

A BIOGRAPHICAL - CRITICAL STUDY OF AUSTIN CLARKE

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A BIOGRAPHICAL - CRITICAL STUDY
OF AUSTIN CLARKE

BY

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English Language and Literature
Memorial University of Newfoundland
11 April 1991

St. John's

Newfoundland

Abstract

This dissertation is a critical study, in a biographical context, of the work of Austin Clarke; it investigates not only Clarke's growth as a writer but also the extent to which his work reflects, and is an attempt to understand, his life experiences. An overview of the Barbadian setting forms the backdrop for an examination of his early years, a period in which the stigma of his race and social origins impels him to seek success though essentially in terms imposed by the dominant English cultural heritage. The course of his life and literary career in Canada is then traced; it is clear that the marginality he has known in Barbados recurs in his new home and that it evokes within him an intense awareness of himself as a black man, driving him to draw extensively upon his experiences in order to write.

The dissertation examines Clarke's early literary efforts in Canada, his declining fascination with poetry in favour of fiction and his shift from an affiliation with English romanticism to a social realism that places him in the mainstream of West Indian literature. It follows his career as he publishes his first two novels, both set in Barbados and absorbed in the alienation and inner mutilation the society

has induced in the colonised, and as he progresses into a series of novels and short story anthologies dwelling on the social and psychological complexities of the black immigrant experience in Canada. It is shown, however, that he renews his contact with the West Indies and resumes his scrutiny of Barbadian society with a typically critical eye.

The dissertation suggests, nevertheless, that the link between Clarke's life and writing is not simply a matter of sources of raw material or influences on the direction of his career; through his analyses of the black experience Clarke tries to come to terms with his past, to comprehend his own psyche and to achieve a sense of personal identity. In the process, this study concludes, he has made a notable contribution to the literatures of both Canada and the Caribbean.

PREFACE

If I were to look back over the snapshots of my youth in Barbados, I would have to remember the wind, and the music in the wind, as it ran its fingers through the rustling hairs of the sugar canes in the mornings of cold baths and warm green tea: bright and early; and hungry sometimes. But my life in Barbados was not all cockroaches and flies; not all wind and sugar cane. It was also carefree: but with a freedom restricted by the history of that parallelogram of life drawn for us many years ago by the English ... and by our own ignorance of ourselves¹

Austin Clarke

The richness and complexity of his experience, captured so vividly in his "Harrison College and Me" (1966), makes Austin Clarke a subject of extraordinary interest. His life illustrates the major consequences of being born a black in a West Indian society still under British rule, for he was in his youth the classic colonial, inferior in status, limited in prospect, and drawn away from his roots by his immersion in a culture introduced from abroad. Yet the stigma of poverty and "illegitimacy" made escape an obsession. It is absorbing then to watch his growth; as he sought refuge in Canada, the embryonic duality of his loyalties in Barbados--represented by

¹"Harrison College and Me." New World Quarterly Barbados Independence Issue 3-4 (1966)31.

his allegiance to both the white culture and the black community--evolved into a full-fledged ambivalence toward white society, and his contact with Canada drove him to nurture his craft as a writer.

But Clarke's life is also important as a record of the raw experience that has provided him with basic material for his writing. Furthermore, it furnishes clues to the nature of his personality, his psyche and his work. It helps to explain, for example, the sometimes stormy character of his relationships with individuals and institutions, and it provides insights regarding the form and content of his literary work. The influence of his studies, his reading and his contact with other artists, for instance, is strongly evident in his writing. Moreover, his work is often an attempt to secure self-knowledge and to come to terms with the contradictory nature of his own experience of "growing up stupid", leading him repeatedly to such themes as alienation, emasculation and loss of identity. He is unquestionably a fascinating figure. That he should emerge from such unlikely beginnings to become not only Canada's first major black writer but also someone of cultural and literary significance in a wide variety of contexts is a truly remarkable achievement.

It is puzzling, therefore, that Clarke has received comparatively little attention, especially since he has been a highly productive writer. By 1986, he had published seven

novels, three volumes of short stories, an autobiography, well over one hundred and fifty columns in the Barbadian newspaper The Nation and numerous pieces in other newspapers, among them the Toronto Daily Star and the Toronto Telegram, in addition to sundry articles and short stories in a range of magazines and periodicals. He had also accumulated an extensive body of unpublished works. Yet up to 1988, the main commentaries on his writing have been those by Lloyd Brown, Frank Birbalsingh, Keith Henry and Terrence Craig and, though stimulating and valuable, these treatments have generally been confined to selected groups of works. In his Racial Attitudes in English-Canadian Fiction 1905-1980 (1987), for example, Craig includes a succinct though incisive examination of specific facets of Clarke's work but with an emphasis on the Toronto trilogy. In biographical terms, published studies of Clarke are equally circumscribed. Leslie Sanders, in Profiles of Canadian Writers (1982), offers a sketch of Clarke's life, but the information she provides is necessarily restricted and her review of Clarke's works is limited in that it is brief and proceeds no further than The Prime Minister (1977). While supplying short introductions to Clarke's writing, Terrence Craig in The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (1983) and Anthony Boxill in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, Canadian Writers Since 1960, First Series also furnish inevitably selective and condensed biographical descriptions, but even in the more recent Boxill study the account extends

only up to 1983.

Three dissertations have touched on specific Clarke novels. Jennifer Yip Choy's M.A. thesis (1976) analyses The Survivors of the Crossing with respect to the black West Indian's effort to establish a home in the New World, while Horace Goddard's study (1977) superficially examines the social, economic and racial concerns of the West Indian immigrants as revealed in The Meeting Point (1967), Storm of Fortune (1973) and The Bigger Light (1975). Geta Au Leseur's doctoral dissertation (1982) treats Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965) cursorily along with nine other novels, viewing it solely in terms of the writer's attempt to find his roots.

The most extensive and detailed analysis of Clarke's writing appeared in the fall of 1989 when Lloyd Brown's El Dorado and Paradise was published, though even in this study Brown contents himself with an examination of Clarke's major published works and for the most part incorporates into his book the type of biographical information already available in previous accounts. Nevertheless, he has produced an important and perceptive critical evaluation of the corpus in terms of the failure of two myths, Canada as El Dorado and the Caribbean as a tropical Eden, arguing that Clarke's fiction is an indictment of the two societies for their moral and social failures.

In general, therefore, there has been a dearth of comprehensive examinations of Clarke's writing. As W. J.

Keith notes in his Canadian Literature in English (1985), Clarke's published work has been "characteristically neglected" (p. 169). In addition, his early unpublished efforts have been ignored even though they constitute an important phase of his development as a writer. Perhaps because of their enforced brevity, the biographies, too, have tended to be less than elaborate and have presented essentially chronological outlines of major events in Clarke's life, with little attention to the richness and diversity of his experiences, the connections among events, or the reasons for particular developments or occurrences. For the most part, also, they have not probed the relationship between Clarke's life and his work.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to correct such limitations through an extended analysis of Clarke's writings along with a more comprehensive overview of his life than has hitherto been available, one that will suggest the complex and often contradictory elements and interrelationships of his life and work by establishing a common context for both. The most adequate means of so doing has seemed to me to follow a relatively strict chronological organization of the material and to integrate an examination of the major publications into an ongoing biographical account. Elspeth Cameron's Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life (1981) serves in this context as an excellent illustration of the uses to which such a pattern may be put.

This study of Clarke is based on a variety of sources. Among the most valuable have been the lengthy personal interviews to which Clarke so generously submitted himself in 1987 and 1988, along with the reminiscences and commentaries of his wife and a number of his friends and associates. Another has been the extensive collection of Clarke's papers held in the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collection of the Mills Memorial Library at McMaster University; these have been examined in detail, with clarification and additional information provided by Clarke himself when required. Further material has been furnished by Harold Hoyte, the editor of The Nation, who kindly sent copies of many of Clarke's contributions to the Barbadian newspaper, and by Monica Peters, who supplied copies of Clarke's short stories that have appeared in Bim, the Barbadian literary magazine. While my letters to Clarke's publishers have elicited little cooperation, this disadvantage has been partially offset by the fact that from 1974 Clarke began keeping copies of his own letters to others, among them his agents and publishers. When placed alongside correspondence he has received, these give a reasonably clear picture of his dealings with agents, publishers and others.

In documenting my sources, I have employed the designation "McMaster" to identify material forming part of the Austin Clarke Collection at McMaster University. With the exception of letters to me or to I. J. Baksh, the

correspondence to which I have referred is held in the Austin Clarke Collection. I must also note that, where no documentation is provided, the biographical information in this dissertation has been derived from my interviews with Clarke.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank several people whose contribution to this study was invaluable. I owe much to my supervisor, Dr. Peter Ayers, for devoting time and energy to giving me constructive criticism and advice; his unfailing patience, discipline and sense of humour were vital in enabling me to complete the dissertation. I am most grateful to Austin Clarke who, despite personal bereavement, generously allowed me a week-long series of interviews in 1987 and not only agreed to further interviews in 1988 but also elaborated on numerous points through regular correspondence. I wish to thank him, too, for his continuous support of my work. I also wish to acknowledge my debt to Betty Reynolds Clarke for her very kind assistance; the additional information she supplied and her insights into Clarke as a husband, father, writer and man were truly valuable. I would also like to thank those of Clarke's friends and associates who have shared with me their recollections of different phases of his life and activities, as well as Monica Peters and Harold Hoyte for making available to me many of Clarke's publications in the Caribbean. I am grateful, also, to the Mills Memorial Library of McMaster University for permitting me access to the material in the Austin Clarke Collection. I wish to express my gratitude to the staff in the Mills Memorial Library archives, especially

Dr. Kathy Garay and Dr. Charlotte Gray, for their efficiency in mailing me copies of many of Clarke's documents and for their courtesy and generous allocation of their time during the weeks I spent at McMaster working on the Clarke papers. Thanks are also due to Dr. Patrick O'Flaherty, Dr. Lawrence Mathews and Dr. George Story for their comments on the first draft of this thesis and to Dr. Elizabeth Epperly for her support and encouragement. Thanks are also extended to Harriett Taylor for her assistance in the typing of the final draft of the dissertation. Last but not least, I wish to thank my husband, I. J. Baksh, and my son, Anton Baksh, for their unstinting moral support.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviation is used to identify sources cited from The Austin Clarke Collection in the Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University.

(McMASTER) The Austin Clarke Collection, the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collection of the Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University.

Chapter 1

Growing Up in Barbados

Austin Ardinel Chesterfield Clarke was born on 26 July 1934 in Barbados, a small island in the Eastern Caribbean.¹ He was the son of Kenneth Trotman, a black man of limited means,² and Gladys Irene Clarke, a Negro girl of sixteen. It was perhaps not the most auspicious start to life. The product of a temporary liaison, Clarke would hardly know his real father; when his mother did marry three years later, it was to Fitzherbert Luke, who had just begun his training for the police force. Clarke was to experience at first hand the uncertain and in many ways destructive world of irregular sexual and marital relationships characteristic of particular segments of West Indian society, relationships which both haunted his own life and provided him with the source of much of his material as a writer. The child of

¹Barbados is 166 square miles in area. Midway through the twentieth century its population was about 230,000, making it one of the most densely populated islands in the Caribbean.

²Clarke describes his father as a craftsman and an amateur painter but provides no details regarding the latter's pursuits. He concedes only that his father had never presented an exhibition of his paintings or received much attention for his artistic work.

black, working class parents, he would also come to know the full weight of an inherited colonial order that at his birth had changed little over the previous three hundred years. His class and colour ensured that his struggle for an education and for a reasonable chance to advance himself in the world would be a bitter one. The education he did receive was one that guaranteed a disoriented and distorted perspective on life, for it was based on a mid-Victorian English public school pattern that largely ignored the reality of the West Indies. As if such forces were not enough, Clarke had to contend with the more general problems of growing up in a society that had in many respects been cut off since its very inception from the social, intellectual and literary developments of western civilization and that would not make fundamental adjustments to the twentieth century for years to come.

The roots of Barbadian society and culture, like those of the Caribbean more generally, were fixed firmly in the conditions established by the original colonial settlement. Only decades after its initial occupation by Englishmen,³ Barbados displayed a class system that would remain basically unchanged well into the twentieth century.

³The first European settlement of the island occurred in 1627 with the arrival of forty Englishmen, who were accompanied by ten Negro slaves. In the following years other whites settled on the island, cultivating tobacco and other crops with the aid of white "servants" and Negro slaves. Barbados rightly claims a longer connection with England than any other West Indian society.

The oft quoted description by Albert Gomes of the state of Trinidad in 1930 sums up vividly the stagnant nature of Barbadian society as well:

Trinidad in 1930 was a remote and forgotten back-water of the world. It lay deep and still in its sweaty sleep, tossing only occasionally when its comfortable dream touched furtively the nightmare into which it was to awaken abruptly in 1937.⁴

At the top of the Barbadian social hierarchy was the plantocracy; white, exclusive, and distant in status from the rest of the population. Next in rank came the estate managers, overseers and other white plantation employees. Others, mainly of English origin, comprised a middle class living outside the large estates,⁵ while the blacks formed a distinct group at the bottom of the social hierarchy. There were other elements seeking a niche in the society, principal among them being the "poor whites" and the coloureds. A "poor white" segment had developed because the growing use of black slave labour had affected the fortunes of indentured servants, who were largely of English origin. Unable to compete in the labour market and left to fend for themselves, the servants and their descendants sank rapidly deeper into poverty and

⁴Albert Gomes, Through A Maze of Colour (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: Key Caribbean Publications, 1974) 15. The "nightmare" in Trinidad, as in other British West Indian colonies around this time, was the onset of large-scale riots and protests that would pave the way for political change.

⁵This middle class included small landholders, clergymen, professionals, businessmen, clerks and skilled workers.

degradation.⁶ Becoming more numerous were the coloureds, who had originated as a result of sexual liaisons between white masters and Negro slaves.⁷ As a group they were shunned socially by the whites, and they did not enjoy the latter's legal and political rights.⁸ Rejected by the whites but carefully dissociating themselves from the blacks, they entrenched themselves at a vaguely intermediate point in the society from which they strove for social acceptance by those of higher status.

Even by the 1950s, the class system had changed little. Whites still formed only a small part of the population but owned almost all the sugar estates and controlled the major business concerns, retaining considerably greater prestige than other groups.⁹ Though the law no longer discriminated against specific segments of the populace, social discrimination persisted and, in terms of colour distinctions, Barbados was widely regarded in the Caribbean

⁶F. A. Hoyos, Barbados (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1978) 72-74.

⁷The number of coloureds was at first small but, partly through sexual activity among themselves, grew to about 7,000 by 1834. See Hoyos 102.

⁸Douglas Hall, "Slaves and Slavery in the British West Indies," Social and Economic Studies 11.4 (1962): 313.

⁹The 1946 census classified 5.11% of the population as white, 17.55% as coloured and 77.27% as black. See David Lowenthal, "The Population of Barbados," Social and Economic Studies 6.4 (1957): 450.

area as the most rigid of the British West Indian islands.¹⁰ Under such circumstances, the fortunes of the blacks did not improve much. Poverty and unemployment were rampant. The majority, with no more than an elementary schooling, had access only to low-status jobs, substantially in the form of agricultural and general labour.¹¹ Those fortunate enough to receive a secondary schooling competed with one another for the few positions available in teaching, in the clerical and higher grades of the civil service, and in clerical work in the private sector. Only a very small number able to muster the necessary resources could hope to attend university and enter one of the professions. Typically, middle-class blacks had better prospects than their poorer counterparts, who tended to be left out in the contest for more desirable educational and occupational opportunities.¹²

The living conditions of the black masses reflected the latter's economic hardships. In a lower-class Bridgetown

¹⁰Lowenthal 467-468.

¹¹The possibilities included skilled as well as unskilled jobs. Among the skilled workers were tailors, shoemakers, cabinet-makers, printers, bakers, and tradesmen in the construction industry, mechanics and other engineering specialties. Among the unskilled were cane-cutters, loaders, dock workers and casual workers. Many jobs were of a "dead-end" nature. Workers such as domestic servants, seamstresses, laundresses, hawkers, messengers, delivery-men, gardeners and yard-boys, for example, had little opportunity for promotion. See G. E. Cumper, "Employment in Barbados," Social and Economic Studies 8.1 (1959): 122-126.

¹²Christine Barrow, "Reputation and Ranking in A Barbadian Locality," Social and Economic Studies 25.2 (1976): 114-115.

suburb at the end of the second World War, for example, two-thirds of the houses were owned by their occupants but in no case did home owners have title to the land on which they lived. Only a minority of the houses were structurally sound. Most of the householders obtained their water from public standpipes and cooked with wood on coal-pots or rocks, with sheds often serving as kitchens.¹³ In the plantation areas the houses of the owners and the managers generally retreated behind walls or screens of trees and shrubs while the small houses of the blacks stood massed in a corner of the estate, on rocky land or along the highway. Even here, houses tended to have only a few square yards for a garden or a yard and their occupants usually did not own the land on which they had erected them.¹⁴ The existence of a large underprivileged class later interests Clarke and, especially in Survivors of the Crossing (1964) and Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965), he depicts not only the inequities of the Barbadian class system but also the social and psychological consequences suffered by

¹³Barrow 113-114.

¹⁴Since the middle of the century, the black majority has certainly made progress. Improving educational and occupational opportunity have allowed them greater upward social mobility. Living standards have improved; electricity, modern appliances and running water are more widespread in homes, particularly those of the middle classes. However, the structure of the society remains basically unchanged, with a small white and nowadays partly coloured minority dominating land ownership as well as manufacturing, business and commercial activity. See Christine Barrow, "Ownership and Control of Resources in Barbados: 1834 to the Present," Social and Economic Studies 32.3 (1983): 106.

blacks because of their imprisonment at the bottom of the society. Indeed, few West Indian writers have captured as vividly as Clarke the bleakness of life among the black Caribbean poor.

Naturally, many sought avenues of escape. To blacks facing the inaccessibility of land, restricted educational and occupational choices, substantial unemployment and a generally depressed standard of living, emigration has long appeared a desirable alternative to life in Barbados. A considerable number was employed in the construction of the Panama Canal and, on the completion of the project in 1914, Barbadian emigrants went increasingly to other parts of Latin America and to the United States, frequently as agricultural workers. In the case of Canada, West Indian immigration was at first minimal, with the Barbadian lower classes represented essentially by females employed as domestic servants, maids and kitchen porters. The "domestic scheme" allowed women to gain immigrant status after two years of service with a Canadian family, and the first batch to be admitted to Canada from the Caribbean under this arrangement entered the country in 1955, the year of Clarke's own arrival in Toronto. In sending money back to relatives, emigrants contributed to improving the lives of many Barbadians, since the funds were used for such purposes as purchasing land, educating children and generally raising the recipients' standard of living.¹⁵

¹⁵Hoyos 186.

But, as Clarke shows, emigrants were likely to pay a price for their apparent economic gains. In such works as The Meeting Point (1967), Storm of Fortune (1973) and The Bigger Light (1975), Clarke illuminates the experiences of fictitious immigrant characters in Toronto, drawing parallels with the fate of blacks in Barbados and indicating how difficult it is for even the emigrant to achieve a sense of psychological well-being.

It is in the political sphere that Negroes in Barbados seemed to make the most dramatic progress. For centuries, the whites monopolised political power,¹⁶ though reductions in the qualifications for voters in 1884 led to the election of the first coloureds to the House of Assembly.¹⁷ The bicameral structure of the governing body survived into the twentieth century but it was then gradually reformed as the society took the path toward the British model of cabinet government. Nevertheless, the rate of change proved at first

¹⁶An elected Assembly first appeared in 1639 and soon came to be dominated by the plantocracy. At first merely advisory in function, it soon acquired the right to initiate legislation, which nevertheless needed the approval of the Governor and a nominated Legislative Council to become law. This system of government remained virtually intact for over two hundred years and was used by the privileged to protect their interests. See John Poyer, The History of Barbadoes (London: Frank Cass, 1971) 435 and Vincent T. Harlow, A History of Barbados 1625-1685 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1971) 219-251.

¹⁷In the 1870s formal political participation was still confined to those with some property and only about one percent of the population was eligible to vote. See G. E. Cumper, "The Differentiation of Economic Groups in the West Indies," Social and Economic Studies 11.4 (1962): 327-328.

too leisurely to satisfy the lower classes, long forced to accept intolerable working conditions, poor wages and high unemployment. Trades unions and new political parties materialized, their leadership drawn from the ranks of both the black working-class and the coloured groups. Men like Hugh Springer and Grantley Adams, both lawyers and Oxford graduates, joined in the effort to achieve social reconstruction and further political reform. Deteriorating economic conditions generated intensified disaffection among the poor and led to violent protests in 1937. Following similar developments in other West Indian territories, Britain committed itself to guiding the Caribbean societies toward self-government.

In 1943, when Austin Clarke was still at elementary school, property and income qualifications for voting were further lowered and many exercised their newly-won franchise. As a result representatives of the labour movement, who were frequently black and working-class in origin, won a larger proportion of the seats in the legislature. Additional extensions of the right to vote and modifications to the machinery of government brought more political power to blacks, while the representatives of the traditional middle class and the spokesmen for the plantocracy and for the island's manufacturing and commercial elites increasingly found themselves confined to the contracting nominated section

of the legislature.¹⁸ In elections contested in 1951 following the introduction of universal adult suffrage, Grantley Adams led his ostensibly socialist Barbados Labour Party to a clear majority in the House of Assembly and blacks finally saw in power a Government that they expected to advance their cause. Clarke, now seventeen, was still at secondary school and was not directly involved in the island's political life. Later, however, he returns to this period to examine the exercise of power by blacks in a time of political reform and, especially in Proud Empires (1986), exposes the gap between rhetoric and reality. The political events of 1951 also had a personal significance for Clarke. Among those elected to the House of Assembly was Errol Barrow, who would become his mentor and friend and would greatly affect the course of his subsequent career.¹⁹

¹⁸Jesse H. Proctor, "British West Indian Society and Government in Transition, 1920-1960," Social and Economic Studies 11.4 (1962): 287-293.

¹⁹Errol Barrow had studied Law at Lincoln's Inn after graduating from the University of London in Economics. Following disagreements with Adams, he defected to the rival Democratic Labour Party and became its chairman in 1959, leading it to victory in the elections of 1961. Barrow steered Barbados through further constitutional changes and, in the wake of the collapse of an incipient West Indian federation, led the country to political independence in 1966. Barrow and his party dominated the local political scene until their defeat in 1976 at the hands of the Barbados Labour Party now headed by Tom Adams, Grantley Adams' son. Before this fall from grace, Barrow had invited Clarke back to Barbados to fill a post that would soon occasion the latter considerable disenchantment and eventually provoke the novel The Prime Minister (1977), a powerful indictment of a society under black rule.

Other social institutions in Barbados underwent more modest change. As in the political sphere, early developments in education did not enhance the opportunities of blacks. During the period of slavery, indeed, provisions for schooling of any kind were rather meagre, and as late as the nineteenth century the efforts of the Christian denominations in primary education did little to ameliorate the lot of the blacks. As well, secondary schools, which appeared in growing numbers in the nineteenth century, admitted mainly the children of the white middle and upper classes. A major innovation in 1858 was the designation of three schools -- Lodge School, Harrison College and Queen's College -- as "First Grade" schools offering both classical and modern studies. Several others, including Combermere, the Boys' and Girls' Foundation Schools, the Parry School, the Coleridge School, and the Alexandra Girls' School, were reorganized as "Second Grade" schools.²⁰ The government introduced a number of "exhibitions" open to all students who showed promise but relatively few poor blacks won places in secondary schools through this means. The structure of primary and secondary education that had emerged remained unchanged until the middle of the twentieth century,

²⁰Barbados has preserved this distinction among secondary schools. The "First Grade" institutions have Sixth Forms, permitting students to meet the matriculation requirements of British universities, while the "Second Grade" ones do not. In Clarke's day, the latter enabled students to write the Senior Cambridge Examination while the former prepared students for the Higher School Certificate Examination as well.

by which time Codrington College had become affiliated with Durham University in England and enabled a few black and coloured students to obtain a university education as well.²¹

Despite some expansion of the system, the educational inequalities traditionally linked to race, colour and class diminished only slightly, and in Clarke's youth the most that the majority of black boys and girls could expect after primary schooling was some form of apprenticeship or informal instruction.²² Only "minuscule proportions" of black adolescents attended secondary schools,²³ and such prestigious institutions as Harrison College and Queen's College were still largely the preserve of the privileged elements of the population.²⁴

The secondary school curriculum was modelled closely

²¹Codrington College was established through a bequest by the white planter Christopher Codrington for the training of young men for missionary work. It was affiliated to Durham University in 1875 but was in due course superseded by the University of the West Indies, which established a campus in Barbados in 1963.

²²G. E. Cumper, "Employment in Barbados," Social and Economic Studies 8.1 (1959): 122-125.

²³Hermione McKenzie, "The Instructional Experiences of Caribbean Women," Social and Economic Studies 35.3 (1986): 69.

²⁴In the 1950s, however, the government undertook the expansion and diversification of secondary education, retaining and enlarging the traditional grammar schools but also introducing a wider range of newer secondary schools as well as vocational and technical training programs. In 1962, Barrow's government abolished tuition fees in public secondary schools and by the following decade most Barbadian children of the appropriate age were attending some type of secondary school.

on that of the English grammar school. Literature, for example, typically meant English Literature. One problem in this field was the absence of a sufficiently large body of West Indian poetry or prose fiction. For centuries the higher social classes had by and large been "stubbornly philistine",²⁵ preoccupied with status, material acquisition, and the enjoyment of social life. As James Stephen, a prominent British abolitionist, observed of the West Indian plantocracy in 1831, "There is no civilised society on earth so entirely destitute of learned leisure, of literary and scientific intercourse and even liberal recreation."²⁶ The Caribbean had therefore produced little of literary merit. The first novels by West Indians about their own people had appeared only in the twentieth century, written in most cases by local whites or coloureds and usually giving scant attention to the experiences of blacks.²⁷ But such early writers as Thomas H. MacDermot (Tom Redcam) and Herbert de Lisser had made little impact on the plantocracy or on the growing middle class which, following in the footsteps of the

²⁵Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Heinemann, 1983) 35.

²⁶James Stephen, quoted in Reinhard Sander, "Introduction," From Trinidad, ed. Reinhard Sander and Peter Ayers (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978) 1.

²⁷Among the early novels were Tom Redcam's Becka's Buckra Baby (1903) and One Brown Girl and -- (1909), and H. G. de Lisser's Jane (1913), Jane's Career (1914) and Susan Proudleigh (1915). Later novels included Alfred Mendes' Pitch Lake (1934) and Black Fauns (1935), and Jean Rhys' Voyage in the Dark (1934) and Good Morning Midnight (1939).

former, had rejected local writing and clung to the English literature they had been taught to value. The dearth of native writing had also occurred because, as Reinhard Sander observes, from the very beginning the reception of magazines such as The Beacon and Trinidad which attempted to fill the vacuum was "not a friendly one".²⁸ It was after 1950 that British West Indian prose fiction truly blossomed, as first novels by a host of new writers were published.²⁹ The primary focus of the British West Indian novel shifted dramatically. As Kenneth Ramchand notes, for the "first time in writing related to the West Indies, the Black characters are not restricted to being peripheral or background figures" and the fiction presented a remarkably searching analysis of the community:

It is not unique for novelists to be regarded as having something special to say to their societies. But the West Indian novelists apply themselves with unusual urgency and unanimity to an analysis and interpretation of their society's ills, including the social and economic deprivation of the majority; the pervasive consciousness of race and colour; the cynicism and uncertainty of the native bourgeoisie in power after independence; the lack of a history to be proud of; and the absence of

²⁸Sander 2.

²⁹Among these first novels were Samuel Selvon's A Brighter Sun (1952), George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1953), John Hearne's Voices Under the Window (1955), Vidia Naipaul's The Mystic Masseur (1957), Jan Carew's Black Midas (1958), and Andrew Salkey's A Quality of Violence (1959). Other first novels, including Wilson Harris' Palace of the Peacock (1960) and Michael Anthony's The Games Were Coming (1963), quickly followed.

traditional or settled values.³⁰

This flood of writing that was of mounting relevance to the lives of the black majority came too late to affect Clarke's formal schooling. In any event, the educated long resisted "a native literature that was not the English literature they had been brought up to consider the only literature possible"³¹ and, influenced by this attitude, the British West Indian school systems in Clarke's day and in the following decades retained the type of curriculum they had long cherished. In such works as Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965) and Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack (1980), Clarke highlights the absurdities of a school system that in Literature, as in History and other subjects, extolled a culture and fostered loyalties that satisfied spurious tastes and failed to meet the genuine needs of West Indian blacks.

In religion, too, tradition gave way only reluctantly to more enlightened practice. The Anglican Church, the first to gain a foothold in the island, soon formed alliances with the higher classes and, until it was prodded to do so by its leadership in London, did not seriously respond to the challenge of Christianising the Negroes. By 1871, almost ninety per cent of the population had become Anglicans, most of whom were black. Apart from the

³⁰Ramchand 4.

³¹Ramchand 12.

occasional coloured exception, however, the clergy was white and maintained its affiliation with the higher classes, which had provided most of its members. Through seating arrangements in the churches and variations in the amount of respect accorded weddings and marriages, the Church differentiated among the various groups in Barbados.³² Negroes and coloureds gained admission to church choirs but only after considerable opposition and controversy. During Clarke's youth, membership in an Anglican congregation was still a mark of respectability, and clergymen continued to exercise substantial power.³³ Now, however, they included black men among their numbers. Other Christian denominations also attracted followings in Barbados but they were never a serious threat to the Anglican Church,³⁴ which is the one that Clarke later selects for the closest scrutiny. In such novels as Survivors of the Crossing (1964) and The Prime

³²Blacks were generally seated at the rear, in segregated galleries, or in the wings. See Kortright Davis, Cross and Crown in Barbados (Frankfurt-on-Main: Peter Lang, 1983) 101-102.

³³Apart from their typical religious duties, for example, they managed schools and almshouses, often taught in secondary schools, served as headmasters of the leading secondary schools, and worked alongside high state officials on the Anglican Church Council of Barbados.

³⁴The Methodists and the Moravians were among the more successful of the smaller groups, partly because of their early willingness to begin work among the blacks, while other sects -- such as the Seventh Day Adventists and the Church of the Nazarene -- most likely attracted adherents because their more spirited forms of worship better met the emotional needs of the blacks than did Anglican worship. See Davis 34-35.

Minister (1977), he casts the Church in its traditional role, viewing it as a highly conservative force in the society.

It is in the realm of relationships between males and females, however, that Barbadian culture manifests its most enduring elements. Norms regarding sexual liaisons among lower-class blacks depart noticeably from those among blacks of higher status and coloureds and whites of every class, who have all ostensibly adopted the prevailing European model of monogamous unions within stable, legally-recognized, nuclear families.³⁵ Apart from casual unions, three main types of mating relationships occur among working-class Negroes -- visiting, common-law, and legal-marital.³⁶ In the visiting relationship the male receives sexual favours from a female by

³⁵Pat Ellis, "Introduction -- An Overview of Women in Caribbean Society," Women of the Caribbean, ed. Pat Ellis (London: Zed Books, 1986) 7.

³⁶Scholars have attributed such patterns to a variety of factors. These include the origin during slavery of a tradition of impermanent social arrangements, the marginality of men in an economy that limits their opportunity to assume full responsibility as providers for a family, the survival of elements of African culture, and the reduced availability of males owing to large-scale emigration. The first explanation, one of the most popular among scholars, refers to such practices as the selling of slaves to other plantations, the taking of slaves as mistresses by white masters or managers, and the inducement of slaves to breed with a number of men, all of which allegedly prevented the development of strong conjugal units among blacks. See, for example, James Allman, "Conjugal Unions in Rural and Urban Haiti," Social and Economic Studies 34.1 (1985): 28-29; F. Henriques, "West Indian Family Organization," Caribbean Quarterly 13.4 (1967): 31-32, and Moni Nag, "Pattern of Mating Behaviour, Emigration and Contraceptives as Factors Affecting Human Fertility in Barbados," Social and Economic Studies 20.2 (1971): 113-114.

going to her periodically in her own or her parents' house. The expectation usually exists, especially on the part of the female, that a union of this sort will ultimately lead to marriage, though generally it does not. Individuals may engage in a series of such associations before progressing to one of the other two mating arrangements.³⁷ In a common-law relationship, the male and female are sexual partners in the same household but are not legally married. Such unions may be terminated at any time, with the partners taking new mates in any convenient type of liaison.³⁸ Legal marriage is the preferred form of union for most working-class blacks,³⁹ but it is not entered into lightly and tends to occur later than in the middle classes.

As a result of the impermanent character of many sexual liaisons among blacks, women must often assume major or sole responsibility for rearing and providing for their children.⁴⁰ Offspring may be dispersed among relatives and

³⁷Dorian Powell, "The Role of Women in the Caribbean," Social and Economic Studies 33.2 (1984): 102.

³⁸Norman Ashcroft, "The Domestic Group in Mahogany, British Honduras," Social and Economic Studies 15.3 (1966): 272-273. The relative paucity of appropriate research in Barbados forces one to draw on studies in other Caribbean territories. This is acceptable since male-female relationships exhibit similar features from one such society to another.

³⁹Judith Blake, Family Structure in Jamaica: The Social Context of Reproduction (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1961) 118-123; Nag 113.

⁴⁰Sidney M. Greenfield, "Family Organization in Barbados," diss., Columbia University, 1959, 129.

even friends if the mothers cannot cope or if their children from previous unions are not acceptable to new mates as members of the household. A wide range of family structures becomes possible. It is not unusual for the male to be absent and for the children's mother or such relatives as aunts and grandmothers to head the household. There may be one, two, or three generations in the family unit. When faced with financial difficulties, women tend to create supportive networks, with relatives giving small sums of money by way of assistance. Predictably, under such circumstances men often play a marginal role in the rearing of their children.

Yet, the males generally hold rather conventional images of masculinity. They commonly believe that men should always be strong and should not be economically reliant on women,⁴¹ and their "self-respect depends on public expressions of authoritative, self-assertive behaviour".⁴² Furthermore, the norms of the higher classes remind them of the male obligation to be the family provider. It is likely, therefore, that their poverty, the marginality of their role

⁴¹Barrow, "Reputation and Ranking in A Barbadian Locality" 106.

⁴²Norma Shorey-Bryan, "The Making of Male-Female Relationships in the Caribbean," Women of the Caribbean, ed. Pat Ellis (London: Zed Books, 1986) 70. The male-female relationship, with its chronic problem of role reversals and the continuous struggle between men and women for dominance, is nicely illustrated in such stories as C. L. R. James' "Triumph", Alfred Mendes' "Sweetman" and Percival Maynard's "His Last Fling". See Sander and Ayers 86-103, 118-130, 131-137.

in the family and the widespread dominance of the female in family life will often endanger their self-images.⁴³ How they respond to this predicament is a subject that fascinates Clarke. In many of his works, including Survivors of the Crossing (1964), When Women Rule (1985) and the Toronto trilogy, Clarke probes the social and psychological dimensions of the relationship between males and females, showing how patterns of conflict and behaviour prevalent among blacks in Barbados may resurface even in a Canadian setting. Indeed, similar forces have affected Clarke's own relationships long after his escape from the Barbadian scene. The features of Barbadian society formed the context of Clarke's life for his first twenty-one years and it is within this setting that both his Caribbean roots and his subsequent life in Canada must be understood. Most immediately, his background brought him face to face with the most brutal realities of the island's class system.⁴⁴ The village of St. Matthias, in which Clarke lived until he was ten, contained two virtually distinct worlds, one

⁴³Barrow, "Reputation and Ranking in A Barbadian Locality" 109.

⁴⁴The information on which this overview of Clarke's early life is based comes mainly from my personal interviews of the writer. Where I have employed other sources, mainly published and unpublished autobiographical accounts by the writer, these are clearly identified. My immediate interest in interviewing Clarke was to probe the character of his early experience in Barbados and to identify forces that might have influenced him. Comments on the significance of his experiences for his subsequent life and career are, of course, my own contribution.

of them primarily white and in the main comfortable⁴⁵ but the other black and mostly poor. Dwelling in the less "respectable" part of the village, Clarke was surrounded by people who eked out a livelihood through any means available:

A couple of men disappeared on mornings and went to the city either as drivers of small vans or working in the stores. Some dispersed in the other direction to cut cane. Women, most of whom stayed at home, often earned money taking in the washing of the Marine Hotel.⁴⁶ There were always men around and one could not determine what they did for a living. One saw them on Monday and then saw them on Saturday night and they had money. Others worked as butlers and nightwatchmen and other service jobs at the hotel. And there were fishermen.⁴⁷

Because both his parents brought income into the family, his mother chiefly by doing washing and ironing for the Marine Hotel, Clarke himself was spared the worst forms of hardship but, though he never went hungry, even he had to contend with

⁴⁵Pleasantly located between the sugar-cane fields and the sea and only about two miles from the capital, St. Matthias had long boasted a sizeable white population. The whites lived on the main streets, which ran into the highway leading to Bridgetown and were sometimes lined with trees and gates of wrought iron. Among them were senior employees in commercial enterprises, independent professionals such as doctors and lawyers, and plantation managers. Also found in the more "respectable" areas of the village were a few black professionals and civil servants.

⁴⁶The Marine Hotel was a large guest-house with a restaurant, a bar and a dance floor. In Clarke's boyhood, its patrons were usually white.

⁴⁷Austin Clarke, personal interview, 20 August 1987.

modest housing that offered little privacy.⁴⁸

As a boy, Clarke lived as well with the social distinctions that governed relationships in the St. Matthias community. In some settings, apparently, these were based more on class than on colour. In the local Anglican church, for example, middle-class blacks occupied the front pews along with whites and it was not unusual for a black family to share a pew with a white one, each often inviting friends to join it during services. In the village elementary school, too, white children sat alongside black ones and, while private schools also existed in the area, they were usually accessible to children of all races provided their parents could afford the fees. In private life, however, colour was of greater import than class in social affairs. At the end of the school day, for instance, white children disappeared into their own homes and territories and had no contact with black classmates. It was accepted, also, that blacks would not attend the balls at the Marine Hotel. In the complexity of its social relationships, St. Matthias was indeed a microcosm of the wider society.

It seems, also, that Clarke's lowly status forced upon him forms of drudgery that children in more privileged circumstances were likely to escape. As he progressed through

⁴⁸His parents' dwelling was a simple wooden structure with three rooms, one of which was occupied by Clarke's grandmother, though as was common in the island an open shed had been attached on one side to provide additional shelter from the sun and rain.

his boyhood, his household chores became many and varied. He prepared chocolate on his mother's single-burner kerosene stove; he picked up foodstuff from the shops; he fetched buckets of water from the public standpipe both for his mother and his grandmother, and he removed the weeds from the yard. The approach of Christmas implied further tasks. He was required to varnish the furniture and to help clean up the premises. In addition, he assisted his mother as she made roses of all colours with crepe paper and rugs with scraps obtained mainly from the local seamstresses, items she sold to the "richer" folk in the village to raise extra cash.⁴⁹

But Clarke was no mere bystander, no casual observer, in his social world, for he participated in it as fully as was usual for a black boy in his circumstances.⁵⁰ Though he later brought the insights of maturity to his analysis of black working-class society, he had an early chance to begin accumulating images and impressions of his

⁴⁹Austin Clarke, "The Days Just Before Christmas," The Pelican 14 January 1983: 3.

⁵⁰Clarke seems to have been from the beginning a gregarious boy with normal interests. In his earlier years, he joined other children in front the houses on moonlit nights to sing songs and play games. He also accompanied other boys going to the sea for early-morning swims or listened to older boys telling riddles and stories. As he progressed toward adolescence, he began trapping ground-doves or wood-doves for his mother to cook and gathering with boys from the neighbourhood for games of cricket or soccer. Easter, too, was special, for it marked the height of the kite-flying season and, like other boys, Clarke designed and built his own kites. See Austin Clarke, "A Riddle, A Riddle, A Ree," The Pelican 31 December 1982: 3 and "Fridays, Wednesdays Were Best," The Pelican 7 January 1983: 3.

community which, when he drew upon them in his writing, would lend his work authenticity. He must surely have begun to note, for instance, the heightened importance of women in the black family. Indeed, his mother provided a typical example, for while his father was only a background figure in his boyhood and his stepfather earned a pittance with the police force his mother toiled long hours to help provide for the family and to meet the costs of his education. It may be argued that his mother's crucial role in the family, more than any other facet of his experience in St. Matthias, sensitized Clarke to the strength of the black woman and the marginality of the man, themes that would appear repeatedly in his work.

A more immediate result of Clarke's exposure to poverty, however, was the desire to escape, to flee not only the demeaning state of poverty but St. Matthias itself. Clarke credits his mother with being the first to stir his ambitions. She urged him to think of becoming something more than a gardener or some other kind of labourer and held up law and medicine as attainable choices. She insisted that education was indispensable for getting ahead, and so convinced was she of its importance that she enrolled Clarke at the St. Matthias Boys' Elementary School when he was only four. On that occasion, according to Clarke, she left nothing to chance, for she directed the headmaster to flog him if he misbehaved or failed to learn, arguing that since she was busy at the Marine Hotel all day and could not keep an eye on her

son the school should do so.⁵¹

While Clarke and his mother, like others who offered him encouragement, viewed education essentially as a means of upward mobility, his years of schooling would influence him in a variety of ways. Not unexpectedly, they affected his values and his interests. As Frantz Fanon observes in his Black Skin, White Masks (1967), colonialism confronts the subject peoples with the "superior" culture of the master and, since the governing race defines the black man as civilised if he "renounces his blackness", the "colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards".⁵² What occurs is, in Ezekiel Mphahlele's words, a "colonisation of the mind": "Being brought up on the white man's textbooks, you assimilate his thought. You make his goals yours."⁵³ The mission of civilising the black man is often made easier because colonized peoples who seek success tend to find the ways of the ruling group irresistible:

⁵¹In the period of Clarke's elementary schooling, others seem to have sensed that the young boy had greater promise than most children of his age and they encouraged him accordingly. One of these was a neighbour, a washerwoman Clarke remembers as "Mrs. Street", who found him books to read. Another was a young teacher, Harold Pinerho, who suggested that he leave Barbados to obtain better educational opportunities.

⁵²Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 18.

⁵³Ezekiel Mphahlele, quoted in Jane Watts, Black Writers from South Africa (London: Macmillan, 1989) 67.

The first attempt of the colonized is to change his condition by changing his skin. There is a tempting model close at hand--the colonizer. The latter suffers from none of his deficiencies, has all rights, enjoys every possession and benefits from every prestige. ... The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him.⁵⁴

As Samuel Bonhomme notes of the British Caribbean, even the educated surrendered to "the white man's image" and, "instead of challenging it and exposing its weakness and nakedness, fell a prey to it, and lived with it".⁵⁵ The result was often a desire for "the white person's confidence and love" or the growth of an attachment to the master race.⁵⁶ Yet Clarke's experiences in both the school and the community would also pull him in an opposite direction, stirring within him an emergent consciousness of his identity as a black as well as a growing concern for his fellow blacks. A typical product of colonialism, this fragmentation, and the tensions, ambiguities and contradictions it produces, would characterize Clarke's life and writing for the remainder of his career.

Inevitably, Clarke's elementary education increased his fascination with white culture, which in Barbados meant essentially English culture. The subject that probably roused

⁵⁴Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (New York: Orion Press, 1965) 120.

⁵⁵Samuel Bonhomme, Enoch Powell and the West Indian Immigrants (London: The Afro-American and West Indian Publishers, 1971) 29.

⁵⁶Bonhomme 29.

his enthusiasm most was Reading, for it took him into worlds that kept him enthralled. For the first year or two of school the textbooks in even this subject were not exciting, for they employed the then typical phonetic approach that confronted pupils with meaningless lists of words as well as dull collections of sentences. The textbooks for the older children were far more inspiring, containing various forms of prose and poetry and selections from plays. The prose pieces included lessons on health, fables, excerpts from English novels, descriptions of journeys, battles and other events, and stories from Shakespeare and Greek mythology; the poetry acquainted pupils with some of the most famous names in English literature, while the drama consisted primarily of excerpts from Shakespeare.⁵⁷

It was apparently his reading that greatly whetted Clarke's appetite for the white culture colonialism had bequeathed to Barbados. He devoured many of the selections, returning repeatedly to them in his spare time. He grew more and more enamoured of books and partly assuaged his thirst for them by turning to the abridged versions of the English classics held by the school. In this form he stumbled for the first time upon various works by such novelists as Daniel

⁵⁷Book Five in the series, for instance, contains excerpts from works by Jonathan Swift, Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and William Shakespeare, as well as poems by Charles Kingsley, John Masefield, H. W. Longfellow, John Keats, and others. See J. O. Cutteridge, ed., West Indian Readers: Book Five (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1928).

Defoe, R. L. Stevenson, Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. Around the age of nine, he discovered the regional public library, through which he supplemented his reading at school. In the library, he found a rich collection of adventure novels written originally for English schoolboys and he read profusely, his imagination stirred by the deeds of white heroes in distant places like India and Africa.

Of course, it was not only through literature that the elementary school nourished Clarke with white culture. The headmaster emphasized music and encouraged frequent sessions of singing, but the songs were mostly those English schoolchildren would learn. Loyalty to the Crown, too, was a vital part of everyone's instruction, since the headmaster regularly led the entire school in prayers for the King, for England and for the British Empire. What could not be escaped, also, was religion, particularly in the forms approved by the Church of England, with which the school was affiliated. There were the daily routines of hymn singing and prayer, and on Wednesdays the entire gathering of pupils marched across the school yard to the church next door where they were joined by their peers from the St. Matthias Girls' Elementary School for a service conducted by the minister himself.

What Clarke found quite unpalatable about his elementary schooling were the rigidity and the strictness with

which the induction into white culture was enforced. The headmaster reigned in militaristic fashion. He rang the bell to call the school to attention for "saying grace" before and after lunch. Sometimes, he conducted spot checks of pupils' learning by venturing among the classes to fire questions at individual boys. And there were the constant floggings, administered by the headmaster and the teachers. Clarke himself received no beatings and he faced indignities no greater than being pulled by the hair and slapped lightly on the face, but he was upset by the recurrent cruelty. He despised as well the regimentation that characterized much of the instruction in the school.⁵⁸ Notably boring was the teachers' insistence that pupils memorize items and regurgitate them on demand.

Clarke's experience of elementary schooling affected him in other, perhaps unexpected, ways. He must have been a very sensitive boy, for his reading often moved him, filling him with pity. He abhorred cruelty, and literature occasionally stirred revulsion within him through the inhuman nature of the acts it depicted. That Odysseus found it necessary to blind the giant Polyphemus in order to escape, for example, horrified Clarke and helped breed in him a

⁵⁸This is an important clue regarding Clarke's character. He would later show himself to be a creative person who abhors any form of regimentation by others.

dislike for myth, legend and fairy tale.⁵⁹ Yet, his reading also stimulated a growing sense of the power of language and a delight in words. Clarke admits that he has always been intrigued by the ability of some people to use language in an interesting way, and there can be little doubt that he began to acquire this taste through his reading.

Around eight or nine, Clarke's delight in language drove him to write his first poem, which was entitled "The Ballad of Bandy-Legged James".⁶⁰ Clarke reports that this was a "funny" piece in which he commented on people and events he had observed around him, though "most likely, there was hardly any thought, hardly any depth, to the poem".⁶¹ He showed the composition to his friends and from time to time gathered them at a neighbour's house, where he read the poem to them or allowed them to read it for themselves. He had taken a first, feeble step toward becoming a writer and he appears to have thoroughly enjoyed the attention it brought him, especially since his friends thought him "quite brilliant".

Unlike most black children of the time, Clarke was

⁵⁹Clarke intimates that his distaste for cruelty later led him to discourage his daughters from reading myths, legends and fairy tales.

⁶⁰No copy of the poem survives. Clarke claims that the poem filled almost three exercise books and that its title was inspired by Oscar Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", a poem he had enjoyed without knowing the poet's name but had thought absorbing and easy to read.

⁶¹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 20 August 1987.

able to advance into secondary education. There had never been any doubt that he should do so. As he approached the end of his elementary schooling, his mother did not permit him to follow the example of some of his classmates, who often took part-time jobs watering the gardens of white villagers or "fielding" tennis balls in the public courts. She insisted, instead, that he take private lessons to enhance his chances in the scholarship examinations for the secondary schools. At the age of nine, therefore, he found himself staying with other boys after school to receive extra instruction in such subjects as English, Arithmetic and History, with his mother paying the fees out of her own earnings. Clarke did not win a scholarship but he was admitted to Combermere Secondary School,⁶² located on Roebuck Street in the capital, and he commenced his studies here in January of 1945 when he was only ten years old.

Combermere continued Clarke's exposure to a white culture. In Latin, for example, Clarke did little more than ape English schoolboys as he studied grammar and attempted the

⁶²The tuition fee here would be eight dollars per term, with the cost of books and clothing an additional burden. Invaluable at this point was the monthly remittance of five dollars from Clarke's aunt, Heloise Clarke, who several years earlier had been recruited to work in Panama and had decided to remain there. In the year Clarke was admitted to Combermere, the family moved its house to more spacious grounds on Flagstaff Road in the nearby Clapham district. Since the new location was within easy cycling distance of the school, it minimised transportation costs.

translation of Virgil and Caesar into English.⁶³ In English Literature, he had by the end of his second year already studied Julius Caesar and As You Like It, and from the Third Form the school introduced him to a series of other Shakespearean works.⁶⁴ So successful was the school system in kindling his enthusiasm for English literature that he read voraciously on his own, finding the greatest appeal in poetry and in works by Charles Dickens and P. G. Wodehouse.⁶⁵ He also visited the public library on many Saturdays, becoming engrossed in Saturday Night, London Illustrated, The Spectator and Punch.⁶⁶ As well, he was again stimulated to write. In the Fifth Form, he joined a number of classmates in producing a "newspaper" called "The Daily Poop", which consisted of no

⁶³Austin Clarke, "Pragnull!" The Nation 19 October 1979: 14.

⁶⁴Among these were Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, Milton's Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, Sheridan's School for Scandal and an array of poetry by such writers as Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron and Coleridge.

⁶⁵Clarke denies that his writing was influenced by the English writers. At the very least, however, Dickens and Wodehouse must have struck a chord within him. Equally credibly, they might also encouraged his interest in gentle humour and, in Dickens' case, given him a preliminary feel for satirical writing.

⁶⁶Again outside the school setting, Clarke's interest in English Literature was strengthened through the zeal of Frank Collymore, one of his teachers, who often invited senior Combermere boys to serve as ushers or stage assistants at drama presentations at the "Green Room", a theatre with which Collymore was associated as actor and director. Clarke claims that his contact with "live" productions and his opportunity to see some powerful performances by Collymore and others increased his enthusiasm for drama.

more than the middle pages of an exercise book and was usually circulated within the class. Because of his striking handwriting, he was assigned the task of laying out the one copy of each issue, but he also contributed humorous portraits of other students. Around this time, too, he wrote similar sketches for the school magazine, The Combermerian. His creative efforts were not confined to prose, however, for his assimilation of English literature impelled him to write poetry imitative of Milton and Keats.

It was Clarke's special talents in athletics, however, that now began to play a significant role in his life, offering a very different way out of a dead-end.⁶⁷ He discovered his potential as an athlete when, to his own astonishment, he won an unimportant race at school. After this, he competed regularly at Combermere's annual sports day, his specialties being running and the long jump. Clarke is by no means modest about his accomplishments in this sphere, and he asserts proudly that he set records that have not yet been broken.⁶⁸ His successes brought him publicity and as he

⁶⁷Indeed, it soon led to his meeting and interaction with new and sometimes important people as well as to a trip to Trinidad, where he was exposed to what he deemed a more liberal environment in terms of race and class. This visit was to make such a strong impression on him that he began to doubt whether he could live permanently in the more restrictive Barbadian setting.

⁶⁸Confirmation of Clarke's prowess in athletics comes from Keith Sandiford, who attended Combermere around the same time as Clarke. Sandiford, now a Professor of History at the University of Manitoba, writes:

became better known he gained easy access to prominent blacks, who advised him about a career:

By the time I was in the Fifth Form at Combermere, I had met the men of the previous generation who had come back as lawyers. I used to go to the House and listen to debates. I was well known through my athletics, so I was easily approached by these men and we discussed ambitions and careers. They would suggest, "Why not do this or do that?" By the time I went to Harrison College, I knew what I wanted to do. Go to Oxford, then go to the Inns of Court, and go back home.⁶⁹

It was not only at the House of Assembly that Clarke met lawyers.⁷⁰ In this connection, his stepfather's posting to police barracks in Bridgetown proved felicitous, for when his mother became ill it became his duty to take his stepfather's lunch to the barracks. His delight in language prompted him on these occasions to go to the court-house nearby, where he watched the lawyers in action. In this way, also, he met several of them and again talked about possible careers. He

I myself have known "Tom" Clarke ever since I entered Combermere School as a petrified "New Boy" in January 1947. He was then in the third form and had already established an enviable reputation as an athlete. He was our Victor Ludorum (champion athlete) that year and in the next two as well. He ran (and usually won) every distance race from 100 yards to half a mile. Naturally, from 1947 to 1949 he was one of Combermere's outstanding representatives at the Interschool Sports.

See Keith Sandiford to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 28 May 1990.

⁶⁹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 20 August 1987.

⁷⁰Among the members of the House of Assembly were men like Julien Marryshaw and Frederick Smith who had trained in Law in England.

had moved far beyond any thought of a military career, one he had contemplated when he joined the Cadet Corps on his admission to Combermere.⁷¹ Law loomed larger as an option. Now it was not only English culture that attracted him; now it was England itself that beckoned. But Clarke's first task was to complete his secondary education and, on passing the Cambridge Senior School Certificate examinations in 1950, he moved to the neighbouring Harrison College for two years of Sixth Form studies. That his new school would simply prolong influences of the type to which he had already been subjected is implicit in Keith Sandiford's description of secondary schooling of the time:

Our school system ... was still patterned on nineteenth-century Eton and Winchester and the emphasis was still then very much on the four Cs: Cricket, Christianity, Classics and the Cane. So we learnt an enormous amount of unnecessary Latin and Greek, and no natural sciences at all. We learnt a good deal of British and European history and no West Indian sociology at all. We knew some European geography, and could recite all the major European capitals, but we knew very little about Barbados and less about the Caribbean. ... No one instilled in us any pride in our own past or heritage. After all, we were simply British subjects taught to glory in Anglo-Saxon triumphs and to sing "God Save the Queen" as well as "Rule Britannia".⁷²

⁷¹The Cadet Corps was a youth arm of the Barbadian militia. Clarke notes that on becoming a member of the Combermere unit he had become fascinated with the uniform and the equipment and had for a while entertained a career in the militia.

⁷²Keith Sandiford, "Barbados Then, and Barbados Now," Banja #5 (1989/1990): 49.

Being a Modern Studies registrant, Clarke would normally have taken Latin, English Literature and English History as his main subjects, but since the school deemed his background in English History inadequate it decided he would substitute Roman History for it. His studies in English Literature ranged over selected writers from the medieval period to the twentieth century. As it turned out, Harrison College gave Clarke his last formal instruction in Literature and, though he read profusely in later years, Clarke would seldom stray far from the models of form and technique to which he had been introduced up to this point. Clarke found the climate at Harrison College intellectually invigorating. Students were expected to dedicate themselves to their studies and vast amounts of homework were set. On one weekend, for example, Clarke was required to read Macbeth, one hundred lines of Paradise Lost and several poems by Andrew Marvell.⁷³ The teachers were firm and maintained their distance from the students, but they were hardworking and on the whole fair, demanding high standards and expecting respect from all. In this atmosphere, Clarke's immersion in literature once more inspired the poet within him:

I wrote poetry, copies of English poetry. But I went through a phase of enchantment with T. S. Eliot. He was explained to students in the Sixth Form very well by an American, a Harvard graduate, who had come to Harrison College to teach. I went through a period of liking Eliot, and understanding

⁷³Austin Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 3, Folders 3-4, 1981: 17.

him, and feeling I could do even better than him.⁷⁴

With characteristic self-confidence, Clarke set about the task of outdoing Eliot, whom he thought at first to be an Englishman.⁷⁵ He was determined to be a poet, since he regarded poetry as "the highest form of art".⁷⁶

As at Combermere, prominent men influenced Clarke's interests and ambitions. Clarke again performed well in athletics, twice being the Victor Ludorum winner at the school's annual sports day, and the resultant acclaim once more earned him the attention of blacks of some standing in the community.⁷⁷ Among these were H. A. Vaughan, a

⁷⁴Austin Clarke, personal interview, 20 August 1987.

⁷⁵Clarke's "Glendora, Dear Glendora", for example, resembles Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Both works are dramatic monologues, and Clarke's poem unfolds the consciousness of a male narrator who, like Prufrock, recoils from or is afraid of sexual encounter, but it is less successful than Eliot's poem in capturing the pathos or the intense feeling of the speaker. Again, Clarke's "We Have Kept the City Clean" brings to mind Eliot's The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men", for its "Clean Men" attempt to revitalize a dead and degraded city. The rhythm, the everyday language, the recurrence of key words and phrases, and the use of incremental repetition are all reminiscent of Eliot but the subjects are not as elevated as his. See Austin Clarke, "Pensamientos," Unpublished ms. (McMaster), Box 22, Folder 15, 1954.

⁷⁶Austin Clarke, personal interview, 20 August 1987.

⁷⁷Clarke reports that he shortly lost his taste for athletics. In 1952, he was defeated in a crucial race in an inter-school contest and felt he had failed the school. Though he accompanied the school team to Trinidad and managed to salvage his reputation as an athlete, he was discouraged by the amateurish approach to sports and the backwardness of training facilities in Barbados. For such reasons, he stopped training after leaving Harrison College.

magistrate, and C. Hope, a senior civil servant, both of whom wrote poetry. The two men were models of commitment to English culture, and they encouraged Clarke in his literary interests by occasionally inviting him to poetry readings at their homes. But they were also realistic men who saw the importance of a prestigious career, and they urged him to pursue a vocation in law. So did lawyers and politicians whom he met as he continued his visits to the House of Assembly to listen to the debates. A vision of what he might be gradually assumed shape: he would be a professional imbued with the arts, a lawyer who wrote poetry, a cultured man.

But becoming cultured meant becoming more English, so Clarke turned to the British Council premises in Bridgetown for further refinement. Since he was a student he could not participate in the literary, social and other events that occurred there, but he had access to the reading room. Normally, he strolled with other boys through a park and congregated with them at a bus stand to watch the girls. Now, on Tuesday afternoons, he headed instead for the British Council building to pass the time reading British newspapers or magazines, listening to classical music or to broadcasts of the BBC, and having tea with the white woman in charge.

It may be argued, though, that Clarke did not surrender totally to the colonizer. Blacks could engage in forms of community life that lay beyond the reach of

institutions supporting the objectives of the colonial power.⁷⁸ As a schoolboy, Clarke moved freely between the primarily white culture of the educational system and that of his community, and he undoubtedly absorbed elements of each. As he grew older, also, the black political activism gaining in vigour in Barbados almost certainly began arousing within him a stronger awareness of the plight of the Negro and therefore counteracted somewhat the allegiance to the white man which the school tended to foster. In his schooling, too, he was reminded periodically of the social significance of his origins. He had achieved the standing of Sergeant-Major in the Cadet Corps at Combermere but when he arrived at Harrison College he was--for no reasonable cause he could determine--demoted to the rank of Acting Lance-Corporal. He believed, too, that the principal, a white Englishman named J. C. Hammond, had discriminated against him in bypassing him in favour of a junior student. Articling with a practising lawyer was one route into the legal profession and of the three openings available to the school in 1952 two were taken by Sixth Form students, who usually had first claim on the positions, but the headmaster then ignored Clarke to give the

⁷⁸For example, black culture may include unique norms regarding sexual behaviour and the social roles of males and females, flexibility in expectations relating to family structure, and West Indian survivals of African culture in the form of witchcraft, folk tales and musical traditions. Clarke was aware of the practice of elements of African witchcraft, and he would also have heard folk tales of African roots. He almost certainly enjoyed the calypso, which has African antecedents, as well as the steel band.

third to a Fifth Form white. Clarke was disappointed, also, when Hammond gave him a cryptic and lukewarm letter of recommendation at the end of his two years at Harrison, one that noted simply that "he was an outstanding athlete, and has a flair for writing".⁷⁹

On the whole, in the class-conscious environment of Harrison College a sensitive youth could not help but feel that a modest origin was a disadvantage, and so powerful was this perception in Clarke that it drove him to seek success and recognition as a means of compensating for his social "inadequacies". In a self-analysis remarkable for its honesty, Clarke later describes how he used athletics at Harrison for this purpose:

Athletics implied a fight: a competitiveness, a visible defeat and a visible victory. It was something that could be seen; and read about; and applauded--(and I needed applause); and since I could not lay claim to the applause of a plausible legitimacy of birth, nor to the plausibility of a knife-and-fork-eating middle class background, the plausibility of my existence had to be won by me alone.

I understand now (I was not, nor could I be expected to understand it, then) why I did compete in individual sports. I could not share my honours with anyone. I must be in front, alone, in victory, as I had been alone in the defeats caused by virtue of being, firstly, black; secondly, poor; thirdly, illegitimate.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Austin Clarke, "Harrison College and Me," New World Quarterly 3.1/2 (1966): 33.

⁸⁰Clarke, "Harrison College and Me" 34.

In the end, Harrison College left Clarke with "aggression and ambition", which he "could use as antidotes to [his] poverty".⁸¹

But, even in the Caribbean, societies were changing, and events and personalities on the local political scene again reminded Clarke of the nature of the black experience. By 1950, the Barbados Labour Party was leading the protest against the political repression and economic exploitation of blacks. In 1951, two of the men with whom Clarke struck up an acquaintance during his visits to the House of Assembly were Cameron Tudor--the first black president of the Oxford Union--and Errol Barrow, both of whom employed the rhetoric of socialism and asserted their commitment to improving the lot of the common people. And Clarke came under their spell. After writing the Cambridge Higher School Certificate examinations in December of 1952, he was employed to teach at the Coleridge and Parry Secondary School in rural Barbados, but he also found time for other interests. Under the influence of men like Tudor and Barrow, he became active in politics, attending meetings, discussing political matters with friends and writing letters to the newspapers on topics of political relevance.

⁸¹Clarke, "Harrison College and Me" 34. Keith Sandiford notes that the snobbery and social slights Clarke experienced at Harrison College because of his background left him with "deep psychological scars, reflected more obviously in his conversation than in his books". See Sandiford to Algoobaksh, 28 May 1990.

Clarke's concern about the black underdog owed its strength, also, to a close association with the Moe family, which had persuaded him to board and lodge with it when he began teaching. Clarke discovered a worthy model in George Moe, an instructor at a teacher training college, who constantly sought ways of assisting the poor. That his own commitment was not merely intellectual is evident from his efforts as a teacher. The students at Coleridge and Parry were mostly black, and a larger proportion than at the more prestigious schools came from underprivileged families, but Clarke joined his colleagues in creating new opportunities for them. The staff abandoned the formality of the better known schools and worked closely with the students for their academic success. It also organized, without official authorization, a Sixth Form program that enabled the leading students to prepare for an examination which would enable them to transfer to Harrison College.

