

GARY J. LECHLITER (1951 -)



Gary Lechliter, born in Coffeyville, grew up in rural southeastern Kansas, where he sets many of his poems. He is an active reader, writer, editor, and supporter of literary arts in the Lawrence-Topeka area. He was the founder and editor of the literary magazine *I-70*, which featured authors who live along this interstate highway. His educational background is in psychology, and human quandaries appear in his verse. He also explores the varied dimensions of human imagination, collected in his new book *Foggy Bottoms: Poems about Myths and Legends*. Known laws of reality are not enough for this poet, so he turns to confabulous tales.

The popular jackalope image, which I remember seeing in the 1950s, plays on the ignorance of Easterners about the grasslands. This poem continues that legend by asserting "But I know she survives." The narrator has not seen this mythical creature, yet it has a presence drawn on postcards and ashtrays. Lechliter sets up his story, then shifts to first-person experience of being alone on "dusty backroads" and "railroad tracks," places that evoke solitude. In these wanderings, his jackalope becomes a female, despite her masculine rack of antlers. She hides, survives, and leaves behind an intangible aroma. Is she not real?

THE JACKALOPE

**I have never seen
the crossbreed of legend
except in artwork,**

**postcards from Kansas,
ashtrays in roadhouses,
bars and malls.**

**But I know she survives
by hiding in brome,
scanning the flat land**

**for predators.
I have wandered alone
on dusty backroads**

**and railroad tracks,
smelling her stench
in the larkspur.**

Education: Gary Lechliter attended Neodesha High School; Pittsburg State University (BA in Psychology, 1989); and the University of Missouri-Kansas City (MA in Psychology, 1993).

Career: This poet's books are *Under the Fool Moon* (Coal City Review Press, 2001) and *Foggy Bottoms* (Coal City Review Press, 2008). He has won the Langston Hughes and David Ray awards for poetry. He publishes poetry in many regional and national journals. Lechliter serves on the board of directors for Woodley Memorial Press at Washburn University. He lives in Lawrence and works as a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist for the Veterans Administration Hospital in Topeka.