

The Venerable Fisherman Speaks Again of His Days

for the Venerable Bogwang (Lee Sang-chul)

To fish To know
their mouths
the shimmering flesh
the thrash within the net
Flick of knife Fleck of scales

Who can smile looking back?

I was a fisherman a man
of the water blood-soaked
 deck and slicker
of the mud and its secret pockets
of the water and what catches the light
 below
 water that cools the skin
 a man
of the rivulet and the rived
belly pouring out its quick life

*I look forward over the hills
as if forgiveness might –*

I was a fisherman
I had a wife I had children I could feed
whose hands were plump as fish bellies
their fingers always dancing jumping

There was a storm No other sign

A boat is indifferent

When I woke I was still a fisherman
North or South a fisherman
I had a wife who was not cleaved
I had children
whose palms swatted happily at the schooling fish

Some I threw back it's true

There was a toll for crossing
a border even the fish could not see
I was a fisherman Not a spy

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So when the electric prong slid between my legs
I thought it was a water-snake Perhaps it recognized me
Perhaps I had ignored it Perhaps
I had chopped off its head on the other side when
I was a fisherman

Torture?

My hands danced in front of my face then up
toward a light A song played in my right ear
The perfect song for
a day I could not hold
Outside my wife swam away undulant as a strand
of hair swirling beneath the surface
phlegm spit blood piss the outpourings
of the body I will spy

I was never a spy

*I have been thrown back into the world
with a hook in my mouth*

My hands jump at unexpected times
mocking flapping
With my feet in the iced tub I saw
a fish at my ankles It was my child
come to save me I reached for –
but the fish slid from my grip a shimmer
under the surface like a thrashing carp
convulsively mouthing goodbye goodbye goodbye

Are you listening?

I said I am no spy Ask the fish
I said Only release me and I will –

Torture?

Twelve years twelve years
I was a fisherman I said
I only want to go home *to be thrown back* *mercy*

*Come let's walk to the river
Let's hear what the fish have to say*