

Kelvin Corcoran

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Robin Hood in the Dark Ages

The Red and Yellow Book

Qiryat Sepher

TCL

The Next Wave

Lyric Lyric

Melanie's Book

When Suzy Was

Your Thinking Tracts or Nations

New and Selected Poems

Roger Hilton's Sugar

KELVIN CORCORAN

Backward Turning Sea

Shearsman Books
Exeter

First published in the United Kingdom in 2008 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
58 Velwell Road
Exeter EX4 4LD

www.shearsman.com

ISBN-13 978-1-905700-68-4

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Acknowledgements

‘Helen Mania’ in this complete version was first published as Poetical Histories 60 in 2004.

‘Roger Hilton’s Sugar’ was published in an earlier version as a chapbook by Leaf Press in 2005.

Some of the poems here have appeared in *Shearsman*, *Fragmente*, *Angel Exhaust*, *New Review of Literature*, *Green Integer*, *Onsets*, *The Gig*, *Skald*, *Jacket*, *Ahadada*, *Stride*, *Litter*, *further evidence of nerves*, *Quaoar* (with Alan Halsey and Ralph Hawkins) and *Don’t Start Me Talking* (Salt Publishing, 2007) – with thanks.

I would like in particular to thank Lynda Black of the Glynn Vivian Gallery Swansea and Ann Jones, the Arts Council Collection, for their help and support in connection with ‘Roger Hilton’s Sugar’ and the *Spotlight on St. Ives* exhibition.

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Backward Turning Sea

Helen Mania

Helen Mania

Yannis told us of the alternative escape route,
Helen and Paris making chariot wheel tracks in Thalami
down to the harbour at Pephnos.

Spartans left waiting at Kranai,
mouths open, bored before the myth
– look at those sparks, like stars eh?

They spent their first night here,
fell upon one another, spent
until the sun came over Taygetos.

Helen set foot on board, trumpets sound
over water, sewing in the grain
the ships of all the world in her wake.

★

Helen didn't want the trouble
safe behind those walls
the army of the fertile plain said so.

I looked at Marathonisi, plotted
the chariot tracks crashing down
from Thalami to Pephnos and the sea.

Helen didn't want it to happen,
then love like Paris arrived.

I looked at the serene harbour
isle of fennel, empty blue mirror,
Helen was not there nor in Egypt.

Honey melting the other side of Taygetos that night.

★

We need a name for this war,
economics won't move our heroes;
plunder is nearer to it but
join our trade war won't swing it.

We need to make it personal.
Control of grain ships through the straights
and increased tax revenue? I think not;
if we had a woman abducted for instance.

In the future they'll see through us,
as if we would turn the world upside down
for a Spartan girl who warmed up the house guest?
Menelaus' hot wife gone wrong.

★

I set my foot in the track
greased slot to smashed Ilium,
one way ride to bliss or exile.

Night of stars, night of revelation
silver jackal sniffing around the door,
storm came smoking off Taygetos.

The house became a boat and
the great green flooded her mind
the island, her dream, floated out to Paris.

Snakes and figs littered the yard.

That morning Helen threw aside the carpet of stars,
that morning Helen stepped aboard.

★

I kept my Spartan girl wrapped up,
hidden under a pile of cloaks
for this languid, sexual periplus.

We drew bright lines across the water
phosphor alphabet dissolving clues,
we lipsticked the mouth of hell below Tanaeron.

Even so she could not be dimmed,
she shone so fair like a bowl of light
desire lifted us like the tide.

Up from the inky black a message,
where fish pick the bones clean and
fields of seaweed denote a continent.

We turned the world upside down:
Menelaus – Where are your divisions now? Stop.
– Your squad cars and riches? Stop.

I left of my own freewill and cannot stop. Stop.

She lay in the boat burning, my beacon,
shaped by heaven,
they built temples in her wake.

★

Who would believe it over a girl?
despite our endless back and forth,
Io, Europa, Medea and the sassy east?
Moon-struck lovers is all we need.

We could get the Egyptian priests on our side,
build a temple to the goddess stranger;
variation as a post-something aesthetic,
she was a ghost above the Skaian gates etc.

