

CHAPTER FOUR

*ALIENATING GEOGRAPHIES: MR. STONE AND THE
KNIGHTS' COMPANION AND
THE ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL*

That idea of ruin and dereliction, of out-of-placeness, was something I felt about myself, attached to myself: a man from another hemisphere, another background, coming to rest in middle life in the cottage of a half-neglected estate, an estate full of reminders of its Edwardian past, with few connections with the present. An oddity among the estates and big houses of the valley, and I a further oddity in its grounds. I felt unanchored and strange. (*The Enigma of Arrival*,12)

The immigrant must invent the earth beneath his feet.

(Rushdie, Review of *The Enigma of Arrival*, *The Guardian*, 13 March 1987)

All action, all creation was, a betrayal of feeling and truth. And in the process of this betrayal his world had come tumbling about him. There remained to him nothing to which he could anchor himself. (Naipaul, *Mr. Stone and the Knights' Companion* 119)

The aim of this chapter is to examine the impact of alienation experienced at 'home'—in England, that is—by the characters in Naipaul's *Mr Stone and the Knights' Companion* (1963), and *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987). Displacement, alienation and exile are some of the recurring motifs in Naipaul's fiction. His works primarily deal with the displacement and dispersal of individuals consequent upon diasporic movement both within and between continents. The loss of ancestral landscape due to displacement creates a sense of self-estrangement and withdrawal in the unfriendly environment of the alien territory. In Naipaul, rootlessness and alienation are seen as a universal feature of the modern world, afflicting people belonging to different races. The peripheral existence of his characters in a way reflects his own *in-between* situation and the dilemma and anxiety of his own existence.

As observed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin: "A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special postcolonial crisis of identity comes into being: the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (*Empire* 8). Identity consciousness results from the shock of dispossession either by force or by migration. While the awareness is acute when the migrant settlers struggle to establish a bond with their surroundings, including the people in a new land, the ties to a piece of land are no less strong when people feel that they have arrived somewhere or been settled somewhere for a few generations at least. If loss of home or loss of memories of

the ancestral homeland, lead to a sense of deprivation, even alienation, in the characters, it is seen in novels like *A Bend in the River*, that the loss of home and property in the settled place could be as traumatic if not more. Salim in this novel has to live with the ignominy of his native African employee being made the owner of his shop—and veritably his boss—by the new government. This predicament is highlighted here to suggest that Naipaul, while critiquing colonialism and its consequences in different countries across the world, also addresses the fallout of liberation and the rise of neocolonialism in these erstwhile colonies. Colonialism and its hegemonic and military control are replaced by a different rhetoric and a different military in the name of nationalism. The result, in both cases, affects the common people in the same manner: a sense of loss, of confusion and alienation.

However, diasporic writing frequently combines a sense of disillusionment and discomfort along with nostalgia and imaginative reconstruction of homeland and identities. The sense of homelessness and alienation in the new territory is accentuated by the difficulties encountered in the process of setting up secure homes in the new land. For the displaced individuals the loss of home creates a disintegrating effect on body and mind. They always find themselves in a contradictory position between the memories of the old country and uncertainty in the new location. The illusory world they create in the mind to compensate for the sense of loss does not always help to mitigate the sufferings of dislocation.

Unlike the fictions about the homeland (India) nurtured by some of his characters, Naipaul has a different story to tell:

Many Indians, after they had served out their indenture, had found themselves destitute and homeless....Then in 1931 the *Ganges* had come, and taken away more than a thousand....The news, in 1932, that the *Ganges* was going to come again created a frenzy in those who had been left behind. They saw the second coming of the *Ganges* as their last chance to go home....Seven weeks later the *Ganges* reached Calcutta. And there, to the terror of the passengers, the *Ganges* was stormed by hundreds of derelicts previously repatriated, who wanted now to be taken back to the other place. India for these people had been a dream of home, a dream of continuity after the illusion of Trinidad. All the India they had found was the area around the Calcutta docks. (*Finding the Centre* 61)

It is clear from the above account that the repatriated Indians had neither the resources nor the information to find their native places. Moreover, things might have been so bad for those who managed to find their old places and relatives that they might have chosen to strike out for themselves in Calcutta before being overwhelmed by hardship into thinking of Trinidad again. It is also possible that they could no longer connect with the forsaken chapter of their lives. The end result was a sense of dislocation and alienation on all fronts. India was no longer home; Trinidad needed to grow on them.

Such a condition of being neither here nor there could only be termed as exilic after Said. The predicament of the exile is charted out in the following manner by Said:

exile...is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past....Exiles feel...an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people. The crucial thing is that a state of exile free from this triumphant ideology—designed to reassemble an exile's broken history into a new whole—is virtually unbearable and virtually impossible in today's world. (*Reflections* 177)

Given the unremarkable pasts and uncertain futures of the Indian migrants in the Caribbean, their plight cannot exactly be compared to the exiles elsewhere. Instead of a so-called triumphant ideology they have a cultural memory which stands to get diluted with time. Any hope of a resurgence is ruled out by cruel reality checks. What remains is a distant memory which gets increasingly mythicized through nostalgia and oral transmission. What these migrant settlers are left with is “the need to reassemble an identity out of the refractions and discontinuities of exile” as Said sums up” (*Reflections* 179).

The exilic condition of the migrants is a product of geographical displacement which has psychological and spiritual effects. Unlike political exiles they are not banished or ideologically resilient. For mostly economic reasons they agree to migrate or had fallen prey to unscrupulous labour contractors. Before they understand the arrangement, they are on their way to a new and largely unknown destination. Their physical discomfort is accompanied by confusion, uncertainty and disorientation. Thus, physical dislocation becomes a ground for psychic alienation, and the lost homeland becomes a geographical territory in the mind. They feel cut off from all that is familiar. Even after they spend

some time in the new land, their plight remains akin to conditions of exile which is full of contradictions, ambivalences and disjunctions.

