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Enclosure, Dispersal, and *The Enigma of Arrival*

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Abstract: "Enclosure" is a powerful interpretive key to V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*. It is a word that can stand for any contained or bounded space as well as the processes or logics of forming such containment on historical, phenomenological, textual, and subjective registers. A national community, a spatial enclosure, a picturesque image, a literary text, and a human body are all connected figures of enclosure in the text, bodies with borders (or skins) that guard their integrity. I trace how these figures are traversed by countervailing logics of dispersal, where dispersal implies the dissipation of the coherence of a self-contained form. I argue that the tension between logics of enclosure and dispersal centrally motivates the novel's formal project. My argument is especially interested in illuminating the significance of Romantic lyric form to the novel's project of formal "gathering" and to its role in forming a writerly subjectivity that would seek to reconcile the dispersed materials of its composition.

Keywords: V. S. Naipaul, enclosure, dispersal, lyric form, landscape

After the felling of three beech trees in the surroundings of his Wiltshire cottage, the narrator of V. S. Naipaul's autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival* mourns the loss of the protection they afforded. "Only the yews and beeches at the front of the house separated me from the road," he writes, and though the beeches, despite their size, "were not really a form of sound protection," the narrator "fancie[s]" that after their removal "the road noises were louder, especially after five—so that . . . [he] became aware of the end-of-day traffic. And [he] fancied [he]

heard the military airplanes more clearly too" (Naipaul 262). The description captures a synaesthetic co-dependence, as the visual sight of the missing beeches generates a "fancying," a half-deliberate imaginative process that modifies the narrator's perception of the auditory landscape of the cottage. It also precedes an explicit recognition of the status of his cottage as an "enclosure," a historically resonant word that marks its preciousness and its precariousness: "How fragile my little world was here! Just leaves and branches. Just leaves and branches created the colours and the enclosure I lived within. Remove them—a morning's work with a chain saw—and the public road would be just there, less than a hundred yards away, and all would be open and exposed" (262–63). The word "enclosure" in this passage seems to involve two meanings. First, it refers to something akin to a monastic enclosure, a place that the narrator "live[s] within" in a state of cultivated withdrawal from the burdens of contemporary historical life. But if this meaning of enclosure implies an orientation toward the other-than-worldly, the word has a countervailing worldly resonance that undercuts this quasi-monastic idealization: it invokes capitalist and imperialist regimes of property, within which it names the act of cutting private property out of formerly common land. The narrator's fear of the "open and exposed" public road therefore has a doubleness: it marks the fear of the end of a seclusion that has enabled a "second life" (172), and it reflects a class-bound distaste for the encroachment of public space upon his private enclosure.

To call this enclosure "precious" is then to imply a certain de-historicizing "preciousness" of narrative sensibility, even a transference of the melancholia that the narrator sees as a pathology of his English landlord—as "something like acedia, the monk's torpor or disease of the Middle Ages" (53)—onto the belated postcolonial subject.[1] There is also a stylistic preciousness here that makes the enclosure interpretable not just as an aesthetic space, with a quietness and range of colours that differentiate it from the surrounding world, but as a literary space, in which the forms of English pastoral life disseminated by the imperial canon appear. Here, the concept of the literary "enclosure" should be further extended, since it is self-consciously literary language that consecrates the very loss of the enclosed, secluded space as a "literary" loss,

elegantly writable—or enclosable—within the novel's poetics of disappointment.[2] It is difficult not to see Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Binsey Poplars" or Charlotte Mew's "The Trees Are Down" within this particular inscription of rural elegy, which also anticipates the novel's later description of the devastation wrought upon the manor grounds by Dutch elm disease.

This passage reflects the novel's distinctive dialectic between what Sarah Casteel calls "idealization and historicization" (33), or what might equally be termed, in the novel's own language, processes of "perfection" and "ruination." The ideal enclosure of the cottage is exposed—materially "historicized," if you will—by the public road, its perfection potentially ruined by the felling of the trees. But this ruin is also re-perfected as it is mediated through the language of elegy, which grants the narrator a schema of perception that makes the ruin the ideal site of the aesthetic. This dialectical process suggests how "enclosure" can operate as a powerful interpretive key to *The Enigma of Arrival*. An enclosure can be any contained or bounded space—the most "ordinary" of forms, in Caroline Levine's reading, that is yet "too constitutive of social relations, thought, and material structures across cultures and time periods to be disregarded" (36)—but the word clearly also invokes the processes of form*ing* such bounded spaces, as the history of acts and vows of enclosure indicates.[3] Within the novel, the term invokes locations or experiences of spatial containment, aesthetic difference, and even temporal difference (where the enclosure would be a "spot of time" preserving an anachronistic reality). But as we can see in the passage above, these enclosures are closely involved with what would seem to be the conceptual other of enclosure defined thus: processes of historical upheaval; the destruction of a sequestered space; the opening of a seemingly immutable landscape onto contingency, or ugliness; and the very recognition of the connection between these aesthetic enclosures and the history of land ownership under capitalist and colonialist regimes. I will call this countervailing logic "dispersal."

