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The cityscape in a few caribbean-canadian short stories

Judith Misrahi-Barak

- 1 An astonishing number of the Canadian short stories published since the 1970s have been written by writers who have emigrated from the Caribbean. Even if most of these writers started out with poetry, one cannot fail to perceive that all of them have turned to the medium of the short story in order to express themselves and deal with the predicament of the immigrant, as if the very frame of the short story made it easier to master it all. André Alexis, Neil Bissoondath, Dionne Brand, Austin Clarke, Cyril Dabydeen, Claire Harris, Rabindranath Maharaj, Suzette Mayr, Marlene Nourbese Philip, Althea Prince, Samuel Selvon, Olive Senior, Makeda Silvera: all these Caribbean-Canadian writers, be they already well-known or up-and-coming, are extremely prolific. It is impossible to encompass all the Caribbean-Canadian short stories and present them all at once, even if only superficially — it is not the aim of this paper. I shall focus only on those Caribbean-Canadian writers who have taken the Canadian urban environment as source and material of their creative work¹. I would like to highlight some of their similarities as well as a few general perspectives.
- 2 Since ethnic minorities tended to concentrate in urban areas, it seems that the cityscape offers a *topos* where Caribbean-Black identity is most likely to be structured, although so-called *migrant* identity may reveal some features of Canadian identity itself. This is why I have chosen to focus on the city as it is developed in Caribbean-Canadian short stories: beyond its social, historical and political dimensions and its role as a crucible, it offers an ideal projecting canvas for the construction of a self-image, be it individual or collective. It will then be easier to understand how the cityscape provides the opportunity to recompose the inner and aesthetic space, mapping out new territories for the self.
- 3 Austin Clarke is the first Caribbean-Canadian writer to reach international fame in describing the plight of West Indian immigrants, and more particularly Barbadian immigrants. If his most well-known work is his Toronto Trilogy, his short stories also project to the foreground the same migrant characters. All his most recently published

works are books of short stories in which he depicts the Canadian city as offering the highest rate possible of solitude, discrimination and hate². Emigration clearly appears to be a burden, even if it was willingly chosen — an exile one can never reconcile oneself with.

- 4 John Clement Ball is quite right when he says that Clarke's characters can be put in two categories³ :

In the first group are those whom the city has failed, whose experience of Toronto is of exclusion, poverty and loss.... The characters in Clarke's second category allow chinks to become black holes in which racial identity disappears. There are degrees of deracination and assimilation of course, but a typical Clarke protagonist of this group embraces white values and attitudes that erase his black distinctiveness for a wannabe whiteness. And while some measure of material or social success may result, the consequences of inauthenticity are usually devastating. (12-13)

- 5 *Nine Men who Laughed*, one of Clarke's first books of short stories, presents West Indian immigrants who have come to doubt and hate themselves and to experience a state of isolation and depression, because their very presence in Canada is resented and because they have been categorized as 'immigrants'. A good number of his characters represent the powerless, the colonised, the exiled. "Canadian Experience"⁴ particularly deals with the void created by exile and urban existence, the self-doubt generated in and by the white world :

The only sound that comes from the larger group of people going down into the subway is the hurrying pounding of heels on the clean, granite steps and the rubbing of hands on the squeaking rails, polished like chrome. More people are coming up out of the subway at greater speed as if they are fleeing the smell of something unwholesome. (40)