It seems that Clarke himself was a dedicated and imaginative teacher both within and outside the classroom. His responsibilities lay mainly with the "regular" classes, where he taught the Fifth Form English Language and English Literature and the others both these subjects as well as Latin and Scripture. Sometimes he tried to make English Literature come alive by having the students translate the English text into Barbadian dialect, the first indication of his willingness to accord dialect some respectability, though at

this point his efforts are most likely a sign of pedagogical creativity rather than of any radical view of language. He accepted tasks outside the classroom as well. On some afternoons, he coached boys in athletics, and the school developed a better reputation in that field. There were other sports as well--for example, cricket and soccer--and Clarke took charge of these. His years at Coleridge and Parry were by all appearances fully satisfying ones, but they exhibit the fragmentation within the better educated colonial, who has dedicated himself to assisting other blacks but does so by immersing them in the oppressor's culture and thus acquiescing in their loss of identity.

Clarke's activities were by no means confined to serving others. He loved conversation and companionship. His social life was a rich one, as he indulged in drinking sessions with colleagues or friends, in swimming parties at the seaside, and in parties at the homes of female friends. However, he also had serious interests. He could not afford to go immediately to a university overseas, so in 1954 he adopted a practice common among ambitious young men in his circumstances: he enrolled for correspondence courses in Economics and Political Science from the Wolsey-Hall Institute in England. As his studies became more difficult, he obtained tutoring from Cameron Tudor in Political Science and from Errol Barrow in Economics. At the same time, he wrote poetry, and he continued his visits to Hope and Vaughan for poetry

readings. Indeed, the desire to see some tangible evidence of his writing led him to bring twenty-six of his poems together in a collection he entitled "Pensamientos", though this "anthology" was never published.⁸²

The "Pensamientos" collection exhibits traces of two major dimensions of Clarke's psyche at twenty. This duality is reflected in the tension between his poems imitative of English models and those mirroring a concern with things native. As a group, the works display Clarke's successful absorption of the white culture while simultaneously betraying an incipient sense of the significance of blackness and the early signs of a need to redefine himself and his culture in a West Indian context. "Pensamientos" offers evidence, first, of the affinity Clarke felt with an English cultural heritage, for, like much early West Indian writing, his work is largely an imitation of English models. Most striking is the influence of the Romantics, seen mainly in Clarke's choice of theme and imagery. The themes of love and death, for example, recur, as do images drawn from nature.

But "Pensamientos" also reveals Clarke's dawning consciousness of the black experience and the first traces of an interest in a redefinition of self and culture, for the black West Indian is judged worthy of the poet's attention. "Speightstown 1954" is one of Clarke's earliest commentaries on the rampant poverty, the still-born lives of the natives

⁸²Austin Clarke, "Pensamientos."

and the shortcomings of the Anglican Church, "the rich man's Church". "The Voice of the Night", too, has a social dimension, for in alluding to the "frightened girl of the night,/Uncomfortably crawling from the frolics of the night" Clarke appears to suggest that the young woman is degraded by her occupation, most likely the only one she could find. In this poem, also, references to "many sorrowing voices of poor angry men" and "many angry men/Frustrated at the entrance of their lives" evoke a picture of bitter, frustrated males who look on helplessly at what their women must do to survive. Again, "Fisherman Looking out to Sea" is a simple paen to the tenacity with which the poor contend with difficult odds. Clarke depicts the sea as both the giver and taker of life and the fisherman as accepting both the intertwining of his life with the sea--"The sea that draws you magnet-like/On the dark, dead nights"--and consequently a fate over which he has no control. The powerlessness of the black poor is a theme to which Clarke would return in his prose fiction.

Clarke never lost sight of his other ambitions. In early 1954, he applied for admission to Oxford University and some months later was accepted, but he lacked the funds to go to England. He credits Barrow with being the first to encourage him to read for a degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics at the London School of Economics and then proceed to Gray's Inn for the study of law, the route the lawyer-politician had himself followed. In the latter part of 1954,

Clarke discovered that after a minimal period of service it was possible for a teacher to obtain study leave. He immediately applied for admission to the London School of Economics and was successful. However, the chairman of his school board refused to release him, apparently because he opposed the use of taxpayer's money to support someone's studies under a "Communist" like Harold Laski.

In the meantime, Canada had attracted his attention. Clarke had learned from friends that it was possible to work while studying and therefore be able to supplement the meagre sum he would receive as a teacher on leave. In late 1954, having decided to explore all possibilities, he applied to McGill University for admission to its Honours program in English and was accepted but with the understanding that he would complete four years of study, the same as was required of Canadian students. The educational authorities in Barbados shortly approved his request for study leave with salary. He was quite prepared to go to McGill when, during a drinking session, one of his friends, Ronald Hughes, who had studied at the University of Toronto, ridiculed his decision to leave a colonial society to study English at a provincial university in a French-speaking city and recommended instead that Clarke go to Toronto where he might even receive a bursary. Clarke applied to the University of Toronto, which granted him one year's credit for his Higher School Certificate, so he now had a choice of two Canadian institutions at which to further his

studies. Clarke was not averse to doing hard physical work to raise money. In the summer vacation of 1955, he travelled to Caracas, where he was employed by Ralph Ghent's International Packing Company to lift boxes and crates. Toward the end of August, the company agreed to ship his clothes to Canada free of charge. He returned to Barbados to prepare for his departure for Canada.⁸³ The day before Clarke left his homeland, Hurricane Hazel struck and he spent that night in a small church. After a brief delay he began his journey to Canada, with five Barbadian and ten American dollars in his pocket and several bottles of rum in his baggage. When his Trans-Canada Airlines flight landed at Dorval, he had even less cash because he had bought a drink on the plane. He felt uncertain and disoriented. He thought the immigration officers unduly suspicious and their faces terrifying. Through an error by the clerk writing up his ticket in Barbados, he had been routed to Toronto through Montreal, and by the time the immigration officers had completed their interrogation he had developed a dislike of Dorval. On the spur of the moment, he decided to fly on to Toronto. There had been little in his background and early life to indicate that he was destined to become the first black West Indian Canadian writer of fiction.

⁸³Austin Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree" 179.

Chapter 2

Canadian Beginnings

"I had come ... from nothing," Clarke once wrote. "But I had come as an immigrant seeking everything. Canada was the perfect choice."¹ Clarke's optimism was only part of the more complex response typical of all people of colour who venture into a predominantly white society. The "immigrant experience" has been much examined in the light of the trauma and stresses felt by those who suddenly and unexpectedly find themselves less than welcome; much of this experience is relevant here. The colonial, for example, who arrives in the "mother country" confident that since he has acquired its language and values he will feel "more or less at home there",² soon learns that the reality is less agreeable. Forced to contend with the notion that he is "alien, inferior

¹Austin Clarke, "Autobiography," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 13, Folder 4, 1968, 58.

²R. Parthasarathy, "Whoring after English Gods," Writers in East-West Encounter, ed. Guy Amirthanayagam (London: Macmillan, 1982) 66.

and exposed",³ he grows daily more conscious of his racial distinctiveness. He becomes rapidly disenchanted with his new home, and his disillusionment is accompanied by anger and suspicion. He looks everywhere "for signs that this is racism and that is racism".⁴ While his arrival in the "mother country" erases trust and complacency, however, it can at the same time also develop wider sympathies within him. It is not unusual, for instance, for the West Indian who has discovered his blackness to feel some kinship with others of his race wherever they appear oppressed.⁵ He is gripped by a sense of brotherhood more immediate and urgent than any such awareness he has experienced in his homeland. But there is often yet another response. Distance from his native land may bring the immigrant a special form of enlightenment, for "being outside, it was now possible for him to look at the 'world inside', the world where he was born, the world where he had hardly any status, ... a world where life had no meaning".⁶ He can now examine and comprehend this world he has left behind.

As Clarke strove for a foothold in Canada, he showed

³Dilip Hiro, "Another Kind of Minority," Colour, Culture and Consciousness: Immigrant Intellectuals in Britain, ed. Bhiku Parekh (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974) 18.

⁴Sadhu Binning, interview, Voices of Change, ed. Jurgen Hesse (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1990) 27.

⁵Samuel Bonhomme, Enoch Powell and the West Indian Immigrants (London: Afro-American and West Indian Publishers 1971) 35.

⁶Bonhomme 33.

elements of all three responses, becoming acutely conscious of racist attitudes, acquiring a new sense of common interest with other blacks, and reevaluating his own upbringing and early assumptions. Yet his reactions and experiences cannot fully be attributed to characteristic elements of the immigrant experience, for the particular course he charted was determined as well by his talent and his personality. One advantage he held over most immigrants was his "flair for writing",⁷ and he would not long be silent about his thoughts. The process was slow, however; he had first to nurture and develop his craftsmanship and to experiment with differing genres and subject matter as he sought a direction for his career. While doing this, he had to survive and, as he wrestled with anger and poverty, he perhaps inadvertently acquired those experiences he would later be able to exploit in his writing. In his apprenticeship, he encountered all the common elements of the immigrant experience; he also discovered the interests and subjects that came to define almost all his writing and to that extent made possible the later triumphs of his career.

Clarke found his arrival in Toronto a somewhat unsettling experience. The airport bus deposited him in front of the Royal York Hotel and, expecting to enter University College, he took a taxi-cab to St. George Street. After examining the college surroundings, the driver announced that

⁷Austin Clarke, "Harrison College and Me"33.

he could not locate the driveway and offered to take Clarke to another suitable place.⁸ Late at night, therefore, Clarke was all alone in a musty room in the Silver Dollar, an inexpensive hotel of questionable reputation. Within days, he moved to the university campus. The dean, A. S. P. Woodhouse, was apparently appalled that a student should be living in such an unsavoury location and arranged accommodation for him at the college, shortly awarding him a bursary as well. But Clarke did not approve of University College. He thought the conversation too loud and the clothing too ostentatious, and he was repelled by "standards that were too vulgarly immigrant and middle-class".⁹ Perhaps what he designated a tasteless display reminded him too much of the intolerable poverty from which he had come. Perhaps the English tastes he had acquired in Barbados made a more subdued ambience preferable to what he felt existed at his college. In any event, it was only two weeks into the semester when he transferred to Trinity College, where he thought the atmosphere "more relaxed as a place for a gentleman to read".¹⁰

Clarke's plans were clear enough. He would complete

⁸In fact, there was no driveway. This account is based on information provided by Clarke. Unless otherwise documented, all biographical information incorporated into this and the following chapters comes from my personal interviews of Clarke in the periods August 21-29, 1987, and July 1-3, 1988.

⁹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987.

¹⁰Austin Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 3, Folders 3-4, 1981, 304.

a degree programme at the University of Toronto, proceed to London for studies in law and then return to Barbados to establish a legal practice, devoting time as well to politics and writing. He anticipated no social obstacles in Canada. After all, he had attended a prestigious secondary school in Barbados and had immersed himself in English culture. Even though he enjoyed the calypso and Latin American music, he still listened to classical music.¹¹ By his own admission, furthermore, he played the role of a "black Englishman" on the campus, wearing dark suits with waistcoats and smoking a pipe. As he argued later, the black West Indian can be "a very successful immigrant" for he "has never had any serious problems of adjustment".¹²

In terms of acceptance by whites, Trinity College did not disappoint Clarke. As sociable as ever, he formed close and sometimes enduring friendships with several Canadians. Duncan McWhirter, for example, regularly chatted with him for hours, while Neil McLean and Roy McMurtry were among his most reliable and supportive friends.¹³ Nevertheless, his friendships at Trinity College could not

¹¹One of the first purchases he had made in Canada was a record-player.

¹²Austin Clarke, "The West Indian Immigrant in Canada," Unpublished ms. (McMaster), Box 20, Folder 14, 1962, 2.

¹³Clarke still remembers McWhirter's kindness at the time of his first Thanksgiving in Canada, when his friend brought him Thanksgiving foodstuffs after a trip home. McMurtry, who later entered public life, has remained one of Clarke's staunchest friends.

long shield him from encounters with Canadians at large and what he saw "shattered" the relative "security" he had known in Barbados,¹⁴ making him more alert to "the importance of race" in Canada.¹⁵ He noted, for example, the refusal of whites to sit next to him on a crowded bus in Toronto and he began to think that "white people do not believe anything about black people, except that which is bad, that which is based on their perceptions of inferiority".¹⁶ It is arguable that his first year or two in Toronto witnessed the birth of the ambivalence he later acknowledged when he wrote of his "love" and his "hatred" for "this country and for white people".¹⁷ Another development, however, was greater consciousness of his blackness and a more disturbing view of the status of the black man in a white society. This prompted, in turn, a sympathy for American blacks. "It was a vicious time," he would later claim, "when you walked the streets with head bowed in shame for the humiliation of the black in America".¹⁸ The response of the American blacks to their plight became one of his abiding interests.

It was not only his relationship with Canada

¹⁴Clarke, "Autobiography" 4.

¹⁵Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree" 255.

¹⁶Clarke, "Autobiography" 13.

¹⁷Clarke, "Autobiography" 12.

¹⁸Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree" 309.

that occasioned Clarke difficulty, since he faltered in his studies during his first year at the university. He had chosen concentrations in economics and political science but his enthusiasm for his studies soon waned. Apparently, the creativity and independence of his years after Harrison College had left him unable to adapt to the routines of university work:

I found my classes very frustrating and dull and I did not go to many. I did not understand why I should go back to a high school environment. Your opinions were not sought. You had to remember what you were told.¹⁹

Besides skipping a growing number of classes, he turned up late for many. Clarke has attempted to excuse his neglect of his work by suggesting that some privileges of university life--living without anyone to supervise him, obtaining all his meals in a dining hall and "having the whole day to waste either in studies or in talk"²⁰--further reduced his seriousness about his studies and enticed him off his planned path.

For stimulation and pleasure, Clarke took up activities outside the classroom. As a former athlete, he was attracted to sports--to soccer in the fall and eventually, in summer, to cricket with the Grace Church Cricket Club. There was also reading, though he paid less attention than he should

¹⁹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987.

²⁰Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree" 246.

to material recommended by his instructors. Instead, he read other books, along with a wide range of magazines.²¹ Some of the viewpoints these presented no doubt informed him of radical interpretations of world events and therefore contributed to his intellectual awakening. One of his major diversions, however, was spending hours in the company of other West Indian students.²² He met them for long evenings of coffee or for all-day sherry parties. On Fridays, he joined them at the regular social events arranged at the university for West Indian students and their guests. Together, they talked repeatedly about political change in the West Indies, and the conversations would almost certainly have enhanced Clarke's knowledge of the ravages of colonialism. They dwelled, too, on the problems faced by blacks in Canada, with racism a recurrent theme. Clarke's association with his Caribbean friends taught him much about Canada and undoubtedly helped to shape his attitude toward the country.

Clarke and his black friends also discovered the domestic servants from the Caribbean.²³ When they first learned of the House of Domestics, a social centre founded for

²¹The magazines included The Spectator, The Economist, London Illustrated News, Punch, Foreign Affairs and Dissent.

²²Among his friends at the University of Toronto were Victor Callender from Grenada, Doug Grant from Trinidad, and Karl Hall, John Gooding and Leroy Taylor from Jamaica.

²³The first batch had entered Canada in 1955 under the "domestic scheme", which required them to work as maids for a Canadian family for two years before they could obtain immigrant status.

the servants, they stayed away from it, apparently because they feared that close contact with the servants would somehow diminish their own status. In time, they overcame their reservations and made visits to the House a normal part of their lives. Thursdays were the best days. It was the day off for the domestics, and the students often gathered at the House to enjoy West Indian food and music along with the company of the women. Sometimes affairs developed between students and domestics. Clarke observed those around him, making mental notes for the future, but in his conversations with the servants he also probed into the women's lives and experiences in the white community. He would later admit his penchant for absorbing material for his writing from phenomena around him:

In some cases I regard myself as a sponge. Now that has a very insidious connotation, but I regard myself as a sponge in the sense that I soak in all that I see happening around me, to be reordered, organized, and then put back on to the readers.²⁴

At this stage of his life he was trying to understand Canada but was also "soaking in" material for his writing.

One of Clarke's major interests outside the classroom was poetry. As his enthusiasm for his courses waned and a training in law seemed less feasible, he thought more seriously of a career in writing, and it was poetry that

²⁴Austin Clarke in Terrence Craig, "Interview with Austin Clarke," World Literature Written in English 26 (1986): 119.

appealed to him. As early as the winter of 1956, he isolated himself in his room for long periods to read poetry, enthralled most of all by Eliot. In the fall of that year he stumbled upon a notice inviting entries for a campus poetry contest. Immediately, he submitted five poems from his "Pensamientos" collection to Charles Chadwick, who was managing the competition. One of them, "Fishermen Looking out to Sea", won the first prize of five dollars. Clarke was delighted by his success, but even more encouraging was the decision by The Review, a literary magazine edited by Chadwick, to publish all five poems in its winter issue of 1957.²⁵ Clarke wrote other poems and offered them to Chadwick, but though the latter provided critiques, advice and encouragement he did not think Clarke's new work merited publication. Clarke could not yet be confident enough about his talent to take the plunge into fulltime writing.

In the meantime, what Clarke noticed about him strengthened his suspicion that Canada was fundamentally racist. His dealings with the Canadian army, for example, convinced him that discrimination was a reality. In 1957, concerned about his future, he applied to the army for a place

²⁵The Review was published by Trinity College. The five poems that Clarke had submitted in the competition were "Fishermen Looking Out to Sea", "Do Not Come", "Three Years", "The Trees" and "From My Lover's Home". They appeared in The Review LXIX (1957): 23-25.

in its training programme for officers.²⁶ Unsuccessful in his quest, he blamed his rejection on racism, since he felt that a white Barbadian who had been accepted was no better qualified than he. He became more ill-disposed, too, to the university itself, for he believed that in its student employment service whites fared much better than blacks,²⁷ getting the less menial and more lucrative jobs while blacks ended up as janitors or railway porters. Angry and frustrated, he decided to challenge the university:

I was told there were no jobs available except those on the trains, and I refused to work on the trains. But I felt persistence would pay off. I went every morning and afternoon and faced the employment officer. He had jobs, but he said all the jobs I wanted had been filled. There was favouritism, and it was now three or four weeks into the summer. But the officer finally said he had a job for an assistant surveyor.²⁸

Clarke was certain the officer expected him to refuse the referral. He claims, however, that he has always been confident of his ability to accomplish whatever he set out to do. In defiance of the employment officer, he accepted the referral slip, went to Scarborough for an interview and

²⁶This was not the first time Clarke had shown an interest in a military career. On joining the cadet unit at Combermere he had briefly entertained the idea of serving with the Barbadian militia.

²⁷The Student Employment Service assisted students in finding part-time or full-time positions. It provided them with slips introducing them to prospective employers.

²⁸Austin Clarke, personal interview, 23 August 1987.

obtained the job. He reports that he then visited the engineering library at the university and browsed through some books on surveying. When he commenced work the following week, however, he could not set up the instruments properly. His foreman, a German immigrant, proved understanding and taught him the appropriate skills. Within two weeks, it seems, Clarke was in charge of his own surveying crew. In his view, he had proven the employment officer wrong in the assessment of his abilities.

That summer of 1957 was a fateful one for Clarke, as a number of factors caused him to make one of the most crucial decisions of his life. He was dissatisfied with his courses and with the university and his work had deteriorated so markedly that he had failed a history course. Writing fulltime was not a feasible option since he had achieved only modest success as a poet. Yet he was running out of time to shape a career for himself. He suddenly realized he had only one more year of study leave and the possibility of failure in his degree programme worried him. It was during this period of anxiety that he was introduced to Betty Reynolds,²⁹ a nursing supervisor, and throughout the summer he met her almost every day. He decided then that he would not return to university in the fall. On 14 September 1957 he married Betty, settling with her in an apartment on Hazleton Lane in

²⁹Elizabeth Reynolds had been born in Canada of Jamaican parents. A Jamaican friend of Clarke's had arranged a party so that Clarke might meet her.

Toronto. An English training in law had receded beyond the horizon and he had thrown in his lot with Canada.

After his marriage, Clarke acquired immigrant status in Canada and embarked on a search for employment. This was, for him, a period of despair and anger. He applied for positions and endured seemingly prolonged waits for replies, but he was offered little that he thought commensurate with his education or his abilities. He often accepted jobs that came his way, tried them out and then wandered on to other positions. He was in turn an employee in a paint factory, a cleaner in a school on College Street, a janitor at a Baptist Church House and a stage hand with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. After he was dismissed by the CBC, he proceeded through another series of occupations--as an actor, a watchman with Columbia Records, a typist with Office Overload and a labourer with the postal service--before he drifted at the end of 1959 into his first posting as a newspaper reporter.³⁰ He moved frequently because, as he would later explain, he "just couldn't take the regimentation" many jobs entailed.³¹

In his anger, Clarke blamed white racism for his failure to find less menial employment. His early association with the CBC was a case in point. Though he had started as a stage hand, he had gone to the CBC hoping to become a

³⁰Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree" 336-338.

³¹Quoted in Ralph Thomas, "I Couldn't Take the Regimentation," Toronto Daily Star 21 November 1964: 13.

producer. After almost a year with the CBC he had made little headway toward this goal and, when the corporation advertised a vacant position for a script editor, he instantly presented himself as a candidate. Inevitably, his application was unsuccessful. As the reply from the CBC politely explained, he was not as well qualified as other applicants.³² Yet Clarke believed that the CBC had rejected him simply because it did not employ blacks for its more senior posts.³³ And when the CBC dismissed him in 1959 for persistent lateness, he thought that since he was usually only a few minutes late it had treated him much too harshly, and he was certain it had done so primarily because of his race.

This period of occupational uncertainty was not without value for Clarke. He was learning first hand of the immigrant experience and he was coming to know Canadian society--as he had known Barbadian society--from the very bottom. He would again be a "sponge", gathering substance for his later work. Beyond that, he formed new friendships, connections that nourished his artistic interests. As a stage hand, for example, he met actors, among them Barry Morse and Percy Rodriguez, and through them he expanded his network of acquaintances. And he persisted with his poetry even when Robert Weaver, the editor of Tamarack Review, rejected some of

³²J. W. Barnes to Austin Clarke, 17 February 1959.

³³Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987. Clarke's actual words are: "That [sort of opportunity] did not happen to blacks."

his poems because they were "lacking in certain colour of language and metaphor that would give them a distinctive flavour".³⁴ Perhaps his most significant literary achievement, however, was the completion in 1958 of a novel entitled "In A Storm of Passion".³⁵

Clarke's first novel is set in Barbados and depicts the bleak and futile existence of the poor in a small community in which life "plays silly tricks, repeating its patterns and the suffering".³⁶ At the core of the novel is a situation in which Jo-Jo, an indigent fisherman, strives against the odds to provide for his family while Inez, his wife, secretly sleeps with Goady, Jo-Jo's fishing partner, to ensure that the family's needs are met. The completion of this manuscript marked a crucial stage in Clarke's career. It was a tentative step toward the precarious world of writing for a living that would engage Clarke for decades and determine the ebb and flow of his fortunes. In taking it, Clarke demonstrated that he possessed the tenacity essential in the writing of a novel. More than that, the work showed him probing for the first time the West Indian experience and the crippling effects of colonialism on the colonized.

"In A Storm of Passion" is also significant as a

³⁴Robert Weaver to Austin Clarke, 27 April 1958.

³⁵Austin Clarke, "In A Storm of Passion," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 15, Folder 3, 1958. Clarke had initially given this novel the title, "In A Fit of Passion".

³⁶Clarke, "In A Storm of Passion," 224.

seminal work, since it touches on many themes that are central in Clarke's published writing. It engenders in the reader a sense of the poverty, the entrapment, the dispossession and the alienation that are all part of the lives of the black underdog, while it examines cursorily the debasement of the black female, the shortcomings of the educational system and the role of social conditions in determining black attitudes and behaviour. The novel implies, for example, that the conditions of their existence have made many of the villagers mean and immoral, forcing some to adopt double standards to survive, but that these people have the capacity for goodness. In the midst of a destructive storm, even seemingly weak men--such as Brooks, the teacher, and Goady, the licentious fisherman--risk their lives in trying to rescue a young girl. Certain symbols, too, make their first appearance in Clarke's writing. The storm, for instance, represents the inner turmoil of the characters, as it again does in Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965). Again, in both "In A Storm of Passion" and "The Smell",³⁷ incest serves as a metaphor showing how oppression forces its victims to turn inward and so thoroughly ghettoizes them that they become psychologically disoriented and consequently commit acts which under normal circumstances they would label unnatural or immoral. With regard to the nature of the protagonist, Clarke also anticipates some of his published work. In Survivors of the

³⁷"The Smell" is a short story.

Crossing (1964) Boysie and Rufus are prominent figures, but it is a group of villagers which expresses the cumulative experience of the community. This approach has its genesis in "In A Storm of Passion", where the group is a collective protagonist, one with members who are the butt of society and are "caught up in this horrible vortex called life".³⁸ Clarke would discard the collective protagonist for some years after The Survivors of the Crossing (1964) but resurrect it in his last two published anthologies, in which individual characters enshrine specific aspects of a total protagonist.³⁹

In this first attempt at fiction, and in particular fiction with a West Indian setting, Clarke was forced to face the problem of dialect, one that has had some urgency for Caribbean writers. Up to this point, he had never seriously entertained the thought of incorporating dialect into his writing:

I had read The Lonely Londoners at that time, and I used to read it at parties, but I was not a writer at that time. I had not been published. But the effect was so powerful and I said, well, here's a man who is writing about Trinidadians in the way that Trinidadians speak. And I thought this was almost impossible to do because I was brought up in a very formal and classical tradition. And it never occurred to me that one could use the flavour of Barbadian or Trinidadian or Jamaican language to write about these people, without, say, writing a

³⁸Clarke, "In A Storm of Passion," 223.

³⁹The two collections of short stories were When Women Rule (1985) and Nine Men Who Laughed (1986).

calypso or a comedy. ... I didn't think that that writing could be taken seriously.⁴⁰

Changes in the manuscript of "In A Storm of Passion" reveal that Clarke was unsure of his handling of dialect; he often replaced it with more conventional speech. "Things getting tight", for example, was modified to "Things are getting hard". Such a resorting to standard English detracts from the novel because it militates against the development of a sense of realism in the work. Nevertheless, the initial experimentation with dialect would bear fruit as Clarke would eventually transform dialect into one of the strengths of his writing. In his hands, it would become a form of native language that is not too pure to be incomprehensible to the "foreign" reader but is yet able to capture the idioms, the rhythm and the exuberance of West Indian speech while simultaneously expressing the West Indian personality. In the writing of "In A Storm of Passion", also, Clarke's flirtation with dialect signals his further intellectual growth. If his "classical" education was indeed an instrument of cultural domination, then his willingness to grant dialect some respectability alongside standard English gives the impression that he recognized--and was beginning to resist--one form of colonial bondage.

But Clarke had much to learn as a novelist. He

⁴⁰Austin Clarke in Craig, "Interview with Austin Clarke," 123-124. The Lonely Londoners (1956) was written by the Trinidadian author, Samuel Selvon.

captures the hollow and nightmarish world of the villagers well and he recreates local colour with some success, but his novel is feeble in characterization, unenterprising in plot and diffuse in the treatment of theme. His characterization, for example, is hardly memorable; his novel is inhabited by creatures who are so shadowy, so lacking in individuality, that it is difficult to differentiate one from another. In his handling of dialogue, too, Clarke is less than successful. His dialogue is often unwieldy, with the reader in constant danger of losing track of the speaker's identity. He was yet to gain the control and deftness he would display in his published works. He was still reaching after the dramatic mode he later mastered so well that sections of some novels were dramatised on radio or, with minor revisions, published as short stories.

"In A Storm of Passion" is proof that, distanced from Barbados by time and place, Clarke had begun to comprehend the realities of colonialism, in particular its effects on a colonized people. No longer did he accept the romantic view of Empire that had been foisted upon him by the institutions of a colonial society. In his native island, he had witnessed and borne the hardship of the black underprivileged, and Canada had reminded him of the penalty of being black. In his first novel, therefore, he had chosen to bring his insights about colonialism to bear on an analysis of the experiences of blacks in Barbados.

Clarke was not happy with "In A Storm of Passion" and kept the manuscript to himself. By 1959, then, he had achieved no great success in either poetry or prose and had made little progress in any other career. When he was dismissed as a stagehand by the CBC he saw no alternative but to resume his search for employment.⁴¹ At first, luck appears to have favoured him, since only a day after his firing he was hired as an actor in the same studio. His roles were relatively insignificant ones--for example, as a butler or a chauffeur in the "Unforeseen" drama series--but he enjoyed them so much that he briefly considered acting as a possible career, even beginning privately to prepare himself for the role of Shakespeare's Othello. He also applied to be admitted to a drama school in New York but, unable to face the prospect of a long period of unemployment, he did not follow up this initiative. Furthermore, the dearth of roles at the CBC for black actors soon compelled him to seek some other form of livelihood.

After holding jobs temporarily as a nightwatchman for Columbia Records and a typist with Office Overload, Clarke obtained employment with the Post Office for the Christmas season of 1959. Only three days before Christmas, however, he clashed with a supervisor whom he thought guilty of racial stereotyping:

⁴¹By now his family had grown through the addition of a daughter, Janice, who was born on 10 October 1958.

One afternoon I went to work. I still remember this man smoking a cigarette. Two days growth of beard. Big belly, wrapped in a T-shirt that billowed. And jeans. He was the foreman. He ordered me to move a load with a dolly. I had never been able to operate a dolly. He asked me a second and a third time. So I said: "You must think that because I'm big and black I am necessarily strong, but this blasted thing is too heavy. If you don't like it, I'll leave right now."⁴²

Quick to resent the remotest suggestion of racism or of any likelihood that he had been imposed upon because of his blackness, Clarke instantly left his job. His wife, apparently, was not pleased with his decision and, later that day, Clarke was again on a quest for work. He "walked off the street" into the Thomson newspaper offices on University Avenue, informing the receptionist with his usual daring and self-assurance that he wanted an interview for a job as a journalist. His rather direct strategy succeeded, for he was immediately granted an interview. He was asked one question, relating to how he would cover a fire, and in his reply he stressed the need for objectivity. He has often seemed able to communicate to others his firm belief in himself, and on this occasion he was offered a posting with the Daily Press of Timmins in Northern Ontario. He was required, however, to present himself immediately at the offices of the newspaper in Timmins, where he would receive an advance of two weeks' wages.

⁴²Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987.

Clarke accepted the posting and two days before the Christmas of 1959 he arrived in Timmins, where he took a room in a "hotel".⁴³ Naturally, he found the town a contrast to Toronto. It was small, and the main occupations were mining, hunting and trapping. The surroundings were bleak and for the majority of the inhabitants life was a harsh struggle. Yet Clarke's contact with northern Ontario brought him satisfactions of its own. The residents of Timmins were generally friendly and Clarke was easily able to initiate a social and recreational life.⁴⁴ Described as basically a "caring" person,⁴⁵ he apparently welcomed the opportunity for the full and intimate family life his sojourn in northern Ontario brought him.⁴⁶ Also important to him, though, was the chance he now had to escape menial work and to perform

⁴³Clarke would live in this small hotel until the spring of 1960. Betty Clarke was unwilling to leave her job in Toronto and did not join him in Timmins until April 1960, at which time he rented an apartment for the family. Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

⁴⁴By the time Betty arrived in April, "everyone" in town knew Austin, who had already formed a network of friends and had joined a theatre group. Clarke and his wife quickly extended their social circles and were invited out frequently. Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990

⁴⁵Harold Marshall to Ishmael Baksh, 3 June 1990. Harold Marshall is a Barbadian and an old friend of Clarke's.

⁴⁶Betty Clarke observes that she and her husband now had a much more extensive family life than they had enjoyed in Toronto. This would continue when they moved to Kirkland Lake. In the summer of 1960, for instance, the family, having acquired a second-hand Jaguar motor-car to which Clarke had taken a liking, drove out to the parks for evening picnics or went to North Bay to visit a friend who was teaching there. Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

tasks that interested him. As a reporter, he covered a variety of local events, including meetings and activities of the Kinsmen and Lions clubs and the deliberations of the town council; he took the photographs that accompanied his stories, and he sold advertising space in the newspaper. In the spring of 1960, he was transferred to the staff of the Northern Daily News in Kirkland Lake, another small town in northern Ontario. Here Clarke's work gave him even greater pleasure, since it often permitted him an enlarged scope for creativity:

I began writing feature stories on my own and these were published by the newspaper. I did feature stories on every conceivable subject, anything you can think of. I eventually ran out of ideas and did one on cataloguing in the library. ... If the senior reporter was absent I would have had to fill all the news on the news pages, plus taking photographs and advertisements.⁴⁷

After the barrenness of much of his employment in Toronto, Clarke seems to have plunged with gusto into the writing, photographic, social and other activities his job entailed, to such an extent indeed that he had little time or energy for poetry or prose fiction.

For several reasons, however, Clarke turned his gaze more and more to Toronto. Even in Kirkland Lake he eventually became bored by the repetitious nature of his work and the

⁴⁷Austin Clarke, personal interview, 23 August 1987.

limited range of the subject matter available for coverage.⁴⁸ Furthermore, though Betty worked at both the local hospital and a doctor's medical clinic, the family remained poor, for Clarke's salary had increased little beyond the thirty-five dollars a week he had received in Timmins. In addition, the birth of a second daughter, Loretta, on 11 December 1960 made extra financial resources desirable. Besides, Clarke greatly missed Toronto, and he would look "longingly" at the newspapers from the city.⁴⁹ In the end, it was decided that Betty would remain at work in Kirkland Lake while he went to Toronto in search of employment. In January 1961, therefore, Clarke took up residence in a rooming-house in Toronto. Shortly afterwards, he obtained a job on the staff of the Toronto Globe and Mail, for which he had earlier covered a murder in the Timmins area. Betty and his children joined him in April 1961, when the family moved into an apartment on Vermont Avenue.

Clarke had spent over a year in northern Ontario, a phase of his career that was by no means without significance. Apart from the pleasures of creativity, independence, and family and social life, the period had showered him with opportunities to practise and improve his writing. He had been able as well to sharpen such journalistic skills as interviewing and editing which would before long serve him in

⁴⁸Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

⁴⁹Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

good stead. In addition, he had learned even more to discipline himself:

I gained discipline. I was given an assignment and it had to be written well for a certain time. So that afterwards I could go into my study every day, even if I sat down at my desk without doing anything. Lack of discipline was the only thing that could have stopped me.⁵⁰

Despite his absorption in his duties, Clarke had spared himself some time for reading, though he concentrated on economics and history because he had not yet abandoned all hope of completing a degree programme. And his busy life had not prevented him from responding deeply to the landscape and other features of northern Ontario. In the few poems he had written in this period, he communicates his feelings about the place and its people. Thus, in "Kirkland, Lake and Bramble", he mourns the insularity and intellectual suffocation he sees as typical of northern centres; the harshness of the environment and the preoccupation with physical survival stultify intellect and imagination, reducing men to virtually an animal state.⁵¹ Indeed, in "Kirkland, Lake and Driftwood"

⁵⁰Austin Clarke, personal interview, 23 August 1987. Betty Clarke supports this conclusion. She notes that her husband was usually required to gather the information and take the necessary photographs for his story before returning to the office to complete his report by a particular time. She, too, feels that this experience helped Clarke to develop discipline in his work. Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

⁵¹Austin Clarke, "Kirkland, Lake and Bramble," "Black, Color of Snow," ed. I. V. Ivkov, Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 22, Folder 12, 1961. The pages of this manuscript are not

he protests that the north, in the form of "this proud unprosperous town", is no place for human beings and should be "donated to the birds/For even birds migrate before their joy/And summer drop down with the sun".⁵²

Once more in Toronto, Clarke altered his interests dramatically. Certain needs must surely have survived within him, driving him toward a career as a writer. After all, he still suffered the stigma of being poor and black, and in Canada--as in Barbados--he required success and recognition to prove to himself and all others that he had indisputable worth. His self-confidence could sustain him only up to a point, and the danger always existed that he "could be thrown on society without supports".⁵³ He was a sensitive man, too,⁵⁴ and any sign of what he interpreted as racism cut him to the quick since it was to him just one more reminder of the inferior and uncertain place Canadian society had assigned him. Such experiences enraged him, and his anger clamoured for release.⁵⁵ More than ever, he was certain that his

numbered.

⁵²Austin Clarke, "Kirkland, Lake and Driftwood," "Black, Color of Snow," ed. I. V. Ivkov.

⁵³Austin Clarke, personal interview, 23 August 1987.

⁵⁴His old friends, Keith Sandiford and Harold Marshall, both describe Clarke as being an essentially "sensitive" person. See Keith Sandiford to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 28 May 1990 and Harold Marshall to Ishmael Baksh, 3 June 1990.

⁵⁵In 1964, Clarke admitted in an interview that he was "still angry". See Ralph Thomas, "I Couldn't Take the Regimentation," 13.

potential as a writer would be the instrument of his salvation,⁵⁶ and it seemed to him only a matter of time before he gained acclaim for his work.⁵⁷

For his part, Clarke at first believed he had acquired enough substance for sustained writing:

The experiences in the north, the journeys through many Canadian landscapes of attitudes and my own West Indian point of view was sufficient fodder and raw material for a journey into fiction.⁵⁸

Yet he remained undecided, "grappling and having great doubts and intellectualizings and wanting to be a writer".⁵⁹ One issue was a model for writing about blacks in Canada:

All this time there was no black presence and no black aesthetic, no one to whom I could go to explain the essence of my anger. ... I had to search for it in America, which is equally irrelevant.⁶⁰

⁵⁶His close friend, Keith Sandiford, who confirms that around this time Clarke had many white friends, reports that by 1961 his former Combermere schoolmate had well nigh accepted the notion of full-time writing. See Keith Sandiford to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 28 May 1990.

⁵⁷Clarke states: "I have always felt they [Canada] couldn't keep me back." Personal interview, 22 August 1987.

⁵⁸Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree," 361.

⁵⁹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987.

⁶⁰Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987. Around this time, Clarke began reading the works of black American writers, among them Richard Wright, LeRoi Jones, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Larry Neal. Also, he became more interested in West Indian writers such as George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Jan Carew, V. S. Naipaul and John Hearne. As a young man in Barbados, he had occasionally heard readings of the works of some of these on the BBC programme

Black models in America were "irrelevant" to his needs because in his view Wright and Baldwin, for instance, "were writing from a different psyche".⁶¹ West Indian blacks in Canada had not experienced the bloody history and did not face the violent racism that have been the lot of American blacks. They therefore did not react to white bigotry with the same intensity as their American counterparts and were indeed usually "annoyed to find themselves confused with other blacks".⁶²

Clarke was uncertain, too, about the genre he should favour, since poetry, the short story, the novel and even drama all strongly attracted him.⁶³ In the course of 1961 and 1962 he attempted them all. As a result of his few years in Canada, he had concluded that "the black man has to be versatile, he has to be ready to do almost anything just to exist",⁶⁴ and he seemed willing to experiment until he discovered at least one genre that would enable him to make his mark as a writer.

"Caribbean Voices" and had seen a few of their books but, like most "educated" colonials in the Caribbean, he had taken little notice of West Indian writing. The acquisition of this taste had to wait until he came to Canada. Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 1 December 1990.

⁶¹Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree," 361.

⁶²Clarke, "The West Indian Immigrant in Canada," 1.

⁶³Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree," 263-264.

⁶⁴Austin Clarke, quoted in Thomas, "I Couldn't Take the Regimentation," 13.

First of all, Clarke wrote more poetry, some of which was accepted in 1961 by Evidence, an arts magazine published in Toronto.⁶⁵ He was both delighted and encouraged by this success, and he attempted an "experiment in verse" in the shape, for example, of "The Night Visitor", a drama in verse.⁶⁶ "The Night Visitor", a "dialogue of female voices" in three acts, is set in Toronto, the "action" occurring during a week in December of 1956. "The Night Visitor" is indicative of Clarke's intellectual concerns and of his growth as a writer. In examining the experiences of two females, Cassandra and Amanda, he explores for the first time the notion that "to be woman hatched/ Is to be disadvantaged", showing in his play that women are often obliged to degrade themselves by selling their bodies in order to survive. The issue of the position of women in society, whether in the Caribbean or in Canada, is one that would surface repeatedly in his work. In his writing, too, he continues to experiment with dialogue, later to become a prominent feature of his novels and short stories. More than that, "The Night Visitor" shows Clarke seeking to transcend race and place, as the women are portrayed in universal terms in the sense that they face a dilemma common to women everywhere.

⁶⁵Austin Clarke, "Kirkland, North by North," Evidence 2 (1961). The pages of this issue of the magazine are not numbered. This work will be discussed below as part of the anthology entitled "Black, Color of Snow".

⁶⁶Austin Clarke, "The Night Visitor," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 22, Folder 17, 1961.

[sic], his sympathy extends to the miners who have little choice but to live in desolation and futility; he indicts those who create such situations as they exploit others, the "city lord" who goes home to "count his coins" while the miner returns "to family and grief". In "Kirkland, Lake and Driftwood", too, Clarke mourns for the miners who have "wasted their past" and who take to drink not merely "to keep the northern body warm" but also to etherize the mind. On the whole, he views the mining communities of northern Ontario as microcosms of colonial societies of the type he was learning to abhor, and he does not suspend his sense of justice simply because the victims are white.

As 1961 wore on, however, poetry became a less vital element in Clarke's creative work, and it was the short story and the novel that increasingly held his attention. One of the high points in his life was the publication that year of his story, entitled "Short Story", in Evidence.⁶⁹ Here at last was an intimation that he could write prose fiction of publishable quality and that if he plugged away at this type of writing he might achieve success. The story itself was a seminal work in a number of ways. In it, Clarke is shown once more drawing heavily on his own intimate knowledge of the lives of West Indian students in Toronto. "Short Story" is a tale of four black students who barely manage to pay for food

⁶⁹Austin Clarke, "Short Story," Evidence Number 3 (1961): 31-34.

and lodgings. One of them, May Day, solves his financial problems by marrying a Jewish girl, whose religion he adopts. But the story also reveals Clarke's incipient understanding of the more subtle dimensions of the immigrant experience. He examines for the first time--though not in great depth--the opportunism and sacrifice of integrity into which black newcomers are sometimes forced if they are to survive in an environment they see as hostile. Receiving money from the Jewish girl and sponging off his West Indian friends, May Day attends law school and enjoys a higher standard of living than his West Indian counterparts. As he advises the other blacks, "All-you boys got to learn to live in white man country."⁷⁰ Clarke also broaches a subject new to his work; this is the question of sexual politics, in this case the relationship between the black male and the white female. In such works as the Toronto trilogy and When Women Rule (1985), he would delve more deeply into issue of sexual politics and the psychological damage wrought by interracial sexual relationship in all its permutations. "Short Story" is noteworthy, too, for Clarke's persistence in experimenting with dialect. The results are still unconvincing, though, since his dialect reads like contrived fragments of poor grammar and lacks the rhythm and colour of West Indian speech.

While taking up the challenge of writing on his own time, which usually meant working until well past midnight,

⁷⁰Clarke, "Short Story" 33.

Clarke made some headway as a reporter for the Toronto Globe and Mail. He was not enamoured of what he thought the rather detached atmosphere at the newspaper offices, where by his report assignments tended to be dispensed through cards, succinct notes or other impersonal means. Nor did he approve of the limited scope for independence and responsibility of the sort he had enjoyed with the newspapers in Timmins and Kirkland Lake. Yet the job allowed him to make a living at a time when he had not yet found his feet as a writer, and it gave him still more opportunities to improve his writing as well as his journalistic skills. Though he temporarily tolerated the routine nature of his work, however, he was not content to remain an undistinguished reporter:

At the Globe and Mail I saw a vacancy. Nobody at the Globe was proficient in African affairs. I set out to fill this vacancy, to be an expert on African affairs. In those days there was a special page filled with learned commentary. I did some research on Sierre Leone at the offices of the British High Commissioner for Canada. And, without being asked, I wrote two articles. These made the prestigious page.⁷¹

Clarke's resourcefulness had resulted in a notable achievement by a reporter of so junior a rank, but it seemingly proved his undoing as well. In his articles, he had argued that the African nation of Sierre Leone did not truly deserve independence but had nevertheless been granted it by the British, who saw the country as a buffer against the pro-

⁷¹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987.

Communist state of Guinea. According to Clarke, the British High Commissioner questioned the validity of his point, leading the editor, Robert Turnbull, to demand of the reporter an accounting of his sources. Though Clarke produced documents, including pamphlets from Britain he had found at the High Commissioner's offices, his appointment--which was probationary--was terminated. It was Clarke's view that his dismissal was unfair: he had been labelled a troublemaker because of the High Commissioner's intrusion and his editor had failed to support him only because he was black.

After six months with the Toronto Globe and Mail, he now had two weeks' notice of his dismissal. He had defined the actions of the newspaper as improper and, in his opinion, he had no moral obligation to perform duties for his employer during this final period of employment. In this situation, he might have wallowed in self-pity or engaged in futile histrionics. Instead, he pragmatically decided he would profit from the situation by spending the time in writing. Perhaps, unconsciously, he wished to prove to himself and to those who had fired him that he could succeed despite obstacles. Perhaps, too, the discipline inculcated in him by his mother, by his colonial schooling and by his work as a reporter also played a vital role at this point of his life. At any rate, in the two weeks at his disposal he crafted five short stories--"Half-Moons on Pinky's Fingernails", "The Woman with the BBC Voice", "Waiting for the Postman to Knock", "They

Heard A Ringing of Bells" and "Leaving This Island Place".⁷² The stories, which are among Clarke's best, represented some of his early thoughts about the West Indian's adjustment to a new environment. By indirectly giving an impetus to his writing career, it seems, his firing by the Toronto Globe and Mail had actually been of value to him.

But it was the novel that loomed as Clarke's most formidable challenge. His dismissal by the Toronto Globe and Mail served only to confirm what he already believed, that the "invisible but solid hand of prejudice"⁷³ would always deny him respectable employment in Canada. His dealings with Maclean-Hunter, the publishing firm to which he shortly applied for a position, did little to change this conviction. He perceived the company as unwilling to hire him purely because he was black. He continued to press the firm for a job, however, and he was finally offered--in his opinion, rather grudgingly--the post of assistant editor of a magazine entitled Canadian Nuclear Technology.⁷⁴ For Clarke, the

⁷²"Waiting for the Postman to Knock", "They Heard A Ringing of Bells" and "Leaving This Island Place" are included in Clarke's anthology, When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (1971) and will be discussed along with the other stories in that collection. "Half-Moons in Pinky's Fingernails" appeared in Voices 2: A Collection of Short Stories (1965), while "The Woman with the BBC Voice" was published in the Fall issue of Tamarack Review in 1963.

⁷³Austin Clarke, "Not in the Same Pod of Peas," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 27, Folder 6, 1963, 1.

⁷⁴Clarke's duties with this magazine were not especially onerous, consisting mainly of checking the quality and readability of the articles submitted for publication.

specification that the position had been given to him for only two months revealed much about the firm's attitude toward the employment of blacks. As Keith Sandiford notes, Clarke "was always complaining about some real (or imaginary) grievance" and "was everywhere known as an 'angry' young man".⁷⁵ His contacts with Canada had thus continued to reinforce his oftentimes bleak perceptions of the society and to impress upon him the urgency of a career in writing, one that would enable him to find a way out of his misfortunes, to explore the black experience and to satisfy his consuming need both to be creative and to secure acclaim. Since he had in his opinion mastered the short story, he now preferred this genre, but someone had told him--he does not remember who it was--that anthologies were not financially viable unless they were the work of published novelists. From 1961, therefore, he tackled the novel with a vengeance, still trying out varied subject matter and seeking to perfect his craft.

Clarke worked feverishly on the manuscript of a new novel, "The Love and the Circumstance" (1961).⁷⁶ Whereas in "Short Story" he had introduced only incidentally the relationship between the black male and the white female, in this unpublished novel he probes some distance into its ramifications. This initial exploration later yields more

⁷⁵Sandiford to Algoo-Baksh, 28 May 1990.

⁷⁶Austin Clarke, "The Love and the Circumstance," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 16, Folder 3, 1961.

mature fruit in the trilogy, where the interracial relationship is examined with more thoroughness and finesse. "The Love and the Circumstance" shows that, though Clarke remains concerned with the physical deprivation and psychological suffering of the black immigrant, he is consciously or unconsciously contemplating ways in which the racial problem may be alleviated and, in this context, is considering the feasibility of interracial bonds as solutions. The failure of the relationship between the black West Indian art student, Stanley, and two white females, Trudy and Susan, as well as that between the student and Trudy's family underscores Clarke's belief at this point that white-black relationships--and mixed marriages in particular--face a perilous journey. Those involved must overcome too many obstacles, chief among them being bigotry among both blacks and whites. This is a conclusion, one no doubt stemming in part from his own perception of Canada as racist, that he shortly reiterates:

There are problems introduced into an inter-racial marriage right from the beginning which actually have nothing to do with the marriage itself. These problems are imposed by society. I think a black man could get greater fulfilment married to a black woman.⁷⁷

But Clarke is honest in his depiction of interracial relationships, which reveals his budding interest in striking

⁷⁷Clarke, quoted in Thomas, "I Couldn't Take the Regimentation," 13.

a balanced perspective on the issue of race. In his effort to "put back on to the readers" the reality he has observed, he glances--albeit only in passing--at the opposition and the resultant conflicts that occur among blacks themselves when one of their group hazards a crossing of the colour bar. This is a subject he pursues more vigorously in the Toronto trilogy.

"The Love and the Circumstance" is on some ways in improvement over Clarke's first novel, "In A Storm of Passion". There is less diffuseness of theme, and the author ventures further into the minds of his characters. Yet the novel bears the marks of haste in conception and execution. The plot does not work with precision, since its elements require both firmer integration into a whole and more secure linkage to the main theme. Characterization, too, is sometimes faulty, a major flaw being sudden and puzzling changes in outlook and behaviour in such characters as Stanley and Susan. In addition, the lengthy didactic sections on mixed marriages are too obtrusive and disrupt the flow of the narrative. Clarke showed good judgement in regarding the novel as only a trial run.

In 1962, Clarke also stormed through "Marbles in A Ling",⁷⁸ which was intended to be developed into a novel but was left as a series of sketches of West Indian blacks in

⁷⁸Austin Clarke, "Marbles in A Ling," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 16, Folder 4, 1962. A "ling" is a circle on the ground within which marbles are placed in certain games.

Canada. Through the lives and experiences of a range of characters, including domestics, male immigrants and students, he reveals the reasons why the blacks have deserted their homeland--the boredom, the unemployment, the family conflicts and the ubiquitous discrimination based on race and colour. More importantly, he touches on several facets of immigrant life that he would address more fully in his published works. He indicates, for example, that Canada is no Eden for black immigrants, that blacks are discriminated against in housing and employment, that they are usually given the most menial jobs even when they are qualified for better ones, and that the domestics may prosper financially but often end up lonely and frustrated, sometimes being manipulated and cheated by black men whom they have supported. Clarke clearly capitalizes on his own experiences as well as those of the domestics and of other blacks he has known to expose what he sees as a striking irony in the lives of the blacks: the West Indians have migrated to escape from a dismal situation but the move is futile, since they are again exposed to hostile and psychologically destructive surroundings. In the "Introduction", the narrator expresses this truth:

But, just the same, the marbles run away from this ling in the Islands, and come abroad to Britain, or America, or up in Canada, and find themselves in another ling. But it is the said ling. Onliest thing ling in a different place.⁷⁹

⁷⁹Clarke, "Marbles in A Ling" x.

From this sombre outlook, then, the immigrants have done little more than exchange one trap for another. But Clarke's attention is not totally limited to the blacks. In the ninth sketch, he exhibits again a willingness to transcend race in his exposure of what he regards as social injustice. The Italians, the sketch implies, are even more handicapped than the blacks because they cannot speak English. They are regarded with disdain by the Anglo-Saxon whites, one of whom says contemptuously to an Italian woman: "If you come to this rich country, lady, you have to learn how to become a Canadian."⁸⁰

While "Marbles in A Ling" was not published, it cannot be ignored, for it provides additional evidence that Clarke's ascent as a writer was not achieved without the trial and error that is typically a prerequisite for success. In this work, the experimentation is evident not only in content but also in technique. For the first time, Clarke employs a letter to communicate a perspective different from the central character's, a device that will become a hallmark of many of his later works.⁸¹ "Marbles in A Ling" also sees him employing dialect with more daring and consistency than before. In his earlier works, he had depended largely on standard English, which he had punctuated with his forced

⁸⁰Austin Clarke, "Marbles in A Ling," n.p.

⁸¹Clarke uses this device, for example, in "Waiting for the Postman to Knock", The Survivors of the Crossing (1964), The Meeting Point (1967) and Storm of Fortune (1973).

version of dialect. In "Marbles in A Ling", however, he relies almost exclusively on dialect and often relates the story through the consciousness of a dialect-speaking narrator, a technique which is later used successfully in such short stories as "The Motor Car", "If Only: Only If..." and "Waiting for the Postman to Knock". At this point, he was most likely being influenced by other West Indian writers, especially George Lamming, Vidia Naipaul and Sam Selvon. Through his In the Castle of My Skin, Lamming would have been a source of inspiration for the use of Barbadian dialect. Naipaul's work would most likely have suggested to Clarke that local speech might be captured in a form not so exotic as to befuddle the white reader.⁸² It is from Selvon, however, that Clarke would have learned how to exploit the use of dialect through the dialect-speaking narrator.⁸³

In the same year, Clarke hurried through another novel, "No Bed of Roses", which would subsequently serve as the foundation for The Meeting Point (1967). "No Bed of Roses" examines the predicament faced by West Indian women who immigrate to Canada on the domestic scheme and pursues the theme that, unless the domestics take measures to improve themselves and their lot they and their children will be trapped in Canada as second-class citizens. The novel enabled

⁸²See, for example, V. S. Naipaul's The Mystic Masseur, Miquel Street or A House for Mr. Biswas.

⁸³See, for example, Samuel Selvon's A Brighter Sun, Ways of Sunlight, Turn Again Tiger or Those Who Eat the Cascadura.

Clarke to experiment with characterization, events, structure, plot and dialogue and in this way furnished him with the basis for a publishable work. The experimentation without doubt sensitized him to flaws--thin plot, implausible events, weak characterization, unwieldy dialogue and numerous instances of overt didacticism--that he would try to avoid in The Meeting Point (1967) as well as in Storm of Fortune (1973) and The Bigger Light (1975), the two other novels of the trilogy that evolved from the published work. In "No Bed of Roses", Clarke essays for the first time the tripartite structure that becomes the mainstay of several of his published novels.⁸⁴ The exercise must also have revealed to him that the more effective and realistic way to articulate the condition of the black domestic was through the consciousness of Bernice, the veteran, rather than of Estelle, the newcomer, for in The Meeting Point (1967) he transforms Bernice into the central character. "No Bed of Roses" is significant, too, because it represents Clarke's earliest effort to penetrate deeply into the psyche of the black female. The novel denotes a vital point in Clarke's development as a black West Indian- Canadian writer; it marks a mounting interest in the depiction of the black female that would become one of his major contributions in both West Indian and Canadian literature.

⁸⁴Clarke uses the tripartite structure in The Survivors of the Crossing (1964), The Meeting Point (1967), Storm of Fortune (1973), The Bigger Light (1975) and Proud Empires (1986).

Such female characters as Bernice, Dots and Estelle in his trilogy have their genesis in "No Bed of Roses".

On completion of "No Bed of Roses", Clarke headed into yet another novel, "The Trumpet at My Lips" (1962), which traces the fortunes of a young Barbadian, Jim Garfield, as he leaves his homeland and begins his studies in Canada. Following his rejection by a white female named Theresa and disenchantment with university life, Garfield forsakes his studies and wanders from one job to another. He marries his Polish landlady, but failed relationships with her and once more with Theresa eventually leave him on his own, destined to be a "lost roamer in a lost world".⁸⁵ Clarke seems uncertain about the primary thrust of "The Trumpet at My Lips": he flirts with a variety of themes, among them the psychological ramifications of liaisons between blacks and whites, the opportunism into which blacks are sometimes driven in order to survive, and black isolation in a white society. There is a striking autobiographical element in the novel, with Jim Garfield mirroring Clarke in terms of background, aspirations, and employment experiences in Canada. The work is blemished by qualities Clarke's previous novels have exhibited; the characterization is weak, the movement of the story slow and the didactic element obtrusive.

Again in 1962, Clarke hastened through another

⁸⁵Clarke, "The Trumpet at My Lips" 380.

novel, "The Trumpet at His Lips",⁸⁶ incorporating into it some of the content of "The Trumpet at My Lips". Now, however, the autobiographical component is greatly reduced and Barbadian dialect virtually eliminated, presumably because the work was aimed primarily at a Canadian readership. This novel follows the association of Garfield with an older woman, now a German Jew named Karina. Garfield secretly pretends Karina is a younger female, Amanda, with whom he is obsessed, but the novel ends more violently than its forerunner, for when Karina finally rejects Garfield he strangles her. "The Trumpet at His Lips" was apparently the first novel that Clarke had courage enough to submit to a publisher.⁸⁷ McClelland and Stewart, the firm that read the manuscript, rejected it, in the process identifying certain weaknesses that were not unusual in Clarke's longer fiction at this stage of his career--its failure to maintain readers' interest in the characters, its overall lack of action, its "frequent loss of impetus and dramatic effect", its "whole stretches of dialogue" and the general "failure of communication between author and reader".⁸⁸

Though unpublished, these last two novels were not

⁸⁶Austin Clarke, "The Trumpet at His Lips," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 20, Folders 1-2, 1962.

⁸⁷Clarke claims that these early unpublished works were intended only as "dry runs". Austin Clarke, personal interview, 1 July 1988.

⁸⁸Diane Mew to Austin Clarke, 18 October 1962.

without import in Clarke's literary career. "The Trumpet at My Lips" is Clarke's initial attempt to blend autobiography with fiction, and the work is therefore a precursor of such novels as Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965) and The Prime Minister (1977). It also foreshadows one of his most outstanding achievements, Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack (1980), in which he abandons the overt didacticism and rambling dialogue of "The Trumpet at My Lips" for satire, humour and controlled dialogue, gaining as well a happy blending of dialect and standard English. The two unpublished novels also provide further evidence of the influence of black American literature on Clarke. In "The Trumpet at His Lips", for example, Garfield's strangling of Karina is reminiscent of Bigger Thomas' suffocation of Mary Dalton in Wright's Native Son. The similarity is heightened when Clarke makes Garfield a fugitive from the law just as Bigger is after he kills Mary. Violence resurfaces in such short stories as "Hammie and the Black Dean", "A Slow Death" and "Griff", and "The Trumpet at His Lips" marks Clarke's unfolding interest in the notion that racism destroys both the victim and the victimiser.

The completion of four long works well before the end of 1962 demonstrated Clarke's amazing stamina and determination and his incredible faith in himself, one that allowed him to immerse himself in a new effort as soon as one was completed. It also launched a pattern that would follow him through the years; his reluctance--either because of the

drudgery of the task or a need felt to distance himself from the material for a while--to turn immediately to the revision of unsuccessful work. Furthermore, it testified to Clarke's pragmatism; often, instead of becoming dejected by failure at his craft, he tried to salvage at least segments of his works. Thus, "Leaving This Island Place", the short story included in When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (1971, 1973), is almost identical to the account of Garfield's departure from Barbados in "The Trumpet at My Lips", while the short stories "Life Take a Somersault", "Things Take a Somersault wid May" and "I Hanging On, Praise God" are based on sketches in "Marbles in A Ling".⁸⁹

In 1962, Clarke clearly did not limit himself to writing novels or sketches of immigrants or to reshaping excerpts from his novels into stories, for a number of new short stories also flowed from his pen. Among these were "Suppose, Suppose We Really Had A Real Mother", "Women in Exile" and "The Ending Up Is the Starting Out", which again address the psychological and social deprivations of black immigrants in Canada. "The Ending Up Is the Starting Out" became Clarke's second published short story.⁹⁰ He turned to his student days at the University of Toronto for its setting, and the story is told in West Indian dialect from the point of

⁸⁹"I Hanging On, Praise God" was published in Bim Number 36 (1963): 275-281.

⁹⁰Austin Clarke, "The Ending Up Is the Starting Out," Bim Number 35 (1962): 181-183.

view of a black student. Clarke again deals with the phenomenon of racism. He implies that the euphoria the blacks feel at graduation will be fleeting and that what appears to be the commencement of a new life is only the start of another cycle of frustration, since the blacks must shortly "stand up in front of a man and ask for a job".⁹¹ As a group, the stories vary in quality. Sometimes, they lack movement and their main themes are not readily discernible, but they are at times handicapped as well by a somewhat laboured and unconvincing dialect.

Clarke received invaluable assistance regarding the handling of dialect when he submitted "The Ending Up Is the Starting Out" to Bim, a Barbadian literary magazine. Frank Collymore, the editor of the magazine and one of Clarke's former teachers at Combermere, offered the following advice:

The dialogue or the story should not be too West-Indianized, especially as to spelling--this would cause the non-West Indian reader to find it too much like a foreign language. The best thing is to try to suggest most of it by speech rhythms. Of course, you must bring in the misspelt word here and there, but not too often. ... And of course the ignored auxiliary and the floating participle--these all make for the raciness of the speech.⁹²

This was instruction Clarke would subsequently heed, always acknowledging his debt to Collymore. Henceforth, he would pay more attention to rhythm and would try to suggest the

⁹¹Clarke, "The Ending Up Is the Starting Out," 142.

⁹²Frank Collymore to Austin Clarke, 28 May 1962.

"raciness of the speech" rather than to capture it literally. The dialect in his writing would consequently be less laboured and would acquire a more authentic ring.

Despite his voluminous writing, Clarke had gained only minimal recognition for his art and, as 1962 progressed, he still depended almost solely on his journalistic work for his financial survival. In late winter, following his stint of two months with Canadian Nuclear Technology, he had landed a job with a small firm as assistant editor of a periodical named Industrial Sales Promotion. Even here, however, problems were shortly to arise. Clarke apparently discovered that certain articles he had written on special assignment by his manager had been submitted to Canadian Nurse, which had issued payment in the form of cheques made out to "Austin Clarke". Accidentally spotting one of the cheques on a secretary's desk, he claimed the payment as his and, when the manager insisted that the money belonged to the firm, he decided to form his own "company", Austin Clarke Associates, through which he could offer his freelance writing and photographic services directly to customers. In his view, his employer had immorally exploited him and he was justified in using the firm's premises and telephone service for his private business.⁹³ When someone called the offices of

⁹³Austin Clarke Associates never got off the ground. Clarke undertook a study of the origins and fortunes of West Indian domestics in Canada and wrote a report for his "firm" but there is no evidence of any other significant activity. See Austin Clarke, "West Indian Domestics: Canada's Loneliest

Industrial Sales Promotion asking for the manager of Austin Clarke Associates, however, his operation was discovered and, on 22 November 1962, he was summarily fired.

