CONFLUENCES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL, ARCHITECTURAL AND VEGETAL METAPHORS OF POSTCOLONIAL BRITISH IDENTITY IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S *THE ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL*

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Abstract:
V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* is a classic postcolonial autobiography, mapping out the geographical and cultural journey of the postcolonial migrant towards the mythologized centre of civilization, the imperial metropolis. In his Wordsworthian contemplation of rural England as a utopian site of natural, historical and cultural 'piety', Naipaul retraces the inscriptions of a teleological myth of Englishness underlying the grand historical narrative of the Empire and the utopian imagination of the colonial subject's mindscape. The present paper examines Naipaul's deployment of the symbolical valences of English archaeological sites, of architectural and garden landscapes in rewriting his own, as well as Britain's, postcolonial identity. The analysis highlights the historical and ideological significations of the consistent architectural and vegetal conceits of imperial glory and decay, informing this highly poeticised enactment of the colonial migrant's repositioning in the changing cultural landscape of post-imperial Britain.

Key-words:
Postcolonial, migration, cultural identity, hibridity, multiculturalism.

V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) is a book of synthesis, which draws together the multiple strands interweaving the postcolonial author's awareness of his being in the world, and reflects upon their bearing on his creation and construction of personal and artistic identity. *The Enigma of Arrival* is Naipaul's recapitulative *apologia pro vita sua*, born from the need of the middle-aged writer to probe for the meaning of his destiny and the forces which helped shape it – mainly his experience of

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British colonialism as he grew up and his migration to Britain as an aspiring young writer, determined to conquer the very centre of imperial culture.

The confessional narrative introduces us to meditation of the now mature, successful writer, as he revises his career and experience as a migrant to Britain, and, more importantly, celebrates his ultimate rooting into his bicultural heritage, originating in his native Trinidad and adopted Britain. The narrator takes us back to the time of his arrival in Britain, reminiscing about his arduous journey towards realising his personal and literary aspirations and, in so doing, in defining and articulating his postcolonial migrant identity, ultimately housed by the former imperial centre.

As the writer explores the surroundings of Stonehenge, the impression of spatial immensity induces a glimpse of the place's prehistoric past:

'*The setting felt ancient; the impression was of space, unoccupied land, the beginning of things*' (p. 15).

For any citizen of the New World, the prehistoric site bears the feel of a temporal regression, of a vision of the birth of civilisation. Again, he confesses how reality can by bent by a preconceived illusion:

'*The emptiness, the spaciousness through which I had felt myself walking was so much an illusion as the idea of the forest*' (p. 15).

Yet, despite the presence of the new, the narrator retains the awe of the place's antiquity, and tries to cling to an enduring, idealised image of the 'merry old England', unaltered by visible layers of history. Still, he is assailed by images of change and dereliction, of the new discarding the old, spoiling the iconic images of his mindscape. All around him, he sees the remnants of the dying agricultural civilisation of rural England. His descriptions become imbued with meditations on the socio-historical mechanisms of change and with nostalgia for a past which encapsulated his idea of England. The wide-ranging semantic inventory related to change, decay and dereliction creates a cumulative impression of mutability, loss and regret. Occasionally, the fabulous land of the imagination is substantiated by a scene fleetingly touched by the aura of literariness. The sight of sheep-sheering feels '*like something out of an old novel, perhaps by Hardy, or out of a Victorian country diary'* (p. 18).

In the midst of the brutal, disordering invasion of newness, the narrator's eye is soothed by the atemporal perfection of Jack's garden. Its image is symbolic of the bucolic England he had pictured from his readings

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of English literature, from Chaucer to the Edwardians. For him, the garden epitomises the bond between man and earth, which he has always associated with the homeliness of the '*immemorial, appropriate things*' (p. 19):

'*Jack himself…I considered to be part of the view. I saw his life as genuine, rooted, fitting: a man fitting the landscape. I saw him as a remnant of the past (the undoing of which my presence portended)*' (p. 19).

Jack's possession and ordering of his

'*…little piece of earth', is seen as an act of divinely artistic creation, through which 'he had created a special land for himself, a garden where…as in a version of the Book of Hours, he celebrated the seasons*' (p. 20).

