

Hotel Shadow

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

Kelvin Corcoran

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Campion Song' were first written in an abandoned collaboration with
Peter Hughes.

I've also recast two earlier poems from *Backward Turning Sea*,
and put them to use here as the starting points of the subsequent pieces.

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“These centuries of the decline of ancient philosophy
Almost forgotten”

—John Hall

FROM WHERE SONG COMES OR
KEEPING THE EMPIRE IN ORDER

From Where Song Comes

Descended from tribes of the Tarim Valley,
lost in town, open mouthed at the end of
someone else's tether, heads back, arms up,
offering music for money—some hope.

Eyes flicker like English trees in the park,
picture a scheme planted for self improvement
or maps where the houses and circuits will be,
bloody generations scouring the veins.

A chorus of phonemes, not even ghosts,
we stand disjoint, signatures broken
drilling holes in work, family, the whole lot;
those first words cling like a jacket of smoke.

'Woman', 'arm', 'speak', 'weep', 'hit', 'stone'
differing in fundamental forms, thick with roots,
sound unintelligible, shut out—you were shouting
I didn't understand, doors banging in the street.

If we sing our belonging and away,
listen to the neighbour's rising call;
the song's never the same twice,
if we sing belonging and away.

★

There was a moment, perhaps as polyphonic flocks rose from the dark
edge of the forest at dawn, an impelling code fills the sky, a code that
previously didn't exist when things were themselves.

The village empties, even the dogs leave. This could be in east Sumatra,
the Saami steppes, anywhere unrecorded. The hunter-gatherers stand
like stone on the green path which has just become unfamiliar. Terror.

A conspiracy foisted on them from the wet earth itself had them invent the seasons. They take their place in the telekinetic supply chains and the plough sings it, the long slow lines in classical tropes of ridge and furrow.

★

Key terms were dropped along the route
polished and ardent, the sun boiling lowered
into the dreamed sea of lyric voices.

Out of the secret meadow and heap of poet's bones
as if in the tradition of the music of the drowned,
they step forward to sing, we know their names.

In the earthquake zones, they speak lightly,
elaborate buried contours and the lost harmonics of
the green shore, the risen mountain, the first house.

How soft was the air when you laid word by word,
is that you girl leaping from the world's edge
hair spread like a dark net to catch the little poets?

In that massively blue and absolute idiom
another life surges after impact, out there
mid-ocean waves, banks of weeds, dark harbour.

★

The words remain part of a composite unit. They may even ignite a fire in the theatre of the fields and sky as framework of the ritual. Some groups did not attain intelligible song but prayed repeatedly. Such as: 'Spear spear strike home,' or 'Father father give me game to kill.'

We can be certain that choral song followed, everyone in the group singing one thought. Archaic survivals are a different matter, waiting in the shadows by the rude door, at the ragged limit of the worked land, buried, and belonging to others unnamed.

And then that moment arrives, the world tilts and everything is changed. They dug shallow trenches in various scandalous patterns and filled them with honey and other animal products. He said—the words come of themselves, shoot up of themselves, a song.

★

According to our notions Orpheus has returned from
Egypt melancholic and is teaching weasels to dance;
chant the empty road, the muddy field,
chant Spring cocked in the buried dead
and the dubious benefits of the last revolution.

The behaviour of animals and men is hardly distinct,
the finer points of conduct lost in darkness;
from the garden and the secrets of the house
syllables as emotive sounds take shape,
drowned in the ground plan of abandoned towns.

On the shores of the glittering, frozen sea
they suffer a savage and wretchedly poor life;
feed on wild plants, wear skins, sleep on the ground,
we're at the end of the known world
everything beyond is in the realm of fable.

★

What the world needs now is a theory of song,
a thesis on the ballad to free the words in our mouths;
there will be songs for dancing round, songs for sleep,
a song for helping a person across a river.

From the licensed street corner, a version of a version
from another country rings out many voices in one,
songs for masked dancers, performed for the girls
songs of the laws of the school, kneeling on the ground.

Let it unruin many a poor boy, standing next to the gap
an oasis or total knowledge maxed in the echo chamber,
and work songs for Spring, for weeding, planting and rain,
a song of gifts of beer, for wife takers and wife givers.

Boys dancing with reed-pipes, girls with drums,
the other time we enter now is everything.

Sing Champion Song

Today the trees are massive and the air in limbo
makes me think of those working hard to keep me in sunglasses,
to keep me in song,—it's worth it to send me gliding along the streets,
through the flushed and coloured map of unending desire.

Thomas Campion is my neighbour, he lives on the top floor,
he breathes the pure counter-tenor ozone from the tower of song;
though the civic society wanted him out, he's not coming down,
he tells them to drop it and sings louder every night.

But imagine a common purpose in breathing the next breath
and the blossom bursts so candid, like love unfolding,
like a river of untethered clouds naming a new country,
to make us unsay each hectic word in the artless plan.

Sing Campion song eyes closed
this ayre is not recorded on a mail base
leaning onto the edge of darkness
step out where comfort is she will.

★

Campion's perfect iambics oh
what can we do what can
equal the lute river melody
of English poetry beginning.

★

Their boat sailed up the Thames
wood oud Italian loot to her
making fowre parts in counter-point
that they might move stone by sound.

★

My Campion is singing
in the mountain grove
3 for 2 and petrol rush
the wanton country made.

If we talk like this I don't know that I get it,
impasto Sam in the Darent valley, the boys at leapfrog,
error message 208 sings in the forest of night
and the precipitation trailing westward peters out.

At some point for the locals it must tilt,
and where shall we find our colours then?
The forgotten use of realgar, the decline of arsenic,
will you make me a white to match this radiance?

After the abandonment found on lyric stairways
the theory of craft labour took hold in Cambridge,
the Sunni triangle of old learning and money;
London das kapital of foreign occupation.

If songs make us free, we already have them all,
called conflict of interest in the history of the English jig.

★

White van man morning
paths in the sky announce
Campion Restoration
a cure for pain antique.

★

Flicker of Solanum trails clouds
as if by one voyce to an INSTRUMENT
the robin's erratic flight path tells you
there is ever one fresh spring.

★

At the back of the house the green
shaft releases a day from
the box of song all around us
from holes in the lid the light beams.

★

Campion in two three and
foure parts radio nowhere
glory intermittent fills the air
burning down the house.