

- ⁶ Margaret MacDonell, "Bards on the Polly," *The Island Magazine* (Fall-Winter 1978), p. 37.
- ⁷ Thomas H. Raddall, *Halifax, Warden of the North* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 65.
- ⁸ Thomas McCulloch, *The Stepsure Letters* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960).
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Mather Byles to Rebecca Almon, 6 April 1790, Byles Papers, typescript, MG1 Volume 163, Folder 2, 54, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
- ¹² Raddall, pp. 121-23.
- ¹³ Thomas H. Raddall, *His Majesty's Yankees* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), pp. 37-38.
- ¹⁴ Thomas Raddall, *At The Tide's Turn* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 54.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Thomas Raddall, *Pride's Fancy* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. xii.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

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CARIBBEAN REVOLUTION & LITERARY CONVENTION

"It took place in a foreign country, as everything does." Margaret Atwood: "Circle/Mud Poems."

CONVENTIONAL WAYS OF LOOKING at ex-colonial cultures mainly just reinforce colonialism, or are unknowingly neo-colonial: this is the basic message in Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* and Austin Clarke's *The Prime Minister*. These novels not only decry the political naiveté of tourists in the Caribbean, who see only postcard prettiness or its underside, racial violence; they also challenge the linguistic naiveté of those who would ignore the political volatility in the region to write of it in an inappropriate language.

Both novels are by outsiders about outsiders. Clarke, an expatriate Barbadian living in Toronto, writes about a West Indian expatriate returning to his unnamed country (unnamed — but obviously Barbados) after a long period abroad, hoping to contribute to its development through his new position as Minister of Culture. Atwood, a Canadian who has visited the Caribbean and read Austin Clarke, writes about a Canadian journalist who visits a fictional Caribbean island in search of a rest and material for a travel piece. Both these fictional innocents abroad encounter revolution, become unwillingly involved, and flee the consequences.

Both writers use these simple adventure plots to explore the political dimensions of language. In *Bodily Harm*, the pressure toward a crippling self-consciousness exerted by journalism's need for instant and disposable commentary renders Rennie Wilford effectively silent: her writing holds thought at bay, instead of inviting it. In part, her story depicts someone slowly learning to write — to think — again. She learns that her skills at labeling, and thus dismissing, reality are illusory. It will not go away. Jake's career as a packaging expert (all style, no content) matches Rennie's as a journalist — no wonder together their dialogue sounds like Hollywood movie repartee from the 1940's. Their brittle style, however, collides against the pious maxims of Rennie's Griswold childhood, the colourful political slogans of the Caribbean, the ambiguous "please" screamed by Rennie's anonymous neighbour in either pain or ecstasy, and the numerous atrocities for which there seem to be no words. Atwood's search for the words to make her readers see involves exposing the hollowness of language misused. Believing that the "aim of all suppression . . . is to silence *the voice*, abolish the words, so that the only voices and words left are those of the ones

in power,"¹ Atwood depicts this process as it occurs simultaneously in Canada (through market and social pressures on Rennie) and in the Caribbean, somewhat more crudely (through overt political oppression). The voice of *Bodily Harm* assumes many disguises in its attempt to serve, as Atwood believes the novel must serve, as "the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community."²

For Atwood, then, the language of contemporary pop culture poses the greatest threat to Canadian writing. Clarke's poet-politician John Moore experiences the neo-colonial challenge differently. For him, the Miltonic rhythms and Edenic myths of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* pose the greatest temptation, while the indigenous strength of the local calypso or political speech remains beyond his reach. Unlike Rennie's Canada, his world heeds the newspaper article. Although famed overseas as a serious writer, in his own land he has no audience. When his press conference is suppressed, his friend Shirley tells him: "You are just a witness without a defense, without a mouth."³ He is further silenced through silence: when a fraudulent article libelling him is published in the local paper, the government destroys him by their "no comment." This silencing, this refusal to comment, involves a refusal to recognize his existence. He himself becomes invisible: "*He was conspicuous in Toronto.* But here he was just another black man, and no one could tell the difference."

An early image defines the pattern of his experience. Discovering a scrap of newspaper with his photograph and a headline announcing his return, he sees that "tires and recent footprints had left their mark on the entire story that went with the photograph; so he could not read what they had said about his returning." This incident mirrors his difficulties in "reading" the culture he is supposed to be directing. His own country, because of his

Western education, now appears to him as a partially obliterated text. In attempting to reconstruct it, he turns to externally defined images: the paradise of the Northern Hemisphere's dreams and the net of intrigue of Graham Greene's *Comedians*. What is locally generated remains obscure, beyond his grasp. He is warned to watch what he says, and learns to listen for a hidden meaning behind the words of others, but remains puzzled by what he cannot understand. He never hears the joke that condemns Juliet to social oblivion, never sees the photographs that cost Weekesie his life, never grasps the intricacies of the revolutionary plots that cost him his job, and he never sees the Prime Minister face to face, except on the television screen when everything is over. His own invisibility is merely an extension of the significance of these gaps in his experience, and a sign of his powerlessness in a world he had hoped, naively, to change.

