

The Savage Sea – Joe Neal

Gaudy Mustang cars from scattered States
parked along the curving promenade
preen like leaves of Vermont in the Fall,
while their well-healed owners from Des Moines
and Memphis and Cheyenne gorge on clam
or Cape Ann lobster caught off crannied groyne.

But wind is beating up the swell again,
pasting waves against the wall as buoyed-up
bell begins its warning toll and tell-tails
tinkle on the knitting masts of schooners
moored in Massachusetts' Gloucester Bay;
Wyoming cowboys don sou'westers now.

In our minds we try to capture-paint
the scene but colours inter-mingle,
sweeping-brushed by savage, salvage rain
as sullen ceiling closes down on sea
so recently hypethral to the sky;
names we read, carved along the balustrade,

are those of fishermen re-drowned now,
still there but hosed and splashed, salt washed
with absolute disdain – while to the north
and east of groaning cape the Dry Salvages
of granite rock assuage another,
poorer poet's avid lust for fear;

We carve to heel and catch the wind
while green-flash light parts curtain mist
and schooner judders past the rock's grim
grin; the warning buoy lets out its whistle
sigh – annunciation of our own
significance, of others whom we mourn.

Fare we forward then – as a leaf borne
free; a gull calls out and settles dainty
on the stretching sail, clinging leeward
to the lash of rain; we flotsam gainly

for the cleft of shore as an angelus
of bells announces entrance to the bay.