The Lewknor Turn
Also by Anthony Mellors

Affine Arnold
A Pastoral
Sangue Subito
Aristaeus and Orpheus Go Shopping
Anthony Mellors

The Lewknor Turn

Shearsman Books
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bent out of shape
He was afraid to stop his engine, declaring it was a devil to start again, but he would steer in circles until I got back. So I dived in and made for the cave which yawned like the lopsided upper jaw of a whale (the lower jaw being submerged, about thirty feet above the sea). As I swam inside a number of swallows flew out and I could see their little nests clinging to the cave walls and the flanks of stalactites. The cave grew much darker as it penetrated the mountain-side, and a couple of bats, which must have been hanging from the roof, wheeled squeaking towards the light. The roof sank lower, and, swimming along the clammy walls, I found a turning to the right and followed it a little way in; but it soon came to a stop. I tried all the way round and swam under water to see if there was a submerged entrance to another sea cave beyond. But there was nothing. The ceiling had closed in to about a foot and a half overhead, as I could now touch it with my hand. The air was dark but under the surface the water gleamed a magical luminous blue and it was possible to stir up shining beacons of phosphorescent bubbles with a single stroke or a kick. Strangely, it was not at all sinister, but, apart from the coldness of the water which the sun never reaches, silent and calm and beautiful. The submarine light from the distant cave-mouth makes an intruder seem, when he plunges phosphorous-plumed into the cold depths, to be swimming into the heart of a colossal sapphire.
Reaching Psamathus, where the quails are so thick in the air it is said you cannot separate the earth from the stars for them, I could see a black cavemouth across the bay from a wonky skeleton beacon, its lower jaw submerged and appearing to suck in vast quantities of the grey, choppy water as if it were dedicated to creating a restless microclimate within the turquoise calm of the peninsular. The sky was cloudless, the air dustily hot, yet the sea here looked more Atlantic than Aegean as it hustled the yachts moored in front of a glum row of battened tavernas and the mini-market. I scampered up to the promontory to get a better look at the cave, past the newly whitewashed church of Agios Nikolaos, behind which lay piles of discarded picture frames and bleached and paint-spattered prints of icons, and hopped my way along the finger of dazzling white rocks until I reached the iron skeleton. Convinced that I was looking across to the Entrance to Hades, I plotted how I could get closer without drowning in the turbulent water or falling from the vertical face above the cave. But a moment’s reappraisal of the maps and books made me realize I was looking at everything the wrong way round and that the actual, modest and de-mythologized entrance lay where I had already been, at the mouth of one of the little inlets below the ancient spolia known as the Temple of Poseidon. The real cave could be seen only by swimming between moored caiques into a tiny cove where the sea was transparent, calm, and unhurried; it was roofless, well above the waterline, with no trace of a tunnel leading into the underworld (as Pausanias found), and guarded by nothing more menacing than a shrub that looked like hemp and an odalisque on a brightly-coloured beach towel. This was it, this wasn’t it. I was entranced.
Intensively self-mythologized over the years though an archaic element could not be shaped he wormed his way into grim confidence with none of the achieved serenity of the Sun-god Apollo. In a kind of alchemical storm, all life escapes as a viscous secretion, fetid smoke, and boiling refuse wispy hair blown by clouds the word *affectionate* carefully crossed out eroded by exchange in the wet mouths of users as in this thicket, *selva oscura* invisible spheres formed in fright of contact in dreams with the father-image both ghost and corpse through the dockland and the wide streets of the modern city there on the uplands going down to the marsh a love for slowly moving things a desire to feel the movement of time of the singular though not unique advent into existence the place without place of an intimate gaping or gawping as if time itself could be fixed sensing the blood flow inside as if watching a stream the lines like ploughing a field, definitive break with song fragments in the vernacular *figura morta* ‘cruel as the tigers of Ircania’ though a kind of lived substance may emerge for the subject in such access of mind.
Complete time has singularity built in
or so the shroud of rag comforts those who quail
born of starstroke darkly haloed
by their interlocking shadows
glowing red and green through the fabric of a tent.
Terebinth which has for its coloured object
only the contoured surface
of blooming flesh-pink salves
desert macerations and the unity of consciousness
subject to change in a region of eternal truths
blessed by Hermes drinking lemonade and zibib.
Love-tokens kept as sentimental relics work
a lovely little situation
frescoed prelates on the wall of a narthex
cling grimly to an echo of this same love of self
notwithstanding fire of thorns
acoustic eros a philosophy softened with fables
most spiritual among bodies indefinable
the colour of white bones or bared nerves.
Vast logs burn slowly all through Advent
a fresh leak of pain on the spiritual shelf
the high point of the ritual rare
scattered and fugitive like natural beauty
except that no part of nature is beautiful.
III