Against the novel's visions of "man fitting the landscape" (Naipaul 15), it poses the massive movement of peoples in the wake of decolonization, the dispersal of a human "flotsam" of which the narrator is

a part (141). And into the orbit of the desire for an arrested time, the narrative releases the realities of "a death, a fence, a departure" (52), melancholic counterweights to the novel's aestheticizing mood. Dispersal here appears as a historical logic of spatial and temporal dissipation, of movement and change, but it is also a logic of embodied perception, according to which picturesque images of time and place break down in the processes of their apprehension, leading to confusion, melancholia, or even physical pain. Dispersal implies the dissipation of the coherence of a self-sufficient or self-contained form, whether it be a national community, a spatial enclosure, a picturesque image, a literary text, or a human body—all of which are connected figures of enclosure in the text, bodies with borders (or skins) that guard their integrity. But enclosure and dispersal are not merely figures or metaphors: I call them logics because they involve processes of forming or de-forming, material activities that include the activity of writing. I suggest that the tension between the forces of enclosure and dispersal centrally motivates the novel's formal project. Unlike readers who perceive *Enigma* as an evasive text that seeks satisfaction in the de-historicized forms of the English tradition or those who aim to recuperate Naipaul's novel as an illustration of the radical instability of subjective life, I argue that the novel mobilizes a textual and subject-forming power that represents the movement of dispersal in order to contain it. My argument is especially interested in illuminating the significance of Romantic lyric form to the novel's project of formal containment and to its role in forming a postcolonial writerly subjectivity that would, like the narrator's, seek to reconcile the dispersed materials of its composition.

I. Dispersal

The Enigma of Arrival traces the withdrawal of its narrator into a space of safety and seclusion, a place of retirement from "the world" into the landscape of rural Wiltshire, as the novelist figure rents a cottage on the grounds of an old manor house in search of the "healing" of a "second life" (172). The narrator, an Oxford-obsessed Trinidadian novelist of Indian descent who resembles Naipaul, relays his impressions of the landscape, his affective responses to it, and the stories of those who live

(and die) in the surroundings of his cottage. Interpolated within this narrative are stories of his earlier experiences of migrating from Trinidad to London and of his development as a writer. The narrator finds around his cottage what he describes as an "unchanging world" (32), a "picturesque" landscape amenable to the literary and painterly eye, for which his reading—Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Tennyson, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—has made him "ready" (27). In this landscape, it seems that "time had stood still" (130); he sees visions of "man fitting the landscape" (15), visions, even, on certain stretches of his daily walks, "of the world before men" (45). As far as such visions lie at the centre of the novel, they might seem to indicate the operation of a powerfully idealizing subjectivity; the novelist, turning away from the historical and socio-political concerns of his earlier fiction, consoles his subjectivity and renews his aesthetic through immersion in the anti-worldly forms of a rural English literary tradition invested not so much in "setting out to see the world as [in] turning one's back on it, [in] privacy, not adventure" (Walcott 122).

Despite the unmistakable parallels between authorial and narrative personae, and the standard interpretation of the text as a memoir, it self-identifies as a novel, and it can hardly be said that these naïve identifications with a picturesque English aesthetic are those of the author, the novel, or even of the narrator. The landscape, in fact, continually estranges the narrator from these literary ideals and from the desire they express for an enclosure from the space-time of the postcolonial. The first sentences of the novel indicate this estrangement by alluding to the imbrication of blindness and sight in a way that anticipates one of the novel's guiding themes: the instability of visual perception. The narrator recalls how on his first morning in the cottage he "could hardly see where [he] was" before he began to see, as the rain cleared, fields and, "depending on the light, glints of a little river" (Naipaul 5). The narrator's vision appears to be appropriately calibrated with the affordances of the weather: the fields become visible as the rain clears, and the river may be glimpsed as the light permits. But even in this description, the little river "sometimes appeared, oddly, to be above the level of the land" (5), and in the story of the narrator's walk that makes up the first part of

"Jack's Garden" (the first of the novel's five sections), the narrator builds up a picture of the surrounding landscape, almost every feature of which is destabilized exactly as it is established. He recalls seeing "young woods that falsely suggested deep country" or seeing what he saw "very clearly" without knowing what he was looking at (7). The route of his walk includes a viewing point for Stonehenge, from which the ruins are visible, albeit "far away, small, not easy to see" (9), but as the narrator aims to reach Stonehenge he loses his way: "From the viewing point at the top, it had seemed clear. But from that point down had risen against down, slope against slope . . . and at the bottom, where mud and long puddles made walking difficult . . . and there appeared to be many paths, some leading off the wide valley way, I was confused" (9). If the idea of the painter and the possible "glimpse of the painter's view," as the narrator later thinks, make the scene, past or present, "like something one could stretch and reach," something "physically before one, like something one could walk in" (187), then the embodied experience of walking in the landscape belies this painterly illusion. In the narrator's "first walk," as the novel clearly intervenes in the Romantic literature of pedestrianism, he is forced to ask the way, an "absurd" inquiry, he thinks, that further emphasizes "the strangeness of the walk, my own strangeness" (10).[4]