From the writer's aesthetic, literary perspective, Jack's rituals of creating and ordering his space in harmony with the rhythms of nature are ennobled by an aura of saintliness. The gaze of the mature man, like the imagination of the day-dreaming child of long ago, projects the longing for an original purity of place and history in a utopian construct. The utopia of Jack's garden is woven by the erudite man's literary and historical associations:

'*So much of this I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerves of a stranger, and yet with a knowledge of the language and the history of the language and the writing, I could find a special kind of past in what I saw; with a part of my mind I could admit fantasy*' (p. 22).

Every sight and human gesture is fitted in the idealised mindscape of literary and historical memory. Jack's father-in-law

'*seemed a figure of literature in that ancient landscape…a Wordsworthian figure…in an immense Lake District solitude…I saw him actually with a load of wood on his bent back: Wordsworthian, the subject of a poem Wordsworth might have called 'the Fuel-Gatherer'* (pp. 20, 26).

The topography of the garden looks '*like a mediaeval image in literature'*, with Jack as '*the remnant of an old peasantry*' (p. 22). Even Jack's geese, associated with those of ancient Rome, become the pretext of historical and literary excavations:

'*Jack's geese…developed a kind of historical life for me, something that went beyond the idea of medieval peasantry, old English ways*' (p. 22).

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Ironically, their image helps a writer habituated to reading life through literature to perform the reverse operation, and gain a better insight of a passage in King Lear by associating it with a scene of life:

'…with the help of Jack's geese…I had arrived at an understanding of something in King Lear which…commentators had found obscure' (pp. 22-23).

Jack's sickness and death, and the subsequent dissolution of his order dissipate the writer's fantasy of perfection, awakening him to the reality of change and the impermanence of things. He understands that the illusion of historical coherence and permanence induced by his image of Jack's ritualistic enactment of tradition 'like something in a modern Book of Hours' (31), has blocked his awareness of the flux around him. The old man's death is symbolic of a dying order, but the memory of his life remains with the writer as a symbol of the perfect act of creation. With hindsight, he corrects the idealised colouring of his former vision, and reinterprets its meaning in the act of writing.

"*I had seen Jack as solid, rooted in his earth. But I had also seen him as something from the past, a remnant…My ideas about jack were wrong. He was not exactly a remnant; he had created his own life, his own world, almost his own continent…All around him was ruin; and all round, in a deeper way, was change, and a reminder of the brevity of the cycles of growth and creation. But he had sensed that life and man were the true mysteries, and he had asserted the primacy of these like something like religion*" (p. 87).

As a whole pageant of new faces and names, of comings and goings unfolds before him, the writer perceives the frailty of his fantasy and the tyranny of the new over the discarded artefacts of an age-old tradition. Not until later does he realise that Jack's island of perfection is a personal triumph over the decay of both past and present, over a life 'among ruins, among superseded things' (19). His quasi-religious idea of Jack as 'a man in his own setting…a man in tune with the seasons and his landscape' (33), embodying an identity rooted in historical continuity, is set in sharp contrast with the discontinuity of the migrant's identity, with his unsettling sense of deracination and non-belonging. His dystopian sense of being the offspring of a ruinous colonial history prevents him from seeing the historical fragmentation of the centre:

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"*That idea of ruin and dereliction, of out-of placeness, was something I felt about myself, attached to myself: a man from another hemisphere, another background…I felt unanchored and strange…I felt that my presence in that old valley was part of something like an upheaval, a change in the course of history of the country*" (p. 19).

The symbolism of Jack and his garden bespeaks the writer's ideal notion of identity and belonging, which in *The Mimic Men* he imagines as the 'link between man and landscape'. In the next chapters the narrator focuses more on his own relationship to the place and to the meaning of his habitation of an Edwardian estate. Fascinated by the estate's antiquated perfection, whose tranquil solitude suits his mood and temperament, he begins to feel more at home than he has ever felt:

'*overwhelmed by the luck of the near-solitude I had found in this historical part of England, the solitude that that had done away with my stranger's nerves, I had seen everything as a kind of perfection, perfectly evolved*' (p. 51).

However, he is aware that this illusory stillness, the cohesion of history which he relishes is itself the bitter-sweet fruit of '*flux and the constancy of change'* (p. 51). When the house was at the height of its resplendent glory, '*arrived at forty or fifty years before*' (p. 51), his presence there would have been inconceivable:

'*But in that perfection, occurring at a time of empire, there would have been no room for me…Fifty years ago there would have been no room for me at the estate; even now my presence was a little unlikely*' (p. 52).

