CANTICLES

I

(MMXVI)
Beauty is a defiance of authority.
—William Carlos Williams, Paterson.

The greatest poet ... drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet.
—Walt Whitman, Preface, Leaves of Grass.

& For Timothy Kimbrough (1960–)—African-American musicologist—& his (Slavery-destroying) U.S. Patent #6977334.
INTRODUCTORY

The proper way to read is to run on, when anything isn’t comprehensible.
— Ezra Pound (1937, Box 77, Folder 2945)

Pound’s advice is joyously ignorable, for our era furnishes us immediate encyclopedias that make any noun, from any language, instantly accessible. Thus, herein footnotes are minimal. Still, Canticles I offers sporadic sparks of elucidation — where potentially essential — to light one’s way through this sidereal labyrinth of History. . . .

Canticles is a lyric-styled epic. The subject of Testament I (issued in two parts — Canticles I [MMXVI] and Canticles I [MMXVII]) — is History, principally, of slavery and the resistance to enslavement; of imperialism and the struggle for independence from the control of European (and American) systems of governance; and also of the image or symbolism of the ‘Negro’ or ‘black’ in the Euro-Caucasian and pseudo-Christian Occident. Testament II (to be published later) will issue rereadings of scriptures crucial to the emergent African Diaspora in the Americas. Testament III (also to appear later) will chronicle the creation of the African Baptist Association churches of Nova Scotia in 1853.

My method? Oulipo, elliptical, and serendipitous. Upon my meditating on a collection of phrases and/or images, a ‘voice’ would begin to order the bric-à-brac into a ‘confession.’ Usually, I did not know beforehand my speaker’s identity. However, quickly I’d realize that my actor was Caesar or Cleopatra; or Phillis Wheatley or Thomas Jefferson; or W.E.B. Du Bois or Colette…. Once each lyric was scribed, I’d find space for it — chronologically — in the developing whole. Upon entering century # XX, I knew I should include Holocaust witness, plus the brazen voice of Mao Zedong.

My constraints were: 1) to write no piece in Toronto, Ontario, and 2) always to write in black ink (usually via a fountain pen). Hence, Canticles is a species of travel writing in black-and-white. I pray that

* Alert: Any apparent typos may actually be attempts at phonetic script. Speak aloud that misshapen word or phrase.
the reader will find some extra pleasure in connecting a poem, say, ‘by’ Abraham Lincoln in one space with a poem written about him in another, possibly years — and/or an ocean — apart. My wish is to layer events and actors — as palimpsests and mirrors — to present History as an echo chamber.

Enough illumination? Fine! Plunge now into abysmal History: Odyssey through abattoir and bagnio.

George Elliott Clarke
Ottawa (Ontario)
17 avril / Nisan mmxvi

THE BOOK OF INITIATION

Apologia / Gloss / Odes
Apologia

There is no choice but to go down into the Hell of History, go down to the sea where you see slavers floating new language.

To find your language — that lingo hysteria’d by History — black, bloody, white, bony (that diction piano — ivory, ebony), and the books you must echo to find your compass — you cannot encompass, nor truly echo, though it breeds (bleeds) all English poetry — all poetry in English — and you sue epic poets, pursue epic poets, and you come down to, come up with, The Holy Bible: The greatest Poet scribed The Bible....

So, how can I be original? (Only Sin is original?) History ain’t virginal.
And yet nothing's more forever virginal than light, and so "Let there be light," precedes, "I came to a place where all light is moot,"

proceeds until it falls mute.

But History — a demonic Bible — echoes voyages from Africa through Hell to "New World" Africa, reflecting both Hell and a new Bible, and all our voices, poets, be echoes — mirrors, shattering, splintering — reflecting — poets, now only echoes — History, splintering....

[Gloss]

Beyond the deathless names whose examples nullify an epic their examples nurse,
each story is arbitrary tributary to every other story.

* Cf. Graves.

[Unguja City (Zanzibar) 20 février mmvii]
À Salvador, Brazil

Green seaweed drapes singed-caramel rocks;
blue-green water dashes celestial sapphire.
Cloud wisps drift;
snowy palm fronds —
wasteful froth —
accumulate and dissipate incessantly
at rocks they wave at
as they are waved off.

Suave.

Night is wavering blackness:
The Atlantic,
a canticle of soprano Grief
(all those slaves perished
in its frantic Obscurity,
nagging and nagging roguishly) —
slagging carnivorous History.

[Salvador (Brazil) 9 novemv mbvii
& Playa del Carmen (Mexico) 18 dêcembre mbvii]

A Salvador, Brazil*

Cortinas verdes de alga, rocas de color caramelo chamuscado;
aguas azul-verdosa arroja zafiro celestial.
mechones de nube a la deriva;
hojas de palma cubiertas de nieve —
espuma despilfarrada —
se acumula y se disipa incesantemente
a las rocas saludan
mientras se las lleva la marea.

Suave.

