hazard or fall
CATHERINE HALES

hazard or fall

Shearsman Books
Exeter
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 sebald

“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 drawl  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

***