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Vivisectors and the Vivisected: The Painter Figure in the Postcolonial Novel

by

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ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates that the painter figure in postcolonial literature directly confronts issues of nation and tradition within the diminished but still powerful effects of Empire. The figure's resistance lies in its unique translation of a European tradition of art and aesthetics to the specific postcolonial features of local culture and landscape.

The introduction outlines how the painter figure is an appropriate point of entry to the study of the postcolonial subjects in the four model novels: Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (Canada, 1988), George Lamming's *Water With Berries* (Barbados, 1972), V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (Trinidad-UK, 1987), and Patrick White's *The Vivisector* (Australia, 1973). Each novel demonstrates how the painter figure both defies and embraces customary models of resistance for the marginal other in order to parody and challenge fixed Eurocentric notions of identity and subjectivity.

Chapter One, "The Painter as Literary Influence: V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*," explores the influence of two painters, John Constable and Georgio de Chirico, on the novel's narrator. Despite their disparate styles and images, the paintings of these two artists are powerful representations of home and Empire in the narrator's postcolonial imagination.

Chapter Two, "The Painter as Commodity: Patrick White's *The Vivisector*," contextualizes the economic patterns of the painter's relationship to his or her community.

Chapter Three, "A Career Not Exactly Real: Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*," examines the history of the terms "artist" and "painter" and this history's role in the formation of the asocial painter figure. It also explores the effects of education and landscape on painter Elaine Risley's struggle to create "authentic" art.

Chapter Four, "Painting as Political Statement: George Lamming's *Water With Berries*," discusses the themes of political violence and creative autonomy. The chapter also includes an examination of topography and painting within the context of the painter Teeton's reverse voyage to the centre from San Cristobal to London.

Through a comparison of painting and writing, the conclusion to this study discusses recent developments in the relationships between literature and painting, particularly in books that include both visual and written text.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

> It is wise to recognize--despite current critical fashions--that certain masterpieces do float free of their enabling conditions to make their home in the world.
>
> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*

> The sheer strangeness of the activity of art made her a questionable figure; as it does everywhere; as it always has and perhaps always will.
>
> Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*

i

Vivisectors and the Vivisected: The Painter Figure in the Postcolonial Novel is about the political and aesthetic issues that surround the *painter figure* in postcolonial cultures. It discusses four novels that I consider important to the study of postcolonial criticism--by which I mean the practice of reading texts as mediations among and within nations with a colonial or imperial past—as well as the broader, critical study of four individual texts: Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (Canada, 1988), George Lamming's *Water With Berries* (Barbados, 1972), V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (Britain, 1987), and Patrick White's *The Vivisector* (Australia, 1973). I will argue that

the painter figures in these four texts share a unique feature: they are *deliberately ambiguous*, partaking of a European tradition of art and aesthetics, as well as departing from or challenging that tradition because of their inapplicability to specific postcolonial features of the local culture and landscape. As such, the painter figure is an enabling one for these four authors, and one that becomes *both helpful and problematic for critical revisioning of the postcolonial subject.*

The painter figure is an appropriate point of entry into the study of the postcolonial subject as artist because it directly engages with the diminished but still powerful effects of Empire. Patterns of imperialism seemingly find renewed vigour in the literary painter figure--one that falls outside customary models of postcolonial resistance, particularly the marginal other as the primary source of challenge or change. This vigour is evident in the dual identities of the painter figures in these texts, who are often marginalized as painters first, and as colonials second. From these two positions, these painter figures inhabit distinct, creative spaces of the margin/centre binary, and also present counter-figures to customary configurations of nationhood, and to assumptions of "place" or "home."[1]

First, the painters benefit creatively and (sometimes) financially from their exclusion. In other words, the painters' "difference" is valued by their respective postcolonial societies, which imitate a European tradition of art and artists in order to establish their own traditions and artists. Therefore,

the painters, and the societies that produce them, often accept and even demand the painters' asocial behaviour. Second, these painter figures, as colonials, are censored by this same European tradition. The asocial genius is but one role of the painter figure, and its other, more revolutionary features frequently are suppressed in their translation to the colonies. Nevertheless, both worlds can be creatively fruitful ones for the painters, and reconciliation between the two is not necessarily desirable. Each chapter, then, will discuss these two worlds in relation to four different settings, each with its own nuances and problems as Empire continues to influence the postcolonial artist.

ii

At present, there is considerable upheaval and messiness regarding the nature and direction of postcolonial studies. Since the late 1980s, postcolonial criticism has been recognizing that while the articulation of cultural difference is adequate for locating the now familiar discourses of colonialism (language, race, and nation, for example), it no longer suffices as a strategy for reconciling the subject to its decolonized state. The plurality of the postcolonial identity conflicts with the assumption of a shared experience that emerges from the colonial encounter. As a result, what was once considered a viable methodology for classifying "new" literatures that fell outside a Eurocentric canon is now challenged, most emphatically by Aijaz

Ahmad, as the creation of liberal humanists who ignore (inadvertently or purposely) the individual artist's historical specificity and politics.

In 1987, Benita Parry wrote that such critics, particularly those working under the rubrics "new literatures" or "commonwealth literature," "succeeded ... in underwriting a way of dividing the world invented by imperialist discourse ... [and thereby] collud[ed] in displacing a conflictual political relationship" (33). Ironically, Parry claims, critics are undermining the very texts they seek to recover by their complicity in parallel, imperialist tactics.[2] In particular, the "other," a term that marked the colonial's seemingly irredeemable ethnic and cultural differences from the European, is allowed to remain unchanged, representing a centre/margin binary that precludes growth and historical specificity even as it is reconfigured by "sensitive" postcolonial critics. However, as I demonstrate in this thesis, a female painter working in Canada confronts very different obstacles from a male Caribbean painter working in London.

More recently, the postcolonial critic has been accused of pressuring this other to surrender his or her authenticity, thus further inviting the resentment and anger of the (mis)represented and contained postcolonial artist.[3] This resentment is reflected in the fracture between postcolonial theory and postcolonial criticism; the former is associated with an increasingly alienating and elitist American poststructuralist movement, and the latter with a lack of political objectivity. Furthermore, as Ahmad charges,

the term "postcoloniality" functions within this academic enterprise without a trace of irony regarding earlier debates on such fissures (1).

These issues of complicity are important to this project. The controversy over the postcolonial has, helpfully, stimulated a re-examination of seemingly essentializing terms such as "commonwealth," "art," "artist," and "tradition" that characterized the discourse of Western academia. One of the more recent attempts to examine such terms is Neil Lazarus's *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (1999), which makes the persuasive argument that the contention over the artist's place within postcolonial criticism has been about misreadings of the terms "tradition" and "history." Returning to Theodore Adorno's supposition in *Minimia Moralia* (1951) that "one must have tradition in oneself, to hate it properly," Lazarus claims that the term "tradition" has failed to respond to its universalistic claims of social reformation by the hands of its cultural representatives (3). With the efforts of the postcolonial artist, however, tradition is being reclaimed in wonderfully divergent fashion:

> Their [postcolonial writers' and intellectuals'] extraordinary command of and respect for the European humanist ... canon exist alongside an equally extraordinary knowledge (and critical endorsement) of the other cultural works ... the necessary consideration of which cannot be accomplished on the provincial soil of the European canon. Might it not be *these* figures in whom,

> paradoxically--since this was the last thing that imperialism was meant to achieve--contemporary history has encoded "tradition," and they, therefore, who, enjoined to find ways to hate it properly, are uniquely placed to do so? (8-9)

Although I agree with Lazarus's premise that the postcolonial artist finds agency in this paradox, Lazarus does not appear to account for artists such as Naipaul, who has become a knighted British citizen--the "canon on the provincial soil." Naipaul has been called, without irony, a "misanthrope" (Cudjoe 229) and a self-indulgent "blamer" (Theroux 1998; 348) who has "joined the [colonial] oppressors--intellectually and spiritually" (Brunton 82). Declan Kiberd in *Inventing Ireland* (1995), however, provides a fairer assessment of postcolonial artists such as Naipaul. Kiberd believes that, in order to flourish, "the task [of the postcolonial artist] ... is to show the interdependence of past and future in [an] attempt to restore history's openness" (292). As I will argue, unlike writers such as Lamming or Walcott, Naipaul seemingly has no particular knowledge of, or endorsement for, "other" cultural traditions, nor does he appear particularly interested in their existence. Not to be ignored, however, is the fact that Naipaul repeatedly writes about the other in his novels and travelogues including *The Enigma of Arrival*, a novel that envisions history and tradition as states of flux. I believe, as does Lazarus, that the most visible proponents of this rethinking or even recuperation of such imperialist terminology are postcolonial writers

themselves, including Naipaul. Indeed, among the four writers whose work I examine *there is a desire to reclaim a discourse of aesthetics that seeks, remarkably, alignment with a European tradition of painting and painters, while simultaneously acknowledging the other and its imperialist beginnings as a starting point for their revisions.*

iii

I want to argue also that if a common feature of the postcolonial novel is its commitment to resistance, *then painterly postcolonial novels are seemingly uncharacteristic texts*. However, although I examine the stereotype of the painter figure, it does not simply map the Romantic, asocial artist figure onto emergent representations of "new" artists. Instead, I accept Frank Kermode's argument in his influential early study, *The Romantic Image* (1957), that the artist in isolation is a profoundly ambivalent creature who delineates in seemingly "superficial contradictions" (44). These contradictions reflect in part the repeated misunderstanding of the amoral or asocial nature of art, whereby artists such as Oscar Wilde intended to reveal art's paradoxes and "its resistance to [didactic] explication" (44).

Where I depart from Kermode, as I also do from more recent critical examinations of the artist in society, is in the equating for purposes of expedience the artist figure (usually configured as a poet) with the painter figure.[4] I will argue that the originality of each painter in postcolonial

literature is in his or her ability to reveal the tropes of power in ways that any homogenous representation of all kinds of artists cannot. As Said comments in *Culture and Imperialism*, Empire has raised questions regarding how one perceives the novel, and if one "is to study the impulses giving rise to it, [one] shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on one hand, and, on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism" (82). Based on Said's proposal, I suggest that there are distinctive features of all four texts examined here that arise from the stereotype of the painter figure, but this is not the single determining factor among them.[5] Rather, the painter figure serves a different purpose from the homogenous *artist* figure. The painter confronts a Eurocentric discourse that determines the production of *visual* representations of art, as well as written ones--even if this confrontation means, as I argue in my chapter about *Water With Berries*, that the painter must abandon his craft altogether.

I also accept the ekphrastic elements of my topic, but I do not follow the methodology of literary pictorialism, or subscribe to the notions of the "sister arts."[6] In other words, my analyses of painters and paintings and their relationships to the meaning of the texts do not always attend to the painterly qualities of the authors' styles. Instead, I am concerned with how the painter figure contributes to the complexity of the postcolonial narrative of resistance, as well as how painters and painting remain powerful,

relatively unmolested icons as they travel--mainly through the colonial's formal education--from centre to periphery. It is within this context that I examine any literary representations of paintings in the texts. Thus, if the question being asked in postcolonial studies is, in Gayatri Spivak's terms, "can the subaltern speak?", then one must take into account the question of *how* the subaltern speaks. It is no coincidence that Salman Rushdie's narrator in *The Moor's Last Sigh* peppers descriptions of Aurora Zogoiby's painting "The Scandal" with the verb "Look!" (102). At one level, Rushdie playfully reveals the fallacy of "seeing" the visual within the written. At another, more significant level, "Look!" is an appropriate verbal command or gesture to locate Aurora--a highly public painter whose painting is a woven, picturesque representation of the history of India and her family--in opposition to "irritat[ed] ... critics who objected to such historicizing" in painting (103).[7] As the narrator further comments, "tempers are running high in this painting: as in life" (103).

iv

In his introduction to *Imagined Commonwealths* (1999), T.J. Cribb argues for a revisionist, "responsible" approach to literary criticism, one that is "determin[ed by] the perennially utopian nature of literature's politics, [and] only less determined by the dystopian nature of actual politics" (17). Cribb's agenda is partly to reassert the work being done on new literatures

within the Cambridge Faculty of English that in the 1960s was at the forefront of commonwealth studies. However, despite acknowledging the accuracy of objections to "commonwealth," Cribb claims that the term itself is "intrinsically international," but that it was the critical practice that was suspect (4). The project now is to interrogate the mediation between politics of the art and the critic without rewriting imperialist discourse by privileging English-speaking academics from the centre.

Cribb's desire to reclaim "commonwealth" is a difficult one. As Wole Soyinka notes in *Art, Dialogue, and Outrage*, "words do not lose their meanings, their significations, because of any one ideology" (119). However, as Soyinka also points out, words do "insist on an irreducible condition of humanity even as we prove that such a quality cuts across class, ideology, or history" (119). It is for this reason that I choose the term *postcolonial*, for it problematizes the cluttered terrain of both critical methodologies and the literary works themselves, reflecting the inherent flux in Cribb's "dystopian politics" in a manner that a notion of "imagined commonwealth" cannot. Moreover, I concur with Simon Gikandi that one can devalorize the totalizing claims of postcolonial criticism while still critiquing it as a system of knowledge (*Maps* 6).

However, the merit of Cribb's argument is that there is a comparative element in literary studies that has been ignored, and which seeks knowledge of the other on its own terms.[8] If the postcolonial subject is an increasingly

fractured figure, with the margins as the source of authenticity, what happens when the subject wishes to participate in a universal or transnational community of art and artists? Will the lack of discernibly subversive features signal that an author has moved beyond the seemingly stale rhetoric of the postcolonial, or will it invite, as it has with Naipaul, sceptical criticism of the artist's texts and slanderous questioning of the artist's personal integrity?

I answer these questions with the suggestion that these four texts *share* the fundamental supposition that art, and painting in particular, can, if only briefly, transcend the politics of its production. As well, to counter the rawness of their postcolonial identities, these texts appeal to an idealized persona of the painter figure, rather than an overtly politicized writer figure. For Gikandi, this restoration means that "the task of decolonization must be taken to the metropolis itself; the imperial mythology must be confronted on its home ground" (27). It is my contention that the painter figure provides the material for such a confrontation by both embracing as well as questioning the historicized, Eurocentric template that informs it. Gikandi's "home ground" thus becomes a relative, unstable term, and one that I interpret both literally and figuratively regarding the configuration of the painter figure as a local cultural icon charged with clichés. On the one hand, "home" and "home ground" are presented in the four texts as unfixed, ambiguous spaces, nameable only out of the necessity to determine politically the subject's location. On the other hand, the soil and houses and landlords are the

tangible means by which the artist perceives the world and from which art is created.

The Enigma of Arrival and *Water With Berries* are set in England, and describe reverse voyages of the Caribbean immigrant to the centre. In this sense, they are not necessarily typical inhabitants of their respective homelands. However, the protagonists' immigrant experiences are in part precipitated by the romantic, idealized England of their colonial imaginations, often culled from school textbooks and other institutionalized colonial art practices. These experiences affect their own art, revealing as well the painter figure's destabilizing effect on notions of "centre" and "inspiration" which presuppose the origin of modern painting as a European construct. This effect is funnelled through the realization that "home," as Teeton says in *Water With Berries*, "is where I am" (96). However, creative inspiration is to be found elsewhere, either in Naipaul's narrator's native Trinidad, or Lamming's fictional island of San Cristobal. Each character follows exacting domestic routines to counter the realization that home is a temporary condition not only of the artist, but of the immigrant confined within the decayed centre of a now vanished Empire.

Similarly, the protagonists of *Cat's Eye* and *The Vivisector* reflect an ambiguous, conflictory need to domesticate their spaces to resist the Eurocentric painter stereotype that threatens their creative autonomy. Keenly aware of their stereotypical public images that attach to them as

artists, Elaine Risley in *Cat's Eye*, and Hurtle Duffield in *The Vivisector*, are discriminating about their physical homes, reflecting their countries' histories as settler territories struggling to claim national identities. Thus, their obsession is an ambiguous embracing and denial of the rhetoric of a bourgeois society bent on acquiring metropolitan recognition. Superficially, the larger politics of their success is considered secondary, yet the narratives reveal the inextricable necessity of success for them to continue their art and to maintain their domestic security.

Although I am tempted to organize geographically, as well as racially, these various significations of home--as determined by the novels' settings and authors--there are broader, more complicated issues that undermine such a methodology. I envision this project as a process--as the explication of the emergent postcolonial painter figure as it relates to issues of postcolonial studies--and not as a thematic guide to allegories of nationhood. Therefore, to contextualize further "universalism" and "home," I begin Chapter One, "The Painter as Literary Influence: V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*," by situating Naipaul as a contentious figure in postcolonial studies. At the novel's beginning, the narrator surveys with perplexity the dim, snow-covered English landscape outside his cottage in the Salisbury countryside: "I saw what I saw clearly, but I didn't know what I was looking at" (12).[9] The scene is significant, as the narrator is reluctant to go outside, unable to recognize the "real" landscape because he has "nothing to fit it into" (12). It does not

correspond to his schoolbook images of England, nor his concept of seasonal change in his native Trinidad. Momentarily paralyzed, he symbolically straddles an ambiguous fence between a mythical, remote, yet emotionally charged Empire and what the narrator initially sees as the static condition in Trinidad.

To orient himself amidst this strangeness--what painter Janos Lavin in John Berger's *A Painter of Our Time* (1958) calls England's "unfixed, mysterious, romantic landscape"--Naipaul's narrator turns to imaginative reconstructions of John Constable's landscape paintings and Giorgio de Chirico's painting "The Enigma of Arrival" (93). What has angered Naipaul's critics is his supposed admiration for the British literary tradition that inevitably reinscribes the colonial other, detailed in the narrator's lush descriptions of the English landscape, then contrasted to the creative deprivation he suffered in Trinidad. However, this is a superficial reading of Naipaul's relationship to the centre and it does not take into account that Naipaul is equally as fascinated with the centre's decay and bankruptcy as he is with its power and permanence. Therefore, I believe that *The Enigma of Arrival* offers a more introspective, though somewhat accommodating position on the postcolonial subject's relationship with the colonizer. For the narrator as global rather than local subject, the painter figures of de Chirico and Constable interrogate problems of influence and tradition by painting a

fluctuating, mythical world of art that the narrator, as an artist himself, can also see in the equally fluctuating English landscape.

To assess further the characterization of the painter figure in postcolonial fiction, Chapter Two, "The Painter as Commodity: Patrick White's *The Vivisector*," explores the relationship between nationalism and art. I begin by considering the painter Hurtle Duffield as an archetype of the artist figure with distinctly Romantic aesthetic ideals. However, this seemingly universal figure is repeatedly disrupted by an emergent middle class that seeks to profit from Hurtle's success. On reviewing the text closely, it appears to me that Hurtle--who is bought and sold in his childhood--allows White to reveal Hurtle, not his paintings, to be the *object d'art* in *The Vivisector*. There is no indication that Hurtle is a good or even a great painter. Instead, he is literally bought and sold because of his value to Australian culture and not because of his intrinsic artistic merits, a theme initiated early in the text when Hurtle is sold by his parents to the wealthy Courtneys who wish " to discover a genius" (*Vivisector* 62). Consequently, my position differs from other White critics who have focused on Hurtle's work, not Hurtle himself, as the locus for debates on the Romantic in *The Vivisector*. Missing from such arguments is Hurtle as a parodic, ambiguous character who both invites, and disturbs, claims to the painter's desire for creative autonomy, an autonomy that I will also explore in relation to White himself and his autobiography *Flaws in the Glass*.

By *The Vivisector*'s conclusion, the novel represents the painter as a domestic figure who cherishes his financial security and property, values that are seemingly at odds with Hurtle's pursuit of artistic purity. Thus, Hurtle's character not only ironically contrasts the bourgeois powers that control the circulation of his art and eventually claim him as a national icon, it rejects the ahistorical ideal upon which his status as a painter is premised. Within the context of this thesis, then, *The Vivisector* illustrates key issues of agency and the negotiation of a viable postcolonial artist figure.

The next chapter, "A Career Not Exactly Real: Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*," addresses issues of gender as well as the national notoriety of the painter figure. In its haste to fashion a tradition of art and culture and thus become a global presence, Canada, and in particular Toronto, rapidly and indiscriminately constructs edifices such as art galleries and museums, and then surrounds them with urban and suburban sprawl. Similar to Hurtle Duffield, Elaine, as both a citizen and artistic representative of this "new" culture, is a conflictive, ambiguous character who mocks the very commodity that she has become; in Kiberd's analogy of tradition and nationalism, Elaine as icon is a foil to a "narcissistic," stagnant society that effectively loses "its power to challenge and disrupt" (294).

To detail Elaine's ambiguity, I examine how Atwood contrasts the significations of Empire, particularly through Elaine's art education, to the images of home and the "bush myth" of Canada. Elaine is represented as

"different," both as a representative of the dangerous northern Ontario wilderness, and as a female painter in a predominately masculine field. Although her education attempts to contain this wildness, Elaine emerges as an angry figure who finds creativity within this homogenous, repressive state. Moreover, Elaine and her family are a disruptive presence on the uniform, conformist, suburban landscape, refusing to dress "properly" or trim their home with a picket fence and a manicured lawn.

The final chapter of this project, "Painting as Political Statement: George Lamming's *Water With Berries*," counters the optimistic possibilities of the postcolonial artist, although I do not read it as necessarily bleak, but as an examination of the "criminal," asocial element often associated with the painter figure. Threatened physically and creatively in both London and San Cristobal, Teeton chooses to abandon painting and become a terrorist.[10] The novel makes it clear that political forces determine his creative actions, and to submit to these forces is to produce false or inauthentic art, even as Lamming acknowledges the inseparability of art and politics. By examining these explicit acts of aggression, I also demonstrate how the independence of San Cristobal effectively signals the transfer of influence from Britain to the United States. This neo-imperialism is of particular anxiety to the postcolonial artist's autonomy when he is hailed as a hero of independence, and when art is more than metaphorically armed.

v

This project complicates the assumptions about the postcolonial subject as necessarily seeking to resist the influence of Empire. As a title, *Vivisectors and the Vivisected: The Painter Figure in the Postcolonial Novel* is inherently ironic, and the topic is an uncomfortable one. As the texts seek new ways of defining the artist as postcolonial subject, the postcolonial painter figure simultaneously becomes both emblematic of a desire for romantic freedom and artistic autonomy, and a parody of this unattainable ideal. Thus, they all acknowledge the complicit nature of artistic practice within the margins, yet confront the centre without diluting their enabling difference.

Notes

[1] Among these four texts, only *The Enigma of Arrival* does not have a painter as its protagonist. However, as I will demonstrate, the painter figure is important to the text.

[2] Parry refers only to liberalist, metropolitan critics in general. However, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's guide to postcolonial theory *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 1989), has become a frequent target for scholars who agree with Parry's position. Chidi Okonkwo in *Decolonization Agnostics in Postcolonial Fiction* is particularly blunt, calling the book a "denial of history through linguistic disruption" (3).

[3] See chapter four of Gayatri Spivak's book, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason.* London: Harvard UP, 1999, and Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture.* New York: Routledge, 1994.

[4] The most recent book which privileges the artist as writer is Jean-Pierre Durix's *The Writer Written: The Artist and Creation in the New Literatures in English* (New York: Greenwood, 1987). In his analysis of White's *The Vivisector*, Durix negates the painter's specificity by claiming that Hurtle is the persona of White the writer as frustrated painter.

[5] These features take many forms, most obviously in their representation of the painter as an asocial, creative genius (an other not only by virtue of his or her colonial status) but, more importantly, by his or her distaste and distrust

of his or her own culture, and which he seeks to interrogate by participating in a larger, more universal tradition of painters and painting. For example, each text engages at some level with the idea of the gallery opening or the politics of art as commodity, revealing a distaste for what Teeton calls in *Water With Berries* the parasitic "vultures" of creative production (113).

[6] Literary pictorialism implies an overlap in style whereby the linguistic formation of images is translatable into a recognizable image of a painting (as outlined in Jean Hagstrum's *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). More recent studies of pictorial analysis are still concerned with defining connections between a specific literary work and the painterly influences upon it (for example, see Jeffrey Meyers' *Painting and the Novel*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1975; and Marianna Torgovnick's *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985). However, there is important work being done on the anthropomorphic in visual images, especially maps, which I use to complement my discussion on the maps in Teeton's room in *Water With Berries* (see Claude Gandelman. *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts*. Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1991).

[7] In a similar moment of ambivalence, the painter Gregorias laughs at the poet in Derek Walcott's poem, *Another Life*: "'Your poetry is too full of spiders, / bones, worms, ants, things eating up each other, / I can't read it. Look!'" (64).

[8] Soyinka is included in Cribb's collection, along with Ben Okri and Wilson Harris, for his interest in modes of communication across borders. Appropriately, Soyinka's essay, "Child at the Frontier," begins with the image of the traveler attempting to negotiate the real, physical borders between countries while smuggling dangerous or subversive "contraband," revealed to be the writer himself (29).

[9] The narrator's beginning is not uncommon to fictional depictions of the immigrant experience, most notably Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoner*, which begins, "one grim winter evening ... with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if it is not London at all but some strange place on another planet" (7). In both texts, it as though the weather hides the "real" landscape underneath. For the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival*, there is the further assumption that if he waits then the recognizable will eventually appear, but it never does--at least not in the sense he originally imagines.

[10] To highlight the equally political acts of Teeton as painter, I define "terrorist" as someone who uses violence to achieve his or her political ends.

The Painter as Literary Influence:

V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*

> Under the intensity of creative experimentation (the situation and challenge of artists' practice) each work asks itself (and therefore us too) whether there might not be a "place" where culture has not yet reached; it hopes to be that "place"--an elsewhere that is not yet a place on culture's terms.
>
> Michael Phillipson, "Managing 'Tradition'"

> The essential objectivity or life of art resides ... not ... in the given historical prejudices of the artist ... but in what is virtually intuitive or subconscious terrain that may acquire its conscious application later in the extensive body or development of the artist's work.
>
> Wilson Harris, "Continuity and Discontinuity"

Unlike the other three texts examined in this thesis, V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* does not have a painter as its protagonist, nor is the plot specifically about painting. However, *The Enigma of Arrival*'s inclusion in this thesis is an important one: the novel contains as many as eighty-eight

references and allusions to art and literature, including seven references to painters and painting.[1] Furthermore, many of these references are to art of European origin, and many of them speak nostalgically of the painter figure.

These numbers are significant, not simply because Naipaul is a major novelist, but also because the painter figure is instrumental in Naipaul's complex response to the notion of the postcolonial subject as outsider. In particular, *The Enigma of Arrival*'s references to two painters, the English landscape painter John Constable, and the surrealist painter Giorgio de Chirico and his painting "The Enigma of Arrival," establish a thematic position consistent with the other texts in this thesis: the Eurocentric image of the painter figure and how it both confines and enables creativity within a postcolonial context.

These numerous references to the painter figure provide new insights into the criticism Naipaul receives regarding his admiration and appropriation of a British literary tradition. The influence of this tradition on Naipaul's texts has been well documented by scholars, mainly to emphasize Naipaul's strained relationship with his Trinidadian roots and his contention that the postcolonial writer is consigned to mimicry of the metropolitan centre.

The Enigma of Arrival, however, offers a more introspective, accommodating position on the postcolonial subject's relationship with the colonizer. As Rob Nixon comments in *London Calling* (1992), long overdue is

a serious examination "of the disparity between the energetically defended image of Naipaul as one of history's rejects, someone condemned to concentrated alienation, and his standing as one of the most lionized writers resident in England" (26). I agree with Nixon's statement, and I will focus on what Nixon himself has neglected in his own examination of *The Enigma of Arrival*: the role of the painter figure in relation to Naipaul's paradoxical persona as a displaced wanderer and knighted British citizen. Furthermore, I will examine the ways in which Naipaul's fascination with painting and painters is decidedly different from his interest in English literature. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the narrator does not appropriate the painter figure to suit his own political purposes. Rather, he interrogates its nuanced, mythical history to reveal the complexity of his position in relation to the English countryside.

Flux and Change

In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the narrator contrasts his early life (up to the age of eighteen) as a colonial subject of Indian descent in Trinidad to his later life as a confirmed metropolitan writer in London (where he lives from 1950 to 1970). Both positions seemingly mark the narrator as an interloper on the setting's post-imperial English countryside. At times, the narrator seems painfully awkward and out of place in his little cottage on the grounds of the grand but decaying Wiltshire manor where he has spent the past twelve years

(approximately 1970 to 1982). He claims that neither his colonial, nor metropolitan, nor artistic background has quite prepared him for living in the Salisbury county rural manor cottage: "I [was an] oddity in its grounds. I felt unanchored and strange" (*Enigma* 19). As a result, *The Enigma of Arrival* often has a melancholy tone, as though the narrator is saddened that the manor has lost its former sheen as an Empire, and that the surrounding countryside is not the pastoral ideal he had imagined.[2]

I will argue that the narrator repeatedly returns to painters and paintings of a larger European artistic tradition, not only to recall the pastoral English landscape he absorbed as a child from books and pictures, but also to include himself in a history of creativity that has been partly fed by this same landscape. Naipaul has been criticized for his overt appreciation of European aesthetics. Although Naipaul does employ the European painter as an artistic archetype for the narrator's own life, Naipaul also reveals the tenuousness of the narrator's idealized British tradition of art. Rather than lamenting this tenuousness, however, the text suggests this is a process of change rather than decay.

It is this change or flux that is at the centre of *The Enigma of Arrival.* In "Managing 'Tradition" (1995), Michael Phillipson claims that at the core of art is its ability to challenge the assumptions of culture, even as it hopes to find a "place" that exists outside or beyond this culture and not be subject to its institutional terms:

> [The] hope of offering that "other" place is stubborn; artists cling to it, for it re-marks the libidinal intensity of their own relation to the Tradition of art. The search for difference seeks the unruly in order to undo, however temporarily, that which the culture takes for granted as representable. (203)

The Enigma of Arrival provides a particular challenge to Phillipson's statement. Critics of Naipaul's books have objected to Naipaul's attachment to a European tradition of art. Naipaul appears to believe, however, that he first needs a tradition to inform his art before he can make any "unruly" attempt to challenge it. He has shown elsewhere an acute awareness of "the cultural and imaginative needs" of society, and *The Enigma of Arrival* unsettles the notion that his colonial background precludes him from participating in it ("Universal" 22). My examination of *The Enigma of Arrival* will first outline the definitions of art and tradition as they have surfaced in the criticism of Naipaul and his texts. Also under scrutiny is Naipaul's critical notion of a "universal civilization" of art that is played out in *The Enigma of Arrival.* It is this paradox of the narrator explaining both his difference and his right to belong that has led to the polarity of critical positions: the liberal humanists who see Naipaul as either a universal spokesman, or postcolonial critics who see him as a British sycophant. Augmenting this controversy is Naipaul's connection to Joseph Conrad, a

writer that seemingly also exists outside the English tradition, yet is considered representative of it.

I will also examine the novel's references to the paintings of John Constable, particularly the painting "Salisbury Cathedral." Initially, the narrator compares his colonial vision of the English countryside to this painting because it seemingly renders a more than realistic portrait of the narrator's environment. However, the narrator sees this position as stagnant. As a result, the painting becomes a starting point for the deconstruction of both the symbolic, misty cloak of imperialism that obscured the narrator's vision when he sees the snow on the ground outside his cottage, and of a tradition and landscape that he now sees as still vibrant, and capable of being described.

The primary focus of this chapter will be de Chirico's painting "The Enigma of Arrival" (a detail is reproduced on the cover of the 1987 Penguin edition of the text and the jacket of the original Viking hardcover edition). For the narrator, the mythology surrounding de Chirico and his fragmented, rootless life, creatively rendered in his "Enigma" painting, invokes a notion of place and home that is characterized by isolation and anxiety. Shashi Kamra (1990) suggests that the narrator "see[s] a certain ironical reflection of his own situation in ["Enigma"]" (171). This is a true, but understated description of the narrator's investment in the painting. It is not, as Richard Kelly (1989) has intimated, an image that provides a reliable or exact parable

for the structural basis of the novel (156). Rather, within "Enigma" (and between "Enigma" and the Constable paintings) lies a structural basis that will connect the narrator's postcolonial life with the life of a painter who is also an outsider--a man whose art functions on a mythical level that both contains and escapes history. The narrator believes that the "Enigma" painting captures a creative moment that he himself attempts to achieve in his own writing: to see something as new and original, yet unsettling. Furthermore, this moment of anxiety rendered in the paintings remains unsettling, and speaks "of desolation and mystery" (*Enigma* 91-92).

The narrator's appropriation of this mythology through "Enigma" indicates two central ideas in *The Enigma of Arrival*: first, that "home" is transient, and that "arrival" is a moment of apprehension and uneasiness, even after twelve years of residence; second, the narrator's creative interpretation of de Chirico's "Enigma" painting is dependent upon this apprehension and uneasiness.

