

Exile by George Elliot Clarke

*for Kwame Dawes*

Your scuttled *pays* floats—fiery—in the ether;  
Blazing, it vomits smudge-smoke. Your mind chars  
Black because you yaw—moth-like—too near flames.  
You douse your dream-scorched brain with slave-sweat rum— The only gold you can own,  
corroding  
Your liver. Your anthem plays to gunfire.  
When you think about it (when you can breathe)—  
After all the lies that frame nostalgia,  
All the dead faces that occupy photographs,  
All the slain lovers pitched into ditches,  
Your eyes itch and ache with water, then dry—  
Curling like dead leaves, starving for gold fire.