

JOHN'S GIFT TO ME

Red-bellied turtle moving from forest
to lawn, leaving a faint trail in fresh mown
St. Augustine. Green so green gone down
along into noon where a content child naps.
Turtle with its flexible neck tunneling past
all dread the future needs to love,
with strong feet keeping the whole county
from flying off into space, and with eyes
made of dreams no one's had.
Would you mind if I took it along with us
from room to room?
Would you mind if I gave it a name?
Such as . . . John. John looks down into the depths
of a knot in a pineboard floor.
John regards several carpenter ants.
John assumes a cautionary position near a pencilplant.
John's keel points straight to the heart.
For a long while John stands by a cold fireplace.
I'm not the Curator of Reptiles.
Is John a reptile? He seems more like a god
or something greater than that.
For what seemed an eternity John snoozed next
to a stack of newspapers. Their headlines blurred,
dissolved and went back into nameless lands.
John's eyelids stayed in slow motion.
Slow as molasses John's carapace assumed extreme
proportions. My love had gone away and something
monumental had to save that place. John's pity
reached out to an anthropologist, all of her work
one crooked wail, *I'm sorry, I'm sorry for all of us.*
John ushered an old man back into a corner of an
empty field so he could stand on the pitcher's mound
he'd stood on as a boy. For what seemed an eternity
John stood by a telephone ringing for no one.
John opened his hinged mouth to collect a few tears.