Pasiphae, pacify our ecstasy and revolt
as high winds snap the washing-line
and rectangles of bright light fade the sofa
under the window and the patina
on the shaft of a crook turns pale green.
It is an easy and automatic defection
to wash smoke and rust off the ikons:
we don’t suck out of dry rivers these days
in the textual suburbs though following
may lead us by noise in the streets
to a city transformed into sea
possible neumes and flexions
where there are no trees for the cicadas.
Corporate imaging softens and deepens
a plastic technique in saffron and mauve
pretending not to know what human means
though it may have no use for it
or have a use for it but the wrong one
fumbling for change as if all that matters
is the coinage of needs unaware
of the real existence led by women
shining wide in a portable wooden cow.
Mooching in shops for remission of debt
entranced by a snow-white form.
What pleases us is the adaptation
of the object’s form to our faculties
this body that hoped to flower and become
a flute in the frost, violet in a crucible
compelled to feel the distances
when a cold rain falls outside the hut
as if drawing down the virtues of the upper world
by tweaking the lower ones
sunburnt shales and grassless crags
not as we live in everyday banality
but born into an enchanted world
reading dense and mistaken texts
charged by deep country silence
except for odd rustlings in the laurel-heart
fantasms that cannot bear the revelation of speech
as a lower limit or mist of some sort
garb to be abandoned in law or end
the plenitude of form which kills form
making appearance dissolve itself
while still remaining appearance
dazed as they move toward the slaughter house
for there never was a void to be filled
or a view to the depths of the earth
every thing lucid to every other.
An art of conversation and bleared eyes
yet vines still grow over the fallen walls
and shadows of birds cross the brickwork
taken up into the text of a lost epic, recovered at last
like a phase opposition or drag in the system
incapable of becoming an element of cognition
the cinders some forest spirit saw fit
chalk the turf’s secret igniting against grey
chromatic units without system
only in the shades grow cords of yellow cedar bark
like laurels / divine fingers stretched towards
some explicit link that never comes
and cannot choose between the handy-dandy of opposites.
Summer as an image of chaos, persistence of the trope
text with no shadow or fertility where lichen eats the vigour of
the stalk
arrives at violence of opinion merely
tramping through our allotment in heavy boots
Apollo the lizard-slayer an alarming sight at dawn
when the early light makes a grisaille of the interior
recalled in dreams: barrows, labyrinths
cold stares at the windings of pathways
a vacant and superior surface
where you are enjoined to take your seat by the stove:
few things happen at the right time and the rest do not happen
at all.
They drop in at every cafeteria
in towns sick of rebel subjects and tyrant masters
fit for nothing but to be cut into shadows
each pain falsified by guilt, wretched
under dark ilex / narcissus bloom on alders
marking a cross with lamp-black on the lintel
partial to the dark-brown pumice of twice-baked bread
salves and rustic epithalamia
lenten potlatch when the wind is southerly
the growing threat within us of desire and demand
a waste that allows us to recognize order
charms against bad crops or intercourse with the devil
pouncing upon the young like carrion crows
eager as glow-worms blinking up at eventide.
The resort to a logic of contamination
natural property of human labour / surplus
thick with dried stalks and withered sedge
when we do not know what to do for hunger and nakedness
going in and out to find pasture
not the first mortals to see beauty in the beautiful
preserve old discord denied by woodwork
and swollen obtuse stems / interval
between image and concept ruffled with goods:
stenachoria in a fire of thorns.
VII

