

At Ocean Haven

10 July 2003

At dusk, I perch
in the wide, screened
window of my room.
Far below,
surf crashes in
as mist seeps up
the rugged cove
just north.

A mile offshore,
orange lights on crab boats
bob into focus,
then disappear —
reappear, hazy,
then dip again
to emerge bright,
clear.

In near darkness,
the sudden, swift flight
of a bat
or small bird
startles, breaks my reverie.

Rising from below,
the sweet scents
of sautéed green pepper,

then garlic, dance
on the evening breezes.

It has been a long and
pleasurable day — yet,
one still bearing
surprises.

Dream at Ocean Haven

3 July 2004

I dream for a moment,
and in the dream,
I am young again —
the light is the pure yellow
of little flowers,
the deep, clear, vibrant blue
of hydrangea globes.

It is enough for me
to feel again
for only a moment
the unsullied expectancy
of those truly young —
upon waking, I quickly
shake myself back to
my appropriate age.

O, when do those
pure colors of youth
begin acquiring
the solemn tints
of the grave?

In the Wink of an Eye

Age, inexorable leveler,
has its way with all.
Even young flirts
and Romeos become
codgers, crones, ancient
white-haired, shuffling men;
their strangely cocked eye,
wink, or goofy grin —
indecipherable as
all that remains
from a youthful mien.

*Moulin Lesperty
Parisot, Tarn-et-Garonne, France
August 2005*

When Crocuses Break Ground

The soft flash
of winter-white
legs beneath
the drape of white
mid-calf skirt
in retreat
on this twilight,
early Spring street
is like moonlight
on lapping water,
scattering off
the cold backs
of silvery fishes
just beneath.

Haiku at Dusk

The insect chorus
in the woods off my back porch —
nearly deafening . . .

Humility in Fall

On the weekend
the stray dog I call
Carla came to stay,
the Summer heat
was replaced
by cooler Autumn air,
with clear light
and fresh breezes
that gently shook
treetops while
first leaves
fell to ground.

The ridiculousness of
parts of my life
appalls me.
In this evening's breeze,
enjoying setting sunlight
penetrating these woods,
highlighting branches, leaves,
reaching into darker spaces,
I sigh for change
of season, how
my small life has
been touched by
this splendor
far more often
than I've deserved.

Thirteen Turtles: A Prose Meditation

On a morning walk last week, my dogs led me to an overgrown ditch running along our deserted country road, lush in late Spring verdancy. Nearly covered by long grass, I discovered there thirteen turtles, very recently dead, stacked and fitted neatly together in the small ditch with enough care to avoid detection; most likely, no one but me would ever find them there. A single bullet had pierced each of their shells — a small, neat hole likely from a small-bore firearm, perhaps .22-caliber, suggesting kids, perhaps recently out of school for Summer, bored, looking for “sport.” Yet the careful stacking suggests surreptitiousness, perhaps even guilt for the deed after some blood-lust wore away, by an adult instead. I’ve seen a single turtle at this spot on the road before — to find thirteen indicates some diligence.

Considered *yin* to the phoenix’s *yang* in ancient Chinese cosmological symbolism, the turtle was revered in Chinese culture as being one of the world’s four sacred beasts, along with the mythical dragon and phoenix and the very real tiger.

Buffalo, one of the most magnificent symbols of North America’s natural splendor, were revered by the Native American Plains Tribes before westward expansion by mainly European immigrants nearly ended existence for both these earlier inhabitants of the sweeping expanse of the Great Plains. The equally incredible grizzly bears and wolves, feared for their prowess as natural predators to private livestock herds allowed to graze freely on public lands,

were nearly exterminated in the lower forty-eight states by the early twentieth century due to bounties placed on their pelts that were the result of effective lobbying by ranching interests protecting their bottom line.

Passenger Pigeons perhaps represent our saddest and most complete act of species extermination — so numerous was this native bird that passing flocks were said to darken skies for days and the weight of night-roosting birds brought down tree limbs. An Ontario flock in 1886 was estimated to have been a mile wide and three hundred miles long, containing three-and-a-half billion birds, with the flock taking fourteen hours to pass a single point.¹

As a flock animal in North America, Passenger Pigeons were second in numbers only to the Rocky Mountain Locust, yet they passed out of existence in an amazingly short period after contact with the new settlers of North American lands. Habitat destruction contributed to their initial decline in the early to mid-nineteenth century, as massive deforestation for farming cleared away their roosting areas. But, due to their numbers and the relative ease with which the tightly roosting birds could be taken, mechanized commercial hunting ensured their near complete destruction in the nineteenth century's later years — the meat was considered so inexpensive that it was often the only food of slaves and servants and was used as hog feed, even soil fertilizer. The

¹ Ehrlich, Paul R.; Dobkin, David S.; Wheye, Darryl (1988). *The Passenger Pigeon*. Stanford University Press.

last known Passenger Pigeon, named Martha, died in the Cincinnati Zoo on September 1, 1914.

Of these billions of birds that shared our North American skies not long ago, barely survives even memory of their existence today. I ponder the fate of other species irrevocably diminished or senselessly annihilated, the present fate of birds, butterflies, insects, and others with little chance of surviving in our modern world.

Last week I found thirteen dead turtles neatly stacked in a ditch and continue to wonder “*Why?*”

12 June 2012

Sources: *The Passenger Pigeon*, Ehrlich, Dobkin, Wheye, Stanford University Press, 1988; *Li Po and Tu Fu*, translated by Arthur Cooper, Penguin Classics, 1973, pp. 118–119, “Letter to his Two Small Children Staying in Eastern Lu at Weng Yang Village under Turtle Mountain,” poem by Li Po and discussion following, for the material on turtles and their importance in ancient China.

In the Garden

Cardinal's music
from treetop
throughout the afternoon
as a male
throbbled his song.

On the patio
at dusk,
fireflies by the dozen
amaze me
all over again
with their
exquisite display.

O, to be lost in
this sinuous world
of bird song
& bug neon,
unaware of
the duplicity
of men.