

And Water Rises

and water rises
from vast Pacific
escapes six sisters
evades seven seas

damp evaporates
from breath-cleansing trees
red-poppied farm fields
coiled hummingbird tongues

from alpine meadows
life's water rises
before condensing
in rarefied air

cumulus stampede
thundering black sky
searing bright lightning
flees nimbus horseshoes

soft-flaked snow flutters
bleak sleet slants blindly
hailstones sting hare ears
cloudbursts their downfall

living things each drink
pelican, aphid
pear, weeping willow
blue ceanothus

tree swallows sip spawn-
scented pond surface
cacti accustom
to rare dew droplets

happens a lone cloud
hangs low, unhurried
rainless potential
teasing a desert

ibex slake parched lips
at mountain snow-fringe
quick trickles trill forth
crashing on granite

cascade fume falling
to glacial vales
waterworks sculpture
rough rock pebble-round

born crystal ice-pure
unsullied by time
given flight in youth
whitewater runs wild

in stout middle age
our river broadens
its power drained by
feeder confluence

in doddered dotage
slow, meandering
varicose plains
pulse current with tides

mouth surges, merges
with ocean's wet womb
glorious sun warms
and water rises

Blue

Once, you equaled my size,
two hundred pounds, incomplete
in your cows womb, swimming
to Magdalena Bay, Sea of Cortez,
where three tons sloshed into warm waters.

Linnaeus called you Balaenoptera,
the winged-whale. Your fin-wings,
like my hands, sans opposable thumb.
Your digits now numbering four,
tetradactyl to my pentadactyl.

You weighed two hundred tons.
One hundred long feet long,
displacing the weight of two
thousand men my size. You
lived a man's lifespan.

Salts called you sulphur-bottom
from diatoms coloring your skin,
like bullies calling you yellow-belly.

Your steam-like spout hailed whalers
to titanic tea parties where
they betrayed you, they betrayed you.

We killed blues once en masse.
We killed you the other day
when you surfaced to breathe
above the waves and a propeller
sliced your spine: twice sliced your spine.

We called you Blue, your dead
eyes mirrored my head size.
We interred your skeleton and
winged-fin hand in compost
to exhume for tourist views.

Dermestid beetles, one-millionth
your size, hone your bones.
Coliform bacteria, one-billionth
your size, digest flesh from
four-fingered, blue-boned fins.

For you, Blue, no more calves
weighing three tons, measuring
fin-to-fluke twenty-three feet.

Once, I equaled your size,
two thousand times my own,
the day I first held my son.

Elegy for Threepence Three-Farthings

Springs weep between mosses and beech roots,
seep over glacial gravels atop London Clay.
Regulated by knickpoints, Staples Brook
trickles through Epping Forest,
watershed for Rivers Lea and Roding,
Thames Essex tributaries.

Where brook feeds river,
my life mewled into World War II
in aunt's downstairs flat
adjacent to our troglodyte shelter,
should the air-raid sirens wail.
Window cleaner washed mother's view
into my childhood "peacetime",
a soon-abandoned fallacy.

Chilblained children hushed to Uncle Mac
on the BBC at five o'clock,
"Are you sitting comfortably - then I'll begin."
Little Red Hen, Three Billy Goats Gruff,
and scarecrow Worzel Gummage,
mice living in his chest,
regaled our innocence.

I budgeted my sixpence allowance;
tuppence for a comic book,
a farthing for the vicar's Sunday liquor,
threepence three-farthings
for Dolly Mixtures and Liquorice Allsorts.

I ran father's army boots across
the Roding's alluvial plain,
along meandering banks
where iridescent blue Kingfishers
darted death to Sticklebacks;
Wood Pigeons and Cuckoos called.

An Italian ship with a Russian crew
tramped me away from familial country
with plans for an American dynasty,

ten offspring to bear my name.
Fecund Central Valley ripened
my cherry bowl of peeled grapes,
slivered almonds, and wined roses;
but three sons brook no toddlers,
no grandchildren for me,
my dynasty dead from filial tube snips.