La noche es oscuridad vacilante:
El Atlántico,
un cántico de Dolor soprano —
todos esos esclavos perecieron
en su frenética oscuridad,
persistiendo y persistiendo maliciosamente —
arrastrando una Historia criminal.

[Salvador (Brazil) 9 novemv mbvii
& Playa del Carmen (Mexico) 18 dêcembre mbvii]

* Trans. Andrea Martinez.


The Testament of Ulysses X

Destroyed is Troy, crumbled
into smoke, ash, stink.
Debilitated are her gods;
all em horizontal corpses now,
and rot-reek from every field,
every temple.
Their armour — extraordinarily —
is worthless as a chopped-off arm.
Their bronze, their brass, is ludicrous
as sunflowers landscaping a grave.
No Beauty alleviates this Disaster
whelped by Helen — diabolical bella,
that unmistakable — amoral — beauty.
If only Menelaus had beaten his wife,
Helen, like some dog—
like the bitch she was born as.
(I think a gutter had been
her alchemist’s cauldron;
that she abracadabra’d ex slime-formed floozy
to gilt-show monarch.)
Then, her Betrayal could’ve been borne —
and thousands of brave sons,
fathers, husbands,
allowed to plough and press
anthologies of grapes,
pour out dramatic honey,
and build un pied-à-terre
gushing wine and mead;
not endure the chaotic tangle of wave
and torch,
the distempered gravity of spears,
hooking out hearts or eyes;
nor smoke as gloomy as beige;
nor cathedral-crafted calligraphy
lettering premature obits;
nor the turmoil of wounds,
the exhaust of blood;
nor arrowed ghosts,
their chests bristling missiles;
nor skid-marks of toppling chariots;
nor lightning, Fate’s graffiti,
tensing the atmosphere....
But Helen turned out to be the slushy buttress
of a pimp’s bedroom.
Now, Troy is a moon-singed Hell;
the cut-out crescent moon is
a candle wick afire.
This light has an idiotic friendship
with the dark,
for it is more a tintorella’
than it is moonlight.
It is curiously drab.
But suitable is this sombre shade
closing upon indignant fisticuffs
that ground so many Greeks
into this merciless, foreign soil.
The Trojans attacked tactlessly —
like a trove of homicidal suicides:
They perished like cobwebbed snow —
a glut,
in entangled, insidious, parliamentary silence,
impatient to be bones—
a grand stink
springing up in the spring:
even their horses become
monotonous sculptures,
each one a doleful mirror of maggots,
a rat’s nest of snakes....

* Italian: Sunburn.
I’ll take to the silvery, teetering waves —
the sprinkled moonlight —
to spelunk again the consecrated cavity
within my wedded wife,
and forgive my prodigal panting
with Circe —
abandon her gynecological Nursery —
men’s torn-out entrails visible,
their gashed eyes decorating forks.
If only: Only if...

Circe is a blood-purpled Venus,
a mariny” Venus,
and I am her vinegary nigger,
homeboy, black imp —
the backstabbing sailor, the avant-garde assassin,
the Jack-the-Ripper Romeo,
the bottom-of-the-pile
nigger-in-the-woodpile,
who flashes all thirty-two teeth —
ev en the molars —
then sets my canines gnashing
Circe’s drooling pussy
until she quivers, gushes, squirts,
then slumbers with her swine,
and I can finally steal away, fugitive Negro,
exit her ex-oinking, ex-squealing mess hall.

[Nanaimo (British Columbia) 21 & 22 octobre mmxv]

* Cf. A.C. Clarke.
** Pallid-reddish-beige complexion. Cf. M.X.

Hannibal Rallies His Troops

Unbridled, unbreakable, we’ll swarm the Alps,
brave blizzard worries —
the frosty subterfuges that trip fools
into crevasse or abyss,
or see elephants tumbling down
as out of place as frogs in a desert,
their trunks snaking out to snort air,
but never snatch a hold,
as they bray Woe then smash into palpable Silence.

History is Hell.

We meet our fleetly fleeing foe:
A hammer blow crushes one skull;
so blood spurts free, splattering snow.

An axe blow pitches another head
clear of shoulders.
Blond hair—incidental amber—splashes rime.

The ruddied bodies
seem a paste of grapes—
some unappetizing sludge.

Thus, blood displaces dew;
grass bathes in copper;
crimson rosés mountain streams....
Triumph after Triumph, we thunder toward Rome:
Our abundant horses, big-ass elephants, ponderous,
all thunder down the Alps toward Rome.
The tender earth accepts our cleaving steps
as we rush downwards like bee-stung-stamped bulls —
as presumptuous as gods —
to tussle with and mash the Romans to pus.

We strike them as intolerable waves —
loathsom torrent —
while vultures’ watchful wings glide the air,
and the headstrong Romans flounder,
as if drowning,
like lemmings,
as we toss em off cliffs —
thrusting our spears through them —
even as they plunge,
howling,
spiraling up echoes.

