



**Stephen Meats** was born in LeRoy, Kansas (March 16, 1944), and raised in Concordia, Kansas. He graduated from Concordia High School in 1962 and attended Kansas State University for three years before transferring to the University of South Carolina in 1965, where he earned his bachelor's (1966), master's (1968), and doctoral degrees in English (1972).

He has taught at the U. S. Air Force Academy (1968-1972), the University of Tampa (1972-1979), and Pittsburg State University (1979-present), where he is a past University Professor and Chairperson of the Department of English. Besides scholarly articles, editions, and reviews, Meats has published one book of poems, *Looking for the Pale Eagle* (Topeka: Woodley Press, 1993).

His poems and short stories have appeared in numerous journals, including *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Little Balkans Review*, *Albatross*, *The Quarterly*, *The Laurel Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Tampa Review*, *Arete: A Journal of Sports Literature*, *Hurakan*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Prairie Poetry*, *Dos Passos Review*, *Angel Face*, and *The Laughing Dog*, and in the anthologies, *A White Voice Rides a Horse* (1979) and *Kansas Stories* (1989). Since 1985, he has been poetry editor of *The Midwest Quarterly*.

## My Advice

You say you want to find yourself. You'll need  
a piece of gravel. Drive any rocked road  
in Kansas and you'll hear pieces by the dozen

knocking in your wheel wells. For once, stop  
and get out of the car. Take a minute to look  
at the sky—flat bottomed clouds shadowing

the pastures. You'll hear the meadowlark  
on the fence post before you see him fly.  
Pick up your piece of gravel. If you're far

off the main route, a handful of chat, or even  
road sand will do. Cup it in your palm while your  
tires hum away the miles on the asphalt highway.

Warm it in your pocket as you drink your coffee  
at the café counter in the next town, and stay  
a while to look at the faces and listen to the talk.

Then take it home with you and right away  
put it in your garden or your flower box or drop  
it in the driveway. It doesn't really matter.

You've already got your answer.

From *The Dos Passos Review* (2005)  
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## If the Inquisition Had Come to Coffee

The coffee was safe in its shaded cups, the grapes  
on the plate were snug in their cloudy skins  
when the evening sun like an iron bar  
levered open the end of the porch  
and hung its ruddy beacon where we sat.

With this new light behind you, every word you spoke,  
every gesture you made showered sparks  
like meteors entering the atmosphere, and I saw  
that your head was a planet in her quarter phase  
and the moth circling your face was a moon.

If the inquisitorial magistrates had been there to see you  
as I saw you then, I think the true relation of sun  
to earth and stars might have been revealed to them,  
and Galileo with his telescope and Jupiter and the  
mountains  
of the moon could with ease have balanced for the rest of  
us  
the forces of faith and reason in one peaceful orbit.

From *The Quarterly* (1988)  
and *Looking for the Pale Eagle* (1993).  
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# Stephen Meats

Distinguished Kansas Poet

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## All This Moving Apart

It's easy to see why some find it  
hard to believe. Infinity  
compressed into a cube

that could rest in a teaspoon.  
And then the rupture,  
the unimaginable spattering

—across even more  
unimaginable distances—  
of galaxies and other wonders

that race away from each other  
with ever increasing velocity.  
But there it is.

Mathematical calculations,  
say the scientists, and the latest  
astrophysical observations

lead to conclusions inescapable.  
It must be true. But we two  
who watch white crowned sparrows

feeding along the fence row  
and feel the frost under our feet  
as we walk the winter field

*continued at right*

are obliged to ask the question:  
How could this unimaginable  
sequence of incomprehensible events

lead at last to us?  
The wind tumbles a crow  
into the upper limbs of a dead elm

that has shed great sleeves  
of bark to shatter on the ground.  
Our hands find each other

as the crow's clawed feet find  
the naked branch thirty feet above.  
It is too improbable. The mind

cannot encompass the enigma  
that stretches across the vast wastes  
and deserts of cosmic time

to the crow's black claws  
clasping the dead branch,  
to my hand pressing into yours,

to the heat we share  
clinging together in all  
this cosmic moving apart.

From *Angel Face* (2005)  
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## Mother

Once when I was a child  
in the middle of a Kansas blizzard  
I looked into my parents' oil stove  
through mica panes in its door  
and saw three gray and black birds  
with orange eyes  
walking in the midst of the fire.

I called my mother to see.

She took a mop handle  
and smashed those birds  
into piles of ash.

From *The Florida Arts Gazette* (1978)  
and *Looking for the Pale Eagle* (1993).  
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