

MICHAEL L. JOHNSON (1941 -)

Michael L. Johnson, a longtime poet, also lectures and writes about the American West. His new prose book, one of the best on the subject, is *Hunger for the Wild: America's Obsession with the Untamed West* (2007 Kansas Notable Book). In addition, Johnson has written about the cultural history of this region in verse form. He also publishes prose and poetry about art, culture, and many other topics. He has been a professor at the University of Kansas since 1969, teaching creative writing and literature. Since he was born in next-door Missouri, he knows this area well.



Hunting is one of this region's traditions, and "Hunting Again" is a terse sketch about the stalking process, written as though readers were in the field with the narrator. The rhythmic pace is regular and efficient. Discomfort of the expedition is noted in details—the "heft" of the gun; the prick of "burrs" and the "clutch of underbrush." But Johnson does not leave readers with a flat image. In the second stanza, he digs more deeply into the experience. As the hunter seeks to take another being's life, he also confronts his own mortality, his own "uncertain ghost." He confronts a memory "so deep," which is the underlying nature of humankind: We are predators, and this poem does not make apologies for this survival skill.

HUNTING AGAIN

for Pete

**Things are different out here,
our ears tuned for a flush,
eyes set for scat or tracks.
Our soft hands heft oiled steel,
part branches, pluck off burrs.
Our legs ache from mud's tug,
rough clutch of underbrush.
Our noses trust the dog's
to discover the ghosts
of birds, where they are or
only where they might be.**

**We remember so deep
having done this before:
in the stalk, in the quick
moments of violence,
we discover ourselves,
our own uncertain ghosts.**

Education: Michael Johnson received his BA from Rice University (English 1965); MA from Stanford University (English 1967), and PhD from Rice University (English 1968).

Career: The poet has published seven books of poetry: *From Hell to Jackson Hole: A Poetic History of the American West* (Bridge House Books 2001, Ben Franklin Award from the Publishers Marketing Association), *Violence and Grace: Poems about the American West* (Cottonwood Press 1993), *Ecphrases* (Woodley Press 1989), *Familiar Stranger* (Flowerpot Mountain Press 1983), *The Unicorn Captured* (Cottonwood Review Press 1980), and *Dry Season* (Cottonwood Review Press 1977). He has published 1000+ poems in *Westview*, *California Quarterly*, *Illinois Quarterly*, *Northeast Journal*, *Portland Review*, others. He has presented many poetry lecture and craft workshops at conferences.