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THE CONCEPT OF MISFIT IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S *THE ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL* AND IN ANITA DESAI'S *BAUMGARTNER'S BOMBAY*

Who is a 'misfit'? "One who is unable to adjust to one's environment or circumstances or is considered to be disturbingly different from others"[1] a typical dictionary entry briefly says; it would be difficult, however to find much more even in the specialised ones. In postcolonial studies 'misfit' is most often incorporated into and discussed within the framework of the literature of exile. 'Exile' itself is an intricate and capacious term, since in course of time it evolved to denote, as Ian Adam justly observes: "both noun and verb...both a physical and a spiritual state ... both a form of punishment and a route to liberation."[2] With its meaning extended so as to fit all shades of the state of homelessness or uprootedness, it becomes more and more vague and the primary notion of 'exile' as a person banished from one's country for political or religious reasons is conveniently pushed to a marginalised position when needed. To satisfy the need for some internal differentiation within 'exile' experience, other terms such as 'expatriate' or 'émigré' have also been suggested by various critics,[3] but those terms still retain political connotations and thus are, to some extent, just another facet of the same notion. Now, what makes the concept of 'misfit' different from the previous terms? For one thing, it is, as such, devoid of the immediate associations with politics and has more of a social or psychological reference. Secondly, what makes 'misfit' really different from 'exile' is that it is focused on an inward look into the protagonist's perception of the world and the self, whereas 'exile', to my mind, forces us to look upon the protagonist from the outside. Obviously in many cases

[1] *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.* (4th ed. Houghton Mifflin Company. 1996–2004 yourDictionary.com, Inc.).

[2] Adam Ian, "Editorial." *ARIEL* vol. 13, no. 4. (1982), pp. 3–4.

[3] See: "exile" in: Bill Ashcroft et al. eds, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 92–94.

'exile' and 'misfit' may be used interchangeably, but not every exile must be a misfit and not every misfit must be an exile. For example, people who, like V. S. Naipaul, are descendants of the indentured slaves born into a new country become its new inhabitants and not exiles in a strict sense of the word. In this article I will try to trace the process of becoming a 'misfit' in postcolonial terms.

The two books I intend to focus on, namely V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), seem to be too distinct to discuss them in relation to each other, since both of them depict different realities (London as the postcolonial centre vs. Indian periphery), occupy different spatial-temporal niche (a move towards the centre vs. a move to the periphery; post-war vs. pre-war times), present divergent racial and cultural backgrounds (black Trinidadian vs. white European), a narrative mode (fictionalized confessional autobiography vs. 3rd person omniscient narrator). What they do have in common, however, is the unified process of becoming a 'misfit' in postcolonial terms. This process is, I believe, intrinsically linked to another postcolonial concept – that of travel and journey, and, as I am going to show, each journey follows the same pattern of three stages: the stage of preconceptions, the stage of journey and finally of arrival. Each stage brings about a different 'outcome' and depending on whether the ultimate 'outcome' is positive or negative (in other words whether it is perceived as a gain or a loss) it affects the perception of the self by the protagonist-travellers and whether they manage to adapt themselves to the new conditions or whether they fail, thus becoming lifelong misfits.

STAGE 1. PRECONCEPTIONS

When we consider a 'misfit' in (post)colonial terms we typically envisage an end-product of disaporic movements enhanced by the imperialistic politics of the time – an alienated, perhaps hapless figure, which cannot adjust to the surrounding environment because of its ostensible (e.g. racial) or latent (e.g. psychological) differences. But are only the existing adverse conditions responsible for this? What is it exactly that made the two protagonists, V.S. Naipaul and Hugo Baumgartner become misfits?

Rana Kabbani in her research into Europe's concepts of Orient *Imperial Fictions* makes an interesting claim on the alleged "victimization" of the Western traveller by the Western, meaning paternalistic and domineering, thus supposedly truthful, scholarship endorsed by the State. She explains this in terms of the State as a political body which disseminates and propagates only censored and previously filtrated image of the political and

cultural Other in order to serve the State's own purposes. Such discourse becomes responsible, in the long run, for "antiquated metaphors and archaic concepts to which the Western traveller is nevertheless inescapably subservient or "victimized". Thus, Chateaubriand, before embarking on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, prepared himself by reading 'a peu près deux cents relations de la Terre – sainte'; *he had made the journey before ever having set foot outside* France.[4]

Making "the journey before ever having set foot outside", in other words our preconceptions, constitute not only the first but also an integral part of the 'real' physical journey. Preconceptions in (post)colonial context play especially crucial role, since they are grounded in the pseudo-scientific research conducted by the Western Empires throughout the ages, although the Orientalist discourse was not formally established until the 19th century. Its impact was enormous, and as Edward Said notices, it became a discipline "by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – The Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period".[5] In 19th century Britain, the widespread interest in the Eastern colonies was facilitated and encouraged by many state institutions – the Royal Geographical Society, the East India Company or the British Museum, to name just a few. It has to be remembered, that no one expected fully objective accounts of the colonial territories, and, as Rana Kabbani comments, it was a tacit agreement, that the explorers presented their perceptions within an acceptable framework of "systems of thought in which [they] [were] schooled."[6]

The overall outcome of such research was the imagological politics,[7] which, on the one hand, produced a great number of misconceptions concerning the colonies, and on the other, with time, created a falsified, picture of the imperial centre, envisioned in works of Romantic poets or Victorian novelists (which formed the standard tools of education with *mission civilisatrice*). Thus, both the Westerners, like Hugo Baumgartner, and the colonized peoples, exemplified by the narrator of V. S. Naipaul's *Enigma*, were educated on the false premises, learning either the prejudiced or idealized pictures of foreign lands both crudely simplified. This is,

[4] Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myth's of Orient.* (London: Pandora, 1994), p. 10 [emphasis added].

[5] Edward W. Said, "Orientalism" in: Bill Ashcroft et al. (eds). *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 89.

[6] R. Kabbani, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[7] See: Monika Fludernik, "Cross-Mirrorings of Alterity: The Colonial Scenario and its Psychological Legacy". *ARIEL* vol. 30 no. 3 (July 1999). An essay on imagological research in postcolonial literature.

I believe, what evolved later on into a general disenchantment with the colonial era when both sides discovered the artificiality of what they had been taught or told. The incompatibility of the life imagined with reality, or the subconscious drive to confirm the acquired prejudices, was the onset of the typical colonial 'illness' – the inner sense of being a misfit, an interloper since it took time to adjust oneself to completely new conditions or to revise one's own preconceptions about the destination.