Hannibal @ Rapallo

I.

The day recommends Crime:
My Glory basks in a girl’s groans —
as she ceases to be a virgin
and accepts to be a trollop.

Her father’s thrown-up tomb shows
gratifying Grandeur,
suitable for an overthrown king,
now suffering dirt’s leaden Pressure.

His wife, the once-pristine queen,
I’ve fucked quite raw in her down bed,
and, soon, I’ll splay her daughter alongside,
to watch us, and moisten, and be sacked in turn.

II.

Our leaping spears came into Rapallo —
rapacious as sun-slinging Apollo —
to chafe and scrape the chalk-flesh city,
bid the cringing Monarch beg our Pity,

while trailing tawdry, tattered viscera, that blood smear. Anarchic, we uncapped wine and crapped mud,

roughed up the king, manhandled his
wife, wrecked provincial virginities.
Like a wave, we Moors toppled down walls, and, with helpless Gluttony and Lust unfalse, feasted on widows, snacked on virgins. We taught Rapallo Downfall lessons....

We scourged, we purged, we ploughed each lass—like coltish hooves, bolting, ripping up grass.

III.

We have a distasteful view of Rome, anyway. We want Romans to speak the fish language of gasps, while we vineyard their blood-irrigated soil under a merry, red-wine-marinated atmosphere.

No ordinary tortures, no morsel of tremors! I don’t value Waste!

Let the Romans end as debris—unredeemable Exhaust.

[Hannibal Dreams of Rome]

It’s hard to wrestle in mire; hard to balance in mud: But we’ll ford the swampy mess our swords will spill, stuffing hard inches into blanching bellies.

This is jihad: To render the Adriatic a smoke-cured climate, a blast-force, orange-tinged pall. Even clouds will clump grisly—look a jumble of mangled, lop-sided, headless corpses—crushed things—puffed up by maggots. All of Rome will die, more liquid than solid, thanks to our damp—or dripping—swords.

When Rome comes to this wretched cremation—a wealth of ivory ash, so people bake, or creep, perishing, due to indissoluble Thirst,

I’ll have good news:

We Moors will be the dew at their gates.

[Roissy (France) 5 septembre mmxiv]
Sites of European (Caucasian) Enslavement

(1100–1500 A.D. only)

Alexandria
Belgrade
Bucharest
Budapest
Cadiz
Ceuta
Corfu
Crete
Cyprus
Genoa
Istanbul
Marseille
Messina
Napoli
Novgorod
Palermo
Rodos
Seville
Tripoli
Tunis
Venezia
Vienna

Etc.

The mass enslavement of Europeans only ended,
Once mass enslavement of Africans commenced.

[Liverpool (England) 12 octobre mmxiv]

Sestina: Castoff

I scoffed at Portugal; I spat; sucked wine.
A mountebank, “naughty-back,” ex the sea,
Was I: Thus, “patriots” chipped off my face;
Chopped my visage; played Carnage; dredged red ink;
Lopped my nose, tongue, ears, and right hand; so blood
Blanked out my looks. Exiled, got I, to rocks—

St. Helena, a volcano the sea
Don’t quite extinguish. I sport my slag face
To goats and hogs. A naufrague,” no vague ink
Details how shells scraped my scalp to blood,
Then ditto my beard. I copy planed rocks;
Am too tongue-less to taste the sea-salt wine.

I ape now any Moor’s dark, Sphinx-like face—
Blackly expressionless, like blanking ink.
A no-talk poet, I see, through dark blood,
My pale tears smear the island’s sun-seared rocks
With salt, white salt that tarts and tangs my wine:
Anguish could languish me fathoms neath sea.

Portuguese deported my face. No ink
Can illustrate the tidal-wave-plush blood
Their blades cut loose, or how shells, sharp as rocks,
Hacked hairs from skin. Thus, I howl into wine—
Like Rome’s Ovid, banished to the Black Sea,
Where serfs of unsophisticated face

* Crook.
** Shipwrecked dude.
Showed deaf to verse. Regret decays flesh; blood
Pales to tears. I clamber clamorous rocks
And herd my goats, my swine, and swill my wine—
This mouthwash sloshing the brine of the sea—
And will never show off my cast-off face
(Though sailors case it—guess at it—in ink).

I cast a reticle* in pools, by rocks,
Catch schools frothy broth casts bright as wine,
While dawn and dusk show milk’s lustre. A sea
Surge? No: Tears swamp my heretical face,
Scourged by Portuguese wanting maps to ink
Their theft of Goa, to seal Theft with blood.

I swallow enough wine to swamp a sea.
I have no more face due to damning ink
That, calling for blood, cast me upon rocks.**

[Chicago (Illinois) 28 février mmxiv]

* Small net.
** Cf. Christiansë: Fernão Lopes (d. 1545), rather than play conquistador at Goa, India, converted to Islam and rejected Portugal. Fine: The Portuguese hacked off his right hand—and his nose, ears, tongue, and his left thumb. Plus, seashells scalped his skull and razored his beard. St. Helena’s first exile, he planted lemon groves and tended goats and pigs.

