

hazard or fall

CATHERINE HALES

hazard or fall

Shearsman Books
Exeter

First published in the United Kingdom in 2010 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
58 Velwell Road
Exeter EX4 4LD

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-113-9
First Edition

Copyright © Catherine Hales, 2010.

The right of Catherine Hales to be identified as the author of this work
has been asserted by her in accordance with the
Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.
All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements

Many of these poems have previously appeared, some in an earlier form, in:
*Brittle Star, Coffee House Poetry, Fire, Gists and Piths, Great Works, Haiku
Quarterly, Litter, Neon Highway, Orbis, Poetry Salzburg Review, Shadow
Train, Shearsman, Stride, Tears in the Fence.*

Thanks are due to the editors.

Cover photograph copyright © Alex Nikada, 2009.

CONTENTS

seeing it through	9
-------------------	---

interims

temporary lodging	13
relocation	14
threshold	15
just here for the ride	16
open road	17
travelogue	18
driving through norfolk	21
geography	22
low tide at burnham overy staithe (february)	25
divination	26
score	27
small comfort	28
first day of spring	29
in the name of	30
revelation	31
incident involving swans & a poem by w.b. yeats	32

sightlines

portrait of	35
than venice	36
narratives	37
original condition	38
factoring in	39
context	40
on balance	41
war on	42
field walking	43
megalithic	44
agnostic	45
a fortnight before full moon	46

reconnaissance	47
representing	48
art of the detective	49
at the scene	50
winter morning	51
divergences	52
across the	53
in the nature of	54
precautionary	55
out of time	56

unearthings

for all eternity	59
keeping time	61
quantum sonnet	62
dereliction of	63
what's for pudding	64
sonnets	65
anatomy	71
dimensions of	73

“everything we see could also be otherwise”
—ludwig wittgenstein,

“the ship was travelling so to speak along the line
that divides what we can perceive from what
nobody has yet seen”
—w g sebal

“painting has the power to point the finger at what
happened”
—fernando botero

seeing it through

a quiet astringent compromise of sorts—
it's surely the meek who suffer, several see
the dovetailing of memory into the brickwork, while
new debts are expunged by the needy
mellifluous panic of a dawn chorus in the distance
ascending from bare ruin'd notions of the
bone, the idle & the clinamen. & finding this
in the sort of seedy restaurant that serves
unwholesome pastimes on the internet, no doubt
there'll be consequences, & nothing would surprise
in a time of manifestos & mellow fruitfulness.
bringing forward the attenuated circumstance
of unrequited séances, the overall effect
may bewilder the uncertain, the queasy,
the flavour of the season. & various
of their majesties may even attend the play
in soporific wonder though the span be meagre.

how, then, best to serve the appetite? a pre-dawn
vertical insertion event with incontinent
ordnance? that would do the trick to swell
a scene or two & send the orderlies running
for the wings. but is it to be trusted, things
being not quite as they seem? a new
menu item with an icon on the screen
horrifies with auguries of germ warfare
if not nipped in the code & sharpish—o brave
new world that has such weasels in it. & where
are the artefacts likely to be seen? a drifting cloud
is just a drifting cloud; either situation
is ugly, but one of them will be necessary—
the governance of profiteroles depends on it;

until in the presence of the ineffable they squander
what resistance they've afforded to the wild,
sarcastic narks surrounding the citadel. wholly
to blame, & trusting to the power of integers,
the creatures crawl into their caverns & expire.

interims

temporary lodging

as good a place as any where the book
just falls open mid-sentence to start
here & subvert the order far

from the madding & hardly
a stone standing cities we'd imagined
way off the beaten the word is out

let's follow that as far as it'll take us
to the edge where even the largest continent
crumbles how do we bear this

awakening here where you come from
you told me once before the noise begins
at first light you can hear the lions in the zoo

all over the city you cried remembering
here at least the windows are watertight
for the time being we can take our chance

relocation

sharing stories for this time at least
a common thread our minatory arguments
will ensnare us as the seesaw of seasons
swings again tilts towards expansion
of all our desires we stand at the window
(across blank fields our light a beacon
deer blink & cough) what I mean to say

waking early in this house the night shifts
haunts accretions bringing home absence

moving on from room to room to get the measure
of this available space & the day approaching
our breath misting time to grasp rearrange
whatever roots have survived the freeze

threshold

a sogging draw where the body's
syntax is wiped from the map different elements
compete for the mind contours shift
boundaries I'd no longer want
to negotiate

where can I go
camping out for now between languages
hoping at least for a good night's sleep
& perchance that liminal place of dreaming

an autumnal surrey lane a gospel hall
smelling of damp and old age my mother's in there
with the others they're arranging
the harvest festival & start singing
a hymn a happiness I can't share
at the door looking in looking out

the choices we make the fibs we try
to avoid & at last the mind is clearer
the further away the closer

just here for the ride

a place to start from or end up this far
from say the sea the various paths
that have led to this conjunction & here

the versions part one myth's as good
as any other though none allows for difference
they terrify but give you a head start

I am not one of those who named the stars
& imagined them into constellations I do not have
the certainty of a fish a rock a lotus

I'm left with an unreadable sky stories
waiting for the retelling it's what I see
along the way that makes the journey worthwhile

open road

this journey somewhere between

now at least (whipping through landscapes
with fields and trees munching cows
grubby sheep horses moving fast)

and that's real (clouds
the colour of a bruise behind a line of poplars
a glimpse of a hawk circling high)

how it all fits together neatly
this syntax

travelogue

places stations
just passing through always
on the move

miles to go and then the storm
that caught us by surprise
remember
how we sat it out
how the rain
blanked out the mountains
how while we were away
the landscape changed completely
cutting off our retreat
the waterlogged engine
forced us to change our plans
nothing for it but to take
what we could and head
for the high pass
leaving things behind
like clouds ripping softly among pines
