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Abstract

In *God's Angry Babies*, Ian Strachan interweaves different types and styles of discourse as he examines the extent to which stories circulating at a popular level within a community colour people's vision of reality and influence behaviour. Stories, as used in this discussion, include narratives describing events, and fictional stories as well as 'ideologies, rationalizations and explanations' (Faust 2). Type of discourse refers to the distinctions which are made, for example, between myth, legend, folktale, autobiographical writing, news report and letter. Differences in style are created by the mixture of language varieties, the use of figurative language, shifts between direct and indirect speech, and the patterns of rhythm and tonal qualities resulting from these.

JOYCE JOHNSON

‘Is Not Story, Is the Gospel Truth’: Fact and Fiction in Ian Strachan’s *God’s Angry Babies*

‘We all live within the stories we tell, for these tales fashion a coherent direction and identity out of the discontinuities of our past, present, and future.’

(Drew Gilpin Faust, 2)

Have faith to face, Caonoba
the tree-green seas rolled down
one doubt will smash the garden
shatter the convex lawn
drown the three nuns of fear.

(Edward Braithwaite ‘The Cracked Mother’ 180)

In *God’s Angry Babies*, Ian Strachan interweaves different types and styles of discourse as he examines the extent to which stories circulating at a popular level within a community colour people’s vision of reality and influence behaviour. Stories, as used in this discussion, include narratives describing events, and fictional stories as well as ‘ideologies, rationalizations and explanations’ (Faust 2). Type of discourse refers to the distinctions which are made, for example, between myth, legend, folktale, autobiographical writing, news report and letter. Differences in style are created by the mixture of language varieties, the use of figurative language, shifts between direct and indirect speech, and the patterns of rhythm and tonal qualities resulting from these. Much of Strachan’s material is derived from the performance culture of Bahamian oral tradition, but he also specifically relates his stories to the language of ‘classrooms and offices, lawyers and library books’ (Strachan 13) stemming from British scribal tradition. The interaction between the two traditions which resulted in the Bahamian Creole, the local vernacular language, reflects both the nature of the society which Strachan describes and processes taking places within it. The heterogeneous sources which he brings together in the novel reflect the geographical fragmentation and cultural diversity of the Bahamas, which is situated on an archipelago and is inhabited by people of mixed African and European heritage. Strachan’s integration of different formal and stylistic elements suggests the process of creolisation by which native born Bahamians attempt to unite their society and reconcile divergent elements. Events described in the novel highlight

stories which are used by politicians, social agencies like churches and schools, peer groups and family members to influence each other during this process of acculturation. Strachan depicts a central character who comes to disbelieve many of the stories which shaped his outlook. Like his prototype in Brathwaite's poem cited above, he is 'cracked' by fear as his mind is inundated by doubt.

Strachan's plotting of the novel directs attention to the problematics of storytelling. The use of multiple narrators, a drastic rearrangement of chronology, and different styles of narration reflect his concern with the relationship between fiction and fact, appearance and reality, and the effects of time and memory on recollections of the past. In depicting political corruption, social dysfunction and gender inequities, Strachan also brings out the significance of various stories circulating within the society and the ways in which they colour people's vision of reality. The method is dialogic. Neither the narrator's nor a particular character's views constitute the ultimate authority with respect to the situations presented. Moreover, the central character who is highly critical of events is in many ways as compromised as those he berates. Stories, Strachan demonstrates, have submerged meanings which members of a community internalise and act upon. Storytelling, he also shows, however, can be used, as he uses the novel, to make people aware of the 'meanings in which [they] live enmeshed, embedded, not even aware that they exist' (Dance 1992 277).

The novel is set in the fictional islands of the Santa Marias in the context of political infighting following on the achievement of black majority rule. It shows the chief protagonist Mark Etienne Bodie, popularly known as Tree — a name given him by his friend Small Pint — in the process of defining his relationship to his society and liberating himself from the influence of his mother who has been the significant formative influence in his life. Tree, the 'las' chile', and a boy growing up without a father, is especially attached to his mother and is particularly aware of the sacrifices she has made for her children. His experience in the post-Independence period both extend and contrast with those of his mother who grew up in the colonial period. Strachan explores their different historical outlooks, and counterpoints their responses to the architects of black majority rule.

