

## The Armadillo

By Claire and Oliver Smith

Crowd of tourists gather around his world:  
Swarming locusts on a cornfield,  
Devouring leaf and husk. The Armadillo,  
In his chitinous exterior shell,

Sits still, eyes half-closed, contemplating  
The Emperor Charlemagne. The black  
Spaces in his mappa mundi,  
Map of the world. The extreme gaps

Of memory: some Eden, where forest  
Sphinxes thrive beneath the sunrise.  
He wakes to the call of rollmop  
Herring, grating with their thin gnat

Voices. Flies to the Promenade  
Where he's a sea-side side-show.  
A puzzle for the tourist to piece  
Together, poking and prodding

Through the metal railings of his cage.  
He smells burning piers, people  
Escaping in a scream. But it's the smoke  
Of Bloaters that illuminates his nostrils,

Reincarnates him, reflects in the sun's  
Mirror. Gulls circle above, diving  
To grasp at steel bones – the leftovers  
Of the Fishermen's hoard. The Beach

Becomes the Ocean's smear, stones  
Encrusted with gem-like fossils,  
Intoxicated, once singing invertebrates:  
Red, yellow, green. He dreams

Again of Piranhas, knotted in death  
throes deep in the tentacles of some sailing  
ship, floating on Rainforest snow.  
Reality is a trawler docked in harbour water

Near his cage: a chance of escape.  
Though locks are unbreakable, this is a shell-house  
Of a hermit, crabs scuttling  
Around his feet. Crowds

Leave with the sunset, he can dream

Of South America while chewing  
On some spiny off-spring.