

## North Montpelier Pond

Pines reflect in glassy dark water,  
April sun glistens on turtles' shells  
as they bask on logs, startled by the slash  
and clack of our canoe paddles. A few slide  
down to safety while others watch warily,  
unwilling to relinquish their perches in the sun,

sun which warms their blood. They've emerged  
from deep mud where they wintered, asleep  
in their catacombs of water and air.

There is no motion but the ripple of our boats—  
droplets glisten and slide off turtles' black shells;  
this is the turtle-hour, just past April noon

when their shells absorb the vernal sun. On a knoll  
sleep the dead who slowly decay and seep  
through cemetery soil into the pond  
then flow to the floodgate in the dam  
and downstream to the Winooski River.

It's nearly full moon and the turtles have risen  
from mud to sun as they do every spring,  
and bask warmly in their shells—they live long  
and know something of sun, dams and burial—  
they'll be soaking in April sun long after we're gone.

This is the hour of sun waxing white when turtles  
turn to light. Someday we'll all float  
downstream and be gone, but not today;  
today the turtles turn their shells to the sun  
while we drift quietly on dark water.

## **Ghost Dancers at Wounded Knee**

A hundred and forty-four Ghost Dancers and their children  
were massacred and thrown into a trench that December day—  
now a single granite monument marks the mass grave  
in the cemetery at Wounded Knee.

Rifles crackled and blood turned to ice on snow,  
the west wind blew knife-cold out of the Black Hills,  
but today in the cemetery a spring breeze  
whispers across Pine Ridge.

Ghost Dancers' shirts, frayed by bullets,  
embroidered with dyed porcupine quills,  
colors faded after a hundred and twenty winters,  
still cover Lakota bones buried at Wounded Knee.

A breeze blows out of the Black Hills,  
Pine Ridge Reservation is silent  
except for the crackle of cavalry rifles,  
the voices of the Hunkpapa and Miniconju,  
the cold echoes of children's screams,  
except for the voices of Ghost Dancers on the wind.

## Alligators

Around the bend in the canal  
we startle an enormous alligator  
sunning, awakened by the clack  
of our canoe paddles, he splashes  
into dark water and slides beneath the canoe.

My heart beats faster—*you were scared*  
she says—*well he was only six feet away*—  
but other alligators ignore us, barely  
turning their cloudy eyes, unwilling  
to relinquish their sunny places.

Alligators are accustomed to daily  
canoeists paddling the Loxahatchee,  
maybe they know it's Sunday and surely  
they know east where the first sun warms  
their cold hides as they slither to the bank  
to bask; I offer her coffee from my thermos—

*Coffee with sugar, alligator?*  
Sugar plantations and suburbs  
have drained the Everglades and the Loxahatchee  
nearly killing off the Seminole and the alligators  
who now emblazon football pennants, sweatshirts  
and coffee mugs: *Gators! Seminoles!*

The alligator basks and smiles,  
he knows who's drifting to extinction first—  
we canoe around the bend where five  
more alligators sleep in the sun.

## **Elegy at a Yard Sale**

*A house can be haunted by those who were never there. Louis MacNeice*

Under an awning wait the furnishings,  
exposed and alone without the house,  
emptied of the maple table  
where the first sun shone each day  
on coffee cups and worn silver spoons,

emptied of the four-posted oak bed  
where they loved and awoke, emptied  
of the matching bureau whose drawers  
held their socks and underwear.

The house is empty of the cradle  
where their children first slept, empty  
of carpets and chairs, of knives, spoons  
and forks, of mops and of clocks;  
its window panes reflect bare floors.

Everything waits in the yard where signs advertise the sale,  
two crows swoop low, curious about the glittering  
bauble, while the house waits for the final passage  
of its furnishings. The clocks are silent.  
A car door slams and the first sales begin.

The crows caw once, twice, and circle over;  
soon the oak bureau then their maple table,  
bed and baby cradle then the clocks are gone.  
The house is empty, too bright and too quiet.

## **Airport Pigeon**

A pigeon picks for scraps of burritos,  
chips and hamburger buns on the carpet  
near Gate 73—white with black feathers  
on her wings and head— she ekes out a living  
trapped inside Newark International Airport  
hopping around the feet of weary passengers.

She thinks she came here willingly, perhaps  
through an open passenger gate, but now she's  
trapped like us, eating what she can find.  
She can fly miles inside the terminal,  
up over Hudson Books and Vino Volo,  
but she can never reach the sky.  
Meanwhile we'll escape, board  
our jets and— for a few hours—  
soar for miles over mountains and tiny towns,  
thinking we're free as birds.