# Absinthe Drinking in a Bar in Paris

*by* Iain James Robb

Half past six; already, through the gloom
Saltwater flourish sifts from wharfs that ply
Their play like girls that haunt the midnight's womb,
As far it seems as walks of Barbary.

Within the bar, French waitresses and sots
Play dice with time awhile and rub their hair;
The nonchalance of chain-smoke joins its dots
And serenades the motes with equal flair.

How absent am I even though departs,
And rises, archipélagós
Of faces raised through smoke, or famished hearts
Like visions of bruised Harlows and Monroes.

It is the old way; Jeanne Hébuterne,
Thrown out a fifth floor window by the chase
Of tragedy mundane as is eterne,
The kind that sips and swallows might erase

A while, I raise my glass for you, and wire
The strings together, and the broken clots
Of shadows that coquette my junkyard lyre,
Like faces made from coughs and Rorschach blots.

It's half past eight now; people, take your time,
There is no place to go to; chips of ageless cutlery
Sound off like coins relinquished into crime

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From all the loin-wet maids who flutter by.

An image from Boucher sits, in the smoke,
Regrets this night may not bring out its cars:
We do not taste the food on which we choke,
But wander late, and castigate the stars.