

## **Myth-Making and Exile: the Desire for a Homeplace in George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls***

**By Michelle Banks**

In the 1950s and '60s, the United States and Canada became increasingly preoccupied with the state of their cities. Urban centres in both nations were in need of attention and repair, and in 1949, the United States passed the National Housing Act which precipitated the massive and far-reaching urban renewal programs across the two countries. The Canadian National Housing Act of 1957 followed the American legislation, and gave assistance to municipalities intent on initiating similar programs. According to J. Clarence Davies in *Neighborhood Groups and Urban Renewal*, "urban renewal was hailed as the tool that would enable the cities of America to save themselves from blight, decay, and obsolescence" (1). In the American book, published in 1962 at the height of urban renewal programs in both countries, *The Citizen's Guide to Urban Renewal*, Alfred P. Van Huyck and Jack Hornung add their optimistic approval of such efforts at revitalization:

Urban renewal corrects the deficiencies that created the blight by replanning of areas, installation of new public facilities, and by land assembly, clearance and redevelopment. The result of this activity is to enhance the investment attractiveness of the land, which then can compete on more even terms with other vacant land in outlying areas. (12)

Not surprisingly, Hornung and Van Huyck consider urban renewal only in terms of the development of physical space; they suggest that the neglected areas can be corrected (and as Davies says, 'saved') by "land assembly, clearance and redevelopment." In the general formula of urban renewal, the economic and aesthetic values of places are increased by land development, not by community development. It is one of the contentions of the essay underway that this tension lies in the background of George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls*, and influences many of the book's concerns and themes, particularly its attention to exile, mythology, and inclusiveness. In

order to show how this is so, it will be necessary to place on view the relevant history of urban renewal and its consequences.

## **I. Africville: a Lost and Longed-for Community**

“Canada is a land troubled by race and space.”—Rinaldo Walcott

In the early 1960s, urban renewal projects in Toronto, Ontario were considered great successes. Buildings in run-down parts of the city were leveled and residents were moved to the new large public housing areas, such as Regent Park. As word of Toronto’s programs spread across the country, other cities enthusiastically took steps toward emulating them. For example, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, “[u]rban development dominated City Council’s agenda from the late 1940s into the mid-1970s” (Fingard 169). Following the 1957 National Housing Act, the Halifax branch of the Community Planning Association of Canada encouraged the city to hire Gordon Stephenson, a town planner from the University of Toronto, to study the city’s design and make recommendations for improvement. Encouraged by the results of Toronto’s efforts, and keen on creating more retail space in the downtown core and on beautification in general, the City of Halifax eagerly implemented the Stephenson Report. A significant consequence of this study was the construction of Scotia Square Mall, a large complex accommodating a hotel, apartment and office towers, the Trade Mart building, and a shopping plaza. Sixteen acres of land were razed and cross streets were eliminated to facilitate this construction.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat ironically, Scotia Square is now considered one of the most unfortunate blights on downtown Halifax. The concrete towers created a barrier to the north, and the interiorization of the mall’s shops dissipated the energy of the street. The Dal Tech architecture professor Grant Wanzel believes that Scotia Square “destroyed Barrington Street” (Willick 3); “it’s a diseased being,” he insists. Most important, though, and most notoriously, the Stephenson Report also recommended the destruction of a community just outside the downtown area.

Barrington Street, a main artery of the peninsula of Halifax, runs north-south through the downtown. It stretches from the harbour’s southern piers to the mouth of the Bedford Basin at the north end. Before 1964, the pavement at the northern end of Barrington Street crumbled away and a dirt road began. This dirt road led into Africville, a segregated black community established by former American slaves after the War of 1812.

Although technically within city limits, Africville was very much *other* than the city. Separated from mainstream Halifax by geography and race, this largely rural community was by turns neglected and assaulted by the city. In 1855, for example, the city laid railroad tracks through the centre of the settlement. This, according to Howard McCurdy, constituted an “environmental attack on Africville” (81), as, not surprisingly, the trains brought layers of soot, noise, and even death to the community. Africville’s residents paid taxes, yet were repeatedly refused basic services—the city claimed that the community was built on ‘unbreakable’ rock, and it was therefore impossible to provide indoor plumbing for its houses.<sup>2</sup> In the mid 1950s, the Halifax city council voted to move an open city dump to the Africville area, eventually situating it “350 feet from the front doors of the westernmost group of homes” (Clairmont and Magill 115). The decision to move the dump so close to a populated area was made without concern for the health of those living there, and according to the community’s major chroniclers, Donald Clairmont and Dennis William Magill, the location of the dump “illustrates well the negative exchange system that characterized the relationship between Africville and city authorities” (114-15).<sup>3</sup> The proximity of the dump greatly assisted in the characterization of the community as a slum, and before long greater Halifax began associating the residents with the dump, and stories of scavenging were wide-spread.

The denial of urban services (in addition to denying water, the city also refused to police the area or provide assistance in cases of fire) is greatly responsible for the rural nature of Africville, but is not the sole explanation for the community’s ‘country’ feel. In many ways, Africville’s struggle for existence is a struggle against the encroachment of modernity. In *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans*, Herbert Gans suggests that “in most American cities there are two major types of low-rent neighbourhoods” (4), one being those “areas of first or second settlement for urban migrants” (4), a category in which he lists “Negroes” and other migrant groups. These groups, he argues, “try to adapt their non-urban institutions and cultures to the urban milieu. Thus it may be called an *urban village*” (4). This is perhaps an apt description of Africville—a village within, and yet on the margin of a city, a village that attempts to remain rural in its character, but because of geography, has elements of the urban as well.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, writers and artists have interpreted the community’s village nature to a desire among residents to live at least somewhat outside the modern and the urban. The Halifax poet David Woods, for example, blames Africville’s fate on the larger culture’s obsession with modernization. In “Summons,” a poem dedicated to Africville, he charac-

terizes the destruction of the community as another in a series of defeats at the hand of progress: “our hopes are drowned again / In the welter of the modern” (11-12). The poem concludes with a (too late?) call-to-action:

Let us rebel against this lie  
Lift up an intelligent sword  
And assault the new world.  
(30-2)

Wood’s target, the modern world, allows no space in which the local can maintain integrity against the inevitable homogenization. For him, it seems, Africville is wholly incompatible with “the new world,” and represents something self-consciously non-urban. George Elliott Clarke agrees. In “Towards a Conservative Modernity,” a lengthy discussion of authors he terms “Africadian” (black Canadian, especially black Nova Scotian writers), he suggests that Africadian poets have “attempted to articulate their particularity in the face of modernity” (54), but this desired particularity cannot be articulated or even maintained in the modern world. Africadians eventually converted to modernity, and as Clarke sees it, this was a forced conversion:

the advent of modernity for Africadia was marked, not by the founding of a university or the election of a premier, but by the bulldozers of ‘progress’ destroying the Seaview United Baptist Church and the entire community of Africville at the end of the 1960s in the name of integration and urban development. (55)

Clearly, the coercive “bulldozers of ‘progress’” are acting in collaboration with the forces of modernity. “Urban development” and “integration” are concepts that overlook the values of what Woods, among others, sees expressed in the village atmosphere of Africville.

