THE RURAL TURN IN CONTEMPORARY WRITING BY BLACK AND ASIAN BRITONS

The Case of English Country Houses’ Colonial Connections

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In recent years historians have highlighted country houses' colonial connections. Such work is animated by a new approach to British imperial history, which emphasizes colonialism’s impact on domestic architecture, material culture and national wealth. Since the late 1970s, literary critics have contributed substantially to such discussions. Raymond Williams broached the topic in The Country and the City (1973), Gayatri Spivak produced her postcolonial critique of Jane Eyre in 1984, and Edward Said wrote the seminal essay ‘Jane Austen and Empire’ in 1993. This late twentieth-century criticism has been addressed and modified by both Austen and postcolonial scholars. This multifaceted critical response serves as a reminder that canonical English literature has long been preoccupied by country houses’ imperial dimensions. My essay revisits a number of canonical works in order to explore how contemporary writing by black Britons responds to earlier writing about country houses and empire. Works such as The West Indian (1771), Jane Eyre (1847), The Moonstone (1868) and The Way We Live Now (1875) provide an important literary context for a rural turn in writing by black and Asian Britons, a turn which was inaugurated by V. S. Naipaul’s The Enigma of Arrival (1987). My essay situates post-millennial writing by John Agard, David Dabydeen, Sene Seneviratne and Tyrone Huggins in the context of the current renaissance in country house research, which substantially resources post-millennial writing, allowing increasingly historically nuanced critical engagements with the politics of rural entitlement.

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The British country house, that symbol of refinement, connoisseurship and civility, has long been regarded not only as the jewel in the nation’s heritage crown, but as an iconic signifier of national identity. (Dresser and Hann 2013, xiii)

The epigraph above is taken from an edited essay collection called *Slavery and the British Country House*, published by English Heritage in 2013. The book is by no means the first to question country houses’ reputation for ‘civility’. Nonetheless, it considerably expands on Raymond Williams’ sense of country houses’ spatial geographies in *The Country and the City* (Williams 2016). As Lucienne Loh suggests, Williams’ study is foundational for any scholars with an interest in rural Britain’s colonial dimensions (Loh 2013, 2). *The Country and the City* states that ‘important parts of the country house system, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, were built upon the profits of [imperial] trade’ (Williams 2016, 279–280). Williams demonstrates that literary works give valuable insights into the shifting affective and economic relationship between urban and rural Britain. Of particular interest, here, is his contention that the myth of a lost Golden Age has been a recurring literary theme from Hellenistic to neo-pastoral times. He argues poets like Philip Sidney, Thomas Carew and Ben Johnson represent country houses as a wholesome social order, one which is almost always maintained by invisible hands (30). Such writing, he contends, is complicit with the exploitation and violence concealed beneath country estates’ harmonious appearance. He wryly notes that Sidney’s *Arcadia* was ‘written in a park ... made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the tenants’ (Williams 2016, 22). *The Country and the City* unites an interest in class exploitation with a sense of country houses’ global dependencies. Such houses’ slavery links are the exclusive focus of Madge Dresser and Andrew Hann’s co-edited book, *Slavery and the British Country House*. Their book is inspired by a new approach to British imperial history, which emphasizes colonialism’s impact on domestic architecture, material culture and national wealth (Hall et al. 2014; Finn and Smith 2015).

Country houses’ relationship to Empire received scant attention in Williams’ day. Williams himself recognizes that many houses are linked with colonial wealth, but he articulates this link relatively imprecisely, in terms of colonial earnings: ‘spices, sugar, tea, coffee, tobacco, gold and silver: these fed’, he writes, ‘as mercantile profits, into an English social order’ (Williams 2016, 280). It is only recently that historians have been able more exactly to define country houses’ complex and multiple relationship with empire (Dresser and Hann 2013; Barczewski 2014; Finn and Smith 2015). Williams was limited by what could then be concretely claimed. For example, in a 1979 documentary he claims – correctly – that Tatton Hall was ‘refurbished with colonial wealth’. However, the film’s director recalls that Williams avoided making precise assertions about this wealth because he was unable to prove it.

Historians have since amassed substantial evidence of country houses’ colonial connections. This evidence further illuminates the literary material which Williams presents in *The Country and the City*. In Williams’ discussion of William Cobbett’s *Rural Rides*, for example, he notes that Cobbett resents newly moneyed families taking control of the rural sphere during the 1820s. Cobbett’s concern is that ‘the small gentry ... are all gone, nearly to a man, and the small farmers along with them’ (Cobbett quoted by Williams 2016, 111). Williams overlooks a significant detail: Cobbett remarks that the ‘Barings [family] alone have swallowed up thirty or forty of these small gentry’
(Cobbett in Williams 2016: 111). Williams is primarily interested in what Cobbett says about shifting social hierarchies in the countryside, arguing Cobbett merely ‘raises the familiar complaint about the reduction of intermediate classes in the rural economy’ and attributing the cause to the growth of ‘rural capitalism’ (Williams 2016, 110–111). He does not locate the colonial origin of Cobbett’s discontent. In *Slavery and the British Country House* Laurence Brown identifies the source of the Barings’ banking fortune (Dresser and Hann 2013, 99). Their heightened rural influence owed more to colonial finance than Williams knew. Alexander Baring purchased Northington Grange with wealth derived from his father-in-law’s slave-trading activities (Dresser and Hann 2013, 99). The Baring Brothers also arranged for the purchase of Louisiana from Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803, enabling the expansion of slave-worked sugar plantations on mainland America and swelling their riches by around a million dollars (100). As a Conservative MP, Alexander Baring also opposed Abolition, exerting his political influence to protect the profits of slavery (100). Williams’ interpretation of Cobbett reflects the prevailing approach to British imperial history at the time, which tended to underestimate the extent to which imperial wealth – as much as domestic agrarian and industrial profits – admitted people into the landed gentry and aristocracy (Finn 2013, 5; Donington in Hall et al. 2014).5

While it is true to say that historians, more than literary critics, are today most actively pursuing the links between country houses and colonial wealth, it should not be forgotten that literary criticism operated as something of an advance guard to such work. Charlotte Bronte’s novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) was the subject of Gayatri Spivak’s influential critique of nineteenth-century Christian feminist imperialism in the 1980s (Spivak1985).6 As postcolonial criticism gained traction in the academy, scholars subsequently focused on Thornfield Hall’s7 Caribbean connection in the light of Jean Rhys’s prequel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which counters the dehumanizing depiction of Rochester’s wife in the attic. As Ian Baucom explains, the legacy of the academic response to Rhys’s novel has been a revised sense of the country house ‘as more than an arrangement of entrance halls, gilded bannisters, and central wings ... [but also] a carceral space [and] ... a monument to the cultivated remembrances and willed amnesias of empire’ (Baucom 1996, 270).

