

With the Low Poppy Mallow

The field is redolent with spiderswort;
a rich breeze chatters the cottonwood.
Clouds pass telling the story of rain
but don't stay for us to hear the end.
The dog whines wanting breakfast,
as the coffee goes cold. I would rather
not move, taking this in. I am here
with the low poppy mallow, the yarrow,
and the house finch on the edge
of the rain gutter, his red head a signal,
as sycamore and cottonwood seeds
blow from the roof. When the bluestem
moves in waves on the small hill
across the road, it scalds my heart
like hard rain.

~ Bill Sheldon

Ungrassed, the Land

i. Natures

In the best world, we are all
who we should be, following
a nature we cannot resist. This,
then, is the best world. True
to our nature, we can look
about us, see what we have done.
We, though, think we can change
ourselves, our nature. Here
on our high perch, let us look
again. Let us contemplate
what we do next.

ii. The Cell

We walk a graveyard daily,
earth the accretion of all
that has come.
We should fear it less,
and death. We should go
upon our way with respect.
It is a cell that cannot
divide, one we will not
escape. When birds
begin to foul their nests,
their mothers force them out.
Ours is forbearing, but her eye
is hard as any bird's, and you
cannot fly.

iii. The Dust

West of here waits the dust on the wind's
next convoy. Ungrassed, the land
gives itself up to the breath of each passing breeze.
Voracious and careless in our usage,
what comes to pass, we have wrought,
though we take all but the blame.
It is an old story: In the dust
that coats the tables of those
houses without conditioned air lies the history
of all our foolishness and the bad luck
of running out of time. It is not
just wind the dust awaits. The passing
of massive time is something like hope.

~ Bill Sheldon

William Sheldon lives in Hutchinson, Kansas where he teaches and writes. His poetry and prose have been published widely in such journals as *Blue Mesa Review*, *Columbia*, *New Letters*, and *Prairie Schooner*. He is the author of two books of poetry, *Retrieving Old Bones* (Woodley, 2002) and *Rain Comes Riding* (Mammoth, 2011), as well as a chapbook, *Into Distant Grass* (Oil Hill, 2009). *Retrieving Old Bones* was a *Kansas City Star* Noteworthy Book for 2002 and is listed as one of the Great Plains Alliance's Great Books of the Great Plains.