

PAUL NELSON

By a River in Southern Ohio

Steam rises from the surface in ghost-smokes.
The bourbon current slows with cold. A heron is rigid,
a scientist picking along the banks.
A carp rolls, long as a brown boy studying the bottom,
nosing the paper drapery,
blinking at the flash of disposables among the rocks,
green with baby hair.

The air will freeze and be bright all day.
We will hustle from sun to shade and back,
see small birds walk upon the bordering skim
like ornaments reflected in a ghetto window, behind which
denizens starve and sleep, their brains seized,
their eyes cast in bronze.

Given light, these shun the nuance,
so fundamental is their need.
All the big rivers, every tributary, contain them,
mouthing their muddy thoughts and wild bibles.
It is a sin to net or spear them, so primitive a species.
They may be baited, hooked with tinsel lures, but,
beached, they gape and gasp as if to speak.
We throw them back. They are not good to eat.