

ROY BENTLEY

Night Fishing the Ohio

He knows something, this old shovelhead.
Close in, like good whiskey
he has the blood believing again.
Yet a part of him needs the hook,
its pull into light to keep going.
The Masonic Lodge of Belpre, Ohio would agree.
On the near bank, two of their number
brace a weight of wood and oxbone,
carry it stumbling, side-stepping an old dog.

In a clearing by lantern light,
every full belly recalls the flesh,
takes its turn, hefts ax and sledge,
breaks the ribs, spine,
legs stripped now of all that muscle.
I feel each hard blow
ring at the bait-end of twelve-pound test.
Bone bits spray outward in the dark.
Upstream, deer lean across and into barbed wire,
the apples there worth a little blood.

33 South

In fall in Athens County, truck exhaust
mixes with the scent of wild onions;
busloads of students hang from windows,
toss pop bottles in high arcs at road signs.

As the bus turns I catch sight of one
blond sixteen year old, imagine
Sunday at the Midland, buttered popcorn
between us, holding hands,
John Wayne to an Indian, "That's far enough."
Then slowly the feel of hand becomes breast, thigh

billboard for a Baptist church,
holes in it,
verse reading *I am*,
hillside, ash branches filling in
the Way, the Truth and the Light.