The attendance of the prospect of visual "dispersal" upon the thematics of enclosure is clearest in the novel's representation of the enigmatic figure of the landlord, who embodies enclosure as a twinned phenomenon: his unimpeded capacity to see is undergirded by his apparent status as a propertied, rooted subject of empire. The landlord's status as a figure of fascination and desire is especially clear in the narrator's obsession with the view he imagines to be framed by the window of the manor house:

> He would have looked out on something like perfection: the lawn with the great tree in the foreground, the forest or wood to one side, the beaten-down water meadow beyond this lawn, with all the growth of willow and reeds and bamboo clumps and dogwood and the shrubs that loved water; the river with

> its river growths, the water meadows beyond, the willows, the chan-nels, the drowned fields catching the morning light and, at a sufficient distance, the evening light; and then the bare downs again. (203–04)

This view presents a kind of "spot of time," a precarious, accidental painterly perfection; only thanks to a series of unlikely accidents does this patch persist, having remained, the narrator thinks, "almost unchanged since Constable's day" (204). In direct contrast to the book's first opening prospect, which the narrator could "hardly see," the landscape and its ideal aesthetic seem immediately available to this viewing subject, presenting a perfection uncompromised by shifting weather, historical intrusion, or even the mediations of historical consciousness. And yet this prospect is mediated not only by the frame of the landlord's window but also by the conditional tense of its description, which tentatively unsettles its reality. Even the landlord's capacity to see what the narrator imagines him seeing is questioned by his exaggerated concern with the landlord's optical faculties. "What did he see?" the narrator wonders. "Whatever he saw would have been different from what I saw." "What did he see," he asks again, "sitting there in his canvas-backed chair," on one of only two occasions on which the narrator physically sees the landlord (214). On neither occasion, interestingly, does he see the landlord's eyes: the narrator first catches a confused glimpse of the landlord in a car (188), but Mr. Phillips informs him that he would have been wearing dark glasses (189), and on this second occasion he only sees his back before he retreats, "shocked" and again suddenly feeling "like an intruder" (214). It is not even clear to what extent the landlord is able to see at all, since we later learn, in a crucial (and critically overlooked) detail, of the landlord's operation to "partially restore" his sight (254).

The landlord's vista of picturesque natural ruin appears anomalously free of signs of historical ruination. The landlord can see the ivy and the forest debris—in William Gilpin's description of the picturesque, the "superadded . . . ornaments of time" (*Observations* 50)—but not the hedges made up of nineteenth-century household rubbish by which the labourers established their claim to the land and asserted their an-

cient squatters' rights (Naipaul 202), an important history of workers' resistance given the sociopolitical reality of Britain in the 1970s (when most of the events of the novel take place). The landlord's landscape is an object of desire for the narrator, but its authenticity, even its viability, is dispersed by the presence of socio-historical elements of space that expose its historical contingency and by a possible blindness that exposes the bodily contingency of perception, its inevitable dispersal in sickness and death. The dispersal that traverses the logic of enclosure is a historical phenomenon, then—something that reflects processes of historical change such as the felling of the beech trees—and a phenomenological unfolding that reflects the dissipation of a supposedly fixed and enclosed object of contemplation simply in the process of corporeally interacting with it, such as by walking through a landscape, feeling the cold or the damp of the atmosphere, or being impeded by the reality of weather or failing eyesight. Any rare clarity of aesthetic or literary perception in the book is quickly dispersed or contaminated by some aesthetically compromising object: Stonehenge can hardly be seen, but the "luminous red or orange targets of the army firing ranges" are all too visible, encroaching upon the vista and precipitating disappointment (9). Only by excluding or ignoring or somehow not seeing the visible can the narrator take pleasure and comfort in the place that he inhabits. Larkhill is the name of the army artillery school, but only by being blind to the highways and army barracks can the narrator see the larks, which "behaved like the larks of poetry" (20). Tennyson's poem was true, the narrator remembers, or at least remembers thinking (in a qualification that questions the veracity of the prospect), as "the birds rose and rose, in almost vertical flight," appearing as "another unexpected gift" of his solitude (21). And with these "ideas of literature" enveloping the world, the narrator sees "the wild roses and hawthorn" on his walk, but he does not "see the windbreak that grew beside as a sign of the landowners who had left their mark on the solitude, had preserved it." "I didn't think of the landowners," the narrator recalls: "My mood was purer: I thought of these single-petaled roses and sweet-smelling blossoms at the side of the road as wild and natural growths" (21). It is clear that Naipaul's novel is interested in spots of aesthetic difference that are simultaneously men-

aced enclosures, in spaces that seem, at first (selective) glance, ideal and yet are profoundly of-the-world, extended in the contingent fields of space, time, and history. The narrator walks in a space he has only previously considered as a landscape suspended in time, and the experience of physical movement and corporeal inhabitation renders the landscape a place of unexpected alienation and confusion of sight.

