

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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SYMBOLISM
IN THE NOVELS OF
TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM
AND
V. S. NAIPAUL



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Both Tawfiq al-Hakim and V.S. Naipaul make extensive and elaborate use of symbolism to reflect their visions of life. While archetypal symbolism and symbolism of the narrative structure and technique and socio-political allegories strike a reassuring note in Hakim, they have nihilistic apocalyptic undertones in Naipaul. Indeed, it is the skilful use of symbolism by Hakim and Naipaul that strikes universal overtones; this explains the world appeal of their novels and, in Hakim's case, the many translations of his works into many languages. Archetypal symbolism strikes similar notes resounding in the Collective Unconscious and the racial memory of peoples of different cultures.

Both Hakim and Naipaul allude to various mythologies, cults, folklore patterns as well as Jungian archetypes. Both modify archetypes to suit the projection of their own philosophies and their critique of modern societies. Hakim divests myths of their own incredibility, getting them as close as possible to human logic, hence the calculated symbolism gap between Saniya and Isis, and Muhsin and Horus in *Return of the Spirit*. Naipaul, on the other hand, ironically inverts the positive and dynamic archetypal connotations of myths in order to undermine the established creeds and cultures and to convey an underlying existentialist philosophy of the world as an abyss, a void. Contrary to Naipaul, Hakim stands firm in his philosophical vision of equilibriumism, a positive view of the urgent need to counterbalance every power. Even his most absurdist or, as he calls it, nonsensical play *The Tree Climber* is not nihilistic or existentialist.

Another intrinsic difference is that Hakim reveres Egyptian mythology and folklore, and derives personal and national impetus out of them. Hakim derives ecstasy from Egyptian mythical heritage and considers it a cornerstone of a unique Egyptian identity and a real starting

'persona', since he is primarily interested in the notions of flux and the deception of role-playing.

Both Hakim and Naipaul use the shadow archetype to reflect an inner mistrust of the basic instincts of man, especially as embodied by the temptation of some women. Hakim's *The Sacred Bond* and Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* are permeated with references to the scaring primeval temptation of Eve, one that inevitably led to the Fall. References to the 'anima' and 'shadow' in both writers allude to the womb-tomb relationship and, consequently, to that between Eros and Thanatos, hence to incest gratification. In Hakim, however, deliverance is from the dual Holy and Terrible Mother figure, which is at once mystic and capricious. Woman, for Hakim, is also an epistemological symbol.

On the other hand, Hakim's *Return* could be interpreted as an allegory of the individuation or the process of personality development of Egypt herself. The process is embodied by the characters themselves, Saniya being the 'anima', Muhsin the 'animus', Mustafa the 'ego' and Salim the 'shadow'. For Egypt to attain her personality development, flaws inherent in the Egyptian personality have to be transcended through a harmonious interweaving of these archetypal constituents of the Egyptian psyche. Such a reformatory notion is absent in Naipaul, since he is desperate of the reform of both the Indian and Trinidadian personalities, which are, in his opinion, for ever undermined by an inherent inferiority complex and a sense of exile, marginality and shipwreck.

Both Hakim's *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* and Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* could be interpreted as socio-political allegories, a view attested to by the symbolism of setting, character and names of characters. The village in Hakim's *Diary* is presented by Hakim as the state in miniature, while the unsolved, but filed, case of Kamar al-Dawla

him, Naipaul dreams not of seeking reform at home but of escaping the dispiriting and uninspiring environment of Trinidad. Naipaul feels desperately shipwrecked on a secluded island that is nothing but, according to him, a “dot on the map of the world”⁴. While the prosecutor in *Diary* does not fantasize about a flight to the metropolis, both Biswas and Anand in *House* see the flight to the metropolis as the ideal and only means of self-fulfilment.

In *Enigma*, Naipaul voices his belief that London should be a multi-cultural and cosmopolitan city that endows people with a universal citizenship. It follows, therefore, that while Hakim endorses Egyptian heritage, Arab culture and Islamic religion, Naipaul seems dubious of the validity of Indian heritage and religion and Trinidadian culture. It is primarily from this that the dispiriting sense of insecurity of Naipaul’s characters stems, hence the tragic death of Biswas in the crumbling, mortgaged Sikkim Street house. The house symbol seems to connote Trinidadians’, and minorities’, unattainable grail. Furthermore, the garden, the storm, the fire and the serpent symbolism, implies, at once, both the primordial descent into darkness and chaos as well as the Apocalyptic Battle. Significantly, Naipaul retains no illusions whatsoever about a New Adam or a restoration of prelapsarian Eden. While Hakim retains the ancient Egyptian belief that Egypt is the one and only paradise, Naipaul, as the Shorthills’ episode in *House* indicates, believes that Trinidad is nothing but a mock-paradise.