Tree's mother, Maureen Bodie, a woman 'trapped in a world that has been created by men, and whose organisation is male' (Dance 1992a 142) has acquired a degree of autonomy. She has left a husband who abused her, and used the opportunities provided under black majority rule to further her education. Resentment of her ex-husband has been a driving force, but her primary goal in life is to ensure the well-being of her three sons. Maureen has remained loyal to the party which facilitated her advancement and enabled her to establish an identity apart from her husband's. She assumes that Tree thinks as she does. Strachan thus creates a parallel between Tree who tries to be loyal to the mother who has nurtured and protected him and the people of the Santa Marias who have remained loyal to the ruling party. Tree is as much constrained by his

mother's personal history as the people are by stories of the party's role in the achievement of black majority rule.

The novel is written in four parts, each contributing in a variety of ways to the theme of storytelling. Strachan's insights on the role of storytelling in the community emerge not only from personal histories of characters like Maureen and myths circulating within the political environment but also from material selected from the repertoire of folklore, rumour, gossip, and news reports. Given the significance of juxtaposition, alternation (the interweaving and combination of narrative units) and embedding in the novel, further discussion of the uses of storytelling and the problematic relationship between fact and fiction that Strachan creates will follow the contours of the text.

The opening chapter of Part 1, entitled 'Ten', establishes a sense of place, describing the demoralising conditions of life in Pompey Village, a segment of the urban culture in Safe Haven in Grand Santa Maria, the capital of the Santa Marias. People in Pompey Village are victims not only of neglect by their elected representatives but also of their own heedlessness and ignorance, as the accident between a truck and a bus demonstrates. The potholes which hamper movement and contribute to accidents reflect the difficult social terrain negotiated by the community. The accident in which Tree is involved as a passenger, and its immediate aftermath, initiate a train of reflection and a 'revisiting' of the past with respect to the present when he is almost twenty years old. The reference to the general elections scheduled for the following year establishes a time frame for this process of retrospection. For Tree, recollecting past experience and telling his story has a cathartic effect, relieving certain tensions in his mind and in his relationship with others, in particular his mother.

The description of the environment in which the accident occurs introduces themes of political corruption and mythmaking — that is, the construction of stories to ensure public regard or to foster allegiance to a party. The news report by M.E. Bodie, staff writer for *The Daily Report* — Tree narrates, but not in his own voice — underscores the view of the community presented by the third person narrator and draws attention to another kind of story which also serves to define the cultural landscape and determine the political climate. 'True or false', as the third narrator later observes, 'once something appeared in *The Daily Report*, it might just as well be fact, because people treated it as such' (238).

Tree's meeting with his mother, following the accident, provides another perspective on the political environment and the uses of stories. The mixture of understanding and tension existing between Tree and Maureen is apparent when she confronts him in the hospital emergency room. As she rescues him from this demoralising environment, she is determined that he must go to university abroad, as she had done. Tree has secretly been applying for admission to universities in the United States. When he tells Maureen that he has been accepted by one, she urges him to contact the new Minister of Education, Thaddeus McKinney, who,

she hopes, will assist Tree in obtaining a scholarship to finance his studies abroad. Maureen, loyal to the party that brought black majority rule, tells Tree that Thaddeus is 'a good man' (17). She still sees him as 'a humble man from Crab Bay' (17), a man 'with hardly any formal education, who worked his way up from a bus driver' (18). Thaddeus, whose example can be used to show that 'A man could be anything in Santa Maria' (18) has, in effect, the ideal profile for the politician soliciting popular support. Maureen believes that Thaddeus will help Tree, for she has internalised the idea which developed in the context of slavery and colonialism and which politicians of the post-Independence era use in their own interest: 'Black people must stick together' (17).

