

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 — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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, 168 Goodrich Street, Lunenburg, MA 01462.

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.

Chelonian Conservation and Biology, 2003, 4(3):742

The Egg and the Machine

ROBERT FROST¹

He gave the solid rail a hateful kick.
From far away there came an answering tick,
And then another tick. He knew the code:
His hate had roused an engine up the road.
He wished when he had had the track alone
He had attacked it with a club or stone
And bent some rail wide open like a switch,
So as to wreck the engine in the ditch.
Too late though, now, he had himself to thank.
Its click was rising to a nearer clank.
Here it came breasting like a horse in skirts.
(He stood well back for fear of scalding squirts.)
Then for a moment all there was was size,
Confusion, and a roar that drowned the cries
He raised against the gods in the machine.
Then once again the sandbank lay serene.
The traveler's eye picked up a turtle trail,
Between the dotted feet a streak of tail,
And followed it to where he made out vague
But certain signs of buried turtle's egg;
And probing with one finger not too rough,
He found suspicious sand, and sure enough,
The pocket of a little turtle mine.
If there was one egg in it there were nine,
Torpedo-like, with shell of gritty leather,
All packed in sand to wait the trump together.
"You'd better not disturb me anymore,"
He told the distance, "I am armed for war.
The next machine that has the power to pass
Will get this plasm in its goggle glass."

Editorial Comment. — I was recently approached by a reader of this journal who told me that the Turtle Poetry page was the first section he would turn to whenever a new issue arrived. He told me how much he enjoyed the poetry presented here, but how he often disagreed with me about what constituted "good" versus "bad" poetry. Whether poetry is good or not is in the eye, ear, and mind of the reader, and each of us is as individual in our interpretation as the poetry is itself. For each of us there is a different emotional response—my hope as editor is that I succeed in finding different turtle poems that reach out to us in different ways. The selection this time avoids the question of good versus bad by choosing a poem from one of the world's master poets (and my favorite). Living and writing in New Hampshire, Frost displays good knowledge of local turtle natural history, but mixes observations of the tail-marked trail of a snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) with an accurately-described clutch from a painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*). Nonetheless, it's a novel use of turtle eggs as a symbol of the struggle between natural man and advancing development and machinery. And most would classify this poem by Frost as good—I hope our readers agree.

¹ Copyright © 1930 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

First published as "The Walker" in: Kreyborg, A., Mumford, L., and Rosenfeld, P. (Eds.). 1928. *The Second American Caravan*. New York. Republished in: Frost, Robert. 1930. *Collected Poems*. New York: Henry Holt. Reprinted in: Lathem, E.C. (Ed.). 1979. *The Poetry of Robert Frost. The Collected Poems, Complete and Unabridged*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., pp. 269-270.