

THE MADRID REVIEW

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ISSUE 8



HUNTY



Painting the Light: Gordon Hunt

The cover of Issue 8 of *The Madrid Review* belongs to a painter who has spent a lifetime chasing something most of us only glimpse on holiday - that particular quality of light on water when the sun is high, the sea is clear and everything feels, briefly, exactly as it should.

Gordon Hunt lives and works in Fowey, on the south coast of Cornwall, in a part of England that has been attracting artists for well over a century. It is easy to see why. The approach to Readymoney Beach, the local cove he returns to again and again, looks down through clean air onto turquoise water, with families spread out below on the sand. "The subjects and style I paint evoke real feelings of sunshine, holidays, well-being and families," he says, "which seems to resonate with people everywhere. It was not a conscious decision - it's just something that happens with the images I paint."

Hunt came to painting the long way round. He studied Graphic Design at college, graduating in 1981, and spent decades running his own design business. All the while, there was a corner of the house set aside for canvases; a hobby, a passion, occasionally a sale through a local gallery. The aspiration of becoming a professional artist was always present, but so was life. It was only when his children were grown and the design work began to fluctuate that the moment felt right. He has been painting full-time for seventeen years now, and there is a quiet certainty in the way he describes that decision. "There comes a point," he says, "when you realise that painting pictures and sticking them behind the settee is not going to work."

What makes his paintings immediately recognisable is the technique. Hunt works in acrylic on box canvas, beginning not with a white ground but a black one, then building up layers of colour from the darkest tones outward, finishing with the brightest points last — those final touches of white and gold that give his seascapes their signature sparkle. His sketchbook, which goes everywhere with him, has brown paper pages; he draws with both black and white pencils, the white pencil immediately mapping where the light will fall. Photography, sketching and studio work combine into a process that is more considered than its breezy results might suggest. "I have a real sense of painting the light when creating these pieces," he says, and the phrase is not a marketing slogan; it describes something he is genuinely trying to do, and largely succeeds at.

That success has carried his work far beyond Cornwall. He has exhibited in New York and Hong Kong, shown at the Royal Society of Marine Artists at the Mall Galleries in London, and sold through galleries across Britain and internationally online. Last December brought the most unlikely adventure yet: the technology company Pitaka - whose mobile phone accessories aim to combine function with genuine aesthetic beauty - flew Hunt and his wife, the ceramic sculptor Heather Hunt, to the city of Shenzhen in China. The visit included a product launch, an exhibition of his paintings and an interview for an art magazine. "Not something you could ever envisage happening," he says, with what reads as genuine bemusement, "in the life of an artist."

The challenge, he is frank about, is not the painting. Making art, for someone with his instincts, is the easy part. The difficulty is everything else: the social media presence, the gallery relationships, the business of being visible. He is a man who prefers the solitude of the studio, and the requirement to present himself publicly sits uneasily with him. It is a tension familiar to many artists, and he does not romanticise it. "It is not all a happy-go-lucky life: it is work."

Away from the studio, he and Heather are as likely as not to be found on the beach that inspires so much of what they make, walking, swimming, sketchbooks in hand in case something catches the light just so. Their life and their art have grown together until it is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins. He cannot imagine the subject changing. Then again, he adds, with the pragmatism of a man who moved from design to fine art and ended up in Shenzhen: never say never.

Gordon Hunt's work can be found at gordon-hunt.co.uk and through galleries including the Fowey River Gallery and Webbs Fine Art, London.

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MUCH LOVE AND THANKS TO HAN, BOB BLACK, & SATYA BOSMAN: TRUE BELIEVERS

“The Mediterranean Cannot Be Saved Through Isolated Actions”

An interview with UNEP/MAP Coordinator, Tatjana Hema

THE MADRID REVIEW: What are currently the most urgent and overlooked sources of marine pollution globally?

TATJANA HEMA: Allow me first to extend my congratulations and appreciation to coastal communities across the Mediterranean. They are on the frontline of both the challenges and the solutions, and their daily efforts and resilience are essential to protecting and restoring the health of our sea.

This conversation also comes at a very timely moment, as we celebrate the World Oceans Day on 8 June, a global reminder of the vital role the ocean plays in sustaining life on Earth. This year's theme, *Reimagine: Beyond the world we know, a new relationship with our ocean*, invites us to rethink how we relate to the sea, including the Mediterranean, and how we can move towards a more sustainable and balanced future.

Coming back to your question, I would say, honestly, the pressures are significant, but we now clearly see how closely they are linked. The Mediterranean is influenced by how we produce, consume, and manage resources both on land and at sea. These pressures no longer act in isolation; pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change are closely interconnected and often reinforce one another, which is also why solutions are more effective when they are designed in an integrated way.

If we look at the Mediterranean Quality Status Report 2023, the picture is mixed. We are not yet on track to achieve Good Environmental Status - in simple terms, a clean and healthy sea - but it is important to stress that we are also seeing areas of progress. Work on the upcoming report is currently underway, which will help provide an even clearer and more up-to-date picture of both challenges and improvements across the region.

Some things are improving, while others still require continued attention. Yes, fish stocks remain under pressure, and coastal habitats are changing, and invasive species are spreading fast - for example, lionfish and blue crab are now clearly reshaping local ecosystems - but there is strong and growing effort across the region to implement the relevant policies and management measures more effectively.

We are, as scientists, concerned about biodiversity loss, which remains a major priority for attention and action. Marine protected areas currently cover about 9% of the Mediterranean, still below the global target of protecting 30% of the world's oceans and land by 2030. Building on this, we are working with stakeholders and Contracting Parties to scale up protection and bolster reinforce management. This also builds on COP24 decisions to further support implementation, monitoring, and reporting under the Barcelona Convention system, helping countries track progress more consistently and effectively. This includes ensuring that existing protected areas are effectively managed and enforced.

We are also working to help highlight pressures that are sometimes underestimated, such as nutrient pollution from agriculture and wastewater, which can lead to algal blooms, and plastic waste, which is now everywhere - from beaches to the deep sea.



That's why we say very clearly that we cannot solve issues with isolated actions - we need a real shift in how we live and manage resources.

Looking at the broader picture, climate change is also acting as a major accelerator. The Mediterranean is warming about 20% faster than the global average, which is reshaping ecosystems: species are moving, habitats are changing, and extreme events are becoming more frequent. Importantly, none of this happens in isolation — it is all connected. In response, we are actively addressing this through our strategic work under the UNEP/MAP framework, strengthening regional cooperation and integrated responses across climate, biodiversity, and pollution.

TMR: How is plastic pollution evolving, and are current international measures proving effective?

TH: Each day, an estimated 730 tons of plastic enter the Mediterranean Sea - largely from single-use items - with such materials now making up around 95-100% of floating litter and over half of the debris found on the seabed.

There has been progress. Countries in the region, under the Barcelona Convention, have strengthened action plans and are increasingly focusing on prevention, including reducing single-use plastics and improving product design. This shift reflects a broader move toward circular economy solutions, meaning designing systems where materials are reused, repaired, or recycled instead of becoming waste after a single use.

This momentum was further enhanced at COP24, held in Cairo in December 2025, where circular economy principles were placed more firmly at the centre of regional efforts to prevent plastic pollution. Contracting Parties also reinforced their commitments through more operational measures to tackle marine litter at source. A concrete example is the gradual elimination of single-use plastic bags across much of the Mediterranean, either through voluntary agreements or, more importantly, through targeted national legislation. Yet despite this progress, the key issue now is implementation, and this is where we are actively working with countries and partners to provide support and consolidate action on the ground. Following the COP24 declaration and decisions, we are working to better guide implementation and measure progress more effectively, while helping to address infrastructure gaps and uneven investment.

So yes, we are not there yet, but the region is clearly moving in the right direction.

Photo Credit: The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

TMR: What role do microplastics play in marine ecosystems, and what risks do they pose for human health?

