



William Sheldon lives with his family in Hutchinson, Kansas. He teaches writing and literature at Hutchinson Community College.

Sheldon's poetry and prose have appeared widely in small press publications, including and forthcoming in such journals as *Midwest Quarterly*, *New Letters*, and *Prairie Schooner*.

He has two collections of poems, *Retrieving Old Bones* (Woodley, 2002) and *Into Distant Grass*, a chapbook, (Oil Hill Press, 2009).

One Day In Kansas

"It is always disappointing
to ask for gold and be given melons."
--Eliot West on Coronado

Despite their guide, they used
a sextant and ship's compass
to navigate the grass
that grazed their horses' bellies
and rose again unbent
behind armored men astride
heavy horses, trailing cattle,
swine, and camp followers.
"We could look behind,"
they wrote, "and see nothing
of our passing across that grass."

Mexico had bent to their will
like a damp dream of youth. Here,
there were only grass and sweat,
and black flies. People fed them
then pointed further north,
until the day there was nothing left
but to strangle the man
they'd shanghaied, who had taken them
where they commanded but not
where they desired. Nothing but to return
over that sea of grass, under sky
bigger than they wished to contemplate
to the spent dreams of the south.

Appeared in *Flint Hills Review* 10 (2005): 170.

Two Days Before Spring

My daughter navigates freshly tilled earth
where we will plant potatoes. My son
throws a clod into the field beside our yard.
The light below clouds bellying the horizon
fires the rust on the burn barrel, on my children's
red hair. One state west, their great-grandmother
is dying. Again, my daughter has me right
the canoe so she can play inside. This evening
is a tease, our weatherman says. Tomorrow
it will snow. Doctors offer nothing
so definite. Last night she seemed ready.
The grandchildren called, hoping
she would hear. This morning, life
fought up again. My daughter lies still
in the hull of the canoe, eyes closed, giggling
when I rock it. My son finds a tomato stake,
laughs, staggers with it under his armpit,
the sky ablaze behind the canoe, the fence.

Appeared in *5AM*. 19 (2003): 29.



William Sheldon

Distinguished Kansas Poet

• [E-mail](#)

Fecund July

The moon lifts, full
as a musk melon
above an evening pregnant
with the desperation of cicadas,
pulling waves of mosquitoes
from the ditch water. My hands
are speckled with my own
blood. Tomorrow
I will pull ticks, full
as lima beans, from the Labrador's
shoulders.

But this morning
it was weeds and
rapacious Bermuda that would rather
grow in the garden
than the yard. I redirected
tendrils of watermelon
from the fence.

In the distance
an estate sale, the auctioneer's
"Who'll give me..." I imagined
his silver Stetson tilted
back on his head, a halo in mid-
morning sun, like
Bob Browns.

My sisters and I
three and five, picking a watermelon
from his patch, our parents'
full laughter with Bob and his pregnant
wife. "Those melons'll cross
with anything," nodding to her swelling
belly, and saying to me, to young
to get it, "I told her not to
come out here in no sun dress."

Continued at right

Inside,
with perfect calm, waits my wife.
Three months left of bed rest. Our
doctor, remembering an earlier life
in vet school says, "I'll be glad
to get this little one
on the ground."

I return
to the house bearing
offerings. Full tomatoes, their rain
split skin spilling seeds, staining
my shirtfront, and a melon
so ripe it will crack
at the knife's lightest touch.
Greedy, we will eat,
waiting for fall, laughing
at the juice on our cheeks,
tasting the damp heat of sun
and earth and rain.

Sheldon, William. Retrieving Old Bones.
Topeka: Woodley, 2002: 58-59.
Also appeared in Clackamas Literary Review.
4.2 (2000): 202-203.

See additional poem next page



William Sheldon

Distinguished Kansas Poet

• [E-mail](#)

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.”

Sheldon, William. Retrieving Old Bones.
Topeka: Woodley, 2002: 4.
Also appeared in the anthology Least Loved Beasts.
Prescott, AZ: Native West, 1997. 43.

All poetry on this page
Copyright © by William Sheldon, 2006