

# The New Criterion

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## Shorelines

by Charles Tomlinson

Here where the certainty of land begins,  
The ocean writes and rewrites its margins:  
You can read along the rippling of the sand  
The script advancing in its cursive hand,  
Denying it has ever signed before  
The dozen dishonoured treaties of this shore—  
The harbours' disappearing into silt,  
Alexandra's cottage—royal Edward's guilt  
Cost her less smart there—level with the tide.  
To the hopes of merchant or of monarch's bride  
The ocean does not deal long satisfactions,  
Deep in its own ungovernable transactions.  
White on this inland table lies a shell.  
Lift it towards your ear and listen well.  
The approaching breath of ocean that you hear  
Says that the world won't end in ice or fire,  
But lost to the tidal trickeries of water.

—Charles Tomlinson

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**Charles Tomlinson's** most recent volumes are *Selected Poems* (New Directions) and *Jubilation* (Oxford). He is editing a collection of his own prose for Carcanet.

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