

Turtle in the Road

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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 — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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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Turtle in the Road¹

FAITH SHEARIN

It was the spring before we moved again, a list of what
we must do on the refrigerator, when my daughter
and I found a turtle in the road. He was not gentle
or shy, not properly afraid of the cars that swerved

around his mistake. I thought I might encourage him
towards safety with a stick but each time I touched
his tail he turned fiercely to show me what he thought
of my prodding. He had a raisin head, the legs of

a fat dwarf, the tail of a dinosaur. His shell was a deep
green secret he had kept his whole life. I could not tell
how old he was but his claws suggested years of
reaching. I was afraid to pick him up, afraid of the way

he snapped his jaws, but I wanted to help him return
to the woods which watched him with an ancient
detachment. I felt I understood him because I didn't
want to move either; I was tired of going from one place

to another: the introductions, the goodbyes. I was sick
of getting ready, of unpacking, of mail sent to places
where I used to live. At last I put my stick away
and left him to decide which direction was best.

If I forced him off the road he might return later.
My daughter and I stood awhile, considering him.
He was a traveler from the time of reptiles, a creature
who wore his house like a jacket. I don't know

if he survived his afternoon in the road; I am still
thinking of the way his eyes watched me go.
I can't forget his terrible legs, so determined
to take him somewhere, his tail which pointed
behind him at the dark spaces between the trees.

Editorial Comment. — Faith Shearin is a celebrated American poet from North Carolina who has received awards from The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, The May Swenson Award, The Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, The Dogfish Head Poetry Prize, and the National Endowment for the Arts. She is the author of five poetry books: *The Owl Question*, *The Empty House*, *Moving the Piano*, *Telling the Bees*, and *Orpheus, Turning*. Her work also appears in *The Autumn House Anthology of Contemporary American Poets* and *American Life in Poetry*. She wrote this poem after she and her daughter encountered a Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) on a road in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, "a barrier island with a lot of splendid wildlife including wild horses and pelicans." It mirrors the poem we previously published 2013 in CCB 12(2) by Robert S. Foote of a similar encounter with a Snapping Turtle crossing a road in Vermont. Most of us here in the USA have seen Snapping Turtles crossing roads, especially during the spring and early summer—and all too often they become the unfortunate victims of road mortality. I like this poem in its evocative description of this fierce turtle and the contrast and comparison between its situation on the road and the poet's personal life—like the turtle, we all sometimes resist moving from place to place, and sometimes resist those who may try to help us get to where we should be going.

¹ First published 2011 in *Moving the Piano*, by Faith Shearin, copyright © Stephen F. Austin State University Press.
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Submitted by Thomas E.J. Leuteritz.