

# Lassitude

*by* Iain James Robb

It's morning, and the cold black hull of branches sets my resting  
pier,

Amid this drizzle, underneath the poignant pain of birches,  
wrecked

By floods of midyear grieving; wraithlike, Dawn's been becked  
To paint in shafts of faded rose that shades the fen with specious  
cheer.

My feet are clad in broken veils of water, and my throat's been  
cracked

By thirsts I can't eradicate: this drowning deluge first found  
wrack

Upon me with my drought's first sorrow, put me stripped upon my  
back

A sapling in pale mindless spaces, boat among oars the gale has  
hacked

On land that has no armour; still it seems to me, those lifeless  
planks

I've picked out as my shelter, weep their wetness in  
remembrance' wise,

In empathy for golden days when Grecian vaults flocked Persian  
skies,

When gilded gables faced the bays and laurel-yards' terranean  
flanks.

The wetland breathes in beads of mist that wraps along my  
ragged throne,

That paint sweat where the coolness sits, where one branch or  
another had

Engraved its name across my head; my thoughts retire to some  
lost maid

Who rose upon the conch-shell's bed, her seat carved by her  
cousin sun.

There's one stone prison of a face deciphered where the reeds are  
lying;

I imagine her who presaged Helen's doleful sake for worship's  
arms,

Her bust set in these marshes, where no foeman's gore distils her  
charms,

And pale yellow has replaced the shade, of air once grey as dying.

Once forgotten wars were staged not here, but for the blame of  
that

Sublime lust for Mars' patent beauty, patron guide to Florentine:

My supine state is nurtured by the hairshirt crown of eglantine

That bleeds me by your china side, where boyish gods and  
soldiers sat,

Remembering the purpose of desire; the poisoned arrows struck

With hint of endless perfumes, the indemnity kept blood as seal

And innocence experience made keeper; should the spear reveal

Where nectar makes the spirit frozen, youth's long pike unstuck?

Venus, now your august brow that was as white as heaven's cars  
Has lain to rest with age, your gaze is levelled, lost inside your  
sight,

And fails to find a way to bend to other days when eyes made  
bright

Two angels, laughing, dancing, caught at chase between two  
stars.

Your marble hair is serenaded by the teardrops of the snow,

That weaves at fall a marriage-gown: would any men of any age

Still further court on those affections, play the misdirected page?  
My sweet, they have forgotten you; your name has lost its prior  
show.

Once lust-befuddled by the youth who chastened you with aimless  
face  
Of chastity, that paled before the boar took blood with jealous  
tusk,  
Once love's sweet sin had held him in the place where day returns  
to dusk,  
And now no lover clasps your brow, or seeks to break your  
surface-place.

Venus, now the August's prow takes anchor in your frozen gaze,  
The melting poultice of the snow becomes your groom one lonely  
hour:  
Upon its footsteps comes the rain, four seasons in the same day's  
glaze,  
The tropic breeze against your face anointing with your vanished  
dower.

I'll stay here, a stalk in the aspens, too long forlorn yet to fade,  
And sing to you of mystic towers, guide your graces with a tale  
Of days remoter than your smile, find you memories more pale  
Than any absent-gestured mimer's art against your still heart's  
glade.

I'll sleep here, in broken leaves, whose raggedness belies my  
deeds,  
In wanting to paint Nature: no, there seems no blend for oils and  
grit,  
But elegance in death: a lone wren ended forth, her throat is cut:  
I puzzle in your place, and watch your cheekbones crossed by  
aphids.

Life has long abandoned you: I have no space along these  
margins,  
Not here in the swallowing woods, not there trapped on a hilltop's  
peak,  
My powers like yours too anodyne, to make weight on the world's  
reins,  
My gifts on stilts at stillborn giving, headlong flung at birth's first  
seek.

Your face like mine would be remote, from all men of this weak  
domain,  
Where prostituted zeal succeeds the bright sail of your diamond  
age,  
Where simple-minded virtues take the place of high adventure's  
stage,  
And minds dulled by vacuous brush are dead to the far-tempered  
pen.

My gift's a curse, I never asked, to pine with this condition's grip,  
Its virtues caught by no-one, pain transmuted for no greater  
cause,  
The journey took for nothing: should I throw off this autistic  
gauze,  
And take my soul to somewhere nowhere, sail burned down along  
with ship?

Venus, I will seek you, stung by frozen dew on the edge of the  
river:

*Atici amoris ergo: ne pas impune lacessit me.*

Your Adon, I will lie in your lap and realise we were like the  
weather,

Permanent, for someone else: oh seasons, don't push  
me.

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It's morning, and the useless crows teem, picking ravaged berries  
From the sockets of skulls of sightless dead things: falling down in  
fog

The clouds make moats of greyish bowers: dry and brown-grown  
ferries

Stall in the depth of the pool where one sad scarecrow sits: a  
brittle plug

Among poplars, scared by silence: then the raucous stench  
appears

Of rawkish voices I can't reach to throttle, since I drench more  
deep

Each time I move to veer against the pain: the black encroachers  
creep

Their feet on sense' more hallowed soil, that I would rip out both  
my ears,

Not drowning yet, but moored too fast to tear these vile  
tormenting wings,

Which leave my world in such pollution; now that sound has lent  
reprieve

By going back to absence, I hear strains, of strange music, dealt  
of things

My withered state instructs me of, kindness, lent to me that I  
should grieve

With sweeter voice upon its deeper tune; dead Helen, I've known  
yours,

I've swallowed grievance from your sort and lost respect for fickle  
wiles:

My statue's tired affections are more open, still invites with  
smiles,

And still yearns for her monuments, her marble plinths, her  
corridors.

My Venus, let us both be lifeless points the frost snares as its bed,  
Your pallid final lover's arms will hide you: here's no prophet's  
bulk,  
But one who only wished to give new feeling, his malaise of head  
That only dead ears find the space to witness, to his banished  
sulk

Cast out in exile a flayed angel; stalks of sunlight, on this open  
hearth  
Where all the dye of day bakes, flood chrysanthemums, of purple,  
blue,  
Around the moat of freezing thighs: anon, there slides one  
dappled flue  
Beside me that has lost its tone, set distant where the mirrored  
earth

Now taunts with its promise, more than knee deep in the orbit of  
water,  
Reflecting the dark boughs, flank of the tarn; how I vegetate  
strangely,  
And always the hail, that was never my friend, and the calm  
surface-play  
Of hard beads in the wetness insults me; weird melody, render me  
her

And deseat the strained wheeze, from the top of my chest, to the  
wind's moan,  
Through the copse' maze that whistles, that curls with clangour of  
bagpipes;  
Let poverty plead with desire to relieve me, back lashed hard: the  
ruby stripes  
Have bled my flesh like venison: you holding growths, you're not  
my own.

Have greener breath of she support me, Venus, join me at the  
stream,

Which merges by my static kingdom: thunder sings its song for  
three,

Both I, my mistress and this island, knowing we've outworn our  
dream,

Both dreaming of another isle: please, seasons, leave  
me be.