The narrator's idealizing subjectivity is denied, again and again, and the reassuring view that it seeks as the possibility of finding a picturesque vista is continually undermined. If the effect of the picturesque depends upon a stability of visual perspective and a seamless pictorial integration of every element of the landscape, then the novel denies such integration in its proliferation of "views," which emerge from but also challenge the narrator's ways of seeing. To speak of landscape in the singular therefore seems insufficient: we gain a sense of a setting saturated with different landscapes, intruding upon and ruining one another. On his walks, the narrator sees the deposits of geological time, premodern ruins, the remnants of preindustrial farming, the aesthetic scars of mechanized agriculture, relics of empire and markers of post-imperial decline, and images of false pastoral alongside the waste of rural decay and socio-economic destitution. And the landscape is layered with the narrator's own memories and histories, shaped by his reading and, more subtly, by his awareness of his colonial descent, such that the manor garden inevitably invokes as its counterpoint, as Rob Nixon suggests, the Trinidadian sugar plantation on which the narrator's grandparents worked (a history discussed in the second and fifth parts of the novel) (Nixon 246). If from the picturesque vantage the landscape of the cottage and manor must appear as a historyless landscape, ornamented with but not disrupted by ruin, then such an aesthetic enclosure is opened onto the outside in the book, onto historical landscapes that do not exist as "emanations of literature" but instead breach the frame of literary idealization. If these images mark the book as an example of a post-imperial picturesque, to use Ian Baucom's term, then it is clear that the picturesque is operating under pressure or even erasure, situated within an idea of landscape scarcely capable of being "illustrated in painting," to quote Gilpin's writing on the picturesque once more (*Three Essays* 3).[5]

Given this multiplication of landscapes, and the seeming proliferation of narrative perspectives that attend them, it seems appropriate to argue, as Sanjay Krishnan does, that "there is not an organizing perspective from which these events are narrated" and that the narrative self is created "as an effect of the shifting points of view" (613). Baucom suggests something similar in his interpretation of a "confusion regarding the relations of decay and perfection" in the novel, supporting his reading with the following tissue of quotations: "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.) . . . Decay implied an idea, a perfection in the past. . . . I liked the decay . . . while it lasted it was perfection. . . . I lived not with the idea of decay" (Naipaul qtd. in Baucom 181). We have already witnessed the self-cancelling, self-revising nature of some of the novelist's recollections in this text. The novel is full of strange and deliberate repetitions, such as when the narrator parenthetically observes the "overspecified" old wooden gate, "pulled out of true . . . by its own sturdiness and weight" (Naipaul 270), before again describing, a few paragraphs later, the gate's heavy timber frame and how it "had been pulled out of true by its own weight and sturdiness" (272). Descriptions, observations, and turns of phrase proliferate in the text, on one level reflecting a sense of order and routine, as the narrator sees similar things on his daily walks, while on another level generating a sense of temporal and experiential accumulation that threatens to add up to confusion. To put it in different terms, it can be difficult to know whether, and at what points, we are reading what Gérard Genette calls a repeating narrative or an iterative narrative, a narrative in which what happened once is narrated more than once or in which what happened more than once is narrated only once.

II. Enclosure and Lyric Form

Dispersal, however, as a destabilizing movement that contaminates aesthetic, semantic, and formal coherence, does not entirely defeat the work of enclosure. The proliferating phrases and descriptions seem to anxiously register the dispersive quality of language, but they might be read in precisely the opposite way—as the narrator's attempts to clarify the

