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Introduction

Colonialism has shaped the history of millions of people worldwide. During the second half of the 20th century most of the former colonies gained independence. The history of these countries before, during and after colonialism differs a great deal, but a common denominator is that cultural creativity, variously expressed, has been a factor in establishing independence.

Some of the most groundbreaking literary texts written in English over the last fifty years are written by writers in former colonies or by immigrants and children of immigrants to England from former colonies. This postcolonial and migration literature offers a kind of double perspective on the societies it describes, since the authors and the subjects they write about belong to more than one culture. Personally, I have been intrigued by postcolonial literature because of this position in between, and the insight these texts offer into cultural diversity. Furthermore, the encounter with postcolonial literary theory has made me realize how unconscious I was of my own western perspective. Looking at contemporary world literature from a postcolonial perspective has made me more aware of how tainted our analytical gaze can be.

In his collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie writes about cultural displacement and literary creativity:

Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile ground for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again, our distance, our

long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles.¹

V.S. Naipaul and David Dabydeen are both authors who share Rushdie's 'long geographical perspective.' Being of Indian descent and born into British colonies in the West Indies, these two authors, however, straddle not two, but three cultures. They fall, to do violence to the idiom, between three stools. However, both Naipaul and Dabydeen have settled in England, and they have both written novels about coming from the former colony to the former imperial power. In my thesis I will analyze Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and Dabydeen's *Disappearance* (1993) as accounts of the search for an identity.² I will explore to what extent this search is dependent on the colonial background of the narrators of these novels. Since both texts describe the experience of coming to England from a former West Indian colony, I will also compare the two accounts of this experience. Both novels' narrators arrive in England with particular expectations that are shaped by their colonial background. The effect of their colonial education in their respective West Indian colonies is central. Furthermore, their expectations continue to shape their actual experience of England after arrival, even when they have become aware that they have internalised a colonial perspective.

As I will show, both novels portray main characters who are actively engaged in the process of discovering England. Each in his own way is very conscious about how he experiences England. This is for example expressed in the characters' repeated walks in the English landscape and the minute description of their observations.

¹ *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), p. 15.

² All further references to V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections* (London: Picador, 2002) and David Dabydeen, *Disappearance* (London: Vintage, 1999).

A common denominator in the two novels that is immediately noticeable is that the main character is nameless, adding to emphasis the notion that their identity is yet to be established.³

The two narrators' professions as writer and engineer respectively, and their reflections on their work, will also be important elements in my analysis. I will suggest that their professional identities are strongly linked to their colonial history and identity.

By looking at the similarities of these novels in terms of how they deal with displacement and identity, I will suggest that they are rooted in the very similar backgrounds of their protagonists and writers.

Both *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance*, together with other works of these two authors, can also be classified as Travel Literature. Naipaul's novel carries a reference to a journey already in the title. This is particularly interesting because a substantial part of the novel is about the narrator's existence in England long after he physically arrived. However, as I will show, the physical journey is not central in this narrative.

Focusing on the journeys taken in these novels, it is worthwhile to examine in what ways they influence the lives of the narrators. In the first reading of both novels it is obvious that the journey is central to the development of both these characters. It also becomes clear through the texts that the journey is inevitable for both characters, but it does impact them differently and leads them to different paths of life.

The narrators of *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* both live in a state of separation from home. Andrew Dawson and Mark Johnson have examined how the

³ In the following I will refer to the two main characters mainly as narrator, but I will also, for rhetorical variation, refer to them as the main character, the protagonist, and also the writer and the engineer, when referring to *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* respectively.

imagining of migration and exile affects the construction and experience of place and landscape:

The study of movers and variously displaced persons reaffirms the division between those who are 'emplaced' and those who are 'out-of-place', the sedentary and the non-sedentary, fixed vs fluid, roots vs routes, isled vs ex-isled.⁴

As I will show in the following analysis, these two novels portray characters who add a dimension to the categories 'emplaced' and 'out-of-place.' The protagonists in these two novels are not in forced exile in England, but have, mainly for professional reasons, chosen to go there. Their situation is still similar to that of the exile's in the sense that they are in a location that is not their home, and they have both felt it necessary to leave their respective countries of birth.

A lot of the criticism on West Indian literature in general, and Naipaul in particular is concerned with this exile-like situation, since even in their birth country West Indians are in what Helen Tiffin and Diana Brydon call 'ancestral exile.'⁵ Populations in the West Indies have a relatively recent relationship with their birth countries, and the native cultures of their origin have been systematically suppressed through British colonialism, only to be followed by American cultural imperialism.

I have devoted my thesis to these two novels because of a number of interesting common denominators that seem to invite a comparative analysis. As mentioned above, Naipaul and Dabydeen come from very similar backgrounds. As for the choice of these two particular novels, they both describe the journey from a

⁴ Andrew Dawson and Mark Johnson, 'Migration, Exile and Landscapes of the Imagination' in *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, ed. By Barbara Bender and Margot Winer (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 319-332 (p. 321).

⁵ Brydon, Diana and Tiffin, Helen, 'West Indian Literature and the Australian Comparison' in *Postcolonial Criticism*, ed. by Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Stanton and Willy Maley (London and New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 191-214 (p. 195).

former colony to England, and the main characters of the novels share an almost analytical approach to this encounter with a new country. This, however, could be stated about a number of novels by West Indian authors. What sets *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* apart from other such novels is, however, that they both take place in the countryside.

In the following I will, however briefly, introduce Postcolonial theory and look especially at the particular postcolonial condition of the West Indies. Furthermore, I will give a short presentation of Naipaul and Dabydeen. In my analysis I will devote the first chapter to *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and the second to *Disappearance* (1993).

Postcolonialism

Postcolonial literary theory may seem as much concerned with self-definition as the characters portrayed in postcolonial literature. What qualifies as postcolonial literature has been discussed since the term was coined, but the term most often includes literature from any earlier colony. Introducing an influential work of postcolonial literary theory, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), its authors bring attention to how more than 75% of the people of the world live lives influenced by colonialism.⁶

In the more recent *A Very Short Introduction to Postcolonialism*, Robert J. C. Young looks into the effects of colonialism on people's everyday life. He points out that white culture is still regarded as basic to our ideas of what is legitimate civilization. Postcolonialism draws attention to the fact that the continents previously colonised by Europe, Africa, Asia, and South-America, are still subordinate and economically unequal to Europe and North America. Besides advocating equality for the people of these areas, postcolonialism asserts 'the dynamic power of their

⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 1.

cultures, cultures that are now intervening in and transforming the societies of the west.’⁷

Literature and art are important channels for expressing the colonial experience and how this past experience continues to shape societies and individual identities. Postcolonial theory has subsequently emerged as a consequence of the inadequacy of earlier European theory in dealing with postcolonial writing. As pointed out in *The Empire Writes Back*, European literary theories are rooted in particular traditions which are hidden by false notions of ‘the universal.’⁸ The European failure to appreciate other cultures in their own right was thoroughly analyzed in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1985), which continues to be an important point of reference for both postmodern and postcolonial cultural criticism.

English emerged as an important academic subject parallel to the development of the nineteenth-century form of imperialism. The teaching of English literature as the only literature in the colonies became an important aspect of cultural imperialism, through which Western values were presented as a privileged norm and anything representing the ‘peripheral’ or the ‘marginal’ was devalued.⁹

Control over language is fundamental to imperial oppression. In British colonies RP-English (Received Pronunciation English) was taught as the norm, and any variant or other language spoken would be marginalized as impure. The discrimination of what was then considered deviant language helped maintain the power structure of the colony, and notions of what was true and real were established in the language that was considered the norm. For the various peoples in the colonies, the language they were forced to speak, read, and write fell short in describing their

⁷ Robert J. C. Young, *A Very Short Introduction to Postcolonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 5.

⁸ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, p. 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

natural habitat and ‘the gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it forms a classic and all-pervasive feature of post-colonial texts.’¹⁰ A majority of writers from former British colonies have chosen to write in English after gaining independence. In Africa, however, some writers and intellectuals have argued that in order to achieve true decolonization, English and other European languages must be rejected.¹¹ Most writers choose to continue writing in English but the initiative does bring to mind an important difference between the former colonies of Africa and those of the West Indies. In Africa there are alternative languages in which pre-colonial cultures have survived, contrary to the West Indies where pre-colonial history to a greater extent has been lost. I will look closer at this in the following.

Place, displacement, identity, and authenticity are central notions in postcolonial theory, and these are important elements in my analysis since it is the experience of displacement that is perhaps the most direct source of ‘the special post-colonial crisis of identity.’¹² The sense of displacement results in alienation of vision and crisis in self-image, and we see this in the narrators of *Disappearance* and *The Enigma of Arrival*.

As mentioned above, their colonial education is a significant experience shared by the narrators of these two novels. All schoolchildren in British colonies went through an English education based on English, rather than local culture. The narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* acknowledges this when considering his first departure from Trinidad: ‘Now adrift, supported only by the abstractions of my colonial education’ (134). Education was perhaps the most powerful device in the imperial powers’ cultural dominance over the colonies.

¹⁰ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, p. 9.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 130.

¹² Ibid., p. 9.

A recurring problem of postcolonial definitions of identity is the impact imperial educational systems have had on colonised societies. In British colonies, schoolchildren were taught English language, culture, and history. Thus, they grew up with the notion of English culture as superior to their own.

Postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha is strongly influenced by poststructuralism in his work. His cultural theory rejects Western ideas of universal truth and binary oppositions such as centre-margin, because he finds that cultures interact in a much more complex way than such dualisms suggest.¹³ As I will show in the following, the narrators of *Disappearance* and *The Enigma of Arrival* come to England believing in it as the civilized opposite to their uncivilized countries of birth. Through their respective experiences of England, however, this notion is drawn into question.

Caribbean Colonial Background

As a result of the lack of a cultural history in the West Indies before colonization, the domination of English and western culture was especially efficient. It was easier for English culture to establish itself and dominate after independence than for example in India and Africa, where peoples were colonized on their native land. In his lecture *Concepts of the Caribbean*, Trinidadian author George Lamming states:

A concept of people or place does not arrive out of the blue. How you come to think of where you are, and of your relation to where you are, is dependent on the character and nature of the power of where you are.¹⁴

Growing up within countries that were politically and economically subordinated Britain is a defining element in the lives of the narrators. In order to examine notions

¹³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁴ 'Concepts of the Caribbean' in Birbalsingh, Frank, *Frontiers of the Caribbean* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1996), pp. 1-14, (p. 1).

of identity and displacement in *Disappearance* and *The Enigma of Arrival*, it thus becomes important to know the authors' colonial backgrounds. As former colonies in the West Indies, Trinidad and Guyana have similar histories and this West Indian colonial background is fundamentally different from that of African or Asian colonies, as Philip Sherlock points out:

Colonialism, however important, was an incident in the history of Nigeria and Ghana, Kenya or Uganda; but it is the whole history of the West Indies and [...] it has a deeper meaning for the West Indian than for the African.¹⁵

Without underestimating the African colonial experience, it is important to note this difference when looking at the Caribbean. Whereas in Africa colonisation happened on the soil of the peoples' ancestors, the Caribbean is a region where aboriginal peoples were almost completely exterminated, to be replaced by people from Africa, Asia and Europe. There is no common language in the area and the respective colonies have inherited their official languages from their former imperial powers, which in the case of Guyana and Trinidad was Britain. The complexity of the population is also something the two colonies have in common, and here they differ somewhat from other British colonies in the area because of their comparatively large minorities of East Indian descent. One tends to think of the Caribbean as mainly populated by peoples of African decent, but in Guyana and Trinidad in particular there are large minorities of people of Indian ancestry, descended from Indians who came to the region from East India after 1838. Indians migrated under the system of indentureship during the second half of the nineteenth century. After the abolition of

¹⁵ Philip Sherlock, *West Indies* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), pp. 13-14.

slavery, indentured workers replaced African slaves as the main source of labour in the sugar plantations.

In the Caribbean in general Indians represented a social sub-group and were consequently socially and politically marginalized. This marginalization stemmed from their comparatively late arrival in the region as well as the fact that they replaced freed African slaves on the plantations, causing them to assume the lowest position on the social ladder.¹⁶ However, whereas there were 20 percent Indians in the English-speaking Caribbean in general, in Guyana and Trinidad there were 51 and 40 percent respectively. In addition to the similar populations in these colonies, former British colonies in the Caribbean in general share a history of emigration after Independence. For a number of reasons many emigrants left shortly after World War II to settle in Britain. Others left in the 1970s and the 1980s and these emigrants formed communities where they settled. The oldest and largest of these Caribbean immigrant communities is found in London and most novels about immigration to England take place in the capital. As stated above, *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* are unusual because they take place in the English countryside, removed from the more typical immigrant community.

Caribbean or West Indian literature is often explicitly concerned with the postcolonial cultural situation. In the introduction to *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*, F. M. Birbalsingh points out how displacement and exile are quintessential aspects of Caribbean experience that constantly reoccur in literature from the region.¹⁷ V.S. Naipaul and David Dabydeen are both writers concerned with these themes. Critical theory on the literature from this area is dominated by a postcolonial perspective. This is also true of Dabydeen's novel *Disappearance*,

¹⁶ Birbalsingh, Frank, ed., *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1996), p. xvi.

¹⁷ Birbalsingh, p. xiii.

because the text appears to be designed as an illustration of the postcolonial experience.

As I will show in the following analysis, the narrators of both *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* set out towards England with the idea that their countries of birth represent the uncivilized periphery to the civilized centre, which is England. The only history they know on departure is that of England:

Until independence in most West Indian territories, the history of British slaving was not officially taught in schools, the origin of the black presence in the Caribbean deliberately obscured. West Indians were taught that their history had nothing to do with a 'jungle' and 'uncivilised' Africa [...] The history of England was also Barbados' history, or all of it that mattered.¹⁸

As a response to the strong British influence, a lot of post-independence literature from this area has consciously been engaged in the rewriting of English classics, such as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), where the author gives voice to the dark and silent 'other' of the classic *Jane Eyre*, the Creole Bertha Mason. In general, West Indian rewritings of canonical English works tend to be less specific than this particular example, and in Naipaul's works there is rather an intertextual relationship with English literature. Together with numerous references to various English and Western works of art and literature, we are constantly reminded of the effect English and Western cultural imperialism has had and still has on Naipaul's authorship, as well as his characters' identity. David Dabydeen is perhaps even more explicitly engaged with English art and literature, and certainly so with a more explicit historical agenda. His focus is especially on the portrayal of the colonial 'other' in English art and literature.

¹⁸ Brydon and Tiffin, p. 206.

Tobias Döring explores intertextuality in novels about Caribbean-English journeys in his book *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition*. Looking at *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance*, he detects what he terms ‘strategies of transformation’ in this ‘Caribbean-English reversal of discovery.’¹⁹ He points out how they both share an intertextual relationship with Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899).²⁰ However, whereas Marlowe’s colonial quest is into the unknown, in *Disappearance* and *The Enigma of Arrival*, the narrators are searching for the England that they know through texts and images, a search that is parallel to their search for their own identities, professional and private. Whereas the area of Marlowe’s quest was a blank spot on the map, the two protagonists going to England in these two novels have a very specific knowledge about the country they are going to, as well as why they are going there. Whereas Africa to Marlowe was ‘the great unknown,’ England to these two protagonists involves a ‘great known.’ However, the knowledge they have acquired of England in the schools of Trinidad and Guyana proves, as I will show more thoroughly in my analysis, to be no more accurate than Marlowe’s preconceptions about Africa before his arrival.