This was a critical point in Clarke's life. The frequently long waits for responses to his applications for jobs had always made him "depressed", so he did not welcome the prospect of another search for employment. He had begun to think, indeed, that he was actually "unemployable", largely because he could not tolerate the restrictiveness of the types of employment that had normally come his way.⁹⁴ He knew, furthermore, that he "was now serious about writing".⁹⁵ With his wife offering to be the main breadwinner for a while so that he could follow his inclinations,⁹⁶ he decided in November 1962 that he would not depend upon others for a career and that he would take a year off to concentrate on his writing.

Other events in Clarke's life encouraged him in his enthusiasm for writing. In September 1962 he had moved to a house on Asquith Avenue, only a block away from the Pilot Tavern, where members of the artistic community--painters, sculptors, writers, and actors--regularly gathered in a large

Immigrants," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 29, Folder 3, 1962.

⁹⁴Clarke, quoted in Thomas, "I Couldn't Take the Regimentation" 13.

⁹⁵Austin Clarke, personal interview, 23 August 1987.

⁹⁶Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

room toward the rear of the premises to drink and chat. Occasionally accompanied by his wife, Clarke often went there on evenings and in this way came to be accepted within those artistic circles.⁹⁷ But the activities of the group were not confined to drinking and talking at the Pilot Tavern, for its members also frequented coffee shops and jazz clubs or retired to someone's room in a basement or an attic for wine and more conversation. It was, from Clarke's account, an invigorating phase of his life:

The actors, artists and painters read quite a lot. They read everything. This group introduced me to Christopher Fry, Dylan Thomas, the "Russian Easter Overture" and that sort of thing. I found that aspect of my education conducive to my experiment in verse. Also, there were some supportive people in Toronto. The Isaacs Gallery was owned by a young Jewish man who had the sense that something important was being attempted. He exhibited Coughtry and even Coughtry's brother, who was a photographer. On Sundays we would have mixed-media concerts where somebody would read from Dante--the original--and I would read from LeRoi Jones' The System of Dante's Hell, and somebody would play the piano. There were also intellectuals with record shops. You could go to a store and they would play

⁹⁷Clarke designates the period 1961-1963 as his "Beatnik era". It overlapped with the age of the "hippie" movement. The "hippies" themselves were becoming more evident in Toronto, the Yorkville area being one of their favourite haunts. The Pilot Tavern, which Clarke mentions very fondly, was located in this area. Among those whom Clarke names as his associates were Dennis Burton, Grahame Coughtry, Robert Markle, Gord Raynor, Jurgen Iskowitz, William Kilbourn, Leonard Cohen and Harold Town. Acceptance into the group was perhaps rendered easier because as a stage hand with the CBC Clarke had often seen--and most likely been seen by--Dennis Burton, a painter, and Graham Coughtry, a sculptor, who both worked in the design department of the CBC.

you Beethoven's Ninth free.⁹⁸

Parties, too, were numerous. A popular one was given by the Kilbourns, whom Clarke counted among the "supportive" people in Toronto.⁹⁹ They invited promising artists to an annual party at their home in Rosedale, and it was William Kilbourn who read from Dante in the "mixed-media" concerts at the Isaacs Gallery. In an atmosphere charged with artistic and intellectual stimulation, Clarke could not help but wish even more urgently to establish himself as a writer.¹⁰⁰ There is evidence that by September 1962, he had already begun work on a new novel. His penchant for modifying segments of his longer, and often still unfinished, works into short stories is reflected in his "A Letter from A Man to A Boy".¹⁰¹ This story, which is set in Barbados, is an account of the betrayal of Rufus, a black who tries to organize a strike on a plantation, and it is very similar to a section of the novel later published as The Survivors of the Crossing (1964). In

⁹⁸Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987.

⁹⁹William Kilbourn had written a book on McKenzie King, while his wife contributed to an arts column in the Toronto Daily Star.

¹⁰⁰Betty, Clarke's wife, notes that the house on Asquith Avenue was very spacious and that Clarke had a large room in the basement in which to do his writing. She confirms that he now took his writing even more seriously than before, spending more time at it. Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 November 1990.

¹⁰¹Austin Clarke, "A Letter from A Man to A Boy," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 26, Folder 5, 1962.

July, it was returned to Clarke by Hughes Massie Ltd. because there was "no market for a story of this length",¹⁰² and it was rejected shortly afterwards by the CBC because it was "too long for radio and too difficult to adapt for TV".¹⁰³ It appears that Clarke had decided to direct his attention to blacks in Barbados. His novels about West Indian immigrants in Canada had not been successful, in his view largely because he had found himself trying to comprehend a society which he "could not understand" and which did not want him "to understand it, a society that was impenetrable".¹⁰⁴ He had been forced, therefore, to utilise "the only store of events and experiences" that he might truly call his own¹⁰⁵ and, since the fate of blacks was still a matter of intense concern for him, he now set his sights firmly on completing a novel about the experience of blacks in his homeland.

¹⁰²John Green to Austin Clarke, 17 July 1962.

¹⁰³Robert McCormack to Austin Clarke, 14 September 1962.

¹⁰⁴Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987.

¹⁰⁵Austin Clarke, personal interview, 22 August 1987.

Chapter 3

The Survivors of the Crossing

Clarke had assumed an enormous burden. The satisfaction of his deeply ingrained drive for success and acclaim now depended more than ever on his ability to write. So, too, did the preservation of his sense of masculinity. It had "always been important to him to have an image of being the provider and head of the family",¹ and he could not long withstand the ignominy of a situation in which his wife was the main breadwinner.² This was a time, moreover, for testing his mettle, for determining once and for all just how good a writer he was.³ Triumph at his craft, therefore, was

¹Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

²In an interview in 1964, Clarke stated that he was proud he could at last support his family through his own earnings. See Ralph Thomas, "I Couldn't Take the Regimentation," Toronto Daily Star 21 November 1964: 13. This is not surprising, since Clarke was a product of colonial forces which had marginalized and emasculated the black male, preventing him from performing the conventional role of the male in the family. To be supported by a wife was, for the black male, perhaps too strongly reminiscent of a phase of history that still rankled. Because of this, there would be a strong need in Clarke, as a black West Indian male, to affirm and prove himself as the head of his family.

³Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987.

indispensable for both his material and his psychological well-being. Failure would have been unbearable. As it turned out, the year 1963 witnessed a shift in Clarke's fortunes in Canada, and events would shortly vindicate him in his decision to alter the course of his career.

The year began rather inauspiciously. Under pressure to publish, Clarke had placed his earlier novel, "No Bed of Roses", in the hands of a British agent, John Johnson. In early January, however, Johnson expressed skepticism about the chances of a British publication of the work.⁴ To make matters worse, Alfred Knopf of New York declined "The Survivors of the Crossing",⁵ this only days after Johnson had suggested that it was too long and diffuse and contained an "excess" of dialogue.⁶ However disappointed he might have been by such developments, Clarke did not forsake his writing. McClelland and Stewart, who had received a copy of "The Survivors of the Crossing", had not yet made a decision about publication, so Clarke could still hope for good news. As was his wont, therefore, he worked energetically, often writing until four in the morning in the isolation of his large study.

Clarke's principal interest in the winter of 1963 was the manuscript of another novel, "Amongst Thistles and

⁴John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 3 January 1963.

⁵Henry Robbins to Austin Clarke, 31 January 1963. Clarke had completed this novel by December 1962.

⁶John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 24 January 1963.

Thorns", through which he was racing in characteristic fashion,⁷ but he also discovered time to write four essays. His subject was racial discrimination in Canada. Though he had several white friends and still enjoyed the company of the artists and writers who frequented the Pilot Tavern, his capacity for bitterness toward the world of white Canada was easily aroused. He could, in fact, swing unpredictably between buoyancy, optimism and self-assurance, on the one hand, and "moodiness" and despair, on the other, and when his anger flared he could easily become "abrasive".⁸ It was undoubtedly in one of his gloomier moods, perhaps precipitated in part by uncertainty about the fate of his novels, that he penned his condemnations of racism in Canada. In "The Black West Indian Immigrant, as A Canadian Citizen",⁹ "Six Years of Jim Crow Existence in Toronto",¹⁰ and "Not in the Same Pod of Peas",¹¹ he elaborates on the theme that Caribbean blacks, despite a British cultural heritage that should make them

⁷John Johnson, his London agent, would later complain about the diffuseness and unwieldy nature of the manuscript, undoubtedly the results of Clarke's haste. See John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 4 March 1964.

⁸Harold Marshall to J. Baksh, 3 June 1990.

⁹Austin Clarke, "The Black West Indian Immigrant, as A Canadian Citizen," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 23, Folder 8, 1963.

¹⁰Austin Clarke, "Six Years of Jim Crow Existence in Toronto," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 28, Folder 5, 1963.

¹¹Austin Clarke, "Not in the Same Pod of Peas," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 27, Folder 6, 1963.

acceptable to Canadians, remain outsiders because of racial discrimination. In "A Black Man Talks about Race Prejudice in White Canada", which was accepted for publication by Maclean's,¹² he again charges Canada with racism, outlining the areas--such as immigration policy and employment practices--in which he believes discrimination against blacks to be rampant. He will not seek Canadian citizenship, he asserts, because in so doing he would close his only "escape route" from Canada.

If the four essays on "race prejudice" are proof of Clarke's limitless interest in the black experience in Canada, so also is his involvement in the Caribana festival of Toronto. A small affair in its early years, the festival was initiated by Clarke and a few other West Indians to exhibit their Caribbean culture in its various forms. In late winter, a play he had written as a contribution to Caribana '63 was performed in a theatre at the University of Toronto under the auspices of the university's West Indian Students Association.¹³ This work, entitled "Children of the Scheme", again captures the desolation that marked the lives of the West Indian domestics.¹⁴ Clarke's activities with the

¹²Austin Clarke, "A Black Man Talks about Race Prejudice in White Canada," Maclean's 76.8 (1963): 18, 55.

¹³Yvonne Bobb to Austin Clarke, 4 March 1963.

¹⁴This work was shortly expanded into "Children of Exile", a play about the futility of the lives of these immigrants who are exploited even by black students. See Austin Clarke, "Children in Exile," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 21, Folder

festival demonstrate not only his sustained concern with the fortunes of blacks in Canada but also his greater willingness to accord black culture some respectability.

It was not long before Clarke's fascination with the black movement in America attained a new intensity. "Bombarded by television and other media about things happening in America",¹⁵ he increasingly felt some community of interest with blacks in the United States, seeing their experience as a warning of what could happen in Canada:

This movement was relevant to blacks in Canada as a warning--a warning to ourselves and the rest of the society--that, if blacks are not vigilant, what happened in America could easily happen in Canada, because the situation here is similar to that in the US, except that people did not talk and call one those names.¹⁶

His mounting interest in the writings of American blacks--chiefly those of James Baldwin, Richard Wright and LeRoi Jones--also focussed his attention on the black protest in the United States. It was the black leadership that caught Clarke's eye, and, of the black intellectuals, Baldwin held the most immediate interest for him. He had been "fascinated by some of the things Baldwin had been writing about".¹⁷ Indeed, he had only recently read Baldwin's collection of

2, 1963.

¹⁵Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987.

¹⁶Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987.

¹⁷Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987.

essays, The Price of the Ticket,¹⁸ and had been enthralled by the force and beauty of the American's language. In the spring of 1963, he approached Harry Boyle of the CBC with a proposal for a radio programme on Baldwin in the "Project" series. He argued with his not unusual faith in himself that, since he was--like Baldwin--an artist and a black, he was well qualified for the task. It appears that Boyle was kind and supportive, and shortly afterwards Clarke arrived in New York to interview the American writer for the CBC. He chose to stay in Harlem, about which he had heard and read so much, and obtained a room at the Hotel Theresa, a "battered, run-down place" that had some claim to renown because Fidel Castro had once lodged there.¹⁹ Despite telephone calls and several visits to local restaurants, bars and coffee-houses, however, Clarke failed to unearth Baldwin. Harlem was vibrant, alive with political activity, music and dance, but as his search exhausted and frustrated him his enjoyment of the community declined. He was determined to take "something" back to Toronto, if only to prove to Boyle how good a reporter he was.²⁰ But, it seems, attempts he made to record a church service and a street-corner speech by a black radical both

¹⁸James Baldwin, The Price of the Ticket (New York: St. Martin's/Mareck, 1959).

¹⁹Austin Clarke, "Tranno!" Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 28, Folder 20, 1978, 10.

²⁰Clarke, "Tranno!" 10-11.

proved dismal failures.²¹ Clarke moved to an artist's studio in the Bronx, hoping in this way to escape from the nauseating conditions of the Hotel Theresa as well as to find radio material for the CBC. Finally, new friends he had made suggested that he interview Malcolm X.

Inquiries at a popular black restaurant and a Black Muslim mosque, followed by a series of telephone calls, shortly earned Clarke an agreement with Malcolm X for an interview of fifteen minutes, an arrangement that initiated yet another dimension of his colourful career. Clarke's first meeting with the American occurred at the CBC studio in New York, where the interview was to be recorded. His image of the black "radical" had been shaped by reports in the mass media, which had painted the American as a violent and dangerous man, and he was quite astonished by what he found instead. Impeccably dressed in a business suit, Malcolm X seemed a "trim, attractive, respectable, 'unbad' person" who talked calmly and persuasively about the Black Muslim philosophy.²²

²¹Clarke, "Tranno!" 12-13.

²²Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987. Clarke reports elsewhere that, according to Malcolm X, the Black Muslims have "no desire to accept the white man's belated offer of integration into a corrupt, outdated society", but believe that black people should love one another and seek their salvation through self-reliance. Malcolm X himself dreamed of a world in which "all people will be judged by character rather than colour". Like other Black Muslims, he deplored the use of violence as a strategy for reforming American society but accepted the right of blacks to employ it in defending themselves against white brutality.

Clarke was impressed by Malcolm X's articulation of his objectives and ideals, so he invited other prominent blacks to air their views about appropriate goals and strategies for black advancement.²³ It was his interview with Malcolm X, however, that generated the strongest reaction. He had scored a triumph in gaining access to a black leader widely regarded by whites as one of the most notorious in America. He, and apparently the CBC itself, was delighted with his achievement:

The CBC studio sent [the tape] up on the line. Everybody was talking about it. Here I was on my first try with the CBC at convincing them I could do it and I had done it the first time. It must have created a sensation at the CBC, because various programmes bought pieces of it, so that when I returned there were at least two thousand dollars waiting for me.²⁴

On his arrival in Toronto, he also learned that the CBC had already broadcast his interview with Malcolm X.

One of the immediate results of Clarke's success at the CBC was a desire to resume his journalistic work in New York. On his first trip, he had observed the general poverty,

See Austin Clarke, "Autobiography," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 13, Folder 4, 23.

²³Among these were Floyd McKissick, the manager of a black-initiated welfare programme, John Henrik Clarke, the editor of the black magazine Freedomways, Paule Marshall, the writer, and Queen Mother, the aging woman who advocated the creation of a separate "kingdom" for blacks within the United States.

²⁴Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987.

the rich political life of Harlem and the diversity of thinking among black leaders regarding the advancement of their people. It is conceivable, too, that, since the financial returns from his first assignment for the CBC had exceeded his expectations, he felt that radio journalism would enable him to fulfil somewhat more effectively his obligations as head of his family. In the absence of any signs that "The Survivors of the Crossing" would be published, furthermore, he had probably weakened in his resolve to devote an entire year only to testing himself as a writer. Ignoring the possibility that journalism would cut into his time for writing and thus affect the quality of his work, he submitted a proposal to the CBC for a radio documentary on Harlem. The CBC immediately offered him a contract to prepare two sixty-minute programmes on Harlem to be broadcast on 27 October 1963 and 3 November 1963. The agreement allowed him the sixteen weeks from 1 July to 18 October to complete the project, so he returned to Harlem in July to commence work.

Clarke interviewed blacks from all walks of life to gather the bulk of the material for his programmes. He also chatted informally with friends he had made on his first visit, he walked extensively, and he studied the environs from unobtrusive seats in local cafes. Once more in Toronto, he prepared his two broadcasts. The first, "Harlem: the Black Ghetto", was scheduled to open the "Project '64" series on 27 October 1963. Largely through excerpts from interviews, it

presented a graphic picture of the poverty, the misery, the squalor, and the futility of life for many in the black community. The second programme, "Harlem in Revolt", described--again mainly through interviews--the frustration and the resultant radicalism that pervaded Harlem, sketching the various movements and philosophies competing for support among the blacks.²⁵

Clarke's visits to New York in 1963 marked another stage in his life-long quest to locate and define himself, this time as a black West Indian Canadian to be distinguished from his new black American friends. He discovered, for example, that the anger of the Americans had risen to a pitch that far exceeded his own in Canada, perhaps--he conjectures--because as a West Indian he had "never had that intractable ball of racism to attack"²⁶ and because American racism was far more crushing than any he had faced.²⁷ He learned, too, that he could not support the many American blacks who endorsed violence in the pursuit of what they perceived as their rights, though he agreed with Malcolm X and the Black

²⁵See Austin Clarke, "Harlem: the Black Ghetto" and "Harlem in Revolt," Unpublished radio scripts (McMaster) Box 21, Folder 5, 1963.

²⁶Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987.

²⁷Clarke notes, in this vein, that he had enjoyed Baldwin's Go Tell It to the Mountain (1952) in part because it dealt with a black situation somewhat similar to that in Barbados, "except that there was not this unrelenting racism". Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987.

Muslims that violence was acceptable as a means of defence.²⁸ In his conception of the role of the artist, he asserts, he again diverged from the black movement in America:

I have never felt the cultural and racial responsibility experienced by black intellectuals or artists, as in the United States, to produce a literature or an art the only intention or purpose of which was the liberation of a people. ...Race cannot be the foundation of any serious literature except that it is used creatively and artistically.²⁹

Though Clarke truly sympathised with the American blacks, therefore, he did not become embroiled in their activism, and he never ceased distinguishing between American and West Indian blacks. In the short story "One Among Them", for example, he underscores some of the differences between them. Thus, Goldie, a Barbadian immigrant surrounded by Americans, "found himself almost imitating their mannerisms" and in the process almost becoming "an American like them", though he "refused to allow himself to talk like them" because "he

²⁸Thomas, "I Couldn't Take the Regimentation".

²⁹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 28 August 1987. Clarke is in agreement here with Vidia Naipaul, who writes:

The American Negro's subject is his blackness. This cannot be the basis of any serious literature, and it has happened again and again that once the American Negro has made his statement, his profitable protest, he has nothing to say.

See Vidia Naipaul, The Middle Passage (London: Andre Deutsch, 1962) 69.

wanted to remain West Indian."³⁰

Yet his journeys to New York were not without significance for the subsequent course of his life and career. Apart from providing him with an opening into radio journalism, they helped him establish a network of friends close to the core of the black protest.³¹ The black community would be a source of strength for him, for he "would draw emotional and psychic energy from Harlem".³² His connections would enable him to tap into the spirit of the black movement and thus remain alert to the problem of the black experience in a white society. But his contact with New York influenced him in other ways. By his own admission, the fact that he had acquired "aspects of a cultural nationalism has nothing to do with Barbados, but rather with [his] association with a liberation movement in America".³³ In his poetry, he had already shown the germ of a favourable disposition toward blackness; his interaction with American blacks now imparted vigour to a growing pride in black culture. In addition, he came to espouse some aspects of Black Muslim thought, believing that it was "a terrible waste

³⁰Austin Clarke, When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971) 140.

³¹Clarke numbers among his new friends Paule Marshall, Jimmy Yeargans, Larry Neal, and Max Roach.

³²Austin Clarke, personal interview, 28 August 1987.

³³Austin Clarke, "An American Dutchman," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 13, Folders 1-3, 1969.

of energy trying to become integrated" and that it was better for blacks to command the respect of whites through success in business and other independent pursuits.³⁴ In light of his earlier decision to depend mainly upon his own resources for survival, it is not unlikely that the strategy of self-reliance advocated by the Black Muslims was acceptable to him at least partly because it coincided with his own attitudes regarding a career. His weeks in New York produced yet another effect, however, and that was a minor softening of his perception of Canada. In comparison with the United States, his new home seemed to him more than before to be a land of some virtue, and he was finally moved to concede that "for the black man, Canada is perhaps the least uncomfortable place to live in the white English-speaking world".³⁵

Clarke's American experience did not affect him only in terms of career, values and attitudes. He was satisfied that in giving black spokesmen an audience outside the United States he was in his own way serving the black movement.³⁶

³⁴Thomas, "I Couldn't Take the Regimentation."

³⁵Thomas, "I Couldn't Take the Regimentation."

³⁶In addition to his perceived differences from American blacks, Clarke's personality also probably prevented him from participating directly in the American black protest movement. He had long enjoyed all opportunities to be creative--for example, as a teacher, as a reporter in northern Ontario and as a radio journalist--and had always resented having to conform to rigid expectations and frameworks imposed upon him by others. For instance, he had hated his elementary schooling, his early jobs in Canada and his work for the Toronto Globe and Mail because of what he saw as their regimentation. In the same vein, he later expresses relief on

But he was active in other ways as well:

I organised demonstrations against one firm because its president at the time had just returned from South Africa where he had made derogatory statements about the blacks. Then we would demonstrate against apartheid. ...I would make speeches. Sometimes, people would meet at my house and we would walk down the street. I also wrote things, suggesting that blacks be given jobs as policemen, in banks, and so on.³⁷

Clarke's visits to New York had also fuelled his fascination with the United States and this would impel him to return to it periodically, with some impact on his career and his writing.

Despite his pursuits in the United States, however, Clarke persevered with his fiction. His proclivity towards adapting segments of his longer works into short stories served him in good stead. Originally a unit in "Marbles in A Ling", the short story "I Hanging On, Praise God!" was published in 1963 in Bim, the Barbadian literary magazine,³⁸ while "Words, Words, Words Is the Future", based on a section

being able to return to Canada in 1971 after working at Duke University, for he was then free from the unwelcome pressures of an "oppressive moral responsibility to the brothers in the revolution". See Austin Clarke, "Memoirs of A Southern Town," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 26, Folder 15, 1971, 3. Clarke was willing to serve the black cause but on his own terms, independently, and in his own way.

³⁷Austin Clarke, personal interview, 25 August 1987.

³⁸Austin Clarke, "I Hanging On, Praise God!" Bim Number 36 (1963): 275-281. In this story, Clarke stresses the isolation of the West Indian domestics, who "hang on" in the hope of returning to the Caribbean with the means to lead a better life.

of "The Survivors of the Crossing", was rejected by the CBC but appeared in Bim toward the end of the year.³⁹ Yet another short story, "The Woman with the BBC Voice", greatly appealed to Robert Weaver,⁴⁰ who accepted it for the Tamarack Review.⁴¹

In the meantime, the fate of "The Survivors of the Crossing" remained unknown. In late summer, McClelland and Stewart had still not issued a verdict on the manuscript, while in London John Johnson had not yet managed to place it.⁴² In October, however, Clarke saw a ray of hope. He learned that David Machim of Heinemann liked the work because it was characterized by such "high spirits" and, while containing many tragic moments, was nevertheless "so free from bitterness and censure".⁴³ Heinemann was willing to relinquish the Canadian rights to the novel and had written

³⁹Austin Clarke, "Words, Words, Words Is the Future," Bim Number 37 (1963): 29-35. In this story, Clarke demonstrates how the lack of a good education handicaps the lower-class black in Barbados. Rufus talks about the benefits of a strike but when he faces the plantation overseer he reveals himself to be no more than an inarticulate peasant.

⁴⁰Robert Weaver to Austin Clarke, 9 June 1963.

⁴¹See Austin Clarke, "The Woman with the BBC Voice," Tamarack Review Autumn Issue (1963): 27-35. The primary concern of this story is the black man's frequent preference for white women over those of his own race. Lester, a black student, deserts a West Indian domestic for a white immigrant with less education. Clarke offers a portrait of men who, in spite of their education, remain enslaved by the values and criteria of a colonial society.

⁴²John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 22 August 1963.

⁴³John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 11 October 1963.

McClelland and Stewart to ascertain what kind of "deal" might be arranged, though the firm had not yet made its final decision about accepting the manuscript.⁴⁴ In the end, the two houses agreed on simultaneous publication in Canada and England, and Clarke received the copies of his contract with McClelland and Stewart just before Christmas.⁴⁵

It was a momentous occasion for Clarke:

I felt very exhilarated, and proud, and excited, and beside myself. My feeling of joy and accomplishment was actually greater on receipt of the letter of acceptance than it was when the novel actually appeared in print. When I knew the book was going to be published I had planned this fantastic party--I had planned in anticipation of how I would feel--but it was a kind of letdown when I saw a copy of the book. I had used up all that emotion.⁴⁶

But before the novel was finally published revisions were necessary, primarily a judicious pruning and polishing of the manuscript.⁴⁷ The planned publication date was 5 October 1964, a deadline that was easily met. Because of other engagements, Clarke missed the official release of the book in London, much to the disappointment of his British publisher,⁴⁸ but he managed to attend a delayed launching

⁴⁴John Johnson to Clarke, 11 October 1963.

⁴⁵M. Hodgeman to Austin Clarke, 5 December 1963.

⁴⁶Austin Clarke, personal interview, 25 August 1987.

⁴⁷David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 29 January 1964.

⁴⁸David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 23 October 1964.

party in Toronto.

Clarke had accomplished quite a feat, for it was not usual for first novels to be accepted and published simultaneously in two countries. He had gained the distinction, moreover, of being the first black West Indian-Canadian novelist published in Canada and in Britain, an honour which gave him considerable pride. He was gratified, too, by the generally favourable reception of the novel by reviewers. The completion of the original manuscript had convinced him that he indeed "had the talent to write fiction",⁴⁹ and the reviews indicated to him that he had not been amiss in his judgement.

It seems, judging from the reviews, that Clarke had largely eliminated many weaknesses of his earlier novels, such as unimaginative plot, loose structure and often poorly focused writing, and that he had consequently produced a work that could hold the reader's attention. In this connection, The Journal of Ottawa saw the novel as sharing with the reader "events that are not readily to be forgotten",⁵⁰ while The Gleaner of Fredericton thought it "an intensely human story, brilliantly told by a native of these parts".⁵¹ In England,

⁴⁹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 25 August 1987.

⁵⁰Dorothy Bishop, "A Novel of the Week," rev. of The Survivors of the Crossing, by Austin Clarke, The Journal 5 December 1964. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁵¹p. B., "Poverty and Ignorance," rev. of The Survivors of the Crossing, by Austin Clarke, The Gleaner 28 November 1964. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

similarly, the Times believed the book "succeeds lustily in the fundamental business of not outstaying its welcome",⁵² and the Times Literary Supplement regarded it as sometimes "very funny" and also "very sad" but "never boring".⁵³ One of the most glowing tributes to Clarke as a writer came from the novelist Olivia Manning, who described him as among the "brilliant" novelists from the West Indies, as "outstanding" among the writers of the English-speaking world and as capable of constructing a novel "which is compelling in its delicious revelation of the deviousness of the human heart".⁵⁴ Clarke received credit, also, for his rendering of West Indian dialect, one that the poet Derek Walcott found "well done" and even "touching and lyrical".⁵⁵

There were of course occasional dissenters, who fastened for the most part upon Clarke's characterization, certainly one of the flaws in his unpublished novels. In Robert Fulford's view, for example, the author "fails to create characters who can lift themselves off the page and

⁵²Rev. of The Survivors of the Crossing, by Austin Clarke, Times 8 October 1964. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁵³Rev. of The Survivors of the Crossing, by Austin Clarke, Times Literary Supplement 15 October 1964. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁵⁴Quoted in David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 10 November 1965.

⁵⁵Derek Walcott, "Parody of the Protest Formula," rev. of The Survivors of the Crossing, by Austin Clarke, Sunday Guardian 23 August 1964. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

force themselves on our consciousness",⁵⁶ while in the opinion of Frederick Porter of the Glasgow Herald character development in the novel is vague and unconvincing.⁵⁷ Yet The Survivors of the Crossing is in any context an important milestone in Clarke's emergence as a writer. The novel is the first major published statement of some of his chief concerns, and it provides evidence of the enhanced sophistication of his thinking. It represents, also, the early stages of his attempt to work out in fiction aspects of his own life, implying through his explorations that to understand who they are and where they stand the colonized must view the present in the context of the history of slavery, displacement, and colonialism. With this novel, Clarke joined the new "tradition in West Indian imaginative writing",⁵⁸ one that has been described so well by George Lamming:

Unlike the previous governments and departments of educators, unlike the businessman importing commodities, the West Indian novelist did not look out across the sea to another source. He looked in and down at what had traditionally been ignored. For the first time the West Indian peasant became other than a cheap source of labour. He became, through the novelist's eye, a living existence, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in

⁵⁶Robert Fulford, "The Dreams of Rufus," rev. of The Survivors of the Crossing, by Austin Clarke, The Daily Star 4 December 1964. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁵⁷Frederick Porter, "New Novels," rev. of The Survivors of the Crossing, by Austin Clarke, Glasgow Herald 10 October 1964. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁵⁸George Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile (London: Michael Joseph, 1960) 38.

riot and carnival. It is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality.⁵⁹

The novel is significant as well because it marks a point at which Clarke's craftsmanship had gained a maturity that finally earned him the chance to speak loudly through a substantial work.

The Survivors of the Crossing is noteworthy for its incisive treatment of the black experience in a colonial society.⁶⁰ It does more than present a vivid picture of life among lower class blacks, however, for through this portrait it also bares the diverse nature of the effects of colonialism on the colonised. The novel embodies a range of insights Clarke had obtained, primarily through conversation and reading, about the often subtle processes at work in a colonial society, processes that not only trapped the black masses in an enduring poverty but also distorted the colonised socially and psychologically. Amid the welter of forces

⁵⁹Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile 38-39.

⁶⁰The novel centres on the efforts of an illiterate, middle-aged canecutter named Rufus to effect change in a Barbadian society which, despite the beginnings of transfer of political power to nonwhites, is still encumbered by a colonial class system. A letter from a friend in Canada heightens Rufus' dissatisfaction with the status quo and he convinces other labourers on the plantation where he works of the need for drastic action to force concessions from the white elite. His methods--the strike and then guerrilla tactics--are never likely to succeed and he ultimately brings upon himself the hostility not only of the whites but also of the majority of the blacks and coloureds. See Austin Clarke, The Survivors of the Crossing (London: Heinemann, 1964).

conspiring against their well-being, the novel implies, blacks of the lower classes are unlikely to find a short and easy path to fulfilling lives.

Described by Clarke as "a novel of nostalgia and remembering",⁶¹ The Survivors of the Crossing paints a gloomy picture of the experience of the black masses in Barbados. The class system bred by colonialism forces upon the poor the chaotic and precarious type of existence described by Boysie:

"A man coming from another place and seeing how we live, and get on, won't think he living in the twentieff cent'ry at all! He would have to think that this is some kiss-me-arse part o' Africa where the English forget to build closets and went 'way without leaving the natives food and things."⁶²

From Clarke's perspective, constitutional change has by itself done little to weaken the economic underpinnings of the class structure. Strongly reminiscent of the transitional colonial society delineated in Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1968),⁶³ Barbados possesses a predominantly black political elite that has been rendered virtually toothless by its failure to challenge the economic might of the white

⁶¹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987. It might be noted that Clarke demonstrates loyalty to his friend, Errol Barrow, by setting the novel in the period in which Grantley Adams led the government. The action takes place in 1961, the year in which Barrow's party came to power.

⁶²Clarke, Survivors 169.

⁶³For a discussion of such transitional societies, see Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1968) 150-163.

establishment.⁶⁴ In the absence of fundamental reform of their society, the black masses are imprisoned within the lowest layers of the class structure, a destiny nicely symbolised by Rufus' experience:

For so many years, his world has been the cane field, and now that he is fleeing from his world, he finds himself back in the cane field. And the cane fields lead him one way only, right back to the plantation.⁶⁵

There is no escape for Rufus from the slot to which the class system has assigned him.

Clarke quietly makes the point that long after the Emancipation⁶⁶ the workers are still little more than slaves, mere chattels toiling in inhuman conditions for a pittance. The frustration generated by such circumstances is manifested by Rufus when he attacks the land as though it were his enemy:

But he raised the four-pronged agricultural fork high above his head and plunged it into the passive earth, and with a choking bitterness in his heart grunted, 'Yahh!' Again and again he raised the fork in the air, and each time the explosiveness within him choked the word from his mouth, as if he

⁶⁴Clarke's depiction of this aspect of Barbadian society matches that found in sociological research. See, for example, Christine Barrow, "Ownership and Control of Resources in Barbados: 1834 to the Present," Social and Economic Studies 32.3 (1983): 83-120.

⁶⁵Clarke, Survivors 191.

⁶⁶Slavery in the British Caribbean was abolished in 1834, though a four-year "apprenticeship" was required of adult slaves before they were actually liberated.

were breaking his heart.⁶⁷

The novel conveys forcefully the sense of powerlessness and despair that pervades the land. In terms of the West Indian novel, perhaps only Harold Ladoo, in his No Pain Like this Body (1972) and Yesterdays (1974), has been as effective as Clarke in depicting the nightmarish world that envelops the colonised and threatens to annihilate them as individuals and as a people.

But, in The Survivors of the Crossing, Clarke discloses other, usually more subtle, ways in which colonialism taints and warps the society. The new political elite, schooled to revere British values and impotent against the economic power of the whites, mouths empty socialist rhetoric but still looks lovingly abroad for cultural sustenance.⁶⁸ Evidently content with the trappings of authority and with the social privileges associated with election to the House of Assembly, the politicians seem little perturbed by the difficulties of the poor, an indifference exemplified by the prime minister's response to the peasants' request for help:

"He say he too busy in the House o' 'Sembly. He have important gov'munt business to transsack, and

⁶⁷Clarke, Survivors 3.

⁶⁸Clarke was, of course, quite familiar with the marks of respectability in colonial Barbados, among them being adherence to the Anglican faith and an immersion in a classical English education.

he don't get paid for that!"⁶⁹

Yet it is not only between the black lower classes and their more privileged counterparts that colonialism drives a wedge, for fragmentation occurs among the masses as well. The power of the plantocracy forces the labourers apart; many worry about losing their jobs or about being blackmailed by their employers for participating in a strike. Disunity develops within their ranks. Clarke seems, indeed, to agree with Samuel Bonhomme's contention that in the colonial setting "blacks were too accustomed to the presence of the white man as their superior to question his infallibility", with the result that "one West Indian would literally betray another for a white person, with the hope of gaining the white person's confidence".⁷⁰ Seen in this light, the betrayal of Rufus by Biscombe, the shopkeeper, is a natural outgrowth of the character of the society in which the blacks live.

Colonialism, Clarke seems to suggest, is to a large degree responsible for the general nature of black attitudes and behaviours. In denying most blacks anything more than a basic schooling, it has inadvertently encouraged within them a pathetic gullibility. Rufus, for instance, is too easily persuaded by the letter from Jackson that Canada is a utopia

⁶⁹Clarke, Survivors 146.

⁷⁰Samuel Bonhomme, Enoch Powell and the West Indian Immigrants (London: The Afro-American and West Indian Publishers, 1971) 29.

in which blacks are accorded dignity by being treated "as men".⁷¹ The blacks' educational deficiencies also make them politically ineffective. Were Rufus a better educated person, he would have managed to formulate a more commanding rationale for the strike and to communicate to the workers the merits of his original plan, which requires discussions with the plantation authorities prior to any act of open rebellion. Instead, he loses control over the workers, whose own poor education induces them to act irrationally:

All he had intended was a peaceful talk with the overseer or the manager. But now he saw that the tide of emotion was taking the whole business out of his hands.⁷²

The workers' simple-minded attitude and conduct stand in striking contrast to the cool, calculated planning of the better-educated manager.

Blacks display other attributes that apparently have their roots at least partly in the colonial setting. Boysie and Mango, for example, have no real vision of the future and are engrossed in the satisfaction of immediate needs. Stultified by the rigidities and limitations inherent in the class system, they have become weak, avaricious and self-centred, their loyalties shifting with change of circumstance. With little hope of escape from their crushing poverty, they

⁷¹Clarke, Survivors 24.

⁷²Clarke, Survivors 42.

seek to exist through any means at their disposal. The exploitation of ingenuity and wits as well as of the opportunities of the moment becomes a way of life for many. Defining what is "moral" takes second place to ensuring survival. Thus, Biscoombe's betrayal of Rufus is inextricably linked with the need to preserve some degree of well-being and to achieve even a modicum of significance and status in a harsh and unyielding society. And the "immorality" of which Stella, Rufus' "wife", seems guilty is forced upon her by the structure of the society. It is because she sees no other avenue of escape from her destitution that she capitalizes on her wits and sexual charms to improve the conditions of her life and increase her children's chances for a more comfortable existence.

Clarke clearly views the church and the school as implicated in the oppression of the blacks, and The Survivors of the Crossing is a subtle indictment of both institutions. Whippetts, the schoolmaster who is supposedly responsible for nurturing young black minds, is merely a white man in a black skin, one who in essence furthers the interests of his white masters. Aping the dress, the speech and the behaviour of his white superiors, he cuts a ludicrous figure that is out of touch with the real needs of the people. The school system, as Clarke would show with greater vigour in Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack (1980), serves mainly to distort the development of the young by perpetuating colonial forms of

education that foster a worship of all that is white and a consequent denigration of the black self.

The church, too, is found wanting, for it is presented as largely unconcerned about the problems of the working classes. The Anglican minister, McKinley, is a foreigner with little comprehension of the people around him. Even when he tries to convince the plantation manager and overseer that the workers' desire to improve their lot does not imply "that they are plotting to overthrow the plantation",⁷³ he desists rather easily. The traditional alliance of the Anglican Church with the Barbadian higher classes is reflected in McKinley's notion that "it was not ordained by God for the people to rise up against their leaders, whether spiritual or temporal".⁷⁴ The church, the novel quietly suggests, has too long been passive and has in this way lulled the poor into an unquestioning acceptance of the social order that prolongs their subjugation.

All is not gloom, though, in Clarke's penetrating look beneath the surface of Barbadian society. Stella, for example, exhibits many of the attributes--among them an admirable strength--of the archetypal black, working class woman of the Caribbean. One of Clarke's "major criticisms" of black literature in the West Indies and America is that "the black woman as a full character has not yet been fully

⁷³Clarke, Survivors 41.

⁷⁴Clarke, Survivors 29.

exploited by black writers", perhaps a sign of the "black man's subconscious disapproval" of the idea that a woman might be more "socially powerful" than he.⁷⁵ In The Survivors of the Crossing, as in When Women Rule (1986) and other works, Clarke attempts to rectify this deficiency he perceives in black writing. Through his portrayal of Stella, and to a lesser extent of Clementina, he reveals that, in spite of the precarious nature of her life, it is in many instances the woman who provides her children with a degree of family stability. That Stella, for example, forges ahead to promote her children's welfare, even while withstanding the injustices of the society and the brutal treatment meted out to her by the men in her life, attests to her courage and tenacity. Clarke's portrait, based on his intimate knowledge of life among the Barbadian poor and perhaps at least partly on the role his own mother played in his early years, is a tribute to the black working class woman of the Caribbean.

Nor are the lower classes, in Clarke's view, without the potential to alter the conditions of their existence. Rufus, for example, is mired in poverty but senses higher possibilities, envisioning a life of greater dignity for himself and his family:

⁷⁵Austin Clarke, "Black Literature: 20th. Century," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 13, Folder 4, n.d., 23. The black woman is often dominant in the family because, in the absence of a man, she is the head of the household or because, even when a man is present, she may be the main breadwinner.

"And now, I not only looking forward to tomorrow, or the next two days, or even payday. I looking to the futures. I dreaming, Boysie, 'bout that day, when I could look up in Turnbull' face and say 'kiss my arse', when a piece o' this land I working on all these years belongst to me, when Stella could wear high shoes like the manager's wife I looking to the futures when them two starved-out childrens o' mine could go to Harrison College...like the children o' the Rev, or the manager"76

The novel points to the avenues open to the working classes generally to alter the conditions of their existence despite the obstacles within and without themselves. They must face the consequences of their own limitations--for instance, their educational deficiencies--but they must also come to terms with their hesitancy over determined action, the egocentricity of the black political leadership and the avarice of the white elite. And the quest can never cease. As is intimated by the title of the novel, with its allusion to the ability of the original slaves to survive the unspeakable conditions of transport and of slavery on the plantations, an indomitable spirit is indispensable for black social and psychological gain.

The Survivors of the Crossing is not overtly didactic, and it is certainly not prescriptive, but there is a hint in the novel that real change will come with later generations, who will be better educated and thus better equipped to comprehend and pursue the vision of the better

⁷⁶Clarke, Survivors 66.

life. Clarke has observed elsewhere:

It seemed to me that if these labourers were more revolutionary in spirit, and more educated, that they could have exacted much more as wages from, say my own stepfather, and from the large sugarcane plantation owners.⁷⁷

A man like Rufus, the novel seems to suggest, can perhaps only show the way. As Clementina notes, with a touch of optimism, "God give him that time for a purpose. ... For a purpose--a good purpose."⁷⁸ By taking an early uncertain step forward, this statement implies, Rufus and the villagers have begun to pave the way for meaningful change.

The Survivors of the Crossing evidences the great strides Clarke had taken not only in intellectual sophistication but also in his craft as a writer. Profiting from publishers' criticisms of his earlier novels and from editorial recommendations relating to the manuscript of The Survivors of the Crossing, he avoids the sprawling, unwieldy style of the rejected works, favouring instead a much smaller and restricted canvas. He now achieves a more tightly knit plot in which all chains of events are more carefully interlocked and contribute with greater consistency to the illumination of character and the development of theme. He steers clear, too, of the rambling digressions and serpentine

⁷⁷Austin Clarke, "Interview with Austin Clarke," by Terrence Craig, World Literature Written in English 26.1 (1986): 117.

⁷⁸Clarke, Survivors 202.

dialogues that time after time so weakened the plot and impeded the flow of the narrative as to render the previous novels tedious and even boring.

Clarke's growing mastery of technique is everywhere evident in the novel. He is increasingly adept, for example, at creating suspense, as in the scene in which the workers discuss their plans at a "secret" meeting, unaware that their enemies are within earshot of them, the mood being heightened because the consequences of this situation are not revealed until later in the work. He stirs interest, also, through the technique of sudden but credible discoveries, such as Rufus' realization that Biscombe has betrayed him or Biscombe's stumbling upon the truth that it is Boysie and not Rufus who has stolen his money. His handling of events instils in the novel a sense of urgency and danger but at the same time communicates the futility of the workers' efforts to trigger change.

The Survivors of the Crossing has a conventional, even old-fashioned, linear narrative, the kind with which Clarke's education had made him most familiar through his immersion in writers such as Dickens, Thackeray and Eliot. It remained the tradition with which he felt most comfortable, perhaps at least partly because his formal schooling in literature had ended before it could take him through an examination of less orthodox approaches such as those frequently adopted in the modernist and the postmodernist

novel.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, he employs his linear presentation effectively. The division of the novel into three parts enables him to trace the stages of the peasants' revolt and in this way to examine the course of the individual--and indirectly the national--quest for self-fulfilment, a quest that in a very broad sense parallels his own early pursuit of a similar goal.

In Part I of the novel, Rufus, like the rest of the community, is initially mute about the exploitation he apparently endures, though he grasps that he deserves a life of greater dignity. Jackson's letter, while distorting the truth about the status of blacks in Canada, serves a useful purpose in nudging him--and in turn the peasants--out of a passive stance. Through the letter, Clarke expresses his new awareness that West Indian peoples have been slow to recognize their role as the colonised and that they will truly liberate themselves only when they have become informed of the real nature of their situation. More than that, however, he has captured a phase of his own quest for self-fulfilment. Though he had witnessed as well as experienced the harshness of poverty, he had not in his early years understood the roots of the evil. Like Rufus and the villagers, he had been for the most part acquiescent, for even on leaving Barbados to further

⁷⁹Naturally, Clarke's novel differs from its English models in its emphasis on the local West Indian colour and landscape as well as in a social realism that springs out of its Caribbean background.

his studies he had planned essentially to enter the legal profession so that he could occupy a prestigious niche within the class hierarchy of the day. And he had come to Canada expecting to conduct his transaction with this society with some degree of ease. It was his direct contact with Canada that, like Rufus' indirect link with the society, transformed passivity into a desire to challenge the status quo.

The Survivors of the Crossing may be viewed as Clarke's externalising of his own blindness about colonialism so that he might confront it and come to grips with the ravages it had wrought on Barbadian society and on him, but it may also be seen to represent his struggles against white society in general. Part II of the novel, which deals with the attempt at a strike, again seems to reflect a new segment of Clarke's quest. Once stirred into action, he sought in different ways to reduce the racial oppression he saw in Canada so that he might find dignity within her. Through his marches, speeches and writing, for example, he attacked--or held up a mirror to--Canadian society, hoping through such means to foster change. But, as in Part III of the novel, protest was ineffective. Yet the work ends with some optimism, perhaps because Clarke was himself optimistic. He had published poems and short stories, and the future did not seem entirely dim. Just as the peasants in The Survivors of the Crossing had taken the first steps forward, so had Clarke. He would build upon this foundation and force the society to

yield and thus to grant him self-respect, not through revolution or didacticism but by furnishing it with proof of his worth and by letting it examine itself through his art.

Clarke's accomplishments in The Survivors of the Crossing extend to other dimensions of the writer's craft. In his "In A Storm of Passion" (1958), which describes fictitious events in Barbados, setting is vague and contributes little to the work. In his first published novel, however, it adds realism. A strong sense of time and place is created through a rich array of concrete detail. Images of the recurrent rain and mud in which the labourers battle for a living, the razor-sharp leaves cutting into the workers' flesh, and the intense, unrelenting heat burning through tattered clothing all capture a land at a particular point of its history.⁸⁰ So do the accounts of such community rituals as the selling of black pudding and souse on Saturdays and the gathering of the men at Biscombe's shop on payday to squander their meagre earnings on liquor, corned beef and crackers as they rail against a system they perceive to be unjust. Such detail lends Clarke's depiction of the community considerable vitality and credibility.

But setting in the novel is not merely a backdrop against which events unfold. It tends to parallel and

⁸⁰See Clarke, Survivors 173-176, where, in describing the burning sugarcane field, Clarke credibly captures the scent, sounds and movement as well as the sense of danger and urgency associated with such an occurrence.

therefore to underscore the psychological states of the characters. Thus, the gloom of the night-time scenes matches the futility and apprehensiveness of the villagers' lives, while darkness reflects the labourers' ignorance and lack of direction. Again, the locating of most of the action within a local arena attests to the circumscribed nature of the peasants' lives. It might be argued, in fact, that the overall setting--with the plantation house looming over the community--gives added force to the notion of the ascendancy of the coloniser over the colonised. Evidently, Clarke had learned to utilise setting for the purpose of developing and reinforcing the main thrust of a novel.

In terms of characterization, The Survivors of the Crossing deviates from such West Indian novels as C. L. R. James' Minty Alley (1936), Claude McKay's Banana Bottom (1933) and to a certain extent George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1953), which tend to present their black characters as sanitised and romanticised figures. In his novel, Clarke has not--in Vidia Naipaul's words--"flattered the prejudices" of any particular "race or colour groups".⁸¹ The challenge of ensuring an authentic depiction of the West Indian middle class has been noted by Vidia Naipaul, who observes:

It is not easy to write about the West Indian middle class. The most exquisite gifts of irony and perhaps malice would be required. ...

⁸¹Vidia Naipaul, The Middle Passage (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974) 68.

Characters would have to be treated as real people with real problems and responsibilities and affections ...⁸²

Of course, Clarke focuses on the lower rather than the middle classes, but his treatment of the blacks satisfies Naipaul's criteria of authenticity because it is honest. It indicates the humanity of the blacks yet does not sentimentalize them.⁸³

Clarke's realistic exploration of character is accomplished through "brutality" as well as through satire and irony, elements that Naipaul believed possible only in a mature West Indian literature that was not limited by the writers' "fear of letting down their sides".⁸⁴ The opening lines of the first chapter, for example, provide a satirical description that reveals Rufus' idealism and naivety. Scared to death of the overseer and made ridiculous in appearance by a soaking he has received in a downpour, the uneducated Rufus has the temerity to contemplate challenging the established order. It is ironical that this illiterate, cuckolded man, who cannot articulate his thoughts to his superiors, dares to

⁸²Naipaul 69.

⁸³Characters display greed, disloyalty and dishonesty, for example, but they may also reveal humanity. Stella, for instance, is "immoral" in being unfaithful to her "husband", but she is also concerned about her children's welfare. As has already been noted in this chapter, though, Clarke finds the roots of the less attractive behaviours largely in the structure of a colonial society.

⁸⁴Naipaul 69. "Brutality" takes the form of the portrayal of character with uncompromising truthfulness.

assume the leadership of a minor "revolution" and does so, furthermore, on the basis of a letter which he cannot read and which thrusts upon him a misleading impression of the life led by blacks in Canada.⁸⁵

The characters Clarke creates are representative of West Indian blacks but they are nevertheless individuals. Through the bawdiness of their lives and language and their joie de vivre in the face of daunting circumstances, Clarke conveys some of the eccentricities--especially the spiritedness--of the West Indian. In the main, however, the characters remain unique beings. Rufus, Biscombe, Stella and Clementina, for example, are deeply etched in the reader's mind because their individual traits are sharply delineated. Rufus, in particular, attains a striking complexity as a character, for he is shown to be self-serving, cunning and brutal but also tender and idealistic. He is, as Patrick O'Flaherty's suggests, a "brilliant creation", a man "in whom generous humane motives struggle for control over his ignorance and cruelty".⁸⁶ Again, Clementina is a fully

⁸⁵It might be noted that Clarke employs extensively for the first time a blend of the comic and the tragic, with the former serving to accentuate the latter in the depiction of character and events. While the description of the peasants' meeting in Biscombe's shop is comical, for instance, it shows how ill equipped the labourers are to effect change. Again, Stella's effort to obtain a loan from Biscombe is presented humorously, but the incident highlights her courage in facing up to the tragic circumstances of her life. See Clarke, Survivors 184-189, 18-21.

⁸⁶Patrick O'Flaherty, "Critically Speaking: Book Review," CBC, St. John's, 20 December 1964.

credible figure, no less so when her evangelical fervour spills over into her ordinary life as she reproaches the labourers for "showing signs of surrender" and for "betraying Rufus".⁸⁷ Even such minor characters as Mango, Boysie and Whippet are memorable, their amorality, avarice and sense of humour and their preoccupation with the satisfaction of immediate needs giving each his own individuality but making all representative of blacks who dwell in similar conditions. Through some exploration of his characters' psyche, also, Clarke succeeds in explaining the origins of the mercurial and sometimes unsavoury behaviour they exhibit.⁸⁸

Clarke rises to new heights, too, in his exploitation of symbolism. A rich vein of symbols running through the work assists him in communicating with greater economy and in eliminating the long, overtly didactic meanderings that detracted from his unpublished novels. The overseer and the plantation house, for instance, function as vital indicators of the oppressive forces at work in the society. The very name of the overseer, who is called "The Jockey", is suggestive, for it conjures up images of a virtual slave-driver who--like a jockey--drives the creature beneath him to the limit of its capabilities. And his physical

⁸⁷Clarke, Survivors 135-136.

⁸⁸For example, fear of losing their jobs leads some workers to vacillate in the strike. Again, Stella's sense of powerlessness regarding improvement of her own and her children's fortunes leads her into infidelity.

stance, as he looks down on the labourers from high in the saddle, effectively captures the relationship between the more privileged and their underlings within the structure of Barbadian society:

When he came forward, the men and women fell dead silent, their hands at their sides, lifeless, in complete submission, complete subjection, for this man, this overseer, held more power over them the manager himself The overseer hired and fired the labourers. He paid them at the end of the week; he slept with any of the women labourers he wanted, The overseer was the kingpin in the village.⁸⁹

The towering plantation mansion, which remains intact though flames engulf the surrounding sugarcane fields, signifies the power and impregnability of the white plantocracy:

The house rose out of the dawn like a monster. Rufus stood and looked at it a long time. ... He saw the pillars still standing like strangers to the rest of the house. They were unscorched. The trees were standing too, untouched by the fire. He cursed himself for having started a fire which could not consume the house and the trees, as it had consumed most of the sugar canes.... Perhaps this kind of a house is invincible. Cannot be destroyed. For it had survived since the time of his grandfather, who had worked as a yard boy on the plantation.⁹⁰

The symbol reinforces one of the most significant ideas in the novel, that the labourers are not yet equipped to challenge the dominance of the elite.

⁸⁹Clarke, Survivors 61.

⁹⁰Clarke, Survivors 191-192.

Symbols appear in a rich variety of forms. They may be objects, such as the plantation house or the homes of the villagers, the latter being indicative of the poverty, the insecurity and the alienation that are among the end products of colonialism. They may also be situations or circumstances. Thus, the chaos and the discord among the villagers and the recurrent scenes set in darkness signify, respectively, the peasants' confused psychological state and intellectual limitations. Characters, too, serve as symbols. Rufus represents the man of vision whom colonialism has made ineffectual, the constable the corruptness of the law, and Clementina the exhilarating revivalist brand of religion that is more in tune than are the more traditional ones with the spiritual and psychological needs of the villagers. What is especially significant, though, is Clarke's skill in marshalling the range of symbols in the service of crucial themes, particularly that of the ramifications of colonialism among the blacks.

One of Clarke's finest achievements in The Survivors of the Crossing, however, is his handling and exploitation of Barbadian dialect. He again captures the rhythm, the colour and the raciness of the dialect but does so without resorting to the relatively unsanitized version such as is found, for example, in his short story, "I Hanging On, Praise God!".⁹¹ Instead, he employs a selective dialect that is closer to an

⁹¹Clarke, "I Hanging On, Praise God!" 275-281.

elementary form of English, its distinctive features being simplified grammar, limited vocabulary, local idiom and slang, simple syntactical structure, and intermittent use of spelling based on local pronunciation. Clementina's speech illustrates this type of language:

"Looka, Mister Biscoombe," she said, turning round, laughing, "I have to ask you please to go to the devil in hell, and leave me peaceable to sell the little black pudding and souse, do. And if you intends to put some o' this niceness in that big mout' o' yours well, you hads better hurry up and come quick, 'cause I have four pig's feet keeping for Rev'runt McKinley" ⁹²

Dialect is refined though not so much that it becomes obviously artificial. In this way, Clarke creates a sense of a language that is alive and real but retains his ability to communicate with a white foreign audience.

Clarke gains added credibility for his characters because the whites speak in standard English and the blacks in dialect. Transitions from one form of language to the other are smooth, and the form of speech is always appropriate to the character. In this respect, Clarke's writing has improved immensely from that in his unpublished novels.⁹³ But the use of dialect performs other functions in the novel. It helps

⁹²Clarke, Survivors 162.

⁹³In "The Love and the Circumstance" (1961) 170. for example, Clarke employs standard English and dialect and often shifts abruptly and inconsistently from one form of language to the other. At one point, for instance, Judy, a white Canadian, suddenly speaks in a dialect she could not possibly have known.

impart realism to the work and heightens the impression of the villagers' backwardness. Furthermore, the gap between the dialect and standard English serves to distance the narrator--who uses the latter--from the characters and their experiences and therefore to sustain an impression of objectivity and authenticity in the narrator's description of that world. Clarke's willingness to incorporate dialect into The Survivors of the Crossing has significance beyond the novel itself. It reveals how far Clarke has moved from strict adherence to the values of a colonial education. His sensitive rendering of dialect also demonstrates that a writer could invest local speech with dignity and status without idealising it. Like Samuel Selvon, Vidia Naipaul and George Lamming, Clarke has done much to gain West Indian dialect a respectable place in art.

With the publication of The Survivors of the Crossing, Clarke was more firmly on the way to achieving recognition as a writer of some stature. In this novel, he contributes to West Indian fiction through a conscious attempt at realism, seen especially in his probing of the complex effects of the structure of a colonial society on character. His concern is with the depiction of character and situations as well as, albeit indirectly, with the nature of the black experience in the Barbadian society he knew in his youth. He therefore joins other black West Indian writers, who are for

the most part "as much interested in society as in character".⁹⁴ As he himself notes, he is "looking at a stratum of society and describing that stratum".⁹⁵ To accomplish this, he presents the thoughts, feelings and actions of his characters and allows his readers to make their own inferences from the flow of events. His anger is controlled. Perhaps his earlier profusion of unpublished writings--with their frequent bouts of blatant sermonizing--had functioned as a means of catharsis. Certainly, The Survivors of the Crossing proves that he can, like other West Indian writers, undertake an "analysis and interpretation of [his] society's ills"⁹⁶ and that he can do so while subduing his anger in the interest of his art.

⁹⁴Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Heinemann, 1983) 5.

⁹⁵Clarke, "Interview with Austin Clarke" by Craig, 124.

⁹⁶Ramchand 5.

Chapter 4

Amongst Thistles and Thorns

The first real justification of Clarke's decision to support himself through independent means had occurred in 1963 with the acceptance of his journalistic work by the CBC. There can be little doubt that this event had substantially boosted his morale, encouraging him to press on with his writing. But the news that Heinemann and McClelland and Stewart had agreed to publish The Survivors of the Crossing (1964) had proven even more gratifying, leading him immediately into a fresh burst of activity. His interests now pulled him in different directions, for he wrote fiction, spoke out in the press, leapt into new projects for radio and engaged in a range of pursuits in the local community. His involvements tended to keep the experiences of blacks at the forefront of his consciousness; it also forced him into a closer scrutiny of the work of other black writers, with some effect on his own artistic and intellectual awareness. In terms of public recognition, however, it was his writing that brought him the greatest satisfaction.

In the winter of 1964 Clarke finished his revisions

of the manuscript of Amongst Thistles and Thorns and mailed the work to his agent in London. John Johnson was not wholly enthusiastic about the novel. He had reservations not only about its "excessive" length and its "slight" plot but also about the amount of "West Indian talk" in it.¹ Nevertheless, he submitted it to Heinemann and within two months received word that the publisher had accepted the manuscript.² Clarke signed the contract for publication in May and learned the very next month that, as it had done in the case of Survivors of the Crossing, McClelland and Stewart had arranged "an option for Canada" for the new novel.³ Johnson's misgivings about the manuscript had been of little consequence. Heinemann was, indeed, "delighted with Amongst Thistles and Thorns",⁴ and David Burnett - an editor with the firm - shortly informed Clarke that it was "another beautiful book", one demonstrating that the latter had "a great career" ahead of him as a writer.⁵ Clarke had achieved a tremendous success. As the Guelph Guardian noted, the two publishers had been so impressed by his writing that they "took the unique step of accepting his second novel for publication long before

¹John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 4 March 1964.

²John Johnson to S. J. Totton, McClelland and Stewart, 13 May 1964.

³John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 2 June 1964.

⁴David Machim to Austin Clarke, 4 June 1964.

⁵David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 12 October 1964.

the first was ever released".⁶

Though the novels occupied much of his attention, Clarke retained an undiminished interest in the short story. Perhaps because of undue haste in his writing, however, he produced work of uneven quality. The Montrealer accepted "An Easter Carol" for publication in its April issue of 1964,⁷ but other stories were rejected. Some of the reasons are obvious. For example, "The Night Watchman", which is set in Barbados and dwells on the corrupt behaviour of some working-class blacks,⁸ is somewhat uncertain in terms of plot, theme and characterization, while "The Lovers", which tells the story of a one-night affair between a black man and a white woman in Toronto,⁹ seems deficient in terms of focus and the motivation of characters. In the course of 1964, however, two other Clarke efforts, "Early, Early, Early One Morning" and "Waiting for the Postman to Knock", appeared in Bim, the Barbadian magazine.¹⁰

⁶"Books," rev. of The Survivors of the Crossing, by Austin Clarke, Guelph Guardian 4 December 1964. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁷Gerald Taafe to Austin Clarke, n.d.

⁸Austin Clarke, "The Night Watchman," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 27, Folder 4, 1964.

⁹Austin Clarke, "The Lovers," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 26, Folder 10, 1964.

¹⁰Austin Clarke, "Early, Early, Early One Morning," Bim Number 38 (1964): 78-88, and "Waiting for the Postman to Knock," Bim Number 39 (1964): 159-170. The first of these two stories is the same as that published in The Montrealer under the title, "An Easter Carol". Both stories appear in

Not content merely with seeing his stories in print, Clarke attempted to sell a number of them to the CBC. Some were rejected as being "too long"¹¹ but, after revision and shortening, "They Heard A Ringing of Bells" was bought by the CBC for its "Anthology" programme.¹² Clarke also expanded his contact with the CBC to include work of a different kind. One of his proposals, "The West Indies through the Eyes of Its Writers", interested the CBC, which offered him a contract to prepare a sixty-minute programme for its "Sunday Night" series. In preparing his script, Clarke chose to examine the depiction of West Indian society in the works of such writers as Vidia Naipaul, George Lamming, Edgar Mittelholzer, Derek Walcott, and Samuel Selvon. The task required a closer examination of the works of the West Indian writers than any he had previously attempted. He identified a number of themes that emerge in them, including the nature of the class system and of the psychological states it induced, the effects of the imposition of British culture on predominantly black societies, the character and function of education, and the meaninglessness of life for most blacks. He was attracted, also, to the writers' perceptions of how taste, behaviour and

Austin Clarke, When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (Toronto: Anansi, 1971) and will be discussed as part of that collection.

¹¹See, for example, Robert McCormack to Austin Clarke, 10 January 1964 and 7 October 1964.

¹²Robert McCormack to Austin Clarke, 14 February 1964.

ambitions were shaped by the class system and by other dimensions of West Indian society. To describe such concerns in his radio script, he employed a mixture of brief introductory remarks and lengthy selections from West Indian writing.¹³ After revisions suggested by the CBC to strike a better balance between narration and excerpts,¹⁴ the script was accepted for broadcasting. While it does not examine the writers' art, "The West Indies through the Eyes of Its Writers" is nevertheless Clarke's first "formal" analysis of the literature of the Caribbean. It not only alerted him to just how much his own work had in common with that of other black writers of the region--and thus reinforced his faith in himself as a writer--but also served as part of his initial preparation for his later pursuits in academe.

Encouraged by the response of the CBC to his work for radio, Clarke advanced other proposals. "A Writer Takes A Second Glance at His Society", appealed to Robert Weaver, a programme director with the CBC, who invited Clarke for further discussion of the project.¹⁵ The upshot of negotiations was an agreement that Clarke would complete a documentary of forty-five to sixty minutes entitled "A Writer Returns Home" for the "Sunday Night" programme, with the

¹³See Austin Clarke, "The West Indies through the Eyes of Its Writers," Unpublished Radio Script (McMaster) Box 22, Folder 9, 1964.

¹⁴Robert Weaver to Austin Clarke, 6 May 1964.