However, in order to discover the preconceptions about India and roots of being a misfit in the case of Hugo Baumgartner, the eponymous hero of Anita Desai's novel, one has to go back to the times of his childhood. Living in pre-war Berlin with his loving family of rich German Jewish merchants he constantly moves around the rich but sombre interiors of a majestic house, full of splendid furniture and ornaments made of rosewood, mahogany or ivory imported by his father from India. Thus, when Hugo goes back in his memories he sees his father tapping "the Berlin streets with authority" with "his walking stick with the ivory knob,"[8] or "languorous *chaises-longues* in carved mahogany or consoles in blonde wood with gilded scrolls" and other "opulent pieces of furniture" – sofas decorated with satin or velvet, "Empire suits", "lamps shaded with mosaics of glass."[9] The interesting thing is that Hugo does not feel comfortable in such apartments. On the contrary, he seems to feel lost whenever he enters them and his uneasiness about the richness and opulence may explain his later estrangement from everything that he associates with Oriental imagery.

With the onset of the Second World War marked by the persecution of the Jews, Baumgartner is suddenly recognised as the Other. This fact is ominous because it quickly develops into a strong sense of rejection and later on it will lead to his exile, self-depreciation and low self-esteem. In order to escape the fate of his father who dies in Dachau, he unwillingly accepts a post in India recommended by his family's friend, Herr Pfuehl. It is interesting to notice how the foreign country is 'promoted':

> 'In India he may begin a new life!' the Gentleman from Hamburg thundered 'Yes, you may think of it as an ancient and backward land, my good Frau Baumgartner, the land of snakes and fakirs, but have you not heard of the British Empire? Don't you know, Hugo, that it is a colony of our neighbours in Britain? I have reasons for thinking of it as a colony of promising place and so should you, Hugo, now that you have taken over my clerical work. You ought to know how much of my timber comes from there, all the finest mahogany and rosewood, and all the fancy pieces of sandalwood – where else but from the East, from India and Burma and Malaya?[10]

[8] Anita Desai, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (London: Penguin Books: 1989), p. 23.
[9] *Ibidem*, p. 26.
[10] *Ibidem*, p. 53.

Upon a closer look this short speech reveals all the typical associations connected with the fabricated image of the Orient – the land *is* ancient and backward precisely because it seems so when compared with the European (British) civilisation, and yet it can be saved from its savagery and put to 'good use' for the very same reason – because of the presence of British troops. The fact that the British enlightenment and salvation were not offered as a gift but as an enforced exchange seems all but natural – and India for the Baumgartner family is, after all, a primary source of income.

On the economic image of India another one is superimposed – the romanticised one, the one of a savage and uninhabited land which has yet to be conquered. It is envisioned by Hugo when he tries to convince his mother to go with him "when he tried clumsily to paint a picture of their new beginnings in the East – a crude picture, all tigers and palm trees and sunsets."[11] He admits, of course, that people there have their own literature and so must be educated, yet their great poet Rabinah Tagore cannot, in the opinion of Baumgartner's mother, compare with the poetry written by her German friends. It should also be stressed that India is not really Hugo's choice – in fact he would be quite happy to stay in Germany – and when talking about it he echoes concepts known only too well – not necessarily because he believes in them but because he had not been offered any other alternative, if we take into consideration the Orientalised image of the country propagated by the imperial accounts.

Baumgartner's solitary trip to Venice, on his way to India, is of great significance because it confirms his preconceptions of how East may look like, which, on the whole, only confirm his vague but unpleasant notions. Venice – a 'phantom-like' city poised on the waters of the Mediterranean, was for centuries a prosperous commercial centre linking Europe with the East and even when its glory was gone, its appearance of wealth and splendour still reminds of its past. Because of its 'strange location' and internationality, it was a city unlike others, with the cityscape giving "a sense of mystery and ill-defined expectancy."[12]

Venice is also often called the threshold of the East and as such it gives Hugo clues as to what India may look like. In fact, it is only after Hugo's arrival in Venice that his preconceptions of India are revealed. It matches and enriches his ideas to a perfection. When he accidentally finds himself on the Rialto, the commercial heart of Venice, Hugo is convinced that he has already drifted to an Eastern market in India. He suddenly

[11] *Ibidem*, pp. 55–56.

[12] D. K. Feil, "How Venetians Think About Carnival and History". *Australian Journal of Anthropology* Jan 8, 1998 n. pag. Online. Internet. December 12, 2000.

realises that Venice is not only a threshold to the East but that "Venice was the East, and yet it was Europe too; it was that magic boundary where the two met and blended."[13]

The Eastern allure of Venice seems to be further confirmed when he visits the San Marco's basilica – the wealth of the temple, its marble mosaics, gems and golden ceiling bring to his mind all the typical images and associations with the Orient – the basilica reminds him of a rich potentate's palace. Apart from the sensuousness of the place which repulses him, it is also significant that the place takes on itself an active role – it 'thrusts him out' as if he was an unwelcome visitor, or so it seems to Baumgartner. It reveals his subconscious tendency to perceive himself as a constant object of attack and rejection, the two feelings which will become intensified during his stay in India. His sense of uneasiness inside the basilica due to its 'Easterness', that is opulence and lavishness, remind him of his childhood phobias.

Hugo's associations of San Marco basilica with a rich potentate's palace recall the imagery of William Beckford's *Vathec* (1786) or Antoine Galland's the *Arabian Nights* (1704) indulging in rich descriptions of Eastern splendour, transmitting the encoded traditional stereotypes of Eastern behaviour and typology of characters, such as violent, vindictive and merciless men or treacherous and lecherous women, of Eastern gluttony, foreign to Western ideas of humiliation and chastity. In fact when Baumgartner observes pigeons and pigeon-feeders who 'seemed to him equally gluttonous in their taking and receiving: was it not how beggars were said to behave in the East, beggars and their patrons who gave them alms for their own sakes?',[14] he feels only sheer disgust.

V. S. Naipaul, the protagonist of *The Enigma of Arrival*, was subject to quite a different propaganda, hidden under the name of *mission civilisatrice*. It originated as an attempt to bring civilisation to those cultures that were considered vulgar in comparison with the European ones. Initially sponsored by the crown and later becoming seemingly independent, The Royal Geographical Society or various missionary societies, propagated the imperial values and brought to the colonies another colonizing force apart from the military – that is education. Perhaps in a sense it contributed to the colonizing process to a greater extent than the military occupation because its traces can be seen in all modern postcolonial societies, not only because English became the mother tongue but because it imposed a Westernised picture of the world, thus establishing the common world of references and drawing a clear division line between the centre/Europe

[13] A. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 59.