TH: Microplastics are often invisible, but their presence and significance are now well established. They are found throughout the marine environment - in water, seafood, and across the ecosystem - highlighting the scale of the issue and the importance of continued action. While we are still deepening our understanding of their full long-term impacts, the knowledge we already have is driving stronger attention and response.

At the regional level, countries are intensifying cooperation on monitoring, which is helping us better understand how microplastics move and behave across water, sediments, and marine life, and is supporting more effective responses going forward.

In addition, microplastics can carry other pollutants or microorganisms, which reinforces the need for continued research and preventive measures. As for human health, studies are ongoing. We know exposure pathways exist, including through seafood, and this is precisely why a precautionary approach is applied, meaning we act while science continues to evolve, because the issue is already widespread.

TMR: Are there any innovative solutions or policies that could significantly reduce marine pollution in the next decade?

TH: Yes, there are, but only if we scale up what already works.

One of the biggest shifts we are seeing is the move toward a circular economy (reuse, repair, and recycle). That means designing waste out of the system from the beginning, not dealing with it at the end. A very important tool here is Extended Producer Responsibility. It basically means producers take responsibility for the entire life of their products. That encourages better design, reuse, and recycling.

We are also working, under the UNEP/MAP framework, to support major improvements in wastewater treatment in coastal areas, and to scale up action on agricultural pollution and nutrient runoff at the source. The parties have committed to strict standards in this respect. Another key step is reducing single-use plastics, not only through bans, but also through incentives and smarter market systems.

Increasingly, we also try to connect the dots, because climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are not separate issues. They must be addressed together. And technology is helping too. Satellite monitoring, AI tracking, and marine sensors are improving how we detect and respond to pollution. But of course, none of this works without sustainable financing.

That cooperation is absolutely essential.

TMR: How can individuals, cultural institutions, and media platforms contribute meaningfully to raising awareness and driving change?

TH: A very important one, honestly, essential.

Protecting the Mediterranean can't be isolated or in silos. It is deeply cultural and behavioral.

Individuals can make a difference in very practical ways, especially by reducing waste and avoiding single-use plastics. Small actions matter when they are multiplied across millions of people. Cultural institutions are also key. They help translate science into stories people can feel, not just read.

That emotional connection is what makes issues real for society. And media platforms - like *The Madrid Review* - have a very powerful role. They connect science, storytelling, and public awareness. They help bring environmental issues out of policy rooms and into everyday conversation.

At the end of the day, this is not just about information. It is about values, behavior, and responsibility. As the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development clearly shows, real progress only happens when everyone is involved: governments, civil society, media, private sector, academia, and citizens.

As we mark today the World Oceans Day, this is a moment not only to reflect, but to act with ambition and urgency. Let us *REIMAGINE* our Mediterranean Sea as a healthy, resilient, and living system and *REIMAGINE* our relationship with it. A relationship that moves away from pollution and degradation, towards balance, responsibility, and respect for nature at the heart of our economies and ways of life. The future of the Mediterranean is still ours to shape, and it is a future we must choose to transform together.

UNEP/MAP works with governments, scientists, civil society organizations, and local communities across the Mediterranean to address marine pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate pressures through regional cooperation under the Barcelona Convention framework.

More information: [UNEP/MAP Mediterranean Action Plan](#)

BIOGRAPHIES POETRY

Luis Alemañ (Alicante, 1983) es educador social forense en la Fiscalía de Menores de Alicante y doctorando en Educación en la Universitat Jaume I. Fue codirector del Festival de Poesía y Performance Poe-kráticos (2012-2016). Es autor de *Animales heridos* (Amarante, 2019), *Del cuerpo y la memoria* (Franz, 2020), *Cruzar el Rubicón* (La Isla de Siltolá, 2022) y *El número que ha marcado no existe* (La Isla de Siltolá, 2024). Su obra ha sido incluida en diversas antologías colectivas, entre ellas *146 voces para que nunca nadie* (Universidad de Murcia, 2026). Ha sido finalista del XIII Premio Internacional de Poesía Jovellanos. Sus poemas se han publicado en revistas literarias como Anáfora, Mule, Digopalabra.txt, Alameda 39 e Invernadero.

Todd Turner is an award-winning Australian poet and master goldsmith. His work is published widely, including in Meanjin, The Australian, Southword and upcoming in Poetry London. He is the author of the collections *Woodsmoke* and *Thorn*, and his third volume, *Breathwork*, is forthcoming from Puncher & Wattmann in 2026.

Steve Denehan lives in Kildare, Ireland with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the award-winning author of two chapbooks and seven poetry collections.

Brought up in rural Staffordshire, Charles Penty is a journalist by profession and has lived and worked in Colombia, Brazil and Spain, as well as the UK. His poems have appeared in *The Poetry Review*, *Poetry News* and *PNReview*, among other publications.

Satya Bosman is co-editor at Black Cat Press. She has work in 14 Magazine, *The Lake*, *The Storms Journal*, *The Poetry Lighthouse*, *Porridge Magazine* and *Eche* amongst others. She won Third Prize in the Kent & Sussex Poetry Society folio competition 2025 and 2026 and was shortlisted for *The London Magazine Poetry Prize* 2026. Her debut collection *Dream Logic* published with Crumps Barn Studio in 2026. Her instagram handle is [@poetryandnightingales](#)

Carmella de Keyser is a prize-winning British poet, known for explorations of identity, and the liminal spaces of human experience. Founder of the Harlow Circle of Poetry Stanza, judge for the Harlow Poetry Open, she has two published chapbooks, and three books are forthcoming, from Hedgehog Press, Alien Buddha Press, Parlyaree Press and the Seventh Quarry Press.. She is on [X here](#) and [Blue Sky here](#) and her website is [here](#).

Laura Seymour's poetry has been published as a collection, *The Shark Cage* (Cinnamon Press 2015) which won the 2013 Cinnamon Press debut poetry collection prize. Individual poems have appeared in various journals including *Poetry Review*, *Poetry Wales*, *Poetry London*, *Acumen*, *Magma*, *MsLexia*, *The North*, *South*, *Glitterwolf*, and more, and most recently in the *Outskirts anthology of LGBTQ+ poetry* published for Pride 2025. She recently won the 2025 Waltham Forest Poetry Competition.

Emily Tee, originally from Northern Ireland, is a poet living in the UK Midlands. Reflections on nature and society often feature in her work, which appears in many places online and in print, most recently *Poetry Scotland* and anthologies by Yaffle Press, *The Poetry Lighthouse* and *Black Bough*. She volunteers with *The Wee Sparrow Poetry Press* and judges their ekphrastic challenges. Emily has a mini poetry pamphlet due with *Atomic Bohemian* in late 2026.

Gerard Smyth was born and lives in Dublin. He has published eleven collections of poetry, the most recent of which are *The Turn for Ithaca* and *The Sundays of Eternity* (both Dedalus Press). He is co-editor, with Pat Boran, of *If Ever You Go: A Map of Dublin in Poetry and Song* (Dedalus Press). [His website is here](#).

Lesley-Anne Evans is an Irish Canadian poet living in Kelowna, Canada. In 2024, she relocated to her birth city, Belfast, and received an MA in Poetry with distinction from the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen's University Belfast. *Mute Swan, Poems for Maria Queen of the World* (The St. Thomas Poetry Series, 2021) is Lesley-Anne's first full-length collection. Her second collection is forthcoming from Ronsdale Press in 2027. Lesley-Anne's poems appear in *EVENT Magazine*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Salzburg Review*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Banshee Lit Mag*, *Image Journal*, and elsewhere. She stewards Feeny Wood, a retreat for makers and spiritual seekers. [Her website is here](#).

Punyasloka Mohapatra is an India-based writer of poetry and short fiction whose work has appeared in *Merion West* and elsewhere. His writing draws on post-impressionist sensibilities to explore memory, displacement, war and its aftermath, and the fragile emotional landscapes of ordinary lives. Through lyrical and reflective narratives, he examines the complexities of human experience and the tensions between history, identity, and belonging. He works as a banker and is currently pursuing an MBA at the Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode.