¹⁵Robert Weaver to Austin Clarke, 5 June 1964.

script including half-hour interviews of the poet, Derek Walcott, and the author's former mentor, Frank Collymore. In July of 1964, even before he had begun work on this task, he signed another agreement to prepare a documentary entitled "British Guiana" for the "Project '65" series of the CBC.¹⁶ In August, Clarke left with his family for Barbados, where he began gathering material for his scripts.¹⁷ He seized the opportunity to deliver a public address on racial problems in the United States, irritating the American consul in Barbados with his charges that American society was racist and oppressive. By early September he had already taped an interview with Frank Collymore.¹⁸ On this visit to his homeland, he also renewed his friendship with Errol Barrow, who was now premier of the island, as well as with other Barbadians who had gained prominence in politics and the professions. From Barbados, he proceeded to Trinidad, where he interviewed the poet Derek Walcott. He then travelled to British Guiana to conduct the research and interviews for his script, finally returning to Canada in October. Both financially and professionally, he had reason to congratulate himself. No longer just another West Indian immigrant in Canada, he could now speak to and for both cultures with some

¹⁶Austin Clarke, Contract with Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 17 July 1964.

¹⁷Yvonne Bobb to Austin Clarke, 5 October 1964.

¹⁸Robert Weaver, CBC, to Austin Clarke, 9 September 1964.

authority.

Clarke now discovered that the release of Survivors of the Crossing had brought him firmly into public view. As the first West Indian novelist published in Canada he was something of a rarity and he found himself participating in a succession of interviews for the mass media. On 7 December 1964, for example, he discussed his novel with Dave Blue on the radio programme, "Toronto Today". By the end of 1964, he could face the future with a fair degree of optimism. His first novel was selling quite well: the response of Caribbean booksellers had from the beginning been "most rewarding"¹⁹ and total sales of the English edition had numbered 2,500, about one thousand more than was usual for a first novel.²⁰ Furthermore, he had signed the contracts for Amongst Thistles and Thorns and had already completed the first draft of another novel tentatively entitled "No Bed of Roses".²¹ Indeed, he had been writing with such speed that as early as the summer of 1964 David Machim of Heinemann's had advised him to take his time over the third novel, since two were already under contract and it would be some time before a third could be published.²²

Clarke also continued his writing as a newspaper

¹⁹Brian Donat to Austin Clarke, 18 August 1964.

²⁰David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 22 December 1964.

²¹David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 29 July 1964.

²²David Machim to Austin Clarke, 4 June 1964.

journalist. In 1964-1965, he contributed a series of short essays to the Toronto Telegram, his subject matter ranging from local issues to matters of national or international significance. The themes that recurred most in his essays, however, were immigration policy in Canada and the treatment of blacks in Canada and the United States. Clarke protested more than once against what he saw as the unfairness of Canadian immigration policy, alleging that Canada apparently often preferred whites with undistinguished intellects to blacks of superior competence and that the country was immoral in restricting immigration from the Caribbean though Canadian enterprises reaped a fortune in that region. He also repeatedly reminded his readers of the remorseless mutilation of the black psyche in Canada and the United States, but particularly in the latter, where in his view the integrationist movement led by Martin Luther King was heading inexorably toward failure.²³ His protests against Canadian discrimination had their roots in a genuine compassion for other blacks but also, perhaps, in an anger that surged when the sense of psychological well-being he was tasting as a result of his literary achievements was threatened by "signs"

²³This overview of Clarke's essays for the Toronto Telegram is based on the interviews of Clarke by the present writer as well as on analysis of twenty-four of the original manuscripts for the "Dissent" columns. See Austin Clarke, "Dissent" mss. (McMaster) Box 23, Folder 19, 1964-65.

that whites still considered his race inferior.²⁴ In terms of his career, the columns are significant because they exhibit some inclination on his part toward satire as well as his ability to seize upon contemporary events or issues around which to weave his essays, qualities that would both achieve fruition several years later in the form of weekly columns for the Barbadian newspaper, The Nation, in which the satirical element in Clarke's journalistic writing would come to the fore.

The short story, too, remained one of his principal preoccupations. He wrote "Once and Forever around the Block"--with the alternative titles of "The Little Girl-Child" and "The Child"--which lacks clear focus but seems to be an attempted exploration of the psychological effects of rape on the female victim, since the story shows a white female who has been raped coming to hate all men and contemplating life

²⁴Richard Wright describes a somewhat similar form of frustration faced by black American writers in the early decades of the twentieth century:

These Negroes were in every respect the equal of whites; they were valid examples of personality types of Western culture; but they lived in a land where even insane white people were counted above them. ... During the first quarter of this century, these men ... fought as the Negro had never fought before for equal rights, but they fought in vain.

See Richard Wright, White Man, Listen! (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 84-85.

with a strong sense of loss.²⁵ His habit of extracting or adapting segments of his novels as short stories was again in evidence as he reworked into a short story entitled "The Discovery" an incident in "No Bed of Roses" in which a white man, Burmann, seduces a black domestic named Estelle.²⁶ Another story, "Leaving This Island Place", appeared in Bim in the first part of the year²⁷ while "Half-Moons on Pinky's Fingernails", Clarke learned, was scheduled for inclusion in an anthology entitled Voices 2: A Collection of Short Stories, to be published by Michael Joseph in London later that year.

Clarke also maintained his contact with New York City. By now, he reports, he had become a friend of Malcolm X's, and the latter had tried to prevail upon him to play a more central role in the civil rights movement. But he had preferred to concentrate on his journalistic work when in the United States, at least partly because he believed in devoting time to thorough preparation for his interviews. In his view, this demanded extensive reading of all books, magazine articles or newspaper reports that would shed light on the

²⁵Austin Clarke, "Once and Forever around the Block"/"The Little Girl-Child"/"The Child," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 27, Folder 10, 1965.

²⁶Austin Clarke, "The Discovery," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 23, Folder 18, 1965.

²⁷Austin Clarke, "Leaving This Island Place," Bim Number 40 (1965): 240-249. This story appears in Austin Clarke, When He Was Young and Free and He Used to Wear Silks (Toronto: Anansi, 1971) and will be discussed as part of that collection.

backgrounds, attributes and most recent activities of his subjects. Such preparation had the added advantage of increasing his familiarity with the works and thinking of some of the leading black artists and intellectuals in America.

Clarke had enjoyed in particular the works of James Baldwin and Richard Wright, regarding the latter as the leading black American writer of fiction,²⁸ but the poetry of Larry Neal and LeRoi Jones also fascinated him. Since he thought LeRoi Jones the preeminent black poet of the United States, he arranged in 1965 to interview him for the CBC, planning his material so that it would generate two types of radio programmes, one of a political and the other of a literary nature, and in this way save Jones' poetry from being "submerged by his militancy".²⁹ In preparing the literary programme, he did not write an extensive script but inserted the songs and music of such blacks as Richie Havens, Abbie Lincoln and John Coltrane to emphasize and illustrate the themes in Jones' poetry. The two programmes were broadcast in the "Project" series of the CBC in the fall of 1965.

Though sympathetic to the objectives of the black protest movement, Clarke's trip to New York for the

²⁸Among the books by Richard Wright that had been read by Clarke at this stage were Black Boy (1937), Native Son (1940), The Outsider (1953), Black Power (1954), Savage Holiday (1954) and The Long Dream (1958).

²⁹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 25 August 1987.

interviews³⁰ again reminded him of a point of disagreement he believed existed between him and the black American artists and intellectuals:

LeRoi and I disagree on a very basic intellectual point. LeRoi Jones, Larry Neal, Cleaver and some of the musicians felt that an artist living in America in the '60s and being black had as a first responsibility the liberation of his people, meaning the presentation of an image that is positive. LeRoi Jones called that cultural and literary responsibility. I have never felt that the artist should be harnessed by such a responsibility. I have also felt that for an artist to be truthful he cannot present an entirely negative picture. He needs to be balanced.³¹

Yet Clarke's association with the American blacks was not without its impact upon him, for it continued the process of

³⁰In 1965 Clarke interviewed LeRoi Jones and Floyd McKissick, the black writer and activist.

³¹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 25 August 1987. LeRoi Jones outlines as follows his own view of the function of the artist:

The Black Artist's role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. His role is to report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society, and of himself in that society, that other men will be moved by the exactness of his rendering and, if they are black men, grow strong through this moving, having seen their own strength, and weakness; and if they are white men, tremble, curse, and go mad, because they will be drenched with the filth of their evil.

See LeRoi Jones, Home (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968) 251. The tendency observed by Clarke in black American writers has also been noted by Ezekiel Mphahlele, who states that the black American poets were deliberately creating a poetry that is "a black expression, a black revolt, a realisation of a black consciousness, available to all black men who respond to the battle cry". See Ezekiel Mphahlele, Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays (London: Macmillan, 1972) 98.

weaning him away from the strong dependency on a white culture he had acquired in his youth. That it had this effect is evident from his participation in the establishment of the Ebo Society, the major function of which was to demonstrate the cultural and artistic achievements of West Indians in a country he perceived as unwilling to grant the blacks recognition as full human beings. The Society organized literary evenings as well as exhibitions of folk-dancing, painting and sculpture by black artists. With the aid of other West Indians - among them Yvonne Bobb, Charlie Roach, Amba Trott and Romain Pitt³² - Clarke founded The Ebo Voice, a monthly newsletter intended for distribution primarily among people of West Indian origins.³³ The newsletter had a strongly literary orientation, though some writing of a political character also appeared in it. The publication never became firmly established, however, and after several issues it folded, largely owing to a paucity of contributors and the reduced participation of its founders.

Perhaps much more rewarding for Clarke were his continuing dealings with the CBC. In March of 1965, he sold

³²Yvonne Bobb, a Trinidadian by birth, had come to Canada on the "domestic" scheme but after serving a Canadian family for the mandatory two years had resumed her studies and become a university librarian. Charlie Roach was a musician; Amba Trott, from the Bahamas, was interested in theatre, and Romain Pitt of Grenada was a law student.

³³Anthony Ferry, "Canada's 'Black Arts' on Display," Toronto Daily Star 10 July 1965: 10.

the CBC the broadcasting rights for a documentary on Malcolm X³⁴ and two months later signed an agreement to prepare a commentary on capital punishment for the CBC programme, "Special".³⁵ By this time he had already begun to make appearances on the CBC series, "Viewpoint", a late-evening spot in which guests expressed their opinions on topics of public interest, and in his case the programme dwelt on matters similar to those he had raised in his columns for the Toronto Telegram. He learned, too, that the CBC was interested in a "piece" on "a writer's return to the West Indies",³⁶ so he commenced work on this radio script using material he had gathered on his visit to the Caribbean in 1964.

Clarke's major freelance journalism for the CBC in 1965 was related to West Indian immigrants in England. In March of that year the proofs of Amongst Thistles and Thorns had been mailed to him for correction and he had learned that the scheduled publication date of the novel was 28 June 1965.³⁷ A party to mark the English launching of the book was planned for 1 July 1965, and Clarke met some of the expenses of a trip to London by extracting from the CBC an

³⁴Austin Clarke, Contract with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 7 March 1965.

³⁵Austin Clarke, Contract with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 7 May 1965.

³⁶Robert Weaver to Austin Clarke, 19 March 1965.

³⁷David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 10 March 1965.

assignment to prepare a radio documentary on West Indian immigrants in that city. Clarke claims he had always been curious about the fortunes of fellow blacks in England and had indeed sometimes regretted not having emigrated to the "Mother Country". He therefore welcomed the opportunity to visit England. He spent much of the three weeks he had been allotted for the CBC project in interviewing a widely representative sample of blacks of Caribbean origins, including the writers Michael Anthony, Jan Carew, Samuel Selvon and Andrew Salkey as well as workers drawn from a wide range of occupations and professions. His discussions with his subjects covered topics ranging from housing problems and discrimination in employment to English resentment against blacks and parental worry about the fate of their children at school.³⁸

Clarke's activities in England were not limited to interviewing others and attending a party in Mayfair to mark the publication of his novel. He struck up a close friendship with David Burnett of Heinemann's, and the Englishman not only invited him to his home but also accompanied him on a trip to

³⁸Austin Clarke, "London's Black Pilgrims," Unpublished Radio Script (McMaster) Box 21, Folder 10, 1965. Among those interviewed by Clarke were Neville Goddard, a bus driver, Lloyd Mayers, a labourer, Constance Moe, a nurse, and Richard Small, who had come to London to receive an MBE award. As narrator, Clarke describes the racial tensions in London. He asserts that, while West Indians had come to England regarding her as the Mother Country, the English had renounced all obligations of parenthood and the home had become an orphanage.

Cambridge University. Clarke also met Michael de Freitas, popularly known as Michael X, who was a leader in the Racial Adjustment Action Society, a militant organization that aimed at improving the lot of non-whites in Britain. He had gained access to Michael X quite accidentally, it seems. While in the CBC London studios for some work on his audiotapes, he had casually mentioned to an Englishwoman that his failure to meet Michael was one of his greatest regrets. She was acquainted with Michael X and through her Clarke received an invitation to supper in the black activist's apartment. His encounter with Michael X confirmed his reluctance to become deeply embroiled in black politics for he concluded--as he had already done with regard to some of the civil rights protagonists in the United States--that his host did not possess the intellectual training vital for effective leadership in the black cause.³⁹ Nevertheless, he found his association with Michael X profitable, since the latter took him to interesting "night spots" in London and conducted him through Brixton and Notting Hill for first-hand observation of predominantly black neighbourhoods.

One of the highlights of Clarke's stay in London was

³⁹It appears that Clarke's doubts about Michael X were well founded. Vidia Naipaul claims that Michael de Freitas--alias Michael X/Abdul Malik--was not genuinely concerned with the goals of the black movement but was a psychologically disturbed opportunist who exploited the black power movement in Britain, and later in Trinidad, for his own aggrandisement and financial gain. See Vidia Naipaul, "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad," The Return of Eva Peron (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, 1983) 11-92.

his "conversation" with Edward Lucie Smith for the British Broadcasting Corporation's "World of Books". The topic was "The Literature of Empire and After"⁴⁰ and the discussion centred on works by Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster. Clarke's twenty-minute segment was recorded only days before his departure for Canada but he was able to hear Smith's interviews with V. S. Naipaul and Anthony Burgess, the two other participants in the programme. On the whole, he was impressed by the civilized intercourse of the more enlightened of the English, illustrated in his view by the indulgence in a couple of drinks of whisky and an informal chat before the formal recording of his BBC segment and by the invitation to have tea with Smith's wife--the novelist, Olivia Manning--at the family home in St. John's Wood.

Clarke's visit to England was important in a number of ways. Though it had been planned partly because Clarke "had become interested in black affairs",⁴¹ it confirmed yet again the wisdom of his decision to turn to a career in writing. It was significant, too, because it led to friendships with West Indian writers--primarily Jan Carew and Samuel Selvon--who would once more have an impact on his life or his work. Furthermore, the more intense and often violent racism that Clarke saw existing in London provided another kind of evidence concerning the distorted and destructive

⁴⁰Joseph Hone to Austin Clarke, 6 July 1965.

⁴¹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 26 August 1987.

vision of "Englishness" with which his education had indoctrinated him. It led to a further erosion of his fondness for English culture and institutions, to a diminution--in Richard Wright's words--"of negative loyalty"⁴². He discovered "with regret", for example, that the English accents Barbadians had admired were often lower class ones, and he had the uneasy feeling that the exhibits in museums and art galleries for the most part reflected neither him nor his history.⁴³ England provided as well yet another perspective on Canada, as in the case of America a favourable one.

In Canada, the publication of Clarke's second novel only a year after the appearance of his first had a dramatic effect on his career:

My life changed. They were more exciting times then, because there were fewer writers. And there was some fascination because I was a black writer. I was embraced. I was called upon quite often to give my opinion on things--civil rights things, literary things, things of interest to Toronto, and so on. I was regarded as a sort of celebrity. ... I was functioning at the highest levels of the arts

⁴²Richard Wright, White Man, Listen (New York: Doubleday, 1957) 16. "Negative loyalty", according to Wright, is found in the educated segments of colonised peoples. It is "a kind of yearning under almost impossible conditions to identify with the values of the white world, since their own traditions have been shattered by that world". It has perhaps been "stronger among American Negroes and West Indian Negroes than any other sections of the colored people in the world" because these particular groups have lived "within the confines of the white cultures that dominate them--cultures that limit and condition their impulses and actions".

⁴³Austin Clarke, personal interview, 26 August 1987.

in the community. Some of that was perhaps tokenism, which I am willing to accept. But I was among the intellectuals and opinion shapers of the society.⁴⁴

Clarke was enjoying the success and the acclaim he had himself identified as among his most fundamental needs.

Amongst Thistles and Thorns unquestionably enhanced Clarke's reputation as a writer. With a few exceptions, the critics were less equivocal about this novel than they had been about Survivors of the Crossing. In some instances they pointedly noted Clarke's improvement as a novelist. Colin Rickards of London Express Features, for example, proclaimed Clarke's new novel to be "certainly a better book than his first one"⁴⁵ while Robert Fulford, writing in the Toronto Daily Star, conceded that the new novel was "more attractive than the first, if only for sentimental reasons".⁴⁶ Other reviewers noted such features of the work as more effective characterization and even greater objectivity.⁴⁷ Regarding

⁴⁴Austin Clarke, personal interview, 25 August 1987.

⁴⁵Colin Rickards, "Caribbean Bookshelf," rev. of Amongst Thistles and Thorns, by Austin Clarke, London Express Features, 25 August 1965: 3. See Clippings (McMaster) Box 34.

⁴⁶Robert Fulford, "A Bad Place to Be A Child," rev. of Amongst Thistles and Thorns, by Austin Clarke, the Toronto Daily Star 15 November 1965: 29. See Clippings (McMaster) Box 34.

⁴⁷See, for example, I. S. M., rev. of Amongst Thistles and Thorns, by Austin Clarke, Press and Journal (Aberdeen) 5 February 1966, and "New Fiction," The Times 1 July 1965, Clippings (McMaster) Box 34.

the latter, Derek Walcott observed in the Sunday Guardian of Trinidad that there had been an improvement over the first novel in that Clarke had kept "a judicious distance" from his characters, enabling the reader to "discern their figures more fully" and achieving a result nearer tragedy than "all the manic protestations of the first book".⁴⁸ Others believed Amongst Thistles and Thorns to be a better novel than Clarke's first because it was "a tightly knit and entirely credible glimpse of reality"⁴⁹ or because in it the writer had limited his scope and defined his objectives effectively enough to produce "a more satisfying artistic whole".⁵⁰ The commentary that pleased Clarke most was perhaps that of the Times Literary Supplement:

English writers, however traditionally inclined, can hardly any longer handle narrative or description or dialogue with anything like the verve and freshness that seem to come naturally to many a Nigerian or West Indian. ... There are already several, like Clarke himself, who retain the vitality and freshness of their race while making reasonably certain that their good wine is

⁴⁸Derek Walcott, "A Bajan Boyhood," rev. of Amongst Thistles and Thorns, by Austin Clarke, Sunday Guardian (Trinidad) 5 September 1965: 8, 11. See Clippings (McMaster) Box 34.

⁴⁹Nancy Kavanagh, "There Is Always Hope Tomorrow," rev. of Amongst Thistles and Thorns, by Austin Clarke, The Sherbrooke Record 9 October 1965. See Clippings (McMaster) Box 34.

⁵⁰Howard Cronis, "Book Review," rev. of Amongst Thistles and Thorns, by Austin Clarke, The Toronto Telegram 11 September 1965. See Clippings (McMaster) Box 34.

conventionally bottled and will travel.⁵¹

Being identified by a prestigious newspaper as one of the writers contributing through their fiction to a revitalization of English literature was a tribute Clarke would long remember with pride.

In Amongst Thistles and Thorns,⁵² Clarke interweaves fiction and autobiography and thus follows the model of George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1953) and Vidia Naipaul's Miguel Street (1959). Like Lamming and Naipaul, Clarke incorporates into his work various experiences from his own life, and he employs a mature narrator-protagonist who casts an objective and understanding eye on events of his youth.⁵³ All three novels come to a conclusion at critical turning points in the protagonists' lives, hindsight and maturity indicating to the narrators that it was at these crucial junctures that their maturation and the

⁵¹"Old Bottles for New Wine," The Times Literary Supplement 16 September 1965. See Clippings (McMaster) Box 34.

⁵²Set against a Barbadian background in which poverty and cruelty--as well as ignorance and violence--easily overshadow fleeting, impulsive acts of love and kindness, the novel relates the story of three crucial days in the life of a nine-year-old named Milton Sobers, in the process depicting the boy's relationship with others who people his immediate social world. These include his mother, Ruby, who is a washerwoman, and the two men in her life, Willy-Willy and Nathan, one of whom is Milton's real father.

⁵³While Lamming's protagonist furnishes an account of his life from nine to seventeen and Naipaul's from fifteen to eighteen, however, Clarke's deals with just a period of days.

expansion of their awareness of reality had begun.

Clarke was familiar with the writing of both Lamming and Naipaul, but it was unquestionably Lamming who exerted the greater influence on him. Indeed, Clarke admits that he found In the Castle of My Skin "a storehouse of ideas" for a writer and that he "may have borrowed some things".⁵⁴ Certainly, both Clarke and Lamming place their narratives in a Barbadian setting and historical context, and both are engrossed in the theme of colonialism. They are similar, too, in that they analyze the ramifications of colonialism at three levels--the world of the individual, the world of the local community, and the world of men--though Clarke places more emphasis on the world of the individual, one that in many respects mirrors a personal experience that he is in the process of attempting to comprehend. Lamming suggests a parallel between the protagonist's growing awareness and the island's evolution from colonial rule to independence. Clarke does the same, since in the three days of his life described in Amongst Thistles and Thorns Milton progresses from innocence to a budding sense of the realities of life in a colonial society and of the possibility of breaking free of his chains.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Austin Clarke, personal interview, 25 August 1987.

⁵⁵Austin Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, NCL Edition, 1984) 179-180. Clarke's narrator states:

... perhaps, if the day was long enough, I could even reach as far away from this village ... as Harlem New York, America. ... I knew I could leave

Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin no doubt confirmed for Clarke the legitimacy of including in his fiction selected elements of his personal experience. In his novel, Clarke portrays a world that he knew intimately in his boyhood. He not only names places he had himself once frequented⁵⁶ but depicts characters and situations very much like some he had encountered in his early years. Like his own mother, for example, Ruby has been an unwed teenager, and she displays a strength and tenacity reminiscent of Gladys Clarke's, for she also endures hardship so that she might send her son, Milton, to Harrison College. Again, Milton has a father and a stepfather and is bent on discovering the identity of his true father, a situation that has its origins in Clarke's own life. After her marriage, Clarke's mother had forbidden him from mentioning his father's name in her house but in his adolescent years he had grown interested in meeting his father and had in fact secretly done so.

Amongst Thistles and Thorns is autobiographical, also, in that it captures the essence of Clarke's boyhood

them all because I had defeated them all.

Milton now felt that he could gladly flee the restrictive forces within his community.

⁵⁶There are references to places familiar to Clarke, including Gravesend Beach, the Garrison Savannah, the Bath Corner, the Marine Hotel, the "Front Road" and Harrison College. Allusions to Harlem may also be linked to Clarke's awareness of this American community and its significance in black America, though at the time the manuscript of the novel was completed Clarke had made only one brief visit to New York.

experience. Clarke explains:

It is true that the main character in the book is a little boy, and it is true that some of the things he experienced in the book I perhaps did experience in life. But I was not thinking about myself; I was thinking of myself as a kind of prototype. ... I thought that the life I led in Barbados might have coincided with the lives of other boys my age.⁵⁷

Clarke was writing about himself, then, while assuming that he was describing the nature of the lives of other boys as well. The image he presents of numerous facets of his protagonist's life--of schooling, of family relationships and of religious involvement, for example--therefore indicates to some degree the character of his own boyhood.

While Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965) reintroduces several themes already broached in Survivors of the Crossing (1964), particularly those of the importance of the family, the Church, the school, and the environment in general in the moulding of an individual and a people and the inhumanity of a colonial system that fosters the oppression of the weak by the strong, these are now interwoven with a more central concern. They serve to illuminate and develop the major theme--the young Milton's quest for self-identity and self-fulfilment as an individual, as a black person, and as

⁵⁷Austin Clarke, "Interview with Austin Clarke," by Terrence Craig, World Literature Written in English 26.1 (1986): 116.

part of the larger universe revealed to him through his schooling and especially through Willy-Willy's vivid accounts of his journeys abroad.

Clarke limits himself to Milton's consciousness and develops other characters only so far as is vital for shedding light on Milton's quest and maturation as he journeys both physically and psychologically from innocence to an aware adolescence. In the fashion of Dickens' Great Expectations and Joyce's "Araby", Clarke utilises the first person point of view--with the story told in retrospect by the mature narrator-protagonist--though he provides information necessary for the development of the story and themes through flashbacks, dream sequences and interior monologues, as well as through the conventional dialogue and interaction among characters. This narrative point of view permits a dual perspective on Milton, who appears as a nine-year-old on the brink of adolescence--with his own outlook and his own experiences of the world--but also as he is viewed by a more mature Milton looking back on his life and assessing his development with a sympathetic but more judgemental eye. Clarke's incorporation of a mature narrator-protagonist also allows for the use of both dialect and standard English, a desirable feature since a narration in dialect only would be tedious for the reader in a metropolitan society. The novel gains in credibility, too, since the language is appropriate to the speaker; the young Milton employs dialect while the

mature, more educated counterpart communicates in standard English.

In certain respects a bildungsroman,⁵⁸ Amongst Thistles and Thorns is infused with elements that lend it substantial depth and focus. Prominent among these are interior monologues that plumb the mind of both the younger and the older Milton and provide vivid and convincing pictures of Milton's growing maturation as well as of his progress toward more complex insights. The boy's sharpening sensitivity and perceptiveness are portrayed with especially striking clarity in the monologues concerned with his mother. While a young boy, he is struck mainly by her injustice and cruelty in her dealings with him but a waxing maturity teaches him that her position has always been an untenable one and that the particular forms of treatment he has endured at her hands have been prompted by a lifetime of loneliness, suffering and frustration and, unconsciously, by her ever-present fear that she might be impotent to rescue him from a similar fate.⁵⁹ As in the psychological novel, Clarke's work is concerned more with the inner than with the exterior features of a protagonist whose actions are shown to spring largely from the workings of his own mind, exposed in part

⁵⁸For a discussion of Amongst Thistles and Thorns in these terms, see Geta Au Leseur, "The Bildungsroman in Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean Fiction: An Integrated Consciousness," diss., Indiana University, 1982.

⁵⁹Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 46-49.

through interior monologues.

Again, Amongst Thistles and Thorns contains a chain of distinct incidents rather than a complex plot and has apparently borrowed a prominent characteristic of the episodic novel.⁶⁰ Clarke dwells on those segments of Milton's life that bear some significance to the young boy's growth as a person. The sexual scenes, for example, are not merely gratuitous: they delineate Milton's rising sexual awareness or his apprehension of the power the sexual drive exerts over human beings, including even his own mother. Again, the episode of Willy-Willy's drowning is important in that it signifies the death of Milton's childhood and a transition from innocence to experience. Willy-Willy's vision now becomes Milton's as the boy sees "the green pastures" of the village "stretching far far out to the sea all the way across the ocean to Harlem New York City, America".⁶¹

Elements of satire, too, are evident in Amongst Thistles and Thorns. As in Survivors of the Crossing, the juxtaposition of comic and tragic scenes underscores the tragic and aids in the development of notions of interest to Clarke. The comic scene in Miss Brewster's home, for example, throws into sharp relief the wretched condition of this lonely

⁶⁰"Runaway," rev. of Amongst Thistles and Thorns, by Austin Clarke, The Oxford Times 6 August 1965. See Clippings (McMaster) Box 34. The reviewer in the Oxford Times labels the work a picaresque novel and states that "viewed as a collection of episodes and character studies it is superb".

⁶¹Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 169.

and frustrated spinster who is denied all chance of fulfilling herself as an individual. The concern she demonstrates about the future of the younger generation certainly suggests that had circumstances been different she might have done much to improve life for herself and those she taught.

Clarke directs his satire especially against a school system he views as anachronistic and as substantially irrelevant to Barbadian society in general and to Milton in particular. In The Survivors of the Crossing, he had begun through his art to come to terms with the black experience in Barbados. In Amongst Thistles and Thorns, he explores this experience again but on a more personal level. The novel is in part a vehicle through which he reevaluates his own history and in so doing better comprehends it. His satirical treatment of the educational system, for example, is founded on his own experience of Barbadian schooling. In a humorous vein he exposes the brutality and ignorance of the subservient and self-serving black headmaster, the detachment and insensitivity of the white inspector who consumes his delicious food in the presence of the starving schoolboys, the absurdity of the school syllabus and of foreign books dealing with subject-matter far removed from the challenges of local Barbadian life, and the incessant glorification through this system of all things British and white. The implication is clear. The outmoded and irrelevant form of education prevailing in the society does not encourage intellectual or

spiritual growth. Instead, it insidiously perpetuates self-hate and a sense of inferiority, for it requires that all things be measured against criteria established by the white elite.⁶² As Memmi recognizes in The Colonizer and the Colonized, it helps to set the stage for a racial differentiation that "lays the foundation for the immutability of this life" in a colonial society.⁶³ Milton has to surmount the obstacles to growth with which his educational path is studded and the school can take little credit for whatever level of maturity and of insight regarding himself he succeeds in achieving.

Clarke's skill in creating significance rests in large measure upon his sophisticated treatment of setting, both the actual and the imaginary. Examples of the importance of setting are numerous. The squalid, poverty-ridden environment the characters inhabit signifies both their physical and their spiritual deprivations. The storm, the winds and the rain reflect Milton's--and at times his mother's--conflicts and fears. The upheaval in nature appears pronounced when Milton attempts to make sense of and come to terms with his chaotic world, the fragmented style of the novel mirroring Milton's disjointed world. The scenes under the damp and claustrophobic cellars, with recurring images of

⁶²Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 12-13; 165; 172-176.

⁶³Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (New York: The Orion Press, 1965) 74.

darkness, allude to Milton's lack of knowledge and to the hellish life that entraps him physically and spiritually. They also indicate his status on the social ladder and within the family circle: he is truly of minimal importance. In the outside world he is ridiculed, and in the home he takes second place to his mother's companions.⁶⁴ Indeed, the young Milton's social standing in his local community parallels the position of black men in a colonial society for, like such men, Milton is always on the fringes of the society, always looking in and though desirous of being full participants in the society, always being relegated to a position of insignificance.

Setting is of prime importance, also, because it underlines Milton's psychological development as his growing comprehension of his society leads him to greater understanding of himself. The Barbadian setting, with its hallmarks of injustice and black poverty and apathy, is contrasted with the world of Harlem, the black Mecca where Negroes with appropriate motivation might achieve material success and spiritual fulfilment. It communicates in concrete form the notion of imprisonment in a particular mode of life that is in essence little improvement on existence on the

⁶⁴For example, Milton is jeered at by his schoolmates who label him a thief; he is chased from the white area by dogs and a black servant; he is treated as an animal by the white druggist; he receives leftovers at home after his mother has fed her male friends, and he is required to sleep on the floor while Nathan uses the bed and the bedroom.

plantation prior to emancipation. The physical landscape indicates that in reality the master-slave arrangement still exists and that class distinctions are still a conspicuous feature of local social life. The whites dwell in large stone mansions on the Front Road and frequent the Marine Hotel, which is out of bounds to blacks. Their homes are protected from the blacks by dogs, high brick walls and guards, and blacks enter the area only if they work there as menial help or are simply on their way to some other destination. Milton is treated ignominiously in this exclusive neighbourhood not only by a white boy and his dog but also by a black watchman who reveals his conviction that Milton is not in his proper place:

"You little black fool, what the hell right you have hanging 'round the white man' hotel? You ain' belongst up here! You belongst down there!"⁶⁵

The richer whites inhabit the top of the hill, while the poor blacks--the lesser orders of humanity--are gathered at the bottom. Intermediate groups, consisting of relatively poor whites and those blacks fortunate to have regular white-collar jobs, live in small, unpainted houses on the side road. The physical disposition of the community reflects the social differentiation of whites and non-whites which all groups accept and which confirms in the Negro a powerful sense of his own inferiority.

⁶⁵Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 38.

In this setting, the entrapment that is a pervasive feature of life for the Negro is strongly evident in the field of employment. Blacks can obtain mainly menial jobs with little financial reward and to avoid dismissal they must at times tolerate insulting and demeaning behaviour on the part of whites. Their submissive disposition is attributable in part, also, to their history of subjugation to the whites. Ruby, who toils over a washtub every day only to be rewarded with five shillings and complaints from her white employer, rants and raves at home about the woman's unfairness but in her presence becomes virtually speechless. Her historical and social background have shaped her in such a way as to render her inarticulate before the white power:

And my mother, never able or brave enough to raise her head from under, the years of subjection by these people, to look at this powerful strange white woman; and making certain, no doubt, that she and her "little boy-child going eat bittle next week", would not dare to raise her voice in this woman's presence.⁶⁶

Indeed, the relationship between Ruby and the white woman is analogous to that between blacks and whites in Barbadian society as a whole.

An inevitable correlate of the typical employment experience of blacks is abject poverty, a state reflecting the Negroes' psychological emasculation in a white-dominated colonial society. The life of hardship among the Negroes,

⁶⁶Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 34.

with its attendant cruelty and violence, contrasts with that of ease and comfort enjoyed by the likes of Ruby's employer. The white woman's luxurious house lacks nothing and is a world apart from Ruby's, which leaks badly during rains, quivers in storms, and never contains enough food for its occupants. The differing fate of blacks and whites is captured with startling power in the scene in which the white school inspector nonchalantly gorges himself at lunchtime in full view of the starving schoolboys about him,⁶⁷ a scene again symbolic of the relationship between blacks and whites in colonial Barbados.

To understand who he is, Milton must comprehend the nature of the society that has shaped him, and there is no doubt that in this regard he makes progress. He precociously begins a journey that Clarke himself is only now making through his art, one that Clarke certainly did not make at Milton's age. He displays an increasing sensitivity to his physical and social environment and begins to question the disparity between the races. He puzzles over the fact, for example, that the white woman who lives in idleness enjoys a comfortable existence while his mother who slaves from dawn to dusk barely manages to survive:

⁶⁷Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 174.

And I wondered why that was made so, why my mother who worked harder than six white women, seven days a week, had to spend this unholy night in a sieve ...⁶⁸

He acquires insights about the link between the structure of the society and the behaviour of blacks, connecting his mother's harshness and cruelty toward him with the debasing treatment meted out to her by her white employer and by life in general. In this way, he comes to the realization that her helplessness and frustrations are usually directed at him not because she is innately cruel or devoid of concern for him but because:

... perhaps she, too, had had a rough day. Perhaps she was only laughing because she had already cried the whole day; and since nothing had happened to cheer her up, she decided to laugh on the outside, and cry on the inside.⁶⁹

Gradually, he makes sense of his mother's vacillating attitude toward him and thus catches a glimpse of the subtle ways in which the society has moulded the blacks.

The Harlem setting, unlike the Barbadian, symbolises the alternative to which Milton aspires for it is associated with a positive black identity and with black self-

⁶⁸Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 171.

⁶⁹Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 29.

fulfilment.⁷⁰ The Harlem of which the young boy dreams is a place of racial awareness, racial independence, racial pride and to a large extent racial achievement. It is a world in which the values and standards are those of the blacks themselves. This milieu inculcates in its people the idea that black is beautiful and good and encourages them to look kindly on themselves, taking pride in their race, their history, their culture and the achievements of others of their kind. The freedom the blacks of Harlem possess to be true to themselves has not sprung from passivity or apathy, however. Rather, it has been earned only through a long, painful and often bloody struggle with whites, a notion implied by references in the novel to the presence of the armed white policemen patrolling the black neighbourhood. Harlem contrasts with the Barbadian setting in that it offers blacks the opportunity to strip themselves of apathy and strive for material and spiritual gains both as individuals and as members of humanity at large. Of course, it is not a perfect world, Clarke implies, for it has its "thistles and thorns",⁷¹ but it is nevertheless blessed with

⁷⁰The references to Harlem are evidence of Clarke's perception of this New York community as a source of the new black consciousness. Up to the time the manuscript of the novel was completed, Clarke had visited Harlem only once to spend a few days with a relative. Through reports in the mass media and his general reading, however, he had come to see Harlem as a centre of the new black thinking and rising black aspiration.

⁷¹Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 91.

"flowers"⁷² and unlike a dehumanizing and suffocating Barbadian society that perpetuates dependence on a colonial power it offers the black man a chance for growth.

Clarke's designation of the outside world, and of the United States in particular, as the setting associated with opportunity for black growth is again evident in the quests of two other characters, one less successful than the other. Willy-Willy's journeys represent more than a search for the basic material satisfaction denied him in Barbados. During his stay on a citrus plantation in Florida he discovers that the disparity between blacks and whites obtains here as well:

"And I look 'round, and be-Christ all I seeing is black people working from sun-up to sun-down, and all the brown-skin boys and white boys sitting down in the shade."⁷³

Recognising the situation as a mirror-image of the life in Barbados he had sought to escape, he extricates himself with alacrity from the new trap and goes to Harlem, where for the first time he experiences a sense of self-worth and accomplishment. Armed with a vision of what the black man can achieve when he is accorded human dignity and is not predestined for the bottom of the social ladder, Willy-Willy abandons his successful life in the United States and returns

⁷²Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 91.

⁷³Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 44.

to the benighted world of Barbados, apparently wishing to share with others of his race his new-found vision of black possibility. The reference to Step'n-Fletchett, "that nigger what had so much o' money that he uses to wear gold slippers",⁷⁴ underscores the potential for self-fulfilment inherent in blacks. Crippled by apathy and an obsession with the material and the here-and-now, however, Willy-Willy's Barbadian associates have no time for a man of vision, regarding Willy-Willy as a fool and an eccentric. Such a man cannot thrive in this environment. While Rufus of Survivors of the Crossing is imprisoned for twenty years, Willy-Willy drowns in the flood, the mother of his child refusing him shelter in the midst of a tremendous storm. Her reaction is symbolic of the community's rejection of social and racial consciousness and its unpreparedness for progressing toward self-fulfilment.

The quest by eleven year old Rachel again highlights the world outside Barbados as a setting linked with improvement of the human condition. Moved by dreams of a less stultifying life, Rachel runs away from home and eventually reaches the United States where she marries a prosperous black man and has a family of her own. Hindsight tells Girlie, her mother, that Rachel is not the Jezebel she has thought her but has simply been " 'escaping from the system ...' ".⁷⁵ Like

⁷⁴Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 93.

⁷⁵Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 66.

Rachel, Milton has to run away from this environment if he is to escape its crippling influence. His journey as a nine-year-old is limited physically and psychologically but it is the catalyst that will trigger the later, more extensive journeys of the older Milton, and though Rachel and Willy-Willy are not equally successful in their quests the young Milton unconsciously emulates them both. Release from the conditions of life into which one is born in a society such as Barbados, the novel posits, comes most quickly to those who can break away from the prisons of family and community and acquire the ability to see beyond their insular world. Barbados offers no alternatives for the black person; it is a place of "thistles and thorns".⁷⁶

Amongst Thistles and Thorns dwells primarily on the quest theme but it also presents a remarkably realistic treatment of the role of women in the black segment of a colonial society, though even this dimension of the novel is bound up with ideas that hold a central place in Clarke's thinking. The work follows Survivors of the Crossing in delineating a family structure quite at variance with that typical of Western society. Not only are Clarke's women often heads of their households but they often have no legal husband and live with a temporary male companion who may or may not be the father of their children. The introspective nature of Amongst Thistles and Thorns enables Clarke to examine in

⁷⁶Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 154, 159.

greater depth the dilemmas and conflicts confronting black women in Barbadian society and he is clearly sustained by a scholarly tradition that attributes the rise of typical patterns of male-female relationship among Negroes to the social and economic conditions of slavery. The slave family has been described as a fluid entity:

If a "husband" belonged to the same plantation, he could reside with his wife and their children, but in other circumstances, it might be impossible for him to do so. In either case, it was the link with the mother which provided the basis for the existence of the slave family. The fact that the father was not even needed as the bread winner further reduced the importance of his role, and made it possible for the slave women to dispense completely with any form of stable union if they so desired.⁷⁷

Clarke's women in Amongst Thistles and Thorns, as in his first novel, are shown to be heirs to the slave family tradition, which has become entrenched through the limitations of black opportunity in a colonial society with both positive and negative consequences for the female. Their social and economic deprivation are linked to strength and courage but also to persistent peculiarities of conduct. In this connection, Clarke's depiction of Milton's mother is indeed illuminating, for Ruby endures vicissitudes similar to those of the black female slave. Pregnant at age fifteen, she is forced to leave school to take care of her "fatherless" child.

⁷⁷Elsa Goveia, Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955) 235-36.

With only some elementary education, she is equipped for only the most menial of jobs but she struggles bravely to support herself and her son. Nathan feels no responsibility for the child's upkeep, ignoring even a court order to provide support. He is the epitome of the slave father, the male predator who has been immunized by social patterns emerging in slavery--and preserved in the economic conditions bred by colonialism--against all sense of responsibility for mate and child.

Because of his history and his unenviable location at the bottom of a colonial society, the black, lower-class male has been debased, his place for the most part taken by the women. Since he lacks the resources to provide for and house a family, he often has a marginal or non-existent role in the domestic group and, forced by circumstances into the social niche of the old slave father, he is seldom driven by affection for or any sense of moral obligation toward his children. For example, Nathan, Milton's purported father, refuses the boy shelter on the one night on which he turns to him for help. Even Blackman, the headmaster, who has a respectable job and is granted some status in the community, becomes habituated to traditional expectations, forcing his wife to complain " that she didn't know what the bloody hell the headmaster did with the money he got from the Government for being headmaster; that she had seven half-starved

children running around naked at home... ."78 In failing to provide for his family, even the relatively privileged Blackman is in reality performing the role of the slave father.

There is another aspect of male behaviour, however, that again has serious implications for the black woman, and this is the frequent male recourse to violence. Blackman, for instance, repeatedly brutalizes his wife as well as the defenceless schoolboys. More often than not, indeed, the community reveres the man of violence and brutality, and in this context the ideal father is often the man of brute strength and action. Even schoolboys wish that their fathers were like Nathan, who has thrashed Blackman until the blood runs from his wounds.⁷⁹ In fact, Clarke implies, male violence and aggressiveness constitute an attempted display of machismo, which is a direct result of the black man's conscious and unconscious sense of emasculation. The male's sense of marginality--of impotence in providing effectively for mates and children in a society in which the dominant norms demand that he do so--and of negligible worth in the social order forces him to assert his worth through violence.⁸⁰

⁷⁸Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 16.

⁷⁹Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 132.

⁸⁰Clarke's point of view is supported to a large degree by Shorey-Bryan, who notes that black men "often feel that they can only bolster their ego by asserting their dominance

Despite the black female's dominant role in the family and the legitimacy accorded the slave family tradition in the Negro community, most black women if given a chance would in Clarke's view opt for marriage and a conventional family life. Ruby's willingness to accept the reprobate, Nathan, because of his vague promises of marriage reflects the same underlying attitude as Stella's complaints in Survivors of the Crossing about Rufus' denying her a wedding ring. The likelihood of permanence and stability in her family life so boosts Ruby's self-image that she feels she can now march up to the white woman's house, look her in the eye and tell her "plain and simple, 'Kiss my arse, please!'"⁸¹ For the child, too, there is something missing. Black women are often a major influence on their children who, like Milton, might well appreciate their mother's monumental efforts on their behalf and also understand how the society has forced the women to act sometimes in apparently contradictory ways. Yet, Clarke seems to suggest, the dearth of appropriate male models may be a problem. Milton's quest for his father implies that an important element of family life is absent and that it is only when he discovers his true father that he can break out of a childhood world dominated by his mother and truly develop. Ultimately, it is not Nathan but Willy-Willy, Milton's real

over women and children". See Norma Shorey-Bryan, "The Making of Male-Female Relationships in the Caribbean," Women of the Caribbean, ed. Pat Ellis (London: Zed Books, 1986) 70-71.

⁸¹Clarke, Amongst Thistles and Thorns 109.

father, who opens up to the young boy the world of Harlem and all that it connotes.

According to Lamming, how well the writer discharges his responsibility to the "community of men ... will be judged not only by the authenticity and power with which his own private world is presented, but also by the honesty with which he interprets the world of his social relations".⁸² There can be little doubt that, in weaving into his fiction some of his experiences as a colonised black, Clarke has captured his private world with both "authenticity and power" and that he has also been brutally honest in his analysis of what it means to be black in the web of social relationships typical of a colonial society. Yet Amongst Thistles and Thorns is more than a representation of realities Clarke has known. It is also a medium enabling Clarke to face up to his own past in an effort to comprehend it. In his extensive treatment of Milton's relationship with his mother, father and stepfather, for example, Clarke traces the effects of colonialism on black attitudes and behaviour. Through such endeavours, he is able to grasp the meaning of his own early experiences and to delineate the forces that have helped to make him what he is.

⁸²George Lamming, "The Negro Writer and His World," Caribbean Quarterly 5.2 (1958): 112-113.

Chapter 5

Steps Toward A Trilogy

I

Clarke's career following the acceptance of Amongst Thistles and Thorns for publication was as hectic as ever. He wrote prodigiously, accepted speaking engagements and involved himself in radio work. He also for the first time gained access to American university campuses as a visiting lecturer or speaker. The last venture had profound implications for his reputation, his interests and his financial standing; it also brought him fresh perspectives on his own experience as a black immigrant. This was certainly a period of Clarke's life in which the "energy and talent" that Paule Marshall so admired in him¹ and the "rich, complex personality"² that others remember him by were very much in evidence.

Clarke's enthusiasm for writing seemed boundless.

¹Paule Marshall, personal interview, 2 November 1990.

²Keith Henry to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 17 August 1990. Keith Henry, a black West Indian who once lived next door to Clarke on Brunswick Avenue in Toronto, is a historian employed by the State University of New York at Buffalo.

On completing Amongst Thistles and Thorns, he discovered he had "run out of material" and could think of nothing new to say about Barbados.³ He therefore confronted anew the challenge of portraying, through the medium of a novel, the experiences of blacks in Canada. By March of 1964, he was already working on the manuscript of "No Bed of Roses",⁴ which would be published in 1967 as The Meeting Point. It needed extensive revision, however, and by the winter of 1965 he was finishing its fifth version. Clarke finally mailed the manuscript to Johnson, his London agent, who shortly informed him that Heinemann was interested in publishing it but thought some "cutting" desirable.⁵ Independently, Burnett, who was about to resign from his position with Heinemann, intimated to Clarke that the new novel had impressed him as being "kind of strange, sort of remote, and foreign", with some superficial characterization and a great deal of excess content.⁶ Johnson concurred with much of this assessment and advised Clarke to do the appropriate rewriting before seeking a contract for publication.⁷

Clarke, as was his wont, simultaneously pursued a

³Austin Clarke, "Under the Sandbox Tree," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 3, Folders 3-4, 1981, 397.

⁴Frank Collymore to Austin Clarke, 18 March 1964.

⁵John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 13 May 1965.

⁶David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 18 May 1965.

⁷John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 19 August 1965.

variety of other interests. He realized he had prepared radio programmes on blacks in the United States and England but had produced nothing about those with a long history in Canada, so when Africville⁸ gained public attention because of government threats to dispossess the blacks of the Halifax lands they occupied he obtained a CBC contract to prepare a radio documentary on the Africville community. He spent some time in Halifax in the summer of 1965 interviewing residents of Africville about their experiences and their economic opportunities and returned to Toronto to prepare his documentary. Though the programme was ready by early Fall it was--as Clarke perceives the situation in retrospect--too controversial for CBC tastes, since it presented the Africville blacks as victims of political manoeuvring. Only fragments, mainly the interviews featuring black leaders, were ever aired. But the CBC did accept some of his other work; on 24 October 1965 it broadcast his programme, "London's Black Pilgrims", and two days later bought the rights for his documentary, "A Writer Returns Home".⁹

⁸Africville was born when blacks migrating from the United States to Nova Scotia in the late eighteenth century bought land in the northeastern part of Halifax and settled there. The area became a slum neighbourhood lacking basic city services. Halifax expropriated the land for an approach to a new bridge and finally levelled the houses in 1967.

⁹Austin Clarke, Contract with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 26 October 1965.

Clarke also retained his interest in the short story. One of his major achievements was winning the 1965 Belmont Award¹⁰ with the story "Four Stations in His Circle", which describes the experiences of a black man trying to pierce his way into Canadian society at its highest social levels. The story also won the University of Western Ontario President's medal for 1965. Inspired by these successes, Clarke compiled a collection consisting mostly of his stories already in print in an effort to achieve his first published anthology.¹¹ However, the collection, tentatively entitled "Four Stations in His Circle", attracted no offers from publishers and though Clarke was disappointed by this response he was totally unprepared for a CBC rejection of his prize-winning story.¹² On probing into the reasons for the CBC decision he learned that the Corporation considered some of the language unacceptable for the public airwaves and considered the work, along with other submissions from the author, too long and complex for radio broadcasting.¹³

¹⁰This Canadian short-story competition was sponsored jointly by Saturday Night and a well-known tobacco company.

¹¹The stories in this collection were "An Easter Carol", "They Heard A Ringing of Bells", "Waiting for the Postman to Knock", "Give Us This Day, and Forgive Us", "Four Stations in His Circle", "The Collector", "Half-Moons on Pinky's Fingernails", "Leaving This Island Place" and "Who Shall Have Her Cake?"

¹²Robert Weaver to Austin Clarke, 13 December 1965.

¹³Robert Weaver to Austin Clarke, 4 January 1966.

Disappointing, too, were the difficulties of getting his new novel, now entitled "The Meeting Point", accepted for publication. Macmillan of Canada was interested but required substantial revision of the manuscript. For its part, Heinemann was also willing to consider the novel for publication but wished to see it with the revisions Clarke was making for Macmillan.¹⁴ Heinemann finally signed an agreement to publish "The Meeting Point", though not until 1967,¹⁵ and kept Clarke working at the manuscript by requesting additional cuts in August, 1966,¹⁶ and again in February, 1967.¹⁷

Clarke broke the monotony of repeated reworking of his novel with other pursuits. He accepted a contract to read for thirty minutes from the manuscript of "The Meeting Point" for the CBC's "Tuesday Night";¹⁸ he applied for and received a Canada Council Arts Fellowship to write a book on the jealousy theme in Shakespeare's Othello,¹⁹ a project which caught Heinemann's attention,²⁰ and he expended some of his

¹⁴John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 5 April 1966.

¹⁵John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 10 June 1966.

¹⁶John Selby to Austin Clarke, 25 August 1966.

¹⁷John Selby to Austin Clarke, 8 February 1967.

¹⁸Austin Clarke, Contract with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 15 February 1966.

¹⁹Robert H. Blackburn to Austin Clarke, 14 March 1966.

²⁰John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 10 June 1966.

energy on short stories,²¹ elaborating on the social relationships and other aspects of the lives of Caribbean blacks in Canada. He also maintained his contact with the CBC. Early in 1967 the Corporation bought "Four Stations in His Circle" and, in the fall, informed him that "On One Leg", too, would be aired in its "Anthology" programme.²²

Clarke has been described by people who know him well as basically a "gracious"²³ and "most generous"²⁴ person, and nowhere does he exhibit such qualities more distinctly than in discussions with the CBC regarding the adaptation of "Four Stations in His Circle" for broadcasting. He could have done this task himself. Instead, he recommended that it be given to Jan Carew, the Caribbean author whom he had interviewed in London in 1965 and whom he had more recently encouraged to come to Canada. He felt some responsibility for helping Carew find his feet in Canada, and sharing the available work seemed one way to accomplish this. The CBC accepted his recommendation,²⁵ and from this point he

²¹"Give Us This Day, and Forgive Us" was published in The Tamarack Review in the winter of 1966. By the end of the year, "The Collector" had been accepted for publication by The Transatlantic Review and "Four Stations in His Circle" had been bought by Saturday Night. See Kurt Hellmer to Austin Clarke, 22 November 1966 and 5 December 1966.

²²Robert Weaver to Austin Clarke, 22 September 1967.

²³Henry to Algoo-Baksh, 17 August 1990.

²⁴Harold Marshall to J. Baksh, 3 June 1990.

²⁵Austin Clarke to Valerie Kahner, 8 March 1967.

and Carew became close friends.

Other assignments for the CBC kept him in touch with the sentiments of American blacks. For example, the Corporation agreed to pay Clarke for each thirty-minute segment on Stokeley Carmichael actually broadcast in its "Money and Power" series²⁶ and offered him a contract for a sixty-minute documentary on the black American activist.²⁷ By March Clarke had interviewed Carmichael and was hard at work on the editing of the tapes.²⁸ He gathered subsequently that a trilogy of his thirty-minute programmes on the American would be broadcast a second time by the CBC in a special programme called "The Best of Ideas".²⁹ He had seized the opportunity provided by his visit to New York for the Carmichael interviews to chat also with Roy Innis, another leading participant in the Civil Rights movement, and with the material obtained he prepared a script in which Innis comments on the black renaissance in Harlem and argues for a separate black society within the United States, asserting that integration is impossible in a society that is fundamentally racist.³⁰ The CBC also engaged Clarke for other

²⁶Janet Somerville to Austin Clarke, 16 February 1967.

²⁷Austin Clarke, Contract with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 10 March 1967.

²⁸Austin Clarke to Valerie Kahner, 7 March 1967.

²⁹Janet Somerville to Austin Clarke, 16 June 1967.

³⁰Austin Clarke, "Interview of Roy Innis," Unpublished Script (McMaster) Box 25, Folder 11, 1967.

assignments, including the preparation of a documentary on "The World of Graham Coughtry" for "Project '68"³¹ and a three-part series on "Cultural Africanization" for "Ideas".³²

Clarke's numerous commitments inevitably made it difficult for him to meet some of his obligations. Johnson deemed it necessary to advise him on two occasions that he should not neglect his work on Othello, in which Heinemann had expressed an interest,³³ while Boyle urged him at least once "to get to work" on the Coughtry tapes.³⁴ The publication of The Meeting Point, which had been scheduled for 8 May 1967 by Heinemann in England and 12 May 1967 by Macmillan in Canada,³⁵ further complicated the author's life. Clarke wrote and recorded four, sixty-second radio advertisements for his new novel, emphasizing the value of the book in helping whites understand what it means to be black in a society like Canada. He was interviewed "extensively" on radio and television in Toronto³⁶ and was the guest of honour at a West Indian evening arranged to celebrate the publication of his novel. The publicity Clarke received as a result of the

³¹Harry Boyle to Austin Clarke, 27 January 1967.

³²Lewis Auerbach to Austin Clarke, 9 October 1967.

³³John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 8 February 1967 and 14 July 1967.

³⁴Harry Boyle to Austin Clarke, 10 May 1967.

³⁵Donald Sutherland to Austin Clarke, 16 March 1967.

³⁶Hora Clarke to Peter Desbarat, 1 June 1967.

release of The Meeting Point in May of 1967 brought him a fresh round of speaking and other engagements.³⁷ It apparently did not make any easier, however, his efforts to have his major works published in the United States. He would have welcomed such a coup, perhaps to some degree because he believed it would have elevated his status in the eyes of his black American friends.³⁸ The Survivors of the Crossing and Amongst Thistles and Thorns, along with the short-story anthology entitled "Four Stations in His Circle", were offered to Little, Brown and Company, which requested a submission of The Meeting Point as well,³⁹ but after assessing them the publisher declined all four works, the novels because they were judged weak in plot and characterization and the anthology because the stories were thought uneven in quality.⁴⁰ The response from a number of other companies was no more encouraging.

³⁷For example, in September of 1967 Clarke conducted a writing workshop organized by the Writers' Guild of Sault Ste. Marie and in October he participated in the Third International Teach-In at the University of Toronto and in the annual Conference on Caribbean Affairs in Montreal. See Rita Tuckett to Austin Clarke, 4 June 1967; Jeffrey Rose to Austin Clarke, 13 May 1968, and F. V. P. Harvey to Austin Clarke, 16 August 1967.

³⁸Clarke had been corresponding with Paule Marshall, for instance, about their respective literary work. See Paule Marshall to Austin Clarke, 26 April 1966.

³⁹Kurt Hellmer to Austin Clarke, 15 March 1967.

⁴⁰Kurt Hellmer to Austin Clarke, 10 May 1967.

Well before The Meeting Point appeared in print, Clarke had begun writing his next novel, eventually published in 1973 as Storm of Fortune. He had not originally planned to write a sequel to The Meeting Point but his penchant for adapting segments of his novels as short stories had alerted him to the possibility of further development of character, plot and theme along the lines initiated in The Meeting Point. The completed manuscript of over six hundred pages reached Johnson in July of 1967, and the agent's reaction was that despite its other positive features its length would make it very expensive to publish.⁴¹ Kurt Hellmer, Clarke's American agent, was no more enthusiastic.⁴² In due course, Heinemann turned down the manuscript; the firm was not confident enough about the success of the novel in the United Kingdom to publish it.⁴³

In the fall of 1967, Clarke's life entered yet another phase. He received a letter from Robin Winks, a Yale History professor, requesting copies of The Ebo Voice. Winks was conducting research for a book on blacks in Canada and Clarke's The Meeting Point (1967) had alerted him to the need to bring his study far closer to the present than he had intended.⁴⁴ On the advice of Jan Carew, who argued that

⁴¹John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 20 July 1967.

⁴²Kurt Hellmer to Austin Clarke, 1 August 1967.

⁴³Janice Robertson to Austin Clarke, 12 September 1967.

⁴⁴Robin Winks to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 22 June 1990.

reporting an engagement at Yale in one's curriculum vitae would be far more valuable than receipt of a small cash payment, Clarke proposed to Winks that a speaking invitation be arranged for him at Yale in return for whatever copies of The Ebo Voice he could locate. The result of these negotiations was a request that Clarke visit Yale University for the period November 12-14, when he would deliver a public lecture on the subject of "Negritude and West Indian Literature", conduct a student seminar on the expression of national identity through literature, and read from West Indian works.⁴⁵

Clarke's visit to Yale was a notable success, for about a month after his return to Canada he received a formal invitation to spend two weeks at Yale in February, 1968, as a Hoyt Fellow at Morse College.⁴⁶ The point of the Hoyt Fellowships was to bring stimulating people to the University largely for informal meetings and discussions with faculty and students. Clarke's fellowship was subsequently extended to about four weeks to permit some association with Berkeley College as well⁴⁷ and for this period he was designated writer in residence, his stipend to be paid out of the Hoyt Fund.

⁴⁵Robin Winks to Austin Clarke, 7 November 1967.

⁴⁶John W. Hall to Austin Clarke, 20 December 1967.

⁴⁷Charles A. Walker, Master, Berkeley College, to Austin Clarke, 19 February 1968.

As gregarious as ever, Clarke entered with zest into his second contact with Yale. He gave talks to classes, met with college faculty and interacted informally with students. As Robin Winks shortly informed him, his visit was "immensely successful" and had "stirred up the students in precisely the way in which they needed to be shaken".⁴⁸ Indeed, he had made such a favourable impact at the University that he was invited back for a brief speaking engagement in April.⁴⁹ The trip to Yale was a stimulating and productive one in another sense, for in a four-month period he published seven items, all of them analysing aspects of the black experience in a primarily white society.⁵⁰ During the summer of 1968, he was appointed a Visiting Lecturer jointly in English and American Studies at Yale for the period 1 September 1968 to 30 June

⁴⁸Robin Winks to Austin Clarke, 1 April 1968.

⁴⁹Joseph La Palombara to Austin Clarke, 30 April 1968.

⁵⁰In The Confessed Bewilderment of Dr. Martin Luther King: And the Idea of Non-Violence as A Political Tactic (Burlington, Ontario: Al Kitab Sudan Publication, 1968), he argues that King's commitment to integration is misguided in a society in which racism is entrenched. In "Summer Violence: Black and White," The New Journal 1.10 (1968): 3-4, he suggests that a creative relationship between blacks and whites in the United States is unlikely because white attitudes regarding blacks are sustained by history and culture. Similar themes occur in his "White Man's Terrible Guilt," Toronto Telegram 1 April 1968; "Summer Is for Killing," Weekend Magazine 18 (1968): 2-4; "U.S.A. The Proud Song of the Black Revolution," Toronto Daily Star 11 May 1968: 10 and "Two Nations the End Result of Black Power," Toronto Daily Star 14 May 1968: 7. Clarke's "The Mysterious Lack of Black Faces on Signs," Toronto Life 2.8 (1968): 32-33 claims that the absence of black faces on signs and other material reveals white unwillingness to recognize the presence and worth of blacks in Canada.

1969.

Clarke's success at Yale opened up a number of new academic opportunities. Prior to taking up his new appointment, he went to Smith College to speak at a seminar on the establishment of a Black Studies programme at that University, and he was present at the Danforth Foundation's New Fellows Conference held at Zion, Illinois.⁵¹ In New Haven itself, Clarke, accompanied by his wife and his two daughters, took an apartment about a five-minute walk from the Yale campus, and he began his university teaching career with one course in Creative Writing for the English Department and another on Black Literature for the American Studies programme.

Clarke's geniality was one of his most valuable assets, for it enabled him to develop an excellent rapport with his students. Every two weeks or so, for example, he invited a group of his students to his apartment for meals and for informal class discussions,⁵² and when he was elected a Guest Fellow at Calhoun College that fall he played a critical role in the inauguration of a Calhoun college magazine, the first issue of which included contributions by LeRoi Jones,

⁵¹Peter Briggs to Austin Clarke, 18 May 1968. The Danforth Fellows were recipients of Danforth Foundation Graduate Fellowships and the new ones numbered one hundred and twenty-five. Clarke was expected to address the new Fellows at least once and to serve as "advisor" in a seminar entitled "The Artist and the Community".

⁵²Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

William Coffin and Clarke himself.⁵³ He also participated fully in the social and intellectual life of the college. Indeed, both he and his wife thoroughly enjoyed the social and cultural life of the Yale community. They received numerous invitations to parties, mainly from white faculty, and attended musical and other performances given by visiting artists.⁵⁴ While Clarke relished the opportunity to partake of life in one of the more privileged oases of white society, however, a particular dimension of his being clamoured for experiences of a different kind, and he satisfied these needs through fortnightly visits to Harlem to immerse himself in black music and in the fellowship of such black friends as Paule Marshall and Max Roach.

Intellectually, the Yale experience was of immense benefit to Clarke. He had always been a profuse reader. He had, for example, familiarized himself with the works of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi and thus sharpened his insights regarding colonialism and the psychology of black-white relationships in the context of white dominance.⁵⁵ At Yale,

⁵³R. W. B. Lewis to Fellows of Calhoun College, 24 October 1968.

⁵⁴The novelist, John Hersey, and his wife, Barbara, were among their closest friends, but they met such other well known people as George Brubeck and Norman Mailer. Clarke met Mailer--who was visiting Yale--at "a couple of parties, and they hit it off very well", becoming friends from that point. Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

⁵⁵He had read, for instance, the Grove Press editions of Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Mask (1967) and The Wretched of the Earth (1968) and the Orion Press edition of Albert

he persevered with his reading, better acquainting himself with the works of numerous writers, among them the black Americans Eldridge Cleaver and James Baldwin, the Nigerians Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, and the West Indians Michael Anthony and Vidia Naipaul. More importantly, he was forced by his teaching responsibilities and his speaking engagements into a closer analysis of some of this writing. In his Literature course, for example, he tried to demonstrate that black authors in other countries did not necessarily interpret the world precisely as their American counterparts typically did, and it was around this time that he began developing his distinction between "vindictive" and "non-vindictive" racialism in black literature.⁵⁶ In the summer of 1969, too, he taught a six-week graduate course to about twenty students for the School of Letters at Indiana University and in it he dealt with the treatment of race in black literature, paying special attention to works by Richard Wright, LeRoi Jones and

Memmi's The Colonizer and the Colonized (1965).