/standard and the margin/Other/substandard. The education offered to the natives of the colonies was to produce the so-called 'mimic men', or to use Homi Bhabha term, 'hybrids'. T. B. Macaulay's famous 1835 Minute on Indian Education proposed to create a class of Indian interpreters between the two cultures "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, in intellect."[15]

But perhaps the most astonishing process which occurred in the European approach towards teaching the colonial subjects was reshaping their minds with respect to their sense of belonging, so that they acknowledged the difference and superiority of what was European (meaning British) which was supposed to be familiar or normal, over everything that was of colonial origin, which was considered secondary and exotic. Such state of affairs was, as Bill Ashcroft explains, due to the fact that in "English education, the attribution of exoticism as it applied to those places, peoples or natural phenomena usually remained unchanged" so eventually the indigene children could regard their own vegetation as 'exotic' and oak or yew was naturalized and domesticated by "the English text they read."[16] V. S. Naipaul in his article *Reading and Writing* while remembering his childhood in a small village in Trinidad mentions the school curriculum and his impression of the British Empire:

> It sent us textbooks (Rivington's *Shilling Arithmetic*, Nesfield's *Grammar*) and question papers for the various school certificates. It sent us the films that fed our imaginative life, and *Life* and *Time*. It sent us batches of *The Illustrated London News* to Mr. Worm's [Naipaul's teacher] office. It sent us the Everymen's Library and Penguin Books and the Collins Classics. It sent us everything. It had given Mr. Worm Jules Verne. And, through my father, it had given me my private anthology of literature.[17]

Both in his article *Reading and Writing* and in his novel *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul enumerates some of the literary classics he came to know during his school years in Trinidad – *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield* which no doubt were responsible for creating his crude image of London, the heart of Empire, sombre, cold and mysterious, but also *Tales from Shakespeare* by Lamb, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Jane Austen's novels or more contemporary classics, such as *Hindoo Holiday* by Ackerly, or *Jesting Pilate* by Aldous Huxley. Among these perhaps the most influential writer, apart from Dickens, was Joseph Conrad with whom Naipaul felt the greatest affinity and *The Heart of Darkness* seemed most

[15] Jenny Sharpe, "Figures of Colonial Resistance". *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1, (Spring 1989), p. 144.

[16] B. Ashcroft et al. eds, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, p. 95.

[17] V. S. Naipaul, "Reading and Writing". *New York Review of Books* Feb 18, 1999 n. pag. Online. Internet. Jul 12, 2000.

plausible to him because "the climate and vegetation was like what lay around me." All other novels were almost incomprehensible due to their foreignness: "The language was too hard; I lost my way in social or in historical detail ... When it came to the modern writers their stress on their own personalities shut me out: I couldn't pretend to be Maugham in London or Huxley or Ackerly in India."[18]

Dependence on British literature and constant preoccupation with it from a very young age separated Naipaul from his own roots, created a wide gulf between him and the culture of his grandparents, the Asian Hindu immigrants from India who served on a plantation of sugar cane in the West Indies. Although at first he felt more complicity with *Ramlila*, a traditional Hindu epic performed by the indentured workers in the fields, than with Western movies, with time he acquired English tastes and certain disenchantment with what Trinidad or non-western world could offer. Certainly it could not offer as much as the Empire, at least for the protagonist, who on leaving the island comments on its lack of beauty and poverty: "At a ground level so poor to me, so messy, so full of huts and gutters and bare front yards and straggly hibiscus hedges and shabby back yards: views from the roadside" which he contrasts with its ideal image seen from the plane "like a landscape in a book, like a landscape of a real country."[19]

It had never, however, occurred to him that as Trinidad seen from above looked more attractive, the same logic might apply to the imagery of English landscape, idealised in art and literature. But the realisation of this fact would come only after Naipaul's settling down in the English countryside, and this realisation would be accompanied by an inner, subconscious disappointment leading to acknowledging himself as a misfit "a man from another hemisphere, another background."[20] And yet, when he eventually travelled to India, to visit the places where his family used to live, he felt the bitter disappointment with what he experienced. He writes:

> 'India was special to England; for two hundred years there had been any number of English travellers' accounts, and, latterly, novels. I could not be that kind of traveller. In travelling to India I was travelling to an un-English fantasy, and a fantasy unknown to Indians of India: I was travelling to the peasant India that my Indian grandfathers had sought to re-create in Trinidad, the 'India' I had partly grown up in. ... There was no model for me here, in this exploration; neither Forster nor Ackerly nor Kipling could help.'[21]

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[18] *Ibidem.*

[19] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* (London: Penguin Books: 1987), p. 97.

[20] *Ibidem*, p. 19.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 141.

One can easily notice Naipaul's uneasiness about this travel which is the effect of his prevalent feeling of uprootedness and the painful memories of his childhood in Trinidad, the place he tried to get away from. Remembering his life on the island and his Indian origins, he cannot be beguiled by the literature while travelling in India – the place is too personal and known to allow for fantasies, it is too realistic. As Naipaul admits: "I didn't look back to India, couldn't do so; my ambition caused me to look ahead and outwards, to England ... In Trinidad, feeling myself far away, I had held myself back, as it were for the life at the centre of things."[22] On the contrary, in England which he chose for his homeland, everything seemed literally taken out of literature, or at least he strives to make the reality literary so as not to lose contact with his surroundings, thus when he comments on the English countryside "...I loved landscape, trees, flowers, clouds, and was responsive to changes of light and temperature"[23] he subconsciously echoes Wordsworthian "Daffodils", one of the standard poems taught in all English colonies describing the beauty of the Lake District, to which Naipaul at times directly refers in his novel "Jack... seemed a Wordsworthian figure: bent, exaggeratedly bent, going gravely about his peasant tasks, as if in an immense Lake District solitude."[24]

The colonial education was not, however, strictly literary – it functioned on the economic level as well by providing the colony with everything it deemed necessary, thus stressing the fact of dependence, likewise of welfare and abundance:

> 'This outer world – England principally, but also United States and Canada – ruled us in every way. It sent us governors and everything else we lived by: the cheap preserved foods the island had needed since the slave days (smoked herring, salted cod, condensed milk, New Brunswick sardines in oil); the special medicines (Dodd's Kidney Pills, Dr. Sloan's Liniment, the tonic called Six Sixty-Six).'[25]

No wonder that Naipaul decides to grab the occasion when, after passing English exams with his application for scholarship accepted he leaves Trinidad for England – the country whose history he knows better than that of his place of birth. What is even more important, it provides an appropriate setting for pursuing his literary career, as he had decided to become a distinguished writer, and this, he deemed, was possible only in the very centre of the colonial world, the centre which established the literary canon, a place of opportunities.

