

GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE

## JUDITH

I.

1. To Damascus and to Beirut,  
to Carmel and to Gilead,  
to Jerusalem and to Cairo,  
and to the border with Ethiopia,  
Assyria's monarch, Nebuchadnezzar,  
dispatched messengers to demand these nations  
and/or city-states  
back him—i.e. Assyria—  
in a new war to satisfy self-aggrandizement  
and permit *Lebensraum* expansionism.

2. To enlarge his domains, he'd bellow "War,"  
but only step his feet into stirrups  
if forced.

3. Nebuchadnezzar craved to be an emperor,  
not a mere king.  
He wanted a war to beautify maps.  
(He wasn't really a truly mature king—  
just a kiddy brute.)

4. (Were there intimations of petty *Poetastry*  
as he schemed his epic enlargement?)

5. Nebuchadnezzar's messengers entered palaces  
whose rulers deemed th'Assyrian  
as being just one more monarch

and not one bit superhuman.

6. The petitioned kings tee-heed, hee-hawed, snickered.  
They continued to polish their unstained steel.  
They did not explicitly weaponize—  
turn staffs into spears, wine into poison.

7. They scorned Nebuchadnezzar's ambassadors  
as misplaced and as obnoxious as scars.  
These kings were as inconsiderate as bruises.

8. Nebuchadnezzar's messengers shrank home  
with pissy letters scourging any alliance;  
worse, the discouraging kings sent no mollifying gold.

9. Nebuchadnezzar felt disgraced, defaced,  
defanged, if not dethroned.  
His brain was all *furuncle*.

10. His solution? Well, to slay multitudes!  
He'd liquidate every principality—  
Syria, Judea, Egypt—  
and eliminate every breathing thing  
between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.  
Policy: *no pity for parasites!*

11. Crimson *Delirium* addled the rebuked royal.  
His *Debauchery* would be *Butchery!*  
Nebuchadnezzar was gonna do multiple *Regicide*  
and enslave queens as tavern-door sluts.

12. *Time for blood-slicked swords!*  
Time to quit his queen's ecstatic gussets—  
the play of eyes in their *faulle* bedroom.  
Time to quit the bawling nursery  
and blood-damaged diapers.  
Time to abandon the middle-aged miracles

of whisky-dressed-up tea, any branded liquor.  
Time to seek ghastly *Happiness: Mass Murder!*

13. Starting with King Arfaxad, Nebuchadnezzar  
splintered his chariots,  
chopped up his horses,  
and spitted his soldiers,  
or chopped up his chariots,  
spitted his horses,  
and splintered his soldiers.

14. King Arfaxad stampeded to the Ragau mountains,  
crying to bare rock, “Gimme shelter!”  
But tyrannical Nebuchadnezzar  
cornered the toppled king  
and terminated him with stabbing, spear-tip jabs.  
His groans modulated into whimpers—  
stolen, plagiarized sounds.  
His bleeding was hospital spittle—  
as operatic as a toilet—  
his gurgling baritone,  
his whooshing soprano.

15. (The fatal stab broke through Arfaxad’s skull.)

16. Arfaxad was a deer hide full of spear holes.  
His throne was now a scarlet-smearred stool.

17. Next, Nebuchadnezzar ransacked Ecbatana.  
This was the unwholesome “undercard.”

18. Nebuchadnezzar’s troops beleaguered  
and ransacked the capital’s gold supply.  
Th’Assyrians tore down trumped-up towers,  
alchemized cream into excrement,  
slashed gold into tinsel.

19. Nebuchadnezzar was as absolutist as a teen.

20. Retired now Assyria's monarch to Nineveh,  
camping there 120 days (nigh Sodom)  
so his equipage of equestrian troops  
could feast and wine and wench—  
all gluttonously, deliriously, frenziedly.

21. *Peace* is an orgy—or it ain't.

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II.

1. Nebuchadnezzar roared, "Revenge!"  
His oath wracked every Palace surface.

2. The guttural syllables shot from preposterous guts  
and a tongue best suited for cannibal foreplay.

3. (Consider th'Assyrian king as mimicking  
a prehistoric dictator—  
like the mythical Tyrannosaurus Rex.  
He's the type of slave ship captain  
who turfs his "cargo" overboard  
as sport for sharks.)

4. The king summoned his Cabinet—  
Crown ministers and councilors,  
lawyers and bankers—  
his ice-faced cronies—  
and had each one plot—  
in concert—  
the extermination of all dissident peoples.

