lutgendorf, the “*Ramayana* tradition” holds that Hanuman is “the original narrator of

the tale of Rama,” but his “perfect narrative became irretrievably ‘lost,’ surviving only in fragments through the lenses of human storytellers: Valmiki, Kampan, Krittibasa, Tulsidas, and so on” (35).

In the Hindu pantheon writing is more readily associated with Lord Ganesha, the elephant-God, whom Naipaul evokes in *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), a satirical account of the would-be writer, Ganesh Ramsumair. However, Lutgendorf reminds us that Hanuman traditionally holds the status of divine storyteller whose tale is further authenticated by the fact that he is a key participant. His “lost” but intentionally “pure” *Ramayana* text and its subsequent retellings transfer the tale from a sacrosanct “truth” narrative to the subjective and re-creative terrain of storytelling and myth. In so doing, attention is drawn to the flexibility and open-endedness of all signification practices. Notions of originality and authenticity are therefore brought into question. In this regard, Robert Antoni’s *Divina Trace* (1991) is of interest since his text notably transgresses these borders in its radical reconstruction of the *Ramayana* as a New World creation story.

Section two of the novel, “A Piece of Pommerac,” features Hanuman in three related but disparate discourses. Ultimately all versions escape complete decipherability due to character doublings, multiple narrators, role reversals and, in the case of the middle book, “Hanuman Speaks of the Monkey Tribes,” a coded “monkey language” that parodies the “truth” claims of all signification practices and discourses whether scientific, philosophical or religious. The institutionalized indicators of textual authority and authenticity such as linearity, rationality and originality are thereby displaced. In these versions, Hanuman is not the original narrator of the Rama and Sita tale as tradition holds, but the “cuss” wielding “monkeyscribe” of a “yana” dictated by a deceased “Uncle Valmiki,” the Caribbean transmutation of the revered creator of the *Ramayana* archetype, Valmiki.

In Antoni’s retelling, the very notion of “creative mimicry” is turned on its head as the epic poet is the deified muse who dictates to a self-doubting less than extraordinary monkey that can “only scribble verbatim what he me tell” (*Divina Trace* 214). Yet mimicry as mere copying is undermined as Hanuman re-produces the master’s text in “mirror-form” or “reverse” of what he hears, as well as invents. Hanuman is not the dependable guide of religious lore, but a partial narrator of Corpus Christi’s fragmentary history, where factual discontinuities, faith and cultural diversities are enmeshed in a seemingly unending genealogy of cross-fertilizations that comprise an as yet not fully decipherable Creole nation-story.

Conversely, Naipaul makes no overt connection between the narrator of *A House for Mr. Biswas* and Hanuman; however, the deity hovers in the shadows of the text’s omniscient narrator, who in turn is but a shadow of the author. Additionally, the imaginative licence he takes with the *Ramayana* is arguably less transgressive than Antoni’s. Yet, *A House for Mr Biswas* writes back to the “master” texts of the author’s ancestral tradition by making its content relative to his historical context. The novel not only invites cognizance of the crisis of signification in the

changing social ethos of colonial Trinidad, but in its indigenization of the Rama and Sita myth adds a New World version to Hanuman’s mythic long tail/tale.⁶ Therefore, Biswas’s unaccommodated state which fuels his agonized search for a literal and existential architectural fit is arguably analogous to the author’s own search for a house of style, coming from a context where, as Bhabha argues, the aesthetic and ideological assumptions inherent in Iris Murdoch’s claim that the “novel must be a house for free people to live in” (qtd. in Bhabha, “The World” 142), is incompatible with the myriad historical displacements of the postcolonial experience. Bhabha provocatively interrupts the logic of consolidation and closure inlaid in Murdoch’s statement by asking the following questions that all have thematic and structural implications: “Must the novel be a house? What kind of narrative can house unfree people? Is the novel also a house where the unhomely can live?” (“The World” 142).