The preconception stage, which is the onset of any travel, whether to the East or to the West, plays a vital role in it for a lonely traveller who

[22] *Ibidem*, p. 120.
[23] *Ibidem*, p. 21.
[24] *Ibidem*, p. 20.
[25] *Idem*, "Reading and Writing" n. pag. Online.

decides to set off on a long journey. Since no one is a *tabula rasa*, protagonists of both novels carry with themselves the baggage of acquired knowledge, which will have to be revised or, in postcolonial terms, deconstructed later, because travellers often too readily forget that their ideas of the ultimate destination do not necessarily have to concur with reality.

STAGE 2. THE JOURNEY

Alan Frost in an encyclopaedia entry on exploration literature paraphrases the words of John Ledyard, a junior of Cook on his third voyage: "To travel is to be in error – but how other than by travelling may we know the falsity of some perceptions and the truth of others?"[26] This short statement seems to reflect best the spirit of many postcolonial writings which dwell on 'face to face interactions' between different cultures because it stresses the fact that Journey is something more than just shifting the self to another part of the world. It is interesting to note that in Middle English the word used instead of 'journey' was 'progress', which meant particularly a 'seasonal journey' or 'circuit' referring to "the journey of a king round his dominions or a bishop round his dioceses"[27] and later on, in the seventeenth century, it gained a 'moral' flavour as well. Thus, 'progress' in the modern meaning became in a sense equal to the journey but not only in its physical dimension as marching on and penetrating the land further and further, but also as a spiritual self-development because journeying means a departure from the point we are and moving beyond it. It demands, then, constant verification or even rejection of our previous concepts in order to be able to accommodate new experiences. Bruce Chatwin in *Songlines* writes: "'Travel': same word as 'travail' – 'bodily or mental labour', 'toil, especially of a painful or oppressive nature', 'exertion', 'hardship', 'suffering'. A 'journey'."[28] This has been well documented by the postcolonial writers such as V. S. Naipaul or Salman Rushdie who after years of English education, on arriving in the Western world suddenly discovered that their initial knowledge of it was a construct which had little to do with reality. Perhaps this is the reason why so many protagonists of the postcolonial world, often endowed with a 'migratory' past, are presented as if in a state of constant wonder and alertness, which often reaches a level of irrational fear and suspicion because of one's feeling of

[26] E. Benson, L. W. Landly (eds), *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 467.

[27] Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines* (London: Picador, 1988), p. 219.

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 215.

intrusion, of being *unfit* for the new conditions. Their observations often take the form of detailed descriptions like those in V. S Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, additionally marked by heavy irony and a concentration of the narrative on the self.

Many contemporary scholars criticise the subjective image of the world presented by various travellers but I believe that adopting a subjective, or even an egoistic point of view is an integral part of any journey. Journey is the first, real, almost tangible stage in a man's 'progress', marked by strong individualism because it is precisely during the voyage that the travellers discover their inner self, and the creation of the self. The full realization of it can only take place, at least at the beginning, by describing oneself in opposition to the existing reality. Such an attitude may wear off after some time, if the newcomer manages to adapt himself, but if his arrival is not followed soon by success, then a sense of alienation and miscomprehension deepens, paving a straight road to a feeling of rejection and disappointment – the two basic qualities one may find in any misfit character.

Contrary to the preconception stage, which was only receptive, the journey stage in the process of becoming a misfit is the first true challenge posed before the protagonists; it demands action and allows for the creation of one's own opinions about reality. Many of the early experences will be transformed over the course of time, yet going on a journey is the first revelatory stage in life. That is why in many cultures (nb. Indian tribes) sending a young man on a trip was treated like a rite of passage into manhood. The youth was tested in a number of ways, his experiences collected and accounted for, his dreams becoming the final oracle. The outcome of this was the bestowing of a proper name for him: in other words, giving him an identity. In what many might call a rather 'primitive' way of discovering one's true self and identity ('primitive' meaning 'uncivilised'), this seems quite common in the modern world, although hidden under other labels and symbols.

Perhaps it was not puerly accidental that Anita Desai sends her protagonist of *Baumgartner's Bombay* to Venice, because of its dreamlike quality. If we treat *La Serenissima* as a kind of relevatory dream, then we may interpret certain events as the prognostics of Hugo's future. The Jewish merchant in Venice brings on an instant association with another famous, literary figure, namely Shakespeare's Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* and his house in the Jewish quarter, the Ghetto Nuovo. As Berry Ralph in *Shakespeare's Venice* observes, the word 'ghetto', meaning 'foundry' first originated in Venice, where in 1516 the first Ghetto Nuovo was created. Its main aim was to protect the Jews from looting and violence, but nevertheless it also meant segregation; soon it became a generic term used

by all over Europe. In fact it is only in Venice where he realises who he really is – the encounter of a young Jewish woman who mentions to him the Jewish quarter makes him think that "here he would find for himself a new identity, one that suited him, one that he enjoyed. The air quivered with possibilities, with the suspense of quest and choice."[29] However, his attempt to find the place ends in an ominous fiasco, and symbolically the city seems to throw him straight on the Rialto bridge as if reminding him of the proper vocation for a Jew – usury and merchandise (the Rialto bridge was and is the centre of commerce). As Rana Kabbani in *Imperial Fictions* writes about Venice: "The original city *forms* the traveller, provides him with his vision, predicts his reactions and produces his narrative."[30] Thus, Venice plays an active role and reveals unconscious desires, anticipation and fear. The fact that Hugo finds himself on the Rialto bridge may have been due to an unconscious drive towards this place and symbolically points to his professional destination. It also emphasises the common associations with this ethnic group, and perhaps in this way Baumgartner finds unity with his people – by means of impersonal commerce rather than by cohabitation. The Rialto and its bustling life "made him forget the Jewish woman, the painter."[31]

The Rialto bridge takes on yet another significance. It strikes Baumgartner that this bridge is the very place where he felt "the natural citizen". An old Indian proverb compares life to a bridge which man has to cross, and in Baumgartner's case this saying takes on a literal dimension. The bridge is transition, and life compared to a bridge is life in constant transition, which parallels the nomadic life of the Jewish nation. The fact that Baumgartner crosses the Rialto bridge is significant as it symbolically transfers him to another hemisphere and his well-being on the bridge prophesises his inability to really settle down in India because the imaginative West-East boundary the bridge provides, is 'a place neither here nor there', a kind of non-existent void. It may delineate the clear opposition between the West and the East but it cannot become a really existing place, as it is always in transition. The fact that Baumgartner looks for such a place accounts for his being unfit to live elsewhere.