Roger Camp is a former Marine NCO who daily walks the Seal Beach pier, muses over his orchids, spends afternoons playing blues piano and reads under an Angel's trumpet surrounded by a charm of hummingbirds. His poetry has appeared in numerous journals including *The Southern Poetry Review*, *Nimrod*, and *Scientific American Magazine*.

Thomas Saunders is a young poet from The United Kingdom. His work has appeared in places such as *Mindfork*, *Across the Margin*, and *The Gentian Journal*. [You can find him here](#).

Edward Lees lives in London. During the day he works to help the environment and in the evenings he writes poetry. His works have been accepted in various journals including *Southern Humanities Review*, *The Common Dispatches*, *Whale Road Review*, *Potomac Review*, and *Anthropocene Poetry Journal*. He has been nominated for Best of the Net. [His Substack is here](#).

Maria Taylor is a British Cypriot poet and reviewer who has been highly commended in the Forward Prizes. She has been widely published including poems and reviews in *The Guardian*, *Magma* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. Her first collection *Melanchrini* was shortlisted for the Michael Murphy Memorial Prize. Her most recent collection is *Dressing for the Afterlife* (Nine Arches Press).

Sophie Segura was born and grew up in Dublin, spent many years in Buenos Aires and currently lives with her partner and two children in the mountains outside Madrid. She has worked as an EFL teacher, clothing designer, magazine contributor and editor. Her poetry has been published in *Southword*, *Magma*, *Tears in the Fence* and elsewhere. Other writing, as Sophie Parker, has appeared in *The Irish Times* and *Time Out Buenos Aires*.

Clive Donovan has three poetry collections, *The Taste of Glass* (Cinnamon Press 2021), *Wound Up With Love* (Lapwing 2022) and *Movement of People* (Dempsey & Windle 2024) and is published in a wide variety of magazines including *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Crannog*, *Interpreters House*, *Madrid Review*, *Salzburg Review* and *Stand*. He lives in Totnes, Devon, UK. He was a Pushcart and Forward Prize nominee for 2022's best individual poems. His [Facebook](#) is here.

Erin Wilson's poems have appeared in *Southword*, *The North*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *B O D Y*, *takahē magazine*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Presence*, and elsewhere internationally. She has won a Pushcart and a Silver Medal with the National Magazine Awards in Canada. Her work appears in *Best Canadian Poetry 2026*. The Munster Literature Centre honoured her by highly commending a chapbook. She lives on Robinson-Huron Treaty Territory, in Northern Ontario, Canada, the traditional lands of the Anishnawbek. She is most at home amongst trees. She refuses to carry a cell phone.

Ursula Kelly is originally from Northern Ireland and currently lives in Benijofar on the Southern Costa Blanca. Having published when much younger, she returned to writing poetry after moving to Spain. She has had poems accepted by Acumen, Poetry Scotland, ARTEMISpoetry, Under the Radar, The Wild Umbrella and Ragaire. Her work was Commended in the 2024 Second Light Poetry Competition.

Shaun Barr is a poet, gardener and photographer based in Cumbria, UK. His most recent poems have been published in The Manchester Review, Dream Catcher, The Frogmore Papers, and Tar River Poetry (forthcoming). [He is on BlueSky here.](#)

Eleanor Davies was raised in Devon, England but now writes from her home in Edinburgh, where she also works as a doctor. Her writing is often inspired by dreams, bodies and the unconscious mind. Her writing is due to appear in the forthcoming book *This Modern Love Now*.

Joshua St. Claire is an accountant from a small town in Pennsylvania who works as a financial director for a non-profit. His haiku and related poetry have been published broadly including in Frogpond, Modern Haiku, The Heron's Nest, and Mayfly. He has received recognition in the following international contests/awards for his work in these forms: the Gerald Brady Memorial Senryu Award, the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Haiku Invitational, the San Francisco International Award for Senryu, the Robert Speiss Memorial Award, the Touchstone Award for Individual Haiku, the British Haiku Society Award for Haiku, and the Trailblazer Award.

Sarah Lindenbaum is a Midwest writer and book historian with a bachelor's degree in creative writing and a master's in library and information science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her essay on Bob Dylan and Shakespeare as self-conscious literary writers is forthcoming in 2026 by Cornell University Press. Most recently, she was an International Merit Award winner in the Atlanta Review 2025 International Poetry Competition and will appear in the upcoming *Winter in America* (Still volume, published by Carbonation Press).

Aidan Coyle is from northwest Ireland. He now lives near Paris with his husband. A recovering academic, he has enjoyed rediscovering his creativity through poetry. His work has appeared in Southword, Crannóg, Ragaire, The Belfast Review, The Stony Thursday Book, Pennine Platform and Prole, and in *Everyone Started Singing*, a 2026 anthology of poems about community edited by Jenny Mitchell. His translations into French of poems by the contemporary Irish poet Maureen Boyle have appeared in the Belgian literary review, Traversées.

Nayana Sivanandan is a writer based in Bangalore, India, drawn to the small, human moments that linger long after they pass. Her poetry has appeared in Wingless Dreamer, and her fiction in Columbia Journal and Modern Flash Fiction.

FLASH FICTION

Antonia Saavedra Díaz is a Spanish writer with a background in pharmacy, working between fiction, food writing, and literary experimentation. Her work often explores power, systems of care, and the quiet violence embedded in everyday rituals. She is the creator of the narrative universe Mari Estrella, where domestic spaces, kitchens, and institutions become sites of tension and transformation.

Her writing has appeared in The Madrid Review and other literary platforms. Antonia combines scientific precision, gastronomy, and professional practice with a literary voice attentive to structure, repetition, and moral ambiguity.

Geneviève Genicot is a Belgian poet and fiction writer based in Madrid, after periods of living and working in the UK, France, Italy, Portugal and Poland. Initially a lecturer in literature and sociology at university, she later worked as a playwright for a street theatre company, before becoming a published poet and fiction writer, performer, and editor of both fiction and academic texts. Her work explores journeys, cities, street poetry, and our relationship with machines and technology. She also leads creative writing workshops and literature seminars, introducing French and Belgian literature to international audiences.

Jeff Harvey lives in Madrid and edits [Gooseberry Pie Lit](#). His recent fiction is in Moon City Review, Ghost Parachute, MoonPark Review, trampset and many other litmags. His work has appeared on the Wingleaf Top 50 longlist and has been nominated for Best Microfiction. He's on [Twitter](#) and [BlueSky](#).

Marisa Mena (Navarra, España, 1963) Filóloga (UNAV), editora, especialista en tratamiento de textos. Su formación apunta a la práctica de la escritura, la edición y la fotografía. Codirectora de Editemos, firma consultora especializada en la producción de libros de arte y cultura, ha publicado narrativa, cuento y ensayo en libros, revistas y catálogos de arte. En el ámbito de la microficción, sus textos han integrado compilaciones y antologías dedicadas al género. Dicta charlas y talleres ligados a la práctica del lenguaje y la edición. Vive y trabaja entre España y Venezuela. [Instagram](#).

Enzo Farías Molina (Santiago de Chile, 1980). Escritor, poeta y cantautor. Su trabajo ha sido ampliamente reconocido en certámenes y concursos a nivel nacional. Durante 2024 participó del Taller Kenningar de la Fundación Pablo Neruda. Entre 2024 y 2025, varios de sus escritos fueron publicados en medios digitales nacionales e internacionales (Perú, México, Venezuela, España, Italia). En noviembre de 2025 funda Puerto Oscuro Ediciones Independientes, a través de la cual edita su primer libro: *Campos de Hielo* (2026). [Aquí está su blog](#).

