

THE LOBSTER SESTINAS

by Angela J. Davis

I. Confession.

A Dutch still life, green to perfect red
from the metamorphosis in fire and water
of this once great, star-fish ripping centipede, his
raptor hands now closed, each blind eye
composed on its wiry stem, but still a part
of his magnificence, the gangster of the sea.

You could never bear the thought of this sea
creature burned alive, preferring your blue and red
rack of lamb, roasted in the open and split apart
with stems of rosemary, garlic in half-moon cloves, no water
need touch its flesh, no feathery swimmerets offend your eye
let alone inspire tales of a fabled dying hiss.

Nerval strolled the Seine with a lobster on his
leash, or so it is said, insisting the tethered sea
creature presented no greater incongruence to the eye
than the spaniels nosing what remained from the red
weathered drunks, singing and pissing into the water.
Whether the poet saw any absurdity in ripping apart

the carcass he leaves to our speculation, as if to impart
a blessing (or at least a permission) we might draw from his
odd promenades to toss a living thing in boiling water.
Perhaps he knew of their ignoble birthings at sea
billions, at once, no larger than mosquitoes, not red
but transparent, floaters and gliders in the eye

of splash storm from a mother lobster, no whisker or eye
to guide these micro lobsterlings as their eely mouths would part
for everything, including each other, a prefiguring of their red
and hapless fate, from calcium coloratura to desperate hiss
last salt water gasps of the gangsters of the sea
plunged from boatyard crate to scalding water.

I have stood slicing lemons, waiting for the water
to reach full boil and If God is a lobster, I
am in trouble, but a Hell from the sea
could be preferred, my limbs numbed first, then shred apart
in the lobster's fists, his crusher and cutter forcing a hiss
from my marrow and drawing to my bones an irresistible red.

"A gradual heating of the water is more humane," I once read,
but blanched to imagine the foam on his eye, the hiss
of sea slowed still in his limbs, before their red and final split apart.

II. Nocturne

Lavender breezework lowering the sails, a hint of rain
clearing the boardwalks before the violet blue
ocean of night opens and rises and the first pair
of stars appears. But while the spaniels lie
and bloodhounds bay under cover of this August night
a lobster king has gently turned his queen upon her back.

No thoughts of lobsterlings disturb the queen upon her back
who has shed a shell and left her burrow for the rain
of his perfume. Far from boatyard crates, the union of this night
comes only once or twice a year: bubbles from the green and blue
sea grasses rise in the shallows, for a minute they lie
crusher and cutter in one another, the lobster pair.

Only human invention would think to pair
the green centipodals, lacking bone of back
with a beef Bourbonnais or a bisque to belie
the mud huts clawed in the true terrain
of the pugilist sea creatures rocking beneath the blue
still of sea on a star-pinned night.

Not all are green; hues among the gangsters of the sea
vary as blossoms on a Texas prickly pear.
Rose and amber lobsters roam, and the celebrated cobalt blue
as well as calicos, who when turned upon their back
show signs of sexual confusion as well, but perhaps full rein
of the ocean's gardens' earthly delights in burrows lie

for the asking of these scorpions whose unmatched claws belie
a dexterity and range of options wider than the night
itself, infinite as a violet band of Heaven after rain,
a deserved ecstasy, perhaps, for such a pair
for whom a pot not of gold, but boiling water will take back
to lobster heaven, with its infinity of urchins and blue

flowering sea grass where the bubbles once blew
from lobster lovers content to rock and lie
in shallows flecked with light flashed back
from lobster boats docked below a star-pinned night,
the dome below which we, too, kiss and our blue shadows pair,
night blooming flowers in the ribbons of summer rain.

Our fingers, too, know the shimmering, blue terrain
and so we descend the boardwalk scoured with lye
and to our room repair
landsick and longing to swim and sleep on the lovely back of night.

III. Leaving Maine

Symbol and syllable swim toward us on the air waves,
our plane tickets beckon. But I do not want to leave
the black trunks of maples before the shorter rays
of autumn crown their branches in burgundy and mustard,
and flower stalls fill canneries for fish wives who remain
long after geese and children have left for warmer weather.

The lobster boats, peapods and dories, are no bell-weather
unwavering as the lobsterman's stare across the shallow waves
of coves and sandbars, long white fingers off the coast of Maine
might stir for mermaids or seahorses, grapes on fluted leaves,
but are unfazed by tendrils of bearberries and mustard
tumbling through a jeweled thicket lit by autumn rays.

Beaches overcome with sea creatures inspired neither forays
nor great love of lobsters among colonists, whose weather
logs remarked on native wives who dived and mustered
on their backs sometimes a hundred lobsters pulled from waves
for chieftain lovers to dry and pound the papery leaves
of lobster meat fired white in early kitchens off coastal Maine.

A sheet of ice once scraped across the coast of Maine,
burned rivers and shoals, glittering veins, and raised
ocean and island: cross-pines, feathers, leaves
earth, freed of weight, by the amber gift of weather
light-drawn seaweeds and minnows flashed on waves
and on the hillsides sprays of lilac, rosemary, and mustard.

Before the sugar maples, canneries, and mustard
furriers and quarries, and English names for Maine,
long before the plumes of jet stream flashed on coastal waves
lobster wanderlust stirred in these waters, summer forays
to the shallows, and returns in darker weather
to deeper shelves, lit by sea grapes swelled on purple leaves.

Talk of rain or shorter days cannot make me want to leave,
but I'll unwrap apples and cheeses, black bread and mustard
greens as you open the wine into the weather:
apples and sand, black bread, my hair like a mane.
We raise our glasses, lit by rays
flashing life in the shallows and light on the waves.

Our plane lifts from the flaming leaves and mackerel waves
unfolds its wings and noses forward into mustard autumn rays
while indifferent to the vanishing of birds and warmer weather,
the lobsters will remain.