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**in memoriam**  
**Gael Turnbull**  
**1928-2004**

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## shearsman 60

*poetry by*

carrie etter  
catherine hales  
fred johnston  
andrew jordan  
karin lessing  
aaron mccollough  
sam sampson

*prose by*

dennis barone

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KARIN LESSING

*Yunnan Sketches*

*for Karen H.*

I. Tiger Leaping Gorge

beginning with a children's song from the *Shi-ching*  
(*Book of Songs*, Arthur Waley's translation)

*The Little Lady of Ch'ing-Ch'i*

*Her door opened on the white water  
Close by the side of the timber bridge;  
That's where the little lady lived  
All alone without a lover.*

Your door opened on the white water  
Close by the leaping stone  
A stranger in the land  
Alone with your anxious heart.

The roaring stream below, snow peaks above  
Curve after curve, the mountain road  
Thinking of the prince who went wandering  
And did not return.

High, high above, my friend  
At ease among the snow peaks  
Without thought of going back  
Ready to float up to the clouds.

With this mountain-grass broom  
I, too, would join the immortals  
It got lost along the way  
There's nothing left to do but wait.

Sun rising behind Jade Dragon  
Sun setting behind Mount Haba  
Deep in the gorge, unobserved  
Flinging stones into the rapids below.

Sheer rock faces closing in, inch-wide the sky  
Sudden silence; where did the river go?  
Intruding upon a spirit world  
We ought to tread as on thin ice.

Tread as on thin ice, muffle the heartbeat  
With luck we'll clear the passage  
Painted bright, face to face  
Awe and dread guard house and temple gate.

What are you doing here, child, alone  
High up by the dust road?  
Grandma's down in the drop  
Where healing grasses grow...

Wait, wait, little boy,  
She will surely return!

At *full stars* site, dashing spray  
Travellers stop to gaze, time passing on –  
Here, in these living eyes, I see  
Waiting still, another lonely, towering form.

Gorge narrowing, gorge opening up again  
Green water crashing, white water leaping  
Arms or hearts, which is the more violent  
I cannot say.

With prayer-bead words, with streamer clouds  
With the remembered line, with the forgotten poems  
With everything inscribed, with everything washed away  
With a long way yet to White Face Peak Refuge.

Waking up in the shadow of White Face Peak  
So close, close almost to touch –  
Yet its crevices run so deep  
Nothing could thread them green nor grief soothe.

in a lighter vein...

Not really, really a *château* but a mountain lodge  
Not really hermit poets musing, tranquil and grand  
Mist, plus pavilion, plus lake – mostly polluted –  
Just us, prince and queens having breakfast.

...and for crown jewels, seeds  
from the castor-oil tree  
three to plant – will grow or not – three to keep  
for delight.

Bright little colts, so smart in your snap-shot gear!  
Should an offer to ride  
straight into the tomb of some unfortunate princess  
be declined?

Though I, too, would love a dress of pure jade  
I count the years left, some bleak, some bright  
And the horses of my suite  
I'd rather see trotting beside me on the mountain road.

In the river, reflected, a dress of jade  
I count the floating peaks, the years  
And the horses of my suite  
Trotting beside me on the mountain road.

If the stone drum were struck  
Could it be heard deep in third gorge?  
At first bend, laughing and shouting  
Here we tread lightly, make haste.

Laughing and shouting, who cares?  
Birds on the dance-floor sand in March  
Tracing the characters for 'gold' and 'sand'  
The June rains will sweep clear.

It's getting late by *miracle lake*  
For two hours people fished – caught plenty  
Then the torrent broke through the landslide  
Where do we cross over?

With this kind of craft  
With no landing in sight –  
Smoke for luck!  
No choice but trust.

As leaf on current  
by counter-current clasped  
in midstream  
ever floats all care out of the world.

Sun setting, blue stars pouring  
Down over Eastern Slope  
Raise your cup to all flowers  
Raise your eyes to the dragon clouds.

\* \* \*

## II. North and South

Full moon and hearts, people crowd close  
What will the artist make of a face?  
How extravagant, that missing tooth  
Beside flowering pink almond.

Pink peach, white pear  
Follow each other in bloom  
Qing Qing's needles clatter  
Variably, in and out of tune

(her curiosity can't be helped.)

Green green the fern  
Red red the yarn  
Double stitches single hearts  
Retain.