⁵⁶"Vindictiveness" reflects the degree to which a society grasps its continued oppression and is concerned in its art with "setting the record straight", which it does by presenting blacks positively and by maintaining a black point of view to counteract the depiction of blacks in white art. Much black American writing is thus "vindictive". "Non-vindictiveness" occurs when the society thinks it has freed itself of racism and its art is no longer concerned with "setting the record straight". Political independence in Africa, for example, makes such a preoccupation unnecessary, so that writers like Achebe and Soyinka can write with artistic freedom and honesty. See Austin Clarke, "Black Literature: 20th. Century," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 13, Folder 4, n.d., 8-12. The manuscript is undated, but it was written by Clarke at Yale University.

Chinua Achebe. More and more, he found himself being designated an expert on black literature and it was as such that Brandeis University offered him an appointment for the 1969-1970 academic year as the Jacob Ziskind Visiting Lecturer in Afro-American Studies and American Civilization, an appointment that Yale permitted even though it would overlap with its own extension of Clarke's visiting lectureship for another year.⁵⁷ Clarke's intellectual explorations as he held these positions kept constantly before him the issue of the function of the artist in society and undoubtedly influenced his own approach to writing.

Clarke rather extended himself during his two years at Yale. He met his instructional and other obligations at the university but, as Betty Clarke notes, he was "away from the campus a lot, moonlighting".⁵⁸ From October to December in 1969, he conducted ten workshops on black literature for teachers employed by the Bridgeport Board of Education. He also managed to do some occasional work for the CBC,⁵⁹ to join the staff of a Creative Writers' Workshop organized by

⁵⁷George Langdon to Peter Diamandopoulos, 5 June 1969.

⁵⁸Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

⁵⁹For example, his interview of the controversial Yale chaplain, William Sloan Coffin, was broadcast in "One Minute to Midnight" on CBC Radio. See J. A. Gonzalves, CBC, to Austin Clarke, 5 September 1968. Clarke also signed two contracts, one dated 21 April 1969 for a programme on George Wald for CBC's "Concern" and the other dated 10 February 1970 authorizing the CBC to broadcast "This Woman Have Plenty Troubles", an adaptation of a section of The Meeting Point.

the Ryerson Technical Institute for two weeks in August, 1969, and to visit a number of campuses as an invited speaker. In the first three months of 1970, for example, he talked about black literature at Williams College in Williamstown, the State University of New York at Buffalo and the University of Southern California, and lectured on black nationalism at York University and St. Francis Xavier University.

But Clarke tried as well to maintain a respectable level of literary productivity, though in this regard he enjoyed mixed fortunes. Attempts to place The Meeting Point in the United States had repeatedly failed, essentially because publishers were skeptical about the potential appeal of the novel to the American reading public.⁶⁰ Encouraged by the acceptance of two of his short stories for publication,⁶¹ however, Clarke compiled a new anthology under the title of "When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks", incorporating into it several of the stories from his unpublished "Four Stations in His Circle". In the non-fiction sphere, he agreed to write an introduction for the Collier Books Edition of Peter Abrahams' This Island Now, a novel set in Jamaica.⁶² On a larger scale, he submitted a proposal to Harcourt, Brace and World for an anthology of black writing

⁶⁰Kurt Hellmer to Austin Clarke, 23 October 1969.

⁶¹See Austin Clarke, "Why Didn't You Use A Plunger?" The Tamarack Review 52 (1969): 51-62 and "What Happened?" The Evergreen Review 14, Number 85 (1970): 21-22, 61-67.

⁶²Malcolm McPherson to Austin Clarke, 1 April 1970.

and, when this elicited little enthusiasm on the part of the publisher, he followed it up with an outline for a collection of critical essays on black Caribbean, African and American writing. He also completed a book-length manuscript entitled "An American Dutchman", largely his reflections on his activities in the United States in the summer of 1969.⁶³ The anthology, "When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks", held little interest for American publishers but the Anansi Press of Toronto viewed the stories as falling into a coherent pattern⁶⁴ and in the last month of 1970 sent publication contracts to the author.⁶⁵ However, both "An American Dutchman" and the collection of critical essays on black writing were declined by publishers.

Since Clarke had no immediate obligations in America at the end of his appointment in New Haven, he flew back to Toronto early in the summer of 1970, better off financially

⁶³Austin Clarke, "An American Dutchman," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 13, Folders 1-3, 1969. This work, completed in September of 1969, is a commentary on Clarke's association with Indiana University in Bloomington, a brief visit to Clark University in Boston, and a trip to Houston, Texas, as the guest of Jean deMenil--a wealthy patron of the arts--whom Clarke had met through his new American agent, a black man named Ronald Hobbs. Interspersed among these accounts are his observations on the readings for his course at Indiana University and on other books he had read, among them works by Norman Mailer, James Baldwin and LeRoi Jones.

⁶⁴Cheryl X, Hobbs' Agency, to Austin Clarke, 29 October 1970.

⁶⁵Cheryl X, Hobbs' Agency, 4 December 1970.

than when he had left for Yale two years earlier.⁶⁶ As usual, he kept himself very busy. He announced his return to Toronto with an article in the Toronto Star questioning the authenticity of a newspaper commentary on blacks in the city.⁶⁷ Yale was still fresh in his mind, however, and he hurried through a manuscript entitled "God and Mammon at Yale", in which he presents his thoughts concerning some aspects of his own connection with--and life in general at--Yale University.⁶⁸ In addition, he again made the CBC a frequent source of employment,⁶⁹ one of his assignments taking him to Barbados for two weeks and affording him a chance to renew old connections. His interest in the short

⁶⁶Clarke's wife had returned to Toronto a year earlier. The family had learned that the house they had occupied on Asquith Avenue was to be demolished and Betty Clarke had come back to Toronto to find a house to purchase. She had chosen one on Brunswick Avenue and Clarke had flown to Toronto to sign the appropriate documents. After that, Betty had stayed on at Brunswick Avenue with the children, with Clarke returning for brief visits every month or so. Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

⁶⁷Austin Clarke, "What Can A White Journalist Say About Toronto's Blacks?" Toronto Star 27 June 1970: 11.

⁶⁸Austin Clarke, "God and Mammon at Yale," Unpublished ms. (McMaster) Box 15, Folder 2, 1970. Clarke did not find a publisher for this manuscript. Little, Brown, for example, decided that the writing was "disorganised", the editor admitting that he found himself "getting confused by the random sequence of events and the sudden jumps from subject to subject and back again". See William Philips to Austin Clarke, 12 February 1971.

⁶⁹For example, he signed contracts with the CBC to prepare scripts for "A New Beginning" (3 September 1970), "Return to Barbados" (24 September 1970), "Lionel Hutchinson" (24 September 1970), "West Indian Family" (16 December 1970) and "You Should Have Used A Plunger" (23 July 1970).

story, too, remained as alive as ever, and during the summer of 1970 he wrote several new ones, some of which--like "Griff", "The Motor Car" and "On One Leg"--were later included in his published short-story collections.

Clarke had planned to stay in Canada and devote himself to his art, but in reality his connections with university circles in the United States made it difficult for him to ignore the academic world there. Early in the summer of 1970, he informed Williams College--where two months previously he had spoken about black literature--of his willingness to accept a visiting lectureship at that institution.⁷⁰ The result was his appointment as the Margaret Bundy Scott Visiting Professor of Literature for the Winter Study Period, 4-29 January 1971, and the Spring Semester, 3 February-27 May 1971.⁷¹ After teaching courses in Creative Writing and Black Literature at Williams College in the Spring Semester, he resumed work on his short stories in Toronto.⁷² In the meantime, Walter Burford, who had

⁷⁰Arthur Carr to Austin Clarke, 19 May 1970.

⁷¹Arthur Carr to Austin Clarke, 11 June 1970.

⁷²Clarke was receiving positive responses to his work from the CBC and publishers. Two more of his stories--"When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks" and "Early, Early, Early One Morning"--were read on CBC's "Anthology" in March and June respectively, while a third--"Leaving This Island Place"--had also been bought for the same programme. In addition, two of his stories were due to be published. See Austin Clarke, "The Motor Car," The Evergreen Review Number 92 (1971): 25-28 and "When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks," Canadian Forum October Issue (1971): 21-23, 58.

taught with him at Yale, was instrumental in arranging his appointment as a lecturer in the Black Studies programme at Duke University for the period September 1971 to May 1972.⁷³ In the fall of 1971, he agreed to contribute an article on "Caribbean Writers and Writing" to a supplement of the New York Amsterdam News intended to provide an overview of "the many faces of black culture, black arts, and black history",⁷⁴ and even before he had finished his first semester in Durham he wrote "Memoirs of A Southern Town", a work of over one hundred pages in which he offers his observations on his trip to and early association with Duke University.

Clarke's involvement with the United States and with American academic life had by no means been free of contradiction and ambiguity. From the very beginning, he confesses, he had been nagged by doubts about his decision to take a position at Yale:

I had mixed feelings about going to the States. ... My moral foundation had been shaken by my acceptance of the job. ... I had already deluded myself that I could work within the US system though hating the US.⁷⁵

It is perhaps no surprise, therefore, that while he enjoyed

⁷³See Walter Burford to Austin Clarke, 21 December 1970 and 9 March 1971.

⁷⁴Charles F. Harris to Austin Clarke, 2 September 1971.

⁷⁵Clarke, "God and Mammon" 12.

many aspects of his contact with academe he also found a great deal to condemn and consequently produced a series of critical--often extremely negative--observations on American society and academic life, often dwelling on the crippling effect the character of such social worlds had on blacks both individually and collectively. Thus, in "An American Dutchman", written in 1969 after his travels from New Haven to Indiana and Texas, he accuses America of being more concerned with the "nationalistic problems of other countries" and with the exploration of the moon than with vital domestic problems.⁷⁶ He argues that most Americans are "not decent or God-fearing" people,⁷⁷ and that in the United States "there is something profoundly wrong with being black".⁷⁸

Often, Clarke's examination of America takes the form of a diatribe against whatever institution he happened to be employed by. In "God and Mammon at Yale", for example, he is especially harsh on Yale and its white community. The university, he asserts, expects one-way allegiance from its faculty, who must regard personal conscience as secondary to being a loyal member of the Yale community. The institution is hypocritical in claiming to be politically neutral while refusing to take a stand against American investment in South

⁷⁶Clarke, "An American Dutchman" 127.

⁷⁷Clarke, "An American Dutchman" 127.

⁷⁸Clarke, "An American Dutchman" 260.

Africa.⁷⁹ Black students are badly served by the university: Black Studies as a field has not been accorded "academic legitimacy" on the campus, and black students are harassed by university police.⁸⁰ The white students, furthermore, are in general racist "without compunction".⁸¹ Again, in a newspaper article, he bluntly attacks segments of the Williams College faculty for their docility and subservience in their dealings with senior administrators as well as the administrators themselves for their "high-handedness" in responding to student protests,⁸² while in "Memoirs of A Southern Town" he is enraged by apparent signs of racism and stereotyping, the social discomfort of black students on the campus and the "lack of seriousness" of Duke University about Black Studies.⁸³

Such assaults by Clarke may appear to indicate an opportunistic willingness to bite the hand that feeds him; they could also suggest a querulous hostility to all forms of society and institutions to the degree that they cross his own inclinations and expectations. Certainly consistency is not their primary virtue; the radical nature of the black

⁷⁹Clarke, "God and Mammon" 50-52.

⁸⁰Clarke, "God and Mammon" 58-67.

⁸¹Clarke, "God and Mammon" 152.

⁸²Austin Clarke, "Student Walk-In: the 'Visitor' and the Faculty Meeting," Williams Record 4 May 1971: 3-4.

⁸³Clarke, "Memoirs of A Southern Town" 71-83.

experience in the United States both repels and fascinates him, while Canada is viewed simultaneously as a bastion of racism and a more agreeable place for blacks to live in than America.⁸⁴ The contradictions and paradoxes of Clarke's outbursts are real, but they are reflections of more complex attitudes and reactions than the more obvious interpretations above allow. Such attitudes and reactions are without a doubt traceable in part to fundamental attributes of personality. Clarke is, as Paule Marshall notes,⁸⁵ a "principled" man, a man of strong convictions, and, as he has more than once shown, he is not hindered by loyalty from acting as he deems fit toward those who have offended his sense of propriety.⁸⁶ One form of behaviour that irritated him was unwarranted servility, for he "had been taught quite early by [his] mother never to entertain that feeling [of subservience] about anybody or anything".⁸⁷ Another was injustice, such as that typical of racist societies or institutions. It was only natural, therefore, that once he had discerned such behaviours

⁸⁴Clarke, "An American Dutchman" 107, 350. Clarke notes that in recoiling from the intense racism of America he took refuge in Toronto.

⁸⁵Paule Marshall, personal interview, 2 November 1990.

⁸⁶For example, when he thought he was unfairly dismissed by the Toronto Globe and Mail he had no remorse about devoting his last two weeks on the job to writing short stories, and when he concluded that Industrial Sales Promotion had improperly taken money that should have gone to him he saw nothing wrong with clandestinely setting up his own company using his employer's office facilities.

⁸⁷Clarke, "An American Dutchman" 173.

he felt free to condemn them in any way he chose. But the contradictions and paradoxes of his outbursts also have their foundation to a significant degree in his experience both as immigrant and writer and must be placed in the larger context of his life and work.

Critical here is the progressive sense of alienation and isolation which Clarke had experienced since his arrival in Canada. In Barbados, he had been taught to become a "black Englishman", but in Canada he had discovered that his English cultural heritage did little to facilitate his assimilation; rather, it came to indicate the loss of whatever genuine cultural roots he might once have shared with his people. It was Clarke's particular gift to transform this sense of alienation and isolation into a source of creative energy. His experiences in the United States merely intensified both processes, the growth of his feeling of alienation and isolation and the creative drive that records it.

At Yale, for example, Clarke was outraged by humiliating treatment that he thought devalued him in comparison with white academics,⁸⁸ and in Texas he felt "the power, the fear, the prestige and the influence of oppression in the white columns".⁸⁹ Despite his close friendship with

⁸⁸For instance, Clarke complained to the university that in the library he and other blacks were often asked to produce identification cards while whites were not. See Austin Clarke to Martin Price, 10 May 1969.

⁸⁹Clarke, "An American Dutchman" 153.

individual blacks and his sincere concern about blacks in the United States, he perceived a distance between himself and his American counterparts, noting sadly his own cultural dispossession:

I suddenly felt a great distance between me and ... the black Americans, their thoughts, their psyche, and even an absence, too, of roots. I was a kind of exile ... in more ways than one."⁹⁰

In the end, Clarke was forced to conclude: "I can only be a spectator in this country, even among my own people."⁹¹ It was this estrangement in the midst of American society that he was able to exploit as a source of creative drive in producing such works as "An American Dutchman" and "God and Mammon at Yale".

II

Clarke's writing career, no less than his academic one, was flourishing. Some of his work had found a sympathetic reader in the person of William Philips, an Associate Editor at Little, Brown and Company who was driven by his "very high regard and enthusiasm" for the manuscript of Storm of Fortune to ask its author for The Meeting Point and

⁹⁰Clarke, "An American Dutchman" 176.

⁹¹Clarke, "An American Dutchman" 402.

a "package of reviews" as well.⁹² After assessing the materials submitted by the writer, Little, Brown decided to acquire the American rights for The Meeting Point,⁹³ and the firm shortly agreed to publish the other novel, too. Clarke signed contracts giving Little, Brown the American and Phillipine rights for The Meeting Point and all rights for Storm of Fortune, which would be marketed in Canada on the publisher's behalf by McClelland and Stewart.⁹⁴ Clarke learned in November that The Meeting Point had been "put into production".⁹⁵ Since Storm of Fortune still needed "work",⁹⁶ Clarke spent some of his time at Duke University doing the necessary revision. Little, Brown eventually announced that The Meeting Point would be published on April 3, 1972, with Storm of Fortune following six months later.⁹⁷

The Meeting Point (1967) and Storm of Fortune (1971, 1973) represent only the first two volumes of a trilogy that was completed in 1975 with The Bigger Light. The three are interconnected in terms of action, character and theme and, taken as a whole, constitute the first and most comprehensive account of the black West Indian immigrant experience in

⁹²William Philips to Austin Clarke, 27 May 1971.

⁹³William Philips to Austin Clarke, 24 June 1971.

⁹⁴William Philips to Austin Clarke, 19 August 1971.

⁹⁵William Philips to Austin Clarke, 8 November 1971.

⁹⁶William Philips to Austin Clarke, 19 August 1971.

⁹⁷Charles A. Ray to Austin Clarke, 2 March 1972.

Canada, for it traces the trials and tribulations as well as the material progress and psychological growth of a group of people hoping to forge new lives for themselves in an alien and often hostile society. Yet each of the novels is a unit in its own right and stands on its own merits. In this chapter only the first two will be examined, since they are more closely linked to each other by chronology, theme, character, and circumstances of publication.⁹⁸ Dimensions of black existence introduced and partially explored in The Meeting Point are scrutinised further in Storm of Fortune, while characters making their entrance in the first novel are shown in the second as still groping toward material success, a sense of community, human dignity and individual self-fulfilment. The Bigger Light, on the other hand, dwells on the black who has attained some measure of material prosperity.

Both The Meeting Point and Storm of Fortune were well received. In the former, characterization was singled out for particular praise as "alive", "well drawn" and "masterful". More general comments tended to be equally positive; Stan Tefferman of the Toronto Telegram found the strength of the book to be "the reduction of the oppressor and

⁹⁸The restriction of the analysis to these two novels is also necessary if an orderly chronology is to be preserved in the biographical account.

the oppressed to the same pathetic level",⁹⁹ while Colm Brogan of The Yorkshire Post noted "a fairly delicate hand and sharp delineation".¹⁰⁰ Others commented that it was a "beautiful, comic, innovative, spellbinding and tragic novel about the West Indian subculture of Toronto"¹⁰¹ and that it "fairly zings with life; swift-paced, vital and with a humorous appreciation of the injustices of today's world".¹⁰² Reservations were few, and tended to concern structure and pace.

Storm of Fortune was greeted even more enthusiastically. It was seen, for instance, as "an age-old story of racial prejudice told gracefully, yet powerfully from the black point of view"¹⁰³ and as "sometimes a very funny book" but "ultimately a serious one".¹⁰⁴ The Winnipeg Free

⁹⁹Stan Tefferman, "Mismating at the Meeting Point," rev. of The Meeting Point, by Austin Clarke, Toronto Telegram 27 May 1967: 22. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁰⁰Colm Brogan, "Slanting the News," rev. of The Meeting Point, by Austin Clarke, The Yorkshire Post 11 May 1967. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁰¹"Tragedy in Toronto," rev. of The Meeting Point, by Austin Clarke, The Boston Globe 16 April 1972. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁰²M.J.F., "Dialogue Leaps from Pages of Vital Novel," rev. of The Meeting Point, by Austin Clarke, St. Catherine's Standard 17 June 1967. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁰³Judy Van Rest, "Another View of Prejudice," rev. of Storm of Fortune, by Austin Clarke, The Sunday Oklahoman 20 January 1974. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁰⁴Ruth Russell, "Toronto An Alien World, Says West Indian Author," rev. of Storm of fortune, by Austin Clarke, The North Bay Nugget 10 August 1973: 3. See Clippings (McMaster), Box

Press recommended the book as "one of those entertaining novels that outstrip anything that sociology could give us on the same subject because of its vitality and richness of character"¹⁰⁵ and The Brampton Daily Times introduced Clarke with the promise that "you will find yourself drawn to him and his characters like a magnet".¹⁰⁶ Another feature that appealed to some was Clarke's ability to combine the comic and the tragic, with the "tragic comedy ... presented quietly but most effectively".¹⁰⁷ It was claimed as well that the novel had turned out to be a superior effort to The Meeting Point since it was "more controlled and richer in allusions" than the latter¹⁰⁸ and "surpassed the sketchy libidinal renditions" of The Meeting Point while sustaining "a depth of compassion and understanding", accomplishments that established Clarke as "a major Western writer".¹⁰⁹

34.

¹⁰⁵David Williamson, "Beyond Sociology," rev. of Storm of Fortune, by Austin Clarke, The Winnipeg Free Press 4 August 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁰⁶Wray Roulston, "Books 'n' Things," rev. pf Storm of Fortune, by Austin Clarke, The Brampton Daily Times 21 July 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁰⁷Sigmund A. Lavine, "Second Book in Trilogy," rev. of Storm of Fortune, by Austin Clarke, The Worcester Sunday Telegram 21 October 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁰⁸William French, "Bein' Nobody," rev. of Storm of Fortune, by Austin Clarke, The Toronto Globe and Mail 10 May 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁰⁹Joseph Benson, "Mr. Clarke's West Indian Trilogy," rev. of Storm of Fortune, by Austin Clarke, The Greensboro Daily News 2 September 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

The Meeting Point, though simple in plot, leads smoothly into Storm of Fortune. It deals mainly with Bernice, a black Barbadian who migrates to Canada on the domestic scheme and works for thirty-two months for a wealthy Jewish family in the Forest Hill district of Toronto. Bernice's physically comfortable but lonely life is interrupted when she is visited by her sister, Estelle, who is ostensibly on a holiday but is secretly determined to obtain immigrant status so that she might free herself from the poverty and the limitations of life in Barbados. While sharing Bernice's small apartment in the Burrmann home, she engages in an affair with the master of the house, unsuccessfully attempts an abortion, and ends up in the General Hospital. Though Bernice is the central character in the story, and Estelle is clearly of some significance as well, the novel also introduces a number of minor figures, among them Boysie, Dots, Henry, Agatha and Gloria.¹¹⁰

Storm of Fortune continues the saga of these West Indians in Toronto and is distinguished from The Meeting Point in part by a more complex plot in which four story lines are

¹¹⁰These minor characters include Boysie, an uneducated and unemployed West Indian; his wife, Dots, a West Indian domestic servant who is employed by whites in Rosedale and who supports her husband; Henry, another uneducated and unemployed black; Agatha, a white educated Jew who eventually marries Henry, and Gloria, a white whore from North Bay who befriends Estelle during their stay in the General Hospital in Toronto. Gloria issues an invitation to Estelle to visit her in North Bay, one that the latter takes up when she leaves the hospital.

tightly interwoven. The first of these centres on Bernice's increasing difficulties in the Burrmann household after Estelle's hospitalization and disappearance. The second examines Estelle's predicament after she leaves the hospital, depicting her attempts to flee from shame and embarrassment first by going to North Bay and later by living anonymously in Toronto. The third deals with two West Indian friends of Bernice's: Dots, the former domestic servant who is now a hospital aide, and her husband, Boysie, who now runs a successful janitorial business. The novel focuses on the growth of Dot's ambitions and its influence on her husband, Boysie, who also begins to change as he develops new attitudes toward education and financial success. The fourth is concerned with the marriage between Agatha, a Jewish university student of wealthy background, and Henry, the uneducated and unemployed West Indian, as well as with the latter's psychological deterioration and eventual suicide.

The thematic content of the two novels relates in the main to the black immigrant but its emergent application to whites is evident as well. Though the black experience is inevitably of central importance to Clarke, such content is often embedded in the writer's probing of the relationships between blacks and whites in general, of specific associations between black men or women and whites of the opposite sex, and of the physical and psychological effects of both open and subtle racism on the new immigrant. In the course of this

analysis the themes of isolation and loneliness, of the quest for material achievement and individual self-fulfilment, of the significance of culture, history, race and environment for the shaping of the individual, and of the search for identity are frequently made to appear relevant to both blacks and whites.

Bernice is a classic example of Clarke's conception of the world of the black female immigrant. The Meeting Point lays bare her attitudes toward both the white world and the black communities in Toronto and the United States, following her in her pursuit of financial security and human dignity in a society which she views with an ambivalence reminiscent of Clarke's since she does not want to leave that society but sometimes hates it because she senses that it will never fully accept her. Unlike Ruby in Amongst Thistles and Thorns, Bernice has fled from a stultifying Barbadian society but has simply abandoned one prison for another; she has freed herself from a colonial society that has maimed her psychologically only to find herself in an alien land that perpetuates the mutilation, for her new country attempts to convince her that she belongs to a morally inferior species of mankind: "My Mummy says you people are nasty, And My mummy says that you shouldn't live among us. You're different from us."¹¹ It humiliates her, too, by judging her capable

¹¹Austin Clarke, The Meeting Point (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967) 20.

of only the most menial of tasks:

... and there is this old black woman in the washroom for women. But what the hell is she doing there? Does she have to wash their hands? wipe them? kiss their backsides after they use the toilet?¹¹²

And it insists that she be treated accordingly: "I don't have to be nice to her. She is only the maid."¹¹³

The conditions under which Bernice has been granted the privilege of migration, too, have reinforced within her a certain perception of herself in the new society and have done nothing to boost her morale, self-image or self-confidence, for in coming to Canada under the domestic scheme--a kind of modern-day indentured labour system--Bernice is acutely conscious of her status in this alien society:

She always saw herself as a servant; a sort of twentieth century slave. It was mainly the hard work which reminded her of her status. And also, the small wages.¹¹⁴

Migrating under the domestic scheme has also meant condemnation to spending most of her time with a family immersed in a culture different from her own, a family which regards her only in terms of her efficiency as a maid and seldom attempts to discover what she is as a person. She

¹¹²Clarke, The Meeting Point 136.

¹¹³Clarke, The Meeting Point 19.

¹¹⁴Clarke, The Meeting Point 5.

moves in a society that degrades blacks simply on the basis of colour: a black man is arrested by white police officers because they conclude instantly that he must be the offender in a traffic accident when in reality it is the white motorist who is guilty.¹¹⁵ Bernice herself, though contracted to do no more than cook three meals a day, is eventually seen performing additional duties and being regarded as a chattel and workhorse by her employer, who obviously treats her as such in loaning her to a friend whose own maid is ill:

"Forget about calling an agency for extra help, darling. That costs money. I will send Bernice over. She can do the work of a mule, two mules, ha - ha! and look, you don't even have to bother paying her anything."¹¹⁶

Bernice's experiences illustrate another aspect of the life of the black female immigrant, the taste of isolation and loneliness. While the servant recognizes that immigration has brought her a modicum of financial security and physical comfort and feels grateful to Canada for such benefits, she is also alert to the fact that her happiness is circumscribed. Though she can now buy clothes, for example, she has few places where she might wear them, and she usually spends her days off in a West Indian pub among strangers of her own race. Even when she organizes a party, many of the guests are either strangers or merely acquaintances who typically refrain from

¹¹⁵Clarke, The Meeting Point 5.

¹¹⁶Clarke, The Meeting Point 6.

acknowledging publicly any social connection with her and sometimes treat her even more harshly than whites do. A case in point is Priscilla, the black nurse, who has attended Bernice's party but exhibits no sympathy for her when she takes Estelle to the hospital. Instead, she tries to divorce herself from the other two by describing Estelle as yet another "black whore",¹¹⁷ and when she sees Bernice waiting in the wrong area she chases her off contemptuously to the Waiting Room "as if Bernice is a dog".¹¹⁸

Such isolation and loneliness result in sexual deprivation and it is this state of affairs that leads Bernice into a relationship she would not ordinarily condone, a lesbian affair with another lonely black. Environment and circumstance, Clarke notes, have once more forced blacks into forms of behaviour they would normally deem abhorrent. Bernice's interior monologues expose her fluctuating feelings about Canada as well as the conflicts with which she has to grapple and, frequently in the form of imaginary letters to her mother, they also underscore her profound sense of isolation. Ultimately, it is only when Bernice is compelled to leave her retreat in the Burrmann home and to strengthen her affiliation with other blacks that she makes some headway

¹¹⁷Clarke, The Meeting Point 248.

¹¹⁸Clarke, The Meeting Point 249.

in overcoming the dearth of meaningful relationships in her life.

The black immigrant in a white society is under abnormal strain. Bernice is always conscious of her blackness and is hounded by the conviction that whites are constantly assessing her or thinking adverse things about her. Like Dots, she senses the burden she has to shoulder as a newcomer in Canada:

"We have to be on our best peace and behaviour, always. Everything we do, every word we utter, we gotta be always remembering it is a reflection on all the hundreds and thousands o' coloured people in Toronto and in the whole o' Canada."¹¹⁹

This new responsibility affects her relationship with even those close to her. Estelle is amazed at her cantankerous behaviour and her frequently angry explosions in incidents that are only minimally provocative, and even with Estelle and Dots Bernice is ever on her guard, constantly afraid of drifting into conduct likely to arouse the disapproval of the white community. The exuberant, energetic joie de vivre inherent in her nature and manifest in Boysie and Dots is repressed and gradually disappears from view.

It is evident from Clarke's study of Bernice that the psychological damage inflicted by a colonial system is not easily transcended through migration. Although Bernice is

¹¹⁹Clarke, The Meeting Point 122-123.

repeatedly forced by conditions in Canada to face up to her racial uniqueness, although she reads black publications such as Mohammed Speaks and Jet, the self-hate bred in the Barbadian setting and fostered in white Canada engenders in her a hatred for those blacks who--through their civil rights marches and demands for equality and dignity--pose a threat to her relatively comfortable existence in the cocoon she has created for herself. While the younger Estelle is proud of her blackness and claims that if she were living in Canada she, too, would be part of the march, Bernice scornfully denounces the protestors as "a lot o' stupid black people marching 'bout the place", declaring that it nauseates her "to see what this blasted world o' black people is coming to" and displaying her contempt for "these niggers in Canada" who "don't know how lucky they are!"¹²⁰

Despite her knowledge of racial discrimination, furthermore, Bernice naively attempts to divorce herself from blacks of a different origin:

"But this is Canada, dear, not America. You and me, we is West Indians, not American Negroes. We are not in that mess ... 'cause we grow up in a place, the West Indies, where nobody don't worry over things like colour, and where you aren't condemn because you are blacker than the next person," ¹²¹

Bernice's attempt to differentiate herself from blacks of

¹²⁰Clarke, The Meeting Point 220.

¹²¹Clarke, The Meeting Point 220.

other societies, which is highly reminiscent of Clarke's own simplistic effort to do the same during his early years in Canada, is the product of a comforting belief in the myth that West Indians are different from other blacks and therefore receive less destructive treatment at the hands of white Canadians. Even when Henry asserts that the black struggle is Bernice's as well and that blacks from the West Indies and elsewhere are "all niggers to Mister Charlie",¹²² Bernice retorts: "You may be one o' them ... but not me."¹²³ This submergence of one's true identity, Clarke implies, is merely a form of self-deception and self-denigration. In the United States, paradoxically, Clarke had discerned a difference between himself and his American counterparts, a difference that to some extent enabled him to preserve his integrity as an artist,¹²⁴ but whereas Bernice's differentiation was founded largely on a denial of reality his was built to a significant degree on a perception of the uniqueness of culture, of historical experience and of psyche.

To her credit, Bernice eventually grasps the reality of her situation. The Estelle-Burmann affair forces her to the realization that, her years of toil for her employer notwithstanding, Rachel perceives her not as a full

¹²²Clarke, The Meeting Point 224.

¹²³Clarke, The Meeting Point 224.

¹²⁴For example, he did not subscribe to the black view that art should serve the interests of black liberation movements.

person but as just another black woman. The vindictiveness displayed by her mistress and the loss of her sheltered cocoon help her to discover herself and to develop. Thrown on her own resources, she grows psychologically as she employs her wit and courage to find a new job and begin a new life, all the while becoming more independent and assertive. In all this, she is assisted by her black friends, Dots and Boysie, who provide her with physical and moral support and nurture within her a pride in her race, and she shortly begins to experience a sense of community and kinship with her black counterparts. For the first time since her arrival in Canada she can be her true self, liberated from her inner tensions and hostilities,¹²⁵ a transformation evidenced by her willingness to assist Estelle until the latter is capable of supporting herself.

Through Bernice and her connections, Clarke sheds light as well on the relationship between black males and black females in their new environment, concluding that the immigrants are caught up in essentially the same situation as that prevailing in the colonies. Black women emigrating under the domestic scheme soon discover that they are women without men. Persuaded by history and circumstance that whiteness implies superiority, the black men in Canada tend to gravitate toward white women. Boysie and Henry, for instance, both exhibit such an inclination. Boysie perceives his wife, Dots,

¹²⁵Clarke, Storm of Fortune 239-240.

as a "stupid woman"¹²⁶ and initiates a liaison with another black while at the same time having an affair with Brigitte, the German maid. Henry observes that though he is a "one woman man" he has discovered that "that woman have to be white!"¹²⁷ Ironically, while Henry is perceptive enough to view Boysie's absorption in Brigitte as an indication of black surrender to the myth of white superiority he fails to see his own fascination with Agatha in a similar light.¹²⁸ It is an awareness of this male blindness that induces Carmeeta Sweet, an immigrant, to declare resignedly that black women in Canada appear doomed to watching their men "dance with white women, take out white women, and spend their money on white women".¹²⁹ As in Barbados and other West Indian colonies, black women are often abandoned by their men and must devise alternative means of fulfilling their needs.

One course of action open to the black woman in this position is to sponsor a man from "home", but sponsorship creates its own difficulties. It breeds tension in the relationship because, first, a sense of emasculation wells up in the male as he acknowledges his absolute dependence on the woman for immigrant status and, second, a feeling of male entrapment arises from the requirement of marriage to the

¹²⁶Clarke, The Meeting Point 83.

¹²⁷Clarke, The Meeting Point 83.

¹²⁸Clarke, The Meeting Point 237.

¹²⁹Clarke, The Meeting Point 69.

female sponsor. Male resentment is a natural outgrowth of such conditions, as is evident in Boysie's confidences to Henry:

"You want to know something? I come into this country, as you might say, through the back door, meaning I come in only in the behalfs of swearing out an oath that I was going to marry that stupid woman, Dots, in a specified time. Not that I had no fucking choice in the matter. I had as much choice as a rat in a burning canefield. I either married Dots, gorblummuh in that specified time, or out goes me! ... it pains my arse to think o' myself, as a man sponsored, and sponsored, gorblummuh, by a woman at that!"¹³⁰

The problem of dependence on and indebtedness to a woman is exacerbated when the man learns that the dreams of success with which he has left his homeland have quite remote chances of fulfilment. His job opportunities are either few or nonexistent, especially since he often has limited education and no technical or professional skills. Boysie, for example, hunts unsuccessfully for a job for eight months after his arrival in Canada and his frustration is clear as he speaks to Henry:

"Now, you know, you could bear me out in this, that I been seeing hell to lay my hands 'pon a job, 'cause I isn't a idle man. Gorblummuh! sweat have poured offa my back like rainwater, pulling hand-cart and working in the canefield in Barbados, so work don't scare me. But I been seeing them civil service people, the Imperial Oil people, Shell

¹³⁰Clarke, The Meeting Point 83-84.

Oil, paint factory after paint factory, mottor car factory, be-Jesus Christ, Henry, the whole bunch o' them bitches. And you think they would give me a job? I can't say, really and trully, ergo and quod erat demonstrandum, that I get any lot o' money outta this country, Canada."¹³¹

The probable outgrowth of such circumstances, a heightened version of Clarke's own early difficulties in Canada,¹³² is a continuance of the psychological annihilation of the black male initiated during Caribbean slavery and sustained under colonialism in the West Indian territories, when the black man was deprived of the appropriate resources and the opportunities to discharge the conventional male role of Western society. His response in the Caribbean was to assert his masculinity through drinking, brawling and womanizing. His status in Canada is similarly a vital contributing factor in his behaviour.

Clarke repeatedly emphasizes the crucial role of external factors in the shaping of black behaviour and attitudes. In alluding to a specific affair between Bernice and a black man, for example, The Meeting Point underscores the extent to which female isolation and emotional deprivation are often so intense that women may sacrifice their pride for

¹³¹Clarke, The Meeting Point 213-214.

¹³²The experiences of Boysie and Henry contain elements of Clarke's early life in Canada. In describing their fate, Clarke draws on his own struggle as a janitor, a paint-factory worker, and a holder of odd jobs as well as on his experience of being fired for being late for work.

even a temporary escape from their despair. Bernice is able to indulge in a liaison with Michael essentially because she can minister to his financial needs, but since the relationship is not founded on love and the situation of male dependency is not conducive to respect for the female the young man abandons her at the earliest opportunity. She is left waiting for him at home while he spends her money on "'one with long white blonde hair'".¹³³ Even when women are fortunate enough to be married, lax living and the consequent neglect by their men often force them into their own extra-marital connections for companionship.

As the comments above might suggest, in The Meeting Point and Storm of Fortune Clarke does not interest himself solely in the relationships among blacks but also in the interracial liaisons involving blacks and whites. Here he discovers once more the familiar phenomenon of the psychological devastation of the blacks. In Clarke's major illustration of an intimate association between the black male and the white female, Henry is in dire financial straits. He has been unemployed since he lost his porter's job and meets with no more success in finding another one than he does in securing an apartment for himself and Agatha. His complete financial dependence on Agatha parallels and highlights the black male's indebtedness to his black mate in both the past and the present. The relationship produces in Henry the

¹³³Clarke, The Meeting Point 124.

inevitable sense of inferiority and a consciousness of being "a goddam failure".¹³⁴ How erosive for his psyche this state can be is evident from his confession to Boysie:

"A man sits down in his bed at night, or during the day, and sees his whole goddam upside-down life spin a fucking somersault before his eyes. Goddam, it take a fucking strong son of a bitch to admit failure, that he is a failure, and continue living in the midst o' that blasted failure. You is the first and only person living or goddam dead that I ever had the guts to admit this much to."¹³⁵

The effect of the conditions of his existence on his behaviour is striking but understandable. Desperate to salvage some pride and dignity in a culture that forces upon him obligations he cannot meet, he is driven to lie to his wife and to create an imaginary world in which he gains at least minimal success:

"Goddamn, Boysie, a man don't admit he is a failure to his wife. He does lie, he lies like hell. And she does have to find out for sheself. He tells her he's working, that he's drawing money every week from some job; goddam, sometimes, if he is a real failure, he even invents a job and tells her every two months that he got a raise. That kind o' man is me.

It start with the bank accounts. I opened three, about two or three bank accounts with two dollars in each. ... And I would make my own deposits ... every week I would write-in \$1,000 with my own hand. One thousand! And it end-up with this. ... I intentionally invented these things because something out there is keeping me

¹³⁴Clarke, Storm of Fortune 55.

¹³⁵Clarke, Storm of Fortune 54-55.

from getting at these very things, and that thing keeping me back isn't powerful enough to keep back my imagination and my subconscious and convince me that I don't already possess them things."¹³⁶

To impress his masculinity upon Boysie, Henry exaggerates the number of policemen required to overpower him in an incident in which actually he has been beaten up by only two. But Henry obviously realizes that he is engaged only in self-deception. He admits to his friend:

"I didn't tell you no lies Boysie, Goddamn, what I say to you, if it sound like a lie, and even if it is a lie, it is not a lie to me because I want it to turn out exactly as I tell you. You understand what I saying?"¹³⁷

He knows, too, that his financial success is only a figment of his imagination:

"I's a goddamn failure. But I imagine that I ain't no goddamn failure. I am a man with one hundred and forty thousand dollars in fucking imaginary bank accounts! That is me! An imaginary man."¹³⁸

Henry's psychological well-being is further threatened when later in his marriage he realizes that his wife views him in terms of a sociological case study, terming his racial attributes "beauty" though she is in reality giving him an

¹³⁶Clarke, Storm of Fortune 54-55.

¹³⁷Clarke, Storm of Fortune 54.

¹³⁸Clarke, Storm of Fortune 55.

inferiority complex.¹³⁹ The black man's association with a white woman, Clarke implies, does not necessarily bring him the social and psychological upliftment it promises. In Henry's case, the effect on the spirit is so damaging that suicide appears the only hope of escape from a pervasive sense of futility.

Clarke touches on other dimensions of the black male-white female relationship, particularly the social significance of marital intimacy. This social element is strikingly illustrated in Henry's description of his sexual activity with Agatha as a symbolic act of revenge for white brutality against blacks as a whole and black women in particular. Henry confesses that during the sexual act he thinks not of Agatha or of love but of "all those black people lynched and killed, all those black cats murdered and slain, all those black chicks raped and dehumanised, demortalized," ¹⁴⁰ He declares, furthermore:

"You think that chick was hip to what I was thinking of the Man? Goddamn, baby, she was thinking I was loving her. But man, I was repaying! I was repaying her for what her brothers do to my sister, you dig? There ain't no such thing as love baby. It is re-payment. A final goddamn repayment." ¹⁴¹

¹³⁹Clarke, Storm of Fortune 277.

¹⁴⁰Clarke, The Meeting Point 199. The images of violence Clarke introduces here show the influence of black American writers such as Eldridge Cleaver and LeRoi Jones.

¹⁴¹Clarke, The Meeting Point 199.

It is unlikely, Clarke suggests, that an interracial union of this type will easily survive the subtle processes at work to undermine it.

But it is not only the attitude of the black male partner that is suspect, for the interracial relationship also generates undercurrents of animosity toward both participants. The black females often secretly despise the men, who in their view have deserted them for white women, and they may resent the white partners as well for "stealing" their men.¹⁴² The whites in these relationships probably suffer more than their black counterparts who marry white men: they are perceived as having stooped beneath their class while black women are seen as gaining in status through their interracial marriage. As Storm of Fortune reveals, white women initiating intimacy with black men need a special resilience, since all the established social and cultural forces will pit themselves against them and, as in the case of Agatha in the early stages of her friendship with Henry, induce them "to weaken under the stress of society and its demands".¹⁴³ The situation with which Agatha ultimately has to contend is not an encouraging one. Her parents renounce her, the police break up her wedding party with threats, and as she leaves the scene of the reception whites peer disapprovingly at her, one of their numbers finally articulating their communal view of her as a

¹⁴²Clarke, The Meeting Point 190.

¹⁴³Clarke, The Meeting Point 190..

"white bitch".¹⁴⁴

With regard to people's attitude toward those daring to cross racial barriers to establish unions, however, Clarke certainly presents blacks in a more favourable light than whites. The West Indians are not as unyielding in their antagonisms as the whites. Though the blacks - especially the women - have reservations about Agatha and her marriage to Henry, they do accept her into their company and try to provide her with moral support. When her friends fail to turn up for the marriage ceremony and the bride's side of the church is empty, for example, Dots "reushers" half of the gathering to the vacant section purely to lessen her embarrassment,¹⁴⁵ and in time the blacks admit Agatha into their company and their activities.

Clarke exploits the Henry-Agatha liaison not only to examine the forces operating in the relationship between black men and white women but also to parallel and illuminate that between blacks and those whites who live in close proximity to them even as they view them consciously or unconsciously as inferior or primitive. Henry's experience of life with Agatha and his contact with her material and cultural possessions repeatedly force upon him a sense of primitiveness and inferiority of status. It is in this very way that blacks are bombarded in a white society by reminders of their subservient

¹⁴⁴Clarke, Storm of Fortune 253.

¹⁴⁵Clarke, Storm of Fortune 248.

status and their "backwardness" and are prompted to define themselves as inferior. Naturally, blacks do not respond uniformly to such subtle conditioning. Many weaken in the face of such pressures and seek acceptance through marriage to whites or through adoption of the values dominant in white society. Others, as Bernice initially does, play the role of the perpetually smiling, accommodating black who is perfectly contented with his assigned station in life. Occasionally, as in the case of Henry, some come to view death as the only release. However, there are blacks who, like the protestors, refuse to become slaves to an unfair system and have the courage to take a stand and battle for the chance to grow as individuals and as a race.

Yet another dimension of interracial sexual encounter is that involving the black woman and the white man and it, too, is subjected to some dissection by Clarke. Estelle is quickly confronted by the reality that her status in an affair with Sam Burrmann is no different from her grandmother's on the plantation. Raped and sexually exploited by Sam, Estelle becomes pregnant, but Sam shunts her aside and attempts to free himself of obligations to her by falsely insinuating that her pregnancy is the result of her escapades with other men. When Estelle is hospitalized after a failed attempt to abort her pregnancy, Sam appeases his conscience by sending her small gifts and by arranging for her to obtain immigrant status, but the black woman seems little more than

a means of sexual gratification for him and her inferior status in the society appears to render any sense of responsibility toward her on his part largely superfluous.

Clarke again appears only too aware of the complexity introduced into interracial intimacy by the participants' background, history and culture. Sam's earlier encounters with black women in the ghetto have been the most satisfying he has known and the memory of these, along with his unfulfilling sexual partnership with his wife, propels him toward Estelle. Yet, his emotions and attitudes fluctuate wildly. He discovers himself growing to love Estelle, but the conventional outlook with which he has been burdened reminds him constantly of her blackness and social inferiority, compelling him in spite of his better judgement to regard and treat her as a black whore. Even as he embraces and kisses her, his thoughts contrast with his acts and betray his ambivalence:

"goddamn, look what I picked up off the street! look at me, Sam Burrmann, screwing about with this big black nig - Negro woman, goddamit, but baby, you're barking up the wrong tree. I know a lot of men who lay their domestics, screwing and being screwed-up by them; but that's not my scene, baby. I bet you're going to tell me you're pregnant. Am I going to feel bad! and weep? Or get the best goddamn abortionist in Toronto, and put you in his goddamn hands? .. with a little expense everything'll be fine, .. so, you're not fooling me baby."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶Clarke, The Meeting Point 187.

Estelle herself is not free of emotional vacillation. Her historical and cultural background has prepared her to understand that despite their fleeting moments of tenderness Sam perceives her as little more than a slave, and she in turn becomes an exploiter. Desirous of beginning a new life in Canada, she manipulates Sam until he procures for her the immigrant status she needs, though the price she pays is the desecration of body and spirit. In the incident in which Estelle discloses to Sam that she is pregnant, Clarke captures poignantly the interplay of the mutual ambivalence the two lovers feel:

Sam had worried about her being pregnant for a long time, but he had decided that when she told him, he would not be kind to her; he would be cruel, and make her hate him, and make her kill the child. He did not feel he really cared for her: never did. But he was still worried. She sat watching him, hating him; and he sat watching her, hating her, hating himself for having got mixed up with her 'You have to get rid of the child.'¹⁴⁷

Again, in Clarke's view, the complex emotional undercurrents stirred in interracial sexual involvements by differences of background, history and culture are a threat to the survival of such relationships.

Ultimately, The Meeting Point and Storm of Fortune, and indeed the trilogy as a whole, go beyond an obsession with essentially one racial group to reflect a widening of perspective on the author's part, since at this point Clarke

¹⁴⁷Clarke, The Meeting Point 218.

also concerns himself with whites, particularly Jews of Toronto. Sanders' assertion that Clarke's portraits of Jews "are sketches, the salient features in the outlines being those which seem most striking to the West Indian sensibility,"¹⁴⁸ has some credibility in Agatha's case but certainly not in the Burrmanns', for enough of the Jews' inner lives is exposed to render them flesh-and-blood beings and to reveal some continuities in the experiences of Jews and blacks.

In spite of their wealth and status the Burrmanns, like many of Clarke's black characters, are imprisoned by internal and external forces born of their race, culture and history, forces that often significantly mould their lives. The impetus for the Jewish obsession with achieving success in the Anglo-Saxon world, Clarke implies, comes from the Jews' unconscious need to prove to themselves and others the fallacy of the Nazi view of their race, for it is their hope that the attainment of high social status and material prosperity will demonstrate their equality with the Anglo-Saxons and therefore the distortion of their worth inherent in the Nazi perspective. That the Jews wish to assert their value as human beings in the face of memories of the Nazi onslaught upon their merit as a people may be inferred from the Gassteins' deliberate employment of a "Kraut" as their maid

¹⁴⁸Leslie Sanders, "Austin Clarke," Profiles in Canadian Literature, vol. 4, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1982) 91.

and from Dots' claim that Mrs. Gasstein derives satisfaction from telling her friends that "she have one o'them working under her".¹⁴⁹

In the case of Rachel Burrmann, too, historical and cultural circumstances prove relevant to attitude, behaviour and experience. Rachel's early life as the daughter of a slum landlord has no doubt instilled into her a persistent miserliness, one that causes her to underpay Bernice and to regard herself as highly generous when she gives the latter a five-dollar raise. Indeed, her frugality may well be one source of friction in her marriage, as is evident when Sam accuses her of cheapness and rips off the plastic covers she has placed on their furniture to prolong its service.

Rachel's background has other effects on her actions. Since she has grown up in a "rich suburban area of the city",¹⁵⁰ she does not readily sympathise with or understand people in less fortunate circumstances. She appears at times to be concerned about Bernice's problems but her interest in her black maid's welfare is quite fleeting, basically a diversion in the long, empty days of a dilettante's life. Even when she perceives in a Mexican gigolo's eyes the distaste another might feel about being exploited, she defuses whatever discomfort the discovery occasions within her by attributing the Mexican's attitude to

¹⁴⁹Clarke, The Meeting Point 109.

¹⁵⁰Clarke, The Meeting Point 106-107.

his jealousy at the wealth of Jews.¹⁵¹ With praiseworthy objectivity, Clarke refrains from didacticism and allows the unfolding of events to disclose a rich, educated but selfish and niggardly woman whose trips abroad, frequent parties, sexual escapades and voluntary work cannot eradicate the essential loneliness and emptiness her failings inflict upon her. Rachel, the white woman who has every possession money can buy, finds that she leads a sterile and unhappy life. Clarke's treatment of Rachel is not simply a writer's depiction of a Jew; it is an impartial commentary on critical aspects of the life of modern man.

Clarke's insights regarding Sam Burrmann's psyche are even more penetrating. Once more, background appears to shape attitude and behaviour. Unlike Rachel, Sam had "been close to blacks throughout his adolescence and university days"¹⁵² but suffers from a guilty conscience because he was once party to the injustice meted out to a black boy, Jeffrey. His poverty, his guilt and his sexual and other escapades during his ghetto days create a barrier between himself and his wife for he has never revealed that part of his experience to her. The rift is further enlarged because Rachel cannot bear him a son, and every "man needs a son".¹⁵³ The extra-marital affairs in which both partners indulge because of

¹⁵¹Clarke, Storm of Fortune 229-230.

¹⁵²Clarke, The Meeting Point 107.

¹⁵³Clarke, The Meeting Point 154.

their inability to maintain a meaningful and sexually gratifying relationship with each other do not help matters. And Sam's existence is as empty and shallow as his wife's. He is a failure as a husband and neither his frequent sexual affairs nor his successes as a corporation lawyer bring him a sense of fulfilment. They also fail to engender within him anything more than a superficial sense of moral responsibility. As in his youth, when his cowardice caused his black friend, Jeffrey, to be jailed for a crime he had not committed, he lacks the moral fibre that would enable him to accept responsibility for Estelle and her pregnancy.

The Burrmann-Jeffrey episode also highlights the phenomenon of similarity of response and behaviour among human beings facing parallel circumstances. Implicit in this event is an ironic commentary on the unexpected parallels between Germans under Nazi rule and Jews in Toronto. The inclination of many Germans to bow to popular sentiment rather than lodge their disapproval of the injustices and atrocities to which the German Jews were subjected appears--at least from Clarke's perspective--not essentially different from Sam Burrmann's reluctance to proclaim the black's innocence or from the Jewish pedlar's unhelpful insistence that though he "had actually seen Sammy Burrmann" with an apple of the stolen type in his hand he could not distinguish "between Sammy and Jeffrey, who was black".¹⁵⁴ Though the Jewish poor have

¹⁵⁴Clarke, The Meeting Point 107.

endured hardship and homelessness and the Jews as a race have suffered discrimination and injustice, they at times nevertheless display little sympathy for blacks, another underprivileged and victimised race.

On the whole, Clarke portrays the Burrmanns as human beings with the same weaknesses and foibles as blacks:

"All white people is bitches, if you ask me. And we, as black people ain't much different, neither."¹⁵⁵

In all groups, furthermore, the success or failure of human relationships is not necessarily contingent on the actions of only one partner. Bernice naively blames Rachel for the failure of the Burrmann marriage:

In her judgement, a marriage going sour like this one, had one blame. One person was responsible for its ruin; one thing; one action.¹⁵⁶

Clarke's views on the subject are less simplistic. Such relationships, Clarke believes, may disintegrate for complex reasons, and both partners usually contribute to the collapse. Dots and Boysie, like Rachel and Sam, fail to maintain a satisfying union because of a variety of influences emanating from their backgrounds and the conditions of their existence, and all human intimacy is--by implication--likely to be threatened by a similar array of forces.

¹⁵⁵Clarke, Storm of Fortune 238.

¹⁵⁶Clarke, The Meeting Point 154.

Clarke's incursion into the field of interracial relationships leads him inexorably back into the theme of racism, for years one of his central preoccupations. In one incident after another, though without being strident, he illustrates Canadian racism in both its overt and subtle forms. The difficulty experienced by black immigrants in finding even menial jobs is an obvious example. Ironically, even the instruments of justice violate the humanity of blacks, for Henry receives a beating at the hands of two white policemen who have calculatedly awaited his emergence from Brigitte's apartment. The press, too, displays little concern about the unfair treatment of blacks: although Henry's lawyer assures him that the beating will be publicised, the newspapers are silent on the incident, and Henry is compelled to confront the unpleasant possibility that the newspapers might be racist:

"The papers will print that story, Boysie.
The papers got to print my story. They have to.
That is justice. And justice got to be done ...
."157

Clarke's quiet denunciation of racial bigotry is accomplished with great effect in part through cameo treatments of white immigrants, who might naturally be expected to evince a sympathetic attitude toward black newcomers, and of whites who have had close contact with

¹⁵⁷Clarke, Storm of Fortune 50.

blacks at some earlier point in their lives. Henry learns, for instance, that it is the new immigrants who tend to be the most racist of the white community. With one door after another slammed in his face as he seeks an apartment, he decides to check the names of residents in the district in which he has suffered such humiliation and he notes to his astonishment that "all the names on that street that slammed doors in my face, or won't open the fucking doors, all the names were mostly European names. Chuck or Chich or Gowski or Shev."¹⁵⁸ It would seem perfectly normal as well for whites with some experience of life among blacks to be somewhat enlightened in their dealings with people of that race but, as Clarke intimates, such prior contact does not necessarily purge the former of bigotry. In applying by telephone for an apartment Bernice is accepted as a tenant but when her white landlady discovers the West Indian is black she quickly reneges on her commitment, even though as it turns out she has spent twenty years in Africa with her husband. Clarke's account of the landlady's metamorphosis captures the guile inherent in the more subtle manifestations of racism:

Something happened then to the woman's eyes; some film of resentment replaced the little life that was in them. 'But surely, you didn't ...' she began, with a smile of graciousness and dignity and old age and very old-practised deceit and dishonesty took the place of the film. 'I was under the impression you came to talk about Christianity ... you did say you were a Baptist,

¹⁵⁸Clarke, Storm of Fortune 284.

you know . . . but you must take The
Watchtower . . .¹⁵⁹

Bernice may be allowed into the Christian fold but not into the same house as the landlady. Clarke has introduced an additional irony into his probing of racism: blacks are supposed to accept the white man's God in spite of white rejection of the human brotherhood He teaches.

The depth of Clarke's concern is suggested by his treatment of the police. When even these, committed as they are by their vocation to offering equal treatment and protection to all people, are revealed as racists, Canada can be little better than South Africa, and through allusions to South Africa and the United States Clarke suggests that unless racism in Canada is identified and eliminated it will spawn its own evils here as well. And the two novels give the dangers definite shape. Racism warps the lives of the innocent. Whites who have the courage to associate with blacks are subjected to the viciousness often reserved for the latter. Agatha, for example, faces almost insurmountable obstacles in obtaining an apartment simply because she has a black husband, and when for that very reason she is once evicted by one landlord, the lawyer she has hired to fight her case drops the matter on becoming aware of its racial dimensions.

But it is the effect of racism on its primary

¹⁵⁹Clarke, The Meeting Point 147.

victims that most alarms Clarke. The bitter taste of racism stimulates in the black a reaction not only of inner torment and a sense of impotence but also of pervasive fear and disillusionment. Nowhere is this more evident than in Henry as he awaits newspaper reports of the beating he has received from the policemen:

The pains in his head send a throbbing of fury through his whole body. Delirium had kept him restless on his spinning bed last night. Hope was not yet dead, although the newspaper had not used the story the day after, as Mr. Turnbull, the reporter Agatha's lawyer had introduced to him, had assured him. Hope was the only thing he had to keep him going. And pride. But the fear of disappointment was deep-seated, more real than the hope or pride.¹⁶⁰

Henry's fear is deep-seated in part because of his awareness of recurring police brutality and injustice. He recalls, for instance, the incident in which the police reacted brutally to a black man whose only crime was to ask out of curiosity what was happening when he saw a policeman giving a driver a ticket for speeding¹⁶¹ and an occasion on which a black sailor from the Canadian navy was beaten up and arrested by white policemen on the night of his wedding party, supposedly because he was disturbing the peace.¹⁶²

Racism not only corrodes the psyche, destroying all

¹⁶⁰Clarke, Storm of Fortune 50.

¹⁶¹Clarke, Storm of Fortune 51.

¹⁶²Clarke, Storm of Fortune 51.

sense of pride and self-worth, but breeds anger and transforms its victims so markedly that they engage in thoughts and deeds quite alien to their normal temperament. In Henry's case, the prospect of injustice at the hands of the law proves violently infuriating:

"You want to know something? I feel like getting up outta this bed right now, and walking down Yonge Street and smashing every goddam store window down there. Then I'm heading for Queen's Park, and I killing every blasted politician there. And when I finish doing that, I have my gun, and be-Jesus Christ, I am killing every fucking cop that pass" ¹⁶³

Henry's response is not limited to mere words or thoughts. In his efforts to find an apartment, he is once so incensed at a proprietress' transparent racism that he spits in her face as she is about to shut her door on him and he later returns to paint a swastika on her door. Again, a similar experience at the hands of another potential landlord impels him to grab the latter by the scruff of the neck, and he "would have kill that bastard dead, dead, dead" had Agatha not been present to restrain him.¹⁶⁴ Racism, as Henry senses, is a powerful force:

"*This thing, man. This thing does some funny things to a man's mind, Boysie. I am talking about*

¹⁶³Clarke, Storm of Fortune 51-52.

¹⁶⁴Clarke, Storm of Fortune 282.

the effects, man, the effects."¹⁶⁵

Continual subjection to racism, Clarke suggests, may well distort the victim's psyche and by implication pose a threat to the stability of the community, but it is the society itself that creates this menace to its well-being.

Clarke is reasonably balanced in his analysis of racism. Consistent with his increasing objectivity in examining the motivations of characters differing in race, he emphasizes that racial bigotry is not the exclusive property of any one group. Both the black women's grudging acceptance of Agatha and Bernice's relief at the death of the white man who planned to marry Lottie, a death Bernice regards as "a good thing" since Lottie would be "marrying the wrong man",¹⁶⁶ are indicative of reverse racism. Black bigotry, though not as injurious in its effect as its white equivalent, is nevertheless disruptive and militates against communication and understanding, creating obstacles for those whose enlightenment predisposes them to accept people as human beings rather than as members of a particular race.

As the title of The Meeting Point implies, the black and white races meet in Toronto. When this occurs there is no question that white bigotry rears its head. But such intolerance, Clarke implies, cannot always be attributed

¹⁶⁵Clarke, Storm of Fortune 282.

¹⁶⁶Clarke, The Meeting Point 16.

entirely to white callousness. The extroverted and exuberant West Indian feels fettered by the relatively sedate and subdued life that the dominant community regards as the norm and in the early stages of his life in Canada fails to make the behavioural compromises that might ease his path into the mainstream of Canadian life. Furthermore, though he will not often admit it, the rejection he suffers in the search for employment may arise at least in part because of his poor education, skill and job experience. The West Indian's first meeting with Canadian society is thus marked by a collision of values and to some extent by a "master-servant" relationship not unlike that prevailing in the Caribbean colonies. It is only through time, education, cultural adjustment and hard work that blacks can elevate themselves in Canada and consequently gain greater respect. They must accept, however, that under existing circumstances "life is a choosing thing" and that "yuh can't get everything you want".¹⁶⁷

The themes Clarke incorporates into The Meeting Point and Storm of Fortune are not necessarily new to his writing but he elaborates upon them more fully here than in prior works. There can be little doubt that he has drawn heavily on both his own earlier struggles as a new arrival in Canada and on those of West Indian immigrants he has known well or observed carefully. While he clearly felt Canada to be a better place than the United States, it is equally

¹⁶⁷Clarke, Storm of Fortune 155.

apparent that the ambivalence displayed by a character like Bernice reflects Clarke's own perpetual insecurities regarding the life of blacks in any white society. Significant in terms of his growth as an individual and as a writer is his progress beyond obsessions with his own resentments. These works, with their treatment of blacks as well as whites, point to a much broader sympathy for the problems of other minorities; though his experiences have made him to some degree aggressive, alienated and isolated, he is able as an artist to grasp that other minorities face dilemmas similar to those of the blacks.

Chapter 6

When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks

The announcement by Little, Brown that Storm of Fortune would be published toward the end of 1972 had no dramatic effect on the pattern of Clarke's life. The novelist completed his teaching and related obligations at Duke University without serious detriment to his other pursuits, and when the term of his appointment ended he followed a variety of paths. Writing, of course, retained its preeminence among his various interests, and his creative work once more brought him disappointments along with successes as he strove to illuminate the experiences of blacks and at the same time to realize the potential he saw in himself to be one of Canada's leading writers.

Though persevering with his creative efforts, Clarke had again been unable to meet an important deadline. As early as 1968 David Burnett, his former editor at Heinemann who had moved to Norton Bailey, had encouraged him to write an autobiography¹ and in August of that year Clarke had duly

¹John Johnson, Agent, to Austin Clarke, 21 August 1968.

signed the requisite contract.² By April of the following year the writer had made little progress, prompting a letter from Burnett who advised him against allowing "extraneous activities to endanger the biography" he had contracted to write.³ A few months later Johnson, too, thought it necessary to remind him of his commitment to Norton Bailey.⁴ The recurrent prodding he received from both his agent and his editor drove him to submit "An American Dutchman" in fulfilment of his contract⁵ but this manuscript was totally unacceptable to Burnett, who explained that what he had envisaged was an account of Clarke's childhood, his departure from Barbados and his impressions of life there as well as in other countries he had visited.⁶ In the end, "An American Dutchman" was returned to its author, the London agent having failed to place it,⁷ and work on the autobiography was again deferred.

To Clarke's delight, however, sales of the Canadian edition of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear

²David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 16 August 1968.

³David Burnett to Austin Clarke, 14 April 1969.

⁴John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 25 November 1969.

⁵John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 4 June 1970.

⁶John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 9 December 1970.

⁷John Johnson to Austin Clarke, 17 December 1971.

