

from **The Men**

Lisa Robertson

*Cet extrait de l'oeuvre de Robertson, The Men, voit les hommes – non les femmes – comme l'énigme de la différence sexuelle. Les hommes deviennent « les portraits, les natures mortes » ou les objets de la représentation fétichiste, mais jamais par simple inversion. Plus exactement, le poème prend comme sujet l'ubiquité de la masculinité afin d'inventer une forme de compassion critique, une représentation qui fige les hommes et les libère des statuts de sujet et d'objet, tous deux critiqués mais bien entretenus et vénérés au moment des moqueries. Par son évocation de « les hommes » (jamais « l' » ou « un homme ») tantôt lyrique, tantôt ironique, le poème de Robertson permet aux hommes d'exister à l'intérieur de l'espace du fétiche. Les hommes sont « ennuyeux et fascinants », « ornementaux » et « séminaux », ils font pleurer les femmes et les ennuient, mais ils sont toujours les hommes, et la poète veut « simplement les représenter ».*

\* \* \*

With constancy and languor and a simple face  
To find what is constant  
I write  
In the bonny day of them  
With equal acuteness and clearness.  
In the bonny day of them  
Among these various attitudes  
I never sigh, I never sigh  
At volition  
Nor the little leaves opening.  
What's loved and known is hydromel  
The rest, prudence.

This is my first true speech.

There were a thousand and twenty-two stars and fear and lust moving together like make-up over all the cities of them, their spines laid back in the seizure of strangeness. There were burnt-out skies of flat and leaf-laden nature, the rough territories of their hands floating over the surface of our ragged breath and their sadness built of doubt. Whether these ideas are true or false they are certain. Everything I can remember about summer is the men, portraits, still-lives, the stiff leaf of the camellia. The men became what they are like rather than what they are –

A lyric

Comportment

With succulence and bigness of deep red.

How boring and fascinating the men.

I do this for them with structure and bigness.

I want to speak about their sentiment as a secular event. The weather is as it looks, framed in nostalgia and money. The fall of the light is the fall of the secular. The men are a house inside out. They are ten men

Named Phil and Jeff  
In September.

They elaborate a cogitation. Increasingly their oxygen is my own and I in my little coloured shoes to please them. Their revolution is permanent and mine a decoration. This is fact, not anger. When the trees smear their sky, when their poems are the periphery of the West, when they swim from their silver docks, I swim too and we communicate in water. This was September, there were three of us, and one was a man. I feel passionately about their gardens.

Each of us psycho-sexually is a man, dreaming and convulsing, plunged into some false Africa manically like a poet. The leaves are turning pink, or they are thickening and sturdy. Why go on changing? I like garlands and green clothes and my face is simple. I know their soul is pain and it doesn't help me. I have experienced each of them, and the calls on the stairs. I go with them to a point.

The weather is normal. I lay my ear against the curved-downward ceiling to hear the rain. The men are a ceiling, and their heart outside. The men live like this, and it is knowledge, and no knowledge needs their weakness

Which as a curtain bells  
As the walls palpitate.

Surely I could, like a poet of some previous epoque, praise them  
In some sparse rhyme  
And with humble touches.  
The paint is thin, the light  
Breaks through their skin  
With precision and ardour  
Or more properly refracts  
Rather than absorbs this praise  
And with humble touches  
They are happiest  
In stillness and their silver smoke drawn pretty.

To feel, to laugh, to ride horses  
Is what the men are for.

Ornamental all are  
Seminal citations.

Noble men, fair men, men glowing with  
Their names, men of the world's  
Four parts, men who sigh  
Trilustrally, men of living  
Snow, avid men, men breathing  
My own name – why  
Do I adore them?

Some have gone to buy food  
And some are returning and some  
Never do. Some will die  
Among books and I'm tired  
Of the school of errors. Some  
Put me in darkness. Why  
Does my verse adorn them? And some  
Transparently slender in summer  
Are so bold, though dulcet shade  
Is brief, and some moan  
As I enter the night on its hinge.  
Some smoke as you lick them. Some  
So dull, some equivalent, some  
Dwindling. It's late, rivers and acorns  
And I'm tired. Some's desire  
Is not my desire, and some's  
Desire dulcet by my estimate. But  
There are diverse and new  
Things in any climate. Some  
Think poverty is sap for a poet  
And some will always seek  
Other love, other leaf, other light.  
Some avoid indolence and some say  
"I can't live because I used to live"  
I won't give them the formula.  
In friendship and the thin air  
Some speak the word hydromel  
And I repeat them. The dulcet shade  
Is brief my men  
And this is my first true speech  
And this with a decorous amplitude  
And this in the middle of my life, the  
Streets silent and the night all covered in questions  
And this desire which discerns  
Is not my desire  
And this ornament  
Is my ornament  
And this is where I rest.