À Bartolomé de Las Casas*

Atlantic spray stings raw—
bites like sandstorm grit.
The ocean’s tint is a taint.

Our vessels prosecute
The Middle Passage—
the golliwog charter.

The sea’s no good to us:
A guidebook to sharks,
it swallows us in a cantata of froth.

I’ve come to recognize
Each Spanish saint hath
the purity of a rat.

Our trade’s insidious:
I feel I’m Priapus in an apiary:
Watch dark feet slink, each ebon bottom swish.

Here my adulteries stay hidden—
distant from Salamanca’s lemon groves.
But I’m a grubby, gobbling Believer.

I enmesh my innards with theirs—
taffy twats as tight as a crack:
but there’s no Catharsis.

* This priest (1484–1566) promoted the African Slave Trade as a humanitarian answer to the genocide against hemispheric American Indigenous peoples, then perishing in the millions.
We buckle to biblical guck—
an encrustation of grimy sweat,
for that’s how Enmity ebbs to Amity.

After the surge of our torches,
I play a pallid Terror,
wobbling at bronze thighs.

What matters gold, cava, psalms?
I’ve screwed black birds
til their bones cracked.

Reverend sir, I wait and wait
for Salvation, and my dreams rot.
I drink up Misery—
silver swallowed as wine.
I’ll kill myself drinking
to drown out

your damnations and denunciations
of our debaucheries and “drastic measures”
(um, massacres)....

I know: That Slavery is just,
is a tuneful illusion
for bawling, cathedral choirs
by Salamanca’s cloud-shadow river.

But that symphony staggers me
like daggers.

We conquerors, feral, are now
impregnated by blackness—
a damn-it-all-to-Hell blackness—
an immedicable, irredeemable stain.

Seamy, but dreamily, deviously bourgeois,
I know my morals are threadbare as a bone—
or echo rancid sentences in a scrofulous tale.

I thought we white Christians
had one purpose in Africa—
to astonish, or abolish, not to appall.
But our Church is a dead letter.

Oh, waste on me no prayers,
but serve me La Cartuja
Mistela Moscatel outta Valencia—
to warm my arctic chemistry.

I want a port for downing port,
for I’m on the verge
of cracking open more virgin Moors
and more muck-faced tatterdemalions,
to plunger each squeezing sink-hole,
then pump juices oiling us both.

Is it a crime, eh?
I tug oinking from their mouths.
I have cooing for their haunches—
each chocolate tease,
tangibly lascivious.
(Nudity is clever dress.)

I’m as silky as a tarantula,
and it’s flamboyant Charity
to press a Negress down
so her dusky limbs catch my snow.

Thus, la dama blanca’
is preserved for my Benevolence.

[Salamanca (Spain) 8 jun mmxi]

* Spanish: White woman.
The Confession of Marie-Josèphe Angélique, juin 1734

Foreword: An Incantatory Biography

Twelve years a “poule de luxe” in steamy, squalid Alexandrie, Égypte, and then shipped off to the snowy wastes of Nouvelle-France, there to be “bred” callously, the rebellious Marie-Josèphe Angélique, due to the vengeful ire of her owners, Monsieur et Madame De Francheville, was charged for an incendiary “crime” — an accident — that ravaged much of Montréal, in avril 1734. True: Camouflaged by the smoke and cinders of her burning household, the slave woman slipped her shackles, and “stole away” with Claude Thibault, her fellow servant (not slave, but white), thiefing also sustenance — a loaf of bread and a magnum of wine. They trudged through snowdrifts, seeking to steal to freedom in Vermont. Adrift in a desert of blizzards, Thibault vanished; but Angélique was captured. Tortured to recite the appendant “Confession,” next she was judicially murdered: First, she hanged; then her corpse was incinerated at the stake; next her ash and bones were dumped with sewage into the River Saint-Laurent. Her death — at roughly age 25 — was as horrid as that meted out to Saint Hypatia; yet, her afterlife is glowing — as symbol of Liberty, torrid, a Vesuvius, alive, active, transplanted to Mont-Réal.

False historians attempt her oblivion, but so numerous were the slaves who wept at her dying, Liberty’s poets feel jealous.

— Junius

The Confession of Marie-Josèphe Angélique, juin 1734

I.

Slavery enacts a kind of insect destruction — whole colonies havocked, collapsed.

“Ethiopes” get smoked out, smacked down, stomped on, cracking like brittle bugs, or become forced fly-litters, chewing mire, uncomplaining.

Europe visits upon Africa a vampire animus.

The Renaissance necessitates a cynical, sarcastic Christianity, biting, ripping, and clawing.

Supposedly too “dark” for “Enlightenment,” we’re branded with ironical names, and stand satirical tasks.

Thus, my slayer is “Amor de Cosmos”!
The “black Bacchant” will lasso me with a noose, to please Nouvelle-France, this vista of wolves.

