

Shore Glass, Cincinnati

Here the common river, clogged with
coal dust and the red-clay sand of brick,
low stones smeared with shad-silt,
perch-bladder, reeking skin of mudcat,
delivers its surprising jewels
to the battered concrete of its banks.

All day, boys come down
with sacks to glean
this treasure—
bromo bottles shattered
in the Pennsylvania uplands
then roared down-flood,
smoothed to deep sapphire
in the river's lapidary tumble;
Ohio bottle bottoms
shaped like Hopewell gods and totems;
jugs and moonshine jars
slivered like mica
in the wrack.

Watching these boys
intent in mud and stones,
I see an opal haze surround them,
see the instinct to collect
all that flashes, glitters,
gathers light to glinting,
curve in upon them like a lens
of Byzantine enamel,
and I think of bower birds
who set blue stones
among their chapels in the forest,
as if to make connect
the fury in their blood—
to court and mate,
to deck, dapple,
be dazzled by world's brilliance—
with the elegance of life,
the rich increase
of beauty's million species.