

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

One must always pretend something

Among the dying

—W.S. Merwin

When writing poems about extinction
it's important that you make the poems
deep, but uplifting.

Nobody wants to read a bumper poem
about endangered orcas and their dead babies.
Keep it light. Keep it motivational. Encouraging.

It's important to accommodate your gentle reader.
Don't say anything about how "If you won't
swim in it, why should they have to live in it?"

Don't say that. Honesty is offensive
in this day and age. It's always been offensive.
How else do you suppose we got here?

Maybe, instead of saying something like,
"The orcas and salmon are going extinct
because of ordinary greed and apathy,"

instead, say something like, "The noble creature
with his power and grace, shall journey away
forever, through the portals of time."

Good taste, omits mention of ~
(baby orcas, abducted to be theme park clowns—
decades in chlorinated cages, taking their eyes—

how during the capture, so many died.)
Don't forget, to forget what you know
about human cruelty—

how the baby orcas that didn't survive
had their bellies slit and filled with stones,
then were sewn closed

and dumped into the sea,
to sink into a silence so dark and so deep
public outrage couldn't reach—

a depth unfathomable as a mother's grief—
too heavy to carry for one day, much less 17.
Among the dying, shall we pretend

that in the end, we too, shall not be listed
among the dead? Yes. Let's pretend,
when writing poems about extinction.

Rena Priest