

"It's the dead of midnight, and Orion wheels round..."

by Iain James Robb

It's the dead of midnight, and Orion wheels round-
With passing road-streams as its parallax, cars
More distant from us, as the next one's windows
Blocks the view of riders free from traffic lanes; I
Am not your window. As you glide, or go to ground,
It's not through feigned modesty, at that desire
Or this I lose now: as your mouth goes round-
And slopes from what fills out my thoughts with fire.

If you see the stars come out my sweet, they shiver
For themselves; they were not ever blue with you:
But white are all the static worlds we leave behind,
When caught up in swaddlings, when we seek the river...
At the traffic-juncture we don't notice now,
As a fly knows nothing of a fall from beauty-
Nor knowledge, or of life, when there was none to know;
The ploughman it is only tills, then fears the plough.

No difference whether office block, or sight
Of broken lot, a lune-fall vow, before a steeple:
As the roofless lanes are all devoid of running people-
As the violet ranks of clouds which make their tideless flight
Our vows. This ever even is the town or city
That resurrects itself in us a city's paragon...
In sleep, whose liquid lengths again, my pretty,
Take your face, with all the naiad-lights that die by dawn.

Though we cannot see these clearly, though a cloud is bright,

And dark in pastel latticings against our stars,
Above, and whip-scorned, riderless, in firefay flight,
The constellations hide. There are no gravid bars
Between them, just the sum of bare uncounted places
Nearer here, it seems to touch, than our dumb cores-
Between us, myriad drifts of pale, and fractured, faces...
Tuned by sightless light that sifts and sides all shores.

We might imagine separate lives, to beat the pabulum;
Your face I've fractured into rafts of silences
Brings back their glass of masks. I sense our traffic passers
Shift along like knives through night, below strange galaxies.
-Once I had made imagine a pale martyred stripling,
Nailed with bloodied garlands, to a willow tree,
That jerks to jellied zephyrs, could have held my features-
That are turned for due against you, as he shrieks, "Aiee."

We smile thus a while and we consider laughter;
In their one-way wash of window-scapes the cars lose light.
A cloud-wrack hangs in ganging flocks of bled magenta-
And ignores her scarlet lattice in her floodlit flight.
And there are no wounds our fingers tend, *memento mori*
Is what I call you - just a smoothness lacking cracks...
Except the hiss-performing lips we close, behind the doorways-
That cancel out our kiss, and passing parallax.

*And I once imagined faintly a pale martyred stripling,
Nailed along with bloodied garlands, to a willow tree,
That jerks again to zephyrs, could have held my features-
That are turned anew against you, as he shrieks, "Aiee."*
Speed well my dareway darling: though the speedwell enters
Death in den, by Fall, your eyes pass breath their highborn blue...
There is no other colour the high night remembers;
It also is outlasted but will fall from you.