My fault? I’m a “bold hussy,” or Salomé — “contortionist prostitute” — an inky shape — incarnating Cleopatra and Nyx.

Taught “a slut is the saint of Love,” I served up my taut thighs on deviant sofas, first in Alexandrie, then here in Montréal — two Babylons — to let ivory potentates take bronze moi till their jets trickled onto my hips, or I knelt to each man’s tap, as if I were lapping water from a baptismal font.
In fleshpot realms —
Égypte et Nouvelle-France —
I yielded to acrid, burnt-rubber smells;
obscene lamplight smudging shadows;
the urine tastes of erect dogs.

(Then was a Nile of turquoise;
now is a St. Lawrence of turds.)

I was told I descend from dames—
unbridled, uncivil.

So I did fixate as the gaudy eyes
of a fornicatrix—
a brazen goddess, Hathor—
and let twinned fingers tease oils
out my sex.

I did batten upon each randy rigidity;
cork myself with each:
til a man’s searing bleach
beseeched my openings:

A profane siren,
I saluted the polluting
phallus
as if, standing,
it mirrored God’s rood.

II.

Here, striving to reach oblivious Indians,
black-robed priests topple from canoes
into floods,
drown, but ascend to canons.

Yet, all clerics disregard us slaves:
Chained like dogs and bred like swine.

III.

I am Marie-Josèphe Angélique of these snows—
all your white screams.

De Francheville bought me to capitalize on soldiers
drooling after cooze.

Soon, I donned that pungent taint—
rust-odor of baby-birth-blood—
baptizing my suddenly blasphemous name—
Mary/Joseph—
a joke Madonna, a prank saint.

Bearing bastard upon bastard,
all flushed away by flu
—or auctions—
I sought salvation from these snows
(the sift of Sorrws).

IV.

Montréal plagiarizes Roma, really:
Smoky vespers—
plus vipers in every marital bed.

At midnight, so many adulterers snore
beside their vamps,
it’s th’opportune hour
for Arson—
the play of flames, startling,
starting under a cathedral’s eaves.

V.

10 avril, fire’s tendrils and fronds
fry Montréal black
amid a snuff-film of snow.
Today, the ruins resemble letters
inked by an appalling evangelist.

_Uprising_ came: An onslaught of light!

Look! Light is nothing, if not fire.
(Even stars are bonfires.)

My halo:
A city in flames....

VI.

I chanced to slip away, a silhouette;
leapt into white blazing snow.

Crossed an ice desert,
veered south to Vermont;
was a fiery fugitive,
wading fugal alabaster.

One “john” kept me company:
Claude Thibault.

We melted—miraculous—amid snow;
spewed hot creams _ensemble._

But after his happy groan—
into my nappy skull—
he was gone—
snappy.

VII.

A recluse amid an icicle _Hell,_
I wasn’t long free.

My skin is ready char—
or sable, volcanic grit.

I’m pilloried as city firebrand—
and its chief louse.

That’s fine: I die like Saint Joan—
incandescent, flamboyant.

I recall my Nile of marble and cloud.
The St. Lawrence mills mud and mosquitoes.

VIII.

My sorry executioner, bro’ Negro,
stews in cologne of port, oranges, rum.
Of San Domingo [later Haiti]—
he’s harangued—
with charitable _Clarity—_
“Hang her, and be free”(_d_).

He will render my body
as wan as _Memory._

IX.

The narcosis of martyrs in their catacombs—
their stupefied skeletons—
testifies that God discards the _Dead._

I stare down the priest who sights,
under my threadbare shroud,
my chill-hardened nipples,
my black-thatched sex,

who thus thrills

to my titillating _Humiliation._
I gotta shiver:
I already feel as cold and tired as the Dead.

X.

On the gallows, my unhurt face beams joy—
exhilaration of looming escape.

My judges hold me “harmless” now—
to have my “bestial”
body put down as “celestial”—
ash—or defiled snow.

They consider me copper
they’ll melt down to fog.

XI.

I’ll reincarnate in backward history—
as a Negress who branded a city
a Sodom of lust,
a Gomorrah of greed,
and commanded gold flames
that countermanded ice.

Favourable phosphorescence—
burnishing the north star:
Je suis Sainte Marie-Josèphe, l’Égyptienne.

Witness of Madame Thérèse de Couagne

I.

I smell François Poulin de Francheville
slinking toward she,
the septic salope,
her sepia stink.

My mate’s rapacious, yes,
but it’s sagacious
policy that Angélique
defecate us riches.

But why must he
spelunk her dusty guts?

II.

Angélique squeals, screeches,
my man crushes her lewdly!
I’m luxuriantly shamed.

But she sprawls, insolent,
in her supine sluttish,
her scorpion-sting nipples up-thrust,
so my husband bends to her,
his gallows erection.

Her you-know-what gleans hair
from his beard.

Too oft he brushes lips against her plush hips;
she spreads her thighs to be speared, pierced.

