NATURE POETRY II

John Breukelman

1 Of alle the floures in the mede
2 books in the running brooks
3 and the well-attir'd woodbine
4 Birds in their little nests agree
5 Flowers are lovely; love is flower-like
6 All day the low-hung clouds have dropped
7 every common bush afire with God
8 A narrow wind complains all day
9 The year of the rose is brief
10 April's wonder is worth it all.
11 An ocean is forever asking questions
12 little sweet-tasting brooks
13 The Snake foams white in Idaho
14 the sharp lift of the fins.
15 the dump, the hills of gook
16 But my words like silent raindrops fell

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The favorable response to "Nature Poetry" (The Kansas School Naturalist, December 1973) has led to the decision by Editor Boles and myself to publish this "Nature Poetry II."

As noted in 1973, some nature poetry is only descriptive, but more often it makes use of figurative language, symbolism, and indirection, in order to set the stage for the expression of experience that may go far beyond mere description. And as Verne Rockcastle said in the March 1964 issue of The Cornell Science Leaflet, "Those who observe nature closely and with sympathy, and make the effort to share their observations and their feelings with others, do so in many ways. Some interpret with camera; some with paint and palette; some with song and story; some with prose. But some of the most vivid creations have come from the hand of the poet—the one who writes with his soul in his hand."

These aspects of nature poetry were illustrated by examples from Emily Dickinson, Carl Sandburg, Sara Teasdale, Judith Jacobs, Richard Dorer, Kenneth Porter, Verne Rockcastle, Gary Snyder, and the Japanese haiku writers Basho, Buson, and Bora. Also included were some "road poems" and "irregular haiku" supplied by James Mersmann, and two traditional American Indian poems. All this occupied about half of the space, the rest being taken up by my own writings and a couple from my daughters.

The present number differs from the previous one in two respects. First, except for the section on children's poetry, it consists of my own writings. This is in response to suggestions from several of you who commented on "Nature Poetry." To quote one: "My pupils and I wish you had included more of your own poems. We can always find the others in the literature books and anthologies." And second, because several of you asked when this or that verse was written, I have this time dated all of them.

Many of you took the time to write or call about "Nature Poetry." Of those who had a favorite, or expressed one or more preferences, many more mentioned PLAINS OF KANSAS than any other, and Rolla Clymer did it the honor of reprinting it in the El Dorado Times, March 1, 1974. So we are starting "Nature Poetry II" by repeating the biggest vote getter from the previous number.
PLAINS OF KANSAS

"Kansas is a level plain"
in the geography book,
but not where you stop your car
To get out and look.

Not at Coronado Heights
Or where the Flint Hills are,
Not at Tonganoxie Lake
Or Fegan or Lone Star,
And not the bluffs of Atchison,
The breaks of the Saline,
The chalk cliffs of the dinosaurs
Or the Barber County scene,
And not along the Skyline Road
Or Smoky Hill terrain—
But in the book Kansas is
A flat and level plain.
1934

THROUGH THE YEAR

Since one of the most basic natural features in the Temperate Zone is the "swing of the calendar," let's proceed with the seasons and the months of the year. And this being the December number of the Naturalist, let's start with winter.

WINTER

The snow has begun in November and busily throughout December went on into seventy-three with dull regularity.

All through the winter so nasty, so blizzardy and so blasty, so sleety and so slippery, and with such icy frippery that the old-timers can't recall ever seeing such winter at all.

1973

FIVE BELOW

It's five below;
here by the fire
I can see iced snow
on the high-line wire.
Only reverie's flat
brings movement of green
so frigidly quiet
is the whole snowy scene.
1973

WINDFLOWERS

The white and purple prairie flowers
which brave the last defiant blasts
of wintry winds that blow in March
and whisper colored harmony
to those who are attuned to hear—
they betoken pregnant earth
teeming full of waking life,
they softly speak with confidence
of many more good things to come.

