

Shucking shrimp



Out back on the bricks
they sat with a tub of cold shrimp
and a chipped bowl
of horseradish and tomato sauce.
The old man said nothing.
He might as well have been standing at the edge
of Ginnungagapet or in the Norse North
called Nifelheim, the world of the cold.
Was he looking for Loke the devious
who finally met his fate
trying to escape down river in the shape of a salmon?
The old man picked up a lemon,
and squirted juice over the semi-translucent bodies.
"I don't understand," he finally said,
"how you can believe in *God*."
Three shrimp were immediately sacrificed
up and into unctuous mouth and down voracious gullet.
"*No one* I know believes in *God*. *No one*."
Two more bodies shucked and sucked,
drowned in cocktail sauce.
Silence except for smacking, sucking, chewing, peeling,
shucking, gulping, swallowing, dipping, squirting.
Was the old man looking for Dagon?
Was the old man looking for the Babylonian fish god
who lived in the Erythraean Sea?
"No one. Just *you*."
The mound of shrimp shells grew like a destroyed village
laid waste in caustic ponds and bloody rivers.
"*How can you believe, 'eh'?*"
More shrimp shucked; the son ate the lesser portion.
The old man worked the bucket
eating the tender bodies almost mechanically –
the mounds of shells growing higher still.
"I just *can't* believe. It is impossible."
The shrimp bucket was empty.
The old man wiped his mouth and picked his teeth pensively.
Then came the seltzer. "Isaac," said the old man,
"I *doubt* if I will ever believe."