

## 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.