

Epilogue – Turtle Poetry

Dead Turtle

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Curious that I should want to eulogize a turtle
Perhaps it was his ignominious death
(Why did I think of it as male?)
That still form by the road

The grass that greens the median barrier had just been mowed
The blades that clipped had ripped the turtle's shell
And threw him...or he dragged himself
Exposed upon the slab

When first I sighted him, I thought he was alive
But absence of response was too abject
He eloquently spoke of death
Next day he was still there

Each time I passed, I tried to turn my eyes away
Not see this tiny, tiresome tragedy
But to ignore him was to slight
All victims man has left

So I watched while summer sun tanned him to leather
A kind of rigor mortis raised his head
Last gesture of primordial pride
Of death with dignity

There was a gradual sinking, shrinking of the corpse
Like the closing of the covers of a book
Some unknown force then lifted him
And one day he was gone

¹Composed 1997

After seeing a dead turtle for several days on Interstate Highway 75 near Tampa, Florida

Editorial Comment. — This poem about a dead turtle on the road, probably a Florida softshell, reminds us of the all-too-often sad outcome of interactions between turtles and man, especially man's development as represented by highways and automobiles and the destructive nature of our technology. As the turtle in the poem was gone one day, if we are not careful to preserve our natural heritage, all turtles will be gone one day. But though we are the problem, we are also the solution, and our efforts to preserve turtles and their habitats will make a difference for future generations. The survival of turtles in Florida and elsewhere will depend on our efforts. ANDERS G.J. RHODIN.