

Kansas Poets Laureate at Large

Hawk up,

by Kevin Rabas, Kansas Poet Laureate 2017-19

a hinge in wind,
old sad hunter, wings
depicted in cave paint.

We've seen you
for centuries, above.

Asclepias Tuberosa L.

by Kevin Rabas, Kansas Poet Laureate 2017-19

How the butterfly
milkweed seed,
little coffee bean,
unfurls a feathery
shoot, white
against sky,
skims, lifts
in wind.

Burn Blue or Blue Skies

by Kevin Rabas, Kansas Poet Laureate 2017-19

E says he likes the sky
today, how the sky lightens,
whitens at the horizon, how the short waves,
UV, pass blue through nitrogen and oxygen,
light the sky.

Burial Mount, Luray, KS

by Kevin Rabas, Kansas Poet Laureate 2017-19

There's a mound
at my father's place,
a green hump of a hill
that has a ring of rocks
inside, near the top,
and ancient bones, 600 AD, beneath—
from someone who could also
see this river, this rim
of cottonwoods, and the bison
we no longer see, and the tallgrass

taller than ever, and the smoke
lines from fires miles
to the east, like spirit trails,
like skywriting, like the pulse line
on a wrist, thin, but beating,
beating like a drum.

Kevin Rabas, Kansas Poet Laureate (2017-2019), teaches at Emporia State University, where he leads the poetry and playwriting tracks and chairs the Department of English, Modern Languages, and Journalism. He has nine books, including *Lisa's Flying Electric Piano*, a Kansas Notable Book and Nelson Poetry Book Award winner.

Crying With Glasses On

by Eric McHenry, Kansas Poet Laureate 2015-17

It's such a grownup thing to do.
Like renting tap shoes to perform
for no one in an electrical storm.
What's wrong with you?

Remove your spectacles and cry,
already. If there's rain
on your side of the windowpane
you're probably the sky.

What's the intention of a tear
if not to lubricate and cleanse?
I'll tell you: a corrective lens
is making things too clear.

In college I could see the future
coming and would often
pop out my contacts first, to soften
its least attractive feature.

If you'll just give it half an hour,

grief will discover
you drawing steam-roses in the shower,
and join you, like a lover.

Previously published in Eric's book *Odd Evening*, and in *Poetry International*.

Eric McHenry's most recent book of poetry is *Odd Evening*. Others include *Potscribbler Lullabies*, which received the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, and *Mommy Daddy Evan Sage*, a collection of children's poems illustrated by Nicholas Garland. He lives in Lawrence, Kansas, with his wife and two children and teaches creative writing at Washburn University. He is the poet laureate of Kansas for 2015–2017.

Driving Kansas

by Wyatt Townley, Kansas Poet Laureate 2013-15

What sticks up
sticks around.
Grain elevator, water tower, steeple.

Elevator,
tower,
steeple.

Towns slide by, parades
of telephone poles—
the voices they carried,

silent. The stone bank's a tomb
by the post office, the letters
and the hands that wrote them,

elevator,
tower,
steeple,

gone. We are the last

letter sent here. All week
we arrive and arrive.

The rest goes like cursive,
like rain into earth—the natives,
the neighbors, the porch.

Wyatt Townley was Poet Laureate of Kansas (2013-15) and continues living a double life. A former dancer turned yoga teacher, she has written books on both subjects and lives at the curious intersection of poetry and poetry-in-motion. Her poems have been read by Garrison Keillor on NPR, featured in US Poet Laureate Ted Kooser’s syndicated “American Life in Poetry” column, and published in journals including *The Paris Review*, *North American Review*, and *The Yale Review*. This poem was written during her poet laureate travels and will appear in her new book, *Rewriting the Body*, forthcoming in 2018.

The Dharma of the Arms

by Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Kansas Poet Laureate 2009-13

is the upper back, the secret side
of the heart's cradle and lung's steady dreams.

The dharma of the lungs is the atmosphere
that breathes us in, lets us go.

The dharma of the air is the jetstream,
which is the dharma of the hawk,
riding the thermals until sweeping
the wind down to the cedar tree.

The dharma of the cedar is turning light
into shelter for the nest of wrens.

The dharma of light is weather,
whose job it is to turn seed to fruit,

and body to sleep. The dharma of sleep
is to let go and trust the changing ground.

The dharma of the earth is love.

From *Following the Curve* by Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Spartan Press, 2017.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Ph.D., the 2009-13 Kansas Poet Laureate is the author of two dozen books, including the recent *Miriam's Well*, a novel; *Following the Curve*, poetry; and *Everyday Magic*, a collection of beloved blog posts and personal essays. Her previous work includes *The Divorce Girl*, a novel; *Needle in the Bone*, a non-fiction book on the Holocaust; and five poetry collections, including the award-winning *Chasing Weather: Tornadoes, Tempests, and Thunderous Skies in Word and Image* with weather chaser/photographer Stephen Locke. Founder of Transformative Language Arts at Goddard College where she teaches, Mirriam-Goldberg also leads writing workshops widely.

The Smell of Water

by Denise Low, Kansas Poet Laureate 2007-09

Mother and I, unmatched pair, drive
gravel roads into country.
Dry creeks lead sky to each direction.
She stays in second gear and says nothing.
Car upholstery smells of rotting foam rubber.
Sun spotlights grass and grass.
Occasional white-frame houses moor beside mailboxes.
No people interrupt the scene.
She turns west. I roll down windows.
Pressure of blustery wind slits my eyes.
Up a ridge of flint knucklebones we stop. Get out.
I breathe in heat and then a taste of blue.

*Denise Low, Kansas Poet Laureate 2007-09, is author or editor of 30 books of poetry and prose. Forward Reviews writes of her new memoir from the University of Nebraska Press, *The Turtle's Beating Heart: One Family's Story of Lenape Survival*: "An accomplished poet, Low's well-honed prose flows with lyric intensity. In Kansas, a place 'where eternity has a real valence,' she searches for documentary evidence of her ancestors' passage through history and for the timeless threads of culture." American Book Review writes of her short fiction book*

Jackalope (Red Mountain Press): “In Low’s sure hands the literary trickster (a figure who dominated American Indian writing and criticism in the 1980s and 1990s) re-emerges in Jackalope as a resilient imaginative force for the twenty-first century.” She teaches professional workshops and classes for Baker University’s School of Professional and Graduate Studies.

She has won three Kansas Notable Book Awards and has recognition from Seaton Prize, Pami Jurassi Bush Award of the Academy of American Poets, Roberts Prize, and the Lichtor Poetry Prize. Low has an MFA (Wichita State U.) and Ph.D. (Kansas U.).