Finally, I will examine the narrator's relationship with his landlord. The narrator's interest in their relationship is "not [tied to a perception] of imperial decline ... [but] the historical chain that had brought [them] together" (53). The sentimental landlord is presented as an Orientalist, a poet, and an illustrator. It appears, then, *both* the landlord and the narrator have entered into a contract based on their tenancy agreement, their creativity, and their imperial connections. However, the narrator is not the

exotic racial and literary curiosity the landlord believes him to be. Instead, the narrator considers himself as a living, visible presence at the manor. He believes that he, like the landlord, is able to appreciate and marry the manor's history with its current state as a remnant of empire.

Naipaul's Universal Civilization

If Naipaul has been accused of admiring a European artistic tradition at the expense of his Caribbean roots, it is a position not entirely of his own making. Until recently, the prevalent interpretation of Naipaul and his work was that of the nationless outsider who has brilliantly mastered the English literary language. Now, most scholars question such humanist and romantic claims. However, both assessments ignore what tradition and art mean to Naipaul. In "Our Universal Civilization," Naipaul writes that "I was traveling from the periphery, the margin, to what to me was the center; and it was my hope that, at the center, room would be made for me" (22). Naipaul claims that his decision to live and write in London was a practical one, in that it had a "commercial organization" and a desire for new creative "stimuli" that was unavailable in 1950s Trinidad (22). It is a conviction repeated by the narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival* who realizes that his "literary life ... was to be elsewhere" (*Enigma* 108). In *Cat's Eye*, this sentiment is shared by Elaine, who understands that she has to stay connected to Toronto professionally or she "will drown" (14).

Beyond this practicality, however, is Naipaul's belief that Europe, despite the violence of its colonizing past, has given way to what he calls the "universal civilization" ("Universal" 22). This civilization is rooted in Europe's accommodation of intellectual and creative difference, and, according to Naipaul, avoids the political: "It is an elastic idea; it fits all men. It implies a certain kind of society, a certain kind of awakened spirit" (25). In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the narrator also has an "awakening" of creativity, inspired by the de Chirico painting (a point I will discuss later in this chapter) and the fact that the "idea of an unchanging life was wrong" (*Enigma* 34). The artist may be a marginalized figure, but to be an artist is also to be in an enabling position because the artist is not bound merely by politics and tradition, but encouraged and challenged by creative precedent. However, whether a civilization can fit "all men" is questionable, and for Naipaul his interest in this civilization came after his writing provided the financial freedom to live in this centre. Also, Naipaul's "universal civilization" is at the expense of countries which are not interested in, and do not share, a European tradition of art.

Naipaul's position has continued to generate controversy among scholars. In his analysis of Naipaul's *Guerrillas* (1984), Victor Ramraj (1984) concludes that "Naipaul's is a cosmopolitan, internationalist consciousness, which surveys encompassingly the human condition, not restrictively the political, the racial or the national" (196). Other scholars have not been as

willing to acknowledge Naipaul's vision of an expanding creative space, or overlook the possibility that it rhetorically reinscribes humanist values that reflect Naipaul's own creative agenda. In particular, Derek Walcott and Selwyn Cudjoe see Naipaul's universalism as idealistic. Walcott, in his 1987 review of *The Enigma of Arrival*, states that "the myth of Naipaul as a phenomenon, as a singular, contradictory genius who survived the cane fields and the bush at great cost, has long been a farce" (30). He also claims that Naipaul, now comfortably writing from the centre, maintains this position by reinscribing a fear of the other. In other words, he shares the centre's paternalistic approach to countries like Trinidad and represents them as intellectually and artistically underdeveloped. However, Walcott moves beyond Naipaul's text to criticize Naipaul personally, and mistakenly assumes that Naipaul and his narrator are one and the same.

Paul Theroux also attacks Naipaul personally. His 1972 book, *V.S. Naipaul: An Introduction to his Work*, was the first complete study of Naipaul, and it declared Naipaul's texts completely original and void of literary influence: "Naipaul is the first of his line, without a tradition, or a home" (76). Theroux's exuberance, however, gives way to disillusionment in *Sir Vidia's Shadow* (1998), his account of his twenty-five year friendship with Naipaul. Of *The Enigma of Arrival*, Theroux now writes that he could "never enter" this ponderous narrative (293). Instead, he concurs with Walcott's position that Naipaul's universalism is elitist and racist, and ends his account with a

disturbing, racist characterization of Naipaul as a frightened Indian on the streets of London who skulks in fear of a beating from white street thugs.[3]

Critics of Naipaul, however, generally do agree that he is "our finest writer of the English sentence" (Walcott 1987, 28). Here, Walcott's use of the word "our" raises an important point: Walcott is, rightly, separating the writer from the man, his public persona, something Theroux is incapable of doing. But Walcott, like Cudjoe and Theroux, has difficulty separating Naipaul from his characters, and repeatedly turns to a reductivist position, and assume that each text is only a variant of the ideological position of the previous one.

I approach these issues by turning to Naipaul's most frequently cited artistic double, as evident from writings by both critics and Naipaul himself: Joseph Conrad. Initially, this appears to be an obvious choice for Naipaul, as Nixon suggests: "As a displaced writer, and immigrant, an international wanderer turned Englishman ... Conrad has provided Naipaul with his most direct point of entry into mainstream British literature" (88). However, I would qualify Nixon's statement by noting that it is the anxiety of identity arising from Conrad's fiction, not Conrad himself, that interests Naipaul. In his essay "Conrad's Darkness," Naipaul states that in Conrad's best writing, "the writer does not come between his story and the reader" (55). Furthermore, Naipaul believes that "the myths of the great writers usually have to do with their works than their lives" (64). Here, Naipaul sees textual,

not personal, conflicts of identity as the key element for an interrogation of the politics of identity. Although this distinction is debatable, for Naipaul it does return the emphasis or criticism to his texts where he believes it belongs. It is a position repeated in *Cat's Eye*, as Elaine is inspired by paintings "that seem to exist on their own accord" (346).[4]

In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul further problematizes his connection to Conrad and a British literary tradition by demonstrating that Conrad's texts are historically specific to Conrad's own experience. Chinua Achebe, however, is not convinced of this. His assertion that Conrad is a "bloody racist" ("Image" 9) parallels his criticism of Naipaul, in that Achebe feels Naipaul's texts also reinscribe the comforting, racist myths of the colonizer ("Viewpoint" 13). Achebe's stance has not changed since the publication of *The Enigma of Arrival*, and he continues to argue that the presence of these writers in academic curriculums not only ensconce them in the British literary tradition, they also perpetuate colonialism and racism. Certainly some of the more controversial lines in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* appear to support Achebe's claims. In particular, Marlow justifies imperialism by appealing to the "idea" of it, not its practical enforcement: "The conquest of the earth ... is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; an unselfish belief in the idea" (21). In a seemingly similar passage in *The Enigma of Arrival*, Marlow's "belief in the idea" of a conquering European

civilization becomes a refrain for the narrator's initial faith in the "high idea of the nobility of [his] calling" as a writer in English (*Enigma* 103).

However, the narrator does submit to the "sentimental pretence" that Marlow admonishes, and undermines the security of the tradition behind the writerly profession. The narrator has so many pre-conceived "ideas"--of landscape (*Enigma* 15, 80, 52, 170), British history (50), race (108) and British culture (118, 119, 134)--to name just a few, that the trope, the "idea," finally collapses. For the narrator, the "idea" becomes "a curse," as imitation and idolatry of a specific cultural legacy renders his own work powerless (26). From this, I conclude that Achebe's criticism fails to see that Naipaul's metropolitanism is not the same as reinscribing colonialism. Instead, Naipaul is interested in the aura that surrounds Conrad through his writing rather than his public image--the artist as creative genius whose work is the subject of controversy, not the artist himself. Furthermore, the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* distances himself from Conrad's own relationship to the British literary tradition. Specifically, Naipaul reconsiders the narrator's identity in a European tradition of *art* that reflects his anxiety of arrival in a larger, more culturally diverse and sophisticated world than the one that Conrad confronted.

Naipaul and Constable

In his essay "Continuity and Discontinuity" (1970), Wilson Harris explains that "it takes a particular kind of mind ... to perceive both sides of the coin in his lifetime, namely, the wall of prejudice and the intimate phenomenal resources for divergence" (177). For the narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival*, his interpretation of the Waldenshaw manor and its surrounding landscape is initially marked by a limited, narrow vision shaped by the Britain of his colonial imagination. However, as I will argue below, within this country setting the narrator recognizes "resources for divergence" in his colonial upbringing.

As a way to marry English landscape as the narrator envisioned it would be, and the troubling way he sees it upon his initial arrival, the narrator recalls John Constable's "Salisbury Cathedral." The narrator's reference to the Constable painting is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the painting is a visual referent for both the narrator and the reader, who also may be unfamiliar with the setting. Second, it establishes the thematic direction of the "Jack's Garden" chapter--the narrator's colonial background as it intersects with rural England. Finally, it begins the narrator's association with the European tradition of art and painters in order to assert his own place as an artist.

As the narrator recalls his first four days at the Waldenshaw manor, he attempts to survey his environment through the constant mist and rain.

Although he has been living in England for twenty years, he has been in London, and the countryside near the town of Salisbury is strange and new, and serves to emphasize his solitude, and his anxiety "about [his] work and this move to a new place" (*Enigma* 12). In contrast to Teeton in *Water With Berries*, the narrator's move to a rural setting is an unusual one. As I will discuss in the Lamming chapter, the immigrant usually confronts an urban environment, and often his first encounter with English life is with a landlord and a rooming house. In this rural setting, the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* does not know how he should interpret it since he seems to have no point of reference: "I saw what I saw very clearly. But I didn't know what I was looking at" (12).

For visual direction, the narrator defers to the image of Constable's painting, "Salisbury Cathedral." He remembers it as a beautiful painting, even though he only saw it in a grade school reader as a poor reproduction:

> It was Salisbury. It was almost the first English town I had got to know, the first I had been given some idea of, from the reproduction of the Constable painting of Salisbury Cathedral in my third-standard reader. Far away in my tropical island [Trinidad], before I was ten. A four-colour reproduction which I had thought the most beautiful picture I had ever seen. (12)

The "Salisbury Cathedral" painting provides a seemingly recognizable portrait of the English landscape that the narrator believes exists outside his

cottage (Salisbury was the narrator's final train stop from London, his previous place of residence, before he made his way by taxi to the cottage itself a few kilometres away).[5] Like Elaine in *Cat's Eye* who is fascinated by her school reader's suburban images that were not "anything like [her] life" (*Cat's Eye* 30), the narrator is taught to look beyond Trinidad for images of beauty. Furthermore, he considers the painting a realistic visual representation of Salisbury, and therefore knowable, and unlike the real landscape which still exists as an "idea" only. Not only does the painting give colour to an unexpectedly colourless setting of wet snow on the ground, it also provides a sense of place for a man who claims he is not entirely sure where he is.

The narrator's observation also ironically contrasts the common, stereotypical associations between colour and landscape usually reserved for tropical countries like the narrator's Trinidad. Similar to the Old Dowager in *Water With Berries*, who envisions San Cristobal as a cascade of blues and yellows, *The Enigma of Arrival*'s narrator equates the coloured reproduction of Salisbury with beauty. Again, a reproduction supplants the real. However, in *The Enigma of Arrival* this disparity of experience emphasizes the narrator's colonial upbringing; even as the narrator looks at the meadow firsthand, he cannot properly see it because it does not match his recollection of the reproduction.

Here, I wish to clarify the narrator's vision of the landscape by suggesting that the Constable painting simply titled "Salisbury Cathedral" is not likely the one the narrator is referring to, although it is likely the one in his memory and contributes to his anxiety of place. There are at least ten Constable paintings of Salisbury Cathedral.[6] There are also numerous versions of each title, all composed between 1820 and 1825. "Salisbury Cathedral" is a small 7 1/2 by 11 oil on paper, unlike the others which are much larger oil paintings on canvases. "Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds" (hereafter referred to as "Bishop's Grounds") is the painting most likely to have been reproduced in the narrator's third-standard reader.[7] It is the one painting that has come to represent all the other paintings in the series. The seven hundred year-old church is in the middle distance, centred between two great trees (probably elms) which form their own cathedral-like arch through which the viewer sees the church. Directly beneath the arch are four cows, milling about some murky water. As well, the arched trees of the painting form yet another entrance, seemingly to the grounds of the church itself.

This entrance is important, particularly in relation to the theme of the narrator as arrivant. He may have lived in England for twenty years at this point, but he still feels "the rawness of response ... felt [his] strangeness, [his] solitude" (13). To step metaphorically through the archway does not offer him what he believes is the native Englander's sense of place. Instead, the

entranceway marks yet another beginning of the narrator's description of his colonial experience as it meets the European tradition. Kelly, in his book *V.S. Naipaul* (1989), notes that the Constable painting as described in *The Enigma of Arrival* "gives one the illusion of knowing a place, but the artist's vision is a distortion, a fantasy out of which everyone could construct his own world" (157). I agree that the painting seen in childhood does give the colonial narrator cause for distortion, but it also prompts the narrator in his rural setting to deconstruct his colonial world and begin to know his immediate, physical surroundings; to tear at what the narrator calls the "old scab" of his difference prompted by his stay in London (*Enigma* 13).

Constable's painting remains static in the narrator's mind for decades until the narrator begins to explore tangibly his environment, yet it still speaks of the narrator's anticipation. The scene is not unlike one in John Fowles *The Ebony Tower*, in which the protagonist David Williams drives through the French countryside to interview the painter Breasley. The landscape reminds David of its influence on Breasley's painting, and he concludes that "no amount of reading and intelligent deduction could supplant the direct experience. Well before he arrived, [he] knew he had not wasted his journey" (4).

In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the Constable painting develops a sense of place, rather than a specific location. This sense of place also reminds the reader that *The Enigma of Arrival* is a fictional reconstruction of the English

setting, imagined through paintings and literature. Geographically, the manor is not in Salisbury proper, but near the village of Waldenshaw, and the cathedral's spire is not visible from this distance. However, in *The Enigma of Arrival*, the Salisbury paintings provide various angles of the church and the rural life around it, thus reflecting what the narrator believes he will see when the mist finally clears and he can begin to explore: "I knew that the house I had come to was in one of the river valleys near Salisbury ... and when the rain stopped and the mist lifted ... I went out one day looking for the walk and the view" (*Enigma* 12-13). However, the narrator is now aware that what he will see cannot be what he has expected from pictures. The image has already been distorted, both by his difference, and by the real landscape's own refusal to conform to the image prepared for him by Constable. As the painter Janos Lavin comments in Berger's *A Painter of Our Time*, the English countryside "is essentially an unfixed, mysterious landscape ... What you see of the English landscape is like a garment on a torso that is constantly moving" (95).

Literally passing through what I have described as Constable's metaphorical entrance, the narrator comes to know every detail of the manor, and from these walks he learns that there are two paths that lead to the cottage from the public road: "Two ways to the cottage. Different ways: one was very old, and one was new" (*Enigma* 13). These paths function as figures for the narrator's journey as an artist in his own right, as well as his acknowledgement that his colonial past must be integrated, and not rejected;

his first impression of the landscape as formed by the "Bishop's Grounds" is a basis for revision and inclusion rather than abandonment: "I felt that my presence in that old valley was ... a change in the course of the history of the country" (19). It is a remarkable and bold claim, as the narrator asserts his presence in the landscape while, ironically, the familiar images such "the cow-sheds and dairy buildings beyond the churchyard were being pulled down" (53).

This emphasis on "presence" may explain why the chapter "Jack's Garden" is focused on the narrator's desire to see the landscape with his own eyes. As he walks the paths he punctuates tactile experiences with exclamation points, and notes with delight the smell and feel of the damp rural ground, including the sections that surround the decayed remains of an abandoned house that once fit into the country that Constable saw (17). All these experiences are intriguing, even as he notes with irony the decaying state of his surroundings.

Naipaul's narrator returns to Constable in the chapter entitled "Ivy." However, now the reference is to the painting "Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows," and it places the narrator on the other side of the treed entrance of "Bishop's Grounds." The cathedral in "Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows" is off in the distance, dark and obscured by the shadows of trees and cloud. In the foreground is a team of horses, drinking from the water after a day's work while the driver waits in the pullcart. In addition, there are

numerous tree stumps running along the bottom of the painting--signs of work and development as the figures appear to be building a road by the meadow.

In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the road by the meadow is now paved, running down from a steep hill, yet the scene still reminds the narrator of the Constable painting. Although the narrator appears more comfortable on the manor grounds, he still is an outsider who works from a distance:

> Just in this way now the water meadows had the effect (in one corner of the mind) of abolishing the distance between Constable and the present: the painter, the man with his colours and brushes and boards, seemed as near and contemporary as what he made us now see: the water channels and pollarded willows he had settled down one day to paint. This idea of the painter, this glimpse of the painter's view, made the past ordinary. The past was like something one could stretch out and reach; it was like something physically before one, like something one could walk in. (170)

The narrator would like to believe he *is* "walking in [to]" the landscapes of Constable that began with the painting "Bishop's Grounds." He has found the walk and the view he was looking for in the first days following his arrival. However, this passage also indicates that only his misunderstanding or mis-seeing renders the past "ordinary." The narrator can only "abolish the distance between Constable and the present" by qualifying the painting and the past: it "seemed near," and was "like something" tangible. He does this

by picturing Constable sitting at his easel and imagining he is seeing the same scene (or the "effect" of the same scene) as the painter. The meadows, the trees, and the river have not changed very much, and they in turn "abolish the distance" between the vision of the painter and the vision of the writer. For the narrator detailing his own version of the "landscape," Constable now is both the idealized figure who produced the painting seen in the narrator's youth, and the narrator's contemporary.

But the relationship is also an identification with the painter as a representative of a changeable tradition. Constable was the last practitioner of a style inherited from the Dutch landscape masters of the 17th century. Biographer Malcolm Cormack (1986) notes that Constable's regional landscapes were considered a deviation from painters such as John Turner who painted in varied locations (53). Constable was not a traveler, and preferred to paint scenes in and around his home in the Suffolk area. Paradoxically, then, Constable differs from the narrator, whose very identity is connected to leaving and arriving. However, Constable was also a man of solitude who shunned company and rarely painted portraits even though they would provide income (although he was not averse to borrowing money from his affluent parents). His obsession with landscape painting, the single-minded creative purpose that alienated him from society and granted him little success as a painter, contributes to the modern claim that he is one of the great English landscape painters of the 19th century (Murray 63). From

this inclusion in the painting tradition emerges a stereotype which anticipates the narrator's romantic image of Constable the painter at his easel. The narrator calls this image an "idea of the painter" implying that the "idea" of Constable is more real than Constable himself.

If the narrator imagines Constable at his easel, then the past becomes "ordinary" not because Constable paints ordinary scenes of rural life and landscape, but because he pays attention to details the narrator can also notice. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the pollarded willows and the water channels have changed, but only slightly. The narrator contributes to this scene by noting that the century-old beech trees now line a paved road, their new leaves hanging over the asphalt. He also ironically notes that "this was the scenic drive the taxi-drivers of the town took visitors along" (*Enigma* 170). The stereotyped tourists, themselves implicated in this myth-making because they view the centuries-old landscape nostalgically, briefly alleviate the narrator's own anxiety about his alienation from the landscape. The result is the narrator's assertion that Constable "had imposed his vision on an old landscape, but on [Constable's] vision was imposed something else now, a modern picturesque" (170).

Here, I believe Naipaul is using the original 18th-century meaning of "picturesque": "a landscape that looks as though it came straight out of a picture" (Murray 1959; 249). The "modern" picturesque, however, is the vision of the narrator. He fashions his own interpretation of this piece of land by

including the tourists who literally or unimaginatively snap photographs of the same scene from taxi windows, despite his previous sentimental valorizing of the reproduction in his colonial school reader. On the one hand, the tourists take "pictures" of a landscape because it reminds them of a picture (the scene is a touristed reproduction of a reproduction, similar to the Old Dowager's attempts in *Water With Berries* to freeze Teeton's painting of San Cristobal in a moment of colonial antiquity). On the other hand, the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* is also reminded of a picture, but he does not want to reproduce it in its seemingly pastoral setting. Rather, he wants to integrate it with it modern nuances--nuances which include himself. The scene is a possible ironic reversal of the nineteenth-century picturesque books of India which stereotyped the Indian native for European readers. As Mildred Archer and Ronald Lightbrown discuss in *India Observed* (1982), engravings of costumed natives, accompanied by text, gave "the reader ... in his armchair the sensation of viewing the [Indian] region as a traveller and artist" (79). In these travelbooks, the picturesque is proposed as scientific evidence of place or landscape.

Naipaul and de Chirico

The English countryside of Constable's paintings introduces *The Enigma of Arrival*'s central problem of the narrator as other within the home/landscape of the colonizer. However, it is the de Chirico painting of the

same name as the novel, "The Enigma of Arrival," that articulates further the narrator's sense of dislocation. The narrator finds the reproduction of de Chirico's painting in *The Little Library of Art*, which is tucked away on one of the Waldenshaw cottage shelves. As with the Constable paintings, the narrator initially sees "The Enigma of Arrival" (hereafter referred to as "Enigma") as a painting valid for all time. He is the observer, gazing at a reproduction that may somehow authenticate his experience in England. However, the "Enigma" painting does not, at least outwardly, speak of a European tradition of painting that duplicates the culture and values of the narrator's adopted England. Rather, the "Enigma" painting marks a shift from the exterior landscape in the paintings of Constable to an ambiguous interior landscape that reflects the narrator's own "enigma of arrival." As I have noted, Constable's paintings bear resemblance to an assumed reality of the English landscape that tourists see through the windows of taxis, and which are reproduced in the schoolbooks of the narrator's childhood. The "Enigma" painting, however, offers no recognizable representation of the external. Instead, the painting can be read as an allegory of place and home that speaks of loneliness and anxiety.

In the second paragraph of the chapter "The Journey," the narrator introduces the reproduction of the "Enigma" painting that he finds in his cottage. However, the discovery of the painting is prefaced with a paragraph that explains the necessity of this discovery:

> To write about Jack and his cottage and his garden, it was necessary for me to have lived a second life in the valley and to have had a second awakening to the natural world there. But a version of that story--a version--came to me just days after I came to the valley, to the cottage in the manor grounds. (*Enigma* 91)

The narrator's "second awakening," his vision of the exterior landscape, is only possible after the surrealist de Chirico painting instigates a revision of the interior landscape depicted in part by Constable and a tradition of realist art. As a colonial, his "first life" in the valley is imitated through art (despite the fact that he has lived in England for over twenty years); what he believes to be the "natural world" is a reproduction of what his colonial education has taught him to see. The surrealism of "Enigma," on the other hand, accommodates numerous interpretations. As a result, the narrator speaks of multiple, coextensive narratives--his personal history intertwined with the history of European art, intertwined with the experience of Jack and his garden--all of which are "versions," or interpretations, of his experience as it is enigmatically rendered by de Chirico's painting.

I quote in detail the narrator's discovery of the "Enigma" painting:

> The cottage at that time [days after his arrival] still had the books and some of the furniture of the people who had been there before. Among the books was one that was very small, a

> paperback booklet, smaller in format than the average small paperback and with only a few pages. The booklet, from a series called 'The Little Library of Art', was about the early reproductions of Giorgio de Chirico. There were about a dozen reproductions of his early surrealist paintings. Technically, in these very small reproductions, the paintings did not seem interesting; they seemed flat, facile. And their content was not profound either: arbitrary assemblages, in semi-classical, semi-modern settings, of unrelated motifs--aqueducts, trains, arcades, gloves, fruit, statues--with an occasional applied touch of easy mystery: in one painting, for instance, an over-large shadow of a hidden figure approaching from round a corner. (91)

What is evident in this passage is a critical knowledge of art not apparent in the narrator's descriptions of Constable's work. He repeatedly, forcibly, notes that de Chirico's paintings are reproductions, as if they lack the liveliness of Constable's landscapes, even though they, too, are only reproductions. Examining them with a critical eye, he declares the reproductions "flat" and "facile," and their content "not profound." They are "ordinary," but not in the way Constable's paintings are "ordinary" by virtue of their accessibility. It seems that because de Chirico's paintings do not directly reflect the narrator's colonial status, their content is "arbitrary" and "unrelated." The setting is appropriate for an interrogation of a colonizer/colonized dynamic--the colonial

discovering the book amongst the remnants left by the manor cottage's previous tenants--but the paintings do not visually recall any past or current landscape in the way that the painting "Bishop's Grounds" connects with the narrator's past.

The narrator also says in the above quotation that the de Chirico paintings have "an applied touch of easy mystery," implying that their meaning is interesting, if somewhat strained and unchallenging. For the narrator to see himself in the painting as the "over-large shadow ... approaching from round the corner"--the interloper skulking about the English countryside--is, I think, an obvious interpretation, and his refusal to utter this meaning seems, then, quite significant.

Thus, the narrator's interpretation of the paintings reproduced in the *Little Library* reveal his intellectual and metropolitan visage; that is, the narrator is not a naive colonial gazing uncritically at the picturesque landscape. In spite of his criticisms of the de Chirico painting, he states that the *Little Library* reproductions were "always a surprise" (91). It seems reasonable to conclude that the narrator possibly has seen this painting before, or that he has been studying it at length.

What is Naipaul's intention with this supposedly circumstantial discovery that has such importance to his narrator? As I have noted, Naipaul wants the reader to see the discovery of the painting as yet another, superficial encounter announcing the objective position of the peripheral

colonial. However, I also believe that the narrator's gaze at the reproductions further deconstructs their agency (if they, indeed, as reproductions had any agency to begin with) by showing that de Chirico, unlike Constable, is better positioned to represent the postcolonial subject on Naipaul's universal, global scale. Specifically, de Chirico circulates beyond a European world view to include an orientalist one as well. His paintings, particularly "Enigma," revise mythical settings such as the city and the port to depict the complex, modern alienation of the other.

To illustrate these points further, I will examine the book itself. The de Chirico volume of *The Little Library of Art* series, entitled *De Chirico*, provides an indulgent, romantic, biographical portrait of the painter.[8] Even the First World War cannot interfere with the obsessed, asocial, gifted painter, as Werner Helwig concludes: "And if the painter [de Chirico] has actually been able to banish the first world war from his works, it is because he is faithful to an inner and imperious necessity, from which nothing could deflect him" (3). *De Chirico*, in other words, evokes once more the educational primers of the narrator's childhood that perpetuate the stereotype of the European painter figure. De Chirico's uniqueness, as Helwig describes it, reinforces the grandeur of European art, even as de Chirico ignores the politics of its origins. However, if de Chirico banishes the war from his paintings, it is not because of an "inner necessity," but because his paintings do not contain historical and linear accuracy. Instead, the seemingly random images and motifs in de

Chirico's paintings capture a tragic, melancholy tone, as well as partake from numerous traditions and mythical elements.

These heterogeneous qualities are what interest the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival*, for they parallel his relationship to the ever-changing English landscape. It is little wonder, then, that the narrator has "never once taken a camera on [his] walks," preferring instead to have images "exist only in [his] head" (87). He may acknowledge the fallibility of his colonial gaze, but it is an imaginative process that captures the flux and change of his rural environment (and himself within it) more like a painting than a photograph. As Walter Benjamin notes in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1968), "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (221).[9] "Uniqueness" is a quality determined by its history, whereas the reproduction is lacking "presence in time and space" (220). However, by emphasizing the reproductive quality of "Enigma," the narrator reflects his need to reclaim his vision of the Wiltshire landscape from its postcard qualities--qualities frozen in time--to the tradition which these postcards represented. Teeton, in *Water With Berries*, believes that he must stop painting to counteract this powerful, Eurocentric gaze. Similarly, the narrator of Atwood's *Surfacing* destroys "Random Samples," David and Joe's film project, by exposing the film and "let[ting] it spiral into the lake" (168). The gesture not only symbolizes the

imaginative limitations of pictures and a return from art to real, living nature, but also the death of her father who drowned with his camera around his neck. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul's purpose is not to lament the landscape as it changes or is appropriated, but rather to emphasize his narrator's vision of the landscape which continuously marries images of the old and the new.

This inclusion of self within an evolving landscape of both art and place is further emphasized in the narrator's description of the "Enigma" painting:

> [A]mong these paintings [in *The Little Library of Art*] there was one which, perhaps because of its title, caught my attention: 'The Enigma of Arrival'. I felt that in an indirect, poetical way the title referred to something in my own experience; and later I was to learn that the titles of these surrealist paintings of Chirico's hadn't been given by the painter, but by the poet Apollinaire, who died young in 1918, from influenza following a war wound, to the great grief of Picasso and others. (*Enigma* 91)

The style here is highly allusive and is intertextually rich. The narrator's "discovery" that the paintings' titles were taken from Apollinaire, whose death caused "great grief to Picasso and others," envelope the painting in multiple artistic impulses.[10] It is these personae of cosmopolitan artists that may also attract Naipaul's narrator to the "Enigma" painting and de Chirico.[11] The "Enigma" painting is by no means one of the Eurocentric

representations of reality that the narrator was taught to admire as a child. However, it contains historical resonances that are "real," and these resonances allow Naipaul's narrator to exist in a "tradition" that transcends the colonial implications of living at Wiltshire. By claiming that the painting's title refers in a "poetical way" to his own experience, the narrator attaches an aura to the painting's originality. But if, as the narrator maintains, there is little aesthetic value in "Enigma" itself because it is a series of "arbitrary assemblages" and "unrelated motifs," then where does the "poetical" originate?

My position is that painting's "poetic" value lies in part in the painting's mythical, oriental influences, and what the narrator interprets as a "classical scene, Mediterranean, ancient-Roman" (91). However, before I proceed, I will examine de Chirico's relationship to this tradition, and how it connects to my outline of Naipaul's "universal civilization" earlier in this chapter.

De Chirico believes that cultural autonomy is not only impossible, but inimical to artistic creation. In his *Memoirs* (1962), de Chirico outlines his position:

> With the passage of time and the maturing of a culture, it [art] refines and reduces the primitive images, molds them to the requirements of its clarified spirit, and writes its history flowing from the original myths. A European epoch like ours, which carries within itself the

> overwhelming burden of so many civilizations, and the maturity of so many spiritual periods, is fated to produce an art that ... seems to be one of mythical uneasiness. Such an art arises through the works of those few who are gifted with particular clarity of vision and sensitivity. (449)

In this sense, de Chirico predates Naipaul and his vision of a continuous, but non-lineal history of European art, as well as offering validation for the seeming appropriation of culture for which Naipaul is often strongly criticized. Like Naipaul and his universal civilization, de Chirico is a displaced artist whose "home" lies outside his birthplace, and he invokes a diverse, mythical past to create a sense of belonging in the present. Furthermore, what de Chirico calls Europe's "burden" of history accommodating these multiple civilizations, is reprised--albeit less overtly--in Naipaul's position that civilization should continue to "accommodate all the world's thought" and the "awakened spirit" of creativity ("Universal" 25). If de Chirico's art produces a "mythical uneasiness" in Naipaul's narrator, it is the result of the narrator's desire to include himself in a historical process that sees art as creative moments of disruption as new and original artists are included in this mythical genealogy.[12] It is not a neutral position caused by a blending of culture but, in Theodor Adorno's words, "an ambivalence of aesthetic construction" which seeks creative freedom in what is bound by social order (225).

One, therefore, may begin to see how Naipaul's "indirect" connection with de Chirico takes on broader significance. Naipaul's work finds inspiration in more than de Chirico's "elusive" or "displaced" persona, it provides an entrance to the discourse of myth which ostensibly allows him to move beyond his position as a "reproduced" post-colonial subject and artist and participate in a larger European or modernist artistic arena, as opposed to merely a British literary one.

The parallels between the narrator and de Chirico are emphasized further in the narrator's continued reactions to de Chirico's painting:

> A wharf; in the background, beyond walls and gateways (like cut outs), there is the top of the mast of an antique vessel; on an otherwise deserted street in the foreground there are two figures, both muffled, one perhaps the person who has arrived, the other perhaps a native of the port. The scene is of desolation and mystery; it speaks of the mystery of arrival. (*Enigma* 92)

In an ekphrastical blurring of visual and verbal forms, the narrator sees de Chirico paint the anxiety of arrival while the narrator articulates it in words, refusing the autonomy of the reproduction as it is presented in *The Little Library of Art*. The doors, in the painting visual signs of passage, become symbolic of the narrator's fictional construction of himself as other and his own journeys. As the narrator focuses on the dark, muffled identities of the two figures, he is unsure which is the native and the arrivant. Symbolically, it

could be de Chirico who is the native of this creative port, and the narrator the figure who has just arrived. Also, they could be shrouded Odysseus figures, representing modern revisions of the heroic, displaced wanders, denationalized, without a history, or a centre to call home. However, I believe the narrator's uncertainty signifies the freedom the figures have to choose the direction of their passage. Within this freedom lies the anxiety of what is on the other side of the door. It is this moment of ambivalence that produces, in de Chirico's terms, the narrator's creative sensitivity.

