

### **Cape Return**

for Alistair Te Ariki Campbell

Carried out by tears, songs and speeches  
they make offerings on their journeys—  
the atua are strange, 'plant gods, tree gods,'  
who'd strike them—until the familiar  
path shudders down—a heavy wave

on the shining sands of the longest beach.  
Spirits flying from east and west, ridging  
the spine between, meet at the headland  
above Tohe's beach. At Maringi Noa  
they look back, tears thundering down to join

new ones coming north. At Waingunguru  
the stream mourns them. They climb another hill,  
reach another stream—then a waterfall  
silenced by their crossing. They continue  
the last ascent, a ridge, which lifts up the cape

to Hiriki, then a sharp fall where water  
lies waiting to hold them. They are expected  
to drink and swallow the night, with  
a chance, even then, to stay—the sentinel  
there has the power to turn them back.

They continue. Desires splutter like spit  
on flames. They're leaving for long Hawaiki,

to sail, dip and chant like birds forever.  
The mist swarms over the last cliff, climbs off  
the last piece of coast over the ocean, home.

Robert Sullivan

Note:

I am indebted to the 'Te Reinga' entry in Margaret Orbell's *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Maori Myth and Legend* (Christchurch: Canterbury UP, 1995). The entry describes the geography of the spirits' final journey to Hawaiki, the Polynesian homeland also known as Savaiki. The poem appears in my forthcoming collection *Shout Ha! to the Sky* (London: Salt Publishing, 2010).