Certainly, Hanuman House is the overarching symbol of the acute condition of “the unhomely” in the circumstances of Biswas’s story. The slow disintegration of the Tulsi dynasty and Biswas’s sense of existential displacement are, in fact, evidence of the uncomfortable emergence of a new cultural sensibility, national space and world order which he is simultaneously trying to understand and locate himself in. Once inside the Tulsi fortress, it becomes clear that its “thick” stoic walls and windowless rooms are not impervious to the advance of an encroaching world, parodied, for instance, by the household’s adoption of the Christian tradition of eating salmon on Good Friday, the influence, the narrator suggests, of the “orthodox Roman Catholic Hindu Mrs. Tulsi” (*House* 138). Then there is Seth’s exasperated exclamation that “this house is like a republic already” (123) in reaction to Mr. Biswas’s “paddle your own canoe” (107) rebelliousness, a motto that establishes him as a sign of transience that interrupts the accustomed relational frames of the clan, their myths of containment and politics of stability.

Additionally, overseen as it is by the partially recognizable shadow of a “slightly sinister” Hanuman, an aura of duplicity and trickery surrounds the Tulsis’ dwelling where life proceeds in a chimerical mingling of shadow and light, appearance and reality, past and present. These dualities are evident, for instance, in Shama’s prank in providing black stockings for an African customer whom she thinks is unrealistically demanding flesh-coloured ones; Mr. Biswas’s role as the marginalized house fool and pretender; Mrs. Tulsi’s feigned bouts of sickness that mask her authoritarian excesses; and the almost umbilical connection of the modern concrete building to the original termite-eaten house by a wooden bridge. The trauma of change is displayed in the uneasy disparity between the internal life of Hanuman House and the reality of the world outside. The narrator articulates Mr. Biswas’s sense of being ambivalently situated between the old assurances of the now disintegrating feudal law of the Tulsi clan and the attractions of independence offered by the emerging modern nation as follows: “At Hanuman House everything had appeared simple and reasonable. Outside, he was stunned. ... [Yet] in the press of daughters, sons-in-laws and children, he had begun to feel lost, unimportant and even frightened” (*House* 95-96).

In a certain sense, Naipaul's Hanuman is the ambivalent, cross-cultural symbol of discomfiting change. This role as cultural bridge intersects somewhat with a brief appearance of the figure in Lakshmi Persaud's *Butterfly in the Wind* (1990). Early in the novel, Kamala, the young narrator, triumphantly shares her reconciliation with the illogic of a nursery rhyme about a cow that jumped over the moon by interfacing it with a tale her grandmother told about Hanuman who once swallowed the moon, having mistaken it for an "attractive berry" (17). Incidentally, the better known story tells of Hanuman's swallowing of the sun, not the moon, which results in him being wounded by a thunderbolt.⁷ Nevertheless, whether Kamala's recall of the tale is a product of the disorientation caused by the imposed "contrary" material of her Western-style education; a diasporic transmutation of the original on her grandmother's part; or an "error" of memory, the deity fuels an accommodative leap of imagination across the apparently disparate and unevenly valued sources of cultural knowledge.

While the psycho-spiritual disorientation generated by the clash of cultures seems aptly symbolized by the "dark," that is, the perceptual destabilization produced as a result of Hanuman's playful swallowing of the sun/moon, the often traumatic dynamic of cross cultural encounter is quickly resolved as Kamala reasons, "if the moon can be kept in ones mouth, a cow can jump over it" (*Butterfly in the Wind* 17). The effect is that the familiar and unfamiliar find common ground on the basis of a perceived similarity and so evokes, though only superficially, what Wilson Harris theorizes as the creolizing trick of an "involuntary association" in which difference is accommodated via a perceived similarity of traits ("Creoleness" 239). While Harris's theorizing of the process suggests a transforming confluence that disturbs the neat borders that demark otherness, Persaud seems satisfied with maintaining an associative parallel that allows for the recognition, and even appreciation of similarity, but preserves the integrity of the separate cultural traditions.⁸ This careful policing of the borders of difference is perhaps symptomatic of a fear of cultural erosion or even contamination in the burgeoning multicultural environment.