So, instead of living with the ideas of fixity and rootedness, Naipaul embraces notions of temporality; of flux. He is a man on the move. He cannot attach himself to any secure cultural identity; rather, he perpetually remains in motion pursuing transnational models of belonging. His diverse cultural journeys take him to different places and make it possible for him to create dynamic ways of thinking beyond fixed notions of identity based on older ideas of rootedness and cultural purity. He always discovers himself in contradictory positions. For him, all territories are alien. He develops precarious feelings toward his cultural roots, which reveals his identity problems. He continues to examine this problem of lack of cultural and physical moorings first in his novels based on Trinidad and around the Caribbean and then in other places around the world.

The early novels of Naipaul are mostly based on his experiences in Trinidad. His novel *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* marks a point of departure, a shift of location from the early novels. It deals with the life of Mr Stone, an Englishman displaced in his native English environment. The primary focus of the novel is on the last two years of Mr Stone before retirement. Although the novel is set in London with exclusively English characters, it has thematic similarities with Naipaul's early novels set in Trinidad in its treatment of the struggle of its protagonist to overcome his sense of alienation and displacement. In terms of alienation and identity crisis it is possible to draw a parallel between the displaced and unanchored Indian immigrants in a Trinidad setting and the struggle of Mr Stone in an English setting. Patrick French in *The World Is What It Is* comments that this novel is "a study of Vidia's loneliness in post-war London and a portrait of a marriage, drawing on solitary days at his desk and the stasis of sexually unsatisfactory married life" (225).

Mr Stone and the Knights' Companion explores the themes of loneliness, alienation, the futility of human existence and struggle for adjustment in an unfavourable world. The novel offers a study of ordinary human predicament. It exhibits Mr Stone's silent miseries, helplessness and self imposed loneliness. Mr. Stone in his middle class background does not feel the need to communicate with the people in his neighbourhood. His relationships with his fellow office workers are kept to the confines of the office. Two years before his retirement Mr. Stone is haunted by a sense of futility and thinks of

a project to keep him engaged in his retirement. His ideas are well received by his employers *Excall* and he receives a raise in salary and position. There is new energy in the project called “Knights Companion”—aimed at making the retirement years less lonely for people through visiting one another—but after sometime things fall out as some people engage in corruption and come up with unnecessary expenses and false receipts. This pushes Mr. Stone into his introversion and sense of alienation from a world that had changed.

Like the protagonists of Naipaul’s early novels, Mr Stone is equally displaced and alienated in his own house on the outskirts of the metropolis of London. The ordered atmosphere of London fails to provide him with a sense of security. Mr Stone the aging Englishman finds the big city a fraudulent one whose outward concrete order cannot make up for the monotony and misery. The London he sees around him is full of immigrants from other places trying to fit into the scene. It is a change in the scenario that he cannot connect with.

In the novel, Mr Stone’s loneliness and alienation is symbolically projected through the image of a tree and a cat. The free movement of the cat and its intrusion in Mr Stone’s privacy and routined life presents a brilliant contrast to Mr Stone’s life of confinement. Similarly, the bare tree in the beginning of the novel and the transformation that comes to it with the passing of time and seasons provide deeper understanding to explore the play of decay, change and renewal in Mr Stone’s life. In the words of Bruce King:

Mr Stone begins by seeing himself as part of the slow, steady continuity of nature. The tree he watches with its seasonal changes is seen by him as symbolic of himself. This is surprising since the seasonal image of change usually suggests sexual renewal, vitality, not a steady decay into old age and retirement. Within the symbol itself there is a contradiction, especially as its use by Mr Stone is the opposite of the expected. (63)

Mr. Stone is not unhappy to notice the deterioration of things in nature and around the house. He is afraid of death and decay, yet willing to accept it as a process of nature.

The predicament of Mr Stone has certain similarities with Mr Biswas’s struggle. But whereas Mr Biswas struggled in life to have a house of his own, an identity; Mr Stone, the aging bachelor, lives in a solid house where he is looked after by his housekeeper,

Miss Millington. However, Ms Stone's steady job and a house of his own could not provide him a sense of security as he finds it difficult to even communicate with his housekeeper. Unlike Mr. Biswas, Mr. Stone gets married to an aging widow, Margaret, attracted by her vivacious personality and manner. Even as he starts adjusting to Margaret's presence in the house, sharing his space, he is disappointed to find that Margaret's manner changes as she tries to fill in the role of an ordinary wife and look after him.

The proposal of marriage seems to bring a ray of hope to Stone's life like spring's bringing of expectations and renewal. Naipaul comments: "In the second week of March Mr Stone and Mrs Springer were married, when on the tree in the school grounds the buds had swollen and in sunshine were like points of white" (27). Here, the swollen buds indicate renewal in nature, suggestive of hope and expectations in Stone's life. It is also an ironic comment on the age of the bridal pair. But this expected change is far from fruitful as the marriage fails to shed his sense of disillusionment. His privacy is lost and his marriage proves to be a failure.

Anxiety was replaced by a feeling of deflation, a certain fear and an extreme shyness, which became acute as the ritual bathroom hour approached on their first evening as man and wife, words which still mortified him. He waited, unwilling to mention the matter or to make the first move, and in the end it was she who went first. She was a long time and he, sucking on his burnt-out pipe, savoured the moments of privacy as something now to be denied him forever....(*Mr Stone and the Knights' Companion* 28)

Mr. Stone's shyness is not unexpected in someone who had been a bachelor for so long. The awkwardness is not so much alienation as a sense of being out of depth in a new scenario. What stands out is his valuing his privacy even on his wedding night and regretting its passing in anticipation of the future.

