

Dear Reader

I

Dear reader, you and I forge a family—
Despite my visible invisibility
And your faithful infidelity.

So long as your eyes (or ears) stray here,
I exist within your compass.
Dismiss me, red-handed, as you will.

Though my voice be as black as this ink—
And just as indelible,

To firm our alliance, I agree to erase
Every mixed-up, mulatto trace of 'race.'

See! My silence and my absence show white—
A blizzard of lies.

No more folderol or avuncular tomfoolery:¹
My shading is as authentic as unmixed gold.

¹ Uncle Tom flimflam....

— George Elliott Clarke

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For Norman Kester

The sun is slipping, angular, gold,
 Behind the black filigree of pines,
 As our train passes the copper-roofed Dorchester Penitentiary,
 While I am reading of Clinton's acquittal
 And of limbs hacked off of Chinese civilians
 On the wrong side of a civil war's machetes.
 The sky is a Turner, burning blue and pink-white—
 Like the Houses of Parliament,
 And we come grinding into Moncton, New Brunswick, like a slave coffle.

A librarian—Beverly True—told me it's true:
 In Amherst, they've found the unmarked graves of slaves—
 Black bodies flung into the marshes
 To decline all identity;
 Their masters: experts at erasure:
 So Canadian....

Now, here is Moncton, with dusk looming massive,
 Oil pools like liquid hearts of darkness, pungent with poison—
 And an ungenteel cancer settling in,
 Breaking song into tears and dirtying everything with history.

—George Elliott Clarke

Caught On Film

When New York's World Trade Center towers, twinned,
Materialize in films between 1973 and September 2001,

The double erections already look as phantasmal
As light, evaporating,

Disintegrating into time and footage,
The happenstance of a camera lens,

Its raptor-like swoop, ogling, then, amnesiac, veering off,
So that what is solid melts away each second.

See: A Hollywood action star races down a street
As blasts blossom in the background,

And the two towers—indifferent, stolid bystanders—
Vanish behind solid, cinematic—*playful*—smoke.

(Isn't all *film noir* really *cinéma vérité*,
While porn merely stages the musical?)

—George Elliott Clarke