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Aesthetics and Identity:  
V.S. Naipaul and the Postcolonial Picturesque

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## CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Contents  | iii |
| Abstract  | iv  |
| Introduction  | 1   |
| Abandoned Landscapes in <i>The Mimic Men</i>            | 11  |
| Cycles of Hybridity in <i>A Bend in the River</i>       | 28  |
| The Hybrid's Redemption in <i>The Enigma of Arrival</i> | 44  |
| Conclusion  | 52  |
| Works Cited   | 54  |

## ABSTRACT

Aesthetics and Identity:  
V.S. Naipaul and the Postcolonial Picturesque

by

Noah Black

In three of his major texts, V. S. Naipaul explores the existential exile of his protagonists, who engage with their landscapes and natural surroundings in order to construct new postcolonial identities. Naipaul's characters often aestheticize these landscapes in language that recalls the eighteenth-century philosophies of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque. Through encounters with various landscapes both in England and its former colonies, Naipaul's exiled subjects cultivate their postcolonial selves, which are, as Homi Bhabha would argue, inevitably hybrid, that is, the synthesis of two conflicted cultural identities that results in the formation of a third, transcendent identity. This project analyzes these encounters through instances of what I call the "postcolonial picturesque," an aesthetic that allows us to explore the landscape's identity-forming potential.

I chart how the development of the postcolonial picturesque in *The Mimic Men* (1967), *A Bend in the River* (1979), and *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) reflects the evolution of postcolonial hybridity in Naipaul's work. Initially, in *The Mimic Men*, the characters' debilitating obsessions thwart the realization of a transcendent hybridity. Then, in *A Bend in the River*, the postcolonial picturesque slips into sublimity and terror, as the chaos of postcolonial revolution overwhelms it. Finally, *The Enigma of Arrival* redeems this aesthetic by grasping its cultural utility and achieving at last a truly hybrid postcolonial identity.

## Introduction

The characters in Naipaul's novels who are separated from their homelands often desire a new connection with the natural world to replace the loss of the "landscapes hymned by their ancestors" (*Mimic Men* 38). The landscape is a foundation in which postcolonial people, especially in the chaotic movement (both physically and ideologically) of the twentieth century, can ground themselves. On this stable scenery, the characters fashion, or attempt to fashion, identities that encompass the tail end of monolithic empires and the subsequent postcolonial beginnings, an experience of negation and chaos. The critic Rob Nixon elaborates on this idea of the landscape's potential to portray post-colonial self-fashioning in his reading of Naipaul's pseudo-memoir *The Enigma of Arrival* (1988), where the narrator sees and constructs the British country landscape as a "postcolonial pastoral" (102). This view reconfigures purely English and imperial traditions of looking at and thinking about the countryside by inserting the narrator's own experiences as an immigrant (and self-imposed exile) from his colonial home in to the canon of landscape narratives. Through a wider use of aesthetic theories, transcending the genre of the pastoral, Naipaul presents a complex picture of the potential for self-representation inherent in the landscape.

Bending the environment towards this representational goal isn't an isolated occurrence in Naipaul's texts, as the protagonist and narrator of *The Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh, again uses landscapes to craft an identity, fusing his memories with those of others. Singh describes the process of extracting the specific identities of his expatriate friends through the recollection of images:

[I]t was possible . . . to draw out from one of our group [an] . . . adolescent secret of cycle rides along a dirt road to the red hills outside her town, in a state west of the Mississippi, to see the sun set . . . and from yet another an English Midland landscape at dusk, a walk among the moon daisies on the bank of a stream, an endless summer walk beside water, into a night scene, with swans; these, on the island, becoming pictures of a world now totally comprehended, of which I had ceased to feel I could form part of and from which we had all managed to withdraw. (67)

In this instance of reflection, the memories of landscapes, embedded with the transience of dusk and with the act of exploring, are pieced together to form a world that is then, because of the character's self-conceptions, rejected. The fluid interplay of representation and imagery necessitates a way of reading Naipaul that seeks to examine both ends of this continuum, the aesthetics that exist in the landscape and the representation that the landscape is given, and in turn gives, to its viewers. Within this scene, the narrator Ralph Singh describes the different memories as "pictures," a judgment of visual quality that recalls the idea of the picturesque, an aesthetic that seeks to combine art, the artificial creations of man, with nature. Naipaul's omnipresent scenery invites an aesthetic approach, but it is my reading locates specific elements, in both the vocabulary and the scenery itself, that recall of the picturesque.

The picturesque, though, cannot be fully analyzed without understanding its origins in eighteenth-century British aesthetics. This philosophical field stretches beyond the art-bound conceptions that exist today. The editors of the *The Sublime* define this nascent, Enlightenment idea of aesthetics as "not *primarily* about art but about how we are formed as subjects, and how *as subjects* we go about making sense of our experience" (Ashfield 2). This definition of aesthetics is necessary not only to the formation of the picturesque, but also to Naipaul's texts, particularly his landscapes, which function as a canvas for meaning-making and the formation of identity. Central to both the eighteenth-

century's aesthetic development and to Naipaul's novels is the distinct aesthetic of the sublime. The Greek philosopher Longinus first examined this aesthetic, and his idea of the sublime as an always overwhelming emotional experience was the basis for the explosion of British aesthetic criticism in the eighteenth century. A central figure in these debates is Edmund Burke, who both separated the previously-entwined aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime and imbued the sublime with political undertones, following the French Revolution. These aesthetic philosophies, grounded in the idea of the sublime and a concomitant ideological element, serve to unveil the ebb and flow of potential for agency, identity-formation, and disillusionment with oppressive systems, both on the individual and national level, which exists within Naipaul's landscapes. This project will examine the ways in which the multiple, clashing aesthetic modes of Naipaul's landscapes explore the difficulties of forming identity within the chaos of post-colonial existence. The essential element here is the difficulty of the formation, as the potential of the postcolonial moment is underlined with both fragility and a tendency towards (often self-destructive) violence. Harsher critics of Naipaul fixate on the hopelessness that these elements seem to impart, but Naipaul locates these not to attack developing postcolonial states, but to instead identify and explain the dangers that face individuals after the end of empire.

This balancing act of two competing poles of knowledge, the imperial and the postcolonial, nostalgia and progress, finds a parallel in Burke's theories of the sublime and the beautiful. In his 1759 work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke endeavors to separate the two titular aesthetic elements by delving into the specific feelings they bring up and by defining what

signifiers evoke these emotions. He defines the sublime as “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger” and the beautiful as “qualities in things as induce in us a sense of affection and tenderness” (130, 145). In conjuring up ideas of pain and danger, the sublime engenders fear in the viewer. This evocation of an undesirable emotion is mitigated by the distance between the viewer and the source of dread. Burke specifies that only “at certain distances, and with certain modifications” can the terrifying be tailored into the delightful sublime (131). Proximity, on the other hand, heightens the pleasure of Beauty. Burke then grounds this emotional analysis by defining the concrete features that signify the two opposing aesthetics. Integral to the sublime are the constituent pieces of obscurity, infinity, and power, while beautiful objects have the opposite qualities: clarity, limitation, and delicacy. The second image described by Singh captures the presence of both qualities, with the “endless” walk along the river driven by a pursuit of the beautiful moon-lit flowers and swans. Neither the sublime nor the beautiful dominates. There exists a balance between the constituent pieces, albeit one that is more than its origins. Singh and his other expatriate friends, in a move inseparable from postcolonial existence, strive for the ideal of a transcendent collaboration. Their perfect collage of memories imbues each memory, and each rememberer, with meaning.

Aesthetics alone cannot account for this semiotic mechanism at work in Naipaul’s novels. Discussions of postcolonial texts are bound up in the ongoing politics of development and interaction between imperial centers and their former colonies. Even in the scene from *The Mimic Men*, Singh’s friends fantasize about British landscapes, far removed from their postcolonial setting. The sublime, too, slips in to imperial discourse. The critic Pramod Nayar, surveying British travel writing about India, argues that the

“eighteenth century aesthetics of the sublime furnished a ready tool for which with the traveller articulated specifically colonial themes” (3811). This weight of empire, compounded by Naipaul’s own colonial-yet-imperial identity and its recreation within his characters, invites a turn to Homi Bhabha and his theories of hybrid postcolonial identity which can help one better understand Naipaul’s works. I seek to synthesize postcolonial and aesthetic theories in order to unite disparate strands of criticism on Naipaul, and open his texts to readings that more fully grasp both the form and the function of hybridity. The link between aesthetics and identity, present within Naipaul’s texts, is not absent from the theoretical dimension, as Burke’s “remarkable contrast” between beauty and sublimity parallels the binary distinction between thought and action that Bhabha sets out, in “A Commitment to Theory,” to dismantle (Burke 140). For Bhabha, the negotiation and antagonism between conflicting theories has a transformative effect on ideas themselves, at once erasing and transforming them. Bhabha states that “the language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of master and slave . . . but the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity” (2385). The actions occurring within this place of hybridity, existing on the metaphorical border between opposing ideas, are characterized as “transmutations and translations” which create an object “that is new, *neither one nor the other*” (2392, 2385). This new hybrid creation, then, acts as an intermediary between the opposing ideas that birthed it, providing an organically formed, and not artificially imposed, common ground. The creation of the hybrid is an act of both unification, as it connects the ideas, and of elimination, as its very existence

works toward a synthesis and ultimate erasure of the conflicting ideas from which it emerged.