In the traces of the past glory, he deciphers the chain of events which has opened the possibility of his presence there:

"*But more than accident had brought me here. Or rather, in the series of accidents that had brought me to the manor cottage…there was a clear historical line. The migration, within the British Empire, from India to Trinidad had given me the English language as my own, and a particular kind of education. This had partly seeded my wish to be a writer in a particular mode, and had committed me to the literary career I had been following in England for twenty years*" (p. 52).

If earlier, his presence felt like a disruptive intrusion in an uninterrupted historical evolution, now he realises that the demise of Empire (epitomised by the decay of the manor) was the pre-requisite of his

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own healing sojourn on its grounds. The same vision of history which '*sent [him] into the world with a sense of glory dead*' (p. 52) gives him now a sense of pertaining to a coherent historical chain, and of a redemptive, private glory. His habitation of the estate implies a defeat of his colonial history. He relishes a liberating, empowering feeling of conquest, of a redemptive colonisation in reverse:

'The builder of the house and the designer of the garden could not have imagined, with their world view, that at a later time someone like me would have been in the grounds, and that I would feel I was having the place…at its peak, living in a beauty that hadn't been planned for…while it lasted, it was perfection' (p. 52).

The narrator experiences an epiphany in which the two strands of imperial history, that of conquest and that of hurt, are fused together within the same history of rise and fall, glory and decay. His vision of the world's becoming is no longer split into binaries (metropolis-colony, coloniser-colonised, master-slave, centre-periphery, civilisation-bush). He *no longer feels the victim of his history of hurt and violation, but the inheritor of a 'universal civilisation'*. This reconciliation with the '*history that had made [him]'* (p. 52) is evident in the association of the two meanings of the word 'estate', which still reminds one of the iniquitous relationship of economic interdependency between the colonial periphery and the imperial centre:

Reconciled with himself, the narrator confesses to a sense of rebirth, of being 'in tune with the natural world' (p. 53), of a kind of homeliness never experienced before:

'Now ironically – or aptly – living in the grounds of this shrunken estate…I found a beauty perfectly suited to my temperament and answering, besides, every good idea I could have had, as a child in Trinidad, of the physical aspect of England' (p. 52).

The mood is most certainly unique in Naipaul's writing, where the ideal and the real never coincide, and the utopia of the centre dissolves in disappointment. For the first time, the child's fantasy is fulfilled in the migrant's sense of wonder, in which the strangeness of the place melts under the familiarity of gilded old dreams. The recognition of iconic images stored by the mind's eye conflates fantasy and actuality in an emotion of discovery which telescopes time and distance:

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'Cows and grass and trees…Though I hadn't truly seen those views before or been in their midst, I felt I had always known them (38). …And they had seemed like the cows in the drawing on the label of the condensed-milk tins I knew in Trinidad as a child: something to me as a result at the very heart of romance, a child's fantasy of the beautiful, other place, something which, when I saw it on the downs, was like something I had always known' (pp. 38, 80).

The magical instantiation of romance is a rare feeling for Naipaul's homeless wanderers, one that startles him late in life, after a second arrival. Like a latter-day Wordsworthian figure, he relives, in an inverted manner, '*emotions recollected in tranquillity*', by insufflating life into the pictures of his literary memory, so that inscape and landscape become '*bound each to each in natural piety*'. For Naipaul too, '*the Child is father of the Man*', as he defines his therapeutic experience in the valley as '*my second childhood of seeing and learning, my second life, so far from my first*' (p. 82).

His rebirth culminates symbolically in the building of his own home only a few miles away from the manor. Finally, the chronic homelessness at the core of the writer's literary identity is healed by the fulfilment of a lifetime dream – that of the bond between man and landscape, which perpetually eludes his characters. Naipaul's poetics of space has always fed on his acute sensitivity for place, always perceived as an intense sensual, aesthetic and cognitive experience, but this is the first time when his love for a place feels shared, as if the place recognised him and loved him back. His setting up home in the valley is bound up with his gratitude for this gift of a lovely, loving, comforting place, which fulfils the child's fantasy and the adult's need for roots:

'The beauty of the place, the great love I had grown to feel for it, greater than for any other place I had known, had kept me there too long…For me, for the writer's gift and freedom, the labour and disappointments of the writing life, and the being away from my home; for that loss, for having no place of my own, this gift of a second life in Wiltshire, the second, happier childhood as it were, the second arrival (but with an adult's perception) at a knowledge of natural things, together with the fulfilment of the child's dream of the safe house in the wood' (pp. 83-84).