Byron Browne was born and raised in Texas. After earning degrees from Texas Tech University and the University of Texas at Austin, he taught Latin and English for over twenty years at the Liberal Arts and Science Academy in Austin. His first book, [Driving Southwest Texas](#), was published in 2011 and the second, Spanish Missions of Texas, was published in 2017 with a translation, *Historia de las Misiones en Texas*, released in 2025. He and his wife, a Puerto Rican native, have lived in Madrid since 2019.

Kevin MacAlan is a returning contributor to the Madrid Review. He lives in rural Ireland, has an MA in creative writing, and has contributed to many journals, including The Brussels Review, The Belfast Review, An Áitiúil, Howl, The Martello, Wild Umbrella, and Drawn to the Light. He was shortlisted for The Yeovil Literary Prize in 2025. [He's on Bluesky here.](#)

Simon Firth is a writer from Morecambe Bay.

LUIS ALEMÁN

Sobre la arena mojada de la playa
ha aparecido el cadáver de un poema.
Filólogos reunidos estudian el caso.

A poco más de cien metros,
en el pinar,
una joven pareja en vano insiste
y rebusca
excitantes nuevas figuras entre las nubes.

SEARCHING

STEVE DENEHAN

I try
to lift the ocean
as a blanket
in my ongoing search
for meaning
but my hands
are small, and
no matter
how tightly
I hold
my fingers together
the water

just

keeps

on

running

through

THE CORMORANT

TODD TURNER

I move as if through water.
Step. Pause. Step.
The boat ramp is a slick of sluiced timber,

damp and salt-caked under my feet—
but no flinch. Instead, a shift—
a slow, blunt sidle to the right.

It isn't a retreat but a widening,
a threshold into another world.
I sit and begin the slow,

awkward drag, inching my weight,
palms flat to the grain.
Squat and braced, keeping the half-share,

trading my human walk
for this clumsy, terrestrial crawl.
Until we are settled,

each of us at the edge.
The wings are pinned open—
two dark, ribbed fans sculling the dawn air.

All neck and nerve—a winnowing,
a sudden tendon-flick of the spine,
the sharp beak scissoring a stray feather.

Below, the lake-skin dwindles its ripples.
Then the methodical, ancient ritual of the sun.
And for a moment we belong to the lake.

CHARLES PENTY

LATE SEPTEMBER SUNSET, ZAMBUJEIRA DO MAR

In the far reaches of the Portuguese
Atlantic off *Zambujeira*,
I watch

a blazing cave
fill with gold coins and ingots,
also the way

the glimmering road
that marks out the days
in blocks of lava

and lustrous metals,
and stretches across the whitecaps
towards me with its glowing carmine

calçada of Estremoz marble
and never-before observed
fuchsias and purples,

slides beneath the waves,
it seems, as I approach sixty,
numbering sunsets and the times left to describe

life's bathymetry,
the first terns and shearwaters from the north
arriving on the full tide,

so suddenly.

SATYA BOSMAN

ASSEMBLED PASSAGE

She rows
past the line of beach lamps
near *The House on the Strand*,
bright in the seaspray, bar one, winking its eye.

Her boat is borrowed
from *The Old Man and the Sea*,
so she knows it's sturdy.

Looks ahead,
takes an occasional bite of fish
(also borrowed)
which must last.

The tide is closing in.
Onward,
To the Lighthouse,
its white circle waiting in the sky.

LAURA SEYMOUR

MUSSELS

clacking and biting ropes
in buckets beside his van -
he left me there,
drawing the ropes
up and knotting them to the tailgate
every eight hours. Lowering the ropes
into the brine in the bucket
every eight hours.
Keeping the mussels fresh,
by mimicking the tide.

When the mussels swung,
dimming, above the water,
he would send me out
to 'pick up' drinks,
and we would all compete
trying to open the shells and lose:
our nails bent
back, our fingers dented
with their oval champ.

I boasted about hanging out there,
my life falling and lifting—beside the van
and away from the van—
I loved the underwater mussels best,
backstage curtains in a kit bag—

when they were
en su salsa
how they opened up
to wine, butter, cream.

SEA GLASS REQUIEM

CARMELLA DE KEYSER

pelagic mermaid tears thrust into an esplanade scrap yard
secrets swell to the shoreline
do you ever feel trapped between a conflict of hope and grief

prismatic cluster bomb pieces outsider syndrome
a scattering of opalescent litter
where is home when you belong everywhere and nowhere concurrently

discarded border dust as smooth as dead elephant bone
we suffuse in drunk tank pink confused disoriented
dear zeus were we ever even whole

and though heliophiles admire us our broken beauty
edgeless and blunt harlequin green and cobalt blue
etches of crescents frosted in lime
we are rolling into an undertow of suspension
a syncopation of stained-glass exiles
fracture and healing is a waiting game
stateless
the beach not sanctuary but resettlement
there is a barbarous loneliness in the boundary between the land and the sea
and what are all our broken pieces worth

and though in new gossamer lands we integrate into different arrhythmias
a popsicle squeeze and bubble-gum swell smack and drop crush and lust
will our souls ever return to their initial omnitude

we asymmetric castaways in perpetuity float
as morning jazz iridescent atonal
broken bottles
transfigured
within the drink of the opium sea

a requiem of universal glass graffiti

ROCK POOLS ON THE NORTH ATLANTIC COAST OF NORTHERN IRELAND

EMILY TEE

Today's a cool grey mid June day, not cold as such,
there's humidity waiting in the wings to bubble up.
It takes me back to childhood summer days by the sea.
Long sandy strands were my favourite, on the golden coast,
but White Park Bay's rocky shoreline held the rock pools.

Always there was fun with a small net on a bamboo pole
seeking small sea creatures that moved too quickly to catch
but that wasn't really the point, it was the pottering and puddling,
mixing the sand in those small cauldron pools into a soup,
adding small smooth egg-shaped pebbles of cream limestone,
stirring in seaweed, green strings of kelp, edible red dulse
and popping bladderwrack's warts on its slimy dark green skin,
hands stinking of the reek and the salty brine of the Atlantic
that would leave a low tide white rime on the dark basalt rocks
edging the pools. With a cloudless sky and the right kind of light
they would gleam such a deep purple from a short distance,
luminous against the black volcanic lichen-speckled basalt.

Shells were there to harvest, but rumoured fossils we never found
except we saw the markings on the sea stones and told ourselves
that they might have been a sea inhabitant millions of years ago,
back in that prehistoric time when humans hadn't yet evolved
from fish-like creatures that somehow crawled onto the dry land.
Sometimes I wonder how far we've really come since then.

A CROSSING, 1975

GERARD SMYTH

When the ferry was on the sea but still not far from land
I began to notice those around me:
Some travelling light, some carrying baggage,
a few with nothing to bring.
I was hoping to see a face, hear a voice
I might recognise but all were strangers
with blank faces, turning their backs
to the never-changing past.
Halfway or thereabouts the seabirds vanished.
We seemed to be neither here nor there,
coming or going, the sea recalcitrant, until at last
we were moving quicker than the drift of the wind,
closer to an England of rose gardens,
bridges of steel, graves kept clean in the war cemeteries.

TANLEQUAH THE ORCA CARRIED HER DEAD
CALF TAIL ON HER HEAD FOR SEVENTEEN
DAYS AND A THOUSAND MILES

LESLEY-ANNE EVANS

In memory of Jimmy Scantland

You're three days gone and I'm going
to hop a train with a dozen white roses

wrapped in kraft paper and descend
to the crescent of Helen's Bay. I'll fold

my clothes in a neat stack, wade into the sea
with my bouquet. And I haven't thought

it through much more than that, but
I want to go in all the way, up to my neck

over my head and ears. I want to hear
whale song but I don't know if I can bear

the cold. I'll tear the petals from the roses
and float them like Japanese prayer boats.

MINUTES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF THIRST

PUNYASLOKA MOHAPATRA

I keep hearing water.

Not outside—
inside the walls,
inside my head.

At first, I thought it was the pipes.
They've been unreliable before.

Now I'm not so sure.

I wake up certain
someone left a tap running.