Few could forget the contribution of Edward W. Said, whose essay ‘Jane Austen and Empire’8 sharpens Williams’ sense of English rurality’s imperial dimension (Said 1993). Prompted by Said’s call to attend to texts’ ‘worldliness’, Austen critics have explored *Mansfield Park*’s colonial dimensions extensively (Rajan 2000, 3). Many challenge Said’s reading of *Mansfield Park* on the grounds that it underestimates the pro-abolitionist feeling both of Austen and women of her generation (Rajan 2000, 8, 9). Others contest Said’s reading of Sir Thomas’s ‘dead silence’ upon being asked about slavery (Rajan 2000, 9; Todd 2005, 105). While Said sees this silence as indicating the novel’s suppression of discussions about slavery (Said 1993, 101), some Austen critics have construed it as exposing Sir Thomas’s guilty conscience (Rajan 2000, 9), or else his children’s indifference, which the reader is encouraged to condemn (Bartine and MacGuire 2009, 40). Despite these modifications of Said’s position, there is broad acceptance of his view that *Mansfield Park* to some degree complies with cultural imperialism (Todd 2005, 105).

Williams, Spivak and Said have all made decisive contributions to this topic. Yet it is hard to disagree with Lucienne Loh that postcolonial literary critics have neglected the question of empire’s imprint on English rurality (Loh 2013, 2). As she argues, literary criticism has ‘yet to comprehensively address the contemporary legacies of Williams’s rich structural understanding of the British empire as a spatialized history of rural exploitation operating simultaneously at the levels of the local, the national, and the global’ (2). Indeed, it would be a shame to close the casefile on country houses at a time when leading historians are producing an increasingly nuanced understanding of eighteenth-
and nineteenth-century Britain as an ‘imperial formation’ (Hall et al. 2014, 17). Moreover, the growing body of historical evidence serves as a reminder that canonical English literature has long been preoccupied by country houses’ colonial links. In turn, reexamining older traditions of English writing reveals the ways in which contemporary writing by black Britons responds to earlier literary explorations of such links. Meanwhile, historical developments in the field of British imperial history are progressively informing and resourcing new literary explorations of this topic.

Hall et al.’s (2014) study focuses on the ‘material interests’ of individual slave owners in Britain. The book attempts to ‘reintegrate various forms of history writing – economic, political, cultural, social – that are increasingly [kept] separate as the profession polarizes between specialist work and “global” histories’ (2, 11). By attending to the personal financial gain of people whose affairs were tied up with transatlantic slavery, Hall et al. recuperate and endorse the insights of C. L. R. James and Eric Williams, who first highlighted – long before Raymond Williams – what Hall calls ‘the constitutive place of empire in the making of modern Britain’ (Hall et al. 2014, 16). Research by country house historians supports this contention. In 2007 English Heritage commissioned Miranda Kaufmann to investigate thirty-three of their properties’ links to slavery (Kaufmann 2007). Of these houses, twenty-six were discovered to have at least one of twelve connections with transatlantic slavery. These connections include houses which were built or remodelled with slave-produced wealth, or houses with slavery ‘associations’, such as investing in slave ships, owning plantations, buying shares in the Royal African or South Seas Companies, producing goods to trade for slaves, and holding colonial office (Dresser 2013, 12).

Other historians have concentrated on country houses’ association with the East India Company, investigating the ways in which the Company impacted on upper-class domesticity (Finn 2013, 1). Like their colleagues in the field of transatlantic slavery, East India researchers wish to overturn the conventional historical view that ‘the British empire made few material demands and had little … material impact on eighteenth and nineteenth-century British society and culture’ (5). As is apparent, these various historical investigations face different geographical directions. Yet all this work reflects a ‘domestic turn’ in imperial history (Finn and Smith 2015, 4), a turn exemplified by the work of Stephanie Barczewski, whose recent study argues country houses were a forum for elite, imperialist expressions of cosmopolitanism (Barczewski 2014, 180). Despite frequently cultivating their reputations as Arcadian retreats, country house architecture and interiors were, from the mid-eighteenth century, visibly defined by colonial engagements (3). They became storehouses of empire, displaying treasures which testified to intercultural encounter elsewhere (4). Moreover, up to one in six houses built between 1640 and the early twentieth century were purchased by merchants whose fortunes depended on colonial trade (122).

The acquisition and domestic display of colonial artefacts is a perceptible theme in English literature, and even preoccupied the early novelist Daniel Defoe. Defoe disliked East India Company trade with China, which he saw as undermining national economic interests (Starr in Johns 2010, 435). He sneered at the craze for Chinese porcelain, which he called ‘the chintz invasion’ (Van Schoor 2014). Baucom observes that many eighteenth-century works are suspicious of riches derived from the colonies. He contends that Richard Cumberland’s play The West Indian (1771) is not so much concerned with the source of this new wealth, however, as with its ‘excesses’ (Baucom 1996, 265). In his essay, Baucom notes that the play’s protagonist, the planter Belcour, ‘wins society’s approval’ through benevolent acts. He also mentions that the planter’s family remove themselves ‘to the English countryside’ where ‘they build and rule opulent houses’ (Baucom 1996, 265). These details merit particular attention. As Madge Dresser and Katie Donington have each recently demonstrated, it was the established habit of those who accumulated wealth through slavery to retreat from
mercantile centres to the countryside (Dresser 2013; Hall et al. 2014, 204), a social pattern which – as I have argued – Williams also overlooks in his commentary on Cobbett’s opinion of the Barings family. Donington argues families who were enriched by colonial wealth recognized the importance of rural land ownership for gaining political leverage and for procuring an entrance into aristocratic social circles (Hall et al. 2014, 204). In *The West Indian*, Belcour’s decision to remove his family to the countryside certainly reflects this tendency, even if it does not reflect upon it. Donington also suggests that families with slave-derived wealth often spent their money on philanthropic projects, such as funding schools or hospitals. Here again, Belcour’s conspicuous acts of benevolence correspond with this historical pattern. Philanthropy cemented local relationships, leaving social legacies which gradually obscured the colonial source of such wealth as centuries wore on (Hall et al. 2014, 238).

Despite country houses’ material connection with empire, they have been instrumental to depicting rural England as a white preserve which valiantly resists foreign influence. This idea has a long cultural pedigree. In a 1771 letter to *The Spectator*, the playwright and essayist Joseph Addison writes that the linguistic influence of French, made popular by ‘the Coxcombs of the Town’, has ‘not yet made its way into the country’ (Addison 1711, quoted by Bray 2014, 11). The letter celebrates the countryside’s remoteness from foreign climes. Yet Addison himself had overseas financial interests, having commissioned colonial trade and plantations (Dabydeen 1984, 29). Despite this, Addison insists on the separateness of global commerce and country estate. Notwithstanding Addison’s assertion that the English countryside is insulated from foreign influence, canonical literature often explores country houses’ colonial connections very directly. The chronological overview which follows highlights this feature of writing from Cumberland’s late eighteenth-century play through to present-day writing by black Britons.

