

## POETRY – “The Sea in Luminous Stereo-Vision”

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By B.T. SHAW, Special to The Oregonian

An interview with poet **Judith Barrington** about her new chapbook sheds light on the marriage of science and art

Perhaps poet **Judith Barrington** was born to write the poems in her latest chapbook, "Postcard From the Bottom of the Sea." Although she has called Portland home since 1976, her roots are in a seaside town, Brighton, England, where she was born and resided till she was 18.

**Barrington** is the author of three poetry collections --"Horses and the Human Soul" (Story Line Press, 2004), "History and Geography" (The Eighth Mountain Press, 1989) and "Trying to Be an Honest Woman" (The Eighth Mountain Press, 1985) --as well as a prizewinning memoir and a text on writing literary memoir. In early June she corresponded with The Oregonian about her latest collection. The following interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Q: The chapbook is called "Postcard From the Bottom of the Sea," not plural Postcards, which leads me to believe you knew early you were working on a project and not simply individual poems. Where and how did the chapbook begin?

A: When more than the first few ocean poems started to happen, I did, indeed, think I was working on a project. And when I had the opportunity to be in residence at the Mark O. Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport, I knew that I was aiming for a collection loosely bound together by the ocean theme.

Q: The Hatfield Marine Science Center? How marvelous, that chance to occupy the worlds of both science and art. How did the residency come about?

A: It was through Kathleen Dean Moore, who is at Oregon State University with the Spring Creek Project, which focuses on writing about the natural world. She knew I was writing about the oceans and put me in touch with the director of the Hatfield Center, George Boehlert. He was kind enough to invite me down and give me the run of their aquarium and access to the scientists.

I was quite intimidated at first, both because I had very little science education and thought I might reveal my ample ignorance, and also because I was using imagination in the poems and I wasn't sure how the scientific mind would relate to that approach.

Q: We do live in an increasingly explicable world --wonder for some places and phenomena has, to a degree, been replaced by fact.

A: I felt an obligation to get the facts that surround my imaginings accurate, but I also felt that there was a lot of room for creativity. Like imagining Jonah up in the air before he lands in the sea, perhaps to be swallowed by a whale --or not. Or like comparing nomadic sea insects to an uncle who disappears into the Sahara desert. The factual world often became just a new backdrop for stories and characters who were sometimes myself.

Q: "Jonah, Mid-Air" is one of my favorites in the collection, with its two sonnet-size stanzas embracing opposing outcomes. Many of the poems in the chapbook have a similar sort of stereo-vision, gazing at two things at once, surface as well as what lies beneath.

A: I'm so glad that you like Jonah --it's one of my own favorites in the collection. I wrote it sitting on a Spanish balcony gazing at the sea while a violent tramontane was dying down, leaving the ocean in turmoil. It was easy to imagine that the sea itself was the monster that might swallow Jonah or anyone else if they fell overboard.

It's so easy to see the ocean as surface, when, of course, it's a whole world. And I've always loved those images of the surface seen from below --the way the light greens the water, just as the fading light at dusk greens the sky.

("Postcard From the Bottom of the Sea" by **Judith Barrington** , The Eighth Mountain Press, \$10, poetry chapbook; available from The Eighth Mountain Press, 624 S.E. 29th Ave., Portland, OR 97214; 503-233-

3936; [www.judithbarrington.com](http://www.judithbarrington.com))

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