What deepens Mr. Stone's plight is the unwillingness to accept that his wife might be touched by age just like him:

In the bathroom, which before had held his own smell, to him always a source of satisfaction, there was now a warm, scented dampness. Then he saw her teeth. It had never occurred to him that they might be false. He felt cheated and annoyed.

Regret came to him, and a prick of the sharpest fear. Then he took out his own teeth and sadly climbed the steps to their bedroom. (28)

Mr. Stone feels defrauded as if with everything else in life he has been deprived of a well preserved wife. He was looking forward to a youthful companion but the sight of the dentures brings up a frightening reminder of age and decay. The fear was obviously his own fear of mortality. This locks him in the cell of his own predicament, something he could not share with his new wife. His own dentures are a sad underscoring of that grim reality.

Stone compares the renewal in the tree and the expected change and newness in his life. In the case of the tree, shedding of leaves occur with the promise of new leaves, a guarantee of greater strength. But, marriage couldnot bring the renewal of spring in Stone's life. His solidity and serenity are lost.

Yet communicating with his tree, he could not help contrasting its serenity with his disturbance. It should shed its leaves in time; but this would lead to a renewal which would bring greater strength. Responsibility had come too late to him. He had broken the pattern of his life and this break could at best be only healed. It would not lead to renewal. So the tree no longer comforted. It reproached. (*Mr Stone and the Knights' Companion* 36)

Communing with the tree, he comes to realize his sense of hopelessness. Unlike the trees, there is no cyclic renewal in human life. His late marriage in the autumn of his life *vis-a-vis* the springtime renewal of the tree just shows the ironic contrast. The sense of reproach he feels is for chances gone by. He had not considered marriage in his prime and when he does it is too little too late. He has nobody to blame for lost opportunities or a past not lived to potential. He can only look inwards: hence, his alienation from the present circumstances

After his marriage, Mr Stone is forced into another passive role and his "habits were converted into rituals" (45). Marriage brought only an apparent calmness, a companionship in old age. But this couldnot conceal his failure, inactivity, anxiety.

...[B]eneath the apparent calm which marriage had once more brought to him, there grew a new appreciation of time. It was flying by. It was eating up his life....Sundays which made him feel that the last one was yesterday—every

racing week drew him nearer to retirement, inactivity, corruption. Every ordered week reminded him of failure, of the uncreative years once so comfortingly stacked away in his mind. (*Mr Stone and the Knights' Companion* 45)

Soon his habitual worries catch up with Mr. Stone. He feels that time is swiftly passing without his having achieved anything of note. His fears only contribute to his sense of isolation as he cannot share them with anyone. His once considered comfortable life looked barren and lost.

Mr. Stone's anxieties become pressing enough for him to look ahead to the weekdays during weekends so that he could hide behind the banality of office work.

Every officeless Sunday sharpened his anxiety, making him long for Monday and the transient balm of the weekdays, false though he knew their fullness to be, in spite of the office diary he had begun to keep, tabulating appointments, things to be done, to flatter himself that he was busily and importantly occupied. (46)

Despite his trying to maintain appearances by preparing and presenting a busy schedule for himself, he begins to feel inconsequential.

Even in the office, he starts feeling a sense of alienation as people's attitude towards him has change. His changed circumstances bring about a change in the attitudes of his colleagues. He had been promoted with better salary and been given an office to himself. But he was no longer able to enjoy it:

And as he progressively lost his air of freedom and acquired the appearance of one paroled from a woman's possession, the young men, even those who were married, no longer tolerated him as before, no longer pretended that he might be one of them. He attracted instead the fatiguing attentions of Wilkinson, the office Buddhist, whose further eccentricity was sometimes to walk about the office corridors in stockinged feet.

He had fallen into the habit of staying in the office later than was usual or necessary, as though to recapture a little of the privacy and solitude he had lost. (35)

It all came down to Mr. Stone's worries and the subsequent withdrawal into himself. While the office space was no longer passable during the day, conversely, he found pleasure by staying back in the office after hours.

The ideas of futility, impermanence and death pervade throughout the novel. The bleak and desolate picture of Cornwall which Stone and Margaret visited during their honeymoon also carries philosophical implications of ideas of death and dereliction.

Human habitation has scarcely modified the land; it was not as if a race had withdrawn but as if, growing less fit, it had been expunged from the stone-bound land, which remained to speak of discord between land and earth.(48)

In the condition of the land Mr. Stone reads England's fate. He is ready to see death and decay everywhere. Moreover, his failure to pick up the signals from the natural landscape is a result of his inability to see things clearly. Stone's sense of alienation is not new to him but he fails to recognize it is because of his locked ego.

During their visit to Chysauster, Mr Stone and Margaret experienced a hallucinatory moment of when they saw a tall big-boned man walking briskly—"walking into the smoke" (49). This disappearance of the man into the smoke bears symbolic overtones. "Mr Stone never doubted that the incident could be rationally and simply explained. But that hallucinatory moment, when earth and life and senses had been suspended, remained with him. It was like an experience of nothingness, an experience of death" (50). This hallucinatory moment can be interpreted as a reflection of Mr Stone's inner emptiness, his failure to come to terms with reality and earth.

