Abstract

V.S. Naipaul’s Guerrillas and A Bend in the River are incorporated within the powerful, all-embracing personal/existential reality of each of the characters. In their world, viewed through their eyes, politics and society and non-existent in the accepted sense, so that the internal and external, once antithetical, are now analogues. The external world of both novels is as chaotic, disordered, violent and almost deranged, as their mental landscapes are. This treatment, containing all the promise of creation, remains unresolved in these novels where it is dramatized as a destructive element.

1 Introduction

In these two novels Guerrillas and A Bend in the River, tension is maintained through implied paradox, the actual story becoming a narrative metaphor for a particular vision of the world. Each novel lays bare the emotional and passionate reality of despair and hysterical fear which underlies the contemporary human situation, ignored, dismissed or suppressed by the general euphoria and optimism generated by incalculable wealth and power. Naipaul reveals the vulnerability of a world which wastes its potential - the sense of a community gone wrong; the protagonist realizes himself as a victim of his environment:

Once it had been a respectable lower-class area, ... But the community once contained in this area of greenery and red roofs and narrow lanes had exploded. Families still lived in certain houses; but many of the houses had become camping places, where young men looked for occasional shelter and an occasional meal, young men who at an early age had found themselves in the streets, without families knowing only the older women of some houses as ‘aunts’. It was a community now without rules; and the area was now apparently without municipal regulation. Empty house-lots had been turned steel-band yards or open-air motor-repair shop... the walls were scrawled, and sometimes carefully marked, with old election slogans, racial slogans, and made-up African names;.....Humour, of a sort, was intended; and it seemed at variance with the words of threat and danger.(Guerrillas, 104).

You mustn’t think its bad just for you. It’s bad for everybody. That’s the terrible thing. It’s bad for Prosper; bad for the man they gave your shop to, bad for everybody. Nobody’s going anywhere ... Nothing has any meaning. That is why everyone is frantic. The bush runs itself. But there is no place
to go to. I’ve been on tour in the villages. It’s a nightmare. All these airfields the man has built, the foreign companies have built—nowhere is safe. (A Bend in the River, 29)

2 Paradoxical Situations
The narrator, able to manifest such paradoxical situations in novels in which meaning does not reside in the actual action, presents a clearer picture of himself as he seeks to hide behind his art, refining himself out of existence. The satiric/ironic self-aware narrator of earlier fiction trying to demonstrate that his third world protagonists are doomed to fall outside their narrow contexts because of their lack of self-awareness, now becomes part of his narrative contexts by refusing to assess it.

3 Jimmy, is a Pathetic Figure
In Guerrillas the narrator’s sympathies are with all the characters. Whilst depicting their actions he simultaneously probes their psyches so that through they are critical of one another. We see them as essentially victims of their situations: their greatness’s are measured against their failures. So that even the worst of them, the murderous gang leader, Jimmy, is a pathetic figure:
She grew heavy; his strength became useless; desolation began to grow on him. And then there was nothing except desolation....
Then he was lost, lost since the beginning of time. But time had no beginning and he was disembodied. He was nothing more than this sense of loss that grew deeper and deeper as he awakened to it.

4 Well-Defined Protagonist
Salim in A Bend in the River is the well-defined protagonist of the novel. He weighs and assesses his various worlds. Yet Salim’s voice as that of the first person autobiographical narrator is finally sympathetic and reductive. He is one of them. The adventurous son of a business and slave-owning family of considerable importance and antiquity on the east coast, he finally admits to Metty, his slave-servant that he is scarcely able to take care of himself. His humiliations resolve themselves into a philosophical understanding of men:
The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it. (9).

5 World of Subjective Reality
In Guerrillas, and A Bend in the River, Naipaul, through the omniscient, impersonal narrator, creates the personal, individualistic, self-aware, self-centred world of subjective reality. The characters, aware of an external world from which they are detached and free-floating, form a community of the fearful and the lost. They communicate with others only in so far as they understand the ‘other’ in terms of themselves, forming a single gigantic world personality. The distinction between the role of the protagonist and the other characters in the novels serves the artistic purpose of verisimilitude and authenticity. Thematically he merges into the qualities of the life of the island and the town in the two novels respectively.

6 Triple Vision
The narrators present to the reader a triple vision in these novels. There is the overall atmosphere of despair, there is the apparently smooth surface of routine in which societies function, where disturbance erupts as if without warning and there is the subliminal-world of subjective reality which is aware of the other two worlds; but this third world has so taken over the personality that as an
active member of society it has ceased to exist. It is here, in the subjective reality of individuals that the reader searches for and finds the genesis of despair. Formed by society, they inject their pessimism, anger, hate and inadequacy into their social situation, sealing off an enclosing world. Hollow at the core, if they move, their movement covers only a short distance between their existential anguish and the smooth surface of the material world. This movement between their two worlds provides relief for it suggests a measure of freedom, of having escaped from a trap, as well as anguish for it denies the stability of a resting place.

### 7 Picture of Despair and Social Breakdown

All the themes of Guerrillas which build up a picture of despair and social breakdown are dramatized by the dual consciousness of the narrator; Alienation from the land, from society and from self - from the important world. It dramatizes not only the static drifting society of the idle and the inactive (no one is seen working for a living - they have no cause for which to fight!) ironically claiming to be doers and saviours, but it also becomes a dialogue between the personal past and person as each character examines and exposes himself or the other, (It takes a public riot, bombings, burnings, acts of sabotage or deep personal injury to activate them only to realize that they are lagging far behind the reality of life on the island). Each one sees himself as a wasted potential, no one more so than Jimmy. His character is most rounded through his writings which enlarge on his fantasies regarding himself; here he exposes his present despair most truthfully as he realizes the distance between the imagined and the actual self. Nobody knows him as well as the reader. To his society he remains an unknown quantity which adds glamour and substance to his reputed personality.

In A Bend in the River the central African state becomes a junkyard for different reasons though its inhabitants are also out of sympathy with the land. Though exploited, its wealth, material and manpower, is far from exhausted. It is choked by its own lushness and richness and the inability of its people to defend themselves and meet the challenges of the modern world. The fatalistic outlook of the past, ‘it will go on’ ‘the town will rise again’ alters into an equally unsatisfactory vision of an Africa which is an abstraction. Neither yields a social vision or lead to responsible action. In this junkyard of obsolete and irrelevant ideas adventurers like Raymond and the Big Man, search for ivory at great risk to their lives. It will go on but it will never be important! Ironically, Raymond, trying to modernize the state, without comprehension of its needs and its potential, with imported ideas, conducting research and writing books on the tribes, is out of sympathy with the land. Later Salim discovers that much of the research has been based on newspaper cuttings. Yvette is more affected by the rebuff she receives from the president, more affected by the rebuff she receives from the President, more involved in her affair with Salim, more concerned with her husband’s future and his present position, than in getting to know the land in which she lives. Similarly Salim, Mahesh and Shobha, Noiman, Nazraddin, all outsiders though not expatriate, feel no links with the town and makes no efforts to establish them. For these people the town is an antagonist which must be mastered and enslaved. They measure their cunning and wit against its trade potential in order to make money, banked abroad, out of its disorder.

### 8 Conclusion

Thus Guerrillas and A Bend in the River, the autobiographical novels of V.S.Naipaul reflects his personal reality. Though Guerrillas is an agonized parody of societal existence and A Bend in the River is a similar parody of individual existence because a man fails to measure accurately the distance between ideas and actuality. The novels together depict the close links
between the individual and his social environment which itself is moulded by geography, history and man’s greed’s.

References