



Gloria Vando's poetry collection, *Shadows and Supposes* (2002, Arte Público Press), won the Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award and the 2003 Latino Poetry Book Award from the Latino Literary Hall of Fame and the. It was also a finalist for the 2003 Binghamton University Book Awards. Her first book of poems, *Promesas: Geography of the Impossible* (1993, Arte Público Press) was a Walt Whitman finalist and won the Thorpe Menn Book Award. Other awards include a River Styx International Poetry Prize; two Billee Murray Denny Poetry Prizes; Barbara Deming Memorial Fund grant; a Kansas Arts Commission Poetry Fellowship; and the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines Editors Grant for her work on *Helicon Nine*.

Vando is editor/publisher of *Helicon Nine*, an independent non-profit literary press she founded in 1977. For ten years H9 published a national literary magazine,, *Helicon Nine: The Journal of Women's Arts & Letters*, for which she received the Kansas Governors Arts Award. Currently it publishes fine books of poetry, fiction, essays, and anthologies under the imprint *Helicon Nine Editions* and *feuilles* (chapbooks).. HNE also sponsored the Marianne Moore Poetry Prize and the Willa Cather Fiction Prize for fifteen years. Vando is a contributing editor of *The North American Review*, and is on the advisory board of *BkMk Press* (University of Missouri-Kansas City).

Her work has appeared in many magazines, anthologies, CDs (including the 2006 Grammy-nominated *Poetry on Record: 98 Poets Read Their Work 1888-2006*, from *Shout Factory*), and textbooks, and has been adapted for the stage and presented in productions off-Broadway and at Lincoln Center.

In 1992 she and her husband, Bill Hickok, co-founded *The Writers Place*, a literary center in Kansas City. A Puerto Rican born in New York City, Vando has lived in Johnson County since 1980.

Out Of Bounds In Kansas
—for Pearse Mitchell

These days I live in a treehouse
above the green,
where golfers swing their arms and bodies
in time to the wind, in keeping
with the driven branches of the basswoods.

It is Labor Day. Hot September gusts
split the air like golf balls whizzing
down the treelined alley to the 16th hole.
I watch the hackers,
their white caps and gloves reflecting
the early morning light as they file by
in a rhythmless conga line,
lifting first one leg, then the other—
but no kick to it, no passion,
only the ritual motion of body like ball
dribbling from fairway to fairway.

Not my stepfather. He had a knack
for it. His feet in their metal-laden
multicolored oxfords trotted like a lithe fox
across the grass. "My heart quickens
when I see a green," he told us
that one time he came to visit.
And he might have stayed—his heart intact—
viewing the course each day
from our high perch, had not the ocean
beckoned to him—as it does me—to come home.

See additional poems on following pages

Snowflakes

—for Elizabeth “Grandma” Layton

You hold up one last drawing
of an old Indian couple sitting
outside their teepee in the snow.
Their grey eyes hook me, draw me
into their drama, into their slow
ritual—the woman’s hands knitting
booties for a child’s child,
the man refining the arrowhead he
has carved for someone else’s use.
In this culture, you explain, even
those condemned to death concern
themselves with life. They deal simply
and honestly with the body’s decay.
They let go. This is the way
of their people; this is their way
of death. The two grey figures grow
so cold that each giant snowflake on
their shawls retains its perfect shape.
You say you mean them to be resigned,
but I see what they see. Beyond
the teepee, where it’s warm, a dog’s
eyes open yellow like a warning.
When I look back at you, past your
thick lenses, I see their eyes.
I tell you I want to kneel by
the old couple, hold them and keep
them warm until death comes.
Yes, even if the snowflakes melt.

All poems on this page appear in
Gloria Vando’s: *Shadows & Supposes*
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Field Day

The red-tailed hawk on the meadow by
my house is having a field day.
This morning he fell out of the sky
like a kite caught in a down wind,
clamped his talons into a skittering
squirrel and in an unbroken arc
landed on the largest limb
of a walnut tree across the green.
I watched the kill, enthralled by
the hawk’s smoothness, precision, its
tenacity, reminded of the aerialist’s
grand sweep as hanging upside down
from the trapeze he thrusts
his hands out just in time to catch
the tumbler by her wrists;
or even the swift curve of a stranger’s
arm, swinging back and forth
like a pendulum as he passes you
on the street and snatches
your wallet, your identity, your worth.
Here, too, the squirrel never knew
what hit him, what gust
of hunger swept him off his feet.
Through binoculars I saw the hawk
with one quick jerk of beak and claw
defrock its prey, strip it of shape and
name, rob it of substance.
Sometimes in the early evening a vixen
will trot by, her kits by her side.
I grieve for them. Too heavy for
the hawk, perhaps, but oh those tails,
flaming and full and flagrant, bursting
behind them like flares,
can snare the senses, stir a woman’s
envy, a man’s unswerving thirst.



Gloria Vando
Distinguished Kansas Poet

- [E-mail](#)
- [Website](#)

Learning My Name

We have a dialogue, this tree and I,
back to my first lonely run across
the morning, light pursuing me
like a bandit threatening anonymity.
I point it out, now, to my husband,
Look! There it is—my tree.
But on that dawn, jogging up the hill,
my heart feuding with itself,
blood goosestepping in my temples,
my chest, I thought I'd die,
before I'd reach the top—still,
up I went, up the slick slope
to the plateau, where I collapsed
at the foot of the giant pin oak
and lay there in the green lull till
breath came easy, lay there
a good hour inhaling the dark fumes
of mould and peat moss and
regenerating worms. When I sat up
and looked around me, I was landlocked,
beached. I, who'd grown up defying
the surge and undertow of seas
and oceans—earthbound! Yet
I had come to cherish this Kansas land,
its contours comforting as dawn,
reassuring as my grandmother's arms
had been, ready always to bear my pain.
In the distance I could see a fox
strutting across the meadow, above me
sparrows weaving their nest, above
them a hawk on the lookout for game—
Oh, I was happy—I guess.
I leaned back against the tree,
patted the jagged bark behind me
in a reverse embrace and heard—
I swear!—clear as a whisper of love—
I heard my name.

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