Walking straight ahead, straight road, curving road  
Doubting nothing, *boundless and free*  
With the three hundred sixty-five feathered bird  
Among the moving white mists of spring.



Where dragons on satin sleep on the South sky-line  
Of rosewood the beds, by eaves' wing the city gate  
By Red Mud River we turn, up the double-cloud path  
With dreams kept close as pomegranate its seeds.

The air, a dance-floor in the late afternoon sun  
And you can't detach your eyes from it  
The hills flatten and the shadows grow  
Cold jewels, cold jewels.

Waiting for the day lilies to open  
Now that you know their secret meaning  
If only for a day, *sorrow-forgotten*  
Would spread, spring after spring.

\* \* \*

*March - June, 2003*



*Notes to 'Yunnan Sketches'*

page 2. The prince's story can be found in Ch'u Tzu: *Songs of the South* in David Hawkes' translation (Oxford University Press), p.119.

page 3. THINKING of the mountain-grass broom I had bought from the man with the broken arm in one of the several villages called Baisha. As it was quite cumbersome, I had left it behind to pick up again later on. Somehow this turned out to be impossible and so I had to leave China without it.

Driving from Qiao Tou to Tiger Leaping Gorge, I read this on a sheet of paper pasted onto the seat of the minibus:

*Travelling the ancient track of Lijiang*  
*Tasting the Naxi Yin wine*  
*Trekking along the Tea-Horse Road*  
*Drinking the Magnotou Liquor*

Jade Dragon Snow Mt. (5596m.) and Haba Mt. (5396m.). Jade Dragon Snow Mountain has 13 snow-covered peaks.

Halfway between upper and middle gorge are several waterfalls crashing down from Haba Mt. into the Yangtze below as well as the site called *full stars*. The *lonely, towering form* is that of the woman turned to stone in Su Tung-po's poem *The Husband Watching Height*. He wrote it in 1051.

page 4. White Face Peak: a sheer wall of smudged grayish white lime concretions without the least trace of vegetation. Will someone who has been grieving for a very long time eventually look like this?

This was 'Woody's Château' which we were glad to reach!

*the tomb of some unfortunate princess* recalls that of Princess Yongtai of the imperial family; she died in 701 at the age of 19 in childbirth. Another version says that she was flogged to death or hanged herself at the command of her grandmother, the Empress Wu, because of some reported remark. After the Empress' death, Yongtai's father, who ascended the throne, gave his daughter (and her husband who had died with her) a grand burial. When her tomb was discovered a few miles northwest of Xian, it contained a host of ceramic figurines, 777 in all, soldiers, servants, hunters and courtiers, as well as camels and horses.

*page 5.* In the Han period tomb of Prince Liu Sheng and his consort Dou Wan (2nd cent. B.C.), the corpses discovered were encased from head to foot in whole suits composed of over 2000 plaques of jade, sewn together with gold thread.

At Shigu along the first bend of the Yangtze River hangs a big stone drum commemorating a Sino-Naxi victory over the Tibetans in 1548.

The Upper Yangtze or Jin Sha (Gold Sand River) is so low here in spring, that it reveals a wide sandbank in midstream on which K. and R. really enjoyed themselves!

*miracle lake.* In 1996 an earthquake not only destroyed sections of Dayan (Old Lijiang), taking several lives, but here in the gorge caused an entire mountainside to slide down into the Jin Sha, creating a lake full of trapped fish. People from nearby Daju remember the miraculous catch ... as does R., our Tibetan guide, who told us the story.

The 'new ferry' on which we were to cross the Yangtze turned out to be what singularly looked like a partly-deflated and patched-up tire with a single set of oars. One man rowed, while the other watched for currents as well as whirlpools to be avoided at all cost. The 'landing' was a set of boulders scattered along the narrow embankment, such as those we had set out from. Nothing to intimidate an experienced traveller!

*page 6.* On the way from Baisha Village to Yulong Cha Shang (Jade Dragon Snow Mt.), K. stopped to sketch and attracted a small crowd. Comments and laughter while a red sweater got knitted.

The phoenix is said to have 365 feathers, one for each day of the year.