The political ideology, a paternalistic and mainstream liberalism, that ushered in the destruction of the community and the dispersal of its residents is another product of the modern. The paranoid preoccupation with segregation in the 1960s made Halifax city officials nervous about having an all-black ghetto within its borders. Through a certain lens, then, the decision to eliminate ‘segregation’ in the city can appear progressive; what the officials failed to consider, however, was that this particular segregated space occurred organically. The residents were not put there by a powerful “Other”; rather, they chose and settled the land themselves and greatly valued their space and homes. Residents’ desires were not given much con-

sideration in Stephenson's report. He wrote that "[t]here are only two things to be said. The families will have to be rehoused in the near future. The land which they now occupy will be required for future development of the city" (qtd. in Clairmont 56).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Stephenson argued that, "[d]espite the wishes of many of the residents, it would seem desirable on social grounds to offer alternative housing in other locations within the city" (qtd. in Campbell 1).<sup>6</sup> The "social grounds" that he mentions clearly stem from a nervousness about segregation. Similarly, the welfare officials who worked on the Africville relocation considered themselves to be, according to Clairmont and Magill, "'caretakers'" (7) who knew what was appropriate, necessary, and even 'best.' The "social grounds" to which Stephenson refers may also include the community's proximity to a city dump. As Mary Douglas points out in *Purity and Danger*, "[d]irt offends against order" (2), and since the community had been associated with the dump and its dirt for over a decade, Africville was regarded by City Council as a disordered space. It was a place that necessitated correction by the ordering impulse of urban development. The paternalistic and condescending tenor of urban development was not limited to Africville, however. Indeed, it seems to have been a common component of projects throughout North America. Hornung and Van Huyck, for instance, argue that the majority of people are "trapped in slums because of lack of education, economic inability, damaging anti-social traits, or race" (20). They claim that many residents in areas slated for redevelopment are "dope addicts, prostitutes, drunks, criminals and special problem families" (20). Van Huyck and Hornung's conclusion, then, is that through being moved out of their current living areas and into public housing, "[f]amilies have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to break out from their slum environment" (20). There is no mention in either the nationally-focused *Citizen's Guide to Urban Renewal* or in the very local Stephenson Report, of improving existing community standards, or of spending the money necessary to move residents away from their community *on* that community; all assumptions are that there is nothing worth preserving in places deemed "slum environments," and relocatees ought to consider themselves lucky.<sup>7</sup>

The racial overtones of urban renewal projects cannot be exaggerated. In *The Federal Bulldozer: a Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal*, Martin Anderson researches the American initiative, and according to his findings, "[a]pproximately two thirds of the people who are forced out of their homes are Negroes, Puerto Ricans, or members of some other minority group" (7). He goes on to say that, "[t]he federal urban removal program is sometimes privately referred to as the 'Negro removal' program" (7).

Indeed, Rinaldo Walcott complements Anderson's suggestion in his thoroughly racialized interpretation of the razing of Africville. "Now," he says, "the desire to render black peoples and blackness an absented presence in Canada has been made literally and symbolically clear" (36). The sociologist Joy Mannette agrees, calling Africville a "fallen black space" (58). These racial overtones help explain the callous disregard with which Africville residents were relocated. Many of the approximately four hundred residents (the majority of Halifax blacks did not reside in Africville) were moved to Mulgrave Park, a new public housing development on the border of the downtown.<sup>8</sup> Other relocatees were moved to run-down, decrepit city-owned housing already slated for redevelopment. Most offensively, though, is not where they were moved, but how they were moved. On "moving day," several city-owned dump-trucks arrived to carry away residents' belongings.<sup>9</sup>

For some residents, the arrival of the dump-trucks signaled a kind of death. Eddie Carvey, a former resident of Africville who is still seeking compensation from the city, told CBC Radio's Jane Kansas that when Halifax officials finally gave their attention to his community, "they killed it" (1). Indeed, according to J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith, another word for "urban renewal" is "domicide." In their book, *Domicide: the Global Destruction of Home*, they condemn such relocations as Africville's, and stress the probability that since "home is central to our lives . . . the forcible destruction of it by powerful authorities will result in suffering on the part of the home dweller" (4). Porteous and Smith define their neologism, "domicide" as:

*the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in pursuit of specified goals, which causes suffering to the victims.* In addition, we specify that the human agency is usually external to the home area, that some form of planning is often involved, and that the rhetoric of public interest or common good is frequently used by the perpetrators. It follows that home destruction perpetrated by or welcomed by the home dweller cannot be domicile; the notion of suffering is crucial.<sup>10</sup> (12)

For Porteous and Smith, then, the destruction of Africville constitutes an instance of domicile. After leveling the buildings of Africville, the City of Halifax did little with the land—a small portion was taken over for industrial harbour development, and in 1970 the foot of the McKay Bridge was positioned on adjacent land, but for the most part the land remained unused. In 1985, after petitions from former residents, the remaining land

became Seaview Memorial Park, and a monument to the community was erected in 1988. Engraved on the monument is the following epitaph:

To lose your wealth is much  
To lose your health is more  
To lose your life is such a loss  
That nothing can restore.

Clearly Africville relocatees consider the loss of their land, their homes, their community, a loss of life as well as a loss of place. A former resident of Africville Terry Dixon says, “we get along with our neighbours, but something is missing” (91). He insists, though, that each year at the Africville reunion (former residents have held annual reunions at Seaview Memorial Park since 1982), “[f]or three days we have our community back” (91). The impulse to congregate each year on Africville land, and the tendency to regard others descended from the settlement as members of a still-viable community, one that supercedes whatever neighbourhood ties former residents currently have, suggests a continuing mourning process and a desire to keep alive some quality the original community is believed to have represented.

The Halifax black community (and indeed the Canadian black community, for the demise of Africville has become a national symbol of racist government policies) has responded to the loss of the Africville settlement, I suggest, with a desire not only to remember, but also to mythologize it. During the community’s existence, there was an obvious tension between the vibrancy of the lives lived there, and the neglect which gave the community its slum classification. Since the death of Africville, memorializers have focused almost completely on the vibrancy of the community, and on their longing to return to its idyllic space. Donald Clairmont claims that “Africville represented the essence of the black experience in Nova Scotia” (36), and thus considers it a place of history, a haven, “a place where everybody knew one another, and where most people were related by kinship to one another and to the original settlers” (47). Terry Dixon asserts that he “will feel the effects of the relocation forever” (91), and another former resident, Fred McMahon, says that “[t]hose who knew Africville pine for the community. Their children dream of the community they never knew” (1).