The intermingling of the contrasting aesthetics is one that Burke himself anticipated but never fully explored. The mechanisms of hybridity that Bhabha elaborates can be applied to Burke's aesthetics, and it is within the contact zone of the two aesthetics, the sublime and the beautiful, that the critics Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight introduced the picturesque, an aesthetic hybrid. Introducing this new aesthetic, Price states that "the effect of the picturesque is curiosity" (177). This curiosity is engendered by variety and intricacy, aspects distinct from both beauty and sublimity, but also indebted to particular elements of each. Variety exists in the blending of the sublime and the beautiful, allowing the viewer to lapse in to and out of the particulars of either foundational aesthetic and their synthesis in the picturesque. Integral to the intricacy is "a partial and uncertain concealment," where the entire object or scene is never fully apparent. Picturesque objects are ones of mystery and potential, with their entire truth hidden. Here, the picturesque resembles another, more recently analyzed aesthetic, Freud's quality of "The 'Uncanny.'" Derived from the German *heimlich*, the uncanny is both "intimate" and "concealed," and it here parallels the alteration of beauty that appears within the picturesque, a pleasure that promises to reveal itself more fully to viewers upon their investigation of the concealment (932-33). The deferral of beauty's immediate pleasure engenders a sense of curiosity, a desire to know more. Invited by the deferment, the viewer explores the picturesque, both physically, by wandering through a landscape, and mentally, by imagining the possibilities.

This invitation plays out in Singh's memory-pictures, as the central action in both is the pursuit of the setting sun through the picturesque landscapes of hills and rivers. These landscapes lend themselves to the picturesque imagination as they fragment the vision, breaking up what would be flat or straight into a pleasing level of disorder, and hide away, from any single view, a complete truth. Knight particularly focuses on this internal potential of the picturesque and creates a very distinct process of picturesque association, where "the [picturesque] objects recall to the mind the imitations, which skill, taste, and genius have produced; and these again recall to the mind the objects themselves, and show them through an improved medium" (173). The path of thought travelled by association runs through both art and nature, and, as such, Knight believes that the process of association gives the viewer a greater appreciation of both human artifice and the natural world. For Singh, the envisioning of the picture-memories is a reconstruction that builds towards a more complete comprehension of the world, an improved perception of the very thing that the picture-memories represented.

The editors of *The Sublime* state that this new level of appreciation of the landscape is an adaptation of "the analytic of the sublime to a new social and political environment, predominantly middle class, with a whole new set of priorities and assumptions" (Ashfield 15). Burke and his predecessors developed their aesthetic theories at end of the eighteenth century, in the transition period between the Enlightenment and modernity, where revolutions and industrialism were moving power out of the hands of the traditional landed elite. These new priorities and assumptions are elaborated on by Price, who states that the impact of the curiosity "though less splendid or powerful, has a more general influence," as it engages the mind on a more intellectual

level than the pure emotion of love or terror (177). The sublime and the beautiful belonged to the aristocracy. While the picturesque and the middle-class that appreciates it may not have the wealth and tradition of the landed gentry, the moment in which they exist is one where their potential to enact leveling, democratizing change in the social and political realms is about to be realized.

This resolves a potential complication between the heavy aesthetic analysis of the beautiful/sublime binary and Bhabha's critical theory. The critic Dabney Townsend states that "Burke provides Price . . . and Knight (by way of argument and contrast) grounds for transforming the natural qualities into aesthetic expression" (373). The picturesque is not so much a compromise between the beautiful and the sublime as it is a dualistic, ambivalent embrace and rejection. The formation of the picturesque depends on the binary created by Burke, but the picturesque simultaneously disrupts the easy separation. It seems, at least at first, that the picturesque does not engage in the theoretical action that Bhabha finds necessary in the formation of hybrids. He states that "the hybrid moment of political change . . . contests the terms and territories of both [the opposing theories that formed it]" (2388). Although the aesthetics of the picturesque do not criticize the beautiful and sublime ideas that birthed it, on another layer of discourse, that of social value, the picturesque rejects the traditions that elevated its aesthetic forebears. The sublime "was indifferent to the needs of both the land and its users, to the productive capacity of the land to yield sustenance or organize social relations" (Ashfield 15). On the opposite end of the aesthetic spectrum, beauty was too commodifiable and too artificial. Where the sublime disavowed practicality and purpose, the purpose of beauty was beauty, and in signifying nothing more than itself it led to the same wasteful and

insular aesthetic as the sublime. To correct these oversights, the picturesque arose, advocating a way of viewing the land that imbued it with significance derived from thoughts and actions, the act of exploring its scope, and not from emotions and reactions, the mere marveling or devotion inspired by the sublime or the beautiful. The very presence of the picturesque rewrites the values of its aesthetic forbears, the contestation of the preexisting elements that Bhabha sees as an integral part of hybridity.

Naipaul's landscapes, too, reflect the possibilities of newly formed sociopolitical groups. The original aesthetic of the picturesque re-presents itself in a new, hybrid permutation, what I term the "postcolonial picturesque." Much as Bhabha draws on *The Mimic Men* to construct his formal theory of mimicry, I draw on Naipaul's raw textual and thematic matter of aesthetics, identity, and landscapes to construct my own theoretical framework of the postcolonial picturesque. This aesthetic grafts the visual signifiers and ideological tenets of the picturesque on to colonial landscapes, and then, through the common ground of inherent potential, draws on Bhabha's theory of hybridity to shape an aesthetic that is both grounded in, and a rejection of, the ambivalence of the postcolonial moment. This critical dimension of the landscape reveals the freedom and possibility that Bhabha sees as inherent in the hybridity of newly formed postcolonial identities. The variety of the picturesque lies at the heart of postcolonial identity, a self-representation forged from perhaps the sublimity of imperial power and the beauty of progress, both material and ideological. The variety that these antecedents impart to postcolonial individuals means that "they are now free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference" (Bhabha 2397). Bhabha's very word choice is that of the picturesque. Discontinuity and

difference are part of the intricacy and variety that create the curious, enticing unknown of the picturesque and the hybrid. The scope of the sublime inevitably extends into uniformity, while Joseph Addison describes beauty as being limited to “a narrow compass” where the mind immediately grasps its entirety (65). The difference of the hybrid corresponds with the difference of the picturesque, breaking up the uniformity of the sublime, and similarly disrupting the immediate comprehensibility of beauty.

Naipaul’s landscapes exist within this disrupted space of potential, and the characters who view the land constantly revise their views as they work through the difficulties of postcolonial identity. For Singh, though, the postcolonial picturesque is a fleeting pleasure. Its freedom and potential are birthed in a moment of chaos and then fade just as quickly. He rejects the very same picturesque that he constructs, as the burdens of a calcified identity, perhaps mis-forged in that hybrid instant, are too limiting. This represents Naipaul’s first use of the picturesque: an initial instance, signifying the freedom of the first postcolonial moment, that then vanishes under the weight of the used-up potential and freedom of that genesis. The picturesque, with all its freedom and potential, fades, and all Singh and Naipaul can imagine is their “own immanent extinction” (*The Mimic Men* 68). Naipaul, though, presents more than just the dissolution of hybridity, and this paper will chart the course of its development across the three novels. The evolution of the postcolonial picturesque moves from the rejection and deconstruction of the aesthetic towards an eventual embrace.

### Abandoned Landscapes in *The Mimic Men*

The process towards rejecting the postcolonial picturesque envelops much of Naipaul's 1967 novel, *The Mimic Men*. The protagonist of *Men*, Ralph Singh, is stuck between landscapes, both physically and mentally. He bounces back and forth between England and the fictional Caribbean island of Isabella. At the same time, he repeatedly disavows landscapes and the identities they can contain, but then returns later, seeking new conceptions of his surroundings and himself. The landscapes that he embraces seem to be true hybrids, with his postcolonial experience colliding with the vanished imperial, aristocratic traditions. Selwyn Cudjoe states that "the characters [in *The Mimic Men*] are fragmented and uncertain of their positions within the society" (99). This uncertainty about one's position within postcolonial society is displaced on to the landscape, where identities can be practiced, discarded, and embraced in a private realm. Here, perhaps, the true depth of the postcolonial picturesque reveals itself. Its ambivalence surpasses that of merely confused identities and becomes an ambivalence that turns on itself, endlessly finding its very mechanisms first romantic, then debilitating.

In his exiled state, reflecting on his past from a London hotel room, Singh returns to two separate imperial heritages. He imagines himself as both a Rajput prince on the central plains of Asia and as a plantation owner, living close to the land and people of Isabella but simultaneously removed from them. Both of these are nostalgic fantasies, desires for an element of the past, but there are critical differences between the two. They are variations on imperialist nostalgia, what Renato Rosaldo describes as the "mourning for what one has destroyed" that occurs on the margins of empire, where imperial agents lament the loss of the subject culture's exotic elements (107). The plantation fantasy

twists Rosaldo's theories, warping them into a post-imperialist nostalgia. The empire itself has been destroyed but then, after-the-fact yet by the destructors, romanticized (107). The Rajput dream is more of a conventional form of imperialist nostalgia, but again Singh's identity complicates a strict definition. While its reality was destroyed by empire, Singh crafts equally concrete connections to both the destroyer-empire of Britain and the destroyed Mughal and Rajasthani empires. The two dreams are linked because they both represent fantasies of being a part of an empire, and, more specifically, of being an agent of the sublime power of the empire. The differences between the two imperial variations means that the aesthetic of the sublime is expressed differently in the landscapes of the fantasies, and this idea of inherent elements of difference becomes the critical point upon which the daydreams collapse.

