

My Father, the Mimic Octopus

Show him a damselfish and he's off,
slipping into something less comfortable
in toxic yellow and bangled black,
six arms threaded down a waiting hole
like a band of ferrets – *Ta daa!*
I give you a pair of sea snakes out for a swim.

Blink and he's gone,
a flounder undulating in his wake,
arms tight together in a leaf-shaped wedge,
like a tasselled flipper fleeing its foot,
propelling through the water with poisonous glee –
I give you the flattened sole fish.

Bring in the divers and he's out there,
the jellyfish number, fluid arms afloat,
or a lionfish, spread-finned, venomous-spined,
a spear-clawed mantis shrimp praying for applause;
three hearts pumping in a pulsed drum roll –
I give you Vidocq-topus, Master of Disguise.

Give him the first few notes and he's away,
deafness no obstacle,
eight arms shimmying into slinky lamé,
gold fingers reaching through the waiting waves,
he's the mollusc with the Midas touch,
reaching for the low notes on the ocean floor –
I give you Shirley Bassey, my father.