Although he has heard stories casting him in a different light, Tree agrees to meet McKinney to please his mother — his need for a scholarship is greater than burgeoning doubts about the ruling party and the use of a common history of oppression to engage loyalty. He realises that he cannot hope to further his education unless he accepts some form of patronage, a view which is confirmed in a subsequent conversation with two friends in which he discovers that Yellow Man has bought his driver's license and Small Pint has joined the police force without meeting the requirements. Moreover, there is his mother's story which seems to justify her outlook and her continuing loyalty to the political party which helped her.

Flashbacks to Maureen's childhood, adolescence and marriage in the rural environment of Runaway Island evoke the context of traditional storytelling and oral history. Strachan thus reminds the reader of other types of stories which characterise the culture — stories other than those intended to accomplish political objectives. The tone of the narrator, which is noticeably different from that describing Pompey Village, suggests another ethos. The narrator combines the truncated sentences and repetitions of the storyteller searching for words with the succinct downright manner of the 'knowledgeable' informant. Underlying the narrative voice is that of the polydialectal Maureen. Her 'language of choice' (12) is the vernacular, but she has taught herself to use standard English effectively and has conveyed to Tree an idea of its importance and 'power' (13). The account of her early life, which distances it from the world of Pompey Village, underscores her achievement in educating herself and achieving independence in a male-dominated society.

Set in anterior time, Maureen's struggles as a child growing up in a rural setting contrast with the experiences of her sons who live comfortably in the city. By blending personal history with various types of folklore, Strachan indicates how her story functions for her and those to whom she tells it. Maureen uses her story like a myth to inspire her sons and motivate them to succeed. In outline, her story is typical of those which parents of her generation, who have moved to the urban context, tell their children about life in the country, and the difficulty of making their way up and out. However, it may also be compared to the story

which the politicians rehearse about the difficult road to independence and black majority rule. Both stories tell of triumph over difficult circumstances, help to shape future development, and instil loyalty. Maureen, however, unlike the politicians, does not dispense favours to win support.

Maureen's personal history is repeated in a dramatic monologue which is addressed to Tree. This version of her story voices her dissatisfaction with her situation as a woman, disappointment with her older sons, and the failure of her marriage to their father, Mercer Stone. The irreconcilability of Maureen's and Mercer's outlook reflects the situation in the wider community where, as Maureen tells Tree, '*What a woman say don't mean a shit.... What a man say is law*' (39). Although Maureen's own example as a woman who has liberated herself from virtual servitude as a wife and managed to function independently subverts this idea, she still displays the '*cart horse*' mentality (34) derived from her early upbringing. She is overprotective of her sons who, even in a crisis, wait for her to come home and cook their dinner, and in a variety of ways helps to perpetuate the male dominance that she rebelled against. She cannot, as it were, change the story and, like the community in relation to the ruling party, she is trapped in the history of past experience.

As the focus of narration shifts to Thaddeus McKinney, Maureen's problematic situation regarding her sons and her entanglement with history are further illuminated. The narrator's vituperative and ironic account of Thaddeus' career highlights the limited options of the black man attempting to better himself in the immediate post-Independence period, the self-justificatory attitudes of politicians in a context of adversarial race relations and various forms of political manoeuvring. As was noted earlier, in the popular estimation Thaddeus, 'the humble man who had come to Safe Haven as a picky-head boy from Crab Bay' (47) has become a heroic figure despite the various stories in circulation about his marital and financial problems. People who 'came up the hard way' can empathise with him to the point where they suspend moral judgments. The interview with Tree, who is seeking his assistance, presented directly without tag clauses or intervening narrative, conveys a different 'story' from the commonly accepted one.

Finally, Part 1 introduces the story of Tree's eldest brother Firs'born whose experience is essential to an understanding of the tension between Tree and his mother. Terse narrative frames a brief scene which shows how Firs'born has effectively cut off communication with his family, and surrounded himself with barriers of gibberish or silence. Firs'born's attempt to obtain a university education abroad had ended in failure and his story is unsettling for Tree who fears that he could disappoint his mother as Firs'born has done. Firs'born's inability to use a shared language increases Maureen's distress, and alienates their brother Kevin. Strachan here directs attention to the role of language in sustaining relationships.

