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THE MADRID REVIEW NEWSLETTER

May 2026



OCEAN'S 'EMPEROR OF GLADNESS' WASHES IN

The paperback release of *The Emperor of Gladness* by **Ocean Vuong** arrives on 28th May (Vintage, UK), renewing attention around a novel that first appeared last year via Penguin (and Jonathan Cape in the UK). Following Hai, a young man pulled back from the brink by an unexpected caregiving relationship, the book blends Vuong's lyric sensibility with a grounded portrait of work, precarity and connection.

The response to the hardback was notably divided. Many critics admired its emotional intensity and stylistic ambition, praising what one reviewer called its "luminous, almost incantatory prose" while others were less convinced. Some reviews argued that the lyricism could feel overextended, with one critic suggesting the prose "tips from poetic into self-conscious," while another noted that its diffuse narrative risks "diluting the emotional stakes it seeks to heighten."

Yet even sceptical responses tended to acknowledge the book's ambition and distinctiveness and the divide, in many ways, became part of its appeal: a novel that invites

strong reactions rather than passive agreement. Its paperback publication feels well timed - not simply revisiting a success but reopening a conversation.

Several notable May releases broaden the picture. *John of John* by **Douglas Stuart** (5th May) is published by Grove Press and offers a stark, tender portrait of desire and damage in the Hebrides, continuing Stuart's interest in class and emotional survival. *The Things We Never Say* by **Elizabeth Strout** (Random House) turns inward, tracing loneliness and the quiet tremors of everyday life through the character of Artie Dam.

Meanwhile, *Glyph* by **Ali Smith** (26th May, **Hamish Hamilton**) experiments boldly with language and form, asking what storytelling can still recover in fractured times. Completing this anglophone selection, *The Calamity Club* by **Kathryn Stockett** (5th May, Penguin) marks the author's long-awaited return, weaving together community tensions and buried secrets in the American South.

From Spain and the Spanish-language sphere come equally compelling titles. *Tarántula* by **Eduardo Halfon** (Libros del Asteroide) blends memoir and fiction in a searching meditation on memory, identity and Jewish heritage. Alongside it, *Finge que estás muerta y yo te llevo* by **Julián Delgado Lopera** (26th May, [The Feminist Press at CUNY](#)) immerses readers in Bogotá's queer underground, vivid with risk, humour and defiance.

MADRID BOOK FAIR

The biggest book news this month, though, is that the **Feria del Libro de Madrid** takes place in the city's Retiro park later this month. Now in its 85th edition, it runs from 29th May to the 14th June, with opening hours from 10:30 to 14hr and 17hr to 21hr on weekdays, 22hr on Fridays.

This year's programme brings together a notable mix of globally recognised authors, reinforcing the fair's status as a major Spanish-language publishing event with international reach. Among the most prominent confirmed names are the Cuban writer **Leonardo Padura**, the Spanish novelist **Arturo Pérez-Reverte** and Nobel Prize-winning author **J. M. Coetzee**. [Check out all the details on the official site](#) - they have lists of when and where you can find the writers you want to meet.

THEATRE

Highlights include smaller productions such as *Una siesta con suerte* at **Teatro Victoria** (9th-24th May), alongside adaptations of classics like *La Celestina* (3rd May) at **Teatro Farándula** and even a condensed staging of *Les Misérables* (10th May). At the more formal end, opera and music-theatre continue to play a central role. Zarzuela is a traditional Spanish theatrical genre that combines spoken dialogue with sung musical numbers, often blending opera, operetta and popular song and is well worth a look. **The Teatro de la Zarzuela** hosts performances such as *Arquitectura musical* on 5th - and if you look on the website you can find lots of good offers, while the **Teatro Real** presents productions including *Roméo et Juliette* later in the month, check times and dates on the Teatro's website.

NEW POETRY

From Carcanet Press, the end of the month brings a substantial group of titles on 28th May, led by **Jorie Graham's** *Killing Spree*, a major new collection from the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet continuing her late work's engagement with ecological crisis and political instability, alongside **Sophie Hannah's** *Work Experience*, which blends poetry with theatrical and musical elements in a more accessible, often playful mode, and **Matthew Welton's** *Small Birds Singing*, an extended, formally experimental sequence marked by fragmentation and sonic patterning; earlier in the month, Carcanet also launches **Robert Minhinnick's** *Alcatraz: Poems from the Contemporary Welsh*, a work engaging with Welsh poetics, landscape and politics that helps anchor the press's May list. Bloodaxe Books, meanwhile, concentrates its releases on 21st May, where **Patricia Smith's** *The Intentions of Thunder: New and Selected Poems* stands out as a major retrospective gathering work across her career, foregrounding her formally dynamic, performance-inflected approach and her sustained attention to race, history and violence, accompanied by **Jennifer Lee Tsai's** *Melete*, a new collection likely to extend her reputation for formally inventive, visually and conceptually alert writing, and the more lightly trailed *Egrets, While War*, part of the same tightly curated seasonal grouping. From [Shearsman Books](#) comes a single clearly dated [May title](#), **Jürgen Becker's** *Foxtrot in the Erfurt Stadium*, translated by Martyn Crucefix, continuing the press's longstanding commitment to international and especially European poetry in English translation. Finally, [The Emma Press](#) contributes *Aardvark Day* by **Victoria Gatehouse**, published mid-month, a debut children's poetry collection drawing on zoology and natural history to create an accessible, illustrated sequence that broadens the month's range of readership. Taken together, May 2026 presents a concise but varied snapshot of contemporary poetry publishing: major international figures and retrospective volumes sit alongside formally ambitious new work; translation remains an essential conduit for widening the field and smaller presses continue to diversify audience and approach.