- 6 The Barbadian man who is the main protagonist of the story cannot even get out of the lift to go to a job interview, so well has he ingested and digested the image of worthless immigrant that the Canadian white working world has been quick to impose upon him. In "The Collector"⁵, Nick, another Barbadian, collects empty bottles in order to earn a coin or two. He scours the wastegrounds of the city and knows all its dirt, thus symbolically pointing to the idea that collecting garbage is all that is left for immigrants to do: "he was plunged into the gutters of Toronto, searching for empty wine bottles. He found them in laneways, parking lots and garbage cans (...). Nick knows the city better than the mayor because he knows the city's garbage." (13-14)
- 7 These two short stories show immigrants in Clarke's fiction as the ones who suffer most from discrimination and loss of self-esteem. Others, on the contrary, struggle against victimization by an overblown desire to assimilate to white society and values, even at the risk of jeopardising their Black identity. Such is the case for instance in "Four Stations in his Circle"⁶ which highlights the immigrant's complex that turns into a neurosis: "Immigration had transformed Jefferson Theophillis Belle; and after five years made him deceitful, selfish and very ambitious... Jefferson had his mind on a house and a piece of land round the house. 'I must own a piece o'Canada!' (51) He is even arrested by the police because he roams at night in Rosedale, one of the wealthiest and most exclusive districts in Toronto. Jefferson will finally manage to buy the house of his dreams, but only to realise that his neighbours believe him to be the gardener! The short story ends quite tragically with the news of his mother's death being broken to Jefferson (he had refused to give her the money needed for an operation), just as he is mimicking diplomats and ambassadors in front of his mirror... Hence neither is he

integrated in the white community, nor is he part of the Black community anymore, and the reflection in the mirror is an empty one, just like the one in the shop windows — his whole life comes down to mimicry. But here, the motif of the house is important enough for us to stop and examine it more closely.

- 8 The house is the smallest unit in the city but contains some of the problematics of the city at large. The house, or the apartment, in Caribbean-Canadian fiction, often offers a concrete image of what it can be like to have emigrated from the Caribbean to Canada. In Clarke's, but also in other writers' short stories, the house is often that of the Canadian employer for whom the West Indian domestic works⁷. "I'm Running for my Life"⁸ stages a young woman working at the house of a man whose wife has just run away. May dreams that she will one day be able to "upgrade her life in the city... invest in the future" (75), but she fears being fired before she has made a woman of herself. So she tries to keep a low profile, she almost blends in with the furniture. She is reduced to forging a borrowed identity for herself, that does not fit her. Like Blue Beard's young wife, she steals into the forbidden bedroom/cabinet of her mistress :

She had run her fingers over the designer dresses that filled one closet. She had touched, had opened, re-touched and had sampled more than three vials of perfumes.... She tried on the polka-dotted blue silk dress a second time, and was convinced that she looked much better in it than *her*. And with this, she possessed it in her mind; felt that it belonged to her... (77)

- 9 In fact, the house is clearly the metonymic expression of *the other's* territory, all the more impossible to inhabit as it still reflects a master-slave relationship, as is the case in Neil Bissoondath's short story "The Power of Reason"⁹, where the working day of a domestic and mother of three is described. Monica works at several houses, including Ms Galahad's :

It is Ms Galahad's day.... Whenever Monica enters Ms Galahad's house, once she has shut the door behind her.... she feels the house close in around her, feels it pull her into its own alien world.

It is in no way an exceptional house. Two storeys. A roof of green shingles slipping at the edges. Living room, dining room, kitchen. Bedrooms upstairs. A yard out back the size of a grave. (206-209)

- 10 The world of *the other* is described as so heavily *alien* that the only possible comparison is that of a *grave*, which also provides an image for the city and for the whole country in which the Black immigrant finds his integrity shattered to pieces.
- 11 If Austin Clarke and Neil Bissoondath offer quite a bleak outlook on Black employment, the figure of the West Indian female domestic is treated by Dionne Brand in a radically different way, much more militant and politically oriented. In "Blossom — Priestess of Oya, Goddess of Winds, Storms and Waterfalls"¹⁰, the eponymous character is also a new immigrant in Toronto and also works as a domestic in order to survive. Blossom makes her struggle against sexual and racial discrimination heard loud and clear following her employer's attempts to rape her :

The next day Blossom show up on Balmoral with a placard saying the Dr. So-and-So was a white rapist; and Peg and Betty bring a Black Power flag and the three of them parade in front of that man house whole day. Well is now this doctor know he mess with the wrong woman... (34)

- 12 Blossom's real struggle however will lead her back to ancestral spirits: she becomes Priestess of Oya, Goddess of Winds, Storms and Waterfalls. She moves out of her employer's house and chooses her own dwelling place — in spirituality, in her

ancestors' words, in what others would call madness. That is to say she refuses to play the part of the hermit crab, content with borrowing the other's house and thinking one can do without one of one's own.