III.

Is my husband a sculptor, happy to work either marble or coal?

How do I beguile an old bull? Should I show snippets of skin?

Instead, I scent the stale Shame of a steadily thawing turd— dingying my sheets.

IV.

Monsieur’s pal, Jacques César, can be excused as an unwitting brute: He’ll end up throat-cut in a cathouse. Sure.

But why can’t César alone do all the fucking, smear his charcoal upon Angelique’s grimy paps, milk her gnarly dark nether hairs of lice?

V.

My eye-sockets piss. I feel marinated in marble.

I’m drunk with mucus. Zealous is Jealousy.

VI.

I pray that Egypt’s shuddering croc— bought off a Boston dock— will realize reeking Infamy,

to wallow in her own urine.

VII.

Nouvelle-France is a rickety sewer. I could demolish all this wooden virtue—all my pining— with a penny’s worth of fire.

[Digby (Nova Scotia) & Pointe-de-l’Église (Nouvelle-Écosse) 26 février mmxiii]
All Calm in The Bahamas?

Tides loom volcanic,  
ashen water crashes,  
lashes, our sides.  
The sky’s an upside-down well.  
(The clouds’ purple features  
terrify us like our cargo—  
those mauve faces, maroon faces.)

The storm flushes us  
off th’infernal ocean—  
into cover—  
this cove.

I yearn for ecstatic chirping,  
and to spy dawn’s distinct grey—  
as pacific as a nursing infant—  
and next behold,  
insurgent gold!

The flooding waves—  
sallying, harrying—  
haunt us jauntily,  
taunt us:  
We toss to and fro, heaving.

Now I down more honey-tinted rum,  
to see if this colour can conjure  
the sun, in Sympathy,  
or even the moon’s dull, dulcet, indulgent mirror.

I wish Fear were Fiction,  
but we menace and manhandle th’Africans;  
and, allotting ails to the lot,  
we act as heartless as skeletons.

(I hear each dry virgin’s scream  
as my crew slaps and mauls,  
outfitting my ship as water-tight Harem.)

The hold is as unhealthy as a ditch.  
Each African eye glares gold—  
as if dipped in yellow piss.

Delighted by all that disgusts a Christian,  
underfoot bugs, at-hand vermin,  
creep, writhe, tattoo flesh—  
stinging, biting—  
at will.

So, I’m especially suspicious  
when a black brute  
goes mute:

They must fancy sawing open our throats,  
length-wise, jaggedly,  
jaw to lungs.

(Slavery’s a damned Crusade:  
Europe criminalizing Africa.)

We had beautiful welcomes along the Gold Coast,  
and trawled a murder of niggers—  
chained and coffled for us—  
like a string of fish.

But on each stockade post on the black-palmed shore,  
leered a lipless skull.

No wonder a vague Anguish plagues my heart.

Our caustic Commodity may yet find Liberty  
by churning countless black hands burgundy  
with our Caucasian innards.
(Each slave is a tom-tom Attila,
a prayer-moaning Machiavelli.)

Sweet God, I vow that I’ll trade no more
in human merchandise —
if the sun yet shows Impatience
to rend and sunder these clouds
in tune with

“Amazing Grace.”

[ Cable Beach (The Bahamas) 27 mai mmxii ]
III.

If one studies Machiavelli, one learns:

The beauty of History is struggle;  
the history of Beauty is struggle;  
the struggle of History is beauty;  
the history of Struggle is beauty;  
the beauty of Struggle makes history.

But the struggle for Beauty is never “history.”

[Ottawa (Ontario) 23 mai mmxii]
如果一个人阅读马基雅维里，他会学到:

历史的美在于斗争；
美的历史在于斗争；
斗争的历史是美；
斗争的美创造历史。

但是争取美永远不会成为“历史”。

[渥太华 (安大略省) 5月23日2012]*

* Trans. Anna Yin.

On Citoyen de Sade (1790)

He uncorks 1st-class wine
to corkscrew 2nd-rate tarts
in 3rd-degree Corkings.

Plungering these cesspools,
as enticing as cemeteries,
he injects venom

as he inserts his penis.
At sex a cobra,
his cock slithers through nappy hair,
then roots, bares fangs, strikes.
As confident as a stain,
he beds sozzled, bamboozled floozies,
asses em like he’s massacring pastries.
He casts out a flurry of coins
to acquire vulvas any jerk can jig.

This lily-starred night, Sade begs
a yellow, saggy-dug slattern,
to let him slurp her babe’s green shit.

It is his testament to Fucking:

What matters is how deep
our own Commitment goes.
Can’t say I stomach a Negress.
I’ve had a few —
just as I’ve tried butter chicken.

But that black succubus Vénus cussed like a sailor:
Masterpieces of Profanity flowed out of her
as my prick stabbed into her backside,
that hot, seething ditch.
(My arrow —
like a sparrow-
bone —
honed
down to her marrow.)

