

Lesley Harrison

Disappearance
—north sea poems—

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2020 by
Shearsman Books
P.O. Box 4239
Swindon
SN3 9FN

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB
(this address not for correspondence)

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-698-1

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Fare forward, voyagers!
All old men are explorers.

SAMPLER

BIRDS OF THE NORTH SEA

An invocation, using birds' names as they alter during passage or along migration routes between Orkney, Shetland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Svalbard. To be read aloud.

<i>arctic skua</i>	tyvjo – aulin – kjove – kjói -tyvjo
<i>arctic tern</i>	ritto – tirrick – kría -kyst
<i>black guillemot</i>	teistie – tystie – tjest – peiste -teist
<i>curlew</i>	whaup – whaup –wulp
<i>golden plover</i>	weeo – hjele – ló – heilo
<i>great northern diver</i>	emmer – immer gös – imbre – lómr –islom
<i>gull</i>	meeuw – maa – måge – máfur -måke
<i>lapwing</i>	kievit – teeick – whippo –vibe
<i>long tailed duck</i>	ijseend - calloo – havelle –hávella
<i>oystercatcher</i>	skeldro – shalder – tjaldr –chaldro
<i>razorbill</i>	alk – wylkie – álka – alle -apparluk
<i>ringed plover</i>	sanloo – sinlick – sandiloo –sandlo

BARNACLE

In *Topographia Hibernica* (1187), Gerald of Wales described how he had seen geese hatching from mollusc shells.

like seaweeds attaching to timber,
wherein are these little lung creatures
all pendicle and mouthing

their hard beards filtering the tide,
a mouth cone, a soft sack of eggs
a dark bead, dormant, suspended;

until they split from their stump,
sleeking out ungloved
– half milt, half gargoyle –

and dive joyfully into the air, growing full
and certain, their pinbones ripening
creaking past in long, dry lines

dispersing in the vast
blind margin of the ocean.
Thus they become themselves at last.

TOPOPHILIA

*Saint Cuthbert (c. 634 – 687) spent his last years in seclusion
in a cell on the Northumbrian island of Inner Farne.*

i.

morning.

a cloud lifts, the island resolving
in a turn of ocean

the sparkling clink of waves on sand
sound, a living matter
sound illumined

a wave swallowing a rock pool,
the gulls, their sharp words
repeated and repeated

the god of my childhood
in the grey white sea noise
in the screech of seabirds.

ii.

Spring tide.

I walk into the sea's cold bloom,
its heft, its anonymity.

I trace my entire belief
in the viscera of salt and wind,
the natural fall of cloud.

here is only everything:
the secular ocean,
the crush and crush of new waves;

its motion brings peace,
the beach, its privacy and darkness
a relief from psalmody.

iii.
a round hull
knocking into hollows

the eider,
their broody pots of down

this bright space,
its salutary emptiness.

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iv.
a stone cell
hunkered on a rock.
quiet vacancy.

v.
gathering
in the green light of dawn

eider croon in the
hollows between waves

their white defined by
the darkness of the water

conscious points
in this inexhaustible space.

vi.
to dwell outside myself,
to live in the lived world
among snails and grasses

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in ordinary daylight
growing old, neither man nor woman
fasting in silence.

vii.
the dune slacks. beds of neat helleborine
watercress and elder.
the milk vetch, tight lipped.

viii.
otters pry in bedrock
puddling the sand, then vanishing completely
in the heavy green.

I love the disappearance –
the free power of waves,
the world that ends at the surface

the presences of stars in daylight.
the thin white moon.
the gannets, their slow ovation.

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CLOSE'S FISHERMEN'S CHART. SECTION 2. THE NORTH SEA.

London: Edward Stanford, 1905. Price 10/-

*Coming from the westward
a ship enters the true stream*

*the true stream will always carry a vessel
towards the North Foreland
, and from it when it is falling*

*except near the Coasts, where
it partakes the form of the land*

THE SEA BED

When taking soundings, it must be borne in mind, that the sea bed, like the land, consists of hills, valleys, plains of sand or mud, or rugged cliffs, sometimes with abrupt faces, at others with jagged sloping sides, or strewn with boulders, etc., etc. A single cast of lead might mislead a mariner, as it might happen to drop on a spot either much more shoal, or much deeper than the average soundings in the neighbourhood. This explains why fishermen find many soundings not shown on any chart.

Fishermen sound every yard of the sea under 200 fathoms in depth, and find nearly every shoal, reef, or deep hole in the sea. A Government surveying ship out at sea, only sounds a spot here and there, as a rule many miles apart. The distances can easily be ascertained by following the line of soundage and measuring the distance between each.

Note carefully the distance between the soundings on the chart you are using, and then plot your soundings accordingly on the chart. Experience has demonstrated that as a rule a series of soundings plotted on a chart at the same distance, agree within a fathom or two with those shown on a chart, even in deep water. In the case of a very foul bottom, the difference in the soundings may be even greater. But a navigator in such cases will of course use his commonsense.

**mud, dark, sand, shells, rock, hole, course, stones*

– ABERDEEN BANK – Buchan Deep – WITCH GROUND – SWATCHWAY –
THE GAT – LONG FORTIES *Fine Sand* –

WITCH HOLE

they leaned towards Denmark
divining the grey ship,
eyes hair streaming

moaning like gulls,
boiling cloud out of
a blue ordinary morning,

the new queen
buckled, puking in the squall
waves fizzing

at the keel –
the white bloom of water that
the ship fell through.

SAMPLER

UNST

this island
where grass grows like hair.

on days like this
you breathe through your skin.

THE GAT

gåos - tirrick - mallimak - svartbakr

Those lost at sea come back as birds.

– St MAGNUS GROUND – TURBOT BANK *Rough* – OTTER BANK SPRING &
SUMMER HALIBUT. COD. LING. WHEN CLEAR OF DOGFISH –

ST MAGNUS GROUND

snow falls
on the dark moor

the old ship groaning
like a tree.

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NUN'S ROCK

kneeling to bedrock –
entranced

almost overshadowed in the
sudden sea hole

biblically black,
her blunt head – her cowl – her silence