BOOKSHOP EVENTS

At **Secret Kingdoms**, Madrid's only all-English bookshop, May programming continues with two early-evening literary events. It's run by Madrid Review columnist David Price and his excellent team and don't miss the amazing second hand section at the back of the shop!

On 16th May **Gigi Berardi** presents *Bianca's Cure*, a Renaissance-set novel following a young woman's pursuit of early chemistry amid alchemy, religious authority and political tension as she seeks a cure for malaria. On 21st, novelist and academic **Timothy Ryan Day** introduces *Leaven*, a speculative novel about a neuroscientist whose breakthrough coincides with a destabilised world, explored through themes of intelligence, survival and bread-making as metaphor, followed by readings, discussion and signing.

At **Librería Parenthesis** in Lavapiés the shop continues its bilingual children's series *Domingo de cuentos* on 3rd May at 11:30am and an English-language session on 10th May at the same time, both aimed at children aged 3–6 and designed as informal, drop-in storytelling events. The most visible concentration of activity comes from **Librería Rafael Alberti**, which effectively shifts its programming to the Feria del Libro de Madrid, beginning on 30th May in El Retiro. On the opening day (Friday 30th May), the Alberti *caseta* hosts a sequence of signings including **Xulia Alonso** (12:00–13:30), **Milena Busquets** (18:00–20:00), **Leonardo Padura** (19:00–21:00) and **Juan Cruz** (20:00–21:30). The programme continues into Saturday 31st May, with appearances from **Carlos del Amor**, **María Dueñas**, **Luis Landero**, **Andrés Neuman**, **Mario Obrero**, **Ignacio Peyró** and **Sara Mesa**.

At **Librería Gaztambide**, May includes a presentation and signing of *Sobrevivir en el Medioevo* by **Mikel Herrán** on 16th May. The event features the author discussing his new book, a popular history of medieval life that challenges common stereotypes about the Middle Ages. The session is followed by a book signing, continuing the shop's focus on bringing academic and popular history into direct conversation with readers in an informal neighbourhood setting.

EXHIBITIONS

At the **Museo del Prado**, the key temporary exhibition running through the month is *The Prado in the Feminine Form III: Artistic Patrons of the Museum's Collections (1701–1819)*, which continues until 24th May and explores the role played by women as collectors and patrons in shaping the museum's holdings, offering a historical counterpoint to the Prado's canonical narrative. Nearby, the **Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza** presents one of the season's defining shows, *Hammershøi: The Eye That Listens* (17 February–31 May), a major retrospective of the Danish painter built around his austere, silent interiors, while late in the month a new exhibition dedicated to Ewa Juskiewicz opens on 26 May, extending the museum's interest in reinterpreting portrait traditions.

At **CaixaForum Madrid**, May is anchored by *Am Ashurbanipal, King of the World, King of Assyria* (9th April–4th October 2026), a large-scale historical exhibition developed with the British Museum that brings together more than 150 objects to explore the power and legacy of the Assyrian ruler.

Matadero Madrid continues its role as one of the city's key sites for contemporary and experimental practice, with a rolling programme of exhibitions across its halls.

Beyond the institutional circuit, the galleries of Carabanchel—now firmly established as one of Madrid's most active contemporary art districts—provide a more fluid and studio-based exhibition culture. The area's spaces and artist-run venues host rotating shows that often emerge from collective practices and curatorial experiments; recent projects such as *Epistemologías radicales* at **La Tercera Nave** point to the kind of materially diverse, politically engaged work that defines the neighbourhood's scene, even as individual exhibitions tend to be short-lived and less formally scheduled than museum shows.

We also love **ARMA gallery**, where there's always something to blow your mind.

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LISTINGS

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PUBS AND BARS

Madrid's bar scene now splits neatly between stylish cocktail bars and traditional neighbourhood pubs, with Irish bars unusually central to the mix. In areas like Malasaña, La Latina and Huertas, places such as [Salmon Guru](#) and [1862 Dry Bar](#) lead a wave of cocktail-focused venues, while older spots like [Bar Cock](#) keep a more classic, Madrid feel with timeless interiors and simple, well-made drinks.