- 13 Hence, if the house is a metonymic expression of *the other's* domination, the fact of possessing a house of one's own becomes the symbol of social integration and success, of increased identity. But far from leading to inner peace and self-realization, the house is often depicted in Caribbean-Canadian short stories as a trap or even a grave, a sort of outgrowth of a city in which it has been impossible to make room for oneself. It is hardly the ultimate refuge one could have expected it to be. In another short story by Clarke, "Trying to Kill Herself"¹¹, the main female protagonist lives alone in a basement flat, "this underground living, this confining hole" (98). As early as the first pages of the short story, a gloomy and oppressive atmosphere rises from the flat. The only link that the woman entertains with the outer world, other than her day's work and her Bible readings, is the telephone — phone conversations with three girl friends who don't even know her precise address. This fact highlights the urban solitude she suffers from :

.... suppose her mind could no longer withstand the torment, and her mind snapped, and she became mad, insane, gone off the head. If any of these things happened, there was no one in the whole world, meaning no one in this city who could find her. Who could come and rescue her. And put her into the ambulance. And if she died, no one to notify anybody. (122)

- 14 Her anguish of dying alone is to be found in many other short stories, for instance in "A Slow Death"¹²: "Could he die in this house and nobody would know until the gas company came to read the meter?" (159). The element in "Trying to Kill herself" that turns things upside down is the intrusion of a dog, asking to be let in, away from the cold and snow. The woman takes care of the animal until it gets a little too close and familiar, rubbing itself against her legs — she throws it outside again, so violently she has the impression she has killed it. From then onwards, the slow spiral of depression engulfs her. She locks herself in her house, until she meets her own death. She also becomes gradually aware of details in the neighbourhood that she had ignored until then :

It was on this day that she began to notice the regulation of the postman's visit, the dropping of the advertising materials through her letter box, the routine of the noise and footsteps and the growling between man and woman coming through the thin wall that divided her from next door. Above her head, she could make out no definition of their lives: it was one heavy thud as if they walked in winter boots. (120-121)

- 15 As madness makes its way into her psyche, the metaphor of Jonah and the whale begins to emerge: "She pictured herself as Jonah; and imagined herself in the ship and in the cabin and in the bowels of trouble.... She was certain now that she, like Jonah, was a castout, a castaway, an outcast." (124). It becomes quite clear that the house, the district and the city are one and the same hell :

She was in a fish's belly. The basement where she had been lying, flat on her back, was like the bowels of the sea, she could feel the encirclement there, the hollowness there, the darkness there; and the rumbling of the furnace, like the organs in a stomach digesting and resisting matter. And she felt during that time that she was lost in darkness. (125)

16 The biblical allegory applies to the whole city. And so as to identify more precisely with the prophet, even without any prophecy to utter, the woman swallows a handful of pills and drowns herself in her bath tub.

17 The house in Clarke's "A Slow Death" is just as emblematic of a relationship with the city :

It began very slowly, almost imperceptibly, his hating the house in which he lived for fifteen years; and without warning, like the melting of the stub of snow at the end of his walk that signalled in the spring. This hatred became a rage, an explosion, and consumed his mind. It happened soon after his wife died. Her scent and her spirit remained in the house, quiet at first, and like an aggressive tenant afterwards, taking up most of his time and his space, although he was now occupying the three-storied house by himself. (151)

18 If the house has become unbearable to live in, it is because it has accumulated all the misery and frustration of "a past, unhappy life" (153). But in this short story, a park just outside the house provides an escape from this misery. Sibelius Park, maybe because of its musical connotations, becomes for the main protagonist a "vacationland of his imagination" (156)... It constitutes a kind of vacuum in which he can breathe more freely, and also offers a viewpoint onto the outside that the house didn't offer. From the park, it is possible to witness the changes going on in the city and particularly in the area of Toronto called the Annex, which is quite central to the development of the story — the man appears to be sorry about the 'town-housing' policy in the area :

Fifteen years ago this house was on a street whose houses had an ordinary beauty and working-class charm. The street was inhabited by Jews and Anglo-Saxons who were still trampling through snow to catch a five-o' clock streetcar in the morning; by people of modest means and fair-sized families, with children who played safely in the park. But all of a sudden the street became popular, enviable and expensive; and just as suddenly the neighbourhood became known as The Annex. He never found out what it was annexed to....