Ancient sublimity dominates Singh's Rajput fantasy, and he disregards the picturesque in favor of a far grander aesthetic. Reading *The Migrations of the Aryan Peoples* as a child, the young Singh

lived a secret life in a world of endless plains, tall bare mountains, white with snow at their peaks, among nomads on horseback, daily pitching [his] tent beside cold green mountain torrents that raged over grey rock, waking in the mornings to mist and rain and dangerous weather. (118)

This landscape contrasts itself with the island of Isabella in multiple ways. The "endless plains" are the antithesis of an island, bounded by definition by the sea. The snow, too, is an element that cannot exist in the tropics. Even the water is different, with the raging torrents altogether different from the "neat channels of streams, fresh but brackish" that break up the beaches of the island (133). The Burkean elements of danger and expanse, necessary to the sublime, are present within this dream, and are reinforced by the role in

which Singh casts himself. The stories “of the Rajputs and Aryans [were] stories of knights” (117). Not only is the landscape itself sublime, but so, too, is Singh an agent of the sublime empire, namely, a warrior, an individual accustomed to the danger of that aesthetic and capable of carrying out the violent acts that give human beings their own sublime element. Given the nomadic nature of the knights of the fantasy and Singh’s wandering attempts to form an identity from the chaos of Isabella, the martial power of the fantasy represents an effort to imbue his own life with some kind of potency and significance, an attempt to escape from curves and discontinuities of the picturesque and definitively fix an identity. The function of the sublime’s power, within the fantasy, rejects the potential of the picturesque, the deferred seizing of identity, for a set path. Singh desires to be more than a lost child on Isabella; he is the racial inheritor of a grand tradition. Summarizing the landscape of the fantasy, he merely states “I was a Singh” (118). His name is a metonym for the sublimity of the imperial past that carries enough gravitas to stand alone. The gravitas of signified pointed to by Singh’s name bears enough meaningful semiotic weight to need no explanation. The name, enveloped in majesty and sublimity, does not even need to speak for itself. It merely imposes its existence, the ultimate act of power and what seems to be the most stable way of crafting an identity.

Weiss undercuts this grandeur when he characterizes the fantasy as one made from “images of sublime emptiness” (103). The end of the metaphor is not human power and significance, but the opposite: meaningless insignificance. In another form of the fantasy, Singh sees himself and his ancestors “riding below a sky threatening to snow to the very end of an empty world” (98). The “empty world” encompasses more than just

the physical description of the image, one of plains devoid of anything except Singh and his horsemen. It reflects the nature of the fantasy, revealing the dream itself to be an “empty world,” one that imbues Singh with a false, misplaced sense of identity. The temporal distance and textual sources filter and ultimately distort the image, creating a gulf of meaning that Singh cannot fill. The image’s sublimity forces itself into the foreground because the reality it points to, the romantic past, lies beyond Singh’s understanding. The world is empty because its creator is necessarily absent from it.

The text returns to the emptiness of the fantasy in a later permutation, where Singh vanishes from the image. Here, the horsemen scour the landscape in search of “their leader,” and are eventually told “You are looking in the wrong place. The true leader of you lies far away, shipwrecked on an island the like of which you cannot visualize” (118). The inability of the inhabitants of the fantasy to picture Singh’s reality on Isabella reinforces the incomprehensibility of the fantasy itself. Singh cannot insert himself into the dream because the reality of the mountains, snow, and horsemen is antithetical to his homeland. The landscape that he comes from and the culture that has crafted him are beyond the bounds of the thoughts of the people he wishes to link himself to, and so the reality of the illustrious Indian history is as equally beyond Singh’s ability to visualize.

Singh’s second fantasy of post-imperialist nostalgia sheds the overt sublimity of India for the postcolonial picturesque of a plantation on the island of Isabella. The plantation grows Singh’s favorite crop, cocoa, and this fertile environment at once mirrors and softens the landscape of the Indian fantasy.

It [cocoa] grows in the valleys of our mountain ranges, where it is cool and where on certain mornings your breath turns to vapour. There are freshwater springs that make miniature waterfalls over mossy rocks and then run clear and cold and shallow in their own channels of white sand. (39)

The mountains, mist, waters and even colors of India are reflected, but their sublimity disappears. Instead of raging torrents of green water there are “miniature waterfalls” that “run clear” (39). Cool island mornings replace the dangerous weather and endless snow. The island is more temporally and psychically close. Given Burke’s idea of beauty as engendering in the viewer a desire for proximity, it seems as if the only possible psychological response is to imbue the temporally closer of the two fantasies with pleasure.

Singh’s creative efforts replay the landscape’s fertility. Retiring to the estate house, he spends his days writing. While the Indian landscape depended on other texts for its origin, Singh becomes the writer in this scenario, crafting his own work. In doing so he seizes upon and realizes the potential of the postcolonial picturesque, extending its moment of creation by linking his writing to the landscape that at once contains and inspires his artistry. Cudjoe describes the act of writing in *The Mimic Men* as “a process designed to organize and give meaning to life [that] becomes life itself and thus the basis upon which to chart Singh’s and his society’s development” (103). The endless repetition of Singh’s imperial fantasies now intrudes upon the semiotic function of the acts, with Singh unable to escape the process of writing. Cudjoe, though, does not press far enough with his analysis. Writing does more than chart the progression; it actively remakes Singh and his surroundings. He constant revises and rewrites both himself and the landscapes.

Within the plantation fantasy Singh imagines “literary labour interdigitating with the agricultural; and that word agriculture would have acquired its classical associations and lost its harsher island significance” (41). Here, Singh wants to return to the classical conception of Virgil, and specifically the *Georgics*, which blend together the grandeur of the Roman Empire with the details of agriculture. This poetic mediation (deliberately and tactically deployed) subdues the sublimity inherent in imperial scope and power. The sublime is alluded to and simultaneously dismissed within the fantasy when Singh describes the fading “harsher island significance.” Weiss points out, contra Singh’s fantasy, that, in fact, “West Indian field-workers are often shackled to a livelihood that is another form of slavery” (97). Instead of the harsh reality of Isabella, the laborers are “arcadian figures,” belonging more to a mythical, ideal realm of agriculture than to the colonial situation (40). Complicating the classical references, the scene layers beauty on top of the doubly British and Roman imperial, and therefore sublime, context to draw the fantasy into the realm of the picturesque. The estate house’s architecture is beautiful, as Singh states “everywhere the eye would have found pleasure in fashioned wood, in the white fretwork arabesques” (40). The beauty continues in the landscape with the clear freshwater streams and miniature waterfalls, scenery that entices through its clarity. Any potential sublimity is discursively encircled by both literary reference and sensory description. Finally, the plantation-owning image of Singh directly controls the sublime. Where he was a knight in the Indian fantasy, now he commands laborers who cut down the cocoa with “knives . . . like the weapons of medieval knights” (40). As a warrior, Singh had the potential to kill, but in his plantation-guise, he commands not only the ability to destroy but also the power of growth. Containing these two oppositional

elements crafts the figure of Singh as a picturesque individual, containing within himself the potential of the postcolonial picturesque.

Everything in the image seems to contribute to an attempt to transcend oppositional aesthetics, but a deeper reading of the fantasy undercuts this, much like the ultimate demise of the Indian landscape. The aesthetic of the plantation is predicated on an imperial reality and a romantic view of the empire that cannot coexist. The hybrid grows out of two clashing ideas, but in that same action it fails, because the image signifies an impossible landscape and identity, negating the potential and possibility of the postcolonial picturesque and its attendant hybridity. Here the emptiness continues further, as Singh cannot even latch on to a surname and a grand heritage. While the Indian empires were destroyed in eras far removed from the present, Singh actively brought about the end of empire that undermines any possibility of the plantation fantasy. As a radical politician, standing for “the dignity of our island” (237), Singh’s eventual victory in the polls means, as Cudjoe states, “a formal break with the mother country and a discontinuation of her tutelage” (105). As an agent in the destruction of his own fantasy, Singh succumbs to a nostalgia that is neither postcolonial nor pre-colonial. A postcolonial nostalgia would reminisce on a once-utopian, now fallen Isabella. Here, the impossible promises (“to abolish poverty in twelve months . . . to kick the whites into the sea and send the Asiatics back to Asia”) given by Singh and his compatriots would have to be somehow achieved (237). While the Indian fantasy is a form of pre-colonial nostalgia, its underlying sublimity makes it ultimately another permutation of imperialist nostalgia. It is, recalling-yet-modifying Rosaldo, post-imperial nostalgia: a nostalgia for empire after its end, felt by its very destroyers.

At this conflicted, paradoxical depth lies another layer of hybridity. Singh's fantasy, a reactionary dream, defies any assumptions that could be drawn from his radical, leftist politics. It draws on both the immediacies of the postcolonial present and appeals back through time to Rome, the archetypal empire. To explain this, a return to Bhabha is necessary, as he specifically addresses the situation in *The Mimic Men* in his article "Of Mimicry and Man:"

What [instances of colonial imitation] all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' [incomplete and virtual] presence. (123)

Built on the uncertain, irresolvable grounds of conflicted desires, the "partial presence" defines the very nature of the fantasy. The "rupture" in the discourse is the formation of the postcolonial nation, partially breaking from the previous colonial past but incapable of completely eschewing it. As such, the representation of Singh can never exist, as this persona is too fraught with contradictions in identity, and so is resigned to an incomplete and virtual existence.

Despite the parallel between the fantasy and Bhabha's definition of mimicry, Singh's actions complicate a perfect correspondence. He seems to transcend the first "but not quite" stipulation, as he fully embraced the imperial persona. There is no subversive mimicry present within the fantasy. It is Bhabha's development, from "but not quite" to "but not white," that unravels Singh's effort (128). The repetition of the color white within the plantation fantasy acts as a racial signifier, pointing towards the one piece of unchanging identity, Singh's skin color, that he wishes to change but cannot. The white, present in the sand and the fretwork arabesques, exists in both the nature and the

architecture that Singh commands. He tries to approximate the whiteness he lacks by owning and controlling white things, a symbolic but ultimately futile gesture. Singh grasps at both the artificial and the organic, but his reach cannot then return to himself. His actions can only change the external world, and he pushes this piece of agency to its conceptual limits. His rule over the knight-laborers and the arcadian figures is the command of other, foreign cultures that resides in the very definition of an empire. The novel fully manifests this parallel when Singh travels to London in an attempt to negotiate a nationalization of Isabella's plantations. At the home of Lord Stockwell, owner of the majority of the island's estates, Singh glimpses "a Kalighat painting, momentarily disturbing because [it was] so unexpected: Krishna, the blue god, upright, left leg crossed in front of right, flute at his lips, wooing a white milkmaid" (269). Krishna contains within himself the aesthetic of the sublime, insofar as he is able to display it to humans. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, he reveals his true form to the warrior-prince Arjuna, who sees the divinity as "endless, . . . the entire universe established in one" (11. 11-13). Stockwell has captured this exotic sublimity within the painting and in moving the image from India to England, warping its significance. Instead of the Hindu religious significance, this captured Krishna becomes a symbol of imperial might, as if the sublime of the Other is inferior to the European permutation of the aesthetic quality.

