

# Unicorns, Narwhals, and Poets

When their bones washed up on shore, riddled with holes, it was impossible for the avid reader of Verne to not imagine this world in the scope and scale of the settler state. What tropes are readily available to us in our nation's consciousness? Land was not yet an archive, rather in 1870, it was still being sloshed and burned in Manifest Destiny frenzy.

A horse is legible. Let's give it a horn. What of the sea's sovereignty? Which is more unimaginable—a magical horse that has a horn or a cetacean with a tusk 1.5 to 3 meters in length that can sense in the Arctic cold waters, distances that the dolphin like whales have traversed. Imagine that animal communication can be complex—completely outside of our realm of comprehension. It's hard to be certain of anything. It's this that opens us up to the possibilities of an infinite universe.

You can only see what you know unless you are willing to look with another's eyes, rub your tusk or horn against another's to communicate the Imaginary. How queer, to be unseeable until typification evolves to include one of your subject positions. My bone could sense other males before I was caged by words, even when I couldn't imagine it. Sometimes when you look you can only see what others find acceptable as scenery.

It's this accepting other's names and words for you that fence in, domesticate, and delineate the Imaginary. It's what drives near threatened species to extinction's edge. When we can't see ourselves is when we've completely disappeared.

For me, writing poems is a way of breaking that cage, a way to have the unicorn become the narwhal become the speaker become the writer become the reader all at once. It is a resistance to colonial forms of Imaginary takeover—a rebuke of having my dream space occupied by measures that insure that what the United States calls a *chair* is a *chair*. Sometimes a chair is a *kursi*, a *pirha*, a *golposh*, a saddle, a chariot. I want to ride the possibilities of what a chair can be into the darkest shadow of Lemuria, or across the galaxies.

**Revivification:**

The strategies for allowing your mind to bend include many types of magical spells, though the one that I keep returning to is to sincerely believe in the alchemy of language—that some words and ideas cannot be dreamt of in just one. Each word is a placeholder with the possibility of being a hinge that opens a door into entirely new meaning.

You are lucky that you have a horn or tusk that grows out of your own body. It's sensitive and scientists don't know what exactly it does. It may sense the salinity of the water, it can keep information about where you've been, it can also be used as an antenna to hear in the dark, it is a sensory organ. It can lead you to food and sex. This sensory tool that doesn't quite have a firm definition can lead you into writing something that surprises, that connects you to your environment, that icepicks the colonized mind free.

Key to this is to trust the sensorial hauntings that follow you. Your skin is your guide. When do you get chicken skin for no apparent reason? Is there someone or some ghost behind you? When I was on Khidderpore docks—the site where my ancestors were stored before transport to Guyana—my skin was all mountains and peaks. There was something I could not fathom, a depth that affected my entirety. I just knew there was something to voyage that linked me to this place all these generations later.

It's this sensation that will lead you. Follow it into the unknown and navigate the clear coldest waters trusting your senses, your skin—the memory stored in your body will guide you.

When I came back to the United States I sat with my Aji and asked her to teach me her songs. She sang and I understood a poetic nest where I could pod. I submerged myself under her oral poetry and lost myself to wonder. These songs and stories were buried under my colonized heritage. I had to relearn my familial language. I had to put down the bible. I had to start pronouncing my name correctly. I had to scrub off the whitewash that I wore growing up to protect me from the brutal, violent racism of rural Central Florida.

Themes of Voyage, separation, labor, loss, longing, a promise of return, shifting familial relationships, language attrition, colonial contact, losing caste—these were shifting familial relationships, language attrition, colonial contact, losing caste—these were the

bumps that I felt in Khidderpore, West Bengal. These were familiar. Ideas that I dreamt about and had a complete bodily, sensorial feelings about. I had been in this water before. I recognized the canyons, the salinity. I flipped through my poems and what emerged scrimshawed on the pages was the ghost of this poetic of indenture.

Of course I unknowingly sing these songs. What's reported as genetic memory brings me to this poetic through my intuition. By trusting my skin I follow my tusk into bliss. This was all new to me and familia(l/r).

### **How to Follow the Migration Patters**

So it's clear that narwhals know instinctively when to be where and how. This could be because they have very sensitive organs and apparatuses to lead them. This could be because they trust their tusk's intuition. Here are some very practical ways of inviting wonder and magic back into your writing. This will save your life and free your dreaming.

1. Sit with your elders and learn what are the ancestral memories and in stincts that bring you back, in return migration, to themes that make you feel your skin sing.
2. Make up your own words for yourself. Feel free to change them as often as you see fit.
3. Be many things, not just one thing. Be a unicorn that's really a narwhal that's really a poet that's really a poem that's really a frangipani, that's really a darvaza.
4. Read wildly about what stirs you.
5. Practice alchemy and magic—even if it's guesswork.
6. Write freely to reclaim your language.
7. Practice unlocking deadlocks.

### **Narwhal**

*Nar* in Hindi means  
    *man* as *whal* is *whale*  
in some white  
    tongue. What is manly  
about me—  
    my tusking other bulls  
to communicate chemistry  
    of saline in microchannels?

How long did it take  
     your blond world  
 to see my bone  
     as commodity, to saw it  
 from my head and  
     present it to the king  
 of Denmark?  
     My helical tusk  
 is canine and I've  
     transformed too  
 in a frozen series  
     of metamorphic snapshots  
 into a magic-  
     blooded equestrian  
 into terror into ignorance  
     of what leviathan cravings lurk.  
 Sometimes we die  
     from suffocation when  
 ice freezes over  
     the sea's face.  
 Sometimes dancers'  
     scarves strangle to death,  
 Like you I'm not  
     man. It just takes time  
 for the next  
     transformation  
 into whale fall  
     where immortality  
 persists. You paint  
     silks of half-  
 fish women,  
     and pray to never  
 fall into abyss.  
     but the more marvelous  
 is before you.