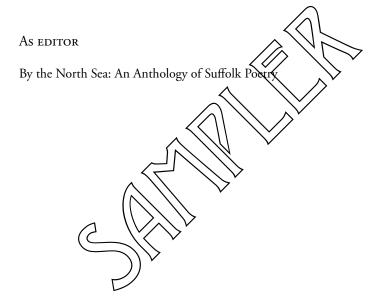
Signals to the Disappearing Shore



Also by Aidan Semmens

A Stone Dog The Book of Isaac Uncertain Measures Life Has Become More Cheerful There Will Be Singing The Jazz Age



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First published in the United Kingdom in 2026 by Shearsman Books Ltd PO 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 978-1-83738-020-6

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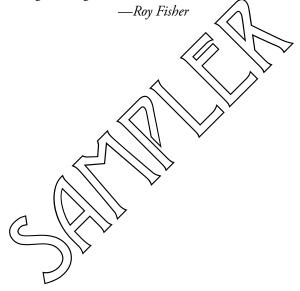




Impressionism, though for the poet fascinating, by itself is certainly not enough

—Jean Cocteau

He knows good Englishes





Another country

for Geraldine Monk

by boat, for how else would they come? Sigurd and Thorfinn and Salif and Ali fishers and fighters and farmers spirits of the sea investing true life in hope

of happier returns to (or with) Sigrid or Sarah or Alyson

or a reunion on the Island of the Young off the shore of Eynhallow, Scilly or

land always out of sight (but only just) to misted eyes where spirits roun where you are ever approaching and never arrive – or if you do

never leave (investments may go up or down)

and what is the name of the island? no one knows or accounts differ

words are not to be trusted for who is to know if the name you have signed on this form is the one you will be known by in the land of the gods? (isle of dogs)

then standing at the cliff edge watch weather approach across the water wavetops whipped off by the wind tell of those adventurers fallen into the earth's mound

Svejn awaiting rescue scratching in clumsy runes Olaf the oaf thinks his wife is faithful ha ha

but this occurred in another time

so consider
what the uniform and the grey suit won't
countenance: that the evidence
may have been tampered with
files redacted, photos retouched or clipped
(in matters of importance there's always
trial by scissors and paste)

it's all there in black and white (before panchromatic film red or pink became black blue or green rendered white – but who remembers now the world was not so simple thank)

and by air on curley wings clambering up the sky then parachuting down, that curlew cry bubbling across tidal mud and moor

the martin and the martlet merle in the marginalia shapes of a faith inked, painted, sculpted not compassed in the liturgy and yes, who was the model for the Kilpeck sheela – generic or sui generis? (and who wielded the tool, or decided – she or he, they're written out, uncarved, unlettered)

bread and circuses, bread and circuses (but who bakes the bread, who walks the wire?) – so we're trussed/concussed unworthy of trust

unworthy words but this dream occurred on another shore another landing

another border scribed across the map, razorvire cr a once gentle landscape blank walls awaiting only the (unborn) grathist the intoxicant paint slow leakage on the littoral

A raga for Enheduana

Something was built here that was thought important,

a funeral ziggurat perhaps, memorial to a fallen tyrant,

an ancient palimpsest inscribed with layer upon layer of dream,

seals and ceilures, precious beads commemorating epic deeds.

Here are toys, idols, weaponry held forever in a ruined fortress

stripped femurs and the skull of a horse laid bare amid the desolation,

fishtraps and walkways woven basket-fashion, an imprint of wicker work in vessels of clay,

residual rituals implidit in goatherds and pot sherds.

Married to the moon, Enheduana is the mortal embodiment,

a living cultic likeness of the astral goddess Ishtar Inanna,

consort of the wise one Nanna whose name may be Sin,

whose crescent horns herd the stars like cattle

while she, cast alone into the rebel-held wilderness,

must yet prepare sacrificial feasts for errant deities

and centuries of dead women interred beneath the floors.

Stains in the stonework become scenes of rural life,

a lush green land of milk and honey, sheep and goats shaded by dive and palm

landscapes to locate a criticial houre, places mapped to hopes and fears.

healing and wisdom to witch lore; and does it matter if the story isn't true?

For who will speak of the buildings destroyed, the political framework of human bone,

missiles aimed at targets, habitations near the border?

These laments are not meant to express sorrow but to avert future catastrophe,

the as yet unimagined brutalities of Agamemnon, Caesar, Lionheart, Assad.

Law, legend, transaction are preserved in reed-cut indent on clay,

baked into permanence in the burning of the library,

genealogy and astronomy hardened into artefact.

Some of the words are lost while others remain indecipherable

from which architects of the new city construct a misleading narrative.

Fabrics depict ritual grieving in moments of agony and intima

childbirth woven with growing grangives rise to the birth of writing

the name of the writer revealed as the weaver of reminiscence.

text woven into texhile, table built into tablet,

the interlaced marks of Inanna, fatal goddess of war and metamorphosis,

whose power to be infinite has lesser gods fleeing

like bats among the ruins – those furtive future gods

of Abraham and Zeus descend like fallen angels

bearing gifts of survival, art and joy, submission, fame and insignificance,

desire and lust, profit, absence, poverty and wealth, the art

to destroy and to create, to plant and pluck out;

a cargo of stolen powers – weapons, wisdom, justice,

musical instruments and old age, objects and practices,

elements and destinies, preciou metals and memorable food,

all the lost languages entombed by the windblown sand,

green hills and gatherings in a fertile crescent, cities without a city wall.

A few fugitive traces of pigment remain that perhaps served images sacred or profane,

archives of pilfered portraiture are made absurd and mythic by displacement,

routes of desperate migration deadlier than ever,