

The latest catch stinks illing-sweet, no matter
How hard the blowing scours the culling pens.
Afoot in mucus, ice and offal-spatter
On a writhing deck, Dan guts fish, and pins
The rattling tarps, working out his back pains.
A sprawling hillock angle-slaps the bow;
He almost slips. He wipes his spray-stung brow.

Their thoughts are never easy in the bag
They tow. They're after flounder, giant hake,
Gray sole and other flatfish if they're big.
Is this place right? The time? They watch their wake
And wonder. Far below, did something break?
A different dip and shudder in the pull,
Uneven drag. They don't believe they're full.

They man the winches, play the cable, reel
The snarled mouth of the mesh maw up. They set
Their own jaws, wrestling with the plates of steel
To free them. Spirits start to rise with net;
It isn't ripped! They see enough to whet
Their hopes again. The back half holds its fill;
Enough good ones, maybe they still won't fail.

The struggling sack is pierced with bony fins,
A single gasping monster hoisted high
To dangle and then burst into the bins
As Jarl yanks on the knot. With sharp know-how
Dan wades the mound, outlandish alien who,
With crystal in his hair and beard, assort
The flapping gourmet silver from the quartz.

The North Atlantic pickets round their craft,
Hurls foam invective. Jarl shoves in the throttle,
Eyeing shifty winds. Dan shouts from aft,
"Mostly grays! We pay off the Aristotle
Tomorrow!" Pre-dawn brings a bluish mottle,
Bias-lighted clouds. Spume climbs the hull,
But grins crack tension as Dan works the haul.

The biggest part of being best is knowing
When to leave and live for next-time risks.
Now in the wheelhouse they begin renewing
Silent pride in their boat, their skill. Whisks
Of rain accent aloneness. Panel discs
Of light ignite their eyes. I long to rub
Their poor shocked hands and draw them a hot tub.

(cont.)