Singh's fantasy inverts and trumps Stockwell's imperial dominance. The links to knighthood in the laborers' knives mark them as examples of European might, and their alternate configuration as "arcadian figures" adds a level of classical, mythical significance that parallels Krishna. Singh controls not only Europe, through its metonymic representations, but also the colonial landscape, and in ruling them both he

and his holdings emerge as hybrids. Where his servant-knights are sublime in power, the landscape contains touches of beauty. Within this fantasy, Bhabha sees Singh as a "parodist of history" who creates "a narrative that refuses to be representational" (126). The impossibility of Singh, the Indian colonial, dominating the imperial center is this destabilization of history, but the parodying of history is not as evident as Bhabha argues. Instead, Singh's enchantment with history necessitates an inevitable to it. His engagement does not point towards some effort to undermine colonial discourse, nor does it unconsciously and inevitably destabilize imperial narratives, as Bhabha suggests. Instead, the rationalizations required to fashion himself into an imperial persona are Singh's attempts to dissolve the refusal of representation and to forge a new, wholly imperial self. Singh earnestly desires that his plantation fantasy was the reality, was representational. The refusal lies not within him, but in the exterior and uncontrollable contexts of identity, birth and race, that prevent him from truly seizing the image. In this fantasy, Singh pushes his mimicry its absolute limit; a mimicry that perfectly reproduces the realities of imperial attitudes (as there is neither interior intention nor exterior implication of disruption present) but that still cannot be that desired imperial element.

Within this confused arena of depiction and impersonation, a turn to another theorist, Jean Baudrillard, helps to fully explain the depth of Singh's fantasy. The depth of the perfect-yet-disingenuous recreation exemplifies Baudrillard's hyperreal, "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (1). Singh's act itself can be defined as simulation, the "feign[ing] to have what one doesn't have" (3). This simulation reveals the underlying tension of the fantasy. Bhabha states that mimicry "problematizes the signs of racial and cultural superiority, so that the 'national' is no longer naturalizable"

(125). Singh's race and culture, the West Indies Indian, mark him as unfit for the reality of his fantasy, but despite these unassailable boundaries he can still construct the image. This act of construction contains within it all the necessary elements of empire -- the classical references, the dominance of other cultures, the romantic views -- but the reality of empire is that deliberate and conscious acts are not enough to truly enter in to it. A monolithic sublimity exists in the uncontrollable imperial prerequisite of race and birthplace.

Singh's mimicry, through Baudrillard, represents the unreal. It is a stunted hybridity. Instead of transcending its origins, this mimicry envelops, and is in turn enveloped, by them. It cannot escape its pre-existing framework of ideas and can only mix and match, not alter, these constituent parts. Creation, too, lies beyond the reach of mimicry. The plantation fantasy, then, merely simulates hybridity, as the representations of Singh exist in personas of creation, that of the writer and of the farmer, creators of art and life. But the real Singh is neither of those personas, and so he must mimic them. He grasps the end result of hybridity, its generation of the new, but cannot, or is perhaps unwilling, to embrace the agonistic process that destroys the ideas that precede the formation of the hybrid. Singh's reluctance hinders any attempt to give up the past, and so all he can aspire to is simulationist mimicry, acts of impersonation and not of embodiment. While the plantation is, at first glance, a perfect postcolonial picturesque, the hybridity entailed by that aesthetic is absent. Within the fantasy, the postcolonial and the picturesque prerequisites are checked off one-by-one, and yet the promised transcendence, the new potential-filled identity, never materializes. His fascination (more a restrictive devotion) with the past European empires limits Singh's efforts to craft an

ideal landscape and identity to only a re-presentation, the Quixotic repetition of the known-but-nonexistent. It seems that the deep level of unreality present in the representation, its refusal to represent hybridity, casts doubt on the reality of the postcolonial picturesque itself.

This failure snakes backward through the text, and the narrating, fantasizing Singh, is stricken by the same inability to represent. This true Singh is a stunted, failed writer. His attempt to write a history of the end of empire bears no fruit, and he complains that he has become a “victim of the restlessness that was to be my subject” (38). He cannot transcend this failed persona, as he ends up being overwhelmed by the thought of empires. Even in their end, empires prove to be too powerfully sublime a subject, rejecting the “partial expression” that Singh attempts to provide (38). The plantation-writer Singh harnesses a piece of this sublimity, as this ideal writer exists both within (as the plantation owner interacting with the laborers) and apart from the society he takes as his subject (the afternoons of the fantasy are filled with the solitary task of writing, apart from the world). Despite the inclusion of this aesthetic, even in fantasy Singh contains his ideal self to permutation of the writer’s identity, merely a rehearsal of himself, an artistically sterile creation.

Singh confesses “In that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and labour than by the calm and order which the act would have implied” (39). In crafting his history of empires, Singh would have ordered the chaos of the revolutions and dissolutions that heralded the end of colonial time, what critic Veena Singh describes as Singh’s attempt to “impose his romanticized vision on the reality of the things” (157). Again, as with the crafted personas, this is a futile attempt at imposing meaning that

masks the reality of disorder with a signifier that mimics the “order” that existed under British rule. Bhabha, drawing on the post-structuralist vocabulary of Jacques Derrida, states, “Each objective is constructed on the trace of that perspective that it puts under erasure” (“Commitment” 2386). The mechanisms of hybridity are copied in Singh’s literary attempt, but only up to a point. The postcolonial chaos proves to be more than a “trace” when Singh attempts to erase it with analysis. It rebounds and overwhelms this attempt to construct order over it, and ultimately forces Singh to revert to expressing this desire in a fantasy. Both reality and Singh’s own fantasies, though, prove to be too unstable a base for any hybrid formation. The disavowal the postcolonial picturesque, rejected through the recurring themes of sublimity and order, reinforces the stunted identity of Singh as a man who is obsessed with the illusions of the ordering power of history.

Moving to London, Singh finds new imagery, the cityscape, with which to interact. Singh feels characteristically ambivalent about this, as his ever-present fascination with the past leads him to reflect, with a note of sadness, that “the gardens this asphalt replaced are commemorated inside in photographs” (41). In discussing modern cities, the critic Rahal Mehrotra states that their architecture and form is “devoid of references to the past” (244). Here, the city enacts the hybridity that Singh wants to play out within his history, but with the wrong eras. The present and the future of the uniform apartments and car-parks erase the greenery, leaving only the trace of the subsumed perspective present in the photos. The picturesque, doubly represented through pictures of landscapes, has been consumed by the city’s tireless enforcement of singular, sterile progress.

This destruction of the past, constantly forced on to Singh, drives him to theorize that his flight from Isabella “was part of the injury inflicted on me by the too solid three-dimensional city in which I could never feel myself as anything but spectral, disintegrating, pointless fluid” (61). The erasure of the past leaves Singh without any references on which to construct an identity, and Veena Singh describes the Singh of the novel as finding London to be a place of “final emptiness” (165). This emptiness manifests itself in the language Singh uses to describe his feelings invoked by the wound of the city. One definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary for “spectral” is “unsubstantial, unreal.” Without a landscape that links to the romantic past, Singh finds his very reality in question. This void reveals that the significance of the past, existing in landscapes, constitutes a part of Singh’s essence, an element of himself that without which he cannot be. Mehrotra sees the city as “a static city, built of a more permanent material such as concrete, steel, and brick . . . and monumental in its presence” (246). The city’s break from the past is a permanent one, signified by its entirety, down to the very materials. These constituents are, for Singh, “too solid,” resisting interpretation as much as they resist the elements. Without the past, he dissolves, sliding into the chaotic postcolonial mode that he so desperately resists and that he sees as less-than-real.

The solidity of the cityscape is not entirely insurmountable. While it obliterates greenery and resists the efforts of Singh alone, it finally becomes picturesque for a brief moment. Surprised by a sudden snow, Singh gazes out of his apartment and contemplates the now-fluid cityscape. “Beyond the grilled basement window, the small back garden, usually black, was white: snow lay on the weeds, the bare plane tree, the high brick wall” (14). Here, Singh perhaps finds a counter to the monolithic quality of the city. The falling

snow layers itself over the existing landscape, changing the aesthetics of the ground it covers. This imposition also alters significance, as Singh characterizes the snow as something that "added to the dampness inside [the apartment] and seemed to add to the chaos as well" (14). A cursory reading of Singh's description appears to imbue the snow with the same negative chaos found in the colonies, with the weather heightening the confusion indoors and linking it to the disorder drove Singh to flee to London, but the use of "seemed" undermines this initially negative meaning. Instead of pointing towards the reality, "seemed" signifies the unreality of that initial perception. The chaos is not reinforced by the snow, but quite the opposite. The snow imparts a level of calm on the city. It is the only thing that can change Singh's perception of the cityscape and drain the city of its might. Looking out of an attic window, Singh contrasts "the bombsite . . . wholly white" with "the thin lines of brown smoke rising from ugly chimneypots" (9). The contrast between the beautiful snow-covered cityscape and the defiant ugliness of urbanity causes Singh to feel "all the magic of the city go away and [to have] . . . an intimation of the forlornness of the city and of the people who lived in it" (9). A picturesque cityscape emerges here, with the beauty of the snow-covered ruins clashing with the inescapable, and therefore sublime, aesthetic of the city as a whole. The city refuses to submit to the snow's layering alterations without a fight, defiling the pure-whiteness and draining enchantment that Singh feels towards snow covered scene, but it is not enough to prevent its significance from shifting. The forward-looking gaze of the future fades into the forlornness. The erasure of the past here becomes tragic not only for Singh, but for the entire city and its population. Disconnected from the past, they perceive the same isolated that plagues Singh. Order has come, but it is neither an order

of the past nor an order of the future, merely an ordering of the moment through a brief fixing of meaning.