'Town-housing' sprang up like the bulbs he nurtured in the city parks. He watched the street change from a stable, working-class district to one made up of lawyers, university professors and architects. (154-155)

19 When the man finally makes the decision to sell the house, the final irony is that, without his being aware of it, he sells it precisely to a property developer who plans to build town-houses himself... The final explosion is deliberately prepared so that both the house and its inhabitant disappear within it.

20 If the house and its inhabitants are often the victims of an urban expansion that follows liberal economic principles, the pair is sometimes dissociated, and the house can even become a threat to the person living in it, once more reflecting the threat of the city. In "Body and Soul"¹³, one of the short stories in Althea Prince's excellent first book, it goes as far as treason. Dolores is the living example of the Caribbean woman who has emigrated to Toronto and found a secretary's job. She's living in a bourgeois area with enough money to live comfortably, but she is only concerned with the image that others have of her, and she wishes it as different as possible from her native Caribbean. Caught up in this post-colonial alienation, she is so obsessed by the other's gaze resting upon her that she ends up feeling she is being watched in her own house. And as expected, she catches a man spying on her from the skylight at night. This intrusion of the other's gaze into her privacy proves totally destructive: "Her house no longer felt safe; she had lost her centre." (96) The other's voyeuristic gaze confronts her with what she really is, exposing her self-illusions: "She had done all the right things, but they

had not paid off." (101). And she feels so « unwanted and unloved » (99) that she can see no other solution than taking her own life, using the same method as the woman of "Trying to Kill Herself" — and one cannot fail to notice that the Caribbean-Canadian urban short stories often end with the death of the protagonist, as if to underline the absence of a refuge or way out. In "Junice and Stanley"¹⁴, Junice feels trapped in the city just as she feels trapped in her marriage — again, the city is one of the images for feelings of entrapment and alienation. Nevertheless, it is towards or through the city she drives when one morning, she wants to escape from Stanley and his hypocrisy :

.... she got up and dressed to go out, but she still had no particular destination in mind. She drove out of her neighbourhood and turned the car in the direction of the highway. That she still did not know where she was going bothered her in a funny kind of way....

She headed onto the 401 East and the further she got into Scarborough the more concrete structures she began to see. She sighed, wondering where she would have to drive to escape the spiralling cement. Suddenly the sky-scrappers tapered off and she was looking at houses. She still felt she had not escaped the masses of concrete. (134)

- 21 She wants to escape both from the city and from her own life, but to escape from the city, she goes deeper inside it, and the never resolved paradox is to be found in many other Caribbean-Canadian short stories. She also desperately tries to get away from the alienations she brought with her from the Caribbean, mainly concerning male-female relationships. At the end, she is one of the few characters who contemplate the future with a stronger, positive outlook: she makes the decision to hire a lawyer and ask for a divorce, which she would probably never have done had she stayed in the Caribbean.
- 22 As we have seen, the city can be highly threatening and claustrophobic, so much so that the immigrant — but this could also be true of any individual — tries to escape from the house and away from the city at large: the narrator in "No Rinsed Blue Sky, no Red Flower Fences"¹⁵ is one among the many who have this desire to get away: "The city was claustrophobic. She felt land-locked.... She wanted to rush to the beach. But not the lake. It lay stagnant and saltless at the bottom of the city. She needed a piece of water which led out, the vast ocean."(87)
- 23 Depicting this attempt to find a refuge away from the city, quite a few of the short stories are set in bars. "On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows" by Neil Bissoondath¹⁶ is built on the spacial and mental oscillation between a rooming house for immigrants in Montreal and the bar next door. The time scheme of the story is one day, time enough for the seven immigrants to know whether their application for refugee status will be accepted or not. The focalization is alternately external, so as to gain a view of the whole situation, and internal, so that the reader becomes more intimate with Joaquin, a victim of torture in South America. Joaquin seeks refuge in a South American bar symptomatically called 'La Barricada'. Everything happens as if the city was held at bay: the story is made of interior spaces — the house and the bar, the memories and the waiting. Both the house and the bar provide a sort of protecting cocoon against the city and the outside world. The description of the bar expresses this notion of antechamber, of purgatory between past and present :

