



**Wyatt Townley** was Kansas' 4th Poet Laureate. Her work has been read by Garrison Keillor on NPR, featured by Ted Kooser in his *American Life in Poetry* column, and published in journals ranging from *The Paris Review* to *Newsweek*.

She won a Master Artist Fellowship in Poetry from the Kansas Arts Commission to complete her latest book of poems, *The Afterlives of Trees* (Woodley Press), selected as a Kansas Notable Book. Other books of poetry include *The Breathing Field* (Little, Brown) and *Perfectly Normal* (The Smith).

Wyatt served as a frequent literature panelist for the Kansas Arts Commission and in 2003 was invited to help establish the State Poet Laureate position. A founding board member of The Writers Place, and for years a visiting author with Young Audiences, she serves on the board of the Kansas Alliance for the Arts in Education.

The confluence of poetry and poetry-in-motion has shaped Wyatt's life. Formerly a dancer, she has taught yoga for over thirty years and is the founder of Yoganetics®, a therapeutic system that has spread to ten countries. HarperCollins published her book on the method, *Yoganetics*, deemed an "Editor's Choice" by *Yoga Journal*.

Also see: [www.yoganetics.com](http://www.yoganetics.com); [www.WyattTownley.com](http://www.WyattTownley.com)

## Striptease

It takes a lifetime  
to shed our skin.  
Take a lesson:

The snake slides out  
the maple shakes off its propellers  
and hair by hair we follow

like Hansel and Gretel  
dropping what we can.  
The cicada sings

only after leaving  
its shell on the tree  
just as the poem

unwinds down the page  
losing its earrings,  
its shoes on the stairs.

Originally Published in *The North American Review*  
Also published in *The Afterlives of Trees* (Woodley Press)

## The Breathing Field

Between each vertebra  
is the through line  
of your life's story,  
where the setting sun  
has burned all colors  
into the cord. Step

over. Put on the dark  
shirt of stars.  
A full moon rises  
over the breathing field,  
seeps into clover and the brown  
lace of its roots  
where insects are resting

their legs. Take in the view.  
So much is still  
to be seen. Get back  
behind your back, behind  
what is behind you.

Originally Published in *Yoga Journal*  
and *The Breathing Field* (Little, Brown)



# Wyatt Townley

Distinguished Kansas Poet

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## Abyss

You've left a hole  
the size of the sky  
in the chair across the table

in the chasm of the closet  
your shoes hold the shape  
of every step we took

through the seven rooms  
of a world with no language  
but that of moving

on macadam and the miles  
of velvet earth before rainfall  
between rows of corn

and up the curving drive  
until they landed beside  
the bed a black hole

you disappeared through  
as I look for a sign  
of you slivered with stars

your body without borders  
nowhere and everywhere  
in the wind moving through trees

on its way down the hall  
to the back of my neck  
in the chill you still send through me

and so I slip into the deep  
abyss of your shoes  
standing where you were last

pointing in two directions  
trusting the way forward  
is also the way back

Originally Published in The Paris Review  
Also published in The Afterlives of Trees (Woodley Press)

## Prayer for a New Millennium

On the first evening  
buzzing with the last  
light that skids through everything,  
let the body drink its deepest  
breath, the lower back  
spread like a constellation  
with one lone star swerving.  
Let the hands, lined with meteors,  
open, releasing all they've held —  
coins, hammers, steering  
wheels and the silken  
faces of children — to find  
what on earth they really hold.  
Let the crown of the head  
move away from the shoulders  
and into the distance  
where another is waiting.  
Let go of the forecast you heard  
when you were younger  
than the child now clattering  
up the backstairs all  
laughter and gasping  
for what we're here to do.  
Look down. Look at the stars.  
We're here so briefly, weather  
with bones.

Published in Southern Poetry Review,  
Prayers for a Thousand Years (HarperCollins),  
and The Breathing Field (Little, Brown)

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