

## Robert Fisher

## For Whom Are the Hymns

I must press myself against the embankment  
To let the horsemen pass,  
And in the lead are the cavalry singers,  
Each one a beautiful youth,  
And none more beautiful than my son,  
His red curls luminous in the late afternoon sun,  
Floating like feathers of a tanager,  
Above gold braid and a scarlet tunic  
Tight at the throat,  
And their strong voices somewhere between  
Seraphic and terrifying,  
And my heart sees golden stalks of corn  
Waving in the August heat awaiting  
The swoosh and flash of the mowers' scythes.

My other son stands tall and muscular  
Against the violet dusk,  
Stands poling his punt  
Gliding in a long row of punts  
In a graceful arc curving  
Toward the cape of an island.  
They lean forward, together as in a ballet,  
And light their lanterns,  
Which one by one wink out behind the headland.  
My son is a line drawn by a master  
On the last rays of purple and scarlet.  
A glow wavers above the windward side of the island,  
And on the breeze comes chanting  
And the smell of burnt offerings.

Mothers huddle on the shore and gaze across the channel.  
We wonder for whom are the hymns,  
For what spirits and powers the slaughtered animals,  
And for what destination might they set off,  
Or if they return at dawn,  
What can we read in their sunburnt faces, in their black eyes and black  
curls?