I follow the sound
to a dry sink.

It doesn't stop.

The war, they say, is still going on.
I think it's just changed shape.

It moves like water—
shows up where it wants,
slips through things we thought were solid.

Yesterday, I tried to cup my hands
under nothing.
Held them there
longer than I should have.

No one mentioned it.

We don't mention a lot of things now.

The buckets are still lined up outside.
Empty, but patient.

A man swore he heard rain last night.
We almost believed him.

I laughed.
It sounded wrong,
like something cracking.

The news keeps talking—
strategy, control, progress—

I keep thinking
if they can hear what I hear.

A steady dripping.
Not loud. Just enough

to make you turn your head.
Sometimes it's close—

right behind me.
Sometimes it's far,
like it's remembering me.

I tried to sleep through it.
Dreamt of water
and woke up thirsty.

That felt unfair.

This morning, I drank slowly,
just in case it was the last time
my hands understood what to do.

The sound is back now.

I'm not following it anymore.

Let it come closer.

Let it fill the room
if it wants.

At least then
I won't have to imagine it.

FINDING MY SEALEGS

ROGER CAMP

It's my first time fishing
in forty years
the half-day boat nudging
the pier's rosary
of bald tires.

Finding my sea legs
I fish from the same spot
my father showed me
as a child.
The boat anchors

close to shore
the cliffs shrouded in fog
the tangled kelp rising rhythmically
in the flat gray light,
home

to the white sea bass we seek.
Unlike the anchovies of my youth
the bait is baby squid
its manzanita red mantle
melts into my hand

while jetting between my fingers.
Its enormous eye entrances
as black ink squirts into the sea.
The skipper's laconic voice
soothing our lack of strikes

the bait boys eager
gaffing a fish, untangling lines
tying a knot
when I am unable to find my glasses.
The trek from the bait tank

a gauntlet of tackle, a deck slippery
with entrails and silver scales.
Unsteadied by age
my hand teems with life
returning

to take my father's place.

DRESSED IN BLUE

EDWARD LEES

There is a cloudless sky, an ocean, and a boy.
The life of the mid-morning light
turns the world into a still spectator.
The boy lays on the beach, bathed in blue
from the sky and the ocean,
feeling the bright warmth on closed lids
that comes from above.

Like the boy, the light sheds its skin.
As it travels, it gets knocked around,
has to adapt to the world around it.
What we see is what is cast off.
The blue is lost light and the boy is scattered like the sky.
In this way we resemble the world:
whatever was whole is decomposed into pieces.

The ocean meanwhile has had a chance
to observe the sky and adjust.
It does not resist but absorbs what it can,
the reds and yellows, the fiery passions.
It continues to accept the light into itself,
cooler and more tranquil now,
ever darker in its depths, as if reclaiming what was lost.

Where the sky and ocean meet,
at his feet, there is a recurring conversation.
He listens but hears only an untranslated thrum.
He returns for many years to decipher it,
sensing the start of an answer in the merged horizon.
His trips shorten to make room for work.
He dresses in blue.

ON THE BEACH

THOMAS SAUNDERS

On the beach, watching the waves undulate
and the seagulls wheel high up above,
calling everything by its true name —

history seems so far away, the past
a towered castle on the other side of time:
the troubled flesh-dealer heritage

of my life is as distant
as a sea thick with white sails,
a muddy English field adorned in frost,

its cargo below contained by barbed
wire fence chains, black sheep
heading for hard work and slaughter.

The present is cloudy red with blood.
Yet here I am safe from the swirling madness
of prejudice, lost and complete.

We do not comprehend our wrongs until
they are placed before us: either gently,
warily like a shiny pirate ship

placed before a child, the parents not knowing
how they will react; or plonked
on our laps like a child's rejection.

All I want is to not be viewed
as having a head-start, to begin
in amongst the dirt like everyone else.

*

Sometimes I am an outsider in my own
body. Sometimes I am filled
with rage, a storm spitting untruths.

Most days I am sceptic, cynic.
I stand on this beach and feel
the wind point its blame.

*

The two bridges stream
away from England, arterial,
across the sea towards the hazy landmass

of Wales. Did Coleridge once
stand here, back when it looked
very different, and felt a kind of peace?

Probably not: but even so I like
this feeling of being on the edge of things,
alone and forgotten by the world.

The faeces-moulded mud, the jut and jab
of spear-headed rocks: it shows my smallness.
I don't mind. All rivers have an ocean to get lost in.

THE SEA ALWAYS COMES BACK

MARIA TAYLOR

My mother took a stone from the beach
of her childhood, unaware of trouble to come.
She kept it in a souvenir box
decorated with the silent mouths of cowrie shells.

A plain stone, its bulk sculpted
by rough salt-water. It looked smooth
though it felt jagged in the hand.

Trouble happened, a lost home and ocean.
She'd open the box, inviting a bright ghost of water
into our land-locked lives.

Years later, after showing passports at a checkpoint,
the miles of unmarked, dirt-track roads
that flared up into clouds of red dust,
we found the sea's horizon and stepped into its light.

I ran a finger over the briny hump-back rocks
at Neraides and Chelones,
coves named after sea-nymphs and turtles.
The past finger-slipped into the present.

Brightness, lustre, even from stone –
we keep the ocean in a box.

STRANGE BEAST

SOPHIE SECURA

It was always there in my childhood home, poking its nose out from behind the curtains, lurking outside when banished from the sitting-room, perking up when the radio was tuned to somewhere between Indreabhán and An Cheathrú Rua.

It had followed my mother from birth; it rode the train with her from Gaillimh to Dublin, stowed away on the ferry to Holyhead and back. She couldn't shake it.

It came with us on foreign holidays, to family restaurants with checkered tablecloths and mini-Union Jacks stabbed ceremoniously through our undercooked *steaks hachés*.

We were never to get too attached. It was on its last legs they said. It reeked of bog-holes and hedge bottoms, had become a nuisance, an embarrassment. And yet it persisted in dragging a half-dead thing—a gift—to our doorstep.

By the time I left home we still hadn't named it.

*

A decade passed. One night I thought I saw it circling the bins outside my Buenos Aires flat. Fuera! I cried. But it stayed put, returned my gaze—no cowering now—and howled.

It's been here since. It rubs its scent around the house, sprawls on the couch between me and my boyfriend, provokes admiring comments in the park. It sleeps with its paws on my throat and its rump in my childhood.

I've named it.

THE CROSSING

ERIN WISON

I had never seen anything quite like it. Sustained for ten to fifteen minutes, probably twice a minute, over and over, sheet lightning lit the dome of night. I was driving through pouring rain, the rain increasing, then (how?) increasing again in volume as though someone were tinkering with a soundboard, seeing how much of the amplified storm we could endure. I gripped my steering wheel tightly, galvanized by each charged moment. Then what was left of my headlights (whose light was being hammered to the earth by rain) passed over, dimly touching the broad bodies of deer crossing ahead. They seemed more concerned with the lightning and the force of the downpour than with traffic. I'm not sure they noticed any of us were real. They were colourless and slow, consistent in their walking, passing from one side of the road to the other, veil, through veil, to veil. I thought of you and I and how we talk with one another, how we drop our dark faces, how our words are much like night's green leaves handling water. Veil, through veil, to veil, through the deluge, I thought of our whispered words.

A WORLD OF ONLY SEA

CLIVE DONOVAN

What would it be like as a world of only sea?
A world of deep, heavy, regular swells,
Of species in communion,
Maybe whales the dominant race,
Their rôle to be corrupted – taint oceans
With religious tracts and wars.

Or perhaps the whole sea evolves
To an immense, wide, planetary brain:
Plankton neurones link the globe,
Knowledgeable corals store its memories,
Diligent dolphins plough fresh their questions
And, with the huge fin-powered stability of fish,
Serene shoals drift with conspicuous intelligence
Accepting homage from anemones
As they pass.