I have it now: our brother's loss is our cause.
Make sure you don't catch them,
clear all the harbours down to Matepan;
it's Priam's turn for regime change.

★

We fled in the hour of the furnace
Helen a black outline in the blast
dark one, I see only your face.

Swing the pendulum myth
another woman, another man sail eastward
pass Cythera, ploughing the grain.

Aphrodite came swanning out
attendant gods swim in her wake,
their mouths shaping O O in the eddies.

Oh Helen I loved every woman
to have you, Mr Meat Me, the fool
to find you deep in darkness.

★

My lord they have flown;
I have posted guards to the passes
but who can outrun love?
I'll stick the barb into Menelaus.

I think I hear armour clashing by night,
see smart bomb snapshots of Trojan bunkers;
saturation red hits the air in waves,
reconstructed it's just as real.

Draw up the list of ships
and tilt our western powers into the east;
we can lead our little princes
into the divided meadows of Aphrodite.

★

Helen you are not to blame,
your smoky heart faced the east
the colour rising inside you.

She ascends the steps above the gate,
Helen, the cicadas whisper unearthly,
the sky fuses around the shape of a girl.

Politicians made silent as stone,
remember hope, scratch at lust,
the word wanton dry in their mouths.

She steps forward parting the air
into the live broadcast
wrapped around the world.

She steps forward, pictures the boat
parting the waves, the field of men below,
what? the dream of? the plains of Argos?

She wanted to see her brothers
on the island of Pephnos, they stand in the waves,
guarding the safe passage of her escape.

She steps forward, it is Helen
ascending, her shape makes a window
in the air for the breathless sky.

★

We saw the sun burn the high meadows
the rain drench the white roots
the wind fuck the come hither waves.

We ran up the goat tracks, breathless
between spurge and aconite and mallow.

Helen you have undone the world
I taste your looks, touch your colour
you were always there, my radiant lexicon.

See how our boat dips and rises
to our shared step aboard
noses out of Pephnos over the endless sea.

We lie together in the seabed
just rippling the light with our breath.

The Subsequent World View

Aphrodite, riding on a goat
keeps me here, anchored in song.

Aphrodite's Bay

I walked in the favour of the gods
the children calling from the water
once out of the bay of the Libyan Sea.

You Egyptians from over there
who can work the gold like us?
make trade in gifts, copper and staples?

We are dripping with this blue
we will prosper for ever
the children call in their drowned language.

There's no dignity wading ashore
the stones roll under foot
and you stagger through endless need.

At that moment, face to face,
sea around your feet, sky falling away,
you must choose, abacus or knife.

★

I was in the market of market town on Saturday
when I found her in daylight – from where?
Across the Caspian, Anatolia, Sumerian dark wave
against the backdrop of Birmingham bargain stall,
over my head in the tide of singing birds.

Looky, look at this, where'd they get that?
How did that get here and what is your name?
I am not from here, my name trans-Pontine,

I step over the silver thread between two worlds,
I walk to you across water and open the door.

Red dust of Asia perfumed my feet,
the golden hordes at my back look around
their horses nickering for fresh water;
I come from the founders of towns and trade,
I rise up from boom and bust harvests.

I led the way from rickety kids to shining surplus,
I focused the mirage of the blueprint town
across the high table-land, made specialists spring,
dreaming a design to catch the whole world;
our turbine ploughing to the western shore.

★

Today the lesson is English grammar.
It is dangerous to swim in Aphrodite's bay.
Repeat.

Why since then everybody wants to die?
It is the third world war already I think,
bit by bit, what is happening, this music.

Everybody so running to die – why?
You see this aria of Tosca, if they did,
maybe it would make them ok.

And it is dangerous to swim in Aphrodite's bay;
the razor shells will cut your feet,
the currents around the rocks are unpredictable.

Though the water is milky and clings to the skin
like a second body that slides and fits around your own,
long after you have returned to shore.

Today English grammar is heroic film;
the black and white harbour before money arrived,
western coiffure on Levantine heads.

At night I watched the ships unload:
the dove-cotes, trinkets and sex toys,
the belief in mythology as fact.

And finally, more than we bargained for,
objectivity in Babylon
brought to book on the banks of the Euphrates.