

"No lights shine out tonight high hung in heaven"

by Iain James Robb

(From Postcards from a Railway Station (final poem))

No lights shine out tonight high hung in heaven:
And the constellations like a dead man fall.
No sight of polar eyes, whose sons are seven,
And I stand unthinking and beyond it all
I own it all a joke, those words I fashioned for you
Had gone by unthought for, and they could not show
Their plumage bright as his you took as true:
So I rest them now to watch their west birds blow.

And was it always such? It will be thus forever
(And the breezes linger out so steady and slow);
There is silence over me; beyond me the river
Takes my poems to westward, and it's off they go.
Fall over, find flight, if now the eddying weather
Drifts across the senselessness, that chafes my pain-
Drifts below the billows of the Clyde's dim mirror:
Take fearless freight, this night, and race the rambling rain.

My paper sails, shift out, and drift downriver-
With no clippers calling out "Ahoy" and "Ho";
And though I won't be going where the long ships shiver
(No boats are rowing on where I would go),
My hands are shallowed now and still they quiver;
It should not be thus, yet still this thing shall be.
And it would not be this, if you had lulled me, lover,

Ah, my loveless river, had you loved but me.

The night seems empty now its wings have risen;
Shall the clouds sit bright to watch a dead man fall?
There's just the field of frosts upon the blank horizon,
To spill out milk and saffron, on the water's shawl.
And my pages float onward, yet their wheel asks why
I've cast their faces to mutter 'gainst their scribe's decree:
And in asking once now, do they dance or die,
Or join their hands, to flutter 'neath a lidless sea?

Abandoned like the diamonds that the cloud-banks sever
(And the breezes linger out so steady and slow),
There is silencing upon them now — so ride the river,
All my parts that parted speech some lives ago:
Fallen over in flight, and let the mainmast shiver,
Take the rest of me as west and, sunk, set sail:
And it is lonely now, that here no ships drift hither.
Take each hand in hand and lift, and race the gale.

There's a storm coming now, to rock and lull the river,
And the ripples sift, and sigh, "Hola", "Hello":
And though doomed to drifting like a reckless lover,
No haven waits for them, at last, where they may go—
Dead pages, petals shed of verses once. Never
Had you known them once, to give your kingdom free:
Yet the shrill of windlasses might sit less bitter,
Ah, my love, if ever you could love just me.

There lies a shadow that the riftless winds have riven—
Now the moon hits silvers of the still tide's swell.
And now the bird that falters, where its wing has striven,
Casts my eye back, halting, where before I fell.
I bequeath these hidden poems that had flown for you
To a place where nought will flit and, fluxioned, flow

On pages left to bleed and seep straight through:
Where my thoughts are crossed, and haltered, with their birds
below.

And I stand chanced still, and watch my west words wither
(And the breezes linger out too steady, too slow),
Now a sound has stirred, upon the rambling river,
That reminds me of how her south and north locks flow.
Come shadow, sad shine, so let her shape slide hither,
Yet allow its leave a ghostling on one glance of gale;
I have known it once, yet let it rest unknown forever
With my own, and wreck us there: and set your stays and sail,

Faint words, eloping listless, with the roving river:
And it seems there cries "Goodbye" to me, "I turn and go";
And though time should tell me lengthwise, that all cuts recover,
I am through with mouthing out, "Farewell", "Hello".
I can't sit still or think; no raft of thoughts deliver
Any sweetness; secret fleetness was the worth of we;
I 'd been unbound in hours your swift minutes wither,
If your flesh had ever reddened, into love of me.

If your mouth had blossomed into mine, then part forgiven
Were the wordless nothings to me, that the tree-tops tell-
Outside my graying window, to the sun's misprision:
That has turned its untraced back on all the days I fell.
The dessication tends against the battening sky,
And usurps black fields as crests, upon the storm-road's lea;
Deemed adrift here sinking ever, am I doomed to die,
And to sleep in dreamless wheeling, 'neath a ridgeless sea?

The shrills and open whispers both arrive together
(And the breezes draw too steady, far too slumb'rous slow),
In unhidden rain that rolls and loves the loveless river..
That throbs out in the shadow's path, where no boats row.

I can see, reflected skywards, in the Clyde's brown mirror,
And as blank, with dying violets, as its wraiths of rain,
No face of mine, to split the lastless veils of terror:
But recall at last the pathless faiths, that trace my pain.

There is nothing that is restful as the restless river:
Though a long gale holler out and say, "Heave-Ho",
And another flail to answer; they conspire and gather
And they leave no landmarks, for the roads I'll go
Down now. And past the wailing of the friendless weather
Was a caging place my verses claimed, but leave them be-
If they were yours as well, if now they drown together...
Though, my love, you loved them, and you loved but me.

