

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Linzi Lee Ann Garcia for the Master of Arts in English presented on 20 March 2020.

Title:

WHAT'S NOT THE MATTER WITH KANSAS: THE KANSAS EXPERIENCE EXPRESSED
THROUGH POST-CONFESSIONAL POETRY

Thesis Chair: Kevin Rabas

Abstract approved: _____

This thesis consists of an original creative manuscript of poetry and a critical analysis that examines the use of fragmentation and metapoetry in contemporary post-confessional poetry written or published in Kansas. The analysis investigates selected poems by F.D. Soul, Elizabeth Dodd, Wyatt Townley, and Denise Low and focuses on how these authors present a multifarious voice of Kansas through the post-confessional style. The same analytical lens is then applied to four poems from the original manuscript. The analysis also focuses on the reciprocal influence between the social aspect of the Kansas poetry community and the poetry itself. The Kansas experience, expressed through poetry, is an experience of deep interconnectivity with the land, the self, Kansas poetry, and Kansas poets. This thesis is contextualized in the discourse surrounding the literary and social value of contemporary poetry.

Keywords:

Fragmentation
Metapoetry
Post-confessional

WHAT'S NOT THE MATTER WITH KANSAS:
THE KANSAS EXPERIENCE EXPRESSED THROUGH POST-CONFESSIONAL POETRY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of English, Modern Languages, and Journalism

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Linzi Lee Ann Garcia

May 2020

Approved by the Department Chair

Approved by the Dean of the Graduate School and Distance Education

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank Dr. Kevin Rabas, Professor Amy Sage Webb, and Dr. Mel Storm for their participation serving on my thesis committee.

I extend deep thanks to Dr. Kevin Rabas, who offered me the opportunity to attend Emporia State University and has been steadfast in his roles as mentor, creative partner, and friend. His professional and poetic guidance and encouragement teaches me new ways to get my ideas and art into the world, and for that, I am forever grateful. He truly believes in the power of poetry and our place alongside it.

I appreciate the participation of those with whom I spoke about contemporary poetry and small press publishing. Your insight supersedes what other research avenues currently provide, and I venture to improve access to information about contemporary poetry and small press publishing through projects like this.

This project would not have been possible without the love and care of my family. They have trusted my decision to pursue academia as a means of professional and creative fulfillment, and I hope this project presents to them that their trust has been well-placed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
APPROVAL SHEET	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
ANALYSIS OF CONFESSIONAL CONTEMPORARY KANSAS POETRY	3
ANALYSIS OF ORIGINAL POEMS	12
POETRY OFF THE PAGES	21
WORKS CITED	27
<i>BUILDING A HOUSE OF JOY: AN ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT OF POETRY</i>	29
PERMISSION TO COPY STATEMENT	49

WHAT'S NOT THE MATTER WITH KANSAS: THE KANSAS EXPERIENCE EXPRESSED
THROUGH POST-CONFESSIONAL POETRY

INTRODUCTION

Poetry written by Kansans is primarily published and read by other Kansas poets. When the readers and publishers are composed primarily of their own, there is a deep interconnectivity. This interconnectivity is the foundation for the Kansas experience. Kansas poets rely on the land, other poetry, and one another, directly and indirectly, for poetic inspiration and real-world professional, educational, creative, and social practices. Though writing can be a solitary experience, Kansas poets are never alone in their practice, as they are constantly entering conversations on and off the pages about what poetry *is* to them and what it can do for the community. Poets with multifarious roles on and off the page lead to an overlap of responsibilities, presenting poetry as an art and as a social phenomenon.

