

Beat Meditations: Beach / Mountain

By George Elliott Clarke

I.—Prince Edward Island National Park (@ Cavendish)

Waves shining like woven cord and straw—
shoot forth short fronds—
linear whips—
knotting against rocks
or leafing with seaweed,
according to tidal syncopations,
avid.

That was, what? Eight years back,
when my daughter, Aurélia,
then just a girl,
was ready to abandon the *zouches*
(booksellers)
at Lucy Maud Montgomery's estate,
where *Anne of Green Gables*
exists pretty much as a rock,
impervious to the wash-out *History*
that's swept away buggies and catalogues
and even the twentieth century.

We'd strolled amid parliaments of bees,
inspecting doddering berries,
or buzzing piled-up hay,
in the late summer,
the cumulus of lettuce flowering
in dialectical opposition to the cloud-bruised sky.

Then we traversed to Cavendish—
creaking over arranged wood planks,
threaded through Mi'kmaw marsh
(once also Acadian),
to view and scent this saltwater distillery—
the unimaginable port
(way too much seesaw for shipping,
but with pocket harbours good for fishing)—
the exudation of spray—
limp, ephemeral steam—
that terminates walk-ways—
intruding slashing floods
upon sloping, yielding sand,
while viscous sculptures splatter—
foaming against rock.

Impossible to untangle *Whiteness*
 from this milk,
 this star-coloured frost!

Porcelain is froth—just as earthy,
 just as fragile—
 and just as unstable as the waves that shape it,

as it gangs up on shore,
 boiling and brawling and bowling
 pebbles, shells, softened glass—
 then gangrenes,
 confronting seaweed or sawgrass,

but almost never undermining the dunes—
 those bumps, lumps, of failed drumlins,
 those humps of sand,
 hostile to marsh-mud.

On this island the French labelled, *Île Saint-Jean*,
 and poet (*Native Son*) Milton Acorn dubbed, *Minago*,
 (the Mi'kmaw for *Island*),
 and the Mi'kmaw proclaimed, *Epekwitk*,
 or “cradle of the ocean,”
 was also where Confederation—Canada—got cradled:
 No wonder, then, that Acorn's *Jackpine Sonnets*
 endlessly trumpet *Liberty*,
 articulated as *Democracy* plus *Social Spending*,
 plus *Green Thinking* sustaining *Gold Standards*....

Anyway, it's here that, that August,
 the Atlantic surged—
 erratic as a pirate ship,
 but relentless in battery.

Water crept upon the gull-broken shells;
 sand—gritty honey—
 stuck to our feet;
 the sun along the chittering tide
 blazed in speckles.

Aurélia swam in the roadless sea,
 crackling lithe and blithely
 through unexpected lapis lazuli,
 interspersed with gilt.
 I had to sit out—parental—the moment,
drent in a river of heat,
 my bister skin blistering,
 and stinging insects haloing me,
 daggering at me in vivid 3D,
 while Aurélia, golden, forged her white trail,

that candour,
out of the cinemascope seascape.

(If only the swish and squawk
of long-circling, long-standing gulls—
foam-tinted—
that dirtied, clerical whiteness—
could drive off orgiastic mosquitoes!)

Relief came feral: A bit of chill
off the Gulf of St. Lawrence,
the last sun streak on the water
gleaming almost lurid—
like a quay, collapsing in side-swiping waves,
splintering into toothpick slivers,
soon lost in a blanking quagmire....

Indeed, incoming imperial, Whitehall fog,
arrived, so sudden, so sodden,
Aurélia splashed ashore,
the Maple Leaf Flag fell listless,
mist-laden,
and then drops splattered,
studding rocks with spots,
due to oncoming cloudbursts—
hoary (*canus*)—
métissage of black and white;

and it was time to skedaddle,
skittish,
for the auto,
to motor through the generously sable, liquid tempest,
the illustrious storm,
that sky suddenly as nocturnal
as white seagulls on a black-tar wharf—
sparks guying through pitch—
like words out of the legislature—
lightning for the *ferantur*:
We the Governed....

(So much lightning was there,
I thought Thomas Alva Edison
was being reborn
as Frankenstein's Monster.)

From the furious weather,
from the swank, sandy—not too pebbly—beach,
we landed next in Charlottetown,
namesake of the arguably partly-African
Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz,
wife to George III,

whose policies sundered British America
into Loyalist and Republican factions—
the eventual birth of two nations:

One wild, *ferus*,
and another one lush with wilderness.

