

Kelvin Corcoran

Other Books by Kelvin Corcoran:-

Robin Hood in the Dark Ages (Permanent Press, London, 1985)

The Red and Yellow Book (Textures, London, 1985)

Qiryat Sepher (Gallopig Dog Press, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1988)

TCL (Pig Press, Durham, 1989)

The Next Wave (North and South, Twickenham & Wakefield, 1990)

Lyric Lyric (Reality Street Editions, London, 1993)

Melanie's Book (West House Books, Hay-on-Wye, 1996)

When Suzy Was (Shearsman Books, Kentisbeare, 1999)

Your Thinking Tracts or Nations (West House Books, Sheffield, 2001)

Kelvin Corcoran

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My Life With Byron

(2000)

And Such Other Cudgelled and Heterodox People

Climbing the liquid stairs of drink
we go are you there Alan
in the English good night
where Byron glides unwritten.

*

Across empty England tilting under cloud
towards a new order and petrol thirst,
trees lift like visions at the margins of fields;
an innocent history passing with ease
as if the rural poor lined the road, waving.

Blasted through a slot together landscape,
with no essential link between these lives
– easy as speed, didn't feel a thing –
dead winding gear, wooded fields, barracks towns,
figures moving together in a film.

To answer the young lord's questions:
we can commit a whole country to its prisons,
depopulate and lay waste all around us and
restore Sherwood forest as an asylum for outlaws;
in the English good night, where Byron glides unwritten.

*

In the cold eye of the lake
light dissolves around the trees,
a boy, free as a fish, dives
dreaming of the sea.

*

Lyres on earth cast like nets
to catch the living god
but to stand beneath these walls
and fall into those hands is terror.

The beginning is music, a strange thing;
in the shade of power we found ruin and delight,
crossing Paynim shores, Earth's central line,
through an invisible door.

Over the dark sliding wave
into half the world unknown,
with liquid nerves in charged air
we sought the god of birds.

Saw the blue cape afar
said his heart, tamed to its cage
all summer long;
milord is dreaming an island of light.

*

"I ran to the end of the wooden pier... the dear fellow
pulled off his cap and wav'd it.. God bless him for a gallant
spirit and a kind one."

*

After an interval of years, this composition to one far and firm;
events left me for imaginary objects, an imaginary England.
Do you remember when we were out with the Luddites,
from airy hail about the county, about the forest and villages?

But buzz buzz eager nations, not with human thought,
no new land nor fair republic, no deep sea music sounding.
Events left me in the umbrage of green shade,
my dear Hobhouse, return to that country.

In that completed state words are things,
the electric chain we darkly bind about ourselves.
From this tower of days I see the pathless woods
and the waters washing empires away.

*

excuse the scrawl, fresh morning at daybreak
boat starting for Kalamo . . blue upon blue these mountains,
the Turkish fleet gone, the blockade removed

the air fresh but not sharp, we sailed together,
the song we sang was – a nation to be made,
when the waves divided us we made signals
firing pistols and carbines, tomorrow we meet at Missolonghi

if at the head of some one hundred boys
of the belt and of the blade, that I may
(calculate the cost of keeping one man in the field for one month
the sale of the Rochdale manor?)
we bore up again for the same port

excuse the scrawl ..
frosty morning that means to be of promise,
that I may get the Greeks to keep the field

the final port or [word torn out with seal]
who will stick with the Greeks now?
the Lempriere dictionary quotation Gentlemen
or those who do not dissemble faults or virtues?
(when I was in the habit)
I reserved such things for verse

*

Aboard the Florida in an oblong packing case lined with tin,
organs and intestines in earthenware jars
– *this heart should be unmoved* –

The case stamped with seals of the provisional government,
painted black and submerged in a barrel of spirits
– *worm, canker, grief* –

Hobhouse went aboard at London Dock Buoy,
the undertakers were draining the barrel
– *life blood strike home* –

Though assured "it had all the freshness and firmness of life",
he declined this last view of his friend
but later identified him by his foot.

And John Clare, wandering down Oxford Street,
saw the funeral train and a girl sighed – *poor LB* –.

*

To answer the young lord's questions

Saturday night at the trough
they talk about technology,
new magic make you work harder,
their veins corrupted to mud.

I can hardly make the words out,
I never saw such things in the provinces of Turkey;
men sacrificed for cheap exports,
for Spider-work to bloat others.

The magistrates assembled,
troops ransacked homes around Newstead;
men, guilty of poverty, wanting to dig
but another owns the spade.

This mob enabled you to defy the world;
the poor pitched against the poor
must learn flexible work and slut-time,
must learn global economy.

Capital tips off the edge of the world
to strike the old deal still in place,
a life above ground or boundless waste;
here we go, here we go, here we go.

Breakers of frames, iconoclasts incandescent,
let me be among you about the county;
snap their heads awake

with the politics of paradise.

THE LUDICROUS PLACATION OF GHOSTS

Beyond my hand and the round eye of light,
Byron, Jane Harrison and my mother
stand in the mist of Niagara Falls.

They stare at the wall of water falling,
decked out in the tourists black poncho,
the water falling a thousand feet.

In the great rush she looks at me
with such courtesy for the living,
then steps into the beaded air for ever.

*

His shoes were black and shiny,
he danced across the Irish Sea in 1946.

Spic and span drill in the holy orphanage and British Army;
I'm not making up a word of this.

How wide's the Irish Sea?
How deep the coastal shelf?

*

They will not eat blonde food,
think of Dumuzi, his snake hands
his final descent,
—dig a trench to the west of the tomb—

They will break a contract of shadows,
they long for morning air, on the street,
to walk and let them live in us,
*—look along it to the west,
pour down water as purification, then myrrh—*

Some sounds some burdens can release,
–*do not name the dead*–
some sounds some burdens can release,
–*but they will have blood*–

They know there's nothing like the world,
they cannot make up one word of it.

