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## Peter Stothard

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December 17, 2007

### Drunken Boats

Just occasionally, in a life full of words, there are words that you think you should have heard before, known before, felt before.

If you're editor of the TLS (OK, no 'ifs'), you think (I think) you (I) should even have published them before.

[Alan Jenkins](#) has an office next to mine at the TLS. As it happens, we are moving offices tomorrow and we shall be a few feet further apart. But that is of no consequence bar being true of the here and now.

He has been with the paper much longer than I - though we arrived among the glass and grey slabs of 200ish Gray's Inn Road at about the same time in 1981, I to The Times, he to the literary cousin we both share now. He is a poet.

We share a love and care for the TLS - and another care, for rivers, The Thames for me, for him other rivers I think, though perhaps the Thames too.

I've known for some time that he was writing a poem, maybe more than one poem, about boats and water.

We spoke about Pope's Windsor Forest a while ago and about the Moselle of the Latin poet [Ausonius](#), about which I know a little and from which Pope borrowed a few Thames lines.

His new little book, [Drunken Boats](#), has already been published and purchasable for a few weeks. Our diarist JC, not one to promote a colleague's book beyond its merit (that is not how we do things here) has already praised its renderings of Rimbaud (above), an achievement that is beyond this classicist's power to judge.

My own copy, purchased from [Sylph Editions](#), arrived only this morning, battered somewhat by the weight of Christmas cards around it.

The opening poem, Salt, has occupied me for all this evening of that arrival day.

I'm not going to quote from it. There is strict injunction against doing that without permission. And this is a blog. And speed is all.

I'm not going to 'close read' or criticise it in some other way which many in the [TLS family](#) could better do.

I'm not going to imagine how Alan will receive these words. I'd never write half a line about him if I did that.

I'll just say that it has been a wonderful evening with the poem so present, the water so present and with the absent poet seeming so present.

TLS rules discourage us from publishing in our paper what is already available to be read and bought.

So buying and reading is all I can [encourage](#) anyone to do.



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Sir Peter Stothard is Editor of the [Times Literary Supplement](#), the international journal of books and ideas. Between 1992 and 2002 he was Editor of *The Times* and in 2003 he wrote, [Thirty Days](#), a fly-on-the-wall account of Tony Blair in Downing Street during the Iraq War. He writes on politics and literature, ancient and modern.

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