This tendency to remember Africville in a romantic and nostalgic light is responsible for how much of the literature on the community is shaped (I am excepting here, of course, the historical and sociological accounts to which it has given rise). In 1989, the Africville Genealogy Society staged

an exhibit at the Mount St. Vincent University art gallery entitled, “Africville: A Spirit That Lives On.” The exhibit showcased photographs, news reports, art work, testimonials, a speakers’ panel, and resulted in a book entitled *The Spirit of Africville*. The opening section of this book is a twenty page 1950s-era topographical walking tour of the community narrated by Charles R. Saunders. “We start at the end of Barrington Street” (15), he says as he leads readers down Campbell Road, pointing out landmarks along the way: “[i]f you look to your right, you can see the docks of Pier 9” (15), and, “[w]ater, tracks and bushes—that’s all you can see right now. Kind of reminds you of the country, even though we’re still in Halifax” (18). He names families, “the Carters, the Klints, and the Browns” (18), and pauses at the Seaview United Baptist Church, which he refers to as “the living, breathing soul of our community” (23). The choice to open a book on Africville with this very genial tour through a now-dead community is an expression, I argue, of longing, and indicates the Genealogy Society’s desire to render the community romantically.

In addition to penning the walking tour for *The Spirit of Africville*, Charles Saunders writes a column for *The Halifax Daily News*. The Africville community had been gone twenty years before his first column appeared; yet between 1989 and 1998 he wrote eighteen pieces on Africville, each of which demonstrates his idealized view of the community and his attempts to raise it to mythological status. In a June 30, 1989 column, “Africville—What If?,” he characterizes the reunions held in Seaview Memorial Park as sunny, pleasant times when former residents and their children commune with the ghosts of the place:

on Reunion Day, you can almost see their [the buildings] outlines take shape as the older residents point out locations to children born long after the relocation. Many of the people who lived in and fought for the community have long since died. Yet you can still hear the whisper of their voices beneath the hum of conversation. (187)

Saunders insists upon the haunted but benevolently magical quality of this patch of land. David Woods’s writings on Africville spring from a similar impulse and exhibit a similar insistence. In “Summons” he calls Africville “our kingdom of love” (18), and in another work, “Nova Scotia Reality Song,” he tells the story of the blacks in Nova Scotia, and claims, “I was there when Africville was taken” (94); “I was there at those moments, / And I am there now” (97-8). Woods, however, was not actually present “when Africville was taken” (he emigrated to Canada in 1972 from Trinidad), but he asserts a presence nonetheless. If his presence is not based



upon history, then it must be based upon a feeling of solidarity and spirit. Clairmont, recall, claims that Africville represents “the essence of the black experience in Nova Scotia”; as such, the place has been attributed a magical quality that invites and inspires such idealized assertions. Woods’s eagerness to identify with a community he never actually knew, to proclaim it a place of “love,” along with Saunders’s eagerness to hear the voices of Africville’s ghosts, betray a desire to write the place into imaginative mythology.

## II. How Exile Melts to Mythology

“We are our pasts. Nothing is forgotten.” —George Elliott Clarke

In 1990, George Elliott Clarke published *Whylah Falls*, a verse collection chronicling a mythic black community in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia, and I suggest, the fullest achievement of such fervent efforts to mythologize the Africville space as those we have seen evidenced in the speeches of former residents, and in the writings of David Woods and Charles Saunders. Clarke’s myth-making, however, takes a different direction, and indeed, his fictional Whylah Falls is not at all a replica of Africville. Rather than strictly re-imagining Africville, Clarke imagines *the* ideal Nova Scotian black community, and his portrait draws not only upon the Halifax settlement, but also upon the rural black communities he knew growing up in Windsor, Nova Scotia. By positioning his community outside the urban, Clarke is able to employ the elements of pastoral poetry, and can thereby suggest a timeless and idealized mythic environment.

*Whylah Falls* begins where Africville ended, not in time or space, but in condition: the text begins with exile. The preface-poem, “Look Homeward, Exile” (xxx), accomplishes three things in its title alone. First, the title establishes exile as one of the central concerns of the collection, as the protagonist, X, is returning to Whylah Falls from five years absence; second, the title alludes to a European tradition that will feature prominently in the poems; and third, by referencing Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel*, Clarke implies that his “exiles” are also “angels.” Moreover, Xavier Zachary, the speaker of most of the poems, is known only as X throughout, thus suggesting anonymity, but more important, erasure (here, as in A.M. Klein’s “Portrait of the Portal Landscape,” the *ex* prefix from both the Latin and the Greek for “out of,” puts us in mind of exclusion, exodus, and

indeed exile, thereby implying a thorough identification between the voice of the poems and the condition of homelessness).

Simone Weil has said that “[t]o be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (Said 183). Edward Said agrees, arguing in “Reflections on Exile” that “[e]xile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (173). This rift causes a “crippling sorrow of estrangement,” and, Said argues, “the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever” (173). Furthermore, Said believes that, “[f]or an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment” (186). An exile lacks the rootedness which Weil considers a deep human need. “Look Homeward, Exile” points readers toward such lack, estrangement, and pain: composed by X while in exile (away at university), it indicates that this “sorrow of estrangement” is, at least for the time being, “unhealable”—he writes that “nothing warms [his] wintry exile” (xxx).<sup>11</sup>

According to Said, exiles suffer the “deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation” (177). They therefore feel “an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives,” he suggests, “usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people” (177). And finally, Said argues that “much of the exile’s life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule” (181). Certainly Clarke has not designed Whylah Falls to be “ruled,” but the creation of this mythic community arguably does constitute an attempt to “compensate for disorienting loss,” or heal the rift of exile. In the 1960s, blacks were removed from Africville and exiled into greater Halifax—they then suffered the “deprivations” of “not being with others in the communal habitation,” and this exile not only affected the four hundred residents physically moved from their homes; rather, the relocation and dispersal of the Africville community has become central to the black experience in Nova Scotia, and, as such, it has become an experience of exile that reaches beyond the boundaries of downtown Halifax and involves the imagination. The text, then, is Clarke’s attempt to create for Nova Scotian blacks a kind of “triumphant ideology.”