The figures' alienation is emphasized further by another feature of the painting's foreground which the narrator does not mention, the chessboard. The chessboard replaces a realistic presentation of the Italian piazza or public square. Such squares traditionally maintained an important function within Italian society. A gathering place and focal point, they stood as manifestations of the "metaphysical essences," the symbols of place in Italian culture that act as emotional centres (Far 8). By portraying this centre as a shadowy chessboard, de Chirico replaces positive emotions with anxiety and uncertainty, much like the seemingly calm countryside reveals the raw nerves and difference of *The Enigma of Arrival*'s narrator. To the right of the chessboard in the painting stands a darkened area which, if examined closely, is a deep, dark hole. While the triangular shape of this darkened area plays off the triangular section of the chessboard, giving the immediate foreground of the painting an uneasy equilibrium, the pointed shapes, with their

darkened corners, are employed to increase the underlying tone of fear and anxiety. The painting as a whole contains no formal focal point at which the lines of the painting can converge. A painter might say that the "air" of this painting recirculates, resulting in a suffocating or claustrophobic sensation. It is this lack of focus, or suffocation, that the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* seeks in the Constable painting when initially the mist prevents him from seeing the landscape outside the cottage.

Like the figures in de Chirico's painting, the narrator's arrival in the port of London as an idealistic young immigrant was also disorienting. However, while the narrator sees himself in the "Enigma" painting, he also misreads the painting in order to write a story of a voyager who could not be defined by any one period or culture. But unlike his initial interpretation of the "Enigma" as a hodgepodge of images and allusions, the narrator now reaches beyond the painting and "take[s] pointers" from the Bible, Horace, Apuleius, and other classical references to recreate his own "free ride of the imagination" (92). I quote at length:

> My story was to be set in classical times, in the Mediterranean. My narrator would write plainly, without any attempt at period style or historical explanation of his period. He would arrive ... at that classical port with the walls and gateways like cut-outs. He would walk past that muffled figure on the quayside ... to a gateway or a door. He would enter there

> and be swallowed by the life and noise of a crowded city ... At the moment of crisis he would come upon a door ... and find himself back on the quayside of arrival ... He has been saved; the world is as he remembered it. Only one thing is missing now. Above the cut-out walls and buildings there is no mast, no sail. The antique ship has gone. The traveler has lived out his life. (*Enigma* 92)

First, the narrator removes the boat in order to disrupt the conventional pattern of mythical voyages.[13] His use of myth, in other words, leads him to what Cudjoe calls a "confrontation" with history (211). However, it is not to confront what Cudjoe and Achebe see as Naipaul's nostalgic relationship with England.[14] The narrator is not attempting to exist within a self-contained artistic universe. Rather he is forced to acknowledge and re-evaluate, as he has before, his relationship to history and his colonial past, symbolized by the voyager walking past the de Chirico's muffled figure on the quayside to walk through the door. The voyager has arrived at last, but death is also nearby, and no more journeys are possible.

It is in this "crowded city" that the voyager panics and loses his sense of "mission." But this lost mission, like the narrator's initial idealism when he arrives in London, is a positive revision of the story within de Chirico's painting. The city is a place of power and imagination, and although the voyager's life is near its end, this end can only take place by his passing

through another door which is not the one from which he entered. He must find his way through the city, and to find the quayside unchanged when he comes out again would signify lack of growth. There would be no meaningful perspective on a life that has passed.

Here, the essential tenet of the painting--the enigma of arrival--implied in its title is now evoked as a major theme lying beneath the narrator's life. Speaking at once to past and present, "fact" and "fiction," is the following statement from the narrator:

> ... again, years after I had seen the Chirico picture and the idea for the story had come to me, again, in my own life, was another version of the story of "The Enigma of Arrival." (97)

This cyclical process makes the narrator realize that "the calling, the writer's vocation was one that could never offer [him] anything but momentary fulfilment" (97). De Chirico has similar moments with his "Enigma" paintings, and when he returns to look at them "has the strange impression that [he] was looking at these things for the first time ... Nevertheless the moment is an enigma to [him], for it is inexplicable. And [he] also like[s] to call the work which sprang from it an enigma" (*Memoirs* 398). This comment reveals an essential similarity between de Chirico and Naipaul's narrator. The narrator is uneasy with the enigmatic nature of his own work and life, yet this unease is the wellspring of his creativity. Like the characters born of

Naipaul's experiences, the narrator's voyager finds a crowded city, London, which becomes his mythical, enigmatic centre.

There are, however, difficulties with identifying *The Enigma of Arrival*'s narrator with this shrouded figure in his claustrophobic setting. While this merging of myth and history inspired and influenced by "Enigma" may give Naipaul's narrator a unique understanding of his rural environment, it does not make him any more interested in its inhabitants. If myths are more inspiring than reality for de Chirico, then the grounds of Wiltshire provide cover for the narrator's reticence. History intrudes on the self-contained world of art reflected in myth. The narrator is not anxious to meet people on his walks, for they interfere with his imagin[ing] [himself] a man of those bygone times" (*Enigma* 23). On numerous occasions he either outrightly avoids people (26), keeping out of their way either by turning off the path to hide in the landscape, or by abandoning the walk altogether (77). He also lies to a dairy worker about which cottage he lives in (34), and he lies to a woman who asks if he lives in the cottage she lived in as a child (84). Although it is apparent that the narrator sees England as his artistic home, de Chirico's mythical past of European art and artists provides a more accommodating residence. Furthermore, as I will argue below, what the narrator defines as "home" is decidedly different from others who live in and around the manor, particularly the landlord.

The Landlord

If de Chirico's "Enigma" provides the narrator with a means for creative and philosophical confrontation with history, then the narrator's social confrontation" with history is most evident in the curious relationship he has with his landlord. The Wiltshire estate "had been created in part by the wealth of empire," but has since decayed, with only the landlord living in the main house (53). Although the two men never actually meet, the narrator catches glimpses of the elderly, dying man. The first time, the narrator sees him a passenger in the car driven by Mr. Phillips, and the second time, the narrator glimpses the landlord's "fat shining leg" while the landlord is sitting outdoors (192). Through these two sightings, and with some black and white photographs, the narrator assembles an image of the landlord that is in keeping with the nostalgic representation of the manor. Indeed, the narrator has no wish to meet him, for "the personality of [his] landlord was expressed ... by the mystery of the manor and the grounds" (175).

This nostalgic description of the manor, however, is problematized by the narrator's refusal to afford the landlord the same sentimentality. The narrator's interest in their relationship is "not of imperial decline ... [but] the historical chain that had brought [them] together" (53). He is especially interested in the landlord's abilities as an Orientalist, a poet, and an illustrator. Therefore, both the landlord and the narrator are entered into a contract based on their tenancy agreement, their creativity, and their imperial

connections. Still, the narrator claims that the landlord's creativity is the stagnated artistic abilities of his youth; moreover, the landlord's vision is stalled in a "joke knowledge of the world ... fed by the manor and the grounds ... [and] outside England and Europe, a fantasy Africa, a fantasy Peru or India or Malaya" (253). His novel on Africa, written fifty years ago, is a stereotypical meditation on the other, full of latent sexual violence and cannibalism. And the landlord's poetry is a stereotyped version of Indian romance, again full of a sensuality attributed to the other, while his drawings mark an "absence of restlessness and creative abrasion" (254). All three mediums reflect a "complete, untouched, untroubled world ... [that] had turned to morbidity, accidia, a death of the soul" (254). As a result, the narrator believes the landlord cannot leave the manor because it is the only place that allows him to exist in his own world of comforting lies. Like the Old Dowager's house in *Water With Berries*, it has become a symbol of a shrunken empire, as well as a problematic representation of what was often the immigrant's first home--the rooming house.

If the narrator rejects the landlord's sentimentality, these same spiritual and creative defects still allow the narrator "to feel goodwill in his heart for [the landlord]" because the narrator now sees himself, not the landlord, as the keeper of the manor's legacy (175). The narrator's tenancy is not out of economic necessity and confinement--he could afford to purchase his own property if he so desired. Rather, it is a temporary home, creatively

productive in its abrasive proximity to colonial history. The landlord, however, is stranded in a colonial world where, as Harish Trivedi points out in his commentary on the orientalist mind, "one could be patriotically and unproblematically identified with the other" (13). When the landlord has Mrs. Phillips give the narrator his series of poems on Krishna and Shiva, the narrator sees them, in Partha Mitter's terms, as "art appreciation predicated on a universal language of art" (350). Moreover, the narrator remarks on the landlord's paternal instincts and his protection of him and the manor (*Enigma* 174). However, unlike Teeton's fondness for the Old Dowager in *Water With Berries*, the narrator sees this paternalism as comical, and he views Mrs. Phillips as a conduit between the living and the dead: the landlord as decaying relic of a physical empire--represented also by the manor--and hardly any kind of representative of a vast European history of art that transcends the brutality of colonialism.

Furthermore, the narrator is not the racial and literary curiosity as he believes the landlord sees him, asserting an arrogance that is not seen in Teeton. Instead, the narrator envisions himself as a living, visible presence at the manor. He believes that he alone is able to appreciate fully and marry the manor's history with its current state as a remnant of empire. He sees, like de Chirico before him, not only through the eyes of the outsider, but, more importantly, through the eyes of an artist who believes in a very different, more positive universal ideal of art.

Both Fawzia Mustafa (1995; 173-174) and Sara Suleri (1988; 28) have noted that the narrator's indulgent representation of the landlord, which creates an ironic distance between the narrator and the destructive nature of empire, only serves to emphasize Naipaul's complicity in the project. These assertions, however, do not take into account the possibility that Naipaul's artistic interests go beyond the admiration or appropriation of the British literary tradition. He is interested in a broader representation of art and artists. As I have noted, Naipaul's narrator claims that "men need history; it helps them to have an idea of who they are" (*Enigma* 318). But, he continues, "history, like sanctity, can reside in the heart; it is enough that there is something there" (318). The landlord has his manor, but the narrator views the landlord's life in a series of black and white photographic images that "forc[e] one to think of the tract of time that followed" (173). The landlord is old and decrepit (as is the manor), and his visage is "not charged with the spirit and labour of the painter" (173). As a result, he only serves to strengthen the narrator's own conviction that his position as both postcolonial subject and important writer infuse him with a spirit of a universal European art that is not confined to the Euro-humanism of the landlord.

Summary

Cudjoe points out that "the task, then, of *The Enigma of Arrival* is to describe in a painstaking and meticulous way the manner in which Naipaul

arrives at and accepts the universal civilization of the Western world" (222). However, the novel is painstaking in its desire to not appropriate, but to participate in, this "universal civilization." Therefore, as Apollinaire "spoke" to de Chirico, de Chirico "speaks" to the narrator, giving him the opportunity to tell the story of "that scene in the Chirico picture" and an opportunity to fill the void that he initially sees in the centre of the English landscape (*Enigma* 92). If the narrator draws on the Western cultural memory, on mythical representations of the painter which have their origins in far away times and places, he makes no apologies for it.

Notes

[1] There are seventy-five references and allusions to literature, seven references to European painters and paintings, and six references to film and literature about film. I have counted numerous references to one author or painter as one reference. For example, there are eight separate references to John Constable or his paintings.

[2] This melancholy is most evident in the novel's first chapter, "Jack's Garden," which describes the first four years of the narrator's twelve year stay at the manor.

[3] Naipaul's world was partially and apparently modelled on the life of Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1898-1999), who moved to Oxford from India in 1970. Up until his death, Chaudhuri continued to write in English about the need for India to accommodate the British influence in its history. He was, likewise, lionized in England for his English texts, but berated in the postcolonial circles because his occasional defence of the British was considered deliberately provocative and unsound. However, Chaudhuri's obituary *in The New York Times* resembles Theroux's characterization of Naipaul, as Chaudhuri is described as a "thin, short, spry man" in colonial Indian dress who was a curious sight in the streets of Oxford (Kaufman A12). Ignored is the fact that Chaudhuri continued to write in Bengali about Bengali, even when he lived in Oxford. Unlike Naipaul's life, it is one few in England knew.

[4] Margaret Atwood would appear to agree that the public artist must be kept separate from the private artist. Her website--www.web.net/owtoad--is filled with excerpts from her works and links to bibliographies. However, there is little biographical information, and the website does not offer any interpretation of her work. One might say the website acts as a buffer for those seeking biographical insight into Atwood's texts and her desire not to comment on them.

[5] Constable's work was a reflection of the natural and traditional--it stood in marked contrast to industrialized urban London. His composition in "Salisbury Cathedral" makes use of *chiaroscuro* which gives the painting of the cathedral and its grounds a heightened sense of colour, produced by layering lighter shades of colour over darker ones. The heavy blobs of paint laid thick with a palette knife produce a texture that details the rays of light through the trees and on the cathedral itself.

[6] The possible ten paintings: "Salisbury Cathedral" (1829-1831); "Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden" (1820); "Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds (1823);" "Salisbury Cathedral from Long Bridge, near Fisherton Mill" (1829); "Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows" (1831); "Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows (The Rainbow)" (1831); "Salisbury Cathedral from the North West" (1829); "Salisbury Cathedral from over the Close Wall" (1820); and "Salisbury Cathedral from the River" (1820).

[7] I am basing this hypothesis on two factors. First, indexes in less complete books about Constable use "Salisbury Cathedral" to reference reprints of "Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds." Second, American secondary school educational texts designed to teach art appreciation (also distributed in Canada and not entirely dissimilar from the narrator's third-standard reader) use "Salisbury Cathedral" to title slide reproductions of the "Bishop's Ground" painting (Art Education Incorporated).

[8] *The Little Library of Art Series* were small 5 x 6 inch books that gave the reader an introduction to painters and movements of generally European art. The series was published by Tudor of New York from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s and there were seventy-two volumes in all. On average, each volume had about thirty pages, with fifteen pages of introduction and fifteen, usually colour, reproductions considered representative of the painter or movement.

[9] The narrator is also hesitant to take photographs of Jack, for he, too, is "rooted in his earth" (*Enigma* 87). Any attempt at reproduction would destroy the memory of Jack's life as the narrator saw it.

[10] The narrator's comment that de Chirico was given the titles to his "Enigma" series by Apollinaire is questionable. De Chirico's first "Enigma" painting was "Enigma of the Oracle," painted in 1910 in Italy, and de Chirico

did not meet Apollinaire until 1911 in Paris. Possibly it was only the word "enigma" that was given to de Chirico.

[11] Born in Greece to Italian parents, and working out of the European centres of Paris, Milan, and Munich, de Chirico's art and biography have critical receptions that parallel Naipaul's:

> One thing is certain: there is no easy answer about Chirico's origins. Without insisting too strongly, I suggest a description that sees Chirico as a kind of adopted Italian, or more exactly, a converted foreigner much taken with the vast visual fare and tradition that Italy could offer ... (Beck 84)

The critical language adopted by art critics to describe de Chirico reflect those often applied to Naipaul's life and artistic projects. Like Naipaul (and, as I outlined earlier, Conrad as well), de Chirico is described as the other, moving from the periphery to the centre and finding inspiration in its traditions. Note also Beck's Eurocentric self-correction that the "foreigner" is "converted." In order to participate in the cultural and artistic benefits of Europe, the other is expected to adapt and conform.

[12] In *The Enigma of Arrival*, these creative moments of disruption are found in the narrator's frequent separation of his "second life, so far away from [his] first" (82). The former life is imitative, while the second life captures the flux of the English landscape.

[13] See Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972). Campbell divides the adventure of the hero into three main phases: departure, initiation, and return. One could argue that the narrator's return to Trinidad for the funeral of his sister, Sati, fulfills the heroic cycle. It could also be argued that the narrator returns out of obligation. However, the narrator is moved by the experience, seeing his own life in England as a further displacement of Indians in Trinidad who "had made [themselves] anew" (317).

[14] Cudjoe, in his eagerness to condemn Naipaul's politics, makes a serious critical error by repeatedly reading *The Enigma of Arrival* as an autobiography. True, even as the narrator displaces his anxiety within the imaginative story of the voyager, Naipaul, too, configures within *The Enigma of Arrival*'s narrator his own fears when he left Trinidad for London in 1950. However, the autobiographical slippages in *The Enigma of Arrival* exploit what Phillipe Lejeune in *On Autobiography* calls "the horizon of expectation," whereby an autobiographical text fails to live up to the expectations of its readers who refuse to see it as an "obvious practice of nonidentity" (15).

The Painter as Commodity: Patrick White's *The Vivisector*

> Frank ... was a problem, and though he had never considered it when he had the two children to manage alone, Clem agreed now, after many nights of shame and self-accusation, to send the younger boy away.
>
> David Malouf, *Harland's Half Acre*

> What gets produced and performed and received by audiences is often determined by straightforward economic facts.
>
> Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*

Like the other texts studied in this dissertation, Patrick White's *The Vivisector* (1970) sparks debates surrounding the economic and social production of the postcolonial artist. In Part One, four year-old Hurtle Duffield is the *merchandise* in an economic transaction. His working-class parents are afraid that Hurtle's "unusual" behaviour may become "useless" behaviour in the future (*Vivisector* 16), or, they lament that they cannot "provide the opportunities" (55) for such a "beautiful" and "clever" boy who likes to draw (54). Unsure how to manage their volatile "property," they opt to sell Hurtle to the wealthy Courtneys--for whom Mumma Duffield works as

a laundress--for five hundred pounds. To the indigent Duffields, it is an enormous sum. In turn, the prosperous Courtneys, "collectors of Australiana" (27) and anxious "to discover a genius," consider Hurtle to be a sound financial investment (62).[1] Moreover, Hurtle's "authenticity" as a potential Australian artist validates the Courtneys as connoisseurs of artefact collection.

However, the transaction is not a smooth one. On the one hand, the money does not relieve the Duffields' guilt over selling their son. On the other hand, the Courtneys fail to recognize that their "investment" is a human being who may not necessarily respond to their cultural and capitalist approach to child-rearing. Indeed, Hurtle is a cruel, precocious child who refuses their nurturing. Ironically, however, Hurtle becomes what the Courtneys had initially predicted: a famous painter. He becomes, in fact--as we see in the retrospective exhibition scene at the end of his career--a piece of "Australiana." His paintings are the merchandise bought-and-sold by the Australian middle class that values the name (which, remarkably, is Hurtle Duffield, not Hurtle Courtney, since Hurtle re-assumes his birth name once he turns sixteen) attached to the paintings more than it values the paintings' artistic qualities. "They're an investment" (580) for buyers who follow Europeans and Americans "buy[ing] him overseas" (578).

The course of Hurtle's life and career--from bought and sold commodity to celebrated Australian painter--raises crucial issues surrounding the agency

of the postcolonial artist figure. First, I will address White's depiction of the historical conditions that seem to demand an "authentic" Australian painter such as Hurtle. Specifically, *the possession of (a) Hurtle Duffield* is a complex parody of what Harish Trivedi has called the "colonial transaction," a term that includes both the language of commerce, and the aesthetic products which invariably become the "most permanent and authentic record[s] of [colonialism's] process and proceedings" (1). In *The Vivisector*, Hurtle is such a "record," a *work of art* if you will, salvaged from its original owners (his parents) and subsequently put on display for the Australian public.

This notion of display, however, is laden with the ambiguous, nationalist intentions of an emergent Australian middle and upper class. Ignorant of the aesthetics of "great" British art, but envious of British cultural and economic power, the Courtneys, gallery owners, and critics attach their desires to Hurtle. As I will argue, scenes such as the Courtneys' trip to London--characterized by their rude behaviour in edifices of British culture such as the Tate Gallery, where Mr. Courtney farts in front of a painting--do not simply mock a boorish Australian social elite that is unable to appreciate the aesthetics of art. Rather, the text is a lament for Mr. Courtney's destruction of the inspirational qualities of art. In other words, while White recognizes the fallacy of "art for art's sake," he also problematizes the typical Australian art patron as a wealthy adventurer who divorces beauty from life

and derives pleasure from acquisitions, thereby confusing the emotional experience of art with business savvy.

White's position here is similar to the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival*, who ironically notes that his success as a writer is indebted to the historical "perfection" of colonialism that marks the decaying conditions of Waldenshaw manor (*Enigma* 52). The manor itself is the "apotheosis" of colonialism, built indirectly by the labour of the narrator's "impoverished Indian ancestors" in Trinidad, yet its ruin and beauty "commit[s] [the narrator] to the literary career [he] had been following in England for twenty years" (52). Similarly, in *The Vivisector*, the Courtney home is a storehouse of paintings and other records of culture, but, unlike the narrator's landlord, the Courtneys believe their home's contents "are too valuable" to be appreciated aesthetically (*Vivisector* 49). Commerce and commercial value are more important to the Courtneys than taking pleasure in the formal or thematic surprises of art. Moreover, they do not want art to question the status quo, especially issues of class and history. Therefore, the books--accounts of voyages and explorations--are unread, and the European paintings become merely souvenirs from vacations (50). Unlike the manor's landlord in *The Enigma of Arrival*, there are no romantic illusions attached to these works of art, in part because the Courtneys have not lived the experiences that coincide with the art's production--even if those experiences are the spoils of colonialism.

Hurtle, like Naipaul's narrator, may be a misfit, but he is the only one who can truly appreciate the art objects--the spoils--in the Courtney home. For example, Hurtle notes the smoothness of the paint of the Courtney's Boudin painting, wishing he could touch it but cannot because it does not belong to him, while Mrs. Courtney asserts her authority, absently remarking that the "[painting's] worth a lot of money" (50). Such scenes are parodic, but White still infuses them with the same cultural sentimentalism for which Naipaul is often strongly criticized: Mrs. Courtney may be the owner, but Hurtle recognizes its "true" value. Examining this sentimentalism further, I will briefly detail White's own ambiguous relationship with Britain. Specifically, White has been canonized as a historical link between Australian and British literature, and critics have not treated him as harshly as they have treated Naipaul. This raises the question, why is Naipaul considered an implicit supporter of colonialism while White is not?[2]

One significant difference between the two authors is that any historical "perfection" White raises in *The Vivisector* is premised on absence and lack. In *Yurugu* (1994), Marimba Ani describes this absence as specific to the Western pursuit of individual freedom and ambition:

> Twisted by the ideological demands of [a] culture [premised] on value characteristics, they [Europeans] are made to seem positive, superior, even healthy. They are, instead, manifestations of a cultural ego in

> disequilibrium ... Created in a spiritless context ... the self that emerges ... seeks further to despiritualize its surroundings. (561)

Ani's notion of disequilibrium is connected, I believe, to the ways in which Australian novelists often present artists as being misunderstood by their families. The artist needs to seek affirmation or encouragement elsewhere, similar to the European's need to define himself by seeking out the other. Hurtle's parents, for example, are seemingly ill-equipped to deal with matters of "commerce" and "culture" to raise him "properly" or "effectively," yet they love him deeply. Ironically, Pa Duffield is always seen "taken up with his business" (*Vivisector* 9) of collecting and counting bottles--his means of supporting his family--but he is confused by Hurtle's indifference to such meticulous tasks which might lead to an "honest trade" (*Vivisector* 18).

Furthermore, the parental inability to provide for the gifted child surfaces in other Australian artist-novels such as David Malouf's *Harland's Half-Acre* and Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*. "I do not know what to make of it," says Sybylla's mother in *My Brilliant Career* (30). In these novels, until they leave home, the gifted children are both sources of pride and sources of embarrassment to the parents, who often impose their vague, Romantic notions of the artist on their own peculiar child. Conversely, in a struggle to maintain their identities in a society in which other class and occupational roles are clearly defined, artists are restricted by such myths. They are vulnerable to the concerns of the community, even though they

seemingly transcend these concerns by virtue of their creative difference. Thus, in *The Vivisector*, Hurtle is not necessarily a Romantic painter figure because he wants to be one, but because he has to be one within the confines of the colonial artist/public exchange. He is the stereotypical asocial figure--at times preposterously so--a loner who restores, or is expected to do so, a spirituality lost in a overtly secularized society.

A better articulated portrait of this spiritual or divine painter figure first appears in White's *Riders in the Chariot* (1961). The mixed-caste aboriginal painter Alf Dubbo, on his deathbed, "transfer[s] the effulgence of his spirit on canvas" (458). Although "the body of Alf Dubbo [is] quickly and easily disposed of ... The dead man's spirit was more of a problem: the oil paintings became a source of embarrassment" (461). In *The Vivisector*, White depicts a white, urban Australian society where there is no room for an Alf Dubbo or his paintings. Instead, we see the paradoxical figure in Hurtle as he attempts, contradictorily, to re-enact Romantic notions of the autonomous artist figure and maintain a distrust and disdain for the Australian public that buys his work: it is, remarkably, a public that he does not necessarily reject.

For example, not unlike this public, Hurtle is a wise investor, and enjoys the ownership of property and his ability to make large financial purchases. As well, the latter half of *The Vivisector* sees Hurtle seeking familial security in a large, colonial house filled with the furniture of the

previous owner. It is an uneasy situation for Hurtle as he attempts to negotiate the Duffield and Courtney influences that conflict within him. Both the Duffields' and the Courtneys' acts of charity--to do what is "best" for Hurtle--sanction the regulation of Hurtle's Romantic heroism and his own monetary exploitation of it.

It should become evident that an uneasiness pervades the four texts in this thesis, connected by the thread of Hurtle's five-hundred-pound pricetag. In *Water With Berries*, it is the treacherous promises of financial reward and nationalist recognition that prompt Teeton to stop painting altogether and sell his catalogue of work to a gallery for five hundred British pounds. Although the amount may be coincidental, the disparity between how the amount is perceived by the buying and selling parties is not. Teeton uses the money to finance The Secret Gathering's revolutionary plot in San Cristobal. He declares that is the exact amount that he needs: no more, no less. However, the amount "astonish[es] the merchants at the gallery" by its paltriness (*Water 19*). Conversely, The Secret Gathering has never seen so much money before. In Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's financial success "generate[s] envy ... among other painters, [but is] not enough so [she] can tell anyone to stuff it" (15). And, as I have noted, the narrator of Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* can afford to share the home of the oppressor (or at least rent the manor's cottage), but he is still profoundly aware that the home is in decline, forcing the landlord to rent out the unused quarters.

In each novel, then, the autonomy of the artist is framed by his or her economic value behind the wake of colonialism. Through the relentless parody and exaggeration of both the crass middle-class and the stereotypical painter figure, *The Vivisector* describes this autonomy at its most crippling, and its most liberating. It is a paradox that informs both the Duffields' sad, desperate attempt to rid themselves of Hurtle, and the Courtneys' purchase of him, as well as Hurtle's attempt at some form of domestic stability by the novel's conclusion.

Poultry and other Odd Birds

I begin my analysis of Hurtle as an agent of Australian nationalism by examining references to poultry and other birds, which I see as significant metaphors of class in *The Vivisector*. First, I will demonstrate how one of the Duffields' chickens--the pullet--is seemingly a symbol of Hurtle's difference as an artist because its physical deformity and unusual behaviour separates it from the other chickens. However, the pullet's deformity as a symbol of difference troubles issues of belonging in an Australian community that excludes according to class and genealogy. Consequently, Hurtle's sale to the Courtneys allows both the Duffields and the Courtneys seemingly to participate in nation-making, but the Romantic representation of Hurtle reveals how such secular narratives of nationhood are continuously negotiated against a clearly defined other.

In *The Vivisector*'s potent opening scene, four-year old Hurtle asks his father why the other chickens are pecking at the "crook-necked white pullet [which is] ... grabbing what and whenever it could, but sort of sideways," in the dusty Duffield yard on shabby Cox Street (*Vivisector* 9).[3] Pa tells him that the others "don't like the look of [the pullet because] it's different," while Mumma Duffield wants to "hit [the pullet] on the head if she only had the courage to" (9). Because of his fondness for "scribbles" and "droring" (17), Hurtle soon learns that he, too, is an outsider who is different from his friends and family. Thus, the scene has invited some readers, such as Noel Macainsh, to see the "bird ... [as] symbolic of the typical difference of the artist" (77). Moreover, as Hurtle pursues a painting career, his "unusual" habits become evidence of his genius--the topos for the Romantic painter figure (9).

What is important about the pullet is that it struggles to survive, reflecting the Duffield's own struggles and their sale of Hurtle in order to provide for the rest of the family. Scholars such as Macainsh and Jennifer Gribble are tentative in their analyses of this pullet scene, glossing over the chicken as simply an "emblematic" bird that is a fitting symbol for the "typical" difference of the artist (Gribble 157). The point that is overlooked, however, is that that Mumma is unsure about the chicken. Because "it was Mumma who killed the fowls," she is hesitant to kill the pullet (9). Also, the pullet, despite its oddness, produces eggs, and Mumma possibly cannot afford to kill it because she has six children to feed and is pregnant with the seventh.

Unsure of any proper course of action, she leaves it alone to fend for itself, which it does. Similarly, she believes that Hurtle's difference is a sign of his toughness. "Hurtle ain't afraid," Pa tells Hurtle's sister, Lena after she pinches Hurtle's arm (38). Capable of withstanding physical abuse, the Duffields assume that Hurtle also can endure living with the Courtneys.

Simon During in *Patrick White* (1996) argues that White infuses *The Vivisector*'s working class characters with "moral characteristics such as humility and stability," yet the "humble are always other to, and lesser than, the author and his readers (even if they are morally and spiritually superior)" (45-46). Although Mumma and Pa indeed are humble and proud, whether they are sacrificed to White's traditionalist position on class differences is questionable. Instead, I interpret the sequence of events as an indication that the Duffields have no choice but to sell Hurtle, and that money is merely, and probably inadequately, compensatory for what is essentially an heroic act. In other words, in order for them to retain their dignity, the Duffields cannot fail to "provide the opportunities" for what they anticipate to be Hurtle's particular creative needs (55).

Furthermore, unlike During, I conclude that the Duffields are not ennobled by their ignorance, but rather are keenly aware of the circumstances which had led to their current financial and social predicament. Although the opening scene is brief, it is evident that Mumma's ambivalence symbolizes not so much the difference of the artist, but the conditions that prevent her

from knowing how to respond to difference, be it the pullet, Hurtle, or anything else. However, by failing to wring its neck, she recognizes that the pullet deserves to live. She also knows, on some level, that her son also deserves "a chance" and that his sale was an act "of love" (74).

Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra in *Dark Side of the Dream* (1991) contend that the artist in postcolonial Australia retains the aura or characteristics of the Romantic hero, but is now "expendable, with qualities that are an embarrassment in the new society, to be admired but not imitated" (62). However, they also believe that it is the artist's marginality that validates this new society because it is a reflection of the colonial identity (62). Hodge and Mishra's comments are useful here, clarifying how Hurtle is "expendable" not necessarily because he can improve the Duffields' economic position, but because they wish to participate in nation-making. "You're what I've been trying to tell [Mrs. Courtney's staff] about," Mumma confides to Hurtle (*Vivisector* 22). In the Courtneys, Mumma sees an opportunity to take credit for Hurtle's gifts, but not be responsible if he "makes [her] ashamed" (22).

Mumma's "shame" stems from the Duffields' inability to rise above their class after they emigrated from England. For example, soon after Hurtle asks Pa about the pullet, he begs his father to open the box that Pa secretly keeps on a shelf in the stable. In the box are various family possessions, including a lock of his sister's hair, expired deeds, photographs of Pa's parents, and a family ring. Hurtle is curious to know if Pa liked his mother

because "she looks funny ... [and] sort of different" (10). Pa responds angrily that his mother was a "lady ... a clergyman's daughter," but died of consumption six months after her arrival in Sydney (10). Exasperated by Hurtle's questions, but eager to embellish Hurtle's depleted lineage, Pa also tells Hurtle the story of Hurtle's grandfather, Hertel Vivian Warboys Duffield, an "haristercrat" whose dream was to ride to the centre of the uncharted new world of Australia (10). However, barely into his journey, Hertel had a seizure and fell off his borrowed mule, dead. The scene is both a parody of Voss's epic journey--whereby Voss also attempts to find meaning away from "the material world which his egoism had made him reject"--and a signal that each Duffield generation recedes from the idealized promises of emigration (*Voss* 36). Thus, the novel begins with a state of diminishment--Hertel Vivian Warboys Duffield has become simply Hurtle Duffield.[4]

The vestiges of this heritage are symbolized by the family ring, now a parodic coat of arms or heraldic sign of the Duffield "haristercratic" heritage that clearly recalls the deformed pullet--by this time butchered, cooked, and served on a platter:

> The ring had a sort of bird on it, sticking out its tongue. The bird was cut off short, below the neck. What was left, looked as though it was resting on a dish. (*Vivisector* 11)

Once probably a sign of class and privilege, the ring is now comically reduced to sheer function--food on a dish. Hurtle, too, will be reduced to function; he is

the exceptional child who is sold so the Duffields can properly feed the children who are more suited to their working-class lives. Through no fault of his own, there is no place for Hurtle in this class. Yet, Hurtle's family history is more distinguished than the Courtneys' history, of which the reader knows nothing about except that its status is derived from wealth. This wealth is sufficient in the new Australia society (or appears to be), but what "Duffield" offers appears silly and pathetic. White makes it clear, however, that Pa values his family's history, but he will only offer to Hurtle this history and its symbol--the ring--in private because he is embarrassed by his family's legacy and by the strangers who "laugh" at Hurtle's odd first name (11).

