Archilochus on the Moon
Simon Perril

Archilochus

on

the Moon

Shearsman Books
This book is for my extended family, the Demon Crew; for Mum and Dad for putting me up in their Barleythorpe garret; for the hospitality of Public Houses; for Holly and Erin (when they’re older!); and for Kathleen Bell, whose belief and interest in it—and the early gift of Michael Ayrton’s *Archilochus*—gave me a rhythm to work by.
“Announce to the Parians, Archilochus, that I bid you found a conspicuous city on the moon”.
the throat and feet collect it:
dust, deep and the colour of age
spread thick as a painted lady’s cheek

We settle on the pock-marked grave
of all faces; the undergarments
of all the sacked places
the oracle sent us to,
for a few more allotments

lands to turn our spear-flexing hands
to; and if they are taken,
Ares, there is no mistaking
with what we irrigate crops.

Yet here the seas have died
so to what, exactly, do we sacrifice
save memories of wineskins,
fair-capped waves, Parian figs
and wood-topped hills.

I offer thanks
and my arse
for a flag.
2.

we call it the Child Lands
as the thinness of air
leaves us helpless as our young

and we dream whilst awake
of mornings, trees and seas
and not to feel each frosted bone
anger the other;

this sword-work under the skin
makes the body gently sing

for we are strung out under stars,
and the sky’s perpetually thick
as lust, and no less black

our chests shield-wall tight
rattle like wifely prattle;
our bird-fast hearts,
caged fists
3.

for this is the strangest island,
inked on all sides
skies bubbled
like wine too fast poured

yet the land is parched;
the only damp
is infantry crotch
and the tears of those keep watch
on the scabby hills.

Here are rocks to throw,
θo we are not spoilt for targets
despite our buffoon leader

his dragoon-speak
lacier than his locks,
flouncier than frocks

—shroud-cloths
for moon-moths
to nibble at:

we peer at the Earth
through these holes
4.

we wake wave-wet
for want of the sea,
light fires of our fish-nets

late locusts
upon a land long-stamped
by the dead, their dust-life
we swallow
along with fight-guff

the augeries are fucked. We
keep them company.

Hedgehogs
have it nailed
as a whelp I swam,  
felt the moon’s clutch;  
and now it’s weak  

soft as the pulse  
to a flute  

and disputes are similarly  
distant, dance  
on the wick of a lit spear tip;  

for such is thought,  
my nipples crack  
with imaginary salt  

the only measured motion  
that governs here:  
my bowels
yet things grow
thick in the mind:
soil between our ears,

interior fields fatten
rich in putrefying matter,
the tangled roots of our years
of love and war and trade

and perhaps then it will rain
in the fitful dreams
of twitching men
on this tinder-dry plain

nothing
upon which to sharpen
my blade
we beat the Thracians here
stride and stomp the desiccated straits
so many cocks

but for what else
do we roost in craters,
rot on this lunar perch?

For pockets of coins
like young hedgehogs, easy
to catch, so hard
to hold on to

save here
—no markets on the moon.
And I couldn’t give a fucking fig
for there are none
Zeus, a fucking sign
would be welcome, other

than your swap
of newly smithid spears

for a spine.
Until then

I decline all offerings, place
no further bets

and if I’m still
your pet, be advised

I bite
even my own limbs;

what’s mine, is yours:
a mouth full of blood

irrigates my pride,
sole lunar crop
9.

I speak ill, as
we’ve had our fill of Zeus-born kings
and Spartan heroes.

Sack the moon,
and you sack all
that lights the underside of Eros

stokes
those body-bits
that do the joining

and the mind
they favour and fever
riots like a market-place.

I have no love of tyranny.
Everything is for the Gods, so
they can have this:

Thanks
Artemis, Selene and Hecate
you lunar three
owe me an explanation;

after this abysmal journey
to a land beyond coin and precinct
to where the Earth-stone sinks
below the horizon:

where should I find one
with whom to play
the sinews of my soft horn;

for it may yet
produce song
when skilfully played upon

still elevate
white
libations
day, day, day
you stay so long here
sleep seems the wrong decision

even when, Earthshine-blind,
time itself freezes
glass discolours;

and we discover
nothing soft; no waves
have played rocks
to pebbles

not a single snowflake
shapes these peaks,
yet our feet are winged

things change weight;
a thrown feather
outstrips a heavier vessel

and we no longer wrestle
with the packs on our backs
being Olympian

on this heap of stones
12.

house of holes,  
land of collisions,  

you rain rocks  
like a battlefield  

yet deal no victory,  
heap no spoils.  

Let’s hazard Zeus knows  
why he’s gouged and plucked  

all manner of coloured stuff  
from this standing stone;  

this bone pendant  
swung around no neck