Anne Compton considers the world of the poems, this imaginative place with a sensational history, to be the collection’s strongest feature. “*Whylah Falls*,” she notes, “creates an entire world, a cosmos of relationships, and of humans in relation to nature. The degree of rootedness is what is attractive in *Whylah Falls*” (57). “Rootedness” fends off exile. Clarke’s

protagonist, remember, is allowed to return to his home; X's experience of exile is rendered temporary, situational, and not permanent. Recall too that X understands his exile from Whylah Falls as "wintry" (xxx). According to Northrop Frye's theory of the four *mythoi*, winter is generically related to the literature of experience, satire and irony, and consequently, "realism" (162). *Whylah Falls*, then, can be said to open with realism since it opens with X in exile, but the text quickly assumes the "cyclical movement" and follows the "rhythm of process" (158) that Frye suggests characterize the organization of myth: soon it is April, spring (associated in Frye's schema with comedy), and X is granted relief from exile. Just as Frye notes that the adaptation of myth to nature is a kind of "process of building and planting" (158), Clarke's emphasis on spring, the mythos of comedy, generates the "rootedness" to which Compton refers. I suggest that it is through this possibility for "building and planting," and through the return to "rootedness" that, according to Clarke, might help "reconstitute the broken lives" of the black Nova Scotian community.

Clarke positions his narrative of the black community in a timeless, rural, and idealized setting, or as he told one interviewer, in the "anti-twentieth century gardens of the Annapolis Valley" (77). Whylah Falls is thus a pastoral landscape apparently untouched by the modern impulses that eventually destroyed Africville, a place infused with sunlight and colour.<sup>12</sup> It is a place modeled on Virgil's Arcadia and populated by romantic figures capable of supernatural feats. Othello, the local bluesman, can "conjure fresh blues from stale beer" (13), while "Pushkin, the third, sits by the iron woodstove and ruminates over an open guitar about an unhealed hurt he suffered over a century ago" (14); the protagonist is a Petrarchan lover who sends "rugosa rose blossoms to Shelley" (10), who, like Adam in the Eden of *Paradise Lost* (4:301), has "hyacinthine hair" (13). Likewise, this is a place where things are seen, not for what they are, but for their imagined potential. For example, we are told that "a timber truck lumbers past, loaded with raw news and unprocessed love letters still locked in bark and leaves" (13). The truck that passes is carrying lumber, yet in the world of these poems, that lumber is recognized as soon-to-be love letters. This is a special place, to be sure. In an interview with Clarke, Compton notes that *Whylah Falls* puts two hundred years of history into "mythic terms" (139). Clarke agrees and tells her, "I took that role on" (139). In the "Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary Edition" of the book, published earlier in *Quarry* as "Discovering *Whylah Falls*," Clarke explains his commitment to myth.<sup>13</sup> In two different but complementary metaphors, he says that "myth is the glue of art" (xxv), and "myth is the womb of narrative" (xiv). The

“Preface” to the first edition clearly invites readers into a mythical universe:

Founded in 1783 by African-American Loyalists seeking Liberty, Justice, and Beauty, Whylah Falls is a village in Jarvis County, Nova Scotia. Wrecked by country blues and warped by constant tears, it is a snowy, northern Mississippi, with blood splattered, not on magnolias, but on pines, lilacs, and wild roses. (xxvii)

The community’s founders, we learn, valued “Beauty” over ‘Good Government,’ and the violence intimated here is a romanticized and aestheticized violence. The alliteration of “wrecked” and “warped,” and the image of blood splattered on the landmarks of the lush pastoral landscape, “pines, lilacs, and wild roses,” hints at an abstract relationship to violence. In short, *Whylah Falls* is not a work of realism. The Preface (especially the founding premise of Beauty), insists that the reader regard Whylah Falls as an aesthetic and not-*too*-real landscape. The place, like its conjurer and immortal-seeming inhabitants, is supernatural. Referring both to the mythic elements in the work, and to his rather elegant style, Clarke has said, “I had to decide how closely I wanted to reproduce the truths I knew. I opted for watercolour rather than a photograph” (xvii). This representation must be measured against an equally prevalent but somewhat contradictory expression represented in the text—the documentary-style inclusion of “archival” photographs. The photos, culled from the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, the National Archives of Canada, and Clarke’s own collection, curiously termed “Author’s Archives” in the list of photo credits, can be read as an attempt to ground the text in a photographable reality. The images implicitly communicate that the stories constitute an actual lived-history, that Shelley, X, Othello, and the other characters really did inhabit a place called Whylah Falls, or at the very least, that they are based upon historical figures. Apparently, then, the author has opted not just for “watercolour,” but for both “watercolour” and “photograph.”

Despite the great lengths to which Clarke has gone to present the text as something both very real-seeming (as illustrated by the documentary-like inclusion of “archival” photos) and at the same time, very other-worldly (as demonstrated by the idyllic landscape and the extraordinary feats of the characters), ultimately his loyalties lie predominantly with myth. What I have been calling Clarke’s commitment to myth, but what could easily be called his indulgence in myth, extends beyond the world of Whylah Falls-the place, and incorporates the presentation of *Whylah Falls*-the book. In lieu of typical Acknowledgments, Clarke includes a section

entitled “Admission” in which he thanks “the Ontario Arts Council” for providing “a vital grant,” notes that without the assistance of “Paul Zemokhol, Mary Schmidt, Allan Safarik, Roger McTair, William Knight, Sylvia Hamilton, and John Fraser,” the books would not have been written, and acknowledges his reliance on the “Weymouth Historical Society” (xxviii). Fairly standard stuff, but then he closes the “Admission” with this: “The poems are fact presented as fiction. There was no other way to tell the truth save to disguise it as a story” (xxviii). What is the motivation for placing this assertion *here*? Granted, Clarke entitles this section “Admission” and not “Acknowledgments,” but for all intents and purposes this *is* his Acknowledgments section, and for the most part it serves the function that the reader expects—with the exception of the claim about truth and fiction, everything else included here is a non-fictional ‘thank-you’ of some sort.<sup>14</sup> Such claims are more suited to a Preface or even an Introduction. Furthermore, Clarke signs the “Admission” and dates it “April MCMXC” (xxviii). Given that the book is concerned with the pilgrimages of exiled people (recall that the collection’s second poem is “The River Pilgrim: A Letter,” written by X in April), and that April is traditionally the time for literary pilgrimages, this date cannot be a happy coincidence.<sup>15</sup> The dating of this assurance of fact (“[t]he poems are fact presented as fiction”) is certainly itself a fiction. To enter the world of *Whylah Falls*, both the imagined place and the book, is to enter a world where myth is not only the “glue of art” or the “womb of narrative,” but *is* the very art we encounter.

### III. Marginality and Inclusion: The Poetics of *Whylah Falls*

“All narrative pursues an original identity, and poetry declares it.”

