

around her raveled elastic swimsuit.
She'd throw me a pack
and buy me a cone just so
it would look good. I'd sit where
the old-timers in clean
pressed bibs watched trains, eat
my cone, smoke a butt, and listen
for the old Chessie
to squeal through town, drowning out
the smell of cows.

A WOMAN BY THE MISSISSIPPI

Her expression is nothing
to look at. You would think
her occasional pats of the water,
the rippled buildings
reflecting, boats and people
thinning out with each wave
was a romantic thing,
but it isn't.

The Mississippi is like a fat slug.
Its surface images of thin,
rheumatic couples holding hands
edge the river, and break
the sand—slurry crabs hide
their faces, distorted,
tinged in the dirty light.

The river isn't beautiful today.
Its brown mouth spits up
stones along the shore, the pitted ones
layered on layers
of smooth snail and crab shells.
And only the weepy tree at the river's back
waves over the water soft and green.