Naipaul’s and Dabydeen’s respective protagonists are just as much explorers within themselves as explorers of England. Thus, *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* tell us about the protagonists’ personal development and their expanding knowledge of themselves. Their development and their self-awareness are constantly dependent on the shared history of England and their countries of birth in the West Indies. Döring finds that seen as life-writing, postcolonial accounts of

¹⁹ *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a postcolonial tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 115.

²⁰ For details about the original publication of Conrad’s text, see Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Robert Hampson (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995), p. 3. All further references to this edition.

discovery like these two novels must be read as ‘the production of selves and texts that reflect, or reject, their historical and rhetorical determinations.’²¹

Finally, attention must be drawn to the relationship between cultural identity and labour. Again, the West Indies hold an exclusive position in terms of how this region’s population has been formed in accordance with the demand for labour.

Lamming claims that,

If labor is the foundation of all culture, then the Indian presence in Trinidad was the ground floor on which that house was built. Fundamental to all of my thinking, this concept of labor and the relations experienced in the process of labor is the foundation of all culture, and this is crucial to what I mean by the Indian presence as a creative Caribbean reality. For it is through work that men and women make nature a part of their own history. The way we see, the way we hear, our nurtured sense of touch and smell, the whole complex of feelings which we call sensibility, is influenced by the particular features of the landscape which has been humanized by our work; there can be no history of Trinidad or Guyana that is not also a history of the humanization of those landscapes by Indian and other human forces of labor.²²

Although the labour in question is very different in the two novels subject to my analysis, both narrators’ professions play prominent roles in the respective texts and I will also explore this aspect in my following analysis.

V.S. Naipaul

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born in 1932, in Chaguanas, a small town in the central sugarcane belt of Trinidad. In 1938 the family moved to Port of Spain.

Naipaul’s parents were second-generation immigrants from India, and unusual as such because they were high caste Brahmans. Being a high-caste Hindu in Trinidad was

²¹ Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages*, p. 113.

²² ‘Caribbean Labor, Culture, and Identity’ in *Caribbean Cultural Identities*, ed. By Glyne Griffith (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), p. 21.

difficult because caste was insignificant in the context of the larger creole society of the West Indies.

V.S. Naipaul himself rejected Hinduism at an early age and never felt quite at home in the Indian-Trinidadian community where he grew up. Through his colonial education, his admiration for, and curiosity about Britain grew. The young Naipaul attended Queen's Royal College, Port of Spain in 1943-1949. A dedicated student, he won a scholarship to attend University College, Oxford, where he studied from 1950 until 1954. He was in other words still a very young man when he first left his family to go to England. Shortly after Naipaul had received his degree in English literature, he started working freelance for the British Broadcasting Corporation where in 1954-1956 he was editor of the 'Caribbean Voices' radio programme. He married Patricia Ann Hale in 1955. In 1970 he went back to Trinidad planning to live there, but ended up travelling from country to country until he returned to England where he finally settled the same year. During the seventies he was often abroad, in Africa, India, South America and the USA. However, since the return in 1970 he has mainly lived in Wiltshire in England, which is also the setting for his autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival* (1989).

The critic Timothy F. Weiss divides Naipaul's authorship into three phases which he describes as "outside", "in-between" and "among," but as he points out, this is a simplification.²³ These terms are, however, useful when explaining the development in his writing. In the first phase he mainly looks back to the colony from his new position in England, a perspective that may seem directed towards a British or Western audience. His writing is marked by a critical attitude towards the society of Trinidad and other former colonies. He continues this criticism in his second phase of

²³ *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V.S. Naipaul* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 222.

writing, but in this phase also turns his critical gaze towards England. His third phase of writing is recognized by its focus on the more personal aspects of the cross-cultural experience.

Naipaul's first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, was published in 1957, and for this he received the John Llewelyn Rhys Memorial Prize. Over the next two years he published another two novels, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *Miguel Street*. These first works of fiction from Naipaul's hand all take place in Trinidad in the 1940s. A number of critics have responded negatively to Naipaul's critical depiction of colonial societies. Among them is Selwyn Cudjoe, who has accused Naipaul of seeing the culture of the colonizer as the universal culture.²⁴

With his next novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Naipaul really established himself as a major writer. The novel is a vivid portrait of an Indo-Trinidadian man troubled by his lack of independence within his domineering family-in-law. Naipaul's father was the model for the character Mr. Biswas, and it was also his father's struggle to write, against the expectations of his Hindu family and community, that helped convince Naipaul that it was necessary to leave Trinidad in order to become an author.

Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion, published in 1963, was Naipaul's first novel to be set in England. This marked the transition into the second phase of his writing, a phase in which he continues his criticism of colonial and postcolonial societies, but at the same time expresses feelings of alienation towards England and criticizes the decay he detects in English society. With *The Mimic Men* (1967), which is considered to be his second major novel, Naipaul won the W.H. Smith Prize. Like

²⁴ V. S. Naipaul: *A Materialist Reading* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

his next work, *Guerillas* (1975), this novel is about Caribbean individuals whose lives are strongly affected by social and political problems in their respective societies.

A Flag on the Island, a collection of short stories, was published the same year. In 1971 he won the Booker Prize for *In a Free State*, a book that mixes autobiography and fiction, and is mainly concerned with issues of individual freedom and the decolonized world. In 1979 Naipaul's fictional gaze turns towards Africa with the publishing of *A Bend in the River*, a novel in which he explores an African community after decolonization.

On the borderline between autobiography and novel, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1989), along with other works published in the 1980s, represent a third phase in Naipaul's authorship. His focus now dramatically turns inward, on how his world experience has shaped him as a person and more specifically as a writer. And, as I will return to more thoroughly in my analysis of *The Enigma of Arrival*, this new position 'among,' as Weiss termed it, enables the author to look at his subject(s) with greater clarity. Having perhaps become more aware of his position in the world seems to have had an almost liberating effect on Naipaul, since he is no longer searching for a fixed point of view. At this stage the writer, as expressed through his narrator, is also more explicitly conscious in his texts of why he sees the world the way he does. Furthermore, Naipaul is in many ways as critical towards English society in this novel as he has been towards colonial societies in his earlier work.

Naipaul's most recent novels, *Half a Life* (2001) and *The Magic Seeds* (2004), tell the story of a young Indian who moves to England and ends up more or less travelling the world. In these two novels the author leaves the dense and meditative style of *The Enigma of Arrival* and returns to the lighter, more satirical prose found in his earlier novels.

Having travelled in the West Indies on a scholarship from the Trinidadian government, Naipaul's first travel book, *The Middle Passage*, was published in 1962. Since then he has gone on to write a number of non-fiction books, mainly based on his travels. After revisiting the Caribbean he traveled to India, the country of his ancestors, about which he has written three non-fiction books: *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990).

Today, V.S. Naipaul is an honorary doctor of St. Andrew's College and Columbia University and of the Universities of Cambridge, London and Oxford. In 1990, he was granted a knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II, and in 2001 he received the most prestigious literary award in our time, the Nobel Prize for Literature.²⁵

David Dabydeen

David Dabydeen was born into the East Indian community of Berbice, Guyana, in 1955. Like Naipaul he grew to be a devoted student and was granted a government scholarship to go to Queen's College in Georgetown. Dabydeen's parents divorced when he was a young boy, and already in 1969 Dabydeen was sent to London to live with his father. After finishing school he was granted a scholarship to study English at Cambridge University, and in 1982 he completed his doctorate in 18th-century literature and art at University College, London. He is currently Director of the Centre for Caribbean Studies and Professor at the Centre for British Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Warwick. Dabydeen has also served as the Guyanese

²⁵ Bibliographical and Biographical details taken from *Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 125*, ed. By Bernth Lindfors and Reinhard Sander (London: A Brucoli Clark Layman Book, Gale Research Inc., 1993), pp. 121-144, King, Bruce, *V.S. Naipaul* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, Second Edition 2003), pp. 1-22, and *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, ed. by E. Benson and L.W. Conolly (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1073-1075.

ambassador to The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Dabydeen's literary works comprise three collections of poetry and five novels. His fictional writing is concerned with the shared history of England and the West Indies and explores the effects of colonial history in both English and Guyanese society. His first collection of poetry, *Slave Song*, was published in 1984 and won him the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. His other collections of poetry are *Coolie Odyssey* (1988) and *Turner: New and Selected Poems* (1994). *Slave Song* was republished in 2005. Slavery is an important motif in Dabydeen's poetry. His acclaimed long poem *Turner* is a lyrical account of the slave experience based on J.M.W. Turner's painting 'Slave Ship.'

The Intended, Dabydeen's first novel, was published in 1991 and earned him the Guyana Prize for Literature. Telling the story of a young boy sent from Guyana to England to study, the novel is clearly autobiographical. Like the young Dabydeen, the main character also dreams of becoming a writer. Furthermore, the novel is clearly informed and influenced by Dabydeen's interest in contemporary critical theory. This theoretical awareness continues to influence his fiction and is perhaps even more apparent in *Disappearance* (1993), his second novel. Three years later, his third novel, *The Counting House* followed. Whereas his first two novels take place in England, this novel is about an Indian couple and their quest for a new life in Guyana at the end of the 19th century. In the novel *A Harlot's Progress* (1999), William Hogarth's famous prints of 1732 are his motif, and in the latest, *Our Lady of Demerara* (2004), the shared history of Guyana and England is intertwined with a murder mystery.

In his academic career Dabydeen has written, edited and co-edited several books on Caribbean literature and identity. More recently his research has been directed towards early black British literature and the black presence in English art and literature, with special emphasis on the 18th century.²⁶

My following analysis of *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* will explore the ways in which the authors' backgrounds influence their writing. As mentioned above, chapter one offers an analysis of Naipaul's novel, and chapter two is about Dabydeen's slightly more recent text.

²⁶ Bibliographical and Biographical details from *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, ed. by E. Benson and L.W. Conolly (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 325-326, <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ctccs/staff/dabydeen/>, accessed on 2006-03-15, and <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth113>, accessed on 2006-05-15.

Chapter One: *The Enigma of Arrival*

The Enigma of Arrival is about its main character's development into a writer. At the same time, it is an account of this character's evolving self-awareness through this process. Judith Levy describes the novel as Naipaul's 'myth of origin and the autobiography of his post-colonial self'.²⁷ The novel is as much focused on internal as external events. Furthermore, as Rob Nixon points out, this novel is the first of Naipaul's works to address the writer's relationship with England, the country where he has spent most of his grown-up life.²⁸

The novel is mainly set in England, and is for the most part dedicated to the narrator's life there after he has lived in the country for about twenty years. I will begin my analysis by exploring the structure of the novel. Subsequently, I will discuss the text as autobiographical fiction. The focal point of my analysis will be this textual rendition of an encounter with England, and how this encounter is affected by the narrator's background.

Narrative Structure

The Enigma of Arrival is divided into five parts, 'Jack's Garden', 'The Journey', 'Ivy', 'Rooks' and 'The Ceremony of Farewell'.²⁹ The chronology of the novel is non-linear and the main events are gradually revealed to the reader through the reading. Repeatedly, new information is added about circumstances or characters described earlier in the novel. This forces the reader to reconsider her impressions of the accounts throughout the text. For example, on the last page it becomes clear that

²⁷ V.S. Naipaul: *Displacement and Autobiography* (New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995), p. 97.

²⁸ *London Calling: V.S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 39.

²⁹ All further references to V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections* (London: Picador, 2002).

substantial parts of the preceding narrative from the countryside describe a period in the narrator's life when he suffered from writer's block. This information sheds new light on the narrator's experiences.

The novel begins with 'Jack's garden,' which takes place in the beginning of the 1970s, twenty years after the narrator's first arrival in England. In the second section, 'The Journey,' the story goes twenty years back in time, to the narrator's journey from Trinidad to England and his first months there, in London. The following two parts, 'Ivy' and 'Rooks,' both take place after 'Jack's Garden.' In 'Ivy,' the year 1977 is revealed to the reader through the narrator's counting of rings on the trunk of a cut-down cherry tree (236). This is illustrative of the bi-ways taken in the rendering of information in the text. In the final and comparably shorter part, 'The Ceremony of Farewell', the narrator begins to write *The Enigma of Arrival*, thus completing a circle.

The confusing structure of the novel is effective in demonstrating how the world, and people's perception of the world, constantly change; how nothing is absolute. Just as the narrator gradually unveils his surroundings and his perception of them, so the reader gradually unveils the novel. In other words, the structure serves to reinforce one of the main messages embedded in the narrative. In the following I will take a closer look at the narrative of each part of the novel, and thus further explain the intricacies of its structure.

Fictional Autobiography or Autobiographical Fiction?

As described in my introduction, the population of the West Indies is historically displaced. Mark McWatt suggests that there is a connection between the Caribbean reality and the tendency in West Indian fiction to go beyond the traditional form of

the novel.³⁰ He especially looks at the fictional autobiography, and suggests that this concern with the autobiographical self as fictional character may spring from the particular Caribbean experience. As noted by Brydon and Tiffin, ‘the worlds inhabited by colonised peoples have been partly imagined or generated for them by European discourse.’³¹ Because of the relatively recent relationship between the West Indian peoples and the land they inhabit, they do not have a local pre-colonial discourse to counter the European. Fictional autobiographies may partly function as an answer to this. *The Enigma of Arrival* is certainly a novel that confuses the borders of fiction and autobiography, and, as mentioned above, Levy describes the novel as Naipaul’s ‘myth of origin.’³² The fictional autobiography may partly be interpreted as a way for the displaced peoples of the Caribbean of dealing with the lack of local myths of origin.

The biography of the fictional first person narrator in this novel is coherent with the biography of V.S. Naipaul himself, but a number of presumably significant circumstances of Naipaul’s life are not described in the text. Like several of his other novels, *The Enigma of Arrival* deals with the theme of becoming a writer. And, as in a number of his other novels, living in a country other than where one was born is significant to the development of the main character’s identity.

No reader or critic familiar with Naipaul’s work will disagree that his writing emerges from his own life, but the fact that it is informed by its writer’s personal experience does not turn a text into an autobiography. Compared to other novels by Naipaul on similar themes, such as *A House for Mister Biswas* and the more recent *Half a Life*, this novel can be said to be more consistent with the writer’s actual life

³⁰ ‘The West Indian Writer and the Self: Recent ‘Fictional Autobiography’ by Naipaul and Harris’ in *Journal of West Indian Literature* 3, 1 (1989), pp. 16-27, (p. 16).

³¹ Brydon and Tiffin, p. 77.

³² Levy, p. 97.

than the two others, but this is rather a result of all that remains untold than a result of all that is told. In this story there is obviously a great deal going on in the narrator's life that we are never told about, but the main events of which we are told coincide with Naipaul's life. The novel mainly concentrates on what goes on in the narrator's mind. However, we are constantly reminded of the subjectivity of the account, for example when the narrator concludes that 'Everyone saw different things' (325).

