

Visions of Granada (Double Sestina)

by Iain James Robb

Double Sestina

On the surrender of the Alhambra to the Christian Spaniards, while on the losing side of territorial disputes, by the speaker, the Moorish king Boabdil: and the subsequent exile of the Moors, who brought geometry, astronomy, architectural advancements and the secrets of underground aqueducts to that idyllic part of Southern Spain.

There lies all worlds of a sorrow, here in this green sphere,
That lift their dirges for the wind, though morn's cerulean spires
Kill the wind and paint the clouds before the noon retires,
Pass their voices where none catches them or ear gives way:
And none will listen to my plaints, for these are held too near,
And I am going forth in exile from the southern country,
Like a song that caught a king's ear once, left lapsed to silence,
Or some voice that died before it said its sad goodbye.
We are all gone some strange day but I have no alliance,
None to mourn me where I go abroad on stranger plains
Than met my fathers when they reached a land devoid of rains:
And set home here where they lived below the world's eye.

The things that met them then were gathered at the eye
With starling sounds, that traced the air from sands of silence
Time weaves with wheels of seasons left apart from rains;
From harsher lands they'd tracked then, at their last goodbye.
With the stars for map they'd set their jennets past the plains,
From posts and forts of stone and mud, at moon's alliance

With the skies of black and blue, towards another country,
Somewhere else as home beneath the turning sphere.
They came with all their wisdom of the stars held near,
Of compass-shapes that curve in flux and turn to spires:
Here to come, my homeland, though no thoughts pave way
Sensing change for any good, now that my hand retires.

Now that my grasp on crown and throne and land retires,
I leave to seek some solace in some further country,
Some place I might forget myself, now I've gave way
To the Christian knights to sack my halls by evening's sphere.
Now gone are all those regal halls and summered spires,
Comare's vaults and towered heights where hawks flew near;
No Moorish ladies there court some long passed alliance,
And Tunisian drums sound no beat where the listless eye
Is drawn to sleep with flutes that charm the sleeping plains,
Where sleeplessly the moon rains down its arms of silence.
All known from paths of birth, to this I've said goodbye-
And weep like women here, in lieu of less long rains.

Come, death at length and cast forth as the fading rains
The fruitless flights of thinking, that my heart's alliance
With soul thru thought had cast before this heart's goodbye-
And let hopes fade as dreams, now that my woken eye
Sees nothing I feel mine, now all has died in silence.
The Vega that I knew once with its sun-bleached plains
Known now seems as a consort that my youth held near.
I see it now behind my shoulder, now the dark retires,
And flees before bright vacant stars. Those inner spires
Of my own fortress and retreat in peace in calmer country,
Will seem as brightly gilded by my dreams' blue sphere,
Doomed to fade their lustre through some strange king's way.

With ages still to pass their breath by wind's white way,
More monarchs fall like fools before their end rides near,

And weep like children facing sleep, under the grieving sphere
That paints its falling tears to north, before the day retires.
The hawks not hooded yet have all the world for country,
Free to come and leave their kingdoms and the rocky spires
The mountains clasp like hands upon the pale green plains,
Never dreaming death will leave them, as the frigid rains
That float from northward, past a point of stark hard silence-
That silent here states back through me that last alliance
I weakly made, to lose my kingdom, once the Spaniard's eye
Had seized my tract before the taking: ah, my land, goodbye.

And though I go and leave this place, would one goodbye
Commend posterity to breathe my words along these plains,
To tell of fables of the Moorish kings, whose ardour's eye
Had seized Spain's maids away to reap their loins' red rains?
Here history and dreams had kept my youth's alliance
With the citron groves and flower leaves, that sun in silence
Under pomegranate paths, beneath the gardens' spires,
To know the starling's cry and flutter in the morrow's way.
Though my Alhambra bore its banner from a foreign country,
One I return to that I never knew, those vaults stay near
In which my treasure was entrusted, though my grasp retires,
With the infant dreams descended from my fortune's sphere.

