

At the Canadian Sesquicentennial, Looking Back at the Centennial: A Little, Personal Nostalgia

When de Gaulle cavalcaded to Montréal and shouted,
“Vive le Québec libre,”
and got kicked out this monarchy,
i.e., got sent packing back to the French Republic
for confusing Québec with Algérie

(just like the FLQ did later,
aping the FLN);

and the go-go Justice Minister—
“‘Oncle Tom’ in a sports jacket”—
(so sayeth his naysayers), M. Trudeau
veered his sports car
 (“Mercedes”—not to be confused with “the girl,”
he jested),
to & fro yet another Constitutional
[Anglo pronunciation of the first French word is needed here] “*pel*” *fête*,
but advised all, “The State—Victoria’s ghost—gotta quit our bedrooms”;

and bow-tied Mikey Pearson got skyjacked by the lapels
and shaken about by (“All-the-Way”) LBJ,
who accused the 14th PM
of “pissing on my carpet,”
thanks to a peacenik polemic that the Nobel Laureate
quoted in the Great Society Republic,
complainin bout the carpet-napalmin of Vietnam;

and George Grant railed against, sallied against,
the Frankenstein cross-breed of *Technology* and *Imperialism*,
calling on English-speaking Canada
to keep saluting dour Mama Britain
in preference to glitzy—but *Welfare/Warfare*-schizoid—“Oncle Sam”;

and Gordon Lightfoot scribbled “Black Day in July,”
observing the sirens and corpses and dirty violence
of Motor City (Motown), and that black smoke—
what used to be Detroit—
spiralling up over Windsor, ON,
darkening the Essex County corn crop,
thanks to rebellious mobs burning down the catastrophically taxing
ghetto shops taking, taking, taking,
but never giving “blues people” a break;

and The Beatles assaulted Cold War “suits” with *Sergeant Pepper*;
 and Harvard prof Leary dropped *Lucy-in-the-Sky-with-Diamonds*,
 surreal hints about the (*Kama*) Sutra
 activated *via* Lysergic acid diethylamide

(which was already being C.I.A.-tested—illicitly—
 on unsuspecting souls tucked into a Montreal
 institute’s psych-depression beds);

and N.S. premier G.I. Smith came in
 and Bobby Stanfield went out—

to helm the federal Progressive Conservatives
 (a pure Canadian ideal, really, the “Red Tory”)—

after Dief-the-Chief got “dumped” or “decamped”
 (so thought some, punning on the campy incident);

but that’s okay cos he pencilled in The Bill o’ Rights
 (*circa* 1960),
 which got inked up later as The Charter o’ Rights and Freedoms;

and Nova Scotia’s government helped transfer *Clairtone* stereo
 (beloved by Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy*)
 to Stellarton to manufacture colour televisions
 (though both moves were boondoggles);

and deeming Canadian federalism retrograde,
 M. Lévesque bailed on the Québec Liberals
 to invent the Mouvement Souveraineté-Association
 and eschew “direct action” (“riots”)
 and try to persuade folks democratically
 to vote independence *via* the ballot;

and Pierre Vallières was about to launch
Les Nègres blancs d’Amérique du nord,
 that incendiary memoir—
 a version of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (?);

and the year before, Isabel LeBourdais critiqued
The Trial of Stephen Truscott
 in her eponymously titled, sensational *j’accuse*,
 telling all that the boys-in-blue got wrong
 the forensic evidence, the investigation,
 fixing up the whole awful mess of too quick a damnation;
 but the Supreme Court still ruled, 8-1,
 against Truscott,
 delaying actual *Justice*

just a few extra decades;

and I was a “coloured kid”
 in Halifax,
 7 years old and excited about Canada’s 100th—
 and caught the Ocean Limited train up to Montreal,
 where resided my excellent, beautiful, back-talkin Aunt Joan
 (outta Three Mile Plains, N.S., y’all);

and went with my two bros to Expo 67—
 to see the world up close—
 my lil passport stamped at most of the pavilions,
 including the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.—
 in the midst of the Space Race,
 and the mini-skirt was just hitting its stride;

and Sean Connery romped round as “Bond, James Bond,”
 in *You Only Live Twice*;

and then Rocky Jones—
pace his devotion to Dr. King’s Civil Rights Movement—
 set up Kwacha House in Halifax,
 to begin to intro *Black Power* and Black Panthers
 to bagpipe-and-tartan-kilted Nouvelle-Ecosse;

and we ex-“Negro,” ex-“Coloured” kids
 started to dream about
Liberation, Socialismo, Development
 (“Regional” & “Economic,”
 Canuck-style);

and I’d already been two years previously
 under the tutelage of Alexa McDonough
 (future leader of the NSNDP and the federal NDP),
 who was then my *Kindergarten* teacher
 (hired by my mom, Mrs. Geraldine Clarke),

and who a couple of decades later
 had Rocky Jones as an advisor—
 just as I did;

but first I recovered the albums of Dylan & Cohen;
 and bounced to the jazz-disco-funk of Parliament-Funkadelic;

only about a decade after I was 7.

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