Rennie's powerlessness in *Bodily Harm* is also linked to her invisibility, although ironically she has first assumed it as protective camouflage.⁴ At first her very visibility as a tourist tends to make her invisible as a person; later, in jail, she becomes literally invisible, in that she is hidden from the outside world and not important enough for the Canadian government to protest her incarceration. Her operation begins her disappearance; her imprisonment completes it. Yet even as a child, crucial absences characterized her experience. One of her first memories is of being shut in the cellar by herself for doing something wrong, but she can't remember what. In such ways, Atwood underlines the connections between Rennie's Canadian and her Caribbean experiences. Safety is an illusion anywhere in the world, as silence is a weapon. The silences in *Griswold* are so powerful they are almost visible. In *Toronto*, Rennie is haunted by a faceless stranger, the man

with the rope, who symbolizes all the unvoiced threats to women which are immanent in our culture. Silencing language, either literally through denying it speech or more subtly through trivializing its use, becomes the chief form of violence depicted in both novels.

While Clarke uses the metaphor of the comedian, the actor who can imitate action but cannot initiate it, and of the witness, who can watch but cannot bear witness, Atwood combines images of the journalist who reacts but never acts with that of the tourist who sightsees but cannot see. Both novels show how tourism turns foreign cultures into objects of cultural consumption. (The Canadian tourists in *The Prime Minister* ask unthinkingly where they can buy some "broads on this island"; Rennie regrets her choice of St. Antoine when she learns how little there is to consume there.) Both novels also equate tourism with irresponsibility, showing their tourists as the new imperialists, happily exploiting a country they can easily leave behind. Atwood, however, takes her analysis one step further than Clarke's, to argue that tourism is the twentieth-century way of life, not just in the Caribbean but everywhere. Rennie is just as much a tourist in Canada, writing lifestyle pieces about trends, as she is in the Caribbean, writing about resorts. She sees every aspect of life as something to be labelled and consumed, and that is the essence of tourism. Condemned to superficiality, the tourist can only see what has been selected for him to see: he sees in prescribed and circumscribed patterns. Suggestively, the museum and tourist site in *Bodily Harm* is also the jail. Trained to see the other as object, the tourist carries the jail of his assumptions with him wherever he goes. After the failed coup, Rennie's metaphorically jailed consciousness is literally jailed: she sees the trap her tourism has led her to; but ironically, in attempting to imagine an escape, she

constructs yet another hackneyed plot, in which jaded journalist becomes romantic reporter. Yet Atwood's only too realistic conclusion does not deny the validity of responsible reporting, as the achievement of *Bodily Harm* itself indicates. The novel bears witness to the ways we fool ourselves, as well as to the ways we fool others.

Atwood's "permanent tourists" (to borrow a phrase from P. K. Page) are also voyeurs: tourism is a kind of pornography. Both activities use the concept of "aesthetic distance" as a respectable cover for aggression. Clarke, too, links the violence of sex to the violence of tourism. The airplane bringing tourists to the island in *The Prime Minister* punches itself "like a penis into the valley." John Moore's lyrical evocations of his country as a beautiful black woman, however, detract from his analysis: they are sentimental and embarrassing. To define paradise as the possession of a beautiful black woman is still to be caught in the tourist trap of trying voyeuristically to possess another, instead of learning self-possession. John Moore's failure to possess himself completely results in false visions of woman as paradise regained, and idle daydreams of power, both of which are undercut by the physical reflection of his general impotence — his sexual impotence. John Moore cannot see what the reader can — that his impotence derives from his isolation from his community and from his ignorance of its contexts.

What had been implicit in *The Prime Minister* is made explicit in *Bodily Harm*. Tourists are the new imperialists, colonizing themselves as much as others. In some ways, a colony is to a metropolis as a woman is to a man. Atwood's epigraph from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* stresses the complicity of the victim in the act of victimization and the necessity for questioning traditional ways of seeing. Berger writes: "A man's presence suggests

what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman's presence . . . defines what can and cannot be done to her." The same might be said of a colony. The authorities on both fictional islands welcome tourism, despite its disruptive effects on their societies, because of the immediate wealth it can afford them. Their complicity also reveals a failure of imagination. They cannot imagine questioning the basic assumptions underlying the societies they have inherited; their innovations consist solely of attempting to introduce Western efficiency into the exploitation of their resources. Only Dr. Minnow in *Bodily Harm* dreams of substantial change which would revolutionize thinking instead of merely power structures, and he is killed.