It is a curious place, small, with whitewashed walls and fake beams overhead, bits and pieces of his country, his continent scattered around. Baskets hang from the ceiling, shawls cling to the walls, drums and Pan flutes dangle from crooked nails. Travel posters show Andean heights, Machu Pichu, the modernistic sterility of Brasilia. Quietly, as if wafting in from a great distance, the sad music of the

mountains linger just out of reach, a fading memory even before you can seize it.
(14)

- 24 Joaquin is aware of the discomfort he provokes in himself whenever he comes to this bar: "It is like a closet for the soul, built for containing dusty memories of lives long lost, for perpetuating the resentments of politics long past." (15). But at the same time, he cannot prevent himself from coming to this territory outside all the other territories. It is the only space in which he can push back the frontiers of the Canadian state and Canadian reality, and re-invent the stage of his own history. A sort of "counter-space", much as one speaks of counter-discourse.
- 25 If some characters attempt escaping inside the city itself, others escape into themselves, in an imaginary space that doubles the concrete space of the city. A few short stories by Austin Clarke develop these parallel interior spaces which evolve into a mindscape, an interior city. "Letter of the Law of Black"¹⁷ is in the form of the letter a father writes to his son. The father spent some time in Canada on a two-year labourers' scheme but was sent back to Barbados for not respecting the conditions of the scheme; the son went to Toronto to complete his degree in Economics and Political Science. As the letter is written, the city half-remembered/ half-fantasized by the father superimposes itself onto the city the son lives in, or at least the city that is refracted in the father's imagination: "You could tell me if Stollery's Emporium for Men is still at the intersection of Bloor and Yonge Street? I spent many dollars and more hours talking to the manager..." (57). And further on: "One winter when I was flat on my back with fever, indisposed through health and threatened with dismissal from my job of being a janitor, and laid up in a small attic room on College Street near where the Main Public Library used to be..." (60). Moreover, mingled with the advice from father to son (the avowed purpose of the letter), is the narration of the problems he had with Immigration, as well as his "love life and escapades in that city of Toronto" (62). Under the pretence of talking to his son about Toronto, he is in fact telling him more about his private life than he ever had the opportunity of doing until then...
- 26 "Ship, Sail! Sail Fast!"¹⁸ focuses on a man's ride in a taxi across a small town and on his train ride back to the city. Both in the taxi and on the train, the man lets his imagination wander, and his trip becomes "a ride he was taking with his eyes and imagination" (31). The corn fields are running past beside the train, and breed images surging from the individual and collective past; the images that take shape little by little in his mind bring the protagonist back to slavery and plantation days :
- The fields of corn are running beside this monster of iron.
And in them he sees the figure of a woman. Jane. He knows her name because her name is the name of her plight.... Jane is running beside the train. Her eyes are balls of horror, for in them he can see himself....; can feel the cow-skin rip into her soft black back.... (35)
- 27 Clarke, as all the other Caribbean-Canadian authors, shows the necessity of going back towards the past, of revisiting individual and collective memory. What is at stake is the redefinition of the present and the recomposition of one's mindscape.
- 28 In "At the Lisbon Plate"¹⁹, Dionne Brand pushes even farther away the frontiers of history. The 'Lisbon Plate' is a Portuguese bar in Toronto and the setting for this story. Homodiegetically narrated by the central character, a real barfly, the story is a collage of different moments in her existence and different modes — fragments of urban life, visions of the past, alcohol-induced rambling, political dreams... The bar truly offers a concentrate of the city and of the country's history; it is also the place where both can

be put in perspective and possibly displaced: : "The bar has a limited view of Kensington Market. Across the street from it there's a parkette, in the centre of which there is a statue of Cristobal Colon. Columbus, the carpet-bagger." (99). What's more, Rosa, the bartender, is of Portuguese origin, which brings back to the surface the colonial and post-colonial history of Canada while providing an occasion for a confrontation with contemporary Canadian reality :

