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"To be a colonial is to be a little ridiculous and unlikely, especially in the eyes of someone from the metropolitan country. All immigrants and their descendants are colonials of one sort or another" (1)

Throughout his works, the image of the colonial in V. S. Naipaul's fiction has gone through metamorphoses in keeping with the author's increasing insight into man's position in the universe. This study proposes to examine the different impressions and the development and sharpening of the author's perspective from one pole to the next.

The early works, The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira and Miguel Street, are dealt with from a West Indian point of view. The colonial society is examined in the pre-independence period, and the image the colonial has of himself is carefully presented. These novels reflect what Naipaul records in The Middle Passage, of the colonial's attitudes to himself, his fellow-colonials, his place in the world, education and politics. They are written in a humorous vein and have been referred to as 'social comedies' by the author. (2)

This era is controlled by "the trap of the colonial mentality", (3) which involves reverence for anything foreign, particularly if European in origin. The printed word is highly respected. It is one of the hinges on which Ganesh swings and offers Mr. Biswas a means of escape. It is this colonial mentality which frustrates Mr. Biswas and perpetuates the mimicry examined in The Mimic Men.

In 1961, Naipaul published A House for Mr. Biswas which marks another view of the colonial society of Trinidad. The author presents the frustrations of living in a colonial society, through the plight of Mohun Biswas. The novel presents the struggles of an East Indian caught between two worlds, both colonial, but both as devastating.

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Naipaul examines the narrowness of the Hindu community, the security it offers while making its members very dependent and almost helpless against the aimless but demanding wider society. Through his central figure's "progress" over the years, Naipaul is able to highlight the society within whose sphere Mohun Biswas revolves.

The Mimic Men is Naipaul's presentation of the colonial as politician and a figure of exile. Although island politics is the means by which Ralph Singh is catapulted into exile and finding himself, it is not the focal point of Naipaul's presentation. The idea of mimicry and uncreativity is also explored, but even more than this, as Naipaul says,

"It deals with my own problem, the disassociation of a man from the simplicity around him. And I find this is experienced by many people in more complex surroundings."⁽⁴⁾

It also looks at the colonial finally facing up to life in England which is supposed to be the source, pivot of all that he has learnt.

From The Mystic Masseur to The Mimic Men, Naipaul's concentration has been on the West Indian. We can observe the development of another aspect of Naipaul's vision of the colonial in the next two works. The collection In A Free State presents the dispossessed colonial and the problem of displacement as a universal condition. English expatriates in the title novella are as much at limbo as the third world immigrants of "One Out of Many" and "Tell Me Who To Kill". The coloniser is presented as complacent and adopting the colonial attitude - one of being totally secure - while the colonial achieves a tenuous personal freedom.

A Bend In The River, like the collection, focuses on Africa and the colonial's relation with North America and Europe, but his

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condition is not peculiar. Interpretations of the terms 'free' and 'slave' in a universal context, fix man as a 'colonial' in an uprooted existence in a world which emphasises its transience. Naipaul's shift in territorial focus parallels the author's increasing need to examine man's position, to understand exactly where he belongs in this universe. But from Ganesh to Salim, Naipaul insists that expatriation or self-exile is a better choice than rotting in third-world dereliction. Yet there is dereliction everywhere and we are all nomads.

"I have always believed that a writer writes one book all his life; whether consciously so or not, his work is of a piece."⁽⁵⁾

This statement by Nadine Gordimer can be applied to the works under discussion, in that the image of the colonial is ever under examination, the unsettled figure always trying to assert himself, developing from a territorial representative to a universal symbol.