—George Elliott Clarke

Geographically and economically marginal, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick are in many ways *other* to the rest of Canada. As well as physical (geographic) and practical (economic) marginality, the Atlantic provinces have likewise experienced ideological marginality. In the Conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada*, for example, Northrop Frye participates in this insidious tradition when he describes what it might be like to approach Canada from the Atlantic Ocean:

Canada has, for all practical purposes, no Atlantic seaboard. The traveler from Europe edges into it like a tiny Jonah entering an inconceivably large whale, slipping past the Straits of Belle Isle into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. . . . To enter the United States is a matter of crossing an ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent. (834)

The purpose of Frye's analogy is to illustrate the vast and claustrophobic traits of the Canadian environment, but what he also accomplishes is an effective removal of the Eastern provinces from the landscape of Canada. The experience of sailing into Halifax is not like being swallowed by a whale, but is instead just as Frye imagines the experience of sailing into the United States. His conception of Canada cuts the Maritime provinces out of the physical and literary landscapes, and suggests that one is not really in Canada until one reaches Quebec. In what is perhaps a more surprising context, Cecil Foster's 1996 book, *A Place Called Heaven: the Meaning of Being Black in Canada*, similarly ignores the Eastern Canadian experience. His study makes no mention of Africville or even the more general Nova Scotian black experience, and focuses almost exclusively on Toronto and Montreal. His title, then, is inappropriate, given that, "[b]efore the liberalization of Canada's immigration policy in 1967, which resulted in an influx of Africans and Caribbeans to Canada, particularly Montreal and Toronto, Nova Scotia had the largest black population in Canada" (Calliste 283).<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, Foster's main focus is on contemporary black experience, but surely what it means to be black in Canada cannot be adequately explored without reference to history outside the nation's two largest urban centres (and certainly pre-1967 events are not already irrelevant). Foster's limited vision of Canada relegates an already-marginal group further towards the edge, and implicitly renders their 'meanings of being black in Canada' insignificant.

Clarke, of course, is acutely aware of Nova Scotia's problem of marginality. In discussing his university education, he remembers feeling "that the Toronto intellectual elite despised folks from Atlantic Canada" (144).<sup>17</sup> "Maritimers," he notices, "live degrees of marginality. We are the Maritime margin relative to Toronto, but we are the Canadian margin in regards to the States" (157). In "Towards a Conservative Modernity: Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Acadian and Africadian Poetry," Clarke explains why he believes this problem to exist. Following George Grant, he views modernity as a colonizing power and local culture as anachronistic resistance, and so argues that the poetics of Acadia and Africadia have remained marginal. "If, as Grant states, 'the choice between international-

ism and nationalism is the same choice as that between liberalism and conservatism,” he writes, “Maritime poets have opted for the latter and have thus incurred the concomitant obscurity and marginalization” (50).

Countering such obscurity and marginality has become one of Clarke’s projects. There is an obvious concern in his work, both creative and scholarly, for inclusiveness. At the Harvard University round-table discussion on “U.S./Canadian Perspectives on the Multiculturalism Debate,” he characterizes himself as “a seventh-generation Canadian of African origin, but also Micmac Native heritage, from Nova Scotia” (13). He goes on to mention that “my heritage included a Caribbean background on my paternal side” (13), and cites several other ethnic and national influences on his identity: “[b]ecause Nova Scotia is heavily influenced by its British heritage, I grew up pledging allegiance to the Union Jack,” and says, “[a]lso at the time I was listening to lots of African American music” (13). Similarly, in the Introduction to *Eyeing the North Star*, a collection of African Canadian poetry he edited in 1997, Clarke writes of growing up amongst the likenesses of both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Queen Elizabeth II, and of watching both National Film Board shorts and listening to New Orleans jazz, and he confesses that he “wept over Malcolm X’s *Autobiography* (1965) and Margaret Lawrence’s *The Stone Angel* (1964)” (xii). In both the round-table discussion and the anthology’s introduction, Clarke maintains that these varying elements of identity are not incongruous, but have simply been the natural formation of his subject position. A similar commitment to this multiplicity of identity turns up in *Whylah Falls*. In the poem “Radiant Being,” X assures his readers that his love is “a Nova Scotian lass” (174). Given that the subject of this line is black (Shelley), X’s (and Clarke’s) assertion is that she is *both* black and a Nova Scotian, and that these two strands of identity are not inharmonious. Clarke’s concern for inclusiveness extends beyond his conception of personal identity, whether fictional or autobiographical, and affects his editorial practices. Commenting on the selection process of *Eyeing the North Star*, he asserts that “No single approach to the literature can suffice” (xxiv), since black Canadian writers have thus far produced a more diverse canon than one finds in the anthologies of African American writers, who, he argues, are more easily grouped. “Like Canada itself, the African-Canadian ‘community’ fissures along regional, linguistic, gender, class, and ethnic lines, thus rendering the incarnation of race solidarity a difficult enterprise” (xviii). Whereas race is foremost among the concerns of African American writers, “*race*, per se, is not everything for African Canadians. No, it is the struggle against *erasure* that is everything”(xviii).

*Whylah Falls*, then, is not only Clarke's contribution to the Africville conversation, it is also his attempt to defend the black experience against erasure. "Because African-Canadian history is ignored in Canada," he notes in *Eyeing the North Star*, "African-Canadian writers are forced to act as historians" (xx). Clarke waxes rhetorical on the subject in "Responsive Reading," and actually assumes the historian's role. The prose poem begins:

To sing Nova Scotia, its epic heroes of Glooscap, Champlain, Preston, and Howe, there must needs howl an angry train and the sharp-toned voice of African Baptist choirs, those Black saints swaddled in snow-white robes of Glory, testify to Ethiopia's gorgeous blackness. (147)

The poet's unmistakable point is that the song of the province cannot be sung without verses that include a black presence. In the 1998 interview with Compton he comments on the tradition of excluding blacks from representations of Nova Scotia:

Black Nova Scotians have been left out of so much. And in a sense, we are very much still outside the canon and whatever else. This inclusiveness is also a response to all those travelogues about Nova Scotia, from Will R. Bird's *This is Nova Scotia* to Margaret Morley's *Down North and Up Along*, particularly those about the Annapolis Valley, my favourite part of the province. Most of them did not mention black people, or they mentioned them condescendingly. This jarred with my recollections and my knowledge of Black communities in the Annapolis Valley because they were, to my mind, not exotic but simply part of the valley, part of Nova Scotia life. (141)

His response to historical exclusion is to write blacks into the landscape of the Annapolis Valley, and with *Whylah Falls* in particular, to write the black United Empire Loyalists into history.<sup>18</sup> Weymouth Falls, on which *Whylah Falls* is based, was founded on the shores of the Sissiboo River in 1783 by black Loyalists, and according to Sylvia Hamilton, the black Loyalist migration meant that, "for the first time, there would be large numbers of free Black people in Nova Scotia, a situation not found elsewhere in North America in the late 1700s" (19).<sup>19</sup> Arnold E. Davidson agrees that writing the first free black settlers into the landscape of Nova Scotia is an important project. Clarke's "portrayal of one poor black community," Davidson argues, "constitutes a summary and symbolic history of blacks both in Canada and in the new world—a history often overlooked in Canadian literature" (265).