In 'The Journey', the narrator tells us about his writing of books that clearly are identical with Naipaul's works, for example *In a Free State*. This is a text that similarly to *The Enigma of Arrival* resists generic borders, consisting as it does of short stories, a novella and two excerpts from a travel diary. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the narrator reveals that the Africa of *In a Free State* is not one particular country, because to him the places that have influenced him are also in his memory influenced by each other:

The Africa of my imagination was not only the source countries – Kenya, Uganda, the Congo, Rwanda; it was also Trinidad, to which I had gone back with a vision of romance and had seen black men with threatening hair. It also now became Wiltshire. It was also the land created by my pain and exhaustion. (187)

The passage reminds the reader of how the narrator is constantly relating to different places in his life and his writing. Furthermore, it underlines the constant subjectivity in the narrator's account of any place he describes. By way of the reference to this writing process, identifiable with Naipaul's own work, the resemblance between the narrator and Naipaul the author is reinforced. At the same time, no names or titles are given, thus leaving their likeness open to interpretation.

In this novel where so much coincides with Naipaul's life, a number of presumably important characters and events in his life are left out. Analysing the

novel, Chandra B. Joshi notes that during his life in the English countryside the author was living with his English wife, who is never mentioned in this text. She continues to point out the reader's right to question this omission, based on the assumption that this wife has played a significant role in the life described in the novel.³³ Since *The Enigma of Arrival* is fiction, however, the writer is at liberty to include and leave out any fact or fiction. The combined knowledge of the wife and the fact that the novel is autobiographical, may, nevertheless, serve to guide one's interpretation. Rob Nixon suggests that the exclusion of the wife is part of the textual composition of isolation necessary to 'achieve that elevated solitude – to survey his own presence in that pastoral scene [...] Her acknowledged presence would have jeopardized the uninterrupted 'I' who is wedded to the Wiltshire landscape and, through it, gains entry into the lineage of romantic English pastoral.'³⁴

In this novel, the narrator's perception of what occurs is more emphasised than the incidents themselves. The external events in his life are of course important factors, but as far as the focus of the novel is concerned, they are secondary to how the narrator experiences them, and his development through the writing of this text is at the core. This narration of an evolving self is sparse in sustained characterisation. The other characters are portrayed through the gaze of the first-person narrator who through these portrayals and depictions of his surroundings is creating his identity in a literary text. This enhances the autobiographical impression of the text, and the entire novel can be read as an attempt at an explanation of who the main character is and how he has come to be this person.

³³ V.S. Naipaul: *The Voice of Exile* (New Dehli: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1994), p. 224.

³⁴ Rob Nixon, *London Calling: Postcolonial Mandarin* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 163.

In the Country

The majority of novels written by West Indian authors about life in England are set in London, where there are substantial minority groups. Both Naipaul and Dabydeen have given accounts of this multicultural environment in their fiction. For instance, in one of Naipaul's more recent novels, *Half a Life*, the main character comes from Trinidad to London and soon finds himself in a social environment dominated by minority groups. The same is true of Dabydeen's first novel *The Intended*, where the protagonist and most of his friends belong to minority groups. A vast majority of immigrants choose to settle in big cities like London, where the population is more diverse in terms of culture and ethnicity than in less populated areas. Newcomers from other than the dominant culture thus blend in more easily. In this respect *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* describe immigrant experiences out of the ordinary in that they both deal mainly with life in the English countryside and more specifically the village. Consequently they face communities more traditional than in big cities, as noted by Jean Popeau:

The English village may be said to be the last redoubt and container of the peculiarity which is Englishness. The towns and cities have long become multicultural reflections of various migrations and movements [...]. It is the English village which may legitimately claim the rural dreams and aspirations of those Englishmen hankering after a pastoral Eden associated with a certain strain of values encapsulated by 'Englishness.'³⁵

Perceptions of England

As mentioned above, the first part of *The Enigma of Arrival*, 'Jack's garden', begins twenty years into the main character's life in England, when the narrator has just

³⁵ 'Disappearance' in *The Art of David Dabydeen* ed. by Kevin Grant (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1997), pp. 99-110, (p. 99).

moved to Waldenshaw, a remote village in Wiltshire. In the first two paragraphs we are introduced to the observational, descriptive, and contemplative style that will continue to permeate the entire novel. At the same time, the central themes of the novel emerges:

For the first four days it rained. I could hardly see where I was. Then it stopped raining and beyond the lawn and outbuildings in front of my cottage I saw fields with stripped trees on the boundaries of each field; and far away, depending on the light, glints of a little river, glints which sometimes appeared, oddly, to be above the level of the land.

The river was called the Avon; not the one connected with Shakespeare. Later – when the land had more meaning, when it had absorbed more of my life than the tropical street where I had grown up – I was able to think of the flat wet fields with the ditches as ‘water meadows’ or ‘wet meadows’, and the low smooth hills on the background, beyond the river, as ‘downs’. But just then, after the rain, all that I saw – though I had been living in England for twenty years – were flat fields and a narrow river (3).

A sense of strangeness is immediately created because of the contrast between ‘the tropical street’ and the English scenery. The landscape, so carefully described here, will continue to play a central part through the entire novel. The narrator’s verbal mapping of this particular part of the countryside is substantial to his encounter with England. One of the functions of this process in the text is to express the narrator’s need for detailed knowledge of the surroundings in order to feel less like a stranger.

Furthermore, the very first paragraph very explicitly underlines the subjectivity of this narrative. The narrator appears in the second line, and it is made clear that we are presented with what this narrator perceives. Dagmar Barnouw aptly

describes the beginning of the novel as ‘a description of revisions in perception.’³⁶ This perception in itself contains the narrator’s interpretation of what he sees: ‘I could hardly see where I was [...] I saw fields’. Every account will involve interpretation, but in this novel the reader is constantly reminded of this and the entire text is permeated by self-reflexivity. In a number of the descriptions of characters and surroundings the narrator reveals uncertainty about what he perceives. At no point during the novel are we allowed to forget that what we are told is only from one point of view. Shortly after, the uncertainty of this account is repeated, adding to it the unfamiliarity of this landscape: ‘I saw what I saw very clearly. But I didn’t know what I was looking at. I had nothing to fit it into’(5).

In the second paragraph the narrator already hints towards the influence of art and literature on his perception of England, as he cannot mention the name ‘Avon’ without mentioning Shakespeare. Later on in the novel we will see how the English countryside reminds him of books he has read and paintings he has seen.

Already in this second paragraph the narrator begins to reveal his background, referring to the ‘tropical street’ where he grew up. We are also given the information that despite this arrival at a new place, he has already lived in England for twenty years. In this sentence, ‘I had been living in England for twenty years,’ the past perfect also signifies that the narrator is thinking back, that he is writing about this experience at a point further ahead in the future. What happens when is, however, not of great importance in this novel, not least because plot and action are secondary to the narrator’s perception of his surroundings. But the passing of time is of great significance, since time has worked on the narrator’s perception. Seeing himself from

³⁶ *Naipaul’s Strangers* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 118.

the outside, he contemplates that ‘He could not have seen like that, so clearly, twenty years before. [...] It was necessary for him to have gone through a lot’ (189).

As mentioned in the introduction, the countryside is an unusual setting for a postcolonial immigrant novel. Most such novels take place in London. In a later novel by Naipaul, *Half a Life*, we see how the multicultural capital offers companionship with other immigrants, which becomes a support in the process of adjusting to a new place. Nixon comments on the unusual choice of location for *The Enigma of Arrival* and claims that,

In composing *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul invents postcolonial pastoral. There is decidedly no other British writer of Caribbean or South Asian ancestry who would have chosen a tucked away Wiltshire perspective from which to reflect on the themes of immigration and postcolonial decay. It is a place where Naipaul stands alone as an oddity, and the result is a self-engrossed, deeply solitary, almost evacuated, though powerful work.³⁷

The solitude of his countryside existence appears, in other words, to be necessary in order for the narrator to achieve this very introvert and personal perspective on the immigrant experience.

By naming the first part of the novel ‘Jack’s Garden’, the author immediately creates a curiosity about Jack and his garden as well as the expectation that this character will play an important role in the novel. There is, however, as far as the reader can tell, little interaction between the narrator and this Jack. He is rather, in the eyes of the narrator at his arrival in this new place, a part of the surroundings: ‘Jack had first been a figure in the landscape to me, no more’ (28). And both in the title of this part of the novel as well as in the text itself, he is first hinted at through the

³⁷ Nixon, p. 161.

mentioning of his garden and his cottage. One could say that Jack as a character slowly emerges, since his garden, his cottage, and even his father-in-law are all introduced before Jack himself. The narrator reveals that it is Jack's garden that makes him notice Jack, thus disclosing both the narrator's fascination with gardens as a phenomenon, but also suggesting that it is not so much Jack, but what Jack comes to represent, that makes him so important to the main character. With the introduction of Jack into the text, a human element is added to everything that is observed, and the narrator perceives him as 'man fitting the landscape' (14); as opposed to himself. In the same passage it is, however, made clear that this belonging of Jack's to the landscape was part of the narrator's initial perception, a perception that is later to change. Timothy Weiss tries to explain the narrator's fascination with Jack:

The narrator admires Jack for his courage and dedication, but even more important, because he creates his home, his world.³⁸

The mapping of the landscape includes numerous pieces of information on how the buildings, fields and gardens are maintained, and Jack's keeping of his garden is an important source of the narrator's fascination with this character:

The hedge was regularly clipped, the garden was beautiful and clean and full of changing colour, and the goose plot was dirty, with roughly built sheds and enamel basins and bowls and discarded earthenware sinks. Like a medieval village in miniature, all the various pieces of the garden Jack had established around the old farm buildings. This was Jack's style, and it was this that suggested to me (falsely, as I got to know soon enough) the remnant of an old peasantry surviving here like the butterflies among the explosions of Salisbury Plain, surviving somehow Industrial Revolution,

³⁸ *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V.S. Naipaul* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 202.

deserted villages, railways, and the establishing of the great agricultural estates in the valley. (17)

The narrator first interprets Jack as a character whose history in this particular corner of England goes hundreds of years back. In a way, he attributes the history of the place to Jack, but he will eventually discover that Jack comes from somewhere else in England; that he is not the original local he thought he was. Even though the fascination with Jack stems from the belief that he is a man who belongs to the place, discovering that Jack is an outsider and thus somewhat similar to himself is reassuring to the narrator. It reinforces his growing awareness of how everything is changing, and how he is only another person to come and go. Everything and nothing stays the same.

The Journey of Life

In the second part of the novel, 'The Journey', we are told about the main character's departure from Trinidad, his journey to England, and what he describes as his first two months there, in London. This part also tells of the narrator's first return to the Caribbean. After six years he returns on a writing scholarship and this journey back proves to be a powerful experience that leads to a realization for the protagonist of his own frame of mind:

But after my six years in England, to come upon Barbados like this, suddenly, after thirteen days at sea, was less like coming upon a landscape than like seeing very clearly an aspect of myself and a past I thought I had outlived. The smallness of that past, the shame of that smallness: they had not been things I could easily acknowledge as a writer. (163)

There is an interdependence between how the protagonist experiences the place he is from and the place he has moved to, and these experiences change through his life and continue to shape his identity.

Connections are repeatedly made between the protagonist's actual observations and how they fit into the image in his mind. On his short stop in New York he realizes his appreciation of people he meets, and how this appreciation is a direct result of the fact that they confirm 'so much of what I had read' (121). Arriving in London, however, he makes a different observation, realizing that the London of his mind is the London of the past:

I was [...], without knowing it, like the Russians I was to hear about (and marvel at) who still believed in Dickens' London. (144)

He ascribes this experience to the descriptive nature of Dickens' texts as opposed to more recent literature exemplified in the novel by Somerset Maugham's works, which did not, according to the narrator, 'create pictures in the mind, because they assumed too much knowledge in the reader' (144).

The journey of this part of the novel is completely intertwined with the main character's ambition of becoming an author. It is, in Levy's words, 'a linear narrative recording time before Wiltshire as a sequence of events connected with writing.'³⁹ The ambition to study and become a writer is what motivates the journey. To the narrator, writing is a way of creating and explaining himself, and the decision to write dictates his life journey, illustrated in this part of the novel.

The insertion of the section "The Journey" into the sequence of the "cyclical" sections on Wiltshire is a structural representation of the incorporation of the pre-

³⁹ Levy, p. 103.

Wiltshire existence into the rebirth at Wiltshire. This culminates a process both in the narrator's life and in the strategy of the narrative as the creation of a myth of origin. It also focuses on the opposing tensions inherent in such a creation.⁴⁰

Even though the narrator has arrived at the conclusion that he has left Trinidad for good, he has not really become an insider in England either, but has instead accepted his position between places. It is as if this character has been shaped through an ongoing process where the writer actively tries to create the self that he wishes to be, but at the same time he cannot free himself from his past experiences, and thus become completely the new self that appears to be his ideal.

The account of the narrator's first encounter with England is devoted to London, although it is told that he only stays in the capital for a couple of months before going to Oxford (139). The novel, however, never takes place in Oxford, but it is stated that he has spent about four years there when he goes on to describe his first return to the Caribbean (160). Considering how important both literature and education is to this character it is interesting that his student days at one of the world's most famous universities is left out of the narrative. The first two months in London form an interesting contrast to what we initially were told, in 'Jack's Garden,' about his arrival in Wiltshire, and one must assume that the narrator considers his days at Oxford to be of less significance in this context. 'The Journey' also describes his first return to the Caribbean, signifying that the title of this part not only refers to the journey from England to Trinidad, but that 'The Journey' encompasses a number of journeys, including the internal journey undertaken by the narrator towards becoming a writer. It is in other words the journey of life, and this part describes events that lead up to the final arrival described in the novel. This arrival, which the narrator reaches

⁴⁰ Levy, p. 103.

in Waldenshaw, does not refer to the actual arrival at the new place where he finds peace, but to the narrator's arrival at the state of mind where he finally finds himself in harmony with himself and his surroundings: 'So in tune with the landscape had I become, in that solitude, for the first time in England' (20-21). By telling us about his life in Waldenshaw before describing the previous journeys, the novel goes far in terms of signifying the importance of this experience of Waldenshaw. Simply noting the amount of text devoted to thorough descriptions of the landscape, the people, the animals, and the buildings in the countryside with the comparatively lesser amount of text and detail on London, we see how this period in the countryside is highlighted:

Technically, the gardens were at the front of the cottages. In fact, by long use, the back of the cottages had become the front, and the front gardens had really become back gardens. [...] A paved path with a border of some sort ran from his 'front' door all the way down the middle of his garden. This should have led to a gate, a pavement, a street. There was a gate; but this gate, set in a wide-meshed wire-netting fence, led only to a wire-fenced patch of earth which was forked over every year (16).

In the third part of the novel, 'Ivy', the narrator briefly mentions his attendance at parties in London and thus makes it clear that there are things going on in his life besides his country life in Wiltshire, for example in a passage about the writer Alan: 'the London parties I occasionally saw him at' (313). However, this is about as much as we learn about his life outside Wiltshire, suggesting that this part of the life described is beyond the scope of this novel.

After 'The Journey', 'Ivy' takes us back to the slow pace and the almost meditative mode of 'Jack's Garden', as displayed above, in the quotation from the novel's first page. The narrator rents a cottage attached to a manor and this third part of the novel is devoted to this manor, its people and its surroundings.

