

ABSTRACT

The Fear of Extinction in the Fictional Works of V.S. Naipaul:
 an Examination of Four of Naipaul's Protagonists -
 Mr Biswas, Mr Stone, Ralph Singh and Salim.

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The fictional works of V.S. Naipaul, like the man himself, have been misunderstood to a great extent. Naipaul is not a pessimist; neither is he a nihilist nor essentially existentialist. Behind his works there lies a vision of man that has not been thoroughly, if at all, examined by literary critics. That vision is of man struggling to survive in a world that seems bent on making him extinct (an idea not inconsistent with the current view of man as an endangered species). Far from being pessimistic, Naipaul sketches the courage and resilience of the human spirit in coming to terms with the challenge and fear of extinction. Viewed in this light, Naipaul's protagonists need to be re-examined in order to be justly appreciated. Seen as men struggling to achieve, they appear to be failures , ending up in the way they began: homeless, exiled, nondescript. Seen as men struggling against extinction, their very survival becomes testament enough to a kind of moral, psychological, and physical strength.

In Naipaul's world, to be alive, to be aware rather, of having survived extinction in the face of an almost alien, destructive universe, represents the ultimate, almost stoical, kind of triumph

each individual protagonist can ever hope to achieve. Such an awareness of the world and of man's position in it, while serving to intensify the individual's helplessness, at the same time, forces upon him a way of seeing the world and himself which lends a sense of meaning and purpose, albeit limited, to existence.

This short dissertation aims at establishing the nature of the fear of extinction; tracing the sources of the fear; assessing the extent to which the fear is combated; and considering the implications of this motif in terms of the kinds of literary criticism the works have received, in terms of Naipaul's vision and in terms of Naipaul himself as a man confronting this fear of extinction.