Within Naipaul's pre-eminently tragic vision of displacement, this passage encapsulates the simplicity of a lifetime longing for the archetypal

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fulfilment of a fairytale homecoming. The enigma of arrival is suddenly lightened by the epiphany of home. King views the novel's parable of home building as 'a rewriting and fulfilment of Biswas' (King, p. 141). He observes that

'*…like Biswas in Port of Spain the narrator's life in Wiltshire is a healing process leading to success. Biswas's story concludes when he obtains a house of his own; the narrator's story also leads to the building of his own house…Enigma concludes the story of Biswas'* (King, pp. 141-142).

The third section, 'Ivy', returns to the narrator's contemplation of his Wiltshire rural paradise. His living on the old aristocratic estate is defined by a sense of empathy with '*the man in whose grounds I had so unexpectedly, for the first time in my adult e life, found myself at peace*' (p. 172). His romanticising gaze focuses on the microcosm of the estate, on its natural and architectural harmony and the secluded lives of its residents – the landlord, Mr and Mrs Philips, the manor caretakers, Bray, the driver and Pitton, the gardener. If in 'Jack's Garden', he witnesses the decay of a traditional rural civilisation, his meditation on the idyllic, nostalgic stillness of the landlord's decaying garden and manor suggests a change of larger, global significance – the decline of the empire. The narrator sees his relationship with his landlord as illustrative of the empire's fate. The difference between their backgrounds and experience of colonial history makes them the metonyms of the coloniser/colonised binary. Their co-habitation and acceptance of difference is an acknowledgement of their interconnected history:

'I was his opposite in every way, social, artistic, sexual. And considering that his family's fortunes had grown…with the spread of empire…it might be said that an empire lay between us. This empire at the same time linked us. This empire explained my birth in the New World, the language I used, the vocation and ambition I had; this empire in the end explained my presence their in the valley, in that cottage, in the grounds of the manor. But we were – or had started – at opposite ends of wealth, privilege, and in the hearts of different cultures' (p. 174).

The antagonism of their symbolic positions on either side of the historical divide recedes in front of the changing, inclusive concept of contemporary Britishness. The narrator ends up at the heart of the Englishman's culture. They share a space symbolic of the centre of empire,

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a setting reminiscent of a past imperial glory. The context of their encounter suggests a symbolic empowerment of the former colonial, and his active participation in the imperial culture:

'*But the world had changed; time had moved on. I had found my talent and my subject, ever unfolding and developing'* (p. 174).

His empathy with the landlord is no doubt sincere, but the nature of his identification with him, beyond their affinity of disposition and mood, can be read as the colonial migrant's belated triumph over history, by which he can share the space of the former colonial master:

'*So though we had started at opposite ends of empire and privilege, and in different cultures, it was easy for me, as his tenant now, to feel goodwill in my heart for him*' (p. 175).

The landlord's declining status is also suggested by his accidia, an affliction of the spirit which makes him withdraw from the world of purposefulness and action:

'…a disturbance of some sort, a morbid, lasting depression, almost an illness, resulting in withdrawal, hiding, a retreat to the manor, complicated after a while by physical disorders and – finally – age' (pp. 173-174).

Even his inherited privilege, which defines the difference between him and his tenant, is seen to be a burden rather than an asset. United by their mental and emotional disposition for seclusion and by their shared hermitage, they are also differentiated by the predictable nature of their futures, as the narrator's hope of recovery and a new beginning is contrasted with the hopelessness of the landlord's infirmity:

'*Privilege lay between us. But I had an intimation that it worked against him. Whatever my spiritual state at the moment of arrival, I knew I would have to save myself and look for health; I knew I would have to act at some time. His privilege – his house, his staff, his income, the acres he could look out at every day and knew to be his – this privilege could press him down into himself, into non-doing and nullity*' (pp. 174-175).

