

POETRY / POÉSIE

On the Centennial of the October (Bolshevik) Revolution: A Canticle

George Elliott Clarke

Sooner or later, it had to happen....
After workers got robbed naked, gaunt, starved,
Their wages vandalized, their savings stripped,
By oligarchical monarchs, posh scum—
Czars and Machiavellian quislings—
For whom iced vodka substitutes for blood—
Syphilitic financiers, chartreuse-eyed,
Drooling, all master pedophiles, eager
To beggar kids, turn em into black-squad
Labourers, penny-paid, their limbs buggered
In sprockets and gears, or lopped by machines,
Next to suffer absolute zero: *Death*....

Sooner or later, it had to happen....
That slimy *Theology*, maggot priests,
Domesticated whimpering, the scorched waste
Of *Geopolitics*, blood-gluttonous,
The simpering dying off of millions
(Millionaires excused), industrious plagues,
Decay livid as rust, as snowed-over
Corpses, faces sucking up mustard gas,
As deformed as shadows, sprawling in pits—
The muddy, low-down, low-brow-stuffed trenches—
The once-tolerable *Tragedy* of
The Eastern Front, all those pallid spooks....

Sooner or later, it had to happen....
 Bleeding over parliamentary pages,
 The civil strife of angina in schools,
 Ballet boxed-in tight—in boxing-rings—
 The *pas-de-deux* stymied by brute punches—
 The thundering damnation of cannon,
 Actually dirty, breeding pure dead-souls,
 Lacking all *Allegiance*—grisly, cold,
 Beautiful, dead things—eyes bumped, dumped into
 Buckets; all had to—undoubtedly—
 Disdain the plaudits of poets, the liars
 (Plutocrats' propagandists), skulls squished flat....

Sooner or later, it had to happen....
 Dentures detonating *Declarations of*
War; meat-eating voices, cesspool mouths, lips
 Clamping sewers, and peasants vomiting
 Green-brown water (ex-red blood), scurvy juice,
 Loose teeth, Yellow Fever, Black Lung, gangrene,
 Heinous *Bibliolatry*, even though
 Their pay is rats, botulism, rickets,
Corrosion, *Erosion*, jail cells, TB,
 Monkey shoulders, chancres, paralysis,
 Bum tickers, strokes, diabetes, bilge, steep
 Rates of debt, divorce, suicide, murder....

Sooner or later, a *Revolution*
 Had to happen—Bolshevik, red-flagged Dawn—
 To stop fires from assassinating shacks
 Where dull newspapers sulk, Tolstoy's beloved
 Dirt-poor stooping where gas has clawed out eyes;
 Bare-assed, empty-handed, their *History*
 Faltered, where *Charity* would sack palaces,
 Extravagant baubles, junk, *Fabergé*
 Eggs accounted less worthy than hens' eggs....
 But still the *Revolution* baffles cops—
 A "catastrophe," "conflagratory":
 "Unkempt décors frosted with tomb-like guilt...."

Yes, let's boggle at that *Revolution*,
 Castigate "the butchers, the whoreson butchers!"
 But the idea uplifted '17.
 To put down monsters, unabated thugs!
 And sure quixotic! To dream that teamsters
 Could be prime ministers, that cooks could be
 Judges, and that all could share "Bread, Land, Peace";
 That doctors could go barefoot; that poets
 Could draft Constitutions; that midwives could
 Pilot rockets; that daycare workers could
 Boss banks; that cowgirls could be CEO's;
 That was the dream, and it was innocent.

Dominion-impressed soldiers weighed anchor
 For the Soviet Union—to squash the "Reds":
 Yet, ideas run borderless. So was born
 The Winnipeg General Strike (or "Commune"),
 The Regina Manifesto, unions,
 Labour rights, credit unions, and public
 Health care, plus "The Welfare State"—simply.
 Russia's October Revolution was
 A necessity. *Never Tyranny!*
 Though that *Revolution* turned sour, rotten,
 The ideals that citizens are equal,
 That governments serve citizens, are ours,
Canadian—favoured at balloting
 And savoured—grave—in our Constitution?

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