Considering all this, Hugo Baumgartner bears resemblance to another symbolic figure of 'Jewish origin', namely that of the Wandering Jew,[32] which often served as a vehicle for anti-Semitism In the case of Baumgartner, who was forced to leave his fatherland because of the intensified persecution of Jews before the imminent war, another propagandist explanation for

[29] *Ibidem*, pp. 62–63.
[30] R. Kabbani, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
[31] A. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
[32] "Wandering Jew (legend)". In: *Encarta Encyclopaedia*. Internet. Online. 2000.

banishment was constructed, as Bruce Chatwin explains in his novel *Songlines* in a short note:

> **Psychiatrists, politicians, tyrants are forever assuring us that the wandering life is an aberrant form of behaviour; a neurosis; a form of unfulfilled sexual longing; a sickness which, in the interests of civilisation, must be suppressed.**
>
> **Nazi propagandists claimed that Gipsies and Jews – peoples with wandering in their genes – could find no place in a stable Reich.**[33]

V. S. Naipaul's experiences stand in contrast to those of Baumgartner. In his novel *The Enigma of Arrival* he presents perhaps the most detailed study of the colonial traveller's voyage to the western hemisphere. V. S. Naipaul-narrator, enamoured with the western literature, decides to follow his father's steps and become a writer, which can be achieved only in London. The fact that his choice to become a writer is a conscious decision is of great importance because it 'steers' his behaviour and shapes his vision from the very start of the journey. After reading a lot, he seems to adopt a certain attitude to reality: the distance enhanced by self-irony which will increase with time. He is not an intuitive traveller like Baumgartner who relies on fate to solve his problems, but adopts an analytic approach to what he experiences. In *Finding the Centre*, he defines his attitude to travelling – he adopts the poise of a "looker".[34] To assume a voyeuristic personality certainly accounts for Naipaul's alienation and unwillingness to cross over the invisible barrier between himself and external world, and thus from the very beginning he was aiming at becoming a misfit, or at least an outsider.

Naipaul begins his journey when he is almost 18 (another rite of passage) and soon feels the sense of loss when he observes the changing patterns of the Trinidadian familiar landscape, which from distance become even attractive but at the same time detached. Such a shift in the perception of things will reoccur many times during his life, till at one point he will confess, upon arriving in Barbados, that he feels like a tourist. But, what is more important, the same shift of perception applies to the cultural and racial mixture of people the Puerto Ricans "subtly different from the mixed people of my own place."[35] He notices that people travelling "alter their value,"[36] the glamour of travel soon wears off, since the envied 'chosen one' curiously transforms into one of the many, and at the same time strikingly noticeable in the multitude. In the case of Naipaul the shift of perception is not only external but also internal with respect to his own

[33] B. Chatwin, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

[34] V. S. Naipaul, *Finding the Centre*. (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 11.

[35] *Idem*, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 98.

[36] *Ibidem*, p. 101.

ambitions and reality, thus creating a wide gap between the colonial Trinidadian and the 'worldly' writer, the lost one and the witty, the all-knowing. His ignorance of his surroundings "...made nonsense of the personality the writer wished to assume – elegant, knowing, unsurprised."[37]

In order to prevent his "assumed" personality from further dissipation and to pursue his literary career, Naipaul starts a diary, however it only testifies to the 'construct' of his assumed self since he consciously censors and leaves out events he feels ashamed of, especially those which touch on personal matters. He ignores the familial farewell at his departure, the Asiatic ritual of parting which reunites not only the closest family but also all the relatives who crowded at the terminal. As Naipaul explains, such farewells were a reminiscence of ancient times when a traveller was never to be seen again. But the protagonist's wish to cut himself off the insular past makes him willingly forget the bonds with Trinidad and his colonial past. Such approach is ostensibly different from what European travellers experienced when travelling to other regions of the world. Rana Kabbani in *Imperial Fictions* mentions that European travellers often commenced their journey by finding suitable company of compatriots because this would prevent them from adopting foreign Eastern customs or becoming 'infested' with Eastern way of thinking. Naipaul, on the contrary, tries to assume the Western style of behaviour and to get rid of the colonial label and his native culture. Moreover, the diary which was supposed to be a record of his journey experiences is subjected to as much self-imposed censorship as it used to be by many European travellers who noted down only those observations which justified their ends. V. S. Naipaul, being a narrator of his own story, does the same, and in the same manner – he establishes himself as the centre of things. He observes his changes in personality, especially anxiety and fear which showed through his initial excitement but also the feeling of boredom, and yet, he has to admit "that between the man writing the diary and the traveller there was already a gap, already a gap between the man and the writer."[38]

His initial enthusiasm with the journey seems to gradually diminish when confronted with daily perplexities – inability to move around the city, to ask for cutlery in a hotel, to understand the news in a newspaper, apart from the weather forecast. He bitterly feels the lack of familiar "points of reference", its intertextuality and his lack of knowledge results in self-humiliation "the writer of the diary was ending his day like a peasant,"[39] in other words, in defeat. During a show of a French film he suddenly

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 103.
[38] *Ibidem*, p. 102.
[39] *Ibidem*, p. 105.

realises that his education imposed on him by the colonial government was "monkish, medieval learning quite separate from everyday things"[40] and a visit to a bookstore leaves him even more disenchanted. In the metropolis, his knowledge proves to have been more than superficial and predominantly of classics, which only further deprives him of the confidence about his education. Vivek Dhareshwar in his essay on V. S. Naipaul's *Mimic Men* and *The Enigma of Arrival* blames the "abstract of education" for such state of affairs, as it "provides him with knowledge about European history" and at the same time "leave[s] him ignorant about his island and its community: it disengages him from them by subjecting him to a stereotypical knowledge about them, by devaluing his local knowledge of his community." According to him, the subconscious message is to "disentangle oneself from the camouflage of people" and to make a fresh start "the romance of life in the metropolis."[41] At this stage, however, Naipaul's "metropolitan romance" is deconstructed and intensifies Naipaul's feeling of estrangement and foreignness.

And in fact Naipaul-the-Author deconstructs the storyline of the novel further. He explains that the title for his book and also the inspiration for its contents originated from a painting by Giorgio de Chirico "The Enigma of Arrival." This early surrealist painting gave Naipaul a certain idea as to what he should aim at while writing his 'autofiction'. He wanted to write a story (which in fact becomes an allegory), set in classical times, about a lonely traveller who arrives in a great Mediterranean city with a mission (Naipaul does not state what kind of mission), spends some time there visiting the city's temples, houses and famous places. Swallowed by the city, the protagonist would have "a feeling that he was getting nowhere; he would lose his sense of mission; he would begin to know only that he was lost. The feeling of adventure would give way to panic. He would want to escape, to get back to the quayside and his ship. But he wouldn't know how.[42]

The similarity of the imagined story to the 'reality' presented in the novel is obvious, thus it can safely be said that the misfit element which reveals itself during Naipaul's voyage is in a sense an innate one, it appears on the surface as a response to the writer's intention of assuming an allure of an outsider, an exile. It should be no surprise then, to read that Naipaul-the-Protagonist-Traveller boards a ship bound for England, escaping the New York City crowds and moves to another continent.