The postcolonial element seeps into scene, though, as the racial signifier of the white snow, emphasized through its covering of the “usually black” garden, finally allows Singh to glimpse the element that he lacks. The white skin that eludes him and degrades his fantasies into mere mimicry is finally imposed on the landscape by a force besides himself. The uncontrollable exterior elements that dictated he be born an Indian in Trinidad now enforce a total whiteness. Additionally, the garden that the snow blankets is doubly barren and overgrown, the tree bare and the ground choked with weeds. Singh’s pessimistic conception of the postcolonial moment, the rampant chaos that defies the order necessary for meaning and identity, vanishes under the snow. Here, Singh’s racism fully reveals itself. The blackness, signifying the decay of meaning, can only be defeated by whiteness. This final postcolonial picturesque relies on the transient snow, and because of this temporality it melts away, like every one of Singh’s previous fantasies and attempts at ordering.

The tragedy of the lost past becomes inescapable for Singh, as the repeated self destructions of his fantasies lead him to “no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them” (13). Singh comes to the conclusion that all constructed landscapes, all of his attempts at hybridity, are representative of the whole, and that hybridity is a futile goal. This lost past consists of only lost imperial ideals, but also a faded postcolonial, hybrid past that Singh has, through his imperial enchantment, failed to grasp. In his historical fascination with empires there perhaps exists an element of self-loathing, an exponentially-increasing existential void from which he can find no escape.

Singh's racial and historical prejudices cut him off from all possible outlets, serving only to undermine any effort he attempts. The postcolonial picturesque is the "gold of the imagination" that Singh sees as inevitably decaying into the "lead of reality" (13). The constructs of the imagination are always antithetical to reality, and are always already the losing party in any contest between the two, a confrontation that leads not to a hybrid transcendence, but an infinite repetition of disillusionment.

### Cycles of Hybridity in *A Bend in the River*

Singh may fall short of hybridity, but Naipaul's 1979 novel *A Bend in the River* reveals that an incomplete, partially achieved hybrid moment engenders only destruction. The work is perhaps his harshest depiction of postcolonial existence, one where the postcolonial picturesque evacuates the text, fleeing from the chaos and violence that it failed to transcend. The work takes place in a thinly-veiled representation of Zaire, specifically at its central city of Kisangani. This city, located deep within the nation, thrives because of the bordering river. The novel's depictions of the river's and the city's development serve both to underline and to complicate the nation's rise to prosperity and the ensuing violent collapse. Initially, the picturesque inescapably guides the character's perceptions of the landscape. Salim, the narrator, sees the potential of both the town and the nation represented through the postcolonial picturesque. As a newcomer to the town, he is drawn to a ruined park overlooking the river rapids, where from a concrete sidewalk he sees "fishermen's nets hung on great stripped tree trunks buried among the rocks at the edge of the river" (46). Here, the villagers with their nets interact with the river and its power, a hybrid, picturesque interplay of man and nature, civilization and the wild. This aesthetic cannot last, and it fades from nature as violence and hopelessness set in. The natural landscape of the river and the Bush flashes briefly as sublime before losing that delight under the gravitational pressure of immediate terror. In the end, only in the manmade scenery of ruins can the postcolonial picturesque find a refuge.

Salim first finds the fictional river, perhaps the same one that Marlow and Kurtz explored in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, to be an exciting and exotic place. The river helps make the town a bustling marketplace, and Salim moves from his family's home on the eastern coast of Africa to the town in order to take over a store. The economic potential of the river is not just that it links the city to other major cities in Africa, but that it is a meeting place for the various villages scattered throughout the vast African bush. These villages are connected to the main river by "secret channels," and the village traders rope their dugout boats to the steamer and follow it into town (7). This image of the river contains the variety and intricacy of Price's picturesque. The tributaries, hidden in the dense jungle, provide the delight of camouflaged truths, with subtleties hidden from the inquisitive eye. The potential of these hidden villages, with their own distinct cultures, matures into the economic boom of the town, with its marketplaces and ever-expanding suburbs. This synthesis of purchasing power and mysterious origin creates the postcolonial picturesque. The hybrid potential is that of new consumers in the marketplace of diversity. Freed from imperial oppression, they manifest their newfound liberty in regular shopping sprees before retreating back to the bush.

The villagers jealously guard their final destination, though. Returning on the steamer at night, they wait until the boat disappears from view before they reveal the exact location of their secret channels. In this description of the darkened river, Salim links identity to the picturesque. He states that while traveling the river at night "you heard yourself as though you were another person" (8). Timothy Weiss states that "as 'narrating self' Salim can critique the illusions of Salim as 'experiencing self'; the former perceives the differences between illusion and actuality. His story . . . constitutes an

autocritique in which the narrator evaluates the attitudes and actions of the character in the novel” (176). This double existence is a permutation of hybridity. The “narrating Salim” is here the transcendent piece of hybridity while the “experiencing self” is the base reality that the narratorial Salim wants both to engage with and to escape from. This dual existence only becomes clear, to both Salim and the reader, within the picturesque landscape of the river. The pressure of the postcolonial picturesque reinforces and discloses the existing interior hybridity, forcing it to become apparent. This manifestation in turn pushes Salim into an awareness of the multiplicities present within his idea of himself.

Naipaul emphasizes this meaningful connection between the landscape and identity because he finds its absence to signify the decline of both individual and national identity. In “A Country Dying on its Feet,” Kevin Foster, whilst describing Naipaul’s analysis of the Argentinean landscape, concludes that the Argentinean plains are “not a canvas of possibility but both the context and explanation for the nation’s failure” (173). In *Bend*, the opposite is true. What Foster describes as the “people’s failure to imprint themselves upon [the land]” does not apply to the meaningful landscapes on *Bend*, where the environment come to play an integral part in the identity both of the native Africans and of Salim (173). Even as an immigrant outsider Salim successfully grafts himself into the natural environment. He finds within the picturesque river the economic potential to grow his small business, a rise which fashions him into a prominent member of the river-town’s society. His double-identity, existing as both a citizen of the state and as a valuable outsider, later returns Salim to the river landscape. During a rebellion, the President deploys a unit of white mercenaries to protect the town, and particularly its

expatriate population. Safe from the fighting, Salim reflects that “it was like being transported to the hidden forest villages, to the protection and secrecy of the huts at night” (79). This image fits Bhabha’s description of an “ambivalent juxtaposition, a dangerous interstitial relation between the factual and the projective” (2384). The safety of the city is factual, while the romantic idea of the hidden village is a falsely projected fantasy. The bush containing the villages is that same bush that the soldiers attack. Their efforts are as directed against the landscape as they are against the people, as Salim witnesses jet planes “drop[ing] . . . explosives at random in the bush” (80). These contradictions cannot last, and they eventually push Salim to revise his view of the river. He begins to feel constricted by “the presence of the river and the forest all around (more than landscaping now)” (123). The description of nature as being “more than landscaping” is important, as it signifies as much a mental inability to control nature as a physical instability. The land has grown uncontrollable and approaches the limitless terror of the sublime. The danger that Bhabha finds in this ambivalent juxtaposition becomes the dominant emotion in the relationship between Salim and the land. As the stability of the nation deteriorates, Salim feels his status as an outsider more acutely, and the onrushing uncertainty manifests itself in the landscape that, like the nation, and like Salim's position, becomes less and less controlled.

This approaching danger brings about an end to the novel’s picturesque depictions of the river. When his servant Metty offers to walk with him to the river, Salim’s unspoken response contains only pure terror: “The river, the river at night. No, no” (221). Both Metty’s invitation and Salim’s evasive response are spoken, leaving the unvoiced dread as its own line in the text, a singularity that is heightened by the fact that it is the

only instance of Salim's interior state in the entire conversation. This pure terror evoked by the once-alluring landscape is an instance of what Christopher Wise calls Naipaul's "distinctive qualities [of] . . . detachment, alienation, [and] psychological suffering" (61). Once an integral member of the hybrid community of the place, Salim now comes to resent both his own identity and the atmosphere of town, rife with paranoia spurred by the ongoing rebellion. He is no longer in a position of strength. Instead, with no fixed identity, he is the easy target for officials looking for bribes. The period of hybrid freedom ends, and Salim's identity solidifies into a definition-by-negation. He is merely "not" a Presidential supporter, rebel partisan, or European outsider. Nationalization projects strip the shop he owns from him, and when he is imprisoned for dealing in ivory, he resolves "to maintain and assert . . . [his] position as a man apart" (270). The very fact that he forces himself to define his distinctness proves that he has lost a positive identity. Where he was once an important member of the town, now he must prove to both himself and his captors that he is an individual. There is no longer any meaningful link to the nation or to the land. Salim's positions of strength and opportunity, present during the country's initial prosperous phase of postcolonialism, have disappeared. The weakness inherent in his position presses too close, and there can be no pleasure in the landscapes that once reminded him of his strength. Instead, the geography symbolizes the violence that others can enact, and the impotence of Salim's own existence.

The novel's final scene fully realizes the river's newfound violence. Salim, traveling by steamer to escape the country, passes the hidden villages that he once dreamed of. The villagers, though, no longer embody the hybrid aesthetic: "These dugouts . . . had no produce to sell. They were desperate only to be tied up to the steamer.