It has struck me more than once that a little more than a century ago I may have been Rosa's slave and not more than twenty-five years ago, her maid, whom she maimed, playing with the little gun that she got from the general from Aporto. My present existence is mere chance, luck, syzygy. (97)

- 29 As Charlotte Sturges very adequately remarks²⁰, the bar is the locus where stories are told and retold, stories of others and self-stories. Through the first-person narration, Brand plunges into the colonial past, interrogating present and future. The fact of sitting in this bar for hours enables the narrator to cast a closer look at others and at herself. She even comes to see herself from a distance :

This is my refuge. It is where I can be invisible or, if not invisible, at least drunk. Drinking makes me introspective, if not suicidal. In these moments I have often looked at myself from the third floor window of the furniture store across from the bar. Rheumy-eyed, I have seen a woman sitting there whom I recognize as myself. A Black woman, legs apart, chin resting in the palm of her hand, amusement and revulsion travelling across her face in uneasy companionship; the years have taken a bit of the tightness out of my skin but the expression has not changed, searching and uneasy, haunted like a plantation house. Surrounded by the likes of Rosa and her compadres. A woman in enemy territory. (97)

- 30 She has several other visions of herself, this woman "whom (she) met many years ago. As old as dirt, she sat at a roadside waiting her time, an ivory pipe stuck in her withered lips and naked as she was born. That woman had stories, more lucid than mine and more frightening for that." (98). To those stories respond other stories of her own: "In the summertime, I come to the bar practically everyday. After my first beer I'm willing to talk to anyone. I'm willing to reveal myself entirely.... The knots in my head loosen up and I may start telling stories about my family." (99).
- 31 Through the stories and oral tales she tells, of colonial atrocities and contemporary oppressions, a whole series of past and present characters come to life on the urban scene of the bar, providing so many facets and fragments of the search for a Caribbean identity as well as a Canadian one. From her immobile position, she evaluates the exterior mobility of the city and its inhabitants. She sometimes takes on the role of director, reorganising the space and the stage of history. At other times, from her position of invisible spectator, she highlights the identity of those who have too long remained invisible. Brand underlines the idea that the Caribbean-Canadian Blacks position themselves on a continuum from total invisibility to hyper-visibility²¹ — Ralph Ellison is never very far away.
- 32 Through all those stories, the narrator crosses the frontiers of time and space, opening up mental spaces that had so far remained too cramped. This opening up occurs in a parallel way through the writing of the text, and through the re-writing of space. In fact, the use that Brand makes of the city in her text resembles the use she makes of language and literature: opening up the frontiers, pulling down the barriers and modifying perspectives. As she introduces the urban space lived in by Canadian Blacks into the literary one, she conjugates it according to different modes. Indeed, one has to bear in mind that the short story is but one of the genres she adopts: writing poetry,

short stories, novels and essays is her way of attempting to modify the socio-political and aesthetic balance of Canadian diverse identity. Even within *Sans Souci and Other Stories*, the mere fact of multiplying the possibilities of language on the continuum from standard English to creole, from written language to oral, from narration to poetry, is enough to have codes, modes and literary dominant practices flounder. The geography of the urban space that provides a setting for her stories is the tool Brand uses in the redefinition of the geography of the text. Both are concerned with the recomposition of the social, political and ethical landscape of Canadian society. After reading Brand, the map of Toronto is not quite the same as it used to be.

