

**'Merman'**  
**Jean O'Brien**

I had been working in the fish farm for weeks,  
that one near the river outlet and the sea.  
I didn't like the work we were constantly  
wet, dirty, didn't like the men there either.  
They were insolent, often dropped small fry  
and crushed them underfoot. One in particular  
Glaucus, tall, muscular cast his sea-green eyes over me,  
tried to lure me as I tipped phosphorus feed  
into the holding pens that smoked and stank  
and made mist veils I tried to hide within.

One day he walked towards the tanks  
waders held in his large hands, he was chewing  
on a herb he said was magical, always urging  
me to eat it. I would not bite. Anyway whatever way  
it was, he leaned to pull the waders on, both legs  
got caught in one boot and over he flipped.  
I cast around for help, no-one was there. I went back.  
He was emerging from amongst the shoals  
of salmon, clinging to his single wader  
up to his waist were the glittering scales of smolts.

He rose shaking, coloured sequins waterfalling  
as he tried to right himself and beckoned me for help.  
I took the bait and when I caught him,  
we stumbled, he landed me and pinned me down,  
I looked, held his eyes, it was early the rising sun  
was flooding them with hooks of golden light. I said No.  
He parted my thighs and when it was over,  
untangled his legs, shook the silver armour  
from himself, his eyes had lost their luster.

I left distraught and walked all day stumbling  
over ditches and hillocks, stopped now and then  
to eat, following the river to its source.  
At so many hundred feet I rested where the stream  
welled from the earth, cooled my toes, kicked gravel  
into little pools and felt the flow snagging  
in the waters of my womb. I cried and screamed  
and shook my fists at the sky, knew then this birthing  
pool was to be my fate, tried to obliterate  
his sea-green eyes, his face, his terrible merman tail.