

BOOK REVIEW

Blues and Bliss, The Poetry of George Elliott Clarke. George Elliot Clarke selected with an introduction by Jon Paul Fiorentino. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2008; xvii + 66 pages; ISBN 978-1-55458-060-6; \$14.95US (paper).

Blues and Bliss is one of eleven publications in the Laurier Poetry Series that include an introduction from the selector, 35 poems from the Canadian poet and an afterword from the poet themselves discussing their work within the landscape of Canadian Poetry.

Clarke's work seeks to engage and access the Africadian community as demonstrated by "the collective "we" as a rhetorical device, drawing in or excluding the reader, depending on his/her ethnicity" (xv). He also frequently references art and literary icons across his body of work including Josephine Baker, Victor Hugo, Sade, Ezra Pound, Eva Braun, Picasso, John Coltrane and Henri Rousseau to name a few. Clarke's poems selected here focus on a myriad of themes, the ones I find most engaging are those in the selections from *Execution Poems: The Black Acadian Tragedy of "George and Rue"* focusing on poverty and hunger. In "Trial 1," for example, the reader sees the testimony of George but not his, mostly likely racist, interrogator.

I am most familiar with Clarke's *Whylah Falls*, "born of this matrix of journalism, pop song, social activism" (62), having the pleasure of seeing it staged at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa some years ago. This collection includes eight selections from *Whylah Falls* that are incredibly sensual. I believe one of the goals of this series is the provide an entry point into the work of Canadian poets, and if so I sincerely hope that readers will be inspired to pick up the complete version of *Whylah Falls*. What is included here is fabulous, but merely a small fraction of the entire work. One device Clarke uses very effectively I hesitantly describe as the "laundry list" that so many writing instructors and mentors have cautioned against using. In "Chancy's Menu" and elsewhere in the collection Clarke builds a picture that can be felt, smelled and tasted extremely vividly.

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