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THE ENIGMA EXPLAINED:
THE STUDY OF THE CHRONOTOPIC RELATION
BETWEEN V. S. NAIPAUL'S NOVEL *THE ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL*
AND GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S PAINTING
THE ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL AND THE AFTERNOON

Abstract. The article is a comparative analysis of V. S. Naipaul's novel *The Enigma of Arrival* and Giorgio de Chirico's painting *The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon*. The relation between those two works extends far beyond the title. The novel and the painting seem to inform each other so that the book can be seen as an extended ekphrastic response to the image or the visual scene can be read as *mise-en-abyme* of the entire novel. The common denominator for the interaction of the visual and verbal *Enigma* is the idea of the chronotope. All the major elements of the image, *i.e.* the internal hesitation symbolically represented, the city square in the background, the idea of uncertainty and indefiniteness suggested by the motif of voyage, as well as the interconnectedness of the past and the present in the architecture of buildings, involve de Chirico's *Enigma* in a peculiar relationship with literature and Naipaul's novel in particular. In the context of the novel, the painting becomes an exact representation of the chronotope of the threshold in the narrator's life, when first in New York and then in London the breach in his personality becomes recognised and begins to determine all his subsequent decisions and actions. Consequently, Bakhtin's words referring to the representational potential of the chronotope become literally materialised and concretised in de Chirico's painting. Moreover, the close interaction of Naipaul's novel and de Chirico's painting, as discussed in this study, is accompanied by the process of approximating the condition of the other art.

Key words: ekfrazja, chronotop, V. S. Naipaul, Giorgio de Chirico, czas i przestrzeń w literaturze i sztuce.

Time and space are central aspects of human perception and understanding of reality. If we assume representation and assistance in comprehending

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the world as one of the roles art is supposed to perform, time and space will become crucial also in defining art. Consequential for the modern thought was Lessing's *Laocoon: an Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766) in which he divided all arts into spatial and temporal, ascribing painting to the former and poetry to the latter category. In accordance with the nature of signs both arts operate with, Lessing ordained that pictures should focus on presenting objects or people in stasis whereas actions should be depicted by poetry.

If it be true that painting employs wholly different signs or means of imitation from poetry,—the one using forms and colors in space, the other articulate sounds in time,—and if signs must unquestionably stand in convenient relation with the thing signified, then signs arranged side by side can represent only objects existing side by side, or whose parts so exist, while consecutive signs can express only objects which succeed each other, or whose parts succeed each other in time.¹

The visual and verbal arts were still viewed by Lessing as iconic of reality, but the aspects of reality they were expected to imitate were different. Jean Hagstrum nicely summarises Lessing's dictum: "Painting, a spatial and visual art, should not strive to become a temporal and psychological art; and poetry, a temporal and intellectual art, should ignore the demands of line, space, color, and simultaneity of effect."² Lessing's separation of the arts according to the medium used and the preferred subject matter ensued a long-lasting debate on the artistic representation of time and space.

The spatio-temporal polemic gained intensity in the 20th century with Joseph Frank, Gerard Genette, Paul Ricœur and Mieke Bal making a lasting contribution in the field of literature. The list of scholars involved in the debate is far from exhaustive, yet for the sake of the present study I will narrow my interests even more and focus on Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of space-time. Following Lessing's prescription, Bakhtin consented that time is the dominant category in literature.³ He argued, however, that time in a literary text cannot be considered without reference to space. According to Bakhtin, the two categories of time and space constitute a fundamental unity, as in the human perception of everyday reality. This intrinsic correlation of

¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* 1776, trans. Ellen Frothingham (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), 91.

² Jean Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 155.

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics", in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, ed. by Brian Richardson (Columbus: The Ohio University Press, 2002), 15.

temporal and spatial relationships denoted by the term “chronotope” is tantamount to the world construction that is at the base of every narrative text.⁴ Bakhtin defined the chronotope in the following way:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.⁵

Although Bakhtin confined his study of the chronotope to literary texts, he allowed for the application of the chronotopical method beyond literature - “We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature; we will not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture.”⁶ Following this rather subtle incentive, Bart Keunen studies the chronotope in relation to film. In his article “The Chronotopic Imagination in Literature and Film” he claims that “the concept of the chronotope is related to the film shot because it expresses the experience of change.”⁷ Since the spatio-temporal nature of film can hardly be questioned, Keunen's argument seems fully legitimate. In her article “The Chronotope and the Generation of Meaning in Novels and Paintings”⁸ Janice Best goes one step further and makes a comparative analysis of the chronotope in Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale* and Manet's paintings in which, according to Lessing, time should not be the object of study.