Naipaul, in contrast, offers no simple resolutions. Hanuman is assigned a multi-faceted, contradictory nature by which he is simultaneously prankish, sinister and kind—the ambivalent overseer of a house where worlds intersect, albeit uncomfortably, in Trinidad's changing socio-political and cultural space of which the text is the aesthetic image. This paradoxical play of traits embodied by the monkey god is actually not uncharacteristic since in the Hindu pantheon he belongs to a "class of ambivalent deities," as the eleventh avatar of Rudra/Shiva (the destroyer).⁹ Although the deity's benevolence is popularly recognized in orthodox Hinduism, it is with this tricky, duplicitous trait that Naipaul chooses to negotiate the text's mytho-religious reworking of the Rama and Sita story of exile and homecoming. For Biswas, there is no triumphant return to stability, no illuminated pathway of return to a lost, original home, symbolized in his disconsolate movement from one imperfect, partially completed house to the next.

Yet the evocation of Hanuman’s ambivalent nature provokes a reconsideration of Biswas’s condition as merely one of divine abandonment in the “wilderness” of Trinidad. Rather, one is invited to ask if Naipaul is in fact pointing to the need to reinterpret and rediscover the deity’s meanings and functions in the altered realities of a modern, New World order. Is it possible to suggest that Hanuman has undergone some sort of imaginative and diasporic transformation or maybe even a creolization in socio-cultural conditions where fresh ways of seeing and daring creative methods are required? Is Naipaul teasing out his own aesthetic connection between the New World writer/storyteller and the figure of the monkey?

A response to these questions seems discernable in his “Prologue to an Autobiography” where he takes his time to give details about his writing posture in the BBC’s freelancers’ room, then located in the Langham Hotel:

My shoulders were thrown back as far as they could go; my spine was arched. My knees were drawn right up; my shoes rested on the topmost struts of the chair, left side and right side. So, with my legs wide apart, I sat at the typewriter with something like a monkey crouch. (60)

Though sleight of hand, he returns to the monkey figure about twenty years after it first appeared in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. The pose, he admits to be “unusual,” but seems, in retrospect, to offer it as a kind of trademark or an odd particularity of style, which he remembers holding as he wrote the infectious tales of *Miguel Street*, stories of his early Trinidadian experience. This is a writer who knows the game of self-construction, as well as his relationship to the tricky art of narration as a New World mimic man of style, straddled between streams of narrative, religious and philosophical influences on which he is free to draw. Memory is evoked as the conspiratorial agent that traverses barriers of time, space and consciousness to engineer an imaginative return to the “material” of home from which he had sought to detach himself. That “moment” in the freelancers’ room is therefore staged as a pivotal chapter in his writing journey since it offered him the wisdom that “to write, it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of self-knowledge” (“Prologue” 79).

Further, this strategic positioning of the writer, awkwardly, yet productively constrained by a monkey crouch mirrors his discovery of an economy of style that emerges after much misdirected attempts to write. Naipaul explains that the arrival of the first two sentences, one fact and the other invention, which began the enigmatic story “Bogart” opened the way for the style he adopted, for they had “created the world of the street” and “set up a rhythm, a speed, which dictated all that was to follow” (“Prologue” 58). But the writer, particularly one with a colonial background, is always a kind of mimic man as the image of the monkey self-ironically suggests. So even as one is tempted to claim that he discovers something of an indigenous style in the Langham Hotel, this has to be understood in relation to his as yet unsettled hybridized identity as a colonial caught in an ongoing process of cultural and imaginative “diaspora-ization,” to borrow Stuart Hall’s self-acknowledged “ugly term.”¹⁰

In this regard, a direct connection can be made with James Clifford's "hotel chronotope" and Naipaul's representation of himself as the relocated immigrant, West Indian (monkey) writer.¹¹ The freelancers' room is paradoxically characterized by a "hotel atmosphere," busy with "chat," "movement" on the one hand, and a haughty "Victorian-Edwardian" gloom that evokes the economy of servitude on the other, suggested in his speculation that it might have been a pantry (Naipaul, "Prologue" 60). Histories, cultures, traditions and geographies traffic and interchange as island and metropole, past and present, permanence and temporality, scribal and oral, inspiration and craft, memory and invention come to bear on a location that is plagued by its own uncertainties and governed by transience. Moreover, marked as it is by travel and encounter, it is the quintessential metaphor of the modern, cross-cultural global matrix in which the writer is inserted.

