



# Thomas Reynolds

Distinguished Kansas Poet

• [E-mail](#)

**Thomas Reynolds**, was raised and currently lives in Paola, Kansas with his wife and two daughters. He earned history and English degrees from Washburn University and an MFA in creative writing from Wichita State University. Currently, he is an assistant professor of English at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas.

Reynolds has been writing and publishing poetry for the last twenty-five years. In 1987, his chapbook titled *Electricity* was published by Ligature Press of Topeka, Kansas. His first full-length collection of poetry, *Ghost Town Almanac*, was published in 2008 by Woodley Memorial Press of Washburn University of Topeka.

Reynolds, who combines his interest of history & poetry in his writing, has published poetry in both print and online journals, including *Alabama Literary Review*, *New Delta Review*, *Prairie Poetry*, *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*, *American Western Magazine*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, *Potpourri*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Muscadine Lines: A Southern Journal*, *2River View*, *3rd Muse Poetry Journal*, *Ash Canyon Review*, and *Magaera*.

He's currently wrapping up a second poetry manuscript, tentatively titled *The Distance of Brothers*, which focuses on his family's history.

## Mental Notes of a Kansas Hermit

Walk through bramble and get stung by a wasp to see  
One blue wildflower burning in a red meadow.

Fly a kite constructed of reeds and newsprint,  
Or weighted by stones, build a fortress for ants.

Tear down the snow fence, but save the posts.  
Walk through time, but always return before dusk.

Eat a hatful of berries with two wild onions  
And wash your breath with a tin cup of rain.

Deny the existence of prairie phantoms  
When they snuff out kindling or watch you sleep.

Owe allegiance to things you can touch,  
Dirt and wood, to replace God, country, wind.

Send a fifth bottle down the swollen creek  
With a note inside that reads "Be my friend."

## Land of the Post Rock

Backed by a line of stone posts strung with wire,  
Roughly chiseled and leaning at various angles,  
The old man standing in the vine-carpeted field  
Seems merely a stray too stubborn to follow orders,  
A post hopelessly off track with the plodding march  
Wandering inch by inch into a watermelon patch,  
Equally bent, with the same scarred discolored face  
Notched in odd striations as if by hammer blows.  
The puzzled look on his face expresses surprise  
At the distance he has traveled without realizing,  
As if his thoughts had only momentarily drifted  
And suddenly he has awakened to a new position  
Tangled with vines in a field of round stones.  
His left hand grasps his hat, the right balances  
On its fingers a quarter-moon watermelon rind  
Turned slightly upward toward the old man's face,  
Held as if it were producing a sound, a low hum  
Or dull ring such as stone makes when broken.  
The ground around him is littered with stones,  
Covering as if rained down from the gray sky.  
And the old man gazes out at the photographer,  
Inquiring how, in a land of nothing but stone,  
The skies could open up only to deliver more.

## Happy Hour at Vera's

Hunter, Kansas.

*"On the wings of a snow-white dove,  
He sends his pure sweet love..."*

Less like a dove than a spindly underfed hen,  
Vera maneuvers among graffiti-laden tables  
Snatching up glasses with the quick motion  
Of a chicken pecking corn, discerning empties  
Like scattered grains among tall grass,  
No hesitation or wasted motion, all smiles.  
For this is Happy Hour, the hall is crowded,  
Vera is dressed to kill, with polyester slacks,  
A tee-shirt with her round face on the front  
And written underneath, "Vera's—Hunter, Kansas."

Already sweat beads on her lip's velvety down,  
A widening water pool gathers at each armpit.  
And on her way she's telling a familiar tale,  
In her tremulous squawk, of the night Willie  
Crashed his car into the pool hall's west side,  
Sending glasses and pool balls flying outward,  
And of how she chased him down Victor Street  
Till he fell in a blind stagger at her feet  
Begging, "Be merciful, O great vengeful bird,  
Most vicious buzzard, and fly to your cave."

Vera finishes up, and everyone toasts Willie,  
"the only worm to ever ruffle Vera's feathers,"  
laughing loudly but with the unsettling image  
of a fuzzed-up Vera hovering above their eyes  
mistaking them for gravel bits to feed her crow.  
As if to dispel the image, Johnson calls out,  
"Vera, sing the dove song!" amid loud approval,  
though some mumble amiably, "Now you done it."

Vera sets down her tray, immediately obliges  
With a song she's sang some thousands of times,  
But never on key, filled with occasional honks  
And general skimming above and below the tune,  
Abruptly ending before once more taking flight,  
Putting the exhausted bird through its paces  
With the same message held fast in its claws.

Then somebody clips money into the juke box  
And sheepishly Willie walks from the corner  
To take Vera's hand, pull her to the floor,  
Twirl her about in an awkward semi-pirouette,  
Then absolved, pass her to the next one,  
Vera grasping each as if from some duty,  
Carrying him like he was a broken twig,  
Setting him down on the opposite hallway  
The way a dove culls sticks for a nest.

## Rodeo

The cheers of the crowd  
Their easy banter  
Echoes in silent waves

Across the rodeo arena  
Gray and frozen  
Under a winter sky.

Last July's extravaganza  
Was well-attended  
But this crowd is infinite!

Bullish and expectant,  
Wind tears  
At the chute gates.

Riding the air,  
Bucking and rocking,  
A snowflake hits the dirt.

In holding pens,  
Leaves skitter  
Like nervous colts.

An empty bag  
Bloated and brash  
Staggers for the exit.

A loose cord  
On the ticket booth  
Waves more in.

Weeds tick them off,  
One at a time,  
On a chain-link fence.

No need for tickets  
Or hand stamps  
Or life.