During his visit to Cornwall, Mr Stone had the experience of a pitiable condition of a retired workman in a teashop who had been in service with the same farm for forty years. It was on that night that the idea of forming a society of the pensioners of his company called the Knights Companion came to his mind. The society was formed and it proved to be a successful one. "The usefulness of the scheme had been proved beyond doubt. The Knights Companion not only uncovered cases of distress and need; they also uncovered many cases of neglect and cruelty" (79). But, Mr Stone's joy came to be short lived because of Mr Whymper, the young PRO of Excal turns the scheme for mere commercial profit. Regarding the purpose of organizing the society of the pensioners, differences become evident between Mr Stone and Mr Whymer. "Always there was this difference in their approaches, Whymper talking of benefits to Excal, Mr Stone having to conceal that his plan had not been devised to spread the fame of Excal, but simply for the protection of the old" (64-65). Mr Stone was devoted to the scheme of the Knights

Companion with utmost sincerity. The scheme was also a successful one as it proved to be effective in fulfilling the need of the pensioners.

Gradually, however, Mr. Stone begins to feel that he has become unnecessary for the functioning of the scheme. He also feels betrayed and disillusioned when he comes to realize that his idea is used by others for commercial gain. The writer expresses Stone's growing frustration, disillusionment and despair in this way:

Other people had made his idea their property, and they were riding on his back. They had taken the one idea of an old man, ignoring the pain out of which it was born, and now he was no longer necessary to them. Even if he were to die, the Whympers and Sir Harrys would continue to present *Excaliburs*. He would be forgotten together with his pain: a little note in the house magazine, then nothing more. (100)

Stone realizes that his welfare scheme has been turned into a commercial enterprise by unscrupulous people. He had become dispensable to them and he was no longer being given credit for it. Like all introverts he had been hoping for some recognition for his project. Instead he feels that people were riding on his back, making merry with his plan to help others in need.

Through its investigation, the Knights Companion brought to light the pathetic living condition of a pensioner. Following an address, an investigator goes to the house of a pensioner in one of the streets of Muswell Hill and discovers a man in a desolate condition.

The address had turned out to be in one of the respectable redbrick streets of Muswell Hill. The house was not noticeable if one walked past it quickly, for red brick is red brick and there are more rank gardens in Muswell Hill than the borough of Hornsey would care to admit. It was only on scrutiny that one noticed that the house was derelict, the window frames washed of all paint, that the curtains had a curious colourlessness, and that about the structure there was that air of decay which comes from an absence of habitation....She [the investigator] had knocked and knocked. At length there was movement, and as soon as the door was opened she was assailed by the smell of dirt and mustiness and cats and

rags, which came partly from the house and partly from the cheap fur coat that the woman who opened was wearing....

The investigator forced her way into the hall. Cats rubbed against her legs, and to the protests of the woman in the fur coat she responded with something like bullying. There were many letters in the hall: a mound of football coupons, letters from various government departments, and all the literature the Knights Companion Unit had sent out. Breathing with difficulty, the investigator had searched the house, and in a room bolted from the outside had found her pensioner. The smell was even more disagreeable than that downstairs. The man did not see her; the room was in darkness; he was lying on a bed of rags....The man appeared to have lost the gift of speech; what he uttered were gruff little noises. The investigator pulled down curtains, an easy task; with greater difficulty she opened windows. And then at last the man spoke, a sentence of pure foolishness. But here the investigator broke down and sobbed. (81-82)

The above passage brings before us the pathetic living condition of man in England—the land which is always viewed in many works of Naipaul as the land of security and permanence.

In Stone's case, his inability to keep up his ideas in the active world created in him a sense of alienation. The seriousness with which he develops the original idea of organizing the Knights Companion is betrayed in the world of action. We find Stone in a constant struggle between ideas and action. The unfortunate gap that exists between his ideas and the world of action aggravates the psychological sense of loss and loneliness.

Gradually he realizes that

in that project of the Knights Companion which had contributed so much to his restlessness, the only pure moments, the only true moments were those he had spent in the study, writing out of a feeling whose depth he realized only as he wrote. What he had written was a faint and artificial rendering of that emotion, and the scheme as the Unit had practised it was but a shadow of that shadow. All passion had disappeared.... All that he had done, and even the anguish he was feeling now, was a betrayal of that good emotion. (118)

Stone's inability to actively participate with the surrounding world aggravates his sense of alienation. In spite of living a well ordered and secured life in the city of London Mr

Stone is haunted by a sense of futility, despair and decay. Neither his marriage nor the scheme for the pensioners could provide him a sense of solidity and meaning in life. He remained alienated and disillusioned. His marriage and the scheme can be viewed as attempts to establish a sense of communion with others – to escape from anxiety and despair.

Just as Mr. Stone sees signs of England's decay in Nature, the city offers him even stronger signs of spiritual erosion. Walking through the dull streets of London, he notes the conflict between man and Nature, and connects man's destructive tendencies with corruption.

He stripped the city of all that was enduring and saw that all that was not flesh was of no importance to man. All that mattered was man's own frailty and corruptibility. The order of the universe, to which he had sought to ally himself, was not his order. So much he had seen before. But now he saw, too, that it was not by creation that man demonstrated his power and defied his hostile order, but by destruction. By damming the river, by destroying the mountain, by so scarring the face of the earth that Nature's attempt to reassert herself became a mockery.
(125)

Mr Stone's isolated existence represents the dilemma of man alone in an alien, unintelligible world. Towards the end of the novel, Stone feels himself isolated and helpless in an unfriendly world.

What he does not realize is that a lot of his unhappiness and alienation begins and ends with his attitude to life and the world. For him,

Life was something to be moved through. Experiences were not to be enjoyed at the actual moment; pleasure in them came only when they had been, as it were, docketed and put away in the file of the past, when they had become part of his 'life', his 'experience', his career. It was only then that they acquired colour, just as colour came truly to Nature only in a coloured snapshot or a painting, which annihilated colourless, distorting space.