The relocation of the artist child to a family context supposedly more conducive to his or her talents (or tolerant of his "difference") is a design familiar to readers of Australian artist novels, such as Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* (1901), and David Malouf's *Harland's Half Acre* (1984). In *My Brilliant Career,* Sybylla is a budding writer whose creative temperament causes her mother concern. First, the mother thinks the teenage Sybylla is "lazy and bad," then "ill," before finally deciding to send Sybylla away to live with her grandmother who offers "to pay all expenses" if it will improve Sybylla's conduct (31). Similarly, in *Harland's Half Acre*, Clem Harland, after his wife's death, sends his youngest son, Frank, to live with his sister. Despite the "many nights of shame and self-accusation" that Clem suffers because of this decision, it does lead to Frank's career as a painter (7).

Frank's aunt recognizes the promise of his drawing, and arranges art lessons for him. Soon, Frank forgets his father and the fact that his promise to visit Frank never materializes.

Hurtle's situation differs from Frank and Sybylla's in that he does not have an extended family where at least one member wants to nurture his difference and talent, and has the financial ability to do so. Furthermore, Frank and Sybylla have no desire to leave their parents, whereas Hurtle, as he sits in the stable and symbolically slips the family ring on and off his middle finger while "Pa pretend[s] not to look," is clearly ambivalent about any decision his parents may make regarding his welfare (*Vivisector* 11).

Mumma Duffield sells Hurtle because she is convinced that only the wealthy Courtneys can fulfil what she believes to be an essentially economic function of the patron, and she is dazzled by the Courtney's wealth and its ability to purchase "culture." When Lizzie the maid shows Mumma Mr. Courtney's library, Mumma is impressed by the numerous, leather-bound books. "Mr. Courtney must be a highly edgercated gentleman," gasps Mumma, only to be told by Lizzie, the maid, "Oh, he doesn't *read* them ... [Mr. Courtney] has to do something with 'is money" (27). Lizzie's comment is lost on Mumma, and the text cynically reveals the transparency of the Duffield library and the ease by which the Duffields's status can affect the direction of Australian art and culture; Mumma's conviction that "it's the edgercation that counts" is confirmed when she sees the library (14). However, it is

apparent the Courtneys are decidedly not altruistic, and they derive their power by maintaining the status quo, by taking Hurtle off the Duffields' hands.

One is reminded of Lady Bracknell's stance on Jack Worthing in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Pleased with Jack's wealth, but disturbed by his lack of parents, she informs Jack that if he wishes to marry Gwendolen he must "try to acquire some relations as soon as possible" (Act I). Certainly Lady Bracknell cannot allow Jack into her family without a proper, social-sanctioned contract. Therefore, Jack must conjure such "relations" from the abandoned handbag carelessly left on the Brighton Line by Miss Prism. The handbag (similar to Pa's box with its expired deeds and other proof of ancestry) is evidence of Jack's lineage. In *The Vivisector*, a binding legal contract seemingly allows the Courtneys to acquire Hurtle (and his name) without further obligation to the Duffields. When Lena, Hurtle's sister, asks if Hurtle will ever come back to visit, Pa replies that "it is not in the contract" (75). Thus, the Duffields convince themselves that in order to "provide the opportunities" for Hurtle (and for the remaining Duffield children) and to circumvent his feeble lineage, the sale is the only solution (55). Conversely, the Courtneys cannot simply ask the Duffields for Hurtle because this would presume that the Duffields are incapable parents (if nothing more than breeders, which Mumma repeatedly points out) which is, of course, exactly what the Courtneys believe.

Hurtle, however, becomes a source of consternation for the Courtneys, and the sale complicates the seemingly stable Australian class hierarchy. The contract does not ensure that Hurtle will always remain a "Courtney" (he joins the army at sixteen, leaves to fight in the First World War, and never returns to them). In addition, the Courtneys erroneously expect Hurtle's promise as a genius to be attributed to them (which it is not because Hurtle reclaims the name "Duffield" after his stint in the army). For both families, however, the desire to influence or participate in the artist's elusive creativity troubles a nation premised on class and genealogy. As a parable of colonialism, *The Vivisector* characterizes both families as co-conspirators who facilitate what Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1991) calls the "political-biographical narrative" of "the property history of [European colonies'] new possessions" (175). As the Duffields resign themselves to powerlessness, the Courtneys attempt to instigate, through Hurtle, a secular narrative of nation that fetishizes the obscure power of art in an attempt to claim cultural superiority and social stability.

But if the hopes of the Courtneys and the Duffields are pinned on Hurtle, then one must examine how White attempts to resolve his often problematic representation of Hurtle as this Romantic symbol of culture and nation. Frequently, White characterizes Hurtle as an inclusive, metaphorical representation of the other. As I noted in this chapter's introduction, there is no room for painters such as Alf Dubbo in *The Vivisector*. This, despite the

fact that Dubbo is also a stereotype who, like Hurtle, is laden with the difficult task of discovering the "truth" through art in what *The Vivisector*'s narrator calls the "dreck" of Australian urban society (392). As an Aboriginal painter, Dubbo is not a "legitimate" descendant of the European tradition of art and therefore cannot participate in what White describes essentially as a Eurocentric cultural practice. By contrast to Dubbo, even hapless Grandfather Duffield endows Hurtle with a "proper" lineage that at the very least allows Hurtle to reject it and seemingly free himself from mainstream society. Hurtle is, in this instance, adopting what Homi Bhabha describes in the introduction to *Nation and Narration* (1990) as the negotiation of possible spaces between cultures:

> [T]he marginal or "minority" is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity--progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past--that rationalize the authoritarian, normalizing tendencies within cultures in the name of the national interest. (4)

Although Hurtle is not a minority other figure in society's eyes, he does create and embrace self-marginalization. By undermining his Romantic stereotype, posited between Australia's entrenched economic and social barriers, Hurtle disrupts their seemingly depoliticized aesthetic interests.

In *Riders in the Chariot,* however, the ability to represent a counter-discourse to the "justifications of modernity" is never fully articulated until Alf Dubbo is dead. Mrs. Noonan, Dubbo's landlady, wonders what happens to Dubbo's paintings after they are sold at auction. At the scene's conclusion, White indicates that Australia is not yet ready for artists such as Dubbo: "[his] paintings disappeared, and, if not destroyed when they ceased to give the buyers a laugh, have still to be discovered" (*Riders* 461). Here, the closure is rather tidy, perhaps deliberately so, and it points to Australia's difficulty with outsiders such as Dubbo, whose art is redeemed only through White's parody of the dominant class. The scene recalls Russell Ward's observation in his early influential study of Australian literature, *The Australian Legend* (1958), that the Aboriginal absence in Australian art is symptomatic of the Australian need to "impart an air of urbanity to the exotic frontier landscape" (232). In turn, the Aboriginal, in his or her absence, is mined as an authentic representation of the Australia imagination and its link to the rugged outback. For White, a confrontation with such powerful myths reveals that the postcolonial will always carry the signature of colonialism. As a result, his representation of the painter figure, Aboriginal or otherwise, is marked by its state of belonging. It is either compromised in order to survive (Hurtle), or it is ignored altogether (Dubbo).

To further establish how White's Romanticism affects his depiction of the painter figure, it is useful to turn to White's *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976),

published six years after *The Vivisector*. The novel examines the myth of the idealistic settler who saw in Australia the promise of a new Eden and a more accommodating humanity--albeit one White comes to describe in *The Vivisector* as an inherently corrupt one that excludes figures such as Dubbo. More importantly, however, is A *Fringe of Leaves*' central premise that if nature is embraced and accepted on its own terms, then nature becomes a state of grace or liberation for those corrupted by civilization. For example, Ellen Roxburgh's removal by shipwreck from civilized society, and her subsequent return, links the colonial experience to the Romantic notion that social change is connected to the individual's profound, feral experience outside the urban centre. When Ellen is stripped naked by her aboriginal captors and then forced by hunger to eat human flesh, there is the implication that only a confrontation with her natural self will free her from conventional morality: "She could not ... explain how tasting flesh from the human thigh-bone in the stillness of a forest morning had nourished not only her animal body but some darker need of the spirit" (*Fringe* 245). Shedding the pretensions of her married name "Roxburgh," she is able to survive by becoming, again, Ellen "Gluyas," the farmer's daughter. Significantly, then, Ellen returns to "civilization" and to propriety by fashioning a fringe of leaves around her waist, fastening it with her wedding ring. Her depraved experience in the bush is symbolically followed by what Mark Williams in his book *Patrick White* (1993) describes as not necessarily "the process of burning away

the veils of civilization ... but an enigmatic silence that lies behind all our socially constructed fronts" (138). Ellen now has sympathy for the Aboriginal people and is unable to endure watching their cruel treatment, particularly from Captain Lovell, who commands the settlement at Moreton Bay.

Hurtle, too, has difficulty adjusting to "civilization" when he returns to Sydney after the First World War, and his healing is characterized by a series of hesitant starts and painful admissions. After experiencing "the smell of death" and "praying for survival," as the cultured Hurtle "Courtney ," he takes to wearing his Grandfather Duffield's ring (172). He does this partly to prevent his lover, Nance, from stealing it. More importantly, he does this to remind himself that he was once a "Duffield," and that "atavistically he was at the mercy of a laundress [Mumma] and a clergyman [her father], an aristocratic, no-hope drunk [Grandpa Duffield] ... and poor, scrawny ... Pa [Duffield]" (*Vivisector* 235). By wearing the ring, Hurtle sheds the Courtneys and their attempt to "civilize" him and his creativity, and he reclaims his Duffield heritage. This transition is symbolized by the gorge, on which Hurtle's home is precariously balanced, physically and metaphorically. The narrator describes it as perched somewhere on "the gulf between art and life at its most repulsive" (218), and "the great discrepancy between aesthetic truth and sleazy reality" (193). It is into this gorge that Hurtle releases his anger about his sale to the Courtneys , as well as a devastating review of his first art show: "That night Duffield stood on the edge of the gorge and let out

his anguish. It came up out of his chest, his throat, in increasing waves" (234). Simultaneously, his anguish releases his despair about his past, and signals his new (if only temporary) freedom to be his own person and create new art.

Elaine in *Cat's Eye* also finds creativity in despair when Cordelia and Grace bury her in the hole in Cordelia's backyard. Afraid at first, Elaine eventually sees in the hole's darkness a "thicket of leaves" whose movement is "rich, mesmerizing, desolating, infused with grief" (*Cat's Eye* 114). The leaves are symbolic of her time in the bush with her family, and in the darkness Elaine imagines that she "vanish[es] and reappear[s] later, but different, not knowing why [she has] changed" (113). The experience helps her understand how she will paint what she cannot see, foreshadowing her own healing and her dissectional paintings of the cruel Mrs. Smeath's and her diseased heart. Hurtle's epiphany, however, is short-lived. Although his scream relieves him of the emotional burden of the Courtneys, he then throws the ring into the gorge to also rid himself of the Duffields and their part in his sale: "It was his worst perversion: to have hung on to a ring, long after the money was spent ... Or pretension: worse than anything [the Courtneys] had tried to put across" (*Vivisector* 250). Briefly convinced that he is now free of both families, he soon regrets his decision. Frantically, he searches the gorge floor for the ring, possibly thinking that he has "vanished" and cannot "see" without the ring after all--that he needs this physical reminder of his family.

I see this scene--the concluding one to Chapter Four--as a defining moment in *The Vivisector*. Hurtle does not recover the ring, and seemingly sheds his Courtney and Duffield selves. But while he is searching for the ring, Nance commits suicide and Hurtle finds her body upon a rock. Wracked with despair, Hurtle is unable to summon any experience which "might help him deal with it; but nothing in his life or art did ... [He began] sweating and trembling, groaning aloud for the inspiration withheld from him" (252). For Hurtle, experiences such as war were simply opportunities to erase the Courtneys from his life. In addition, his paintings were, as Nance says prophetically before her suicide, dishonest indulgences "that what [Hurtle] would like to think are truth" (247). It is only when Hurtle returns to the house and throws his self-portrait into the gorge is he ready to abandon his unworkable image of himself and his vocation and become an "honest" painter: It "clapped and clattered at first, before bowling rather tamely down ... then drowning in total silence" (*Vivisector* 253). Unlike Hurtle's frantic grubbing on the gorge floor, the self-portrait is noticeably passive in its descent. Hurtle's "lungs strain" as he hurls the painting, but, like the self-portrait, no sound comes out of his mouth (253). Deflated of ego and pretensions, and "too weak in his present condition" to destroy the self-portrait himself, Hurtle now, decisively, lets the gorge consume both his Duffield and Courtney selves (253). He is prepared to move from the gorge

which contains the literal (Nance) and the symbolic (the self-portrait and the ring) remains of his past.

During argues that White's characters undergo such visceral experiences because White himself marks a transition period in Australian history:

> White [is] connected to the national culture at what we can call its colonial/postcolonial switching point: the moment when the nation was beginning to stop conceiving of itself as a colony and instead was beginning to consider itself an independent nation-state [and eager] to acquire cultural canons. (11)

As I argue further in the next section, Hurtle resembles a central figure in During's "switching point." He is an icon for a country in need of an artistic hero , yet this country only knows and expects its Romantic figuration. What I must clarify, however, is how White sees the Australian landscape as necessarily empty, and how it swallows--like the gorge does to Hurtle--pretensions to Australia's independence if issues of the past are not resolved first. In his autobiography *Flaws in the Glass* (1983), White implies that when he eventually returned to Australia in 1947 after twenty years of writing in England, he *inherited the land* from his parents. He calls it an act of neglect rather than kindness, particularly from his mother, Ruth, who, after the death of her husband, Dick, in 1938 "took off [to England] and left [me] to it" (135). Such a misfortune places White in the metaphorical position as defender of

Australia, while simultaneously criticizing the English sensibilities of his parents and of his private education in England. In *Flaws in the Glass,* White would like to believe that a distinct Australian literature emerges when he begins to write.

Although there is a certain arrogance in White's privileged "inheritance," it is important to focus on White's need to see the Australian landscape anew. Williams argues that White's early life possessed a conflictive, dual identity as he longed for the Australian landscape, yet despised its boorish, banal citizens (2). Thus, Williams explains, when White permanently returned to Australia it was to "a landscape without figures" (4). Although Williams' position, much like During's position, is to explain White's transition from the accommodating tradition and culture of Europe to an ambivalent relationship with Australia as a new but receptive nation, his hypothesis is an intriguing one. Specifically, Williams' notion of an "unpopulated landscape" to provide the means for the production of art parallels the one that Hurtle must come through before he can begin to paint anything of significance.

White's interest in an "unpopulated landscape" is similar to that of Al Purdy's in his poem "Lament for the Dorsets." The Dorsets lived in the Quebec and Labrador regions until approximately 1500 A.D. In the poem, the speaker describes the last living Dorset, an old man, carving ivory swans for a dead grand-daughter:

taking [the swans] out of his mind

the places in his mind

where pictures are...

The carving is laid aside...

and after a while wind

blows down the tent and snow

begins to cover him

After 600 years

the ivory thought

is still warm (54-75)

Purdy contrasts the old man to the urban, "twentieth-century...apartment dwellers" who see the Arctic as a unchanging expanse of snow and ice, not a place that produces art and artists (30-34). The narrative unsettles the conventions of the artist and its heroic ideal (as it is understood in settler colonies), as well as disrupts the tradition of art as a geographically specific, European invention, a point heightened by the irony of the name "Dorsets"--the name to an English shire. The seemingly static and nameless landscape has stories to tell, buried beneath the snow, and a commonly-held superficial image of the north is supplanted by life and creativity. Matters for the artist in postcolonial settler countries must be invented because they are seemingly not there to begin with. However, with this shift from the conventions of the

centre to the specificity of local experience comes a positive change of perception.

White's Australia is geographically distant from the Canadian arctic, but the *persistence* of the artist is of particular relevance to my chapter --the possibilities within a country's landscape that liberate the artist from his or her creative inheritance from the centre. In his essay "The Prodigal Son" (1958), White addresses his motivations for returning to his native Australia after twenty years in England. In an apologetic tone, White recalls the suggestion of an Australian journalist, Guy Innes, who said that upon White's return to Australia from England, "'the colours [would] come flooding back on to [his] palette'" (16). When White did return to Australia in 1948, he agreed with Innes, citing the "refreshed landscape" as one of the rewards of re-entering Australian life (16). In the next section of this chapter, I will examine this "refreshed landscape" in the context of Sydney suburbia where Hurtle (like White) purchases a home.

Hurtle at Home

At nine pages, the fifth chapter of *The Vivisector* is the shortest in the novel, but it marks a noticeable difference in White's characterization of Hurtle as an asocial painter figure in the European tradition.[5] First, Hurtle is not named. Instead, the narrator refers to him as either the "stranger" (255), the "artist" (260), or, in the final sentence of the chapter, as the

"painter" (262). As I note in my discussion of *Cat's Eye*, "artist" and "painter" are ambiguous terms that invite both respect and suspicion. In *The Vivisector*, the change in classifications marks Hurtle's point of entry into the neighbourhood; he is the stranger whose place in the community is determined by how the community defines and accepts him as a painter, even though this community's members are also fragmented and isolated from one another.

Hurtle's connection to the neighbourhood is through the grocer Cecil Cutbrush, the disgraced former church warden who befriends Hurtle while the two are sitting on a park bench in suburban Sydney where the "ash-coloured rock" of the outback meets "the blind sockets of the white-faced houses" (254). The scene is paradoxical, as Cutbrush, a lonely man who is eager to reveal his unhappiness (and sexual urges) to the middle-aged Hurtle, initiates what I argue in this section to be the "domestic arrangement" of Hurtle Duffield. This arrangement is necessarily an uneasy one, and similar to the narrator's arrangement at the manor in *The Enigma of Arrival*, as well as Teeton's tenancy in the Old Dowager's boarding house.

In the scene where the two men first meet, Cutbrush approaches the bench in hopes of a chance sexual encounter. When he sees Hurtle, whom he recognizes immediately as a newcomer to the neighbourhood, Cutbrush quickly sits down to "assess the stranger's status" (255). However, Cutbrush is confused by Hurtle's clothing, which has "too many contradictions" (255).

His jacket is expensive and well-made, the hat of "excellent felt," and the brogues made-to-order. But the wearer's "sloppiness" cheapens their appearance, and although Hurtle's haircut is decent, "even fashionable," it needs trimming (255). Hurtle's elegant yet worn clothing symbolizes a transformation from the *named* asocial, slovenly painter Hurtle Duffield, to the *unnamed* stranger who is able, at least tentatively, to participate in the social world from which he seemingly was once separated.

In their conversation about "self-love," Cutbrush also is confused by Hurtle's confession that he, too, has "been accused of loving [him]self," and that his cruelty and obsessive behaviour contributed to the death of his agent, Maurice Caldicott, who was in love with Hurtle (258). Although Cutbrush interprets this confession as a sanction of his sexual preferences (when they go their separate ways, Cutbrush cannot help masturbating), the important revelation is about Hurtle. The latter's confession signals that the painter, too, is in "need of consolation," and that his work does not fulfil or complete his solitary life (258). Ironically, Cutbrush marvels at the fact that he has met "a real professional artist! ... who can make a living at it," and is impressed not by who Hurtle *is*, but what Hurtle *does* (260). Thus, the focus of the chapter is not, as Williams has argued, a continuation of Hurtle's "movement toward self-deification" as a painter, one who is contrasted with a naïve public symbolized by the confused Cutbrush (109). Instead, I believe, the chapter initiates the text's conflation of the overtly Romantic figure that

dominates the first half of the novel with the more gracious and sympathetic painter figure that characterizes the second half. Although Cutbrush is a pathetic figure, he is also an earnest one, and thus it is ironic when Hurtle tells him that he believes in God because "otherwise, how would men come by their cruelty--and their brilliance" (259). In Hurtle's eyes, Cutbrush, too, has his moments of cruelty and brilliance, and is not merely a figure of mockery, but also a figure of suffering, the stuff out of which Hurtle can begin to create new art.

These notions of dignity and suffering are, significantly, reflected in Cutbrush and Hurtle's conversation about houses. The narrative links the plot of Hurtle moving from his ramshackle gorge house to his new one on more prosperous Flint Street. To make conversation, Cutbrush focuses on this home in his neighbourhood, and the status that owning property confers: "Not everybody can afford to buy their own home. Not everybody's that successful" (258). Uncharacteristically, Hurtle also shows pleasure in what wealth can afford:

> This is the house I shall work and die in. It's not in any way an exceptional house. You can walk about in it, though. And it's on a corner. It has entrances on two different streets--so that you can easily escape from a fire--or a visitor. Oh, it's *pleasing*! (258)

Although Hurtle realizes that he is "successful," and that he owes this success, ironically, to art collectors "who buy [him]--almost as if [he] was

groceries," he is not apologetic about his earnings because it reflects the state of ambivalence in which he can be productive (260). Symbolically, the house has two entrances (or exits): one on Chubb Street where "women called to one another over collapsed fences" and there is "a mingling smell of poor washing, sump oil [and] rotting vegetables" (the lower class street similar to the Duffields' Cox Street); and one on Flint Street, with its "masked houses [that] had a secretive air which didn't displease him"--perhaps similar to the Courtneys' home and its treasures he discovered as a young boy (264).[6] This home, which is the site of artistic creation, also allows Hurtle to be a neighbour, a shopper, and an investor in real estate.

The Flint Street house had belonged to an eccentric retired produce merchant, Mr. Gilderthorp, who, at one time, "must have had pretensions," and outfitted the spacious house with stained glass and iron lace (263). The reader is again reminded of the Courtney home, stuffed with grandiose furniture, ornate fixtures and unread books, but the Flint Street house is now dilapidated, and Hurtle purchases it "cheap" from Gilderthorp's distant cousin who "is anxious to be rid of the embarrassment (263).[7] However, similar to Gulley Jimson's protectiveness of his boathouse in Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*, "which is a bit rotten in places, but [he was] glad to get it" (8), and Alf Dubbo's habit of locking the door of his tiny rented room (*Riders* 348), Hurtle guards his purchase, vowing that "nobody would invade [it]" and his privacy (*Vivisector* 264). Like Dubbo, who begins to paint the very day he

moves in (*Riders* 348), the two "faces" of both Hurtle and his house lead him "compulsively to paint" (*Vivisector* 265).

Hurtle's defensive posture may be linked to his dual identity as "Hurtle Duffield" and "the artist." Although in Chapter Six the narrative returns to naming "Hurtle" as its protagonist, Hurtle remains simply "*the* Artist" to his neighbours (265). Hilary Heltay, in her book *The Articles and the Novelist: Reference Conventions and Reader Manipulation in Patrick White's Creation of Fictional Worlds* (1983), claims that White's use of definite and indefinite articles before proper nouns, especially at the beginning of chapters, nudges the reader "willing[ly to] accept as familiar something which is in fact new to him" (34-35). It appears, then, that the reader must evaluate his or her own cultural assumptions about what is meant by "the Artist" in *The Vivisector*. Despite the intricacy of her undertaking--analyzing hundreds of articles in White's texts--Heltay's book is primarily a defence of White's style, and not an interpretation of his novels. However, her book does invite an examination of Hurtle's one identity as the asocial loner and the freedom Hurtle finds within the ambiguity of the designation "the Artist." This ambiguity allows him to manage his own affairs independent of wealthy patrons such as Boo Davenport and Hero Pavloussi, even as his wary neighbours accept him only because he "pays his bills like anybody respectable" (264). Similarly, in *Cat's Eye*, Elaine, because she (and the public) supposes the "artist to be a lazy, tawdry sort of thing to be," has a "real life" alongside her "career" as a painter

(*Cat's Eye* 15). As I argue in Chapter Three, her uneasiness regarding her career is ultimately liberating, allowing her to confront those who wish to control her reputation within the Canadian art community.

Moreover, like Atwood, who disguises her painter figure in powder-blue track suits, White undermines Hurtle as stereotype by revealing Hurtle's fantasies of excess:

> [Hurtle] was unhappy with his own money when it came: while prudently investing it. He also allowed himself one or two luxuries, such as ... a good tailor, made-to-measure shirts ... [and] Napoleon brandy. He also dabbled in luxurious fantasies ... an expensively scented mistress ... an exotic car. He had never learned to drive; he would arrange to have the car driven. (*Vivisector* 266)

There is a certain freedom in Hurtle's fantasies, which closely resemble those of the Wildean dandy. As with his house, Hurtle reveals two sides to his personality--the "Artist" who in his own debonair manner fulfils the stereotypes of the public, and the necessary vivisector who paints the underbelly of his adopted suburban neighbourhood. As Declan Kiberd explains, it is a tactic that Wilde himself adopted, embracing his double as a path of resistance to English imperialism: "On the one hand, [Wilde] duplicated many of the attributes of the colonizer, becoming a sort of urbane, epigramic Englishman. On another more subversive level, he pointed to a subterranean, radical tradition of English culture" (44). For Wilde, England

became a fertile site for probing a "society that has no place for its dissidents," not unlike the Salisbury countryside explored by the "English" Naipaul (Kiberd 47).[8]

Australia, of course, was colonized in part by these same English dissidents, those whose removal "sapped English society of ... the creative and the criminal, leaving only dull suburban types" (47). In *The Vivisector*, White deplores how these "dissidents" have come to resemble the "suburban types" remaining in England. He therefore disrupts this trend by Hurtle's alliance with Rhoda, the Courtney's hunchbacked daughter who "remind[s] him of the crook-necked pullet at home Mumma hadn't the heart to kill" (*Vivisector* 31). Rhoda has been raised in the same environment as Hurtle, one that is not confined to the tailored-suits and the other obvious trappings of the Courtneys' material pursuits. Instead, as a physical mirror of the Courtneys' more grotesque features, Rhoda leads Hurtle to a renewed creative interest in his present paradoxically foul and genteel condition.

When Hurtle happens upon Rhoda in the street, pulling her cart of horse offal to feed the stray cats, Hurtle finds himself "blubbering shamefully" (439). He begs her to come home with him, saying that he would "like to tie the end of [his] life to the beginning. I think in that way--rounded--it might be possible to convey what I have to do" (450). In some valuable ways, the scene is reminiscent of Joyce's *Ulysses*, where Stephen Dedalus meets his sister, Dilly, in the bookstore. However, in that novel, Stephen

abandons her because he thinks this will make him a better artist, despite his love for her: "She is drowning. Agenbite. Save her ... She will drown me with her, eyes and hair ... Misery!" (200). Stephen's dilemma represents larger issues of Irish nationalism, and his decision, despite the pain it causes, is necessary for him to become an "authentic" artist in the Romantic tradition. In *The Vivisector*, however, Rhoda does not need to be rescued by Hurtle, and the scene initiates a less alienated position of the postcolonial artist figure. Hurtle is Stephen as Bloom, if you will. Hurtle and Rhoda do not embrace because it would have looked "grotesque" (*Vivisector* 450), but they are bonded by their deformities, negotiating the effects of Mrs. Courtney, "reaching out from those last rooms in Battersea," the place of her death (600). Furthermore, unlike Stephen, Hurtle does not have the same urgency to distance himself personally from daily life. Hurtle remains aloof, but only insofar that he can see his society objectively and create artistic dreams for this society so that it can learn to see itself in new ways.

We must be careful, therefore, not to assume that Hurtle and Rhoda's domestic suburban routine, even in parody, is the banal monotony of the middle-class (although White's description of the filthy Hurtle and the hunched-over Rhoda eating rancid bacon and runny egg for breakfast before they leave for "work" is certainly amusing, the scene is still redeemed by its grotesque quality). Instead, it is Hurtle's excessive individualism that relentlessly informs Romantic notions of the universal aesthetic. Tamara

Winikoff, in her essay "Big Banana and little Italy: multicultural planning and urban design in Australia" (1994), observes that the Australian urban centre is planned on the stifling of cultural and class difference: "Public and private space, almost without exception, was designed on a British colonial model ... [which] effectively obliterates behavioural patterns, rituals, customs, beliefs and values which are dependent on, and inspire the form of new spatial arrangements" (132). The colonial homes in particular, like the one Hurtle and Rhoda reside in, may mark the cultural heritage of Australia, but because of their ostentation do not encourage communication among neighbours. In *The Vivisector*, White unsettles this traditional configurement, forcing the neighbourhood to accommodate Hurtle and Rhoda. In time the neighbourhood accepts Hurtle and Rhoda and become accustomed to his standing on his balcony (both front and back), as well as Rhoda pushing the horse offal through the alleys (*Vivisector* 264).

As I pointed out earlier, privacy is agreeable to Hurtle, and the house is the place where he paints people in pain and in suffering; however, the response to the paintings by their subjects is one of acceptance of their similarly diverse, and frequently tragic, predicaments. For example, Hurtle's painting of Cutbrush, "Lantana Lovers Under Moonfire," depicts, in Hurtle's words, "a great white arse shitting on a pair of lovers---as they swim through a sea of lantana--dislocating themselves" (261). Cutbrush is at first horrified by his depiction. However, once over his initial shock, he is pleased that he

has been "consummated," (560) and lets Hurtle know that he is glad to have him as a friend and neighbour.

Similarly, in what I consider to be one of the key passages in the novel, Rhoda, as she and Hurtle prepare to leave for Hurtle's Retrospective Exhibition at the State Gallery, summarizes what she believes to be Hurtle's role as an artist within the community:

> *I don't believe artists know half the time what they are creating ... But like ordinary people who get out of bed, wash their faces, comb their hair, cut the tops of their boiled eggs, they don't act, they're instruments which are played on, or vessels which are filled--in many cases only with longing.* (571, White's emphasis)

Rhoda's comment gently makes fun of her domestic relationship with Hurtle, as well as Hurtle's increasing concern with appearances and his own decaying, flatulent body. Hurtle and Rhoda are not ordinary citizens, any more than Cutbrush, their neighbours, or the people who buy Hurtle's art. More importantly, however, Rhoda's remark initiates one of White's major antagonisms in the latter half of *The Vivisector*--the wealthy art community that desperately wants a painter of national and international reputation, yet has an investment in ordering its young tradition according to liberal humanist practices.

Unfortunately, White's depiction of Hurtle's Retrospective as a parody of the Australian art community is excessive, running at close to twenty-nine

pages of disjointed dialogue by stereotypical characters. Furthermore, I believe that it detracts from the carefully-crafted relationship between Hurtle and Rhoda. What is apparent, however, is that to the gallery patrons art confers social acceptability, and, like Hurtle, they see the Retrospective as an embarrassing and guilty acknowledgement of their need to be recognized by others. However, their peers are the London and New York centres which determine whether a Duffield painting is "worth buying" (578). The Australian gallery patrons are not, as I have argued, like Hurtle, who now seeks approval mainly from his neighbourhood subjects. "Whatever you accuse us of," an anonymous critic says sarcastically, "you can't say we aren't a sound society" (579). The critic's sarcastic observation reflects the guests' palpable uneasiness over their contribution to Hurtle's fame. Ironically, however, the observation also highlights Australia's own metropolitan concerns with how and what to show in its galleries. Elizabeth Gertsakis makes this comparison in her analysis of the modern Australian art gallery:

> [Australian] art galleries, like other national galleries ... for the reception of art ... continuously edit and censor and only sometimes permit terms and conditions for visual meaning that are foreign to the dominant and narrowly socialised pathways to interpretation and value. Contamination ... is a carefully controlled cultural commodity, and if the 'impure' (whether it be political, sexual, racial or formal as an aesthetic genre) is considered inadequately framed by the processes

> known as conventions to the aesthetic regulators, it fails to enter the arena of legitimation. (43-4)

In *The Vivisector*, Hurtle is the "controlled commodity" that offers Australian art a pathway to acceptance. But one is also reminded of the Courtneys, who are unsettled when they discover that Hurtle refuses to be shelved like the books in the library when he "discover[s] that the Courtneys who had bought him would not expect his company" (*Vivisector* 80). At the party, the "mob" (579) is frightened of Rhoda and think that Hurtle's paintings are "sick," but, noticeably, they do not dismiss Hurtle and his work (582). They recognize that Hurtle's difference is a necessary part of their construction of Australian history, and that his emergence as a national icon is premised upon his controlled rupture of accepted notions of class and power.