While the narrative records Maureen's anguish, it also invites an objective view of her treatment of Firs'born, as she comforts him: 'Don' mind Kevin. He

don' know better. He never suffer, you see. He never suffer like you or me, so he don' know better' (63). Maureen's remarks convey more than she is aware of saying. Her experiences and the stories that she has heard have taught her to valorise suffering. Her utterances reflect an attitude to suffering and misfortune that is also prevalent in the society where politicians use the stories of past oppression to appeal for support. People who have suffered together, they tell the people, understand each other and, as a consequence, must support each other.

Part 2, 'Voices', elaborates on themes already introduced and adds to the range of narratives. A series of flashbacks recalls Tree's early life in Crab Bay, one of the Santa Marias, and a subsequent period in the capital Safe Haven. Recollections of the period before his family moved from the rural environment of Crab Bay centre on experiences in elementary school and incorporate the folklore relating to children's games. It seems a world away from the accident that M.E. Bodie's news report, describes. The account of Tree's elementary schooldays, however, point not only to the poverty of the educational system but also to the capacity of the school curriculum to accommodate political mythmaking.

Tree's early years in Safe Haven are marked by his friendship with Small Pint, another boy growing up without a father, who initiates him into the ways of the city. Tree's world expands after he meets Small Pint who knows most of the stories circulating in Pompey Village. Small Pint, who 'pretended to be Christopher Columbus sailing from Spain' (89), directs Tree's journeys of exploration in this new world, making up stories of 'adventure and gold and spices' (89), while initiating him into the realities of urban life. Small Pint, however, dismisses the culture of classrooms and offices. His voice challenges Maureen's, as he tells Tree: 'School don' count. They is only be trying to play wit' ya head in school' (87). Through Small Pint, Tree meets others beyond his mother's circle of acquaintances, some of them social misfits whose stories have legendary status in Pompey Village. The stories of these people who are virtually outsiders in their own community not only illuminate other situations and events in the novel but also show how the lines between fact and fiction become blurred. They highlight other sources of oral tradition, rumour and gossip.

Mudda Mae's story is based on speculation and gossip supported by other stories circulating in the community that relate to obeah and black magic, and are associated with the African past. In her case, circumstances in the present are explained by beliefs surviving from a distant past. The children of Pompey Village have imbibed these beliefs which, though not directly taught, inform the social environment and colour the words people 'throw' at each other. Mudda Mae's 'eccentricities' and the 'smooth expanse of brown dirt' (101) in her yard where nothing except a sapodilla tree grows, fuel suspicions that she is an obeah woman: 'She done frig up the soil an' all' (101). Children, who are anxious to add their names 'to the annals of the Village, be numbered among the legends of the place' (103), Tree and Small Pint among them, 'endeavoured to challenge the old obeah woman' (103). Their daring assaults on Mudda Mae's property, in

turn, also became 'the stuff of legend among the younger children' (103). Stories thus create new stories. When Tree finally has a face-to-face encounter with Mudda Mae, he recognises that the fanciful stories which he once accepted as fact are fiction.

Crazy Mr. Burke's story also centres on the illusion/reality shift. Mr. Burke, a charismatic and inspiring preacher who formerly avoided women, surprises his congregation by marrying Brenda, a seductive newcomer to the church, who is less than half his age. When she leaves him for a younger man, Burke abandons his church and lapses into irrational behaviour. Admiration quickly changes to pity, some church members blaming Brenda for 'bewitching' him and others wondering 'if Burke head wuzzan bad from day one' (109). Burke's sudden downfall raises questions about his congregation's perception of him. Who was the real Burke? Was the charismatic preacher a creation of his followers, like the children's imaginings about Mudda Mae? Mr. Burke's story clearly points a moral for characters like Thaddeus McKinney and the popular Prime Minister of the Santa Marias whose hold on power depends on how others perceive them.