Hybridity and travel are inscribed in Naipaul's self-portrait as the monkey-scribe that imaginatively governs the hotel/writing room. In its capacity as mimic, illusive mischief maker and mocker, the figure functions as an intercultural and transcultural totem of "creative ambivalence" that, in this instance, expands the meaning of Brathwaite's "indigenization" as part of the process of "Caribbean curation," to more actively incorporate both the intercultural and transnational features of Caribbean identity.¹² This radical decentring of cultural and imaginative location perhaps accounts for the fact that unlike *A House for Mr Biswas*, the figure in the "Prologue" is not overtly identified with the Hindu pantheon, leaving it open to the wide play of ethnic and transcultural links to the trait of trickery that informs Naipaul's mythological bank as a New World writer.

One such connection is the crossroads figure of the Afro-Creole Caribbean folk tradition, the spider Ananse that lurks in the shadow of his reference to Earnest Eytte, a fellow freelancer from Guyana.¹³ Naipaul recalls that during thinking pauses in his writing, Eytte habitually swept his hand down his forehead "like a man brushing away cobwebs" (Naipaul, "Prologue" 60), evoking a connection with death, the man and the writing, thereby allegorizing the issue of aesthetic renewal and the (post) colonial writer. This spider "trace," so to speak, which is also a sign of the (spider) monkey, is central to the Caribbean's oral tradition and invites associations with the ritual ending of the storyteller's tale: "crick-crack." The communal and open-ended qualities signal the need for participatory responses such as the one Merle Hodge offers in her novel *Crick Crack Monkey*, the title of which alludes to the characteristic interface of orality with Caribbean literary practice, as well as the creative trickery of narration.¹⁴ The Hindu association is therefore insufficient, since it appears that Naipaul is subtly weaving himself into a more diverse symbolic tradition that includes but expands beyond Hanuman.

Arguably, then, in keeping with the text's subtle intercultural mythological play, the monkey image is further elaborated to interface with the "dancing dwarf," which surfaces in his semi-autobiographical story "How I Left Miguel Street," to which he returns in the "Prologue," as he does with the "Bogart" story. In that story of leave-taking, the protagonist remembers: "I left them all and walked briskly towards the aeroplane, not looking back, looking only at my

shadow before me, a dancing dwarf on the tarmac” (Naipaul, “Prologue” 78). The creature is the shadow of the colonial mimic (monkey) man, a sign of his inescapable and disruptive double-consciousness or more appropriately multiple-consciousness. Of course, several things happen at once. Naipaul as “colonised man” is “tethered” to the complexity of his own shadow that “splits” and (self) satirizes his “presence,” historically fractures and culturally re-synthesises his “being,” located as he is on the ground of creative ambivalence between resistance and assimilation.¹⁵

When he leaves, the many mythological traditions and cultural influences of his formation as an Indian growing up in the multicultural environment of colonial Trinidad leave with him. Like the diminutive, trickster monkey that simultaneously mimics and creatively inspires the young Naipaul at the typewriter, the dwarf with its half-formed, childish nature represents his awareness that he is a physical and literary “small man” seeking to infiltrate, by imaginative cunning, the great tradition of Western literature.¹⁶ More importantly, as it plays mischievously on the airport’s tarmac, the site of departures and arrivals, the creature is the trickster mascot that prefigures the life of writing to which he journeys, just as the “Prologue,” with its intricate plays between fact and fiction, old and new writing acts, foreshadow the “autobiography” to come—most likely *The Enigma of Arrival*. Every act of writing is therefore a shadow of what has gone before in which the distinctions between truth and fiction, as well as the historical past and present are blurred. This accounts for the many returns to previous texts on which the “Prologue” is structured as he moves, step by step, towards fresh ground and insight, hence the logic of his declaration that his “last book contained all the others” (Naipaul, “Two Worlds” 183).

