

KEVIN JAMES RABAS (1974 -)



Kevin Rabas grew up in Shawnee, Johnson County. He attended area colleges and also Goddard in Vermont. Now he teaches creative writing at Emporia State University. He has a musical background, including training in marimba and other percussions. He still performs music regularly in eastern Kansas (see his website below). While living in the Kansas City area, he developed talents as a jazz drummer, historian, and critic, which influences his poetry both in form and content. He writes about Charlie Parker ("Bird's Horn") and other musicians. He also approaches a poem like an improvised solo, with a musical phrase (like a poetic image) enunciated and then repeated in varying ways.

In the poem "Lightning's Bite," he begins with a child's voice as a boy asserts that lightning is like a mammal with teeth. Throughout the poem, then, the narrator notices the sky in this new mode, or musical key. The clouds "look like they are carrying heavy sacks." The trees "wave" in the wind. And because this is a child's poem, imaginary "great dragons" can appear in the cloud formations. Next, the poem shifts back to an adult's perspective, or instrumental voice, as the narrator admits the phenomenon is simply wind. So the grown-up comforts the child. Yet the adult narrator is changed. When the storm passes, he sees wind as something more: "It is like standing under a bridge as a train goes over." The two perspectives merge into a third, as a musician would resolve a melody with a final chord.

LIGHTNING'S BITE

**Watch out. The lightning might come down
and bite you, my son says, and we look
to the gray, weighted clouds above us
that look like they are carrying heavy sacks
of hail or rain. Or snow, but it is too early for that.
So we hold out our hands and look for the droplets
that should come, and there are none.
So we look to the trees that wave and bend
and to the branches full of big green leaves,
branches that look like the necks of great dragons
twisting and fighting, when all this really is
is wind, and we go home, go inside, and watch
as the lights go out, and we listen to the storm above us.
It is like standing under a bridge as a train goes over.
But this train keeps coming, and rumbling, and my son
puts his hands over his ears. I take him in my arms,
and we do not tremble. We laugh.**

Education: Kevin Rabas received a BA in English (University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1995); MA in English (Kansas State University, 1998); MFA in Creative Writing (Goddard College, 2002); and Ph.D. in English (University of Kansas, 2007).

Career: This poet teaches at Emporia State University, where he co-directs the creative writing program and co-edits *Flint Hills Review*. His awards for poetry include the Langston Hughes Award. He has published *Bird's Horn* (Coal City Review Press 2007) and *Lisa's Flying Electric Piano* (Woodley 2009). His jazz poetry CD is *Last Road Trip*, with saxophonist Josh Sclar (<http://kevinrabas.com/>)