

2 Poems

by Iain James Robb

IN THE QUIET TIME

Forgiveness and forgetfulness are words
I sometimes think have worth to just the dead;
Though envy creeps, I grudge no man's rewards:
There lie no guilt-edged thoughts against my head.
The funeral march bears off, away from mind,
The petty sins that no more stain the frame
Of this lone man we represent in name
To all lost things, that whisper with the wind.

It's not a day that's either cold or strange,
Where I watch all these mourners, as I stand
Where fancy lacks its liberty, to range
Beyond each word ungarnered, at my hand.
None speak, or if they talk they take each breath
From drops the distant rains forget to pour;
Their eyes won't seek the sunset's western shore,
That greets the death of day and day of death.

Though time, for some, has seemed itself to die,
Grown rigid as frost's wraith upon a leaf,
It does not join them there within their grief;
There's grown no western darkness in the sky,
Beyond that which the eve's last blind has drawn
Against its usual shuttering sun worn eye-
So that it seems forgetful they should cry,
Forgetful that things stay, though all stays gone.

The winds that seem stagnated now will pass
Again against these beachless banks of green:
To wreath the trees they'll touch till leaves will last,

And move them past, and weave a different scene.
We think a while for us their stray breaths sigh,
With all such things the stark clouds can amass:
Forgetful that all forms thus leave time's glass,
With wraiths that played, then fell from memory.

My presence here, as one who shares the blood
Of he who long since passed his coffin's press,
Is as some page made void of one true word:
My speechless voice just as superfluous.
I leave my speech for that one nameless cloud
That closes round the white heights, as unseen
As any ghosts that wreath their gabardine-
As weightless as the sails inside their shroud.

Could I have proffered solace? In my way,
It seems, were just faint sorrows, feinted joys.
I know there falls a squall through noon's last ray,
That cannot tune my tongue to comfort's voice.
Constrained by air, I wake, and watch for sleep;
Things seemed more flush in lustre when, a child,
I'd not yet learned to walk inside the wild-
Too steeped in tears to feel them, or to weep.

PER ASPERA AD ASTRA, NEMO NISI MORS

The Convalescent Sounds Again the Shedding of his Soul

Come, dawn, and drown your grey lips in that hour
That fades me out and lay your scarlet mouth,
On dream-laned eyes oblivious to your dower-
As the nomad drinks out memories of drouth:

Since to perish innocent, against the dies
Of clanging blacks and brights, the stars too cease
Like crowns that sense that no tiaras rise
For weights too great for silence: jades of fate sans diocese.

Give leave for me to wander, O my Lord
(For no coronas else come than my own)
To paint my wingless spirit with no word:
All passions fail what passions they disown.
Lay down your halberd, soul so sweet your stairs
Were flights both high and bare, and blank past blue:
There is a place inside claims both our airs-
But whose name flayed you forth: yet mine? Whose Hand will ply
to you?

Someday, I'd like to think, I'd be the one
No thane with fish of glazed aquariums:
That harbour those who fail to sound the sun,
As I write instead my porn encomiums-
For whom? No face for which my pencil thrums;
Like ligatures of things that sway by night,
The forms my gibbet stalks, to bind my flight-
And find myself, and lose my self again, in flooded light.

Reverberations of my strange soul's strings,
Made dark by floodit lanes these words I chew.
Did Icarus lose his will's light with his wings?
A caged bird shares within its usual zoo
No music of the planes nor of the rings
That lie outside our size; this much is rue.
Their cosmic slopes know not no knowledge brings
How turn my turns: what matter, no last life reverses Go.

* * *

Pray for my soul, for neither it nor I
Once said, "I am the face behind your skull:

We mirror we ourselves thus when we die."
Yet I threw the dice that diademed my kill.
Twelve months have gone (but Winter will be kind
To what Fall fells) since last September slew
The frames of those who burgeon still past mind-
Not of my selves, but inwards me and out, who still are you.

It was not *he* who truly died, and yet
I find myself in watch for *him* who died;
Such fallow creatures we who nurse regret
For those who envy suckled, as it vied
With the tricks we use to claim coquettish day
Our own; my shade I mourn for and assize!
To fall down now could dissuade the clay
Suns walk, where I chase garish sins of paradise.

And do you remember me, forgotten lord
Of I who stand your master? I am you-
We sang the same, O soul of black and blue:
Disowning, I reclaim your brindled bird.
A speckled star-length place against one eye,
White dawn: what my September knows of its July
My mirrored breath may know betimes, of lips that overrun
In absence: a twin face shall count in one oblivion

All things, but all begins; in this the hour
Of librium cloudrise we have slaked our drouth.
Come join with us, Dame Bright, your skirts of power
That prise the mists of convalescent proof-
My shield against your stare, my glass cast dimmer-
Less far to what I'd face as self, mere face, the merely me.
New fronds set gowns from last September's glimmer,
To spend their dower: recrowned one hour, is this eternity?

Iain James Robb

