

AMY BEEDER

Big Fish Eat Little Fish

—after Bruegel

Look it up.

Go ahead—

type in *Bruegel* and *big fish* to see that gutted belly so divinely etched:

crabs a-scatter & groupers mussel-crowned, shuttlecocks, a sinking tower,
a father saying *Ecce* to his son. It's mostly humdrum, this harvest: everyone busy
with maws & tridents, poles & knives.

Know that you will be full. You'll live long enough to shy from different sorrows—

In paintings Pieter B. would use tempera: pigment suspended in egg yolk,
wine & myrrh, a famously delicate substance in keeping with all those Flemish
proverbs about balance:

one foot shod, the other bare, fire in one hand & water in the other, you know

you will waste almost everything. Dispense your life like coin to dancing bears.

One man's blade bigger than himself is engraved with an imperial orb, or else
the alchemical symbol for atrament which upon googling I found to be a
very dark substance indeed, linked to the ink of cephalopods & certain fabulous
caterpillars

& all this I learned in minutes while even Antwerp's most famous late cartographer
could not trace that giant carp's uncertain path.

*A day will come when you fail to find joy even in Blue Madonna's opulence or
sweetly dangled apricot, in this*

land & sea thus intermingled: musk grass, hyacinth, oyster bed, or to see what
richness may emerge when the acreage stubbles & the harbors fill with silt
& then the day