They were in flight from the riverbanks" (277). For even its inhabitants, the river has come to embody savagery. The trade with the village people vanishes in the face of the terror now present in the jungle. The postcolonial picturesque no longer holds true even for the people who once constituted it, and the aesthetic delight of the sublime has been crushed. Wise, drawing on Adorno, terms the inheritor of these failed aesthetics "radical negativity," a denunciation of identity and connections as at best ephemeral and at worst illusory (66). Naipaul depicts the hopeful hybrid that Bhabha envisions as too weak to survive in the world. Burke's revision of the sublime explains this decay, as he removes terror from its definition in his 1790 work *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The mob rule that Burke saw in France reoccurs in *Bend*, and the conclusion is the same. The "barbarous philosophy" of the revolutionaries, whether they are French or African, ultimately leads to the destruction of heritage (289). The end result of this erasure of tradition, and the power inherent within it, is the creation of a system where "laws are to be supported only by their own terrors" (289). Here, the sensation of terror encroaches and imposes itself on the minds of the people. Within this atmosphere of oppressive anxiety, no evocation of fear, no matter how distant, can be enjoyed. The violence necessary in hybridity becomes all that exists within the hybrid. It cannot transcend its origins and is mired within the chaotic moment of destruction. The picturesque of the river is revealed to be, despite its purely aesthetic conjunction, lacking in the mechanisms of hybridity that allow for the ideal formation of identities. Instead, violence replays itself, propagating terror to the exclusion of hybrid growth.

The ruins that dot the landscape of the text counter this sustained decay of both the river and society. The ruin exemplifies the picturesque. It exists as a middle ground

between the beauty of life and birth and the sublimity of death. Describing his hometown, Salim fixes on the remains of a colonial stockade, and describes it as “just four walls in a picture-postcard setting of beach and coconut trees” (12). It is a remnant of civilization that interacts, visually, with the natural world. This act then mediates the viewer’s experience of nature, providing a decayed geometry to contrast the unbound nature that surrounds it. The physical and temporal limitations of the stockade contrast with the limitless ocean that exists just beyond it. From his very birth, Salim has gazed upon hybrid aesthetics, a fact revealed by the categorization of the scene as a “picture-postcard.” Not only is the aesthetic picturesque, but Salim consciously recognizes it as such.

Perhaps, though, it is only the inclusion of the “picture-postcard” frame that transforms the scene into a picturesque one. In his article “Foundational Ruins,” Alexander Regier asserts that the wrecks of civilization emblemize the sublime, in that they signify the destructive act that created the ruin. This, in turn, represents a fragmentation of ideas that is “the necessary condition for the subsequent rationalizing categories of the sublime” (359). Here, the river’s decline into sublimity and then terror seems to be reproduced in the ruins that dot the landscape of *Bend*. The once-fashionable European suburb of the city lies ruined and overgrown, as if to herald the end of civilization and a devolutionary return to chaos and violence. Manmade ruins of a different type spring up in the slums, as the exploding urban population creates “mounds of rubbish [that grow] . . . month by month into increasingly solid little hills . . . as high as the box-like concrete houses” (87). Instead of a picturesque decay, unceasing tides of both humanity and nature crush the city from both within and without. Elaborating on the

effect of the sublimity of ruins, Regier states that “mirroring the ruined buildings, people are said to be ‘sinking under the Anguish of Despair’” (363). Nature and man seem to blur, but contains no liberation. The rubbish becomes a natural landscape, revealing an out-of-control human existence, a subversion of hybridity much like the river, where transcendence is impossible.

The idea of ruins as sublime excludes the postcolonial picturesque. The freedom and potential of postcolonial hybridity have no outlet; terror suppresses agency. These ruins signify such a collapse that the tragedy inherent, even when viewed from the distance that Burke sees as necessary for delight in the sublime, is haunted by what Regier terms “the importance of ineffability” (364). The immensity and infinity of the sublime bleed back into the mind of the viewer, impressing more fully upon him or her the extent of the ruin’s incomprehensibility. This plays out in *Bend*, as Salim, reflecting on the cause of the ruined suburbs, states that “it was unnerving, the depth of that African rage, the wish to destroy, regardless of the consequences” (26). Despite his distance, Salim still finds the immense scope disturbing, and this mental state impacts his ability to act. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “unnerve” as “To deprive (the mind, etc., or a person) of firmness or courage; to render incapable of acting with ordinary firmness or energy.” The sublimity of ruins, then, directly erodes the hybrid significance of the postcolonial picturesque. Instead of creating spaces for action, ruins force themselves on to preexisting mental space, limiting thoughts and action with their temporal weight.

Regier’s conception of ruins is ultimately wrong, though. In focusing on Burke, he locks himself into a singular view of the aesthetics of ruins that refuses to see their development into more pleasing scenery. He even approaches the hybridity of ruins when

he states “the foundational ruins in turn must rest on an abyss that cannot possibly form part of any architectural stability” (371). This ambivalent position of ruins as a device that desires both to remind and to hide is the essence of Bhabha’s hybridity, itself entwined in the ideas that birthed it but desiring to escape those bounds. By linking sublime aesthetics to a more functional realm of representative thought, Regier overlooks Price and Knight, who elaborated on the aesthetics of ruins in a way that extracts them from the limitations of the sublime. Even Salim makes the connection between ruins and functional representation, as the idea of the “picture postcard” stockade contains within it the economic impulse, here an underlying recognition of tourism that leads him to travel out to the town to take over his friend's business.

For Price, ruins are particularly picturesque because they are “often so mixed with trees, that the tops hang over their balustrades, and the luxuriant branches shoot between the openings of their magnificent columns and porticos” (175). The crumbling structure, a product of human action, represents art, which interacts with the nature that intrudes in the form of plants and trees. The ruins of *Bend* are consistently overgrown in this exact manner. In the ruined suburb “vines and creepers had grown over broken, bleached walls of concrete or hollow clay brick” (27). Joseph Addison presciently described this exchange in his series of essays entitled *The Pleasures of the Imagination*. He contrasts “the rough careless strokes of nature” with “the nice touches and embellishments of art” (65). Addison’s ideas clarify this exchange between sublime nature and beautiful art that appears in the picturesque ruin, as the smooth curves and straight lines of the stone remnants are interrupted by the roughness of the trees. Price’s idea of the picturesque as a middle ground between the beautiful and the sublime physically manifests itself in the

combination of the two aesthetics, the beauty of the architecture and the sublimity of the raw nature. This combination creates the integral picturesque quality of variety, as both the sublime and the beautiful exist side by side, allowing a viewer to shift his focus from one to the other.

These varied images and qualities appear again in the suburb, as “here and there in the bush could still be seen the concrete shells of what had been restaurants” (27). Here, ruins are a physical hybrid, a zone where nature and art can coexist. Mehrotra states that “the ruinous quality of the city of modernity is recycled to create a new spectacle” (247). This new spectacle is the postcolonial picturesque. In the ruined suburb, the encroaching greenery configures the wholly artificial buildings as “shells,” a word that portrays them as more than just unnatural blocks of concrete. Shells are an element of nature that act as a naturally formed home for the animals that use them. The blurring between artifice and nature appears within the text’s very perception of the suburb. What were once buildings, wholly manmade, are now imagined as objects belonging to the natural world. Their purpose, habitation, remains, but they are now thought of as more natural. Just as the curves of nature soften and transform the sharp lines of the buildings, the growth and constant advance of nature soften the tragic destruction of the ruin that makes it appear, according to Regier’s analysis, to be so sublime. While the intruding nature may be sublime in its raw form, the interchange with the surviving architecture dilutes this aspect of its aesthetic, an act which then expands to encompass the whole of the ruin.

This link between the visual reality of the picturesque and what it signifies was elaborated on by Knight, who draws on Addison’s more important theory of the

interlinking of ideas, associationism, to build his idea of the picturesque. This view of the aesthetic depends on cycles of thought that pass through nature, into art, and then back to nature, producing a transcendent conception that draws on both knowledge and artistic feeling. Salim undergoes this very process when viewing the landscape of the town.

Looking out at “imported ornamental trees” near his apartment, he states, “I associated them with coast and home, another life. The same trees here looked artificial” (52). This link between Salim’s home on the coast and the flora natural to that environment allows the trees to first recall their associations, and then to reflect that memory back along the same axis, altering how Salim perceives the trees in the unfamiliar environment of the town. In seeing them as “artificial,” false, constructed, the trees are transported out of their original natural realm and in to the manmade environs of the surrounding city.

The image of the trees falls just short of Addison and Knight’s ideal associationism, as no transcendence occurs. At best the meaning calcifies into a sense of loss, displacing any potential. Knight’s engagement with the philosophy of the mind moves his arguments away from the realm of the physical world, and as such he does not directly discuss landscapes at all, let alone ruins. Ruins, though, follow a path similar to Knight’s association cycles, as they invite viewers to exercise their minds. They hint at some original, complete structure, and in doing so they invite the viewer to imagine the original. The audience then compares the imagination-constructed original to its current state. The pure art of the original’s architecture is compared to the interaction of art and nature present in the ruin. This creates an association-cycle that is comparable to the picturesque-landscape-inspired combination of thoughts that Knight lays out.

The contrast of nature against art present in Knight's train of thought shifts to a contemplation of nature's interaction with art, present in the ruin and made more apparent by the comparison to the untouched-by-nature, imagined view of the original structure. Giving his friend Indar a tour of the town, Salim shows him "the ruined cathedral, beautifully overgrown and looking antique, like something in Europe -- but you could only see it from the road, because the bush was too thick and the site famous for its snakes" (115). As an "antique" and an object that belongs more to Europe than to Africa, the cathedral slides out of a singular time and place, existing as much in an imagined space as in the town. It is an architectural imposition, a concrete manifestation of imperialism and its effort to transform both the land and the people inhabiting it. But even this sign of sublimity has slipped into the picturesque, revealing the efforts of empire, just like its aesthetic, as transient. In extending through these multiple times and multiple realities, the ruin comes to represent a nostalgic past, but only because of its current aesthetic status as picturesque. This specific aesthetic allows the ruin to act as a place of dialogue between the past and the present, and within this dialogue the imagination's responses grow and proliferate. The once-direct imperial referent has vanished, and so the pressures of imperialism on thought have faded as well. What was once a center of power becomes the crux of the town's aesthetic, its most pleasurable vista. Salim passes by rusted docks to reach it, and then returns through the town's maze of slums. Surrounded by ruins, the cathedral appears as the essence of its surroundings, exemplifying not only Price's visual interaction but also Knight's mental progression. This is the reality of the town's aesthetic, the postcolonial picturesque, which here expands itself to become a temporal hybrid, entangled in its lost past.