The phrase “contemporary Kansas poetry,” encapsulates Kansan poets who have been published within or outside of Kansas as well as non-Kansans whose work was published by Kansas presses. Kansas readers are exposed to these books in particular. Sustaining poetry as an artform means sustaining readership through continual publication of new books. The contemporary Kansas poetry books currently being published express everyday life thoughts and experiences and increasingly express how poetry itself adds to life. This style of poetry is classified as confessional, meaning it expresses personal thoughts and experiences. A notable amount of contemporary Kansas poetry is written in this style. The confessional style is more effective when it integrates other postmodern modes, including fragmentation and metapoetry. Though confessional poetry comes from the postmodern school of thought, the additional postmodern elements make the term “post-confessional” more appropriate for the purposes of

this essay. These additional modes help universalize the confessional style while peeling apart the layers of the author's, publisher's, and reader's relationships to poetry.

Some contemporary critics argue that confessional poetry is limited in its inwardness and selfishness. Donald Hall and Galway Kinnell claim that contemporary poetry has not brought forth anything revolutionary or novel for the literary world. Hall calls contemporary poets "Hamburger University poets" and contemporary poems "McPoems" for the quantity, lack of quality, and interchangeability they present (301). Rather than creating strong individual poems within a larger artistic movement, he asserts that the "McPoem" is identical from coast to coast, "subject to the quality control of the least common denominator," and has been that way for some time now, without any signs of changing (301). Kinnell says he would rather see poetry that is able to "express the pain of everyone," suggesting a universal message, rather than an unrelatable, overly-personal poem that is specific to its author.

Other critics, including John Haines and Louis Simpson, assert that although contemporary poets and poetry are not regularly producing unprecedented poetry, the confessional style still has a valid place in the arts, and its supporters understand that all art "enhances life for us" (Haines 133). Within this perspective, contemporary confessional poetry has the ability to transcend the ego and to universally express experience. This can happen on or off the page, extending the private, confessional style into the public. Haines says poetry has the ability to be a "fundamental restoration of community [because] poetry is essentially social, and has always been so" (135). Adding the postmodern elements to confessional poetry, such as exploring the identity fragmentation that occurs when writing metaliterature (i.e., writing about writing), elevates confessional poetry to be more dynamic. This analysis of post-confessional

Kansas poetry adds to the discourse surrounding what contemporary poetry is and how the Kansas poetry community is exploring it.

ANALYSIS OF POST-CONFESSIONAL CONTEMPORARY KANSAS POETRY

Contemporary Kansas poetry is often confessional. Confessional poetry first emerged in the public sphere in the 1950s through the work of Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath.¹ The subject matter expressed in the poem focuses on the individual's private physical and mental experience, and the form embraces the first-person point of view. Confessional poetry is considered a branch of postmodernism for its exploration of colloquial speech and the relationship between the poem's narrator and the poet (Poetry Foundation). Most basically defined, postmodernism came into being as a reaction to its preceding movement, modernism. Postmodernists are known to argue "that 'truth' is culturally specific [and attack] traditional concepts of history, knowledge, and reality" (Poetry Foundation). The postmodern movement is said to be "suspicious of hierarchy and objective knowledge and embraces complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, and diversity," and in its current forms often includes a focus on identity (in relation to literature and culture) and metaliterature (such as metapoetry) (Poetry Foundation). To strengthen the postmodern identity of confessional poetry, other postmodern literary applications of fragmentation of identity, fragmentation of content, and metapoetry help increase the dynamism of confessional poetry.

In the books *between you & these bones* by F.D. Soul and *Like Memory, Caverns* by Elizabeth Dodd, their styles of confessional poetry welcome the reader into their emotional psyche. Soul's poems are explicitly and overtly confessional; she writes, "And so / this book /

¹ Lowell was Plath's teacher at Boston University, where she audited his class in 1959.

shall become my confessional” in an embedded sectional introit in her book (125). This introit's overt declaration about the collection's mode seems conspicuous. This poem on its own is weak, because the relationship between the poet, the poem, and the book is too personal and unrelatable to give the reader anything to attach to. She gives the book its potential identity as *her* confessional, though she leaves the poem in an ongoing state of becoming. At what point does the book become confessional? Using the past tense, “And so / this book / became my confessional,” would give the reader a sense of resolution, instead of waiting alongside the author to discover when this book finally becomes her confessional. Overt confessional poetry is limited in this sense. Haines warns against this “sporadic and shallow response to things” and thinks that if the poem were placed “within the context of a unified outlook on life,” the poem would provide an opportunity for the reader to connect with it (131). In the same *Soul* collection, other confessional poems do adopt the unified context and transcend the poet's ego, providing an example for what effective post-confessional poetry can be.

