

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.