(Mr Stone and the Knights' Companion, 186)

Mr. Stone appears to have shades of Browning's Grammarian and Eliot's Prufrock all rolled into one. Instead of capturing and enjoying experiences, he prefers to document them. He derives pleasure in things past from where nobody could remove them or intervene in the order of things. He is so used to registering the essence of things when they were no longer a part of flesh and blood experience, that he convinces himself that they come to life or acquire colour, only after they are framed. Raw experience to Mr. Stone is 'colourless distorting space.' Such an attitude suggests a level of withdrawal which is psychological more than social.

Stone's sense of alienation can be easily marked in his inability to participate in the renewal that Spring brings. He becomes aware of the approaching spring. On his way to work, he observes the trees at the advent of Spring. He also notices the marks of "approaching spring in the behaviour of people" (106). But he fails to participate with the newness that spring brings.

He observed. But participation was denied him. It was like his 'success' from which at its height he had felt cut off, and which reminded him only of its emptiness and the darkness to come. A new confirmation of his futility presently arrived. For reasons which in his own mind were confused – his restlessness, his fear of imprisonment at home, his hope that given more time he might do something that would be his very own, something that would truly release him – he had been making vague enquiries about the possible deferment of his retirement, which was to take place in July. (106-107)

Thus, the novel underscores the suffering of man – the predicament of individuals in an unintelligible world. The feeling of loss, emptiness and alienation which Naipaul describes in other novels is in fact echoed in the desolate and disillusioned condition of Mr Stone. This novel also challenges the myth of London as the city of security, comfort and permanence which occurs in many novels of Naipaul. The novel exposes the sense of void, futility and despair behind outward appearance of a city like London which usually stands for permanence, solidity: the place that provides ample scope for individuals to realize their dreams and desires.

Naipaul's personal anxiety, his feelings of rootlessness and alienation in Trinidad as well as in England, is extensively explored in *The Enigma of Arrival*. The novel underscores the problems of situating himself both in Trinidad and in England which has made him

alien to both the places. He settles down in a cottage on a country estate which reminds him of England's grandeur. As observed by Baucom,

The narrative of this dwelling constitutes the bulk of the text and stages Naipaul's cautious, slow, and deliberate approach to the enigma of his place in the imbricated discourses of empire and Englishness. The great, if crumbling, house provides the link between those discourses. (*Out of Place*, 176)

Naipaul keeps returning to the grand façade of the house.

He recognizes in the vast and beautiful structure a sort of grandeur and finds in that grandeur a little of that long history of dominion.... In this opulent architecture, Naipaul discovers a domestic imprint of an empire (Baucom, 177)

As he continues his examination of the house and the extensive grounds

Naipaul sees more than grandeur. He sees fabrication, and ruin. Wandering the grounds of the house and the agricultural lands attached to those grounds, Naipaul confronts the inventedness of the England that he believes he has inherited and to which he wishes to belong. Everywhere he looks, he finds signs of the carefully constructed fictions of English identity. At first, Naipaul can admit only parenthetically that he has registered the existence of these signs. Again and again, he qualifies the image of an unchanging and natural England with literally parenthetical admissions of that England's careful and deliberate manufacture. As his knowledge of the house, grounds, and surrounding countryside increases, however, Naipaul abandons his attempts to contain his recognition of this England's inventedness within the defensive bracketing of parentheses. (Baucom 177)

Naipaul finds within this discourse of empire a place for himself as extension of it as well as its critic. He is no longer the eighteen-year old colonial subject who had come to England for education. As the mature writer he questions the landscape, the structures and the people around him in England. He records the decay and disjunction behind the carefully maintained facade. His interrogations provide him with answers pointing to the constructed nature of England's grand image and identity. Interestingly, he decides that he can locate himself within that invented structure as the creator of artful fictions based on experience.

The Enigma of Arrival is a meditative novel which reflects on the realities of change and decay; the cyclic patterns of death and renewal. In this work, apparently diverse aspects are put together which provides a spatial dimension to the sense of dislocation, loss and renewal. As he observes:

The wide muddy way became grassy, long wet grass. And soon, when I had left the farm buildings behind and felt myself walking in a wide, empty, old riverbed, the sense of space was overwhelming.... The setting felt ancient; the impression was of space, unoccupied land, the beginning of things. There were no houses to be seen, only the wide grassy way, the sky above it, and the wide slopes on either side.... It was possible on this stretch of the walk to hold on to the idea of emptiness. But when I got to the top of the grassy way and...looked down at Stonehenge, I saw also the firing ranges of Salisbury Plain and the many little neat houses of West Amesbury. The emptiness, the spaciousness through which I had felt myself walking was as much an illusion as the idea of forest behind the young pines. All around—and not far away—were roads and highways, with brightly colored trucks and cars like toys. Stonehenge, old barrows and tumuli outlined against the sky; the army firing ranges, West Amesbury. The old and the new; and, from a midway or a different time, the farmyard with Jack's cottage at the bottom of the valley.

(The Enigma 8)

The impression of wide open spaces is carefully maintained to offer relief from the signs of human occupation in the vicinity. This at once points to the planning that went into English spaces including open rural spaces, attesting to 'England's careful and deliberate manufacture,' as Baucom suggests (177).

The novel records Naipaul's serious engagement with the pain of being unanchored, the paradox of freedom, the process of change and decay, his own sense of loss and alienation. It is a philosophical meditation on the issues of loss and renewal. From his cottage near Salisbury, the narrator concentrates on the English countryside, the remnants of the past, deserted cottages, which are reminders of World War II, and he comes to realize that even in this seemingly unchanging and secure landscape its inhabitants are not exempt from change and decay.

