Back Bay Biloxi – The Purgatory of Shrimp
Brian Overstreet

Sunken in a shrimper's salt box
With croaker and spot floating belly-up above them
The shrimp cling to their souls
With insect legs
Even in death.
Buried beneath their brethren
In iced tubs and onion bags
Hauled all the way to Mississippi
The Purgatory of shrimp
Where their souls are freed
When their hulls are ripped
From their meat in noisy peeling machines.
The swarming flies are shrimp souls
Licking salt and guts from my sticky forearms.
The piss-ants are shrimp souls
Walking in line toward my warm Barq’s rootbeer.
The catfish are shrimp souls
Souls of the mean shrimp
The bully shrimp
The bastard shrimp
Lurking in the shadow beneath the shrimp shop
Waiting for hulls to be pushed through the grading machine
Discharged into the silt-mud and slime-water
With the funk of a stagnant bayou
Feeding so fiercely
A man could run across their backs
To the other side of the Bay.
Indifferent with their envenomed spines
To my flesh
And my organs
If the graders push me too hard
And I slip through the pipe-hole in the factory wall.