## The Iowa Review

Masthead Logo

Volume 43
Issue 1 *Spring* 2013

Article 28

Spring 2013

## Fifty-two Hertz

Jonathan Travelstead

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

## Recommended Citation

Travelstead, Jonathan. "Fifty-two Hertz." *The Iowa Review* 43.1 (2013): 120-122. Web. Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.7312

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

## FIFTY-TWO HERTZ

Imagine roaming the world's largest ocean year after year alone, calling out with the regularity of a metronome, and hearing no response...[the animal is saying,] "I'm out here"..."[but] nobody is phoning home."

—Andrew C. Revkin, New York Times

Marine biologists listen
through their underwater instruments
to this solitary baleen whale
and name her for her song's
unique frequency,

an exhausted cry no other whales can hear.

\*

So we call her June,

give her a human name, claim her as if we could erase her loneliness the way we erase our own:

erecting antennae, slinging radio waves like ships that sail beyond the script on the map's border that reads

here be dragons,

hoping a postcard with a bit of code that says

You are

comes lobbing back to our wide, gray dishes.

THE IOWA REVIEW

120

So we call ourselves billions

of ones and zeroes

exiting a hole,

falling from a scarp's blasted entrance

to slate-bruised knees

where we pray for a story

we can believe.

\*

Or we pray for rain to fall as snakes that bite their tails in prairie grass and roll to the horizon

where dust-browned leaves rise in a conjured gale.

Or we pray for tufts of nebulae that shake glimmering dust from their locks, christen our foreheads with soot.

Holding out for a switch flicked in the heavens, we pray for confirmation.

\*

June, what if your song returns from a distant place?

121

\*

An alien haunted my bedside as a child.

Its almond head,
the ink-black ovals that passed for its eyes
paralyzed

me in them,

one brackwater finger held to its subtraction-sign mouth took from me the knowledge I was alone.

122

June, let us each come forward and join the swelling solitudes.

Let us commune in this dark's first burning breath and experience

the stars' frequencies individual in light and sound,

each unique as the fingerprint's gentle sine

shining their celestial voices down on us. May we not refuse their beauty which says

I see you. I name you.