\* \* \*

Ordinarily the solemn men  
In the relief of a decision  
For erotic anarchy and so on  
Their interlocutors are clouds  
Or they are a window  
Erotically and I'm convinced  
Each room is spiritual  
Perhaps  
It emits and holds and knows  
Over and above the municipal dialects

Tarnished river, streets serpentine, sulphur lights, black massing of foliage, papaya slice of sky, it's 6:45 and I'm 39. The men are numberless and sad and factual.

Any man  
Has loved a girl  
Nearly

Miles away and  
Some  
Years ago

Silvery and half erased by a morning-like desire, and the cabs empty, the men live on air, like an orchid, and on their choice of good words.



Mists rise, earth freshens with dew, and new clouds greet the men. The same atmosphere, the same dull light, is their atmosphere, their light. The men are assimilated to it. The earth is a very little thing. These men are not old enough to die or to love. They make room for rapture and ideas and the enumeration of things. They flow and exchange and their sky is internal to them, tinged milk-white behind the suffusion and their forest too is a densely foliated treatise. The eager curiosity of the men, the expression of the men who start back in fear and surprise, the distant uninterrupted men, so much is flowing through me, so much that I know about the men, that I am moved to weep. I am moving into what men are

And their veins are purple

Snares

With their own disasters

Groaning and seeking

La la la

Sequins

The men have contradicted another  
In their assertions and proofs. Weary  
Of dogmatism, the men seek  
An actual system. The men  
Knew, but exhibit, acquire  
But stand or fall  
As men. In this manner  
Alone they can be called useful.  
Then they will speak  
The modest language  
They speak

Lawyerly the men walk through the impartial stripes of light and repeat the incredible number. There is always a theme. To breathe the common air of the men, to fall where they fall, cry clearer than any bell, to coil and thrust and seek

The young men in ads this spring, men in TV, I glimpse the little teeth in their passion. Equivalent, dwindling. Honestly, I postpone them.

They cannot resist their own honour.

To fuck some the men in glimpses  
Clearer than any bell  
Their little eyes widen  
I glimpse the little teeth  
In their passion the men very eagerly  
To catch new light  
In general terms  
To their baths  
Retire illuminated.  
Such is the potent harmony.

Plentifully of reason, plentifully  
Of ceremony, plentifully the pastoral of the men in the middlediction that  
they have.  
The men in their short sleeved shirts  
Are glad  
Beautiful and goodly  
With beauty and tallness  
And a kind of fear  
And sweet glance plentifully  
The men breathe into me, tender, phallic, kimonoed, and I, in the middle  
of my life reply  
That I would like to very much  
In this brief season  
I can't tell you what its like to be in the rooms with them, the  
Nothingness entwined with the mental and the odour of smoke  
From the hallway.  
I'm wearing this silky thing for  
My skin and the men plentifully  
And I am so sad.

The men are as mysterious as art, as  
Glamorous as dew and  
Plentifully  
Their faces  
Fall upwards.

Should I go thoughtful to them my song?  
Should I live on their strange food?  
And then another glance  
And I am  
Who writes the men  
Under a shade tree  
In summer.  
I am nourished and burnt.  
Burnt and nourished

And they in their baths and their dialects

I have gone far towards them  
Neither appeased nor sustained  
But in the clear light anyhow

What is it to desire them, they in their baths and offices, and the burning  
tint of the sky  
Burning from afar unfeigning and open  
My face consumes them. Yes  
My face consumes them.

In the middle of my heart  
The nerve of their pelt  
At the root of my heart  
The impatient hand  
At the burning of my heart  
Green hills and lakes  
In the grief of my heart  
Their pride, precious and lost  
And I know well the heart's a skiff  
Afloat in them and lost

In this history there are instruments  
Like faces of men rough and inaccurate  
There are terrestrial decorations  
Called human there are propositions  
Complex and deciduous and sticky

But I believe that their right  
Shoulder recedes and their left leg comes for  
Ward powerfully, that always they are  
Accompanied by experiments  
Like putti, I believe that the men at  
The parking metre, the men in the  
Tunnel, the men near the unopen fence  
Romantic with skies the men naturally  
Playing  
Won't change my life by speaking

Ah  
The lovely face of them  
Their window all mixed up with concepts  
And their lovely forest a concept  
Their window is a life  
The trees outside  
Their window are another  
Life where I'd endure but

The entire tradition speaks against this.

I wish simply to represent them.  
One man reaches out his arms.  
The wind is strong.  
The street bends slightly.  
The horizon vanishes.  
The aesthetical trope neither.