Silks, a work that Random House had declined,⁸ exceeded the publisher's expectations and plans were afoot for another printing, perhaps of three thousand copies.⁹ Philips, who had recommended publication of The Meeting Point and Storm of Fortune by Little, Brown, echoed the favourable reception given the collection by Clarke's readership.¹⁰ Though he liked the anthology and was especially intrigued by its title, he believed that the inclusion of content more meaningful to the American reader would enhance the book's prospects in the United States and therefore make publication there more viable. With an eye on an American edition of his collection, therefore, Clarke worked on a number of stories in 1972, including "Bonanza 1972 in Toronto", "Her Name Was Reggina", "An Invitation to Join" and "One Among Them".

As the end of his contractual obligations to Duke University approached Clarke devoted more time to polishing what he had written, and individual stories were modified more than once. Revised versions of "Her Name Was Reggina", for example, were completed in March and April of 1972, while two reworked versions of "One Among Them" had taken shape by March of that year. Nevertheless, Clarke's efforts did not quite produce the calibre of writing desired by Philips, who offered

⁸Charles Harris, Senior Editor, Random House, to Austin Clarke, 2 March 1971.

⁹Shirley Gibson, Anansi Press, to Austin Clarke, 23 May 1972.

¹⁰William Philips to Austin Clarke, 12 April 1971.

a pointed critique of the stories. In the editor's view, Clarke was overly addicted to "violent endings", evidence of this tendency being provided by such stories as "Griff", "Hammie and the Black Dean" and "One Among Them". Indeed, "Reggina" was the only truly credible work. Often, Philips felt, the endings were not very realistic, and he cited "An Invitation to Join" as an example of this weakness; there was no "tradition" inherent in the people or "established in the story" which would make the emotionless, ritualized killing that occurs seem a natural outcome.¹¹ Clarke apparently responded to Philips' assessment in a manner that satisfied the editor, for he was notified shortly that Little, Brown would publish the collection in 1973.¹²

Having resumed residence in Toronto late in the spring of 1972, Clarke accomplished more than the revision of the short stories for the American edition of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks,¹³ since he was at that time also working on the third novel of his trilogy and was still tinkering with "God and Mammon at Yale". In the summer of 1972 he served as an instructor in writers' workshops at the Haliburton School of Fine Arts and York University and went to Guyana to attend the Caribbean Festival of the Arts,

¹¹William Philips to Austin Clarke, 17 July 1972.

¹²Phyllis Westberg, Harold Ober Associates, to Austin Clarke, 14 August 1972.

¹³He would in fact continue at this task until early in 1973.

breaking the trip in Barbados where he spoke on "Black/White Confrontation in Canada" at the local campus of the University of the West Indies.¹⁴

In the new year, Clarke remained as busy as ever. Black Theatre Canada, a newly formed community-oriented group, invited him to join its board of directors¹⁵ and, demonstrating his sustained interest in black culture, he consented, his name being listed among those of the board members for 1974 around the time the theatre received five thousand dollars as "seed money" from the Toronto City Council.¹⁶ Not long afterwards, he was also appointed a member of the Metropolitan Toronto Library Board.¹⁷ A development that excited him much more than these advisory roles, however, was the offer of another Visiting Professorship, this time at the University of Texas, where he would teach two courses, one in Afro-American Literature and the other in Creative Writing.¹⁸ By the summer of 1973,

¹⁴Joy Allsop to Austin Clarke, 25 August 1972.

¹⁵Vera Cudjoe to Austin Clarke, 5 March 1973.

¹⁶Membership on boards was not a new experience for Clarke: his most recent stint in this capacity was as a member of the editorial board of Black Lines: A Journal of Black Studies, a Pittsburg publication he had served during 1971-1972. See Larry G. Coleman and Clarence Turner to Austin Clarke, 15 June 1971, 24 April 1972.

¹⁷E. J. Sayers to Austin Clarke, 7 June 1973.

¹⁸Clarke received this opportunity because of the sudden resignation of a faculty member in the fall semester. His appointment had been proposed by Roger Abrahams of the university's African and Afro-American Research Institute and

Clarke could face the future with renewed self-assurance. He was comparatively affluent, owning the house he occupied on Brunswick Avenue along with two others in the neighbourhood. He expected, too, that the American edition of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks would revitalize his reputation, and there were other works under way. In addition, he had officially been accepted as a participant in the Exchange Visitor Program of the University of Texas.¹⁹

Though Little, Brown was disappointed that When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks was not reviewed as widely as the firm wished,²⁰ the critical assessment the anthology received was sufficient to confirm Clarke's faith in his future as a writer. The Canadian edition had already sparked its share of approving remarks. Clarke had been described as "gifted with an incredible capacity for observation and articulation"²¹ and his writing as "powerful

would have required his arrival for the winter semester of 1973, but officials of the institution thought the time inadequate for processing the appropriate papers and obtaining a visa. What ultimately materialized was a Visiting Professorship for the period 1 September 1973 to 8 January 1974. See Roger D. Abrahams to Austin Clarke, 13 February 1973, and Geneva Gay to Austin Clarke, 13 February 1973 and 14 June 1973.

¹⁹Patricia Roberts, Foreign Faculty Advisor, to Austin Clarke, 19 June 1973.

²⁰William Philips to Austin Clarke, 31 March 1975.

²¹Ramon Mansoor, "Baring the West Indian Soul in Canada," rev. of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (Canadian Edition), by Austin Clarke, Trinidad Guardian 30 June 1972: 4. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

and probing"²² and showing a tendency to make "West Indian speech into a form of music and poetry ... tremendously versatile in what it expresses, and exhilarating to read".²³ The American edition was viewed similarly as containing stories "that are charged with life",²⁴ "dazzling and sensitive chronicles of West Indian experience at home and abroad"²⁵ that reveal Clarke to be "the interpreter par excellence of the West Indian immigrant to the North American metropolis".²⁶ While the writer had his occasional detractors who, like Leo Simpson, sometimes thought it time for him to "break into something new",²⁷ he had little doubt that with the publication of the collections of his short stories he had emerged as one of Canada's leading exponents of

²²Ronald Bates, "Two Novels Refute 'Malaise' Reported on Canadian Scene," rev. of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks, by Austin Clarke, Books in Canada November 1971: 21. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²³Leo Simpson, "Burst Innocence in Crystal Fragments," rev. of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (Canadian Edition), by Austin Clarke, The Boston Globe Magazine 23 October 1971, See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²⁴"Book Reviews," rev. of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (American Edition), by Austin Clarke, 9 December 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²⁵Thomas Dotton, "Books: The Other Austin Clarke," rev. of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (American Edition), by Austin Clarke, The Boston Phoenix 25 September 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²⁶Pat Goodfellow, rev. of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (American Edition), by Austin Clarke, The Library Journal 11 January 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²⁷Simpson 23 October 1971.

the genre.

Only a minority of the stories in When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks have been analysed by critics, and these have been explored in the context of Clarke the novelist rather than of Clarke the short story writer. They have most certainly not been examined in terms of Clarke's life. In the present study, more attention is paid to those stories which illuminate Clarke the man and writer and which reflect again his effort to work out in art the conflict and paradoxes which continually plague him. Diversity is the hallmark of the anthology. Of the total of sixteen stories in the Canadian and American editions,²⁸ two are set in Barbados, ten in Canada and four in the United States.²⁹ Both editions are marked as well by substantial variety in subject matter and technique. In terms of content, for instance, the stories encompass a broad spectrum of the black experience familiar to Clarke, including the trauma of

²⁸Stories common to both editions are: "An Easter Carol", "Four Stations in His Circle", "The Motor Car", "Leaving This Island Place", and "When He Was Young and He Used to Wear Silks". Additional stories in the Canadian edition, published by Anansi, are: "They Heard A Ringing of Bells", "Waiting for the Postman to Knock", "Give Us This Day: and Forgive Us", "A Wedding in Toronto", and "What Happened". The additional stories in the American edition, published by Little, Brown, are: "Griff", "Bonanza 1972 in Toronto", "One Among Them", "An Invitation to Join", "Her Name Was Reggina", and "Hammie and the Black Dean".

²⁹The two stories set in Barbados are "An Easter Carol" and "Leaving This Island Place", while the four set in the United States are "One Among Them", "Her Name Was Reggina", "An Invitation to Join", and "Hammie and the Black Dean".

life in colonial Barbados,³⁰ the race conflict, failure and poverty encountered by black immigrants in Toronto,³¹ the personal cost of the achievement of success by the individual black,³² and the meeting of the West Indian black with his American counterpart.³³ Their differing emphasis on such subject matter supplies a basis for grouping them for discussion purposes, with additional attention reserved for those reflecting the influence of the black American protest movement and its intellectual arm on Clarke.³⁴

Set in Barbados, "An Easter Carol" is reminiscent of Amongst Thistles and Thorns, in which Clarke employs the first person narrative as he probes the depths of the young Milton's mind. The short story revolves around one important event in a boy's life - singing a solo in the Anglican Cathedral before some of the most important people in the island. This

³⁰"An Easter carol" and "Leaving This Island Place".

³¹"They Heard A Ringing of Bells", "Waiting for the Postman to Knock", "Give Us This Day: and Forgive Us", and "Bonanza 1972 in Toronto". The stories do not all spring newly fashioned from Clarke's imagination. For example, "A Wedding in Toronto" is a slightly modified version of pp. 242-253 in Storm of Fortune and "What Happened" of pp. 272-286 in the same novel, while "Give Us This Day: and Forgive Us" is based on pp. 205-208 in The Meeting Point and "They Heard A Ringing of Bells" has its genesis in Clarke's unpublished sketches of immigrants entitled "Marbles in A Ling".

³²"Four Stations in His Circle" and "The Motor Car". "Leaving This island Place" may also be placed in this group.

³³"One Among Them" and "Her Name Was Reggina".

³⁴"An Invitation to Join", "Hammie and the Black Dean" and "When He Was Young and He Used to Wear Silks".

responsibility proves a heavy burden for the eight year old as he realizes that any failure on his part would humiliate not only his mother, who has sacrificed much to make this occasion possible, but to a lesser extent the entire black community. Faced with so apparently straightforward a plot, one reviewer has claimed the "problem" in "An Easter Carol" to be that "the island choir-boy can't get his swollen feet back into his shoes in time for his solo in the Church of England cathedral"³⁵ and another that the story is about "an eight year old's agony at walking to the Anglican Cathedral for his first Sunday as a choir-boy"³⁶, but these are assessments that ignore the autobiographical and social contexts of the story. In fact, "An Easter Carol" relies extensively on Clarke's own experiences, including those as a member of an Anglican Cathedral choir, and mirrors a young person's pain and frustration as he witnesses the evaporation of his dreams of achieving a higher niche within the almost impregnable social order of a colonial society. His failure in the task he has been allotted leads the protagonist ultimately to sense that he is essentially an outsider in the society, an emergent awareness effectively captured in Clarke's depiction of the boy as staring through the West Window of the cathedral at the

³⁵Virginia Kirkus Service Advance Review, rev. of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear silks, by Austin Clarke, 9 January 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

³⁶Rev. of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks, by Austin Clarke, New York Times Book Review 9 December 1973. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

congregation within and underscored by the boy's willingness to see himself reflected in a beggar standing in the "silhouette of the East Gate".³⁷

"An Easter Carol" touches as well on topics such as the nature of the black family unit in a colonial society, the role of the female, and the effects of the father's absence upon the family, themes already explored in Amongst Thistles and Thorns. But the story is also memorable for Clarke's ability to delve into the young boy's mind and uncover the fears, terrors and torments of the eight year old:

I imagined monsters coming out of them [the canefields]. Only last week a man had been lambasted by the "Man" in the canes. My head was swollen with monsters coming at me. I heard a rustling in the canes. And I dropped the bucket. And when I stopped running, I was beside our paling.³⁸

It is also a tribute to the resilience of blacks who, as the zestful preparations for Easter imply, seize upon special occasions to wring moments of enjoyment out of destitute lives.

Also set in Barbados, "Leaving this Island Place" adds a new element to Clarke's analysis of black family life since it exemplifies the conflict that might occur within the offspring when parents are caught in the ebb and flow of

³⁷Austin Clarke, When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks (Toronto: Anansi, 1971) 15.

³⁸Clarke, When He Was Free 4.

mating relationships so vividly described by Powell³⁹ and Smith.⁴⁰ In the story, the young black Barbadian is torn not only between an instinctive sense of loyalty to his natural father and a desire to divorce himself from him because of the failure and disgrace he embodies but also between loyalty to the father and duty to his mother and other relatives who have forbidden him from having any dealings with this man. The latter conflict, that between conscience and duty, partly parallels Clarke's own experience. In the writer's youth, the name of his natural father was taboo in his mother's home but he did pay secret visits to his father, who eventually died of tuberculosis in an almshouse. Indeed, the writing of this story may well have been Clarke's way of exorcising a ghost that had haunted him, since his protagonist gets his just deserts for abandoning his own father in an almshouse. At the moment of the young man's triumph - leaving the restrictive island for a better life in Canada - the middle-class woman who wishes to marry him in the face of considerable opposition casts him aside because she has discovered he has a father in a public home. Yet, Clarke's juxtaposition of the almshouse, characterized by its foul smelling, decrepit or dying paupers, with the cricket field and its middle and upper class players

³⁹Dorian Powell, "The Role of Women in the Caribbean," Social and Economic Studies 33 (1984): 104.

⁴⁰Raymond T. Smith, "Culture and Social Structure in the Caribbean: Some Recent Work on Family and Kinship Studies," in Black Society in the New World, ed. Richard Frucht (New York: Random House, 1971) 262.

all garbed in white flannel as they take tea in the pavilion powerfully concretises the conflict within the protagonist and elicits sympathy for his desire to escape his father's fate by beginning afresh elsewhere. This sympathy is deepened because the protagonist has found himself in an untenable situation not of his own making, a situation in which loyalty to one natural parent necessitates disloyalty to the other and in which fluctuating emotions and psychological suffering are inevitable.

In his own life, Clarke would come to understand the father's perspective on the father-son relationship, a sensitivity he displays in "Madonna, Madonna".⁴¹ This short story, written after a protracted extra-marital affair that resulted in the birth of a son to Clarke,⁴² reveals Clarke's

⁴¹Austin Clarke, "Madonna, Madonna", Texas Literary Review 1 (1974): 31-39.

⁴²Around 1965 Clarke's marriage entered a period of uncertainty. Driven to a significant degree by the need to be successful, to receive public acclaim and to be the main provider for his family, Clarke had involved himself in a demanding array of activities, particularly after the publication of his first novel in 1964. He therefore had less time for family life. Gradually, he drifted apart from his wife, who felt indeed that she had been shunted aside by Clarke in his bid for fame and fortune. Melva da Silva, a light-skinned Toronto resident of Guyanese origin, became his mistress and on 29 August 1967 bore him a son, Mphahlele Soyinka Clarke. While Clarke was at Yale in 1969, Melva sent their son to Guyana to live with her half-sister, and Clarke shortly terminated his relationship with her. In 1975, however, Clarke paid the fare for his son's return to Canada. To his disappointment, he has not been able to establish a close relationship with his son, who--much to his chagrin--has not developed the strong black roots he had hoped the boy's African names would encourage in him. In time, it might be noted, Clarke and his wife decided to preserve their marriage

intense depth of feeling in its portrayal of a father's concern for his son in whom he sees himself reflected. Unlike the young man in "Leaving This Island Place" who believes that in going away he can sever all filial bonds and leave the past behind, the mature narrator in "Madonna, Madonna" observes that the parents and their child are inextricably bound together: "The son reminds you of the mother and you embrace the one and feel the body of the other."⁴³ Filial links cannot be eradicated or denied simply because of distance, time or artificial separation. The two stories together offer a complex picture of the father-son relationship and imply that age brings a more enlightened appreciation of its true nature.

"Leaving This Island Place" delineates the dilemmas facing many black children amid the shifting alliances that typify their family life. Ultimately, however, Clarke's treatment of loyalty to parents, whether natural or adoptive, and of the issues and problems generated by the impermanence of marital and other unions transcends the specific Barbadian context out of which it springs, to become a searching examination of modern society more generally.

Unlike "An Easter Carol" and "Leaving This Island

though on a different footing, agreeing to remain close friends while permitting each other room for independence. To facilitate this style of life, Clarke moved out of the family home on Brunswick Avenue in 1980 to a townhouse he had recently bought on McGill Street in downtown Toronto.

⁴³Clarke, "Madonna, Madonna" 39.

Place", ten of the stories in When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks portray specific aspects of the immigrant experience in Canada, a subject Clarke had already investigated in The Meeting Point and Storm of Fortune. The two stories extracted from Storm of Fortune add little to what Clarke achieves in the novel. "What Happened" again encapsulates the psychological devastation of a black man by his white wife and a hostile white society, a twin assault that not only destroys his self-esteem and equanimity but also wrecks his marriage. Discrimination and poverty transform Henry into a time-bomb, and the anger and frustration thus far controlled now threaten an explosion:

"And you know what I am thinking all the time?
Murr-derr! Murder to them or murder to myself, but
murr-der!"⁴⁴

For its part, "A Wedding in Toronto" once more communicates the unfettered joy and exuberance of the blacks as they celebrate Henry's marriage to Agatha, but the story gains a somewhat different emphasis from its origins in Storm of Fortune. In the novel, the tenants' action in calling the police and the resultant intrusion by officers of the law serve as evidence of discrimination and injustice. Boysie has no doubt that racism is at work. As they resound in the room, the words of the Mighty Sparrow's calypso - "*They treat me like a savage ... they treat me like a savage ... they treat*

⁴⁴Clarke, When He Was Free 127.

me like a savage ..." - seem to bear the message that whites unfairly regard blacks as primitive beings.⁴⁵ By introducing another calypso into the scene, however, Clarke appears to suggest that blacks would not have responded differently from the white tenants, for Sparrow sings disapprovingly of black inconsiderateness:

*"I tired and I disgust ... big Sunday evening, they cussing, they fighting, they gambling, they beating pan and bup - bup! iron bolt, and stone pelting, send for the police, still the bacchanal won't cease"*⁴⁶

Here Clarke goes beyond his early bitterness to view interracial relationships from a more balanced and far more complex perspective, a process the beginnings of which are seen in his earlier work. He implies in "A Wedding in Toronto" that a particular mind-set may predispose black immigrants to regard as racist actions that are not really such and that myopic views will result only in misunderstanding and a widening of the gulf between the races. In this story, racism is viewed as everyone's problem; both blacks and whites are susceptible to it and are at times equally guilty of it.

Other stories in the collection are also informed by themes already evident in the first two novels of Clarke's trilogy. "They Heard A Ringing of Bells", "Waiting for the

⁴⁵Clarke, When He Was Free 89.

⁴⁶Clarke, When He Was Free 85.

Postman to Knock", and "Give Us This Day: and Forgive Us", for instance, are comments on such aspects of black immigrant life as racism, denial of opportunity, poverty, and failure. "They Heard A Ringing of Bells" contrasts the immigrants' hopes and dreams with the reality of their lives and the ambivalence of their feelings toward their new country. The black newcomers cling to the hope that Canada will offer them a chance for a new life but they merely encounter fresh problems and obstacles, so that the better life may be long in coming or may prove forever elusive.

"Waiting for the Postman to Knock" outlines a bleak and depressing picture of the poverty and sense of impotence that are Enid's fate when she tries to improve her fortunes in Canada. By setting the story on Christmas day, Clarke underlines the irony of a situation in which not a single Christian, whether white or black, extends charity to the impoverished and suffering Enid in the midst of the most important festival of the faith. Indeed, insult is added to injury when the very company that has served Enid an eviction notice sends her a Christmas card. How little the black immigrant receives and how little she expects are cogently demonstrated through Enid's tearful request to God "for a piece o' Christmas cake and for Dots".⁴⁷

"Waiting for the Postman to Knock" draws attention, also, to the heavy burden borne by the black female immigrant.

⁴⁷Clarke, When He Was Free 50.

Enid receives letters from her mother castigating her for not taking care of the son she has left behind and from her lover, Lonnie, asking her for financial assistance. The claims of those who depend upon her obligate her to achieve even minimal success, and her failure seems all the more inglorious. Mired in circumstances that prevent her from helping even herself, she can do little to alleviate the guilt that afflicts her.

The destructive nature of poverty and of its concomitants, discrimination and failure,⁴⁸ is again the subject of "Give Us This Day: and Forgive Us", in which twenty years of destitution and discrimination in Canada finally drive Henry to attempt suicide. The black fails even in this and thus discovers there is no escape from the trap in which he exists. Like "Waiting for the Postman to Knock", the story ends with the protagonist awaiting eviction, and it is tempting to argue that perhaps Clarke hints here at the presence of a distinctive brand of racism - one known to occur in the United States - that would "purify" the society through the wholesale ejection of blacks.

The themes of isolation and alienation, too,

⁴⁸When Henry applies for a job in the civil service his application is "misplaced" and when his landlady, who is evicting him, shows his room to a prospective occupant he discovers that she has been overcharging him and indeed has raised the rent in order to get rid of him (70-72). Again, when he is seen pushing his way through a crowd in the company of Agatha, his white girl-friend, Henry is beaten, charged with assault and taken to jail despite his protestations of innocence. Interestingly enough, Agatha says nothing in his defence (72-78).

resurface in When He Was Free and He Used to Wear Silks, though most distinctly so in "Waiting for the Postman to Knock", "Four Stations in His Circle" and "Bonanza 1972 in Toronto". Whereas Enid's isolation in the first of these stories is symbolised by her imprisonment in her cell-like room, Pinky's in "Bonanza 1972 in Toronto" is demonstrated through her presence in the midst of an indifferent crowd. At a party organized by the Barbados government to boost the tourist industry the guests, with one exception, totally ignore her, and so shattering is her discomfort that when a Mr. Worms deigns to speak to her she is moved by her gratitude to cry out tearfully in her heart, "Thank you, thank you, Mr. Worms for at least mekking me feel like a person, a lady."⁴⁹

The notion of the black as an outsider, hinted at in several of the stories, is considerably amplified in "Bonanza 1972 in Toronto". Indeed, not only is Pinky an alien in Canada but, given the changes occurring in her homeland where Canadians are buying up the land and the society is catering more and more to the needs of the tourist while deemphasizing those of the native, she will soon find herself an outsider in the country of her birth. Clarke no doubt views these Barbadian developments as simply a modern form of colonialism. Certainly, the whites' appropriation of Pinky's homeland and her exclusion from its benefits are metaphorically conveyed by the incident in which the flying fish, the symbol of Barbados,

⁴⁹Clarke, When He Was Free (American Edition) 137.

is devoured by one Canadian while Pinky is denied any of it.

The isolation and alienation that are often the lot of Clarke's immigrants are usually the result of the treatment of blacks by the white community. In "Four Stations in His Circle", the writer restores some balance to his analysis by suggesting that such a fate may at times be attributable to actions of the black immigrant himself. The principal theme in this story, however, is that the black immigrant, in adopting the values of white society and in particular its quest for material success, may sometimes enjoy a modicum of achievement but may pay a high psychological price, perhaps even in the form of insanity and a general destruction of self. Jefferson is bent on owning a house in Rosedale, which symbolises the pinnacle of material attainment, and to achieve his goal he abandons his sick mother as well as his black friends. In his desire for acceptance by the Rosedale crowd Jefferson, a janitor who undertakes other menial jobs in order to settle his debts, passes himself off as an engineer, but this life of subterfuge brings him none of the satisfaction he has anticipated. He is constantly ill at ease with the Rosedale circle and always afraid its members will discover him to be a fraud who lives in an empty shell, for his dwelling lacks not only the trappings of a home but the joy and laughter of family and friends as well. The empty house in which he lives is symbolic of what his own life has become.

The success Jefferson has attained is circumscribed, for it has been secured at immense psychological cost. Jefferson represents the black immigrant whose humble social origins drive him to establish himself as a respectable member of his new society. A prerequisite for admission into the more desirable ranks in Canada, he feels, is that he divest himself of his true self and live a lie. Such a self-betrayal cannot long be sustained, however, and when Jefferson stands before his reflection in the mirror even his fertile imagination cannot shield him from the unpalatable truth that his success is a meaningless one. He has severed all connections with his roots and his true self and he is soon reduced to pacing about his empty house as he talks to invisible guests like a madman.

In "The Motor Car", too, Clarke's protagonist achieves a somewhat dubious success, though the costs are not as awesome as in Jefferson's case. Calvin works doggedly and single-mindedly to purchase a Galaxie, the car of his dreams, but when he achieves his goal success almost turns into tragedy. The white woman in his car is injured in a freak accident and had Calvin not cunningly gulled the police by playing the stereotypical role of the subservient black samaritan he might well have ended up in jail. In his conscious reworking of LeRoi Jones' Dutchman, with its sexual/racial stereotypes, Clarke reverses the role of male and female, for, unlike Jones' Clay, Calvin is not destroyed

by the white seducer.⁵⁰ Rather, he dismisses her from his life as easily as he tosses her handbag through his car window. From Calvin's point of view, and perhaps that of a black activist like Jones, such a course of action is fully warranted, though an alternative interpretation of Calvin's conduct may be that the "success" the black man gains is linked to a loss of moral integrity and humanity. As Lloyd Brown notes in El Dorado and Paradise, "the symbolic acquisition of the car becomes a kind of Faustian pact which he [Calvin] pursues and achieves narrow, material goals--at the cost of his humanity".⁵¹ But while the story centres on the fate of the black immigrant's search for material well being, it also, as Lloyd Brown suggests, "raises questions of the commercialized American dream symbolised by the car",⁵² a Ford, and emphasizes the "cultural costs of American criteria of success in Canada".⁵³ The story is reflective, once again, of Clarke's widening perspective, moving as it

⁵⁰Andrew Salkey claims that "The Motor Car" is a "nicely judged turnabout of the well-known LeRoi Jones play Dutchman" and that "unlike LeRoi Jones' sub-way chick who murders her self-assured black man and escapes only to continue her vicious conquests" Clarke's "white Canadian woman who comes on strong" to Calvin "gets her 'comeuppance' in the end." Andrew Salkey, "BBC Caribbean Service", Undated, 2. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁵¹Lloyd Brown, El Dorado and Paradise (London, Ontario: Centre for Social and Humanistic Studies, University of Western Ontario, 1989) 61.

⁵²Brown 62.

⁵³Brown 62.

does beyond the circumstances of the black immigrant to the wider Canadian context and in particular to the destructive and dehumanizing nature of Canadian adoption of the American value system.⁵⁴

The ongoing discussion by no means exhausts Clarke's portrayal of immigrant life in Canada. The notion of the black male's need to remind himself and others of his masculinity, for example, recurs in "Griff". Their status in the Caribbean family undermined by historical circumstances and poverty, black men--as Barrow notes⁵⁵--have usually attempted to preserve a sense of their manhood through the exercise of control over their women, a tendency reflected in their physical and verbal abuse of the latter. Black men have few alternative means for confirming their manhood and maintain the respect of their peers. And peer pressure in the West Indian circle of immigrants is a powerful force. When it is brought to bear on Griff, he can no longer ignore his black counterparts' contempt at his inaction. In their eyes, he is less than a man because he is inert in the face of

⁵⁴As early as 1944, Frederick Philip Grove, in his Master of the Mill, explored the dehumanizing effects of mechanization and the quest for material success on the individual Canadian and on the society generally. Hugh MacLennan's The P. accipice (1948), too, visited similar themes but emphasized the moral dilemmas which the American value system posed for Canadians. In "The Motor Car", though at a metaphorical level, Clarke reiterates a sense of similar dangers.

⁵⁵Christine Barrow, "Reputation and Ranking in A Barbadian Locality," Social and Economic Studies 25 (1976): 106-109.

other males' advances to his wife but especially because he fails to take her wife in hand. He is keenly aware of his passivity and of the expectations of his peers. In the end he overcomes the restraints he feels because of his British upbringing and succumbs to peer pressure, thus vindicating himself in his associates' eyes as well as his own.

A different theme, the differentiation of the West Indian from the American black, is pursued in certain works in the American edition of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Suits, stories that are indeed a restatement of Clarke's personal response to the American Negro. At the beginning of his stint at the University of Texas, for example, he had been disturbed by a sense of dissimilarity to the black American:

I suddenly felt ... a great distance between me and the materials I would use, the black Americans, their thoughts, their psyche, and even an absence, too, of roots. I was a kind of exile in Houston, in more than one way.⁵⁶

It is to preserve such a uniqueness that Goldie, the black West Indian protagonist of "One Among Them", totally rejects the militancy and racial perspective of the black American students with whom he interacts. Furthermore, he employs deliberate strategies to avoid being identified with them: he ignores the black universities to enrol at Duke, regarded by

⁵⁶Austin Clarke, "An American Dutchman," McMaster University, Hamilton, 176.

the blacks as a racist institution, and he registers "in a four-year honour course, with a major in Meteorological Science and Classical Music Appreciation".⁵⁷ He consequently incurs the ire of the black students, who regard him as a traitor for his refusal to identify with their ideals. Yet when sudden hospitalization prevents him from grooming himself differently from the Americans, he discovers that in the eyes of whites, too, he is merely another black. Neither group is inclined to perceive him as a West Indian. When his meteorological charts are mistaken for plans aimed against the white establishment and he is therefore thrown out of the hospital he is regarded as a hero by the blacks and realizes that he would do nothing to withstand the declaration of brotherhood they forced upon him."⁵⁸

The central thesis in "One Among Them" is that it is difficult if not impossible, for the West Indian to retain his identity amid the social pressures of an American environment. And the firmness of the foundation of this special identity is beyond doubt. The racial caste system Goldie observes in the States no longer quite exists in his native island. The black West Indian, despite limited resources and opportunities, has progressed further than his American peers in the social and political spheres. Goldie, who comes from a background distinguished by "a black

⁵⁷Clark, When He Was Free (American Edition) 151.

⁵⁸Clark, When He Was Free (American Edition) 166.

Government and black schoolmasters and black lawyers",⁵⁹ cannot be faulted for remaining unimpressed by the black-owned North Carolina Mutual Building, regarded by the blacks as a symbol of their achievement and progress. He is convinced, instead, that the southern blacks "were foolish to live for so long in this arrangement".⁶⁰ Yet, the story implies, the special identity of the West Indian immigrant to the States is constantly under seige, even by the American blacks themselves, and whether the newcomer wishes it or not, permanent attachment is virtually impossible. He will be engulfed by a native black community that demands his allegiance.

"One Among Them" is perhaps a working out in fiction of the dilemma Clarke himself faced during his interactions with the American black power movement. It demonstrates his awareness that this movement, with its insistence that "blackness" means a rejection of conventional assumptions and values, can represent in its extreme versions as much a denial of self-worth and self-identity and be as psychologically crippling as the more familiar form of denying the reality of blackness altogether, as has been illustrated in a number of Clarke's stories.⁶¹ The account of Goldie's experience is a

⁵⁹Clarke, When He Was Free 145.

⁶⁰Clarke, When He Was Free 144.

⁶¹Examples of such stories are "Four Stations in His Circle", "A Short Acquaintance", "How He Does It" and "Griff".

particular illustration of the kind of alienation that befalls West Indians in the United States, an alienation which is different from that felt in Canada by all troubled minorities in their struggle for survival but which is no less destructive in all of its manifestations (that is, rejection by blacks, rejection by whites, and mistaken acceptance by blacks). The double bind in which Goldie finds himself is analogous to Clarke's own struggles to define himself, for himself, at the cost of being at odds with most groups with which he comes into contact, with Clarke as late as 1990 reiterating the point that he is different from the black American, that he can never become one and that he "would never live in America ... a place of tremendous power, a place that for some reason, everybody in the world--except [him]--wants to live".⁶²

"Her Name Was Reggina", too, delves into the matter of the separateness of the West Indian identity from that of the black American. At one level the story concerns itself with a West Indian's obsession with a nymphomaniac. The black man grasps the power the woman exerts over him and the danger she poses to his well-being only when a southern policeman, gripping his night stick "in expectation of use upon the man standing at the wrong time, at the wrong woman's door locked

⁶²Austin Clarke, Other Solitudes, eds. Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990) 70.

from the inside",⁶³ inquires of her whether she was having any difficulties. Had she intimated that she was, the West Indian would undoubtedly have been subjected to humiliating and possibly violent treatment. Clarke is obviously aware of white brutality against the American Negro, the existence of which phenomenon had been confirmed by his own contact with the racial tensions within the society.

At a metaphorical level, the story reaffirms the distinction between the black American and West Indian identities, though on this occasion the West Indian is drawn to the ideals exalted by his American peers only to be rejected by that group. The protagonist's attraction to Reggina parallels his interest in and flirtation with the black power movement, a peripheral involvement somewhat reminiscent of Clarke's own proclivities. The movement seduces the young man but, as he soon discovers, it is rife with danger, in part because its insatiable appetite for resources to serve the cause precludes a concern for the individual and in part because ironically the American blacks themselves regard him as "an outsider".⁶⁴ Clarke's writings often portray the West Indian as an alien in Canada but "One Among Them" and "Her Name Was Reggina" suggest that, whether the West Indian is embraced or rejected by the American blacks, he can never fully identify with them and they in turn

⁶³Clarke, When He Was Free 203-204.

⁶⁴Clarke, When He Was Free 203.

seem unable to view him as wholly one of their own. Clarke alludes elsewhere to the strong sense of uniqueness possessed by American blacks, stating that he does not think "that even white Canadians consider themselves Canadians to the extent that Americans [including blacks] consider themselves Americans".⁶⁵ At the same time, the American blacks do not truly comprehend the West Indian from Canada; even black magazines such as Ebony, Jet and Sepia do not recognize the duality which the Canadian West Indian experiences and which he cannot readily slough off. Clarke's stories often mirror the contradictions which are inherent in his own life and which he faces again and again in his search for identity. It is through writing fiction, particularly works like "One Among Them" and "Reggina", that Clarke has been able to come to terms with the problem of duality and could therefore state in 1990 that he is a Canadian citizen but that the best of him is Barbadian, though he concedes that the issue of duality still surfaces each time blacks in Canada are attacked.⁶⁶

While Clarke's relationship with the black American intelligentsia and protest movement was an uneasy one, he was not immune to their influences. One of the stories illuminated by his consciousness of the black movement and its ideological underpinning is "When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks". In this work, a black man comes to

⁶⁵Clarke in Other Solitudes 62.

⁶⁶Clarke in Other Solitudes 69.

realize that his five-year obsession with a white woman - analogous to white society - is rooted in an illusion, for in comparison with the black Georgia woman, Marian, who symbolises black society, the white female is "nothing more vivacious than a feather worn in her broad-grinned hat".⁶⁷ The black Marian is the earth mother, woman bursting with zest and passion, strength and courage, tenderness and tenacity, and in his interactions with her the protagonist discerns the beauty of his blackness, finally regarding his colour with pride. Freed by this discovery from the shackles of his long obsession with the white woman, he can now embark on the journey that will lead to fulfilment:

He was young and free again, to live or to travel imprisoned in the memory of freed love, chained to her body and her laughter by the spinal cord of anxious longdistance, reminders said before and after, by the long engineering of a drive from Yale to Brandeis to Seaver Street to Brandeis⁶⁸

Marion's departure suggests that she no longer needs to be his mentor. The regeneration that has created in him a new view of his blackness equips him to confront the outside world with confidence, a process of maturation that would seem to parallel Clarke's own growth as a result of his contact with black America.

"An Invitation to Join", too, is a quiet

⁶⁷Clarke, When He Was Free (Canadian Edition) 150.

⁶⁸Clarke, When He Was Free (Canadian Edition) 151.

acknowledgement of Clarke's debt to black America, since it reveals the writer's recognition of the likely consequences of a society's denial to its people of full participation in its on-going life. In the story, the young woman who is appalled by events unfolding around her and who wishes desperately to escape from the community is representative of blacks who desire nothing more than the opportunity to lead a normal life. Deprived of such a blessing, they may well have recourse to violence. Tell-tale signs exist that beneath the surface of an apparently ordinary community lurk rage and violence. In this respect, the female protagonist's fear and obsessive wish to flee from the housing project are ominous. In an eruption sparked by black frustration primeval drives, symbolised by the brutality of the woman who swings a baseball bat against an innocent child, sweep the blacks on to unrestrained action. The implication is that, while blacks do not all subscribe to militancy, violence will not readily be controlled once it breaks to the surface. Yet, Clarke's reservations about the effectiveness of violence for the solution of black problems are clear at the end of the story: "He looked for the woman who held the baseball bat and wondered if she was the answer."⁶⁹

But another less sombre notion threads its way through "An Invitation to Join"--the awareness among blacks that the imposition of white culture upon them has been an

⁶⁹Clarke, When He Was Free (American Edition) 183.

instrument for their subjugation at the hands of the dominant society. The blacks in the ghetto vent their anger and frustration on two black Christians attempting to foist their religion on a community increasingly drawn to its own roots and culture, a community with a growing conviction that the white man has supplanted its culture with his in order to make second-rate citizens of its people and lull them into passivity. Softly echoing The Colonizer and the Colonized,⁷⁰ the story alludes to the early efforts to Christianize Africa:

More than once, the man visiting the woman thought that the drummer had seen Africa on the face of these dancing people. ... Through this music, these two Christians passed like deaf-mutes, like two missionaries moving through the thickness of an infested and infected jungle;...⁷¹

What seems clear from "An Invitation to Join", however, is that with greater enlightenment blacks seek to devise an alternative moral order requiring a realignment of their religion and culture and a rejection of the black Judases who function as tools of a white society that threatens to overwhelm them.

Set in the United States and strongly inspired by

⁷⁰Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (New York: Orion Press, 1965) 76. Memmi comments on the Europeans' efforts to found a "new moral order" in the colonies, one in which they are "by definition" the masters. Christianity is an important building-block in this new moral order.

⁷¹Clarke, When He Was Free (American Edition) 176.

Clarke's contact with American campus life, "Hammie and the Black Dean" also scrutinizes the Negro orientation toward a white-dominated social and cultural environment, concretising the tensions produced by the placement of growing numbers of black students in traditionally white universities.. So long as the blacks conform to stereotyped expectations through unorthodoxy in dress, in demeanour and in attitude toward their obligations as students, no one expresss great concern. This preliminary behaviour of the "bloods", however, is merely a defence mechanism offering protection in an alien and often hostile environment, and time brings the blacks greater confidence in themselves, a modicum of trust in the establishment and the courage to integrate with the rest of the student body. By this stage, though, they have created a fearsome image, and their metamorphosis earns them only suspicion. Had the administration talked with the students, it would have learned that they were engaged not in plotting against the establishment but simply in a harmless, albeit exuberant, "rapping". The absence of communication is a major cause of catastrophe but the blacks must share the responsibility for the difficulties that arise since their initial intransigence and their dubious conduct have magnified the tensions of the situation.

The objectivity of such an analysis does not prevent Clarke from incorporating into the story traces of the skepticism of black radicals toward both the institutions of

white society and those blacks who succumb to their attractions. The juxtaposition of the shooting with Hammie's tale of the black who "don't have a B.A. from no Ivy League college" but who is "making twenty-five grand" in the ghetto⁷² highlights the reason why so many Negroes isolate themselves within the ghetto community. Labels and stereotypes still prevail in the outside world, and the story is an indictment of American society as well as of institutions of learning that are supposedly bastions of freedom, tolerance and enlightenment but accept token blacks only to stunt their development as human beings. Hammie's view that the only thing he has "learned at this ... place in three years, is three words: *slide, rabbit and psychoexistentialism*"⁷³ is indirectly a denunciation of a system that pretends to nurture but instead destroys.

No less despicable are blacks who fall prey to the blandishments of white society and its institutions, for such Uncle Toms are more dangerous than the whites. Their greed, ambition and overpowering need for acceptance in the social mainstream make them easily susceptible to manipulation by the whites. It is after all not the white president who shoots the students; it is the black dean who, acting on appearances rather than facts, performs the deed, employing the president's rifle which the president has taught and

⁷²Clarke, When He Was Free (American Edition) 235.

⁷³Clarke, When He Was Free (American Edition) 241.

encouraged him to use. It is an act that is followed by no remorse. With the president looking on, the black dean guns down the blacks saying to himself, "I got the mother fuckers at last" ⁷⁴

The wealth of subject-matter in When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks is matched by a variety in technique that attests to Clarke's growing virtuosity as a writer. While there are the customary excesses, where the broad effect becomes lost in the enthusiasm of Clarke's creative excitement, ⁷⁵ more often than not the results are striking in their energy and artistry. More typical is the description of the Easter preparations in "An Easter Carol", which is marked by its rich imagery and concrete detail and resounds with the excitement of the occasion:

For all night I could smell the delicious smells
seeping under my door from the kitchen: the
roasted pork: the great cakes, the sponges, the
bananas, the golden apples, the rum, the sweet
drinks; the new coats of varnish and polish and
paint on all the ancient furniture in our house.
This was Easter in our house. Everything was
cleansed ... Everything was new, was clean, was

⁷⁴Clarke, When He Was Free (American Edition) 242.

⁷⁵For example, "An Easter Carol" contains such infelicitous wordings as "Rank, rank sheep whose perfume would have taken a soap-factory of scrubbing to wipe off" and "I walked in the valley of the shadow of the canes this time (my guardian angel-dog beside me!" while "Leaving This Island Place" is marred by such bathetic concoctions as "The two eyeballs in the sunset of the room is my father" and "He held a family circle of compassion in his heart". See Clarke, When He Was Free 6, 7, 24, 25.

virginal.⁷⁶

In this collection, Clarke exploits a diversity of approaches, as is evident in his adoption not only of the conventional chronological narrative but also of the direct interior monologue and the monodrama. Of the stories characterized by a chronological sequence three are first-person narratives which as a group parallel Clarke's own growth and changing preoccupations. In "An Easter Carol" the eight year old inhabits a restricted world, his major concern being to please his mother, and the first person point of view permits a vivid portrayal of his anticipatory joy at the coming of Easter, his fear of failing his mother and his terror at the unknown. The older protagonist of "Leaving This Island Place" faces more complex problems, and the first person narrative exposes his emotions and attitudes in a manner that renders him deserving of sympathy. Filtering into this story are traces of one of Clarke's former models, T. S. Eliot, in whose dramatic monologue J. Alfred Prufrock dissects himself and finds himself wanting. In "Her Name Was Reggina" a more mature man is no longer absorbed in purely personal or insular matters: the first person narrative discloses his attempt to confront the black problem in the States, evaluate it and determine his role in its resolution. Other stories marked by chronological sequences employ the third person point of view in providing

⁷⁶Clarke, When He Was Free 3-4.

insights into the psyche of their characters, thus forcing the reader to view their protagonists with both sympathy and objectivity. In this respect, Jefferson in "Four Stations in His Circle" and Goldie in "One Among Them" serve as striking examples, since both elicit understanding but are nevertheless seen as contributing to their own disasters.

The most unusual work in the two collections is "When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks", an indirect interior monologue which attempts to convey the inner life of the protagonist and traces his ascent from a naive prostration at the altar of the whites to a genuine discovery of his roots. The interior monologue captures the rich detail, both the significant and the insignificant, that has characterized the inner existence of the protagonist up to the time of his departure for the United States, lending credibility to his obsessions, his moments of confusion, his fluctuating emotions and his altering perspectives. Through a flashback that recalls his psychological and spiritual odyssey, the protagonist begins to view the course of his life with a clarity that has long eluded him.

Clarke's command of the short story is evident as well in those works that are essentially monodramas,⁷⁷ many of which were almost certainly earmarked for radio, television or the stage. They abound in a rich and lively West Indian

⁷⁷These are "The Motor Car", "Hammie and the Black Dean", "Bonanza 1972 in Toronto" and "Waiting for the Postman to Knock".

dialect laced with a humour that in many instances serves to throw into bolder relief the pathos or tragedy of the protagonist's predicament. In addition, the dialect imbues the characters and their experiences with authenticity and, without authorial intrusion, absorbs the reader in the life of the speakers or their subjects. In such stories as "Bonanza 1972 in Toronto" and "The Motor Car", also, it bubbles with the West Indian's spontaneity and natural sense of humour, bestowing on the characters an effervescence that wins them admiration as creatures who can lift themselves above utterly depressing circumstances.

That Clarke has matured immensely as an artist is obvious as well from his delineation of character. The two editions of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks present a plethora of characters, some round, others stereotyped, and still others symbolic or bordering on caricature, but all memorable and none of them sentimentalised. In the stories with an allegorical dimension, characters are often abstract, shadowy beings serving an essentially symbolic end.⁷⁸ This is especially true of the women, who are depicted primarily from an external vantage point, while the male psychology is analysed in some depth. However, this probing of the male psyche is not restricted to the more allegorical works. In "Four Stations

⁷⁸The best examples here are "Her Name Was Reggina" and "When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks".

in His Circle", for instance, the inner workings of Jefferson's mind are drawn with such sharpness that while the black man's actions are typically comical it is the tragic nature of his situation that stands out most distinctly. Clarke's sketch edges dangerously close to caricature but it manages to denote the dehumanization of the black immigrant who is enmeshed in a quest for material success completely blind to the reality that his goals are founded on false values, those bred in him through a colonial upbringing and his subsequent contact with a society that labels as inferior or inconsequential everything that is not white or cannot be assigned a monetary value.

It must not be thought, though, that Clarke's most searching examinations of the black psyche are confined to his male characters. In a number of stories, among them "Bonanza 1972 in Toronto" and "Waiting for the Postman to Knock", Clarke pursues a course already taken in The Meeting Point and subjects his female characters to rigorous study, capturing not only their sense of isolation, their frustration and their fundamental unhappiness but oftentimes, as in Pinky's case, their irrepressible vivacity. The first West Indian novelist to probe deeply into the black female's consciousness, he creates a picture of her psychological terrain that is startling in its realism. Even in a story woven around several characters, he manages to dissect Estelle's inner being and to elicit sympathy for the black woman through the

Careful revelation of her fluctuating thoughts and emotions.

When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks

is a tribute to Clarke's versatility and self-assurance as a writer. Clarke's stories delve deeply into the experiences of blacks, by and large depicting the pathos and tragedy of their lives in a new land; but while they often engender horror and disgust at the inhumanity they lay bare, they do not become instruments of moral didacticism. Clarke achieves significant distancing and gains a measure of objectivity in his treatment of the black, though the violence and vituperation sometimes seeping into his dialect suggest where his sympathy lies. The stories hold up a mirror to both blacks and whites and if they demonstrate the strength and tenacity of the blacks they also display the latter's foibles, though always without divesting them of their dignity.

Chapter 7

The Bigger Light

Clarke arrived in Austin, Texas, for the beginning of the Fall Semester of 1973 and felt an instant distaste for the university campus that went well beyond his usual reservations concerning American academic life. It was the seemingly artificial character of the setting that most offended his sensibilities; to all appearances, the institution might well have been planted arbitrarily in semi-desert by people with a surplus of funds, and the abundance of trees and other vegetation, though lending a superficially pleasant and even fragrant air to the locale, consequently struck him as disturbingly unnatural. Student and faculty reaction to his presence in the socially conservative Texan milieu was less a source of discomfort than what he regarded as the contrived nature of the campus, since--as he now claims--he had fortified himself against psychological injury through a conviction that the university was indebted to him for the favour he was granting it in consenting to teach its students. Freed of concern about his reception, he was able to direct his energies toward his responsibilities and

interests, in the process even managing to make a few friends.

Inevitably, teaching occupied much of Clarke's time, especially since his classes had attracted and retained a fair enrolment.¹ However, it was a novel experience for him to teach Afro-American Literature to a group without a single black student. In this course, nevertheless, he retained his customary focus, leading his class through an analysis of a typical sampling of writers from Africa, the United States and the Caribbean² as he tried to demonstrate that blacks outside the United States did not experience the same restrictedness as their American counterparts and that black intellectuals elsewhere differed correspondingly in their perception of the world.

Such demands prevented Clarke from attending as much as he wished to his writing, but he still managed some progress in the revision of his latest manuscript, a novel entitled "To Name the Bigger Light". By the end of October he had also completed and reworked "The Old Man at the Window", which was merely a short story adaptation of his novelette

¹From the very beginning of his university teaching career, Clarke had shown an ability to develop rapport with his students. Robin Winks of Yale University, for example, notes that Clarke's students "responded well to him". See Robin Winks to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 22 June 1990.

²The required reading included Chinua Achebe (A Man of the People), James Baldwin (The Fire Next Time; Go Tell It on the Mountain), V. S. Naipaul (The Middle Passage), LeRoi Jones (Dutchman; Black Magic), Ralph Ellison (Invisible Man), Richard Wright (Eight Men), Edward Brathwaite (Rights of Passage) and Derek Walcott (Another Life).

"There Is A Mad Woman Who Lives across the Street"--a piece that had already absorbed some of his energies in the summer in Toronto--but he apparently still thought the manuscript not polished enough for publication. Indeed, he would continue to address its deficiencies when he returned to Toronto at the end of the year and it would be well into 1974 before a new version of the work was actually published, now with the title of "Madonna, Madonna".³

Occasional speaking engagements at Northwestern and Yale in 1973 offered temporary escape from the unreality of the Texas campus,⁴ and at the end of the term he hurried off to Toronto several days before the formal end of his contractual period. Clarke's slightly premature departure from the University of Texas was prompted by a desire to settle some personal business in Toronto before his embarkation on a new career that would again take him to the United States. The task that now beckoned was the outgrowth of an earlier visit to Toronto by his friend and former mentor, the prime minister of Barbados.⁵ Errol Barrow, who

³Austin Clarke, "Madonna, Madonna," Texas Literary Review 1 (1974): 31-39.

⁴See Earl Wilborn to Austin Clarke, 11 October 1973 and Robin Winks to Austin Clarke, 18 October 1973.

⁵Clarke had maintained his connection with Barrow. While at the University of Texas, for example, he had arranged for the Barbadian prime minister to give a lecture at the campus in November, 1973. Barrow was at that time a visiting speaker at Florida International University. See Austin Clarke to Errol Barrow, 10 October 1973.

had at that stage enjoyed several years as the island's political leader, had suggested that the time was ripe for Clarke to employ his talents in the service of his native country and in the early Fall of 1973 had prevailed upon the writer to accept a posting as Cultural Attache with the Barbadian embassy in Washington.⁶ After a brief respite in Toronto at the end of 1973, therefore, Clarke hastened to Washington to assume his new position.⁷

Clarke was delighted by Washington: the city appeared a tremendously exciting place, even more so because the writer's stay there overlapped with the unfolding of the Watergate affair. As a diplomat, furthermore, he was able to savour a sense of importance quite disproportionate to the size of the country he now served, since the representatives of all foreign governments were extended similar courtesies. The fact that Barbados had never before designated anyone a cultural attache also proved advantageous for Clarke, allowing him considerable leeway in the definition of his official responsibilities, and he chose to engage himself in a number of different tasks. He not only organized talks and programs

⁶Robin Winks to Austin Clarke, 10 October 1973. Winks refers to Clarke's ascent to the ranks of the diplomats.

⁷Clarke went to Washington without his wife and his children. He was assigned an apartment on the third floor of the building housing the Barbadian embassy. Betty and his daughters visited him here periodically, while he returned to Toronto about once every month. Betty Clarke, personal interview, 14 October 1990.

to help Americans understand the people of Barbados but also devoted time to such matters as interviewing individuals intent on taking up residence in Barbados, setting up exchange visits involving Americans and Barbadians, and seeking scholarships for Barbadians. He participated extensively as well in the social and cultural life Washington offered.

For a while, inevitably, Clarke did little new writing. Though he had begun another novel, "More", he could not work at it with the intensity it demanded, but he completed a radio play entitled "She Is Our Leader", confronting anew the issue of West Indian identity.⁸ He also touched up an occasional story in a quest for its publication, and he received a request for permission to include "A Wedding in Toronto", his story from the Canadian edition of When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks, in a proposed high school text in Canadian Literature.⁹ But he also had his disappointments during the course of 1974. While Phyllis Westberg of Harold Ober Associates, his American agents, liked

⁸Austin Clarke, "She Is Our Leader," Box 22 (McMaster) Folder 1, 1974. In this work Clarke asks whether the West Indian black is distinct from the native African. As Bill, a real African, notes in the play, Doreen - a West Indian who aspires to be culturally African - can never truly achieve her goal because she treats her men in a way that does not reflect the customs of African women and she wears inappropriate robes on various occasions. Bill's conclusion is that "an African is an African and a West Indian is a West Indian", no doubt reflecting Clarke's convictions about the uniqueness of the West Indian identity.

⁹Joyce Elkin, Macmillan of Canada, to Austin Clarke, 12 December 1974.

his story , "The Robber", she failed to place it with a publisher.¹⁰ At the end of winter, Philips of Little, Brown rejected his novelette, "There Is A Mad Woman Who Lives across the Street",¹¹ while in the fall "The Old Man at the Window" - the short story adaptation from the novelette - was returned to him unpublished.¹² Such disappointments were more than compensated for by the publication of The Bigger Light. Clarke had signed a publication contract with Little, Brown in mid-January, 1974,¹³ and he had learned two weeks later that the novel would be published early in the following year.¹⁴ By July "To Name the Bigger Light", the title the work bore at that stage, was "in production"¹⁵ and in December review copies of the novel were already being mailed "to get the word out".¹⁶ Little, Brown invited Clarke to name other people to whom copies might be sent for publicity purposes,¹⁷ acting almost immediately on his recommendations.¹⁸ The Bigger Light was released to the public in February, 1975, and by

¹⁰Phyllis Westberg to Austin Clarke, 21 February 1974.

¹¹W. D. Philips to Austin Clarke, 29 April 1974.

¹²Phyllis Westberg to Austin Clarke, 24 September 1974.

¹³Phyllis Westberg to Austin Clarke, 14 January 1974.

¹⁴W. D. Philips to Austin Clarke, 1 February 1974.

¹⁵Louise Erdman to Austin Clarke, 18 July 1974.

¹⁶W. D. Philips to Austin Clarke, 18 December 1974.

¹⁷W. D. Philips to Austin Clarke, 18 December 1974.

¹⁸W. D. Philips to Austin Clarke, 2 January 1975.

March Little, Brown was in a position to report that the book was "selling well".¹⁹ Indeed, at the end of spring the book was out of stock and, since there were back orders to fill, Little, Brown set the wheels in motion for another printing.²⁰

The reviewers' reception of The Bigger Light was in the main enthusiastic. Clarke drew praise, first of all, for the quality of his writing. Americas, for example, reported that "in The Bigger Light, dialogue, humor and character merge into memorable fiction",²¹ while Saturday Night claimed that "the characters are so real you could reach out and touch them".²² Clarke's sensitivity also won approval: the novelist was commended by Publisher's Weekly for his "sympathetic eye" and his "humanity",²³ by The Montreal Star for "writing from the heart about fellow immigrants",²⁴ and by The New Yorker for "seeing unerringly into his characters'

¹⁹W. D. Philips to Austin Clarke, 28 March 1975.

²⁰W. D. Philips to Austin Clarke, 21 May 1975.

²¹Charles Larson, "Caribbean Novel," rev. of The Bigger Light, by Austin Clarke, Americas 27 (1975): 51. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²²John Ayre, "When the Promised Land of Canada Becomes A Mockery," rev. of The Bigger Light, by Austin Clarke, Saturday Night June 1975: 71-72. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²³Review of The Bigger Light, by Austin Clarke, Publisher's Weekly 30 December 1974. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²⁴David M. Legate, rev. of The Bigger Light, by Austin Clarke, The Montreal Star 22 March 1975. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

hearts".²⁵ In more general terms, The Islander suggested that Clarke has "earned his cultural pay by this one book alone, no matter what other contribution he makes in Canada",²⁶ while The Times of the Americas went so far as to argue that Clarke's entire trilogy "adds a powerful new dimension to that classic genre of North American fiction - the immigrant novel".²⁷ Whatever reservations existed among reviewers concerned mainly an alleged thinness of plot, with Clarke perceived as "stretching too little material over too long a novel".²⁸

In The Bigger Light Clarke reverts to the tripartite structure of The Meeting Point and Storm of Fortune to illuminate the main stages of Boysie's search for identity. Part I revolves around the West Indian's failure as a husband and an individual despite his material success, financial security being merely a precursor to renewed discontent and unhappiness. This section ends at a climactic point: Boysie suddenly stumbles on the truth that his wife has become a stranger to him and that she escapes to an alien world in

²⁵"Briefly Noted: Fiction," rev. of The Bigger Light, by Austin Clarke, The New Yorker 24 February 1975. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²⁶Stan Obodiac, "Participatory Contribution to Canadianism," rev. of The Bigger Light, by Austin Clarke, The Islander 1 June 1975: 9. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²⁷Aaron Segal, rev. of The Bigger Light, by Austin Clarke, The Times of the Americas 17 September 1975. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

²⁸Ayre 71-72.

which he has no place. Part II enlarges upon Boysie's growing estrangement from his wife and other blacks primarily because of his absorption in himself and a temptation to discard his essential nature. Yet, his frequent reveries--often triggered during his wait for the woman to emerge from the subway--and his interaction with Lew and Millicent James alert him to the aridity of his existence. Convinced that fulfilment is impossible in Canada, however, he begins to look toward Harlem, suspecting that the cultural and psychological centre of black America might well provide a means of escape from the hollowness that haunts him. Before long, he wishes simply to be liberated from the state to which he has been reduced. Part III of the novel bares the confusion that shatters the self when Boysie, desperate for a way out of his dilemma, assumes a persona he considers likely to earn him approval and acceptance within the white community. He no longer views himself as Boysie, the Barbadian, but as Bertram Cumberbatch, the Canadian who has relinquished all ethnic alliances. But his efforts prove fruitless, and the novel concludes on a seemingly ambiguous note as Boysie leaves all his possessions behind and heads for the United States.

Boysie's quest for identity, and ultimately for personal freedom, is the very core of The Bigger Light. It is a search with a more muted echo in Dots' life, but while the black woman achieves a certain degree of self-respect and freedom by extricating herself from her role as a menial

Boysie languishes in a different milieu. Despite his material comfort, he cannot escape the truth that he is merely a glorified janitor and that his skills are so limited that if he were to return to Barbados he could compete only for the least prestigious jobs. He knows, too, that he has little education, that while he has lived for years in Canada he has not progressed beyond the level of schooling with which he left Barbados. He has much but as always he is nothing, so he is doomed to a search for some mysterious and unknown quality of life that would inject some substance into his being. His life has become a journey: his physical migration to Canada, his pause to taste immigrant life in Toronto, his movement away from the Canadian black community and finally his departure for the States parallel a psychological odyssey in which he seeks a sense of identity and a personal freedom.

Boysie's physical and psychological journey has had its genesis in the dehumanising canefields of Barbados. Battling with the poverty and spiritual mortification that typify black life in Barbados, Boysie is driven by one constant goal, to emigrate to Canada and make a "success" of himself. It is a goal that he pursues remorselessly and, though he must surmount an array of daunting obstacles, sheer drudgery and the sacrifice of pride enable him to transform himself into a financial success. In time, he operates a prospering janitorial service, owns four houses and an expensive car and enjoys the privilege of easy access to

credit at the bank. Though at the pinnacle of worldly success, however, he feels disenchanted with himself and his life. He is still unable to shake off a sense of inferiority to a man like MacIntosh, whose offices he cleans, and while the latter's success is in his view associated with such admirable attributes as intellect, education, command of language and business acumen, his own is founded on work that reminds him of his once servile status.²⁹ His sense of inferiority is prolonged by his continuing interaction with MacIntosh as well as by his wife's belittlement of his occupation and his achievements. As Boysie discusses with Dots his plans for enlarging his business and becoming a stronger force by adopting the tactics of the Bay Street businessmen, she scornfully reminds him that he "cleans offices down there".³⁰ The stigma attached to his occupation is a constant reminder of his humble status.³¹ Erroneously, he comes to believe that he can nurture a meaningful identity - and thus circumvent the sense of inferiority that negates

²⁹In depicting Boysie's relationship with his employers, Clarke is again drawing upon the period of his life when he was forced to accept menial jobs, twice as a janitor. Boysie's conflicts relating to language, culture and colonial brainwashing also have their origins in Clarke's own experiences.

³⁰Austin Clarke, The Bigger Light (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975) 19.

³¹Boysie's abandonment of his prosperous business when he embarks on his trip to the States is perhaps an unconscious wish to break completely with everything that reminds him of his degrading position in the society.

the material advantages he has secured in Canada - by shedding all that pertains to his blackness and creating a new man who satisfies the criteria for acceptability in a white society. Such criteria, as he interprets them, constitute the blueprint for his metamorphosis into a "white" Boysie.

The Barbadian initiates the denial of his true self by closing his eyes to the problems that are the lot of black immigrants, pretending now that racism does not exist and that indeed he has never "experienced discrimination and prejudice".³² All the hardships "which he knew existed, and which happened everyday...he had wiped out from his interest and his consciousness".³³ Instead, he devotes his time and energy to writing to the newspapers about issues of some urgency to white Canadians, voicing "his opinion on matters such as pollution, urban development and high-rise apartments in the downtown area where he lived"³⁴ and assuming such concerns as his own while he ignores the difficulties that plague the lives of others of his own race:

These were matters which affected him, he said, more than the problems of immigration which affected some immigrants he knew. He chose not to waste his time writing letters to the editor about the racial problem in the city, or about police brutality.³⁵

³²Clarke, The Bigger Light 3.

³³Clarke, The Bigger Light 75.

³⁴Clarke, The Bigger Light 3.

³⁵Clarke, The Bigger Light 3.

He no longer sympathises with the black underdogs and instead views them through new lenses, labelling them as thieves and troublemakers, as indolent but raucous people who sully his image in the Canadian eye and bear no resemblance whatever to him.³⁶

In his urge to refashion himself, Boysie severely curtails his association with West Indians. He forsakes the clubs in which the blacks congregate in favour of the bar in the Park Plaza, which is patronized by young, white executives, and here he suppresses his discomfort as he chooses to "sip and dream of how successful he was becoming"³⁷ while he waits in vain for someone to recognize him as a man of some importance. To segregate himself from the black community, he also eschews all entanglement with the Black Power movement. When he is taken by Millicent James to the Home Service Association, a black organisation rendering assistance to needy blacks, he is appalled not only by the horrendous hardship he witnesses but also by his own negligence in living so many years in the city "without seeing these things, or even thinking 'bout them".³⁸ Yet, bent on creating a new self, he shunts aside this new knowledge, justifying his inaction with the specious argument that when

³⁶Clarke, The Bigger Light 15-16.

³⁷Clarke, The Bigger Light 17.

³⁸Clarke, The Bigger Light 208.

he was struggling "he didn't see any black people willing to help him". When Millicent tries to bind him closer to the black world by attempting to inculcate into him a pride in his heritage,³⁹ the false self that he deems necessary for acceptance within white society makes him balk at the invitation and abruptly terminate his friendship with her, since he perceives her as an impediment to the achievement of his goals. In each phase of Boysie's odyssey there is a confrontation between the real and the false in the black man's psyche, but though he is faced with choices he inevitably opts for alternatives that he feels will improve his chances of acceptance within the mainstream of Canadian society.