1934
SPRING
Here now is March which brings
variety along the way,
sometimes calm, sometimes wind,
often both in a single day;
sometimes the wind blows up rain,
now it's bright, now it's gray,
but always spring means flowers,
in March, in April, and in May.
1932

SUMMER
In the “good old summer time”
when lightning may strike,
that's when we get searing winds,
tornadoes, and the like.
Summer carries punishment—
heat, sunburn, and dust—
escape it when you're able,
endure it if you must,
- but -
when the thermometer breaks
one hundred in the shade,
that's when we appreciate
the old swimmin' hole.
Summer is essential
for most of what we eat,
and August to a baseball fan
is worth the sweat and heat.
1930

AUTUMN LEAVES
Autumn leaves are brilliant
gold against the sky,
but autumn leaves are gorgeous
only when they die.
Autumn leaves are gorgeous,
yellow, brown, and red;
autumn leaves are brilliant
but autumn leaves are dead.

AUTUMN WIND
The geese against the blue
flying in patterned V's
seem to think the gusts
are but a gentle breeze.
But the whitecaps lend an air
of vigor to the lake,
and dancing fallen leaves
elude the active rake.
The windmill runs full speed
in the October gale;
the little boat seems dangerous
with full distended sail.
1974

JANUARY DREAMS
of cold sharp snows
in grinding streams
as the low wind moans
and the high wind screams.
1945
FEBRUARY

"February hath XXVIII alone" said Richard Grafton long ago (Chronicles 1562). This had for centuries been so (Februvs tenet octo vicenrus), and is so right now, except in years divisible by IV an extra day somehow has crept. February makes it up with stinging blizzards, weather rough, snow and sleet and slush and stuff; in Kansas we are all agreed 28's more than enough. 1954

MARCH

Windy March has come again; across a Flint Hills valley flies a lone blue heron, in and out of moody clouds in doubtful skies. The winds of March cannot decide—now balmy, now a wintry blast, with driving snow, then gentle rain; March will settle down at last. 1949

MAY

is when every day has something to say. What? That depends on who it is she's talking to—it's up to you. 1943

APRIL

Robert Frost said in Vermont: "You know how it is with an April Day," still and windy, warm and cold, all the way from March to May, Kansas April is even worse; we're planning a camping trip, and so a frigid wind from north and west freezes April in ice and snow. But April weather doesn't last and by the next mid-afternoon April goes in one big leap to one of the perfect days of June. April is a fickle month, winter, summer, spring, and fall, but April weather at its best is worth it all, is worth it all. 1958

OCTOBER'S COLOR

Knowing only April you could never have foretold the grandeur of October's yellow, lavender, and gold, and the brightest bit of color in October's gorgeous scene is nature's certain promise of next year's crop of green. 1946

JUNE

The promise in winter comes true so soon in June when springtime changes to summer in June so soon. 1974

JULY

"The struggle for existence" is primary business for any living thing that tries biological success. "Survival of the fittest" surely must apply to anything that can survive in Kansas in July. 1951
AUGUST

Summer's hot in Kansas, all the home folks say; if you visit Kansas choose April or May. If you live in Kansas you must have a reason; when you have vacation you may choose the season to get away from Kansas; it may all be up to you, but don't come back in August; you'll be sorry if you do.

1955

NOVEMBER

And nature now decides her summer secrets to be no longer worth the trouble keeping; the birds have left their summer homes and so the smoothly interwoven nests for which in June we strained our eyes in vain now stand out boldly in their filligrees of twigs.

1936

SEPTEMBER

July is adolescent September is mature August is in doubt September is quite sure January is the baby September fully grown March is the footstool September is the throne September is the harvest by April foretold September is the promise of October leafy gold.

1960

DECEMBER

turns the key locks the door and walks away without a word or backward look

He won't return.

A new tenant will move in right away now.

1938

KANSAS

In 1935 I had the opportunity of hiking along the Santa Fe Trail in western Kansas for what seemed like a couple of miles. With my mind's eye I saw the traffic that wore down this tremendous roadway, which in many places still shows after all these years.