Departed farther than passed travels, can a nearer sphere
Of roads yet green attend my footfall? Should the opal spires
That signal boundaries of Moorish lands, dawn's path retires
To cast me clouds, though sky be calm, within no windy way
By which dead hopes were guided, though the sun stays near:
And I am travelled to the charred earth of a dusty country,
Where guilt with exile goes, and by the hands of silence
Make I now remembered remnants of ill-starred goodbye
Of the days when I held court before the Court of Lions.
Now nothing spares to me the sight of these bared plains
That lifeless or deep-verdured roll by summers' reins,

That seem to mourn dead freedom mine, with lightless eye.

Men may call me undecided, cursed with clouded eye,
Who left his fathers' state and names to pass away to silence,
With those lordly hallways left where no empathic rains
Spill needled tears one moment, ere they bid goodbye,
And pass back to the sunburned world's unpassing plains.
What are words, to tie a cast, to mask my doom's alliance?
They can cast my deeds ignobly to a shadowed country,
Where praised are men of blame, my acts in future's sphere
Become a murderer's or dastard's acts, or anywhere
My name is read, I'm banished to where dark suspires
Its oblivious sheet to mock my state that once held sway-
Over chronicles and names of *kings*, ere truth retires.

My mother, give forgiveness, though their *stand* retires
In the kingdoms of conquistadors, who prized their country,
From Granada's hills and rills that bore my name's high way:
Though I leave these by agreement for the leaner sphere
I'll find where Moorish knights feel heat thru boxwood spires,
Though the coolness of the desert sands one day stayed near.
Where jackals hunt with eagles for the spoils of lions,
I will think of where green kingdoms leave by fortune's eye
The hands of men and serfs, now sent to cross these plains:
And all the lives they loved once, in the arms of silence,
Guarded from them now, to seal their path's goodbye
From sapphire drifts of dream, that leave the world's reins.

Though northern soil should char with heat then feel the rains,
My own poor state shall blast me past all hope's alliance
With words the gentiles made with me; my lands, goodbye-
To all that touched me lightly once, at ear or laughing eye.
Farewell, my brothers, all I've known descends in silence,
All you've known of me left far, past Andalusian plains-
That men forget were Boabdil's, now I leave anywhere

That blood was spilled in wars where name of God retires.
My heart will dry within me though its breath suspires:
I'll shed my trueborn crown, to know some other's country,
With all that leaves to taunt me, sceptre, throne and sphere,
With hold on maids and minions, through my kingly sway.

My queen and children, walk with me through this long way,
Though few of all the fruits we picked find sweetness near,
Which were grown within the gardens, as the citron's sphere
Would teach me bitterness, to drink my tears now all retires
Its wonted tang, and pleasure finds a vanished country
In my mouth whose thirst was quelled by Lindaraxa's spires.
Farewell, you birds my brothers, though you leave your plains
To find return to what you left, beside the trade wind's reins;
The world for me's a dream that soon departs in silence,
If it stayed with those whose governance was as the lion's,
Whose span stayed as the hawk's whose kingdom met the eye
Of the white sun, that knew my future once; this is goodbye.

Though other countries claim my state, my hearts, goodbye
Is made by other men with time, who'll face those plains,
The Vega turning like a pale green coast from looking eye,
That long these years has flourished where we caged the rains-
When men of state leave my Alhambra, under death's alliance.
Yet I alone, who die not there, have met the heart of silence;
Once it's caught me, I shall drown in name where night suspires,
And as lord to perished king, its state holds mine in sway-
And all these things have passed on, to some other country;
Look out my name, you bound in Time, you'll find it anywhere
My taste and touch, my sight or hearing touched, as sense retires
Here, where things pass forth as ghosts, from sphere to sphere.

Goodbye, broad-hilled Granada, from your wooded spires
And white-washed plains where green contends I make my way.
My eye that stings with salt now seeks an unknown country,

Where the reins of day bring no quiet nights when sleep is near;
The carved lions of the Alhambra stand, though dream retires
With all that lapses into silence, 'neath the wide green sphere.