But how would it be without hard land?
Without some freakish rock to hurl and dash and break
Upon? Oh soul of water!
Would you not know the agonies of separation?
Hiss and thunder, milky foam?
Dazzling rainbows in showers of spray?

Yes, you know well the deep ordered swell
That covers and conquers all
But your heart has never been smashed or seduced
By a grateful rock that gladly bursts
Open to receive you, letting you grind
And scrape and rub together making children,
Sifting, sorting, ever shuffling,
Ever refining crystal children.

*And at last upon that new-born land
Would scattered furrows mark and score the sand:
Unsteady fish tails dragged in grit
Between paired prints of inquisitive feet...*

BEACHED

URSULA KELLY

It was when he hid my overcoat, then I knew
I wasn't going anywhere, anytime soon.
I'd said too much. He feared the backwash of my life,
had wanted me to cast off from the past, forget
the slap and suck of water on my skin.
And I'd been willing. His net had saved me.
Trussed in knots of gratitude, I did not give a single thought
to my coat, that he was peeling off
when he carried me onshore.

But this year when the wind came from the sea,
I breathed the bitter tang of stinging sleet and spray.
I sensed a creeping dryness in my flesh,
and howled frustrated tears to be earthbound.
I see our sons range round me like ungainly trees,
loose-limbed, but still implacably rooted
in this land that is not mine
with a language I could never speak
and barely understand.

I do not think he'll ever let me go
and sometimes doubt I could go, if he did.
Affection casts a haar around us both.
These days I bite my tongue and persevere
with a watery smile and clamminess of touch.
He knows I know. And that I'll never ask.
He hears me hunting through the house at night,
turning out the cupboards, softly searching
for the proof of who I was, before my landing.

They say I have no soul to trouble me,
so I cannot feel their mortal fears or pains.
But always now on waking I am sick
with curdled craving, buttermilk
that's long soured in my mouth.
I carry this dank longing close,
encircling a shoal of want,
poised to close my eyes
and swim into the day.

BEACHED

SHAUN BARR

It seems to happen slowly:
whales tricked by a light or sound
they're pulled towards, mapped
and mistaken for something else,

a navigational mishap maybe, or the false
sense of security a whole ocean gives you:
far-off horizons and unimaginable depths,
boundaries no more than a blurred sense

of casual belief in limitations;
an easy willingness to trust
in a world that exists
without endings.

Rapt by a sudden warmth of sunlit
shallows, the novelty of the new,
realisation comes late
and soon gives way

to floundering and the thrash and flail
of fins. Until gravity grips,
a pressure pushes in,
crushes life out.

Gone is the grace of their slow-motion
fluidity, morphed into a mass of bodies
stranded like strange boats, strewn over
the sands for what seems like miles.

Watching the aftermath on a TV screen
we puzzle over why so many end up here.
They say it can be the senility of just one,
the confusion old age can bring.

But so tight the family ties, so bonded the generations,
the rest are bound to follow headlong into harm.
We turn from the screen distraught, wondering
when (though neither of us can say it out loud)

the mass death of other families bound together —
children, mothers, and fathers — stopped hitting us
like this; how a scene of dead whales shocks us more.
Stays with us longer.

STARGAZER
ELEANOR DAVIES

My head is underwater; my eyes scan the seabed.
I lie perfectly still. My eyes and mouth are exposed
only because they have to be—I would rather be swallowed
in my fullness.

There are so many men, I think I might drown.
They watch me. When I emerge, dripping, I leave my body
to gaze at myself from inside their misshapen skulls.
I carry on as if nothing happened.

In dreams, a body of water morphs from sea to lake to bathtub
the same way the body of man morphs from lover to assailant
to fish. My face is grotesque and calcifying.
Any day now I'm expecting to grow gills.

ENDS THIS STRANGE, EVENTFUL HISTORY
SARAH LINDENBAUM

In the Miocene epoch, the first rails sprouted wings.
Herons waded in the shallows of vast basins.
You might see an owl in the daytime,
the size of an eagle, gripping a tree limb.

In the grasslands were bone-crushing dogs
and low-slung rhinocerotids.
The forest horse had supplanted the dawn horse,
and Ambulocetus wavered between land and sea.

Miocene is from the Greek, meaning less recent.
Heraclitus said everything flows, and nothing stays,
but time is not a river unless it courses backwards.
It is now understood to be a landscape, the past in one valley,
the present in another, the future high up on a nearby ridge.

Call back the rails and the owls. Call back the walking whale and Lazarus's crocodile.
Call back the rude prototypes, the dog-like horses and the horse-like dogs.
Call back the carnassial dog-bears, the cud-chewing pigs, the non-marsupials,
the feliforms and elephantimorphs, the ladder-horned ungulates and terror birds,
the first requiem sharks, the aberrant toothless things, the gravel beasts.
Call back the creatures known only from a broken mandible or single bicuspid.
Call them back to the boiled seas, the diminishing rivers, the burnt acres,
the arid lands, the dense and blinding warmth.

Call back all the extinct orders but leave out the highest. The hot earth is ready for its old
inhabitants.

OCEAN HAIKU
JOSHUA ST CLAIRE

seaspray world
three ring-billed gulls
pecking at coquina

menhaden
a lituus
of brown pelicans

storm warning
the stuttering
wings of terns

salt gales the celadon horizon

the golden hour silhouette of an ibis

whitecaps
the underbelly
of a ring-bill

storm coming
the loop loop loop
of a white tern

across the face
of the waters
three brown pelicans

the sound of distance contracting nightwaves

gracklesheen
the Atlantic slides
into night

A SUNSET DIVINE
NAYANA SIVANANDAN

Standing into the mouth of the sea
Like many other along with me
Enjoying the mild breeze and calm sun
A prelude to a beautiful sunset
I walked on the manmade breakwaters
A pavement into the sea, gigantic rocks
Natural and manmade ones piled on one side of it
Courageous ones climbed over the rocks
Reckless ones ran through them wild
While I stood timidly in those paved path
Feeling the rocking of the sea
One side the sea was mild like a lake
plastics has washed up to its shore
Two fair cranes stood in one leg dishing through those floats
A lonely man, with water up to his stomach, was with his long nets
Trying luck on the placid waters
His friends standing in the shore watching him closely
There was nothing more interesting than this.
Boys were playing hide and seek
Who were long past their age for that game
Everything was right in this place.

A lonely woman and her grandson sat on a big rock
Watching the sun turn from orange to red
Her face was stoic, an untold pain
Which she shared only with the setting sun
Her grandson sat near his silent grandma
As if he too silently knows her pain
He sat there alongside her, turning his head in between

There were gangs of people, fun frolic youth
Came as a gang or a colorful family
All loud and competing to show who was more fun
Ignoring all of these, sea smashed into the rocks
As if it was a game she would never get bored of
Her admirers were awe struck
She again came running towards the rocks
From where I stood the sea looked strange
As if she was hiding someone or something
Something wanted to come out of the sea
And she was trying her best to keep it at bay
Sun laid his orange carpet over the sea to welcome it
A white and red spiral lighthouse afar
Was beaconing for its journey
A lonely boat and its passenger unknown to all these
Floated aboard looking at the crowd in the breakwaters
An arrogant eagle flew too low
Lower than the many crows in the golden sky
Nothing came up from the sea
Even though she looked brimming
I looked at the sea and at the sun
And the lighthouse and at a mystique silhouette of a tree
I knew it was time for me to leave
I gathered the pretty shells of memories
And locked in my fist tightly
I knew it was time to go
Leaving behind the remains of a divine sunset