CATALOGUE OF SHIPS

Aboard the Princess Elizabeth, the Lisbon packet
for the Vathek theme park.

Aboard the frigate Hyperion,
big sun bright sea the land of.

Aboard the Townshend packet,
Captain Bucket at your service.

Aboard the Spider for Prevesa,
Missolonghi over the water, low in the mouth.

Aboard the Pylades, quick step to Smyrna.
Aboard the Salsette, salt it for the Hellespont.

Aboard the Hydra, transport ship
stuffed with Elgin's plunder.

Aboard the Volage, sweet frigate.
Aboard the schooner Bolivar, oh my Bolivar.

Aboard the Hercules for Cephalonia,
an unnamed mystico, an unnamed bombard, fit for song.

Aboard the Florida, down the blackhole
all the way to Hucknall Torkard

Where Cain stands in a spotlight
and nothing flows from liquid space.

I walk with dust in peopled darkness – come.

AMBELAKIA

All afternoon the birds of Ambelakia sing
and the air is the shape of itself
rising in one breath to Olympus and Ossa;
that light should have substance and sound.

The Common Company of Ambelakia founded 1778,
founded on madder, sheep blood and method,
the red dyed cotton of the first co-operative.
“We have decided to renew our company,
spreading a table for all . . in the dress of communication . .”

Schools Libraries Hospitals Mansions Welfare

In 1811 Ali Pasha, sociopath and maverick,
admirer of Byron's ears, raided the village.
By 1820, with the rise of Manchester as king,
the fall of the Bank of Vienna and the war of greater powers,
the beneficent society collapsed.

Remember the Common Company of Ambelakia,
the first industrial co-operative.
Remember schools; libraries; hospitals; mansions; welfare.

*

The painted ceilings and walls of the houses
depicted real and imagined cities,
young girls gazed down from balconies
and the world abounded with birds and flowers,
as the high meadows with aconite, anemone and cyclamen.

The full moon is high tonight,
the spring sky milky with stars;
other villages cast like sparks
shine out across the valleys.

THE OBJECTS WERE NOT PAID FOR OR GOT FOR A
FIXED PRICE (Elgin)

As they lowered the last metope marble rain fell on their
faces,
"Telos." The Disdar stepped into history and with him
the five (Clarke)
girls crying for their sister, the ravished one, ready for
shipment
in the lower town, filling the air with lamentations.
(Douglas)

The events dictate a mythology of fact and we wait for
the girl
to return in Spring. "Milor explored in the bowels of the
earth to
dig them up." Milor stole gods to that coast of no return,
to the (Benizelos)
shadow world below this light; the triumph of Eng-a-lish
classicism. (Byron)

Milor ripped the Panathenaic frieze from the walls of the
cella
where the goddess dwelt. It is the procession of all her
people
translated into stone and she the city incarnate. "To
realise its
meaning we must always think it back into its place."
(Harrison)

Of the money Elgin received half repaid to the
government in debt;
the objects thus an integral part of the British Museum
collection. (Smith)

The ivy on the wall lifts in one wave
as summer flares into the sky,
a pattern of streets, a map of pleasure
rising deep in the green cell.

If it pours in over our eyes and mouths
light flooding through limbs,
the young green hands
hold us breathing under water.

Then a door opens deep in the cell,
you hear the music of all your life:
to go in is dangerous,
to turn away is dangerous.

Brother to the snake, in winter riot born,
let me bear your tattoo;
light splashing from leaf to leaf,
glossy cups scandent for the god.

They knew what hit them
out on the coast
sky black with ash
earthquake
tidal wave
fire

They knew
a crowd on harbour street
white stones bordered by blue
a crowd in one wave
sacrifice to get at the life again

If this is a poem
about the death of
the one the many
there must have been children sleeping
in sweet abandonment
as the unknown sailed into the harbour
and the world stopped

Even the air of the high peaks
thick with ash bitter mouth
even the blood dead they knew

Late at night another station fades in,
late late, when only security lights burn;
this is news, another station,
Orpheus ascending in ritual intervals.

From the archives of Radio Sofia
a language I don't have,
Yanka Rupinka, Kalinka Vulcheva
– sung on returning from the fields.

Nerve stripping voice, unearthly scale,
my whole life pouring back to me
at ground zero, I hear it fade out in
a table song by different means.

Early morning frost this morning,
white ghost packing blue fields away,
turning from night, these counties
run to the capital, pale horse racing.

Thinking your dark body asleep in my hands,
thinking big sun raging
from a slab of marble sea,
anaesthetised by Duveen out of Elgin.

But to wake on Ossa in spring,
at each step a grove, a secret stream,
the air rings under an endless sky
waiting for a figure to appear.

In delight a door opens in the air,
we see the whole of Thessaly rising.

DISCLAIMER: ~~BYRON NEVER WENT TO~~
~~AMBEIAKIA~~

"I saw before me in the vivid occupation of the
people of that place a living
notion of the world made good, a species of heresy, a
society unfallen –
just suppose this were known in England – the very
thing I had traversed
the theatre of war to find, here .."

He saw the Common Company of Ambelakia
working,
the houses, the schools, the three hundred
workshops,
he saw Shelley plain and the technology of genius.

As polyphonic bird song filled the air
he saw Ali Pasha's troops rise out of the Vale of
Tempi,
indifferent men climbing the foothills of Ossa.

To exact murder, taxes, arbitrary arrest,
invisible powers of empire on their backs,
he saw the same beset the Nottingham weavers.

He saw the enormous condescension of posterity
rise up and he retreated into the house of George
Mavros,
all thought and poise gone.

Milord knocked clean off his box.