*page 7.* Po Chü-I (772 - 846) wrote a poem called *After Lunch* :

*After lunch – one short nap;  
On waking up – two cups of tea  
Raising my head, I see the sun's light  
Once again slanting towards the South-West  
Those who are happy regret the shortness of the day;  
Those who are sad tire of the year's sloth  
But those whose hearts are devoid of joy or sadness  
Just go on living, regardless of "short" or "long".*

(Arthur Waley's translation)

*full box* village is Daju where everything grows on a lovely wide plateau surrounded by a mountain range. We'd call it 'horn of plenty'.

From the Western Hills, south of Kunming, we had a fine view of Dian Lake on which nothing stirs it is so polluted.

Near Geju ('Tin City'), where K. sketched a very peaceful village scene down below the road; it took some time before I realized that the *white worms* were people carrying huge white packs uphill.

On March 20, we learned from Ma, our guide, that the U.S. army had invaded Iraq.

Recalling Li Ching-chao's *tzu* poem that begins with *There are fragrant plants in the pond! In the deep green shade of the garden...* (K. Rexroth's translation).

The Zhu family grew rich by trading in many goods, including opium, but mainly tin. We stayed in this beautiful mansion several nights. The courtyards especially were very fine and there were so many of them that I didn't even attempt a count.

... the pomegranate is the symbol of Jianshui.

*page 8.* The *Hemerocallis* or day lilies of my garden patch were also called in China the *sorrow-forgotten* flowers.

SAM SAMPSON

*Nowherewhon*

God knows depictions can still move on  
like translucence, snow echoes

where ice carves a face, no  
hones a point of difference

Ice is Lake

Lake is Ice

still: our surfaces will reverse (no-  
where) weighted to a mark; an end, a beginning, and so on....

*Decomposition*

Sperm whales (littered : leaden : fallowed)  
they lie low, sunk in soiled black

buried beneath a roll-call of bird's-  
eye shrill...of offbeat wash,

visceral

this new year moon spills the foreground back,  
to where twelve beached: blow-holes, black holes: muffled in-formations.

(Karekare: 14<sup>th</sup> November 2003-2004)

*From Zion Hill*

It's deceptive, the way wavelets highlight this coastline  
to say: *this sea of black concretion and never endings*

*will always criss-cross at the Manukau Bar.*

To Onehunga, through the Heads, a container ship slides past

remember, here our words ride-  
on surfaces; wavering lines which traverse the Tasman.

*Encompassed*

Prima facie: *I am a part of all that I have met*  
and apart from everything else

a headiness of blinks  
blood rituals, and self-inflicted fact  
(a back-

drop: to where solipsists once shaped mission statements  
to where adventurers sailed, and oceans mixed

buoyant receptors)  
yes, sensory

as Ulysses' machinations

(pulling this and being pulled)  
between the person and magnetic north

insisting for instance:  
opposites will cause movement,  
and time? well that's the time that movement takes

before the magnetic needle details,  
visitations; cardinal points, which finger circumstance.

## ANDREW JORDAN

### *No Resistance*

I said that on Sunday 22nd April a detainee called D had attempted to escape from the establishment around late morning to lunchtime. I said that he had equipped himself with various items of escape equipment. He had gone to the exercise yard carrying his bible and left towards the Chapel. When he was in the passageway leading to the Chapel and out of sight of Officers he climbed the window grill onto the roof of the Laundry. He climbed through danett wire, although he cut himself severely whilst doing so. He dropped down the back of the Laundry close to the inner fence between 'H' Dormitory and the sportsfield, close to the sportsfield gate, then scaled the fence into the sportsfield. However, he was badly cut again by danett wire. He hung from it, above the sportsfield gate, and twisted awkwardly, breaking his left elbow. Beyond him stood the final fence, which does not have danett wire. Unhappily, for him, he was too injured to proceed. He spent an hour or more awaiting staff coming to apprehend him. I said that he was not missed until 11.45 am. An Officer climbed onto the roof to view the grounds. He reported seeing D at 12.15. Staff entered the sportsfield, using the sportsfield gate, and apprehended D, who put up no resistance.

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Andrew Jordan lives in Southampton, where he edits the splendid magazine *10th Muse*. This is his second appearance in *Shearsman*.