Although Rennie and John Moore remain trapped in their basically American or British ways of seeing, the reader learns to see the inadequacy of these languages as ways to convey a Canadian or Caribbean reality. Both *Bodily Harm* and *The Prime Minister* parody the imperialist novel of an education through a confrontation with the colonial "heart of darkness." The very structure of such a novel militates against its protagonist discovering anything that can be useful to the development of the colony's point of view. Clarke's closeness to Moore in *The Prime Minister* creates some doubt as to how clearly he himself perceives Moore's failure. Yet Clarke raises some important issues through Moore. What is the poet's role in an ex-colony? Should he try to provide leadership through his poetry or through political action? Or should he divorce his writing from society entirely? *The Prime Minister* remains pessimistic about the ability of literature to effect change, though it is ambivalent about the power of the written word. No one reads John Moore's poetry, but the newspaper runs the country. Is Clarke suggesting that the writer who genuinely wishes to

contribute to his country's real development (as opposed to the development of underdevelopment) should turn to journalism or music, to the popular forms that are reaching the people because they employ their language? But if he is, then why does he continue to write novels? Because he is trying to change the novel form, to make it more accessible as a popular genre, reflecting political concerns and challenging "literary standards of the colonization period."⁵ The powerful writing in *The Prime Minister* records the language of the people, particularly Kwame's speeches. As John Moore recognizes in a rare moment of insight: "The speech had ceased to be a political harangue and had become a work of art. . . ." Its strength mocks the false sentimentality of John Moore's lyrical evocations of "the blessed woman with her black beauty." If one could be sure that Clarke meant his readers to see John Moore as a false poet, then all would be well, but Clarke carries ambiguity to the point of confusion.

In *Bodily Harm* there is less uncertainty. The disorienting fragmentation in narrative technique questions the conventions of chronology, of cause and effect and of aesthetic distance, and exposes the language of cliché. By deliberately using an unsympathetic central character, Atwood forces her readers to think as well as feel. She provides no more answers — indeed, possibly fewer alternatives to the language of the metropolis — than does Clarke, but her questioning is more incisive.

Clarke's concern in *The Prime Minister* is to find a creatively violent language to challenge the old Miltonic rhythms that still hold John Moore's imagination in sway, but Clarke himself seems moved by some nostalgia for these European forms and by some fear of where violence in the language may lead him, so that *The Prime Minister* leaves us in limbo. Atwood writes with a surer sense of moral

purpose. She believes "that fiction writing is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community," and that to write is to bear witness. *Bodily Harm* itself bears witness to how power operates in our society. Revolution is a messy, obvious way of quelling dissent. What *The Prime Minister* and *Bodily Harm* both show is how opposition may be censored before it has ever surfaced: in the writer's selection of literary form and language. What they do not show is whether ex-colonial cultures can develop their own voices sufficiently to circumvent these obstacles.

NOTES

- ¹ Margaret Atwood, "An End to Audience?" *Dalhousie Review*, 60, No. 3 (Autumn 1980), 427.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 424.
- ³ Austin Clarke, *The Prime Minister* (Don Mills: General Publishing, 1977).
- ⁴ Margaret Atwood, *Bodily Harm* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981).
- ⁵ Austin Clarke, "Some Speculations as to the Absence of Racialistic Vindictiveness in West Indian Literature," in Lloyd W. Brown, ed., *The Black Writer in Africa and the Americas* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1973), p. 178.

DIANA BRYDON

SOME NOTES TOWARDS "UNDER THE VOLCANO"

AS I WAS RECENTLY working through the Lowry manuscripts of *Under the Volcano* in the Special Collections Division at the University of British Columbia, I had in mind a number of small but annoying questions about the book which I hoped might be clarified by the drafts. Some were, for Lowry in his early drafts sometimes dropped a clue as to the source of an allusion or the intention behind a phrase; and others, such as the identity

of "Lee Maitland," remain as big a mystery as ever. I want to comment on six of these points, partly because each touches upon a small but significant aspect of the novel so far overlooked by commentators more interested in the dark wood than the trees that comprise it, but also because, collectively, they show something about the way that Lowry worked and reworked his sources and early drafts. I shall take each of these one by one, but the growing complexity of the answers should demonstrate that Lowry's art has at times a most curiously and intricately wrought structure.

1. *Why does Yvonne get upset, p. 58,¹ when the Consul says "Peegly Weegly"?*

This still remains a mystery. The Consul points with his stick through the trees towards the "little American grocery store, catercorner to Cortez Palace," and Yvonne, hurrying on and biting her lips, is determined not to cry, whereupon the Consul, taking her arm, is suddenly contrite, saying, "I'm sorry, I never thought." Thought of what? The drafts here are of little help, but in one and only one version of the chapter (*UBC* 10-7, p. 10)² both Yvonne's grief and the Consul's contrition were heavily accentuated, still without an explanation. "Piggly Wiggly," more correctly "Piggly Wiggly Southern," is a supermarket chain based in Georgia and Florida, dealing in groceries and general merchandise. There was a celebrated one in Mexico City, on *Independencia*, the first of its kind in Mexico, and a smaller branch in Cuernavaca, not quite "catercorner to Cortez Palace" but not far removed, being located on the *Avenida Guerrero* about one block up from the *Zócalo*. One is forced to speculate: perhaps Yvonne is reminded of her dead child, to whom she might have said, "This little piggy goes to market..." Or perhaps that very rhyme — "This lit-