

# The New Criterion

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## The runners at San Benedetto

by Charles Tomlinson

Two runners are crossing the shore by night:  
Their sound on sand, their lithe iambics gauge  
The certainty of arrival and return  
Before the wide encroachment of the waters  
Smooths out their footprint frontier. Cloud  
Keeps dulling the cusps of a moon  
Just risen. A steadier glow  
From the endless necklace of the lungomare,  
A fitful one from the circling beam  
Of a lighthouse that dapples keels  
Close-packed, rocking at anchor.  
For lovers crossing the shore by night,  
None of this is their concern. They see  
In the unpaved pathway a chosen destiny:  
They choose each other and this place,  
Place to return to and by night re-pace  
In the twilit ritual that runs between  
The competing geometries of shore and sky  
Where the first stars prick their courses.  
Lovers, how many years of light  
Await you behind that sky I cannot say:  
Your compact with the dark will guide you where  
Beneath time's leisurely eye, the common day  
Tests this accord that was confirmed by night.

—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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