The problem of time and narrativity in the visual arts has been prompted by Lessing's essay and discussed at length within aesthetics and art criticism.⁹ Interestingly, the problem can be approached also from the side of literature. Not unlike the chronotope, which entails conjunction of elements —“the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature,”¹⁰ the alleged timelessness of a visual

⁴ Nele Bemong, Pieter Borghart, Michel De Dobbeleer et al. (eds.), *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives* (Gent: Academia Press, 2010), 3.

⁵ Bakhtin, 15.

⁶ Bakhtin, 15.

⁷ Bart Keunen, “The Chronotopic Imagination in Literature and Film,” in *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope*, 40.

⁸ Janice Best, “The Chronotope and the Generation of Meaning in Novels and Paintings,” *Criticism* 36,2 (1994): 291-316.

⁹ Jeoraldean McClain, “Time in the Visual Arts: Lessing and Modern Criticism,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44,1 (1985): 41-58.

¹⁰ Bakhtin, 15.

artwork can be challenged at a junction—in the form of ekphrasis. Originally an ancient rhetorical term, “ekphrasis” has been adopted by literary criticism to denote a literary description of a visual artwork.¹¹ James Heffernan’s study of the ekphrastic phenomenon from antiquity till postmodern literature exposes the implicit temporal nature of visual images. Heffernan concentrates on such examples of ekphrastic passages which deliver from the pregnant moment of visual art their embryonically narrative impulse, and thus make explicit the story that visual art tells by implication.¹² Accordingly, rather than static descriptions, ekphrastic responses to visual images become narratives inspired by the visual scene. As Heffernan’s analysis demonstrates, though impaired in its representation of time and change, the visual image can pose questions about time and induce temporal analysis. In consequence, visual arts can be safely included in the study of the chronotope.

Therefore, I will attempt in this paper a comparative analysis of V. S. Naipaul’s novel *The Enigma of Arrival* and Giorgio de Chirico’s painting *The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon*. De Chirico’s painting, chosen to serve as the title of the novel, seems to inspire the whole of Naipaul’s work. The novel can be viewed as an extended ekphrastic response to de Chirico’s image or the painting may serve as *mise-en-abyme* of the entire novel. The way the novel and the painting inform each other will be the main object of my study with a simultaneous attempt to demonstrate that the interrelation between the image and the novel is largely chronotopic.

The major characteristic of Naipaul’s *Enigma* is its indefiniteness pertaining to the generic status of the work. The book reads as an autobiography. Facts from the narrator’s life—his Trinidadian and Indian origin, scholarship to Oxford, travels to India, Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, books he wrote as well as the 10 years’ residence in Wiltshire—bring to mind Naipaul himself. It must be noticed, however, that the full title of Naipaul’s work is *The Enigma of Arrival. A Novel*. The word “novel” attached to the title makes the book a fictional composition which, however, “contains few of the staples of the novel form: it is thin on both narrative momentum and sustained characterisation. The former is replaced by reflective soliloquy; the latter by a series of thumb-nail sketches of individuals ...”¹³

¹¹ James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1993), 5.

¹² Heffernan, 5.

¹³ John Thieme, “Thinly veiled autobiography.” *Third World Quarterly* 9,4 (1987): 1376.

The reason why Naipaul's *Enigma* fails to comply with the condition of the novel is that it is heavily influenced by the presence of the painting: in the title of the book, in the narrator's ruminations and in its form. The "strong inclination towards the visual"¹⁴ which Naipaul exhibits in his experimental work happens at the expense of action. Naipaul's characters are not initiators of action, their energy being invested mainly in the occupations of the mind. Moreover, they serve as subjects of study rather than of plot-activating relationships. In effect, they become portraits, singled out and framed.¹⁵ Thus, Naipaul's aesthetic choice in *Enigma* is to walk an indefinite path not only between fact and fiction but also between literature and visual arts.

