

THE FARONAUTS. AROUND THE BALTIC SEA

by *ADAM ROBIŃSKI*

Genre: creative non-fiction. To be published in June 2026 by Czarne Publishing House.

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THE FARONAUTS is a lyrical memoir which follows the author's six-year journey around the Baltic Sea, weaving together natural history and cultural reflections with personal encounters. The starting point for this pilgrimage is the view of the horizon and the timeless riddle of what lies beyond. A ten-year-old boy standing on a beach during his summer vacation sees before him a staggering infinity; thirty years later, as an adult man, he decides to touch it and to understand all the meanings we assign to it.

The natural world of the Baltic sea is a mosaic of ever-changing habitats: from brackish lagoons and sandy beaches full of amber to rugged limestone cliffs and rocky archipelagos of the North. It hosts spectacular migrations of tens of thousands of birds, the stealthy dance of harbour porpoises, and the occasional appearance of Arctic species, reminding us how fluid the region's ecological boundaries truly are. Seasonal ice, shifting sandbars, and the rise of postglacial land illustrate a fragile landscape still reshaping itself, while human activity – shipping lanes, canals and tourism – adds another layer of influence. Together these forces create a living laboratory where resilience, adaptation, and the delicate balance between culture and more-than-human world serve as metaphors for longing, displacement, and the search for belonging play out daily across the Baltic shores.

Structured as a series of chapters, each devoted to a different Baltic country, the book moves from Lithuania's Curonian Lagoon, a haven for migrating birds, through Latvia's sea and coastal folklore and a myriad of Estonian lighthouses. Russian coastline becomes the backdrop for a story of invasions and conquests; in wintery Finland, Robiński wanders across the frozen Gulf of Bothnia, searching for deeper spiritual meanings within a precisely described and measured landscape. The Swedish chapter follows his hike along the High Coast, where human lifetime intertwines with deep geological time, and the post-glacial movements of the land are visible as if on the palm of your hand. Denmark, the gate to the distant ocean, becomes the domain of marine mammals: native porpoises, dolphins and larger whales, which for reasons known only to themselves venture into these waters. The German island of Rügen serves as a springboard for reflections on tourism and how it



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influences our perception of space. The chapter set in Poland tells a story of anthropocene forces which shape the seascape. Robiński travels to a purpose-built island, created from scratch as a by-product of the canal cut through the spit. Seeing it as a satire on authoritarian control of nature, he documents the rapid emergence of the island and the clash between industrial engineering and spontaneous wildlife colonisation.

Robiński's odyssey owes much to the rich literature of the region, ranging from Nobel laureates Thomas Mann, Tomas Tranströmer and Czesław Miłosz, to seemingly anonymous poets and writers whose work blossomed from their attachment to local landscapes.

THE FARONAUTS reads like a love letter to the Baltic – wistful and exuberant, scholarly yet deeply personal. Throughout the work, recurring motifs – horizons, lighthouses, migratory birds, and the sea's mutable boundary – serve as metaphors for human longing, movement and the search for belonging. The book celebrates curiosity and connection, urging us to see the Baltic Sea not merely as a body of water but as a living tapestry of cultures which are not separated by the sea, but joined by it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Born in 1982 and raised in Warsaw, Adam Robinski graduated from Warsaw University in 2006. He started his career as a journalist, working for local and national newspapers and magazines. His literary debut, *Hajstry. Krajobraz bocznych dróg* (Backroad Landscapes), a collection of essays on the links between humans and nature that form while traveling Polish backroads, was published in 2017 and marked his shift to longer writing forms. He has since published a number of books, continuing to explore how human and more-than-human worlds mix.

They include *Kiczery. Podróż przez Bieszczady*, a Chatwinesque travelogue about discovering the Carpathian mountain range on the borderlands of Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine (2019, translated and published later in Slovakia); *Pałace na wodzie* (Palaces on the

Water, 2022), a biography of European beaver population and a story of their surprising return from the brink of extinction; *Puszcza domowa* (Home Forest, 2024), a polyphonic more-than-human story of Warsaw's Kampinos National Park.

In 2025 he published *Wodyseja* (A Rivertale), a novel for children (8+ years old) about a brave young beaver who has to find her way back home.

Adam Robiński has received several literary and travel-writing awards and nominations, as well as scholarships from the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the city of Warsaw and the Swiss Fondation Jan Michalski.

He lives and works in Warsaw.