However, the narrator's profound compassion also crosses the boundaries of the historical and social opposition inherent in their polar imperial inheritance. His benign sense of communion with his landlord springs from their shared vulnerability to the displacements of historical change or adversity:

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'*And coming to the manor at a time of disappointment and wounding, I felt an immense sympathy for my landlord, who, starting at the other end of the world, now wished to hide, like me. I felt a kinship with him*.' (p. 174).

The historically constructed incompatibility between them, the incongruity of their origins and destinies dissolve in their sharing the same time, space and mood:

'*And though I knew that men might arrive at similar states or attitudes for dissimilar reasons and by different routes, and as men might even be incompatible, I felt at one with my landlord*' (p. 174).

They never really meet face to face or speak to each other. Their mutual invisibility to each other symbolically re-enacts the recognition of otherness, which, in Bhabha's vision, both divides and binds the antagonistic, yet mutually dependent subjectivities created by colonialism. Their exchange is mediated and rather one-sided, almost like the coloniser's dissemination of his values and civilisation. In the landlord's gift of poems about Krishna and Shiva, transmitted through Mrs Phillips, the writer sees '*my landlord's gesture of welcome to me*' (p. 192). It may also be read as reminiscent of the coloniser's dissemination of the West's Orientalistic myth and wholistic notion of India, which left its mark on the collective consciousness of the subcontinent. It epitomises the European's gift of knowledge to the Orient, accepted as the Orient's knowledge of itself:

'*His Indian romance was in fact older, even antiquated, something he had inherited, like his house, something from the days of imperial glory…philosophy melting away into sensuousness, sensation – my landlord's Indian romance partook of all those impulses and was rooted in England, wealth, empire, the idea of glory, material satiety, a very great security* (pp. 192-193).

Moreover, the landlord's firm hold of his place in the world is rooted in the consciousness of his inalienable dominion over his material and cultural inheritance:

'*His anchor was his house, his knowledge of his social worth…the knowledge of who he was remained with him…his signature…spoke of someone still savouring his personality*' (p. 193).

His self-assurance contrasts with the writer's relentless wonder at his own presence in that space, at the centre of imperial order:

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'*I felt delight at the setting, the naturalness, the rightness. And surprised that this was where I lived*' (p. 176).

But their likeness sometimes seems to supersede their difference. On catching a glimpse of his landlord basking in the sun, the narrator speculates on the northerner's longing for sunshine, imagining his indulgence in tropical fantasies.

'*But his instincts were Mediterranean, tropical; he loved the sun…But he stayed in his house, which was his setting, and dreamed of being elsewhere, dreamed in his own way*' (p. 192).

The symmetrical inversion of their utopian impulses speaks of the universally human yearning for the mystery of alien, distant shores, of an enticing life awaiting elsewhere. The Englishman's fantasy of the tropics parallels the Trinidadian child's fantasy of the pastures of England. Two people dreaming of each other's hemispheres, they become the perfectly fitting halves of the same sphere. This craving for the Other's place is symbolic of the duality of the imperial desire, which Bhabha defines in psychoanalytical terms as the bidirectional desire to possess the space of otherness, to imaginatively inhabit the Other's being, endowed with the sensualistic symbolism of a fetish. This romance of displacing and replacing the Other is particularly associated with the colonised subject's fantasy of possessing the space and identity of the coloniser. The narrator's view of himself and his landlord as two metonymic inheritors of empire envisages his reversed conquest and colonisation of the centre.

The juxtaposition of the two life stories allegorises the historical cycles to which they pertain – the landlord's life cycle encapsulates the rise and fall of the empire, while the writer's new life among '*the debris of a life*' (p. 197) bespeaks in its turn the collapse of imperial order and the dawn of a new, postcolonial cycle. The end of the imperial cycle, with its dislocations of the history and identity of peoples and territories, heralds the beginning of a post-imperial cycle of displacement and relocation, which remaps the human geography of the former metropolis. The two lives are reflected as emblematic of a parallel, but contradictory movement – the writer's rise parallels the aristocrat's fall. This parallel is confirmed by a significant chronological intersection. The narrator discovers that the moment of his initial journey to England coincides with the landlord's retreat into seclusion. His adventure begins where the other's life journey ends:

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'*In 1949 or 1950 – 1950 being the year I had left my own island...– in 1949 or 1950 my landlord had withdrawn from the world out of an excess of knowledge of that world*' (p. 197).

