

TURTLE POETRY

Editorial Introduction. — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material. We encourage our readers to submit poetry or songs for consideration, either their own material or work by other authors. Poems may be submitted to Anders G.J. Rhodin, Chelonian Research Foundation, E-mail: RhodinCRF@aol.com.

Our desire is to share with our readers the beauty and wonder of turtles as expressed through the art of the poem or song. In the sense that the relationship between man and turtles is multifaceted, so too is turtle poetry. The poems we publish here will reflect that complexity, from poems of pure admiration for the creatures themselves to others reflecting the utilization of turtles and their products. Some poems will reflect man's use of the turtle for sustenance, others will stress man's need to preserve and protect turtles. Some will deal with our emotional interactions with turtles, others will treat turtles light-heartedly or with seeming disrespect, but all will hopefully help us to better understand both the human and the chelonian condition, and remind us that the turtle holds a sacred place in all our hearts.

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Turtles

AUTHOR UNKNOWN¹

It was the weather that drove us in,
That rainy afternoon in May,
And the weather, I suppose, that drew us out
Cold and shivery, unprotected,
Gulping draughts of salt night air,
Amazed at clouds and the moistness of it all;
Our bare feet rejoiced at pebble and leaf,
Grateful for the grit between our parched toes
And the unmerciful touch of rain.

We Knew the sadness of walls,
the cold consistency of ceilings,
the dumb flatness of floors;
We knew the shrill insistence of right angles,
perfect squares, and well drawn lines;
We knew the slow steady sweep of the electric clock,
And we grew quiet.

No small wonder, then, with sense withdrawn,
that beach, and sea, and air at first
were numb and dull to me
Or rather We to them,
Shocked without the shells that encased us blind.
Tumbling as from sleep
We widened at the delicious randomness
Of sea clump, dark sea oat, Lone driftwood
And the unending conversation of surf.

We grew giddy with space,
Toes tracing the sensual curve of ocean's edge,
Skin drunk with salt, wet, and sand,
Until, sea-tossed, wind strewn, and scatterbrained,
We became whole again.

Something in the moon, or wind, or water,
Or none of these, something older
and more removed the sounding waves,
This beaten shore, the hard edged shells
That prick and stab into the present;

Something deep, primordial, an ancient call.
She answered, and left her weightless world
For the uncertainty of the shore.
How heavy the burden of herself became,
the massive shell, the tapered limbs
That scratched and clawed
for purchase in the too forgiving sand,
she knew alone,
and alone she bore, amidst the shadowy terrors
Of an alien world seen through eyes already tearing.

We watched her, breathless, perform the rite,
Marveled at her close-lidded patience, her energy,
The thick head that nodded slow acceptance
Of utter exhaustion, the unrelenting will
that rendered her oblivious to all
Save her pearly charges' burial.
We fondled her leathery skin,
Gazed into her eyes admired the thickness of her
wrinkled neck, and
thought deeply
of the soft expression on her darkened face.

The deed was done, the sand replaced,
She joined the sea again,
And we waded with her to the edge of our world,
Saw her graceful form retreat into the darkness.
In silence, we filled her clumsy tracks,
Erased all trace of what we'd seen,
And dreamed of another cosmic night
When sand shall scatter, and the sea
Shall open up her arms to turtle minions.

Editorial Comment. — This poem evokes for me a sense of the primeval connection between people and sea turtles and the role of the wind and weather in stimulating both our human behavior and turtles' nesting. The turtle reference might possibly represent a ridley, driven, like us, by the weather. I thought it a fitting rejoinder to the scientific discourses elsewhere in this volume on how weather and wind affect Kemp's ridley nestings. For me, the poem creates a sense of mystery and awe as we contemplate these ancient creatures of the sea and the natural forces that affect not only their behavior, but possibly, ours.

¹ Poem obtained by Clay A. Johnson and posted 16 October 1995 on the CTURTLE listserve;
original author unknown, no record found through extensive web search.