What seems to be at stake in Clarke's project of inclusion is both finding and asserting a home in Canada. The Loyalists, the founders of his mythic community, sought freedom and a home in Nova Scotia. Africville, the community that stands behind the composition of *Whylah Falls*, to quote Saunders again, "was tradition; it was family; it was, above all else, home" (188). A home, of course, fends off exile, and is the rootedness Weil declares intrinsically valuable. In "Home as an Ordering Principle in Space," Kim Dovey argues that "home is a notion universal to our species, not as a place, house, or city, but as a principle for establishing a meaningful relationship with the environment" (qtd. in Porteous 26), a point with which John Berger agrees when he writes that, "[o]riginally home meant the center of the world—not in a geographical sense, but in an ontological sense" (55). As such, home came to establish, to a degree, reality; therefore, Berger notes, "[w]ithout a home at the center of the real, one was not only shelterless, but also lost in non-being, in unreality. Without a home everything was fragmentation" (56). The experience of being without a home and "lost in non-being" is not unlike Rinaldo Walcott's characterization of the black experience in Canada in *Black Like Who?*: "[t]o be black and at home in Canada is both to belong and not belong" (36); it is, he argues, a fragmented "practice of the in-between" (36) because:

Canadian state institutions and official narratives attempt to render blackness outside of those same narratives, and simultaneously attempt to contain blackness through discourses of Canadian benevolence. Thus blackness in Canada is situated on a continuum that runs from the invisible to the hyper-visible.<sup>20</sup> (36)

The tension that Walcott describes between the "invisible" and the "hyper-visible" is reminiscent of W.E.B. DuBois's famous assertion about the life of a post-slavery African American. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois refers to this position as one of "double consciousness":

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. . . . One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (45)

While Walcott's characterization is reminiscent of DuBois's assertion, Clarke suggests that regardless of these similarities, DuBois's formulation is not appropriate in a Canadian context. In "Contesting a Model Black-

ness,” he suggests that black Canadians feel more than a *double* consciousness:

the African Canadian consciousness is not simply dualistic. We are divided severally; we are not just Black and Canadian but also adherents to a region, speakers of an official language (either English or French), disciples of heterogeneous faiths, and related to a particular ethnicity (or national group), all of which shape our identities. African Canadians possess, then, not merely a double consciousness but also a poly consciousness. (17)

If the experience of being black and at home in Canada is, as Walcott posits, an experience of both belonging and not belonging, and as Clarke conceives, a potentially overwhelming and confusing “poly consciousness,” with regional and linguistic concerns competing with ethnicity for position in one’s consciousness, it is no wonder that the notion of home is unstable. All the more reason, then, for home to be sought, valued, protected, and even mythologized.

bell hooks explains that historically blacks have “believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension” (42). The term, “homeplace,” she says, denotes a “site of resistance” (47), and is a place where “we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world” (42). Furthermore, she notes that the notion of “homeplace” does not only apply to the structures of individual homes, but also implies a “community of resistance” (42). Since Clarke, echoing the sociologist Joy Mannette, notes that Africadians “seem to believe that identity is found, not primarily in the self, but in the group” (13), the desire for a home in Canada also becomes the desire for community.

Not only is the desire for home, for community, expressed in *Whylah Falls*, but it is the longing for a lost home and a lost community that guides the poetics of the text. There are only two instances in *Whylah Falls* where the text’s relationship to the community of Africville is made explicit. The first is in the poem “Bees’ Wings,” which concludes by asserting the urgency of poetry when X tells Shelley that

. . . there’s nothing I will not force language  
To do to make us one—whether water

Hurts like whiskey or the suns burns like oil  
 Or love declines to weathered names on stone.  
 (12)

The love reduced to “weathered names on stone,” could well be a reference to the stone monument that now stands in Seaview Memorial Park to commemorate the settlement of the land by the “First Black Settlers: William Brown, John Brown, Thomas Brown,” whose names are now “weathered . . . on stone.” Significantly, this is also the poem in which Othello’s role as a tragic hero is foretold (“His unknown, imminent death” [12]). Although Othello is not the speaker of the poems, his character is drawn closest to the landscape. He has, after all, “waterfall hands” (106) on guitar strings, which suggests a connection between his body and the Falls. By pairing Othello with the landscape and by then relating his “imminent death” in the same breath as a reference to the fallen community of Africville, Clarke proposes the mortality of his mythic and idyllic community. Likewise, in “How Exile Melts to One Hundred Roses,” the collection’s second reference to Africville, X comments on the fragility of community:

Shelley, we wrest diamonds from coal,  
 Scrounge pearls from grubs and stones, lest penury,  
 Work filthy rags of our magnificence,  
 Or planners bulldoze our flowers into dirt.  
 (18)

Again, Clarke articulates the possibility that planners may eventually target even this mythic community and “bulldoze our flowers into dirt.”<sup>21</sup> With the reference to “flowers” Clarke has effectively translated the disregard for Africville into the disregard for and willingness to destroy beauty. According to Clarke, this willingness must be considered in a political context. “This ability to find one’s own beauty, and to define beauty for oneself, is also politic,” he insists; “[i]t is an act of resistance against all people who declare your community a slum, or define you personally as ugly or ignorant, or on the margin” (144). His creative response is to imagine a community not only able to appreciate the aesthetic, but one *founded* on “Beauty.” The text, he assures us, is “a place where the death of poetry has not yet occurred” (xxv), and if we bear in mind his belief in the political consequences of owning conceptions of the beautiful and the poetic, *Why-lah Falls* becomes a political text. Indeed, the epigraph invites us to regard the text as such:

*I know that this traitor language can turn  
One truth into another or even  
Against itself. Yet it is all we have.*  
(vii)

The position of the post colonial author is crucial to a negotiation of Clarke's poetics. The "traitor language" (the tropes, styles, tools of the white European-schooled author) is inadequate and even dangerous, but its inheritance is unavoidable and its use almost so. Confronted with an overwhelmingly white (and non-Canadian) canon, Clarke assigns himself a jazz musician-like role—he relies on the art of improvisation. He explains his "strategy," both political and artistic, to Compton:

part of my strategy as a writer, in responding to my status as the scribe of a marginal and colonized community, is to sack and plunder all those larger literatures—British, American, Canadian, French, African-American, Caribbean. (143)