Jack's garden reminds him of England's glory as well as the Trinidadian plantations as sites of hard labour. The narrator says that Jack's working in the garden "brought back very old memories to me, of Trinidad, of a small house my father had once built on a hill and a garden he had tried to get started in a patch of cleared bush: old memories of dark, wet, warm earth and green things growing, old instincts, old delights" (28). Thus, the English countryside is used as a comparative yardstick for the narrator to examine the Trinidad landscape where he spent his childhood.

Naipaul goes on to say that the more he explores during his walks the more things he notices which were not consonant with the setting:

So much of this I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerves of the stranger, and yet with a knowledge of the language and the history of the language and the writing, I could find a special kind of past in what I saw; with a part of my mind I could admit fantasy. (14)

He is able to read meaning into things which would be missed by the ordinary viewer, because of his training. He cannot look at England away from the background of Empire. Nothing looks simple or straightforward to the informed observer. His fictions as he indicates would be woven out knowledge and experience of England and English Imperialism.

The narrator becomes aware of the lack of spontaneous coordination between Jack and his immediate surroundings. He comes to realise that Jack is only seemingly rooted in his landscape. At first, the narrator assumed in Jack a deep rooted sense of belonging to the natural world around him. He did not know that Jack's relationship with the landscape is a matter of choice—a deliberate action.

I saw him as a remnant of the past (the undoing of which my own presence portended). It did not occur to me, when I first went walking and saw only the view, took what I saw as things of that walk, things that one might see in the countryside near Salisbury, immemorial, appropriate things, it did not occur to me that Jack was living in the middle of junk, among the ruins of nearly a century; that the past around his cottage might not have been his past; that he might at some stage have been a newcomer to the valley; that his style of life might have been a matter of choice, a conscious act....(14)

The narrator's observation of the English countryside brings to him ideas of the ephemerality of things. Nothing is as permanent and secure as it appeared. As a stranger, he developed the idea of an unchanging state of the country life. The newcomer's admiration for tradition and cultural heritage receives a jolt when he realizes that some things have been built to give the impression of ancient heritage when they were not exactly old.

But slowly, through his observations and experiences the narrator realizes that his idea of permanence and security was wrong. He comes to terms with the idea that everything is subjected to decay.

Here was an unchanging world—so it would have seemed to the stranger. So it seemed to me when I first became aware of it: the country life, the slow movement of time, the dead life, the private life, the life lived in houses closed one to the other.

But that idea of an unchanging life was wrong. Change was constant. People died; people grew old; people changed houses; houses came up for sale. That was one kind of change. My own presence in the valley, in the cottage of the manor, was an aspect of another kind of change. The barbed-wire fence down the straight stretch of the driveway - that also was change. Everyone was aging; everything was being renewed or discarded. (32)

What looked secure was subject to change and decay. Old age and death loomed large on the scene. The cycles of the seasons continued.

The advent of Spring brought freshness to the surface of the lane. Behind it there were the secret happenings of loss, neglect, an emptiness. Jack's death, and his funeral

like the death and funeral of his father-in-law some years before—seemed to have happened secretly: one of the effects of the country life, the dark road, the scattered houses, the big views. His vegetable plot, overrun with weeds, was barely noticeable. His fruit and flower garden grew more wild, the hedge and the rose bushes growing out. His greenhouse at the back (really the front) became empty. (49)

The narrator's close observations of Jack's life unravels for him the myth of permanence. "The ruin of Jack's garden after his death finally cures the narrator of his faulty vision

and, consequently, of his sense of his own irremediable out-of-placeness” (Tarantino 175).

The narrator notices the changes that have come to the countryside. The estate is linked with the spread of empire.

The estate had been enormous, I was told. It had been created in part by the wealth of empire. But then bit by bit it had been alienated. The family in its many branches flourished in other places. Here in the valley there now lived only my landlord, elderly, a bachelor, with people to look after him. Certain physical disabilities had been added to the malaise which had befallen him years before....
(53)

But the estate and its owner are both dwindling. The owner did not have a direct heir or anybody to show concern for him nearby. What supposedly came out of the wealth of Empire was now a sign of its decline as well. Elsewhere Naipaul is not unhappy to see ruins because they are reminders of a genuine past.

The three farm cottages were converted into one big house. “The builders were working on the roof, hanging slates fast. The van with the builder’s name was on the driveway, where once Jack’s geese had roamed” (97). The old manor house was touched by change, most of the old farm buildings disappeared, new building went up. The sanctity of Jack’s cottage was lost.

How exposed a house looks when it becomes a site for builders, how stripped of sanctity, when a room, once intimate, becomes mere space! Jack’s cottage (whose interior I had never seen until now) had been reduced—without side wall or middle flooring—to pure builder’s space, and at this stage of building was still pure space, like the space within the ruined stone-walled house with the big sycamores further along the driveway. Somewhere in that space Jack had made his bravest decision, to leave his deathbed for the last Christmas season with his friends, in the so ordinary public house not far from the end of the driveway. And that was the space to which—with what illness, delirium, resignation, or perhaps reconciliation—he had returned to die. (97)

The narrator offers a comparison between Jack and the Phillipses. Jack was rooted to the landscape. Even in the midst of decay and insecurity Jack was supported by his labour in

the garden. He derived a sense stability and solace in his close association with his activities in the elaborate gardens. On the other hand, the Phillipses enjoyed a different kind of comfort. They lived there with a sense of temporariness. It was a life outside their home.