referent, to stabilize the shifting scene, and to describe the scene with an exhaustive and repetitious detail that would make it familiar. To return to the description of the flowers, which the narrator thought of as "wild and natural growths" (21), there is not merely a non-hierarchical doubling and re-doubling of equally valuable perspectives. A sense of loss is registered in the distance between subject and phenomena delicately established by the phrasing: the narrator does not describe experiencing or encountering "wild and natural growths" but "thinks of them *as*" such (emphasis added). The growths are not the flowers as they present themselves to the senses—the fantasy of an unmediated spectacle—but a trope at one remove from the flowers, as reproduced by an active cognitive operation. The narrator remembers, however, that he perceived them in this way in his "purer" mood. This purity is ambiguous: does it imply that the idea of pure perception is itself part of the trope? Is it an ironic, false purity, in other words? Or, in a richer paradox, is there purity in the capacity to see a trope innocently, to see something false as if it were true, thus granting it a subjective *trueness* (to echo the description of the wooden gate)? This moment complicates the commonsense opposition between trope and pure phenomena, the latter of which, in the Husserlian method of phenomenology, one arrives at through the "reduction" of tropes. When the tropes fall away, what emerges is not a purer perception but a frightening impurity, as the narrator encounters the world in its ugliness and alienating otherness. The dispersal of the spectacle of "wild and natural growths" does not imply a concomitant dispersal of the subjective centre of perception. On the contrary, the affect of loss *gathers* this dispersal within the narrative of the developing subject, whose persistence over time depends on the capacity to accommodate a range of seemingly incompatible views.

Timothy Bewes argues that Naipaul's book reformulates literary creativity as "no longer the recording or the projection of an 'inward development,' but an openness to the world and its volatility" (*Event* 88). Indeed, if the Wiltshire landscape is metonymic of the grandeur of Empire, however faded, and so represents a consecrated space of pure history in the narrator's earlier consciousness, then this myth is displaced by the emergence of an idea of history as that which intrudes upon and

disperses pictures of spatial and temporal ossification, exposing them in their culture-bound inadequacy. But it is not enough to oppose an interest in the profoundly Romantic concern with "inward development" on the one hand to an interest in the world and its volatility on the other. Dispersal does not prevail; rather, dispersal and enclosure are involved in a dialectical negotiation iterated on different levels, as the tension between "perfection" and "ruination" informs the novel's theory of its own project. In mobilizing the possibilities of literary form, Naipaul pursues a synthesis between the volatility of the historical world and the narrative of inward development, and the novel itself is explicitly positioned as an outcome of this synthesis, written from the perspective of a developed subject whose formal construct can gather the world in its ugliness, abjection, and contingency and aspire to enclose it.

It is in this light that the novel's fidelity to the literary tradition, and specifically to English Romanticism, should be explored. This fidelity has far less to do with the picturesque setting of much of the novel—which, as I have established, is a picturesque under erasure—than with its formal composition and the subject-(re)forming ambitions of that composition. Among the novel's many intertextual references, Romanticism seems to have a privileged place: it provides schemas for seeing with the "literary eye" (Naipaul 18), evident in such moments as when the narrator encounters the "Wordsworthian figure" of Jack's father, "exaggeratedly bent, going gravely about his peasant tasks, as if in an immense Lake District solitude" (16) (he later thinks that he belongs in a poem Wordsworth might have called "The Fuel-Gatherer" [23]), or when he sees Jack's garden, concreted over after Jack's death, and thinks that surely "some seed, some root, would survive," some "memory of Jack, preserved in some shrub or flower or vine" (91), a passage that especially recalls "Michael" and the "straggling heap of unhewn stones" that carries the trace of the shepherd's story. But the greater significance of Romanticism does not lie in the repertoire of images and phrases it bequeaths to the narrator but in its inscription of a passage from expectation to disappointment and finally to reconciliation, a passage founded in a *re*-mediation of the speaking self and his world from a later, more mature vantage point.

Romantic lyricism offers an expressive language for seeing more than once, for responding to aesthetic anomalies or disappointments and tracing the emergence of another way of seeing. Just as the speaker in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" notes the hedgerows that he remembers from five years before that are in fact, he thinks as he checks himself, "hardly hedge-rows, little lines / Of sportive wood run wild" (ll. 15–16), so the novelist figure in *Enigma* habitually looks and looks again, in a way that makes clear the genealogy of landscape perception upon which the text draws. What is especially striking about these repeated acts of looking is the extent to which the second or third moment of perception does not so much modify as radically undermine the initial picture. In "Tintern Abbey," the poet's muffled recognition of the presence of impoverished workers and vagrants in the landscape has proved a point of critical contention, because their lives are transmuted into an aestheticized trace: only the "wreathes of smoke / Sent up, in silence, from among the trees" offer the "uncertain notice" of the rural poor that would in fact have been quite visible at the scene (ll. 17–19). But from the narrator's perspective in *Enigma*, threateningly non-aesthetic images cannot be transmuted so easily, such that his retroactive recomposition of the landscape signifies a more pronounced gap between the text's "two consciousnesses," as the second, mature consciousness significantly rewrites his earlier untutored fantasies. Yet the narrator can finally render the lesson he learns in Romantic vocabulary: he is exposed to the ruins of history—to the "world and its volatility," as Bewes puts it—and to the reality that to experience time is to experience one's own implication in a process of ruination, the approach of the final self-dispersal of death.

