Weaning as Prototype

a. A Brief History of the Bottle Includes

who built it first,
who nursed it,
who tied a label to its neck
then swung it from the county jetty,
who took it both
as spar and eyeglass,
who sinned by it,
who swore by it,
who bore each splinter
like a martyrdom
and knew which miracles
it worked (The Breaking
of the Pate, The Reverse
Piñata), who stood watch
with it uncorked, or,
smearing its mouth with sweets,
caressed neck and shoulders,
hoping it could be dangled
humanely or from
an unknown angle.
b. Cold War Cautionaric

Like low-rent majorettes, 
we shared sparklers while the Weikel brothers, 

Theodore and Robert, spiked the alley 
with roman candles. 

Someone’s eye fell out. 
The clubhouse vanished into embers. 

Frowns embossed themselves on brows. 
We couldn’t say how H2O 
in bottle rockets scrubs their flight — 
we weren’t Newtonians, 

(though Chucky Partain, 
pitching rocks at a garage-door's 

row of dirty diamonds, was.) 
Spit! Fetch holy water! 

Mrs. Weikel, nurse to a perpetual plummy funk, 
broke down and called the fire truck. 

c. Post-War (Deep History) Cautionaric

The investigation links sweat on a boot tongue 
to me, a label’s lick to you. 

Offshore, creatures solder themselves together, 
build long, evidentiary reefs 

that swiftly confiscate beach.
So though each vintage has its legs, bottle,
we can’t run—which in our common delirium
suggests treading water.

Recall that the Civil War amputations
by Dr. Bliss were perfect save for the sepsis.

Another recommendation to stay bottled up:
“All the time he was out of his head
not one bad word or idea escaped him” —
thus Walt Whitman wrote Corporal Irwin’s mother

after the boy, wounded near Fort Fisher, succumbed.
Thirty years later a Pennsylvania man

donates a limb which has outgrown him;
it’s still a nightmare swagger jamming glass.

After we’ve been rescued, bottle,
we’ll visit it at the National Medical Museum

along with the dry thigh bone of Private Oscar Wilbur,
wounded at Chancellorville, who, as he malingered,

asked Whitman if he “enjoy’d religion”
and was told, at least in the water-rippled

account of this I stole from a library,
“Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean.”

d. Bottle Rebottled

Chasing the ghost of an idea,
I found a solid bottle that displayed,
if I considered too its slanted mouth,
more than one way to be illogical.
But when I claimed a splinter
then tossed the whole contraption shoreward,
I recalled a thirst so clear
no tide would suit me.
So I’m glad it’s gone beyond me.
Sly undrinkable,
through which the secret grains travel
as if to serve some larger table,
consider me for once less scoffer than I was.
And to all who dislike a crooked span?
Go easy on the bottle, friends.

Note to Bottle

To you I’m a maker’s mark, the great unweaned.
My view through sunstroked glass? More green.