Since this part, as well as the first, is more concerned with the description of the surrounding landscape and its people, the timeline becomes less significant. At this point in time, Jack has passed away, but a lot of these circumstances existed along with Jack. However, it is only now that the narrative gaze turns towards the manor and its people. This illustrates how limited the knowledge given in the first part of the novel was. It is as if the reader is given information in carefully measured portions, which is normal in a work of fiction, but in this novel the intricacy of the structure reinforces the impression of narrative guidance.

Through the entire novel, Naipaul insists upon the uncertainty of perception. A number of passages describe people, or landscape, or incidents, but with a constant reminder that this is just the narrator's interpretation of what he has seen. For instance, when the narrator sees his landlord in a passing car he sums up his impression of this character: 'I had an impression of a round face, a bald head, a suit (or the jacket of a brown suit), a benign expression' (204). As he goes on in this passage about this observation of the landlord, he describes a conversation with Mr. Phillips, who was driving the car with the landlord in it. Mr. Phillips tells the narrator that the landlord was wearing glasses and the narrator asks himself how he could have seen this 'benign expression' behind these glasses, clearly signifying how much is implied in every experience by the narrator's interpretation. By way of this constant emphasis on the subjectivity that lies in this representation of England, Naipaul in a way gouges questions of whether he gives a realistic account, and also avoids the issues that he does not want to get into. Any novel or other textual account describing experience will of course be subjective, but this narrative can be described as overtly subjective.

The final part of the novel, 'The Ceremony of Farewell', serves as an account of the narrator's final metaphorical arrival, a conclusion to his perceptions and contemplations in the novel. With this part the novel also completes its interrupted circle because the narrator on the very last page 'began to write very fast about Jack and his garden' (387), the result of which we as readers have just read. The fact that the novel in a sense ends with its beginning reinforces the notion conveyed of constant flux.

This concluding part of the novel mainly describes the narrator's return to Trinidad for the cremation of his late sister. Returning to Trinidad he is both an outsider and an insider there, similar to the position he now enjoys in England. At the very end of the novel, attending the ceremony related to his sister's death, he maintains the position of an observer. A lot is new to him after years of absence:

Something else was new to me: the pundit was being 'ecumenical' in a way he wouldn't have been when I was a child, equating Hinduism – speculative, many-sided, with animist roots – with the revealed faiths of Christianity and Mohammedanism [...] it was his way, in a changed Trinidad, of defending our faith and ways.
(380)

Although some things appear 'new' to him on this return to his country of birth, he at the same time uses the word 'our' about himself and the Hindu community, thus also expressing a sense of belonging. Such affiliation is never expressed about his relationship with England. However, as the narrator says, the initial departure from Trinidad was final. But after almost being absorbed in the decay that he found in the landscape, the manor, and the people of Wiltshire, attending his sister's cremation completes his adjustment to death and decay as flux, as constant change. This cyclical interpretation of decay is underlined by the final completion of the novel as a circular

composition as the narrator on its final page begins writing the novel that we as readers have just read (387).

Decay and Constant Change

The theme of decay reoccurs in different ways throughout the novel, and the theme permeates the third part of the novel, 'Ivy.' Long passages are devoted to decay and deterioration in various forms and the preoccupation with this theme can almost be perceived as an obsession for the main character. An important message conveyed through this part of the novel is how his attitude towards this decay develops as a result of his years in this particular place in the English countryside. In 'The Journey' the narrator at one point reveals that when he first came to London, the greatness of the past led him to think that he had come to England too late (141). Eventually, in the course of his stay in Waldenshaw, however, he finds that in his subjective perception the English countryside is now in its prime. Mark Stein notes how 'the affinity the narrator feels to the process of decay supports his sense of accommodation on the declining estate.'⁴¹ The perfection of the past that he associated with the manor and imperial greatness had to pass. Considering his landlord, he concludes: 'Perfection such as my landlord looked out on contained its own corruption' (222). One of the reasons why he comes to peace with the decay around him is exactly that his presence necessarily has to involve the end of imperial greatness. The decay that represents the fall of the English empire also represents an opening for him to England.

The title, 'Ivy,' carries symbolic references significant to the theme of this part and of the novel as a whole. It is the plant of Dionysus, god of life's regenerative

⁴¹ 'The Perception of Landscape and Architecture in V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and David Dabydeen's *Disappearance* in *Acolit*, 1 (1995), pp. 15-29, (p. 21).

energy and of vital fluids like wine, milk, honey, blood, and semen.⁴² The title may in other words signify a celebration of life. As an evergreen plant, Ivy represents the victory of life over death, and this is coherent with the narrator's observations of his surroundings. He sees decay, but he also sees continuance.

The fourth part of the novel, 'Rooks,' has a similarly symbolic title. Like crows or ravens, rooks are carrion birds and therefore the presence of rooks is often thought of as foretelling death.⁴³ The connection between rooks and death serve to underline the theme of death and decay in the novel. However, an additional interpretation of the birds is introduced in the novel itself. Old Mr. Phillips, the father of the man who is the landlord's personal aid, recalls an old saying that rooks bring money to a house, and says in conversation with the narrator: 'If you think they're birds of death you can't stand the noise. If you think it's money, you don't mind.' (324). On the one hand, the possibility is introduced that the birds are a positive presence. At the same time, this superstition serves as a reminder of how people tend to see what they want to see and interpret their surroundings for their own comfort. In a sense, this is what happens to the narrator through his experience in Wiltshire, since his interpretation of the decay surrounding him in the end becomes an expression of the circle of life.

The manor, 'created at the zenith of imperial power and wealth' (284), is the most notable remnant of England's past greatness in the narrator's surroundings. Now, however, it is too expensive to maintain the manor, and its deterioration is repeatedly described in different ways, especially in 'Ivy'. Weiss observes that the narrator's presence in Waldenshaw, together with the landlord's acedia, the deteriorating manor, and, in this chapter, the ivy, signify the decline and fall of

⁴² Ferber, Michael, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 101.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-169.

European empires.⁴⁴ As the narrator points out, decay implies ‘an ideal, a perfection in the past’ (228). The introduction of the narrator, this colonial, to the manor grounds, is a powerful reminder of how the wealth of the past was based on colonial exploitation. Thus, it undermines the idea of perfection in the past.

Homelessness

Michael Gorra observes that ‘the relation between home and homelessness provides the central metaphor of all Naipaul’s work’.⁴⁵ In this novel, the sense of homelessness is constantly expressed in the way the narrator describes his surroundings. He is continually exploring and creating records of this exploration through his writing. He also a number of times describes himself directly as foreign. The point is also made that what was once somebody’s home does not necessarily continue to be so, for example when an old lady comes to the narrator’s house where she used to live, but finds it completely altered and does not recognise it. The narrator has rebuilt the house and what was once the lady’s home no longer exists. Parallel to this, the narrator’s presence in the English countryside is an expression of change ‘in the course of the history of the country’ (124).

As mentioned above, a contrast that emerges through this text, and also in Dabydeen’s text, is the discrepancy between the narrator’s expectations towards England prior to arrival and his actual experience of the country. The encounter with an England different from his suppositions increases the narrator’s sense of homelessness.

The grounds for the young man’s expectations are complex. The colonial background of Trinidad, with Britain as colonial power, is of course an important

⁴⁴ Weiss, p. 199.

⁴⁵ *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 64.

element. Growing up, the main character belonged to a society that was subject to systematic British cultural imperialism. The cultural influence from Britain seems to have had a greater impact on the young mind than the formal political relationship between the colony and the colonial power. As explained in the introduction, the relative lack of a precolonial local history in the West Indies left it more open to such cultural influence than colonies in other parts of the world. This is illustrated in this novel by the degree to which the narrator is influenced by England, its history, and its authors. Ideas of the English landscape are also prominent. In the colony the narrator already has clear ideas of what the English countryside looks like, based on images from art, literature and advertising. He is excited when he recognises some of these in England. A picture that reoccurs in his mind throughout the text is that of cows on tins of condensed milk. In Wiltshire he for the first time sees the real life version:

This was like the design on the condensed-milk label I knew as a child in Trinidad, where cows as handsome as those were not to be seen, where there was very little fresh milk and most people used condensed milk or powdered milk. (38)

This picture on the tin box has apparently made an impression on the main character, and has played a part in the shaping of the English landscape in his mind. Seeing the cows in the English countryside he is, as noted by Döring, reconnected to ‘the displaced and mediated views of his colonial childhood.’⁴⁶ The image expresses the glorification of England and how Trinidad through colonial eyes pales in comparison, since in England even the cows are ‘handsome,’ as opposed to the Trinidadian cows. However, as the narrator will discover, English agriculture has lost a lot of its

⁴⁶ Tobias Döring, ‘The Passage of the Eye/ I: David Dabydeen, V.S. Naipaul and the Tombstones of Parabiography’ in *Postcolonialism and Autobiography*, ed. by Alfred Hornung and Ernstpeter Ruhe (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 149-166, (p. 159).

romance. The farmland surrounding him in Wiltshire is marked by deterioration. New buildings and devices substitute the old just like the condensed milk is a substitute for the real thing.

The young version of Naipaul's narrator certainly romanticises England, and he does so based on the British Empire's presentation of England in the colonies. The England he grew up with does not exist in reality. Since so many of his ideas and hopes for the future depended on these ideas of England, this realization involves a reassessment of these hopes and ideas and in consequence a reassessment of his idea of himself:

Naipaul's gaze upon Englishness is shown to reveal a greater self-reflexivity, and a bitter apprehension of his own implications in the workings of empire. Always writing himself into his critique of the postcolonial condition his oeuvre concedes the existential cost of desiring metropolitan England from the colonial margin.⁴⁷

The strategy of the protagonist of *The Enigma of Arrival* in confronting this 'existential cost' is, however, individualist and it rejects victimization. Although surrounded by remnants of imperial England, the narrator finds his own way into this world. In the beginning he feels that he is a stranger, whereas the others belong in the valley, but towards the end of 'Jack's Garden' he has discovered that it is not so, and realises 'how tenuous, really, the hold of all of these people had been on the land they worked or lived in' (99).

⁴⁷ Ann Blake, Leela Gandhi, and Sue Thomas, *England through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 130.

Writing Life

The main character's dream of England and his dream of becoming an author are closely intertwined. As Levy points out, Naipaul, like his father, considered the writing career as a means of creating a self.⁴⁸ Looking back at himself as a boy, he recalls his urge to leave Trinidad and the effect this had on his life there:

I had for many months during the past worrying year been denying myself things, at one stage even (secretly) denying myself food, out of a wish not to lose my scholarship, the scholarship that was to take me to England and Oxford, which was not a wish so much to go to Oxford as a wish to get out of Trinidad and see the great world and make myself a writer. (124)

Achieving his goals in Trinidad is impossible, as in his eyes the colonial society of Trinidad does not contain the subject matter of great writing. This is closely related to the fact that the great authors he looks up to are Western. Furthermore, what is not revealed in *The Enigma of Arrival* is that Naipaul in Trinidad saw 'his father's creative talents get dashed by that unsupportive environment'.⁴⁹ This serves as a partial explanation as to why the narrator, this fictional version of Naipaul, feels such a strong urge to leave Trinidad in order to live and write. Settling down for his first night in a New York hotel, the narrator eats chicken brought from Trinidad with his hands and considers:

In my diary I had written of the biggest things, the things that befitted a writer. But the writer of the diary was ending his day like a peasant, like a man reverting to his origins. (123)

⁴⁸ Levy, p. 85.

⁴⁹ Nixon, p. 161.

Again, this is the assessment of the older writer looking back at the incident with a new perspective. He acknowledges the extremity of his self-consciousness about his background, and, especially through the sections about his journey to England we see how eager he was as a young man to move towards a different world. Despite moving geographically, and despite concentrating on the things that 'befitted a writer,' he is unable to avoid the feeling of inferiority, of belonging to what in his eyes as a young man was an inferior culture. This idea of the colonial culture as inferior and the Western and British as superior is of course imposed on this young Trinidadian by means of the British influence in his country. As I will return to in the next chapter, the young protagonist of *Disappearance* has similar preconceptions about England and the West as superior and cultivated, as opposed to his country of birth. The outlook of Naipaul's writer protagonist is, however, quite individualist, as he never explicitly explains his own self-consciousness by placing blame on external factors of international power relations and colonial history. He acknowledges, of course, that he is affected by colonialism, but rather than writing against this world-altering historical phenomenon, his gaze is inwards; it is that of a middle-aged man looking at his own development as person and a writer. In this retrospective process he does, however, acknowledge the negative aspect of his colonial self-consciousness:

Concealing this colonial-Hindu self below the writing
personality, I did both my material and myself much
damage. (159)

Striving towards his ideal he acknowledges that he has repressed parts of himself that will always be there. This is a realisation that both says a lot about where he was as a writer and a person at that time of his youth, but also about where he feels he has arrived at now. The sentence also underlines what repeatedly is made clear, especially

through the second part of the novel: at this point in his life, writing and ‘my material’ come before ‘myself.’ His Indian and colonial heritage is suppressed when he strives towards the ideal of the Western writer. Together with the physical move, assuming the role of the author is an important part of his attempt at erasing his ‘colonial-Hindu self,’ a self which in his view is not fit for literature. The literary world to which he aspires is English, or Western. Similarly, Dabydeen’s protagonist identifies himself mainly as an engineer, as he sees this as the most important aspect of his identity. During his first stop in England, in London, Naipaul’s narrator finds that he has come to England too late:

So I grew to feel that the grandeur belonged to the past;
that I had come to England at the wrong time; that I had
come too late to find the England, the heart of empire,
which (like a provincial, from a far corner of the empire)
I had created in my fantasy. (141)

He goes on to compare himself with the older people of his Asian-Indian community in Trinidad, concluding that their feeling of living in ‘the wrong place’ was passed down to him, but whereas the older people looked back to India in response to this feeling, his ambition caused him ‘to look ahead and outwards, to England; but it led to a similar feeling of wrongness’ (142). This realisation is one that has come to him over time:

The process of learning, however, is necessarily the
occasion, as in childhood, of the loss of the ideal,
wholeness and completeness.⁵⁰

This loss begins to take place within the young writer as he arrives in England and begins the first chapter of his life there in London. The England of the literature and

⁵⁰ Levy, p. 100.

art he has consumed in Trinidad is suddenly lost. However, it is not until later, when he reconsiders this period of his life, that he is fully able to comprehend the impact it has had on his own development, both as a person and writer.

Arrival

As a middle-aged man living in the countryside he is still an observer of his surroundings, but the main focus of writing has shifted as he is now seeking to ‘understand and finally correct’ his situation.⁵¹ Michael Gorra observes that Naipaul has ‘an abiding concern with the issues of mimicry and authenticity and assimilation that face a self caught on a cultural border’.⁵² In *The Enigma of Arrival* we see how the England that the main character knew in Trinidad is constantly tested for its authenticity on his arrival in England. His own identity as a young man is in many ways dependent on this England, and as the Trinidadian image of England proves full of misconceptions, he falls into an identity crisis. The England of the real world initially lets the young man down, because he expects to arrive in the great imperial power that belongs to the past.