5. Every once-arrogant, once-humiliating tribe  
hazarded a thwacking.

6. “Destroy every mustard bastard!  
Discourage refuseniks of their innards!  
Disfurnish laggards of their virtues!  
Canvas the insolent  
and encompass them with burial shrouds.”

7. *Conquest* and *Massacre* voted on,  
Nebuchadnezzar granted General Holofernes  
120,000 soldiers and 12,000 cavalry  
to dissipate the rebel peoples as maggot gruel.

8. Th’Assyrian troops’ feet and horses’ hooves  
were commanded to perpetrate *Rape*, *Robbery*, and *Murder*,  
forbidding any escapees or survivors;

9. to be cutpurse conquistadors;  
to slay the bullish recalcitrants.

10. Nebuchadnezzar swore, “The wounded  
will pollute every pond and gully with blowflies.  
The dead will populate and poison the rivers.  
Cholera’s gonna collar and choke our foes.

11. “No mercy is permitted.  
Pacify unruly tribes by burying ‘em,  
and do so as they plead, wheezing, for *Death!*”

12. Holofernes viewed his own majesty  
as resident in his guts, his cock.

13. Holofernes intoned, “*Heil Caesar,*”  
then marched 120,000 soldiers west,  
plus 12,000 horse-mounted archers.

14. This armada numbered camels, donkeys, mules  
(to transport arms and implements)—  
plus oxen, sheep, goats

(to furnish meat and milk)—  
plus gold and silver  
(to purchase slippery passage from underpaid watchmen).

15. Their intent was to be so deforming  
of “enemies”  
as to be demonic;  
to treat other human beings  
like plague bacilli.

16. Behind the chariots, coaches, and livestock  
traipsed along an army of bootlickers,  
cocksuckers, profiteers, fortune-tellers,  
fortune-seekers, psychopaths, sociopaths—  
as omnipresent as dust and insatiable as pigs.

17. (Even babes got born in chariots  
or plopped down into road dust.)

18. The camp-followers were a kleptomaniac wind.  
They’d tear into sweets, tear into houses,  
tear down torn-up streets.

19. This mob would dally equally with dolly and lad.  
They were taffeta punks and *horum*  
(prostitutes)  
with cleft, plum-like asses—  
and well-used *hackneys*  
(harlots)  
with cleft, peach-like quims;  
and they were consummate pirates.

20. (This party of stigmatical cunts and grisly bums—  
this gross of filthy, nagging mouths  
and cum-dripping asses—  
all these deflowered creatures—  
loved to garb in *piel y punto*

[leather and wool]  
 and play *Treasury*-smashing earthquakes,  
 an *Onslaught*.)

21. After only seven days, Holofernes put down  
 Put and Lud—  
 in a *Blitzkrieg*—  
 smacked down the cities,  
 and put to the sword Rassisites  
 and Ishmaelites,  
 south of Chellea.

22. Next, Holofernes traced the Euphrates,  
 winding into Mesopotamia,  
 and torched every town along the brook Abron,  
 so wind carried their ashes to the sea.

23. Cicilia? Every inhabitant died.  
 (Holofernes set an example for Attila the Hun.)

24. Nearing Arabia, Holofernes set afire  
 the tents, sacked the sheepfolds,  
 and skewered and roasted the sheep  
 of the Midianites—  
 and skewered and roasted the Midianites.

25. Damascus saw its wheat harvest become  
 waving flames,  
 while herds were corralled and butchered,  
 houses were broken into and looted,  
 young men's cocks got chopped off,  
 old men lost their big heads.  
 Bodies were awakened, stabbed,  
 and left as corpses.

26. All along seacoasts and throughout inlands  
 Nebuchadnezzar's nemeses quailed before  
 Holofernes' shaggy bridles bearing cutthroats.

27. Chronology counted down  
as slain genealogies mounted up.

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III.

1. Fearing dastardly, maniacal Holofernes,  
the besieged kings dispatched ambassadors  
à Nebuchadnezzar,  
pleading *Deliverance* from his redneck, Yahoo *Violence*,  
and pledging to th'Assyrian tyrant  
full usage of their temples, courts, vineyards, wheatfields,  
and even offering themselves and their wives and daughters  
as the alpha male's eager, doting slaves.

2. (Note the dictator's snout and jaw—  
the impression of a spear tip.)

3. Assyria was becoming  
an empire of carnivores and cadavers.

4. The king's rumbling of "War"  
was capitulated to by ambassadors  
mumbling of *Occupation*.

5. But not one was ready to *show hackle*  
(willing to fight);  
all were *jaculatory*  
(prayerful),  
acting as if *kingdomed*  
(proud of monarchy).