In the middle of farmyard dereliction and his own insecurity in his job and cottage, Jack kept his elaborate gardens and did his digging for vegetables and flowers and kept his plots in good heart. So, in the middle of an equal insecurity—since at any time their employer might die, and they would have to move on with their possessions to another job and another set of rooms—the Phillipses made their cozy home. Jack was anchored by the seasons and the corresponding labors of his gardens. The Phillipses had a different kind of stability. It was events outside their home, festivities outside, that gave rhythm and pattern and savor to their townish life: the outings, the visit two or three times a week to their pub, their annual holiday in the same hotel in the south. (241-242)

These people try to give the impression that they are firmly rooted in the landscape. But, the narrator's close association with them unfolds before him their floating lives. They live with the idea of transitoriness, without any definite plan for the future. The narrator comes to know that they are migrants, dispossessed individuals who are spending their days without any sense of solidity and security. About the Phillipses, the narrator comes to know that they "had no plans for their future, had almost no idea of that future, had planned for nothing, and lived with the assumption that somehow, should things go wrong here, there would always be a kind of job, with quarters, for them somewhere else" (261-262).

In the same way it is Bray, the car hire man, who seems to be rooted in the landscape than anyone else in the village also exhibits a careless attitude regarding the maintenance of the gardens. The narrator finds that Bray, who rebukes Pitton for his lack of knowledge about gardens "had so little feeling for gardens and even for the valley in which he lived that he had turned all the front part of his house plot into a concrete area for his various, always changing, vehicles" (262). The narrator comments on the Phillipses in the following way:

Though they looked settled in the quiet of the manor, and though they were of the region, they were not "country" people, but people of the town, with country-

town tastes. Though they seemed to be absolutely part of the manor—at ease in their quarters and indifferent to the dereliction around them, as though that had come so slowly they had not noticed—they were in fact rootless people... (241)

These characters are alienated from their surroundings. Through their dress and behavior, they want to give an impression of security. People are seen trying to emulate others without conviction, pursuing goals that lead only to discontent or boredom.

The novel also foregrounds the dilemma of the older people of the Asian-Indian community in Trinidad who always carried an imaginary India in their minds. For them Trinidad was “the wrong place” (142). They looked back to their ancestral homeland which “became more and more golden in their memory” (142). In their hearts, India existed both as real and imaginary place. Their physical alienation from India created a deeper emotional and spiritual crisis. But for the narrator, India turned out to be only a land of imagination - a remote faraway place that remained only as a part of the mind. He felt alienated both from India and Trinidad and looked forward to England—the land of grandeur and glory. He comments: “I didn’t look back to India, couldn’t do so; my ambition caused me to look ahead and outwards, to England; but it led to a similar feeling of wrongness” (141-142). In the days of his childhood, he created an image of England as the centre of things—the land of security and permanence. But when he actually arrived England he came to know that the land of glory he created in his fantasy was lost.

The narrator says: “... 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... I had created in my fantasy” (141). When he really arrived in London he realized that “the perfect world” he had created in his imagination did not really exist. That image of glorious London actually belonged to “another time”. He says: “As a child in Trinidad I had put this world at a far distance, in London perhaps. In London now I was able to put this perfect world at another time, an earlier time” (143). So, the narrator belongs nowhere. He is afflicted by a sense of not belonging. For him, each location is both real and imaginary.

The novel highlights the disastrous effects of loss of roots, the loss of ancestral landscape on people’s mind and spirit. In the case of the first generation of migrants, this emotional and spiritual sense of loss of homeland is more acute and profound. For the descendents

of the migrants, the land of their ancestors does not exist as a physical reality. They also suffer from the same kind of experiences of alienation and dispossession like that of their parents and grandparents. The circumstances in Trinidad had created a deep uncertainty and alienation in the narrator. He carries a sense of loss, of alienation, of homelessness which he inherited from his impoverished ancestors who had to live an uncertain life as a result of their peripheral existence in Trinidad. So, a sense of ephemerality, loss and decay had been deeply embedded in the narrator's psyche.

To see the possibility, the certainty, of ruin, even at the moment of creation: it was my temperament. Those nerves had been given me as a child in Trinidad partly by our family circumstances: the half-ruined or broken-down houses we lived in, our many moves, our general uncertainty. Possibly, too, this mode of feeling went deeper and was an ancestral inheritance, something that came with the history that had made me: not only India, with its ideas of a world outside men's control, but also the colonial plantations or estates of Trinidad, to which my impoverished Indian ancestors had been transported in the last century... (55)

Naipaul examines his autobiographical elements from a philosophical perspective. In this connection, Santiago comments: "*The Enigma of Arrival*, a massive text that includes an immersion into autobiographical realities, is also a philosophical text in which Naipaul projects existential ideas of impermanence, futility, and doom" (164). Here, Naipaul points out certain philosophical implications of displacement and rootlessness. In the case of his ancestors, the loss of national and cultural identity had led to alienation and dispossession which is a historical reality—a consequence of colonialism. They had been bonded labourers who had been cast out into the unknown. The plight of these Indian migrant workers reminds him again of the projects of British imperialism and its outreach.

While examining the philosophical implications of such historical realities Naipaul broadens his perspective which results in encompassing the existential suffering of other individuals afflicted with different forms of estrangement. From his position of uncertainty and dereliction, he turned his attention to other people who also suffer from crisis of rootlessness. The work turns out to be a deeper philosophical meditation on transitoriness, meaninglessness and decay. Naipaul's preoccupation with a deep rooted sense of despair, emptiness and death is expressed in the following passage:

How sad it was to lose that sense of width and space! It caused me pain. But already I had grown to live with the idea that things changed; already I lived with the idea of decay. (I had always lived with this idea. It was like my curse: the idea, which I had had even as a child in Trinidad, that I had come into a world past its peak.) Already I lived with the idea of death, the idea, impossible for a young person to possess, to hold in his heart, that one's time on earth, one's life, was a short thing. These ideas, of a world in decay, a world subject to constant change, and of the shortness of human life, made many things bearable. (23)

The ideas of change, futility pervade throughout the novel. It is as if the narrator finds things bearable because they are not permanent and so sure to change. Otherwise he might have found the idea of England's decadence along with the changes in his life less bearable.