[40] *Ibidem*, p. 108.

[41] Dhareshwar, Vivek. "Self-fashioning, Colonial Habitus, and Double Exclusion: V. S. Naipaul's, *The Mimic Man*." In: *Criticism*, 31 (Winter 1989), p. 92.

[42] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 92.

STAGE 3. THE ARRIVAL

The third and the last stage of the voyage is arrival, upon which the protagonists have to verify further their initial preconceptions. Whether they will become misfits or escape, at least to some extent, this label depends on various circumstances I will discuss here. The measure of success, however, cannot be devised in purely economic terms. On the contrary, it may be altogether impossible to extrapolate clearly defined factors which could determine where success and failure begin and end. The misfit category is, in fact, a very inhomogeneous one and in order to get to the core of 'misfitness' a wide range of factors has to be taken into consideration.

One of them is certainly the environment, the conditions the protagonist has to live in, which seems so obvious that it is rarely taken into consideration. Still, it is the only 'thing' which accompanies the newcomer all the time – even if he chooses solitude, for V. S. Naipaul who took refuge in the country, or Hugo Baumgartner who avoided social contacts as much as possible, the surrounding conditions cannot be escaped. It is also the very first thing the protagonist encounters, when he sets his foot in a new land, apart from the multitudes of people, who seem at first a solid, living mass, as in the case of Hugo Baumgartner.

Ruth Prower Jhabvala, in her collected stories *Out of India*, said that it was impossible to ignore India precisely because of its intrusiveness; its assault on the body is definite and cannot be passed unnoticed. When it is combined with teeming crowds, noise and intense smells – of perspiring bodies, cooking smells, and animals – the impression which they leave on Hugo is that of one's helplessness and incomprehension. His Venetian dream turns into an Indian nightmare: "He could not read these faces, or their expressions – joy? agony? panic?"[43] Almost panic-stricken and cheated by a driver of 'a stinking carriage', he finds his refuge in a small, dirty room of a deteriorating hotel. The fear of novelty, the lack of determination, likewise his inability to act and comprehend the surrounding reality of the place, leave him in constant hiding. Gradually, he instils into his mind the feeling of omnipresent menace and conviction that India will defeat him. His attitude towards Indian society is dubious – on the one hand, he would like to assimilate in order to avoid suspicion on the part of Indians and British troops, especially as World War II becomes imminent; on the other hand, perceiving the country as "a symbiosis of mystery, danger, and bestiality"[44] he knows assimilation would mean the violation of his principles.

[43] A. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

[44] Tony S. da Silva, "Whose Bombay is it Anyway?: Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay*". *ARIEL* vol. 28, no. 3. (Jul 1997), p. 69.

Tony Simoes da Silva attributes this to "a Manichean dichotomy that relates Baumgartner's survival to being able to remain continually alert to the mischievous and dangerous ways of the Other. His relationship with India is one in which he needs not only to identify the Other but also to ensure that he himself remains an Other."[45] In other words, it is Baumgartner's choice to maintain his 'misfit' identity precisely because it is the only 'stable' identity he possesses.

V. S. Naipaul's approach to the novelty of the place is quite different. He explores the *terra nova* in a more self-centred and conscious way, focusing on the details, on the linguistic and cultural aspects of England. It should be stressed here that in *The Enigma of Arrival* there are two 'arrivals' to England – the first one to London and Oxford, and later on to rural part of England, when Naipaul's writer's career is established. It is however, the first arrival which seems to determine and influence Naipaul's perception most. Although his feelings are not as dramatic as in case of Baumgartner, nevertheless he feels bitterly disappointed, since it turns out that the image of England he was presented with at Trinidadian school was no longer valid. The splendour of colonial era encoded in the classics he read, turns into the "blend of smells of hot milk, soot and cockroaches" of the dark rooms in Earls Court lodgings, the no longer existing goods advertised on the back covers of Penguin Books he read in Trinidad. As a result he loses his faculty of imagining things – "I lost the gift of fantasy, the dream of future, the far-off place where I was going ... [n]ow, in the place that for all those years had been the 'elsewhere', no further dream was possible."[46] Robbed of his hopes, he is forced to reject the fantasy of his preconceptions.

Disenchanted with postcolonial heart of the Empire, Naipaul settles down in the countryside where he tenants an Edwardian house nearby Salisbury. Still, he feels very uneasy and no less disappointed. The marvellous Constable-like *paysages* are affected either by the influx of modernity or decay: the invasion of the town's people indifferent to the past, deteriorating stables and barns replaced with new, ultramodern concrete buildings, deformed cows. Even his own presence, as Naipaul puts it, is the sign of a dramatic change, and the novel echoes this many times:

> After all my time spent in England I still had that nervousness in a new place, that rawness of response, still felt myself to be in the others man's country, felt my strangeness, my solitude. And every excursion into a new part of the country – what for others might have been an adventure – was for me like a tearing at an old scab.[47]

[45] *Ibidem*, p. 68.
[46] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 124.
[47] *Ibidem*, p. 13.

> The idea of ruin and dereliction, out-of-placedness, was something I felt about myself, attached to myself: a man from the other hemisphere, another background, coming to rest in middle life in the cottage of a half neglected estate, an estate full of reminders of its Edwardian past, with few connections with the present ... I felt unanchored and strange.[48]

The dissolution of England's imperial past, the artificiality of certain elements of the landscape, e.g. a medieval church which on closer examination turns out to be an artefact, "a plagiarism of the past", or a fake farmhouse, question Naipaul's assumed identity. Ian Baucom attributes his growing melancholy to "the imperial custodians of English identity", meaning education, which gave him "an idea of Englishness" which produced "a colonial subject more rigorously English than the English." He concludes that "[t]o admit to the artifice in the landscape, to admit to the constructedness of his England, is to admit to the inventedness of his own identity. ... To discover as a middle-aged man that that England had never been, or had existed only as a counterfeit of itself is, to put it mildly, a difficult thing."[49]

Apart from the 'enforced' revaluation of reality, the other problem is language, though both protagonists locate it in different areas. Naipaul feels his mastery of language defeated when he realises his inability to use appropriate names for popular species of plants, because for him as a writer a thorough knowledge of language is of primary importance. If mastery over a language may be treated as a sign of one's adjustment to new conditions, which should be relatively easy to achieve in case the protagonist's stay is lifelong, then Hugo Baumgartner does not acquire even the basics of culture, as he is baffled by the terms of politeness, "[a]fter fifty years, still uncertain... which language to employ."[50] He also betrays more commonsensical but reckless attitude towards language – he appropriates languages (Hindu and English mostly) according to his own needs, thus building his own, closed space in which he could exist – a kind of linguistic ghetto.