From the outset, Wilkie Collins’ novel *The Moonstone* (1868) connects a country house with colonial adventures in India. Its prologue is narrated by a corrupt East India colonel, who details his theft of a sacred moonstone during the real-world ‘Storming of Seringapatam, 1799’ (Collins 1998, 9). The novel is undeniably Orientalist. Yet it also worries about the consequence of violence committed in the name of empire. The stolen moonstone is brought to the house and it wreaks havoc. Moreover, its theft from the colonies raises the further possibility that other furniture, including the 'India cabinet', may have been similarly looted, or at least transported to the UK by the East India Company. The country house in Collins’ novel is no Arcadia. The servant Betteredge attempts to doze off in his beehive chair, but his attempts are thwarted by the arrival of three men from India, who beat a foreboding ‘Indian drum’ and disturb the ‘quiet English house’ (81). Ultimately, *The Moonstone* casts doubt, in a karmic sense, on the possibility of enjoying empire’s material benefits with a quiet conscience. This is the case even though, as with Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, a happy marriage between sympathetic characters closes down the disturbing questions which such works initially raise.

Anthony Trollope’s novel *The Way We Live Now* (1875) shares *The Moonstone*’s theme of foreign bodies in country estates. Like Addison and Collins, Trollope fears alien intrusions. These concerns are addressed in his autobiography:

<extract>

If dishonesty can live in a gorgeous palace with pictures on all its walls, and gems in all its cupboards, with ivory in all its corners ... and get into Parliament, and deal in millions, then
dishonesty is not disgraceful, and the man dishonest after such a fashion is not a low scoundrel. (Trollope cited in McCrum 2014)

Trollope’s depiction of ‘gorgeous palaces’ enumerates evidence of empire’s material cultures in upper-class households (Finn 2013; Barcewski 2014). He sneers at the kind of imperialist cosmopolitanism that the historians Margot Finn, Kate Smith and Stephanie Barcewski have explored (Finn 2013; Finn and Smith 2015; Barcewski 2014). The protagonist of The Way We Live Now is Augustus Melmotte, a rich Jewish speculator who attempts to purchase a country estate. The novel is not directly concerned with colonial wealth, but it communicates concern about the degree of status and political influence that can be bought with new money, a theme earlier explored by Cumberland and Cobbett, and also Jane Austen herself. Austen’s interest in this theme is demonstrated by the architectural historian Sarah Parry, who argues that, in Mansfield Park, the Elizabethan building, Sotherton Court, symbolizes old money and a traditional social order, unappealingly represented by the silly Mr Rushworth. By contrast, Mansfield Park reflects its origins in commerce (Parry 2014, 1). Parry observes that the name ‘Park’ is synonymous with ‘improved estates … fashioned by men who made vast fortunes and were … rewarding themselves with new country houses’ (1). In Trollope’s novel, Melmotte does not make his fortune in the colonies. However, his foreignness is designed to heighten the sense of cultural and political imposition that such money excites. Melmotte’s presence in the English countryside is presented as an affront.

Arthur Conan Doyle’s short story ‘The Adventure of the Five Orange Pips’ (1891) is more directly concerned with the moral dimensions of colonial wealth. Its focus on American slave-produced wealth indicates the broad geographical scope of the literary preoccupation with new money’s impact on Britain’s countryside. Despite focusing on a different source of material gain from The Moonstone, Conan Doyle’s story communicates similar misgivings about ill-gotten gains. In particular, Conan Doyle inherits Collins’ idea that bad behaviour in the colonies will be avenged. In the story, a Florida-based planter, Elias Openshaw, returns to his native Sussex and purchases a country estate, presumably with profits from his plantations. However, his former crimes against slaves and abolitionists eventually lead to his murder. In a form of Old Testament justice, the same fate is visited on Openshaw’s son and nephew. Dealt by an almost supernaturally invisible hand, the triple murder overwhelms even Sherlock Holmes’ power to avert disaster. The third and final murder is prefigured by ‘equinoctial gales’, which ‘cried and sobbed like a child in the chimney’ (Doyle 2012, 168). These gales are represented as a ‘great elemental force’ (168) which links country houses with sites of foreign cruelty. The image of the ‘sob[bing]’ child strikingly alludes to the army of manual labourers who are mobilized to secure the creature comforts of the rich in their country estates, a phenomenon later explored in Williams’ The Country and the City. Conan Doyle’s story conveys anxiety about the treatment of manual labourers and links them obliquely with violent excesses in distant colonies. The nature of Openshaw’s death is highly symbolic. His body is discovered ‘face downward in a little green-scummed pool’ without ‘any sign of violence’ (Doyle 2012, 173). A clear distortion of the green and pleasant land metaphor, the corpse’s posture points to unsavoury truths about country house wealth, likewise obtained, furnished and maintained without any outward ‘sign of violence’. Unlike Addison, writing back in 1771, Collins, Trollope and Conan Doyle do not disavow the link between country houses and colonial profit. They draw literary inspiration from it.

These literary themes continue well into the twentieth century, reemerging in the Bond novels of Ian Fleming, which abound with foreign intrusions onto British country estates. Emma Grundy
Haigh and Sam Goodwin observe that, far from being ‘Englishmen’s castles’, country houses in Fleming’s novels are besieged by ‘foreign, clandestine forces’, a threat embodied by Cold War villains like Hugo Drax and Auric Goldfinger in Moonraker (1955) and Goldfinger (1959) (Grundy Haigh and Goodman 2014, 21). Postmillennial writing similarly worries about foreign presences in country estates. Paul Torday’s novel Salmon Fishing in the Yemen (2007) substitutes Fleming’s Cold War villains with a Middle-Eastern sheikh, who buys the Glen Tulloch estate in Scotland. The novel derives its dramatic effect from the sheikh’s obvious foreignness to the country estate. This is illustrated by the protagonist’s depiction of his first encounter with the sheikh:

<extract>

I heard the shrill shouting of a pair of oystercatchers and, further away, the unmistakable cackle of a grouse ... I fished down again as before, and ... felt that prickling in the back of the neck that we sometimes get when someone is watching us ... About thirty yards behind me and a little bit above me, on the road, stood a small man in a white headdress and white robes. He looked absolutely out of place on that road, with the heather moor behind him. (Torday 2007, 48)
</extract>

Jones’ familiarity with the landscape is signalled by his easy recognition of iconic Highland sounds – the ‘unmistakable’ call of grouse and oystercatchers. Immersed in a pool, Jones is at ease with nature, as native to his environment as the surrounding ‘heather moor’. By contrast, the sheikh stands on tarmac, suggesting that the ‘hook-nosed’ imposter no more belongs to the Scottish Highlands than salmon belong to the Yemen.

