

Fishers
(fishing with my son on the Upper Weber)

In the last days of summer
we walk through tall grass
to the river long before
the sun spills over the mountains.
As we cast into morning air,
he flits like a water skeeter,
impatient for the taut nudge,
the sudden pull. "Be still,"
I say, "You'll scare the fish."

*the river rolls over the rocks
tumbling mauve and ochre stones*

Still he stalks the fish,
an ancient angler
crouching in wet grass.
"Where are all the fish?" he asks.
"Here, where the current slides away;
there by that big rock."

*there, where the shards of morning
break deep on stippled stones
where clouds wash over wild, watery weeds*

Shadows recede against the mountains.
He asks, "Where do fish come from?"
"Some have been here for many years;
others are planted each year
by the hatchery."

*they swim from secret pools in the sky,
from starry rivers among the spheres, like birds
that fly through seas on fluent wings*

"Have there always been fish?"
"As long as anyone remembers,
long before your grandfather and
your great-grandfather, long
before the Indians were here."

*ancient fish swim down the headwaters of time,
from old lakes deep as skies, where Indians wait
for rain on a seamless shore*

Still the fish ignore our hooks
and still he wonders,
"What do fish bite?"

What do they like to eat?"

"Sometimes corn or salmon eggs;
night crawlers are usually best,
although they love insects."

*insects with frail, iridescent wings
swim in the wind—mayflies and moths,
bumblebees and beeflies, golden-eyed lacewings
and black-winged damselflies dance before
shifting and sliding rainbows*

"What kinds of fish are there?"

"Mostly trout here—rainbows,
a few browns. Over in the lake,
bluegill and perch."

*sturgeon old as stone,
walleyed pike and yellow perch,
black bass, mackerel, and blue pickerel,
brown trout, rainbow trout, and silver salmon
glide and turn in the crystal light
their scales catching slanted sun*

"Did you go fishing with granddad?"

"When I was a boy, we'd get up
at three in the morning
and drive over Mount Hood
to the Deschutes River where we'd
catch trout as big as your arm."

"Who's best, you or granddad?"

"Your granddad's pretty good.
He can catch fish where noon else can."

*our ship sails over the mountain toward the dawn
where in morning mist deer run before us
as in a dream; at the river my father watches
the wind and the water for signs I cannot
discern. Suddenly, a giant trout jumps into the air
to greet us, his mottled body silvers the sun
before my startled eyes*

"But the greatest fisher of all
lived a long time ago. They called him
the Fisher King, and the fish of all
the waters listened for his voice, and
when he called them or when he sang
his song, they came right up to him."

He arches his eyebrow, "Really? That's
just a story, isn't it Dad?"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

*fish leap before him as he walks
on the waves and whales praise him
from the great green sea; he casts*

*his net into the brine and heaves it
brimming into the boat, and at
the psalming of his voice
the fish dance joyfully about his feet*

“Dad! Look! I’ve got a bite!”
His pole arches against the sun
and dips into the river.
“Hold him! Reel in, reel in!
That’s it, don’t lose him! Steady now.”
The stippled trout flops
at his feet; he watches it
with wonder.

When the sun reaches its zenith
my son and I turn from the river and
walk toward the mountain
through summer air filled
with the incense of sage.
His fish in one hand, he reaches up
and puts his other in mine.
“Thanks for taking me fishing, Dad.
I love you.”
And a fish leaps in my breast

*and into the sky, arching over
all streams and all seas,
a rainbow over the broken world*