In the narrative present, he seems to have discovered that this process of discovering the real England in which he finds himself has been and still is essential in the shaping of his own identity. The title *The Enigma of Arrival* may therefore be interpreted as this ongoing process of finding his place in England and the world. The arrival that the title refers to is not so much the initial physical arrival in this country, so much as the narrator’s coming to terms with his place in the world and the complexity this implies for his identity. As Nixon puts it, arrival in this novel ‘serves more as metaphor than event’.⁵³

⁵¹ Levy, p. 79.

⁵² Gorra, p. 8.

⁵³ Nixon, p. 161.

In 'The Journey' the narrator dwells on his fascination with Giorgio de Chirico's painting from which he has taken the title.⁵⁴ It is particularly the title that catches the narrator's attention, and later he learns that the title was given, not by the artist, but the poet Guillaume Apollinaire. Studying the painting, the narrator interprets its two figures as two different people, one who has arrived and one 'perhaps a native of the port. The scene is of desolation and mystery; it speaks of the mystery of arrival. It spoke to me of that, as it had spoken to Apollinaire' (106). This raises the question of whether the narrator would have seen what he sees had it not been for the poet's highly interpretative title. Furthermore, it illustrates how guided the narrator is by literature. However, considering how divided the narrator feels about both Trinidad and England, and considering his presentation of arrival as an ongoing process, it is perhaps strange that he is so certain about his interpretation of the figures in this surrealist painting as two different people. An interpretation of the two as images of the same person seems more consistent with Apollinaire's title. The figure whose face is shown wears a coloured robe of some sort. He appears to be moving towards the viewer and away from the ocean, which, revealed by the sail in the background, is on the other side of the wall. It is possible that the other figure, very much like a shadow, simply represents the state of mind of the person in front. This figure appears to be standing still, facing down, but in the direction of the ocean. If the painting does portray an arrival, as seen by Apollinaire, the figure and its mental shadow may signify exactly what the narrator is writing about, someone who physically has arrived, but is mentally still facing his past.

On his initial departure from Trinidad as well as when first arriving in England, the young writer seems to expect that England will be the perfect

⁵⁴ See Appendix 1, Giorgio de Chirico: *The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon* (detail), reprinted from Tobias Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages*, p. 110.

replacement for what he sees as his imperfect home. The move made by the young man from Trinidad to England is one that involves the closing of one chapter and the beginning of a new one. Consciously and subconsciously, he finds a number of strategies to assimilate into England and Englishness as he sees it. The landscape of the English countryside is central to this process of assimilation within the main character, and his daily walks around the English landscape on one level function as a deliberate strategy to help him assimilate into his new surroundings. Furthermore, the verbal description of the landscape completes this act of assimilation:

The solitude of the walk, the emptiness of that stretch of the downs, enabled me to surrender to my way of looking, to indulge my linguistic or historical fantasies; and enabled me, at the same time, to shed the nerves of being a stranger in England. (18)

The narrator's feeling of strangeness shows how conscious he is about the connection between the landscape and his personal approach to it, always conscious of the history of the landscape as well as his reproduction of the landscape in his writing. He not only surrenders to looking, but to his way of looking, a gaze that involves 'linguistic and historical fantasies.' This gives an impression of how prominent language and history are in the narrator's perception of the world around him. In her analysis of *The Enigma of Arrival*, Judith Levy highlights the amount of repetition in these passages describing the landscape. Drawing on Freud's vocabulary she finds in Naipaul's text the tension between 'the repetition compulsion as acting in the service of the ego and its drive to master and control [...], or acting in the service of a death instinct, a drive to return to a conserving, inanimate state, death, or origin'.⁵⁵ She goes on to describe these passages in 'Jack's Garden' as a recitation of the main character's 'assimilation

⁵⁵ Levy, p. 109

into a landscape'.⁵⁶ By way of repeated walks on the same paths, minute observation of the details, and finally this textual rendering of that experience, the narrator takes possession of the surrounding landscape:

Daily I walked in the wide grassy way between the flint slopes, past chalk valleys rubbed white and looking sometimes like a Himalayan valley strewn in midsummer with old, gritted snow. (18)

Anthropologist Jessica Dubow suggests that walking may serve as a means of conquering spatial alienation in order to establish the self within a foreign landscape.⁵⁷ To the main character the observation that accompanies the walking is central, and he seems to be of the conviction that observing the surrounding landscape down to the smallest detail is the way for him to achieve the goal of truly knowing it: 'I picked my way up and down around each mound; I wanted in those early days to leave no accessible mound unlooked at' (18).

The meditation on walking in this novel recalls Michel de Certeau's thesis of spatial practice. To the narrator, the most important aspect of walking around in the English countryside appears to be his description of these walks in his writing. To de Certeau, the act of narration is what makes the journey; the 'narrated adventures [...] organize walks [...] before or during the time the feet perform it.'⁵⁸ To Naipaul's narrator this process is intended. The intention to verbalise the walk almost appears to be the motivation for the walk.

The countryside where the main character takes these walks is near Stonehenge, and being in close proximity to such an important historical sight is of

⁵⁶ Levy, p. 108

⁵⁷ 'Rites of Passage: Travel and the Materiality of vision at the Cape of Good Hope' in *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, ed. by Barbara Bender and Margot Winer (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 241-255, (p. 253).

⁵⁸ *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 116.

great significance to him. He seems to be convinced that knowing and being close to England's history bring him closer to the English identity at which he strives to arrive. As I will show, Dabydeen's novel also takes place in close proximity to an important historical sight.

Throughout the novel there is an underlying sense of nostalgia, a romantic longing towards the England of the past, but especially the imperial days. It is therefore interesting that Stonehenge belongs to pre-English history. It was there long before the England of the protagonist's vision came into existence. From a postcolonial perspective, one that emphasises the power relations between where the protagonist was born and where he is now, Stonehenge may represent an age of innocence.⁵⁹ At the same time, however, the protagonist does not express negative feelings towards England's imperial past, nor does he seem to contemplate the power relations between where he is and where he comes from. He repeatedly compares the England of the narrative present with the England he had learnt about before arrival, and the England he experiences fades in comparison with the imperial England in his mind. The narrator is never explicitly political about the relationship between his colonial place of birth and Britain as imperial power. The exploration he undertakes is on a more personal and emotional level.

Towards the end of 'Jack's Garden', the narrator assesses his position there differently from when he arrived:

I had thought that because of my insecure past – peasant India, colonial Trinidad, my own family circumstances, the colonial smallness that didn't consort with the grandeur of my ambition [...] – I had thought that

⁵⁹ The Irish Nobel Prize winner in Literature Seamus Heaney employs a similar use of prehistoric elements in his poetry when dealing with English domination over Ireland, see *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 40, ed. by Vincent B. Sherry, Jr. (Detroit: A Bruccoli Clark Book, Book Tower, Gale Research Company, 1985), pp. 187-188.

because of this I had been given an especially tender or raw sense of an unaccommodating world. (99)

He goes on to compare his initial feeling of being a stranger in the valley with how he viewed Jack as ‘solid, rooted in his earth.’ Through his stay, however, the narrator has discovered how Jack instead ‘had created his own life, his own world’ (99). The narrator is no longer fascinated with what he thought was a predetermined sense of belonging, but with the demonstration of individual initiative in taking control over one’s life. Like Jack, the narrator has also ‘created his own life, his own world,’ but he needed Jack to make him realise this.

A Solitary Wanderer

Throughout the entire text, the main character appears to be a very independent as well as lonely character. His distance to the people surrounding him contrasts with the closeness to the landscape that is created through his wanderings in the area. As mentioned before, Chandra B. Joshi claims that this ‘depleted social and emotional life’ is imposed on the writer by exile. His ‘mental faculties are sharpened by this isolation, his perspective and reflective abilities made more acute, but the heart and spirit are atrophied – there is no sustenance for them in this rootless existence.’⁶⁰

There is no expression of strong affection from the protagonist towards any other characters, and thus we are presented with the narrative of a whole life up until middle age where no such affection exists, beyond the family, that is. The narrator’s approach to the people around him is contradictory in the sense that he shows great interest through his descriptions, but at the same time he seems detached. His observations and analyses of other people are given priority in the text over his feelings, and at the

⁶⁰ Joshi, p. 223.

same time we are invited to take a greater part in the private dramas of his neighbours than in his own. In a passage about a village scandal, he refers to town life as something that 'at one time might have involved them all, Mr and Mrs Phillips, Brenda and Les, and Michael Allan' (77). Through these passages about particular events around the manor, the interest in the people around him is displayed as well as the exclusion from 'them all', signifying that he has never been a part of 'town life' the way they are. During his life in Wiltshire there seems to be no such private drama on the writer's part and no relations that could involve such drama. At the same time, these observations and analyses reveal aspects of the writer's approach to his surroundings and also to a certain extent display his personality. The main character thus is unveiled through his gaze upon others. Also, the development in the social landscape of Waldenshaw reflects the natural and cultural landscape in the sense that both are under constant change. Just like nature's colours change, people come and go. The cyclical structure of the novel underlines this constant process.

Years after his stay in London the narrator receives a letter from an Italian woman he knew there. When he does not reply, the reader is told that he cannot do so because her insecurity feels threatening to his own feeling of security, and so he concludes: 'I preserved my own balance with difficulty' (196). In order to preserve his own security and his ideas of himself and what he has become, it seems paramount to the main character to treat his London days as a closed chapter, and the young man he was as someone he has left behind. Precautions must be taken in order to preserve his identity as the writer and man that he sees himself as now, years later, with his adjusted sense of self.

The falseness of the identity assumed in the original conception of his life-as-writer is given further symbolic representation at the end of the section in the letter from

Angela, a figure from his early time in England, which arrives “almost at the end of my time there.” [...] Angela, an immigrant like himself, unable to pronounce the narrator’s name, and in an attempt no doubt to find a common ground between them, had at the time of their first acquaintance renamed him: “She called me Victor.” [...] Now ten years into his “rebirth”, the irony of the act is acknowledged: “And it worked for me, too: through all the intervening sensualities, all the uses which I had put my body, the name Angela had given me called up the enigma and false promise of that early time in London.”⁶¹

His reactions to this letter, and the precaution he feels he must take in order to preserve his identity, highlight the fragility in his idea of his own self as well as his insecurity and confusion. It also marks the distance between this middle-aged man in Wiltshire and the young man he was in London. A letter from a long-lost friend is enough to threaten the balancing act that his identity apparently involves. His Italian friend reminds him of the early London days and the insecure young boy he was at the time. This insecure young boy was also one with a less intimate connection with England, a man without a home. Furthermore, in writing this letter about her somewhat unhappy situation, his friend also represents a fellow immigrant who is unhappy with her life in England, which is yet another scenario to which the main character is very reluctant to relate. In general the main character is attentive to people’s inability to master their life situations, and it troubles him. The Italian girl had renamed him Victor, and the memory of this may be a troubling reminder of the wish he had as a young man to become English. At the same time the name implies greatness and victory, something the protagonist is insecure about whether he has achieved for himself. Remains of victory and greatness were also what he missed on his first encounter with England. But all in all, the reminder of Angela and his life in

⁶¹ Levy, p. 105.

London disturbs his identity, which at this point has been readjusted in accordance with its surroundings.

One aspect of Jack the gardener is that he represents someone who does master his situation and the main character admires him for his abilities:

Jack himself had disregarded the tenuousness of his hold on the land, just as, not seeing what others saw, he had created a garden on the edge of a swamp and a ruined farmyard: had responded to and found glory in the seasons. (100)

Alan, however, who like the main character is a writer, is someone who one could say fails at life, and such failure disturbs the main character because it forces him to reconsider his own situation.

After years of living in England, the main character knows the country and has learnt a lot about the people. He apparently also knows the community surrounding him very well. However, one thing that will always make him different from the English is his background and thus his different perspective, his references and his ability to see this society with the eyes of someone who grew up somewhere totally different. Considering his neighbours who work at the manor, he classifies them as servants, and remarks: 'I come from a colony, once a plantation society, where servitude was a more desperate condition' (70). In other words, theirs and his outlook on the world will forever be different, and whereas he as a young man was under the impression that he could become English and take on the English frame of mind, he has now come to terms with his position in between cultures and his possession of a colonial past. Furthermore, he assumes about his landlord that 'Whatever he saw would have been different from what I saw' (233). As the narrator has replaced his idea of decay with the idea of flux, this assumption about the landlord also implies

that to him, who has experienced the greatness of the manor in the past, this new understanding of flux and constant change is not accessible the way it is to the narrator, who sees it all from a different perspective.

Furthermore, there is in this text a refusal of victimisation combined with an underlying insistence that his multicultural background is rather a source of insight than an obstacle and not least that his particular experience has been necessary for him to arrive the way he now has. The following passage draws a line between his background and his arrival in Wiltshire:

And twenty years of a life which had been the opposite of my landlord's had brought me to the solace of the debris of his garden, the debris of my own life. Debris which never ceased to have an element of grandeur.
(238)

These considerations of the narrator, seen together with what we know of the originally so privileged, yet now ill and withdrawn landlord, express the narrator's nostalgia of the manor's past greatness. Since he describes the lives of himself and his landlord as opposite, they come to represent the opposition between the colonial and the imperial, but at the same time the nostalgia that lies in this passage is probably as much about the narrator's coming to terms with the passing of time and his own mortality, since he later claims that death is the motif behind this entire novel:

Death was the motif; it had perhaps been the motif all along. Death and the way of handling it – that was the motif of the story of Jack. (376)

However, like life, the novel departs from Jack and appears to expand enigmatically beyond the narrator's intention. *The Enigma of Arrival* certainly gives an account of the development of an identity on which colonialism has been a great influence. At

the same time though, this perspective is somehow partially refused because of an eagerness to look ahead and not be limited by the label.

The reluctance to be seen in terms of his background is apparent in the presentation of the interaction with the other characters in Wiltshire. It appears as though his ethnic background is never an issue to the villagers, except for the landlord who sends the writer poems of Hindu gods (231). This total disregard of the arrival of a West Indian in a remote Wiltshire village in the seventies is however impossible. It is an event that would hardly go unnoticed. Again, this is a reminder of how much is deliberately left out from this account of the narrator's time there. There is quite an individualist statement in this choice to focus merely on his own experience of others rather than their experience of him. In this lies a refusal to focus on their presumed perception of him as 'other'.

Chapter Two: *Disappearance*

In a way similar to *The Enigma of Arrival*, *Disappearance* tells the story of a man from a former colony in the West Indies who has come to England, but whereas Naipaul's narrator initially went there as a young student, the narrator in Dabydeen's novel is a Guyanese engineer travelling to England on business. Unlike the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival*, Dabydeen's engineer is of African slave ancestry.

Thanks to his former university teacher, Professor Fenwick, the engineer has been hired to work on a project on the southern coast of England. A sea wall is being constructed in order to secure parts of a rural English village from crumbling into the sea. When he begins to contemplate the British influence on his own people's history, the engineer experiences internal conflict about his participation in the project.

Like Naipaul's writer, the young engineer is reluctant to identify himself with his ethnical or colonial background. Both main characters strive towards creating a self that is independent of these factors. Inevitably though, through his experiences in England and the acquaintances he makes during his stay, the narrator's ideas about himself and the world are challenged. Aspects of Britain's imperial past and the narrator's background are brought to the surface through his meeting with England.