SANTA FE TRAIL

Stand here a little while in the middle of these tracks, these grass-grown ruts, now almost healed but once deep-worn and dusty, deep-worn by many wheels and many tired feet of men and beasts—
stand here a little while and see
the canvas-covered schooners
on a grass-ocean route
pass by in patient lines
in spite of heat and cold
and thirst and hunger
and storm and drought
and loneliness
and sickness
and death—

stand here a little while
with head uncovered
and watch
"the winning of the West"
along this dusty trail
this long, tough,
dusty trail—

stand here a little while
before you brag again
of making it to Dodge City
in forty-three minutes.

1935

KANSAS OCEAN

Stand here—look across the ocean
of Kansas prairie—let your distant gaze
extend itself to where the sky and grass
meet along a band of purple haze.

Stand here—across the Kansas ocean see
the flying fishes (crows and meadow larks)
as lightly as their scaly models swing
from grassy wave to wave in gentle arcs.

Here miles contract to little more than rods
and rods appear as inches on a screen
until the straining eyes have shifted gears
in keeping with the measure of the scene.

1935

During our 46-year residence in one of the
several "Gateways to the Flint Hills," there
have of course been countless opportunities for
poetical responses to the many stimulating ele-
ments of this marvelous region.

ELMDALE ROAD

———a drive when the day is done
to see in the red of the evening sun
the scarlet sumac's finest skill,
Persian rugs on every hill—
shadows drawn in purple strokes
over russet of resting oaks—
poison ivy trying its best
to copy colors in which are dressed
the elm and the oak; still the wheat
insisting green is the one to beat.
No matter—even the weeds declare
October color magic is there
by a rural road for all to see—
(at least for a dreamer such as me.

1964

FLINT HILLS AUTUMN

When Flint Hills autumn colors come
in all the range of dyes and tints,
it's mighty hard to squelch the urge
to send big Kodacolor prints
and colored booklets to describe
this most natural of the arts
to my senior citizen friends
retired to "more scenic" parts.

1974
SOUTH DAKOTA

We have long had a summer home in the Black Hills of South Dakota. These pine-clad mountains have often been the inspiration for verses.

RUSHMORE

Mount Rushmore:

Confer perpetual renown and honor upon the Builders of America whose unyielding faith and indestructible devotion made, and make, our country.

This granite shrine, however, is only a colossal sculpture unless America's devotion to right, to liberty and justice for all, now and forevermore, be yet more indestructible and more unyielding than the Archean granite in which the artist worked.

1940

CATHEDRAL SPIRES

When a white concealing blanket hangs below the bases of the granite teeth hiding the dark green softness underneath, underneath, a snarling mountain bares its jagged fangs.

Later, when the pines so gently wear their fluffy vestments, white and soft, contrasting with the granite pipes aloft, a stately organ plays a mountain air.

1940

Onl y a shor t dista nce eas t of the Bla ck Hils are the Bad La nds. a weird assemblage of erosion patterns now incorporated into the Bad Lands National Monument.

BAD LANDS

a climate lush with crocodiles and palms
and inexorable change to grass and horses and camels
to rising land and erosion and colors
with dinosaurs and tiny lizards and turtles—

all recording change which you can see if you know how to look—

you can see it all even including the present.

1925
MAN IN NATURE

We human beings, though we may be the "Lords of creation", should not forget that we ourselves are a part of nature. "Man and Nature" is a misleading concept; it is really "Man in Nature."

EXTINCTION

It's a sobering thought: the extinction of *Homo sapiens* would be followed by immediate environmental improvement for nearly all other animal species, for all except a few—

*house rats*
*house mice*
*house sparrows*
*starlings*
*cockroaches*
and a few others—
only these constant companions of *Homo sapiens* would suffer from his absence.
1969

BARKING DOGS

Listen to a pack of barking dogs; usually only one of them is barking at any one thing; this dog could be called the leader; the others are barking at him; dogs are so much like people.
1951

TELEPHONE POLES

Tall and straight
tall and crooked
short and straight
short and crooked
broken down by storm
standing after, leaning,
even held up by wires
they should support.
Telephone poles are like men.
1969
CAMPING
When you live
in camping terrain
your tent is your home,
your shelter from rain.
Unlike your house
(for what it is worth)
your tent lets you live
right next to the earth.
1973

THE HAIKU
I became fascinated with haiku when I en­countered them in a college English course. In its strict arrangement this Japanese verse form consists of three lines, of 17 syllables arranged 5-7-5. Because of its shortness the haiku depends on suggestion and illusion; it cannot give a detailed description. This very limitation makes the haiku an interesting way to express a quick impression, a snapshot as it were, of a natural feature. I have had a lot of fun doing haiku.

