



# The Unmapped Country: Stories and Fragments

*Ann Quin , Jennifer Hodgson (Editor)*

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This new collection of rare and unpublished writing by the cult 1960s author explores the risks and seductions of going over the edge. The stories cut an alternative path across innovative twentieth-century writing, bridging the world of Virginia Woolf and Anna Kavan with that of Kathy Acker and Chris Kraus.

**Ann Quin** (b. 1936, Brighton) was a British writer. Prior to her death in 1973, she lived between Brighton, London, and the US, publishing four novels: *Berg* (1964), *Three* (1966), *Passages* (1969), and *Tripticks* (1972).

## The Unmapped Country: Stories and Fragments Details

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# From Reader Review The Unmapped Country: Stories and Fragments for online ebook

## Craig McDonald says

The first of Quinn's books I have managed to get a hold of, and I will preface this review with the acknowledgment that that was my mistake. This is a collected work of much of her early and/or unfinished work - and as such I imagine it is of most interest to the completist, who wants to trace her stylistic influences. This runs the gamut from (to my mind) relatively unsuccessful experimentations with avant-garde writing forms of the 1960s ('Living in the Present' seemed particularly exhausting) to some of the more stylistically conventional but haunting 'seaside noirs' of 'Nude and Seascape' and 'A Double Room' - which I thoroughly enjoyed and which suggest I might have done better starting with her novel *Berg*. Other personal highlights included 'Ghostworm', 'Motherlogue', 'Never Trust a Man Who Bathes With His Fingernails', and 'Tripticks'.

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## Nate D says

Ann Quin is one of the great 20th century experimentalists bridging modernism and post-modernism over a series of increasingly brilliant novels over the decade of 1964 - 1973 prior to her untimely death. As such, it's unbelievable that we had to wait until this year to get a collection of her short fiction into print. It's all here: surreal beachscapes, drearily perceptive investigations into everyday life (of middling love affairs, of the struggling writer), ghost-written monologues, whiplash-inducing cut-up experiments, an early form of her masterpiece *Tripticks*, and, at last, a surviving fifty page fragment of her great unfinished 5th novel, the real treasure here. A subjective asylum story in the best tradition of Nerval, Kavan, Carrington, and Zurn, this one burns with the candid particulars of a personal fragmentation of reality, and, worse, the inability of others to really care or attempt to aid the sufferer outside of the check boxes of lingering-sense-of-responsibility or institutional bare minimums. As such, chilling. And with that, a great close to 2017.

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## MJ Nicholls says

Quin's incomplete novel, the titular piece published here, is one of her most remarkable prose works: a startling autobiographical exploration of a psychiatric collapse, set in an institution similar to the various she attended in her last troubled years. The remaining stories showcase her unquiet and skittish creative mind, the strongest (for me) the stories that share the bleak interiority of her first novel *Berg*. 'Nude and Seascape' is an unsettling story featuring a man burying a female corpse, and 'A Double Room' captures a miserable attempt at a torrid affair ruined by impotence, the latter one of Quin's funnier pieces, and 'Eyes That Watch Behind the Wind' is a lyrical story set in Mexico featuring a more lucid form of abstract writing. The less successful fragments are the cut-up stories 'Tripticks' (later her last novel), 'Living in the Present' and some strange blips written for an artist boyfriend. Her prose is often abstruse to the point reading for pleasure becomes a chore, such as in 'Ghostworm' or 'Never Trust a Man Who Bathes with His Fingernails', two inscrutable pieces where the staccato sentences and minglings of narrator and character rarely produce any notable effect. Two self-portraits 'Leaving School — XI' and 'One Day in the Life of a Writer' offer a brief peep into Quin's personality, something that remains elusive and mercurial across her strange and blackly comic writings.

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## John Conway says

‘After her death in 1973 at only 37, Ann Quin’s star first dipped beneath the horizon, disappearing from view entirely, before rising slowly but persistently, to the point that it’s now attaining the septentrional heights it always merited. I suspect that she’ll eventually be viewed, alongside BS Johnson and Alexander Trocchi, as one of the few mid-century British novelists who actually, in the long term, matter.’ Tom McCarthy

<http://www.andotherstories.org/book/t...>

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## Sean says

Ann Quin is one of my favorite writers, and while I won't go so far as to say this collection disappointed me, it certainly did not measure up to the high bar set by her novels (nor should I have expected it to). While the word 'fragments' in the subtitle held a certain allure when I first saw it, in truth the word 'fragments' here refers to literal fragments, as in unfinished, probably unintentionally so, having not ever been published (and perhaps not ever intended to have been). This gets at the issue of posthumous publication, about which I am a perpetual fence-sitter. In Quin's case, of course, there was very little published during her lifetime, outside of her four novels. It was almost inevitable then, given the recent (minor) resurgence of interest in her work, that a collection such as this would appear.

