

## **The Straining Rowlocks**

An ageing man, you sip your coffee at the cafe wall;  
the estuary is out of sight but, like a monk meditating,  
you immerse yourself in the mantra  
of the rowlocks, the river's rusty gates.

Your mind merges with the current and you know that  
the oarsman reaches his wrists, heaves against the running tide.  
The pier moans to the surge of the stream and you absorb  
the yammering of the shipwright's winch.

You recollect a life of muckin' about in boats,  
recall secluded days submerged, the technique  
of catching fish with bait. You imagine a reverent selection  
of the sharpest barbed hook.

You weight it with a split shot sinker suitable  
for the flow; you cast, sew the needle  
and thread with precision into the quivering quilt,  
your frame braced low in the sanctity of ritual.

With flexed fingers you tighten the line pressure,  
grip the cork firmly with the other hand.  
In the brushstrokes of the washed watercourse  
the wind lifts the rhythmic ripples,

the eddy of memory; nearby mooring ropes buckle,  
the bounce of the yachts in balance. Absorbed anticipation  
seated on the gleam of fluid diamonds and then the jagged tug,  
repeated as you allow the line to set.

When the bream is landed, slapping tail and spicy smell,  
its gills leak reddish brine around your bare toes.

A pitching curtain of seagulls circles  
your sanctuary, wheels away your furies

and your griefs up the stained glass cliffs.

At the end the estuarine slime slides sideways  
from the anchor as you haul it across the gunwale,  
square your shoulders for the row home.

Decades of memories; you search for yourself in the slam,  
the smack of the straining rowlocks.

It is time to request the bill.