As with *The Enigma of Arrival*, I will begin my analysis of *Disappearance* by interpreting the narrative structure of the novel. Subsequently, I will place the text in terms of its genre, which is more straightforward here than in the case of *The Enigma of Arrival*. My further analysis of the novel will mainly focus on how the narrator's experiences situate the novel in a postcolonial tradition.

Narrative Structure

Disappearance is divided into three parts and twelve chapters.⁶² The contrast between the former colony Guyana and England forms an all-encompassing contrast throughout the novel, but is mostly present in the first part. Here, long retrospective passages describe incidents from the narrator's childhood, youth, and professional experiences in Guyana. These passages present the narrator's background, and serve to establish his character. Retrospective passages about his life become less dominant in the second part of the novel, and the third and final part is completely devoted to what can be interpreted as his farewell to England for good.

The chronology of the novel is linear; it begins with the engineer's first days in England and ends with his departure. Everything is presented from the perspective of the engineer who is now in England, and it is his afternoon conversations with Mrs. Rutherford that lead up to most of the retrospective passages. Also, just like in *The Enigma of Arrival*, what we are told about his past is filtered through his older and more experienced mind; he looks back from a new perspective. It is, however, the stay in England that seems to awaken and change the main character, as well as instigate a revision of his past. This is specifically triggered by the question that dominates the first part of the novel: 'Why, Mrs. Rutherford wanted to know, did you become an engineer?' (4). The question is emphasized by its being the opening sentence of the novel and by its repetition in the very beginning of chapter three (38).

Genre

Disappearance is more conventional in both genre and style than *The Enigma of Arrival*. The prose is tighter, with shorter sentences and without the ongoing reconsideration of statements that so dominates in Naipaul's novel. In addition,

⁶² All further references to David Dabydeen, *Disappearance* (London: Vintage, 1999).

Dabydeen's novel is mostly told from the point of view of the narrator in the narrative present. The engineer is the main character as well as the first-person narrator in the novel. The novel is narrated in the past tense, but it is only when the engineer remembers Guyana that he is looking back on a period of his life that is over. His experiences in England are described as the present of the narrative, unlike *The Enigma of Arrival*, where it is revealed in the end that the entire novel is a rendering of memories of the past. Whereas Naipaul's narrator looks back and reviews the process of his changing perspective, the narrator in *Disappearance* discovers this change in himself towards the end of the novel. The style is still contemplative, but not to the degree of *The Enigma of Arrival*. Whereas Naipaul's novel is dominated by long accounts of almost meditative perception, this novel is more conventional in the sense that it contains more descriptions of events.

Whereas Naipaul's novel is a fictional autobiography, *Disappearance* must be classified simply as fiction. Like the majority of Caribbean Postcolonial novels, it contains a number of biographical elements. The story of the engineer is in many ways similar to the story of Dabydeen himself, but there are indisputable differences between the two, and it is clear that the author is not attempting to tell his own story in this novel. Nevertheless, perspectives are offered on the experience of coming to England from Guyana, which of course is a familiar situation to the author. Moreover, the tension between the former colony and England is more prominent here than in *The Enigma of Arrival*.

Colonial Background

Like *The Enigma of Arrival*, Dabydeen's novel begins in England. In this later novel as well, the protagonist's background as a foreigner is brought up at a very early stage, already on the second page: "I was [...] from a different culture" (4). As

mentioned above, the narrator of *Disappearance* is of African West Indian descent and his African heritage adds to the cultural complexity with which he is associated. His African ancestry furthermore becomes a factor in his meeting with England. *The Enigma of Arrival* portrays a man who through his profession describes his life and surroundings, aiming to understand and by understanding come to terms with himself and the world around him. Through the novel this self negotiates his environment and is gradually forced to reconsider his ideas about himself and the world. In *Disappearance* we encounter a young man who confronts these issues more superficially. Instead of attempting to understand his own identity and finding his place in the world, he looks for external solutions. Through his work as an engineer, he shapes and alters his physical surroundings, trying on a metaphorical level to achieve control through work. During his stay in England he is eager to get under the skin of the country and its people, but finds himself repeatedly confronted with himself, his identity and his place in the world.

Through the retrospective glances at his childhood, student days and professional life in Guyana, we are presented with characters and incidents that in some way have shaped the narrator's personality.

In chapter three, which begins with Mrs. Rutherford asking why the narrator became an engineer, he thinks back to his schooldays in Guyana. At one point, his teacher, an Englishman called Mr. Leroy, tells him that he will never be an engineer, 'because an engineer is a man of grammar whereas you speak waywardly like the nigger you are!' (60). The contradiction that the narrator feels exists between his ethnicity and his profession is in other words forced upon him during his colonial education.

Jamal is another significant character from the narrator's schooldays. A small boy of Indian descent, he gains the other children's respect by taking the blame for any piece of mischief conducted in school. However, when he eventually refuses to play the scapegoat, the other children freeze him out. In retrospect, this story may suggest that Jamal played this role because he belongs to the marginalised Indian population. In the English village, the narrator's awareness about his own racial prejudice is raised because he himself feels prejudiced against. This experience seems to make him realise his own prejudice, especially against the Indian minority in Guyana. Thinking back on one of his projects there, he remembers his thoughts about the Indian coolies:

The British had shipped them from India to the West Indies, high-caste and low, Hindu and Muslim, all lumped together in a brown porridge. (25)

In this passage about this job in Guyana, one of the coolies is more central than the others, namely Swami. He is nameless, but his fellow workers call him Swami, which is an honorific title given to a Hindu religious teacher.⁶³ This Indian worker is portrayed by the main character as a simple man, physically strong and guided by superstitions, but at the same time a force to be reckoned with because of the respect he enjoys among his fellow workers. During the project, the young engineer defies Swami's superstitious warnings about the methods chosen. Shortly after, Swami is crushed by a bulldozer and eventually dies from the injuries. This tragic event has obviously made a great impression on the young engineer and it makes him question his own judgement and his faith in science:

⁶³ *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary* (New Jersey: Gramercy Books, 1996).

Now, surveying my unfinished sea-dam, I began to doubt everything that made me, all the learning I had absorbed from books in years of rapt concentration. I began to doubt my blackness, my ability to work the land as my forefathers had done. Perhaps the Indian was right, perhaps all I had were the trappings of white people's ideas, white people's science, and I knew nothing else, nothing of what he claimed to know through circuitous contact with the earth and intimacy with its ghosts. (37)

Besides voicing the engineer's self-doubt, this passage expresses his feeling that there is a contradiction between his ethnic background and his profession. As shown above, this feeling was planted within him, or at least reinforced by his teacher, Mr. Leroy. These experiences from Guyana come to the surface in England, probably because he gradually realises their importance in the build-up of his self-image.

In one of the passages where he is looking back at his childhood in Guyana, the engineer thinks about the village drunk Alfred Roosevelt who influenced him as a young boy. At one point Alfred told him that 'Real life is abroad and big-big stories' (51), which echoes the ideas of Naipaul's young writer who does not find Trinidad fit for literature, while he immediately finds what he considers appropriate material as soon as he departs. Naipaul's writer and Dabydeen's engineer share this strong feeling of coming from cultures that they consider to be inferior to the English culture. They have internalised these views through their colonial education. In *Disappearance*, this is shown through the episode mentioned above, where Mr. Leroy makes racist remarks in the classroom.

As a young boy not only school, but also leisure activities are dictated by the imposed English culture. And when independence is finally to come, English cricket is followed by American basketball as various forms of cultural imperialism continues (39). During his upbringing in Guyana, the narrator is constantly taught the culture

and history of others, and he never learns about his own African history. As I will show in the following, this has great consequences for his self-image, and it affects his experience in England in significant ways.

Professor Fenwick, the protagonist's university professor, is initially the great role model who represents Western science and technology as well as the narrator's idea of English honour. However, as the story develops, this role model as well as a great deal of the experiences he has in England, let him down.

By quoting *The Enigma of Arrival* in the epigraph, Dabydeen establishes a relationship between his text and Naipaul's even before the narrative begins, and he particularly draws attention to the character of Jack:

Was it Jack? I didn't take the person in; I was more concerned with the strangeness of the walk, my own strangeness, and the absurdity of my enquiry.

In light of this, the fact that Mrs. Rutherford's husband is called Jack seems to be more than a coincidence. However, the character of Dabydeen's novel appears to be very different. Just as significant in the choice of this quotation is probably how it draws attention to the revision in Naipaul's text of what is perceived. Furthermore, the lines quoted express the preoccupation with the actual observation of this character by the narrator, as well as the awareness of how he reacts towards the characters surrounding him. Just like Naipaul's writer, Dabydeen's engineer will reveal a lot about himself through what is told about his observation of others. And both main characters show how much they depend on external factors and especially other persons in order to define themselves.

Another quotation in the epigraph brings in one of the most thoroughly discussed characters of postcolonial theory, Mr. Kurtz, the man who appears in

Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*. However, instead of quoting Conrad's text, Dabydeen quotes T.S. Eliot's 'The Hollow Men', thus drawing attention to the great influence that Conrad's text has had on other texts. Bringing in *Heart of Darkness* already at the threshold of the novel, Dabydeen in a way places the novel thematically, and also gives directions to the reader in terms of how the novel should be read. As soon as Mrs. Rutherford starts telling the young engineer about her husband and his behaviour in Africa, it is revealed that he shares characteristics with the infamous Mr. Kurtz. They both reveal their inner beast in Africa, but in Jack Rutherford's case it is made obvious that this beast was already within him, and that he went to Africa in order to free his inner beast. Thus it is almost as if the connection between Conrad's and Dabydeen's character is there not only to add a dimension to Jack, but to make sure we keep Kurtz and what he represents in mind.

A fourth epigraph connects the title of the novel to Jacques Derrida's notion of writing as 'the disappearance of natural presence.' Early on in the novel, the narrator ponders on how vulnerable textual meaning is to the workings of time. As he is reading inscriptions in Mrs. Rutherford's books he feels 'intrusive and uncomfortable' because to the people who wrote the inscriptions he is 'from the future they could not envisage' (9).

In addition to placing the novel in a postcolonial context, these epigraphs appear to be the author's way of playing with the readers' expectations. The final quotation of Margaret Thatcher suggests an irony behind this extensive paratextual apparatus.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The quotation is from a speech made by Margaret Thatcher after an important victory during the Falklands War, see <http://www.thenewscentre.co.uk/falklands/decisive.htm>.

Changing England

The engineer is constantly looking for answers to his questions about the true nature of England and the English, and in his quest he is focused on the people around him. In the following I will analyze his experience of England and how the acquaintances he makes shape this experience.

There are several passages where the narrator contemplates the images of England that were available to him in colonial Guyana: 'I had grown up with English story-books but even as a child I distrusted the brightly coloured pictures of the butcher, policeman, grocer, baker and other characters who gave such order to England' (80). He expects the English to be 'mannered and restrained' but at the same time he is very curious as to whether his expectations will be met. Even though he originally goes to England as a professional, the stay soon becomes his personal quest for genuine Englishness. On his first day of work on the beach, he is disturbed by what he sees: 'I was quietly distressed by the untidiness of the whole scene, the lack of purpose and absence of authority' (113). Since his work constitutes the area of his life where he feels in control, disorder in his professional world is especially disturbing to him. In addition, science in his eyes symbolises truth and the execution of this science is to him an honourable undertaking. Because of his education he attributes these qualities of his science to England, the power that educated him. Jean Popeau points out the connection between his perception of England and his professional outlook:

The narrator's encounter with the contradictions of England and Englishness confounds his engineer's sense

of knowledge and leads to the occasional outburst of angst against Mrs. Rutherford.⁶⁵

Mrs. Rutherford, the narrator's eccentric landlady, is subject to the outbursts because she continues to confront him with these contradictions, while at the same time she becomes someone he can trust. She in a way serves as the female oracle of the novel. Herself belonging to a marginalised group, she takes the position of attacking the English, starting with the men in her own life. By way of Mrs. Rutherford, the novel also brings to attention the different positions held by British men and British women in the process of imperialism. Mrs. Rutherford for one does not associate herself with the imperial project of the English past. She does, however, insist that the people in Dunsmere are ghosts of the past, and as Döring points out, there is a certain irony in this role held by Mrs. Rutherford in the text.⁶⁶

Because of Mrs. Rutherford's insistence that the young engineer must confront his reality, the political implications of England and Guyana's shared past are forcefully brought to his attention. He finds through his stay in England and his discoveries there that he can no longer escape into his engineering and see the physical world he works in as independent of its history, nor can he avoid his personal issues with history. His wish to leave Guyana has been interdependent with his wish to go to England. It is therefore upsetting to him to go through this discovery.

To the narrator, Professor Fenwick is the personification of the truth and honour that he attributes to engineering. Professor Fenwick is role model and subject to admiration both because he is a scientist and because he is English. Thus he personifies the connection between England and science in the eyes of the narrator,

⁶⁵ 'Disappearance' in *The Art of David Dabydeen* ed. by Kevin Grant (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1997), pp. 99-110, (p. 108).

⁶⁶ *Caribbean-English Passages*, p. 134-135.

which is substantial in the build-up of his admiration of England. The name is taken from Wilson Harris' novel *The Secret Ladder* (1963), where Fenwick is a Guyanese government surveyor going up a river in a process of mapping it. Making this connection between the professor of *Disappearance* and this map-maker may be a comment on the imperial aspect of the English professor teaching Western science in the colonial university.

Working on the project in the English village, Mr. Rushton also soon becomes a significant character. Since he is the leader of the project and a fellow engineer, the narrator considers him to be a person of authority. However, towards the end of the novel, the engineer discovers Rushton and Fenwick's involvement in a fraud connected to the project. Together with Professor Fenwick he eventually becomes important in the reshaping of England in the engineer's mind, and what he sees in these two characters leads him to new questions and doubts about England and the English. He repeatedly associates the qualities of Rushton and Fenwick with English qualities in general, and at one point, contemplating Mr. Rushton, he asks himself:

Did he ever uncork himself in private acts of cruelty and fantasy? I found myself puzzling over his character, as fifteen years before, in identical circumstances, I had questioned the restraint of Professor Fenwick. Was it because they could rule their spirits that they once ruled the seas and made an Empire? But what now that the cliffs around Hastings were collapsing as the Empire had crumbled? (121)

Throughout the novel, as he ponders this national identity crisis that he sees in England, the narrator gradually becomes aware of his own identity issues. In addition, there is a further parallel between his suppression of his personal identity crisis and his work on the sea wall. The sea wall may be interpreted as the embodiment of a denial of the loss of imperial greatness. Mrs. Rutherford continually reminds us that

England's past of colonial suppression is close, and she repeatedly points out the lack of confrontation with this past. Symbols of the English empire are still presented with pride despite the terrors exercised by the imperial power in the colonies. And instead of confronting this, the England that denies the dark side of imperial history is symbolically preserved by way of the sea wall. Elements of the same history are partly what cause an identity crisis in the narrator. He refuses to explore his African identity, presumably because it involves victimisation and thus lack of control.