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*Working with Narratives: Our New Reality as the Main Theme*

In the folklore, peasants worked in the fields. Simple folk in touch with essential things – the circuits of the moon, the seasons – they were unconscious of complexity except in how it related to the astrology of seeds. They built no temples, though they knew of them as ‘wonders’. In amongst the peasants were princes, men with sensibilities, who had taken the first step into the ‘gothic’ revival of late 18th century England. It was a seed, culture taking root in an idea. *It proved a language.* It helped us out. These princes were disguised as shepherds, they loved simple country girls who they could use, confuse, idealise. “She had a clear complexion” meant she was virtuous and thus desirable, free of disease. Her breath was sweet. In our new revised edition, based on the earliest texts, a Messiah was concealed beneath the uniform of a prison officer. At weekends, when his wife was away, he would go out and pretend to be a fireman. Women like firemen. From that we can assume women do not like prison officers? This was not spelled out, but it is still observed today. Women call them *pigs*, keeping up the rustic connection. Even female officers are unlucky in love, or so they believe, even if they are attractive. It’s important to the plot: characters must suffer and learn in order to construct a new world from hard won philosophies. Humanity benighted, the stories and the people no-one wants to know. In this they are similar to asylum seekers, the immigrants they despise and lock up; it is an engine of the plot that prison officers bring it on themselves. *Now complete the story.* Bit-part characters, they walk on and off. Our scenery is cardboard – our hills are painted on a wall. It is a mural. An officer in disguise has a temporary self; a Trumpton fireman. *Silly arse.* He is so much like the asylum seeker he loathes, the man with a false passport. One is noble and brave and the other is scum. Guess which is which: *this might be the task of the reader.* Who, here, in this field of pain, is the true bearer of civilisation – the prince from the city, or the peasant he deceives? The prisoner

or the officer? A novel and disposable art, the narrative;  
it is the most common skill, you cannot wake up  
without inventing a story. *In this world, nothing is real.*  
There is romance in the pain. Each man is a hero  
in that he is alone; his theme is redemption –  
not of himself, but of his jailer – and endless work,  
the labour involved in the manufacture of meaning.  
In folklore peasants worked the fields. They sang.  
And the song carried them away as they worked  
until song became their work and they were called poets.  
They could not be admitted then, for they would change  
character, plot – even the outcome and meaning of history –  
so they were banished from the republic. So, once more  
they arrive at the gate in disguise, as an officer or prisoner.  
*Something has taken them.* They are changed, trapped  
by the plot, forced into philosophies. *It never ends.*

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## CATHERINE HALES

### *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



*the theatre box*

(after max beckmann)

wife    mistress    or simply escort for the evening  
her pearly and sequined poise is flawless

leaning into the chimera light  
her grip on her fan perhaps a little too tight

the trail of her arm along the balustrade  
a little too easy

which play is she watching from beneath those white  
half-shut lids masking eyes

like obsidian mirrors  
at her back the gentleman leans away

into the line of the arch that frames her  
pauses in his scan about the house

(are those wings of angels painted on his upturned glasses)  
perhaps a tense moment in the action

makes her fingers grip the rail  
just before the flourish

where the edge of the box tilts into darkness

---

Catherine Hales grew up in Surrey and now lives in Berlin. She has published poems in various magazines, including *Stride*, *Orbis*, *Fire*, *Haiku Quarterly* and *Brittle Star*, with work forthcoming in *Fire*, *Neon Highway* and *Coffee House Poetry*.

**CARRIE ETTER**

*Divining for Starters (21)*

How to initiate a beginning on birthday-eve, the last of last chances, the gaze on accumulation, acquisition.

The long curtains bear an unearthly blue, perhaps sapphire but not lake or flower.

Not lake or flower witnessed and assimilated. Which might propel.

Sounds move above and before me.

I would/would not slough.

Above, the Italian couple recede to a footfall discourse. Before, a predictable residential street in East London. There is little to make of this in the morning, but come night.

The exhausted day uncoils, and I go in.

