

When the Sardines Run Again

On that day the sardines moved as a single wave,
as a gull's wing, breaking the surface of water,
mercurial, beacons flickering
again and again,

like a silver we have heard of
but no longer believe in.

Later, on the beach, after we left the pier,
an old surfer told us that
he had seen this before—
how the sardines turned the sea into pale swathes of silver,
how when he spread his palms wide
his hands came up filled with light,
and the fish swam thick around his torso
marking him too with silver.

The next day people talked about the heavy flocks of birds
following the fish.
Everyone had a story.
Some even saw smooth gray whales in the wake
and one man photographed porpoises.

But all this seems inconsequential.
For us it will always be the thin silver fish.
It shouldn't have been possible anymore
how they charged the water around that silent, solitary pier.

And long after, if things were difficult
or only different

we talked about how the sea swelled silver
slapping against the pilings,

sardines dancing in atavistic return.