Mrs. Rutherford repeatedly draws attention to what she sees as the violent nature of the English (101). When she asks the narrator why he does not hate the English, he replies that he does not 'ponder on what's just or unjust, I only trust my work' (104). Through his experiences in England he does, however, begin to consider the graver aspects of England's involvement in his history. Mrs. Rutherford and Mr. Christie both function as catalysts in this process as they ask difficult questions and uncover the truth about the English, and more specifically this village and the project to save it. On arrival the engineer still believes in his work and the sea wall project. However, towards the end of the novel he discovers the controversy around the sea wall and even the corruption in the project management. The greatest disappointment to him is Professor Fenwick's participation in this corruption, since he is someone the narrator has always looked up to and thought of as genuinely English. When the Professor falls off his pedestal, the England that the narrator wants to believe in disappears. Like Naipaul's narrator the engineer has to consider whether this England ever existed, or whether, as claimed by Döring, the Englishness they are in search of did not exist prior to the colonies, but were in fact 'the product of the colonial culture it seemed to have transferred elsewhere.'⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Caribbean-English Passages*, p. 77.

In *Disappearance* it is the task of the colonial narrator to save the village that he is visiting from disappearing into the sea. This situation is not unproblematic, as Popeau points out:

The colonial who should perhaps be engaged in undermining all such 'essences' as 'Englishness', 'nationhood', 'country' as formulating and imprisoning concepts ranged against his interest, works to protect these values, crystallized in the village, against the ravages of time and nature.⁶⁸

The narrator tries to avoid this dilemma and focus on his own investigation into Englishness, but his investigative gaze increasingly includes himself.

Within the village we find the English Garden and, as discussed in Chapter Two, the gardener Jack and his devotion to gardening especially fascinate Naipaul's narrator. The most central gardener in *Disappearance* is Mrs. Rutherford, and in many ways she is the opposite of Naipaul's gardener. She is a woman, of course, and where Naipaul's gardener appears to be calm and in favour of compromise, she is brutal and direct. Of Jack, however, we know a lot less. Despite this, it appears as though Jack is a harmonious character and someone who is in line with an idea of the garden as a civilised place of serenity and calm, qualities that the narrators of both novels seem to associate with Englishness. Mrs. Rutherford, however, disrupts this idea of the harmonious and civilised English Garden, 'snipping off the heads of dying roses with a particularly violent action of her scissors' (67). In effect she also disrupts the idea of a harmonious and civilised England and metaphorically expresses her wish to kill off traditional ideas about her country, its culture and its history. After a rendering of her relationships with men, and her husband Jack in particular, Mrs. Rutherford concludes:

⁶⁸ Popeau, p. 100.

‘That’s why I keep the garden I suppose, to remind me of their Englishness, their cruelty. It’s the most English thing I can do.’ (158)

Traditionally, gardening is thought of as harmonious, but this outburst of Mrs. Rutherford in connection with imperialism suggests gardening as a form of violent domination. It also involves displacement, as plants are taken from their natural habitat and replanted elsewhere. Thus, the exotic plants of an English garden can be seen as metaphors of the displaced African and Indian populations of the West Indies. The practice of gardening epitomizes man’s domination over nature and forms a parallel to the narrator’s engineering. From this perspective these two practices are comparable to England’s imperial domination of other countries and peoples. Mrs. Rutherford’s garden of Englishness is, however, now under attack by the sea.

Observing the English landscape, the narrator contemplates how people have altered the land:

Axes, then chainsaws, had reduced the forest to arable plots and, while men hacking the land behind, the sea was equally intent on the cliff before. Still there was a certain beauty in the sparseness of the landscape, a settled order such as follows inevitably from centuries of plunder. (92)

As Popeau points out, dominance is associated with civilisation, and the narrator of the novel seems reassured by order and domination of land because of this civilised aspect of it.⁶⁹

From an early age this young man was especially fascinated by the powers of the sea. Early on, in what appears to be part of his initial reply to Mrs. Rutherford’s question of why he became an engineer, the narrator says that he has spent his ‘whole

⁶⁹ Popeau, p. 107.

professional life working against the sea'. However, it is now, in England, looking at the sea from the cliffs near his landlady's house, that he realizes: 'It was the first time in my life that I had shown fear of the sea' (14). He does not say that it is the first time he has felt this way, but that it is the first time he has 'shown' his fear. It is as if coming to England confronts him with a fear that was already there, but that he can no longer hide. Furthermore, the choice of words suggests a detachment from himself as well as his surroundings. At times it is almost as if he sees himself from the outside.

In an ongoing contemplation of his own relationship with the sea, he considers the connection between the ocean's powers of destruction and peoples' power over peoples:

What destruction could Europeans wreck on Africans or Africans on Asians compared to the sea's frenzy? [...] How feeble were our strategies to colonise the land compared to the sea's ambition! I plotted my life in relation to the life of the sea. How to shackle it with modern tools was the challenge before me, how to enslave it to my will and make it work for me. (17-18)

His observations are perhaps accurate bearing in mind the power of nature, but the comparison he makes between colonisation and the sea serves to downplay the impact which colonisation has had on the world. When he earlier on claims that his own professional battle with the sea has left 'no space for the sorrow of ancestral memory' (17), it is revealing in terms of his outlook on the world and his own place in it. It appears as though he has made sure to avoid this 'ancestral memory' by keeping himself occupied with what he insists is a force that overshadows such memories. Seen together with his scepticism towards Mrs. Rutherford's African masks and his reluctance to confront his African ancestry, this is a clear indication of what is important to this man. When he chooses to compare colonisation with something

more destructive and powerful, it might be because he otherwise would have problems defending his own choices and his strong belief in England as role model. Since 'every cell in my brain was absorbed in addressing the sea' (18), he thus avoids confronting the more troubling aspects of his country's and England's common history, as well as his descent from African slaves. He escapes this by focusing on a force of nature. When he says that his aim is to 'enslave' (18) the ocean, this involves a shameless refusal to own the history of his own people.

As I will return to later, the narrator's attitude toward the Indian coolies is another element in his personality that implies a deficient awareness about his own people's struggles. Moreover, it appears to be a refusal to see the world in terms of ethics or politics, as shown in the quotation above where he claims not to consider the world in terms of right and wrong. However, this first fear of the sea on arrival in England may be interpreted as a sign that such an important part of his identity cannot be repressed forever. Up until this point it seems as if the ocean with its destructive powers has been a support to him in his attempt at avoiding history, but his meeting with England forces questions of history to the surface. Although he tries to suppress them, these questions, which involve his own recent past in Guyana, cannot be ignored. Like Naipaul's young writer, the engineer discovers that the journey to England also involves a journey within, one that forces him to confront his own self. But their expectations and their findings are different. Even though they both initially seem to have an almost romantic admiration for the British, Dabydeen's engineer delights in modern technology, whereas Naipaul's writer admires the England of the past.

The site of the sea wall project is close to Hastings, and it is obvious early on in the novel that the place in itself carries thematic significance. The second chapter begins with a passage on Hastings' bloody history:

For as long as the English had kept written records, Hastings has figured as a victim of piracy and plunder by foreign barbarians. Over the centuries, wave upon wave of Norse, Dutch, Spanish and French raiders had beached their boats and unsheathed swords and axes. Battles raged for days, the sands sucked in pools of blood and fed them back into the sea. (21)

The inclusion of this particular aspect of English history is in one way a statement about the English also being victims, like the peoples exploited by the British Empire. Bringing this violent part of England's history into his own equation of England, Guyana and his African past seems like an attempt to defuse the cruelties involved in British imperialism. This contemplation on the narrator's part on English history furthermore recalls Marlowe's thoughts on the bank of the Thames in the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* about how 'this also [...] has been one of the dark places of the earth.'⁷⁰

Lack of history is an important element of the inferiority that the narrator ascribes to his country of birth in relation to England. In a passage about the sea wall, he makes this comparison between England and Guyana:

It was not just the scale of Professor Fenwick's plans but their historical depth which provoked awe. Up to now I had worked in a landscape that could scarcely be dated by the scraps of records held in Guyana's few libraries; apart from the few Dutch bottles or Amerindian flints revealed by our excavations, the land seemed absent of data. (22)

⁷⁰ Conrad, p. 18.

At the same time as this passage reminds us of the young engineer's feelings of inferiority on behalf of his home country, it is also more personal. This young man is shown repeatedly to be preoccupied with his own lack of historical awareness and this is an internal conflict that he tries to ignore. However, on the following page he goes on to highlight another aspect of England's superiority in relation to Guyana, when he looks at the Dunsmere project budget and finds the sum of the costs to be 'equal to the total industrial revenue of my country' (23). Through these observations and comparisons we see how concerned he is with continually making comparisons between his home country and England. This highlights the influence of colonialism on his state of mind.

The Loneliness of Exile

In a way similar to Naipaul's writer, this young engineer is presented as a very independent and seemingly lonely character. He is aged 33, but before arrival in England the only person he seems to be bound to is his mother. In the retrospective glances at his university days he appears to be an outsider, and his relationship with the waitress from the university canteen lacks genuine affection from his side. The brief affair appears to have the nature of a sort of experiment to the narrator, and after this one relationship it appears as though there are no new significant romantic liaisons in his life. One of Dabydeen's expressed ideas is 'that sexual merging across racial and cultural boundaries is ultimately the most efficacious means of overcoming differences and hostilities'.⁷¹ The narrator, however, seems almost uninterested in relations of a romantic or sexual nature. Seen in light of Dabydeen's statement, this might be interpreted as an expression of his inability to overcome differences in relations with other people. Furthermore, the narrator's presentation of his social

⁷¹ Popeau, p. 103.

interaction with the other characters bears marks of a constant self-consciousness in his experience of other people. The engineer is quick to take the behaviour of other people personally, and this insecurity is a logical explanation for his lack of personal relationships and is strongly related to his background. The strong connection between the main character and his mother is presented as very significant to his development. Mrs. Rutherford at one point suggests that his mother is the only person for whom he has ever really cared (140). This is probably partly due to the much worse and almost absent relationship with an alcoholic and abusive father figure who left him and his mother when he was a young boy. At one point the father is described as 'a lecher and a layabout' (84). Besides a wish for greatness and a life away from what he sees as the more primitive society of Guyana, his father's absence and general lifestyle has been significant in inspiring the narrator to be everything his father was not. Accordingly, his father's adultery may thus serve as a further explanation for why the main character seems uncomfortable and even disinterested in intimate relations with the few women we are told that he meets. With the additional affair between the mother and the preacher man (85), his childhood is dominated by problematic relationships between men and women. This continues in England, where Mr. Christie and Mrs. Rutherford, the people who come closest to him during his stay, both share a history of failed relationships. At the same time, the young engineer sometimes speculates that the older Mrs. Rutherford might see him almost as a substitute husband, and there are passages where the relationship borders on flirtation, for example after a visit to the Museum of Local History:

'Let's explore,' she suggested, taking me by the hand and leading me into a jeweller's shop. (98)

Shortly after she brushes his cheek in what is described as ‘mock affection’ (99), thus assuring us that there is no depth to their flirtation. At the same time the narrator proclaims that he is ‘deeply and inexplicably bound to her’ (101), and it is as if he feels safe growing so close to Mrs. Rutherford exactly because the age gap secures the platonic nature of their relationship.

Mrs. Rutherford is repeatedly contrasted to the narrator’s mother. At the same time as she reminds him of his mother, these two mother figures also highlight the great differences between Guyana and England. When Mrs. Rutherford tries on a pair of shoes in a shop, the narrator notes her soft skin. The image of his landlady’s delicate feet reminds him of his shoeless mother with her bunions, and this comparison of the two women’s feet form one of the novel’s literally black and white contrasts (99).

In many ways Professor Fenwick functions as a catalyst in the life of the main character. He is the main source of professional inspiration to him, he enables him to work in England, and he in the end plays an important part in the main character’s final disappointment with England.

Through his studies the main character appears to have established a rather close relationship with his Professor: ‘When I grew up I wanted to believe that Professor Fenwick was the true Englishman’ (81). Seen through the eyes of his young protégé, the Professor is an honourable man, and the narrator trusts and looks up to him. Looking back at his college days he remembers how the students used to spread rumours about the Professor, as they had a lot of unanswered questions about his background, for instance as to why he left England for Guyana and why he is alone (82). The students find his choice of Guyana over England almost incomprehensible, which again is an expression of their lack of faith in their country, and their ideas of

English superiority. Already at this stage the Professor is becoming an important influence in the main character's life. Because of their close relationship, the main character worries about his own reputation when rumours spread among the students that the Professor is a homosexual. The main character reacts by becoming more attentive to the female students, despite not being particularly interested. This lack of interest is combined with insecurity and when he thinks back to his student days, he remembers how the girls made him feel clumsy because of the 'peasant ways of our village' (83). Situations in which he appears to be an outsider reoccur in all the phases of the main character's life that are described in the novel. Like Naipaul's writer, he is extremely dedicated to his studies because this is his way of moving up in the world. Trying to make him study harder, his mother threatens him that if he does not do as he is told she will make him 'cut cane or wander among sheep' (83-84). This peasant life is exactly what he is fleeing from in becoming an engineer.

The narrators of both *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* had a clear idea of what their purpose was at an early age, and they were both drawn towards the West and Britain. Whereas Naipaul's writer found his role models in English literature, the scientists Dabydeen's engineer looked up to were also English. In the relationship between their home countries and Britain, it was the former colonial power that provided knowledge and culture. Furthermore, when these two narrators finally reach the country of their respective role models, 'the assumption that cultural value must reside in all things English and antique' is challenged.⁷² In both cases, England fails to live up to expectations. *Disappearance* challenges this notion further because the narrator is a professional who comes to England because of his expertise. The motivation of the two protagonists in their choice of going to England is similar,

⁷² Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages*: 134.

and closely linked to a wish to get away from the plantation society into which they were born. To the young man in Dabydeen's novel, engineering represents Western science and is thus a contrast to the simple society from which he wants to distance himself:

I was a black West Indian of African ancestry, but I was an engineer, trained in the science and technology of Great Britain. (7)

Having been raised by a single mother and having seen the difficult side of life, he is very concerned with the fact that he has made something of himself.

Masks

The stay in England involves a number of different challenges to the young engineer's ideas about the world and himself. His landlady, the ageing Mrs. Rutherford, brings some of these challenges to the surface. Her preoccupation with Africa and African masks especially makes a strong impression on the young engineer:

What was enthralling was the space between wanting to know and the experience itself, which would instantly annihilate all knowledge. It was the space I had put between myself and the African masks as I stood slightly behind Mrs. Rutherford listening to her explanations. I stood behind her to shield myself from being seduced by the power of their ugliness, their inhumaneness. (14)

He is very reluctant to relate to his African heritage, and through his conversations with Mrs. Rutherford he gradually becomes aware of his lack of knowledge about this history and its significance to his identity. Furthermore, the last words of this passage, 'their ugliness, their inhumaneness', recalls Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the main character Marlowe's reaction when seeing the Africans:

What thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity
– like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with
this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly.⁷³

By means of this invocation of Conrad's work, the author reminds us of how his own text relates to the classic. It also serves as a reminder of how the prejudice towards Africa that are displayed in Conrad's text still exists. Being brought up and educated in a country dominated by British imperialism, he has been taught the idea of Africa as the dark contrast to the enlightened west.

