

On Boxing Days, Knights, and High Noons...

Rambunctious is The Ring, where sleight-of-fist
Gambles--mid audible Barbarity
(I mean that mob, excited by each twist
Of glove through air, unto the Charity

Of each bell knelling a round to a close)--
On the purse, title, the trophy, the belt,
To be "Magic," to be sharp thorn, suave rose,
To never kneel because one's never knelt,

And to put fisticuffs to opponents--
"Challengers," "bums," "riffraff"--as bookies say,
And take punches that would, in cars, make dents,
But not to wobble, or get kayoed, okay?

Or stagger, or seem paralyzed, or quiet,
Or quit. A wild jab gets slapped aside, slick;
A fistfight ain't high tea; no, it's a riot
On a stage, where each fist's thrown like a brick

And glass jaws shatter like bad prediction;
And The Champ's our good news gladiator.
He's the people's--the hood's--gold champion
And star. Each triumph's an escalator

Of income. His flash and dash show chic style,
Uplifting the neighbourhood mood. His Gym
Is the cool hangout. Dudes check mirrors, smile,
And put down guns, don gloves, to be like him.

The thing is, the "sweet science" is an art,
A discipline, as The Champ, Otis Grant--
Montreal superstar, Pierrefonds upstart--
Exemplifies. He does what others can't;

Is legendary, Magic, fearless, bold,
A David felling Goliath: No hype--
Like Dave Downey, Clyde Gray--boxers of olde,
Pugilists damning all stereotype.

Otis Grant is George Dixon, Sam Langford,
Reborn, representative of folks, those
Who never sit on commission or board,
But whose stories are heard as comatose,

As D.O.A. But such is Grant's Valour,

In being a champion street guerilla,
To wave the banner and troop the colour--
Of black-and-proud versus bland vanilla,

And to know that a boxer's Athletics
And hard-won wins in the school-of-hard-knocks
Tutor him in tender Economics,
To teach, to share bounty, to withstand shocks.

--George Elliott Clarke
7th Parliamentary Poet Laureate, 2016-17