Traditionally, foreign bodies become even more ‘foreign’ when they turn up on rural estates. Baucom (1996) argues the country house is an enduringly nostalgic site of rurality which supposedly guards the national soul. Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel The Remains of the Day (1989) influentially attacks this idea. In an interview, Ishiguro states:

<extract>

Usually it is the political right who say England was this beautiful place before the trade unions tried to make it more egalitarian or before the immigrants started to come ... I’ve deliberately created a world [in The Remains of the Day] which at first resembles that of those writers such as P. G. Wodehouse. I then start to undermine this myth. (Ishiguro in Shaffner and Wong 2008, 74)
</extract>

As can be seen, Ishiguro questions the notion that country houses legitimately represent a golden age before mass immigration to Britain (Baucom 1996, 246). In The Remains of the Day Ishiguro refutes the belief that country houses provide cultural and material evidence of superiority (Neal and Agyeman 2006, 1). He does not focus on their colonial connections, but on how aristocratic figures ‘fraternalized’ with the Nazis’ in the 1920s (Ishiguro 2005, 74), hosted Sir Oswald Mosley (155) and expelled Jewish maids in the 1930s (146). Ishiguro’s novel endorses Williams’ assertion
that country houses are in no way distant from urban and political concerns. By alluding to Darlington Hall’s\textsuperscript{18} links with Nazism and its dismissal of Jewish staff, the novel also establishes an explicit connection between country houses and racism.

Contemporary writing by black Britons variously troubles country houses’ status as guardians of national heritage, countering the theme of foreign pollution by (re)situating such houses on the British imperial map. Despite this growing trend, academic work on contemporary black writers does not typically venture into the countryside. Overwhelmingly, scholarly discussions focus on the literary legacies of postwar immigration to Britain’s metropolitan centres (Procter 2003; Pearce, Fowler and Crawshaw 2013). By contrast, the contemporary works examined below explore three hundred years or more of empire’s association with country estates, an increasingly pronounced rural turn in writing by black Britons. This development is partly motivated by an anti-racist desire to challenge the perceived newness of Great Britain’s black presence (Ward 2011, 115). Rural Britain is a fiercely guarded site of whiteness (Neal and Agyeman 2006). The black photographer Ingrid Pollard argues black Britons lack a sense of rural entitlement: ‘the owners of these fields ... want me off their GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND’ (Pollard 2004, 29). Criminologists have suggested that misleading versions of the national past fuel overt rural racism (Chakraborti and Garland 2004, 4). More pervasively, however, amnesia about the countryside’s black histories account for widespread assumptions about who is native to the countryside and who is not. Country houses are particularly potent purveyors of whiteness. By engaging with country house settings, therefore, black writers challenge the assumption that black people have no historical relationship with the countryside and refute the idea that white people more naturally belong to it.

Examined in strict publication order, writing by V. S. Naipaul, David Dabydeen, John Agard, Sene Seneviratne and Terence Huggins indicates a gradual shift of literary setting from foreign soil to British soil, or else from urban to rural settings. Rob Nixon’s discussion of Naipaul’s novel \textit{The Enigma of Arrival} is helpful in this regard. Nixon states that \textit{The Enigma of Arrival} executes an ‘experimen[t] in locale, from Third World to First’ (Nixon 1992, 162). However, Nixon sees Naipaul’s journey through rural England as an isolated literary moment, concluding: ‘there is decidedly no other British writer of Caribbean or South Asian ancestry who would have chosen a tucked away Wiltshire perspective from which to reflect on the themes of immigration and postcolonial decay’ (161). For Nixon, \textit{The Enigma of Arrival} ‘stands alone as an oddity’ (161). Yet writing from the ensuing decades supports the opposite conclusion. It is no longer accurate to claim that Naipaul ranges uniquely over Britain’s pastoral terrain. On the contrary, this essay contends that \textit{The Enigma of Arrival} inaugurated a black British focus on British country houses. Naipaul may have been the first postcolonial writer to link country houses and empire, but he was by no means the last (see Loh 2013, 57–83).

Baucom argues Naipaul’s novel inherits and promotes British ‘nostalgia for old England’ (1996, 276). He contends that Naipaul activates the familiar trope, identified in \textit{The Country and the City}, of the imminent loss of ‘old rural England’, which is always just sinking below the horizon (276; Williams 2016, ii, 9).\textsuperscript{19} Baucom acknowledges that \textit{The Enigma of Arrival} deconstructs Romantic visions of England’s past, but argues that Naipaul ultimately ‘represents this ... knowledge’ (Baucom 1996, 276). He concludes that Naipaul’s fascination with ruin and decay ‘marks, in fallen stones, ... [the] boundary of Britain’s imperial past (282).

The insights of Nixon and Baucom are convincing and instructive. However, subsequent literary production shows that Naipaul’s novel is neither unique (Nixon 1992, 161) nor an end to literary explorations of country houses’ global connections (Baucom 1996, 283). \textit{The Enigma of Arrival} created a literary precedent, leaving two significant legacies. The first is its critical engagement with
the politics of rural entitlement. No matter how conservative and nostalgic a retreat Naipaul’s novel ultimately enacts (Baucom 1996, 283), it influentially attacks the preservationist politics of architectural reconstruction. Naipaul asserts that the act of preserving historic buildings sustains an attitude which he describes as ‘turn[ing] away from the coarseness of industrialization’ (2002, 231), a gesture which is, ironically, ‘rooted in England, wealth, empire’ (231). Such statements strongly resemble Williams’ (2016) view of the countryside as a global formation. Naipaul’s innovation is to present English rurality as a phenomenon which is created and reinforced by social ritual. This, in turn, provides the ‘assurance of continuity, the sense of something owed to oneself’ (Naipaul 2002, 52). Naipaul is troubled by this. As a perceived cultural outsider, he is unlikely to be included in this ‘special idea of the past, the assertion – with the wealth and power of ... empire – of racial and historical and cultural virtue’ (221). The irony of an unquestioning, white, sense of rural entitlement is not lost on Naipaul since, as he points out, many of his Wiltshire neighbours grew up in towns or cities (221).

A second legacy of Naipaul’s novel is his belief in the countryside’s capacity to heal20 his ‘rawest stranger’s nerves’ (Naipaul 2002, 56). Nixon’s sense that The Enigma of Arrival ‘invents [a] postcolonial pastoral’ (Nixon 1992, 162) is key here, even if this pastoral eventually falls back on familiar yearnings for a lost ‘old ... England’ as Baucom (1996, 276) suggests. By initiating a British ‘postcolonial pastoral’, Naipaul seeks – and legitimates – a sense of belonging: ‘at an advanced age in a foreign country, I was to find myself in tune with the landscape in a way I had never been in Trinidad or India’ (Naipaul 2002, 221). Naipaul’s experience of belonging is cumulative: he gradually ‘learns about the seasons’ (189) and acquires a vocabulary to describe Wiltshire’s landscapes: ‘I was able to think of the flat wet fields with the ditches as “water meadows” ... and the low, smooth hills ... as “downs”’ (3). Placed in the context of Pollard’s expression of rural estrangement, Naipaul develops a healing aesthetic for those who are routinely perceived as foreign to the English countryside.

