

Passing by Pallanteum

by Iain James Robb

Passing by Pallanteum

Or 'Dido's Song'

Form: Double Sestina, iambic pentameter, rhymed

Who knows of hell, knows less of paradise?
I've known them both, when vanquished in your eyes,
When draws the kelp where lost men had their graves
Below this shoreline where one gust's begun,
From where you left me vacant as the waves;
I mourn alone: all known beneath the sun,
Who sends her song towards your own sought strands,
Has took your right when paths lay wide apart-
With no thoughts of your youth that now avail
Where I stand vacant on these foreign sands,
Once known to me, where rides the *nightingale*-
To voyage from the bondsmaid of my heart.

She wings still distant from your farther heart:
My hand can still caress those phantom strands
That raise my song's voice still, the nightingale,
Your hair you kept when lain by me apart.
Time rather seeks to shift his sifting sands,
Where not one second's pause shall *mine* avail,
My own stilled *time*, where neither moon nor sun
Can pave the way for thoughts of paradise.
I'll seek my home below these castled waves,
Where teeth of rock would put out heaven's eyes;
Dead men have gone before me: day's begun
Though no dawn shifts below their grassless graves.

They sleep: the sea's clefts are their only graves;
No more their eyes range up to seek the sun.

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Their world is ended where the world's begun,
Beneath the tall blue walls of paradise:
Where I'll seek heaven still for those blue eyes
That turned to go and ride the western waves.
Nor memory nor dream's sight will me avail,
That holds the likeness of your straying heart.
No fruit or frondage rises from the sands,
To bring your ship back to these barren strands,
Now you drift striving very far apart;
Give voice for me, my maid, O nightingale.

To live, I'd sound forth as the nightingale,
To burst these clouds: what voice shall thee avail,
My mother moon, when clouds' vows lie apart?
Within the silvered lily's golden heart
Lies more of nectar than my own soul's strands
Of light can send forth, emptied, on these sands,
That move but when made slave to windy waves,
Where sailors' skulls sing to the higher graves,
Unheard, beneath the aether's diamond eyes;
With sight turned black that used to see the sun,
We may meet on some day in paradise-
Though life is ended where Love's trust's begun.

I never lived but where your love's begun
To slay my love of life, as weave the waves
Towards that sphere they see as paradise,
That fills their night and leads them to their graves.
Beneath the southward shutting of the sun,
There lies a world unseen by our tired eyes,
Where other ships drift down to southern sands,
Where other ears will greet the nightingale.
Return, my lord, a native to these strands,
To find the fortunes here might thee avail;
Perhaps you'll find the humbleness of heart

To join me, where you made us one, apart.

The harbour's fleets will still thus drift apart
To seek new blossoms wrought of sinking sands:
Yet, voyager, I'd move without my heart,
To go where still there wings the nightingale.
Not any homeward winds will hopes avail
My sense of, that weave perfumes on these strands,
Reminding me of where you'd held your eyes
To unseen coves where restless thought's begun.
Though dolphins leap and sight the setting sun,
I will not seek them, ravished by the waves,
Whose azure vaults will claim their senseless graves,
Once they've outlasted one blue paradise.

Would that we met again, though paradise
Was lost to me when you estranged your eyes,
From where my reckless urges made their graves
With births of tethered hopes, though Love, begun
Would break as the first jasmine bloom that waves
Its head to drink the bronze head of the sun:
To die where yet its last few silken strands
Mark soil that knows not how we are apart.
My voice will reach your name with no avail,
My Aeneas, out of reach with all the sands
That cannot hear the bright night's nightingale
Home in on flight with all her homing heart.

My love, how canst thou do this to my heart:
Why did you leave these Asiatic strands?
Did you not join me with the nightingale
That mourned for one, who saw two hie apart?
Did not you love the contour of white sands
That pressed your foot and clasped, to no avail?
What lies beneath the surface of the sun

That made you malcontent with paradise?
I'll make my final home below the waves,
Tormented by the coolness of your eyes,
To see no longer when my world's begun
To drown Forever past all births and graves.

When old of years, we need not seek our graves,
When still we harbour longings for the sun:
Now all is ended, long ere you've begun
To set those walls would stand your paradise,
It's just your city knows your longing eyes;
All longed for there beyond the racking waves
Was where you'd build yourself what would avail,
To Time, the city stones that hull your heart.
Home in on sound that flies from soundless sands,
From sea-tombs ribbed, unsounded, in their strands:
O give me sound and voice, to rend apart
The stars, to weep and fall, my nightingale.

Sweet sister soul, swift mistress nightingale,
What tears were bled for you that might avail
The wounds you wept inside when took, apart,
To chambers where he ravished you at heart:
Your sister's groom who pinioned your silk strands,
Those burnished locks that mocked the shiftless sands,
And held your face below his bed's white waves,
Whose cushions were your losing soul's own graves?
How could you spurn his only son's meek eyes,
That never more would shine beneath the sun?
Your loveless lay will stay your paradise,
For earth's sons here who yearn, when lust's begun.

Would that I lost my ardour; light's begun
To seem in mock of where I'd seek the waves,
To drowse and drown me out in paradise,

The only one I'll know in daylight's graves.
My nursemaid will no longer be the sun:
The world is cast in blankness from my eyes-
And seen no longer, ships from orient sands
That steered to meet some foreign nightingale,
Some other singer sounding from their strands:
Or if they come, their tales may not avail
The journey ended, where I lost my heart:
Your path from me is all too far apart.

No mourner with these peoples I, apart,
Who'll grieve for me when vacant of their sands,
And now my serfs are banished from my heart,
Save for my maid, the mourning nightingale.
What use are words? Would any verse avail
In future years my aches, by western strands?
What thoughts of men recline to face my eyes,
And fall where they'll see Time's own deaths begun-
That cannot bear to view sight, as the sun
Spurns all attempts to view Her, as the waves
Will fly athwart in search for those blue graves
The daylight wields, as all their paradise.

Apart from me, and parted from your eyes,
When first I loved, Time's sands had run, begun;
My heart seeks where, beneath an alien sun,
My nightingale will chase the windward waves.
Avail yourself of me, swift ocean graves,
And reach with me my strands of paradise.