As a symbol of all that lies “outside the orbit of consciousness” (Cirlot (91), a connection is forged between the dwarf and Naipaul’s sense of writing as a mysterious and “intuitive” journey (“Two Worlds” 182-183) to “widening vision and a widening world” (“Foreword to *A House*” 132), which he attains by the incremental accumulation knowledge. This approach to writing as a path to illumination is not merely intellectual, but is also deeply spiritual, having its roots in Naipaul’s belief that he continues a vocation given to him by his father, Seepersad Naipaul, his literary predecessor who chose writing as a “version of the pundit’s vocation” (“Prologue” 96). It is highly significant that the prologue of *The House of Mr. Biswas* ends with an image of the idle, yellow typewriter, since its color is an erratic act of rebellion against the black border that the colonial newspaper *Sentinel* carried in an elaborate show of mourning for the Pope’s death (*House* 13). The typewriter would be the vehicle of illumination against ignorance and the fragmentary knowledge and ideological biases of his colonial formation. Writing in this context seems to intersect with the triumphant dance of Shiva, of whom Hanuman is a manifestation, on the prostrate body of a dwarf.¹⁷ The son, however, would transcend his father’s limitations through the telling of many more tales.

Conclusion

In writing about Kamau Brathwaite's use of the "twin-natured" Ananse and Legba in *The Arrivants* as symbols of the "ambiguity of the New World experience," Gordon Rohlehr draws a useful parallel with Wilson Harris's conviction that the artist must move beyond historical ruin to renewal. He argues that in accordance with this vision, Brathwaite begins with "the image of diminished man - (Ananse, Legba...)" and "moves slowly and circuitously towards a vision of creative possibility," knowing that "it will require a long journey through spiritual time and space, before either the artist or the society is in a position to invoke Ananse in his capacity as 'creator' or Legba in his restored capacity as the god of beginning and rebirth" (195-196). While Naipaul is largely read as being preoccupied with the ruin of history, having as he claims, "come into a world past its peak" (*Enigma* 26), it is possible to discern connections to a similar mythopoetic process of loss and renewal in his deployment of the monkey totem.

Apart from bearing the mark of an ambivalent, dual nature, Hanuman, almost like Legba who is "keeper of the door of the material world and *Les Invisibles*," is literally the wounded, cosmic middleman, half-human and divine, who travels between worlds and builds causeways across oceans (Rohlehr 194).¹⁸ He is an agent of contact who initiates and oversees the disruptive uncertainties that visit re-creative change, a function that is embedded in his connection with Shiva, the deity of change and time or variously "the eater of worlds" who mirrors Hanuman's own ravenous appetite (Lutgendorf 188). In Naipaul's usage, the deity's ambivalent shadow seems to interplay with its many diasporic manifestations as it oversees the necessary movement towards adaptation and survival. The young Naipaul discovers the creative possibilities of such negotiations in the Langham Hotel to which he returns much later with deeper understanding at the memorial puja for his sister, which he remembers is staged on the terrazzo floor of her suburban house and officiated by a comfortably "ecumenical" pundit. In that context, the realization arrives that "we had remade the world for ourselves" (Naipaul, *Enigma* 312-313).

At the conclusion of *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul seems less troubled by the inevitability of cultural confluence and sheds the anxious and guilt-ridden condition of consorting with difference in the Tulsi household in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. This early text shares, but with less defensiveness, Persaud's anxiety about change in *Butterfly in the Wind*, where one can discern the operation of a cautious hybridity that is circumspect about the meeting with cultural difference. For Persaud, Hanuman is a temporary bridge across differences and also preserver of a distinctively Hindu identity placed on the defensive in the Westernised colonial environment of the school. Naipaul is likewise disturbed, however, he seems more accepting, though ironically so, of the ambivalence of being positioned between worlds. He does not display Antoni's recklessly playful deconstruction of cultural borders, although in the "Prologue" his monkey-scribe seems to revel in the creative possibilities of the transnational, "unhomely" imagination, and in *The Enigma of Arrival* the writer appears to acknowledge the miracle of survival in throes of change.

