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Prairie Poets

Steven Hind

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Prairie Poets

AT HOME IN A WORD

by Steven Hind

You call this blanket of grass
Prairie, because you were born
a member of a tribe who took
to the lean feast in that name.

Your lips hold the word in
to give thanks just so: Prairie,
you say, and hear the grass
speaking through the thorny wind
season after season. You sit
wrapped in that word.

– from *In a Place With No Map: New and Selected Poems*

THIS SKY

by Harley Elliott

This is the sky I belong to.
Those used to embrace of
Forests or buildings find
difficult purchase here.

As if they might slip anchor
Pulled slowly up with
Nothing to grab or slow
The diminishing rise

Into that ceaseless round.
Every step they take
a prayer to gravity.

Some need this upside
Down ocean of wind waves
Gentle to reckless
And at floodtide rattling

The laces of their shoes.
When you see only sky
In every direction but down
you are put in your place

equal to the mosquito who
claims the same resounding blue
only once upon this time
of a sky to be lived in.

– Published here for the first time

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU WALKED HERE?

by Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

What would happen if you opened to something
so totally beyond human that it dissolved your borders
into bluestem? What if it rained and you got wet?
What if you understood not just that the earth tilted
but that it tilted right through your spine
and that's why you occasionally fall over?

Nothing prepares you for the real.
There's no journey out of this except the one
that separates your bones from your thoughts,
your tendons from the lines of your desire.

In the giant mouth of the dark,
in the opening screen of the dark,
in the bottom of the pot of the dark,
is the dark that isn't so dark.

In the myriad call of meadowlark layered on siren
of coyote upon clanging of wind in cottonwood tree
is also the sound of no sound, too.
Nothing can prepare you for the speed of the universe.
Nothing can steady you enough to absorb even the fact
that light travels millions of years to get to your eyes,
that the dissolved dust of stars are your thoughts

and your thinking, that the sky is so big, that the dirt is
made of bones and breath, that there's nothing heavier
than the ocean, that there's no such thing as exact replicas
in the seasons, and that seasons pour through us like rain
or dust whether we're paying attention or not,
that a rabbit can outrun you in your prime, that language
is only partially made of words, that the earth cannot help
but to keep recycling you into something better.

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Steven Hind is a native Kansan, growing up near Madison on the eastern edge of the Flint Hills. He attended Emporia State University as an undergraduate, and received his Master of Arts from the University of Kansas. He began teaching literature at Topeka High School in 1965, and retired 36 years later from teaching English at Hutchinson Community College.

Harley Elliott is a poet and visual artist living in Salina, Kansas. He earned his B.A. from Kansas Wesleyan University in Salina, and his M.A. from New Mexico Highlands in Las Vegas, NM. He taught art at Marymount College in Salina for many years, and then worked at the Salina Art Center.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, received her Ph.D. and M.A. from the University of Kansas. She is the 2009-2012 Poet Laureate of Kansas. Her career as a poet, fiction and non-fiction writer, teacher (Goddard College, Plainfield, VT), mentor, and facilitator focuses on how literature can help us live more meaningful and vibrant lives. She is the author or editor of 11 books, including her recent poetry collection, *Landed*.