- 33 The city offers the paradox of a territory already composed by and for the other but where an identity of one's own can still be worked out. It is this kind of search that comes alive in Caribbean-Canadian short stories, in which the writers never cease to reformulate the constitutive elements of their identity, old and new, migrant and Canadian. By doing so, they recompose Canadian identity at large and force it to put itself in perspective constantly. Be it in the work of Austin Clarke, Neil Bissoondath, Dionne Brand or Althea Prince, the literary use of the city brings about a new mapping of the socio-historical and political space to be achieved. But more deeply, the integration of the cityscape within the writing allows a new ontological cartography to be drawn.

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NOTES

1. Sam Selvon, or Olive Senior, for instance, have always focused on the Caribbean reality, not on the Canadian one. Cyril Dabydeen has been hovering between the two, trying to understand how the past experience shapes the present, emphasizing the osmosis between the two worlds in one's imagination.

2. *The Meeting Point* (London: Heineman, 1967); *Storm of Fortune* (London: Heineman, 1972); *The Bigger Light* (London: Heineman, 1975). When *The Origin of Waves* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1997) was published, Austin Clarke had not published a novel in more than ten years.
3. "White City, Black Ancestry: the Immigrant's Toronto in the stories of Austin Clarke and Dionne Brand", in *Open Letter* 8 (Winter 1994): 9-19.
4. *Nine Men who Laughed* (Markham, Ont.: Penguin, 1986).
5. *When Women Rule* (Toronto: McClelland, 1985).
6. *When he Was Free and Young and He used to Wear Silks* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1971).
7. One has to know that two possibilities were left open for West Indians who wished to settle in Canada: either come on a student's visa and then ask for immigrant status once the degree was obtained — several thousands of students benefited from this disposition in the 1950s-60s; or be a woman aged between 18 and 35 and come to work as a domestic; the West Indian Domestic Scheme was an official scheme between 1955 and 1965; after having worked as a domestic for at least a year, one could ask for immigrant status, and after five years, for Canadian citizenship. Austin Clarke's Toronto Trilogy focuses on that category of immigrants. This is one of the many aspects where the sociological, documentary aspect joins the literary dimension in Caribbean-Canadian fiction.
8. *In this City* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1992).
9. *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows* (Toronto: Penguin, 1990).
10. *Sans Souci and Other Stories* (Stratford, Ont.: Williams-Wallace, 1988).
11. *In this City*.
12. *When Women Rule* (Toronto: McClelland, 1985).
13. Althea Prince, *Ladies of the Night* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1993).
14. *Ladies of the Night*.
15. *Sans Souci and Other Stories*.
16. *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows*.
17. *In this City*.
18. Austin Clarke, *There are no Elders* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1993).
19. *Sans Souci and Other Stories*.
20. Charlotte Sturgess, "Spirits and transformation in Dionne Brand's *Sans Souci and Other Stories*", *Etudes Canadiennes* 35 (Décembre 1993): 223-229. To be read also: Kathleen J. Renk, "Her Words are like Fire': the Storytelling Magic of Dionne Brand", *Ariel* 27-4 (Octobre 1996): 97-111.
21. This continuum is analysed by Rinaldo Walcott in his article « 'A Tough Geography': Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada », *Westcoast, A Journal of Contemporary Writing and Criticism* 22 (31/1) Spring-Summer 1997.

RÉSUMÉS

La plupart des écrivains canadiens d'origine caribbéenne vivant et écrivant dans des villes, on peut aisément comprendre que le paysage urbain devienne un topos littéraire qui permette à l'identité caribbéo-canadienne de se structurer. La ville est non seulement un creuset dans lequel la diaspora caribbéenne va tenter de se fondre, mais encore une toile de projection idéale pour la formation de nouveaux territoires et la recomposition d'une image identitaire malmenée. C'est à travers l'évocation de nouvelles écrites par des auteurs aussi reconnus que Austin Clarke, Neil

Bissoondath, Dionne Brand, ou moins connus comme Althea Prince, que cet article se propose d'examiner les différentes dynamiques lancées par ces textes autour de la ville.

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