Not only does the narrator communicate such shifts, changes, and disappointments in a lyrically Romantic voice that marks itself as the voice of the subject in solitude, meditating upon the evolution of his "ways of seeing," but the larger structure of the novel reflects the teleology of Romantic lyricism, at least as it has been understood in the work of M. H. Abrams. Abrams' description of the movement of the Romantic lyric is worth quoting in full, given how remarkably faithful *Enigma* is to this version of the lyric form:

> [These poems] present a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on, in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved [*sic*] with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds upon itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation. (77)

The poems that yield this paradigm belong to the subgenre that Abrams calls the "greater Romantic lyric," a form that includes Coleridge's conversation poems, Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," and some of the odes of Shelley and Keats. While I do not consider Abrams' account of the form a neutral or transparently faithful reading of the poems he considers—in particular, his investment in delineating a teleological movement within all of his examples, as the speaker inevitably "achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem" (77), would seem untenable after the work of Paul de Man—I am interested in the extent to which Naipaul's novel enacts a similar movement and what this reveals about its particular investment in and disposal of Romanticism.

The novel's fluent, conversational diction, which attains a transparency of speech and, all the same, "rises" at moments of intensified meditation "to a more formal speech"; the presence of an implied auditor, identified with the reader, in this case; the novel's beginnings in a description of a landscape which prompts an "integral process" of memory, thought, and feeling; and the end-point within Abrams' description—the insight,

recognition of loss, and moral decision—are unequivocal markers of the text's adaptation of lyrical modes associated with Romanticism. The novel begins in a place of seclusion and possible healing, of separation from the disappointments of the world—characteristics bound to the culturally conditioned "naturalness" of the place. At first the narrator does not know what he is seeing or sees only what he is prepared to see, but before long things begin to change, leading to an insight that is also a loss, as he is forced to recognize that the space he inhabits is not static and immutable but historical and as such a place of flux, conditioned by extra-personal and extra-literary forces: "I had hardly begun to look, the land and its life had hardly begun to shape itself about me, when things began to change" (Naipaul 51–52). The ramifications of this insight permeate the text and the narrator's shifting perception of the landscape: his first impulse is to see decay before, looking more deeply at his surroundings, he sheds the idea of decay—a word that implies some "ideal . . . in the past" (Naipaul 210)—and embraces the idea of flux, in a way that recalls parts of Rousseau's famous reverie on his fifth walk.[6] Coming to terms with change, the narrator learns to move beyond his melancholia, to "shed this easy cause of so much human grief," and to reconcile himself with the fact that "everyone was ageing; everything was being renewed or discarded" (32). Ultimately, having travelled back to Trinidad for his sister's funeral, he comes to the most significant "moral decision" of his story: to write the book itself. This decision is an explicit response to the thoughts of death that have been afflicting him (343): faced with "a real death . . . I laid aside my drafts and hesitations and began to write very fast about Jack and his garden" (354). At this point, too, the book completes its Romantic itinerary in exemplary fashion, returning to its beginning and so asserting its organic wholeness—the synthesis of beginnings and endings. The fact that the book concludes with its most radical image of dispersal (the cremation of his sister's body) only to return to its most sustained image of enclosure (Jack's garden) reflects the dialectical ambition of this synthesis.

Out of the ruins of the picturesque image, I suggest, the novelist figure weaves a compensatory aesthetic embodied in the form of the novel itself. Consider the quotations Baucom offers, reintegrated into the co-

herent form in which they appear in the text: "I lived not with the idea of decay—that idea I quickly shed—so much as with the idea of change. I lived with the idea of change, of flux, and learned, profoundly, not to grieve for it. I learned to dismiss this easy cause of so much human grief. Decay implied an ideal, a perfection in the past. But would I have cared to be in my cottage while the sixteen gardeners worked?" (Naipaul 210). In these meta-subjective reflections, the novel's teleology of self-revision and self-realization becomes clear. By decontextualizing the narrator's words, Baucom obscures the process of maturation that they articulate, as they describe the explicit shedding of a particular idea of decay and the development of an alternative, less elegiac, idea of flux. The novel resolves the dialectic of perfection and ruination that it develops: the narrator initially seeks sanctuary in the Wiltshire countryside because it provides images of perfection or completion, apparent "emanations" of literature (Naipaul 21). These promise to reintegrate his splintered subjectivity, put "out of true" by the incompatibility of his experiences as a racialized postcolonial subject with his literary ideals.[7] The ruins of such images—the old dilapidated house, or the overgrown ivy—can be reintegrated into such "perfection" within the aesthetic of the picturesque (where they appear as consoling images of nature reclaiming culture), but other images, specifically images of modernity, such as the abject cattle, the highways, and Jack's concreted-over garden, are more threatening. These spoil the aestheticized ruins that fill the landscape, failing to appear as "superadded" ornamentation and demanding an alternative response. At this point in the movement of the dialectic the landscape becomes secondary to a narrative of subjective growth and writerly development, out of which emerges a novelist figure who has learned how to live in the historical world and how to write a book that apprehends and encloses all that it contains, asserting its compensatory completion and perfection.