This chronological coincidence, which juxtaposes one man's arrival with the other's departure, is suggestive of a '*curious transfer of power, a rewriting of the imperial configuration*' (Mustafa, p. 173). Through this new revelation, the writer's journeying towards the centre of a personal and historical identification comes full circle. The first journey, reinterpreted in the symbolic light of this ironical biographical intersection, is connected with the final journey and integrated in its larger historical significance. This also highlights the irony underlying the relationship of the two moments to the dialectic of imperial history. The irony of the earlier coincidence is reinforced by the writer's present awareness of

'*…the historical irony he reads into his entry, as a former colonial, into his landlord's domain, empire's very heart itself*' (Mustafa, pp. 172-173).

The narrator's postcolonial spin on the ironies of historical change is not confined to the symbolic interpretation of individual biographies. Again, he discerns the traces of flux and change in the vegetal and architectural configuration of the landscape. As in his first excursions in the valley, he relishes the impression of primeval timelessness offered by the landscapes of the manor's grounds. It takes time for him to understand that the impression of naturalness is only the effect of the landlord's design. The artful landscaping and architectural conception are combined so as to convey a vision of the owner's historical inheritance. The narrator discovers with wonder that the estate has been designed to recreate the topography and landscape of a medieval village, to evoke historical continuity by '*a remnant and a reminder of medieval huddle and constriction*' (p. 177). The masterful creation of '*the toy village'* (p. 185) is regarded to proclaim a firm sense of historical and cultural belonging, as well as a feeling of national and imperial pride:

'*…it was part of the taste of the time for a special idea of the past, the assertion – with the wealth and power of an unbelievably extensive empire – of racial and historical and cultural virtue*' (p. 185).

But it is the feeling of untouched naturalness which delights the narrator's sense of '*natural piety'*. Surprised at seeing a blue iris among the nettles on the water-meadow, he expresses his joy in Wordsworthian tones:

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'*I was transported at the sight, and instantly had the wish, if I ever were to plant a garden of my own, to try to achieve that effect…I felt myself in tune with other plants, and truly in tune with the seasons*' (p. 189).

However, in the natural glory of a generously designed, but now untended garden he also sees the signs of the landlord's inaction:

'*Perfection such as my landlord looked out on contained its own corruption. Perfection like that could be easily taken for granted…there was nothing in that view which would encourage action*' (p. 186).

As in the section treating of Jack's garden, the illusion of perfection is marred by the reality of death and decay. The manor's garden itself becomes a metaphor for a dying concept of order. The decay and pervasive wilderness of the garden parallels the declining fate of its owner. The central trope for the fading glory of the estate, which also provides the section's title, is the image of the ivy engulfing the garden and besieging the manor's walls. The landlord himself is reported to have forbidden the gardener to cut the ivy, which illustrates a kind of nostalgic resignation before the tyranny of time and nature, and their triumph over the transience of human order. The narrator is fascinated by the effect of naturalness created by this contrived disorder, but his enjoyment of its bucolic peace is permeated by his nostalgia for the garden's decay.

The image of the dereliction inflicted by time and vegetal overgrowth, evocative of nature's enduring tyranny over human transience, also frames the narrator's portrayal of the humanity inhabiting the manor grounds. All the aging figures at the manor are symbolic of a dying era. Their life stories, all bearing the intimation of the end, are recounted in the third and fourth sections. The title of the latter section, 'Rooks', introduces another metaphor for the journey through the cycles of life and death. If the imagistic trope of the ivy refers to the death of human constructs, the rooks' association with '*birds of death'* (p. 267) portends the deaths and departures which accumulate as the narrator's ten-year stay at the estate draws to a close.

The writer's building of his own house in the English countryside is the symbol of his existential, historical and literary rooting in the synthesis of a hybrid personal and artistic identity. As King points out, Naipaul's harmonisation with the English landscape inscribes his '*claim to have come, eventually taken root, and in his own way, conquered*' (King, p. 147).

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Enigma '*is not really a story of accumulation and assimilation*', but rather of cultural hybridisation, as it '*implies that Naipaul and other former colonials are now part of, and inheritors of, the English literary tradition*' (King, p. 147). The integrative vision of the book resides in its inverted historical symmetries. Its allegory of the colonial's reversed conquest '*continues a history that started with the English conquest of India*' (King. p. 147), to which the writer confers a liberating sense of closure and poetic justice.