In the same discussion he contends that, "in order to come to terms with these 'superior cultures,' we need to reconfigure them in our own terms. I think that is what I was trying to do in terms of *Whylah Falls*" (142). This statement deserves some unpacking. First, such "reconfigurations" of "superior cultures" can be discerned throughout the text. For example, Clarke turns white canonical authors into blues performers: "Howlin' Will Shakespeare, Blind Jack Milton, Missouri Tom Eliot" (55) all grace his pages, as does Shakespeare's Othello, reincarnated here only to be 'martyred' again (see "The Martyrdom of Othello Clemence" [99]). Similarly, Clarke positions the slave spiritual, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" alongside the sailor's lament, "Farewell to Nova Scotia" (148) to suggest a comparable exile in the Maritime experience and the black experience, blending the two, and calling both of them "barbed-wire spirituals of this stony peninsula" (148). More specifically, however, Clarke's 'reconfigurations' refer to the application of the vernacular. He makes the Elizabethans, the English Romantics, and the Anglo-American high Modernists speak with a "Black Nova Scotian accent" (142). Clarke explains this accent in his chapter in *The English Language in Nova Scotia*, "The Career of Black English": the speech of black Nova Scotians has been "scorned, repressed and suppressed, and labeled 'dialect,' 'lingo,' 'jargon,' 'bad English,' 'broken English,' and 'patois'" (125), and it is his explicit aim to defend this particular manifestation of the black vernacular, to declare it both "as Nova Scotian as standard Nova Scotian speech" (125), and "as a vital lit-

erary performance” (125). These aims are dramatized in the development of X’s poetic voice. X begins strictly as a follower, a poet who is content only to echo the verse of the ‘superior cultures’: his “The River Pilgrim: A Letter” is an obvious imitation of Ezra Pound’s “The River-merchant’s Wife: A Letter.” He continues this way until we reach the “Monologue for Selah Bringing Spring to Whylah Falls,” where, for the first time, X gives his attention to the vernacular. He begins, “I cry in the vernacular” (57), and admits, “My college speech ripens before you, / Becomes Negro natural” (57). Immediately following this linguistic awakening, we see the first consistent use of “Black English”—“To Selah” marks a movement away from the imitation of the voice of the white canon in the first parts of the book, towards a more relevant and resonant incorporation of the vernacular, his own local speech, into the poetry.<sup>22</sup> In “To Selah,” X renders local idioms, such as “drippin’,” “sorta,” “kinda,” and “Like your body do sometimes” (59), poetic. The blues elements of black speech, the ‘broken English’ of the black Nova Scotian accent, are celebrated here, and X’s incorporation of them, Clarke implies, signifies the fictional poet’s progression towards authenticity.

While Clarke notes that “*Whylah Falls* was born in the blues, the philosophy of the cry” (xi), and while he has described culling material, particularly colloquialisms and speech rhythms from the black community (“I was literally sitting in people’s living rooms, writing down what they had to say—stories, jokes, sayings, proverbs” [Compton 139]), his use and abuse, or as he says, “homage” and “damage” (Compton 143) of the “master tropes, master genres, master language” (Compton 142) is not as uncomplicated as he claims, nor are his motives so straightforward. Although Clarke pokes fun at *The Anxiety of Influence* in the tenth anniversary edition’s Introduction, it is evident that the text exhibits a far more difficult and involved relationship to the canon. For instance, that same Introduction announces the echoes of William Empson, William Carlos Williams, William Butler Yeats, to name but a summary few, thus demonstrating a seemingly unembarrassed willingness to name names. T.S. Eliot especially looms large in *Whylah Falls*; Clarke is not shy about sprinkling allusions throughout the poems, referring to dry bones, “hyacinthine hair,” and of course to the month of April. This willingness, however, is complicated in the section called “The Death of the Epic.” Here, Clarke cites the influence Jean Toomer’s *Cane* had on the composition and organization of the poems. Surely *Cane* is an important African American progenitor, but another text that must be equally important although not credited, is Edgar Lee Masters’s *Spoon River Anthology*. An author so schooled in American

Modernism has certainly encountered Masters's foundational work, so its absence in the list of influential texts is curious to say the least. Why not admit to having 'sacked and plundered' that work as well?

At base, then, *Whyah Falls* is a work of Eliotic Modernism, a work created consciously to fit into the line of "tradition" Eliot details in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." It is a text which recognizes Eliot's "historical sense" (38), acknowledges that "[t]he existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves" (38), and seeks introduction into that "ideal order." To gain entry into the line of tradition, a text must be both "really new" (38), and demonstrate "conformity between the old and the new" (39); Clarke's work is not so much a work of damage as it is an attempt to pay "really new" homage to the "tradition."

In interviews and introductions, prefaces and preambles, Clarke repeatedly attempts to explain his "sack and plunder" style of improvisation, his relationship to the "superior cultures." The assertion he continually falls back on, by way of explanation and defense, is: "I testify: African-Canadian literature has always been international" (*Eyeing the North Star* xv). I wonder, though, if his commitment to internationalism undermines his earlier support for the local, the anachronistic, the non-urban, non-modern, literature of his marginalized home region. Similarly, Clarke explains that his style, his mode of 'reconfiguration,' is perhaps the only way to "come to terms with" (142) the master narratives of the 'superior cultures.' The ambiguity of this phrase is worth dwelling upon. To borrow Theodor Adorno's expression, "what does *coming to terms with* mean?" (my emphasis 114). Such a vague assertion problematizes the political import Clarke sees in his project, and suggests not an active negotiation with the master tropes, but an analgesic intent. Clarke told Compton that, "[b]eing able to see beauty, to create beauty, to know beauty, is an antidote, a means of balancing the pain, especially for the oppressed" (144). Is this, then, ultimately the goal of *Whyah Falls*? Is the "balancing" of pain through the commitment to beauty responsible for the mythic landscape, the returned exiles, the represented margins, the idyllic "homeplace"? The desire to claim and name a home in Canada, we learn, is more complicated than remembering the "fallen black space" of Africville, more complicated than simply inserting a black presence into the landscape, and more complicated than transforming Elizabethan poets into blues singers. The desire for a community, it seems, involves nothing short of the repeated, complicated, and radical processes of negotiation. *Whyah Falls* participates in multiple negotiations, dealing with concerns of style, desire, exile, and rep-

resentation, but what is perhaps the most perilous negotiation is the one involving pain and healing.