The conflation of the factual and the imaginative that Naipaul's *Enigma* entails concerns also the person of the narrator. A Trinidadian immigrant to Great Britain, the unnamed narrator of Naipaul's book undergoes a transformation from a naive young man seeking a writing career in the metropolitan London into a mature middle-aged artist feeling compelled to analyse his own life. If the former is more than willing to reject his Trinidadian past and Indian origin in favour of the glamour of the Empire, the latter struggles to embrace his multi-cultural experience and incorporate it in his writing. The duality which began the moment he left Trinidad prevails in the narrator's life and is perceived in the following way: "I could feel the two sides of myself separating one from the other, the man from the writer."¹⁶

In a Wiltshire cottage where he comes to dwell, the narrator finds a paperback booklet of de Chirico's early paintings left by the previous tenant. While most of the images seem dull and uninteresting, the reproduction of *The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon* makes a lasting impression. The narrator becomes fascinated by the image and begins to plan a book based on the painting:

[My narrator] would arrive ... at a classical port with the walls and gateways like cut-outs. He would walk past that muffled figure on the quayside. He would move from that silence and desolation, that blankness, to a gateway or door. He would enter there and be swallowed by the life and noise of a crowded city... The mission he had come on ... would give him encounters and

¹⁴ Jain Jasbir, "Landscapes of the Mind: Unraveling Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*" *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 5:2 (2007), 116.

¹⁵ Jasbir, 116, 122.

¹⁶ V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 111. All quotations come from this edition and will be hereafter marked in the text as page number in parenthesis.

adventures... . Gradually there would come to him a feeling that he was getting nowhere; he would lose his sense of mission, he would begin to know that he was lost. His 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... . At a moment of crisis he would come upon a door, open it, and find himself back on the quayside of arrival. He has been saved; the world is as he remembered it. Only one thing is missing now. Above the cut out walls and buildings there is no mast, no sail. The antique ship has gone. The traveller has lived out his life. (92)

In the course of his writing Naipaul's narrator realises that "the story that had come to me as a pleasant fantasy had already occurred, and was an aspect of my own" (157). The story inspired by de Chirico's image and the narrator's comment on it indicate two important things. Firstly, the fact that the narrator reacts to the painting with a story points to the narrative potential of de Chirico's *Enigma*. Secondly, the narrator's comment signals a case of interior duplication and the *mise-en-abyme* effect of the painting. The alleged correspondence between the image and the narrator's life is, however, never fully accounted for and the following analysis will try to provide an explanation.

The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon contains elements typical of de Chirico's early works: a city square, a tower of an unidentified town and a sail somewhere in the background. What makes it different from de Chirico's other compositions is that any natural element is excluded from the image. It is true that de Chirico rarely overuses references to nature, but he likes to play with striking natural details such as bananas, palms, clouds or hills. Even the sea is concealed behind a tall, stony wall, its presence suggested only by a white sail. The image is thus an all-too-perfect example of a cityscape. What may strike the viewer as strange is the fact that the city square is unusually deserted. Apart from the two muffled figures in the centre, there is no crowd and no signs of any activity. Such iconography of Chirico's paintings is explained as a symbol of the melancholy of travel which stems from the necessity to leave familiar surroundings and people as well as the urge to search and explore new, uncharted places.¹⁷

The motif of the city is conspicuous also in Naipaul's novel. Cities played a crucial role in the narrator's life. Raised on an agricultural island, he developed an intense loathing for "the vanished world of sugarcane fields and huts and barefoot children" (265). As the narrator admits, the Trinidadian landscape, associated with terror and poverty, "fed my panic and my ambition,

¹⁷ Krystyna Janicka, *De Chirico. Malarstwo metafizyczne* (Warszawa: Arkady, 1979), 32.

and nurtured my earliest fantasies” (139). Feeling like a man “denied the chance of visiting famous cities, learning their street maps instead” (108), the narrator concocts a plan to leave Trinidad. He wins a prestigious scholarship to Oxford which gives him a chance to get out of the island and become a writer.

The narrator’s contempt for his background and his desire to launch a writing career precipitate an essential split in his personality, perceived as a conflict between the man and the writer. The initial enthusiasm of a young traveller very soon gives way to the feeling of anxiety caused by the man’s wish to belong to “the great world” and the writer’s attempt to contend with the ignoble colonial experience in his writing. The motif of internal struggle binds the whole book together and is symptomatic of the narrator’s entire life. In technical terms, the internal man-writer opposition is actually the only conflict that sustains the narrative otherwise devoid of external action and replaced instead with the narrator’s reveries.

Significantly, the first realisation of the undercurrent struggle comes to the young Trinidadian already in New York—the first stop on his way to the Empire.

