

ELIZABETH CAROLINE DODD (1962 -)

Elizabeth Dodd has lived in Kansas since 1989, when she became an English professor at Kansas State University. She publishes poetry and personal essays, and the natural world appears vividly in all her writings. She also publishes commentary on nature topics that are related to ecological issues, or ecocriticism. This is an emerging field of study in American *belles lettres*, one that has genesis in the 1930s writings of Nebraska author Loren Eiseley. The Flint Hills area of Manhattan often inspires her prose and verse, and from these she moves to human concerns.



This poem, "Lyric," begins with a question of faith. Bishop George Berkeley questioned materialism when he asked "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around, does it make a sound?" Here, Dodd's scattering of "broken" bark and branches across snow create a "grammar" of affirmation. She includes the speaker of the poem—"I turn sideways"—as another natural element, not a dominator of wilderness. The poet's "hillside" consists of unseen realities, including song, the essence of lyrical poetry. Her verse transcends matter, and her answer to Bishop Berkeley is "Yes." Poetry is a sixth sense.

LYRIC

**It doesn't matter
whether
a tree falls
or doesn't on this hillside.
I am here
in this buoyant silence
lifting from snow cover.
There is no story to tell
about cause and effect,
no one to pull
the stiff sheet of grammar
over a scattered pattern
of bark and branches
broken on the snow.
I turn sideways
and the wind slips among us,
so many vertical,
dark shapes.**

Education: Elizabeth Dodd received a B.A. in English and French from Ohio University in 1983; an M.F.A. in poetry from Indiana University in 1986; and a Ph.D. in American and British Literature from Indiana University in 1989.

Career: Dodd has published two books of poetry: *Archetypal Light* (University of Nevada Press, 2001) and *Like Memory, Caverns* (New York University Press, 1992, Elmer Holmes Bobst Award). Her books of essays and criticism are *In the Mind's Eye: Essays Across the Animate World* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), *Prospect: Journeys & Landscapes* (University of Utah Press, 2003, William Rockhill Nelson Award), and *The Veiled Mirror and the Woman Poet* (University of Missouri Press, 1992.)