### Notes

- 1 Poplar Grove, Buckingham, Jacob, Hurd, and Starr Streets were eliminated, as were the farmers' market, and Clayton's Clothing Factory.
- 2 The city's refusal to supply the community with water has become an important touchstone for issues of environmental racism. Indeed, *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice* (1995), edited by Laura Westra and Peter S. Wenz, and published in Lanham, Maryland, chronicles the problem on a global level, and for the book's cover they have chosen a photograph of Africville. The cover displays an image of black children playing near a well—a sign is posted there that reads: "PLEASE BOIL WATER BEFORE DRINKING AND COOKING." A similar photograph is featured on the cover of the Clairmont-Magill study, *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community*.
- 3 According to Clairmont and Magill, "[t]here is no reference in council minutes to a concern for the health of Africville residents" (115).
- 4 Gans further notes that urban villages are often "described in ethnic terms" (4). Africville was originally named after the road around which it grew, Campbell Road; the name "Africville" didn't come into currency until the turn of the century. According to Donald Clairmont, "There was a consensus that it had been imposed by white Haligonians" (41), despite the fact that, as one resident said, "[n]one of the people came from Africa" (Clairmont 41).
- 5 I should mention here that forced relocation in Canada has not been limited to urban areas slated for redevelopment. The Native reserve system, the Japanese internment, and the continuing resettlement of Newfoundland outports immediately spring to mind as other examples.
- 6 In 1959, the Institution of Public Affairs at Dalhousie University conducted a survey of socio-economic conditions among blacks in Halifax, and asked residents of Africville about their community. According to the survey, "roughly sixty-five percent of the respondents reported their liking of living in Africville and their reluctance to move" (Clairmont 48).
- 7 In "Nova Scotia Reality Song," David Woods implicitly claims that the welfare officials, government agents, and urban planners did not know how to judge Africville. Acting on behalf of the vague concept, "social grounds," he asserts, does not sanction disregard for other expressions of value. He writes:

In Africville,  
 The people did the best they could—  
 Building from their dreams and industry  
 They built a church—houses for their families.  
 Starting in 1960 they listened as their homes  
 were called 'shacks,'  
 Their community, 'Canada's worst slum,'  
 By 1969 houses, church, people were all gone.  
 (40-58)

Woods says the families did the "best they could"—this clearly suggests other ways of

judging worth. He also emphasizes the importance and the value of the built environment of Africville—the construction of a church and houses, he argues, indicates worthwhile achievement; the last line further suggests the value of buildings: he lists buildings first (houses, church), then mentions people third.

- 8 Donald Clairmont admits that not everyone was displeased with their new housing. Housing was improved in terms of size and facilities, but the majority of relocatees did express “a loss of freedom and status” in becoming “tenants instead of homeowners” (Clairmont-Magill 225). Furthermore, Clairmont reports that, “[i]nterviewed in 1969, the majority of relocatees—about 70 percent—reported having suffered personal crises as a consequence of relocation and having trouble making ends meet” (72).
- 9 *The Spirit of Africville* exhibits several photographs of dirty orange and yellow dump trucks being loaded with chairs, tables, bureaus, refrigerators, and suitcases (52-69).
- 10 Concepts relating to domicile include “eviction, exile, expropriation, displacement, dislocation, and relocation” (12).
- 11 *Whylah Falls* illustrates several levels of exile. Rev. Langford, for example, “believes everyone is an alien, a refugee, an emigré. Everyone emigrates to the world from his or her mother. Heaven is everyone’s true home” (133). For him, then, the human condition is one of exile. X confesses that he is of “the wrong century” (13); he’s a “Romantic fool” (13), and as such he experiences a temporal exile. We also see exile from the beloved (X and Shelley), and exile from the community (X at university). Finally, the trajectory of exile and return, in a Loyalist context, is one of North and South—the Loyalists are black Americans in exile from their place of birth, the United States.
- 12 The pastoral elements also suggest Clarke’s resistance to Margaret Atwood’s survival thesis. He has expressed his hesitation to abide this thesis in interviews:

At the same time there is, at least in the Maritimes, specifically in parts of Nova Scotia—the Annapolis Valley—but also in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, the possibility for gardens, as opposed to wilderness, where one can find beauty. I find in the Annapolis Valley a very pastoral landscape. The vegetation is lush in the spring, summer, and fall. You can luxuriate. (143)

The bleak picture Ernest Buckler draws of the Annapolis region in *Mountain and the Valley*, for example, does not represent Clarke’s experience. The Canadian landscape, he asserts, does not only inspire terror, and nature is not the monster Atwood, loosely following Northrop Frye, suggests it is (“I have long been impressed in Canadian poetry by a tone of deep terror in regard to nature” [813 Frye]; “Nature the Monster” [Atwood 45]).

- 13 The text of *Whylah Falls* I will be dealing with in this paper is the Tenth Anniversary Edition. Therefore, I will treat the entire text, poems, cataloguing information, Acknowledgments, and particularly the Introduction, as *the* text. The decision to include the essay, in a slightly revised incarnation, that originally appeared in a 1991 edition of *Quarry* warrants an essay of its own, but for my present purposes it is enough to note that, placed how and where it is, the “Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary Edition” cannot help but influence our current reading of the poems.
- 14 In earlier editions of the text (the 1994 edition, for example) the “Admissions” section appears in the same type-face and is organized on the page in the same way as the page dedicated to copyright, publication, and Canadian Cataloguing information. In the Tenth Anniversary Edition the “Admission” appears much more like part of the fictional text.
- 15 I’m thinking here, of course, of *The Canterbury Tales*: “Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote / . . . Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgramages” (1-12).
- 16 In “Anti-Racism Organizing and Resistance: Blacks in Urban Canada, 1940s-1970s,”



- Agnes Calliste cites the 1961 Canadian Census for this information: "In 1961, the black population in Canada was 32,127. Of these, 37 per cent lived in Nova Scotia, 34.4 per cent lived in Ontario, and 13.3 per cent lived in Quebec" (283).
- 17 Clarke, however, has not held a Nova Scotia address since 1987, and is now a professor at the University of Toronto (home of the "Toronto intellectual elite").
  - 18 The black Loyalists have been an enduring topic in Clarke's poetry. His 1982 poem, "Guysborough Road Church" imagines brer rabbit in Nova Scotia ("in a briar patch of pines" [5]). The work is a dramatic monologue which beings, "we are the black loyalists" (1), thus insisting on the spirit of community in the pluralization of the pronoun, much like David Woods's line, "I was there when Africville was taken."
  - 19 Sir Henry Clinton's Philipsburg Proclamation promised "to every Negro who shall desert the rebel standard, full security to follow within these lines, any occupation which he shall think proper" (qtd. in Walker 208). Out of about 10,000 black Loyalists, "about 3,500 blacks were sent to Halifax in the loyalist province of Nova Scotia" (Walker 209).
  - 20 Clarke is one author Walcott credits with successfully articulating a political and ethical stance expressive of life at or on the "in-between."
  - 21 The dominant representation of Africville has become a photograph of the Basin, the church, and two houses, foregrounded by bright red flowers. This image graces post-cards, web sites, and the poster for the National Film Board's "Remember Africville."
  - 22 The vernacular appears earlier in the text, in "The Symposium," but is not penned by X.

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