King commends his '*daring claim'*, remarking that '*to have set his story in London would have been less daring*' (King, p. 147), as London's multiculturalism has long borne out Naipaul's prophesy that imperial centres

'*…were to cease being more or less national cities…[and] were to become cities of the world, modern-day Romes…visited for learning and elegant goods and manners and freedom by all the barbarian peoples of the globe'* (p. 130).

He integrates his art into a perennial myth of English spirituality:

'*But to have set his story in rural England, the England of Hardy's novels, of Constable's paintings, of Cowper's verses and Victorian diaries, of Stonehenge…is in a way to declare oneself the inheritor, someone who has not only earned his place but who is part of the new order, the new literary tradition of the migration of the world's peoples'* (King, p. 147).

His claim to a home in this tradition is firmly grounded in his linguistic inheritance, further refined by his '*growing empathy with a romantic spirit of place and distance*', which underlies Enigma's

'*resemblance to romantic prose, where the writer's self is both the bridge and the traveller between these worlds and ways of writing*' (Hughes, pp. 93, 92).

In Naipaul's integration of his life into a universal spiritual dimension, Peter Hughes discerns a vision which 'is profoundly romantic, a life comparable to Wordsworth's *Prelude*, in which the initial void of the self expands through writing until it fills the universe' (Hughes, p. 91). He argues that the book's texture and language goes back to a

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'… fundamental romantic text, to Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads', arguing that the 'heroism in Naipaul's decision to do without narrative and plot…is comparable to Wordsworth's argument that against any distinction between the 'language of prose and metrical composition'' (Hughes, p. 99).

Indeed, the pictorial and musical expressivity of the novel's language resounds with the tonality of a prose poem. History comes full circle as Naipaul refashions and reinvigorates the English language in the spirit of cultural pluralism. The gift of language which he received is enriched by the stylistic brilliance and the classical cadence of his prose, and restored to a literary tradition which has acknowledged his gift by hailing him as '*one of the finest living novelists writing in English*' (Swinden, p. 210).

The author's habitation of a once sumptuous Edwardian estate, bespeaking the zenith of imperial glory, suggests an act of reversed colonisation, of appropriating an iconic space of the centre's cultural creation, whereas the extinct order of Empire is conveyed through the garden's dereliction. His designing of a house and garden of his own symbolises a reconciliation of centre and margin and an ultimate empowerment of the postcolonial migrant. Against the prehistoric backdrop of Stonehenge, Salisbury Plain and the Wiltshire downs – functioning as an outsized historical theme park – the migrant writer undergoes his rite of passage transforming him into the rightful inheritor of English culture and literature, entitled to inscribe the founding myth of multicultural Britishness.

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Rezumat:

Identitatea britanică postcolonială şi metafora de ordin arheologic, arhitectural şi vegetal în "The Enigma of Arrival", de V. S. Naipaul

Romanul lui V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, este o autobiografie postcolonială devenită clasică, care trasează călătoria geografică şi culturală a imigrantului postcolonial către miticul centru al civilizaţiei, reprezentat de metropola imperială. În contemplarea de factură wordsworthiană a Angliei rurale ca loc utopic al unei „pioase reverii" despre natură, istorie şi cultură, Naipaul urmăreşte inscripţiile unui mit teleologic al identităţii engleze ce fundamentează grandioasa epopee istorică a Imperiului şi imaginarul utopic al supusului colonial. Lucrarea de faţă examinează modul în care Naipaul utilizează valenţele simbolice ale siturilor arheologice, ale peisajului arhitectural şi horticol pentru a rescrie nu numai propria identitate postcolonială, dar şi a societăţii britanice. Analiza reliefează semnificaţiile istorice şi ideologice ale imaginilor arhitecturale şi vegetale prin care se construiesc elaborate metafore ale gloriei şi decăderii imperiului. Construcţia metaforică sedimentează substanţa ideatică a acestui profund poetizat parcurs de repoziţionare a migrantului colonial în peisajul cultural înnoit al Marii Britanii post-imperiale.

Cuvinte cheie:

Postcolonial, migraţie, identitate culturală, hibriditate, multiculturalism.

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