She was a gutter-polluted wench,
plucked from stews and dockside brine,
who sucked me off exquisitely,
even though I’d been jizzin blood.

The extremely rank air, afterward,
intoxicated like sulphuric Hell.

(A Negress backs up Buggery well.)

But Slavery is as natural as Rapine,
and both yield a potentate Happiness.

Note: The best rum cake is gâteau nantais:
Great sweetness gleaned from glazed, nigger sweat.

[Cable Beach (The Bahamas) 27 mai mmxii]

A Slaver Sea Chantey

To savour slashes of gilded rum and splashes of silver tequila!
Ha!
To be gourmet butchers who spoon out calves’ rheumy eyes!
Ha!
To tongue anexoric tarts as black and sour as apple-core pits!
Ha!
To bridle fillies bucking like ale-pissing, bushy-cunted brides!
Ha!
To be fucking productive of mutant, piebald, oreo bastards!
Ha!
To thwack happily a hatchet into the cap’in’s decapitated lips!
Ha!
To grind lying scholars with our molars, incisively decisively!
Ha!
To castrate bespectacled lawyers and arson the Criminal Code!
Ha!
To re-tool Africa and Asia in the Goth, Greco-rococo mould!
Ha!
To spurn gaunt wives who disdain dauntless, sans-culottes fuck!
Ha!

[Bordeaux (France) 1 septembre & Paris (France) 5 septembre mmxiv]
济慈墓前 (1822)*

——亚历山大·普希金

语

言编造亲密：
字母表承诺了最初的客套话——
在字母间嬉闹，
不需要接吻，就能吻到......

(请注意舌头是多么油腔滑调
在说谎时；
在随意说出伤人的预言时；
在挥舞着攻城槌似的打油诗，
把君主从王座上拽下来。)

济慈, 我来到你面前, 我是躲藏在报纸最后一版上的幽灵，
一个不怀好意的鬼魂
我那无法辨识的魅影
掠过你的诗句
在古文“你”这个字里——
在坟冢诱人的夸饰之外——
在树状的墓石上——
发现你标志性的魅力
改变了坟冢炼狱的模样。

你绝不是无足轻重的死尸，
而是生发出镀金百合一般的诗句——
喷射出白灼日光的浑浊墨汁——
自由的甜蜜生活——
你的长眠地开出的花——
和 (罗马) 字母表一样宏阔......

[罗马 (意大利) 2014年2月15日]

* Trans. Qi Liang (綦亮).

Bahamian Discourse*

I.

S

unlight slithers, insinuates itself, amid preening palms.

Likewise, I goad my “serpent”
to rifle lady’s “bird’s nest”:
I don’t trifle.

When the moment
of our monumental Crisis,
our maximum Crisis —
comes imminent
(vehement) —
scissoring her suave silks,
or spoiling the bed’s linen,

we know Tumult — the heart’s lusts —
desires as prejudicial as tears:

We fall sedate,
yes, not sated.

II.

As Lady Jane arrived —
side-saddle sidlin long her horse —
she’ll leave on that ever ready mount,
rearin round to Sir Roach.

* Pace Naipaul.
But our politics is a nullity:
To glut and feast is truest Happiness —
Ain’t it? —
til worms glut and feast on us.

Hubby glances at me,
spots only a coal-coloured crow.
But his lady eyes “a majestic black bull” —
and she plays Europa,
beguiled in grass or surf.

I welcome her cholic jollity;
her cold Authority that I melt
(even as blood contaminates our rum).

III.

Lady Jane mirrors white wax flaming.
To spraggle and spread-eagle that Spoil
mandates pure manhandling.

(How else can I avenge Mr. Roach’s
backside pollution of black maids?)

IV.

Now, my Lady’s extravagant, desiring
what is Criminal.

I clamp myself to damp limbs,
stoop her down in a stupor.

Ungovernable, inexorable,
comes flooding Perspiration.

We couple as satyr and siren,
stage Adam and Eve
as master-and-slave.

Here’s how I make right
a heaven of Injustice —
as in Sophocles.

Yep. But here’s Dismay:
I spy her husband halving my sisters’ haunches.

V.

(I wish I were Massa’s son —
to add Incest
to Adultery and Treason.

Why? I recognize our true world:
Black-clad priests comfort black-clad widows
until threadbare blackness dissolves in shambles,
and they fall, white upon white.)

VI.

Out of the sauna of a salon,
after a luncheon of slave victuals —
pork, songs, guffaws, rum —
Lady must be tusked once more,

and so she comes —
draped in light, wrapped in silk —
this pauper’s Monarch,

to stand my “black tulip”
at her oozing ditch,
until her copious opening
streams gleaming spittle.
Obscenely, I giggle at my bride,
all her pictorial charms
splayed, displayed, and as available
as an empty wheelbarrow.

Now, one more sugared mating,
my “horsepower” overpowers again her scruples.
I grind again a snatch that’s as elastic
as carrion in a vulture’s beak.

