Chapter I

Introduction
It is a widely accepted thesis that West Indian novels traditionally seek to discover and define a West Indian consciousness, usually in terms of racial and national identity and that the process of identification is sparked by the novelists absent from the West Indian scene. Frank Herculs, Paule Marshall, Rosa Guy, and Austin C. Clarke are the four gifted and established West Indian-North American novelists. Austin C. Clarke is the only West Indian Canadian exploring, with special interest, the West Indian experience in North America. A very small native black population in Toronto, the locale for his North American novels. When the first major war of immigration from the Caribbean reached Canada in the early to mid 60's, the new immigrant found in Clarke, a writer who would chronicle their difficulties and disappointments as well as their hopes and dreams(1).

and the youngest artists also began to identify themselves as distinctly Canadian. Clarke was recognised and branded as Canada's 'angry black militant'.

Clarke arrived in Canada in 1955 on study leave for two years to pursue Economic and Political Science at Trinity College, University of Toronto. During his two years of study he read and wrote poetry and in 1957 he won the Trinity College poetry prize and a cash award of $5.00 for his poetry.
Later besides poetry he began to write verse drama in the style of T.S.Eliot and Christopher Fry. In 1959 Thomson Newspapers hired him as a reporter. He was trained in journalism in Timmins and Kirkland. A clever piece of investigating report in *The Globe and Mails* caught the attention of many. He wrote his first fiction: five short stories at the Globe. His decision to devote himself completely to writing brought about a series of novels: *The Survivors of the Crossing*, *Among Thistles and Thorns*, *The Meeting Point* and many other stories between 1962 to 1969 *Storm of Fortune* (1973) and *The Bigger Light* (1975) followed. After serving as the head of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation television for a couple of years in his native Barbados he returned to Canada where he wrote his next novel; *The Prime Minister*.

Clarke's personal expression have come very handy for him and he best uses them in his novels. His exposure to the various situations and circumstances both at his native Barbados and Canada are all well depicted and portrayed with great skill. His fiction is through exploration of the experiences of West Indians, usually Barbadians, both in their native and in Canada. Many of his short stories reflect on American scenes and situations as well.

A social writer, Clarke continually and explores how culture and history shape, the lives of his characters. (2)

Again -

While many of his themes are common to Common Wealth and Third World Literatures- the effects of colonialism and British culture on Colonial peoples; how the developed world appears to the imagination of an undeveloped country, an island people; the experience of immigration to the lands different not only in culture but in race, the phenomenon of racism itself.’ (3)
are markedly handled and pictured through his characters' lives and manners.

Since 1964, Austin Clarke has brought out eight books. These may be divided into two groups. His earliest works: 'Survivors of the Crossing' (1964) and 'Among Thistles and Thorns' (1965) dwell on the lives of the peasants and rural labourers of his native Barbados. The former deals with the lives of men and women in a post-mid-twentieth-century Barbados village dominated by a sugar plantation, whose regime is 'an iron fist on the workers and is known for its bloodthirstiness'. The scene telling of the novel especially the early pages-as Mr. Keith S. Henry puts - are the most brilliant pages in his (Clarke's entire corpus of writing the novel also brings out Clarke's "Very skill at developing suspenseful plots and proves that he has a predilection for suspense and mystery". (4)

The latter is a narrative whose fundamental characteristic is - 'a deadly poverty scarcely distinguishable from destitution. It depicts the major characteristic skill of Clarke. Clarke's collection of short stories: 'When He was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks' (1973) displays his skills in heightened form and constitutes some of the most brilliant and unblemished works. His memoir 'Growing Up Stupid Under The Union Jack' (1980) is but the reminiscence of his own life in Barbados and that of his neighbours and acquaintances. It supports the view, despite the many fine literary movements in his immigrant Toronto, that Clarke's art is surest and subtlest in his treatment of semi-rural Barbados.

'The Prime Minister' (1977) stands apart from the rest of Clarke's corpus. It is the most autobiographical of his works and as he himself says - was written in the "bitter" days following that experience, written about "real people". It is a novel of political intrigue in the post-colonial world and is replete with social
commentary on the new independent Barbados, pertinent and pointed, rarely flattering but smoothly integrated.