II.—Banff National Park (@ Tunnel Mountain)

Whenever I portage from *Routine* to *Magic*,
I find myself in Banff, the premiere national park
in *ye olde Dominion*,
where a goat capers among crags, somewhere,
in the holily elegant mountains,
and I gotta go giggly, manic,
gaga for ascent,
thirsty for *Victory*—
wild-grape wine, wild-rice sake, thistle-distilled scotch—
the achieve of *Inspiration*
(90% perspiration),
as I clamber up from *Doubt*—
those canyons of *Mistakes*,
the miasma of *Misgiving*,
to sight dazzling *Dream*—
peaks unpleated by cloud,
undepleted of sun,
the finished poem,
sloping down the page.

When I've struggled to the pitch—
literally, of Tunnel Mountain,
I've relished the delicious *Anguish*
of such *Triumph*,
too deliriously ephemeral a pleasure:

To attain a summit is like gaining *Sierra Madre* “treasure”;
the win is a loss,
for the top
cannot be topped—
only defended
or surrendered,
so that one descends to *Normality*,
and *Triumph* recedes—
suddenly invisible—
into *Memory*:

The book is closed;
or, one sees, again, a freshly blank page.

One can sink back to earth,
 to sea-level,
 with exhilaration, if you go giddy
 downward, your gait between
 a hop and swinging your legs—
 like a hoppety-hick hiker—
 lickety-split,
 downhill drilling,
 to reach that plateau
 where thorns stab out the sun,
 while you lie on your back,
 ruminating, “I like pine, I like birch, I like spruce,”
 and then you snooze.

However, downslope, one may yet feel,
 not just grounded,
 but downtrodden—
 crestfallen to picnic among mundane, scavenging ants
 and vengeful, atrocious mosquitoes....

Unless you can scruple to sight
 a minuet of dust motes,
 dancing vivid through spruce needles,
 or you retreat to your room among *artistes*,
 to quaff whatever has become of grape leaves,
 to devour sumach-tint wine
 and the spoils of gardens
 amid the squander that is perfume
 in the sumach-red, grape-purple of dusk,
 where crows emit cloudbursting caws,
 until bats—
 those indescribably weird bulldog faces with wings,
 now dangling like grape clusters
 in caverns, those always nocturnal nests,
 wing forth to plunder insects,
 to swallow em like sharks—
 those oceanic vampires—
 wolfing down ruddy meat....

If I'm addled by cunning draughts
 of perfume and/or wine,
 I must resemble an inexperienced gargoye,
 and tear apart *Poetry*,
 much like a psychotropic-driven bear
 ripping apart dreamy anthills.

When I venture again onto Tunnel Mountain,
 scaling up through depths of sky and eagles,
 I fantasize I glimpse a deer's aphrodisiac eyes,
 or a medieval-textbook lynx,
 burying its amber-hard urine under pine needles,

and I wonder if the Middle Age doctorates
 were correct,
 that an elks' antlers can razor through tree branches—
 if need be—
 perhaps in the throes of testiculouse,
 luxurious, gamey breeding?

And were I to plummet precipitously
 would I stop,
 perforated in a tree—
 like a windfall apple
 somehow stuck on a porcupine's spiny bristles?

I muse now on a rain-unhinged mountainside,
 the peril of avalanche or slide
 (as when Turtle Mountain crumbled,
 burying the mining town of Frank, Alberta,
 in 1903, in the middle-of-the-night),
 and figure that the collapse
 is a vertical earthquake,
 whose rumble and grumble
 outtalks *Normalcy*
 and whose strident stalking
 outruns *Safety*.

One audits the thunder of a change
 in *Fortune*—

the thud of a drop—
 as bulls change their natures
 and scatter for shelter
 like bears seeking hibernation....

Suddenly, the drop is a flood,
 and, to survive,
 one must ski or surf
 wherever gravity and/or winds direct.

Lookit:
 That's writing!

One gotta scale through images, memories,
 or tunnel into *Genealogy*, *History*,
 or spring faces, throw voices,
 via a traverse
 across *Time* and *Space*,

to land,
 splashing ink,
 upon dizzying emptiness;

and as the poem is built,
top-down,

one attains
the heights of *Consciousness*,
profound as fathoms.