*Divining for Starters (18)*

The small stand of trees now quickened by a gale, each leaf losing its discrete

And again a rest that resembles languor for the light nearing noon

The unseen, sunseen work of chlorophyll I know and don't know proceeds

The reflexive work of the body apace despite its seeming reticence

Yet I linger on the tree as though it alone

And again a rest that resembles languor for the light nearing

*More Than Bone*

where the writhe fails  
we pass the basket for girders  
so very dear

is the truth the right answer or  
because such rigid infrastructure  
is honest necessarily equivalent to the real

I obey and obey  
the pursuit of standards which  
evidence mounts against me

convolute is my natural  
but 20/20 vision distorts  
but shellac peels away

given the heat of writhe

*Divining for Starters (17)*

In the chill of the ordinary, bereft of season

In the body's malaise, neither wholly healthy nor certainly ill

The pencil rounds the compass's fixed point and renders a new circle on the old

Begging a trajectory for the sake of

Undecided in discernment and spun like a pinwheel

(All motion has some grace)

*Divining for Starters (19)*

Before the sentence  
Bluebells on the mantel  
Whipporwill the call to  
In the dew in the yet  
Into itch and ache into  
The field whereby  
Seeds aloft declare  
Declare whatever the soil

---

American poet **Carrie Etter** has appeared in *Shearsman* several times since she moved to England in 2001. Her poems are forthcoming in *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Stand*, and *TLS*, among others, and this autumn she takes up a post as Associate Lecturer in Creative Writing at Bath Spa University College.

**Fred Johnston** was born in Northern Ireland in 1951 and was educated in Toronto and Belfast. He is now based in Galway in the Republic of Ireland, where he teaches Creative Writing at the University as part of the Adult and Continuing Education Programme. He founded Galway's annual literary festival, the Cuir, and runs a writers' centre for the city. *Being Anywhere – New & Selected Poems* recently appeared from Lagan Press, Belfast. He has published 8 collections of poems, 2 novels, one collection of short stories, and has had 3 plays performed.

**Karin Lessing** was born in Silesia, raised in the USA, and has lived in the south of France for almost 40 years. She is the author of *The Fountain* (Montemora, New York, 1982), *The Spaces of Sleep in Midsummer* (Pentagram Press, Markesan, WI, 1982); *The Winter Dream Journals* (Shearsman Books, 1991) and *In the Aviary of Voices* (Shearsman, 2001).

**Sam Sampson** grew up in West Auckland, New Zealand, attending Auckland University, where he majored in philosophy and taught ethnomusicology. His poems have also appeared in *Ariel*, *Slope*, *Stand*, *NZ Listener*, *Landfall*, *Poetry Review* and *Jacket* and *Salt*.

FRED JOHNSTON

*A Rooting Gift*

*(for Knute Skinner)*

Sometimes it's all we have, a bone-deep  
Turning of the soil,  
So that when we fold back the new earth  
It's as if we'd turned our own skin inside-out,  
And found the skull-white sharding of a stone  
To be a skelping of bone on bone.  
Root and nerve twist and rope, a rush  
Of water like blood to the head,  
A knuckle's worth of hills —  
We could go on, finding the shape of ourselves  
Capped in a wig of moss,  
A rig of knitted-up bare branches,  
A woven door —  
A roof of flesh without a floor.

**DENNIS BARONE**

*At Liberty*

**Trieste**

Twist an anchor so it doesn't end up where lost things go: in the vine without a machete; a lexicon with no syllables; an illusion of reputation. What treasure do we dream charged on the other side, changed by the crossing? And below, water going in some other direction while the sun beats the street, this sea of my prayer. In the distance a silent pond flashes like an astonished remnant of madness: almost this and nothing more. All I need is that old anguish again, an eve of thinking about nothing. There are too many minutes in the margin, in the face, in the suburban street. Yesterday things in the grass, unknown things with no hands or lips, frightened this ardent man. Dust becomes my village. These clouds are like mountains.

**Bristol**

You must, he said with authority, you must write a story as if you're speaking hurriedly and urgently on the telephone to your father, mother, brother, or sister. Breathless, panting almost, you can't stop to make any changes, to cross anything out, or add anything in, not the color of the eyes and if they match the sweater, not the brightness of the stars. Go, quick. But before you start this recitation of events – of joys or horrors or some combination of them, imagined or real – you must have in mind a character to whom this occurs and a place where it unfolds. He repeated then for emphasis: where did these events occur and to whom did they occur and maybe at the end, he conjectured now, less authoritative than when he started, we'll arrive at why or some ambiguous indication of a possible explanation, that's the modern way, he added, almost parenthetically. There will be an end for there will inevitably be a beginning and if there is a beginning and if there will be an end then when that end arrives a middle will be decipherable, knowable, or, at the very least, locatable. The reader can look back, he asserted, but would the reader do so, he then asked, if your narrative has sufficient forward propulsion: call it, suspense? Remember, you're breathless, excited, and this is urgent. This is urgent, he repeated and thus dulled our sense of its potential urgency. The writer must look forward, he continued, but vision will be limited for time and

not grandfather time, but time as a punishing and most unmerciful God, always imposes itself. For example, today you have only ten minutes to relate these events that take place in a specific location to characters you must by now have some inkling of in your artless minds. And so, you must now commence. Pull at the weeds, he challenged us, and he pledged to grade our work severely.