Alongside them, Irish pubs like [James Joyce](#) and [Collin's Irish Tavern](#) act as reliable, lively hubs for sport, late drinks and easy sociability, popular with both locals and expats. What defines Madrid right now is how fluid it all is: people drift from vermouth bars to cocktail spots to Irish pubs in a single night, with variety rather than exclusivity shaping the experience.

FOOD

Madrid's food scene in May is a mix of old-school tabernas, modern tapas bars and a strong wave of contemporary Spanish cooking. In the centre and La Latina, traditional spots like [Casa Lucio](#) keep things classic with dishes such as *huevos rotos*, *croquetas* and grilled meats, while nearby vermouth bars make an early evening ritual of olives, anchovies and small plates.

In Malasaña and Chamberí, the mood shifts towards the more contemporary and chefs reinterpret Spanish staples with seasonal produce and a lighter, more informal style of dining. Meanwhile, markets like [Mercado de San Miguel](#) and [Mercado de Vallehermoso](#) continue to act as casual grazing hubs.

LOVE

Madrid in May is sunset, when the city shifts onto rooftops, parks and viewpoints for a shared golden-hour ritual. [The Azotea del Círculo de Bellas Artes](#) remains the classic rooftop, offering a 360-degree view over Gran Vía and Cibeles that fills quickly as the sun drops. Nearby, [Picalagartos](#) and [Ginkgo Sky Bar](#) combine cocktails with strong skyline views, while the [Riu Plaza España's](#) 360° rooftop adds a more dramatic, high-rise experience.

Locals head to open-air sunset spots like the [Temple of Debod](#) or [Parque del Cerro del Tío Pío](#) for sweeping skyline views. [Retiro Park](#), especially around the Crystal Palace, offers a greener version of the same ritual.

LANGUAGE EXCHANGE

Madrid's language exchange scene, known as *intercambios*, is one of the most active in Europe and remains a key way the city's international and local communities mix. Every night of the week, bars and cafés across neighbourhoods like Malasaña, Lavapiés and La Latina fill with groups practising Spanish and English alongside dozens of other languages, often organised on [Meet Up](#) and other apps. Venues such as [Templo del Gato](#), [El Internacional](#) and various Irish pubs and basement bars host regular gatherings. If you want to learn English we recommend [One Stop Language Services](#) and [North West English Academy](#) in Majahadonda.

RECOMMENDED POETRY



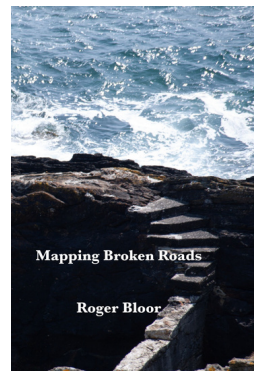
Why the Trumpet is Blue is a searing, unflinching collection that transforms personal trauma into luminous, hard-won beauty. With emotional intensity reminiscent of Plath yet wholly its own, Koester's poetry navigates childhood neglect, grief, and maternal absence with courage and precision. Nature becomes both witness and healer—moonlight, birdsong, and shifting seas offering moments of fragile transcendence. Musicality pulses through the work, echoing the poet's voice as both cellist and storyteller. These poems do not look away from pain; they name it, shape it, and ultimately release it, revealing poetry's power to carry us—bruised but breathing—toward truth and the possibility of healing.



Chasms by Carmella de Keyser is a quietly powerful collection that lingers in the spaces between—past and present, self and memory, belonging and displacement. With striking clarity and emotional precision, de Keyser captures fleeting moments of identity, grief, and transformation, weaving 1990s subculture and personal history into something intimate yet expansive. Her language is accessible but resonant, charged with subtle music and vivid imagery. These poems don't demand attention—they earn it, unfolding with understated intensity. *Chasms* confirms de Keyser as a distinctive, rising voice, offering readers a deeply felt exploration of what it means to exist in-between.



#Moth by Eleanor Holmes is a mesmerising, genre-defying collection that fuses medicine with myth, lyricism with lived experience. Moving between clinical dialogue and luminous poetry, it unsettles the boundaries between doctor and patient, body and self, knowledge and mystery. Holmes writes with precision and wonder, capturing the fragility and strangeness of being human through the recurring image of the moth—drawn to light, transformation, and risk. Both intimate and unsettling, this hybrid work challenges conventional narratives of care and identity, offering something rare: a poetic space where the clinical becomes magical, and where complexity is not reduced, but fiercely illuminated.



Mapping Broken Roads by Roger Bloor is a deeply affecting collection that traces the fault lines of memory, love, and survival with quiet intensity. Moving between the innocence of youth and the weight of adult experience, these poems chart an inner landscape shaped by loss and longing, yet lit by resilience. With vivid, evocative imagery, the work guides us through fractured emotional terrain toward something resembling home. Each piece feels both intimate and universal, inviting reflection without sentimentality. In naming what is broken, the collection reveals unexpected beauty—offering not easy answers, but a sense of movement, meaning, and the possibility of healing.