The centerpiece here is Quin's unfinished manuscript for her fifth novel *The Unmapped Country*, the majority of which was previously published in Giles Gordon's anthology *Beyond the Words*. The missing piece, which comes at the end, is a powerful segment, leaving one to wonder why it wasn't also included in the anthology. With Gordon's book long out of print, the return of this novel fragment to print is what makes publication of this collection so important and worthwhile. It follows the experience of a young woman named Sandra during her harrowing time spent in a psychiatric ward, and offers a scathing critique of this type of so-called mental health care, where patients are warehoused, doped up, and micromanaged like a herd of docile farm animals. The closing section is Sandra's first-person immersive narrative describing an extended event of fractured reality permeated by paranoia.

*Let her think I'm mad, let them all think that, so readily they will claim their superiority over fear.*

I found the stories that round out the collection to be hit or miss. One entitled 'Tripticks', is clearly the basis for her novel of the same name, which happens to be the one book of hers that didn't appeal much to me. 'Nude and Seascape' is a particularly strong example of Quin's abilities tangential to the quasi-horror, weird genre. Others in the collection also align either with this type, or a related neo-Gothic type, with varying degrees of success. The first four in the collection were probably my favorites, and within these is what feels to me like the most thinly autobiographical of Quin's writing. However, this is not a quality I see in her novels, and in fact these stories felt more like a writer finding her voice, one which would mature into the one found in her novels. At odds with my impression, though, are the source notes, which indicate most of the stories appear to have been written concurrently with the novels.

I would not recommend this book to readers unfamiliar with Quin. If anything, it's probably left unread until

one has fully explored her novels and obtained a greater understanding of her themes and stylistic preoccupations. I'm giving it four stars, but most of that is for *The Unmapped Country*. The rest of the collection rates more like a three.

*The long night stretched out. Wind rattled the windows, and snow mixed with hail pounded like small fists against glass. In the middle of the dormitory, a nurse read or slept under a lamp. Sandra stared at this light until it spun from its orbit and approached. Right at the very beginning - but there was no beginning. Vague notes for the basis of a shape. The first section interrupted by the last. No continuous movement. A starting point somewhere. Chord superimposed on chords. The pendulum swung back.*

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## Terry Pitts says

While some writers seek to find their voice, Ann Quin seemed to have a need to explore voices. Her narrators and main characters are female, male, children, passive, angry, feminist, conservative, well off, working class. In these fourteen fragments, only some of which have been published before, we can see Quin pushing further and further into an “unmapped country” of writing. Written over a brief period of something like seven years between 1966-1973, at least four of the stories in **The Unmapped Country** are jaw-droppingly powerful, each in their own Quin-quirky way: “A Double Room,” “Every Cripple Has His Own Way of Walking,” “Never Trust a Man who Bathes with his Fingernails,” and The Unmapped Territory.” (And how about Quin’s titles?)

But my favorites are these three. “A Double Room” is a devastating story of a woman alternately struggling to/refusing to come to terms with her loneliness and her need/hatred for men. In “Eyes That Watch Behind the Wind,” an Englishwoman and an American man traveling through Mexico attend a bullfight—the meeting place of challenge—which becomes a description of their tense, tenuous relationship. In “The Unmapped County,” we first meet Sandra, she is being treated in a mental institution, locked in a daily battle with uncaring doctors and nurses, psychiatrists who make no real effort to understand their patients, and dismal living conditions. In the story’s second part we watch Sandra’s unraveling mind and her relationship with Clive, a painter whose days as her boyfriend are numbered.

For a much longer review, check out my blog.

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## Owen Knight says

Ann Quin was an experimental novelist who died aged 37 in 1973. This collection brings together fragments of her work, including part of an unfinished novel. Many of the stories are written in a staccato style, with clipped sentences and no punctuation marks for direct speech. This can give the writing a certain urgency but, reading the whole collection together, it becomes repetitive.

The stories are often original in their content and are told unemotionally.

An interesting introduction, although I don't think I have the stamina to read one of her novels.

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## **Vivek Tejuja says**

I think my heart skips a beat when I discover a new author. The same happened when I heard of Ann Quin and there was something about her that drew me instantly to wanting to read her. Ann Quin's work is unlike anything I have read before. I know this is said of a lot of writers in this time and age, but in the case of Quin it couldn't hold truer. If you are in the mood to read something experimental, mind-boggling and also the kind of writing that makes you emotional, then please read "The Unmapped Country: Stories and Fragments" by Ann Quin.

Quin does not only break form in her stories and fragments but also goes over the edge in terms of plot. Her writing leaves you with this heaviness in the soul and is ironically also liberating. For instance, here I was reading, the titular incomplete novel (almost 50 pages or so) and I found myself crying and strangely enough smiling (since the story is that of a psychiatric collapse set in an institution quite similar to the ones Quin attended in her troubled years). Her skills of telling a story are crackling and this is a good place to start.

There are then staccato pieces in the book: "Never Trust a Man Who Bathes with His Fingernails" and "Ghostworm" – which are also very vague and make sense when read over and over again. Quin's pieces are like wine I suppose or an exotic cuisine that one grows to like or love or not. There cannot be in-between emotion when it comes to her writing (or so I think).