While this backwards-looking element of the postcolonial picturesque seems to be an important part of its pleasure, Wise complicates this. He finds *Bend* to be a coldly didactic work, where “Naipaul paradoxically seeks the regeneration of African society through the systematic destruction of its traditions” (59). Indar expresses this sentiment within the text, stating, “It isn’t easy to turn your back on the past . . . That is why I hold on to the image of the garden trampled until it becomes ground” (141). Knight’s mental progression of the picturesque encompasses this image. It twists the imaginative reconstruction and mirrors it as an imaginative *destruction*, the partial erasure of precursors that is necessary in the formation of hybrid existence. This destruction, though, recalls Regier’s reading of ruins as sublime symbols of the powerful act that brought about their collapse, a signifier existing in the present that points toward the devastation of the past.

The landscape of the ruined suburb subverts this reading, as it adds another temporal layer on to the postcolonial picturesque, that of the future. While Regier sees ruins as pointing only backward to past tragedies, Naipaul finds the potential for creation within them. After describing the purely visual elements of the ruin, Salim reflects:

Sun and rain and bush had made the site look old, like the site of a dead civilization. The ruins, spreading over so many acres, seemed to speak of a final catastrophe. But civilization wasn’t dead. It was the civilization I existed in and in fact was still working towards. And that could make for an odd feeling: to be among the ruins was to have your time-sense unsettled. You felt like a ghost, not from the past, but from the future. You felt that your life and ambition had already been lived out for you and you were looking at the relics of that life. You were in a place where the future had come and gone. (27)

First, he denies the finality of the link to destruction that Regier finds so necessary in the sublimity of ruins. Death and catastrophe may have occurred, but they are not the end, of

either the ruins or the civilization, that produced them. This idea just restates hybridity, with the trace of the hybrid's erased precursors present, by necessity, within the hybrid itself. Salim pushes past this repetition in the elaboration of the confused sense of time. The ruins are not only a contact zone of every temporality, but they allow the mind to move in to and out of the different times that interact there. This movement, in turn, allows for a freedom of identity. Salim sees himself as a ghost from the future, looking back on the ruins produced by that ghost's past, which is itself another future for the current Salim. This vision looks at first to be tremendously pessimistic, with the end result of action being a ruin, but there is redemption in the picturesque. As objects existing in the illusory future, the ruins are then not wrecks, but the incomplete architectures of things not-yet-built. Mehrotra finds that "modernity's ruins are not ruins, they are allegories of the paradoxical crossings in which ruptures and discontinuities are inherent" (248). Within the temporal discontinuity of the suburb's postcolonial picturesque, Salim fashions for himself an identity of engagement and action, as he is "working towards" the civilization that his future-ghost sees ruined. In signifying both the original structure and its destruction, the ruin encompasses, imaginatively, the emotions invoked by both the beautiful and the sublime. It allows a freedom to direct thought towards the two competing aesthetics, creation or destruction, but given the violence present in the hybrid moment's rejection of its predecessors, even the catastrophe signified by the ruins feeds back into the potential-for-creation present in the postcolonial picturesque.

The text focuses itself on this cyclical return to hybridity, defying even the terrible end that the river flows towards. Wise, trying to best capture the text's cynicism,

describes *Bend*'s style as "epic modernism." This term's applicability extends to another element of the novel, its inevitability (58). The critic John Freccero categorizes the temporal atmosphere of the epic as one where "time moved in an eternal circle, with repetition as its only rationale" (136). This plays out on multiple levels within *Bend*. First, it rewrites Conrad, with another return to and departure from the heart of Africa. The endless coming and going of the steamer both reinforces the connection to Conrad and emphasizes the impervious nature of the text's cyclicity. Additionally, the repeated events of violent rebellion and economic boom connect the circle to fluctuating identities. The postcolonial picturesque is not only expressed by this cycle, but it is the cycle. While the terror and chaos of the river desire to end the picturesque, the ever-present ruins prevent this from occurring. Within the aesthetic moods presented by the text, the hybridity may be muted, but its moment of ascendance will inevitably return. The bush is too resilient for the hidden river villages to vanish, and the violence produces more picturesque ruins that enable illusions and realities of identity-crafting to be imagined and enacted.

Despite this profusion of the postcolonial picturesque, the novel's violence is inescapable, and this represents the sinister side of hybridity and the postcolonial picturesque. The novel, then, presents a sliver of time at the moment of bloodshed and terror, the traumatic moment of the hybrid's birth. Its cyclical nature makes every aspect of its path inescapable, and it seems to doom more than liberate those who desire freedom. At that moment of violence, all those trapped within can do is embrace it. Salim, in a moment of reflection, states "In time it would all go . . . That was no tragedy. That certainty of the end . . . was my security" (202). Hybridity exists in the interstices

between the peace and violence, the freedom of hybridity opens itself to all kinds of expression, and necessarily includes violence. These slashes of hybridity give voice to repressions that Naipaul finds as much present in the landscape as in the people. This is why Salim finds security in his end, and finds it devoid of tragedy. His stab at hybridity has impressed itself on the landscape, in the ruins and rivers he has perceived, and then becomes irrelevant, an outmoded hybridity on an individual level, but one that reflects off the landscape into the culture and society that has left him behind.

### The Hybrid's Redemption in *The Enigma of Arrival*

Both *The Mimic Men* and *A Bend in the River* are considered to be among Naipaul's "political" books, where he expresses what Baidik Bhattacharya terms a "political incorrectness," a depressing, nihilistic take on postcolonial existence (247). *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), though, is a "personal" book. It is a pseudo-memoir. The setting and narrative path, the narrator's ten year retreat to a cottage on a country estate, and the end of that idyllic exile brought about by the death of his sister, are both the realities of Naipaul's life and the fictional facts of novel's world. Despite this one-to-one correspondence between life and text, the book presents itself as fiction. In this fiction-as-life, the narrator, surrounded by the perfect imperial landscape of the British countryside, finds his perceptions of it morphing from a romantic enchantment to a more realist, postcolonial, and ultimately more liberating view.

Walking through the English countryside, the narrator continually links the realities of the landscape to literary references. These connections are concentrated in the opening, scene-setting parts of the book that both introduce the reader to the narrator and his setting, but do this through the narrator's recounting of his initial experience with the landscape. New to the countryside and insecure, the narrator feels obliged to prove to himself and his audience that he is worthy enough to live there. Two literary links stand above the rest, emphasized through their repetition. The first of these is his neighbor Jack's father-in-law. Glimpsing him across a field, the narrator states that "once I saw him . . . with a load of wood on his bent back: Wordsworthian, the subject of a poem Wordsworth might have called 'The Fuel-Gatherer'" (22-23). In his preface to the *Lyrical*

*Ballads*, Wordsworth explains the book's focus on the rural landscape, stating, "Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity . . . and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, [feelings] are more easily comprehended, and are more durable" (650). Not only is the father-in-law's lifelong engagement with the countryside an enchanting way of life, but the Wordsworthian subtleties of this existence, its differences with the narrator's chaotic background, also give the image its true weight. Durability fascinates the narrator, as his previous identities, fashioned in the sterile confines of cities or in the chaos of post-colonies, have fallen apart. The act of working with the landscape, physically altering it for both aesthetic and necessary ends, allows identity, meaningful creative connections, Wordsworth's "essential passions of the heart," to thrive. Weiss characterizes the narrator of *Enigma* as an inversion of Singh. Where Singh can only fantasize about ideal landscapes, the narrator lives in one (205). Both the narrator and Singh are writers who are fascinated with history, but the key difference, the one that explains their different perceptions, is that Singh has removed himself from the history that he takes as his subject, while the narrator continually rewrites the literary connections that he sees within the landscape. Singh's separation prevents hybridity, as it represents an inability to interact with and alter ideas. Far removed, history can only be static, and the consumption and transcendence necessary for hybridity cannot exist. The narrator's rewriting, though, leads directly into the postcolonial picturesque, through the idea of the palimpsest, the idea that "traces of earlier 'inscriptions' remain as a continual feature of the 'text' of culture" (Ashcroft 158). When applied to the narrator's conceptions of the landscape, this engagement with, yet erasure of, the past plays out in

the postcolonial picturesque. The character of the land is dependent on Wordsworth, and yet it extends outside both the geographic and significant bounds of the English countryside. The very nature of the narrator, the foreign Other, drives him to inject literary references in to the land in the first place, an action that then revises the original landscape that initially inspired the reference.

The other recurring literary connection links the narrator to the landscape through Shakespeare. Looking out over the Salisbury Plain, the narrator is reminded of King Lear, and finds an equation between the present landscape and "Kent's railing speech, 'Goose, if I had you upon Sarum Plain, I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot'" (18-19). The Salisbury Plain and Sarum are one and the same, and Camelot is layered over Winchester. The narrator states, "I had arrived at an understanding of something in King Lear which, according to the editor of the text I read, commentators had found obscure" (19). Not only does the narrator's literary knowledge graft him on to the landscape, but the scenery rebounds into other forms of knowledge: a true manifestation of the "literary labor interdigitating with the agricultural" that Singh imagines occurring on his ideal plantation (*Mimic* 40). Removed from the action of postcolonial politics, the subject of his writing, Singh cannot escape a stasis of creativity and identity. In the narrator's exile, though, he retreats into what Singh categorizes as "a more elemental complexity," a space that is more readily interpretable (43). The narrator's referencing of Wordsworth now bears the fruit of identity. The landscape, as conceived of by both Wordsworth and the narrator, demands interaction, interpretation, and the formation of new aesthetics that can more perfectly describe and elaborate on the experience of perception. These aesthetic demands lead to a cycle of association that crafts the postcolonial picturesque.

Picturesque qualities draw the narrator to the landscape, and then his postcolonial identity inspires the him to find the literary references through which he can link himself to the landscape he desires so much to be a part of.