VII.

Now comes dusk,
the colour of a day-old, lemon peel.

What if she — literally — lost her head?

[Pushkin Drafts Eugene Onegin (1825)]

Banish wine and vanish Peace!
Snow pursues and harries off the sun.

The gloom, too dark, is a narcotic.
I’ll recline now and take some wine.

Waves startle the shore.
I’ll write, so a reckless poem startles Thought.

Winter cleans branches sparse;
each tree waves at stars—or clouds.

O! I await measureless fields of blossoms!
Privileged Greenery!

I have been a trumpeting Caesar
mid courts of oinking Sleaze.

Is my Art unharmed? I pray so.
To govern words is to relinquish Vanity.

[Cambridge (Massachusetts) 6 mars mmxiv]


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“À Baha Mar, Pompey Commences Rebellion (1830)”: Our Times. 34.4 (2015 Winter): 49.

“J.M.W. Turner’s Liverpool Reverie.”

“My Poetics and/or Discourse on Pleasure: By Alexander Pushkin (1831)”: The Dalhousie Review. 95.3 (Fall 2015): 329–333.


The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation’s Fellowship Prize (2005–08) transported me to Africa, that continent where History began. Harvard University’s William Lyon Mackenzie King Visiting Professorship in Canadian Studies jetted me to Stockholm and Cadiz, to Rome and New Orleans, and tethered me to Cambridge, Massachusetts, for one year (2013–14). The Library of Parliament’s Parliamentary Poet Laureateship of Canada (2016–17) sustained me in Ottawa, generally. Finally, Dr. Sonia Labatt, Ph.D., and Victoria University (via The E.J. Pratt Professorship at the University of Toronto), sent me packing everywhere else, from Halifax to Paris, from Helsinki to Puumala, and from London to Lisbon, et cetera. If my verses deserve curses, I am to blame. If my pressings seem blessings, my benefactors own your applause.

The usual suspects — The John Fraser, Riitta Tuohiniemi, Paul Zemokhol — encouraged me at the start and upheld me throughout. My editors were Stephen Brown, Diana Manole (diligently, marvelously), Michael Mirolla, Giovanna Riccio, and Mr. Zemokhol (pains-takingly, zealously).

Mississauga Poet Laureate Anna Yin and Kate Marczynski of the Mississauga Central Library provided me with a space for editing a portion of the manuscript. The once G.P.C. permitted her now-ex (moi) to share her then-home in Nantes, France, 2008–2009.

My voluntary translators in Canticles I (MMXVI) were Marco Fazzini (Italian), Qi Liang (Chinese), Andrea Martinez (Mexican Spanish), Robert Paquin (French), Riitta Tuohiniemi (Finnish), and Anna Yin (Chinese). Anticipate others....

Michael Mirolla welcomed this project as soon as I proposed it to him, way back in 2011. I’m proud to be associated with Guernica Editions, and I anticipate, with relish, the subsequent volumes of Canticles.
David Moratto executed the design of this book, but the titular font and interior drop caps reflect the artistry of William Lloyd Clarke (1935–2005). Digitized in 2011 by Andrew Steeves of Gaspereau Press, Bill Clarke Caps is a font my late father drafted— with yardstick, pencil, and ink—in 1969.

The manuscript was edited in Roma and Catarina (Italy); Missis- sauga, Richmond Hill, and Hamilton (Ontario); Halifax (Nova Scotia); Calgary (Alberta); Roissy-en-France (France); VIA Rail Trains 60 & 63, aller-retour, Guildwood (Ontario)-Montréal (Québec); Jeruzalem and Maribor (Slovenia); and Munich (Germany); mars, Nisan, Floréal, juillet-aout mmxvi.

The 4th Poet Laureate of Toronto (2012–15) and 7th Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2016–17), George Elliott Clarke is a revered maker. He has invented the term Africadian and pioneered the study of African-Canadian literature. In his first novel, George & Rue (2005), Clarke introduced an oral textuality that he termed, Blackened English. He wrote the libretto for James Rolfe’s acclaimed opera, Beatrice Chancy (1998), and saw his play, Whylah Falls: The Play, translated into Italian and produced in Venezia, Italy (2002). Clarke also has book-length works in Chinese, Italian, and Romanian. He is a noted artist in song, drama, fiction, screenplay, essays, and poetry. Now teaching African-Canadian literature at the University of Toronto, Clarke has taught at Duke, McGill, the University of British Columbia, and Harvard. He holds eight honorary doctorates, plus appointments to the Order of Nova Scotia and the Order of Canada. His recognitions include the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Fellows Prize, the Governor-General’s Award for Poetry, the National Magazine Gold Award for Poetry, the Premiul Poesis (Romania), the Dartmouth Book Award for Fiction, the Eric Hoffer Book Award for Poetry (US), and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award. Clarke’s work is the subject of Africadian Atlantic: Essays on George Elliott Clarke (Guernica, 2012), edited by Joseph Pivato.