

I must go down...

I must go down to the seas again  
I'd really rather not  
I'm just a kid with a delicate tum  
But my dad wants to sail his yacht

He built it all himself, you know  
And loves to take it boating  
But I'm a little landlubber  
Who's seasick when he's floating

My brother seems to like it though,  
In fact he's pretty keen  
His face is glowing healthy red  
While mine's a bilious green

The voyage seems to last for hours,  
I can't wait till it's over  
But we've set off from Brighton  
And the destination's Dover

The weather's turning colder  
My hands begin to freeze  
But I can warm them on my head  
That's down between my knees

The boat just won't stop rolling  
The sea's got pretty rough  
Why won't they let me stay at home?  
"Enough!" I cry, "Enough!"

*Fifty years later...*

I must go down to the seas again  
I'd really rather not  
My wife likes swimming in the sea  
Whenever the weather's hot

Or even when it isn't:  
She's very tough, you know  
Happy to wear a bathing suit  
When the weather's ten below

"Why don't you come on in?" she says  
"It really isn't cold"  
I say I see an iceberg  
But no, she won't be told

I paddle somewhat gingerly,  
water up to my calves  
but she just plunges blithely in  
- she won't do things by halves

The water's turning colder  
My feet begin to freeze  
She says "You'll soon get used to it,  
Just do it for me – please?"

My eyes have started rolling  
I'm feeling pretty rough  
The water's reached above my legs!  
Enough!" I cry, "Enough!"

## **A Good Beach**

**Sand yachts skitter up and down  
Like insects, clattering dragonfly wings.  
The sand is flat; a good surface for wheels,  
Smooth, no rocks to impede progress.**

**The yachts race around one another joyfully,  
The wind whipping their sky blue sails.  
They celebrate the good beach with its perfect sand.**

**The surf is gentle, a good beach for paddling,  
It has a shallow, sloping shoreline, good for wading ashore.  
The pebbles on the beach are smooth and are the colour of eggs.  
They are sometimes stained with rust, like blood.**

**Where the beach ends, the land rises up  
In mangled, grassy tussocks.  
A military band can be heard faintly from the cemetery,  
The sound caught by the wind and  
Tossed over the sand.**

**A small group of old men look out over the beach, remembering.  
*La férocité dort sous le sable*  
The sand is no longer flat.  
The shells are made of brass and cleave the air.  
The wind and waves cannot be heard over the scream of artillery and the  
cries of the dying.**

**The waves never stop.  
The wind never stops.  
The sand re-forms smooth and clean with each tide.  
This is Omaha.**

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**I wrote this after a visit to Omaha beach in Northern France on the anniversary of D-Day in 2002. The beach really does look like this now.**

## **From Dunwich Heath Sunset**

**February late afternoon  
in low sun  
that covers the sand dunes  
where we stand above the sea.**

**The black buckled shape of us  
stretches out over the dune  
in advancing earth shadow.**

**We look towards  
the greying beach beneath us  
watch waves shattering  
against pebbles.**

**The white surf  
leaps and twists  
in the fists of the wind.  
With stolen sunlight  
flaring saffron and amber  
in the shallows.**

**We turn to warm our hands by it  
even after the sun has gone.**

**And still stand huddled together  
in the last light of the day  
now cupped in barbed branches  
of scattered Gorse bushes  
the yellow darts of petals  
dissolving slowly into night.**

**And from somewhere out there  
the restless surf  
almost lost on the wind  
a bell knelling the day to a close.**

## **Horses**

**Immense cloud mountains oppress the flinty sea  
Stirring the sky  
Restless jostling wavelets irritate the surface  
Like demented flies on a horse's shivering flank  
Sunlight turned down, dimmed, ready for the scene.**

**Cloud water released.  
Exodus from the air.  
Deluge, soaking the sand, denting the waves.  
The sea embraces the new ones,  
And soothes them with salt,  
All the while beating stones  
on the torn hem of the ragged land.**

**A battle of horses are coming  
Hammer of hooves branding the sand  
Frantic heart drum  
Storm wrenched manes whipping the crackling air**

**Gaping nostrils  
Eyes rolled wide  
Ears ironed flat  
Their mouths adorned with foam  
And the hot heave of breath.**

**I see then that I've been living on the edges of my life  
Peripheral vision, missing the point.  
The wide arc of the soul not invited in  
Waiting while the fabric thins and fades  
Afraid to gallop in the storm  
Afraid to place my footprints on the sand.**

