

GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE

Proverbs

1

Claim or declaim what you like!

Write pages that will darken others into history.

Of the making of images,
 many images,
 there is no end.

The beautiful poem is a resolute orchestration of verbs.

Elegance for the sake of elegance.

There are no good—or bad—words.

Lying is hard; rhyming is harder.

Beware of adjectival swooning, self-indulgent prettiness.

Look suspiciously at alliteration like a dish of rats.

(You win some poems—
des vers:
They are poison to worms—
des vers.)

Misshapen words are all; they crooked everything:
So endless pages turn slowly into excrement.

Assassins shit out reviews to make war,
Make reputations, sometimes even to make love.

The library is a morgue; writers are chopped meat.

Consider the book as a chasm or a chute, as an abyss or a void.

No pen jets pigment.

You are what you believe.

Parody is parity.

Apes imitate; parrots echo; writers make.

The advantage of being a writer
 is that you can tell people
what you really think about them,
 tell them about their real faults,
while they hang on every word,
 knowing it is the truth,
and both dreading and loving it,
 passionately.

Do not doubt that you could degrade any monarchy or republic
very quickly.

This world is more terrible—and more beautiful—than one thinks.

And we go on, singing,
 every notebook its own canto.

2

If you can't be good, then look good.

If you don't spread your legs, folks can't spread no rumours.

There are men who call beauty *Beauty*, just so they can plunder it.

Do not shed goodness with your clothes.

Enjoy corrupt, passionate lovers, especially those
Who are very lewd and very dark.

Can you bear the burden of satisfaction?

Love is a pulp and ash in the lungs or veins—
Or six hundred seconds of squelching noises.

Man is out, woman inner:
In between lies the sinner.

We embrace, and it is just skin and bone.

Love is painful at first; and it is painful at the end.

We make love and, eventually, much sorrow.

There is no shame like the shame of lust once shamed to dullness.

3

The young need no religion. Youth is its salvation.

After age thirty, hurt remains hurt—
Or curdles into nostalgia.

Time breathes through men's—and insects'—lungs.

All things must pass;
Even *Pain* dwindles like summer water:
Dew refreshes grass
Cattle wreck *en route* to slaughter.

Child becomes man, man crumbles to corpse,
And all that passes between is history.

History is a moral force, but it only indicts, it never absolves.

The final grace
That is the grave
Sues the disgrace
Of human love.

Is Heaven now? While we reason, while we are sentient,
Enjoying our moments of flux?

You only hit rock-bottom when buried.

You were in the middle of doing something.
What was it? Was it life? Living?