Boysie repudiates his initial identity, also, by deliberately jettisoning all that reminds him of his West Indian heritage. He discontinues the Sunday rum-punch parties in his apartment; he ceases listening to calypso music, substituting in its place classical and popular music that he does not comprehend, and in an act symbolic of his determination to dissociate himself from his roots, he throws a "pile of records" of Caribbean music into the incinerator while he "wiped his hands as if he had just got rid of something filthy".⁴⁰ Furthermore, he dons the mantle of

³⁹She says to him, "A man should be proud of his community, as a man should be proud of his African heritage." See Clarke, The Bigger Light 210.

⁴⁰Clarke, The Bigger Light 63.

white respectability, abandoning his janitorial dress for the three-piece suit of the successful white businessman, an attire he wears even when he goes to his barber. Indeed, he ventures to break completely with his native land and thus with the very source of his being:

"Barbados is no longer in my plans. Or in our lives. I am not going back there to live. I am not even going back there to spend a vacation. I am fixed here in this country now."⁴¹

This physical separation from his roots, he believes, is a vital step in the reshaping of his identity and to emphasize its decisiveness he obtains Canadian citizenship, which now entitles him to look askance at the newer black immigrants and to see them as foreigners "coming into his country"⁴² and "spoiling" his image.⁴³

The consuming nature of Boysie's desire to remake himself manifests itself in the growing deterioration of his marriage. The Barbadian's relationship with Dots has handicapped him in his search for a more enlivening sense of psychological well-being, since whatever euphoria his material acquisitions might have yielded has long been dampened by the almost inevitable recognition that success has been achieved through the sacrifice of his manhood. For admission into

⁴¹Clarke, The Bigger Light 39.

⁴²Clarke, The Bigger Light 176.

⁴³Clarke, The Bigger Light 15.

Canada, he resorted to marrying Dots, a domestic servant whom he has never loved or respected and whom he has increasingly despised. In his early days as an immigrant he was indebted to her for his survival, since he had no means of supporting himself.⁴⁴ Later, he sought to regain his masculinity and his self-respect by indicating to her the extent of his financial success but this she only denigrated, hurling recriminations at him and muttering to herself that "he was nothing, nothing more than a poor-arse black man who she had to bail-out and actually put food in his mouth, for years and years".⁴⁵ The reversal of role has created a relationship that is not psychologically supportive. Boysie detests Dots because she is a continual reminder of his early failure and his initial dependence upon her, a reminder in short of a painful male emasculation. Dots, for her part, cannot recognise or accept an independent Boysie. Long after the early years, she revels in memories of her former ascendancy, reminding Bernice, for example, that when Boysie was jobless he depended upon her for everything and she "was in control".⁴⁶ It is not surprising that, absorbed in the

⁴⁴This, too, is a variant of Clarke's own experiences. Clarke was at one point supported by his wife, as Betty worked while he remained at home and cared for the children. The deterioration of the marriage between Boysie and Dots also echoes facets of Clarke's own life. As will be indicated later, Clarke and his wife had by 1970 begun to drift apart because of differing perspectives and interests.

⁴⁵Clarke, The Bigger Light 34.

⁴⁶Clarke, The Bigger Light 151.

satisfaction of both his material and psychological wants, he is blind to his wife's needs. Indifferent to her welfare and unaware of her life outside the apartment, he criticises her both publicly and privately, conscious that "she was slipping away gradually by her own silence, by his own preoccupation with new things, with dreams"⁴⁷ but disinclined to take action to avert the threatening disaster.

Boysie's manoeuvres to divest himself of his West Indian heritage often result in internal confusion and division, and nowhere is this more obvious than in his attempt to slough off his native dialect in favour of Standard English. His divergence from his true self is clearly mirrored in an inner confrontation involving the two forms of language. The public Boysie tries pathetically to make an alien language his own. He writes letters to newspaper editors in Standard English and he listens faithfully to the CBC, incorporating what he considers a superior form of communication into his daily discourse. He claims that he has changed and that he intends "to master this new language" in order to break out of the "kind of life that somebody destined" him to live.⁴⁸ Yet, while intent on liberating himself from a stereotypical mould, he ironically fetters himself even more. His letters to the editors betray how foreign Standard English is to him, for his articulation is

⁴⁷Clarke, The Bigger Light 12.

⁴⁸Clarke, The Bigger Light 42.

feeble and vapid. The new language is not the liberating force he has envisioned it to be. It is an obstacle to self-realization, because in discarding his dialect for a "superior" English Boysie is once more subjecting himself to the ravages of colonialism. He is exiling himself from his essential nature by stripping away an integral cultural component to replace it with a foreign entity he has been brainwashed into thinking more desirable.

Though the public Boysie strives in vain after a language usage that he believes will gain him a sense of worth, the inner man expresses himself most vigorously and effectively with the much despised dialect. In this respect, his letter to a newspaper and his interior monologue in the Cathedral in Toronto provide startling contrasts. The language of the former is pitiable for its stiltedness and artificiality:

Although this man was born in a small island Barbados, far and distant from this country of Canada, yet Mr. Henry White the late demised poet, is like that other poet borned on an island, Mr. Keats, who loved Nature and flowers the same as Mr. White.⁴⁹

The interior monologue, on the other hand, wells up within the black man and signals his reversion to his essential self as he launches into his thoughts in a dialect that vividly captures his past experience:

⁴⁹Clarke, The Bigger Light 4.

"A man who ain' accustom to shoes don't walk-'bout without shoes, like how these young Northamericans does do, yuh!... Now, back home in Barbados, you couldn't talk in a church. Not talk, you had to whisper in the white man church back there, boy! *Whisper*, so you won't wake up the holy spirits and deads that was buried inside the walls of the cathedral-church, man. You couldn't do that. Talk? In the white man church, godblindyou, and let a police come and throw a couple o' bull-pistle lashes in your arse, and then lock-up your arse for talking in the presence o' God? Man, there wasn't nobody, nobody at all, you hear me? nofuckingbody ignorant enough to talk even in church, a ordinary church. ... anyhow, no man would be such a gorilliphant to have to talk even on the doorstep o' that big powerful cathedral, with choirs dressed so pretty in their crimpson robes with ruffs looking so pretty just like fresh white sugarcakes or like goat-milk from Mammy sheeps, and the organiss parading 'pon that blasted organ like if he is king self, and the Lord Bish-ship that man with the fat red face and big belly, rolling-off them words offa his tongue in the prettiest Kings and Queens English and Latin from the Classicks, so blasted sweet that everybody who ever heard him, and those who didn't have the privilege to have hear' him, but only hear' 'bout him through hearing and talking, man that Bishship from up in England could talk prettier than the six o'clock news 'pon the BBC radio! That was a Lord Bishship! And that was a cathedral!⁵⁰

Boysie's rendering of his thoughts reveals in both literal and metaphorical terms the dilemma before him. In venturing into his past he returns to a dialect with its uniqueness of idiom, rhythm and freshness, a language that is in its own way as "pretty" as the Bishop's. Temporarily ignoring the stigma attached to his dialect, he can cast off his false self and give vent to his innermost feelings. But Boysie's choice of this alternative is only fleeting. Dialect and the true self

⁵⁰Clarke, The Bigger Light 133-134.

will be discarded as soon as he returns to the present. The monologue also metaphorically objectifies the cultural-psychological dilemma that Boysie faces. The language of the Anglican Bishop is the ideal toward which the West Indian believes he must strive if he is to fulfil himself, and juxtaposed against this notion is the spontaneous flow of natural feelings communicated in a dialect the black man has learned to regard as inferior. Yet, the Queen's English is alien to him, and he is destined for growing frustration and for accelerating remoteness from his inherent nature as he seeks to appropriate the social and cultural symbols of the dominant society. On occasion, he comprehends the power that springs from effective manipulation of his own language:

... his thoughts were framing themselves in his own idiom, and he saw for the first time the power of being able to talk as he liked: because there was no one in the truck with him, just his goddamn lonesome; so he could talk for so! lick his mouth, and refuse to speak the King's English which he felt he had to do, and did in fact do, when he was talking with the young Canadian fellow or Mr. MacIntosh. He had done this same thing talking in a formal and forced way when he had to confront Dr. Hunter, his wife's ex-employer.⁵¹

Clearly, his insights regarding the virtues of his dialect are fleeting or unconscious or they are vanquished by a colonial mentality that has conditioned him to brand his native tongue as unworthy in an aspirant to respectability.

Allusions to the song "Both Sides" and the calypsoes

⁵¹Clarke, The Bigger Light 75-76.

"Congo Man" and "Donkey first second and third" also underscore the notion of a fragmented self. Dots describes Judy Collins' "Both Sides", one of Boysie's favourite songs, as "dead music",⁵² a designation that parallels the submergence of the Barbadian's authentic self. The repetition of the lyrics conveys Boysie's spiritual malaise, intimating that he has woven a fantasy as he pursues a goal no more substantial than "ice cream castles in the air".⁵³ The Mighty Sparrow's "Congo Man", on the other hand, reminds him of what he might strive naturally to be. In telling the story of three white women who are eaten by natives as they travel in Africa, the calypso asserts the power of the black man, its vigour and raciness mirroring the vitality of the black psyche Boysie has apparently rejected. Sparrow's "Donkey first second and third", too, bears witness to the worth of the black man and thus exhibits an alternative Boysie might adopt. The calypso inverts the myth of white superiority. In claiming that because of the difficulties it has surmounted the donkey deserves to be placed "first, second and third"⁵⁴ in the contest among the animals in the jungle, the calypso implies that the black man merits a superior standing to the white in view of the unspeakable obstacles he has overcome in his drive for survival.

⁵²Clarke, The Bigger Light 25.

⁵³Clarke, The Bigger Light 25.

⁵⁴Clarke, The Bigger Light 103.

Once Boysie submits to the allure of mainstream Canada, however, his life is racked with confusion and conflict, a state of being reflected in his fluctuating stances in diverse matters. Not only does he alternate between dialect and Standard English, but he also acts with considerable ambivalence toward blacks in general and his wife in particular. On some occasions he admires the resilience, the exuberance and the camaraderie he finds among the blacks, but on others he despises his Caribbean countrymen and shrinks from the acknowledgement of any connection with them. In his relationship with Dots, too, his emotions swing freely from sympathy to hatred. Furthermore, his inner vacillation is fully evident in his reactions to the Italians and the black Americans. It is ironic that the very traits he lauds in the Italians - their pride in their language, their race and their culture, their spontaneity, and their courage to be true to themselves - are the characteristics he despises in the black immigrants, and he fails to observe that despite becoming Canadians the Italians have remained true to themselves.⁵⁵ When he contemplates the black American, as well, similarly inconsistent attitudes emerge within him: he admires the American's English but he shies away from adopting it himself because he does "not wish to be so brutal with language".⁵⁶ Finally, his divided self is brightly reflected in Lew, who

⁵⁵Clarke, The Bigger Light 69-70.

⁵⁶Clarke, The Bigger Light 220.

reminds him both of what he has been and what he desires to be. Indeed, he comprehends fully the extent to which Lew's psychological fragmentation is a replica of his own, confessing to him, "I know you The moment I met you, ... I knew, I knew you."⁵⁷

The theme of Boysie's yearning for self-realization rings more resoundingly through the novel because it touches off an echo in Dots' own longings. Like her husband, Dot desires both greater respectability and greater success. Through tenacity and physical effort she becomes a nurse's aid, in this way earning a measure of self-respect, dignity and independence and thus freeing herself from the servility of her position as a domestic. But material success becomes an obsession that blinds her to her husband's concerns and needs. She is absorbed only "in her bank account and a down payment for a house in the suburbs"⁵⁸ and her entire life now revolves around her job, "planning her material success"⁵⁹ and escaping from the low-rental district that is "making it impossible for her to hold her head as high as she would have liked".⁶⁰ Her preoccupation with her new objectives helps widen the gulf that separates her from her husband, the silence between them deepening because of her inability to

⁵⁷Clarke, The Bigger Light 157.

⁵⁸Clarke, The Bigger Light 11.

⁵⁹Clarke, The Bigger Light 6.

⁶⁰Clarke, The Bigger Light 6.

bear a child and her disinclination to adopt any but the handicapped Janey who is unacceptable to Boysie.

Dot's immersion in her drive for self-enhancement is not very different from Boysie's, but while her husband is tempted into a still born relationship with Millicent James she slips into adultery and in the end Boysie abandons her to go to the States. Eventually, Dots recognises her part in the failed marriage and decides to change:

"I intend to kill him tonight, with loving. I've been too stupid. A woman my age, with not much left, and I am playing hard to get? That is arse."⁶¹

It is now too late, however, for Boysie has willed everything to her and is already on the way to the States. As in her husband's case, the single-minded search for personal betterment has not brought the reward she has anticipated. She will now be financially secure but, as she recognizes, she has in some ways not moved beyond the starting line:

"But look at we two! You and me. Right where we started from. Man-less."⁶²

Like Boysie, she appears condemned in her own way to an enduring isolation and its concomitant negation of the spirit.

In its elaboration of such themes, The Bigger Light shows Clarke's continuing development as a writer. Mellow

⁶¹Clarke, The Bigger Light 284.

⁶²Clarke, The Bigger Light 282.

in tone than prior works, the novel is structured more meticulously and its principal themes are more effectively sustained. In this regard, the view of Publisher's Weekly that Clarke's "particular skill in creating an isolated ethnic world combines movingly here with his ability to comment on the cultural impact of new world values on that lonely special world's people"⁶³ has undeniable validity. So, too, does the notion that "Clarke's sympathetic eye, his humanity, his fine ear for language, all make this story of negative rewards of success a particularly touching one",⁶⁴ for as in earlier works the writer dissects and exposes both the strengths and weaknesses of his characters but he does so without overtly castigating them or stripping them of their dignity.

The work has other virtues. In probing Boysie's consciousness, for instance, Clarke employs an apt narrative point of view but at the same time achieves sufficient aesthetic distancing to offer insights into the character's behaviour that are beyond the black man's ken. Since the central concern of the novel is the psychological impact of the collision between a colonial heritage and North American values, however, Clarke minimises the number of characters and incidents. Activity is less frenetic than in prior works; many scenes are almost static; comic and racy dialogues are

⁶³Publisher's Weekly 20 February 1975. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁶⁴Publisher's Weekly 20 February 1975. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

relatively rare, while the humour that occurs is kept subdued and serves mainly to accentuate the tragic or the pathetic. The overall pace of the novel is slower and its atmosphere somewhat solemn, the letters, the reveries, the incessant listening to "Both Sides" and the recurrent references to the tomb-like garage in the basement all underlining the desperation and melancholy of the struggle in which both Boysie and Dots are caught.

Clarke's success in rising beyond more obvious levels of meaning is again indicative of his firmer grasp of the genre. As John Ayre notes, "much recent West Indian writing, like Canadian, seems to arise out of the obsessive search for a personal identity linked to the country's identity crisis", and the search for identity undertaken by the protagonist of The Bigger Light is not dissimilar to his native country's attraction to cultural and national selfhood.⁶⁵ Boysie's gravitation toward Harlem and the black protest movements reflects one aspect of the West Indian search for cultural and national development. In the course of the battle for true nationhood, large numbers of Caribbean blacks were drawn to the ideals and philosophies of the black movements, and men like Marcus Garvey and Stokeley Carmichael became the new heroes of people who increasingly adopted

⁶⁵Ayre 72. Nor is the protagonist's search dissimilar, it might be added, to Clarke's own attempt to define himself in opposition to the variety of orthodox stereotypes forced upon him in the course of his life.

Harlem as the cultural heart of the black world and as a vital symbol of black identity and independence.

The conclusion of The Bigger Light, though, has been viewed as one of the novel's weaknesses. Keith Henry, for example, regards it as illogical:

The resolution of The Bigger Light is, as we now expect, not very final, as we also expect, not quite what Clarke prepares us for. Regrettably, Clarke succeeds in not being predictable at the cost of being anticlimactic.⁶⁶

Such an assessment, however, is quite mistaken. The notion of Harlem as a desirable destination appears early in Clarke's fiction, for Milton Sobers in Amongst Thistles and Thorns envisages that community as a black Mecca, and the reader is also prepared in The Bigger Light itself for Boysie's departure for the States. The Barbadian acquires knowledge of the black American movements through his encounter with militants frequenting the barber shop he patronises as well as through Millicent James' efforts to lure him into Black Power activity. His attitudes toward the movements are depicted as oscillating between admiration and distaste but it is clear that he toys in advance with the prospect of going to the States:

Perhaps he should go to America, the fountainhead of the "brother" thing, and find some answers

⁶⁶Keith Henry, "An Assessment of Austin Clarke, West Indian-Canadian Novelist," College Language Association 29 (1985): 27.

there. Just get into his car, ... and just drive, just drive, man, until he came to America, to New York City and to Harlem.⁶⁷

Boysie's interest in Harlem has not yet acquired any urgency, but it is nevertheless alive.

The conclusion of the novel has also been faulted for its defeatism. In this regard, John Ayre reads it as tinged by the "sadness and morbidity of defeated identity"⁶⁸ and Brian Vincent as lacking "illumination" since, instead of "taking that leap into understanding which will make him a wiser man, Boysie heads off alone in his big black car into the States".⁶⁹ Such a pessimistic interpretation is only partially justifiable, however, since the real implication of the novel is that Boysie is simply still in pursuit of an identity. Like Clarke himself, he has in the course of his psychological journey in Canada achieved some growth, for he realizes that "he did not have to live in a mould that people expected"⁷⁰ and that he "could be a man, just a man".⁷¹ At the end of The Bigger Light he believes that Harlem will provide the answer to his quest, a conviction

⁶⁷Clarke, The Bigger Light 219.

⁶⁸Ayre 72.

⁶⁹Brian Vincent, "A Ring of Truth in Austin Clarke's Immigrant Tragedy," The Toronto Star 15 March 1975. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁷⁰Clarke, Storm of Fortune 270.

⁷¹Clarke, Storm of Fortune 269.

which will, on the evidence of Clarke's own experience, doom him to further frustration since he will inevitably discover--as Clarke suggests in "One Among Them"--that as a West Indian immigrant from Canada he is not, whatever else he might be, the same as the American black and furthermore has no desire to become such, however impressed or inspired he might be by his exploration of the black movement in the United States. It is perhaps only when each phase of his journey has been fully experienced that Boysie, like Naipaul's protagonist in The Enigma of Arrival (1987), might well discover that "life and man [are] the mystery and true religion of men, the grief and the glory."⁷² Here, Clarke adumbrates a vision that will assume more definite form in later works.

In his trilogy--The Meeting Point, Storm of Fortune and The Bigger Light--Clarke examines through his art significant phases in the life of the immigrant, and in its chronological sequence it communicates vividly the complexities of the immigrant experience in Canada. That Clarke is able to tackle this task so convincingly is no doubt due to the fact that he draws deeply from his own encounter with Canadian society. Certainly, Boysie's divided self and his quest for identity and self-fulfilment have also been features of Clarke's psychological journey in North America. As James Baldwin has observed, "Art has this advantage: that

⁷²V. S. Naipaul, The Enigma of Arrival (London: Penguin Books, 1987) 318.

you can see yourself in it, if you will bring yourself to it."⁷³ The trilogy represents Clarke's most important attempt to clarify in imaginative terms his own taste of West Indian immigrant life in Canada. But Clarke's acquaintance with black American artists and intellectuals--as well as with their work--has persuaded him to confront the issue of the role of the artist in the community, and he has chosen the side of "non-vindictive racialism". The trilogy embodies the honest and objective depiction of the black experience in Canada that this position implies.

⁷³Fred Standley and Louis Pratt, eds., Conversations with James Baldwin (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1989) 31.

these terms here".⁶⁶ The black power movement, which should be nourished by the island government because of its espousal of the dignity and worth of blacks, is rejected and labelled as radicalism. The Prime Minister's preference for white women--he is said to like "European women best of all his women"⁶⁷--symbolically emphasizes, instead, the ruling power's continued adulation of things white.

Moore's realisation that his role as an artist is irrelevant to the building of the new nation brings him intense disappointment. As Brown observes, the idealistic Moore, influenced by his reading of Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth, "assumes that 'culture' should mean the integration of art and society as a whole, that art itself should be a part of a broad national consciousness".⁶⁸ In his capacity as an artist, he views the cultivation of a national culture as indispensable for the achievement of a national identity. He finds, however, that his position and the entire Department of Culture are meaningless fronts designed to lend prestige and respectability to the ruling body:

... the government, like a medieval oligarchic monarchy, was bringing together into its palaces, in time for the coming Independence celebrations,

⁶⁶Clarke, The Prime Minister 32.

⁶⁷Clarke, The Prime Minister 90.

⁶⁸Lloyd Brown, El Dorado and Paradise: Canada and the Caribbean in Austin Clarke (London, Ontario: Centre for Social and Humanistic Studies, University of Western Ontario, and Parkersburg, Iowa: Caribbean Books, 1989) 114.

all the best artistic brains, to give sophistication and culture and style to the new country.⁶⁹

The government is not expecting him "to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race".⁷⁰ In fact, Moore's cultural isolation from his native countrymen is heralded symbolically by the immigration officers' disapproval of Fanon's book, a copy of which they find in his luggage, and by the defaced page of a newspaper carrying the announcement of his return, the tire and human prints on which symbolise the country's attitude toward art and culture and foreshadow Moore's ineffectiveness as an artist in this cultural wasteland in which "he was home" but "he was alone".⁷¹

Indeed, Moore is astonished to learn more and more how successful the government has been in perpetuating not only traditional attitudes but also a class system strongly reminiscent of that of colonial times. There is a paucity of blacks at parties given by members of the ruling group, while whites from abroad, including a South African, are treated with extravagance at the same time as natives are ignored. Travelling along a half-completed road with unpainted, dilapidated buildings, Moore wonders how the wealthy could drive through areas of such gross poverty to reach their homes

⁶⁹Clarke, The Prime Minister 36.

⁷⁰James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man, ed. Chester Anderson (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) 253.

⁷¹Clarke, The Prime Minister 16.

without being moved to seek any improvement in the lot of the poor:

How does it feel every long day in the bright equalizing sun to have to pass through this area with its smell of the ghetto before you could reach a tourist hotel, or a three-bedroom ranch-type bungalow; or was the passage of big imported automobiles through this canal the same as ships passing in the night, not recognising each other's presence?⁷²

He is truly perturbed by the extravagant lifestyle of the elite in this country in which "thirty per cent of the population was unemployed".⁷³

As Moore becomes increasingly enlightened about the workings of the society, his sense of isolation and disillusionment grows more intolerable. He would like to encourage the kind of democracy he has experienced abroad but the corrupt nature of the government under a morally weak and decadent Prime Minister, who with the aid of sycophantic Ministers controls the country through fear and terror, militates against the creation of that type of rule. As the taxi-driver's comments about the sudden disappearance of a government opponent intimates, ruthlessness is inherent in a neo-colonial establishment that not only has in its tenure widened the gap between rich and poor, keeping the deprived and the dissidents in check through corruption and brutality,

⁷²Clarke, The Prime Minister 38.

⁷³Clarke, The Prime Minister 21.

but has adopted the ultimate goal of converting the island into a dictatorship.⁷⁴ Moore is forced into an early acknowledgement that his notion of freedom does not coincide with the government's:

What a place he had come back to! You never know how free you are,...., how much freedom you have living in an alien society, until you come back to your own free and independent country.⁷⁵

He is ill at ease in a society in which a black government, in concert with white investors from abroad, has in essence prolonged the inequities and injustices of the colonial era.

Moore's awareness of the extent of his isolation is strengthened by his discovery that the junta plotting to overthrow the government has drawn him into its plans as a scapegoat, intending to blame the violent confrontation between the police and the masses attending the rally on him and his "radicalism". A deeper sense of alienation is fostered, also, when he learns that the government has known about its opponents' plans but does nothing until the very end, when it moves swiftly to punish the main instigator of the coup and to declare the island a republic. The wily Prime Minister has planned all along to exploit the coup attempt as his justification for proclaiming the country a republic. Moore has become merely a pawn, fully expendable in the

⁷⁴Clarke, The Prime Minister 183-184.

⁷⁵Clarke, The Prime Minister 44.

political manoeuvring by both the ruling group and its opponents.

It is not only the deeds and machinations of others, however, that generate in Moore a despairing sense of his remoteness from the society of his birth, for even shortly after his arrival he becomes aware that he is no longer in tune with the tone and nuances of the language of his people:

His time away from the language was causing him great discomfort in following the speech, and there were nuances of speech which he could not grasp. He had thought of the immigration policeman's comment, "How long are you staying?" all the way down to the taxi,... . The language in its frequency of usage, in its native context, now put itself against him; and it emphasized him as a stranger in his own country.⁷⁶

He is compelled to sensitize himself to utterances which are "spoken as questions, and at the same time sounded like a statement" and to the fact that men in power make only statements, "statements of power".⁷⁷ He has been away so long that he cannot even "make out the gists of conversations" and he wonders "whether he would ever learn the language again, to speak it with its characteristic deceit and hypocrisy".⁷⁸ Yet, under the new "colonial" regime, the use of language is laden with danger and safety depends on the

⁷⁶Clarke, The Prime Minister 17.

⁷⁷Clarke, The Prime Minister 17-19.

⁷⁸Clarke, The Prime Minister 24-25.

careful weighing of "each action and word",⁷⁹ with "the known and unknown repercussions understood clearly beforehand".⁸⁰ So, Moore struggles with the language, and when Weeksie describes Lipps as a "yardfowl" he intuitively feels that it is a pejorative label but he has to analyse the word in depth mentally before comprehending its full impact, that "'yardfowl' was the most uncomplimentary term one man could use to describe another man".⁸¹ His obliviousness to the hidden meanings behind ostensibly innocuous statements and behaviours magnifies his alienation. He is unaware that his fall from grace is clearly foreshadowed by his secretary's sudden change in behaviour toward him, by a staff member's overtures to exchange car tires because Moore will shortly not have need of his, and in the supermarket's abrupt request that he settle his debts immediately. His incompetence in the island's current language limits his communication with his countrymen.

Moore is not entirely without insight regarding local language, for he perceives the violence lurking beneath the surface of everyday speech. Kwame's political address to the masses, for example, is marked by the "violence which had slipped into everyday usage", while bus conductors "were violent to passengers, and hawkers in the markets were violent

⁷⁹Clarke, The Prime Minister 26-27.

⁸⁰Clarke, The Prime Minister 26-27.

⁸¹Clarke, The Prime Minister 29.

in the same oracular way to people who bought from them".⁸² Moore is aware that this violence in language, which is alien to him, indicates an underlying fury and frustration. Unable to challenge a corrupt government that nourishes the dehumanizing and degrading system it was expected to replace, the populace finds a safety valve in language loaded with violence. In general, however, Moore underestimates the power of words. For instance, he dismisses a newspaper article about him as "a crude manipulation", forgetting that in this country the "printed newspaper word was glorified as truth".⁸³ As a result, he is regarded by the people as a radical who is "bringing vi'lence and guns in the country",⁸⁴ a perspective unlikely to be shaken by the government's ostensibly innocent statement, "At this time, we have no comment to make on Mr. John Moore's ideology".⁸⁵ Moore's miscalculation regarding the power of words in his native land signifies his alienation from his people but, even worse, also contributes to his own downfall.

In examining Moore's experiences, The Prime Minister reveals that the immigrant's quest for an identity and for fulfilment, which has come a full circle with his return to his homeland, is once more destined for failure. The early

⁸²Clarke, The Prime Minister 81.

⁸³Clarke, The Prime Minister 124.

⁸⁴Clarke, The Prime Minister 124.

⁸⁵Clarke, The Prime Minister 125.

allusion to Paradise Lost implies that it is the mental and spiritual quest which will lead to "A Paradise within thee, happier far",⁸⁶ that since what the protagonist seeks is rooted in time and place and - more importantly - in the fallen world his quest as he envisions it is unattainable. The allusion to Paradise Regained, too, has a bearing on the central theme of the novel. During his sojourn in the desert, Christ confronts the dark side of human nature, objectified in Satan and his temptations, and in the process of overcoming the evil in man recognises both who he is and the purpose in life with which he has been charged, finally becoming ready for his mission. On a lower and far less sublime plane, Moore discovers as a result of his stay in the wasteland of his island home that his poetic image of his country as offering possibilities for a paradise regained is an illusion, since blacks can be just as vicious and opportunistic as whites. Ironically, it is the narrative voice rather than Moore that draws on the knowledge yielded by the returning immigrant's experience to state that "paradise is in the mind", the implication being that once he has reestablished himself in Canada time and distancing will enable Moore - the admirer of Milton's Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained - to arrive at the same conclusion.

The quest of the black West Indian immigrant will

⁸⁶John Milton, John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957) 467, ll. 587.

have concluded in physical terms but will have begun in the psychological sphere. This search, the allusions to Milton's Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained suggest, is a universal one transcending time and place, a sense of identity and of fulfilment being achieved only when the immigrant views himself in the larger scheme of things, as part of mankind and the cosmos rather than of some specific locale or group. This conclusion in the novel hints at the mellowing of Clarke's attitude toward Canada. More importantly, it points to a more generous, more humane perspective; here Clarke no longer limits himself to contemplating the black West Indian in terms merely of race but comprehends him with a much broader frame of reference. Clarke's resentments are now focused to serve his art, rather than art the resentments.

With respect to growth as a writer, references to The Prime Minister as "not just another political thriller or propaganda novel",⁸⁷ "a brilliant roman à clef",⁸⁸ or possibly a "story of intrigue and counter-intrigue"⁸⁹ are a tribute to Clarke's skill in combining a range of elements in one work. In fact, the novel is an intricate blending of the roman à clef, the propaganda-satiric novel and the political

⁸⁷William French, "Clarke Proves You Can't Go Home - Even to the Islands," The Globe and Mail 22 September 1977. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁸⁸Chris Scott, "Home Is the 'Hoonta'," Books in Canada November 1977: 32. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

⁸⁹W. J. Keith, Canadian Book Review Annual 1977, ed. Dean Turner et al. (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977) 109.

thriller. As a roman à clef, The Prime Minister embodies much of Clarke's experience during his stint as Acting General Manager of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation and, despite the author's early protestations to the contrary, is by his own later admission about "real people".⁹⁰ Indeed, Barbadian reaction to the novel, summed up in Smale's assertions that the "characters vaguely correspond to real people and that some of the incidents are based on happenings that took place here",⁹¹ are powerful evidence of how close to the bone the novel cuts. Clarke has nevertheless recorded for Barbadian posterity, though in an unusual mode, an intriguing phase of the society's history.

The novel also displays a strong satirical element that enables it to comment on the social and political misfortunes of a post-colonial state. Clarke does not descend to overt didacticism but through his satirical treatment of many characters and incidents conveys the notion that the imperialistic figures of colonial times have simply been replaced by equally exploitative blacks. For example, the caricature of Reverend Lipps, trenchant and memorable, underscores the moral decadence and effeteness of the religious institution in the society, while irony at critical junctures illuminates the ridiculousness of even ordinary

⁹⁰William Marshall-Doyle, Cultural Crisis (Toronto: Calypso House, 1981) 38-39.

⁹¹Smale 7.

people. Thus, Vagabond pronounces, unaware of the irony, that his country is the:

"... most freest country in the whole whirrrrl, ...
 . It is a better place for having three percentage white people living here, with ninety-seven percentage power, controlling fucking the Prime Minister o' this country. And that situation is better than any grass-roots government."⁹²

But whites are not exempt from observation. Clarke's Dickensian portrait of Juliet highlights the impotence into which the expatriate degenerates when he no longer wields power. Juliet, symbolic of the colonial regime, is now toothless and dislocated and has been transformed into an object of pity rather than of hatred. Such elements of the propaganda-satiric novel, muted and controlled but still barbed, are a viable mechanism for commentary on social and political flaws in the society.

Like other novels by Clarke, The Prime Minister has flaws. Perhaps its only significant weaknesses, however, are associated with its most obvious source of popular appeal--its lurid claims to be a political thriller. While The Prime Minister is a fairly competent example of the genre, it also has deficiencies in plot and characterization that make it, as

⁹²Clarke, The Prime Minister 127.

such, of only passing interest. Fortunately, in the larger context of the work, these blemishes are of minor consequence. Clarke's real accomplishment is to create an intense and absorbing novel that offers through the medium of fiction an extraordinarily complex examination of the twisted and painful relationships between the West Indies and those of its children who come, from the vantage point of the expatriate, to see it more objectively than is comfortable either for themselves or their motherland. It is one of his most accomplished works up this point of his career and an appropriate introduction to what is perhaps his major achievement, Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack.

II

The period immediately after the publication of The Prime Minister was one of personal struggle for Clarke. The acclaim that had greeted the novel was not translated into financial reward. With one daughter at Ryerson and another due to attend Cornell,⁹³ he was understandably anxious, and

⁹³Clarke's older daughter, Janice, was about to enter her third year at Ryerson and had taken to sharing an apartment with a Canadian girl-friend, while his other daughter, Loretta, was to go to Cornell in August to commence a five-year programme in Architectural Engineering. Clarke's concern about his daughters' welfare shows the tender and caring side of his character which his friends have noted. See Austin Clarke to Harold Hoyte, 23 June 1978.

a grant of a thousand dollars from the Ontario Arts Council,⁹⁴ while helpful, was clearly not sufficient for his needs. Accordingly, he threw himself into another round of frenetic activity, one of his goals being to complete the "More" manuscript. Unfortunately, the novel was rejected by all the publishers to whom it was submitted, even after Clarke had revised it.⁹⁵ Of greater promise was his work on a new novel, a "sequel" to The Prime Minister that would "deal with the violence in society and in the political arena".⁹⁶ By the middle of May, however, he had written only a few pages and during the summer of 1978 progressed very slowly on this manuscript, though he hoped to complete it during 1979.⁹⁷ He did, however, finish and revise a few new short stories and threw himself into a variety of other ventures.⁹⁸

Clarke's financial worries coincided with a period of emotional upheaval resulting from his involvement with a woman, who "distracted" him as he attempted to help her "find

⁹⁴Steve Stevanvic to Austin Clarke, 3 March 1978.

⁹⁵See John Pearce to Austin Clarke, 11 April 1978; Neil Nyren to Phyllis Westberg, 25 July 1978; Jack McClelland to Austin Clarke, 21 November 1978.

⁹⁶Austin Clarke to Jeff Wiltshire, 13 May 1978.

⁹⁷Austin Clarke to Nina Vaerenberg, 17 November 1978.

⁹⁸For example, he auditioned in vain in 1978 for the job as host of CBC's "Ninety Minutes Live"; he served on the advisory council of Ron Atkey's Progressive Conservative candidacy in the federal elections, and in October 1978 he participated in a Commonwealth Conference in Montreal attended by Samuel Selvon, Ismith Khan and other writers.

herself".⁹⁹ While revising "More", for example, he found that, while he knew what he had to do, he could not muster "the concentration for that kind of writing",¹⁰⁰ since "most of the energy one had went into this very debilitating situation".¹⁰¹ He finally turned, however, to a more manageable task. By late February, his recollections of his early years no doubt rejuvenated by his recent seven-month contact with the island, he was "plotting out an autobiographical thing" which would deal with his days at Harrison College and Combermere School and with growing up in Barbados during the war, and he was delighted that the writing was flowing well.¹⁰²

With such an orientation dominant in his mind, he began "entertaining" himself by writing columns for The Nation in Barbados, mainly satirical contributions that in his view "demanded being written ... since Bajans have such a natural sense of humour".¹⁰³ Composing the pieces also served as a means of getting his hand "back in shape for the more

⁹⁹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987. Clarke has not been willing to name the woman with whom he was involved. In a letter to Harold Hoyte in 1978, however, he disclosed that he was "seeing Melva", the woman who had borne him his son in 1967, so it is likely that Melva da Silva was the person with whom he was now engaged. See Austin Clarke to Harold Hoyte, 23 June 1978.

¹⁰⁰Austin Clarke to Desmond Bourne, 9 March 1979.

¹⁰¹Austin Clarke, personal interview, 24 August 1987.

¹⁰²Austin Clarke to J. Wiltshire, 27 February 1979.

¹⁰³Austin Clarke to Desmond Bourne, 9 March 1979.

important writing of fiction."¹⁰⁴ He extracted current subject-matter for the columns from a regular reading of The Nation, from discussions of Barbadian affairs with others in Toronto and from telephone conversations with people in Barbados. His pieces appeared intermittently in 1979 and 1980 but attracted so extensive a readership that they eventually became a regular feature of the newspaper from 1981 to 1983.

As a columnist, Clarke revelled in the independence he enjoyed to roam far and wide in his commentary on Barbadian life,¹⁰⁵ and few major institutions of the society escaped his pen. Education, for example, received its share of his attention as he expatiated not only on contemporary Barbadian education but also on such limitations of schooling in the colonial era as the overemphasis on memorization¹⁰⁶ and the "harsh imperiousness" of the language of the school.¹⁰⁷ In this regard, his portrait of students at the local campus of the University of the West Indies was less than flattering:

Newniversity students, according to my cousin who works up there, does drink a lotta rum and Banks; and drink coffee all night into the wee hours of the morning, to make them radical citizens and more relevant persons. Newniversity education shows one how to reject England and embrace Russia. How to

¹⁰⁴Clarke to Wiltshire, 27 February 1979.

¹⁰⁵Clarke to Bourne, 9 March 1979.

¹⁰⁶Austin Clarke, "Goot from Cawmere," The Nation 31 August 1979: 6.

¹⁰⁷Austin Clarke, "'Otts' and Life Bans," The Nation 16 March 1979: 20.

wear a Afro, how to say "brother" and "comrade", instead of "good morning" and "thanks".¹⁰⁸

Again, Clarke berated Barbados for the absurdity of an elaborate armed establishment:

Wha' happen to the big rocks that they uses to got in Barbados? Man, there was a time when if a man call you a idiot, all you had to do is lick-he-down with a big rock ... Big rocks ain't in fashion no more in Barbados? We getting so modern and civilize and advance, that we can't settle a quarrel with a rock-stone? Or a mortar-pestle? And wha' happen to all the bull-pistles that the police uses to got?¹⁰⁹

He emphasized this point with a fictitious account of a meticulously planned, top-secret military operation that turned out to be no more than a mission to burn twenty-five square yards of dope.¹¹⁰ And he searched out other topics. One of these was the mediocrity and incompetence he believed rampant in post-colonial Barbados, a theme apparent in his account of a coast guard crew losing its way and ending up in Cuban waters hundreds of miles away.¹¹¹ Another, quite reminiscent of his treatment of the subject in The Prime Minister, was the overdependence of the Barbadian economy on

¹⁰⁸Austin Clarke, "When Two and Two Is Five," The Nation 25 May 1979: 16.

¹⁰⁹Austin Clarke, "Soldier Boys, and Soldier Girls," The Nation 26 October 1979: 20.

¹¹⁰Austin Clarke, "Ah Soldier I Will Be," The Nation 16 November 1979: 20.

¹¹¹Austin Clarke, "Flagship," The Nation 27 July 1979: 22.

the tourist industry.¹¹² He reserved most of his satirical barbs, however, for the government of the day.

Since he was troubled by no sense of obligation to the Barbados Labour Party, which had under Tom Adams defeated Errol Barrow's government in 1976, Clarke repeatedly lampooned it in connection with its policies and activities. He felt no compunction, for example, about ridiculing the honours it was sponsoring:

Barbados never honour nobody! Nobody that I grew up with, nor who born here. Barbados does in truth and fact honour people, but most o' them people born elsewhere. Away. You see, we are a broad minded people. We are a international people.¹¹³

He commented on the opportunism permeating Barbadian politics, as politicians freely changed parties and allegiances to advance their public careers.¹¹⁴ He chided officialdom for its extravagance, noting the "high living" by the diplomatic corps in New York¹¹⁵ and the wastage of public funds through the acquisition of a new official residence for the Prime Minister when the latter did not wish to live there and

¹¹²Austin Clarke, "Some O' We Bajan People," The Nation 24 August 1979: 22.

¹¹³Austin Clarke, "Neo-Honours," The Nation 18 May 1979: 16.

¹¹⁴Austin Clarke, "Brooklyn: the Free and the Brave," The Nation 18 January 1979: 18.

¹¹⁵Clarke, "Brooklyn: the Free and the Brave."

received an allowance for staying at his own residence.¹¹⁶ In short, he had embarked on a mission to expose what he saw as the limitations of the government and his objective was fully endorsed by The Nation, a newspaper that supported Barrow's Democratic Labour Party.

As a columnist for The Nation, Clarke wrote with sustained zest, perhaps mainly because he was enlarging on such favourite themes of his as the pitfalls of colonial education, the self-centredness and extravagance of black politicians, and the mediocrity and incompetence entrenched in the now independent Barbados. His contributions were enlivened as well by his hard-earned skill in handling the Barbadian dialect and were further enriched by a steady flow of allusions readily identifiable to Barbadians. "Neo-Honours", with its references to a "professor-fellow" attending meetings at "Yoruba Yard" with its "African thing",¹¹⁷ provides a fine illustration of the latter

¹¹⁶Austin Clarke, "The Battle of Culloden Farms," The Nation 2 November 1979: 16.

¹¹⁷Clarke, "Neo-Honours" 16. Yoruba was an African-oriented organization in Barbados dedicated to identifying the African origins and antecedents of local black culture. Clarke was not enthusiastic about any obsession with the "African thing", for he believed that any quest for cultural antecedents in Barbados must consider the whites of that country as well. See Ridley Greene, "Tom Clarke: I Am Not God," The Nation 20 January 1978: 10.

feature, as do other columns - such as "To Err Is Weak"¹¹⁸ and "'Goot' from Cawmere"¹¹⁹ - capitalizing on Barbadian familiarity with particular events, places, schools and sports. In his figurative language, too, Clarke tapped phenomena to which the local population was attuned, the game of cricket in particular repeatedly inspiring metaphors and similes.¹²⁰ The danger that a leader might lose the support of a colleague with whom he has failed to share power, for example, is communicated in cricketing terms:

A few could be on your side, and you could expect that he going tek your catches in the slips. But since you ain't put he on, because he think he is a pretty bowler, and you bowl yourself, what you think going happen when the batsman mek a thing through the slips? Of course! That fellow hand going turn-in a sieve overnight.¹²¹

This infusion of local colour into the compositions creates an

¹¹⁸Austin Clarke, "To Err Is Weak," The Nation 27 July 1979: 22. This piece speaks of one "Dolphus", a man "getting past the zenith of the strength he uses to have as a young man when he was running all over Barbados in a red car as pretty as a mayflower flower".

¹¹⁹Austin Clarke, "'Goot' from Cawmere," The Nation 31 August 1979: 21.

¹²⁰Clarke's technique is reminiscent of that of another West Indian work, C. L. R. James' Beyond A Boundary (1963), in which the game of cricket is employed as a metaphor for colonialism. James' Minty Alley (1936), the first West Indian novel to be published in England, also focuses on local life at the grassroots level, with James capturing realistically and effectively the variety, zest and colour of life at that level. Clarke was familiar with James' work and may have obtained some of his inspiration from it.

¹²¹Austin Clarke, "Thief and Take, Plot and Plan...!", The Nation 14 September 1979: 14.

image of an immigrant writer once more in touch with his native land while also bestowing on the pieces an aura of authenticity.

Clarke's preoccupation with facets of Barbadian life did not preclude a keen interest in events occurring about him in Toronto. Once more he found much to complain about, and the old charges of racism--latterly muted--are again made with vehemence.¹²² Yet the popular acclaim he had begun to earn himself for his satirical commentaries in The Nation and the satisfaction he derived from the completion of his autobiographical manuscript must have encouraged him to concentrate on his literary career, for by the end of February, 1979, he was "in the mood to do some serious writing" and was rousing himself out of his creative hiatus to tackle the "second part of The Prime Minister".¹²³ A week earlier he had learned of the rejection of his autobiographical effort, then titled "Amo, I Love: Amat, Thou Lovest", and of readers' recommendation that the work be pruned,¹²⁴ so he set about the task of revising it. Having recently ended a "ten year silence" between himself and Jack

¹²²See, for instance, Austin Clarke, "When the Bough Breaks the Cradle Will Fall," Contrast 29 October 1979: 9; "Why I Call Johnson Killing Murderous," Contrast 13 September 1979: 7; "Star Article Dangerous, Misleading, Demeaning," Contrast 25 May 1979: 8.

¹²³Clarke to Wiltshire, 27 February 1979.

¹²⁴Daniel Menaker to Phyllis Westberg, 21 February 1979.

McClelland with a civil exchange over his novel "More",¹²⁵ he submitted his revised autobiography to McClelland and Stewart, which informed him in July that it had accepted the work.¹²⁶

The book was published in the spring of 1980 with the title Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack and on the whole elicited a warm response among reviewers. In Hal Wake's view, for example, the writing "displays far greater confidence, subtlety, and control" than in much of Clarke's fiction, with the author avoiding rhetoric "in favor of a fluid, evocative style that allows his experience to make his point",¹²⁷ while for Ken Adachi, Clarke's "memoir is by turns sombre, funny, elegiac and not a bit testy or edgy".¹²⁸ Again, Darryl Pinckney finds the book "tender, funny, unpolemical",¹²⁹ while Stephen Gauer believes that it "explores the terrain of Clarke's childhood the same way that a powerful telescope reveals a lunar landscape--the view may be limited but the detail is impressive," with its prose never

¹²⁵Austin Clarke to Jack McClelland, 26 November 1978.

¹²⁶Jack McClelland to Austin Clarke, 26 July 1979.

¹²⁷Hal Wake, "On Growing Up as A Colonial Clone," rev. of Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack, by Austin Clarke, The Vancouver Sun 23 May 1980: 40L. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹²⁸Ken Adachi, "Growing Up Stupid in Barbados," rev. of Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack, by Austin Clarke, The Toronto Star 22 March 1980. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹²⁹Darryl Pinckney, "Slums of Empire," rev. of Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack, by Austin Clarke, The New York Review 27 May 1982: 46.

having "seemed so artless and affecting".¹³⁰ The occasional reservations that were voiced about the work tended to focus on structure. Thus, David Williamson suggests that "the book is almost too episodic",¹³¹ while William French notes with less severity that not only is the book "episodic" but that "some of the episodes are better than others".¹³²

Attesting to Clarke's versatility as a writer, Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack¹³³ presents a selection of key incidents and experiences in the author's life from 1944 to 1960, tracing his progress from his enrolment at Combermere High School to his admission to Harrison College and thus marking the completion of one phase of his life. With its episodic structure, it does not record events in chronological sequence, since it also incorporates vignettes from even earlier periods of Clarke's life that are significant for his intellectual and psychological maturation. Written with the same verve as his satirical commentaries in

¹³⁰Stephen Gauer, "Growing Up Colonial," rev. of Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack, by Austin Clarke, The Ottawa Journal 26 April 1980. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹³¹David Williamson, "Novelist's Memoirs Recall Life in Barbados," rev. of Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack, by Austin Clarke, The Winnipeg Free Press 12 April 1980: 4. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹³²William French, "Episodic and Touching," rev. of Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack, by Austin Clarke, The Globe and Mail 22 March 1980. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹³³For the remainder of this chapter, this work will be referred to as Growing Up Stupid.

The Nation, the book functions at different levels. At its most obvious, it is an account of Clarke's adolescence, illuminating the role of the colonial setting, the family and communal life in forming him as an individual and depicting the rites and trials that he had to survive before admission to the selective Harrison College. At another level, however, the book is a source of insight into the absurdities and contradictions of a colonial legacy that was responsible for making cultural schizoids of Clarke and his fellow colonised. In a number of his works, particularly The Bigger Light, Clarke exhibits the divided self of the black underdog, but in Growing Up Stupid he probes into the roots of this fragmentation, his own experience being symbolic of that of his people.

The mature narrator of Growing Up Stupid casts an objective and discerning eye on a crucial segment of his life. His choice of incidents, his gently mocking tone as he presents himself and his people as "stupid", and his ironic touch in exposing through implication the pervasive influence of colonialism on his psyche and his values are indicative of a narrator capable of examining his past with enlightenment and therefore of recognizing that the dichotomy within him is the inevitable outgrowth of his subjection to opposed forces. Family and community life have pulled him toward his roots and culture while colonial institutions, in implanting their values and perspectives in him, have claimed a different

allegiance, a conflict that is nicely captured in the seemingly comic incident in which - as his parents fight to gain possession of him as a one year old - his mother pulls him by the head in one direction and his father by the legs in another.¹³⁴

In his reminiscences, Clarke contends that imperialist rule had quietly but effectively indoctrinated the colonised to accept the notion of the total superiority of the dominant race and its appurtenances and through such channels as the Church, the school, the media and the class system had perpetuated self-hatred and self-abnegation in its victims. At the same time, hindsight and maturity allow the narrator a different picture of those dominant elements in the society. Clarke recalls incidents that militated against the conventional wisdom that everyone or everything English was best. His maturity enables him to see that the supposed "ideal" of Englishness was constantly betrayed by the reality of the English and that the notion of English superiority was purely a myth. Yet the colonial experience had created both individual and societal alienation; the myth of English superiority had been powerful enough, and the indoctrination sufficiently thorough, to create divisions within individuals and the society almost impossible to heal.

Clarke implicates the class system in the

¹³⁴Austin Clarke, Growing Up Stupid (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980) 148.

fragmentation of the black man's self. He demonstrates the pervasiveness of class in the society, employing the topography of the land to suggest the caste-like rigidity of the Barbadian social structure. The elite, mostly whites, dwelled in the highest areas, protected by high walls and vicious dogs, while the poorest people lived at the base of the hills, moving up the slopes as they progressed up the social ladder. When Clarke's parents managed to improve their lot, for example, they moved to Flagstaff Road farther up the hill. The segregation of the whites from the blacks is reflected in the New Year's Eve celebrations, when the former pursued their revelry within the walled hotel while the blacks watched from outside the wall "which was too high and treacherous" for them to climb.¹³⁵ The distribution of occupations among the various segments of the populace was also an integral element of the class structure, with the most important and prestigious positions being held by the whites or their bastards and the most menial ones being generally allocated to blacks. Clarke is clearly depicting with considerable fidelity the stratification of the society he knew in his youth. But he accomplishes more than this in his autobiography, for he suggests that the circumstances he faced tore at the foundation of his allegiance with his own racial community. The achievements and acquisitions of the whites became the hallmarks of respectability. The plantation house,

¹³⁵Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 34.

for instance, was the symbol of the blacks' lives as well as of their ambition for it represented wealth and power, in contrast to the dilapidated huts below that implied poverty and impotence.¹³⁶ The whites' life-style, and the value system that undergirded it, proved irresistible to many blacks who, like Clarke, were tempted to divest themselves of their true selves so that they might share in its blessings.

Education was the principal mechanism through which blacks might escape from the lowest echelons of the society but, looking back, Clarke realizes that while it enabled him to liberate himself from the bondage of poverty it simultaneously denuded him of his own culture and heritage. The school system, which extolled "English society and manners" but was silent about Barbados, was geared to produce "little black Englishmen" who had so assimilated everything English that they were likely to feel "more at ease in England, the Mother Country, than in Barbados".¹³⁷ Education glorified the white world and instilled in the natives the notion that they would remain "savages" unless immersed in the "English poets" and other such subject-matter actually irrelevant to their real needs.¹³⁸ It strongly alienated the

¹³⁶Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 130.

¹³⁷Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 73.

¹³⁸Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 48. In "Harrison College and Me", too, Clarke observes that although he was exposed to "many books of Shakespeare", he was not introduced to "the one tragedy significant to [him] as a black man in a white society--Othello--which above all the snippets of learning

individual and the society from reality; it created "white men in black skins" who, like Clarke, suffered a sense of dislocation as they were torn between a foreign heritage and their own and who could not function naturally in either.¹³⁹

In the religious sphere, the ascendancy of the Anglican Church was indicative of the superior status enjoyed by the white culture in general. The colonial hierarchy had designated the Church of England as more respectable than such evangelical counterparts as the Church of the Nazarene and moreover tended to belong to it, so that membership in that institution--and in particular participation in its choir--endowed Clarke with an enviable status in the community. The Anglican Church also gained in significance from its close connection with the school system, a nexus symbolised by the physical proximity of church and school¹⁴⁰ and vividly

could have anchored [him] down steadfastly, to [his] birth, [his] culture, [his] origin". See Austin Clarke, "Harrison College and Me," New World Quarterly, Barbados Independence Issue 3 (1966): 33. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹³⁹It is reasonable to suggest that Clarke's familiarity with Albert Memmi's The Colonizer and the Colonized helped him clarify his thinking about the impact of education on the colonized. Memmi writes, for example:

The teacher and the school represent a world which is too different from [the colonized's] family environment. In both cases, far from preparing the adolescent to find himself completely, school creates a permanent duality in him.

See Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (New York: Orion Press, 1965) 106.

¹⁴⁰Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 10.

captured in Clarke's description of two hundred boys beginning their school day with resounding renditions of such Church of England hymns as "Rock of Ages" and "Ride on, ride on in Majesty".¹⁴¹ This Church was a route to success and respectability but in return it exacted fealty to its rites and ideals.

The duality produced in Clarke by the allure of the dominant culture and the influence of his native roots is epitomised in his simultaneous affiliation with the Anglican Church and the Church of the Nazarene. Clarke attended the latter during the week, but on Sunday mornings he rode on his bicycle "to sing in the choir of the Cathedral, past the Church of the Nazarene".¹⁴² His mother, like others who were "poor people, people who had suffered, who had had the hardest of lives, who were black in a population of black people",¹⁴³ had gravitated toward the Church of the Nazarene because, as the mature Clarke discerns, it was a part of herself.¹⁴⁴ Worship here contrasted with that in the Established Church, in which the sermons and accents were difficult to follow and people--including the choir boys and the organist--often slept. In the Church of the Nazarene, his mother and other blacks could understand the preacher's words and relate to the

¹⁴¹Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 10-11.

¹⁴²Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 117.

¹⁴³Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 110.

¹⁴⁴Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 110.

spirited worship in which the congregation's public "confessions and testimonies" played a vital role.¹⁴⁵ Worship here suited their needs and personalities. Yet his mother, always conscious of the power of the colonial institution, permitted him to belong to the Cathedral.¹⁴⁶ A Combermere boy, certainly, must be attached to the "respectable" Church, for the school was one of the training grounds for future leaders of the country, who must be so conditioned that they would proceed to champion and perpetuate the values of the imperial society. The black's true self must be suppressed if colonial clones were to be created. Clarke's juxtaposition of his imaginary picture of the English countryside with his spontaneous acceptance of the black Church's brand of religion forcefully communicates the split generated within him by the colonial experience.

The school system and the Church were reinforced by various arms of the mass media in both their political function and their ultimate psychological impact. The British Broadcasting Corporation was an important organ in the dissemination of imperialist values and perspectives since "every night on the BBC World News" the populace listened to Winston Churchill and the BBC announcer, whose accent and mode of speech Clarke and his schoolmates strove to imitate because

¹⁴⁵Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 110.

¹⁴⁶Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 109.

they were symbols of superior status.¹⁴⁷ During the war years, the BBC and such magazines as Punch and English Country Life were instruments for the indoctrination of the Barbadian people, who "lived through the defeats and victories of the British Empire and her Allies", mourned for the dead allies as patriotic "black Britons", and asked God to give their "English leaders good counsel, wisdom and strength to kill more Germans, and Italians and Japanese than the Axis Powers ...".¹⁴⁸

So powerful was each mechanism of colonial domination that even in moments of insight when the people recognized how much they had been exploited they were so greatly swayed by the colonialists' definitions, mode of life and value system that they continued to ape their masters.¹⁴⁹

Clarke elaborates as well on the family and community life as sources of inner psychological tension. The home and village abound with love and pride. In a matriarchal family structure, associated often with the absence of the natural father, "illegitimate" children are not stigmatised but are typically accepted by stepfathers and the community, and Clarke writes with fondness and pride of a stepfather who laboured hard to provide for him and his mother. In the

¹⁴⁷Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 41.

¹⁴⁸Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 14-15.

¹⁴⁹Though the Cornwallis incident revealed that the merchant ships--on which many Barbadian blacks had died in the course of the war--had been supplying the needs of the privileged locals while the poor lived on forced rations, it induced no change of habit in the populace.

ordered world of the dominant culture, however, illegitimacy was viewed as an immoral deviation from normal family life. Clarke recalls the shame and torment he endured at the end of each term when his classmates snickered at the fact that his report was being sent to "Miss Luke".¹⁵⁰ Yet, ironically, when Clarke became an excellent athlete who brought fame to the school "the smear of illegitimacy" was "erased" and "the master came up with a brilliant idea of erasing [his] low caste": he "shielded him from the stigma of illegitimacy" by placing him into the category of a "ward".¹⁵¹ The absurdity of this arrangement did not escape his mother and elicited from her the contemptuous response it deserved: "What blasted foolishness they learning you at that Cawmere place?"¹⁵²

The results of the colonialist distinction between legitimate and illegitimate are predictable. On the one hand, Clarke was conscious of both the acceptance he encountered in the home and the community and his pride in his parents, but on the other he was only too aware of the sense of shame that gnawed at him over his mother and his birth. To surrender to the values and criteria of the imperialist meant scorning and condemning his mother, but how could he forget that it was

¹⁵⁰In "Harrison College and Me" Clarke notes bitterly that this was a deliberate way of embarrassing him as well as of reminding him of his mother's shortcoming and its taint on him. See Clarke, "Harrison College and Me" 31.

¹⁵¹Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 106-107.

¹⁵²Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 107.

this woman who had toiled and sacrificed for his future? And he faced a similar dilemma over his grandmother, whose regular visits to see him caused him acute embarrassment in his youth. As a mature person, however, he discerns that it was the colonialist frame of reference in which he was immured that was responsible for the humiliation her appearances had caused him. Now, as an adult, he can perceive the tenacity of this old woman who, like Wordsworth's old leech gatherer in "Resolution and Independence",¹⁵³ had faced almost insurmountable obstacles in her drive to survive and who had valiantly demonstrated her love for him.

The environment and activities of family and community life also bred division within Clarke. At home, especially during vacations, the children led a fairly carefree and happy life, "eating tons of roasted corn", sucking sugar-cane and playing games.¹⁵⁴ As Clarke states, the village had its "rituals and customs" which "swallowed" him up the moment he entered its precincts.¹⁵⁵ For the school environment, however, the students discarded their old clothing and mode of life for stiff uniforms and a regimen which, though alien to their natural interests and dispositions, they must adopt if they wished to succeed, in this way sustaining a duality of existence that deepened the

¹⁵³Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 164.

¹⁵⁴Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 103.

¹⁵⁵Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 29.

fissure in their inner selves.

While O'Flaherty doubts that Growing Up Stupid is "an anti-colonial tract" and suggests that "the book is not one of hate though he [Clarke] has plenty of reason to hate",¹⁵⁶ it is nevertheless obvious that Clarke is exposing the malevolent influences of colonialism on its victims, though he is not overtly condemnatory of the legacy of this type of regime. Because of his clever and effective handling of irony, humour and gentle satire, his protest is in one sense muted; yet, paradoxically, though he pokes fun at himself, the colonised, no less than at the coloniser, his observations gain an immediacy and force from such honesty that his earlier polemics cannot attain. Anger when it is appropriate is not wanting; the essence of his perception of colonial society is perhaps discernible in "Harrison College and Me", in which his rage engenders a vitriolic treatment of the concomitants of colonialism in the form of an almost Swiftian attack on the education system in general and the principal of the school in particular.¹⁵⁷ The tone, the language, and the mood evoked in that piece all contribute to its success in demolishing a perfidious system that denigrated

¹⁵⁶Patrick O'Flaherty, "Book Review", "Weekend AM", CBC, n.d. See Clippings (McMaster), Box 34.

¹⁵⁷Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 31-34.

him and marked him with a lasting sense of inferiority.¹⁵⁸

While Clarke's indictment is grounded in a specific time, place and people it transcends such narrow boundaries to embrace all peoples who are or have been subjected to the colonial experience, for the underlying properties of the phenomenon display a remarkable continuity from one instance to another:

The mental and social attitudes of a colonial people, black or white, are much the same all over, and are deeply embedded in the consciousness. The habits of deference and feelings of inferiority that colonisation breeds are slow to die; the willingness to have others rule over you lingers in the mind.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸Clarke's embarrassment regarding his illegitimacy, which was deliberately drawn to his classmates' attention by his teacher, is given a comic, light-hearted treatment in Growing Up Stupid, but in "Harrison College and Me" his outrage and bitterness are openly conveyed through an acerbic and hostile outpouring against the system which bred such inhumane behaviour. Also, in Growing Up Stupid he underscores the irrelevance and uselessness of the school curriculum to his society by trivializing it, treating it with irreverence, employing bathos, and repeating the term "Fool" (Latin Fool, Math Fool), one that simultaneously signifies brilliance with respect to mastery of the subject but stupidity in terms of acquiring something of value. In "Harrison College and Me", Clarke directly describes the curriculum as "knowledge which I garnered then and could never use since ...". See Clarke, "Harrison College and Me" 33.

¹⁵⁹O'Flaherty, "Weekend AM". Canadian writers such as Margaret Laurence and Robertson Davies make similar observations. In The Diviners, Laurence uses Morag's novel, Prospero's Child, and the relationship between Brooke and Morag to make the point. In Davies' Fifth Business, Ramsay cannot grow and become independent until he is freed of his British parents and their influence.

All colonised people, black or white, are "dogs amongst doctors";¹⁶⁰ they are all Fridays, or Calibans, or Mirandas. It must not be thought, nevertheless, that Growing Up Stupid is only a cunning vilification of the colonial system, for it is also an account of Clarke's growth in such a society as well as a paean to the family, to community life, and to the people whose vitality, sense of humour, self-sacrifice and irrepressible spirit enabled them to survive and in many instances opened the way for their children to attain a better life.

On the whole, Growing Up Stupid is the most polished and poetic of Clarke's works. Comments or ideas are often conveyed through metaphors, analogies or simply the depiction of selected incidents. The statement "dogs among doctors", which recurs in the book, is a memorable analogy crystallizing the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Symbols are prevalent. Canals, roads and hills denote divisions, while the colour white is synonymous with power - the colonials are usually garbed in white and their houses are white, as is the plantation house, the central symbol of their preeminence. Dialect, Clarke's forte, is kept to a minimum and is used sparingly but effectively at specific points in the narrative to maintain verisimilitude. The work is evidence of Clarke's confidence as a writer. It is characterized by the subtle and controlled treatment of

¹⁶⁰Clarke, Growing Up Stupid 68.

subject-matter, its style is fluid and its language evocative. Some of the vignettes, such as Clarke's affectionate reminiscences about his grandmother and his parents' moving house, are lyrical. Descriptions of vacation time and family life amid rampant poverty often border on the bucolic, though they are always counteracted by incursions of reality. As French notes, the work is "often reminiscent of Dylan Thomas' lyrical descriptions of boyhood in Wales, with the added attraction of the island's lilting speech rhythms and colourful colloquialisms".¹⁶¹ The book is subtle and entertaining but also instructive, tender and funny. Its prose is consistently clear and concise and many of the characters, like Clarke's boyhood world itself, are etched in the reader's memory, often with just a few deft strokes. Growing Up Stupid is proof of Clarke's impressive artistic progress since the publication of his Survivors of the Crossing in 1964.