## **Mussels at Whitstable**

**All that long August afternoon  
on the beach  
we watched the sea retreat  
out of the reach of the children  
who ran after it with dinghy's and lilo's  
kites and shrieks of laughter.  
But it beat them and they returned  
breathless and shivering  
to dry sand and towels.**

**Then we strolled out  
over the dregs of the sea  
onto the wet flat slap of sand  
until we stumbled across a sea field of mussels  
stretching out to the water line.**

**They lay knotted  
like black treasure  
spoils from an old pirate ship,  
clinging to stringy seaweed and rocks  
sheltered from the sea breeze  
and predator gulls.**

**So we bent to our work  
our bodies hooped to the beach  
plucked them sharp and hard  
into our hands  
gathering in the crop  
until we could carry our cache no more  
and bought them back  
to the dry rise of the beach.  
with black plastic bags, sacks and buckets.**

**And later after the sunset  
we boiled water, crushed garlic  
and poured strong French white wine over them  
and sat in the hush of the evening  
eating the summer soft  
salt sea sweet sting of mussels.**

**On Aldeburgh Beach**

**On Aldeburgh beach  
The crunch pebbles  
Drift and roll,  
Drift and roll,  
Shouldering each other  
For space.**

**On the watery sand beneath  
As the shifting mass  
Of mighty, rounded rock  
Heaves and settles  
Heaves and settles,  
The silvery salty water  
Slides and slips  
Between the seaweed-slimey stones  
And sandy creases.**

**Along this beach  
The marram grass  
Pushes through  
Spiking the sand  
With unexpected sharpness  
And through it,  
Long and straight,  
Runs the sandy path to  
Southwold...  
A place of sometime silent  
Echoing, beauty.**

**And...standing spread  
Isolated...upon the shingle,  
A giant shell  
Of ribbed and ridged silver steel  
Gently rusts  
As roll upon roll  
The waves come...in.**

## **The Planet's Brine**

**The planet's brine**

**Held fast to it's**

**Corrugated face**

**By gravity**

**Lunar fly-past**

**Perpetually adding energy**

**Through moonish pull**

**Earth's own winds**

**Creasing and pressing**

**Amplifying the motion**

**Solar power**

**Pulsing though,**

**Sparking life**

**Creation and evolution**

**Adding inestimable variety**

**Microscopic to monstrous**

**---###---**

**Humanity contributing**

**Flotsam and jetsam**

**Enough to corrupt the system**

**Terminally**

## **The Sea**

**I bought my grandson**

**This book**

**About sea creatures**

**He loves sharks**

**(Even more than dinosaurs)**

**Fascinating sea**

**Full of life**

**Mighty whales and tiny krill**

**Sharks for ever out to kill**

**We love all dolphins**

**Until we find**

**That orcas are the largest of their kind**

**Crabs and molluscs and sea snails**

**Starfish octopus and squid**

**Not to mention lobsters**

**Or corals plants and sea weeds**

**We are fascinated by**

**The eternal beat of the sea**

**Like breathing or your heart**

**Thumping**

**The pounding of the sea**

**We are on the edge**

**Screaming gulls**

**Lazy seals on rocks**

**Stinging jellyfish**

**Smelly seaweed and rotting cod heads**

**Fish and chips**

**Ice cream cones**

**Sand between the toes**

**Oh I do like to be beside the seaside**



## **The Sea**

**Touched**

**By sun and moon.**

**Lifeless**

**Yet alive.**

**Swaying**

**Swirling**

**Rolling**

**Engine of emotion:**

**Petrol breath**

**Growling deeper**

**Deeper**

**Deeper still.**

**Stilling for a moment**

**To catch**

**A pause**

**Between thoughts**

**Tumbling**

**Turning**

**Churning**

**Crashing in and down**

**On the ocean bed**

**Of consciousness**

**As I lay**

**Listless,**

**Yet alive,**

**Alone.**

## **Sea Saw**

**Shushing sounds of waves a-breaking  
Rippling rills that reach the shore  
Bringing dredged up flotsam with them,  
Sea shells from the ocean floor.  
Bringing hordes of Viking longboats  
In the wake of Angles, who  
Settled here and intermarried,  
As invaders often do.**

