



John Jenkinson

Distinguished Kansas Poet

• [E-mail](#)

John Jenkinson's misspent youth consisted of long years enduring low-end jobs -- gandydancing, tin-man hustling, drumming, taxi-driving, grifting, and grave-site peddling among them. A late return to the groves of Academe resulted in an MFA from Wichita State University, a PhD from the University of North Texas, and a Milton Center post-doctoral Fellowship in Poetry at Newman University. His most cherished degree, however, remains the one he earned at the School of Hard Knocks, where he continues post-graduate studies.

John's poems have received an AWP Intro Journals award, the Ellipses Prize, a New Voices Award, a Balticon Science Fiction Award, and awards from Kansas Voices, among others – and appear in a surprising variety of journals and anthologies (from Slipstream to The Mennonite, for example). He has published several chapbooks with B.G.S., Hard Knocks, and Basilisk presses, and his first full-length collection, *Rebekah Orders Lasagna*, has just appeared from Woodley Press.

John teaches literature and writing at Butler Community College in Kansas, where he advises the Chess Society and directs the Oil Hill Reading Series. John spends his spare time balancing four children, his fiction-writing beautiful genius wife Catherine (who writes as Catherine Dryden), two cats and a dog – and has taken up song-writing.

Barns

The gambrel-lofted barns, worn siding painted in trade for advertising (Chew Mail Pouch Tobacco fades like the veteran who brushed it), fall to their knees in axles and bundled wire, pigweed's graying spikes, and bow their hay-points toward autumn dirt.

They haven't a prayer. The new kids on the site sport galvanized steel sides, corrugate sunlight as it wiggles its hips across the winter wheat sprouts west of Garfield. Impervious to drought or flood, the ravening of weather's appetite,

they stud the tilled and irrigated prairie fly-specked with huddled little towns where weary farmers bunch around the Co-op to plan late fall's erections. City-boys truck the new barns in, drop them disassembled in the chaff.

But, all barns chew the same cud: honed tools, new leather, feed sacks—and purge their bowels of cogwheels, blunt hoes, old spurs' rusty rowels. Someone waits for love in a half-lit hayloft. Out behind the barn, the kittens learn to smoke.

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Why Orville & Wilbur Built an Airplane

Life, as we suspected, is a bicycle lacking a kickstand: pedal along for a while,

then lay it down. Some of us glide serenely down a long, easy hill on three-

pound Italian racers, scarcely using any of their twenty-two well-lubricated gears. Others

must dismount to walk these leaden Western Flyers up that hot, steep slope, mugged

by heavy corduroys under a midsummer sun, light from the heavy chrome fenders kissing our eyes closed,

the bright air that clogs our passage thickening with effort—the shaky wire baskets filling with rocks.

Originally Published in: The Georgia Review



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Earth as a Place of Burial

In brindled file, the Herefords, Angus amble
loose-musled, heavy boned, and plump
with the Flint Hills' fading grasses,
as we loll at the barbed fence-line,
a clutch of broad-brimmed flowers
shooting the breeze around the weed stems
wedged between our teeth.

The cattle disregard our teeth.
Mothers curl their thick, pink tongues
against the matted calf fur
even though the calves stand near
full growth themselves and chew their cud
with a leisure known to those for whom
desire is just another bull beyond a fence.

Easing to yellow, bluestem battens
down another summer. A choke
of sumac bleeds along the creek, where woods
gnarl up in gold and mixed siennas,
the lime-green snap of hedgeapples,
grapevine's tough gray twist.

The world stumbles
into its slow season as manure steams
an age-old sweetness
across the pasture's hoof-pocked surface
into morning's hesitant frost.

Someone from the food chain glistens—
a bag of bloodied leather
emptied in a carnage of bottlebrush
where the meadow meets the trees.
This is what we remember of the night,
what the brooding herd repeats.

Jigging her bell in the morning haze,
the lead cow tolls what winter promises—
dormant frogs in mud;
the death of grain;
our earth a hard and frozen thing;
farm dogs and the loading ramp.

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South of Red-Wing

I wake up on the wrong side of the equinox,
geese in isosceles stitches
trace a path down the world's face, stop
to ravish the harvest's sun-dried trash

piled in furrows and hedgerows.
A clatter of crows pleats the air
with black derision, brushes a red-wing
off the taut wire of her discretion.

Summer's long truce broken, the mice
have returned to the catfood, gnawed
dank passage to that heavy yellow sack,
peppered our floor with their delicate scat.

This bounty of need, feeling
the leaves crack as the cat stalks
his own red meal, whiskers his way
through the crisp buffalo grass.

Something has burrowed into the half-assed
pumpkin patch—skunk, badger,
another hair-shirt mendicant
telling her beads along the food chain,

clicking the beetles' lacquer-thin shells,
snapping brittle seed-hulls
in her frowsty cell, far from the sun's ache,
taking no thought for the morrow.

Thin fires kiss the evenings now
beneath the railway trestle; and the men
with cardboard signs, trolling the highways
in denim and flannel, all drift south.

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...also an AWP Intro Journal Award

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