

PORPHYRA (THE PURPLE ROBE)

On Christ the King Sunday

He wears the sea on his shoulders,
robe stained with the blood-songs
of a colossal shoal of shellfish.

They snag him with their crowns—
king king king—
like flinging thorns at a current—
king king king—
like trying to nail down the swell—
king king king—
ricochet of title and scepter.

The only proper gesture is the drape
of purple across his back. *Porphyra, argaman,*
*purpura, royal, imperial, Tyrian purple—*one gram
requires the glands of ten thousand sea snails.

You can hear their shells clacking in the nets—
king king king—
You can hear their shells clapping at his neck—
king king king—
The sea lapping at his nape—
king king king—
So you are a king? Is he a king?

He wears the sea on his shoulders,
robe stained with the blood-songs
of a colossal shoal of shellfish,
his back a shimmering cascade of whelks and water.

Porphyra, argaman, purpura, royal, imperial, Tyrian purple—
one gram squeezed from the glands
of ten thousand, twelve thousand, twenty thousand, crushed snails
is barely enough for the fringe of a shawl.

But just a few drops in the pan—
king king king—
from the gland they open in his side—
king king king—

can cover the governor Pilates, the powers,
kings, queens and the whole hard-shelled people.
Porphyra, argaman, purpura, royal, imperial, Tyrian, blood purple—

You can hear the shells clapping at his neck—
king king king—
From the crack in his shell you can hear the purple leak—

God God God—