6. Quailing, th'ambassadors told Nebuchadnezzar,  
"Our property is yours to enjoy  
or destroy—  
or to enjoy destroying,  
as ye like."



7. Through this downpour—outpouring—  
of cavilling confessions,  
outbursts of hypocritical wailing,  
self-critical and hypothetical tears,  
craven flattery and encomia,  
each nation surrendered  
and was rendered as a glittering dependency.

Here was the bullshit of ambassadors—  
on hind legs,  
offering light yowls,  
laps at Assyrian crotches,  
or pronouncements of bitchy dogmas,  
nipping at each other.

8. Apprised of this *Peace* plan, Holofernes  
selected his choicest warriors from the garrisons  
of the towns he'd already seized  
and marched these auxiliaries—  
plus his regular army—  
to the seacoast.

9. The coastal dwellers—fishers, sailors—  
greeted Holofernes and his Irregulars  
with garlands, dancers, tambourines,  
dolled-up and doled-out “fraternizers,”  
much wine, and hip-hip-hoorays.

10. (Waves grasped so much at broken glass,  
the pieces escaped only as they were smoothed,  
their sharp edges rounded by all that scuttling  
and scuffing.)

11. Waves moved forward  
as relentless as breath.  
The seaweed laps  
where the waves overlap.)

12. Unpersuaded, Holofernes torched their temples,  
axed down sacred orchards,  
and chopped up idols of wood and paint.  
Troops *rid-housed* (emptied) every temple,  
every edifice of state.

13. Quickly, forbidden white brides were found,  
floundering under black men's thighs.

14. Quickly, blushing tattoos startled pale thighs—  
where their rapists bruised—  
colonizing.

15. (These maidens whelped blackberry babes.  
Some were assaulted, some set naked,  
but some were *colting* [lewd]—  
some stripped, made *naking* . . .)

16. The couples were animals piled atop each other—  
bees—drones—at insatiable labour,  
getting at, squeezing out, honey.

17. Virgins grew cocks—  
a flock of 'em—  
about their pallid loins.

18. (Glimmering deposits of sperm  
banked in a constellation of vaginas.)

19. Their thighs squirted curtsies  
as the soldiery ploughed up their skirts.

20. The music meeting Holofernes  
was *callithumpian* (discordant).

21. Holofernes eliminated all rival idols,  
so peeps would kowtow to Nebuchadnezzar.

22. No scarecrow could bounce away these garden raiders.

23. No dialect or Faith was to be spared.

24. Like the slick of razors over stubble,  
such were th'Assyrian troops—  
razing—bulldozing down—  
other folks' temples.

25. Smoke wallowed in splintered windows;  
smoke walloped the sky.

26. Even libraries were desecrated:  
a confusion of 'em were set smoking.  
Each book—a clapped-shut butterfly  
or a rectangle squared—  
was now martyred,  
becoming spectacles of ash.

27. *Terrorism* was howls tunnelled through ears—  
scuttled cities, smoky skylines,  
mushrooming gravestones—  
the knotted, clotted breathing  
of the dying.

28. The total darkness of abandoned theologies—  
the gods rubbed out by the all-demanding  
and *Total War* of Nebuchadnezzar—  
that extremist, unenlightened king—  
could be witnessed concretely.  
Coastal capitals were all shipwrecked cities.

29. (Now breakers caper,  
so broken skeletons scrape against pebbles.)

30. Holofernes camped for thirty days  
on the border of Judea  
to water his horses and number his supplies.

31. Holofernes wanted to trample down Judea  
like an avalanche  
startling the sleepy valley villages.

32. That eve, he completed his scar-faced toilette.  
Slumbered.

33. He dreamed of 300 wagonloads of bones—  
stacks and heaps and hills of bones—  
some skulls still having beards—  
some skulls looking cheerful  
(due to the set leer of chaps, jaws) . . .

34. He planned to make chandeliers of bones,  
sculpt fountains of pelvic bones  
(thanks to their fan-like, floral shape),  
set clavicles on either side of skulls  
(the inverse of winged baby's heads),  
build mason shrines of skulls  
(teeth still set in the jaws),  
all inherently mortifying.

35. He planned to nail and spike bones to walls,  
instil mummification in a slum of bones,  
draft an odour of decay akin to dying geraniums . . .

36. Despite the ready pleasures of women  
whose breasts were unveiled . . .

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\*At James Boswell's "Witchery."