There is this sense of unease, this constant shuffling from one reality to another that all-pervades this collection of stories and fragments. Reading this collection reminded me of the urgency of Virginia Woolf, the resplendency of Elizabeth Bowen and the sense of loneliness of Katherine Mansfield. Not that I am comparing (because really Quin cannot be compared), I am just providing a reference or two. All said and done, I know for one that I will be looking out for more of her works (she left this world too soon) and cherish what she had to offer.

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## **Paul Beech says**

As with any "odds and sods" collection, the quality here is a little uneven, which is hardly surprising, given how wildly different and experimental these stories are; but what holds them together (and keeps you reading) is Quin's fiery personality, alternately sombre, meditative, angry, bitter and withdrawn. She quite literally bares her soul, for most of these pieces are obviously little more than thinly disguised rewrites of episodes from her own troubled life.

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## **Denzil says**

Some really very good pieces in here, lots of differing styles of writing some more experimental some quite straight but always with a sense of conflict between what is going on in the head and that in the outside world. Will read one of her novels soon.

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## **Nadia Ghanem says**

Ann Quin is part of an important group of British women writers whose literary production has been ignored by the canon for decades after their deaths, and who are now slowly being brought back to the fore. I feel as though I have righted a gaping wrong in my reading of this collection of stories by Ann Quin.

Quin was an experimentalist writer of the 60s. She wrote novels and short stories and this collection captures two types of material: stories that follow a linear narratives like "Nude and Seascape", "A double room", "Every cripple has his own way of walking", "Motherlogue" and "The Unmapped Country".

And stories akin to flash fiction, structured like vignettes that the title appropriately calls 'fragments' because Quin's style of story telling is narrative fragmentation.

Quin structures her narrations in these types of stories by playing with punctuation to create rhythm - now found in *A girl is a half formed thing* by Eimar McBride, *Peach* by Emma Glass, or *Grief is a thing with feathers* by Max Potter. I love how this rhythmic type of writing and composition is used by these writers to convey trauma & hurt, and by Quin to convey tension and distress. Quin suffered from severe depression, she underwent electro-shock treatment, and it is therefore no surprise to find that psychiatry and mental health are big themes in these stories.

Readers who enjoy the narrative style of *The White Book* by Han Kang, and the merging of reality and psychotic episodes in Kang's *The Vegetarian* will enjoy Quin's stories that delve in the same.

Quin produced four novels, and began a fifth that remained unfinished, she committed suicide in 1973. The beginning of her fifth novel is part of this collection, a real treasure here. It is the titular story 'The Unmapped Country'.

'The Unmapped Country' is set in a psychiatric ward and follows a woman interned there. Quin reverses insanity and sanity here. Madness is the reality of this woman's internment (the insane behaviours she notices). In parallel to these observations she recounts the visions she has of being hunted, and the grasp on lucidity she thought she had is quickly shown as being psychotic. It reminded me of *Lunar Caustic* by Malcolm Lowry whom I love.

All stories explore the sexual tension in relationships, the tension between parent and child. A common setting to these stories is the seaside or seaside towns.

Quin's tone is dark but also often farce-like because she picks on the absurd. This balancing act between the absurd and the somber and strange atmospheres reminded me of Robert Aickman.

Thank you And Other Stories for the free copy of this collection.

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## **Taylor Napolsky says**

Fantastic. I think this is what literature is supposed to do when it's at its best. Some of these stories just tore my heart in half.

If you like edgy, experimental fiction that is (mostly) readable, this is for you.

This other review I read for this said (and I completely agree) this is how we rewrite history—basically lifting up women writers who, so undeservingly, haven't gotten near the acclaim or rep they ought to have.

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### **RobPalindrome says**

Vivid, surreal and hallucinatory. Beautiful and haunting. Some pieces are certainly a lot better than others, but as a whole this book merits repeat visits.

Thank you for making this available And Other Stories!

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### **Hugh says**

My eye was caught by the Guardian's review of this book back in January here, which intrigued me - Quin was a British experimental novelist who died young in 1973 and has since been largely forgotten, but she has some distinguished admirers. This collection brings together various short stories and other pieces, plus the 50 pages of the novel she was working on when she died, which gives the collection its title.

The collection is stylistically varied. Some of the early pieces are raw and visceral, often written in short fragmentary sentences. Others are harder to decrypt and (dare I say it) have aged less well. The subject matter includes childhood memories, sexuality and mental illness, and there is never any sentimentality. I found the collection surprisingly readable for experimental fiction, but I am not sure how much will remain in the mind. I would be interested in tracking down at least one of Quin's four published novels.

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### **Jonathan Norton says**

A mixture of works, most of it autobiographical to varying degrees. There is a straightforward memoir of her journey from school-leaver to published novelist. The title comes from the longest piece, a fragment of an unpublished novel about a woman having a psychotic breakdown and subsequent hospitalisation. The other shorter pieces range across the world and different characters, yet the central viewpoints all seem to share the distinctive Quin stance: detached, involved with the emotional lives of others, yet not fully engaged and always ready to break away, expecting disappointment (the lover is usually old and male and having other opportunities). Switching back and to between first and third persons heightens a sense of a divided self.

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