Less than twenty-four hours had passed since the magical vision of landscape, sugar-cane fields and forested hills and valleys; and the crawling sea; and the clouds lit from above by the sun. But already I could feel the two sides of myself separating one from the other, the man from the writer. ... With the new silence of my solitude, this solitude something I had never anticipated as part of the great adventure, I watched the two sides of myself separate and dwindle even on this first day. (111)

Reassured by the comfort of the hotel, the availability of the press and cigarettes, the narrator decides to explore the streets of New York. He finds that “the city of protected-feeling streets and tall buildings was curiously softly coloured” (107); he is amazed by the wealth of books and goods; yet he cannot combat the thought that “[he] felt no joy” (111) but grew overwhelmed by the “increasing sense of ... solitude in this world.” (111)

Envisaged as a fulfillment of the narrator’s dreams and yearnings, the metropolitan London turns out to be yet another disappointment: “I had expected the great city to leap out at me and possess me; I had longed so much to be in it. And soon, within a week or less, I was very lonely” (121). Neither the process of assimilation the man-part of Naipaul’s narrator yearned for nor the prestigious authorial career the writer aspired to evolved in the right direction. Consequently, the London experience only aggravated the narrator’s sense of alienation, both from the outside world and from himself.

Out of the initial disappointment with the city the narrator's specific approach to time developed, time understood as the past: "the world in which I found myself in London was something less than the perfect world I had striven towards. As a child in Trinidad I had put this world at a far distance, in London perhaps. In London now I had to put this perfect world at another time, an earlier time" (121,120). Eventually, the past becomes his obsession and the sole frame within which time is allowed to function in the novel. After his arrival to London, the narrator admits: "I lost the gift of fantasy, the dream of the future, the far-off place where I was going" (124). The city brings neither fulfilment nor fame; it breeds, however, a strong need of retrospective self-analysis.

The novel starts when the narrator comes to dwell in a Wiltshire cottage located within the premises of an Edwardian manor, in the close vicinity of Salisbury and Stonehenge. Disillusioned with the city, the narrator comes to realise that "to get anywhere in the writing, I had first of all to define myself very clearly to myself" (141). After twenty years spent in England, he arrives at Wiltshire as "an intruder, not from another village or county, but from another hemisphere" (285). His disorientation about his belonging is expressed in a Prufrock-like manner: "For the first four days it rained. I could hardly see where I was . . . the four days of rain and mist that hid my surroundings from me and answered my anxiety at the time" (12). The narrator's move to the countryside seems to be motivated by the necessity to reconcile the two sides of his troubled personality. This explains the peculiarity of time structure in the novel which defies chronology and linearity. Instead, the story develops along what may be called the autobiographical time, characterised by a constant interrelation between the past and the present. In "The Veto of Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography" Louis A. Renza explains that in autobiographical texts the present creates the past by inspiring meaningless data with interpretation while the past conditions the present and springs to life out of the incomprehensible moods of the present.¹⁸ This circular interdependence permeates the whole of Naipaul's novel. The book makes "a kind of spiraling progress, which is in itself a way of affirming the circularity of existence not as hopeless return to the same but as the concession of a second chance, the certainty that every death will be followed by a rebirth" (170). Thus, the chapters of *Enigma* are not sequenced

¹⁸ Louis A. Renza, "The Veto of Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography," *New Literary History* 9,1 (1977): 3-4.

chronologically but form an irregular pattern of prolepsis and analepsis, recollection and reflection. Facts from the narrator's life are revealed gradually, being constantly modified by changing perception: "But that way of looking came to me later, has come to me with greater force now, with the writing" (19), "But it was to be many years after that before the alternations in my personality, or the slight intimations I was beginning to have about those alternations, intimations that were minute fractions of that first day's adventure, were to acquire their proper proportions" (101). Consequently, it can be said that the novel owes its shape to the mechanisms of the narrator's memory, the tensions between what he prefers to forget and what he gradually learns to remember.

The central problem of the hybrid identity in Naipaul's *Enigma* is deep and intimate and communicated through the narrator's peculiar perception of time in space. The past which becomes the main aspect of the narrator's self-study is not only filtered through the present but also chronotopically imprint in space. The narrator's self-scrutiny is done indirectly through intense observation of nature, which offers the narrator a rebirth, "a second childhood of seeing and learning (17)." More importantly, his chronotopic perception of time marks different phases in the narrator's way to self-recognition.

