

## CARIBBEAN LOG: ROMANCING THE HUMPBACK WHALES

## A Rhyme Royal

Beneath the sea our bubbles weave their part.  
The framed montage is sudden silver-slashed  
With black-masked angels practicing their dart  
And pivot, coded greetings sequin-flashed.  
Poor Michael can't perceive the treasures cached  
Around us in the rocking turquoise swells.  
He suffers bends outside his scholar's cells.

Each day our boat explores Bahama blue.  
The engine cut, our dolphin escort bids  
Our bow-waves farewell, turns and arcs on cue,  
Parentheses above the froth that skids  
The surface with night-coming wind. Our grids  
And charts insist we're in a likely place  
For migrant whales but, so far, not a trace.

Our week is climaxed with a midnight song.  
The humpbacks! Humpbacks tuning like a choir.  
We hear a solo, duet, chorus, long  
Sea chanties fill our tape, rise up our wire.  
We roll their voices on our spools, require  
A second playing to convince our ears.  
They sound like pinched chain saws and friction gears.

Two days we chase horizons round a bowl  
And never see them. Goblets of glass-green  
Keep overflowing heads of foam, then roll  
And raise the brew-- now writhing serpentine  
With shapes of life in skins of opaline.  
The pro and poet stare off separately.  
Each has his own Cetaceous fantasy.

Behind my lids my data banks recall  
Cetacea: Sub order-- Mysticeti--  
Reposed on museum platforms near a wall  
The dusty hulls of mounted monsters lie.  
Their eyes, suffused in facelessness, deny  
Ferocity. Their overwhelming length  
Would not let me imagine life and strength.

(cont.)