The party is too much for Hurtle and he leaves in disgust. It is a moment that is remarkably similar to Elaine's predicament at her own Retrospective, and a predicament that Teeton chooses to avoid altogether. Elaine, too, experiences a barrage of faceless and nameless admirers and "feel[s] scraped naked" (434). "Past-tense admiration" (434) unintentionally relegates her to a generation in Canada's art history, as if the country cannot categorize her fast enough in its quest for cultural memory (even as society forces Elaine to dress in black, the acceptable colour code of the gallery set--a code that Hurtle unintentionally foists on Rhoda. He believes that as the sister of the distinguished guest, she should wear a fur coat at public

functions such as the Retrospective). In middle age, Elaine is "the establishment now, such as it is" (*Cat's Eye* 283), just as Hurtle leaves the gallery "groaning with the legend it couldn't contain" (*Vivisector* 598). Both the Canadian and the Australian painters leave their respective galleries, hail a taxi, hoping to get back to their productive "silences" or congenial communities.

Summary

There is no denying that historically there has always been more than a casual relationship between economics, nationalism the reception of art and artists. What is significant about *The Vivisector*, however, is that its frequent parody of the Romantic temper of the asocial artist figure reveals moments of complicity as possible paths of resistance. The Australian people, searching for a symbol of nationalism that will signal their international arrival, and, unwilling or unready to accept an "Alf Dubbo," they need a figure such as Hurtle Duffield who can be readily bought and sold. According to White, however, Australian narratives of nationalism are scripted by an enthusiasm for "the mental comfort and moral support of safe[ty] and contentment" (White 67). Thus, *The Vivisector* satirizes both an intellectually flabby, but financially solvent moneyed-class, and the painter figure's vulnerability to such projects. Certainly this informs both the Duffield's sadly desperate attempt to rid themselves of Hurtle, and the Courtney's purchase of him.

But lurking beneath this transaction is Hurtle's design to reclaim his agency by working within, both literally and metaphorically, the homes of seemingly satisfied suburban dwellers. At the end of the novel, Hurtle attempts to ensure a creative future by his patronage of Kathy Volkov, the exceptional young pianist born into a typical suburban Sydney family. Unlike Hurtle, she seemingly is resistant to any claims he or anyone else may have on her, monetary or otherwise: "Her attitude was hardly grateful enough ... she was holding back something from [her recital audience]: Hurtle could tell that she had discovered in herself that extra sense which is the source of all creative strength" (504). On the one hand, Kathy closes a circuit by becoming like the younger Hurtle. She commands Hurtle's respect and admiration of her art on her own terms. On the other hand, Kathy does not reject Hurtle's patronage, and her creative source--her "extra sense"--still owes much to a Eurocentric Romanticism. In time, she may mellow, as does the older Hurtle, thereby suggesting a failure of continuity in Australian art.

Thus, *The Vivisector* concludes with an ambivalence regarding the stereotypical painter figure. To White, the painter's autonomy is as important as his place and activity within the community, a decidedly un-Romantic feature. Like Gulley Jimson in Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*, Hurtle has a stroke at the end of the novel. As Gulley lies in the ambulance stretcher on the way to the hospital, he tells his friend Nosy to perk up: "Get

rid of that sense of justice ... Get a job, get that grocery, get a wife and some kids, and spit on that old dirty dog, the world" (374).

Notes

[1] The transaction takes place in 1916. Although it is difficult to estimate the value of five hundred pounds in current Canadian funds, it is approximately $80,000.

[2] I am referring to recent texts of Australian literary history, such as *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* (1998) and *Literary Links: Celebrating the Literary Relationship Between Australia and Britain*, which situate White chronologically rather than thematically.

[3] A pullet is a young hen that has begun to lay eggs but has not yet moulted.

[4] "Hurtle" is not spelled "Hertel" because the parson misspelled the name at Hurtle's christening. Pa did not give Hurtle a middle name because "one name's enough for a boy to carry around in Australia" (11).

[5] The Penguin paperback edition of *The Vivisector* (1973) is six hundred and seventeen pages long.

[6] One is also reminded of the beginning of *The Enigma of Arrival*, and the narrator's initial nervousness over which road to choose for his walk--the public road or the manor's private road. However, the narrator realizes that "there is no problem, really," they are simply "two ways to his cottage. Different ways" (*Enigma* 13).

[7] In Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), the painter Ono purchases an expansive home seemingly suitable to his creative needs. The

former owner, before his death, was a businessman, government official, and patron of the arts who admired Ono's work, and he believed that the house "should pass to one he had approved of and deemed worthy of it" (8). However, unlike Hurtle, Ono assumes entirely the social privileges associated with the home, and during the Second World War becomes an advisor to the Japanese Committee of Unpatriotic Activities. Unfortunately, Ono's relationship with his home, and his neighbourhood, collapses when he inadvertently has his neighbour, Kuroda, arrested by the police for making paintings with subversive content.

[8] This subversion of the colonizer's habits is also evident in *Water With Berries*, particularly in the scenes in the neighbourhood pub. Teeton insists on carefully eating expensive shrimp because it offends the publican's belief that Teeton cannot afford them (88). And Jeremy, the San Cristobal liaison, insists on paying for free soda water, frustrating the publican because "the whole incident was too subtle, too lacking in demonstration to warrant [any] action" (89).

A Career Not Exactly Real: Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

> Artists ... appear to be refusing the place of isolation and marginality they have been given and which they themselves have romantically often confused with freedom.
>
> Carol Becker, *Zones of Contention*

> The north was with him always, regardless of where he hung his hat.
>
> Jane Urquhart, *The Underpainter*

> In their haste to become old, young nations tell lies to themselves that turn into necessary truths.
>
> Robert Stacey, "The Myth--and Truth--of the True North"

It is surprising that, to my knowledge, Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* is the only English-Canadian novel with a female painter as its central character, let alone one that probes the politics of the painter figure's British influences. Such distinctions are enough to include *Cat's Eye* in this study of the postcolonial painter figure. However, more important is that the text

overtly explores how the ambivalent relationship between Canadian painters and their audience is a factor in this scarcity.

It is not surprising that that this dynamic surfaces in Atwood's texts. As one of Canada's most celebrated authors, she is keenly aware of the cultural and social factors that can positively contribute to her own image and reputation as an artist. To the Canadian public, she maintains a celebrity and literary status by satisfying the inquiries of scholars and general readers alike. She gives numerous public readings, lectures, and scholarly interviews, in addition to offering glimpses into her homelife.[1] The *Margaret Atwood Information Website* is inviting and comprehensive, offering photographs, interviews, excerpts from recent lectures and texts, and an extensive critical bibliography.[2] Although it could be argued that the World Wide Web maintains a buffer between her and an overly curious public, her website does indicate her awareness that the boundaries that construct the artist figure are being reconfigured.

This appetite for Atwood information is heightened by *Cat's Eye*, as both scholars and general Atwood enthusiasts are lured by the seemingly autobiographical elements of the text. Such observations may have theoretical validity, and portions of Atwood's personal history do intersect with the fictional life of the novel's protagonist, the painter Elaine Risley. Nonetheless, as with the frequent confusion between Naipaul and his

narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival*, I believe that any further claims on the text as autobiography, or as a representation of truth or reality, are problematic.[3]

Specifically, to appropriate *Cat's Eye* for their theoretical agendas, many Atwood scholars have ignored the fact that Elaine is a painter not a writer, and that the two occupations are not interchangeable. To locate a generalized artist figure within a national, postcolonial, or feminist theoretical context requires that Elaine's identity be essentialized. Furthermore, there are specific cultural conditions that accompany the painter figure in Canadian society that interrogate any stable meaning within the text. First, the colonial educational practices and institutions fictionalized in *Cat's Eye* reveal an ambivalent painting tradition within Canada, most notably in Toronto, where Elaine goes to school. As a student of this educational system, Elaine's identity is obscured and divided by Toronto's own problematic relationship to the arts. Also, like Teeton in *Water With Berries*, Elaine's position as a painter is informed by British notions of taste and culture, and an American centre, New York, which now influences the direction and critical language of Canadian painting.

The Disreputable Painter

I begin my examination of Atwood's painter figure by quoting at length a passage from *Cat's Eye* that characterizes the painter's cultural and personal dilemmas:

> Alongside my real life I [Elaine] have a career, which may not qualify as exactly real. I am a painter. I even put that on my passport, in a moment of bravado ... The word *artist* embarrasses me; I prefer *painter*, because it's more like a valid job. An artist is a tawdry, lazy sort of thing to be, as most people in this country [Canada] will tell you. (15)

Elaine does not wish to be different from other people. Perhaps she is not embarrassed by her talent, but by the seemingly disreputable direction it has taken her, and the humiliating effect this creativity has on a society sceptical and suspicious of art and artists. Elaine frequently sees her creativity as socially unproductive, so she seeks affirmation in the more acceptable title of "painter," rather than "artist." However, although she places the roles of both "painter" and "artist" in opposition to her "real" social and domestic life, in turn this life intrudes on her "unreal" life as a painter.

Beginning with an examination of these terms "artist" and "painter" in Canada's artistic and social history, I will argue that in *Cat's Eye* Atwood ironically juxtaposes Elaine's creativity against a rigid Canadian art establishment, and conclude how this establishment is both enabling for Elaine, who gains a certain freedom of expression within the rigidity of its expectations, and confines her within a social order which is unsure of her place, and seeks to define her by nebulous terms. Her terms "real" and the "unreal," in the quotation above, reflect this paradox, and the tension between

the supposedly free (unreal) painter and a repressed or law-abiding (real) public is informed by a transplanted, Eurocentric image of the painter figure which persistently defines Canada's perception. Within this image there are two possible connotations: the less energetic one borrowed by Canada and which helped determine colonial policy; and the censored, revolutionary one that opposed Canada's puritanical values. These multiple discourses vie for hegemony in the text, to which Elaine asserts her own discourse of painting which unsettles both a colonial discourse and the idea of the asocial painter from which it arises.

This ambivalent persona underlines Elaine's seemingly hesitant relationship with the timid Canadian art tradition, constructed from Canada's insecure artistic values and fragmented influences from the European centre. However, by examining Elaine's art education, both in public school and at university, I will show that Elaine has cultivated an antagonistic relationship with this art tradition. As a child, Elaine is taught to copy unimaginatively objects the teacher considers tasteful or acceptable art, including the British flag (83). Here, art is considered decorative, and its intention is to promote the child's uniformity of thought rather than to inspire creativity. It is from this early education that Elaine learns that she is different, both as an artist, and as someone who does not fit in with the other children. Furthermore, I contend that Elaine as postcolonial subject/painter is conflicted because of the imposed colonial template of how she should act

when successful, and the transient sense of bravado that accompanies a persona that is forged through imitation. However, I will also argue that Elaine derives a sense of place from her parents. Significantly, Mr. Risley is a romantic, scientific figure whose charting of northern Ontario insects is ironically linked with Elaine's own creativity as a painter. He prepares the landscape/canvas for Elaine, first by including her in his charting of the north, and then by unsettling the clean, civic images of their suburban Toronto neighbourhood.

While an art student at the University of Toronto and the Ontario College of Art, Elaine confronts patriarchal institutions constructed to emulate, rather than be innovative. Artistically, Elaine challenges these constructions in her painting by allegorizing her childhood and the repressive influences which inform her marginalized identity. However, I also believe that rather than maligning such staid places and "their bias ... toward dead, foreign men" (16), Atwood parodies their hoariness, reflecting her opinion that an art community evolves not just "out of bricks and mortar, but of mind and heart" ("Going" A19). If Canada is seemingly unfit for art, and chooses to follow the passive British influences, then Atwood prefers to focus on human complexities which sully such benevolence. Furthermore, Atwood exposes the grand narrative of liberal humanism that constructed these academic edifices which champion only the exclusive few under the guise of a universal interest in art.

In this sense, Elaine, like Hurtle and Teeton, undermines the painter's seeming freedom to pursue his or her own privileged interpretation of an artistic tradition. As with Naipaul's narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival*, Elaine asserts a desire to claim what Neil Lazarus describes in *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (1999) as "a true universality, with the idea of a radically transformed social order, and to oppose oneself implacably to the false universality of modern (bourgeois) sociality" (3). To disrupt this "false universality," Elaine's narrative focuses ironically on the marginal Sub-Versions Gallery and its creative and monetary relationship with the Canadian art community. Sub-Versions equates its success with its imitation of postmodern New York galleries, and Elaine's work is appropriated into this discourse, along with uninformed, obligatory nods to the influence of Canadian landscape painters such as The Group of Seven. However, I will examine how Elaine repeatedly deconstructs the gallery's narratives that seek to appropriate her paintings within its own elitist pretensions to foster "Canadian" art.

Of particular relevance is how Elaine "reads" or interprets her own paintings for the reader, assembling a continuous story that confronts the gallery's need to place their own interpretations of her paintings in printed text positioned beneath the canvases. As such, Elaine's acts of dissent serve to further disrupt what she already considers the gallery's commodification of her art. Critics such as Sonia Mycak (1996) and Hilde Staels (1995) have

focused exclusively on Elaine as a psychologically split subject, whose "illusion of a unified identity" is rooted in both the illusionary nature of painting itself, and the illusionary nature of self-construction (Staels 187). They ignore entirely the implications of Elaine as a painter, and her imaginatively constructed identity *through painting*--and as such mistakenly *under*-read the novel.[4]

Artists and Painters

To understand the censored translation of the painter figure from Europe to Canada, and Elaine's ambiguous response to the naming of her career, it is necessary to glance briefly at the Canadian history of the "artist" and its development. The current definition of "artist," meaning a practitioner of the fine arts (specifically painting, architecture, engraving, and sculpture), originated in eighteenth-century England with the formation of The Royal Academy of Arts in 1768. The Academy attempted to respond to the public's increasing distance from what it considered the fine arts, and was conceived with the "proposal for the honour and advancement of the Arts, and that it be advertised in the Public and Daily Advertisers" (Hutchison 16). Thus, the Academy publicized its intention to retain the dignity of the arts by reminding the English of what made them a cultured society in the first place. The Academy hoped to regulate the gap between the public and the artist by giving public exhibitions of art, usually painting. Canvases were not only

generally easier to transport and display, it was believed that, visually, they best revealed the creative threads of the history of British art.

However, the Academy's desire to wrap the fine arts in a blanket of tradition while encouraging new practitioners of these traditional styles did, unwittingly, secure the current belief that the fine arts function outside the creative and intellectual realms of the public. As Walter Benjamin notes, "the greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public ... The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion" (234). The Academy, by attempting to educate the public, drew attention to the very fact that the fine arts no longer reflected the experiences of their audience.

On the other hand, painting, particularly oil painting, maintained its currency with the public. Specifically, the painter retained what other artists had seemingly lost--his or her economic and social value. A painting is valuable in part because it frequently serves as a commodity of investment, but also because, ironically, a painting aesthetically appears to counter an increasingly repressive, technological world by virtue of its "human" achievement. Furthermore, these aesthetic qualities are not necessarily in reference to the painting's formal qualities such as style or technique. Rather, the public equates the potency of the painting with the "liberal" painter

himself, whose emotional investment in the work of art is also considered to circulate outside society's constraints.

These current meanings of "artist" and "painter," and their historical antecedents, create numerous difficulties of representation for Atwood as she fictionally creates her own painter figure in *Cat's Eye*. In choosing an appellation, Elaine immediately discards the term "artist." She claims, ironically mocking the narrow, colonially-manipulated vision of the Canadian public, that an *artist* is prone to fits of pretension and is a "tawdry, lazy sort of thing to be" (15). Since the artist offers no practical contribution to society, she is viewed as a burden who offers nothing other than a seemingly artistic temperament.

Elaine's impression is formed early in art school, where "any painter who would call himself an artist [was regarded as] an asshole" (297). Although she is not deterred from pursuing painting as a career, she does confront Canadian educational institutions which are archaically colonial, and art students who are stereotypically sullen and wear black turtlenecks as a uniform of difference. Elaine comments that she's "not sure where this picture [of the artist] has come from. It seems to have arrived fully formed, out of nowhere" (297). However, I contend that Elaine's comment is ironic, and this prefabricated image is formed by a colonialist agenda to mimic a single, selected aspect of the European tradition of art, and the Canadian desire to ensure that its art education meant "establishing the ability of Canadian

artists in the eyes of the Mother Country" (Foreword, *Canadian Section* 3). It is an institutional practice that dictates Elaine's own art education, as her ability is not judged on creativity, but on imitation. If the artist is an "asshole" who has arrived, fully formed out of nowhere, then Atwood's painter figure attempts to exist outside the mediating position of government and patronage, even as it acknowledges its own participation in the continuation of the asocial painter figure that has originated from the same imperial, historical and cultural location.

The foundation of this colonial relationship and its pronounced effect on Canada's art and artists is traceable to Canada's replication of British institutions that attempted to regulate the production of art. In Canada's quest to create its own, parallel art history, the Canadian Royal Academy of the Arts was formed in 1880, taking the English Royal Academy as its model. The Canadian Academy, along with The National Gallery of Canada which was also founded in 1880, required Britain's acceptance, so it promoted Canadian talent as a valuable asset to the Empire.[5] In turn, Britain assumed the role of teacher, allowing the Dominion of Canada to pursue its own creative interests, but ensuring that Canadian art remained wholesome and unproblematic in relation to the British centre, while in turn educating its own population on the aspirations of the Canadian colony. This agenda is curiously phrased in the "Foreword" of *A Portfolio of Pictures From the Canadian Section of Fine Arts: British Empire Exhibition, London, 1924*:

> They would [the continuation of such exhibitions], eventually, result in a greater sympathy and understanding of the Empire's needs, progress and achievements. If, in fulfilment of this, they brought about a regular exchange of some of the national public art treasures within safe and reasonable limits, a most valuable educational work would be set in motion and a great forward step be taken towards that closer communications of ideals and endeavours which is one of the British Empire's greatest needs.

Here, the British agenda to see Canada emulate the Empire's aesthetic and educational direction is marked by distrust. Specifically, the ambiguous phrase "safe and reasonable limits" both encourages and discourages innovative expression. On the one hand, it possibly refers to nothing more than the necessity of the safe, physical transportation of art between borders with the onus on Canadians to be most careful, since fledgling Canadian art was not nearly as materially or culturally valuable as the work of British masters.[6] On the other hand, it can also imply that this exchange of art will only take place if Canadians first fulfil the Empire's behest to produce and display "acceptable" art and artists; in other words, the National Gallery must discourage art that does not have "the Empire's greatest needs" in mind. Furthermore, British citizens, particularly younger ones, would be "educated" about the needs and aspirations of their Canadian colony, and the importance of administrating it with understanding. As Thomas August notes in *The*

Selling of the Empire (1985), such publicity was necessary to ensure a colonial inheritance for the "colonial elite of the future, the consumers and producers to-be of the nation [Britain], [and] the prospective settlers" (107).

The Painter's Education

Elaine's education at Queen Mary Public School in Toronto reflects such exchange of "needs" between Britain and its colonies, particularly in the chapter "Empire Bloomers." In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the Empire is symbolized by the narrator's landlord. The narrator sees his landlord in fragments--including his "fat shining leg" and his letters and Orientalist sketches--and then assembles these fragments to muse on the Empire's historical chain that brought the two men into each other's proximity (*Enigma* 192). However, in *Cat's Eye*, the random images of Empire in Elaine's grade four classroom emphasize the ambivalence of belonging and its problematic influence on her desire to be a painter.

First, the photograph of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on the classroom wall makes Elaine feel as if she is "being watched from behind," their stern gazes reproduced in each Queen Mary classroom (*Cat's Eye* 82). Assuming the vantage point of the photograph, Elaine describes the ordered arrangement of the desks and the symmetrical placement of the blackboards. Her classroom is excessive in its geometric precision, symbolizing the mechanically political and controlled interchange between Empire and colony.

Furthermore, Elaine and her class are required to draw the Union Jack with a pen and ruler, as well as other uninspired, uncreative acts of reproduction such as drawing symmetrical leaves and pumpkins (83). This rigidity affects Elaine's creative growth, even as she is unaware that she has any creative abilities at all, and she is puzzled and frightened by the taxing exactness of these exercises. The scene parallels the young Ralph Singh's educational experiences in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, in which "childhood was ... a period of incompetence [and] bewilderment," filled with repetitious lessons in Empire geography and the weight of the king's crown (90). Thus, the metaphoric equation between order and power is realized by the colonial child through habit, and intelligence evaluated by the ability to reconstruct the "reality" of Empire.

In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's perception of this ordered Empire is also symbolized by the roll-down map in her classroom, which sits on the wall opposite the photograph of the King and Queen. The map topographically constructs a seemingly objective reality that dismiss the "maps[s] of the state of mind" that Atwood outlines in *Survival*, and that are imaginative, shifting spaces in Elaine's narrative (49). Moreover, as I discuss later in my examination of Mr. Risley, the classroom map contrasts the personal and structural links between Elaine's paintings as imaginative maps of the north and her father's scientific charting of his zoological discoveries.

Here I wish to point out a similarity to the maps in *Water With Berries*, the subject of my next chapter. Both the maps in Teeton's room and Elaine's classroom map represent the charting of ownership and conquest. However, on Teeton's maps the people of San Cristobal are replaced with bright, potent signifiers of colour that indicate cultural uniformity. Conversely, in Elaine's classroom, the map's colours signify progress, and countries not matching the pink of Empire symbolize primivitism and heathenism. Now "pink" colonies such as India and Africa (Africa is presented as an homogenous place of darkness rather than a continent separated into countries) were once mired in cannibalism and war until, as Elaine ironically remarks, the British Empire initiated progress by bringing "in electric lights" (84). However, despite having electricity, Elaine is told that Canada still "isn't quite as good" as Britain, and that mimicry and imitation are acceptable, if not desirable, creative and cultural acts (84).

Thus, if in *Water With Berries* cartography renders safe for the Old Dowager Teeton's exotic but dangerous paintings of San Cristobal, then in *Cat's Eye* cartography mutes Elaine's originality and creativity before she even begins to paint. In this sense, mimicry in *Cat's Eye* is not just the colonial artist crudely forced to use material removed from her experience.[7] Instead, the inclusion of geography lessons in imperial education is tempered by a false freedom of expression. Elaine is taught that Canada is superior to the "darker" places of Empire where they once "cut out children's tongues" (84). In

her classroom, this silencing of voice is replaced with training--rather than learning--exercises, to disseminate the politics of England's sovereignty. Furthermore, the one-dimensional map grounds the supposed primitive, static conditions of other countries, thereby encouraging Elaine to recreate picturesquely such places, but within the confines of a colonial's imagination.

Elaine's consequent mistrust of the British, as well as her ambivalent Canadian identity, are contrasted by the art curricula of her two middle-aged teachers: the asexual, disgruntled British expatriate Miss Lumley, and the more imaginative but still didactic Miss Stuart. In particular, their contrasted notions of *decoration* suggest a change in the philosophy of teaching art in post-war Canada. Although Miss Stuart follows a similar, ideologically narrow curriculum as Miss Lumley, by encouraging Elaine's skills Miss Stuart reflects a post-war enthusiasm for Canada's economic and cultural possibilities.

Elaine describes Miss Lumley's love of all things British as "superimposed against the ominous navy-blue background of [her] invisible bloomers" (85). Like the Empire itself, the underwear is "sacrosanct" (85). To Elaine and her friends, the young "bloomers" of the blossoming dominion (and Elaine the budding artist), the underwear is symbolic of both the reverence and shame they feel about the Empire, and their ignorance regarding Canada's place in it. Adult underwear is a dirty and private matter, and Elaine is more repulsed than fascinated.

The bloomers are also a parody of masculine desire and the patriarchal narratives of imperialism. In her analysis of imperial governance in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), Gayatri Spivak argues that "to take the privileged male of the white race as norm for universal humanity is no more than a politically interested figuration. It is a trope that passes itself off as truth and claims that woman ... is merely a kind of troping of that truth of man" (147). In *Cat's Eye*, by representing Miss Lumley as a drone of Empire, Atwood questions the production of its propaganda. Miss Lumley's bloomers are not a site of male fantasy and mystery, but a symbol of a stagnant, repressive ideological project. She is a pedagogical tyrant, but Atwood makes it clear that Miss Lumley's severity is at the expense of her own sexuality.

As an art educator, Miss Lumley is a relic (yet a potent one) who embodies educational and social ideals of a tired Victorianism. Her "classroom [is] like all the other classrooms at Queen Mary, but it seems darker, possibly because there's less *decoration*" (*Cat's Eye* 83, emphasis added). Indeed, Miss Lumley herself is tired and gloomy, a pale representative of organizations such as The Imperial Order of the Daughters of Empire and the School Art Leagues that flourished in the early twentieth-century and had specific ideological agendas about the way art and art instruction should be introduced to the young Canadian. The School Art League in particular worked with the Education Department of Ontario to

provide schools like Atwood's fictional Queen Mary with a blueprint for a *decorative* but proper learning environment:

> The keystone of our league [School Arts League] may be said to be the recognition of the educational value of good surroundings for our children. By "good" surroundings, we mean ... Mural *decorations* or framed pictures which should contribute to the education of the scholars by illustrating the subjects referred to in their schoolbooks and by insensibly training their eyes to the appreciation of what are universally acknowledged to be standard works of art. (Advisory Board 7, emphasis added)

Decoration was an operative word from 1895 to 1960 regarding art education in Canada, and it coincided with the "good" surroundings that the League initiated. Organizations such as the School Art Leagues thought that decorating the classrooms with art and plants would inspire students to a sensible standard of thinking, and children were encouraged to mount murals of their own, copied work alongside reproductions of paintings from recognized European artists. For Miss Lumley, *decoration* is the installation of ideologically correct material in the form of geometric precision, rather than being adornments of celebration. Because of Miss Lumley's "standards," not all student art is displayed on the wall in reward for its reproduction qualities (*Cat's Eye* 83).

Decoration as reward continues in Elaine's fifth grade class. However, Miss Stuart is the first teacher to encourage Elaine's art, and she marks Toronto's transition from repressive, militaristic assertion of Empire to a one that would eventually "assist" an independent Canadian economy. Specifically, Atwood's fictional Miss Stuart applies in her classroom what was considered in 1940s Toronto culturally valuable art education, but formulated on the romantic notion that "habitual acquaintance with objects of taste ... wonderfully improves judgement" (Gerard 109). In its practical application, the "purposeful participation in classroom art and craft work ... should tend to develop people who show considerable taste in their daily lives, with a resulting pride and interest in home and community life" (Ontario, *Bulletin* 3-4). This development of "good taste" is a continuation of Miss Lumley's notion of decoration, which is pursued as a functional method for combining creativity and ideological zeal. Miss Stuart's classroom is bright and airy, and she enjoys making murals of the children's art to ensure the children are uniform in their creative purpose.

Atwood's representation of Miss Stuart's classroom is a microcosm of the larger, liberal humanist ambitions of post-war Toronto to become a social and economic metropolitan centre. For the children, murals are an opportunity to collaborate and confirm supposedly shared life experiences. From this activity, the Ontario government believed that "the formerly discrete subject of art ... fused with the life experience of the child" would

diffuse class distinctions and foster domestic conformity (Ontario, *Arts* 5). The essential tenet was that cooperation and good taste would result in a peaceful society and a healthy economy.

It is this mural group work, particularly when Elaine must draw and display her after-school activities, that, ironically, fuels Elaine's anxiety of difference and her need to keep her art "discreet." Elaine is expected to channel her creativity toward decorating and maintaining a home, not toward being an artist. In contrast, Hurtle's teacher in *The Vivisector*, Miss Adams, demands that he write a composition describing his home--his punishment for being a "knowall" and drawing pictures that she cannot interpret (*Vivisector* 41). It is intended to be a shameful reminder of his shabby house and uneducated parents, and, symbolically, to restrict Hurtle's seemingly masculine freedom from the domestic. However, Hurtle enjoys the narcissistic exercise, and, as I discussed in my chapter on *The Vivisector*, it reflects his lifelong interest in "home" and familial security. Thus, despite these gendered differences between Hurtle and Elaine, there is a public/private split that informs their later lives as painters and their uneasy relationships with their audience.

Furthermore, these politics of home, as defined by the childhood education of the artist figure, reflect an essential difference between Canada and Australia, and the Caribbean. In both *Water With Berries* and *The Enigma of Arrival*, "home" is considered to be transitory. "Home is where I

am," Teeton says to Jeremy in *Water With Berries* (96). Teeton and the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* initially move to England in response to their "abstract educations ... and capacit[ies] for learning things by heart" which has them deny their own island experiences and adopt English notions of taste and beauty (*Enigma* 111). In order to create art, they believe they must relocate, but in turn this relocation initiates what *The Enigma of Arrival*'s narrator calls the separation of man and artist (111). Furthermore, this separation is exacerbated by the contrast in physical settings. Therefore, to produce art, both narrators imply that their very alienation initiates a need to reconcile their two selves: the artist and the colonial. In *Water With Berries*, Teeton chooses to stop painting, but tells Jeremy that he is still a painter (88); and in *The Enigma of Arrival* the narrator concludes that his "real" subject matter is "the burden of emotion" that began with his colonial education (96). In turn, I venture that Elaine's inability to reconcile her painting career with her domestic one is in part because her education is not so much "abstract"--referring to ideas rather than material objects--as it is an obscuration of her creative desire by a masculine, and individuality-obliterating, cultural-political agenda.

When Elaine begins her drawing for Miss Stuart she stares at the blank paper, unsure of what to illustrate. She knows what the other children will draw--skipping ropes, pets, and houses. However, these are not activities from Elaine's experiences. Compounding her anxiety is her awareness that

Miss Stuart expects her to draw such themes, and that if she does not her subjects will not be considered normal.[8] Elaine is nervous, and is convinced that Miss Stuart will punish her for her "abnormal" drawing of herself in bed, with the black crayon coloring in the night "until only a faint shadow of [her] bed and [her] head on the pillow remains to be seen" (*Cat's Eye* 174). Miss Stuart, however, only asks why the picture is so dark, briefly touching Elaine's shoulder before she moves on to oversee the other children. Elaine interprets this touch positively, mainly because she is not publicly humiliated by Miss Stuart by a scolding or a flick on the ear, which is the teacher's usual response of disappointment. As such, Miss Stuart seems to strengthen Elaine's belief that her talent must be kept secret; that art and artists are valuable, but they must be tempered and restrained by both domestic priorities and the good of the group, and, by extension, her feminine place within it.[9]

Rather than risk humiliation, Elaine prefers to "draw pictures about foreign countries ... [as she] desperately need[s] to believe that somewhere else these other, foreign people exist" (173). Ironically, the unseen foreigners who have been reduced to colours on the classroom map are more "real" to Elaine than the drawings from "reality" that comprise the class's murals. In this sense, Elaine is similar to the Old Dowager in *Water With Berries* in that they both seek escape in the foreign, stereotypical images of her imagination. The pictures Elaine draws of Mexican men and Indian women are exotic, picturesque replications of Miss Stuart's versions of places where "the sun ...

is a cheerful yellow, the palm trees a clear green, the clothing they wear is floral, their folksongs gay" (173). However, Atwood implies that these stereotypical, exotic colonial images, like Elaine's ambivalent identity, are not necessarily symptomatic of the fear of other, but are the fear of individuality within the Canadian discourse of nationhood. As such, these constructions do not go unchallenged in the novel, although they do remain problematic.

For example, Elaine's affinity with the foreign is evident in her fondness for Mr. Banerji, her father's university assistant from India. Elaine considers him to be a "creature like [herself]: alien and apprehensive" (138). Like the exotic images of Elaine's imagination, Banerji, for the most part, is a static figure in the novel. Although his shy manner and slight frame starkly contrast Miss Lumley's geography lessons about the cannibalistic, heathen colonies, his racial difference is exploited by Atwood to reveal Elaine's own difference as an artist. In *Water With Berries*, it is possible to temper one's condemnation of the Old Dowager with the fact that she is also a sympathetic character, and in many ways a one-dimensional one as well. However, Elaine's childish fascination with Banerji turns to pity when she is an adult, and she imagines him walking down the street in the 1940s "in dread" of racial slurs (429).

Conversely, when Elaine finally depicts Banerji in her painting "Three Muses"--a painting which celebrates Banerji's fatherly role in her life, as well as introduces his exotic presence into staid Toronto--Banerji is "wearing a

richly worked gold and red oriental costume" reminiscent of Dutch painter Jan Gossaert's "Adoration of the Magi" (428). In Banerji's extended hand are spruce budworm eggs, although Elaine says that no one but a biologist would recognize them (428).[10] The image is deliberately contradictory. Banerji's clothing overtly represents his difference, his orientalism, yet his offer of the eggs remains muted except to Elaine and her father, who recognize the language of the biologist who is familiar with the Canadian landscape.