Naipaul’s novel deconstructs the prevailing logic of belonging to English rural settings, both by questioning the customary terms of such belonging and by indulging in its sensory pleasures. This said, Naipaul shares his contemporaries’ relatively broad-brush treatment of country houses’ material relationship with empire. His sense of the countryside’s ‘external geography’ (Massey 2007, 8) is likewise confined by the knowledge of his day. He establishes a link between Trinidad and the English countryside, but he does this autobiographically. Of his landlord, and owner of the country estate on which he lives, Naipaul writes: ‘an empire lay between us [even while] ... it linked us’ (2002, 208). He states that his own ‘presence there in the valley’ is explained by ‘empire’, but concentrates on the fact that he speaks and writes in English despite having been born on another continent (208). Despite this historical vagueness, Naipaul clearly connects country houses with empire. If his novel does promote closure on the issue (Baucom 1996), then, other writers have not heeded his call. The Enigma of Arrival is an important exploration of the ‘postcolonial country’ (Loh 2013, 57–83) and has been succeeded by many more.

David Dabydeen’s turn-of-the-century novel A Harlot’s Progress (1999) adopts a revisionist approach to Britain’s historical involvement with slavery. Like The Remains of the Day, Dabydeen’s novel interrogates country houses’ reputation for sophistication, presenting them as sites of racist cruelty. Dabydeen’s protagonist is London’s oldest black man, named Mungo by his slave-masters. Mungo’s story is transcribed and reshaped for polite English readers by a careerist abolitionist. A Harlot’s Progress draws extensively from the historical record and is informed by Dabydeen’s own doctoral research, published in his book Hogarth’s Blacks (1987). Many of the characters in A Harlot’s Progress appear in artworks by William Hogarth and Joshua Reynolds, or else are inspired by
known historical figures. The purpose of evoking such figures, however, is to explore how, and to what end, their history is appropriated or strategically rewritten (Kowaleski-Wallace 2006; Pagnoulle 2007, 181; Ward 2011, 7). As a work of historiographic metafiction, *A Harlot’s Progress* plays fast and loose with the archive (Ward 2011, 17). Abigail Ward observes that “truth” is unavailable in Dabydeen’s novel. ‘What matters’, she argues, ‘is the way in which the past is invented, manipulated and bought’ by people with ‘vested interests’ in doing so (122).

In a little-discussed section of *A Harlot’s Progress*, Mungo is brought to a country house owned by Lord Montague. Montague gifts the black boy to his wife, an action which suggests the underlying influence of Peter Fryer’s seminal study, *Staying Power* (1984), a key resource for many black British writers. Fryer’s study is referenced in Dabydeen’s critical work (Edwards and Dabydeen 1991), and this aspect of his novel’s plot recalls Fryer’s description of ‘rich traveller[s] [who] would bring back a black child as a present’ to serve as a ‘plaything’ (1984, 73). Mungo clearly represents such a figure: he is described as Lady Montague’s ‘perfumed pet’ (Dabydeen 2000, 4). This focus on country houses’ black presence has particular implications for contemporary readers. As Ward suggests, *A Harlot’s Progress* focuses on a more historically distant, pre-Windrush, presence in Britain than readers might recognize or expect (Ward 2011, 114). Furthermore, its country house setting lends historical depth to Naipaul’s earlier critique of unexamined assumptions that white people more naturally belong to the countryside, an attitude described by Naipaul as a belief in ‘something owed to oneself’ (2002, 52). Dabydeen deliberately tampers with the historical record, yet he makes far more concrete connections than Naipaul between country houses and several aspects of colonialism. In doing so, Dabydeen substantiates the suggestion that black Britons have genuine historical purchase on the English countryside.

Dabydeen’s novel resonates with Naipaul’s ‘postcolonial pastoral’ (Nixon 1992, 162) because it evokes and criticizes the English pastoral tradition. Mungo’s carriage ride to the Montagues’ home is articulated in these terms: ‘the road was suddenly cleared, city gave way to green land and a carolling sky’ (Dabydeen 2000, 200). This wording – ‘green land’ – conjures up William Blake’s celebrated metaphor of ‘England’s green and pleasant land’, with the aim of later subverting it. The allusion is ironic, since the scenes which follow thoroughly contradict rural England’s purported pleasantness. The Montagues’ country estate is no idyll. It affords Mungo no escape from cruelty, since he is as brutally treated there as everywhere else. The novel’s relationship with pastoral writing is made still more explicit when Mungo ‘canter[s] back towards London’ (Dabydeen 2000, 248) and playfully references William Wordsworth’s 1802 lyric poem ‘I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud’: ‘the only details I recalled were hosts of daffodils crowding the path that took me there, bowing reverentially as I passed’ (Dabydeen 2000, 248). More audaciously, and far more radically than Naipaul, *A Harlot’s Progress* associates pastoral aesthetics with colonial brutality. Artworks in the cabin of the slave-trader, Thistlewood, convey visions of pre-industrial Britain which soothe his conscience (Ward 2011, 123). These visions are condemned as fanciful and ‘antique’ (Dabydeen 2000, 66). Captain Thistlewood pines for ‘poorly coloured emblems of a previous England, the falcon and the unicorn’ (71). The captain’s emotional retreat into a world of Arthurian chivalry is ironic, given the sadistic treatment of enslaved people on his own vessel. Nevertheless, Thistlewood evokes this mythologized idyll by means of a pastoral vocabulary, which Mungo inherits and acquires on board ship: ‘melodic names ... rills, meadows, groves, spinneys and purling streams’ (31). While, for Naipaul, it is healing to acquire and deploy this vocabulary, such words provide the sinister basis for an escapist fantasy for Dabydeen’s character Thistlewood, calming a mind corrupted by rampant colonial trade. More radically still, the novel compares the couplets of pastoral poetry to constructing a slave ship: ‘every inch of deck needed to be plotted to maximize the cargo ... consider the perfection of Mr. Dryden’s couplets, which give new order to the English page’ (31). The allusion
to John Dryden, who translated Virgil’s pastoral verse in 1697, allows the novel to the English pastoral as both feeding and disguising the colonial imaginary.