HOUSE SPARROW
You’re a little pest;
you’re over-populated,
but also friendly.
1966

SQUIRREL
Hey, there, you rascal!
That feeder was intended strictly for the birds.
1963

SUMMER
Gentle warmth of June
heavy, humid July heat
dry, searing August.
1974

WINTER
Doubtful December
Jezebel January
firm February.
1974

SPRING
Gusty winds of March
gentle breezes of April
flowering of May.
1974

PETUNIA
Nightshade, tobacco,
tomato, henbane, and you—
what a family!
1963
CROCUS
Brave little Krokus
even in February
notes the coming spring.
1963

AUTUMN
The winds of autumn
speak no promises, except
of snows of winter.
1966

BLUE JAY
You're a fancy dude
with crest and brilliant raiment—
you're a nuisance too.
1963

WINTER IS NOT FAR AWAY
Winter is not far away
when birches turn to gold;
all the signs of nature say
winter is not far away
with its cold-contracted day.
Though today may not be cold
winter is not far away
when birches turn to gold.
1944

SPRING TRIOLET
With tools of sun and rain
nature works her field.
She tills her whole domain
with tools of sun and rain.
She counts as worthy gain
all life the soil may yield.
With tools of sun and rain
nature works her field.
1959

SO GENTLY
So gently he adorned her hair
with a yellow dogtooth violet,
his touch was light as April air,
so gently he adorned her hair;
perhaps he only put it there
so I could write this triolet;
so gently he adorned her hair
with a yellow dogtooth violet.
1940

THE GROOK
About three years ago I came to know Piet
Hein's Grooks. A Danish mathematician, he
writes grooks in his spare time. These have
been defined as "small windows opening on a
large world." Here are a few of my "outlooks
on an in nature" which I think may qualify.

THE TRIOLET
The triolet, because of its echoing lines,
provides an interesting way to draw word
pictures of nature.
KIDS

Whatever else the kids may be,
this you'll have to face:
they are the only future
of the human race.
1972

DOG FOOD

The recent report on dog food
raised a lot of fuss
just to prove our pooches
don't eat any better than
1973

SPRING

The reason that the springtime
so enriches lives:
exactl" when we need it—
that's when spring arrives.
1974

GARDENING

In the garden of living
there's youth and old age;
young people sow oats, and
old people grow sage.
1975

PRAYER FOR CITY GARDENER

Lord, I am a busy man,
my garden's small, and therefore
help me to keep from planting
more than I can care for.
1975

OIL

With that golden oil
from our neighbor's soil
how apt that Mexico
rhymes with Texaco!
1946

CHILDREN AND POETRY

I am using the rest of my space for children's poetry. The youngsters seem to have a natural affinity for poetry. They like the rhythms and rhyme, the meter and balance. Many, if not most, of them like to make up verses, and prefer this activity to memorizing and analyzing the poetry of others. My daughter, Mrs. Claire Schelske, of Ann Arbor, Michigan, when she was a pupil in the third grade at the laboratory school of the then Kansas State Teachers College, wrote several,

SMOKEY

My cat Smokey
is often pokey.
When it's hot
he sleeps a lot.
Sometimes for fun
he likes to run.
When he wants to eat
he's hard to beat.

My daughter Mrs. Robert Yoder, of Peabody, Kansas, when she was teaching educable retarded children, used poetry as an interest developer. On one occasion she suggested the format:

1. the subject
2. two words describing the subject
WRITE A POEM

Here are some cinquain poems which were written by students at the Ten-Mile Elementary School, Farmington, Michigan, while at the Mill Lake Outdoor Center. Try and see if you can write one of these poems yourself. To write one, first write down two words which generally describe the nature item you are writing about, then three action words about the subject, then a brief sentence which expresses one key thing about the item you are describing; and then last a single word which sums up all of the other things you have said about your subject. You will be surprised with the results.