Growing Up Stupid is significant partly because it probes the foundations of the values and perspectives of the black elite such as that presented in The Prime Minister (1977). In terms of Clarke's quest for identity, however, the writing of the book seems to be the completion of a long voyage of self-discovery and is in a sense intensely therapeutic. The work is not simply an expose of colonial wrongs but is an attempt by Clarke to sort out for himself the

¹⁶¹William French, "Episodic and Touching", n.p.

real nature of the process to which he has been subjected, a process that has left him so rootless, so stripped of any coherent sense of identity and consequently so ill-equipped to define himself in conventional terms. Through this autobiography, Clarke comes to terms with his past and thus with himself. Growing Up Stupid is also important for an understanding of Clarke not only as an artist but as a man. It helps to explain why, from a conventional perspective, he has sometimes proven "difficult" to people with whom he has had to work and why the positions he adopts often appear paradoxical, ambivalent, or even contradictory.

Chapter 9

Battling On

The decade after the publication of Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack (1980) has shown Clarke's fortunes continuing to ebb and flow in their customarily unpredictable fashion. After the success of his autobiographical work, his literary career faltered, while despite the occasional financial windfall--such as selling some of his papers to McMaster University¹--he was for long periods forced to scrape up cash wherever he could find it. Over the last decade, such pressures have often pushed him in other directions; even after regaining favour with the publishers, his commitments have forced him to curtail much of his literary activity.

Clarke offered "Under the Sandbox Tree" to McClelland and Stewart in October of 1980. Covering the years from the writer's admission to Harrison College to the appearance of his first published novels, this

¹Austin Clarke to Gary Dewsbury, 6 May 1980; Austin Clarke to Edward Brathwaite, 9 April 1981. Acting on a "gut instinct" that it would be a good investment, Clarke used some of his resources to purchase a townhouse on McGill Street in downtown Toronto.

autobiographical work lacks the sparkle of Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack and is a candid but rather journalistic account of Clarke's experiences and perceptions of life in Barbados and Canada. In February of the following year, McClelland and Stewart decided on a conditional acceptance of the manuscript, since the firm thought revision essential,² but whatever modifications Clarke made in the ensuing months were apparently not satisfactory, for the publisher rejected the revised manuscript.³ Clarke's instinctive and habitual response was to suppose that the vigour of his attack on racism lay behind the book's rejection⁴ and that Lily Miller, his editor at McClelland and Stewart, was personally responsible for the publisher's decision.⁵ Undeterred by the setback, he carried on with his work for The Nation, arranging for a contract with the newspaper since his columns, now to become a regular feature of the publication, had attracted a wide readership.

Clarke also turned to what he expected to be the final draft of "More", his Rosedale novel. Because of the continuing emotional turmoil in his private life, however, he had "difficulty writing", was "unable to concentrate for more

²Lily Miller to Austin Clarke, 20 February 1981.

³Lily Miller to Austin Clarke, 28 September 1981.

⁴Austin Clarke to John Harewood, 1 November 1981.

⁵Austin Clarke, "Journal 1981-1984", Unpublished diary (McMaster) Box 5, Folders 4-5, 47.

than one or two hours daily" and simply could not recapture his "old momentum".⁶ The beginning of December found him little further ahead and his forays into writing had become "depressing drudgery".⁷ He sought some refuge in his social life, but money was "tight", the "tightest" he could remember.⁸ That year, the very one in which he had assumed Canadian citizenship, had ironically become one of his least creative and most difficult periods in the country.

The end of 1981 was not entirely gloomy for Clarke. The University of Western Ontario had expressed an interest in inviting him to be its Writer-in-Residence in the 1982-83 academic year and he had responded positively to its overtures,⁹ though he learned shortly that the final decision would not be made until March, 1982.¹⁰ In late Fall, too, the CBC's "Anthology" bought his short story, "The Funeral of A Political Yardfowl", for airing in March, 1982,¹¹ an event

⁶Austin Clarke to John Harewood, 1 November 1981.

⁷Clarke, "Journal" 30.

⁸Clarke, "Journal" 35.

⁹Clarke to Harewood, 1 November 1981.

¹⁰S. L. Dragland to Austin Clarke, 9 November 1981.

It was Terrence Craig, an Assistant Professor, who had informally drawn his department's attention to Clarke as a possible candidate for the position of writer-in-residence. Craig had interviewed Clarke for entries in the Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature and the New Canadian Encyclopedia as well as for his own doctoral dissertation being completed at the University of Toronto. Terrence Craig to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 15 May 1990.

¹¹Austin Clarke to John Harewood, 8 March 1982.

which boosted his morale significantly. He had begun to wonder whether he would sell any more of his work "in this hard country" but the CBC purchase reassured him that he could still write short stories.¹² It also meant that Christmas was enjoyable, with drink and food being "the way of life" over the holiday season.

For much of its course, the year 1982 brought no dramatic improvement to the state of Clarke's affairs. Apart from his regular contributions to The Nation, the writer achieved little of substance.¹³ In April, he attended a Congress of Caribbean Writers at York University at which he renewed his association with Samuel Selvon, Jan Carew and other West Indian authors and also read passages from a selection of his own published works. While at the conference he was invited to the University of Miami by Oscar Dathorne, a member of the faculty at that institution, and he proceeded immediately to Florida, where he spent the period April 19-23 speaking to students, touring the area around Miami and visiting relatives.¹⁴ In May, he accompanied his wife to Cornell University for their daughter's graduation. In terms of writing, the period was one of recurrent frustration.

¹²Clarke, "Journal" 41.

¹³Clarke was quite astonished at the popularity of his "humorous little pieces" in The Nation. Each took him sixty minutes or less to write and fetched him \$120.00 (Barbadian). He noted, though, that some of his commentaries were generating controversy. See Clarke, "Journal" 150-151, 277.

¹⁴Oscar R. Dathorne to Austin Clarke, 26 April 1982.

Clarke again tackled "More" but, as he noted in his diary in July, he was forced repeatedly to bow to failure:

I have said so many times that I have solved the problem and still the problem remains. ...But for the time being I am bogged down by ennui, inertia and boredom.¹⁵

With his spirits raised in August by the conclusion of his negotiations with the University of Western Ontario, he thought himself "in a frame of mind to write 'More'", this time "in a larger scope, with the whole of Toronto as background" and with a "less reflective" tone than in previous drafts.¹⁶ By September, indeed, he was confident that he had "this blasted novel" on track and toiled at it up to the beginning of his term at London, Ontario.¹⁷

Clarke was, as usual, unhappy with aspects of his university appointment and in particular with the necessity of his spending several nights weekly in London.¹⁸ Nevertheless, he drove out regularly and stayed in London for the greater part of the week in order to discharge his contractual obligations, which included reading students'

¹⁵Clarke, "Journal" 103-104.

¹⁶Clarke, "Journal" 134-135.

¹⁷Clarke, "Journal" 181; 201.

¹⁸Clarke had hoped to commute two or three days from Toronto but the residential requirements of the Canada Council, which was funding his position with a matching grant, obliged him to take an apartment in London. Craig to Algoo-Baksh, 15 May 1990.

manuscripts and holding office hours to consult with the writers.¹⁹ In the end, he found the term at the University of Western Ontario generally agreeable. He was once more very successful in his relations with students, starting a critical reading circle in which students read their works to one another and helping them initiate a magazine called The Literary Journal.²⁰ During this period, he also renewed contact with Jack McClelland and Lily Baritz-Miller as well as with such writers as Margaret Atwood, Graeme Gibson and Edward Brathwaite, who had been invited to give lectures at the university.²¹ Clarke's original reservations about the appointment gradually evaporated, too, since he discovered a number of people, especially Stan Dragland and Terrence Craig of the English Department, strongly supportive, and his mood improved further with the news that Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack had won the annual Casa de las Americas

¹⁹Craig to Algoo-Baksh, 15 May 1990. In fact, the appointment at the University of Western Ontario was a boon to Clarke, for he was paid \$18,000 for an eight-month period. Prior to this he had scraped together small sums by selling another set of his papers to McMaster University and through rental income and minor publications. He barely managed to raise the money he felt the responsibility to provide his daughter, Loretta, to meet the costs of the graduate programme in which she had enrolled at Cornell University. See Clarke, "Journal" 105, 145-149, 214.

²⁰Craig to Algoo-Baksh, 15 May 1990.

²¹While attending a launching party for Graeme Gibson's Perpetual Motion, for example, he met Lily Baritz-Miller and though he still disagreed with her over her earlier assessment of "Under the Sandbox Tree" they "sort of made up". See Clarke, "Journal" 265.

literary prize.²²

Beneath the surface, however, Clarke was troubled by uncertainty, in part monetarily²³ but more significantly by the nagging doubts creeping into his mind regarding his abilities as a writer. "More", for example, remained intractable and "Landing Rite", his novel set in Barbados, also ground to a halt. With the fall of 1982 shading into winter, he was overcome by deep depression, only too aware that five years had elapsed since the publication of his last major work of fiction. For reassurance, he flung himself into the short story, a vehicle with which he usually enjoyed good luck. He devoted just over two weeks in London to compiling an anthology, though many of the stories he included had been written earlier. It was this collection, as yet untitled, that he thought enabled him to salvage something of artistic value from the period of his association with the University of Western Ontario.

In the summer of 1983, Clarke's literary career regained some of its lost momentum. He finalised his

²²Casa de las Americas was a Latin American magazine that sponsored an annual literary competition, the typical entrants coming from the Caribbean, Latin America and black America. The prize in each category of literature was two thousand dollars in the currency of the winner's country. Clarke has also stated that the autobiography was translated into Spanish and that the Cubans also produced a soft-cover English edition, copies of which found their way into the United States.

²³Austin Clarke to Reshard Gool, 3 January 1983. Clarke notes that the future still promised "a financial tightness".

revisions of his London anthology of short stories, at which point the fortuitous reestablishment of his links with Jack McClelland and Lily Baritz-Miller the previous fall proved invaluable; it inclined him to offer the collection to McClelland and Stewart, which informed him in June of its conditional acceptance of the manuscript.²⁴ Clarke was also preoccupied with his new Barbadian novel and, having broken the "hump" of this work by mid-August, continued with the writing into the fall.²⁵ Around the middle of October, he set himself yet one more target, the preparation of another group of stories by the middle of December. During this eight-week period he actually wrote or revised eight stories, finishing a ninth shortly afterwards,²⁶ and by Christmas of 1983 had further revised most of these.²⁷ He was therefore ready to send out a second anthology for assessment by potential publishers.

Unfortunately, December was once more "a tense time", for Clarke had "no money" but only the "prospects of money" and was restricted largely to "enjoying the hospitality of others".²⁸ The opportunities to do so arose in part from

²⁴Linda McKnight to Austin Clarke, 6 June 1983.

²⁵Clarke, "Journal" 30.

²⁶Among the new stories were "A Man", "Doing Right" and "The Smell". "Doing Right" was eventually broadcast on CBC's "Anthology" in 1984.

²⁷Austin Clarke to John Harewood, 20 December 1983.

²⁸Clarke, "Journal" 303.

one trip to Hamilton to deliver an address on 3 December 1983 at the Barbados Independence celebrations sponsored by the local Barbados-Hamilton Association and another to speak on 6 December 1983 in the "Writers Series" organized by the Department of English at the University of Manitoba.²⁹ On the whole, however, the year ended on a promising note. Baritz-Miller at McClelland and Stewart liked his untitled London collection of short stories and his agents in New York had reacted favourably to his more recent anthology, tentatively entitled "Nine Men". As Clarke observes in his diary, the former collection heralded his return to "serious writing" while "Nine Men" demonstrated he could still attain his former height as a writer.³⁰

A number of developments in the early months of 1984 further boosted Clarke's optimism about his future. He learned that a reprint of Amongst Thistles and Thorns in the New Canadian Library series was scheduled for release at the end of January³¹ and that Sinn und Form, a German magazine, had made arrangements to publish "The Motor Car" as well as

²⁹Clarke, "Journal" 297. Clarke's first visit to Winnipeg was apparently a "huge success": several people came to hear his readings and he "regaled them with some of his funnier tales". See Keith Sandiford to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 28 May 1990.

³⁰Clarke, "Journal" 313-314.

³¹Austin Clarke to John Harewood, 5 January 1984.

excerpts from Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack.³² A short-term appointment as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Prince Edward Island in March helped as well.³³ He had also been at work on "Letter of Appeal", as his new Barbadian novel was now titled, and by April had polished it to his general satisfaction. However, the earlier rejection of his autobiographical "Under the Sandbox Tree" by McClelland and Stewart had stirred some doubt within him about the possibilities open to a black writer in "a narrow Canadian establishment" and he had decided to test anew his literary prospects in the United States.³⁴ He therefore sent the new novel to his American agents, who had already received his "Nine Men" and placed it in the hands of Little, Brown.

Clarke returned now to "An American Dutchman". His new plan, supported by Philips of Little, Brown, was to transform the work into a novel in which the "persona" of the "essay" would become the primary character, with the story being told "through him".³⁵ In May 1984, however, Lily Baritz-Miller indicated that she was now free to edit the

³²A. Zeissler, Sinn und Form, to Phyllis Westberg, 20 February 1984. The German magazine later received permission also to publish an excerpt from the unpublished autobiography, "Under the Sandbox Tree." See Craig Tenney to A. Zeissler, 29 May 1984.

³³R. Gool to G. Hoover, Canada Council, 30 January 1984; Austin Clarke to John Harewood, 14 March 1984.

³⁴Clarke, "Journal" 313.

³⁵Clarke, "Journal" 317.

untitled London collection McClelland and Stewart had accepted the previous year.³⁶ While re-writing "Dutchman", therefore, Clarke also revised his London anthology in light of Baritz-Miller's comments³⁷ and, with this "tedious" process drawing toward completion, he suggested the title of "When Women Rule" under which the stories were eventually published.³⁸ But the news during this period was not all good, for the responses from the United States regarding "Nine Men" and "Letter of Appeal" were not encouraging, his column in The Nation was being discontinued--in his view because some of his pieces had been controversial³⁹--and "Nine Men" was refused by several publishers in England.⁴⁰

Clarke's most significant artistic achievement in 1985 was the publication of When Women Rule by McClelland and Stewart. The dedication of the anthology to Ria Jean McMurtry hints at a mellowing Clarke who has gained greater acceptance within the mainstream of Canadian society and has found it

³⁶Clarke, "Journal" 367.

³⁷Baritz-Miller also wanted two stories from "Nine Men" - "The Man" and "Doing Right" - included in the untitled London anthology, and Clarke was agreeable to this. See Clarke, "Journal 1981-1985" 105.

³⁸Austin Clarke to Lily Baritz-Miller, 10 November 1984.

³⁹Clarke, "Journal" 371.

⁴⁰Patricia Robertson to Austin Clarke, 13 November 1984. Among those declining "Nine Men" was Penguin Books (U.K.), which could not "see the stories working in England" perhaps because the world Clarke had created was so "unfamiliar". See Patricia Robertson to Austin Clarke, 4 December 1984.

easier to regard the dominant group with a degree of sympathy.⁴¹ Of the eight stories in the collection only three were new,⁴² and as a group the works revisit concerns already explored by Clarke, including such themes as emasculation, alienation, racism and the dehumanizing effects of the wasteland in which the dispossessed are compelled to exist. What is new and especially interesting in some of the stories, however, is the evidence they furnish of the widening of Clarke's perspective, for it is clear that the writer's vision now expands to include whites who in an affluent society find themselves just as isolated and alienated as the poor black immigrants. Even in those stories dealing specifically with blacks, race is so effectively deemphasized that the experiences of the black protagonists transcend the individuals and encompass all human beings caught in similar predicaments.

In "A Slow Death", for example, Trotman suffers from isolation and loneliness after his wife's death from cancer.

⁴¹Close friends of Clarke's agree that he has mellowed. Keith Sandiford, for example, notes that Clarke "has now mellowed ... while still retaining some of the old fire and passion", while Harold Marshall claims that "age has mellowed him considerably". See Sandiford to Algoo-Baksh, 28 May 1990, and Harold Marshall to J. Baksh, 3 June 1990.

⁴²"The Man", "The Discipline" and "A Slow Death" were new. CBC's "Anthology" had broadcast "The Collector" in 1965, "On One Leg" in 1967, "Give It A Shot" in 1982 and "Doing Right" in 1984. "Griff" had been published in 1973 in When He Was Young and He Used to Wear Silks (Little, Brown edition) and "Give It A Shot" in the Journal of Caribbean Studies in Spring, 1981.

He is unable to divorce himself from the relationship he has shared with his wife and he clings to the past, roaming the empty rooms of the house he had bought for her and touching her clothing and trinkets, seemingly incapable of accepting the reality of his situation. Loneliness and isolation contribute to his decision to set his house on fire but the fatal action is triggered as well by Trotman's growing awareness that society has no place or concern for the old or the sick and attaches little value to human warmth.⁴³ The real estate agent's treachery is symbolic of the frigid indifference prevailing in the society at large; her materialism certainly leaves her no room for even a trace of humanity. Faced with this realization, Trotman decides to burn down his house rather than have it fall into the hands of avaricious speculators. The fact is, however, that while Trotman is a black immigrant, his experience is not unique to his race. Death, loss, isolation and disillusionment are aspects of life common to all segments of mankind, and no race has a monopoly of particular forms of response to such calamities. Many individuals may survive these devastating intrusions into their lives but others, like Trotman, simply cannot.

Clarke's widening perspective is also apparent in his choice of non-black protagonists and his attempt at

⁴³His former landlady has committed her old nephew, who is dying of cancer, to a cold, sterile institution in which he feels lost and isolated.

communicating certain experiences from the white point of view. In "The Collector", the aging Nick Evans and his friend, Indian Johnson, suffer the poverty, isolation and degradation that are the lot of many black immigrants. They, too, exist on the fringes of a society which attempts to eradicate them from its landscape by chasing them away whenever they appear in its midst.⁴⁴ It is ironic that Nick, who has fought for Canada in war and even adopted a more Anglicized name, is rejected by the very society he has been willing to serve. It is ironic, also, that Indian Johnson, one of the true natives of the land, is just as dispossessed and alienated as poor immigrants, whether black or white. In this story Clarke demonstrates the irrelevance of economic growth and burgeoning wealth for the dispossessed and dislocated people who exist at the periphery of an uncaring society. Derelicts like Nick and Indian Johnson, as is the case with a broken black like Jefferson in "The Man", have no place amid a people preoccupied with the acquisition of wealth. They are instead liable to be crushed, a fate symbolised in the destruction of Nick's cache of bottles by Teperman's crane. In another story, "Give It A Shot", the protagonist is again a white man but once more his experiences are not simply those of his own kind. The quest for material success, the bigotry, the marital failure, the lure of the

⁴⁴Austin Clarke, When Women Rule (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985) 21.

race track as a route to instant fortune, and the resultant disillusionment and sense of failure are all elements of existence that recur beyond the individual and the race.

Also new, and perhaps disturbing to some readers, is Clarke's treatment of women in this collection. The main theme linking all but two of the stories is the relationship between men and women, but it is Clarke's emphasis on less admirable aspects of the female--on the woman as seducer, betrayer, curmudgeon or destroyer--that is quite startling.⁴⁵ Taken outside the context of his corpus, his derogatory and opprobrious depiction of women and of the dangers they represent to men may well tempt the reader to see him as a misogynist. Yet Clarke's attention to the dark side of the female must be viewed as only a partial picture, one that complements his earlier, more positive portrayals in which women often display extraordinary strength and tenacity. It is nevertheless possible that the immediate source of the inconsistency between Clarke's mellow, more tolerant outlook and his apparent assault upon women is his own contradictory

⁴⁵Clarke has stated that he "realized in re-reading the stories that the women are deliciously in the background and their influence is not particularly recognized by the men." Quoted by Beverley Slopen in "The Older, Mellow Clarke," Sunday Star 24 February 1985: 7. With the exception of "Doing It Right" and "The Discipline", the stories have narrators whose accounts are not as detached and objective as they should be; the narrators sympathise with the males and are sometimes comrades of the males. This tendency on the part of the narrators to sympathise and empathize with the protagonists results in the reader's recoiling from the females and rooting for the males, which is precisely what Clarke intended his stories to accomplish.

nature, which allows reactionary values and perspectives to coexist with revolutionary fervour and an appetite for change.⁴⁶ Perhaps, too, the negative image of women and their influence presented in When Women Rule is inspired in part by Clarke's own emotional troubles, not yet sufficiently digested and absorbed into art. It is certainly likely that Clarke is exorcising the sense of dependency on women that he has accumulated through years of reliance on the major women in his life--his grandmother, his mother and his wife. At the same time, there can be no doubt that his images of women in When Women Rule convey aspects of the life he has observed about him and do indeed represent selected fragments of modern reality. In "The Collector" and "The Man", the women remain in the background but allusions to them clearly indicate the devastating nature of their influence on the male. Frequent references to the bottle-collector's curmudgeon of a landlady, for instance, imply that women are partly responsible for the dehumanization of men like Nick. She sits "in the hallway like a lifeguard",⁴⁷ waiting for the rent, and on those occasions on which Nick cannot pay humiliates him by tossing

⁴⁶Clarke is interested in the reform of society so that the underprivileged--among them blacks--might gain a respected place, but he is also somewhat conventional in his views about the role of the male in male-female relationships and When Women Rule is a study of what happens when the "natural order" is violated. It is possible, indeed, that in the collection Clarke is indirectly and unconsciously responding to the more extreme forms of feminism.

⁴⁷Clarke, When Women Rule 11.

his belongings to the sidewalk.⁴⁸ Her callous attitude propels him into a frantic and irrational rummaging for discarded bottles. Indeed, the despicable character of the female influence is nicely emphasized through the disclosure that Nick has an aversion to intimacy with women, preferring homosexual relationships instead. In "The Man", brief references to the young woman in Holt and Renfrew and the "woman on welfare" who lives in the same building as Jefferson connect women with the black man's humiliation and damaged sense of manhood. A hulk of a man, the injured Jefferson is forced into a life of dependence on welfare. The additional embarrassment of his incontinence is a factor in his deteriorating sense of masculinity and it is the presence of the female that exacerbates his loss of pride in himself as a man.

The stories "Griff", "Give It A Shot", "On One Leg", "The Discipline" and "A Slow Death" deal squarely with the male-female relationship. "A Slow Death" shows that reciprocity between male and female can generate a certain degree of success and happiness for both partners. In "Griff" and "Give It A Shot", however, the female's ruthless exploitation of the male who is in no position to satisfy her material cravings creates untenable situations for the latter and produces fatal results. The denigration of achievements and cuckolding of mates engenders violence, as Griff kills his

⁴⁸Clarke, When Women Rule 22.

wife and Pat commits suicide. It is interesting to note, though, that Pat's wife, who is white, is by no means different in outlook from black female characters such as Dots and Bernice, whose pursuit of material wants to the exclusion of other considerations also has catastrophic consequences. Just as Dots imbues Boysie with a sense of inferiority because of his early dependence upon her, so is Bob's wife responsible for the loneliness and insecurity which has made him "sullen and malevolent".⁴⁹ She is to blame for his quitting the civil service and joining the race track crowd and for his humiliation at the hands of her Jamaican lover. The emasculation of the male is clearly not the prerogative of the black female only.

The stories which reveal more than any others the potency of the female influence on the male are "The Discipline" and "On One Leg". In the former, the early male-female relationship has emasculated the male, for the protagonist has been controlled and dominated by his mother and grandmother well into manhood. Furthermore, female power over his life continues into the present, since his lawyer, his son's teacher, the social worker, his boss, his supervisor's superior, the bank manager and his psychiatrist are all women. It is no wonder that the protagonist begins "to think of all of these women controlling his life" and is demoralized by the necessity that he "approach all these

⁴⁹Clarke, When Women Rule 30-31.

powerful women in [his] life for help and sympathy".⁵⁰ Women, "The Discipline" implies, have been major agents in the psychological debilitation of the male, who in an attempt to reassert his masculinity--in this case through the brutal beating of a son--merely dehumanises himself. It is ironic, the story also intimates, that while colonialism was in the first instance responsible for the abnormal relationship between the male and the female and consequently for the emasculation of the male such extenuating circumstances are now given no weight. Instead, the male is judged by white standards which, given his background, are largely alien to him and which display just as much rigidity as his grandmother's. Had colonialism permitted the emergence of a different black psyche, Clarke implies, the protagonist would no doubt have had a better chance of measuring up to white ideals.

In "On One Leg", the other story that vividly depicts the pernicious effect of the male-female relationship on the men, Alexander, a white war veteran, is so ruled by his "complaining callous-handed wife"⁵¹ that to preserve his self-respect among his male friends he weaves tales which picture him as a strong, powerful man with complete control of his life and his women. His false account of a liaison with an Indian woman when he "lived like a man" imbues him with a

⁵⁰Clarke When Women Rule 136.

⁵¹Clarke When Women Rule 114.

sense of masculinity he and his friends consider vital in the male-female relationship, and his myth of himself as a macho male is reinforced by his stories of the "years of his life in the Canadian army, of his conquests, especially his personal conquests of women in Italy, in North Africa, in the Suez and in Britain".⁵² The image he projects of himself enhances his status among his friends, who view him "like a man, like a real man, which they all thought he was".⁵³ But the reality is entirely different. Alexander has spun illusions to conceal a debasing relationship at home for, as Joe discovers, he is tyrannized over by a screaming "thin piece of a stick of a woman" who reduces him psychologically by humiliating him in public, kicking away his false leg and his trousers and shouting to him "in his one-legged underpants, 'Move, bugger! Move! Now!'"⁵⁴ Joe watches the man he has idolised "lower himself down to the floor, onto his hands", following him with his eyes as he crawls into the dark house in this degrading position.⁵⁵

"On One Leg" implies, as do other stories in the collection, that when women rule they wreak havoc on the male psyche, that they undermine their men rather than provide them with support. The latter notion is conveyed no more vividly

⁵²Clarke, When Women Rule 119.

⁵³Clarke, When Women Rule 121.

⁵⁴Clarke, When Women Rule 126.

⁵⁵Clarke, When Women Rule 126.

than by the incident in which Alexander's wife kicks away the veteran's supporting leg. When men are so completely dependent on women, the latter have the power to destroy them physically as well as psychologically, a theme so central to the collection that six of the nine stories focusing on the male-female relationship have violent conclusions that signify physical and/or psychological death. As a group, the stories highlight the wasted potential of men, both black and white, who are trapped in relationships with women that condemn them to defeat.

The publication of When Women Rule in 1985 marked the onset of a resurgence in Clarke's literary career that on the evidence of the preceding seven years would have seemed improbable. In January, 1985, Penguin Books (Canada) had received positive comments on Clarke's other anthology "from all their editors and free-lance readers"⁵⁶ and in April, when the firm expressed an interest in publishing it,⁵⁷ Clarke immediately accepted the offer.⁵⁸ He spent time on revisions, but his successes also inspired him to persevere with his attentions to the Barbadian novel, now entitled "Proud Empires",⁵⁹ which he shortly offered to McClelland and Stewart. When he left for London at the end of May to visit

⁵⁶Clarke, "Journal" 392.

⁵⁷Austin Clarke to Linda McKnight, 12 April 1985.

⁵⁸Austin Clarke to Lily Baritz-Miller, 17 April 1985.

⁵⁹Austin Clarke to Lily Baritz-Miller, 17 April 1985.

Roy McMurtry, the new Canadian High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, he took the manuscript to his London agent but also introduced it to his old acquaintance, David Burnett, who was now with Gollancz.

This period of literary promise coincided with one of greater stability and material security for Clarke. He sold another collection of his private papers to McMaster University and undertook a number of reading and other engagements. Most rewarding of all in terms of money and his need for recognition within the dominant community, however, was his appointment to the Ontario Board of Censors,⁶⁰ a full-time position which he accepted though it limited his time for writing to nights and weekends. He had succeeded as well in extricating himself from the personal relationship that had earlier so sapped his creative energy. Now he could await with buoyant spirits a year in which he would enjoy the significant achievement of having two major works of his published.

First to appear in 1986 was Nine Men Who Laughed.⁶¹

⁶⁰Austin Clarke to Henry Moe, 20 May 1985. In the mid-eighties, too, "Doing Right", "Coll. SS. Trins. Ap. Toron.", "Canadian Experience", "A Slow Death", "The Discipline" and "Funeral of A Political Yardfowl" were broadcast by CBC Radio.

⁶¹Of the nine stories in the anthology, "Doing Right" was also published in When Women Rule, while "The Funeral" appears to be a variation of a section in Proud Empires. "A Man" and "How He Does It" are basically the same story. The narrator of "A Man" uses Standard English and the story is centred in the consciousness of the protagonist. The narrator of "How He Does It" employs dialect. He is a fellow countryman who gives an outsider's sympathetic and admiring view of the

Published by Penguin (Canada), this anthology is for the most part a foray into the world of a cross-section of the black community in Toronto. Here Clarke again takes up old issues, exploring various aspects with his old bluntness and honesty but in greater depth. Clearly, there were limits to his new tolerance, and his success in Canada did not prevent him from confronting what he saw as wrong. Together, the stories suggest that white society imprisons and limits the black newcomer through its penchant for designating him an "immigrant" and thus for rigidly categorising and labelling him in a denigratory way. To survive this hostile and restrictive environment the newcomer resorts to less than admirable behaviour. In adapting to the system he becomes passive, which in time mutilates his manhood, and ultimately he becomes either an empty shell or a shadow of his former self. Clarke states unequivocally that

These stories were written to destroy the definitions that others have used to portray so-called immigrants, black people. They are intended to rip away the film ... in order to provide clear vision, even if what is seen is crueller, less palatable than the picture exhibited previously.⁶²

In this corpus Clarke contends that white racism, through the assertion of black social inferiority and cultural abnormality implicit in the designation "immigrant", has condemned many

events.

⁶²Austin Clarke, "Introduction", Nine Men Who Laughed (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books, Canada Ltd., 1986) 6.

newcomers to becoming hollow men.

The stories illustrate how the "definitions" of the dominant race have destroyed the black newcomer. Labelling and stereotyping have effectively locked him mentally and physically into specific roles and behaviours. As a member of a minority, the immigrant is powerless to initiate significant change in the dominant social attitudes toward him and in time he forgets his original "aristocratic status", acquiescing to being defined "only as an immigrant" and attempting in various ways to reconcile himself to the system.⁶³ However, such accommodation is destructive, for it "becomes in turn, an evil and devious assault upon personality and character, upon the immigrant's nature"⁶⁴ since the newcomer adapts to the system at the cost of identity, self-respect and moral integrity. His accommodation takes different forms and is reflected in the variety of experiences in the stories. First of all, the immigrant may laugh at the system, which reveals an unconscious awareness of "his own inadequacy to take a strict moral position and destroy the system."⁶⁵ Alternatively, he may attempt to become partially or completely assimilated, a process which results in a divided self or in complete annihilation of the true self and which culminates in psychological and sometimes physical destruction.

⁶³Clarke, Nine Men 1-2.

⁶⁴Clarke, Nine Men 2.

⁶⁵Clarke, "Introduction", Nine Men 5.

Clarke's observations about white Canadian society are not a new element in his work. He reiterates the idea that because of its myopic view and its stereotyping of the black newcomer it stultifies rather than liberates his latent potential. Because it will not recognize and harness this potential both the new arrivals and the society suffer. The torment of the newcomer is reflected to some degree in unconventional and aberrant behaviour, and any failure of the dominant group to alter its attitudes toward the black immigrant will have significant repercussions for the society as a whole. As Clarke has noted in an interview,

"One may not look at the civil rights movement as dedicated only to the establishing of the equality of black people. The civil rights movement has reminded and educated us to the necessity of moral truth. It took people a long time to admit that if a group of people systematically and institutionally oppress another group, the oppressors must suffer as a result of that, so that ultimately nobody is free."⁶⁶

As a body the stories imply that the immigrants are merely living [existing], that they have "no life" because they do not live freely or with any semblance of mutual creative relationships.⁶⁷ The stories are meant to instruct both the newcomer and his new society, forcing both to reappraise themselves and discover the truths regarding their

⁶⁶Austin Clarke, "Austin Clarke's New World Dreams," interview by Deirdre Hanna, Now 5.47 (31 July-6 August 1986): 13.

⁶⁷Clarke, "Introduction", Nine Men 5-6.

relationship with each other. They are also intended to shatter the society's complacency by exposing the shortcomings that lead it to devalue the immigrant and they seek at the same time to rouse the newcomer out of his passivity so that he might initiate creative action. Furthermore, they hint strongly at the rage and violence lurking beneath the surface but reflected in police brutality, murder, rape, suicide and other excesses, and they warn in subtle fashion that if corrective action is not undertaken both white and black will pay a price when that violence erupts.⁶⁸

In examining a diversity of lives in black Canadian society, the stories make the point that failure is due in each instance to the psychological damage which definitions and their attendant limitations have wrought on the immigrant. In "Canadian Experience", for example, the protagonist surrenders a comfortable position in Barbados for a fresh start in Canada, ignoring his father's warning that he errs in deserting an "old" country in which he is at home for a young foreign land.⁶⁹ True enough, he finds himself judged and categorised according to the norms of white Canadian society. Convincing himself that he can attain success in Canada by

⁶⁸This notion is effectively conveyed in the very first story, "A Funeral". Lionel, the domino champion, is discovered to be a cheat and his opponent stabs him in a fit of rage. Lionel pays with his life for his lack of moral integrity, but a penalty will also be exacted from his killer.

⁶⁹Clarke, Nine Men 48. The father says: "This land was in our family before Canada was even discovered by the blasted Eskimos and red Indians. Seventeen-something. A.D.!"

discarding his original self, he does not hesitate to adopt his new country's criteria for acceptance.⁷⁰ Given the hostile environment and the relative absence of opportunity to progress, however, he encounters little but frustration. In the end, his persistent experience of hardship and demoralization, along with his loss of identity, propels him toward the "mortal sin of suicide".⁷¹ A similar phenomenon occurs in "A Short Acquaintance", for in bowing to the dominant norms the black protagonist suppresses her true self, even trying to sever her connection with blacks. Such self-hatred leads inexorably to the demise of the real self, a fate indicated metaphorically by the protagonist's actual death.

Intelligence and education offer blacks no guarantee of immunity to the distorting influence of the society's labelling. In "Coll. SS. Trins. Ap. Toron. - A Fable", H. S. Sonny seeks to circumvent the society's categorization by becoming a part of the dominant elements in the population, this despite his awareness of injustices at the university and elsewhere. In short, he sacrifices his real self for entry into the mainstream of the society, and he attains his objective only through alienation from his own people. His friend, Boy, too, is not prevented by his initial questioning

⁷⁰Clarke uses the clothing metaphor to develop this idea. Throughout the story, too, the protagonist is unnamed except for an indication in a Christmas card that his name is "George". This absence of a full name emphasizes his lack of identity.

⁷¹Clarke, Nine Men 7.

of the status quo from eventually surrendering to the materialistic values of the dominant group. Much more might be expected of the intelligent and educated black but in coming to terms with white Canada's labelling he is often warped, frequently adopting values and behaviours that are alien to him. In this connection, the protagonist's rejection of Doreen in "If Only: Only If" primarily because of her social status illustrates how destructive the assumption of foreign values can be, for it leads in this case to self-hatred and an ironic bigotry.

Together, the works in Nine Men Who Laughed communicate the view that the Canadian environment in which black immigrants find themselves debilitates them psychologically, engendering in them a sense of dislocation and often inducing a loss of identity and of moral integrity. Accepting or ignoring a crippling system rather than protesting against its abuses and striving for change is tantamount to committing "moral suicide". The society is ailing but action by blacks as well as whites can restore it to health. The newcomer has a choice, however circumscribed it might be. He can become an instrument of change like his black counterparts in the United States or he can transform himself into a walking ghoul, a mere shadow of his former vibrant self. Whites, also, are able to make choices since they have both the power and the opportunity to effect change. However contradictory or ambiguous Clarke's responses to the

black movements in the US had been, they had certainly persuaded him that more positive action by both blacks and whites is imperative if a less threatening social environment is to be nurtured for all.

Not long after Nine Men Who Laughed came the novel Proud Empires, published by Gollancz in October of 1986. In Clarke's view, this work is a "separate and complete book" but it is nevertheless "specifically linked to that earlier tale", The Prime Minister.⁷² A similar relationship exists between Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack and The Prime Minister. Indeed, as Clarke would agree, the three works comprise a trilogy, though the order in which they were published is somewhat unusual.⁷³ Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack was followed in a logical sequence by Proud Empires but The Prime Minister, which was published first, may be regarded in terms of sequence as the last work in the trilogy.

While the three books were published as separate entities and have different protagonists of varying ages, all

⁷²Colin Rickards, "Austin Clarke Unrepentant of Nostalgia in His Writing," Share 25 May 1988.

⁷³Clarke is quoted by Rickards as stating that in the writing of a trilogy "the second need not follow, in chronological time, the first book" and that Proud Empires "is a sequel to The Prime Minister, because it seems interesting - even so far as the technique of art or the structure of a book is concerned - that you can in fact, enjoy a story, and then want to know how that story came about." Clarke admits that he "was more or less establishing something against the rule that the second book follow chronologically - or even so far as the development of the character was concerned, or the plot - on from the first book."

share the same cultural and historical background. Each book dwells on a specific phase of the life of its central character. Collectively, however, the works encompass the experience of essentially one protagonist who is the product of his colonial heritage, with this "collective" protagonist also symbolising his entire nation. Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack, therefore, may be seen as covering the "collective" protagonist's life between the ages of three and fifteen, at which point Proud Empires takes up the story. The novel follows the protagonist at the age of sixteen to seventeen, the period he spends at the exclusive Harrison College before winning a prestigious scholarship that enables him to attend Trinity College in Toronto, but also deals briefly with his years in Toronto and his return to Barbados. The phases with which these two works are concerned coincide with the final stages of colonial rule, Proud Empires being set specifically in the time of the transition to Barbadian political independence. The Prime Minister takes the story further, delving into the life of the protagonist as he interacts with the community during its post-colonial days. In this novel, the careers of John Moore and the prime minister are expansions of the two options open to Boy at the conclusion of Proud Empires, alternatives that are symbolised by the "small" man - the common people - on the one hand and by the "big" man - represented by Delbert Thorne and Lascelles

- on the other.⁷⁴

One prospect open to Boy, implicit in his conduct and in a variety of symbols and images in the final pages of Proud Empires, is that of accepting a place in the privileged class and of assuming the mantle of power only to perpetuate colonial ideals that have been an intrinsic element in his formal education at Harrison College and at Trinity.⁷⁵ The possibility exists that once he achieves political preeminence power will corrupt him absolutely, and he will continue the manipulation and exploitation of the common man. The prime ministers in Proud Empires and The Prime Minister exemplify this type of political leader, for they both wield power to serve their own interests and to preserve their corrupt regimes. But there is another prospect open to Boy. The

⁷⁴Austin Clarke, Proud Empires (London: Gollancz, 1986) 217-224.

⁷⁵For example, Boy agrees with the plan of the Head of Trinity College to send a "statement of condemnation" to the British High Commissioner in Ottawa expressing "disgust and ... resentment of the dastardly act perpetrated by Nasser" in seizing the Suez Canal (Proud Empires 203) while an African student remains "silent, during the speech and during the singing" of "Rule Britannia" (Proud Empires 204). In addition, he overhears a student contemplating suicide and does nothing, just as he ignores the pleas for help from a woman being brutalized by a man, and his behaviour foreshadows his ignoring his down-trodden people who will also appeal to him when he is in power (Proud Empires 214). Again, Boy's arrival at the Thorne estate in his mulatto uncle's big car rather than in Seabert's small one is another indication of his becoming one of the elite. Also, the house on the Thorne estate reminds him of the plantation house. This, along with his mother's standing in front of the large dwelling awaiting his arrival and his uncle's confident assertion of where he belongs ("This is who you are!"), points to his becoming part of the establishment.

conclusion of Proud Empires also seems to herald the entrance of an educated, benevolent man who is determined to work for the betterment of his people. John Moore, the protagonist of The Prime Minister, is such a man. He is an idealist who believes that power and authority cannot be isolated from moral integrity and who adopts the view that real change is impossible unless the country casts off its colonial heritage, with political power being used to promote the material and psychological well-being of the populace. But Moore cannot survive in this society in which his vision, values and principles attract little support, and his abortive career is indicative of Boy's probable fate should he choose a similar path in life.

An examination of Proud Empires itself reveals that Clarke is reiterating themes from earlier works. The novel contains two main story lines. One of these deals with an ostensibly democratic election and serves as a vehicle for the satirizing of local politics and politicians. The other centres on Boy's formal and informal education and his vying for and winning the scholarship in spite of the political intimidation of his father during the pre-election campaign. Through the latter thread of the novel Clarke again denounces the colonial heritage, particularly in the school system, and shows how inextricably education is bound up with the nature of politicians and political life in Barbados. An elitist school system has conditioned the common man to look up to

people like Boy simply because they possess an education. Furthermore, it has ingrained into the leaders and other important men the values and goals of an alien culture that is irrelevant to the common people, in the process sustaining an elitism that is linked to continued manipulation and exploitation of the ordinary people.

As for politics, Proud Empires contends that the colonial heritage distorts the values of the community. Ascent to the more privileged levels of an intensely class-conscious society becomes for many a prime objective, an obsession introduced in the opening lines of the novel which reveal that although "he lived in a small country village" it was "really from the age of thirteen that Boy wanted to be a big man".⁷⁶ But "bigness" is generally defined not only in relation to wealth, power and authority but also in terms of physical size and strength, brutality, violence, sexual prowess, opportunism and corruption. On the basis of such criteria Boy, like the other villagers, perceives Sarge, John Moore-Adams and Seabert as "big" men, and it is the persistent application of such norms in the determination of eligibility for social prominence that permits the enduring entrenchment of evil and manipulative men in positions of political power. In examining this phase of Boy's life, therefore, Clarke discloses how immoral and unscrupulous men like the prime minister and his cohorts in both Proud Empires and The Prime

⁷⁶Clarke, Proud Empires 7.

Minister attain positions of power.

An important notion in Proud Empires, however, is the culpability of the common man, who is misguided in his definition of "bigness" and consequently tolerates inappropriate attitudes in the politicians. No one is aghast when Seabert announces that he has entered politics with the selfish goals of his "personal betterment" and his "family's betterment".⁷⁷ The ousted prime minister is regarded with admiration because "he is the richest man in the country" and is thought "the best leader" the country has ever had "because he get rich from politics".⁷⁸ Blackmail, terrorist tactics, murder, nepotism, and moral decrepitude in various forms are all accepted as elements of political life. Social reform is virtually impossible, the novel implies, when the prevailing norms permit corrupt men to wield power.

Another theme to which Clarke returns is the stupidity of an education system that is irrelevant to the lives of the people, a subject on which he had elaborated in Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack. In Proud Empires, however, he emphasizes the tendency of this form of education to conceal important truths from even its most successful products until it is perhaps too late for them to change their values and perspectives. This induced incapacity is perhaps one of the reasons why so many educated leaders remain

⁷⁷Clarke, Proud Empires 63.

⁷⁸Clarke, Proud Empires 218.

faithful to the old social ideals and institutional forms. For example, Boy's mother inculcates in him a pride in his Scottish links but not in his African ancestry, and his formal education does nothing to liberate him from his biased perceptions. Even in his last year at Harrison College, Boy

had never heard of the Middle Passage. And even if he had been taught about it at the College, ... he was not eager to bear any ties of family with those men. Africans or slaves⁷⁹

During the drive to the Thorne estate, his uncle tries to stir up within him some recognition of his true identity, depicting celebrated imperialist heroes like Columbus, Codrington and Harris as enemies who should be decried rather than revered by the populace,⁸⁰ but at this stage Boy has already been moulded and conditioned by his colonial upbringing and education and the new interpretation of history has probably come too late to change him. He is already moving toward an elitist niche, the "three-storey structure" which stands "as strong and as powerfully built as the wicket gate in the fortress-like main door of Trinity College".⁸¹

Among the other subjects to which Clarke returns in Proud Empires is that of the role of women in the family and the society. The female is again a person of significance and

⁷⁹Clarke, Proud Empires 22.

⁸⁰Clarke, Proud Empires 223-224.

⁸¹Clarke, Proud Empires 224.

often of tremendous strength. Boy's mother exerts far more influence than his father in shaping the course of the youth's life. She instils in him the "importance" of class and wealth, which form part of his Thorne heritage, and insists that his correct place is with his high-status relatives rather than with Nathan's family. She sings of the dissolution of "earth's proud empires" but ironically every action of hers discloses her commitment to entirely different values and her abiding concern for her son's achievements in the worldly sphere. For her part, the young female, Patricia, epitomises the strength and resourcefulness of the black female. She plans to go to America but if her father loses the election she will go into business to expand "into something big ... a supermarket".⁸² She initiates other steps to equip herself for survival, "taking lessons in dressmaking and needlework".⁸³ Patricia intends to use her intelligence, talent and initiative to prepare herself fully for a life free of dependence on a male.

Clarke resorts to the three-part structure for Proud Empires but the brevity of the sections "Snow" and "Triumph" may well appear unsatisfactory to the reader encountering Clarke's work for the first time. For those familiar with his writing, however, the section "Snow" is a reminder of aspects of the newcomer's experience in Canada, including his

⁸²Clarke, Proud Empires 57.

⁸³Clarke, Proud Empires 52.

loneliness, his alienation, his acceptance of colonial values and his exposure to racism. The final section, "Triumph", is also acceptable in its present form, since The Prime Minister in a sense represents a "continuation" of the novel from this point. On the whole, Proud Empires is a witty, satirical work which captures the vigour of West Indian dialect and society, and though the satire is at times acerbic Clarke portrays his characters with understanding. The novel embodies a consolidation of notions and themes evident in Clarke's earlier works but more importantly it proclaims the virtual impossibility of a genuine and constructive connection between the people and their political representatives in a society still smothered by a powerful colonial heritage.

The publication of two of his major works in 1986 meant that the year was a generally busy one for Clarke. The appearance of Nine Men Who Laughed led immediately to interviews, readings, and promotional tours in Ontario, all undertaken by the writer in addition to his duties on the Board of Censors. As well, he journeyed to Fredericton to speak at a conference on censorship, and he was declared the winner of the Ontario Arts Council Works in Progress competition in which he had entered a fifty-page excerpt from "An American Dutchman", his novel based on his experiences in the United States. In the meantime he continued his rewriting of this novel as well as of "More", his work dealing with whites in Rosedale. One of his more interesting experiences

that year, however, was his visit to England in October for the launching of Proud Empires. On this occasion he spent a month in England, allotting part of the time for a stay at David Burnett's country home but also participating in a BBC interview and a conference on commonwealth literature sponsored by the London Commonwealth Institute. At the latter event, he read from Proud Empires and served on a panel discussing "Black West Indian Writing in Canada".

For much of 1987, Clarke maintained a less feverish pace of activity. He was still engaged in reworking "More" and "An American Dutchman", though he also contributed an occasional article to The Nation in Barbados. Of course, he had never lost his taste for politics. As paradoxically as ever, the radicalism of his views about the fate of blacks in Canada did not preclude an allegiance to the Conservatives. In 1985 he had supported Roy McMurtry's failed campaign for the leadership of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party and in 1987 he again expended much of his time and energy in political activity. He was one of the original members of the Progressive Conservative executive committee for the new riding of Fort York and he donated his services to the Party during its campaign in the provincial elections of that year, serving with the Multiculturalism Committee as it grappled with the task of formulating a Party policy in its sphere of interest. In the wake of the elections, in which the Conservatives were virtually annihilated, Clarke returned to

"An American Dutchman", completing it to his satisfaction by November and then resorting to "reading mainly and trying to overcome the aftermath of too concentrated a life at the typewriter".⁸⁴

The year ended in an exhilarating fashion for Clarke. Penguin Books had slated his Proud Empires for its Canadian publication in February of 1988 and "An American Dutchman" had been sent to his London and New York agents as well as to Penguin of Canada. That Christmas, Clarke was in a mood to celebrate, and there was an abundance of food, drink and presents.⁸⁵ Three days into 1988 he was again at his typewriter working on "More", but a three-day trip to New York followed shortly by a one-week excursion to Miami - in both cases to visit relatives - interfered with his progress.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the year had begun propitiously for him, for his mind was at peace, "turmoil and stress" had been "relegated", and "ambitiousness" was "burning", so that though he was far from wealthy he felt unbridled "energy and enthusiasm" and on his resumption of his labours on "More" the writing in his view went well.⁸⁷

⁸⁴Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 20 November 1987. Clarke was reading "mainly biography of the nineteenth century, with some spicy Hollywood 'lives' thrown in".

⁸⁵Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 2 January 1988.

⁸⁶Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 19 January 1988.

⁸⁷Austin Clarke to J. Baksh, 22 January 1988.

But "An American Dutchman" was a source of some disappointment for Clarke. Penguin (Canada) rejected the manuscript, deeming parts of it "offensive". Clarke was not demoralized by this decision, however, since McClelland and Stewart had shown a strong interest in the novel, and he was confident it would be published,⁸⁸ a confidence that has subsequently proven unwarranted. For the moment, though, he engaged enthusiastically in Penguin's publicity campaign for the Canadian edition of Proud Empires, in the process submitting to several interviews,⁸⁹ but his activities in this connection marked the beginning of a series of diversions that would seriously jeopardize his literary ambitions. By March of 1988, he was forced to concede that his writing was suffering because he had been "distracted by the attention given to this new book" as well as by "too many parties and too much drinking".⁹⁰ In May he flew to Barbados for a four-day visit arranged by Harold Hoyte of The Nation, participating in radio and television interviews and reading for three hours to an enthusiastic audience in the Frank Collymore Hall on the university campus.⁹¹ He understood the urgency of completing "More" but as summer approached writing became even more difficult because of "too many friends and

⁸⁸Austin Clarke to J. Baksh, 19 February 1988.

⁸⁹Austin Clarke to J. Baksh, 19 February 1988.

⁹⁰Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 30 March 1988.

⁹¹Austin Clarke to J. Baksh, 30 May 1988.

too many drinks".⁹² While his pursuits satisfied his need for acclaim, there was the danger that--like some of his characters--he would be so caught up in success that he would lose sight of the means to real personal fulfilment.

A succession of other distractions did not help matters. Clarke's reception on his visit to Barbados had been so positive that Hoyte had asked him to resume his "humorous articles" in The Nation, and he was keen on contributing a few pieces.⁹³ He travelled to Winnipeg in the latter part of June for a week of readings organized by the black journal Caribe and the Barbados Association of Winnipeg,⁹⁴ following this engagement with another reading at Toronto's Harbourfront on July 9. In addition, he spent two days in Ottawa in early July to help brief CUSO recruits assigned to Barbados. In the course of the summer he "put aside" his writing because of his social life with people who dropped in from "all corners of the world".⁹⁵ Whatever hopes he had for a serious resumption of his literary pursuits, however, were dashed when he was appointed to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. A three-week training session in Ottawa during November was a blend of hard work and "gracious living", and he could do little with the manuscript of "An American Dutchman" which he

⁹²Austin Clarke to J. Baksh, 30 May 1988.

⁹³Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 11 June 1988.

⁹⁴Sandiford to Algoo-Baksh, 28 May 1990.

⁹⁵Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 22 July 1988.

had taken with him.⁹⁶ After this, his duties on the Board occupied most of his attention, though he did not deny himself either a pleasant social life⁹⁷ or contact with West Indians and some of their activities in Toronto.⁹⁸ As he confessed in the winter of 1990, the only activity that kept him "close to literature" was the "occasional public reading" and his writing had "to take a kind of back seat for the time being".⁹⁹ In summer and early fall, however, he found the strength to complete his revisions of both "More" and "An American Dutchman" and to begin work on a new collection of short stories.¹⁰⁰

As the final decade of the century begins, Clarke's literary career remains at a critical point. His continuing appointment on the Immigration and Refugee Board has injected additional stability into his financial affairs but, by wearying him and "oppressing" his "sensibilities" through his exposure to the "horrors of Asia and Africa",¹⁰¹ it has also diminished his energy and his inclination to write. Any return to serious artistic activity probably requires a renewed commitment to his art that will take him beyond

⁹⁶Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 5 November 1988.

⁹⁷Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 5 February 1989.

⁹⁸Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 8 September 1989.

⁹⁹Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 16 February 1990.

¹⁰⁰Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 1 December 1990.

¹⁰¹Austin Clarke to Stella Algoo-Baksh, 1 December 1989.

attempts at repairs to "More" and "An American Dutchman", neither of which has won the approval of publishers.¹⁰² Clarke's problem, indeed, is perhaps quite fundamental. In 1982, as he drifted through a period of artistic barrenness, he had sometimes fought for fresh inspiration:

How many nights have I stayed up alone, drinking and thinking and hoping to think of something of literary value, some trick, some clue, some insight to set me ... on the road again of explosive writing?¹⁰³

A similar challenge no doubt awaits him on his return to his literary endeavours. But he has more than once demonstrated that he has the character, and in particular the tenacity, that would enable him to strike out in new directions in his writing.

¹⁰²"An American Dutchman" was turned down by one publisher in the United States in early 1991, and the fate of "More" remains undetermined.

¹⁰³Clarke, "Journal" 120.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

To say that Clarke's work has been influenced by his experience is to offer only a self-evident generalization; the particularities of that generalization, however, are rather less obvious and demand a detailed examination, one that has not hitherto been attempted. It was to provide it that the research leading to this thesis was undertaken. Clarke is clearly a complex figure whose cultural and psychological nature is rooted in an intricately structured society and whose life has unfolded in no simple linear fashion. An analysis of his writing in a biographical context reveals the extent to which his work reflects the complexity of his origins and experience and captures his persistent quest to comprehend and define himself.

The Barbados in which Clarke was born and spent his early life was itself a unique cultural phenomenon, one that within his lifetime was to be significantly reshaped. What he knew in his youth, however, was a class-ridden society founded on gradations of race and colour and penetrated by English values and institutions that seemed, at least for that moment,

virtually indestructible. The implications of this frozen instant in imperial history for Clarke's life and work are delineated from one perspective in the first chapter of this dissertation, which traces its effect on Clarke's values, aspirations and literary interests, and from another in Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack (1980), where Clarke himself expands on the outrage committed by colonialism upon the black psyche. The Canada to which Clarke came in 1955 was in many respects quite different from Barbados; yet it shared with the West Indian island a fundamental characteristic, for it, too, possessed a dominant, largely artificial culture--defined in terms of the WASP heritage--that had evolved without much reference to the realities of the external world and was also to be substantially transformed, in this case into the multi-racial, multi-cultural mosaic that Canada proudly boasts today. It has been Clarke's special destiny to live within the ambit of two dissimilar societies, each marked by accelerating change, and then to try through his writing to understand and come to terms with the black experience and in the process to define himself. His works are partly unconscious vehicles for the search for the inner person, and his writing thus becomes a shoring up of fragments to prevent destruction of the man. It reassures him that he does have an identity, though one not submerged in a particular locale, for in the end he comes to see himself as belonging to both societies and yet in no complete sense to either.

Clarke's quest for identity has been given further complexity by his contact with the black protest in the United States. Sympathetic to the black cause and to elements of the philosophy of its leadership, Clarke has tried in his own way to promote the advancement of the blacks. Yet he could not--indeed, would not--view the black movement as his own, and he has rejected the extremes in both its strategy and its art. The black protest has nonetheless been the balm that has soothed and healed his psyche, wounded by the colonial experience, by the initial stages of his association with Canada and by his encounter with the intense racism of America; it has nourished his faith in the inherent worth and dignity of the black man, in the importance of the voice of the black writer and in the value of his own work as an artist.

It is against the background of his multi-faceted experience that Clarke's emergence as a major writer must be seen. In a sense, he has transcended the clash and meeting of cultures that have made up his life and provided the substance of his work. Resisting loyalties that might fetter his artistic vision, he has been able to negotiate his way successfully through the series of social worlds in which he has participated and to soar above them all to a commanding vantage point from which to speak. At the same time, he has adhered to a certain literary tradition in which his education and reading once immersed him. In this connection, it is

entirely fruitless to examine his writing in terms of ruling orthodoxies of "postmodernism"; by upbringing and inclination he is an "old fashioned" writer, for his technique has its origins essentially in the nineteenth century English novel. While he is guilty of the vice of being unfashionable, however, his work demonstrates attendant virtues: it possesses depth of characterization, it often exhibits subtlety and complexity of plotting, and it is enlivened by an animated elaboration of theme, a judicious use of symbol and imagery, and an attentiveness to detail that lends the writing both vividness and authenticity. Clarke is significant, therefore, as a Barbadian-Canadian who is the first major black writer of the country and who has succeeded not only in Canada but also in Britain, the United States and the Caribbean. He is also noteworthy as a writer who has produced a substantial body of work, the best of which is very good indeed and will always demand attention for its own sake, not merely as the accomplishment of a black West Indian Canadian who made it.

In the Canadian context, Clarke has earned a place for himself by adding to the body of literature by immigrant writers. He joins such authors as Susanna Moodie, Catherine Parr Traill, John Marlyn, Frederick P. Grove and Henry Kreisel, who in their fiction and non-fiction focus on the British or European immigrant experience in Canada and, though he differs from some of these in that he cannot regard his

native society as a true place of refuge from the perils of his new land, he depicts the black newcomer's experience with the same unrelenting courage and openness. His arrival in Canada coincided with the first systematic transplantations of black Caribbean immigrants into the country; he has immortalized these early West Indian arrivals and documented their history through his art, in the course of this showing that, though they have escaped the battling with nature, with the elements or with the natives that the early white immigrants have faced, they have nevertheless been confronted by obstacles no less formidable and through their fortitude and tenacity have also survived and found a niche in their new society.

Clarke's study of the black West Indian immigrant is probing and insightful. He is the first black Canadian writer to investigate the social and psychological dimensions of the black immigrant experience in Canada and the first to recognize the inner dualism that is inevitably the lot of the black newcomer when the white society defines him as an inferior outsider while the black movements in the United States proclaim him a person of dignity and untapped potential. He unhesitatingly addresses the question of interracial connections and through his scrutiny of liaisons such as those between blacks and whites in the Toronto trilogy he bravely confronts the touchy issue of interracial sexual relationships and their ramifications. He also leads the way

among black Canadian novelists in highlighting the love-hate relationship in which the West Indian immigrant often engages with Canada--love because the country offers opportunities that would never be available to him in the Caribbean and hate because he quickly comes to feel that he will never truly be accepted as part of the social fabric. Indeed, Clarke explodes the myth of Canada as a society free of racism; he counters the perception common among West Indians in the islands that this country is a sanctuary and a place of limitless opportunity with an image of Canada as a land tainted by racism, albeit a racism that is subtle and muted in its expression, and he goes beyond a mere insinuation of racist tendencies to trace the degradation and destruction the latter are likely to induce in the black immigrant.

In the West Indian context, Clarke is again of no mean significance. Like other Caribbean writers, he is interested in the vital currents and forces at work in the local society and not in manners and morals, and he brings to the centre of the stage the peasant and the working class. But his work achieves more than an exposure of the society's ills. Vidia S. Naipaul observes that, living "in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands... ." ¹ Though perhaps not intentionally, Clarke's work fulfils such a function. By

¹Vidia S. Naipaul, The Middle Passage (London: Andre Deutsch, 1962) 68.

examining both directly and indirectly what he has experienced as a black in Barbados, and to some extent in North America, Clarke holds up to his fellow Barbadians a reflection of themselves and their own fate, and in seeking to find his own sense of identity he helps them to find theirs. It is this consciousness of who they are and what they have been that helps to make possible the transformation of the West Indian blacks into a truly independent people. As C.L. R. James claims, West Indian books helped people "to make the mental and moral transition which new circumstances required."² Clarke's writing must certainly have played some part in this process.

But there are other facets of Clarke's work that have enriched West Indian literature. The canon makes a wide sweep; it captures in art the stages in the growth of Barbadian nationalism, elaborating on their social and psychological dimensions. Yet it also places under scrutiny smaller segments of Caribbean life. In his treatment of the black family, for example, Clarke goes well beyond conventional scholarship to search out its psychological dynamics, such as when he attends to the internal conflict a son experiences over a father who has deserted or to the descent by males into aggressiveness as a means of compensating for their enfeeblement in the community. His

²C. L. R. James, Beyond A Boundary (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983) 124.

work also earns him the distinction of being the first novelist to undertake an incisive study of the West Indian female, depicting the black woman as typically a person of tremendous strength who can on countless occasions take credit for the survival of the family but who, ironically, is often an unwitting accomplice in the emasculation of the male.

As a writer, Clarke merits admiration in less parochial terms. He has shown a willingness to explore a variety of genres, among them poetry, drama, short fiction, the novel, the autobiography, and journalistic forms, and he has pursued themes--such as alienation, isolation, and the quest for identity--that are universal in their relevance. One of his greatest triumphs, however, has been his command of dialect. Like Naipaul and Selvon, he has played a role in rendering the use of dialect a sophisticated device in the service simultaneously of comic effect and social commentary. Equally remarkable is the character of the dialect he has created and sustained; its naturalness and vibrancy are among its most impressive attributes. A comparison with Victor Reid's New Day (1949), which represents an early but heavy handed attempt at West Indian dialect, reveals just how much Clarke has attained by way of injecting vigour and spontaneity into the language of the "peasant".

Another of Clarke's strengths as a writer is his ability to preserve a tempered and reasonably objective treatment of theme and subject matter. His work tends to be

typified by a relative absence of bitterness, stridency and didacticism, a quality attributable at least in part to specific factors. To begin with, Clarke's innate sense of humour permits him to view the world around him objectively but sympathetically, and his willingness to examine himself as an element of this world militates against his becoming unduly pious and judgemental. Again, his successes in Canada, the United States and England, his association with white Toronto artists, and his close relationship with whites like Frank Collymore, Roy McMurtry and David Burnett have contributed to an ambivalence toward white society that, except for occasional reversals, has inclined him to moderate his hostility toward the dominant groups in Canada and ultimately even to treat whites sympathetically in his work.

Perhaps no less laudable than Clarke's success as a writer are his accomplishments as a man. To have torn himself free from the illusory identifications of a colonial society, to have found pride in his blackness, and then to have grown beyond this to accept the duality of his allegiances are achievements of the highest order. He might easily have succumbed to the negativism usually bred by frustration. Instead, his resilience and determination have enabled him to rise above the problems, the setbacks and the obstacles that have confronted him at various points in his life, diverting him away from complete submission to despair and from the abandonment of his art. As a result, he has contributed to

his adopted country as both an artist and a member of the community. His participation in politics, his willingness to serve political organizations despite his personal failure in that arena, his association with the Ontario Board of Censors, his laments in newspapers and magazines regarding the evils of racism, and more recently his involvement with the Immigration and Refugee Board are indicative of a man who has refused to reject Canadian society simply because he has perceived ills within it and who has instead attempted in different ways to hasten the eradication of such failings. Newer black writers will be greatly indebted to him for his pioneering literary efforts, especially for his fearlessness in choosing to write honestly about the black experience in Barbados, Canada and the United States. As a man, furthermore, Clarke may well be a role model for other blacks, for his life has demonstrated that the black man can carve a place for himself in a white society without "accommodating" to it, without surrendering his self-respect and his own unique identity.

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Amongst Thistles and Thorns
The Meeting Point
When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks
Storm of Fortune
The Bigger Light
The Prime Minister
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When Women Rule
Nine Men Who Laughed
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