Initially, the British landscape, reported as benign and equipped with a healing potential, serves as an instant remedy to the narrator's disappointment with the metropolitan way of London. The vast spaces of the valley in which he comes to dwell respond to the idealised image of England he still harbours: "The setting felt ancient; the impression was of space, unoccupied land, the beginning of things" (15). Above all, however, they offer the anguished Trinidadian a feeling of history and continuity that his colonial past lacks. References to the past are numerous in the novel: "I could find a special kind of past in what I saw" (22), "my sense of antiquity, my feeling for the age of the earth and the oldness of man's possession of it, was always with me" (24), "I had this historical part of England to myself when I went walking" (23).

The tendency to see time through space is particularly easily detectable in the first chapter of the novel. Naipaul's narrator devotes much space in this part to Jack's eponymous garden. The small allotment tended with great care by a neighbouring farmer helps to satisfy the narrator's crave for history as well as his need to assimilate. Surrounded by neglected farm buildings, it stands for history, if only of the by-gone prosperity. On the other hand, the narrator's regular scrutiny of Jack's garden helps him get in tune with the nature cycles in the English climate. Consequently, the passage of time is

recorded by the narrator with relation to the changes in Jack's farming routine. Interpreted through his garden, Jack becomes for the narrator what he himself wishes to be—a "man fitting the landscape (19)" "a remnant of the past" (21).

Apart from the chronotopes of nature, the narrator's intense concentration on the past shows also in his romantic treatment of buildings/constructions. Their chronotopic value lies in the fact that they are reservoirs of historical heritage. The Salisbury Cathedral is viewed by the narrator as a physical realisation of Constable's 19th century artistic vision, which for years fed the young Trinidadian boy's curiosity and admiration for the empire. Analogously, the dilapidated yet still impressive manor, in whose grounds the narrator's cottage is located, brings back the imperial glory of Britain. Stonehenge, in turn, leads back to prehistoric rituals.

With time, however, the narrator's fascination with the English landscape abates as he becomes aware of the transformations it is subject to. Thus, apart from the past and history, time becomes associated with decay. The narrator's sensitivity to passing and ruin is stimulated by those elements of landscape that used to be regarded with deep reverence. There are no other signs of moaning after Jack's death except for the description of his garden: "His vegetable plot, overrun with weeds, was barely noticeable. His fruit and flower garden grew more wild, the hedge and the rose bushes growing out. His greenhouse at the back ... became empty (47)." The narrator realises that "The manor too had its ruins" (49). He begins to perceive Stonehenge differently: "And Stonehenge had been built and had fallen into ruin, and the vast burial ground had lost its sanctity" (50). Eventually, the narrator learns to see the world in terms of flux, constant change, a series of cycles.

The narrator's focus on the past and its interrelation with the present as well as seeing time as chronotopically inscribed in places are clearly also de Chirico's preoccupations in his *Enigma*. Painted in 1912, three years after his arrival in Paris, the composition is largely a result of de Chirico's fascination with the city, its buildings and squares. The nature of the painter's interest in the French capital is, however, quite peculiar. The buildings in *Enigma* combine their modern look with the classical style. This combination can be seen as a personal reference to the years spent by de Chirico in Greece in his childhood and in Italy in his youth, which turns the image into a representation of the "places of the mind which can be linked to real places only in the artist's intentions ... and belong to an area of the memory which is nourished, genetically, by an ancient, ancestral culture: that, precisely, of

classicism.”¹⁹ By this method de Chirico seems to communicate “the continuous interchangeability between the myth of the past and the myth of the present.”²⁰ The surrealist effect of this intersection turns the image into “the unpredictable and fluctuating admixture of memories, or a state of mind.”²¹ Moreover, this chronotopic incorporation of both the past and the present in the style of buildings adds dynamics to the image. If this energy is viewed as “the dynamic between remembering and forgetting,”²² de Chirico’s *Enigma* becomes an accurate representation of the troubled mind of Naipaul’s narrator, his desperate quest for roots and a sense of belonging.

