



Portrait of the Gulf Stream: In Praise of Currents, by Érik Orsenna, translated by Moïse Black (Haus, £7.99)

The French author Érik Orsenna “collects currents” in the way that other people collect butterflies or stamps. He has been in love with them since his childhood in Bréhat, an island off the Brittany coast. His book is a personal and somewhat idiosyncratic investigation into the science and myths of currents, in particular the one that gives the United Kingdom and northern Europe a far warmer climate than usual for this latitude - the Gulf Stream. As well as talking to scientists and discussing past attempts to explain these hidden oceanic pathways, he travels to Norway, searching in vain for the mythical whirlpool the Maelström. At one point, Orsenna admits “I am not a scientist, I am a wanderer”, and it is clear that the true subject of this book, and the source of his fascination, goes well beyond the merely nautical. At the end he mentions feng shui and Australia’s songlines as examples of land-based currents, but one senses that he could have said much more about the way currents resonate throughout literature and our wider culture.

PD Smith