Where the 'legends' of Mudda Me and Crazy Mr. Burke amplify the theme of political mythmaking, Jahown's story has a more direct bearing on Tree's situation. Jahown, who had gone abroad to study, had dropped out of university, a year away from qualifying as a doctor. People in Safe Haven conclude that too many books and too much study have driven him crazy. This is another tenet of folk belief that Tree, who plans to attend university abroad, is aware of. Jahown's story, which is a variation of Firs'born's and that of his girlfriend's brother, Julian, raises doubts about Tree's plans for the future. Such stories tend to make Tree question himself and Maureen's counsel. Jahown's voice, however, cannot successfully challenge Maureen's. Tree is aware of the compromises which Jahown, with his disdain for middle class aspirations, makes to survive. Peddling souvenirs to tourists, Jahown dreams the artist's dreams of showing 'the whole wide worl' what we is and where we come from' (116).

The three satellite stories clearly add to the picture of social dysfunction, while illuminating the major themes. These 'bizarre and embarrassing' (99) stories, which people repeat sometimes covertly, open up another window on the society for Tree. Ultimately they typify those that M.E. Bodie, records for *The Daily Report*. These stories convey a different picture from the tourist brochures which are meant to obscure reality and versions of Bahamian history in which 'a painful reality is often mythologized' (Strachan 2002 3).

In the light of such stories, the novel refocuses on Maureen's past, and in particular, her failed marriage and early struggle for independence. Her past suffering has prepared her to cope with the present and is regarded in a positive light: 'Hers had been a long and bitter seasoning' (117). Insistent repetition suggests the indelible impression of bitter experience on her mind and the extent to which her account of her past experiences resonates in Tree's, countering the

effect of the stories which undermine her influence. M.E. Bodie's article describing the gutting of the Low Price Supermarket — an obvious case of arson which is ignored by the police — juxtaposes the situation of Maureen the black woman, who toiled her way up through education, and the businessman using a shortcut to prosperity. This news item is clearly an ironic comment on Maureen's struggle, which lends authority to her view of experience at this point.

Reminiscences of Tree's high school days further demonstrate the extent to which he is constrained by Maureen's history. Strachan here represents the language of urban adolescents, a variant of the vernacular noticeably different from that of Tree's elementary school days or that of his mother's monologues. Differences exist not only in style and expression but also in sentiment and emotional quality which evoke an environment that Tree must leave behind but cannot completely abandon, despite a compelling loyalty to his mother. On the one hand, he has accepted that he cannot disappoint her: *'I don't want let Mamma down. I got to do well...'* (135). On the other hand, he is aware of his debt to friends like Small Pint who opened up the world of Pompey Village for him. As the Head Boy of the school, Tree, who is required to report infractions of the rules, cannot, for example, report Small Pint: *'Small Pint is my good-good fren. We just changin' me and him. Is like we goin' two diff'ren' ways. But I cyaa never forget where me and him come from'* (136). Like his mother and the party which compels her loyalty, Tree and Small Pint have shared a common history. Tree can understand the dilemma which people like her face and even her characterisation of the Minister of Education as 'a good man'.

Tree's journalistic enterprises also lead to conflicting loyalties. Although he continues to write for *The Daily Report* which attacks the government, in his effort to obtain a scholarship he has also become involved in Thaddeus McKinney's re-election campaign. Required to glorify the ruling party's actions and destroy the reputation of opposition candidates, he is further caught up in an atmosphere of rumour and speculation. The third-person narrator's style reflects the blurring of the lines between fact and fiction in which Tree is engaged: 'People said', 'The news spread', 'It was a popular saying' (142). As McKinney's aide, Tree disseminates information for which no one claims direct responsibility. He uses human interest stories to create endorsements of the government and revises history on demand.

