Sir V.S. Naipaul has talked about the separation of the man (the person who writes) and the writer. How do you feel about this issue?

I think Sir Naipaul intimated, in his acceptance of the Nobel Prize in literature, that it is our innermost self that we secret away; we work in solitude, and in this solitude we experience the epiphany. If I may attempt to paraphrase Sir Naipaulit is this moment of inspiration that in itself creates the mystery of creative writing. I think he would say that other forms of writing share an incompleteness, in that they have not been produced from the revelatory moment. Sir Naipaul believes that the creation of the piece is somewhat of a mystery to the writer herself, and I agree with him there. But he further concludes that we live the rest of our lives apart from this experiencethis mystery. In this sense he thinks there is a separation of the man from "the man as writer." If I interpret this correctly, then I would have to disagree. While I think the act of creation is a mystery, I don't think it is sacred to only some, or sacred only some of the timeit is sacred to all, and for all time. I think everyone lives creative, and, at points, inspired lives--everyone is a mystery to themselves. We pass by epiphanies every day of our lives. There are many people in our lives who bring these epiphanies forward every day, and they will tell you about it in everyday conversation. I think that mystery and wonder and inspiration are a part of everyday life. It is the writer's job to recognize these moments of wonder and mystery, and to not live separately from them.

We see inane practice of zero tolerance everywhere in the United States in our schools, in our criminal justice system, in our approach to diplomacy. Because of zero tolerance we have an overflow in our jails, a belief that security and police departments will solve the issue of why we murder each other, a paranoia and ignorance of those outside our borders, and the insanely overreaching Patriot Act.

However, I do think some writers may think one way, and then write another, and it is this diaspora of the mind can lead to a tortured existence. I think it is very western to mythologize the mystical moment, and to back away from it. Some are willing to see a separation of the experience of humanity from the creative process, and I think it is this thinking that leads to the acceptance of anti-semitism, racism, sexism and homophobia in the canon of writingas if thought and human kindness were somehow outside of the creative mystery. I think being an artist is the practice of opening up oneself to the world. It's a belief in the connectedness of things. Being an artist should seep into everyday existence. All one has to do is walk through the stalls of any market in any country, or start talking to the next passerby who waves hello, to experience the artfulness of life.

Do you think the world has become a dangerous place in which to live?

Yes, it is dangerous, no doubt. So many people have separated themselves from art and from god-- and by this I mean the godliness that is already in us as individuals. I think fundamentalist belief is the antithesis of belief in the individual. I am not alluding here to what is happening in other countries but to what is happening in my own country, the United States. The danger to free thought is fundamentalism. Fundamental beliefs are prescribed codes of behavior which comes from ignorant and overzealous community and religious leaders. It is dangerous when that code is prescribed with zero tolerance. We see inane practice of zero tolerance everywhere in the United States in our schools, in our criminal justice system, in our approach to diplomacy. Because of zero tolerance we have an overflow in our jails, a belief that security and police departments will solve the issue of why we murder each other, a paranoia and ignorance of those outside our borders, and the insanely overreaching Patriot Act. We have stopped thinking for ourselves. It is no mystery how George W. Bush became elected president-- he epitomizes this practice.

Our leaders in journalism and media, who used to be the sentries of thought, have sold themselves out to the cheapest among usthose whose veracity of life depends upon the sensationalized story of someone else's downfall that of Michael Jackson or Britney Spears, for example.

I think being an editor, and being a professor at Columbia College Chicago, an arts and communication school, is the best place for me to be right now. I know it is old fashioned and very pre-post-modern to say, but I think most people create art in hopes of making a difference. Many writers wish to engage in, and shape, culture. When I first started reading for the South Loop Review I thought it was an amazing experience. All these people writing because they have something wondrous to show us. Some of the pages of writing actually dazzled me; it was like discovering the ocean for the very first time. ■