

## Tortoise at Toronto Zoo

I saw a tortoise at Toronto Zoo  
so massive its patterned shell removed,  
upturned and filled with sparkling water  
might have made a bath for infant twins.

I watched it heave its weight against its pen,  
heave hard and hard again against the gate  
whose post once split was now braced  
by a metal belt that tightened on a screw.

The door, too, had buckled at its base,  
blond wood splinters sprayed the earth floor  
where the steel finger of the latch  
had torn through the pit-prop post.

The bare earth floor beneath its legs  
was not so much scooped out as flattened  
into a depression from its pushing,  
pestled down to a compact powder.

Its head with eyes closed was another leg,  
though with eyes opened it resembled  
Mother Theresa without her tea-towel veil,  
Sir Alec Guinness and a Moray eel.

It had the look of one who had been doing  
this a long time: it might have pushed  
a block of stone from flat Nile boats  
over logs toward the distant pyramids.

It heaved and heaved. Patient beyond my  
comprehension, it had something  
of the mountain and the ocean in its shell,  
something that immense and unknowable.