

KATHLEEN JOHNSON (1959 -)



Kathleen Johnson has loved Kansas poetry for decades. This has led her to read widely, pursue an MFA, and also to write reviews of regional and national poets. She wrote insightful, thorough reviews for the *Kansas City Star* for fifteen years. Now she edits the *New Mexico Review* in her new home of Santa Fe. Another aspect of her poetic skill set is her background in visual arts, with art history as an undergraduate major.

One of my own delights in poetry is visual images, and Johnson describes colors especially well. In "End of August," I enjoy the cat's "sapphire eyes," but the poet expands the image further to include "sharp points" and "all twilight." These detail the eyes as faceted, like a jewel, and dark, dark blue, like the evening sky. Other words that evoke colors are moon, sunflower, yellow, bluebirds, goldfinches, and black-eyed susans. This is a good poem for students of poetry to read, because of the use of specifics—the plants are ragweed, candelaria, sunflowers, mulberry, and black-eyed Susans to emphasize season and well as sensual presence. This also illustrates how poets research specificity when writing. Good poets do as much fact checking as journalists. Exactly what birds, animals, and plants herald the end of summer. This is more than fine description and revival of a scene. The last line transforms details into a theme: survival.

End of August

**Tonight, while the half-moon hides
its dark side,
the Siamese tom stretches
black velvet paws,
claws splayed toward a dream:
he hunts, sapphire eyes
focused to sharp points,
all twilight
concentrated in his gaze.
Stealthy as a shadow, he curves
Through a creek-bank jungle
Of giant ragweed, candelaria,
sunflower stalks.
Yellow mulberry leaves litter the lawn.
From low branches,
bluebirds dive for insects.
Goldfinches search for seeds
in black-eyed Susans.
Baby cottontails munch in tall grass.
Quick eyes everywhere.**

Education: Kathleen Johnson graduated from Olathe High School and attended the University of Kansas for a BFA in Art History (1985) and an MFA in Creative Writing (2008).

Career: Johnson's first book *Burn* (Woodley 2009) was a 2009 Kansas Notable Book. As a freelance book critic specializing in poetry, she published more than sixty book reviews in *The Kansas City Star* (2002-2009). Her *New Mexico Poetry Review* website is: <http://newmexicopoetryreview.com/>