**Though this is an island nation,  
“Precious stone” in “silver sea”,  
It has not repelled all boarders  
In its gene pool’s history.  
As the moon’s pull draws the water  
To the sparkling crystal sand  
So the lure of mythic virtues  
Draws the stranger to our land.**

**Unlike the Romans, hostile soldiers  
Come to conquer and subdue,  
Nor the Norse or Norman forces,  
Who came armed and plundering too,  
They are hungry, poor and seasick,  
Seeking rest and sanctuary,  
Seeking refuge in our homeland  
From their own lands forced to flee.**

**Sitting at the water’s edge, wise  
King Canute said ‘It can’t be stayed!’  
Shush now, hear the sea come rushing  
With shells and sometimes hand grenades.  
Crumpled waves or plate glass sheen, the  
Sea’s the source, where we were made.**

## **Worthing**

**Marbles roll around a biscuit tin.  
A lisp of waves bypass Goring  
To instead come ashore and rattle the pebbles  
In the gaps between the groynes at Worthing.**

**Seagulls' startled shrieks,  
A ha-ha-ha chorus, like granny's laugh.**

**I don't mind the gulls or the stones,  
Or the dog barks or the children arguing.**

**I just struggle with that smell.  
What is it? Salty slime?  
Is somebody boiling cabbage?  
Exhausted Odor-Eaters from a teenager's trainers?**

**It's a sickly sweet sufurous scent,  
And I'm back in the school hall  
Pinching my nose to escape the stink bomb  
That Baker let off on the last day of term.**

## **The Seagull**

**His white paper shape glides down the evening sky,  
Ended, his foraging in furrowed russet fields;  
The head turns and, from the throat, a cry -  
Haunting, melancholy, as the still air yields  
To his graceful flight, this last gull home;  
Home to the sea, the fresh washed shore,  
As the colour fades the azure dome,  
He wheels and turns, where the waves through the dark  
caves roar,  
Down past the headland, into the lucid bay,  
There, to land and bob and rise, with the pulsing tide,  
To float and preen and doze, with the passing day,  
Or stalk the beach, where long, dark shadows stride,  
To stand with his companions, row on row,  
Head into wind, one foot tucked high,  
Breast tinted pink by distant sunset glow,  
Awaiting some sign for one to rise and fly;  
Then all take wing and to their stations go.  
Now, as I walk the sand, they're lost to sight –  
Only a feather, here and there, like flakes of snow,  
Bright at my feet before the night.**

## **Pebbles**

**No Trump on the shore and no 'Bollocks to Brexit,'  
No Boris PM – just the glistening sea.**

**No earthquakes, disasters, no Middle East wargames,  
just granite, sand, water, a vast sky – and me.**

**Thank God for the shoreline, for waves crashing inwards,  
for making me feel like a pebble or shell –**

**so tiny compared to the greatness of Nature  
for millions of years being thrashed by the swell.**

**No Trump, Putin, Boris with heads big as pumpkins,  
with hearts for the richest, contempt for the poor;**

**with fiddled expenses, with tax havens, lovers,  
with pussy-grab hands, no respect for the law.**

**I stand on the beach and am awed by the hugeness  
of sky stretching onwards – how far who can tell?**

**Thank God for the shoreline, with waves crashing inwards.  
For Trump, Putin, Boris are pebbles as well.**

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## Sea

Emily Dickinson wrote,  
“Bring me the sunset in a cup” –  
But I can view the sunset  
From my kitchen window.  
I need the sea in a mug,  
Placed on my desk beside me.  
A mug of driftwood and rocks,  
Of sea-glass and shingle.  
Of wind bearing the brackish tang of seaweed  
And carrying the salty screech of gulls.  
Of pale, scudding clouds against a grey horizon  
And the steady, jealous pull of the tide:  
A patient smoothing of sharp edges.  
A mug of something for doleful, land-locked days,  
To anchor me to myself.

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## Sea Lover

Eyes squint, as you sweep rhythmically towards me,  
the debris of the night before, following in your wake  
As you come closer, I teasingly dodge your grasp  
My toes curl into the cool sand and I move away, fast

The sound of your approach is measured, but relentless  
As you stretch across the shore, without a care  
Knocking over indiscriminate people like skittles  
Who are foolish enough to just stand and stare

Whilst the sun is setting, we finally meet, I lie supplicant beneath  
I gasp as my body welcomes your silky touch  
Your warmth envelops me,  
I crave and desire what you offer very much

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