By the time Mungo arrives at the Montague residence, England’s pastoral tradition has been thoroughly deconstructed and critiqued. Mungo’s first impressions of the Montague household redoubles this attack by criticizing upper-class aesthetic tastes, which promote Thistlewood’s arcane view of old England: ‘there was a ceiling mural of nymphs and shepherds – classical scenes’ which immediately make Mungo feel ‘at home’ (Dabydeen 2000, 176). In keeping with the fashions of his day, Montague has also furnished his home with colonial artefacts. As Mungo observes, Montague’s home is

<extract>

full of Jesu paintings and Greek stone and Chinee porcelain ... so that if you walk in, whether you be Turk or Christian gentlemen you feel straight away at home. Or even a Negur like me find ease when I first go into his house, for there was a huge colouring of ships in the hallway, and I look round expecting to spy Captain Thistlewood and to see [his fellow villagers] Ellar and Manu and Kaka rush into the room, banging calabash, slapping thighs and making merry to greet me – but nothing. (Dabydeen 2000, 182)
</extract>

It is this observation, particularly, which highlights the relationship of Dabydeen’s novel with older traditions of British writing. The idea of an absent presence (‘but there was nothing’) evokes the ‘dead silence’ of Austen’s Mansfield Park, when Sir Thomas is questioned about slavery (Austen 1996, 166). Published in the wake of Said’s (1993) essay on Austen, Dabydeen’s novel breaks this silence. A Harlot’s Progress explores the hidden trauma which Sir Thomas fails to describe. When Lady Montague pricks her thumb, Mungo reflects that ‘the real blood runs overseas but I am cleaned up before I come into their presence’ (Dabydeen 2000, 205).

The Montagues’ home is not built with the proceeds of slavery. The family fortune comes from old, inherited money. It is Thistlewood, like many of his real-world counterparts, who ‘accumulat[ed] a fortune for himself which he properly invested in the purchase of an estate in Hampstead’ (112). By contrast, Lord Montague feels ‘contemptuous of the world of commerce, particularly the West Indian merchants whose manners were as unbecoming as their traffic in human bodies’ (188). Nonetheless, Dabydeen undermines the moral niceties of traditional moneyed families by dwelling on the exotic artefacts on display in their houses, items which have been transported by means of Britain’s colonial infrastructure. There are echoes of Austen, Collins and Trollope in Dabydeen’s description of a ‘mahogany table’25 and East India Chinoiserie, such as the ‘Japan table’ and ‘Indian [wall]paper’ (176). Placed in the context of Mungo’s suffering, the result is to invite distaste for country houses’ strange mixture of pastoral escapism and ostentatious imperial display. Indeed, the focus of A Harlot’s Progress on country house interiors actually anticipates the post-millennial ‘domestic turn’ in imperial history (Finn and Smith 2015). Its attention to upper-class domesticity gives depth and substance to Naipaul’s ‘postcolonial pastoral’.

John Agard’s poetry collection We Brits (2006)26 continues the theme of country houses’ relationship to colonialism. The book’s acknowledgements section suggests, once again, the abiding influence of Fryer and Said on postcolonial literary deconstructions of English rurality. Agard writes:
I am indebted to the authors of a number of eye-opening books including ... *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* by Peter Fryer (Pluto Press, 1984) ... [and] *Culture and Imperialism* by Edward W. Said (Chatto and Windus, 1993). (Agard 2006, 6)

Agard’s poem ‘Mansfield Park Revisited’ is dedicated to Said. It follows and endorses the logic of ‘Jane Austen and Empire’ (Said 1993) by promoting Said’s suggestion that country houses are a site of historical amnesia:

*verse extract*

The air is civil with cakes
and marriage proposals,
for overseas possessions
are best kept overseas
and slave revolts not
right for polite conversation
or what’s considered good taste.
Here even history knows its place.

(Agard 2006, 46, lines 14–19)

*verse extract*

Ostensibly, these lines focus on *Mansfield Park*, endorsing Said’s belief that Austen’s novel is agnostic about brutality towards enslaved people. Yet the poem also obliquely targets the modern practice of marketing country houses as sites of leisure. For country house visitors, the pleasure of ‘afternoon teas’ take precedence over public knowledge of ‘overseas possessions’. Agard’s criticism is justified: Caroline Bressey’s survey of National Trust and Historic England properties found that objects which betray a colonial connection are frequently unlabelled, or else information about them is peripheral to the ‘core [historical] interpretation’ of the houses concerned (Bressey 2013, 102).

‘Revisiting Mansfield Park’ can also be read as a further expression of the ‘postcolonial pastoral’, since it evokes a country house setting and condemns depoliticized presentations of history which, like ‘well-laid tea cups’, ensure that ‘history knows its place’ (Agard 2006, 11). Like *A Harlot’s Progress*, ‘Revisiting Mansfield Park’ counters Sir Thomas’s silence by violating rules of ‘good taste’ to foreground the brutality which guarantees and sweetens the pleasure of afternoon tea. In this
regard, Agard’s poem is consequent with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poems by sugar boycott campaigners such as Mary Birkett, who writes:

<verse extract>

How little think the giddy and the gay
While sipping o’er the sweets of charming tea ...
Th’extreme of human misery must taste!
(Birkett quoted by Kowaleski-Wallace 2006, 80)27
</verse extract>

Agard’s poem reignites this long-standing concern about the hidden costs of slave-produced wealth. Even relatively sanguine literary meditations on this issue – such as Austen’s reflections on Antigua, or Cumberland and Trollope’s suspicion of ostentatious colonial wealth – suggest that slavery’s impact on rural Britain was far more evident to earlier generations that it is today. In their different ways, Dabydeen and Agard each attempt to reinstate this awareness.

The poem ‘Sitting for the Mistress’ (2010), written by Seni Seneviratne, historicizes the ‘postcolonial pastoral’ by turning to British art. Seneviratne was commissioned to respond to a late eighteenth-century painting by Pierre Mignard, displayed in a 2007 National Gallery exhibition to commemorate the bicentenary of Abolition (Seneviratne 2010: 88). Colonial-era paintings have become an important literary source for those addressing the British countryside’s black histories, since they provide visual evidence of a historical black presence. Mignard’s painting depicts a young Caribbean girl on a country estate. The girl smiles up at her mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth. Voicing the girl’s thoughts, Seneviratne implies the girl has been coerced into smiling by a ‘nip’ from the Duchess and gruff orders from Mignard, who takes pains to ensure that his subjects’ poses conform to contemporary artistic conventions: ‘Tilt your chin up! Look at the mistress, not me!’ (lines 14 and 43). Both Duchess and painter wish to avoid ‘spoil[ing] the picture’ (lines 42–43) of domestic, upper-class harmony.