TREE STUMP
Barky, interesting
Dying, rotting, aging
The tree stump is a warm home
for different kinds of animals.
Helpful. 
Debbie Harmon

HOLLOW STUMP
Eaten, Strong
Laying, decaying, fertilizing
It provides homes for animals and insects.
Home.

Susie Gucciardo

LEAVES
Crisp
Rotting, dying, decaying
A weird, funny thing.
Crumby.

Brian Corey

The following is reprinted by permission of James V. Stabile, Editor, from the May 1974 issue of Michigan Out-Doors, monthly publication of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs.

SUNSET
The sun is going down, I see.
There are no sounds in the sky or sea.
Just the world
and me.
Amy Joy Dunbar 
Hollis, N.H.
(age 8)

We have received three haiku and a limerick written by children who wish to remain anonymous. PINE TREE was written by a nine year old boy in a southern state. MY KITTEN by a ten year old girl in a western state. SNOWMAN and LOST MITTEN by an eleven year old girl in a northern state.

PINE TREE
Oh, the small pine tree
gently swaying in the breeze
brings joy to my heart.
MY KITTEN

My little kitten
is chasing a butterfly
out of the garden.

SNOWMAN

You look so happy.
We're sorry you can't spend
next summer with us.

LOST MITTEN

There once was a little black kitten
who lost his left-paw mitten;
he looked high and low
and said "one thing I know,
till I find it I won't be quitten".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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the mid-fifties), and my wife Ruth for her
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careful reading of the manuscript. All photos
not otherwise credited are from my own files.

KEY TO QUOTATIONS ON FRONT COVER

1. THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN,
   Geoffrey Chaucer. 1340-1400
2. AS YOU LIKE IT, William Shake-
   speare. 1564-1616
3. LYCIDAS, John Milton. 1608-1674
4. DIVINE SONGS, Isaac Watts. 1674-1749
5. YOUTH AND AGE, Samuel Taylor
   Coleridge, 1772-1834
6. AN APRIL DAY, Caroline Anne
   Southey. 1778-1845
7. AURORA LEIGH, Elizabeth Barrett
   Browning. 1806-1861
8. Untitled. Emily Dickinson. 1830-1886
9. THE YEAR OF THE ROSE, Algernon
   Swinburne. 1837-1899
10. THE ADVENTURERS, Henry New-
    bolt. 1862-1938
11. ROMAN BARTHOLOW, Edwin Arling-
    ton Robinson. 1869-1935
12. ODE TO WALT WHITMAN, Stephen
    Vincent Benet. 1898-1943
13. POEMS: AN HANDFUL WITH
    QUIETNESS, John Stewart Carter. 1911-1965
14. OVERLAND TO THE ISLANDS,
    Denise Levertov. 1923-
15. SPHERE, A.A. Ammons. 1927-
16. THE SOUND OF SILENCE. Paul
    Simon. 1941-
1975-1976 AUDUBON SERIES

The EKSC Division of Biology and Special Events will offer the final Audubon Screen Tour for the 1975-1976 school year:

Tuesday, April 20, 1976—"Four Fathom World," Harry Pederson presenting.

The program will start promptly at 7:30 p.m. on the EKSC Campus, in the Brighton Lecture Hall. Single Admission is $1.50 for adults and $0.50 for children. Family season tickets will admit. EKSC Student ID cards will also admit the bearer. For further information concerning the last Audubon film call 343-1200, Ext. 307.

If you are planning on bringing your students on a tour of the Schmidt Natural History Museum you should write or call Dr. Thomas Eddy, Division of Biology, for arrangements. Requests for a tour of the Ross Natural History Reservation should be directed to Dr. Dwight Spencer, Division of Biology, EKSC.

When you change address, please include your old address as well as your new one when letting the Editor know of your moving. In case you get married, we would like to have your maiden name and old address, as well as the new name and address to which you wish the Naturalist to be sent. Finally, do you know of anyone receiving a copy of the Naturalist who has moved, or no longer is interested in the publication? As we operate on a limited budget, this will help us remove the "dead wood" from our mailing list.

Suggestions for future issues are always welcome.