The story of Thaddeus McKinney's opponent, Maxwell Brown, against whom Tree is obliged to write scurrilous propaganda, highlights another aspect of storytelling: the effect of time on the process of recollection. McKinney's efforts to discredit Brown fail, for while the passing of time has made certain actions, like the Prime Minister's exploits, seem more glamorous, it has also blurred memory of Brown's transgression. As the narrator observes:

He had been gone so long that an entire generation was learning his name, his original name, for the first time. They did not know of his transgression years before and if

they were told about it, they might not have believed it... Even for those who claimed they remembered, the story had grown cloudy, had ceased being fact and become rumour. Those among the older generation who were helped by Maxwell Brown ... began to reshape him in their minds, they began to doubt or simply deny what twelve years ago everyone knew for certain to be true. Only the vindictive swore they knew the details and embellished in the retelling. (144–45)

The vindictive threaten with their silence, since memory can be activated by a chance event or by the political propagandist, like Tree, hoping to create yet another reversal of opinion. Here, the artist's preoccupation with the relationship between the lived event and its subsequent reporting clearly underlies that of the social critic inveighing against disreputable politics.

Part 3, 'Clash', which provides a further retrospective view of Tree's development, continues the exploration of stories which impinge on his consciousness and influence his thinking. Tree finds the stories originating in the religious context especially confusing. A flashback to the funerals of his grandfathers, John Bodie and Simon Stone, who died when he was eleven, introduces folk beliefs relating to death and the meanings of dreams. The traditional religious folklore associated with the African past and the material disseminated by churches including stories of the apocalypse and evocations of hellfire by television evangelists seem equally disquieting. As a small child he was conscious of unseen presences haunting his dreams and making him afraid to fall asleep.

As he matures, Tree is also troubled by the double standard in sexual behaviour in the community. At thirteen, he discovers the minister of his church having sex with a female member of the congregation in the vestry. They are both married people. He knows that this incident cannot be mentioned even to his mother. He is not sure that she would believe him. People who reported certain stories in public were 'considered troublemakers' (99). Strachan thus focuses on another kind of story, one that remains largely suppressed because of prevailing social sanctions but one which becomes a burden for the individual who knows it. Memory of the incident in the vestry haunts the adolescent Tree who is beginning to confront his own sexual fantasies. It reawakens his fears about dying and feelings of unworthiness encouraged by his religious exposure. He is not bold enough to tell other people about his doubts and fears, 'least of all his mother' (195). Questions might make Maureen, who is secure in her faith, think that he is an unbeliever.

Differences between Tree's outlook and his mother's become more apparent when he enters the local community college. At Santa Maria College, Tree meets Elsa who becomes his girlfriend, and whose views are largely incompatible with Maureen's. Elsa, like Maureen, is confident and strong in her convictions. Her story, told in a dramatic monologue, also provides another perspective on Tree's relationship with his mother. Elsa knows Maureen's story: '*Who in Santa Maria*

don't know Teacher Bodie who struggle and pull herself out of a ditch and buil' a house for her chirren on her own?' (188). She is aware of the effect that both Maureen's personal legend and 'her good stories 'bout how wonderful the P.M. been to her and her family' (188) have had on Tree. Although Maureen has freed herself from a tyrannical husband, Elsa recognises that she is passing on to her sons outmoded ideas about women's roles, and by overprotecting them sanctions the gender inequities that she objects to. Elsa observes that, while stories of sacrifice and service may inspire others, they can also become burdensome, as in Tree's case: 'But is possible to love a chile too much.... The burden get to be too much; livin' for you and not for themselves' (189). Memories of a difficult past, she recognises, have helped Maureen to create strategies for survival in the present, but also keep her trapped in a variety of ways. Maureen has attached so much value to her own history, that Tree, as Elsa sees it, though belonging to a new generation, with a new set of experiences, has become caught up in her story and has no clear sense of his own identity. Elsa's observations thus underscore the parallels between Tree who is constrained by Maureen's stories, Maureen who remains stubbornly loyal to her own historical experience, and Santa Marians enslaved by their loyalty to the government which brought black majority rule.