NO PINGS

ANTONIA SAAVEDRA DÍAZ

"Calm sea," the captain said, and the word sounded like luck. It was the first thing that didn't belong. Mari Estrella had been staring at the horizon for hours. She knew that kind of stillness was never a good sign. The ocean doesn't go flat without a reason—too smooth, too watchful. Salt crusted the rails. Diesel clung to their sleeves. "Good night to cross," the captain added. "No traffic. No pings." There were six of us aboard, sitting on our bags. Two orange life vests lay under the bench. Nobody answered. The boat moved slowly, cutting a surface so smooth it looked manufactured. No waves. No wind. The engine sounded indecent, and the water took the noise without answering. "Is it always like this?" someone asked. "No," the captain said. "Only when it doesn't want company. Or witnesses." He smiled, then added, almost kindly: "It prefers balance." At midnight the sonar beeped once. The captain glanced at the screen. "Fish," he said, too fast. Then he muted it. Even muted, a low pulse travelled through the hull—machinery refusing our rhythm. That was when the water began to darken. Not at once—gradually, as though something vast slid beneath us and took the light with it. Mari leaned over the railing. "Don't stare too long," the captain said. "The sea stares back. It keeps what it measures." The engine coughed, then died. A silence with weight. "Start it," someone said. "It's fine," the captain said. "We'll drift." But the boat didn't drift. It held perfectly still—too still. "Are we anchored?" Mari asked. "There's no bottom here." The water moved. Not on the surface. From below. As if something were breathing, and the ocean were its thin skin. Someone gagged, turned away, and wiped their mouth with the back of their hand. "It's a current," the captain said, too quickly. The boat creaked—not like wood, but like something yielding. "What's under us?" Mari asked. The captain didn't answer. He looked down. Then stepped back. "Don't lean over," he said. "Whatever happens—don't interrupt it." The water rose without a splash. The boat tilted. "What if we jump?" No one answered. Because by then it was clear—the boat wasn't drifting. It was being held in place. Measured. Mari looked again.

For an instant, she saw something without shape. Not eyes, not a mouth—only a pressure, a focus, the sense of being accounted for. Not for weight, but for what they carried: fuel, heat, noise, plastic—things that never left. Then she understood. The ocean wasn't trying to sink them. It was correcting. Someone moved. Not a decision—more like a release. They climbed the rail and let go. No splash. Only a dull sound—like something sliding into a space already made for it. The engine started on its own. No one spoke. The captain adjusted the course without looking back. And Mari understood, with a clarity older than fear: there had never been six.

EPIC BLOOM

GENEVÈVE GENICOT

She still wears pieces of the night on her skin as she slips out onto the balcony, a glass of water in her hand. From the terrace where I'm drinking my coffee, there's no telling what plants she's grown in the window box. With a confident gesture, she waters the earth, then disappears into the sheer fabric of her camisole. What are these plants, these shoots that receive the kiss of clear water from an anxious lover in the morning? The seeds in the earth are a secret. Interrupting my Saturday morning meditation, a passer-by enters my field of vision, walking past the terrace on Calle de Argumosa. On her pale green T-shirt, out of impatience, large flowers have sprung up. I love their October scent, their eagerness to exist. Caring for things is a miracle; it's time, multiplied.

Excerpt from the ongoing series "Epic Madrid," where a careful look at reality reveals unexpected facts.

THE PUFFINS

JEFF HARVEY

A whirl of Puffins migrated to Nova Scotia from Greenland after foreign elements succeeded in changing fundamental rights for all species, causing the flock to lose their ancestral lands to an organization that built casinos, condos, and coffee shops. Most Puffins no longer made it to the age of four, the year they were to begin the mating process.

The Sinclair Puffins found a home in the courtyard next to Tim's apartment in suburban Halifax. Out for his morning walk, Tim met Cynthia Puffin as she was prancing about in the fountain with a minnow hanging from her lips, basking in her newfound safety, locating food for her family.

During neighbor appreciation week, Tim invited Sinclair Puffin to pose for a local photography class at the university. He awed the artists with his seventy-six centimeters wingspan and neon-orange beak and feet. A picture of him donned the cover of the local newspaper.

One night Tim heard a weeping sound and discovered the Sinclair Puffins, all covered in red plastic, gathered around the fountain. Their only Puffling, Octavia, had passed after mistaking a closed window for a new path to the harbor filled with her favorite sand eels. And adhering to Puffin culture, they honored her with three days of mourning followed by a family flight to sea to scatter her remains.

BATALLAS DE MAR Y TIERRA

MARISA MENA

La vi acercarse a la orilla aunque la resaca estaba fuerte. El sol hizo reflejo en ella y por un instante la dejó sin rostro. Entró al mar, al tiempo que una ola alta y encrespada la tambaleó para arrastrarla y hacerla desaparecer en un fluir espiral de mil vueltas. Mientras saltaba de mi puesto de vigilancia, estaría tragando agua y arena, la nariz y la garganta inundadas de sal que pica y escuece, sumergida ya en esa otra dimensión ondulante donde hay otros rumores, distintas frecuencias, entre las que seguirían las volteretas y los golpes por la lucha en la que el propio océano se bate. La succión de afuera hacia adentro, de adentro hacia afuera, en un curso que adiviné indetenible y fatal, sin poder gritar ni sacar la cabeza ni domar el laberinto de burbujas. Más agua, más arena ganándole el cuerpo a la superficie, para por fin ceder a las profundidades y dejarse ir. Empeñado en vencer la marejada, logré asir aquel volumen que era ya del abismo y robárselo a la corriente, para llevarlo a salvo y tenderlo en la playa, inconsciente pero vivo, entre el murmullo sordo de muchas voces: Había bandera roja, ¿será que la chica no la vio?

MELODRAMA

ENZO FARIAS MOLINA

Aquella tarde de miércoles, que flechaba la mitad exacta del mes de marzo en el calendario, me planté frente al mar, con la insolencia y el desapego que solo un desdichado sabe tener. El astro mayor caía inevitablemente, pero aun destellaba algo de su crudeza. El reflejo de miles de cristales rotos sobre el agua me acribillaba la mirada. Parecía como si quisiera espantarme. A mí y a esa idea miserable que cargaba dentro del puño. La respiración agitada, el rostro amargo que ya no se parecía en nada al de antes. Vomitaba suspiros densos, como un planeta antiguo en formación, que acomoda lentamente sus placas, mucho antes que su núcleo empezara siquiera a entibiarse. Una sensación postrera asolaba mi desventura. Ya no tenía un idioma para hablar, ni una tierra donde habitar. En la mente y en las ganas crecía a largas zancadas la necesidad imperiosa de destruir la ciudad, junto a todos y cada uno de sus caprichos, de lo contrario, mi corazón correría serio peligro de incendiarse. Ya había pasado por estas zozobras antes, unas cuantas veces. No es saludable repetir.

A esas alturas, deseaba en el alma, y con todas mis fuerzas que el mar se recogiera y volviera hecho una interminable cadena de olas gigantes que arrasaran al mundo por completo. Que nos fulminara de una vez y nos borrara del mapa para siempre. Que se acabara el dolor y la miseria que sentía me estaban aplastando la existencia. Esperaba ansioso, como una navidad, la llegada de un terremoto que partiera en mil partes el planeta, creando abismos de sangre y fuego, por donde caer al infinito. Quedar a la deriva, flotando en medio del cosmos, mirando a la distancia el fin de la especie humana. Estar solo y liberado, en mitad de la nada, en pleno espacio sideral, entregado a mi suerte. Solo. Completamente solo.

Comencé a adentrarme de a poco al agua, despacito, con marcha corta y lenta. Las olas llegaban una tras otra, me tomaban dulcemente, invitándome con insistencia a ser parte de su morada. El agua a las rodillas, jovial, pero fría. Mientras escalaba hacia los muslos, sentí que todo comenzaba a mejorar. Al llegar a la cadera no hubo vuelta atrás. Cuando me cubrió los hombros, estuve completamente mojado y entregado. Volteé a dar una mirada final hacia la orilla y vi mi cuerpo desparramado en la arena, rodeado por la muchedumbre. Algunos corrían de un lado para otro, había quienes gritaban en medio de aquella locura. Otros lloraban—sé bien quienes—, en tanto la estridencia ahogada de la sirena de una ambulancia se podía oír a lo lejos. Desorden y caos en el litoral.

