



Mark Scheel

Distinguished Kansas Poet

• [E-mail](#)

Mark Scheel was born and raised on a farm in rural, east-central Kansas. After graduating from the University of Kansas in 1967, and spending a period "on the road," he served overseas with the American National Red Cross in Vietnam, Thailand, Germany and England. He later took graduate studies and taught at Emporia State University. More recently he was an information specialist with the Johnson County Library in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, and a member of the board of directors of Potpourri Publications Company.

Scheel now writes full time and volunteers on the editorial staff of Kansas City Voices magazine. His stories, articles and poems have appeared in numerous magazines, and he is coauthor of the book *Of Youth and the River: The Mississippi Adventure of Raymond Kurtz, Sr.* His most recent book, *A Backward View: Stories & Poems*, won the J. Donald Coffin Memorial Book Award from the Kansas Authors Club.

His poetry has appeared in dozens upon dozens of publications such as *The Little Balkans Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Cincinnati Poetry Review*, *The Kansas City Star*, *Heritage of Kansas*, *Samisdat*, *Poet*, *The New Poet Series* from Quill Books and many more.

I Sleep with the Dead

Astrologers, priests and necromancers
long ago decreed
the living shall sleep north-to-south
aligned in harmony with the poles.
The dead, on the other hand,
are laid to rest
parallel with the sun's path,
but west-to-east, so as
(at the appointed hour) to rise facing
the Second Coming.
The dimensions of the lake cabin
where I bait my fishhooks
preclude those hallowed traditions.
I bunk down at night
west-to-east, positioned as if
stretched out in my coffin.
And always I wonder—
as somnolence takes hold—
will my eyes open next
to a supernal choir, to cherubim
and a lighted path to glory?
Or—to the usual solar intrusion
beneath the window shade,
to more taxes and arthritis
and sin.

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The Government Is Too Much with Us

with apologies to William Wordsworth
and dedication to Richard Boddie

The government is with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, it lays waste our powers:
Little we see about us that is ours;
We have voted our guts away, a sordid boon!
It bares the intern's bosom to the moon;
With chambered flatulence howling at all hours,
Promises tossed aside like wilted flowers;
For all of this, we are out of tune;
It serves us not—Dear Lord! I'd rather be
Of anarcho-capitalist/libertarian bent;
So might I, standing on some pleasant lea,
Breathe freedom's bliss the Founding Fathers meant;
Or glimpse old Mises rising from the sea
To assuage Rand's clarion rant of malcontent.

Originally published on *The Short Humour Site*



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The Gardener

You've never possessed a green thumb
any more than a store of greenbacks.
Your wealth, it would seem, must lie
in some undetermined realm.
But sprouts and blooms are
her penchant. Her glory. She revels
in the seedling's promise,
the petal's delicate hue.
So each spring discovers both of you
haunting the gardening aisles at K-Mart,
perusing flower catalogues,
sharpening the shears and hoe.
"We'll put the marigolds
along the fence line," she says.
"The tomatoes in the corner,
the lilies under the oak."
And you concur dutifully
and begin to spade the loam.
But as you work, the rivulets of sweat
beckon ancient bonds.
You see, in the way her gloves flex,
your mother's hands at planting.
Her frayed straw hat is cousin to
those Granddad wore at harvest.
The set of her lips,
as she tucks in tender shoots,
was your late sister's look
skipping rope.
And then it's always the same.
On your knees beside the potting soil,
wiping the handkerchief across your brow,
poised in this seam of memory,
you think to yourself that you may be
the richest man alive.

Rain

I remember the green pickup,
coming home in the rain.
From the barn to the house
my father carried me piggyback,
beneath his oil-skinned slicker,
below his wet straw hat.

Cocky as a squirrel,
I looked out across
his shoulder at the dark, wet world
and breathed the smell
of damp straw and
manly sweat, felt the closed-in
warmth of blue cotton against
my arms, the certain rhythm
of booted steps in mud, confident
and steady, and I knew
no pelting rain could fall on me.

He might have warned me, "Son,
listen, other rains will come,
pounding shut your eyes
on highways you'll never ask
the name of." (And the miles of rain
I'd know would prove
it true.) But no. Not then.
He gave instead the gift of silence —
bursting like a young oak, fragile
as a bee's wing — as I
rode blue-cotton warm above
my father's booted feet, steadfast
in where we chose
to go and how we meant
to get there.

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Recipient of the 1990 Nostalgia Poetry Award.

All poetry on this page
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