

My son and I set sail for sea
To feed our family.
His skin was pale and pressed with youth
His balance yet uncouth.

His earthen eyes shined bright with glee
Upon this vast turquoise discovery.
'Tis his first voyage beyond the shore
And to this void of blue galore.

“Take the helm,” I tell my son
His senses ablaze with this aqua world undone.
Hand-in-hand we dance our ship
Above white-capped crests and their subsequent dips.

A dreamy night awaits us both,
but tomorrow the hunt begins.
We sharpen our spears and speak our oath
for tomorrow the hunt begins.

We rise before the eastern sun
in search of our friendly foe
Alas! We spot an ascending one
My son's spear makes the first blow.

The day goes by to our surprise
We haul a mighty catch.
Cream, white, and gray baleen:
Today's pallet from the great saline.

I tell him, “Son, I am very proud
Whaling is a great Makah tradition.
Our family income you have endowed,
The community you have thus heartened.”

He looks at me with eyes of stone,
fists clenched, unclenched, then clenched.
“Father,” he whispers in a sobbing moan
“The hunt has my heart wrenched.

Perhaps this life was best for you,
And your father and his and his,
But for this morose mammalian slew,
My heartbeat goes amiss.

They teach me in the American school
about the ocean and its creatures -

of their beauty and their majesty
and their dependance on society.
They say there is a mass adrift
An agglomeration of synthetic weeds
A byproduct of the core spendthrift
That weighs so much as to buckle God's knees.

I believe these teachers tell the truth -
Our culture is endangered.

I plead for us to stop this hunt,
To change our history.
Now we must adapt or die
to correct our crash trajectory.”

His words shook me like a turbulent wave,
my mouth frothed like a foamy beach.
My own son has become an American slave
He wishes he is peach!

“My son, do you denounce my heritage?
Atone for my virility?
Do you resent my reddened visage,
and wish my skin cursed with Western civility?

So, Manifest Destiny encroaches offshore;
So, it threatens our economy.
But, today, its greedy arms outstretched for more
To assimilate my progeny!

Let this unnatural mass suffocate the fish;
Let the white man be exposed as nature's fraud.
They will survive no longer in our marine niche
For their culture is as plastic as their sea-clot.”

“Father, you are wise and I love you
But two wrongs don't make a right.
You might think our hunt is done,
but theirs has just begun.

The white man's mess is mankind's to fix-
the land, the ocean, the continents.
We are one world, one human race
Together can we solve this case.

The great garbage patch floats,
and the Indian sinks.”

My name is Jonathan Horwitz, and I am the valedictorian of El Modena High School. I will be attending the University of Southern California on a merit scholarship next fall to study Philosophy, Politics, and Law. Since I have lived in Orange County my whole life, the ocean has been not only accessible to me but an integral part of my environment. I wrote this poem to highlight the subtler demographic impacts of polluting the sea. Not only does *our plastics* destroy aquatic systems, but it erodes native human cultures and forces indigenous peoples to make the economic decision to assimilate into the rest of society.