

Facing West

SAMPLER

ALSO BY KELVIN CORCORAN

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

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Roger Hilton's Sugar

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Hotel Shadow \*

Words Through A Hole Where Once There Was A Chimpanzee's Face

For the Greek Spring \*

Radio Archilochos

Sea Table \*

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# The Abduction Zone

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## The Abduction Zone

After Argos Io really was in Egypt  
sand in her mouth, sperm in her lap;  
she took the wet with the dry  
a preservative in the Nilotic oven.

She wasn't caught in another account,  
unlike Helen of the different narratives;  
she was there, she ran or was abducted  
Greeks asserted as self-serving ambiguity.

Though the names have changed since then  
you can go there, see the long lick of the river,  
the deep horizon, cold stars, the bull of Apis,  
hear the creak and splash of water wheels.

Io didn't feel like a figure in myth,  
a clause in the east-west see-saw shuffle,  
no boustrophedonic un-text girl;  
she liked her nails and mouth neat and red.

I'm a king's daughter, she said,  
give me what I want, I don't trade;  
the tender little quail for dinner  
and at night that one-string song.

\*

Then the ancient world wavered  
in the voice of Roza Eskenazi,  
her volatile rhapsody might breach  
the barriers of expectation.

A song circles the harbour wall,  
Greek night blackens the village,  
the little owls call, dogs die, new breeds run  
and Roza my child sings on the edge.

Then the ancient world, who sailed by here?  
Oh Cleopatra, that we perish, talk to him;  
take our kind tender for the distant dead  
their white selves walking against the sky.

Their unaccountable emotional quality,  
their feet sliding on the waves;  
illegible their names, the distant dead  
come calling in an unimaginable tongue.

\*

Theseus abandoned Ariadne on Naxos  
by the harbour, to the rocks and swine;  
the dancing god in bloody riot arrived  
and she screamed her head off.

I can't stay here, counting village idiots,  
smelling pig flop and that effeminate stranger  
spraying the asphodel like a tomcat  
the sea blinds me, the sail-away sea gone sour.

I trip on the beating tide, sway like a tree,  
there's no centre here, just rock and wind and salt;  
I see the drowned temples of white forgetting  
where nameless creatures feed and fuck.

Ariadne really couldn't live there,  
so it ended in the olive grove on the hill;  
she stepped off the dithyramb into thin air  
the sea winking blue all around.

\*

Where Ritsos fought and stood aside  
where imprisonment drilled his brain,  
they've built a monkey house  
a monument to fake money and nepotism.

\*

Europa swam into Ovid's arms  
the sea's crowded and I can't get o'er  
the sea surges flooding all the time  
a girl wide-eyed as if it all just began.

\*

Doctors redeployed to avoid the sick  
a swimming pool tax for others,  
the scabrous rash of shoddy houses  
begins the rot as future option.

\*

Reports all along the Pylos coast  
last offerings gold scrap metal victims  
ships from where? raiders? burning?  
light beacons, mobilise, burning, stop.

\*

So what are we doing now Potnia?  
Do you see them at the foot of the hill  
surrounding us, a flood, do you see them  
through our transparent walls?

Slaves to an alien code, eyes shining,  
mythographers bound and hungry:  
will they come to care for purple robes?  
Either way, at present, it's of no comfort.

May as well dance on sea glint  
and expect to stay dry, return home,  
prosper beyond the long shadow  
occupied by courtyard stir only.

Lady we kept true to you  
in the high places where light is born  
and in the caves of bloody earth  
breathing, we kept true to you.

\*

A warm wind crosses the Hellespont  
but subtle rather, a breeze hesitating  
slips into the long reaches of the afternoon  
and the blue margin between two worlds.

And I remember my submission to you;  
it was always there, its slow message rides me,  
an inclination in my limbs, just let go love,  
then hurtling down hill at the tilt of your head.

You're out there now, a black dot above the splash;  
the better swimmer cutting a V, will I ever catch you?  
It's a large body of water and deep enough,  
on the other side, in the dark village, we'll rest.

