**This Tide of Humber**

If you come to the edge of the world

you need to be ready to throw away

the part of your ticket that says *Return*

along with the plans you made, and the life

you once had. They will say you went

somewhere, who knows where, and stayed.

If you have strayed to this end of the world

it is not because you have been here before

or come back to the door of a lover.

You never sat here together, never

sipped wine or held hands on that bench

or kissed by this river.

You have no history with Hull,

this tide of Humber,

but you know the vast grief

of the sky, the scavenger’s hunger,

its insatiable cry.

If you have come to write the hurt

out of your heart, to take the ache

and heal it with words, leave now.

No scrabbling in dead poets’ bins

can turn *gone* into *come* or *become*.

Come with a stranger’s heart, wiped clean,

to a city that hangs on the sea by a hook,

holds on hard to the edge of luck,

and luck could be

just a fingernail

or a sail or a book

the swish of turbines turning in rain,

its hiss on pavements, its shimmer

dropped like a plumb-line, down

through underground layers,

the slip of mud,

the slap of the sea.

If you come here you see

that the mud is a person washed up

on the shore, a body smoothed and shaped,

stroked from calf to thigh to nape.

The taker and giver

make themselves up out of each other,

water-fingers linger in the deepest folds,

limbs open and close back into the river,

an arm or a leg or a hip

heave out from under the sheet.

The lifted mud is only a hint

of the lost land beneath,

between the shorelines

that yearn for each other.

Water and mud,

mud and water, intricate lovers.

You stand here and hope

that a hand will lift out

of a wave, wave to you

from that weather-drowned land.

Even your stranger’s feet remember

pacing the ground under the water,

the tracks of women and men, crossing,

criss-crossing after ice and drought,

through storm and calm, hunting

the sun and rain, scents on the wind.

You were never looking for ghosts

but they find you here.

Voices sing through the tide.

The rustling, the breathing, the music

of travellers takes you out where the land

would have been, walked over, washed away,

rolled in. And there, the ghost hulls of the trawlers

nudge out of the dark

with the trawlermen who never came back,

hauling their own white wake

and their catch, the fish crying silver

in nets made of air.

If you come to the end of the world

it stings like the edge of a blade,

the verge of a cut, but the cut is a freedom,

a severed rope. Freed men and women

rise up and walk out of the water

and you go with them

past the docks, past terraces and tanneries

with a crowd that grows in every lane,

that dares to look down on a king,

swings up Hessle Road, along

the Boulevard, the Avenue

and Terry Street, past the Minster

and fish market to the Deep,

through a city bombed and bruised,

razed flat, raised up again.

It spreads a grey wing, leads you

to the smallest window you have ever seen,

and through it, shows you all the world,

takes your food, makes it a feast

holds your stranger’s body, folds it

in arms of mud,

and the gulls walk over your heart,

over and over, return, repeat,

on hieroglyph feet, their tracks

a braille of messages

delivered from half-built edges.

The water seeps over the drowned land

to the lip of the city.

It holds its breath.

The women stop

their washing, their stirring, their kneading

and pounding to listen.

Between the widowed face of the sky

and the ringed eye of a gull

everything changes scale.

A blade of grass is a turbine wing

that lifts to the light as a fish

gleams under the blade of an oar

like a shoulder blade kissed by the moon

and under the moon

the land wears the water like a shining veil

and the water bears the moon like a sacred jewel

and the heart is a fish

and luck is the hook

that flicks it up between water and land,

between Humber and Hull

and holds it there

at the edge of the world.