The present study focusses on Austin's Clarke's trilogy Comprising 'The Meeting Point' (1967), 'Storm of Fortune' (1973) and 'The Bigger Light' (1975). The trilogy addresses the lives of a small circle of men and women, who form a fraction of the population, who have come as domestics and are now resident immigrants at Toronto. It is dominantly an exploration of Barbados migrant life in Toronto with plenty of backward glances at Barbados: both in the form of letters and reminiscences.

Clarke's characters are, without doubt, very successfully achieved amalgams of textually evolved and textually eliminated personality, verbal style, and accoutrements. His characters are simple, uneducated women no less than men. They retain our attention even when they are not merely poverty-stricken but also often unperceptive, even stupid leading very physically confined lives.

Clarke, himself being an immigrant explores the immigrant psyche in a moving fashion. The psyche of an immigrant is always tragic as a result of the tension created in the mind between the two socio-cultural environments, between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia. It becomes a challenge for the immigrant to adjust himself to the new condition and to realize their ambitions and to experience a sense of liberation from their inherited social and cultural traditions they have to undergo deep suffering. Most of Clarke's characters being black proletariats from the former British colony, Barbados and who happen to be victims of racism, that arises from the anglophone Canadians constantly indulge themselves in a search for identity, for being from the state of 'non-being'. The search emerges from and continues in dehumanisation and never seems to come to an end.
The first novel, of the trilogy 'The Meeting Point', which introduces almost all of the principal characters is not just a novel, but is also meant to be a social document. It provides us with a substantial tour of black Toronto’s haunts and makes lavish use of the real names of many of Toronto’s personalities, places, and institutions. Many incidents in the lives of the characters replicate the ones mentioned in Clarke’s published views on race relation in the same city in the same year. We witness discrimination - between Whites and Blacks, Blacks and other blacks, whites and other whites - unemployment, scorn and self-hatred. Again, The Meeting Point is much more than a fictionalized political tract or sociograph. It is skillfully constructed and developed, proceeding to a number of simultaneous resolutions, expected and even exciting.

The Meeting Point depicts the struggles of Bernice Leach to survive in her capacity of a domestic in Forest Hill. She alternately despises and feels sympathy for her employers, the Burrmanns, whose shaky marriage determines her working environment. Her main comfort is fellow domestic Dots Cumberbatch and her trial, her visiting sister Estelle, who at the end of the novel, acquires hard-won immigration papers, the guilt offering of Mr. Burrmann, who has made her pregnant and has pressured her into a botched abortion.

The Second novel - 'Storm of Fortune' - comes as an evidence for Clarke’s unusual virtues - humor convincing dialogue, subtle interpersonal relations, ribaldry, a remarkable feel for uneducated characters, both men and women. It is the most cinematic of Clarke’s immigrant novels, an integrated development of the plot is on the whole very happily combined with an impressive succession of varied and independently arresting dramatic scenes. Scenes involving Henry impart to the novel an element of tragedy - an undoubttable embellishment to the work.

Storm of Fortune continues with the same characters. It revolves predominantly around Dots and her husband Boysie Cumberbatch, and his
friend Henry White and his marriage with his rich Jewish girlfriend, Agatha, and the final tragic end of Henry. It lends some insight into the puzzling love-hate affair between the black and the Jewish whites. Also depicted is the gradual transformation in Boysie's social outlook and his upward social climb.

The Third novel - *The Bigger Light* is a blend of cultural alienations and the theme of personal and sexual alienation. It is a sensitive study of the breakdown of a marriage of sexual need, uncertainty, and self-centredness. Parallels may be drawn between Clarke's *The Bigger Light* and Selvon's *Moses Ascending*, with respect to the failure of communication between characters - which is once again an area of special interest for West Indian writers. Clarke gives more vigorous scrutiny than does Grath St Omer, to the condition of alienation at home, in his third novel.

*The Bigger Light* mirrors Boysie's upward social climb in wealth, position and learning. It also focuses on the gradual drifting apart and final estrangement of Dots and Boysie. It also points the paradoxical turns in the marital and non-marital relationships between the characters. It also throws light on the roles that parents are to play in the sociological unit of the family.

In the succeeding chapters, each of the three novels comprising the trilogy have been taken for a thematic and critical study with a focus on the pain, the trauma the immigrants undergo in their attempts to arrive 'at an identity of their own that would transform them from the status of 'non-being' to that of 'being'. In this regard the aspects of racism with special emphasis on the Jewish-Black relationships, mater-servant relationships and internal familial relationships have also been brought to focus.
REFERENCES


2. ibid, pp.24.

3. ibid, pp.25.