In what appears to be an effort to play with the reader's expectations, we are here faced with another poignant paradox. It is an English woman who teaches the narrator about Africa, and it all takes place over the very traditional English cup of tea, which again of course is a tradition brought to England from the colonies. On the one hand, afternoon tea is associated with English hospitality and politeness, and, on the other hand, it is a component of English every day life that indirectly points towards colonial exploitation.

The conversations with Mrs. Rutherford over tea furthermore function as a catalyst in the text since her questions, especially in the beginning, lead up to retrospective passages where we learn more about the narrator's background in Guyana. As noted, through her African masks, her stories and her direct questions, she triggers his insecurities and forces him to consider his own African ancestry and the role it plays in the make-up of his identity. The roughness of Mrs. Rutherford's approach surprises the narrator just like his meeting with England does.

Consequently, Dabydeen's engineer is troubled by Mrs. Rutherford's continuous attempts at confronting him with these aspects of himself. In one of their conversations, he says: 'I'm *me*, not a mask or a movement of history. I'm not black,

⁷³ Conrad, p. 63.

I'm an engineer' (102). Like Naipaul's writer, he is insecure about his identity in terms of both how he sees himself and how others see him. Popeau comments that:

We see the village with its eccentricities and peculiarities through the colonial's eyes. But it is a world which has already constituted him as Other and formulated the terms of his otherness as a black West Indian. The narrator has to negotiate this formulation while engaged in his prospecting of the area, and, something he conceives for himself, a quest for the English, in what might be considered the quintessential English village.⁷⁴

However, at the same time the narrator has had to negotiate his otherness from the very beginning on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. English values have served as an ideal throughout his upbringing and education, and, as noted above, his professional role models have been English or Western, in other words people to whom he represents the colonial other. His stay in the village serves to raise his awareness about this opposition.

Popeau points out the contradiction that the African masks represent to the narrator's values. Born into a culture traditionally seen as primitive and irrational from the Western perspective, he has educated himself into a professional whose aim it is to control nature. His values, completely based on science, are countered by his landlady's appreciation of the African masks. When she attributes animist tendencies to the narrator, this involves a challenge to his self-image.⁷⁵

Throughout his stay in England this continues to be an issue between the narrator and Mrs. Rutherford. She continually attempts to make him identify himself as African and confront this aspect of his history, but to him this represents a threat to

⁷⁴ Popeau, p. 99.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

the self that he has created. The masks unsettle the narrator 'by evocation of an ancient specific order to which I was involuntarily bound' (131).

As mentioned above, the narrator experiences racial prejudice in the English village. On his first days working on the sea wall, he is stared at as soon as he approaches the camp; 'a black man in a striped suit and shiny briefcase walking an English beach' (108). He interprets their stare:

To their mind I was savage beneath my suit, and my briefcase really contained strange herbs. When I was alone, doubtful I dropped my impeccable English speech and howled. (114)

The narrator's experience of the stare of the white workers calls to mind Frantz Fanon's groundbreaking account of the black experience in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952):

I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema [...] I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects.⁷⁶

In England, the narrator feels the burden of such stereotypes, and it is the stereotypes that make him so reluctant to accept his African heritage.

Any kind of mask would suggest confusion or complexity concerning identity. Furthermore, masks are of course normally worn not only to confuse, but also to hide identity, a fact that creates an eagerness to explore what or whom hides behind the mask. As a parallel to the young engineer's unmasking of some of the people surrounding him, the African masks also become less scary. What he was seeking in

⁷⁶ *Black Skin, White Masks*, Introduction by H. K. Bhabha (London: Pluto, 1986), p. 110-111.

the beginning of the novel turns out to disappoint him, while at the same time what initially scared him has by the end become more familiar.

Both Dabydeen and Naipaul relate to art in these two texts and it is worthwhile comparing the works of art that form motifs for the two texts. As noted, the piece of art that functions as a motif in Naipaul's text is a painting by the Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico, it is in other words Western art. Dabydeen's novel, however, circles around masks that are African and can only be traced back to tribes, not to any one individual. In effect they not only represent the engineer's African heritage, but they also represent the collective force of the tribe. Whereas the view of life presented through Naipaul's novel is individualistic, Dabydeen's novel in the end makes a more collective statement, as the engineer discovers the necessity of identifying himself with his tribe.

Loss of illusions

Early on in the novel, Mr. Curtis is only mentioned as an acquaintance of Professor Fenwick's in Dunsmere. Recalling a former relationship, possibly marriage, between Mr. Curtis and Mrs. Rutherford, the Professor warns the engineer about mentioning Mr. Curtis' name to Mrs. Rutherford. Since we are advised by Dabydeen's epigraph to keep Mr. Kurtz in mind, Mr. Curtis' name becomes more than a coincidence. The most striking resemblance between Mr. Curtis and Mr. Kurtz is, however, the way in which they are kept mysterious through most of the text. As he gets to know Mrs. Rutherford, the young engineer tries to ask her about him, but she changes the subject. This of course adds to the mystery of the man. It becomes more and more important for the main character to find information about him, the man who has a central role both in Mrs. Rutherford's life and in the project to preserve the cliffs. At one point

Mrs. Rutherford herself mentions him, but again simply changes the subject when the engineer follows up with a question (116-117). Thus further mystery is added, and this at a point where the tension in the novel begins to thicken and expectation rises towards a conclusion.

Towards the end of the novel, the hypocrisy of the English results in a life-altering disappointment for the main character. Professor Fenwick, the person he had wanted to believe in as 'the true Englishman' (81), has proved unworthy of his trust and admiration. To begin with, Mrs. Rutherford's attacks on her people were countered in the narrator's conscience by Professor Fenwick: 'the memory of Professor Fenwick's kindness contradicted her image of her own people' (95). The discovery of the professor's involvement in corruption obviously changes this. Since Fenwick embodied what he admired about England, this disappointment is in England as well. He is generally disappointed in the English work ethic and their ability to face professional challenges.

Since so much of the main character's identity relies on his presumptions about England, the English people, their culture and their professionalism, discovering that the country is not what he thought, inevitably leads to a total reconsideration of himself and his own values.

Conclusion

In my analyses of these novels my main concern has been to show how both narrators are continually affected by their colonial backgrounds. The narrators of *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Disappearance* both experience postcolonial arrivals in the former imperial centre. Life-altering decisions, as well as their experience of everyday life, are significantly informed by their colonial education and their internalisation of Western values. Since they share an image of England created for them in their colonial countries of birth, it becomes a challenge to meet the real England that is so different from what they had expected.

As noted earlier, *Disappearance* explicitly addresses the postcolonial situation and the impact of this situation on people of the former colony, people of the former British Empire, and the relationship between these peoples. In one of the passages about Mrs. Rutherford's masks, we see how concerned the novel is with colonialism and its terrors:

They looked so full of spite, evoking vague stories of primitive violence. They forced me to connect the smudged photograph and Swami's death, and, before that, the rape of Amerindian women, malarial fever, the drowning of my Dutch predecessors and the wastage of slave bodies. These images which I had buried piecemeal in my mind surfaced in a ritual sequence of shame. (38-39)

In his essay 'Self-Consciously Post-Colonial,' Mark McWatt especially looks at how *Disappearance* and Dabydeen's earlier novel *The Intended* convey postcolonial

theory, and he suggests that Dabydeen makes use of the arguments of post-colonial theory when constructing his fiction.⁷⁷

The paratextual apparatus mentioned above, in the form of the several epigraphs to *Disappearance*, and the references and further allusions to one of the most discussed characters of postcolonial theory, Conrad's Kurtz, are telling in terms of how strongly related this novel is to theory, and of how central theory has been to the writer who set out to write this novel. All the quotations that serve as epigraphs in the novel carry references that relate to the novel thematically, which may seem like an overeagerness to signify what the novel will be about.

Whereas Dabydeen's text more explicitly points out the historical connection between Guyana and England, Naipaul's novel is more clearly dominated by the narrator's experience of England on a personal level. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the reader is invited deeper into the narrator's mind, with his considerations around his identity in relation to England's past and present. In *Disappearance*, the narrator's confrontation with these questions is to a greater degree imposed on him by other characters, in particular Mrs. Rutherford and the Irishman, Mr. Christie. Partly as a result of this difference, *Disappearance* may seem more superficial than Naipaul's novel. *The Enigma of Arrival* goes deeper in its account of the personal development of someone directly affected by the postcolonial condition. Whereas Dabydeen explicitly addresses England's imperial past, Naipaul, as noted by Gorra, is more concerned with the restlessness imperialism has left behind.⁷⁸ The insight given into the narrator's mind is more elaborate in Naipaul than in Dabydeen, and this is connected to the different professions of the two narrators. In a passage about his

⁷⁷ 'Self-Consciously Post-Colonial: The Fiction of David Dabydeen' in *The Art of David Dabydeen* (see Popeau, above), pp. 111-122, (p. 111).

⁷⁸ *After Empire*, p. 71.

journeys, Naipaul's narrator notes: 'travel was a pleasure so much in the mind, so much something for later narrative' (190), demonstrating his instinct to verbalise every experience. Through this recapitulation in writing of his surroundings and experiences, he seems to achieve a deeper understanding of his viewpoint than the more practical engineer. The latter focuses his energy on the physical surface of the landscape, whereas Naipaul's narrator textually investigates his place in it.

The narrators of both novels detect England's history in and around the villages where they stay, but Naipaul's novel seems to allow for more nuances in its assessment of the postcolonial condition. However, in both texts, the narrators' increasing historical awareness is conveyed through their observations. This demonstrates how colonialism affects these two characters in a number of different ways.

McWatt is especially concerned with the counter-discursive elements in Dabydeen's fiction.⁷⁹ The most apparent counter-discursive aspect of both *Disappearance* and *The Enigma of Arrival* is beyond doubt the reversal of the imperial journey. McWatt points out how an important motif of the imperial text is the journey from the centre to the margins of Empire, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* being the classic example.⁸⁰ These two novels by Dabydeen and Naipaul involve the opposite journey from the colonial margin to the imperial centre, and Dabydeen's novel in particular embodies explicit references to Conrad's text. At the end of the novel, the engineer seems to make what may be termed a postcolonially correct choice by abandoning England, thus making it his margin, whereas Guyana becomes his new centre. Mrs. Rutherford has helped raise his awareness about his own internalization of English, or Western, values:

⁷⁹ 'Self-Consciously Post-Colonial,' p. 111.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

‘You don’t know much about our history or yours,’ she said, resuming her attack. ‘Have you ever thought that the engineering you’re versed in is all derived from us? That we’ve made you so whiter than white that whatever fear and hatred you should feel for us is covered over completely?’ (103)

The accusation, as the narrator goes on to point out, echoes that of Swami’s accusation that he is trying to be white. Whereas Naipaul’s main character appears to be aware of this mimicry, Dabydeen’s engineer seems to deny his conscious and unconscious efforts to be like the English. It seems as if it is more important to him *not* to be labelled an African than it is to blend in and be English or Western. His reluctance to see himself as an African, or even a black man, repeatedly surfaces in the text, for example when the coolie Swami categorises him in terms of colour, and the narrator notes: ‘almost against my will I felt myself impelled to defend ‘my’ people’ (32). Again we as readers are made aware of the fact that the narrator is not on good terms with his background. At the same time, he is sceptical of how he so clearly relies on what has been taught him through his colonial education: ‘Perhaps all I had were the trappings of white people’s ideas, white people’s science’ (37). However, during his stay in England, quite a new light is shed on white people’s ideas and their science. Before meeting Mr. Christie, the engineer appears to have been ignorant of the Irish people’s experience with British imperialism. Like Mrs. Rutherford, Mr. Christie forces the engineer to consider the impact of England and its people on his own history.

As noted above, the most distinctive symbol of British colonial exploitation in *The Enigma of Arrival* is the now deteriorating manor. In this novel, the narrator’s encounter with English prejudice towards him as a foreigner is quite humorously channelled through the landlord of the manor. The landlord and the main character

never meet, but learn about each other through their mutual friend Alan and the manor staff. As a gesture, the landlord has self-composed Hindu poetry sent over to his tenant (231). In addition, the landlord demonstrates a clearly orientalist worldview in his novel, where a young Englishwoman ends up being eaten by cannibals in Africa (308). The Landlord is, however, ill and withdrawn from the world. In a way, he can be seen as a personification of the past, and thus his distorted views may be placed in the past as well. Therefore, the narrator appears not to take personally the contents of the book or the Hindu poetry, whereas Dabydeen's narrator at times seems almost offended when he is associated with Africa.

All in all, the countryside of *The Enigma of Arrival* appears to be more hospitable than that of *Disappearance*. This is connected to the more pragmatic attitude towards history that is expressed in Naipaul's text. Naipaul's narrator also points out how perceptions of history, like one's assessment of one's surroundings, are subjective and unstable:

Men need history; it helps them to have an idea of who they are. But history, like sanctity, can reside in the heart; it is enough that there is something there. (386)

Naipaul's narrator arrives at a view of history that opens up a space for him within the English countryside, despite his background. Dabydeen's narrator has a different experience. Through the process of being confronted with his colonial heritage, he reaches the conclusion that he cannot stay in the former imperial power. Stein notes that when the engineer leaves England in the end of the novel:

Naipaul's theme of reconciliation is [...] counterpointed with a movement representing the impossibility of

reconciliation between erstwhile colonizer and colonized.⁸¹

The conciliatory perspective of *The Enigma of Arrival* rests upon a strong subjectivity. Döring finds that whereas in Naipaul's work a central subjectivity is created, 'the eye/ I in Dabydeen's fiction seems always on the point of disappearance.'⁸²

As noted in my analysis, the fact that these two novels take place in the countryside distinguish them from most postcolonial texts of coming to England, as such novels tend to be situated in London. In a further study it would perhaps be fruitful to contrast these two novels with others by the same authors that do take place in London, in order to explore the effects of such different surroundings in textual presentations of the postcolonial experience.

Moreover, these two texts both in their own right offer interesting studies in the intertextuality so typical for postcolonial, and especially West Indian fiction. In my thesis I have only been able to touch upon a few of the references and allusions to other texts, and it would take extensive studies to explore the textual mazes that these novels represent.

I have found that these two texts offer insight into the developing awareness of the postcolonial condition. The way in which there are such clear similarities between the narrators and the authors of these novels supports Döring's claim that:

The life-writing of post-colonial discoverers will [...] have to be interpreted as the production of selves and

⁸¹ Stein, p. 18.

⁸² *Caribbean-English Passages*, p. 114.

texts that reflect, or reject, their historical and rhetorical determinations.⁸³

Together, these two novels by two of the leading Caribbean writers offer a rich exploration of the continuing effect of colonialism on people's everyday lives. They demonstrate the transportation of this effect, by way of migration, from the colonial margin to the imperial centre. Thus, they are accounts of England from what A. Robert Lee terms a 'post-migrant perspective.'⁸⁴ Moreover, a comparison between the two demonstrates nuances and larger differences between experiences that are at the same time in many ways similar. As a result of these arrivals in England, each of these texts, in its own way, displays a developing awareness of the postcolonial condition.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 113

⁸⁴ *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction* ed. by A. Robert Lee (London and East Haven: Pluto Press, 1995), p. 3.

Appendix

Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon*, reprinted from Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages*, p. 110.

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