## **Vienna**

He saw himself in the ornament looking out at the surrounding tree. It had been painted silver by his wife and his hair, too, was silver and so hard to see in the orb. There were green lines about it, mimicking the pine garland that led up the stairs. She came down and saw from a distance that the ornament had not been secured tightly enough, hook to branch, that it was too far back. He sat off to the side, quietly, his head cupped in his hands and his elbows on his knees. She reached out and tried to fix the ornament without disturbing any of the others: the red ones, the blue ones, and the gold ones. He reached out for her hand and she felt something then, some nuisance, and swatted it away. She then got a better grip on the silver ball balanced in the palms of both hands now free from all nuisance but then stumbled slightly as she leaned forward to tighten the hook with the fingers of her right hand. She squeezed the object then as if to use its airiness as counter balance for her motion forward, but instead of providing needed equilibrium it broke in her hand and her blood dripped on to the brightly wrapped gifts at her feet. He then went into the kitchen for a towel and some cortisone ointment. He would dab at her hand. He would clear the festive gifts of his wife's blood. He knew one gift must be his -- at least, one must be his, and now that the hand-painted orb had broken and he had left for the kitchen she would no longer see him there, reflected in her handicraft, though he did not know what this would mean. When he returned from the kitchen with the towel and the cortisone ointment the tree, too, had fallen. It had fallen on its side and rolled toward the door and the door was now slightly open and cold wind entered the room, chilled it some. It had fallen toward the door and away from his wife who sat cross-legged holding her bleeding hand and singing the second verse of "Faith of Our Fathers." He hated that hymn, especially its second verse. He sat down and put the ointment on his own hands and wiped his hands clean with the kitchen towel. He felt betrayed. He stepped over the tree, opened the

door wide, and walked into the garage where he found her red paisley scarf on the cracked cement. He bent down, picked it up, inhaled its residual fragrance and then went to his band saw and cut the scarf into very, very tiny pieces that reminded him of something else. The following week he warned his analyst not to make too much of this.

### Amsterdam

Darkness and damp have cut the city's population into half its high season size and, for a moment, gauzy snow covers the barren patches of a near-empty park. Then the quiet breaks: a merchant rattles up the grate that guards his place, snug in the façade of a former prison, metamorphosed into flats and cafes and shops. I am at home on a steel black footbridge. Here and now I daydream of another possible life. I read late last night in *Het Parool*: "one-third of all conversations that last at least five minutes involve at least one lie." A tour boat passes; a small dog barks, about to leap out of its basket; a man dressed in black stands by the weather-beaten kiosk trying to keep out of the rain.

### Hartford

His house is empty when he arrives – empty and quiet and large. Perhaps, it is too large for one man and one woman. From the window of his study he can look toward the town he travels to each morning and returns from each night. It is winter and the slope of his yard, so green six months ago, is now awash in white, patterned slightly by the paws of the neighbor's cat. Of the garden nothing remains but the dried out sticks of roses trimmed low to the ground and protruding some above the snow. He sits in his study and thinks of the green of May and red of June. He awaits the return of his wife and the start of his dinner, hearty, he hopes, and hot. He dreams the sound of her feet upon the stairs, but realizes that if he has fallen asleep he is now awake for she has entered his room. He smiles, stretches forth his hands, hands that she steps forward and holds. He remembers how he used to write to her when he went to distant places such as Greensboro and she stayed here at home to guard the fort, as they used to joke.



She pulls slightly and he stands, shaky at first; yet, recalling the hikes he took last spring.