Seguí adelante y me sumergí. Cerré los ojos y dejé que la corriente submarina arrastrara mi carne y huesos. Inmerso entre variedad de peces y la vasta flora abisal, ya era libre y pleno. Tenía paz. Al fin podía tener paz, pues ahora, ya era una criatura del mar. Del profundo mar.

JUST THE ONE

BYRON BROWNE

Then there was this time in Pensacola. Water so blue you'd think the sky fell to the ground. Sand white as a blank page. Goddamn postcard. We hadn't intended to stop there, but that view, it sorta' pulls you in.

I don't remember how old he was. Single digits. Small enough for a wave to roll like a clot of sand, young enough to feel that getting mugged by the ocean was fucking hilarious. After the sea, we ate fried chicken and strawberries at some shack up the highway. Later while we were still trying to get there, I hear this squeal from the backseat, "There's a seashell in my underwear!" He held it up so I could see it in the rearview mirror. From his smile, you'd think he'd found a doubloon. We both laughed like madmen for about 100 miles.

That's a great story. How many kids you got?

Just the one... just the one. Anyway, a couple of days later we're crossing the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and traffic is slow as Christmas. I'm thinking that's just the way it is, but no. At the middle of the bridge the cars just calcify on the asphalt. There're all these police cars cramming the space. And then we see a woman perched on the railing, feet together, legs stiff as boards, her hands wrapped around a cable. She's leaning out over the bay- a lost sail caught in the bridge's trusswork. There's a priest and about a dozen cops all huddled, staring up at her. The priest is talking but we can't hear. The traffic creeping by so slowly you can make out the colour of the woman's glasses.

So, we get past and neither of us says a thing for like five miles. Then the boy says, "She was thinking about jumping, wasn't she?" I didn't expect that. I mean, what do you say? My brain is dancing for some answer, but I got nothing. Finally, I just decide on the truth. "Yes, I suppose she was", I say. The boy doesn't answer. He just looks out the window, watching the water. Half an hour later he's playing with his toys again and never says word one about the bridge.

That's a rough lesson for a kid.

You're right. At the time that's what I thought, too.

You still talk with him much?

Nah, it's been a while since we've seen each other.

Maybe you should call him.

Yeah, maybe I should. He's out there somewhere.

HOUSEBOUND

KEVIN MACALAN

It was a day too beautiful to be cooped up at home, but this was Mr Peabody's world now. He could not come and go. He could not visit his friends. Heck, he couldn't even talk to his neighbours over the garden fence without a lot of yelling and recrimination. He felt stifled. He had a live-in carer, a kind but intrinsically lazy man called Patrick. You'd think Mr Peabody could simply ask to go out and Patrick would see to it. I mean, who worked for whom? But Patrick always thought he knew best, and these days Mr Peabody wasn't so agile. He was often short of breath, and he was plagued by arthritis, so Patrick argued that it was for his own good that they rarely left the confines of the house.

Today's conditions were exceptional. An unrelenting breeze, warm and welcoming, coming from the south, brought ozone filtered over the seaweed-strewn beach which lay just a kilometre away. It passed through the birch and alder trees that skirted the shoreline, and delivered a jamboree of intoxicating scents to the veranda at the back of Mr Peabody's house. The dark wood decking, sun-drenched and radiating, still bore traces of petrichor from yesterday's rain. Mr Peabody had turned the soil in the garden's flowerbeds while it was loosened by the damp, and the anticipation of spring brought a gladness to his spirit which eased his aging limbs. Yes, he was tired, but days like these were precious. He needed to go down to the sea.

A brief doze on the veranda did nothing to null his hankering. He ached to stretch his legs striding out on the rippled sand exposed by a receding tide. Mr Peabody didn't drive. Patrick did. And Patrick had a car, an ugly brute of a tin box on wheels that smelled of oil leaks and growled like a bear, but Mr Peabody knew this motorised shed could whisk him down to the coast in a matter of minutes. Of course, Mr Peabody also knew, that unless the idea came from Patrick himself, they'd be going nowhere. It was never wise to challenge Patrick directly, the man would dig in, and double down on whatever method of passing time required the least effort.

Accepting another day imprisoned, Mr Peabody went to the kitchen to find himself a drink. He noticed Patrick's car keys and imagined 'borrowing' the car. He knew this wasn't really feasible, but there had to be a way to manipulate Patrick into thinking about taking a daytrip. The ocean beckoned.

Mr Peabody picked up Patrick's keys and slipped into the lounge. Patrick was seated on the sofa turning the pages of a newspaper laid out on the adjacent coffee table. When Patrick left the room, briefly, Mr Peabody ambled over to where Patrick had been, and hid the car keys under the next page Patrick would turn. This was bound to work.

Mr Peabody sat panting, wagging his tail in anticipation.

RINGO'S DESCENT

SIMON FIRTH

Without realising, I fell out of my own life. It was in the Río de la Plata. I was on the ferry to Montevideo, when I had the sudden impulse to throw myself overboard. I sank through the water extremely artistically, and settled in an octopus's garden. Naturally, Ringo Starr, or possibly his double, was already there, reclining in the shade, wondering if there was any point in trying to get back out.

By nature I'm very shy. Thankfully, Ringo talked a lot. He told me he'd always wanted to go to Argentina. It seemed like such a mysterious place. He'd heard about the time four young men from Florida had grown their hair out and toured South America as the American Beatles. When they came out from behind the curtain at a gig in Buenos Aires, a little girl who'd been going completely nuts started crying her eyes out. Ringo found this very funny. I raised an eyebrow, as if to ask: why? He peered at me and said: how do you think I ended up here? I didn't understand what that had to do with anything. He laughed, a booming laugh that made my ears pop, and then talked about his childhood: years of lying in a giant greenhouse while his stomach ripped itself to shreds, teaching himself drums on biscuit tins.

He recalled other conversations in the garden. He'd talked to Isaac Newton, hunched over a rock at the end of the garden, staring at the needle of his compass on the seabed. He met with a creature who belonged to a black lagoon but had gotten lost, maybe on purpose. The creature was having relationship problems. He was in love with a woman who loved him too, but they couldn't be together due to social incompatibilities. Now the point of their relationship was for her to wait and him to be lost.

One evening I asked Ringo: where's the octopus? He's away, Ringo said. He's an odd lad. I did go into the den once. There's something like a sarcophagus in the dining room. I stood in the doorway and looked at it for a while. Then I came back outside. Also, it's not a house: it's a den.

I didn't ever go into the den, but I dreamed about it. And it was in a dream one evening that I felt the sudden sensation of choking. When I opened my eyes I was rising. Ringo was holding on to my leg. He had a firm grip. Over the edge of the coral, I could just about see a huge red creature drifting with a deathly saunter towards the den.

I can't swim, I heard myself say. Can you?

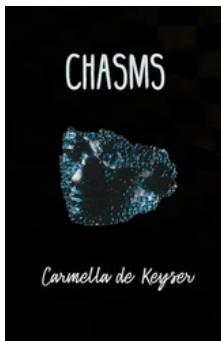
I don't know, Ringo said. What's that got to do with anything?

He laughed, that thunderous laugh of his, which propelled me to the surface and him back down to the seabed, where I presumed the octopus was waiting expectantly for his return.

RECOMMENDED READS



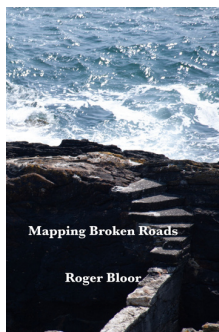
Why the Trumpet is Blue is a searing, unflinching collection that transforms personal trauma into luminous, hard-won beauty. With emotional intensity reminiscent of Plath yet wholly its own, Koester's poetry navigates childhood neglect, grief, and maternal absence with courage and precision. Nature becomes 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. [Have a look here.](#)



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. [See it here.](#)



#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. [Find out more here.](#)



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. [See it here.](#)