The theme of voyage dominates de Chirico's art and is yet another linking element between the visual and verbal *Enigma*. The title *The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon* was given to de Chirico’s image by Guillaume Appolinaire, the painter’s most ardent supporter and critic. Voyaging is what the mystery signalled by the title refers to. Hidden behind a wall and synecdochically represented merely by a sail, the ship in the painting signifies either arrival or departure. A third possibility is that the fragmented and thus ambiguous representation of the ship points to the inseparability of both: every arrival entails departure, and every departure presupposes destination. In tune with deconstructive analysis of language, the idea of departure is potentially inherent²³ within the signification of the word “arrival.” The intersection of the past and the present, and the paradox of arrival give de Chirico’s painting the impression that the chronological time has stopped and instead “the infinitely elastic, intuitive sense of eternity, of duration is evoked.”²⁴ Moreover, the notion of perpetual becoming is evoked as enunciated by Heraclitus, whom de Chirico called the most profound Greek philosopher.²⁵ Being constantly on the move trying to define his own identity, thus in the state of perpetual becoming, is what characterises Naipaul’s narrator. Travels play a formative role in his life. Visits to Africa,

¹⁹ Renzo S. Crivelli, “The Paradox of Arrival: Naipaul and de Chirico,” *Caribana* 3 (1992-1993): 80.

²⁰ Crivelli, 80.

²¹ Marianne W. Martin, “Reflections on de Chirico and Arte Metafisica.” *The Art Bulletin* 60,2 (1978): 346.

²² Roger Rothman, “Between Böcklin and Picasso: Giorgio de Chirico in Paris, 1909-1913,” *SECAC Review* 15,1 (2006): 8.

²³ J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 981.

²⁴ Martin, 347.

²⁵ Martin, 346.

India and the Caribbean help him trace his cultural and familial connections and acknowledge his roots. However, all these voyages, in particular those between England and Trinidad, are never easy, mainly by virtue of the double nature of arrival as suggested in the painting. The narrator seems to be permanently torn between longing to stay and the wish to take immediate leave, both moves being equally distressing: “at either edge of my ‘run’ there was uncertainty” (138).

Uncertainty and indefiniteness pervade both Naipaul’s novel and de Chirico’s painting in which this idea is additionally represented by the two human figures in the centre of the image. Their position in the scene is as telling as it is ambiguous. If treated as travellers, the man in front seems to be a juvenile newcomer whose posture signals both hope and timidity. His stepping on the board suggests a start of a game, a new beginning. The ambiguity concerns mainly the other figure. What is certain is the men’s bent back caused by age, exhaustion, deep thinking, illness or approaching death. However, the viewer will find it extremely difficult (especially if confronted with a miniature copy of the painting as the narrator himself) to identify the white spot as a face or a nape. It is not certain then whether the man is following his young companion or heading towards the ship to make his journey back. Thus presented, those two figures relate to the arrival/departure ambiguity discussed above. When viewed in the context of the novel, those two figures are variously interpreted: as a newcomer and a native of the port, as Jack and his ageing father or as two mythological figures. However, in the light of the analysis carried out in this study, they are immediately recognised as corresponding to complementary aspects of a single persona—Naipaul’s ambitious writer standing beside the image of his socially inept youth.²⁶

All the major elements of the image, *i.e.* the internal hesitation symbolically represented, the city square in the background, the idea of uncertainty and indefiniteness suggested by the half-hidden ship, as well as the interconnectedness of the past and the present in the architecture of buildings, involve de Chirico’s *Enigma* in a peculiar relationship with literature and Naipaul’s novel in particular.

Among many chronotopes Bakhtin studies, he enumerates also the chronotope of the threshold, understood as the chronotope of crisis or break in life.

²⁶ Robert D. Hamner, “Ekphrasis and V. S. Naipaul *The Enigma of Arrival*,” *The Comparatist* 30 (2006): 48.

This type of the chronotope very often takes a street or square as its space. In these places, as Bakhtin argues, “crisis events occur, the resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man.”²⁷ Keunen further explains the nature of the chronotope of the threshold in the following way:

The man, in an agony of doubt, freezes in the face of the new experiential data, compares these with previous, older experiences and is paralyzed by his or her inability to attune the two. The chronotope of the threshold is characterized by a saturation of information and a strong involvement with mnemonic material.²⁸

Interestingly, Keunen’s words sound like an accurate description of de Chirico’s painting read from the perspective of Naipaul’s novel. In view of that, it becomes clear that Naipaul’s use of de Chirico’s painting extends far beyond mere fascination with the title. The painting is an exact representation of the chronotope of the threshold in which the critical moment in the narrator’s life occurs, when first in New York and then in London the breach in his personality becomes recognised and begins to determine the narrator’s entire life. Consequently, Bakhtin’s words, referring rather to the imagination of the reader, become literally materialised and concretised in de Chirico’s painting: “We cannot help but be strongly impressed by the representational importance of the chronotope. Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible... . Thus, the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materialising time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel.”²⁹