Elsa's intervention comes at a point when Tree is becoming critical of his mother's political views. As he is aware, this is partly because of a generation gap, but his involvement in Thaddeus McKinney's election campaign also gives him a different perspective on events. His mother knows the 'good stories' about her party, but he is familiar with the bad ones which he couldn't tell her anyway. As he observes:

Can't talk to Mamma because she won't understand. She's just like most of these old folks. Don't understand when we complain about the Government. Don't understand when we say that the PNF ain't interested in educating people. ... Can't talk to her. First time in my life I can't trust my own mother. (168)

His involvement in an anti-government student demonstration, like Elsa's views on the way Maureen raises her sons, are also things that he cannot mention to his mother.

Tree's account of his half-hearted participation in the student demonstration further illustrates the difficulty of countering the prevailing legends affecting social behaviour. The demonstration seems futile from the outset, and the police treat the occasion lightly: 'They just act like escort' (181). The atmosphere is party-like, with tourists smiling and taking pictures. The demonstrators have no coherent story to buttress their positions: 'We just sit in the road and start up different chants, calling for so and so to resign, saying this and that about the education of the youth' (181). They have no alternative view of history to contest what they were taught in their civics classes, and their 'rebellion' merely serves to reinvigorate stories of the Prime Minister's exploits on the road to

Independence. The Prime Minister's arrival on the scene effectively ends the protest. The student leader of the demonstration, Bain, is subsequently invited to speak at the Party's Annual Convention where 'He attacks corrupt politicians and governmental neglect' (183). Strachan thus highlights another kind of 'story' circulating within the community — empty talk, the clichés of political infighting. Bain is duly enveloped by the aura surrounding the Prime Minister. Tree is, however, even more guilty of empty talk, as he continues to churn out speeches and fliers for Thaddeus McKinney, behind the scenes.

Tree, finally assured of a scholarship to study abroad, is forced to acknowledge his connection with McKinney's election campaign publicly. In a letter to Dr. Runne, a former college lecturer who lost his job, following the student demonstration, he rationalises his involvement with McKinney. Self-interest and curiosity, as a budding journalist, had led to deeper involvement, and he is forced to appear on the election platform to endorse McKinney's candidacy and bolster his popularity among the youth. His role as McKinney's aide, fashioning tales to sway opinion and win votes is essentially that of a storyteller, and he is especially aware of this when he appears on the election platform to endorse McKinney. 'Caught between complicity and challenge', to use Diane Macdonell's phrase, Tree is tempted to alter the legend of 'the good man', 'the humble man who had come to Safe Haven as a picky-head boy from Crab Bay, the bus driver turned union man, the reliable fellow, the man like other men' (47). He finds himself, however, repeating the same old story that his listeners are accustomed to hear. He again recognises the difficulty of countering existing myths — popular beliefs that have built up around McKinney — and of changing the story, even in the light of new evidence. Strachan thus takes the reader back to the central theme of the novel — how the stories we tell influence opinion and affect behaviour.

Tree gains even greater understanding of the power of the myths circulating in the society when his friend Stoolie, a policeman, tells him about an attempt by two colleagues to entrap and humiliate two prominent politicians who are believed to be gay. The attack on the men has been instigated by Thaddeus McKinney, but has been made more possible by the scurrilous article which Tree had written about one of them, at McKinney's bidding. This tale of police brutality also thematises story-telling, as it raises questions about whose story will be believed — the victim's or the policemen's. Acceptance or rejection of either account will depend, to a large extent, on the existing rumours about the parties involved.

