

Excerpt from *The Enigma of Arrival*

To see the possibility, the certainty, of ruin, even at the moment of creation: it was my temperament¹⁾. Those nerves had been given me as a child in Trinidad partly by our family circumstances: the half—ruined or broken—down houses we lived in, our many moves, our general uncertainty. Possibly, too, this mode of feeling went deeper, and was an ancestral²⁾ inheritance, something that came with the history that had made me: not only India, with its ideas of a world outside men's control, but also the colonial plantations³⁾ or estates of Trinidad, to which my impoverished⁴⁾ Indian ancestors had been transported in the last century — estates of which this Wiltshire estate, where I now lived, had been the apotheosis.

Fifty years ago there would have been no room for me on the estate; even now my presence was a little unlikely. But more than accident had brought me here. Or rather, in the series of accidents that had brought me to the manor⁵⁾ cottage, with a view of the restored church, there was a clear historical line. The migration⁶⁾, within the British Empire, from India to Trinidad had given me the English language as my own, and a particular kind of education. This had partly seeded my wish to be a writer in a particular mode, and had committed me to the literary career I had been following in England for twenty years.

The history I carried with me, together with the self—awareness that had come with my education and ambition, had sent me into the world with a sense of glory dead; and in England had given me the rawest⁷⁾ stranger's nerves. Now ironically⁸⁾ — or aptly — living in the grounds of this shrunken estate, going out for my walks, those nerves were soothed, and in the wild garden and orchard beside the water meadows I found a physical beauty perfectly suited to my temperament and answering, besides, every good idea I could have had, as a child in Trinidad, of the physical aspect of England.

The estate had been enormous, I was told. It had been created in part by the wealth of empire. But then bit by bit it had been alienated⁹⁾. The family in its many branches flourished in other places. Here in the valley there now lived only my landlord, elderly, a bachelor, with people to look after him. Certain physical disabilities had now been added to the malaise¹⁰⁾ which had befallen him years before, a malaise of which I had no precise knowledge, but interpreted as something like accidia, the monk's torpor or disease of the Middle Ages — which was how his great security, his excessive worldly blessings, had taken him. The accidia had turned him into a recluse, accessible only to his intimate friends. So that on the manor itself, as on my walks on the down, I had a kind of solitude¹¹⁾.

I felt a great sympathy for my landlord. I felt I could understand his malaise; I saw it as the other side of my own. I did not think of my landlord as a failure. Words like failure and success didn't apply. Only a grand man or a man with a grand idea of his human worth could ignore the high money value of his estate and be content to live in its semi—ruin. My meditations in the manor were not of imperial decline. Rather, I wondered at the historical chain that had brought us together — he in his house, I in his cottage, the wild garden his taste (as I was told) and also mine.

2001年诺贝尔获奖作家奈保尔

节选自《抵达之谜》

甚至在创造之际就看见毁灭的可能和必然：那是我的天性。当我还是一个孩子，住在特立尼达的时候，那种神经质在一定程度上就已由我们的家境赐给了我：我们居住的半坍塌的抑或已残破的房子，我们的一次次迁居，我们的普遍的不稳定感。也许，这种情绪更加深沉，是一种祖传，它来自造就我的历史：不仅来自印度，那儿充斥着人力之外的世界的种种观念，而且来自特立尼达的殖民地种植园或庄园，我的贫穷的印度祖先就是在上个世纪被运到这里的---在这些庄园里，我目前居住的威尔特郡庄园曾是完美之至。

50年以前，这个庄园里本不会有我容身，即便是现在，我的出现也有点不大可能。但我来到这儿不仅仅是因为机缘巧合，确切地说，在引我来此庄园小舍---从此处可见已修葺一新的教堂---的一系列机缘巧合中，有着清晰的历史线索。在大英帝国内从印度到特立尼达的移民，让英语成了我自己的语言，又给了我特别的教育。这在一定程度上滋生了我要当一名用特别的方式写作的作家的愿望，让我投身于文学事业，这种事业，我在英格兰已从事了20年。

我身上的历史印记以及伴随我的教育和抱负而来的自我意识，让我生活在一个失去了荣耀感的世界里，而在英格兰它们让我感到了异乡客的最大心灵创痛。具有讽刺意味的是---或者再恰当不过---目前住在这个规模变小的庄园上，在屋外散着步，那种异乡客的惶惑心情被一一慰去。在草甸近旁的荒芜的花园和果树林中，我找到了一种自然之美，正适合我的性格，也响应了我少时在特立尼达有关英格兰自然风貌之美的种种幻想。

听说这座庄园曾经特别大，它在一定程度上是由帝国的财富建成的。然而，一点一点地，它被转让出去。这个家族的许多分支在别的地方兴旺起来。目前，在这条溪谷里只住着我的房东，他年迈，单身，需要人们照顾。几年前他患上抑郁症，如今再添身体残疾。我对抑郁症所知甚微，但据说类似神情淡漠，像中世纪的僧侣病---那是极度的安全感和对尘世的无限祝福占据了他的全部心思。抑郁寡欢使他成了隐士，只有密友方能见到。于是，住在庄园上，漫步在有草的山路时，我感到孤独。

我相当同情我的房东。我感到自己能理解他的郁闷；我把郁闷看作自己的另一面。我并不认为我的房东是一个失败者。像失败和成功之类的词语在此不妥。只有极其自负的人或对自身价值评判颇高的人才会忽视其庄园的巨大的金钱价值，而满足于居住在半倾颓的处所。我在庄园里的沉思与帝国的衰落无关。相反，我思索着把我们俩带到一起的历史链条---他在自己的屋子，我在他的小舍，荒芜的花园是他的兴趣（听说如此），也是我的喜好。

NOTE 注释：

1. temperament [ˈtempərəmənt] n. 气质，性情
2. ancestral [ænˈsɛstrəl] adj. 祖先的，祖传的
3. plantation [plænˈteɪʃən] n. 耕地，种植园
4. impoverished [ɪmˈpɒvərɪʃt] adj. 穷困的

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5. manor ['mænə] n. (封建领主的)领地, 庄园
6. migration [mai'greɪʃən] n. 移民
7. raw [rɔ:] adj. 刺痛的
8. ironically [aɪə'rɒnɪkəli] adv. 说反话地, 讽刺地
9. alienate ['eɪljəneɪt] v. 疏远
10. malaise [mæ'leɪz] n. 不舒服
11. solitude ['sɒlɪtju:d] n. 孤独