## Oslo

A treatise of this kind is exasperating, a turning away from originality. Two moments within the so-called “narrow sounds” highlight an important (and wholly creditable) contact with skeptical notions of rationalism. It is remarkable that the road to illusion offers walnut instead of pine. The fundamental nature of internal tension reintroduces narration with an impulse to interrogate the performance. What must be emphasized has become increasingly a tool far beyond a minor plea for debate. Thought is, first of all, temporary. We must arrive at the price one hour illustrates, if only to sort varieties of what can be called discontinuous features of fiction that abolish the relationship between the intangibility of the fragmented and the invariably emancipating attack on the unity of historical struggle itself. There is no doubt that conflict is the price of a long-term process of laboring to restore agents entangled in their position of a reluctant brood. Subversion of the self-conscious is the subject of those works structured around the inclusion of devices that have been satisfying to the most authoritarian personalities. The truth is so utterly within the limits of conventional plot that the rejection of feral combinations clarifies the narrative line and would maintain anger in such revelations. It accepts real disaster. The incorporation of materials, the bringing together of constructions efface the performances closely related to the death of words. Compare this statement to that created in the pistol used to create the most obsolete letters. Earlier the narrative dreamed of full presence, of maneuvering and recurring themes counted on curious fingers mediated by interpretations from other quarters.

## Durban

All my thoughts and recollections languish in a purple room. It is not the purple of royalty. It is not the purple painters use to imagine a color that nowhere exists on the horizon at sunset. There is no escape from this purple, nor from my

sweater with so many holes. The blue sky has been perforated by white clouds. Out there on the other side of the wall there is no purple. Birds cluster tight-knit in trees: white birds and blue birds in green trees. There is no purple. And the sea has so many fish, but of that tinge not one. All of this purple in here is a chain, a barred window – my only window. My sweater is purple, too. It does not have enough holes. If it had more, then perhaps I could ... maybe ... or, perhaps, not. This room and its garish walls stipulate that you must remain on the other side. In the market square shopping for parrots, shopping for paint. May the cry of the animal at my feet reach those cobbled streets; may it take your hand.

## **Jakarta**

What notice have the trees taken of me? Do they grow upward and out somehow affected by the fact that daily beneath them I have walked? It's not a matter of temperance, but a disciplined practice to walk under these trees so much of the time. Some are tolerable, but most are little tortures for me: prickly and squat in the all day mid-day sun. The wind that occasionally stirs such still air never turns to prophecy, but only certifies a despair that rises in humid steam up from the barren soil and then disperses like so many flies fleeing the glue strip that would trap them. The broken arm of their branches betrays my alarm at the shrinking of the sticks that prop up this head I carry about upon my proud shoulders. Style is the denial of expression and the bright colors of your gown silence me, the repetitious shade of all this green clamps this sullen jaw. I have been reluctant to call out and shout at the roots of these trees, to gain their respect by well-timed violence. It is a conflict, a struggle to remain here. I used to like Hart Crane. Now beneath these trees, upon this soil I see myself, and all my poetry.

## **New York**

There were three of us in the main office: April, Bill, and me. The three of us differed so much from one another that when it came time to make a selection we could never reach a consensus. We always like that which is closest to ourselves, and so we would select nothing from the hundreds of manuscripts submitted to us. This is no way to run a publishing house.

I like romances. I write them occasionally, too, real bodice rippers. Those books you see at the checkout in the supermarket or airport pharmacies, those books with women swooning on the cover, swooning right into the arms of a stalwart and muscled man.

Bill was a little skinny guy who loved ghostwritten works by former sports stars. If the star had fallen, if he had an addiction to overcome or a battered wife who refused to forgive him, then Bill would argue with especial vehemence for the book. The fatter the manuscript, the more he seemed to like it. Sometimes he'd come into an editorial meeting and – he was such a puny guy – we couldn't see him slumped behind his huge pile of my life in sports manuscripts. Quite frankly, I couldn't understand how he could tell them apart.

April reads deeply in history, too deeply. So deeply, in fact, that she has little understanding of the present world or, more importantly, the current book market. Gibbon, Edward Gibbon of all people is her favorite author.

But then one day last spring at a most unpromising meeting Bill, half hidden behind his mound of pitches, let drop his bomb. We laughed at first and the laughter alleviated the shock, but it did not do much to dispel the sense of gloom that immediately settled about the room. Bill was dying. Terminal. Period. The end. That's it, he said.

