

Elegy for Austin Chesterfield Clarke, 1934-2016

No, he was no relation to me. But,
He was my brother at letters--and sire
Of our literature--"Black Canuck." What
He didn't imagine, he did inspire,

Despite his Bajan birth, elitist school,
Anglican pedigree, haut-bourgeois style,
Red Tory pinstripes. Tom Clarke was no fool:
His satire x-rayed whitewash, exposed bile,

Was clear about Canuck Hypocrisy
On race. Clear-eyed, caustic, his characters
Bet on horses, win jackpots, keep busy
At jobs.... Still, cops stick each one in a hearse.

Or dudes quit farming to take a flying leap
Before subway trains, being Bay Street failures;
And black maids mustn't, with white massas, sleep,
Except, as domestics, they're their jailers--

Congenial, perhaps, but still slave masters--
Or whoremasters--or so Clarke may allege.
Look: White racism breeds vast disasters--
Blacks viewed as dolts--despite having college,

And being stalled at the bottom of every
Scale, whether Vertical Mosaic or Stats
Can report, or whatever reverie
Verifies that Canucks ain't democrats

When thinking "Racial Equality." Clarke
Was the first of us to think of "the least"--
The refugee, the jobless, the "mudlark,"--
That black citizen policed like a beast.

Clarke's fiction copyrights Justice and Crime--
As known by Black Canucks. Read him and weep
For your ignorance of History. Time
Unfurls his analyses: Gilt thoughts that keep.

-- **George Elliott Clarke**
7th Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2016-17)