Although Atwood's description of Elaine's early artistic education is mainly a condemnation of British influence and the adoption of inflexible educational practices, Banerji's place in Toronto is also a reminder that such practices were confined to an urban setting. Detailed instructions for decoration and murals were impossible to implement in one-room schoolhouses in small farming communities such as Uxbridge or Richmond Hill, despite the fact they were within fifty kilometres of Toronto. Teachers were more concerned with instructing farm children the rudiments of learning with little or no supplies. As such, in *Cat's* Eye, Atwood fictionally examines an urban space (Toronto) that within Canada may be considered metropolitan, yet still imposes a political will curiously interpreted by Toronto educators as somewhere between the propaganda of Empire and home decorating.

Frustrated by Atwood's description of Elaine's childhood, Alberto Manguel (1988) and Robert Towers (1989) conclude that *Cat's Eye* is excessive

in its "anthropological catalogue ... of Toronto's tribal customs" (Manguel 67), and "is nearly overwhelmed by the mass of documentation" on the middle-class, Torontonian childhood (Towers 50). I believe, however, that such generalizations ignore the effort Atwood has made to characterize Elaine's specific formation as a painter, as well as Atwood's insertion of Banerji into this environment. It is Elaine's early art education in Toronto that initiates her frequent inability to reconcile her artistic life with her domestic one.

Elaine's post-secondary education at the University of Toronto has a similar, disarming effect on her. When she tells her parents that she intends to pursue art for a living they are concerned, since "art was not something that could be depended on, though all right for a hobby" (*Cat's Eye* 293). At the University of Toronto, she takes Art and Archaeology because it is the "only sanctioned pathway that leads anywhere close to art" (293). However, the University acts not just as a colonial Royal Academy, dictating and guiding the progress of Canadian art and artists, but also as an extension of her public school education--blindly loyal to colonial educational practices and acutely unimaginative. As in public, Elaine feels distant from her schoolmates. There are only women in Art and Archaeology, and none are interested in becoming artists, an occupation not encouraged by the University. Instead, they wear cashmere sweaters and actively pursue potential husbands to avoid any practical applications of their academic knowledge. Even as an painter, in a supposedly creative environment, Elaine

sees the artist in a position that cannot be reconciled with the domestic demands of a patriarchal society.

Atwood illustrates this position through Elaine's relationship with Josef, her Hungarian life drawing instructor at the Ontario College of Art. Elaine must take his course there because the University of Toronto considers nude models and life drawing "pretentious" (294). However, Josef is a tired, bleary character, who juggles his sexual time between Elaine and Susie, another one of his students. Josef, from his stereotypical position as a European and sexual aggressor, is constantly "rearranging" Elaine's makeup and clothing, making her look more European and artistic (323). Symbolically, Elaine is the savage, Canadian other, who Josef attempts to tame by "rub[bing] his hands over [her] skin as if he's erasing [her]" (317), while declaring that painting is "no longer important" (324).

I will argue in the remainder of this chapter that, despite her oppressive education, Elaine imaginatively and physically returns to it and Toronto as sites of creativity. In Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, the hero in the narrator's interpretation of de Chirico's painting "The Enigma of Arrival" is always lost in the city of arrival, and it is this symbolic moment or site of confusion that produces the narrator's creative sensitivity. Similarly, Elaine claims that Toronto is a place of "misery and enchantment," and in her "dreams of this city [she] is always lost" (14). Also, Elaine's Toronto education parallels Naipaul's hero, whereby he unwittingly participates in a

"religious ritual in which, led on by kindly people, he ... find[s] himself the intended victim" (*Enigma* 92). Elaine's educators are not "kindly," but their colonial template does ensure that Elaine's and other students independent painterly ambitions are tempered by a self-effacing insecurity about their cultural value. However, as Atwood details in *Survival*, there is creative potential in the victim's examination of the "objective experiences" that have formed the artistic personality (38).

Painting and Biology

In this section, I will explore further Elaine as a painter figure as she evolves from her educational experiences. I will also argue that Elaine's parents, whose notions of creativity and family function outside the rigidity of the Empire's and the Toronto's educational agendas, provide a positive, though unconventional response to Elaine's formal and social education.

As Mr. Risley conducts his caterpillar research in northern Ontario with his wife, Elaine and her brother Stephen, he seemingly deprives them of a "normal" urban upbringing. When the Risleys do eventually settle in the outskirts of Toronto, they build a home that is a distortion of the uniform, "decorative" art that Elaine learns in public school. As a result, Elaine's parents affect her in two ways: first, they establish a domestic space that is non-conformist and unsettled, thus fuelling Elaine's difference and social anxiety; second, they provide Elaine with an alternative social education that

cultivates her artistic talents by virtue of their own unconscious but creative acts rooted in Mr. Risley's entomological surveying of the north.

Because Mr. Risley's research is valuable to the Canadian government, he is not conscripted for the Second World War. Instead, the Risleys exist, at least to Elaine, in a shifting, rootless world, driving from place to place, sleeping in tents or the occasional shoddy motel, and rarely seeing other people. Others intrude only when they briefly stay in a town or small city, or when her parents listen to the radio and "the war filters in ... remote and crackly" (25). To Elaine, the war is as distant and incomprehensible as the lyrics to "Rule Britannia!" and the photograph of the King and Queen on the schoolroom wall; they are equally foreign.

This absence of social interaction, like her formal schooling, marks Elaine's development as other, and it coincides with Atwood's revision of the north as a dangerous, fearful space. Furthermore, this space also shows that Elaine's eventual distinction as a painter is fuelled not by an inherent, stereotypical need to be alone or to create, but by her parents' emphasis on self-sufficiency within this space. Initially, Elaine does not see herself outside the confines of her family and the sparsely inhabited wilderness in which she travels. She is self-reliant and not self-conscious, and her northern life marks the only time "she was happy" (22). She remarks that eight months pass before she returns to school, and then only for a few months, each stint an unremarkable one. Instead, until her family moves permanently to Toronto,

Elaine depends on her parents for her early schooling, both scholarly and social, and because of their peculiar lifestyle Elaine's childhood develops in isolation.

Elaine's parents' social convictions are premised on self-reliance and resourcefulness. Mrs. Risley makes the family's clothes, oblivious to the fashions of the day. Mr. Risley is the only biologist in his field, and he devises his own tools and methods for his research. Chimnoy Banerjee (1990) comments that the family in *Cat's Eye* "display[s] an 'armour' against effect and a distaste for the culture within which they exist; they isolate and estrange familiar features of mass culture" (514). This may be true, but I believe that in the process the Risleys play a significant role in Elaine's development as a painter, rather than providing colourful contrast to an idealistic post-war Canada.

In particular, her father's work with caterpillars emphasizes a symbolic relationship between art and north/nature that fuels Elaine's creative desires more than any formal, institutionalized understanding of art. Austin Fraser, the American minimalist painter in Jane Urquart's *The Underpainter*, was first drawn to the Canadian north because of his "unusual" mother, who took "delight in the geological oddities" of the chasms and gorges that cut through Rochester, New York (18). Similarly, in *Cat's Eye* Elaine helps her father with his notebook drawings, and the caterpillars come to symbolize a conflation of science and art that reflects the north's effect on Elaine's artistic upbringing.

In *Art and Science* (1972), Dolf Rieser claims that the quality of art is related to the artist's understanding of form, and that in nature "shapes and structures ... provide a perfect solution from an aesthetic point of view" (48). Initially, Elaine is unaware of the influence her coloured drawings of insect dissections has on her art. Like her father, she sees the work as functional--a necessity for the study of science rather than art. However, the caterpillars symbolize a structural perfection required to understand artistic form--an understanding which comes to predominate her paintings.

Appropriately, it is Elaine's dissectional drawings which gain her entry into the Ontario College of Art, as well as serve as a metaphorical boundary between Elaine and her parents, and a link between the aesthetics of painting and the aesthetics of biology. When Mr. Risley looks up in a tree at a harvest of caterpillars, he joyfully calls it "a beautiful infestation" (*Cat's Eye* 24). Elaine learns to respect this "beauty" and, like her father's research, after she examines a beetle or toad she puts it back, "unless [she] needs some of these things for fishing" (26). Their respect for nature converges when Mr. Risley marks his biology students' dissectional drawings in his new capacity as professor at the University of Toronto. Mr. Risley scoffs at students who "put the mouth [of the insect] at the wrong end, or made no provision for a heart" (37). It is a moment that anticipates Elaine's own drawings, particularly her dissection of the noxious Mrs. Smeath, whose heart is that of a "dying turtle: reptilian, dark-red, diseased" (372). Elaine's parodic, visceral depiction of

Mrs. Smeath counters romantic notions of nature and the north as dangerous, but without agency or purpose. And, as I shall argue in the next section, through the intrusion of the north on the suburbs of Toronto, Atwood questions the masculinist paradigm of the north as dangerous, and capable of representation only by its emptiness.

The Northern Experience

Here, I wish to contrast further Mr. Risley's northern and urban experiences and their effect on Elaine as other. Specifically, it is in the north that Elaine considers her parents' activities as "normal." Only when Mr. Risley takes the position at the University and they permanently move to the Toronto suburbs does Elaine recognize her unorthodox upbringing and the politics of Canada as a former colony.[11] During the Royal Visit, as Elaine waits for the Princess to wind her way through the streets, she stands on a "mud mountain with [her] Union Jack hanging limp from its stick" (171).[12]

This mud mountain is the product of the development of the residential suburb outside Toronto, and it is symbolic of the Risleys' transition from northern Ontario travelers to suburban settlers, just as the "limp" Union Jack announces the diminishing British influence on its colony. The scene is an important one, as Elaine imagines herself running in front of the Princess's car, demanding to be noticed and believing "that things will be different, something will be done" (172). But when the Princess passes, Elaine has not

moved from the mountain. Although the scene possibly signals a continuation of colonial influence over the developing dominion, it is Elaine's parents who shape and landscape the mud--a process that coincides with Elaine's own creative ambitions.[13] Elaine comments that their new home in its "lagoon of postwar mud" is a "far cry from picket fences and white curtains" (35). This "postwar mud," however, is laboured over by her parents who trade in their outdoor skills for more domesticated, but still irregular, horticultural pursuits that do not reproduce the predictable suburban environment. Instead of flowers, they work a vegetable garden, and they build the house's interior in a fashion untypical of their neighbours.

As a result, the Risley house intrudes on Toronto's civic attempt to create a homogeneous, metropolitan community that Atwood symbolically inscribes with images of the past being turned with the earth. Elaine is "lagooned" in a suburb that is also isolated, further establishing the familial grounding for Elaine's life as an outsider--a painter--who is continually trying to adapt to the "normalcy" of the suburbs and its inhabitants. W.H. New (1997) claims that Canadian literature portrays cities such as Toronto as "torn ... between the desire to grow and be 'recognized' and the desire to stay neighbourly and small" (157). However, in *Cat's Eye*, the customary distinction of the rural as morally superior to the corrupt urban is blurred as Atwood narrows this binary to include the *sub*urban, and describes Elaine's life there as distinctly alienating, compounded by her parents' curious

adaptation to the suburban environment and its conventions. At first, Elaine enjoys having her own room, but she soon becomes lonely and feels the family is stranded "in [their] lagoon of postwar mud" (*Cat's Eye* 35). She is alone in the north, but she is never lonely, whereas in Toronto she is marooned and chastised by her friends for her slovenly looks and lack of manners. Paralleling Elaine's division, her father, once happy in the north, is now "not so cheerful" (34).

Consequently, in Toronto Elaine is both the uncivilized barbarian from the hinterland, and the potential alienated painter figure. When the Risleys pack up each summer for the trip north, Grace, Carol and Cordelia watch the car leave, and, unsure of the destination, define it as savage rather than adventuresome or exotic. For Elaine, the tortures of childhood, especially the cruelty of her friends, provide the impetus for Elaine's awareness of difference premised on her lack of "culture." To function in this suburban environment requires her to discard her northern "self":

> I worry about what I've said today, the expression on my face, how I walk, what I wear, because all of these things need improvement. I am not normal ... It will take hard work and a long time. (125)

Elaine's childhood friends, however, do not "help" her. Cordelia in particular takes great delight in tormenting Elaine. She is Elaine's vivisector, creating imaginative punishments for minor social misdemeanours, usually premised

on Elaine's dishevelled appearance and improper manners. Here, Elaine is the personification of "nature the monster" outlined in Atwood's *Survival*: Elaine is distrusted, and suspected of betraying her friends (*Cat's Eye* 49). Grace's mother, Mrs. Smeath, says that Elaine's trials "serve her right," and Aunt Mildred declares Elaine a "heathen" without morals who will never change (192).

Aunt Mildred's comment ironically recalls Prospero's claim in *The Tempest* that on Caliban's "nature / Nurture can never stick" (IV.i.188-9). Similar to Teeton in *Water With Berries*, where Prospero's cultural legacy "sticks" to Teeton and inhibits his creativity, Elaine is "uncivilized" because she does not conform to the centre's standards of conduct. She lacks respectability and seemingly lives in a state of moral ambiguity. Indeed, neighbours stigmatize Elaine and her parents for bringing their northern habits to Toronto, where they appear lost. In the north, Elaine defecated in the woods, burying her waste and toilet paper (*Cat's Eye* 23); now, her waste is simply flushed away, "vanishing in an instant" into the urban sprawl (25). However, unlike the narrator's inability to recover the body of her drowned father in *Surfacing*, or the disappearance of Lucy in "Death by Landscape," Elaine's design to leave no visible reminder of her presence is deliberate.

In this respect, Elaine's northern experience is untypical of Atwood's other characters in that nothing frightening or disturbing happens to her. The North is not necessarily a place of fear or of psychological confrontation, nor is

it a place that returns to haunt her in adulthood. Rather, Elaine does paint the north later in life, but it is through the influence of science and her father, not as a distinct, uncharted landscape. Furthermore, Elaine learns to map both the physical and the spiritual, illustrated in her own metaphorical vivisection of Mrs. Smeath in "THE*KINGDOM*OF*GOD*IS*WITHIN*--YOU." The title is partly in reference to Mrs. Smeath's attempt to indoctrinate her with religion when Elaine was a child. However, as I have noted, the painting also conflates science and art, showing Mrs. Smeath as a dissection, with " her one large breast sectioned to show her [diseased] heart" (372). The diseased heart symbolizes Mrs. Smeath's cruelty, a result of her own divorce from Nature and her fear of Elaine. Here, Mrs. Smeath is similar to the characters in *Cat's Eye* in that, other than Elaine's family, no one has any relationship with the landscape outside of his or her urban or suburban environment. Even tame adventures such as visits to cottages or northern vacations are absent.

This absence of encounter contrasts Atwood's other fiction. *Surfacing* concludes with the narrator, after an encounter with the landscape of northern Ontario, returning to Toronto knowing that the city is "the real danger now" (190). In "Death by Landscape" (1992), Lois vows "she would never go up north [again]" (120). She prefers her reclusive life in a Toronto apartment, surrounded by her collection of Canadian landscape paintings which are haunting and "charged with violent colour," yet are contained reminders of her

childhood experience there and the death of her friend, Lucy (121). Both texts give art the power to terrify, and to trouble the monotonous, "civilized" myths of the north that neutralize human complexities. Thus, Atwood believes that Canada needs art and artists to counter middle-class urban Canadians like the Smeaths, whose self-worth is rooted in their sameness. In contrast, Elaine's parents prepare the ground, so to speak, for her to paint stories of her life within a hostile, urban environment.

In *Strange Things* (1991)--Atwood's Clarendon lectures--Atwood concludes the series by noting that soon "the [Canadian] north will be neither female or male, neither fearful or health-giving, because it will be dead" (116). This figurative death is anticipated in Timothy Findley's *Headhunter*, although he goes one step further and implies that only fantasy and dystopian images will sustain Canada's creative culture. In that novel, animals and people now inhabit Toronto, as animals are "forced to cling to what [they] have [left]," and a new disease called sturnusemia, carried by birds, threatens the population (42). Furthermore, Findley ironically parallels this diseased animal population with the symbolic deaths of Canadian literary icons such as Susannah Moodie.

Understandably, Atwood is saddened by the north's destruction, and possibly her Clarendon lectures' romanticizing of the north and its symbolic construction in relation to the south signals her fear that the north will also disappear from all but the most obscure Canadian literature. As I will argue

further in the next section, in *Cat's Eye* Elaine's narrative is prompted by her retrospective, and her paintings' reception signals a reconfiguration of the north's potency, both physically and imaginatively.

The Painter and the Gallery

At the centre of Elaine's narrative is her retrospective at Sub-Versions, the trendy Queen Street art gallery. The gallery, despite its pretentious name, is an ironic stereotype of a commercial, American art gallery. Elaine likens the gallery to a church:

> ... there's too much reverence, you feel there should be some genuflecting going on. Also I don't like it that this is where paintings end up, on these neutral-toned walls with the track lighting, sterilized, rendered safe and acceptable. (*Cat's Eye* 90)

Elaine's criticism recalls Wole Soyinka's position that I outline later in my chapter on *Water With Berries*, in that the modern gallery "is a privileged edifice" rooted in Eurocentric elitism ("Child" 36). However, Soyinka also comments on the irony that painting as a "framed expression ... appears to have been especially tailored" for galleries like Sub-Versions in that the subject matter reflects the secular nature of the gallery space (36). It is this relationship between the painting and the gallery that I believe is at the centre of Elaine's ambiguity regarding her retrospective. First, despite Sub-Versions' earnest attempt to celebrate Elaine's body of work, her paintings

are "sterilized" by its commercial environment. Second, Elaine's attempt to resist this commercialization is problematized by her understanding that it must be tolerated if her work is to be displayed, but that she is also "frighten[ed] by this "place of evaluation, of judgement" (*Cat's Eye* 20).

When Elaine first visits Sub-Versions, she wears a powder-blue sweatsuit while setting up her display, and derives satisfaction from her obvious contrast to Charna, the curator of Sub-Versions who only wears black outfits. The track suit is in part a look of domestic comfort, and also a disguise so she can "walk past [the gallery], [and] glance casually, pretending to be a housewife, a tourist, someone window shopping" (19-20). Elaine is, of course, all of these personae--a composite of the average Canadian citizen who both distrusts and sees the value of art to society, even though she is an artist herself. However, Elaine's persona also recalls Group of Seven painters such as Franklin Carmichael and A.Y. Jackson who worked as graphic designers for the Canadian Pacific Railway, creating advertisements for the north as a tourist destination. In return for their services, the painters were given free passage to the north. Thus, ironically, it was the tourist trade that not only provided access for painters to paint what the Empire saw at colonial exhibitions, it unsettled the myth that the north was an empty, dangerous place that defined the Canadian consciousness. Instead, it was made into a site for public consumption, with the native population removed from this marketable image.

Fittingly, on her way to the gallery, Elaine sees a poster for RISLEY IN RETROSPECT, in which a moustache has been drawn on her photograph. Elaine admires the vandalist's handiwork and its "desire to ridicule" (20). However, she also is pleased that she now has "a face worth defacing," and that she has "made something of [herself]" (20). She sees the vandalism not so much as a political act, but as a reflection of the public attitude toward the stereotypes of art. The moustache imposes a masculinity that ironically recalls her first husband Jon's remark on the inferiority of "lady painters," and his friends who grow sparse moustaches and wear black in the stereotypical uniform of the artist figure (297). However, the moustache also problematizes the notion of gaze. In the epigraph of *Bodily Harm* (1981), Atwood quotes from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*: "A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman's presence ... defines what can and cannot be done to her." The quotation reflects how the female characters in the novel, particularly Jocasta, persistently confront social and governmental systems of oppression. In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's defacement marks how she has positively reconfigured, in Berger's terms, "the allotted and confined space [in] the keeping of men" (*Ways* 46).

This reconfiguring, or re-seeing, of herself as artist continues in Sub-Versions, as Elaine confronts an art world that is run by women, not men. This may be attributed to Elaine's anxiety and fear of Charna, as it was Grace and Cordelia who most maligned Elaine for her difference. Unlike Grace and

Cordelia, however, Charna, and the reporter Andrea, are stereotypes, and Elaine deliberately offends the gallery community which wants its artists to look stylishly "bohemian." Therefore, the sweatsuit also might signal Elaine's success, as she can afford to offend Charna, and ironically pretend that the sweatsuit itself is "iconoclas[tic]" (*Cat's Eye* 91).

In particular, Andrea's interview with Elaine is an opportunity for Atwood to debunk myths about what it means to be a female artist in Canada. Andrea confuses the Vietnam War with the Second World War in her effort to define Elaine's painterly era, and her persistent questions about feminism offend Elaine, who responds with an ironic blankness that she "hate[s] party lines" (94). Elaine's "blankness" is similar to Jeffrey Crane's demeanour in Jack Hodgins' *The Honorary Patron* (1987). Crane is an art historian who for a brief period has a television show about art in Canada. Although Crane is a serious critic, the show is a success because "of his refusal to demonstrate the expected reverence [for art]," giving "sidelong knowing looks [and] ironic smiles, as if to suggest, 'Can you believe any of this? Can you trust me at all?'" (19-20). In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's monotone, rhetorical answers "exasperate" Andrea, who wants Elaine "to be furious and quaint"--the new version of the artist image, no longer censored, but accepted and neutered (94).

Elaine's interruption of Andrea's ideologically pointed questioning reflects Elaine's uneasiness as well as her anger. Sub-Versions attempts to

sell Elaine's show by placing it within a trendy, theoretical context of other works of art, particularly the art shown in New York galleries. This arrangement supposedly allows the isolated images on the gallery walls to communicate their meaning to their viewers, as well as lend Sub-Versions prestige. Furthermore, the owners' names on the cards below Elaine's paintings, although mocked by Elaine as pretending that "mere ownership is on par with creation," confirm that art is also property (90). The material status one acquires by owning a "Risley" cannot be undermined by Elaine, despite her frustrated efforts. In his depiction of Hurtle's Retrospective Exhibition in *The Vivisector*, White counters such crass materialism with an excessive twenty page (578-98) parody of guests debating the merits of Hurtle's paintings as "investments" (580). Finally, Hurtle leaves the party in disgust, a pointed contrast to the greedy, ignorant guests who are enjoying "a lovely party," but one marred by its lack of subtlety (579).

Atwood, however, exploits the ekphrastic nature of her text to deconstruct the fallacious *interpretations* (the rights of ownership) of Elaine's paintings. Specifically, Elaine responds to Charna's textual appendages pasted below the paintings. Of "Picoseconds" in particular, Charna's gloss claims that the painting "takes on the Group of Seven and reconstructs their vision of landscape in the light of contemporary experiment and postmodern pastiche" (427). Elaine, however, refutes this hyperbole: "It is in fact a landscape, done in oils ... with the craggy rocks and windswept trees and

heavy impasto of the twenties and thirties ... In the right hand corner, my parents are making lunch" (427). Part of Elaine's comment is to deflate the critical assumption that Elaine, because she is post-Group of Seven, must be a postmodern painter. In *Zones of Contention* (1996), Carol Becker argues that when one views paintings in which the "conventional notions of beauty" are seemingly not challenged, one often assumes that "there must be some irony in the presentation ... often within the framework of postmodernism appropriation" (60). Since Elaine does not stylistically "challenge" the Group of Seven, Sub-Versions interprets her paintings as vaguely ironic, and therefore in need of explication. In Bryan Wolf's terms (1990), Sub-Versions defers to the potential power of words "to police images" and determine a painting's reception (182).

Elaine's family, though, nestled in the corner of the painting, does disrupt the conventions of the northern landscape, although not in the same manner as Charna's text. As John Cooke discusses in *The Influence of Painting on Five Canadian Writers* (1996), authors, including Atwood and Morley Callaghan, have confronted the Group of Seven and its "transformation from national myth to national cliché," particularly by parodying the heroic language by which they are celebrated (27). Charna's language itself is cliché Canadian art criticism, categorizing Elaine in its quest for cultural history and to cross critical borders to include Elaine in an international community of art. Robert Stacey, in "The Myth--and Truth--of

the True North" (1991), claims that "in their haste to become old, young nations tell lies to themselves that turn into necessary truths" (37). Elaine implies that her painting does not "take on" the Group of Seven, but rather depicts her familial history in a northern setting: a setting that Sub-Versions, ironically, confirms as still very much alive in the public imagination that continues to see the north as empty, ready to be filled with images of the other.[14]

Nevertheless, Elaine's mapping of her personal discourse reflects more than merely Atwood's design to parody contemporary academic discourse of art still fixated on bush myths. Rather, Atwood, like Lamming, wishes to show that the postcolonial painter's subject matter is one of choice, and that style or technique is not necessarily imitation but the participation in a larger world of art and artists not defined by the Imperial border. Toronto painter Jack Bush describes Canadian war era painters as "born, brought up, and taught with a solid academic background to draw properly ... to draw the figure in proportion, and to paint landscape well, and to paint portraits well ... [This] was the education of a fine artist in Central Canada" (Hale 19). When Elaine critiques her paintings, she delights in their effusion of styles, and execution of techniques that she has learned from her teachers or from instructional books. Furthermore, it is this mélange which allows Elaine to paint "pictures that seem to exist on their own accord" (*Cat's Eye* 346).

In "Picoseconds," Elaine's parents are painted in what Elaine describes as the renaissance fresco technique of egg tempura, which contrasts the oils that Charna believes imitates the Group of Seven; in "Three Muses," Elaine employs abstract techniques and the detailed, ornamental style of renaissance painter Jan Gossaert to dress her muses in images of biblical royalty; "One Wing' is a triptych--the central panel is twice the width of the two other panels which can also be folded over the central one. In the middle panel is Stephen suspended in the sky, with the flanking panels depicting a moth and a World War Two airplane; "Cat's Eye" is a self-portrait, with an oblong pier glass in the background resembling the distorted, oblong skull in Hans Holbein's painting "The Ambassadors" (1533). Inside the shape are the shadowed images of Elaine, Grace, and Cordelia trudging through a field of snow; finally, "Unified Field Theory" depicts a cross-section of the sky as it descends to below ground level. In the centre is the Virgin of Lost Things holding a cat's eye marble, the talisman that symbolizes her difference as a painter.

With these narrative descriptions, I believe Atwood attempts to complicate what are seemingly peripheral, Canadian representations of landscape. The science references in the paintings reflects Elaine's relationship with her father and her rigorous, colonial education. However, this same accuracy and execution resembles the frescos of Jan van Eyck and his innovative illusionary realism. Similarly, Aurora, in Rushdie's *The Moor's*

Last Sigh, is criticized because her painting "The Scandal" has its "origins in her family history, irritating those critics who objected to such historicizing" (103). Furthermore, their criticism ignores the painting's style which is rooted in the "narrative-painting traditions of the South," or that the canvas hangs in the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi (101). In *Cat's Eye*, the figures within the oblong shape in "Cat's Eye" resemble de Chirico's shrouded Odysseus figures in "The Enigma of Arrival." The chessboard may have been supplanted by a field of snow, but, like Naipaul's narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival*, Elaine "move[s] from that silence and desolation" of an obvious, external landscape to a more meaningful internal one (*Enigma* 92).

Thus, Sub-Versions exhibits feminist "sub-versions" of acceptable patriarchal art in a gallery that is a "sub-version" of more mainstream Canadian galleries, galleries that are in turn only "sub-versions" of London and New York galleries. However, Sub-Versions also "subverts" and distorts the stereotypical image of the artist by championing Elaine, who, in turn, "sub-verts" Sub-Versions by declaring through her narrative her own personal need to interpret her art and her life. The retrospective confirms her place in the Canadian art community, but the paintings themselves are visual reminders of her past. Symbolically, it is shifting boundaries of landscape that interest Atwood.

Summary

In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine understands that absolute artistic autonomy is a false and unattainable ideal. Painting, like any other creative endeavour that is also a source of livelihood, is subject to the demands of the marketplace and the shifting tastes of its participants. To deny this fact not only evades economic and social realities, but invalidates any attempt to be taken seriously by the public. The Canadian perception of art and artist is a mixture of admiration, mistrust, and ignorance. In a consumer-oriented society, greatness is measured by wealth and popularity, as Elaine suggests in her snide reference to the popularity of Canadian painter Robert Bateman and his wildlife art (15). Such art is not challenging; instead, it lulls the viewer into believing that appreciating meticulous reproductions of the harsh Canadian environment replaces critical and aesthetic engagement.

As I noted at the outset of this chapter, *Cat's Eye* is the only Canadian novel about a female painter figure. However, what is also distinctive about the novel is that its protagonist is commercially and financially successful. Elaine's accomplishment emphasizes that a postcolonial nation may be bound by the language and culture of the dominant society, but the postcolonial nation will define itself not by government or other formalized institutions interpreting the needs of Empire, but by artists who create within this repressive and restrictive setting. Specifically, Atwood has created a paradigmatic structure to introduce a Canadian painter/protagonist who

emerges not just in spite of well-meaning but stifling educational practices, but because of them. The vitality of Elaine Risley as painter begins with her struggles in Miss Lumley's class, and throughout Elaine's career she must contend with such cultural and political authority. The Canadian classroom in particular marks a series of colonial and patriarchal battles for Elaine. However, Atwood presents Elaine as "different" partly to undermine the misguided authority of people like Miss Lumley, but also to show that Elaine synchronically develops in a postcolonial Canada fraught with cultural anxiety over its lack of tradition.

Notes

[1] See "Mom schtick," *Chatelaine* May 1989: 33. The article contains a picture of Atwood and her daughter, Jess, along with two humorous anecdotes about Atwood's home life.

[2] See <http://www.web.net/owtoad> for Atwood's official site, and <http://www.cariboo.bc.ca/atwood> for the Atwood-sanctioned *Margaret Atwood Society Information Site.* In the former, Atwood promises to answer all mail, and has prepared an introduction to her website that belies the aloofness of the writer: "Welcome to this page! We have put it [website] together in the hope that it will help students, scholars, researchers, and other interested parties to find the information they require, quickly and simply" ("Introduction"). Atwood's voice is enthusiastic and accommodating, dispelling the myth of the aloof artist.

[3] Both *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Cat's Eye* have disclaimers which declare their fictional, not autobiographical, design. The full title of *The Enigma of Arrival* is *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel.* Inside the jacket of *Cat's Eye* is the disclaimer: "This is a work of fiction. Although its form is that of the autobiography, it is not one."

[4] Coral Ann Howell's *Margaret Atwood.* New York: St. Martin's, 1996; Sonia Mycak's *In Search of the Split Subject: Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology, and the Novels of Margaret Atwood.* Toronto: ECW, 1996; and Hilde Staels's *Margaret*

Atwood's Novels: A Study of Narrative Discourse. Tubingen: Francke/Verlag, 1995.

[5] In 1924, Canadian artists contributed to The Canadian Section of Fine Arts at the British Empire Exhibition in London. The exhibition was a success with the public and media partly because the exhibited works were well-received, with particular praise bestowed on The Group of Seven, and partly because the exhibition posed no threat to British art.

[6] Jon, Elaine's first husband, is forced to leave Canada to work in the United States. There is no market for his abstract paintings since they do not emulate more traditional styles, and he eventually finds a job making special effects for the film industry.

[7] See Bill Ashcroft, et al. *The Empire Writes Back.* London: Routledge, 1989.

[8] Also, Toronto art teachers were expected to examine frequent reports which attempted to answer the question: "What are the normal characteristics to be found in the pictures made by children, of average ability in art, attending elementary schools in the Ontario school system?" (Staff of the Essex School Art Unit iv). The teachers were given examples of elementary student art so they could study acceptable subjects and standard degrees of technical accomplishment. The examples were mainly interpretations of urban activities such as watching steam shovels or skipping rope, experiences

foreign to Elaine because of her lack of friends and spending her vacations in northern Ontario.

[9] However, it should be noted that Miss Stuart is Scottish, not English. Her leniency with Elaine might suggest a solidarity against colonial rule, although the adult Elaine suggests that Miss Stuart's "exile ... from plundered Scotland" is of far more consequence than Elaine's childhood anxieties (*Cat's Eye* 429). Nevertheless, Elaine is pleased that she can paint Miss Stuart's kindness, "translat[ing] [Miss Stuart] into glory" (429).

[10] Miss Stuart and Mrs. Finestein also are depicted in the painting. Like Mr. Banerji, they are holding round objects of indeterminate origin that require Elaine's explication: Miss Stuart a globe (which contrasts Miss Lumley's flat, colonial map), and Mrs. Finestein an orange.

[11] In contrast, Grace is not sure what her father does for a living, other than that he is a businessman. However, the fact that he leaves home for the day and returns to preside over the dinner table is enough for her to understand that she lives a "normal," life.

