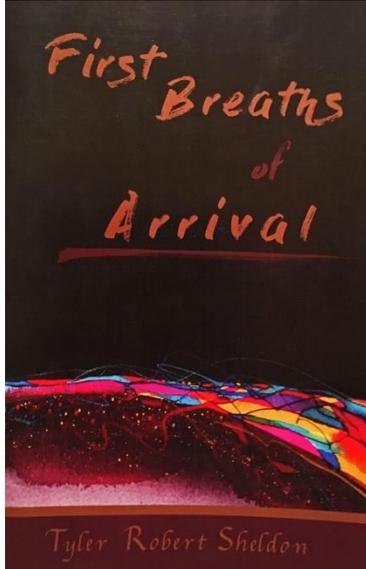


First Breaths of Arrival by Tyler Robert Sheldon
Review by Roy Beckemeyer

I think of Kansans Harley Elliott, Steven Hind, and William Sheldon as "poets of the 6th Principal Meridian." The 6th meridian was the north-south line used as a base for the Public Land Survey System that laid out the township-range plots that make up the hatch-work of green and brown quadrangles we see as we fly over heartland America. These three have lived for many years within a stone's throw of the 6th, and speak as straight as a section-line road about Kansas. The beating heart of Kansas propels their poetry.



In his 16 page chapbook, *First Breaths of Arrival* (2016, Oil Hill Press, Wichita, KS), Tyler Robert Sheldon proves himself a quintessential poet of the 6th as well, but of the next generation. The son of William Sheldon, Tyler has that eye, ear, and feel for his home state, filtered through a modern point of view, a 21st Century mind. His father joins him in the first poem, "For Kansas Poets," and they cut right to the foundation of things:

"The act may not seem writing
so much as incision
into the limestone of this place..."

In the second poem, "In Kansas," Tyler takes off on his own: "if you're not impressed, / don't sweat it. Our best scenery / is not on the ground." He admonishes the visitor to take note, to "Throw lines into the air. / Fish kites from the paling sky."

These poems are full of color, sound, taste: "As a baby I'm told I would eat lemons, / grinding pulp between nubby teeth, / spitting seeds to the wind..." (from "Lemons"); "Tonight I will listen to swing, / ...I'll say the music is coy, a caress / or a new lover's lick." (from "Jazz Poem").

An evening in a printing studio with his artist wife becomes a statement of love (from "Making Prints"):

"She smiles, and I see how she
alone is the room's real art"

Walking the tallgrass prairie, Sheldon cautions: "...don't look for redemption. / In these hills, / you make your own" (from "Code").

This gem of a chapbook closes with a paean to the experience of bringing home a new pair of boots, which the poet dons, then gives this advice:

"Walk (forward only)
as long as you can."

Tyler Sheldon is doing just that, and carrying the 6th Principal Meridian tradition off to new poetic horizons along with him.

Link to [Tyler Robert Sheldon's](#) web page.

Tyler Sheldon is also a book reviewer for The Los Angeles Review. [Here](#) is an example of his work.

[Tyler Robert Sheldon's](#) biography and bibliography may be found at The Map of Kansas Literature.



This chapbook review is graciously provided to *River City Poetry* by Kansas Poet Roy Beckemeyer. Roy is the author of Kansas Notable book *Music I Once Could Dance To*, available from Coal City Press. He's also one of our Summer Sampler 2017 contributors, so click [here](#) to read more. A wonderful bio is also available from Washburn University's [Literary map of Kansas](#).

by Roy Beckemeyer, July 13, 2017