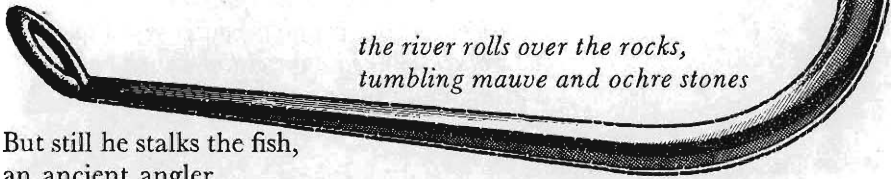


# Fishers

(fishing with my son on the Upper Weber)

Robert A. Rees

In the last days of summer  
we walk through tall grass  
to the river  
long before the sun spills  
over the mountains.  
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*

But 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 and watery weeds*

Shadows recede against the mountains.  
He asks, “Where do fish come from?”  
“Some have lived here for many years;  
others are planted each spring  
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.”

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*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 fishes are there?”  
“Mostly trout here — rainbows and a  
few browns. Over in the lake there  
are 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 night,  
their scales catching slanted sun*

“Did you use to go fishing with Grandad?”  
“When I was a boy, we’d get up  
at three in the morning  
and drive over Mt. Hood  
to the Deschutes River where we’d  
catch trout as big as your arm.”  
“Who’s best, you or Grandad?”  
“Grandad’s pretty good.  
He can catch fish where no one else can.”

*our ship sails over the mountain toward the  
dawn where, in the 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, and 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, 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  
wildly 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,” he says,  
“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*