They still smoke Peter Stuyvesant round here
and white dog shit can be found
dry on the roadside by reeking bins
or lurking in gritty crevices
like the shadows made by rayguns.
What was a sharp scent in the mountains
is down here in Pephnos night-thick:
sage, thyme, jasmine, a library of once damp
now dried books, and the hot whiff of bedpiss.
In the morning, sweet hot figs collapsed on walls
and snapped plastic pegs litter the way
by an eroded limestone beach / flower of the visible
a sudden consistency between incompatibles
as the sun seizes you by the hair
on a terraced path of steps
lined with asphodel and stinking inula.
Little dogs honk like geese in a distant grove
and the day thickens into dream
wheeled squeaking towards the light
up to Thalamai where they say there is a spring
and bronze statues of Pasiphae and Helios
less of a sanctuary than the faded deckchair
two pints of iced water and sesame bar needed
when hands are fat and unclenchable from the heat.
Also the ants here have a whiter colour than is usual especially on the little isle where foot-high statues of the Dioskouroi once stood. Their non-being alone is their *qualitas occulta* though for the helmsman in his rubber dinghy rays from heaps of earth studding the shoreline reach an accord with language itself understood as a lack of order or tangible analogue of silence interrupted by cups of coffee handed through smokeswirls the occasional cigarette and repellant coils had for two obols in the market at Stoupa. This whole place is called Apia, ‘of the pear-tree’ and at this end there is mere amazement where fertility is concerned where wind-skewed we went at the latemouth sovereign in elegy a thousand described routes to the fruitful womb but I shall not be pedantic enough to list them yet all the while it would be true that the mind oversimplifies its materials and few of us are not in some way infirm approaching the dump with a nasal stop and warm negus, blooded and kept warm buoyed every yard or so with a hollow gourd.
IX

‘Saw here the ruin of old cloister and old ruins
arches and large high walls, walks, cold baths
and holy wells, the one with a stone to kneel upon
with the naked knee and after crossing himself with water
(which is all spring water and never freezes) and drinking
a glass of the water and wishing for any matter or thing
(as I said before on naked knee) such shall sure and happen.
The other well being of stone as well as the well and the troughs
is for dipping people for certain complaints
the whole well walled in and the fields planted to great extent
not kept up and the arches and buildings all falling down
except two very high arches or gate-ways and the house
which has been large and noble at present in decay
although it has been new-faced next the garden
and new-sashed within fifty or sixty years.’
Instead, a dull urban waste reveals itself:
no sensuous green mounds swell up like desire
though the leaky tap has stopped dripping
and my hair is the colour of dandelion fluff
especially when the sun slants across it
or as when Osiris blows it as in silly poems
dedicated to the well being of *rus in urbe* charlatans
always lifting up their hope in the hope that metaphor
will relieve them of the adequate symbol.
A sudden heat as the manure truck goes by
on those long miles beyond Newmarket
reconciles concept and intuition in another world
southwards to the heart of London
a defunct movement ready for asset-stripping
in what they call the cold light of day
but north is towards wilderness
where you point out diffusion, anchorage, and fixation
a daring little frill round the hem of normal discourse
the work of mourning without work
threnody in a wheelbarrow and church-darkened pond
carefully traced in the angle of a skeletal arm
somewhere behind the back of the brain
half sleeping not even stirring and the trees
to vent the overflowing of their heart
send branches verging waterwards over the field
partly like wings impressed on the eye
all bent out of shape from flood to world’s end
as those canary-sucking bishops attest
the Church forgets what is meant to be reactionary
where beyond the extreme sea wall
we need not boggle at the word hypnosis
Quomodo sedet sola civitas
the perfect fox-proof roost for nightfall