With Britain joining the WW II, Baumgartner's 'linguistic ghetto' transforms into a literal ghetto in a British camp for Germans. Paradoxically, he is indiscriminately detained as a "German, born in Germany,"[51] and locked up together with Aryan Nazis. At this point Baumgartner's 'misfitness' becomes multiple: he was a 'misfit'/Other in his homeland on the ethnic principle (the label assigned externally), 'misfit' in the Indian society

[48] *Ibidem*, p. 19.

[49] Ian Baucom, "Mournful Histories: Narratives of Postimperial Melancholy". *Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 42, no. 2. (1996), pp. 275–276.

[50] A. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[51] *Ibidem*, p. 105.

on racial/cultural principle (the label assigned externally and internally by Baumgartner himself), and once again 'misfit' on the national principle (label assigned externally). The sense of 'misfitness' and separateness goes even deeper as his 'fellow' – prisoners – the Nazis, enhance further segregation. Moreover, his estrangement within the Jewish group is also noticeable – when for a short period of time the Nazis take control of the camp and tell the prisoners to shout "Heil Hitler!" Baumgartner is the only one who is ready to comply to the "absurdities" as he calls it, but for other Jews' resistance. When Germany is defeated, he is also the only one in his group who does not perceive it as a defeat, as the other Jews take it; "[d]efeat was heaped on him, whether he deserved it or not."[52] In post-war India, torn with nationalistic movements, Baumgartner, as a foreigner, becomes a social outcast reduced to poverty and literal non-existence, constantly fearing the Indians' assault. Paradoxically, it reaches him in the persona of Kurt – a young Aryan boy who, under the influence of intoxicants, mercilessly kills him to rob Baumgartner's money.

Social interaction and racial questions, are also present in V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, although they are manifested through their apparent absence, e.g. the question of race is suppressed to the necessary minimum, and most of it is hidden in allusion. The racial theme, never stated explicitly, is rather linked to intellectual debates and digressions which go on in the protagonist's mind, and they are inseparably connected with his colonialist background. It should be stressed that Naipaul is acutely aware of his Hindu roots, and to some extent his sensitivity about his origins colours his perception of how people receive him. The very fact that he tenants an Edwardian house, still haunted by colonial reminiscences and colonial past, cause certain unease in his adjusting the place to his needs, and the feeling of being an 'interloper' makes Naipaul feel a 'misfit': "...at a time of empire, there would have been no room for me. The builder of the house and the designer of the garden could not have imagined, with their world view, that at a later time someone like me would have been in the grounds, and that I would feel I was having a place."[53] The attitude of other inhabitants of the village seem to confirm his doubts and low self-esteem; he is either ignored, and thus his presence is obliterated, or purportedly dismissed when asking for a favour (Brenda's refusal to handle his post). The awareness of his 'difference', makes the colonial status his life burden – he calls it "raw stranger's nerves."

Yet the most complex relationship takes place between V. S. Naipaul and his landlord, who never visits or even sees his tenant, and the only

[52] *Ibidem*, p. 135.
[53] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p. 52.

thing that V. S. Naipaul receives from him is a collection of poems written by the landlord during his youth, poems which ostensibly refer to Oriental imagery and are pervaded with English concepts about Orient. Surely it points clearly to Naipaul's background, though it is hardly possible that they were aimed at Naipaul with ill-will. Still, the fact that Naipaul and his landlord never meet, even though he resides in the manor, seems odd, just as the fact that Naipaul is never invited to the landlord's house. Such a situation leaves Naipaul in constant perplexity as to the man's appearance and lifestyle and reasons why he never visits him – it subconsciously intensifies his racial uncertainty. Moulding him into a literary sombre figure, he has to revise his idea of his landlord when he sees him one day wearing shorts, which destroys the picture of a noble, aristocratic Englishman. Naipaul's attitude towards the landlord is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, he seems to acknowledge his inferiority due to his colonial background, and his persistence in calling the man his "landlord" all the time brings to mind a relationship between a lord and his servant, which to some extent, looking from a historical perspective, Naipaul was, or he felt he was. On the other hand, he notices also social and cultural changes which have occurred with the flow of time, and which allow him not only to compare himself with the landlord but also to find some affinity (although it is done through oppositions) with him:

> I was his opposite in every way, social, artistic, sexual. And considering his family's fortune had grown, but enormously, with the spread of the empire in the nineteenth century, it might be said that an empire lay between us. This empire at the same time linked us. This empire explained my birth in the New World, the language I used, the vocation and ambition I had; this empire in the end explained my presence here in the valley, in that cottage, in the grounds of the manor. But we were – or had started – at opposite grounds of the privilege, and in the hearts of different cultures.[54]

What allows Naipaul, in his mind, to compare himself with the landlord is not only history and common educational background but also the fact that he eventually achieved success as a writer, which assures him of his own values, while the knowledge of their 'common' past levels the landlord with the protagonist. As he admits,

> [t]wenty years ago ... the imperial link would have been burdensome. It would have tormented me as a man (or boy) to be a racial oddity in the valley. And I would have been able as a writer (at that time) to deal with the material only by suppressing certain aspects of myself.[55]

[54] *Ibidem*, p. 174.
[55] *Ibidem*.

It is clear that Naipaul's outlook is not consistent, and perhaps this is the very to his willingness to cover up the painful or burdensome thoughts about his life in the village society, rather than state an explicit truth.

As it can be seen the stage of arrival and consequent settling down in a new country is extremely challenging for all the protagonists. Similarly to the journey stage, it also demands action on the part of the traveller, but the newcomer cannot be left indifferent to the surrounding conditions – the environment and the society. At this point the travellers stop being 'tourists', who are, in Duncan Fallowell's opinion "voyeurs" as "they do not want to be involved in the place they visit."[56] Even if they try to hide from it, like Hugo Baumgartner, the place will claim its share in their lives affecting their lifestyle, language and way of thinking. Paradoxically enough, even if the newcomers like V. S. Naipaul try to conform to the reality of the place, it does not grant them acceptance or easier adaptation. On the contrary, they are constantly reminded, in a more or less camouflaged way, of their difference, of their being *unfit* – whether because of their race, inadequate or insufficient learning or ignorance of the place. As a result they often fall into a trap of reverting into the very past they wished to escape, only to discover that the dream of "the new land" was just an illusion.

