

## BACK NETS

Thomas Rain Crowe

At high tide the boats bring the nets to  
the narrow turn in the River Taf. Stretch them  
across the channel like a quiet wall, and wait.  
Wait for water to turn 'round at the head of the Towy  
and run back to the Celtic Sea —  
As the tide goes back past the Green Banks of Laugharne,  
only the lucky or streetsmart fish escape the nets,  
caught in the current and too weak to turn  
and wiggle away. And everything is caught in the jail of tides.

In the town, the ebb of city noise has  
reached deaf ears and the nets of business, crucifix, and busy  
minds have stretched their cross-stitch web across  
the road to the human heart. Blocking the path.  
Bringing bad blood to what was the simple oxygen  
in breath, now choking on fumes.  
To what was the health of the out-of-doors  
now locked up in rooms —

The great angler said, "I am the fisher of men." And  
the great wrangler came behind with his back nets  
and his coracles of gluttony and greed, blocking the  
way back to the sea. To homes and  
loved ones. And life that was free.

At low tide the River Taf is asleep  
with no memory of tides. Of stolen fish.  
Or tomorrow's back net of dreams. Only the  
crow and the curlew walk on the soft sand  
where the breathing of cockles trace the history of boats called *home*.  
Boats that have taken beauty in back nets  
out and away from the bay. Out of the long-reach of children.  
And the work that allows them to stay.

— after *Waldo Williams*