Leaving London for a Wiltshire cottage puts the narrator in close contact with the English and indirectly (through a series of comparisons) also with Trinidadian landscape. This fact as well as the travels he makes, his illness and finally his sister’s funeral finally help the narrator achieve synthesis of the worlds and cultures that had made him. He begins to understand that by “[c]oncealing this colonial-Hindu self below the writing personality, I did both my material and myself much damage” (134). Eventually, both men in the painting are interpreted by the narrator as going in one direction (156)—“man and writer became one; the circle became complete (156).”

As it was already mentioned, the idea of circularity permeates Naipaul’s novel and shows in different aspects of the story: in repeated schemes in life

²⁷ Bakhtin, 21.

²⁸ Keunen, 45.

²⁹ Bakhtin, 22.

and experience, in seeing reality in flux, in observing cycles in nature and in human lives as well as in the surprising fact that the ending of the book proves to be its beginning. This tactic produces the effect of simultaneity which was forbidden by Lessing in the verbal arts, and which is further aggravated in Naipaul's novel by its inclination towards visuality and spatiality under the influence of de Chirico's painting. In the case of Naipaul's *Enigma* "spatial organization and thematic matter cohere to form the aesthetic whole of the finished novel."³⁰ On the other hand, when interpreted in relation to the novel, the two figures in de Chirico's painting show different aspects or even stages in human life and by doing so allude to the narrativity of medieval art in which "single panels often contained temporally discrete sections, with protagonists repeated in several scenes in the same work."³¹ Thus understood, de Chirico's work seems to comply with the basic conditions of narrativity, which are as follows: the painting presents more than one temporal moment, the subject is repeated from one moment to another, and the subject is embedded in at least minimally realistic setting.³² This effect of encroaching the territory of the verbal art is intensified by the passage of time being reflected in architectural space as well as the ambiguous representation of the ship which signifies two actions and thus two points in time. The close interaction of Naipaul's novel and de Chirico's painting, as discussed in this study, is accompanied by the process of approximating the condition of the other art.

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³⁰ Hamner, 44.

³¹ Wendy Steiner, *Pictures of Romance* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press: 1988), 1.

³² Steiner, 2.

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ZAGADKA WYJAŚNIONA:
STUDIUM CHRONOTOPICZNEJ RELACJI
MIĘDZY POWIEŚCIĄ V. S. NAIPAULA ZAGADKA PRZYBYCIA
A OBRAZEM ZAGADKA PRZYBYCIA I POPOŁUDNIE GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

Streszczenie

Artykuł ten jest analizą porównawczą powieści V. S. Naipaula *The Enigma of Arrival* i obrazu Giorgio de Chirico *Zagadka przybycia*. Związek między oboma dziełami wykracza poza zbieżność tytułów. Powieść i obraz zdają przenikać się wzajemnie tak, że możliwe jest postrzeganie książki jako rozbudowanej ekfrazy obrazu de Chirico, podczas gdy obraz może być odczytywany jako motyw autotematyczności w powieści. Tym, co łączy oba dzieła, jest idea chronotopu. Wszystkie najważniejsze aspekty obrazu de Chirico, tj. symbolicznie przedstawienie wewnętrznego rozdarcia, krajobraz miejski, dwuznaczność i niepewność sugerowana tematem podróży, nakładanie się teraźniejszości i przeszłości w architekturze budynków, nawiązują do głównych motywów powieści. Ostatecznie obraz de Chirico staje się wizualną reprezentacją chronotopu progu, kiedy podczas pobytu w Nowym Jorku, a następnie w Londynie narrator zyskuje świadomość kryzysu własnej tożsamości, co determinuje jego dalsze losy. W konsekwencji, słowa Bachtina odnoszące się do reprezentacyjnego potencjału chronotopu ulegają dosłownej materializacji i konkretyzacji w obrazie de Chirico. Wzajemnemu oddziaływaniu powieści i obrazu dodatkowo towarzyszy próba przekraczania granic literatury i sztuki.

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Słowa kluczowe: ekfaza, chronotop, V. S. Naipaul, Giorgio de Chirico, czas i przestrzeń w literaturze i sztuce.