CONCLUSION

"Quitting the place that we love means that we are condemned to inhabit our loss forever."[57] This statement seems to reflect best the condition of misfit characters of V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Although the protagonists of those novels are strongly marked individuals who come from different parts of the world, the 'core' of their misfit condition stays the same – a (secret) longing for the homeland enhanced by disillusionment with the existing reality. It is a phenomenon occurring at all longitudes and latitudes and, as the novels show, also irrespective of origins, cultural and social background or learning.

The protagonists having decided to leave their countries in order to "find out whether [their] ultimate destination concurs with their idea of

[56] Duncan Fallowell, "On not seeing Venice". In: *American Scholar* (Winter 2000). n. pag. Online. Internet. December 12, 2000.

[57] James Cowan, *A Mapmaker's Dream*. From: *A Mapmaker's Dream: The Meditations of Fra Mauro, Cartographer to the Court of Venice*. 1996. *Parabola*, Spring 1997. Online. Internet. December 9, 2000, n. pag.

how the world really is,"[58] which was largely due to the politics of their countries, are subdued to bitter disappointment. Not only do their preconceptions of the place turn out to be false, but also their reception is far from welcome, although they were constantly assured of it. This is especially evident in the case of V. S. Naipaul who hoped to find new opportunities for self-development and better living conditions. The disenchantment with reality and growing seclusion result in the protagonists' alienation and withdrawal from society – V. S. Naipaul settles down in a small village and Hugo Baumgartner chooses the life of a recluse with a very limited number of friends and acquaintances.

The 'misfit' category is in a sense unique because it deals with individuals rather than with groups and thus it does not allow for broad generalisations. Yet if we look closer at the protagonists of the novels, they seem to follow certain patterns of behaviour, which may be treated as typical responses of newcomers to the surrounding reality.

One pattern of behaviour is exemplified by Hugo Baumgartner, namely the escape of the present condition by dwelling on and idealising the past followed by shunning the reality. Banished from his own *Heimat*, he has to leave all he loves behind, and is cut off from his roots. Plucked out against his will, he will never be able to cope with his sense of loss – he will have to 'inhabit' it – and this is the direct reason of his 'misfitness'. He clings to the past and allows it to take control of his life. Germany of his childhood years, so strongly associated with his beloved mother, becomes a point of reference, thus never allowing him to feel anywhere else at home, making him a true 'Wandering Jew' figure. And although he realises that there is no place for him in his fatherland, even his stay in the internment camp cannot destroy this idolatry. At the time of war Germany is substituted with Venice, which becomes a symbol of freedom and happiness. He forgets, though, that when he visited it he was as scared and lonely as he is in India. So at a point he says: "It was so strange – it was both East and West, both Europe and Asia. I thought – maybe, in such a place, I could be at home."[59] He pronounces this, however, with little conviction and it can be only doubted if he really means it.

The fact that Hugo Baumgartner chose inaction and submissiveness to the fate and let it decide about himself, accepting what life brought him, may be due to his feminine-like quality of character. Passivity, indecision and receptiveness, stereotypically associated with women, are, however, also basic principles of Eastern religion, and perhaps it is a paradox that trying to remain aloof he should get into the very core of the Indian way of life.

[58] *Ibidem*, n. pag.

[59] A. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

Yet in this case it is just another failure, as he does not apply this attitude in a conscious way but rather treats it as a shelter. Thus, he appears as a man without strong principles, easily cheated or steered. His meekness allows India to 'devour' him, as claims Tony Simoes da Silva:

> Indeed, the man whom Kurt kills is not the *real* Baumgartner, the gentle and civilised European subject who once sought refuge in India. He had long been devoured by an India whose identity Orientalism has always inscribed in terms of inscrutability and threat.[60]

And yet it seems all too much a work of fate, which inscribes Baumgartner's life into a more universal context, when after all those fifty years he spent in India he is killed by a young Nazi-like German.

V. S. Naipaul follows yet another pattern of behaviour characteristic of a misfit, namely that of opposition and exclusion. In fact, such attitude is a mirror reflection of the attitudes and opinions about Naipaul offered by the society he lives in. It may seem a paradox that such an attitude should bring positive results, but it is he who with time becomes successful. After his initial disappointments with the reality he found in England, and especially in London, V. S. Naipaul did not give up his struggle for the literary. On the contrary, he visits and revisits England, examines the land, eventually making it subject to his will, either by learning its topography and mastering the land in linguistic terms, or even 'physically' – by tenanting an old manor house, the remnant of his colonial past. One could say that there are certain similarities between him and Baumgartner, especially with respect to their solitude, yet Naipaul uses it creatively – it gives him space for creating his fictions about the land or himself in order to disguise his initial fear of novelty. Finally, it turns out that his literary perspective which earned him so much distress at the beginning of his journey, proved to be a shield which eventually protected him from 'abstractness', and provided him with a suitable context for delineating his own space. Moreover, with time the protagonist turns his 'misfitness' into an advantage – he becomes, in Salman Rushdie's term "a translated man" who is both an outsider and insider, the only man who can become a chronicler of changes taking place in England. Even his ultimate success and recognition as a writer do not deprive him of this unique outlook, as he still remains on the 'side-track' of literary elites. Still, the sense of something lost pervades his memories, and his almost obsessive search for the past and its examination may suggest that he did not come to terms with it entirely.

The position of V. S. Naipaul is entirely different when compared with the situation of Hugo Baumgartner. His aim to pursue a literary career allows him to use his misfitness creatively and thus become successful,

[60] T. S. da Silva, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

which puts him in a better position. And yet, on the social level he shares exactly the same experiences, feels the same longing for the past and the lost country, no matter how much he would deny it. The recognition of it is even sadder when he, like the other protagonist, has to acknowledge that there is no 'coming back', that he has become a 'tourist' in his former homeland.

In his essay *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie seems to describe best the condition of 'a translated man' who is a misfit in all or only some of areas of human activity. He says: "We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. And as a result ... we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial."[61] Although he looks at the issue from his own point of view, it may be well applicable to other cases, as the general mechanism responsible for creating misfits stays the same. Deprived of their sense of belonging and hardly accepted by others, confounded by the new reality and hardships of life, the protagonists feel an urge to "look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt."[62] The price is high. They condemn themselves to 'inhabit their loss forever'.

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[61] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*. In: *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1989–1991*. (London: Granta Books, 1992), p. 15.

[62] *Ibidem*, p. 10.