

The Mackerel Pit

When the tide is right
I slip out past the last buoy
to the mackerel pit.
Lines meet at house, hill, spit, cove,
and I drift
as soft sea slaps the hull's hollow.

Then it is time for rod, line, knife, bucket, priest
and sometimes I shave grey fish flesh,
impaling sushi on each beaked barb.
The long-line drops on its weight.
I watch each baited hook glow ghost white
down through the watery dark.

My lures are gaudy fairground glitter.
They plumb their depths
while the line reels out turn on turn
to where the very idea of air
is no more than a faintness of light,
and I can reel in and play and wait.

And when it comes it is rainbow-oily,
wrenched from its element, flipping and leaping,
even out of water, true to itself.
Embraced by my warm fist it awaits the priest.
It knows only what is known in the dark glitter of the sea,
twitching, flexing, like silver drowned in air.

I would like to think these barbed hooks
no more barbarous than a passing-on of old ways
and though the days of whiting and cod,
herring and ling, are long gone
and deep down the mackerel pit is dying,
the old stories still hold.