

### **Snapping Turtle**

Our stocked pond kept old Dope around for years,  
rarely on land; blood suckers brought him up to dry,

sisyphean, grappling with his own backbone,  
breasting through gravel with colliding limbs, twenty-pounder:

once sunning on a boulder, his hashish eyes amused;  
another time, millstone in shoreline sand, a volcanic hiss.

But usually, under water, a greenish rock half in muck -  
so still, he'd pluck a frog with rattlesnake precision,

or snatch a duckling, pugilistic nose snubbing defiance,  
cold-blooded as a cheetah, daring us to censure him.

Eternal mourner, outlasting most other species,  
no soaring flight, staunch heart in a chrysalis

of bone, bearing up the atlas of his self-possession,  
on summer afternoons he'd just bask below the surface.

Once at a Jewish market, New York, I saw one fifty pounds,  
so gnarled it seemed prehistoric, or like some tortured gargoyle.

The malcontent's appeal, Dope was contemptuous as a Caliban,  
one day splintering my eldest son's scientific probe of oak.

Nothing the Hurons feared more, ankle shattered by the ancient one.  
Bitter-ender, if he got hold, he might never let go.

*Robert Wiljer*