Remotely, I view youthful treasures
engraved in Italian marble.
1956, by the Yew tree,
farthing rests in peace.
Obverse; Defender of the Faith;
Reverse; Jenny Wren – silent for eternity.
1967, by the vestry, lies Uncle Mac,
Derek Ivor Breashur McCulloch OBE
minus a leg and an eye
lost in the War to End All Wars.
That did not.
1970 in oak shade, dodecagonal threepence.
Its crowned portcullis forever shut.
1972 Taiwanese scrapped liner Castel Felice.

Father, sister, mother, two cousins,
childhood neighbors
and many friends returned
to dust and ashes, repurposed.
Dwelling elsewhere,
I did not see them go.

Lament not the emigrant's lost country.
Bewail not the unborn dynasty.
Shed few tears for passing friends,
ineluctable time fells us all.
Save your grief for unknowable peace,
because, as Thucydides, wrote:
*The kind of events
that once took place
will,
by reason of human nature,
take place again.*
The sirens wail, the void begins
beyond your garden wall.

Once while watching a fogless Pacific

Once while watching a fogless Pacific
Sunset signal against Cabrillo Light
With its green flash on the whelmed terrific
Solar disk, a Marsh Hawk wobbled its flight
On dihedral wings of a grey-blue male
A hapless gopher dead dangling in claw
He called a mate from ground nestlings to rail
Again she rose and sped under her score
Crossing beneath his dropped rodent she lurched
Upside down she flipped, talons spread she grabbed
Her dinner, twisted upright. He searched.
Returned to her nest she shred food he'd nabbed
I wish Nature's cool crepuscular light
Would reuse my body in feeding flight.

Quick in the Dark of Nature's Night

Quick in the dark of Nature's night
Toxic toadstool hoists blood-red hood,
Pipistrelle bats hark fireflies' flight,
Blind worms consume punk-bellied wood.
Jinxed vixens bark and stealth owls swoop
Morsel death upon pygmy shrew.
Dormouse mother beside her stoop
Chews buprestid beetles' lean brew.
When windy hail bestills the riot
In dens borborygmus rumbles
Lingering hunger awaits quiet,
Silence in Nature's glen grumbles.
Dawn rooster's warning wakes man's world,
Fools' false dominion unfurled.

Twelve Quail Passed by My Window Yesterday

Twelve quail passed by my window yesterday
Seeking seeds, food from Nature's raw display.
One scratched around a budding daffodil
And Cooper's Hawk stooped low to make the kill.

Head feathers drooped and eyelids quaking, merged.
Its mate bewailed an antiphonal dirge.
Quail muscle-fibers plucked, cut up and shred
Repurposed life on which blind nestlings fed.

Some English Sparrows, titmice one or two
All died to keep hawks skied in striking blue.
Another quail passed by my window pane
And talons pierced and feathers flew again.

But next year when once more I seek the quail
Their breeding will outnumber hawks, not fail.
Each season quail surrender birds anew
Lay eggs en masse and Cooper's Hawk but few.

Their lives so brief, in handsome plumage fine
Both beauties lead much shorter lives than mine.
We glean from Nature lessons, sub-sublime
Warriors rule this world and death counts climb.

We Walked Our Love to Point Cabrillo Light

We walked our love to Point Cabrillo Light,
Embraced keen Oystercatcher's joyous space,
Pacific breeze-capped ocean brine delight,
Whale spout up-steamed, and sky befogged a trace.
Ascending through Christina's World we found
Savannah Sparrows honored Wyeth's grass
And Swainson's Thrush sang madrigal-sweet sound
While hawks exchanged midair a gopher pass.
Observing nature's palette-colored awe
Inspired our lives 'til tramping time declared
That death-knell's hollow pound upon our door
Cast soulless spouse adrift, and though we dared
To dream eternal dreams together chained,
You slipped our rocky shore, your love remained.