Brechtian alienation of the artist-hero in both Hakim and Naipaul springs from different sources. As Hakim himself explains in *The Flower of Life*, he has all his life struggled to change the Arab underestimation of the theatre as a profession and as a literary genre comparable, for instance, to poetry. To attain social justice, Hakim called for the establishment of

narrative structure reflects his philosophy of equilibriumism, hence his use of the devices of antinomy, synonymy, duality, correlation, complementary polarity, narrative foils and juxtaposition. On these Hakim projects his tenet of the necessity of securing a counterbalance between the power and the alternate power. On the other hand, Naipaul's existentialist and somehow nihilistic vision is perfectly mirrored by his circular narrative technique creating, at the end, the very same and unchanged circumstances of the beginning. The Indian god Shiva's vicious circle of creation-destruction is implied by an anti-novel form, characterized by the absence of the traditional plot, a non-linear narrative technique and a multiplicity of settings and time shapes. In *House, Bend* and *Enigma*, arrival is of a shipwrecked sailor, doomed to be for ever drifting. Naipaul uses fragmentation and defamiliarization of familiar and traditional narrative forms only to project on them an underlying vision of the world as an abyss, a void.

Even the novel genre is undermined by Naipaul. Hakim, however, reveres the narrative skill and compares himself to Shahrazad and the *Samer* and his oral narrative folk-tradition. Nevertheless, Hakim's allusions to *The Arabian Nights*, in addition to creating a fairy-tale atmosphere in his novels, serve other purposes as well. They somehow underline, as it were, the Achilles' heel of Easterners shaping their lives according to myths. In this way, Hakim hints at the need for counterbalancing the worlds of reality and illusion, as crystallized in the Pirandellian tint of metafiction and magic realism of Hakim's literature. If Hakim seems to favour, at times, the artistic replica, Naipaul undermines and denounces reality as mimesis. This explains Naipaul's use of metafictional asides disillusioning, at once, both himself and the reader and preventing both the reader's 'suspension of disbelief' and his possible

identification with the characters. In both *Hakim's Donkey* and Naipaul's *Enigma*, the realist trend is undermined and shown to be unsuitable to modernist uncertainty and insecurity. Similarly, both Hakim and Naipaul undermine the I-as-narrator, stream-of-consciousness and free-association of ideas techniques, as a means of self-ridicule. Such irony turns, at times, to grim and grotesque, even macabre satire. Both Hakim and Naipaul, through the symbolic narrative structure and technique of their novels, level caustic satire at social ills and political flaws.

Both Hakim and Naipaul use the epistolary technique in their novels. In both cases, the letters are addressed to the beloved primarily as the incarnation of the counter-culture of the West: Suzy in Hakim's *Bird* and Sandra in Naipaul's *Mimic Men* are perfect examples. Hakim's letters, however, are not merely addressed to the beloved but are also an emblem of the impossibility of attaining direct communication between the East and the West, between 'Us' and the 'Other', hence Hakim's pioneering use of terms of the later-to-come post-colonialist discourse. While Hakim feels bitter at the Easterners' hollow 'aping' of the West, Naipaul seems to be using the word as a condescending term of dismissal. Other derogatory jargon Naipaul uses are 'barbarism', 'primitivism', 'parasitism', 'resistance', and the 'self-destructiveness' of 'simple societies'. If the 'bubble' image Muhsin uses in *Bird* (89) indicates the clash of conflicting cultures in the Easterners' minds, it also foreshadows the end where Hakim voices his belief in the need for attaining a universal culture with no specific geographical location on the world map.

For Hakim, multi-culturalism and cosmopolitanism do not spring from the globalization and hegemony of a Western culture; instead, they should be based on diversity and cultural pluralism. For the premises of his cosmopolitan capital of the world, Naipaul, on the other hand, chooses and