For Naipaul, inherent in what it means of be a writer from the West Indies is the slow and circuitous coming to terms with the fact that structural frameworks and ideological certainties of an old order have been disrupted, leaving in their wake a world without easy closures; no happy returns to ancestral homes; no reassuring retreats to a culturally pure space or group; as yet no ready made architecture of style to contain its new realities. Yet, as a sign of pregnant liminality, clever shape-shifter and restorer of cosmic order empowered to leap through time and space, the figure of Hanuman teases the imagination into a consideration of its function as an appropriate totem for the New World's diasporic ethos of cross cultural confluence and travel, as well as the aesthetic and philosophical embodiment of what is necessary to narrate its stories.

Notes

¹Apart from *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Cudjoe mentions *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* in this regard (63 and 49 respectively).

²See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*, Chapters 1, 5 and 17.

³Jose Piedra, "From Monkey Tales to Cuban Songs: On Signification" (362). He notes its appearance in Cuban discourse the Latin American literature.

⁴Wilson Harris, *The Four Banks of the River Space* (153). Harris quotes this passage from his novel at length in the essay "The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination," in order to make the intricate point about the interconnectivity of inner and outer time, space, consciousness, cultures and bodies that together enact a paradoxical drama of destruction and renewal, guilt and redemption. For Harris the "therapeutic edge" to the histories of violence that wound the collective human psyche is dependent on the bridging and healing of the fissures caused by the failure to visualise "the stranger in ourselves" (258-260).

⁵Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (85-86). He uses the phrase "almost the same, *but not quite*," to refer to the "*ambivalence* of mimicry" where the gap between "imitation" and "mockery" destabilizes the colonizing demand for sameness.

⁶See Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, where he traces the various versions and representations of Hanuman in Hinduism, which includes the story of the magical growth of the deity's tail (35-88).

⁷See Lutgendorf (132). In one of the versions, Hanuman is struck by Indra with a thunderbolt for his deed. The blow leaves him with a permanently disfigured left chin that results in his name that means "one having a distinctive chin."

⁸Interestingly, the same logic of association is repeated later in the text when she is deeply traumatized by her exposure to Catholicism, which she describes as an entry to "a place unknown to her" (141), where "a certain kind of reasoning was beginning to gnaw at the roots of all the things [she] held dear" (144). Any inner turbulence caused is easily resolved by the intervention of her father's swift wisdom. He simply reasons, "one group is using hell to keep us in line and the other is using reincarnation" (146).

⁹Lutgendorf, 44. He also notes the deity's ambivalent positioning between "the dark side of the Vedic cosmos" according to ancient worship and Valmiki's placement of him in the "luminous realm of the celestial Vishnu" in his epic (87-88).

¹⁰Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, 447. Hall uses the term to refer to the "unsettling" process of "hybridization" that characterizes the "black experience," which in his reading of "black" includes the Asian diaspora.

¹¹See James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Chapter 1. He identifies the “hotel chronotope” as representative of the modern metaphor of travel and exchange; one that is plagued by its own “levels of ambivalence” since it is “negatively viewed as transience, superficiality, tourism, exile, and rootlessness,” and “positively conceived as exploration, research, escape and transforming encounter ...” (31).

¹²The term is employed here in Kamau Brathwaite’s sense to mean the “ambivalent acceptance-rejection syndrome” that marks “Caribbean curation” in which “imitation (acculturation)” is the basis for “native creation (indigenization)” (15-16).

¹³Earnest Eytte is best known for his book on Sir Frank Worrell. See *Frank Worrell* with a foreword by Sir Learie Constantine and chapter commentaries by Frank Worrell.

¹⁴See Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack Monkey* (13).

¹⁵Bhabha argues in “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* that “the image of post-Enlightenment man tethered to, *not* confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being” (116).

¹⁶The link lends support to the cross-cultural nuances of monkey/dwarf image.

¹⁷The dance is indicative of the triumph of wisdom over ignorance. See Cirlot (91).

¹⁸Also, Legba is the Fon version of Esu, and as Gates demonstrates is called the “father of the Monkey” in Fon myth (Gates 17).

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