That's the trouble, she said, I breathe this element  
but where do you start with a founding myth?  
These waves absorb me, drown my secret names,  
and the last thing I saw – a golden beast swimming.

\*

With our expansion westward we found the Sikels,  
not even peasants, primitives living in ditches;  
what they'd do for some pottery and metalwork.

We mapped out the edges, the coastline and inlets,  
never what we really did in there for diversion;  
the silver sea to the ends of the earth tricked us.

There's an art to founding a city and an art to forgetting,  
our music was in despair, ruined and irrelevant,  
even the thought of song scattered to the rim of our lives.

\*

So one day there you are out in the meadow  
friends together collecting the pretty narcissi,  
counting rows of cabbages down to the river;  
you laugh and cast lots for sex, for business.

You wave at the coloured yachts gliding-by,  
Life's Promise, Bright Dawn, perfect names for fun;  
and the little rowing boats like breathing  
ascend mesmeric into the broad paths of heaven.

Then cataclysm – smashed face down in the dirt,  
eye to eye with the roots of irrelevant plants,  
their little white teeth snapping underground;  
you see the hole in the dark heart of everything.

Of course this is Persephone's practiced song;  
as the lights burn low in our buried gardens  
and memory flits from gate to gate in rounds,  
we're all singing – no we'll not come back again.

\*

Hermes donned his cloak, primed his sandals  
and lifted the baby onto his shoulders;  
for the rest they were naked, at ease.

The baby reached for the cluster of grapes,  
ready to drink a river and take possession;  
but where were they going at such speed?

Though there was talk of escape and rescue,  
looking at them you sensed the baby held sway,  
a radiant beam trailing across the blue.

Hermes was rescuing the twice-born Dionysus from divine slaughter.  
Some of the dazzling wonder of Praxiteles' statue is the baby's innocence  
of this circumstance and of his own growing power. Compiling the  
various versions of their journey would make the sky look like an air  
traffic control screen at the height of summer. The flight is the point,  
and a youth rescuing a baby, a god always arriving – a double promise  
of life.

\*

So another day, and there you are in the meadow,  
not particularly aware of the archetypal frame,  
again a flower picking scene, this time by the sea;  
normality at rest in the shadow of father's house.

The white event tiptoed in suggesting dressage,  
his mighty breath barely stirring the daisies;  
oh feel his soft nose, his chains of dribble stiffening,  
an electric shiver ignites his muscled flanks.

Hold on girl, he groaned, plunging up and down,  
we might hit turbid water the way we're going;  
see that island there floating free in the blue,  
between Asia and your name we're surely bound.

Once on land Europa never looked back at all;  
subsequent events proved she had a strong stomach  
– and a good deal of curiosity: she became a queen,  
eyes wide she surveyed the court and liked it.

\*

## Antiope

Four syllables you slug,  
say it Ἀντιόπη An ti o pe  
a voice at night opposed  
could storm a city

Antiope, her trickster  
and their versions, a voice at night  
a shower of arrows  
razor confetti falling

As always, this question  
from the abduction zone  
did she go to him?  
did he steal her away?

\*

a horse that runs in dreams

a find

fields and fields

of votive horses

sprightly black

\*

She swore by the dark bed of Persephone  
she'd had enough of village boys,  
their dumb plucking on banjos.

Give me one who can move at speed  
who looks like he can wear a haircut,  
give me a horse that runs in dreams.

\*

She would listen to country music driving home,  
decisions made, hands steady, tuning in and out;  
certain colours worked for her on the windscreen,  
the headlights reaching forward into the future.

White – meaning blue of the familiar hills,  
darkness rushes by like a bow wave forgotten;  
from a capsule of dials and calibrated thought  
she splashes home to open her mouth and speak.

I heard this song on the radio, I just  
I thought it was but no, I don't know,  
it filled my head, I just wanted to be here,  
the road a lyric, like the wings of song.

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