

Grand Passage

*It doesn't happen often,
none in the flock remembered when;
except one tired veteran,
an aged mallard hen.*

*She foretold it was coming,
the ancient primal urge
for all the southbound waterfowl
to gather up and merge.*

*Then from Orion's starry depths
we heard the call, "Arise!"
And all obeyed the faint command
and millions filled the skies.*

*An aerial Oktoberfest!
A grand and mystic flight.
We sang the old hymn as we flew
that moonlight harvest night.*

*"Hark the herald angels sing!
Glory to the autumn king!
Joyful avian nations rise!
Join the triumph of the skies!"*

Author's Notes: A natural phenomenon. On a given night during fall migration, thousands (or millions) of waterfowl gather in flight. The Des Moines, Iowa, airport's radar was once overwhelmed by this mass migration; flights cancelled.

Once More

*You know who I
would like to see?
Besides old friends
who were close to me?*

*I'd like to see
my dogs again:
Rover, Skippy, Tad,
Midge and Ben.*

*To walk the levee
and the river bank,
to praise them and pet them
and give them thanks.*

*To thank my dogs
for their company
and the way they
always treated me.*

*For if ever I was
rough with them,
they always looked
at me as friend.*

*And a wag of their tail
would let me know,
they knew I really
loved them so.*

Author's Notes: We all love our dogs like family.

The Grandfather Oak

*This tired oak, grandfather oak,
is from another age.
His dream is of a sylvan grove
and he's a patient sage.*

*If you will rest beneath his crown
and feel the branches sway,
while gentle breezes coax the leaves
you'll hear him softly say:*

*"Someday the fire may come back
we'll open up the past.
For I've old dreams to see return
the prairie grass at last;*

*and with it all endangered ones
of long gone yesteryear.
It's why I've spread my limbs so wide
in humble open prayer."*

*Author's Notes: An oak savanna is a grassland,
populated at random with oaks, maintained by fire.
The largest of oaks are called
grandfather.*

The Woodcock

*Each early spring a tour-d'force
awaits a pasture audience;
it's a ritual of mating,
a kind of wedding dance.*

*The dancer is a male woodcock
who struts the twilight sky:
all a twitter he ascends
a spiraling staircase high*

*above his ladylove who
waits for him below.
Then topping out he tumbles,
warbeling soft and low.*

*Safely grounded he breaks into
an aria of "peents"
to hold his lady spellbound
with raspy eloquence.*

*But I suspect that if she left
and he was on his own,
he'd mount the heavens once again
to skydance all alone.*

Aldo's New Conviction

*When on that mountain the old wolf died,
some say a fitting destiny.
Had not the smug, old wisdom preached
her guilt of ruthless cruelty?*

*So died the fire. Yet reignited,
in his soul and mind,
came Aldo's new conviction:
the wolf had been maligned.*

*The mountain could have told him this:
the deer and all its kin,
depend upon the predator
to keep their number thin*

*and save them from a gluttony
that wrecks a healthy range.
The deer and wolf both benefit
from this life and death exchange.*

*The lesson here: a life of ease
is temporary wealth.
If we heed the vision of the wolf's green fire
we'll be saved from ourselves.*

*Author's Notes: This poem chronicles Aldo Leopold's
realization of the important predator/prey relationship.
See "Thinking Like a Mountain", A Sand County Almanac.*