In drawing on Wordsworthian languages of self-development and self-realization, the novel charts the reintegration of "man and writer" (a phrase it obsessively uses) and positions itself as the product of this reintegration. The form of the novel enables an enlargement and amplification of the lyric's reconciliatory movement in terms of duration and

scope (of the materials that can be included within the "meditation") and by heightening the reconciliatory discipline of writerly composition. If Romantic lyrics generally present themselves as enunciations rather than artefacts and therefore end in suspensions as much as completions of speech, then Naipaul's novel, and the work of composition that it foregrounds and separates from the contingent perspectives of the "determinate speaker," is able to enact with greater force a completion and aesthetic "perfection." In this sense, the trajectory of the novel produces an idealized Romanticism that formalizes the dispersive materials of history.

III. The Gathering of Form

Enigma formally reenacts the logic of enclosure, and this formal enclosure binds together the materials of the novel—the events and histories it narrates—to in turn bind together the fractured materials of the postcolonial subject. The lyricism of *Enigma* is integrally, if obliquely, bound to its postcoloniality: it resolves the fractured subjectivity of the postcolonial subject of colonial education and enables a mediated, non-traumatic connection between the fields of literature and history, even if this connection takes place in this novel primarily (although not exclusively) in the landscape of post-imperial England. The novel's literary space is, in its theory of itself, what the aesthetic enclosure of the cottage could not be: a space in which healing and a reconciliation with the writer's historical contingency and finitude can be achieved.

In an essay on Naipaul's "late style," Bewes develops a Deleuzian reading of Naipaul's late work, and *Enigma* in particular, in which he emphasizes features such as dispersal, incommensurability, and ellipsis, such that "all possibilities of a meaningful whole become suspect" (185). I do not find Bewes' reading persuasive for all of the reasons I have elaborated. Even so, the novel is shot through with the same moments of negativity that a number of critics after Jerome McGann have seen in Wordsworth—moments that persist in haunting the composure of Romantic reconciliation (which for McGann constitutes Romantic ideology in its historical evasiveness).[8] As clear as the teleology of *Enigma* might be—clearer than the teleology of Wordsworth's lyrics, I would

claim—it remains an open question as to whether the force of the novel's composure fully absorbs the moments in which the narrator confesses to his inordinate fear of bodily pain, his repeated dream of his head exploding, or his grief upon returning to Trinidad, in the novel's coda, and seeing, once again, its destitution. How we read the novel ultimately depends on how we read the status of writing within the novel. The narrator "la[ys] aside his drafts and hesitations" before he begins to write about Jack and his garden, but the force of his gesture of "laying aside" is as questionable as Wordsworth's famous, critically qualified lines about the redemptions of poetry in "Tintern Abbey": "other gifts / have followed," the poet writes, "for such loss, *I would believe*, / Abundant recompence" (ll. 86–89; emphasis added).[9] Wordsworth's poem and Naipaul's novel inhabit the domain of the dialectic: Abrams' moment of "moral decision" can never be separated from its conditions of possibility—the "drafts and hesitations" from which it wants to assert a cut.

As a deconstructive supplement to Abrams' schema of the Romantic lyric, I pose de Man's similar tracing of the movement of Wordsworth's "A slumber did my spirit seal" in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," with its very different interpretive underpinning. De Man describes "the successive description of two stages of consciousness, one belonging to the past and mystified, the other to the *now* of the poem, the stage that has recovered from the mystification of the past now presented as being in error" (224; emphasis in original). For de Man, the poem is not ironic: the speaker who exists in the "now" is a "subject whose insight is no longer in doubt and who is no longer vulnerable to irony. It could be called, if one so wished, a stance of wisdom" (224). The poem's point of view is of a unified self whose past is unequivocally a past of error and whose present sees, however painfully, "things as they actually are" (de Man 224). But how is this unity possible? Why are the differences between perspectives not internal to the subject, productive of an ineluctable sense of irony that might even make the subject appear as an "effect of the shifting points of view," to quote Krishnan again? I suggest that it is because of the enclosive power of form, the capacity to ground a subjective coherence in the coherence of a formal construct created by

that subject. In de Man's terms, however, this unity emerges from the temporality of form, from the fact that the two perspectives are present but "spread out over a temporality which is exclusively that of the poem and in which the conditions of error and wisdom have become successive" (225). De Man states that this succession "is possible within the ideal, self-created temporality of the poem, but it is not possible within the actual temporality of experience" (225). This interpretation allows de Man to argue that the fundamental structure of allegory is present in the subject's tendency to lay out in narrative what is simultaneous within the subject. This temporality, however, would be something that unfolds in the practice of reading, and reading, as de Man's work consistently shows, instigates a powerfully dispersive logic: interpretive avenues proliferate, semantic units shift and evade examination, and the text finds a new reality with each new reading. De Man's reading of the temporality of the movement of Wordsworth's poem has consequences that are therefore quite different from the conclusion of Abrams' otherwise similar generalization of the movement of the greater Romantic lyric: its emphasis on temporality simultaneously highlights linguistic and semantic movement, however resisted by the power of formal economy. It suggests that the perfection of the Romantic lyric is still open to the forces of dispersal—death, loss, change, instability—that motivate its powers of "recompence."