Tree realises that his views can never be fully compatible with his mother's or his peer group's. Their clashes of opinion are an inevitable part of the process of maturation, and he can accept and reconcile their accounts of individual experiences. This new orientation is reflected in the description of the Junkanoo celebration which begins Part 4 of the novel. Like the creole language, Junkanoo reflects the fusion of different African culture and the blending of African and British traditions in society. A form of expression created by native born Bahamians, it promotes togetherness and enables individuals to transcend their

personal experiences (231). The third person narrator clearly empathises with the 'magic makers' (231). For the participants, Junkanoo is an expression of freedom, an escape from imposed conventions awakening a core of memory, but ambivalence lurks behind exuberance and spontaneity. People 'gel', as the interjected exclamations of the dancers indicate, and social divisions and personal tragedies seem to be forgotten. The embedded conversation of the 'youts', however, interpolates behind-the-scenes bickering, suggesting a different story behind the festivity. The 'cultural guerrilla' (Wynter 36) has not resisted the Market economy, although it continues to serve its original purpose. Junkanoo, in effect, presents a mirror image of the community resonating from a clash of cultures and veering between the make-believe and the real.

The focus shifts to political events and recent Santa Marian history. Tree, who has been writing articles for *The Daily Report* ferociously attacking the government and scurrilous attacks on the opposition for Thaddeus McKinney, assesses the ruling party's performance up to this point, the effects of their recent twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations, and their chances in the approaching general elections. His old habit of acceptance makes him want the party to remain in power, although he has begun to doubt its ability to do so. He questions the stories and beliefs that support the status quo. These include, for example, codes of behaviour stemming from historical experience: 'Black people must stick together', and concerning political leadership, 'the blacker the better' (236). They also include stories of the Prime Minister's exploits in the struggle for black majority rule which Tree and his cohorts learnt in their social classes. Once he starts questioning the account of events that has been passed on to him, Tree remarks, for the first time, features in the Prime Minister's physical appearance that had gone unnoticed before. Myths which had the power to bind also had the power to blind, but the break with the 'storybook past' (256) promulgated by politicians is also a consequence of social developments following on black majority rule. As the narrator observes:

Tree's generation was born into black Majority Rule, born into Independence. They never knew what it meant to have nothing, to shit in the bush (except by choice)... For them pig's feet and sheep's tongue had lost significance as the master's leftovers and had become delicacies. (257)

Weaned on American television shows, and encouraged to study abroad, members of this generation no longer believe stories of the Prime Minister's extraordinary powers, and have begun to reinterpret the events underlying the 'storybook drama' (258) of his exploits. The ruling party which had for twenty-five years controlled the electorate with the stories it disseminated, is in turn brought down by the power of speculation, rumour and 'sip-sip'.

Tree's new perspective on events does not completely invalidate that of Maureen who has remained loyal to her party. His satisfaction with the turn of events is reflected in M.E. Bodie's final news report of the opposition party's

landslide victory at the polls. As Tree prepares to leave for university abroad, he is reassured by Firs'born's recovery which both confirms Maureen's faith in her children and augurs well for him. Strachan uses this incident to highlight yet another context of storytelling. Firs'born's return to using a shared language is not only a good omen for Tree but also enables them to renew their understanding as brothers and revisit their childhood. As Firs'born recounts one of the folktales that their mother used to tell them, Tree knows that all will be well, and he is comforted 'out of joy, out of fear' (271). He leaves the Santa Marias for university abroad, prepared for further changes in a narrative which will continue to unfold. He is not sure what sort of character he will become by the time he returns. Along the road to maturity, he has partially liberated himself from his mother's way of thinking, he has parted company with many of his boyhood friends and he has broken up with the girlfriend who helped him to look critically at his mother's story. Poised to begin a new stage in life, he is ready to assess and appraise stories that others will use to compel his obedience or arouse his fears. The stories which formed him are ones that he will use to create new narratives.

In *God's Angry Babies*, Ian Strachan identifies stories which groups and individuals use to orient themselves within a community and relates individual patterns of experience to structures of experience in the society as a whole. Stories, a means of processing information, inculcating belief, and guiding behaviour, may be used to solicit support from groups or individuals or to discredit them. Over time, personal or communal histories develop legendary status or mythic significance and thus contribute to various forms of ideological subjection. The stories we listen to or tell not only help to create a sense of togetherness or otherness, but also colour our vision of reality.

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