

Airing (Unerring) Facts

Initial news reports totaled up three deaths—
A trio of mythic, metaphysical “suffocations”—
A wife, a husband, their son.

Though the dead laugh off slander,
Broadcasters are ironically reticent
To tarnish a TV-varnished reputation.

Yet, libel was never in the picture—
To parade Grand Guignol theatre,
To showcase repellent reality.

With this telescopic insight,
Editors relaxed their tether,
And let facts screech pure ugliness:

The wrestler strangled his wife with her bra,
Smothered his son with a pillow,
And hanged himself from a barbell stand.

— George Elliott Clarke

“Decisione”

[CV2]

When you jet on down to Basque Biarritz,
 You and your wallet willingly go splits,
 Here where the water flows in starts and fits,
 And spirits are spruced up with a lime spritz,
 And bikinis look best as two teeny bits
 (Glamour dazzles—gaudy—doubled with glitz),
 And you are as pleased as anyone gets—
 In a disco gyring to a 60s blitz
 Of hot soul (during which no cripple sits),
 While young girl moans and her paramour spits—
 His hands all over her pert, perky tits,
 And lovers groan until the starlight quits
 (With manly pegs cementing female slits
 Or plumbing tongues strumming so many clits),
 And sex acts mimic tragicomic skits,
 And each bull snorts and each flighty quail flits,
 And the Atlantic wails (losing its wits),
 At the Grand Plage, where each wave hits and hits
 And foams and froths in sand craters and pits,
 While the lighthouse beckons sombre poets
 To unsheathe *un stylo* as time permits—
 And scribble epics that croon like sonnets
 (*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz?*)....

At the Casino, cashing in her chits—
 Spy B. Bardot, then those Kennedy shits,
 Then pasty, slumming, Sorbonne “lit-crits”
 (Some of them are twats, all of them are twits),
 Plus film stars, fading (each one a ditz—
 Confusing Australia and Austerlitz),
 Leaving behind extreme close-ups of zits,
 Waistlines gone haywire, careers on the fritz....

Make sure you quaff Pelforth (*brun*), never Schlitz—
 Unlike Yanks—and Yankee-wannabe Brits.
 (Canadians come with camouflage kits:
 Each murderer cooks, each assassin knits;
 And Tories bed down with pinkos and Grits).

This poem concludes with the beginning: it’s
 “When you jet on down to Basque Biarritz....”

— George Elliott Clark

Aux Jardins du Rosaire à Lyon

In my hushed nook, among white flowers gone stale,
 Almost funereal,
 With the white cathedral at my back and above my head,
 Towering over Lyon like a heavenly religion
 Grounded in marble,
 There is peace—
 Though kiddies giggle and hunt each other
 As lustily as lovers or pirates,
 Irritating the dust
 That once washed over saints' always dirty feet
 Before it plastered their bones,
 Falling on them like blessings—or respect,
 Entombing them in approximated holiness.

Bees potter about here,
 Wringing what final nectar lingers
 In these doddering, crumbling blooms.
 Pilgrims perambulate amid these massed perfumes.
 Some pray, others parade.

How antique this garden is,
 The trees do not say.
 But surely their ancestors anchored
 Gallic and Roman outposts now ruins,
 And, from time to time, they caught fire,
 To tutor “barbarians” in civilization’s illumination,
 Or to introduce “witches” to blazing Christianity,
 Or simply to permit a peasant
 Steaming venison before steamy venery
 Or his-and-her gourmet sleep.

As sunlight burns to cinders,
 Transients disperse
 To marriages, christenings, feasts, orgies, funerals,
 And the mosquitoes throng,
 Whining, Chaucerian, in the dark.

There is no answer but wine,
 And no eternity outside song.

George Elliott Clarke

Love Elegy Sonnet

à la manière de Pablo Neruda

Obliged to forget that olive waist,
 Those breasts as golden as the sun,
 That shining imperium of your sex,
 My cup culminates with brilliant wine.

I sin, I rot, I'm torn, my little heart:
 Dun, not docile, you won't be coaxed, and so
 My dolour surges, unmediated.
 Gold as the dawn, your beauty havocs me.

To you, I would be having—*behaving*—
 If you would be having to me, oh dame,
 And let my painting tongue laminate you.

Do not aggrieve me further! Let me plumb
 The parade of your flesh, its plum fathoms,
 For jasmine pursues you where you step.

—George Elliott Clarke

James Brown's Rhetoric

Think!
I'll go crazy.
I know it's true.
Baby, you're right:
I've got to change.

It hurts to tell you
I got the feelin'
I've got to cry.
Don't let it happen to me.
Please, please, please.

It's a man's world:
I got you
Bewildered?
I won't plead no more:
You're mine, you're mine.

I'll never, never let you go.
You made me love you.
It was you.
There must be a reason:
You've got the power.

Try me—
Prisoner of love—

- George Elliott Clarke