Like Naipaul, Seneviratne invites sensory contact with nature. Drawing on the resource of eighteenth-century art, her poem offers healing for those who are perceived as foreign to country house grounds. Nature becomes the girl’s surrogate parent, lulling her to sleep with ‘clouds … drifting in a painted sky’ (lines 27–28). The Duchess relegates the girl to the realm of wildlife by calling her ‘petit merlette’ (line 2), a female blackbird. However, Seneviratne gives this a postcolonial twist. The blackbird is an enduringly popular icon of British nature verse. It is the subject of nursery rhymes and nature verse. In poems by John Clare, Robert Frost and Edward Thomas, blackbirds emanate from English landscapes (Armitage and Dee 2009). By contrast, Seneviratne emphasizes blackbirds’ migratory qualities.28 The blackbird spirits the girl to her lost Caribbean home. It is an agent of ‘transrural’ consciousness (Askins 2009, 365) in a form of postcolonial palimpsest in which Britain’s landscape is overlaid with Caribbean landscapes. The bird ‘teach[es] the girl ‘how to fly’ (Seneviratne 2010, line 57) and then perch in the branches of the obechi tree, which represents her mother (line 51). Far from being constrained by territorial boundaries, Seneviratne’s bird is defined by its ability to flit ‘over the palace gardens’ (line 58). The poem transforms pastoral tradition by merging the consciousness of a Caribbean girl with that of the blackbird, a leading protagonist of
nature verse. The girl states that the ‘blackbird lives inside me’ (line 1). This spiritual communion with the landscape secures the girl’s right to be present in the countryside, to linger in it.29 Seneviratne’s poem fortifies this sensory union by historicizing it to promote the idea of black British rural citizenship.30

Tyronne Huggins’ unpublished play The Honey Man31 once again demonstrates the importance of historic paintings to contemporary literary treatments of the country house. The Honey Man begins with a guided tour of a country house by the owner’s daughter, Misty, a name which suggests Britons’ hazy and idealized vision of such houses’ past. During her guided tour, Misty briefly points out a portrait of her ancestor, Dulcina. Her attitude changes when she meets the Honey Man, a squatter at the edge of the estate. Initially mutually suspicious, they bond, and Misty invites the Honey Man to the manor. The Honey Man spots the portrait and recognizes his ancestor, Vincent, who stayed in the house for a time but was sent back to Nevis when he reached adolescence, a fate shared by many of his counterparts (Fryer 1984, 9). Time and space merge as Misty and the Honey Man regress to the past, assuming the roles of Dulcina and Vincent, respectively. This device brings an intergenerational perspective to bear on country houses’ slavery connections. It reminds the audience that earlier generations were far more proximate than we to figures like Vincent.

Vincent’s presence in the painting is not immediately evident. As the audience’s awareness of the house’s black history grows, his presence in the painting is gradually revealed by a trick of stage lighting. This visual trick captures, metaphorically, the ongoing process of making the historical black presence perceptible to a public which has a huge appetite for historic paintings to contemporary literary treatments of the country house. Lightening makes the historical black presence grow, his presence is gradually revealed by a trick of stage lighting. This visual trick captures, metaphorically, the ongoing process of making the historical black presence perceptible to a public which has a huge appetite for historic paintings to contemporary literary treatments of the country house.

Misty and the Honey Man collaborate to re-present their shared history. The revised tour is one of which Caroline Bressey might well approve. For, as Bressey states, such histories ‘are not “black histories” [designed] for sites of “black heritage” or sites of English heritage with “black cultural links”’. Rather, as she writes, these are ‘embedded components of English history’ (2013, 100). Her remark brings us full circle. In The Country and the City Williams reaches towards the same conclusion. He writes: ‘as we gain perspective, from the long history of the literature of the country and the city, we see how much, at different times and in different places, it is a connecting process, in what has to be seen ultimately as a common history’ (2016, 288).

Conclusion

Huggins’ play coincides with two influential popular depictions of country houses’ black history: the drama Downton Abbey, and the film Belle (2014). These productions provide conflicting visions of rural Britain’s black history. Downton Abbey, which has been credited with a surge in country houses’ visits,32 introduces a black Chicago-born singer called Jack Ross in an episode set in 1922. His appearance does not correspond with any known black history of an English country house. Ross’s dramatic function is to serve as a representative black figure. His arrival on the scene reinforces Downton Abbey’s recurrent refrain – voiced by several characters – that ‘times are changing’. Ross is burdened with symbolism. He represents impending social change in modern Britain: postwar
immigration. Ross prefigures the Windrush generation, hinting at post-immigration tensions by raising the spectre of racism and interracial relationships. As Baucom (1996) would likely argue, Downton Abbey reproduces a very familiar brand of ‘postimperial nostalgia’. Perversely, Ross’s arrival at the Abbey actually reinforces the perceived whiteness of country house settings. Ross is London-based and Chicago-born. He references urban contexts of immigration. He belongs to the cities of Chicago and London. His visit is also a one-off: he is there to perform a surprise jazz concert. His presence in the countryside is depicted as a novelty and an anomaly. The result is to obscure country houses’ older black histories.

Belle, directed by Amma Asante, promotes an entirely different perception of black British history. The film was inspired by research into a 1779 painting commissioned by Lord Mansfield, the Chief Justice of England. The painting features Dido Elizabeth Belle and her cousin Elizabeth Murray. For years it had been assumed that Dido, who stands behind her cousin in a yellow silk dress, was an exotically dressed black servant or slave (Byrne 2014, 11). Further investigation revealed her to be the illegitimate daughter of an enslaved African woman and Lord Mansfield’s nephew, who left the girl in Mansfield’s care. Period specialists are not entirely uncritical of the film’s use of artistic licence, but they have broadly welcomed the opportunity to improve public knowledge of a black presence that pre-dates the 1948 arrival of HMS Empire Windrush (Kaufmann in Doward 2014). Moreover, the film Belle suggests the ongoing importance of art history in inspiring black writers, and a number of white counterparts, to explore this topic. Moreover, art galleries commonly commission writers to reinterpret historic paintings. A recent example – which brings Dabydeen again to mind – is Rovianne Matovu’s poems about Zoffany’s painting of Dido Belle (Matovu 2014a) and Hogarth’s ‘Marriage A La Mode’, in which she unites country houses’ Caribbean and East India histories (Matovu 2014b). Given the competing historical perspectives of productions like Downton Abbey and Belle, the stakes remain high.

As its title suggests, Naipaul’s novel The Enigma of Arrival really was an arrival. It established a form of ‘postcolonial pastoral’ (Nixon 1992, 162) which was followed by further literary revisitations of English novels, pastoral verse and country houses themselves. Loh argues that only ‘rarely has fiction’ engaged with ‘a non-metropolitan setting’ (2013, 8). Offering David Dabydeen, Meera Syal, Caryl Phillips and Kazuo Ishiguro as notable exceptions to this rule, she argues – as did Nixon about Naipaul – that only these writers ‘engage explicitly with the history of race and empire within a specific discourse constructed by rural England’ (8). To range beyond the world of canonical fiction is to discover increasingly more literary exceptions to a rule which no longer appears to be the rule. Meanwhile, the ‘domestic turn’ in imperial history (Finn and Smith 2015) has allowed writers to join the historical dots in progressively complex and precise ways. Resourced by art and country house historians, black British writers are providing an ever more extensive literary tour of imperial Britain. As a jealously guarded site of national belonging, the country house is an essential stop along the way.

