La Tortuga [The Turtle]

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 — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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

La Tortuga
PABLO NERUDA

La tortuga que anduvo
tanto tiempo
y tanto vio
con sus antiguos ojos,
la tortuga que comió aceitunas del más profundo mar,
la tortuga que nadó siete siglos y conoció siete mil primaveras,
la tortuga que quedó aquí durmiendo, y no lo sabe.

The Turtle
PABLO NERUDA

(TRANSLATED BY JODEY BATEMAN)

The turtle who walked so long
and saw so much
with his ancient eyes,
the turtle who ate olives from the deepest sea,
the turtle who swam for seven centuries and knew seven thousand springtimes,
the turtle who kept getting harder, and became rigid like a clothing iron.

La tortuga amay plateada,
con severos lunares ambarinos y pies de rapina,
la tortuga se quedó aquí durmiendo, y no lo sabe.

The turtle who plated,
with severe amber scales and feet for catching prey,
the turtle stopped here to sleep, and didn’t know it.
He closed the eyes which had defied so much sea, sky, time and earth, and went to sleep among the other stones.

Cerró los ojos que
tanto mar, cielo, tiempo y tierra desafiaron,
y se durmió entre las otras piedras.

Editorial Comment. — Pablo Neruda [1904–1973] was a celebrated poet from Chile who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. His birth name was Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto, but he was known by his pen name and, later, legal name of Pablo Neruda. He was also a diplomat and politician and was closely involved in high-level Chilean politics. Neruda first became known as a poet when he was only 13 years old, and wrote in a variety of styles, including surrealist poems, historical epics, overtly political manifestos, a prose autobiography, and passionate explicit love poems such as the ones in his collection Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair (1924). Many of his poems also dealt with nature, animals, and wilderness, such as this one about an ancient sea turtle. Neruda was one of the world’s most gifted and celebrated poets and we are pleased to reprint his wonderful turtle poem here. May it serve to help inspire some other budding turtle poets out there.

1 First published 1961 in Las Piedras de Chile [The Stones of Chile], by Pablo Neruda, Publisher: Losada, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
Submitted by Thomas E.J. Leuteritz.