

A Salute to Gloria Clarke Baylis: Canadian Human Rights Pioneer

The hero's not abundantly obvious
Often. She's proud, but magnanimous:
A beauty, yes, but indescribably
Angry. The reason? Her polite fury

Is the only credible riposte to the Queen
Elizabeth Hotel's irrevocably obscene
Rejection of her—Gloria Clarke Baylis's—
Application to be one of two nurses

In September 1964. She submitted
Her credentials, but a hotel aide committed
“Perjury,” lying that the jobs were filled. Worse:
Her application wasn't kept. White as blank verse,

This dude made Montréal appear a City
Of *Segregation*—racial and linguistic. Pity
Gloria Baylis? Nope! Bajan by birth, she'd always
Championed *Equality*. She chose to fight the disgrace

Of the then-Hilton hotel's act of discrimination.
She telephoned the Negro Citizenship Association,
Whose aid included lawyer Gerald Charness,
He of B'Nai B'Rith, of *ange*-augmented brightness.

At the 1965 trial, the Hilton chain said,
“We're ignorant of what our underling did;
And still, maybe he was right, since Mrs. Baylis
Speaks only English.” But advocate Charness

Revealed that Baylis had worked years in French
As a nurse, and he dug at Hilton as if digging a trench.
Affirming the hotel's racism wasn't a once-only show,
Charness had Baylis stand, declare, “I am a Negro!”

Thus, she clarified that her experience was *Racism*—
And not due to lack of skills or lack of bilingualism.
Indeed, she was exceptionally bilingual.
But a twisted tongue had been used by the hotel.

Given the evidence, Judge Marcel Gaboury had to find
For the plaintiff, namely Gloria Baylis. He fined
Hilton only a token amount. But the fact is,
Heroic was Mrs. Gloria Clarke Baylis,

In being the face of Her Majesty The Queen
Versus The Queen Elizabeth Hotel. Obscene
Is the irony! But by taking on Hilton of Canada,
Gloria Baylis took a historic step. Her bravura

Stand saw her triumph in Canada's first test-case
Against racial prejudice in employment. Erase
This glory? No, never more! She's not nameless,
This heroine of *Equality*, namely, Gloria Baylis.

--George Elliott Clarke
7th Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2016-17)