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 ***Journey through Darkness: The Writing of V. S. Naipaul***
(review)

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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A revision of the author's dissertation on V. S. Naipaul, *Journey through Darkness* provides a competent yet uninspired consideration of Naipaul's oeuvre (excluding the 1987 *The Enigma of Arrival*). Nightingale's scope is broad, perhaps overly so, as she examines Naipaul's portrayal of the stultifying legacy of colonialism in both the Third and Western Worlds, considers the extension of Naipaul's range as **[End Page 255]** he crosses "the regional barrier" of the West Indies to claim the larger postcolonial world as his subject, analyzes the concomitant evolution of authorial perspective from benign satire through cynicism and despair to acceptance and sympathy, and investigates the symbiotic relationship between Naipaul's fiction and nonfiction. In addition, Nightingale discusses the structure and style of individual works and elucidates the themes of political corruption and the failure of social and human contracts, entrapment and the paradoxical "free state" of geographical and psychological exile, and the kinship between fantasy and reality.

Lacking a unifying thesis, Nightingale attempts to integrate her wide-ranging concerns into a coherent whole by adopting as her organizing metaphor a recurring image from Naipaul's fiction: a decrepit bus hurtles past canefields and a boy in a hut who stares vacantly into the surrounding darkness, unaware of the vehicle's destination. The bus, Nightingale maintains, symbolizes any newly independent nation pursuing its erratic course through the postcolonial gloom, whereas the boy "may represent the writer himself in the first phase of his career. Nightingale explores this interesting parallel in Part One of her study, investigating Naipaul's early work in which he confines himself to Trinidad and the Caribbean, "the illuminated circle around the hut." The young Naipaul, "adopting the perspective" of the inexperienced boy, portrays Trinidadian society compassionately and humorously in the *Miguel Street* sketches and in the early stories of *A Flag on the Island*. But as the writer matures, Nightingale notes, he moves from the Horatian satire of *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* through the sympathetic

reminiscences of *A House for Mr Biswas* to the scathing observations of *The Middle Passage*. Thus is established a pattern not only of an evolving authorial perspective but also of a widening geographical range (from a Port of Spain street in *Miguel Street* to the entire Caribbean in *The Middle Passage*), a pattern Nightingale traces through the remainder of Naipaul's literary career, which she divides into three phases.

In Part Two of her book, Nightingale extends Naipaul's image to suit her organizational needs as she visualizes the boy/author "look[ing] up the road seeking the point of origin of the bus." In this second phase of his career (encompassing the writing of *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*, *An Area of Darkness*, "A Flag on the Island," *The Mimic Men*, and *The Loss of El Dorado*), Naipaul investigates both the recent and remote past to uncover the seeds of the present dislocation and despair of various colonies and metropolises.

Part Three of the study underlines the limitations of Nightingale's controlling metaphor as she yokes together works that would have been more aptly considered separately. Maintaining that in the third phase of his career Naipaul seeks "the destination of the bus" and finds the fearful and inescapable legacy of colonialism, Nightingale appropriately examines *In a Free State*, *Guerrillas*, and articles from *The Return of Eva Perón* in terms of the deracination, corruption, and violence endemic in postcolonial societies. But the inclusion of *India: A Wounded Civilization*, *A Bend in the River*, and *Among the Believers* in a part that ostensibly focuses upon Naipaul's despair in the face of the "heart of darkness" is paradoxical: these books, Nightingale herself admits, display a new optimism regarding man's resilience and "a more positive tone" than the work of the early 1970s. Moreover, this moderation of Naipaul's vision is inadequately explained. **[End Page 256]**

Part Four of the book examines *Finding the Centre* as a second beginning in Naipaul's career. This...

is true. However, and thus her groundbreaking study offers some credible hypotheses to be tested in the undeveloped realm of serious scholarship on the work of Joyce Carol Oates.

Barford Parker's *The Untransforming Fiction of Cynthia Ozick* places a much different kind of writer in residence. Cynthia Ozick for Parker is above all a Jewish-American writer who "has radically changed the way we define Jewish-American writing and more important, the way Jewish-American writing defines itself." Seeing Ozick as an uncompromising, self-confessed "autodidact," he argues that she "forces her readers to become something of the same thing, lest they miss the enormous cultural forces that bubble just beneath the surface of even her most 'realistic' fiction." She crosses the way from the Holocaust, "as a moral imperative, as Burden-of-History, as a confrontation between survivor and American Jew"; she is able to see ultra-Orthodox Jewry in reality rather than as symbolic configurations. And whereas the insistence on Jewish-American residency "ought" to make her a writer of limited appeal, her unique literary record, her influence and reputation are considerable for a writer who has published just two novels, three collections of short stories, and one book of essays, both a polemicist and a writer of "sketchy fiction." Ozick's effectiveness, according to Parker, lies in her intelligence on her dead self, her sheer passion, her receptivity to change.

Written somewhat wistfully, this short book is a personal essay of admiration and appreciation of Ozick's work. Liberally interspersed with quotations from Ozick's work, it provides, like Bender's look on Oates, a contextual framework in which to place a difficult and often misunderstood writer. Similarly, *Untransforming Fictions* is limited in the depth of its analysis of individual works, and it refrains from critical judgment of the author's achievement.

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Fredy Nighringale, *Joanna through Dickens: The Writing of V. S. Naipaul*, St. Lucia: UWI Press, 1997, 255 pp., \$22.50.

A revision of the author's dissertation on V. S. Naipaul, *Joanna through Dickens* provides a competent yet uninspired consideration of Naipaul's prose (even though the 1985 *The Naipauls of Trinidad*). Nighringale's scope is broad, perhaps overly so, as she examines Naipaul's portrayal of the archifying legacy of colonialism in both the Third and Western Worlds, considers the evolution of Naipaul's range of

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