Several weeks after his death, I found a sealed, unmarked envelope pushed back deep into the top drawer of my desk by some other papers, paper clips, and the general office detritus of several weeks work on romance novels, both mine and others'. It was a letter from Bill that he must have placed in my drawer during his last week in the office, that last week during which he looked so awful, so like he hovered above the open pit. "The perception that things change fast persists," he began, "even as the chill wind of mortality blows me about these midtown canyons of industry, April." I read no further for I realized that in his delirium he must have placed a note for April in my desk. Perhaps, I thought, he had also placed a note for me in her desk. A case of mistaken notes, then, but what was there to be done about it?

I hate April. The small rent in our professional facades evoked by Bill's imminent mortality further increased the distance between us. We vied for something new, but in the same old hurtful way. I rode home that night shadowed by questions I could not answer. Should I give the note to April? Is there a note for me? If there is one, why hasn't April given it to me? The note in my desk got lost inadvertently in a morass of memos and other papers. What excuse does she have?

I decided to burn that note from Bill to April. Clearly, that was wrong of me.

But I didn't read it. I'll say that in my defense. I didn't read it before lighting it with a match, holding it and twirling it for a moment in my dark apartment before letting it fall into an otherwise empty ashtray.

The train's plunge into the tunnel under the Hudson River the next morning seemed oddly deeper and darker than it had the night before. Weighed down with sadness, unsettled by an inchoate sense of shame, and troubled by the possible consequences of what I had done, I wondered what my obligations to April had now become. For some reason my secret and violent action made me feel closer to April, indebted in some sense to her for something that I couldn't quite explain and still can't.

I told April what I had done. She told me that there was indeed a letter for me, that it was in her drawer that she had found it, that she had kept it in her purse for a day or two and then she had burned it. Bill had brought us together, history and romance. I think we were both relieved.

## Here

All facts are fables: this secret passes such minor streams impatient to move faster. Every theory disappears in the Bureau of Statistics, neither here nor there. I imagine a form that at crossroads becomes the sun itself. I know, light is desire and things fall so fast that the sound of falling thrills our prospecting hands. The heather blows, a wind perhaps was always waiting. In any event, after breakfast – so soundlessly – a little boy hangs up the telephone; I dream the waves ashore, those tribes of lunar beauty, and I cry out once more for those leaves that bring us so many melodies in the heavy arms of air.

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AARON McCOLLOUGH

*Eklog South*

. . .*golden address*

physician check my circulation  
golden address I mutter more and louder  
in this telephone the anchorite  
taps barcodes out longshort  
the end was coming 'til we missed  
the end / is coming

. . .*gasstop*

red clay i am on  
in red clay i am  
coming to account  
though track in track out  
my place (this was valdosta)  
of minor rivers  
if i'm too old for this (have been)  
then i'm being too old  
why in the inlet fiddlers  
but the sea  
carnivorous trunks

. . .*ephhatha*

that is be opened  
the second is this

keep awake  
drowsy  
keep awake  
in all this biblical heat  
the way likened to a two-lane road  
compressor touch and go  
. . . I can see people but they look like trees. . .  
. . . I believe; help my unbelief!

. . . *let man's soul be a sphere*

column of dust  
like a thread like orange lips                      foreshortened  
/god laid out  
draft me  
winding lines  
\*flapping crowns of skin torn out of the feet  
    resolve me molecular  
    converse me electric  
let us talk about whatever  
    *tangere tangere*  
    lapping the milk on the floor  
even as it's water  
passing thirsty, friend  
as water thinning milk  
as said all miracles have stopped  
and living is skimmed  
take down all curtains  
we've nothing to hide

. . . *in the house of mary & martha*

in the palmetto state  
at the running tap  
sands and clays and the source  
in the rock that'll follow me  
we are in our place  
in the ear of mary  
the hand of martha  
in a glance as it's gone  
like an audience in the soul  
which contains them  
    so loved  
    flesh  
    to be made  
    a guest  
come in let us in  
come in  
the sea inside the house  
we go across all day  
in remembrance of the sink  
the hinged face of the holy body  
  
thus we look into the face of god  
floating cupboard of each face  
let us in come in  
let us in, we'll rest  
come in, we'll travel together

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**Aaron McCollough** is studying for a PhD at the University of Michigan, where he also teaches part-time, and is the editor of the online journal *GutCult* ([www.gutcult.com](http://www.gutcult.com)). Salt published his collection *Double Venus* in 2003.

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