[12] The influence of Empire recedes even further when Elaine skips Grade 7 and moves into Grade 8, thus "missing the Kings of England in chronological order" (*Cat's Eye* 217).

[13] The obscurity of Empire is also a theme in Priscilla Galloway's *Too Young to Fight: Memories from our Youth During World War II* (Toronto: Stoddard,

1999), a compilation of Canadian authors recollecting World War Two. In Claire MacKay's "1939 May 21: The King and Queen are coming!" young Claire and her older brothers sell spaces on their lawn to observers wishing to watch the King and Queen pass by on their tour of Toronto. Like Elaine, Claire is disappointed, and her brother Grant says that it was not the King and Queen that passed, but "just two statues" (151). Claire's disappointment, however, is offset by the $38.50 profit.

[14] Charna assumes the same cliché language with the painting "Three Muses." She writes that "Risley continues her disconcerting deconstruction of perceived gender and its relation to perceived power," apparently confused by the image of Mr. Banerji in a role seemingly reserved for women (*Cat's Eye* 428).

Painting as Political Statement:

George Lamming's *Water With Berries*

> The socially critical zones of artworks are those where it hurts; where in their expression, historically determined, the untruth of the social situation comes to light.
>
> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

> No one is born a rebel. Rebellion is something we have to be trained in. And even with the encouragement of my father's rages ... there was much about our family life and attitudes and our island that I accepted--acceptances which later were to mortify me.
>
> V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*

To date, the scholarly response to George Lamming's *Water With Berries* has focused almost exclusively on comparisons and contrasts between the novel and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. This is an understandable approach because *Water With Berries* is thematically premised on *The Tempest*, and because Lamming has written and spoken extensively on the topic. Also, the texts share plot and character similarities, particularly the protagonist

Teeton as a deconstructive extension of Caliban who has made the reverse voyage to London, the home of the colonizer. However, there are two essential elements of Lamming's revision of *The Tempest* which merit more than general inquiry. First, Teeton is a painter, a point that scholars have either dismissed or generalized to "artist," a term with separate theoretical implications (as discussed elsewhere in this thesis). Second, although *Water With Berries* is set in London of the 1950s, Teeton's creative and political acts are determined as much by his homeland--Lamming's fictional Caribbean island of San Cristobal--as by his confrontation with a fading British Empire. Thus, the novel suggests both physical and psychical progress toward decolonization.

The Painter Stops Painting

What distinguishes *Water With Berries* from *Cat's Eye*, *The Vivisector*, and *The Enigma of Arrival* is the odd fact that its painterly figure chooses to *stop* producing art. Teeton's choice is partly in response to the Eurocentric, critical reception to his painting. British art critics, as depicted in the novel, dubiously praise Teeton's "exotic" background, not his talents. However, Teeton, in conjunction with the terrorist group the Secret Gathering, participates in bombings and other violent acts in San Cristobal both before and after his arrival in London. Moreover, Teeton finances one bombing with the seemingly reckless sale of his paintings at a rock-bottom price--a

decidedly ambiguous act. The novel also concludes with Teeton being charged with the murder of his British landlady, the Old Dowager.[1] Consequently, the public in London perceives Teeton as a "painter" or a "criminal," or both. Furthermore, both classifications are informed by his San Cristobal origins, further emphasizing his difference. I will argue that because he is labelled as both "painter" and "criminal" by the public in London and San Cristobal, the novel raises specific questions about the postcolonial subject and creative authenticity.

Teeton is alienated in London by his otherness, and after seven years there he has come to despise working in an environment in which an exoticism-seeking audience views his paintings as typical images of his homeland. This audience is also excited and intrigued by Teeton's involvement in bombings in San Cristobal. However, Teeton is not a criminal *simply because* he is from politically unstable San Cristobal, or because he abandons his painting in response to this instability. Yet, paradoxically, Lamming implies that Teeton's only creative recognition stems from these two factors: his ethnicity, and the fact that he participates in bombings. The reporter who attempts to interview Teeton about his exhibition has never seen his paintings, and boldly admits that his story is "about where [Teeton] comes from" (*Water* 159). Furthermore, London's art community perceives him as safe and non-threatening, even as it acknowledges his history of violence, by emphasizing his difference both as a painter and as a San

Cristobalan. It is within this paradox that Lamming reveals a postcolonial critique of the powerful aesthetic codes of "art," "tradition" and "authenticity" as they apply to Teeton and his painting.

I will detail how in *Water With Berries* such codes are imperialist in nature, and attempt to maintain a fixed, ordered reality by destabilizing Teeton's place within it. In particular, I will examine Teeton's relationship with the Old Dowager, one that is analogous to Prospero's relationship with Caliban. An elderly woman who is obsessively protective of Teeton's privacy because she believes that it is essential to his creative process, the Old Dowager represents the traditional function of the patron as supporter of art and guardian of its mystique. She is, nevertheless, still complicit in the suppression of Teeton's agency because she perpetuates the stereotypes of Teeton both as painter and as other. This complicity is evident in the dialogue between Teeton and the Old Dowager, particularly as they organize Teeton's paintings for his final art show. The visual representations of San Cristobal, specifically the landscape of a San Cristobal shore, and, by contrast, the maps of San Cristobal that he hangs over the windows in his room, become symbols of the contested ground of postcolonial "art" as it is interpreted by the colonizer and colonized.

Also important to this chapter is the only other individual painting mentioned in the novel: the portrait of Teeton's dead wife, Randa. Unlike the landscape painting, it is not a quaint image of a mythical San Cristobal.

Instead, it is a representation of "home" where Randa's real-life suffering is intertwined with the social and political difficulties of San Cristobal. Lamming mentions the portrait three times in the text, and each one comes at a moment of violence or anxiety. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno declares that "the socially critical zones of artworks are where it hurts," and that the "wounds of society" can be found in the tension between art and the politics of its circulation (237). Taking up this position on the social production of art, I will argue that Teeton's portrait of Randa has a profound effect on the identities of the other characters and subverts the stereotypical role of the asocial artist.

Finally, I will investigate the broader question of Teeton's criminality. Specifically, whether or not Lamming valorizes Teeton as a criminal in response to the rigidity of the latter's reception in Britain as a painter with a colonial background. On this point, the text is deliberately ambiguous. The laws and language that categorize Teeton as criminal are the same ones whose previous rhetorical function was to justify colonial suppression through often violent means. In this sense, Lamming exposes the fact that the imperial history of this language makes it incapable of justifying its condemnation of Teeton. Moreover, the text is unclear as to whether Teeton has any impact on San Cristobal, good or bad. Lamming argues in his critical text *Pleasures of Exile* (1960) that the colonial's perceived artistic inferiority "begins with the fact of England's supremacy in taste and judgement ... the

first to be cut down is the colonial himself" (27). In *Water with Berries*, Teeton responds to this "supremacy" with what Lamming has called "calculated aggressiveness" (*Water* 26), but there is no indication that the residents of San Cristobal approve or disapprove of Teeton as an artist or as a revolutionary. As a result, it is unclear whether Teeton's violence is blindly destructive, or calculated in its aggressiveness.

This ambiguity does not imply that any act of Teeton's, artistic or otherwise, is necessarily inauthentic and unproductive. Rather, Lamming is ironically drawing attention to the Eurocentric notions of success and failure which predetermine Teeton's reception as a painter. As Simon Gikandi suggests, Lamming's novels, most notably *Season of Adventure* (1960) and *Water With Berries*, "resist narrative closure because the narrative of history which his novels activate is continuous and open-ended" (*Writing* 89). The ambiguity of *Water With Berries* in particular has a destabilizing effect on the monolithic, homogeneous nature of the other because Lamming shows that Teeton withdraws his attention from the centre and returns his focus to San Cristobal's own drama of history. The fact that San Cristobal has its own political unrest challenges any assumption that Teeton can truly be representative of an entire culture and country. Both Britain and San Cristobal alternately incarcerate Teeton and praise his painterly talents, revealing the double irony of Teeton's "fame." Furthermore, San Cristobal's government supports its own artists through American-funded agencies,

which Teeton sees as a continuation of colonial repression. This focus on the United States suggests that there are other, more immediate and insidious threats to San Cristobal than the crumbling British Empire, and complicates any decision Teeton may make to return as an artist.

The Painter as Caliban

Critical scrutiny of *Water With Berries* as a revision of *The Tempest* focuses on the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. In *The Tempest*, Caliban angrily but articulately responds to Miranda's allegation that his speech was "gabble" (I.ii.356) until he learned her language: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (I.ii.363-36). Prospero, reiterating his daughter's allegation, threatens to "wrack [Caliban] with old cramps" for his defiance (I.ii.369). To Prospero, Caliban is undeserving of the kind of benevolence Prospero bestows on his brother, Antonio, and the others in the final act of the play. To the postcolonial critic, Caliban is Prospero's failed colonial experiment: an other gone awry. Furthermore, it is evident in *The Tempest* that, despite his brutish manner, Caliban is articulate and has gained an appreciative understanding of Prospero's language, and of music and beauty.[2] Although Prospero returns "ownership" of the island to Caliban at the play's end and forgives Caliban for his crimes, Prospero has no more use for the island or his slave, and his tone is one of repudiation rather than forgiveness: "Go to! Away!" (V.i.298). Furthermore, by preserving Miranda's

virginity and marrying her to the royal Ferdinand, he has engineered his own social promotion at home, and no longer needs the savage and his island. This scene reveals the questionable nature of Caliban's conversion to Prospero's language. Specifically, Caliban remains on the island as a punished prisoner, defined by the Eurocentric notions of law and property inherent in Prospero's language.

When Caliban curses Prospero's language--"The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!"--Prospero's language becomes symbolic of European knowledge brought to Caliban's island, and which seeks to dictate to Caliban notions of truth and civility (I.ii.364-65). It is worth noting that Caliban also condemns Prospero's abuse of Caliban's initial hospitality, as well as the language that has sought to alter him: "When thou [Prospero] cam'st first, / Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me / Water with berries in't ... and then I loved thee / Cursed be that I did so!" (I.ii.332-39). Caliban comes to believe that Prospero's initial kindness was premised upon Prospero's exploitation of the island's resources through Caliban's enslavement. Caliban has been tricked, and his subsequent anger is expressed through the language of the oppressor, and through his attempt to murder Prospero. The phrase "water with berries," from which the title of Lamming's novel is taken, is symbolic of the many cultural "gifts" or "bribes" that Prospero benevolently or otherwise bestowed upon the "savage" Caliban before Prospero betrays him.

In *The Tempest*'s final act, Caliban's anger, the Renaissance's literary internalization of the fear of other, is still overwhelmed by the power of Prospero's imperialist benevolence: "I'll [Caliban] be wise hereafter, / And seek for grace" (V.i.295-6). Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) calls this moment of ambivalence within a text "improvisation," when the truth of another is revealed as an ideological construct, even as that construct can only be premised on one's own beliefs (227-28). Teeton, as Lamming's literary reconstruction of Caliban's contemporary colonial repression, is now saturated with European influence and notions of "truth"--the "water with berries"--which inform an artistic tradition that adheres to strict codes of acceptance and inclusion. Through metaphors of cultivation such as harvesting and crops, Lamming exposes this image of "water with berries" as Prospero's conversion of Caliban's island to a site of labour and cultural management. These metaphors can be seen both as Teeton's frustration with San Cristobal's reliance on British-owned plantation farming for its economy, and, as I will examine here, Lamming's interpretation of Prospero's cultural legacy as it follows Teeton to London.[3]

During his conversation at the Mona pub with Jeremy, the San Cristobal diplomat, Teeton implies that his paintings are poisoned, not "nurtured," by European cultural "manure" (*Water* 114). The sentiment ironically resurrects Prospero's condemning remark that on Caliban's "nature / Nurture can never stick" (*Tempest* IV.i.188-9). Now, it is Prospero's "nature"

that "sticks" to Teeton, inhibiting his creativity. Lamming continues this metaphor when the Press attempts to interview Teeton about his art show before the reporters are thwarted by the Old Dowager. The Press's interest in Teeton is piqued because of the current trouble in San Cristobal; when one reporter quotes from Stephano's speech in *The Tempest* that "this monster would make a man," he implies that Teeton is profitable only because of his otherness (*Water* 158).

However, the narrator problematizes the reporter's comment by focusing on Teeton's ability to create outside, or in spite of, the centre: "He [Teeton] had been growing without much notice from anyone; a plant which had defied some foreign soil, coming to fruition without a name" (11). Teeton is "growing" and maturing as a painter in London, and he realizes his potential even as he disparages his own work. The narrator's comment obviously renders questionable Sandra Pacquet's assertion (1987) that Teeton's exile highlights the "inevitable bankruptcy of the artistic sensibility outside the framework of [his] community" in San Cristobal (97). Teeton as a creative source, and Teeton's *reception* as a painter--must be distinguished. As I mentioned in this chapter's introduction, Teeton does have a community within London, and it has enabled his painting, a point I will discuss further in relation to the portrait of Randa.

Here, I want to concentrate on the reception to Teeton's painting, both by himself and by others. Metaphors of retarded growth are present each

time the narrator describes Teeton's reactions to the sale of his paintings. His paintings are "the premature fruit of a rotten crop" (*Water* 19), "the fruits of his exile" (114), and "the dead harvest of his youth" (27). Initially, such metaphors do not appear to offer a counter-narrative to Eurocentric discourses of art. However, Teeton's sarcasm is a reference to the paintings as a collection, with the emphasis on their potential for display and sale, not their aesthetic value. Teeton abandons his paintings the moment they are sold to the gallery. The fact he chooses to stop painting altogether does not necessarily suggest that they are inauthentic; rather, he attempts to halt the appropriation of power which underlies their reception.

In *The Purpose of Public Pictures* (1996), Neil MacGregor outlines the function of the modern art gallery in Britain and declares that paintings on display "confer dignity on us when we have lost belief in our own worth [and] they give us a chance to consider our lives in the face of ultimate values and time" (23). Essentializing positions such as MacGregor's that claim that art is good for social morale are interrogated by Lamming through Teeton's refusal to produce more art, and through Teeton's sale of his finished paintings to finance the bombing in San Cristobal. Soyinka in "Child at the Frontier" makes the succinct point that the modern gallery, which once hosted exhibitions of the exotic from the colonies, has been upgraded to be more inclusive and accepting of different painting styles. Nevertheless, the gallery still holds the "dubious legacy of the spirit of artistic 'hoarding'" and elitism

which are then "transferred ... to the canvas itself" (36). As I have noted, Teeton is not necessarily frustrated with his mode of expression, but with its cultural determinism. The display of his canvases cannot serve any social purpose in San Cristobal, other than offering him the suspect distinction that he, as a former colonial subject, has successfully mimicked what is perceived as a European art form.

The Painter and the Patron

The relationship between painter and audience is explored further in Teeton's complex neo-colonial relationship with the Old Dowager, Mrs. Gore-Brittain. An elderly woman who is obsessively protective of Teeton's privacy because she believes that it is essential to his creative process, she is symbolic of Prospero's generous but misguided legacy. A dowager is a woman with title or property derived from her late husband. In *Water With Berries*, the Old Dowager's title is an ironic play on the sparseness of her home left to her by her husband, Prospero. His name revives Shakespeare's Prospero, but because the Old Dowager's small inheritance is from her husband's tyrannically-run San Cristobal plantation, Lamming's deliberately Shakespearean association also satirically echoes the enslavement of Caliban.[4] She is also unaware that this inheritance results from her lover and Prospero's brother, Fernando, killing Prospero. When she finally does discover the truth, she shoots Fernando. She disguises this sordid past,

however, by dutifully maintaining her home and protecting Teeton.[5] She thus achieves a seemingly modest dignity and quaintness that the narrator reveals through the playful interaction between her and Teeton. Each day they go through "their routine of welcome," discussing the weather while she meticulously tidies his room (*Water* 13).

The Old Dowager's devotion to Teeton is linked to her odd understanding of art and patronage, founded on an antiquated and authoritarian template of a former empire. Unlike the English landlord in *The Enigma of Arrival*, she is not a "mysterious" figure (*Enigma* 172), nor does she share Teeton's artistic aspirations. Her house, though, does resemble the landlord's manor in that it, too, has shrunk accordingly with the Empire's decline and "become the manor and grounds alone" (86). Her "grounds" are now over-run bushes surrounded by a fence (*Water* 34).

Inside the house, the Old Dowager's relationship with Teeton reflects in miniature both a colonial/colonist relationship and an artist/patron relationship that foster the art--the "rotten fruit"--that Teeton produces. Introduced on the text's first page, Teeton's room was "in some way their joint creation; some unspoken partnership in interests they had never spoken about" (14). The maps on the room's windows provide the "exotic" scenery of San Cristobal, and Teeton himself becomes a living exhibit for her private pleasure. Also, the room is "spare" and "solitary" (12), further identifying him as a painter who has "some private temperature of the blood" which

legitimizes his imprisonment and is authorized by Teeton himself (11). Once again, there are echoes of *The Tempest*. Ironically paralleling Prospero's cell, the room is both "cosy as a cave" and "like a fortress," and invokes an historical and literary legacy that is confined by stereotypical, sentimental notions of colonialism and art that Teeton and the Old Dowager find both comforting and laden with anxiety (120).

In Teeton's room, the Old Dowager polishes and dusts the frames of Teeton's paintings, lost in "total absorption," while Teeton watches her with "fascination" and "never fail[s] to indulge her" (26). In *Caliban's Curse* (1996), Supriya Nair claims that "the ageing matriarch is meant to be a symbolic comment on England's waning power," and "a feminized erosion of strength" (66). Therefore, Nair concludes, Teeton indulges her because she is no longer a threat to him. However, the Old Dowager as "matriarch" is only distantly a symbolic reminder of past imperial endeavours. A more appropriate term is "landlady," as she is a typical middle-class institution for immigrants from the colonies. Further, Nair's position does not take into consideration Teeton's function as a painter. Instead, with Teeton's paintings, the Old Dowager assumes the traditional function of the patron as guardian or custodian of art and its mystique.[6] Seemingly unconcerned with monetary gain, she only urges Teeton to continue painting because it enables her own role as protector and the high status that she believes it imparts to her. Whereas Teeton produces art within the modern, commercialized world of the

dealer-critic, the Old Dowager functions within an attenuated feudalist system in which the artist often lived under the patron's umbrella, and was bound by loyalty. The narrator implies that the Old Dowager's "moments of prevarication," her lapses into daydream, are the exchange of her customary authority for the appreciation of beauty (*Water* 26). However, the narrator also makes clear that her "idleness" and lapse of "duty" acts as transitions from officious power as Teeton's "landlady" to cultural power as his patron (26). She lovingly dusts his paintings like the custodian of a gallery, taking pleasure in looking after the paintings and simultaneously fulfilling her need for power by controlling his art.

This control is evident when the two reporters come to interview Teeton about his exhibition--a scene to which I have made previous reference. Teeton instructs the Old Dowager "to protect him from their intrusion," and "when the doorbell rang the Old Dowager was prepared for the call" (156). The scene parodies her limited power when she thwarts the already indifferent journalist and photographer. First, they insult the Old Dowager because they cannot recall Teeton's name and ask to see "the painter" (156). They further offend her by referring to Teeton as her "tenant" (156), to which she repeatedly replies, "there are no tenants in this house" (160). The Old Dowager refuses to acknowledge that he is a tenant because it interferes with her romantic notions of the artist and her role as his patron, and it disguises the fact that "it was beneath her dignity to be in the pay of tenants" (223). She nurtures

him and his art and "takes a keen delight in her stewardship of his interests" (161). Here, her "stewardship" is vaguely comparable to Mrs. Courtney's in *The Vivisector*, who purchases young Hurtle from his parents because "she wants to discover a genius" (*Vivisector* 62). To Mrs. Courtney, owning a painter is even better than owning a great painting, and carries significant social worth. In *Water With Berries*, for the journalist to forget Teeton's name is "impudence" and a diminishment of the role which gives the Old Dowager access to an artistic world she would not otherwise encounter and she is reluctant to give him up (*Water* 161). Not unlike the clerk in John Fowles' *The Collector*, the Old Dowager and Mrs. Courtney also reveal the perversity of collecting in response to social deprivations.

The Old Dowager's protectiveness toward Teeton as a colonial subject and as a painter can also be defined by how she views the two representations of San Cristobal in Teeton's room in her house. First, the two maps of the Caribbean with which Teeton covers the windows symbolically reproduce the exotic San Cristobal of the Old Dowager's imagination. Second, Teeton's painting of a San Cristobal beach scene has a similar effect on the Old Dowager, but it is mediated by Teeton's painterly and colonial status. In both examples, however, the disparity between Teeton as artist and as colonial subject is striking. On the one hand, the Old Dowager attempts to assert her position as a representative of a vanishing Empire, and her obsolescence is reflected in her tired interpretations of the maps and painting. On the other

hand, Teeton becomes a subject within the visual representations of San Cristobal, rather than an empowered viewer or artist--he is the anthropomorphic landscape of everything that the Old Dowager deems foreign. Furthermore, as the scene in Teeton's room progresses, the Old Dowager evolves into a parody of the austere colonial authority figure, and her imaginative reconstructions of San Cristobal are measured by her fear of the alien. In a postcolonial reversal, Teeton comes to assume the stance of the "explorer" as he looks at the maps and the paintings, possibly to "refocus" the vision of Teeton the "painter" on his island, rather than on London.

The maps covering the room's two windows are described as "folding maps," possibly travel maps or maps taken from an atlas (12). They also "stare out at [Teeton]," quite possibly marking his lack of privilege and his inability to "see" (13). However, Teeton chooses to see his homeland rather than London when he looks through the window. In this sense, the maps represent not just the brightly coloured exotic spaces that the Old Dowager sees, but also the charting of ownership and conquest that greet Teeton when he looks out the window. The sun that once never set on the British Empire backlights the map of San Cristobal, causing the island on the map to "r[i]se in a blaze of morning" as well (18). Lamming's image here is a militaristic one, and Teeton's frequent glances at the maps remind him that San Cristobal's "history had been a swindle of treaties and concessions. Its sovereignty was no more than an exchange of ownership ... The battles for

ascendancy were too numerous" (18). Furthermore, these battles for "ascendancy" are still being fought in present-day San Cristobal.

Initially, the descriptions of the maps, despite their bright blues and yellows, communicate the accumulation of centuries of exploitation under the guise of apolitical survey and the scientific quest for geographical location and measurement. Ulla Ehrensvärd in "Colour in Cartography" (1987) notes that cartography is a "culturally based means of mediating environmental experience through symbolism, any map feature, including color, can serve as a revealing indicator of cultural change" (124). In *Water with Berries*, the colours of Teeton's maps begin as representable symbols of the former colony of San Cristobal, detached from its people and replaced with bright, potent signifiers of colour that indicate no "cultural change." The uniformity of these colours accentuate the maps' flat two-dimensionality and their colonial origins, backlit by the actual three-dimensional London behind the maps and the windows.

However, it must also be noted that on the map, San Cristobal is not a deep pink hue, the colour that once symbolized Britain and its empire, and, later, the notion of the "Commonwealth." Instead, the yellow represents San Cristobal's current geographical position on the world map. The "blaze of morning" from which San Cristobal "rises" is also symbolic of its anger and defiance, and Teeton's part in it before he moved to London. The narrator comments that

> its [San Cristobal's] habits of submission had suffered a terrible blow. The meek flame started at San Souci [site of Teeton's first bombing] had spread beyond his [Teeton's] wildest expectations. Now this name San Cristobal had become a warning everywhere. (*Water* 18)

The "warning" indicates that San Cristobal is no longer solely a site of obedience and exploitation. Furthermore, the town is represented by a name, not just a colour. As Graham Huggan notes in "Decolonizing the Map" (1990), a postcolonial revision of the map's space "acknowledge[s] the relativity of modes of spatial (and, by extension, cultural) perception[s]" (134). For Teeton, the maps are symbols of San Cristobal's lived time and space, rather than a simulacrum of an ordered world.

To the Old Dowager, however, the maps continue to signify tourism, exoticism, and escape. They are geographically located representations of alluring danger but controlled danger, and they "appear to move forward to receive her gaze" and be fantastically filled with her notions of what the "privilege to travel" should be, while keeping her at a safe distance (*Water* 24). Her readings are reminiscent of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, in which the young narrator would stare at maps and "lost [himself] in all the glories of exploration" (*Heart* 22). Only the blank spaces appealed to him because they have not yet been "discovered." The Old Dowager is also overwhelmed by possibilities inherent in maps. Her remark that "it is such a privilege to

travel," however, reflects her limited means and suggests that San Cristobal is too remote from her shrinking world (*Water* 24). Certainly she is not a mirror of Marlow's wealthy aunt, his "dowager," whose capital ensures his captaincy of the steamer that journeys up the Congo River. Ironically, in *Water With Berries* it is Teeton who has travelled (from San Cristobal to London), while the Old Dowager is essentially housebound.

The narrative, however, moves from a playful mocking of the Old Dowager's "scarce expectations" prompted by the maps to a satirical exaggeration of her character and her "visit" to the San Cristobal of her fantasy (24). The Old Dowager has difficulty locating San Cristobal within a specific time period. The island is familiar to her yet alien, defined by its shifting time and place in the Empire rather than its people:

> [H]er vision was crowded with superb specimens of a race she could not name ... She had covered every mile of road; climbed the tallest peaks; explored the dark, unpeopled interior of the forest; and like the travellers in her reading she had survived. She had come back. She was safe. (28-29)

Once again, literary echoes of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* inform the San Cristobal of the Old Dowager's imagination. The "superb specimens" without voices are possibly reminiscent of Kurtz's "magnificent" African lover in *Heart of Darkness* (*Heart* 76), or Kayerts and Carlier's fearful descriptions of the "fine animals" who work at the outpost in "An Outpost of Progress" and

disrupt the beauty of the landscape ("Outpost" 218).[7] However, the Old Dowager's whirlwind "visit" reads also like a modern travel brochure as she imagines herself seeing the sights without cultural or racial interference. There is safety in the maps, much as there is a supposed safety in reading, possibly because to her both offer the familiarity of the English language and lettering.

Once the maps and Teeton's room have geographically made her feel safe in an exotic space, the Old Dowager turns her gaze to Teeton's painting of an island beach scene, which she has been dusting. But, unlike the map, or the books that she has read, there is no safety in Teeton's painting, despite her attempts to neutralize it. I quote at length:

> ... her eyes had caught a view of the yellow bars of sunlight plunging out of the corner of the painting. She stood the canvas up to look at it again; and the colours seemed to change the more she looked. Now there was a shade of tangerine peeling away from a cloud that crumbled slowly out of view. A fleet of small boats lay idle on the shore. The sea was blue serge in colour; it was crowded with huge towers of rock leaning high above the surface of the water. She thought of danger; the frightful wreck that could befall a ship which failed to navigate the neck of water which stretched between the bigger rocks. It seemed so absolutely real with peril ... The sky felt safer now. At least the

> clouds gave way to airplanes. There was wickedness in these rocks. She didn't believe that boats would trespass there. Perhaps they were no longer in use. (*Water* 26)

Like the description of the maps, Lamming's imagery asserts the legal implications of colonization. The Old Dowager's focus is on fictional European explorers of the past rather than the current San Cristobalans who command the "fleet" of boats on the shore.[8] For her, the "yellow bars of sunlight" imprison the island within a fixed narrative of tropical plenitude and technological inferiority. Furthermore, the rocks symbolize danger, and the Old Dowager voices concern for the imaginary ships that try to navigate the waters, and she is glad that there are now airplanes to maintain trade and tourism with San Cristobal. Meanwhile, San Cristobal's own boats dare not "trespass" the water, and the Old Dowager is relieved that the boats are likely not in use; their technology is antiquated and useless, and their only value is as a quaint image of the past.

However, the narrator questions the Old Dowager's concerns with verbs that signify only her perceptions, and the limits of her interpretation. The Old Dowager "thought" of danger, and the wreck that "could" befall a ship. Also, the scene "seemed so absolutely real," while the sky "felt" safer than the rocks which she did not "believe" the boats would trespass. None of these verbs presents real or concrete action. This narrative play reveals as suspect the mimetic discourse which has historically often validated art. Furthermore,

Lamming exposes the Old Dowager's vision which imprisons San Cristobal. The island is frozen in time only because she assumes it will never change; its beauty is there for her alone to enjoy. Here, Lamming's text is similar to Jamaica Kincaid's description of Antigua in her essay *A Small Place* (1988), whereby she parodies the western tourist who finds Antigua "unreal" in its otherness. Kincaid ironically concludes that "the unreal way in which it [Antigua] is beautiful now is the unreal way in which it was always beautiful" (80). She rhetorically challenges the tourist's notions of the historical and the political by emphasizing the island's uniformity under the tourist's gaze. Similarly, Lamming interrogates the Old Dowager's interpretation of Teeton's painting by parodying her fear of the unknown, and her need to impose on the painting ships and planes to locate the scene within the familiar, the technologically contemporary.

As the narrative shifts to Teeton's interpretation of the maps and painting, the text furthers Teeton's agency as a painter. Initially, it does appear that, like the Old Dowager, Teeton sees his island through the limited and limiting eyes of the explorer or the cartographer. However, his vision is inclusive and functions in the present. Anxious to show the Old Dowager where the boats would have been at anchor, Teeton "shad[es] the map with one hand while the other became a telescope under his eye," and he then "clos[es] one eye in order to sharpen his vision" (*Water* 28). Teeton's telescoped eye possibly represents his "own" island as an explorer would see

it--strange and distant, waiting for discovery. His eye, however, contrasts the Old Dowager's because when Teeton imitates the "land-ho" stance of the explorer, he recalls a moment of discovery of himself--of the Caliban figure; or possibly, he sees San Cristobal as it waits for the migrant's return.

Thus, if the Old Dowager's gaze can serve the nostalgia of Empire, then Teeton's gaze can serve to destabilize the moment of contact that now predetermines the language of visual representation. *Water With Berries* suggests that the Old Dowager prefers the map over the painting because she can "read the map ... and linger over the names ... feeling the slight tremor of her lips which were eager to give them sound" (28). Despite the fact that one is a mechanical representation of a geographic outline and the other an original painting, Lamming makes it clear that she has no language to distinguish between the two. In possibly an ironical glance at Caliban's initial difficulty with European language, both the painting and the map are bound by the Old Dowager's Eurocentrism, as is the language of art that she employs. Furthermore, the fact that she deems the maps "safe" and the painting "dangerous," suggests that Teeton's painting has more artistic integrity than he believes, and that his art is not doomed to imitation and fallacious interpretations. Ironically, the Old Dowager is a discerning viewer, but unable to see or withstand the threatening aspect of her exoticized interpretation.

There are other recuperative aspects to Teeton's art. Specifically, his painting presents the ocean in a "blue serge," and the colours of the land "seem to change" depending on the viewer's position (25). The rocks, which are so frightening to the Old Dowager, break up the constant blue that on the maps signify geopolitical division. The boats have a similar effect, although the Old Dowager notes that the boats on the shore "look firm enough," and assumes that they are abandoned and have not been on the water in some time (25). Likely, though, they are simply not in use at the moment, and their sturdiness is intended to withstand the sea; perhaps they are not waiting to be burnt because they are useless, as the Old Dowager believes (26). Each image in Teeton's painting interrupts the continuity of the ocean's solid blue as it meets the solid yellow of San Cristobal, inserting life and activity into the faceless, politicized maps that represent safety to the Old Dowager.

Furthermore, Teeton restores the San Cristobal of the map to its contemporary position as a geographical location whose place is not determined by its distance from the centre. San Cristobal is where it is, so to speak. Without lifting his eyes from the map, he tells the Old Dowager, "The red lines with the squares. That's where it [San Cristobal] is" (28). He gives names and images to the small red squares which possibly represent habitations along the island's coast, and points out Cattlewash, his place of birth (28). Generally, I agree with Nair, who says that Lamming is "return[ing] the misadventures of imperial rule to the seat of its power in

London" (Nair 71). But, I would take the argument one step further and suggest that Lamming is also positing a return voyage by Teeton, who, as an enabled painter, ironically takes the role also of Prospero. The Old Dowager is as enthralled and terrified by Teeton's art as Caliban is by Prospero's magic. It is a reversal that symbolically returns the island to Teeton/Caliban, while parodying the image of the white explorer "discovering" the Caribbean.

The Self-Portrait

To this point, this chapter has focused on Teeton and his painting in relation to the Old Dowager's symbolic notions of Empire. However, Teeton also paints a portrait of his wife, Randa, who committed suicide earlier in San Cristobal. Her death implicates Teeton because she had sex with an American diplomat in order to secure Teeton's release from prison and his passage to London, a point I will examine later in this chapter. Here, I will focus on the fact that it is the only other individual painting mentioned in the novel, and it is not initially included in the sale to the gallery for Teeton's exhibition.