If Naipaul's novel is a formal enclosure, gathering within its pages the disappointments and failures built into the narrative of the novelist's maturation, it, too, is traversed by the logic of dispersal. The text is opened by the agency of reading, an agency that is not grounded in the will of a specific reader but in the dispersive quality of language. It would be wrong to regard the prospect of such dispersal as the book's inevitable failure, however, since the text marks this prospect at key moments: the narrator speaks of his "drafts and hesitations" exactly as he resolves to write the book, and he brings into temporal succession his recognition of his mortality after the death of his sister and his textual commemoration of Jack's garden. I therefore suggest another word (to which I have gestured above) that would interpose between the idealization of enclosure and the ruination of dispersal: gathering. A book is not

a container, and it cannot properly enclose anything, but it can gather narrative threads, constellate images and phrases, and arrange these in a way that shapes, if not finalizes, their resonances. The word "gathering" is continuous with the vocabulary of rural labour that suffuses the text, and it accommodates the quality of "tenuousness" the narrator comes to value in contrast both to the rootedness of the enclosed subject and the dislocated sensibility of the "flotsam" of the postcolonial. It is Jack's garden that becomes the figure for this gathering: Jack is not "solid, rooted in his earth," as the narrator had initially thought, but someone who had "created his own life, his own world, almost his own continent" (Naipaul 92). When he is gone, however, the narrator sees "how tenuous, really," his hold on his land had been, but Jack had "disregarded" this tenuousness, had "created a garden on the edge of a swamp and a ruined farmyard" (93). Similarly, a certain disregard for the inevitable tenuousness of the writer's hold on the world informs the resolution of *Enigma*, the self-conscious provisionality of its work of gathering.

Notes

1 Many readers of the novel identify the narrator as "Naipaul" and read the text as a memoir. Naipaul calls his text a novel, however, and I insist upon reading it as a fiction and its novelist-narrator as a fictional character or at the least as a minimally fictionalized persona.

2 For a powerful discussion of the poetics of disappointment in Romantic and post-Romantic lyric and meditative poetry, see Quinney. Quinney observes that disappointment has to do with the idea of losing one's place, of being "cast out," of "ceasing to be '*à point*,' in the right place at the right moment, and thus implie[s] a breakdown in one's relation to time, a falling out and away from a recognizable order" (1). This reading of disappointment resonates with Naipaul's novel, as does Quinney's attention to the non-recuperation of disappointment within the sublime or within a movement of lyrical reconciliation (in contrast with Abrams' reading of the greater Romantic lyric, which I engage with below).

3 The most direct recent study of the relationship between the history of acts of enclosure and literary representation is Marzec's *An Ecological and Postcolonial Study of Literature*. For a brilliant recent fictional imagining of the early history of enclosure in England, see Crace's *Harvest*.

4 Included in this large body of Romantic pedestrian writing would be many of Wordsworth's poems, some of Coleridge's and Clare's, and Rousseau's *Reveries of*

a Solitary Walker. See Jarvis for a study of this writing: he attends to how "intellectual processes and textual effects are grounded in the material practice of walking" (33).

5 Gilpin's theory of the picturesque registers this pressure upon it. He asserts its constructedness: the picturesque's particular qualities, in contrast to those of the beautiful, require "the mallet, instead of the chisel: we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps" (*Three Essays* 7). The picturesque emerges from a careful, cultivated roughness—a curated, ordered sense of the rugged. In its emphasis on the discipline required to produce and frame the picturesque, Gilpin's description inevitably also implies its instability: to move through a picturesque landscape would precisely be to risk stumbling upon objects and prospects that would not conform to the picturesque aesthetic.

6 See the passage beginning "Everything is in constant flux on this earth" (88) in *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*.

7 These include the humiliations he suffers in New York City, where he is ripped off by the taxi driver and reduced to eating roast chicken over a wastepaper basket (112–13), and his experience on the Atlantic passage, when he is moved to a "better" class of cabin only to realize that he and others are being racially segregated (125).

8 See Simonsen for an overview of this critical history.

9 As Wolfson explains, "to phrase a spiritual economy . . . with a tentative auxiliary . . . is to deplete the store of recompense" (439).

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