

Pattiann Rogers · *Teaching a Sea Turtle Suddenly
Given the Power of Language,
I Begin by Saying:*

This green translucent continuance
Through which you turn and function, rolling and twisting,
Which fluctuates in darkness, which pulses and pushes
Insistently against your forehead and your belly
And your genitals, to the top of which you must rise for light,
For breath, is called 'The Great Sea.'

And by these fingers, of which you have none, I am tracing
The curve of your horned beak, tracing your flippers
Intricately scaled in canvas, moving down over the wooden
Knobs of your back, down to the leather prick of your tail,
Tracing all the boundaries of that which is called 'self,'
'Great Turtle of the Great Sea.'

And you must try to remember that heavy, ponderous,
Slow-shifting silence which was everything you didn't know you knew
Before your voice. Say 'silence' and listen.
Say 'silence.'

And your motion is called 'gliding, soaring
Propulsion of self' and the passing, one after another,
Of seaweed clusters and floating eels and rainbow wrasse
And scattered obelia is called 'time.' And the direction
Toward which you move is called 'land.' Say 'compelled,'
Say 'driven,' say 'recognition of compulsion.'

Understand how you will eventually make the facts of the earth
By the hard drag-marks of your body over the dunes,
How by interference you will make the aggravated existence of bark
And grit and rut and sandbur. Say 'egg,' say 'begat,' say 'birth
In the warm sandy loam.' Say 'birth by the nearest silver egg
Buried in the sky.' Say 'invisible glass turtles pulling up
The black beaches above, leaving in the night
The scattered glow of their daring eggs.'
Say 'fancy.'

Here at the bottom of the sea, beneath the pock-marked
Boulder, beside the extending and withdrawing feathers
Of the polyps, in the definite turn and focus
Of your reflective eye, here is where you must begin now
To be engaged in the making of your brain, each new word
Bringing a salt-pulsing neuron simultaneously into existence.
Listen, I am telling you, it is from the awareness
Of this precise moment
That the creation of yourself begins.