Britain has entered a period of intensified public debate about black British history. Taking the long view of the origins, provenance and shifting terms of this debate provides a fuller sense of its context. With the rise of public history, important questions are being asked about how history is produced and who it belongs to (Finn and Smith 2015). Contemporary literature should be seen as part of a gathering impulse – beginning with Fryer’s Staying Power – to restore black history to the public domain. The writing discussed in this essay reflects and endorses this democratizing aim. Combining historical detail with sensory union, such writing indicates a broader rural turn, which both animates, and is animated by, a growing sense of black rural entitlement. Such writing grants symbolic access to an iconic site of Englishness which has long been defined as off-limits.
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1 The organization that manages English Heritage properties is now known as Historic England.

2 Williams identifies a ‘counter-pastoral’ literary tradition that resists idealized pastoral depictions by foregrounding the experience of rural poverty (2016, 27–30).

3 This documentary is not in general circulation. It is directed by Mike Dibb and called *The Country and the City* (after the book). It was first broadcast on BBC1 in 1979.


5 For an fascinating discussion of how those with colonial wealth obscured the source of their money by philanthropic acts, see Katie Donington’s essay in Hall et al. (2014).

6 In her discussion of *Jane Eyre* Spivak argues early Christian feminist imperialism is predicated on the oppression of colonial subjects such as Rochester’s wife Bertha, whose humanity is denied in the novel.

7 Thornfield Hall is the home of Mr Rochester and the place where he keeps his Jamaican-born wife locked in an attic.

8 Said asserts that novels like Austen’s *Mansfield Park* highlight the extent to which slave-produced wealth funded luxurious lifestyles, but argues such novels are relatively indifferent to the suffering and resistance of enslaved people (Said 1993, 78). Said argues writers of empire like Kipling and Conrad ‘are prepared for by Austen and Thackeray, Defoe, Scott and Dickens’ (112). Novels like *Mansfield Park*, he argues, promoted ‘a domestic imperialist culture without which Britain’s subsequent acquisition of territory would not have been possible’ (Said 1993, 114).

9 This study refers to newly digitized records of 1830s slave compensation awards made to former owners of slaves following Abolition (Hall et al. 2014, 2). These records can be found online at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs.

10 Hall refers here to James’ *The Black Jacobins* (1938), arguing this book was the first to assert colonialism’s centrality to metropolitan life. However, she suggests that white critics largely ignored his conclusions (Hall et al. 2014, 16).

11 Hall refers to Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* (1964), which advanced the idea that slavery’s legacy significantly boosted Britain’s industrial and economic development (Hall et al. 2014, 9).


13 Defoe disliked the preference for foreign porcelain over better-produced domestic china.
14 Baucom notes that the planter arranges for the fortuitous marriage of the Lord Mayor’s daughter.

15 Following the First War of Indian Independence, Indians were often presented as tigers in need of violent restraint. See Goswami (2012, 54).

16 In her introduction to The Moonstone Sandra Kemp observes that Conan Doyle’s The Sign of Four (1890) is inspired by Collins’ novel, a remark which reinforces the connection I have drawn with ‘The Adventure of the Five Orange Pips’. See Kemp (1998, i).

17 I am grateful to Youngjoo Kim for alerting me to this interview in her paper ‘Contemporary Legacies of English Country House Aesthetics’ at a conference named ‘The Country House in Britain, 1914-2014’, 6-8 June, 2014.

18 Darlington Hall is the country house in Ishiguro’s novel.

19 As Williams argues, this idea of a ‘lost rural felicity can be traced back from English pastoral poets to Virgil, Juvenal, Hesiod and beyond’ (ii, 9).

20 Kowaleski-Wallace (2006) discusses the novel A Respectable Trade (1995), pointing out that the presence of a formerly enslaved Caribbean man makes the air of the novel’s country house ‘see[m] a little cleaner’ (111).

21 Mungo is brought to England by Captain Thomas Thistlewood, a Jamaican planter and sociopath, who lived between 1721 and 1786.

22 Evaristo (2002, ii) also acknowledges the importance of Fryer’s study – specifically, his work on black Romans – in her novel-in-verse.

23 See also Paynoulle’s (2007) discussion of readers’ expectations.

24 Blake’s poem ‘And Did Those Feet In Ancient Time’ was first published around 1808 and contains the phrase ‘England’s green and pleasant land’.

25 Austen’s Mansfield Park contains a reference to mahogany floorboards in Sotherton Court. Mahogany was often produced by slaves.

26 We Brits explores Britain’s centuries-old black presence. The poems range over iconic rural sites including Mansfield Park and Sunderland Point. He also deconstructs country rituals such as Morris dancing, which Agard accurately attributes to Moors.

27 For more information about regional sugar boycott campaigners, see Felicity James and Rebecca Shuttleworth’s AHRC-funded project, ‘Women’s Writing in the Midlands, 1750–1850’. The project is based at the University of Leicester.

28 Grace Nichols imbues a blackbird with similar qualities in her poem ‘Framing the Landscape’ (2009, 23).

29 Pitcher (2015) argues sensory union is key to gaining a sense of ‘cultural citizenship’, although his work implies that this strategy is necessitated by a lack of connection with it in the past. This assertion forgets the black history of Britain’s countryside.

30 The wording of the phrase ‘black rural citizenship’ is adapted from Pitcher’s (2015) phrase, ‘cultural citizenship’.

31 First performed at Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 2014.
A 2013 report by Visit Britain found that almost a third of foreign tourists spend some time in Britain’s historic houses and castles, a phenomenon it attributes to ‘TV and film productions’ such as Downton Abbey (Cox 2014, 7), which achieved higher ratings than The X-Factor (Stock 2014, 285).

While staying at Downton, the singer is told to go back to where he came from. He also embarks on, and is forced to abandon, an impossible relationship with Rose, a relation of the Crawley family. The Crawleys own Downton Abbey.

Historians have argued that, to be strictly accurate, the film should centre on the legal case of Lord Mansfield’s 1772 Somerset ruling instead of the Zong Massacre, in which 133 slaves were thrown overboard during a voyage in 1781. Insurance was subsequently claimed for the loss of profits incurred through this wastage of human lives. The case hinged on whether or not the murdered slaves could be defined as cargo.


Zoffany is assumed to be the painter, although this has never been proved.