Teeton attempts to manage the portrait's critical reception by choosing an owner for it: Nicole, Derek's American wife. Furthermore, references to the portrait of Randa surface three times in the novel, each at distinct moments of violence or anxiety regarding identity: it is found with Nicole's body in Teeton's room; it is discussed by Derek and Roger when they discover that

Nicole is missing; and it is the subject of discussion between Myra and Teeton as they exchange personal histories. Distinct from the landscape painting, Randa's portrait is not a contentious image of a mythical San Cristobal. Instead, its currency is its symbolism as "home," and the novel's characters mark the shifting boundaries of this home by focusing on the presence or location of the portrait, both physically and imaginatively.

Like Teeton's landscape painting, Randa's portrait has not so far been included in any discussion of the novel. This critical silence may be due to the fact that novels about artists, including *Cat's Eye* and *The Vivisector*, often contain scenes that satirize reporters and critics at public events such as gallery openings or book launches. For example, Hurtle and Elaine walk out of their respective gallery openings, and Teeton does not even attend his own. Critics may see these sections as superfluous--an author's fictional revenge on those who do not understand the creative process, or exploit this creativity for economic gain. I would go one step further and say that these sections also problematize deconstructions of postcolonial texts. Such apparently superfluous scenes reveal the tension between the sociological imperative of postcolonial criticism, and the aesthetic interests of art.

Randa's portrait is introduced in a manner that reflects this tension. The portrait exploits the typical image of the gallery opening by disturbing what Homi Bhabha calls "ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (Bhabha 149). In *Water With*

Berries, discourse about the portrait serves to disrupt the "imagined community," in this instance not Bhabha's nation per se, but the supposedly shared community of art that instead imposes rigid, Eurocentric rules of aesthetic worth. At night on the heath, Teeton tells the unidentified woman (the reader learns it is Myra, the daughter of the Old Dowager and Ferdinand) that at one of his gallery receptions in San Cristobal he "gave [Nicole] the best painting [he] had ever done. It was a gift [he] was sharing" (*Water* 111). Teeton gives the portrait to Nicole to offset the superficiality of the reception, and he believes he can "trace his [later] change of attitude to painting back to that evening" (113). Teeton wants to guide the portrait's reception, and he dislikes the posturing that accompanies the gallery gathering: "His skill, the circumstances of its function, the whole context in which it had to work and make itself known, was not without the menace of these vultures" (113-14). As I have argued, Teeton's notoriety pigeonholes the discourse of his work, the "circumstances of its function;" it is reasonable that he would want the portrait to exist outside this discourse of sensationalism.

Although the portrait escapes media attention, it does emerge as a more specific presentation of San Cristobal's lived history. On the heath, Teeton describes to Myra the Ceremony of the Souls, a San Cristobal ritual in which a priest acts as a medium between the dead and the living and the dead's grievances are aired. Although ritual can be interpreted as a potential reconciliation between San Cristobal's colonial past and its neo-colonial

present, the ritual also alludes to the spiritual presence of Teeton's painting outside the discourse of critics and the Old Dowager. Teeton "thinks again of Randa's portrait" (116) after Myra asks him if he has ever "murdered" someone, by which she means if the "other person never recovers from what you've done" (115). The scene is a poignant one. Teeton is unable to "to find the right words" or declare his "guilt" to Myra, and the portrait itself becomes the object by which he directs his confession as he recalls the circumstances of Randa's suicide (117).

Myra explains that one acknowledges this guilt by "the evidence of the other person's life" (116). Again, Teeton refers to the portrait and wonders "what would have been her verdict on those seven years of spiteful silence" spent in London (115). It is the portrait's symbolic law of reconciliation and confession that determines the creator's punishment. Furthermore, this arduous psychological punishment ironically contrasts Teeton's release from prison in San Cristobal, which was expedited in part because of his position as a painter of national reputation.

Randa's portrait is also evidence of Nicole's disappearance. When she goes missing, Roger believes that if he finds the portrait, he will find Nicole:

> "I am sure the portrait is around here somewhere," said Roger.
>
> "And Nicole is around somewhere," said Derek, "just as Teeton is around somewhere." (217)

Derek's facile sarcasm does not diminish Roger's conviction that the portrait is a vital link to his wife, who had made the promise that if there was difficulty between her and Roger, she would return the painting to Teeton. The missing painting disrupts Roger's notion of family, and fractures the life that he has previously constructed in London.

When Nicole seeks to return the portrait and does not find Teeton, she kills herself in his room, where she is later found, with the portrait, by the Old Dowager. The Old Dowager is terrified by her discovery, either afraid that Teeton has murdered Nicole, or afraid of the implications when the authorities find a white woman in the room of her coloured immigrant tenant. Regardless of the exact reason for the Old Dowager's fear, she is determined that her house and name--her miniature empire-- remain "free from blemish" (167). Teeton's absence is enough to convince her of his guilt, despite her resolution to "bur[y] any instinct to question his association with Nicole" (170). She again "cover[s] the maps with her gaze, investigating the slightest evidence of danger" (167). Teeton's room and maps now appear to be symbols of the "dangerous" other rather than the gifted painter. In contrast, the Old Dowager sees the portrait as evidence of Teeton's guilt because he painted it, and it is there with the body. Moreover, her hypothesis seems to be compounded by the fact that as a style, the portrait in general closely resembles the subject.[9] She may not know who Randa is, but the colour of her skin signifies that somehow she is involved in Nicole's death.

When Teeton returns to the house and asks where the portrait is, the Old Dowager replies, "I put it with your things" (180). Teeton assumes that the Old Dowager has moved the painting, and nods in agreement with her action. The two agree that the portrait must be hidden as evidence; of course, each has a different reason: she wishes not to get involved in a crime, and Teeton wishes to rid himself of the physical reminder of his fractured identity as a painter, and as a person. Furthermore, the word "things" implies that the portrait is removed with the other paintings to the gallery, since the sparseness of Teeton's room affords no other hiding place.

The location of the portrait raises important questions. Does the fact that the Old Dowager moved the portrait imply that it belongs with the other paintings and that its currency is, once again, determined only by its relationship to the centre? Or, more likely, is the portrait being hidden in a place where no one will discover it and link it to the "crime?" In other words, is Teeton's agreement with moving the portrait a decidedly subversive and "criminal" act on his part? The portrait's meaning is now provisional and elastic, revealing an aesthetic which does not pretend to circulate within an enclosed economy because, as Teeton's decision to stop painting indicates, it is impossible to do so. One is reminded of Elaine's portrait of Mrs. Smeath in *Cat's Eye*, which is stained with ink by an elderly religious zealot, who, like the Old Dowager, wants to keep her world morally "free from blemish" (*Water* 167). However, rather than having her arrested, Elaine shrugs and says that

the stain "will come off" (*Eye* 374). The portrait resurfaces later in the text as a part of Elaine's retrospective, unblemished, and prepared again to withstand the "ink" of the critics.

Unlike *Cat's Eye*, however, the scene in Teeton's room is cold and unsettling, and it concludes with Teeton carrying out the Old Dowager's orders to dispose of the body in the back yard. There is not the solidarity we find in *Cat's Eye* when the other artists gather around Elaine to "soothe and console" her (374). It is this moment of ambivalence as the Old Dowager seeks to condemn and condone what she believes to be Teeton's crime that precipitates Teeton's crisis as an painter.

The Painter as Criminal

As I have argued, Teeton abandons his painting in response to the ways in which his art has been rendered sterile by the Old Dowager and by critics. In *Water With Berries*, Teeton is not a painter because he has mastered the artistic language of the centre. This would mean that hitherto he had no voice. Instead, he chooses to exist outside the representation of San Cristobal imagined by the Old Dowager. He also considers the bombings in San Cristobal justified because they are intended to promote political autonomy for San Cristobal, and respond ironically to a British agenda of colonizing by military intimidation.

Speaking at once of the African and postcolonial painter, Wole Soyinka calls this critical sterilization of art "race amputation" ("Child" 36). He comments that by seeking to reclaim "authenticity" for the postcolonial subject, apologists for Empire "suppress... art forms ... that may present a reality outside the glossy brochure of state, especially where ... such a reality is veiled, coded, steeped in self-protective nuances and ambiguity" (36-37). Soyinka believes that state projects which encourage popular art forms, such as steel drums in the Caribbean or dancing in Africa, do not celebrate difference or encourage national pride. Instead, they are appendages to a tourism trade that relies on safe, gentle images of culture to encourage economic growth. More important, however, is the fact that these bureaucratic brochures also "suppress art forms" that *reveal* a "reality" outside this multicultural and/or liberal establishment. This suppression is considered necessary by *both* imperialist and nationalist authorities because art can also speak uncomfortable truths that are dangerous to the state. In this sense, the establishment that Teeton rages against is only nominally Eurocentric, as Europe has also never felt comfortable about its own artists, and has often enough starved and ignored them. Art, then, can also be a strong meeting ground for all who seek an end to subjugation. It is produced in history, but does not speak on behalf of history, unlike state-supported folk art. Instead, art's speech is potentially subversive, and is "coded," as Soyinka points out.

Soyinka's image of "race amputation" is vividly portrayed in *Water With Berries*. In London, a black man stops Teeton's friend Roger on the street and asks him his occupation. Roger replies that he is a composer, to which the man rudely says, "'I say there must be a stop to that ... Is men like you make niggers think with their feet. Give me a law and I amputate every dancin' nigger from his legs ... I against all that activity what make niggers swap play for power'" (*Water* 69). The man is convinced that Roger's music perpetuates conventions of the insouciant native and therefore serves no social purpose. He confuses art with racial stereotype, and thinks that all art is the same. The man tells Roger that if he wants a "real purpose," then "if 'tis musical instruments niggers need they must learn the gun'" (69).

The scene is a complex one, and foregrounds the theoretical implications of Teeton's decision to stop painting. The man's derogatory tone resonates with a combination of cliché British idioms ("I say") and colonial dialects without relative pronouns such as "that." Both vernacular languages function as ironic comments on their respective stereotypes, including the man's use of the word "nigger" as a white racist term of exclusion, and as a racial familiarity with other black people. However, this parody also reveals the polemic of the "purpose" of art in a postcolonial society. If Roger's talents are "amputated," as the man proposes, then Roger is denied his creative ability. More importantly, it eliminates his art's potential to interrogate and unnerve an establishment that recognizes the disruptive power of art. Roger's

abilities suffer in London where he no longer composes; instead, he earns money by making occasional soundtracks for newsreels and by collecting bottles for deposit.

Nevertheless, Roger has, contrary to the anonymous man's belief, "swapped play for power" by asserting his autonomy and immigrating to London. The novel implies that in the past Roger's musical gifts were exploited by the authorities in San Cristobal to promote civil obedience and national unity--a position that Teeton ironically refers to as "the unknown slave" (93). This obedience took the form of concerts where Roger was "appreciated" and there was never an empty seat (92). Furthermore, Roger was the son of Judge Capildeo, an important figure in San Cristobal politics who is complicit in political efforts to have Roger return by "tempting him with bribes that would inevitably force him back into captivity" (80). Bribery is a metaphor for the silencing of the artist in Roger in favour of the public performer. Accordingly, Roger's exile in London, where he could engage in "the rigorous struggle of being an artist"(68) and live "in his own name," is preferable to him (93). This "struggle" of the artist is a stereotype of European origin, but it is evidently also a shared position of artists, including Teeton, who seek to end their indenture.

Here, I want to direct the comments of the man on the street to the subject of Teeton as revolutionary, for it is Teeton who quits painting and does "learn the gun," so to speak. Furthermore, Teeton recognizes that he is

threatened by more than the Old Dowager and San Cristobalan politicians. Specifically, I will highlight the more insidious hazard to Teeton's autonomy: the United States and its neo-colonial role in the cultural development of San Cristobal.

Looking at the map of San Cristobal, Teeton believes that "the ocean was too narrow a stretch between San Cristobal and her northern neighbour. There to the north, a nightmare away, the stupendous power of America sent a shiver through every nerve" (18-19). What Soyinka calls the "glossy brochure of state" is represented in *Water With Berries* by American arts funding offered in exchange for economic control of San Cristobal. Jeremy tries to persuade Teeton to return to San Cristobal by mentioning its new Arts Centre, to which Teeton sarcastically replies that "the Americans aren't without a sense of gratitude" (*Water* 94). To Teeton, Americans in San Cristobal are another, but more subtle, imperialist regime, once again installing educational or cultural edifices that ruthlessly exclude oppositional points of view.

Teeton's sarcasm and anger are directed at Jeremy, who represents political shrewdness. However, Teeton is also angry at himself, and the part he plays in this American-influenced administration. He was incarcerated in San Cristobal until his wife, Randa, has sex with the American ambassador to negotiate Teeton's release and emigration. It is an anxiety compounded by the fact that "the other prisoners didn't know what happened" (98), and that

"the Americans suggested that [he] be released" (99). In London, he cannot escape the consequences of his departure, symbolized by the haunting portrait of Randa. Although it was only "a minor revolt" that led to his imprisonment, he now sees himself as a coward and a "deserter" of his fellow inmates (18). There are also accusations that his departure led to the deaths of two friends, and that his American-assisted release was a betrayal of their cause (18, 98).

Teeton's desertion of his fellow revolutionaries paradoxically parallels what could be called the desertion of his art, or, conversely, art's desertion of Teeton. Teeton calls his paintings "an innocent betrayal of the island," signalling his mistaken assumption that art can cause only aesthetic, not political, reactions (19). However, Teeton initially believes his painting, unlike his escape from San Cristobal, was not a disloyal act:

> They [the paintings] might have had some value as a record of his own lack of foresight. The effortless braveries which had passed for courage. The farce of heroism had been dignified by the subtle briberies of an art which had led him astray. There were subtle and cruel dangers in every natural talent ... But he had put these frivolities to an end. (27)

Like his desertion of his fellow revolutionaries, Teeton's artistic creations are cloaked in deception. Previously, he believed that being a painter "dignified" his crimes because his success, both at home and abroad, legitimized his position as representative of San Cristobal culture. However, it is this

position as a painter which led to his release from prison, a privilege not given to the other inmates. Unintentionally, his actions lead to Randa's bribery of the American ambassador with sex, which she pays for with her life. Teeton's "lack of foresight" indicates that he was neither aware of the power of his art, nor that it could induce such a horrific series of events. Therefore, it is ironic that the narrator calls Teeton's art "frivolities." Teeton's art springs from sites of betrayal and shame, and is constantly at the centre of conflict.

However, the narrative is confusing as to which is Teeton's "natural talent"--painting or terrorism. Possibly Teeton believes that his political actions were cowardly, bestowing on him a "martyrdom" he did not deserve (18). In his influential analysis of the artist as hero, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (1964), Maurice Beebe states that "what the artist tries to do is capture lost time and imprison it in the form of his art-work. The man must die, but the artist in him can achieve immortality in his works" (11). Beebe's language here is telling, for it is the very contradiction of what Teeton accomplishes as an artist and as a terrorist. Beebe claims that art, by imprisoning experience, renders it timeless and elevates the artist to heroic status. However, as I have argued, time in Teeton's painting is seen by others as static, trapped in colonial images of the past, as is the island which he paints. Teeton can never achieve Beebe's "immortality" because Teeton's paintings have never been produced in the fullness of the "present." Furthermore, although his criminal background contributes to the

sensationalism surrounding his exhibition, it does not affect the conservative reception of his paintings by the critics and officials of both San Cristobal and London. Therefore, any claim to heroism is, as the narrator states, "a farce."

This ambiguity of the modern painter as hero is also present in Berger's *A Painter of Our Time* , which I referred to in Chapter One. The fictional Hungarian painter Janos Lavin escapes the 1956 Soviet invasion of Budapest to work in London. Like Teeton, Lavin chooses to stop painting while on the verge of success and he returns to his country as a terrorist. The text's narrator, an English editor named John, attempts to reconstruct Lavin's decision from Lavin's diaries and from conversations. However, unable to find out what happened to Lavin in Budapest, John realizes that his need to recreate or understand Lavin's motivations is selfish. It ignores Lavin's decision, and fixates on satisfying John's own moral position: "We may use this confusion, this tangle of contradictions which strangled the life out of people... we may use it if we wish to console ourselves" (*Painter* 191-2). Berger, and I believe Lamming as well, conclude that a fixed identity is not only impossible, it is undesirable. Here, I agree with Simon Gikandi that for Lamming "representation can no longer appeal to the authority of the speaking subject nor can narrative be predicated on the subject's ability to interpret the conditions of its existence" (*Writing* 94). I would add also that by blurring the ideological distinctions between painter and terrorist, Lamming reveals the tradition of art as criminal itself, and uses it as a point of entry

for Teeton's attempt to return to San Cristobal. Specifically, Teeton obscures his identity by taking the name "San Souci." By abandoning his name and using profits from his art to finance the Secret Gathering, Teeton manipulates his connection to the art world, turning its own methods of reward and acceptance against itself.

Teeton's decision to return to San Cristobal as San Souci is deliberate. It is the name given to him by the Secret Gathering, and is the name of the San Cristobal province where Teeton will execute his portion of the Gathering's bombing plans. Accordingly, each member of the Secret Gathering is also given a name of a province where he will simultaneously detonate his bomb. Their intention is to disrupt a government that "teach[es] the poor [that] their duty is to endure like a man who feel[s] his only ambition is to lose" (*Water* 42). Teeton's contribution is the five hundred pounds that he receives from the gallery for his paintings, an amount "which had astonished the merchants at the gallery" in its paltriness (19). However, "it is the decisive contribution to their funds" for the Gathering to execute its plan (44). It is a symbolic gesture, as Teeton repositions the paintings from aesthetic objects to overt material objects, thereby undermining the particular trope of art as existing outside social codes. Furthermore, Lamming again conflates the two seemingly separate constants of art--its aesthetic and monetary value.

The narrative recalls the metaphors of Teeton's art as "rotten fruit" and "dead harvests," but now the paintings are associated with symbols of growth and wealth. When Teeton opens the suitcase that contains the money, "it swells like a stomach where the zip slits open and spills its fat" (41). This image of an animal being slaughtered for a feast--the rich, bourgeois "cow" full of money--is met with surprise by the Gathering: "'The harvest is here,' says Potaro and smiles to hide his amazement. Their voices collide in a chorus of assent" (41). The Gathering's exuberance contrasts the gallery's quizzical response to the five hundred pounds. In addition, (and I refer here back to Soyinka's image of "artistic hoarding" as the modern enshrinement of art in galleries) the dim, secret hiding place which serves as the Gathering's quarters is the antithesis of Teeton's gallery in London. Ironically, the hiding place replicates the very conditions in San Cristobal that the gallery believes it is celebrating by showing Teeton's works. As the Gathering continues to rejoice, the scene resonates with parodic echoes of claims typically made for art:

> It [money] can set off the most violent plague of longing; create some special chemistry of need in a man's desire; betray the most disciplined appetite; or nurture a moment of supreme confidence in the most cynical heart. (44)

The narrative replaces the Gathering's emotions with clichés reminiscent of a sentimental viewer being inspired by a work of art. It mocks the "dignity" and

"values" that marked Neil MacGregor's description of looking at a painting in a modern British gallery.

The text, however, is murky as to the effect of the Gathering's bombing on San Cristobal and its intended political result, revealing Lamming's deconstructive approach. The narrative sardonically plays with the text under the headline "San Cristobal Bomb Attack" by reporting that "man and fish [were] carried equally to their skeleton doom" in Cattlewash (168). The allusion to Stephano and Trinculo's description of Caliban in *The Tempest* suggests that the bombing only managed to kill the "Calibans," the residents of Cattlewash and Teeton's hometown. However, the narrative also hyperbolizes the reporting of such "third-world events" by announcing that "a torrent of fire had rained on the island. Cattle Wash [sic] had been blown to ashes, the village now buried by flood" (168). The newspaper exaggeration ironically presents the incident as yet another case of a former colony incapable of managing its affairs, whose citizens only make news when catastrophe strikes, politically or environmentally. That Cattlewash is misspelled as "Cattle Wash" indicates that the town is of little significance (and also suggests the people as cattle, which have now been eliminated).

The newsworthiness of the bombing parallels Teeton's arrest for the murder of the Old Dowager. In the novel's final scene, the members of the Gathering "def[y] the nation with their furious arguing that Teeton was innocent" (249). What unifies Britain is its show of moral outrage at Teeton's

crime, and its desire for legal justice. In *Yurugu*, Marimba Ani asserts that "it is the traditional political strategy of the European to create the impression that such [legality] exists, thereby disarming the cultural other whom they exploit" (413). However, as Ani summarizes, morality and law (order) have distinct rhetorical implications, a difference that I claim is exposed by Teeton when he legally sells his paintings to fund the Secret Gathering.

Furthermore, the murder of the Old Dowager is a symbolic one. Despite the familiarity that marks the Old Dowager and Teeton's friendship, her death is necessary to highlight the destructiveness of their inherently colonial relationship. However, the Old Dowager is not merely a one-dimensional play on Prospero. The Old Dowager's uneducated but enthusiastic eye for art represents a broader audience of art than the elitist Prospero. Her death does not mark a new beginning for Teeton. He does not travel back to San Cristobal, suggesting, as Nair rightly points out, that "the myth of the celebrated return of the exile is no more promising than the myth of migration to England" (Nair 75). I qualify Nair's statement, though, by noting that the novel makes it clear that the Old Dowager's death is only a part of Teeton's broader rejection of a universalizing aesthetic.

Summary

In *Water with Berries*, Lamming's construction of the painter is marked by extremes. Within the confines of his room, Teeton is the colonized performer, fulfilling the Old Dowager's Eurocentric expectations of the painter. Outside his room he "transgresses," abandoning his painting for political subversion. This trajectory reflects the postcolonial context of Lamming's text, as his fictional island aspires to cultural and political autonomy in the midst of a continuous imperialist discourse. Accordingly, Teeton as postcolonial painter is presented as a cultural curiosity, a "Caliban," within the tropes of the traditional, European stereotype. However, the text effectively deconstructs the potency of the Eurocentric gaze. Furthermore, this deconstructionist project repudiates a European humanist criterion for art that forces the painter to reject his own cultural material. Instead, *Water With Berries* asserts that Teeton's existence as painter in London is not the mimicking of a foreign artistic legacy, but a fractured identity which Lamming characterizes as a condition of the postcolonial painter.

Notes

[1] I will be using the British Longman edition of *Water With Berries*. It contains an additional page which is not in the American Holt, Rinehart and Winston edition. The final page sees the members of the Secret Gathering "furious[ly] arguing that Teeton was innocent" of the murder of the Old Dowager (*Water* 249).

[2] One example of Caliban's appreciation of art is his telling Stephano and Trinculo to "be not afeard" of the island's "sounds and sweet airs"--in this instance Ariel playing a tune on a tabor and pipe (III.ii.132). However, it must be noted that Ariel's music is part of Prospero's plan to expose Caliban's plot to kill Prospero. In this sense, Caliban's appreciation of art invariably must begin, again, with learning Prospero's language of art.

[3] For my purposes, I will focus on how Teeton's art is described as a "dying crop." For Lamming's critical position on plantations, see "Concepts of the Caribbean," in which he discusses the Caribbean's historical movement to a plantation society.

[4] "Dowager" also appears in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which Lysander tells Hermia that he has "a widow aunt, a *dowager*, / Of great revenue, and she hath no child ... And she respects me as her only son [italics mine]" (I.i.157-60). Lamming's Old Dowager, too, is "respectful" and treats

Teeton like a "son." Ironically, Lamming's character has a child, Myra, but believes her to be dead.

[5] See Chapter 5 of Sandra Paquet's *The Novels of George Lamming* for a detailed summary of the overlapping of names in *Water With Berries* and *The Tempest.*

[6] For a detailed examination of the history of the patron/artist relationship, see Janet Wolff's *The Social Production of Art* (1981).

[7] In Conrad's "An Outpost of Progress," the former chief of the outpost was a painter who "exposed himself recklessly to the sun" (216). Although he was unsuccessful at "home," his insight into the perils of imperialism is symbolized by the cross on his grave.

[8] Seventeenth century British maps of the Caribbean reflected the Old Dowager's need to impose a cartographical narrative onto the painting. Large, uniformly-coloured spaces of water met scientifically chartered coastlines. However, the beaches and inland were filled with images of white colonists hunting, fishing, walking, and so on. There is little native representation, and the maps reflect the Old Dowager's image of the Caribbean as a site of controlled danger. See chapter six of Edward Lynam's *The Mapmaker's Art: Essays on the History of Maps* (1953).

[9] The Old Dowager notes that Nicole's face is not the one in the portrait, indicating that the portrait is the likeness of a face (*Water* 180).

Conclusion

The Painter's Progress

This thesis has examined the contribution of the painter figure to gain an understanding of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. It demonstrated also that this relationship is often symbiotic and ambivalent. Specifically, the painter figure frequently seeks refuge in Romantic stereotypes not simply because it is vulnerable to established Eurocentric notions of art and culture, but because it is profitable--economically and creatively--to lurk within the points of collusion of the colonial encounter. Although seemingly a moot point, the cultural impact of colonialism does not dissipate after the colonizer's departure, nor is it necessarily fruitful for the painter figure to ignore any still lingering anxieties of influence. I have chosen aesthetic matters of the painter figure in postcolonial criticism for these very reasons. The figure challenges the postcolonial criticism that insists on seeing the cultural exchange between the colonizer and the colonized as clear, defined binaries of opposition. Moreover, it is helpful in pointing out that the critical quest to locate an "authentic" experience of the postcolonial artist is, more often than not, a difficult endeavour, and one that does not necessarily point to possibilities for future art.

However, a critical practice such as mine that invariably reaches across various postcolonial countries is also susceptible to the very criticism it tries to problematize. In his essay "Identity and Violence" (1997), David Wood claims that "identity is ... often treated corrosively [and] sceptically ... because the shapes that identity takes, or that identities take, today reflect a massive and general externalisation, decentring, dehiscence and articulation of all constituted beings" (Wood 206). I am keenly aware that this thesis frequently attempts to counter this decentring by focusing on the emotional or aesthetic power of art; to unify the various painter figures by comparing their complex desire to create unique or authentic art from under the influence of colonialism.

But complicating this focus on the emotional power of painting are those characters who are touched by the lives of the painters. In each chapter, I have pointed out that the protagonists struggle with the affect of their art on their friends, family, or acquaintances. The suicide of Nicole while she clutches Teeton's portrait of Randa in *Water With Berries* is especially tragic because of the typically romantic gesture in her association of art and death. A similarly romantic perception of art also compels the Old Dowager to murder her lover, Ferdinand, when he threatens Teeton's life. Although it is tempting to accept such upsetting misfortunes as the "stuff of life" of the painter's palette, one cannot ignore the parallel between brutality of art and the "civilized" moral order of colonialism. Teeton and the narrator of *The*

Enigma of Arrival are keenly aware of the irony. When his friend, Alan, commits suicide, the narrator resists the "theatrical kind of death" that is usually afforded to those with creative "sensibility" (*Enigma* 265). Instead, the narrator prefers to remember Alan "at the [manor] which [Alan] thought of as his special retreat" (266). One is also reminded here of Rhoda in *The Vivisector,* who acts as Hurtle's physical reminder of the complex conditions which led them both to the house on Flint Street. Colonialism provides a veneer of consistency for those who live seemingly disordered lives. In light of my project, there is now the potential to see the four novels as a part of a larger social history of the "artist," and to expand its relationship beyond Atwood's Canadian community outlined in Chapter Three.

In that chapter, I discussed the distinction between the terms "painter" and "artist," emphasizing Elaine's association of "artist" with "lazy" and "tawdry." Elaine implies here that not only is the painter more prestigious, but that the visual arts are less encumbered, socially and ideologically. However, many of the issues that affect the painter also affect the writer, and colonialism could be a factor in the *Zeitgeist*--the notion that the spirit of the age is exemplified in the art of the time. As I discuss later in reference to Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound,* there is a resurgence in the blurring of visual and verbal mediums, possibly to confuse or exploit further the language of colonialism in its dying stages. In his discussion of the sister arts in his book *Painting and the Novel* (1975), Jeffrey Meyers claims that

> by reproducing the paintings visually, by describing them verbally, by interpreting them iconographically, by looking at them with the same attention and intensity as the novelists, we can attempt to see what they saw and make that writing and those in our mind while reading. (3)

Although Meyers purpose is to continue Jean Hagstrum's influential work on Romantic literature and painting, he does, ironically, reflect the postcolonial concerns of writers such as Atwood who recognize the colonial imposition of the brush over the pen. In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's detailed descriptions of her paintings such as "Picoseconds" become forceful representations of larger national and cultural concerns that ask the reader to consider the ideological significance of both mediums. Even if the painter is seemingly more descriptive than the most rebellious writer, the brushstroke still carries colonial baggage. The Old Dowager's inability to recognize Randa's face in the portrait is indicative that that the face--the portrait--is not as easily colonized as the landscape of Canada or San Cristobal.

After all, it is the nature of the four texts themselves that have led me in this particular direction. Because of the painter figure's peculiarly stereotypical image and its complex historical antecedents, the texts need to be read in light of the tensions between their seeming participation in uncomplicated tradition-making, and their play with its conventions. The postcolonial and the Romantic are not necessarily mutually exclusive and

antagonistic terms. As I have demonstrated in my discussion of *The Vivisector* and *Water With Berries*, the politics of global economies do not lend themselves to such traditional categories of reference.

Furthermore, I also have been careful to articulate the ambivalence of these figures, and to avoid essentializing or universalizing their similarities for any narrow critical agenda. Therefore, I believe that my approach to the painter figure in the postcolonial novel problematizes the issue of homogeneous representation when one equates the artist figure with the painter figure. Only recently has criticism begun to recognize this position. In "Art and the Postcolonial Imagination: Rethinking the Institutionalization of Third World Aesthetics and Theory" (2000), Cameron McCarthy and Greg Dimitriadis attempt to distinguish between the various mediums of contemporary art as they are critiqued within the discourse of postcolonial theory by, ironically, collapsing the academic discourses that define their boundaries:

> The very separation between literature and other art forms is an illusionary one, challenged by the histories of dialogue that have gone between these [postcolonial] artists, their ideas, and their works. (Dimitriadis and McCarthy 235)

In this thesis, I attempt to theorize the beginning of this dialogue across aesthetic forms. Although I do not agree that the separation between literature and painting is necessarily illusionary, I do agree that postcolonial

authors write about painters in order to participate in multiple layers of expression. Furthermore, the seeming rigidity of the painter figure stereotype allows such writers to parody and challenge fixed, Eurocentric notions of identity and subjectivity.

Regarding the potential for further work, however, several avenues are now open. On the one hand, I wish I could have examined more extensively the parallels between actual paintings, such as Jan Gossaert's "Adoration of the Magi," and fictional paintings, such as Elaine Risley's "Three Muses." On the other hand, I am aware of the author's power to invoke an image merely by naming the title of a painting, or mentioning a painter, as Naipaul does with de Chirico and Constable in *The Enigma of Arrival*. More often than not, such references are either ironic, or deliberately misleading. Indeed, all *four texts in this thesis are playfully aware that they are novels, not paintings made with words*. Furthermore, it is a playfulness acknowledged by other postcolonial writers, including Sam Selvon. In *Moses Ascending*, Moses deliberately kicks over a stack of Lamming's *Water With Berries* in order to get a better look out the window (138).

I also acknowledge that the four novels are not as overtly self-conscious of their visual content as novels such as Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*. I chose not to include that novel in my study in part because the painter figure, Aurora, is a marginal character. In addition, the novel is an examination of the western influence on an established Indian art tradition, which, although

important for historicizing the conditions of colonialism in India, is beyond the scope of this project.

There is also another potential area of study which runs parallel to my project: literary texts written by authors who are also painters. I have briefly mentioned Atwood's illustrations. Regrettably, I only anticipate detailed discussions of books such as Derek Walcott's autobiographical narrative poem, *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000), which includes Walcott's watercolours. In a scene reminiscent of Naipaul's narrator's discovery of de Chirico's "Enigma of Arrival" at Waldenshaw manor, Walcott is fascinated by a slash of pink on the inner thigh of a white hound underneath a table in Paolo Veronese's painting, "Feast in the House of Levi," which he sees in the New York Modern Art Gallery. In the pink spot, Walcott sees "[his] fear, [his] self, [his] craft," and the painting becomes a launching point for his rediscovery of his St. Lucian roots (Walcott 127). Running parallel to Walcott's narrative is the fictional account of the life of painter Pissarro, a Sephardic Jew whose ancestors were driven out of Portugal to the Caribbean, but who chose to paint in Europe for most of his career. Walcott says, "My inexact and blurred biography / is like his painting; that is fiction's treason, / to deny fact, alter topography / to its own map" (101-02). His use of painting and fiction--including his own--to recall memories and to explain experience, I believe, is the direction that the painter figure is moving in its next stage.

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