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

George Elliott Clarke
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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
Faltering, 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 gilt....”
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
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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