

William Robert Sheldon (1962 -)

William Sheldon was born in Fort Collins, Colorado, and moved from Montana to Kansas at the age of five. His father was an English professor at Emporia State University, so he has grown up with regional literary works, as well as immersion in this place's culture. Sheldon excels at the spare, emphatic stories of the western dialect. His poems show that wisdom is the ultimate use of words, not momentary amusement. Each poem suggests, through character and metaphor, a method of understanding the larger world.



For example, blind Uncle Walt in "A Kind of Seeing" hears—or otherwise senses—a rattler while the narrator bales hay. Uncle Walt carries a stock cane instead of a white cane, and he uses it as a teaching tool. The blind man's feat of hearing a snake, though, is not the remarkable event of the poem. When the narrator wants to kill the venomous serpent, Uncle Walt says, "There's worse than snakes," and he lets the animal leave in peace. The nephew learns danger is the natural order of this cosmos, including the unspoken realm of human interactions. Yet revenge is not the appropriate response. Here Sheldon expounds a natural theology, based on lessons that arise in nature.

A KIND OF SEEING

**Uncle Walt walked
the old Crook place
blinder than a rock,
swinging his stock cane
with spiteful accuracy
on the old cow
when she crowded
my lugging of the grain.
Or halted me with it
at the waist
"Watch that wire"
before I felt its metal bite.
Once he hooked me
ass-end over appetite
from a half stack of bales,
and before my wind was back,
lifted coils
gently from the straw
and slid the diamondback
off into the whispering grass.
And to my "Kill it,"
his dusty voice,
"There's worse than snakes."**

Education: M.F.A. Wichita State University (Creative Writing 2006); M.A. and B.S. in English, Emporia State University English (1986, 1984); A.A. Dodge City Community College (1982).

Career: He has worked as a carpenter's assistant, stage coach driver, bus station attendant, and journalist; for the last 17 years he has taught at Hutchinson Community College. His books are *Retrieving Old Bones* (Woodley 2002, Kansas City Star Noteworthy Book) and *Into Distant Grass* (chapbook *Midwest Quarterly*, 2008). He received a Kansas Arts Commission fellowship.