Curiosities

There was no treasure at the bottom of the sea,
But they dredged up creatures
That would be talked about for years.
Hideous forms with no eyes, no fins,
Helpless and translucent in jellied foetal skins,
Sucking and gawping against the chill ocean wind.

The fishermen crossed themselves, and took
A hook to the face of the first
They hit an abscess and the thing burst
The second simply quivered and died.

In the house of Sir Richard Grenville,
I have heard talk of the last and third.
The servants say he preserves it well,
And when he sent Charles its likeness in a letter,
The King wrote back it must come from hell.

When I asked Sir Richard himself, he smiled and said,
Well, why don’t you come and see?
In that dimly lit room
Where he had kept lepers and lions before,
The acrid vapours of phosphorus burned my lungs
And I heard rats running in the walls.
He had a Judas Cradle under a sheet
And insisted its twin lay
In the bowels of the Vatican,
Behind a false wall operated by pulleys
Bearing a portrait of Carloman III.

He motioned that I go the last few paces alone.
And so, I approached the metal casket
Which only seemed to me
To contain a rotting man-o-war
And our deep fear of the unseen.