

HEMBY AND THE HUMPBACK WHALES  
(Megaptera novaeangliae)

GODD  
FIRST PG  
26 you keep this till  
12/95

The salty core of this Aquarian's dream:  
To slither like a seal through parting swarms  
Of small day-feeding fishes; their bright stream  
Defines our path until they plunge like storms  
Of flying arrows, cross the scooping forms  
Of undulating outriders-- our pair--  
Pagliacci faces grinning us a dare.

And now the dream is real as we pause here:  
Increasing time each day the sea is home.  
The flanking porpoise escort pushes near,  
Suspecting us for wetbacks, monochrome  
Against a beige and turquoise catacomb,  
Who crossed their borders holding rigged passports  
And alien marques to dabble in their sports.

Our bubble wake is coded melody;  
Each globule rises to a treble staff  
Of living elkhorn branching like a tree.  
Loose blue conveys whole notes, a sonic graph;  
Our ears are tuned to each breath's epitaph.  
High coral altars bless the tithes of sun  
Along the reeftop posed as Helicon.

Ahead, my partner's outline forms the start  
Of new collages, sudden sequin-flashed  
With black-masked angels practicing their dart  
And pivot, ballet-drilled, pink silver-slashed.  
Poor Hemby can't perceive the treasures cached  
Around us in the gently rising swells.  
He suffers bends outside his scholar's cells.

He has no feel for magic strewn between  
Prolonged depth rapture (my kind always lingers  
On for days) and staid degrees in marine  
Biology. The beauty slips his fingers  
Like eels eluding grasp. His spinal tinglers  
Misfire; articulation never fails  
His wealth of facts. Yet he, too, dreams. Of whales.

The eyes aren't made for Titans; (theirs or mine)  
 Baseball-size lenses stud a misplaced butte.  
 I can't digest the precedent design.  
 Genus: Magoptera. Can we compute  
 Intelligence from sound? Can we refute  
 Old whalers' tales of boats harrassed and followed  
 By Jonah's curse, attacked and wholly swallowed?

As Michael rubs his tiredness, mouth atwist,  
 Like private involuted whelks we meet  
 At interlocking jogs: Do they exist?  
 And were they ever there? Has young conceit  
 Propelled us, spending so much on defeat?  
 Should we head home with time and money left  
 Before this brine-bitch levies total theft?

The evening stirs its palette, bronze and puce  
 As proof explodes the sea in flying shards!  
 As if Jehovah God would introduce  
 A just-made creature launched on gold petards  
 Against our gaze. Unearthly bulk bombards  
 The amniotic fluid it returns to.  
 Then sameness swears no shock took place. No clue.

A hemispheric plug once more breaks free  
 From gravity, fast followed by another  
 Full silhouette destroying simile.  
 We reckon six besides a calf and mother.  
 Again they shed one world into the other.  
 A final lunge-- downpouring shattered fire-drops  
 Interspangled hotly with our heart-stops.

The lead bull takes my spirit, holds the leap  
 Sharp at its peak, eternal in suspension,  
 Indelible with what words fail to keep.  
 Now nothing more can share this sealed dimension.  
 We stand agape, our feet a lost extension.  
 As all our whooping blows away astern,  
 The after-images begin to burn.

(cont.)

We dive with morning. Slowly we go down  
 Through gilded glare, a curtain-rise of krill.  
 Festoons of light define us yellow-brown.  
 La Mer, the mother of our lot, life's mill--  
 We come back to our need for fin and gill.  
 A glimpse of flipper-white in this deep allness--  
 Oh, Quasimodo-- please forgive our smallness!

If elephants are roots of heaven, whales  
 Are roots of earth, embodied in eons  
 Of wrinkled metamorphic rock that sails  
 Like airborne silk the inner echelons  
 Of poles, their tails heraldic colophons.  
 Fear has its moment. Even here we yaw  
 In their dynamics, helpless bobbing straw.

Somehow their sound should be a great deep gonging,  
 Vibrating thunder through sarcophagus dark.  
 Or even low-note blues of bass sax longing  
 With timbal beats to match the regal arc  
 Of vertabrae between each piston spark.  
 Four-octave ranges, shrill with reedy flaws,  
 Compel us to pursue effect and cause.

They may sing higher, far above our ear--  
 Sometimes they're racers' engines on a speedway.  
 But now there's more than sound transmitted here--  
 The water's charged with living interplay,  
 Chain energy aplenty to relay  
 A simple message, one we both receive:  
Yes, you're accepted. No one has to leave.

I'm drowning in superlatives and verbs,  
 My camera weighted down with disbelief.  
 The nearest humpback glides toward me, but curbs  
 Its thrust. Its hide hosts life in bas-relief--  
 Such texture, form-- a frayed sargasso sheaf  
 Trails down between us, stirs reality.  
 My film must prove such animals can be.

(cont.)