

For the Greek Spring

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

New and Selected Poems

Roger Hilton's Sugar

Backward Turning Sea

Hotel Shadow

*For
the
Greek
Spring*

Kelvin Corcoran

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“Amasis’ reign is said to have marked a high point in Egypt’s fortunes in terms of what the river gave to the land and what the land gave to the people... Moreover, it was Amasis who ordained that every year every Egyptian should divulge how he made a living to the governor of his province, and decreed the death penalty for anyone who failed to do this or who could not show he made a living in an honest fashion. Solon of Athens took this law over from Egypt and made it part of the legal system in Athens, where they should let it remain in force for ever, because it is an excellent law.”

Herodotus 2.177.

Translated Robin Waterfield, Carolyn Dewald.

OCCURRENCES
OF THE NAME
HELEN

From here according to Jenkyns

From here according to Jenkyns
Sappho entered the western lyric;
I can see the coast of Asia minor,
low blue hills, an apron of light.

The water's not wide, though I can't
get o'er dark imperial Anatolia
where my language was made;
aconite, mallow, fennel at the root.

Hotel Byron

From Hotel Byron the wind slips over red tiled roofs
bearing us back into port, one more day.
The red and black banners of the KKE
stretched tight as sails above each street,
— they think Lenin lives still in Moscow,
nobody tells them, so they think it still.

Above the sea, a village of old people,
— You Italiani? America? No, Anglos.
No bakery here, at night the dark sea speaks;
no pirates, no Turks, no baker.

Our faces sunk in Saronic blue,
we suffered confusion, the last car fading.
Small boats scud and arc across the bay of light
and you make those shapes with your mouth that I love.

*

Laconic

Kranai Marathonisi isle of fennel
one fisherman the still waters of Githyon
the sun rising

Kranai, Helen said, so
tell me now and I won't ask again
and with morning they sailed into myth.

*

The choir of many voices sing
my heart is broken, oh
the bird flies from the clearing.

How one sound, all my life I've heard
our mouths close around many shapes
possessed by death, by vengeance song.

Deepest octosyllabic land
oh my heart is, the sea rages
make me see what's in front of my face.

*

In the fast channel of Despotikon
I married the sea, the gold circle sank
to surface in a dream all night.
Out of corrugated light; give it back.

Its white absence aches on my finger,
stolen from sense to the sea bed.
If I could work it out
I would know you again.

There is:
the apparent surface of the water;
the light in the body of the water;
the unknown ground under the water.

It sank because it was an object.
It cannot be lost, love has no weight.
It sank into irretrievable regret.
Give it back.

*

By Monday, at the end of the world,
falling in the dizzy air of Cape Matepan,
the lighthouse, the cornflowers alight like blue sparks,
no birds calling the last step down
drowns us into the submarine cave called hell.
You can get into hell. It's not literature.

Each separate light a white path on the sliding waves.

At the end of the world, ships pass bound for Crete,
blue devices low in the water following a strange trade.
We lost track of days and the meaning of number,
heads empty to the waves speaking the first language of sense;
island to island white spume ripples the shore,
a whole country rising up in free association.

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.

After the final mountains we roll down to the sea

After the final mountains we roll down to the sea
south from Kalamata around Taygetos on the Aeriopoli road,
and this is meant to be the literal poem of that journey,
one of a series joining seven songs in transit
as if your whole life comes in on the glimmering tide.

The road turns in a certain way and you see everything,
along this coast where gods and babies are washed ashore
out of the sky into the doorways of abandoned villages;
you can pull up and buy oranges, potatoes, honey
from the last ones alive in unpopulated places.

In the meadows and olive groves myth takes root,
paths in the hills lead there, if you can crawl and scramble;
the snake renews itself and polyphonous birds call,
strophe by strophe in the month of fair sailing
the world takes off to a single tone breaking underground.

The road turns in a certain way—miss it and you die;
ceremonies lift the earth people, gibbering at the edge,
and the voice from the well asks—what do you want?
The route is lined with bright and useless answers,
as if anything could keep us from the great descent.

Where the land ends Helen's brothers look out for us,
striding over the contours of the sea, they say;
as candid waves explode on harbour walls
a girl from Cythera rises, from the epicentre,
to leave us drenched and shining in shock.