The key physical interpreter of the land is the narrator's neighbor, Jack. As a gardener, Jack dominates the narrator's conception of the landscape because of his physical alteration of the land. Where the narrator's references can change his own perception, Jack's landscaping and gardening can alter the shape of the land, which can then alter the narrator's own references. On his walks through the countryside, the narrator always passes by Jack's garden, and these two images come to configure an enacted-ideal of country life. The narrator states that "of literature and antiquity and the landscape Jack and his garden . . . seemed emanations" (21). The definition of an "emanation" hinges on the idea of something generated from an immaterial or spiritual essence, and so Jack and his garden not only signify the romantic landscape, but embody it. Jack's illness and death, then, strike at the narrator's very identification with the landscape. The death, and the ensuing decay of the garden, cause the narrator to realize that "So much that had looked traditional, natural, emanations of the landscape, things that people did -- now turned out not to have been traditional or instinctive after all" (47). The narrator merely discovers a more subtle form of imposition upon the landscape, masked by the narrator's desire to see his ideas manifested in so perfect a figure as Jack. The romantic sign of the garden is as artificial a reality as the narrator's postcolonial picturesque formed through literary references. Both are attempts to graft an ideal on to reality. Evelyn O'Callaghan describes this scenario as one where the immigrant's encounter with "the physical reality of modern day Britain provokes a reassessment of the

fantasy 'idea of England'" (492). The literary linkages prevented the narrator from truly realizing the fragility of his world, as their extent, deep into his existence as a writer, worked to mediate and prevent that inevitable encounter with the true, physical Britain.

Arriving in Britain as an eager young Oxford student, the narrator, like Singh, engaged in his own sliver of mimicry on a literary level: "In an unlikely way, the ideas of the aesthetic movement of the end of the nineteenth century and the ideas of Bloomsbury, ideas bred essentially out of empire, wealth and imperial security, had been transmitted to me in Trinidad. To be that kind of writer, I had to be false" (146). In breaking out of this mimicked identity, an act achieved by an embrace of "a movement between all continents" as the most apt subject, the narrator engages in a partial reassessment of his fantasy of England, but he does not press it far enough, as the reassessment is grounded in the literature that he uses as the framework through which to view the land. Only when the land itself, through Jack, becomes unstable, does the narrator begin to question and realize the depth of his illusion. Like with Singh in *The Mimic Men*, the narrator finds himself stuck in a stunted mimicry, but unlike Singh, he realizes his mistake, and sees that his first idea of the postcolonial picturesque was a distorted and infertile version.

With Jack gone, the decay of the countryside replaces the romantic lens, as without Jack "there was only a ruin" (47). As with the ruins of *Bend*, though, this new topography comes to capture the postcolonial picturesque. The previous attempt at hybridity was an attempt to reproduce nature, but the artificiality of this imposition causes the image ultimately to be flawed. In ruins, though, with their artifice manifest, readily accept the man-made interpellation. Weiss explains the depth of the ruin's impact, as the narrator comes to see that the seeming perfection of the landscape "would certainly

be viewed as decay by previous generations, and that his very presence there is an instance of that decay, a consequence of the decline of empire and the movement of former colonial peoples, like himself, to the metropolitan country" (197). The ideal begins to deteriorate, like in *The Mimic Men*, but the remnant, the ruin, is not the dissolution of landscape into land or imagination into reality. As described above in the analysis of *A Bend in the River*, the ruin effulgently represents hybridity, as the narrator, the intruding "picturesque Asiatic," comes to realize that the postcolonial elements of his identity irrevocably alter the landscape (*Mimic* 248). The layering of English literature over the English countryside fades away into an embrace of the ruin itself. The narrator states that "to see the possibility, the certainty, of ruin, even at the moment of creation: it was my temperament . . . given me as a child in Trinidad" (52). Recalling the ruined suburb of *Bend*, these ruins contain "asynchronous temporalities," and only through the narrator's conscious embrace of his Trinidadian identity can he function within this disordered space (Huysse 18). The pure aesthetic of the ruin is the picturesque, but the depth of its use as a malleable sign is best accessed through the postcolonial past of the narrator.

Bhattacharya states that "the search for an 'authentic' and self-reflexive narrative . . . a familiar quest in the decolonized world, is deliberately problematized in his [Naipaul's] novels through a range of affiliations that does not proliferate seamlessly "(264). This lack of seamless proliferation, the disconnects between the imperial and the colonial, creates the clashes of ideas that form hybrid identities. The narrator grounds his interpretation of the landscape not solely in the literature that he loves, but in the colonial past that forms who he is. Jack's death reveals a void in the landscape that cannot be

filled by literature alone, necessitating a return to the organic, inescapable elements of life that cannot be eclipsed by art. This is an acceptance of the vagaries of the postcolonial identity, but also an attempt to transform them. The idea that any view which suppresses the whole of an individual is a construct, an illusion, and a diversion underlines the narrator's shifting views of the landscape. He states that "land is not land alone, something that simply is itself. Land partakes of what we breathe into it, is touched by our moods and memories" (335). This contact zone between nature and man accesses all of an individual's memories, revealing the limitations of singular, restrictive views, whether they turn on grand histories or on literary canons. Writing what seems to be *A Bend in the River*, the narrator's revelation plays out in his perception of the winter mist and early darkness that imbue the river valley with an "absence of knowledge of where I was" (99). This turn from a romantic view of the landscape to a more complex one is consciously reflected into the narrator's book, as he transfers "all this uncertainty emanating from the valley . . . to my Africa," the literary Africa of *A Bend in the River* (99). The literature that once imposed its views on the landscape is now accepting the landscape's imprint, a reversal of the mechanisms of meaning-making that once determined how the narrator viewed the English countryside. Temporal and spatial disorder opens up not only new meanings, but also new ways of creating meaning. Where the land once merely affirmed the narrator's desire to link himself to England, it now makes manifest his out-of-place existence. This new landscape-informed identity is not a negative one, though, as it inspires the narrator's art by forcing him to grapple with the truths of his own existence.

The links between this new identity and the hybridity present in *A Bend in the River* go further, as the ruins, *Bend's* true manifestation of the postcolonial picturesque, are equally as ubiquitous in the countryside of England. The editors of *Ruins of Modernity* describe "the reality of ruins [as something that] at least calls forth a constructive, "manly" rhetoric of looking into the abyss . . . and thus retroactively confer[s] some modicum of meaning" on to the ruin (5). The abyss is the above mentioned void, the realization of the inevitability of landscape-construction. Where Singh can only find the destruction of ideal landscapes as an inevitability, the narrator grasps a parallel inevitability in their (re)generation. Again remembering Jack, the narrator states "All around him was ruin; and all around, in a deeper way, was change, and a reminder of the brevity of the cycles of growth and creation" (93). Within the equation that links ruins to change, the aesthetics of hybridity arise. Bhabha's own mechanism for hybridity lends itself to an infinite cycle of hybrid formation, crystallization of the once-new idea, and then its annihilation at the hands of a new, nascent hybrid, a cycle of growth and stasis that the narrator experiences in the ruins of the countryside. His ability to focus on the generation and to accept the destruction as natural and beneficial allows the narrator to enjoy and sustain his ideal landscapes.

## Conclusion

The progression of the three novels moves from Singh's refusal and inability to accept the actions of hybridity, to Salim's abortive hybrid moment that is overwhelmed by violence, and finally to *The Enigma of Arrival's* calm embrace of the disordered potential of the postcolonial picturesque. The three texts are more than just this forward march; they are an immanent presentation of hybridity in action. *The Mimic Men's* pre-hybrid imperial past dissolves in the active hybridity of *A Bend in the River*. *Bend's* hybridity, though, remains incomplete. The underlying violence crushes any aesthetic pleasure, and so too Salim's agency. It is only in *Enigma* that a true, lasting postcolonial picturesque is located. This aesthetic is distanced from the colonies that are necessary for its formation. This gulf perhaps implies that only individuals far removed from the chaotic terror of their postcolonial homelands, but also not too invested in the imperial past, are capable of achieving Bhabha's ideal of hybridity.

A fertile middle ground of national and natural histories catalyzes the process of hybridity. The postcolonial picturesque cannot become the dominant aesthetic in former colonies, because the history and heritage of empire press too closely. The delight of the ascendant sublime only serves to mask the looming terror behind it. The overgrown bush of Africa and the Caribbean, and the endless mountains and plains of India, signify and embody an exclusionary multitude of meaning, negating any fixed idea or even mechanism. Hybridity cannot find the firm ground of deadlocked ideas to synthesize and transcend. In "How Newness Enters the World," Bhabha states that "a history of cultural difference . . . envisages the production of difference as the political and social definition

of the historical present” (335). The disorder of postcolonial nations prevents the necessary envisaging, contemplation, and conception required. The disarray of the present erodes the stable history of difference in which hybridity bases itself.

Even the ruins of *Bend*, a stable signifier of history, are fraught with terror. The moment of their creation-through-destruction is not far removed from the present. Salim can see the potential of the ruined suburbs only because he was not present to witness their destruction, and can enjoy the luxury of their decay. The second civil war that drives him to flee the country visits its own share of destruction, but these ruins are not given any picturesque reflection. Those thoughts are simply impossible in the environment of entropy. Until the postcolonial nation can extract itself from the omnipresent chaos and accept not only the finality of the very process of hybridity -- the subject's own immanent extinction -- but also the resulting production of difference, they will only be able to experience the failed hybridity of destruction. The continuation of a legacy of violence combines the worst excesses of empire with the uncontrollable nature of the postcolonial moment. There is no aesthetic pleasure, no chance for identity, only the visceral reaction of rejection, perhaps best expressed in a hybrid quotation of landscape perception: "The river, the river at night. No, no. The horror, the horror." The aesthetics of Naipaul's texts reveal hybridity to be a fragile mechanism, useful only within a limited range of situations and debilitating everywhere else. This revelation valorizes, at its very core, the cyclicity and reversion of hybridity, unearthing in turn an ambivalence towards the inherent contingency of all postcolonial identity.

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