After the death of Jack many changes had come to the life of the farm house. When Jack was not there to do the activities of the farm, "they weren't done; there was only ruin. The new people in the other cottages didn't do what he had done" (49). The life of the manor had transformed and "the organization had shrunk... The manor too had its ruins" (51). Besides, many farm buildings were changed due to renovation. They are now in the hand of builders. The old sanctity, the glory of the past was lost.

How exposed a house looks when it becomes a site for builders, how stripped of sanctity, when a room, once intimate, becomes mere space! Jack's cottage... had been reduced... to pure builder's space... Somewhere in that space Jack had made his bravest decision, to leave his deathbed for the last Christmas season with his friends, in the so ordinary public house not far from the end of the driveway. And that was the space to which—with what illness, delirium, resignation, or perhaps reconciliation—he had returned to die. (97)

What the narrator first views as change, as decay, gradually is accepted as flux. He says: "I had replaced the idea of decay, the idea of the ideal which can be the cause of so much grief, by the idea of flux" (304). That in brief was the truth. Everything was subject to flux.

Like the narrator, Jack, Pitton, Alan, the landlord,—all of them have remained alienated from their surroundings. Pitton "didn't look like a gardener. With his felt hat and tweed suit, he looked more like a visitor, like a man passing through" (255). The landlord

started an attitude of withdrawal towards the garden. He developed a passionate interest for flowers but remained indifferent to the fact that the ivy and gales destroyed so many trees in the garden. The narrator came to know from Mrs. Phillips that the landlord “liked ivy and had given instructions that the ivy was never to be cut” (233). Thus, the narrator sees in him a curious blending of renewal and decay.

...[H]ow did his taste for flowers go with the ruin of his own garden—the ruin through which, from his windows, he would have often seen me walking? Did he in fact see decay? Or did he—since vegetable growth never stopped—simply see lushness? Or did he cherish the decay, seeing in it a comforting reflection of his own accidia? (234)

The landlord represents both similarity and opposition to the narrator. Both of them belong to different cultures and are at different ends of empire. The landlord’s fortune flourished with the spread of empire.

I was his opposite in every way, social, artistic, sexual. And considering that his family’s fortune had grown, but enormously, with the spread of the empire in the nineteenth century, it might be said that an empire lay between us. This empire at the same time linked us. This empire explained my birth in the New World, the language I used, the vocation and ambition I had; this empire in the end explained my presence there in the valley, in the cottage, in the grounds of the manor. But we were—or had started—at opposite ends of wealth, privilege, and in the hearts of different cultures. (208)

The narrator could discover a sense of similarity with the landlord as both of them are linked by the empire. He could see how people from different cultures, dissimilar backgrounds can arrive at similar states. He says: “...[C]oming to the manor at a time of disappointment and wounding, I felt an immense sympathy for my landlord, who, starting at the other end of the world, now wished to hide, like me” (208). He further says: “And though I knew that men might arrive at similar states or attitudes for dissimilar reasons and by different routes, and as men might even be incompatible, I felt at one with my landlord” (209). In this way, the narrator could discover both similarities and differences that exist between him and the landlord.

In part four of the novel, "Rooks", we are introduced to Alan the writer "the man with the childhood, the man with the sensibility" (313). The narrator comes to understand that although Alan is a native of the culture, he "seemed to have as much trouble with his idea of the writer and his material" as the narrator had had with him when he came to England with the ambition to become a writer. Although Alan is equipped with a wide range of material available to him with his "deep knowledge of the setting", he also found it difficult to face certain things like the narrator.

And that writer's personality of Alan's was partly genuine, and no more fraudulent than my own character, my idea of myself as a writer, had been in 1950. Just as, in my writing in those days, I was hiding my experience from myself, hiding myself from my experience, to that extent falsifying things, yet at the same time revealing them to anyone who looked beyond the conventional words and forms and attitudes I was aiming at, so all the literary sides of his character that Alan exhibited, all the books he said he was writing, hinted at truths that were as hard for him to face as certain things had been for me. (314)

The narrator-writer sees in Alan a reflection of his earlier self. For the narrator, Alan forms another link with the landlord's world. At last, afflicted by a deeper sense of solitude and despair, Alan commits suicide.

And then one day I heard...that he [Alan] had taken some pills one night after a bout of hard drinking and died. It was a theatrical kind of death. Theater would not have been far from Alan's mind that evening. It might so easily have gone the other way. Somebody might have telephoned, or he might have telephoned somebody, gone to a party in brilliant clothes, been witty or flattering or outrageous, would have ridden over the theatrical moment of suicide. (321)

The sense of loss comes not so much from death as from degradation. Even life seems to have no value as people cannot cut across their sense of alienation to reach out to others. Incidentally both these novels addressing alienation are written against English backgrounds to suggest that it is something about the English personality that allows for if not encourages a person's turning inward not so much to philosophize as to occupy a solitary comfort zone.

The different forms of alienation and rootlessness of people from different social and cultural backgrounds shown in these novels attest to the fact that disjunctions of culture

and geography result in man's isolation. Although their anxiety of alienation arises from different sources, they also share certain things in common including ties to Empire. Most of the characters are located in England/ English conditions but appear to have been affected by socio-political dynamics across the world. A complex interweaving of alienated individuals from both "centre" and "margin" opens up the possibility of reworking of fundamental binary divisions constructed between European and non-European as they live through their alienation.