

TERRI WITEK

## Manual for Children Leaving Home

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### 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 H<sub>2</sub>O

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,

TERRI WITEK

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.