

## BRIAN DALDORPH (1958 - )

Brian Daldorph came to the University of Kansas English Department almost 20 years ago and has become a permanent resident of Kansas. He contributes to Kansas *belles lettres* in many ways: he writes; he organizes readings; and he is a writing class instructor at the Douglas County Jail—featured in *Poet's Market 2008*. He advocates for writers by publishing *Coal City Review*, a nationally recognized literary magazine. Daldorph's writing is marked by his awareness of social justice. He often uses the form of a dramatic monologue, where he assumes the voice of another character, to get inside human experience. In this way he is able to energize historic works.



"Last Word" is from Daldorph's new book of sonnets. Readers may be surprised at how this does not follow the pattern of a Shakespearean sonnet, yet some of the lines do rhyme; there are fourteen lines; and the ending is an unexpected reversal. This is a contemporary sonnet—it still has a lyric, emotional focus, yet it uses the sonnet form as a guideline, not a straitjacket. One of the enduring qualities of the sonnet form is its length, which sustains thought as long as most of us can concentrate. It fits the human mind like the length of a breath is gauged to our lung capacities.

The speaker of this dramatic monologue is a writer. He believes God is counting his words, like breaths, from birth to death. As he writes late at night, he listens to night music of train whistles and "Yardbird," nickname for Charlie Parker. For The speaker here, these evoke thoughts of mortality. He may think that he will live forever, but in this poem he imagines his end—a single significant word. This prompts readers to ask the same question.

### LAST WORD

**God knows the number of words I'll write.  
 God knows my first word  
 and He's been keeping score since then,  
 even when I'm up past midnight  
 listening to night trains and Yardbird,  
 trying to hold onto my heavy black pen.  
 Sometimes I think I could write forever,  
 just sit at my desk and not move  
 beyond the twitching of my hand. I'd not need a lover.  
 Words would be my picture-framed love.  
 Eventually there'd be only my last word left  
 to write. Perhaps I'd think about it for days,  
 stretched out on my death bed.  
 What should it be? *Rain? Sea? Alone? Amaze?***

**Education:** Brian Daldorph was born in Harrogate, Yorkshire, England. He received a BA at the University of Kent (1983); MA at Illinois State University (1985) and Ph.D. in English at the University of Illinois (1990). His dissertation topic was the poetry of W.S. Merwin.

**Career:** This poet has taught English at the University of Kansas since 1990. He also has taught in Japan, Senegal, and England. His books are *The Holocaust and Hiroshima: Poems* (Mid-America, 1997); *Outcasts* (Mid-America, 2000); *Senegal Blues* (219 Press, 2004); and *From the Inside Out: Sonnets* (Woodley, 2008). He publishes and edits *Coal City Review*.