A *Soul* poem in the aforementioned collection that exemplifies the post-confessional mode is “I write poetry sipping on milk with pajamas and wet hair” (134). The title is, again, overtly confessional, though this presentation of herself humanizes her as a relatable individual who is aware of, and shares, her own writing process. Unlike the images presented by many preceding, canonized poets, there is nothing lofty about this image of a poet, and she presents herself humbly and in a way that assures the reader this poem is a place of comfort, safety, and accessibility. If this poem were only its title, or an introit, like the last one, the confessional analysis would end here. However, Simpson argues that instead of the poet using herself as the sole subject, she “puts [herself] into a dynamic relationship with the environment, and poetry would rise out of this” (408). And poetry does rise out of it—poetry about writing poetry.

To write a poem about writing poetry introduces the concept of metapoetry. Soul, the author of the collection, obviously writes poetry, but the act of writing poetry is traditionally seemingly detached from the poem and the poet. Soul brings the reader into her writing process and makes the confessional poem even more psychologically personal. Rather than ruminating on the personal intimacy of the writing experience, Soul utilizes the platform to show that she and her poetry are accessible. They share the human experiences she describes, rather than describing an exclusive experience. The single-stanza connects the personal to the universal. Soul sets up the connection when she prefaces her list of experiences with the opening line, “I write poetry in what is perhaps the same way we all,” which brings everyone into the experience of “mak[ing] amends / apologiz[ing] with our hands / tether[ing] ourselves to yesterday” and beyond (134). Soul inserts herself into the universal human experience by sharing what human hands are capable of while simultaneously bringing the universal human experience into her poem by explicitly addressing “we all.” Soul’s metapoetry connects her with the readers in an unambiguous, all-welcoming, and nondiscriminatory way.

What the post-confessional accomplishes is more than personal expression. The accomplishment occurs when personal expression reveals an aspect of the universal human experience. Haines asserts that poetry is something that gives its readers something to “look up to” because of the way an idea is “changed, made visible in another, or ideal light; [the readers] are removed from the ordinary and become part of some very old, interior story in which we recognize something of ourselves” (133). The first-person perspective must be utilized as a means of making “one’s own predicament a universal case” (Haines 133). Soul explicitly does so by inserting herself into the universal situation of sharing the sameness in experiences noted above, in addition to inserting herself into the overall human experience of “this goddamn

beautiful being alive business” (134). Each life is personal and unique, but each human can relate to being alive. Soul’s poems are explicitly confessional, while other confessional poems may be more implicitly confessional.

Dodd’s poem “Journal Entries” combines the explicit and implicit first-person confessional approach. The poem shares a series of momentary thoughts, separated by asterisks. Immediately being immersed into Dodd’s psyche is deeply confessional, and the reader is placed in a curious position of reading these previously private thoughts.

The first stanza states, “Today the wind around the house / lifts leaves and tells me / I am afraid to die” (Dodd 33). In the basic confessional interpretive lens, the “I” is Dodd. Again, the reader is given an idea of the author’s position and the time of year of this observation—autumn, the dead leaves blown about. Dissimilar to the way Soul’s confessional poems assume a reader beyond the author, the journal entry is a private documentation generally only written and read by its author. The reader is brought into the writer’s psyche, challenging the concept of whom the first person “I” indicates. Identity is muddled, and this first stanza describes what many other persons experience—wind, autumn leaves, and, most importantly for the confessional style, fear of death. From that point forward in the poem, the mention of “I” halts, and the thoughts, although still the singular narrator’s, transition from looking inward to looking outward. The second stanza shifts to a view of an oak tree:

The oak seems permanent, patient,
 clutching russet shapes that rustle all
 morning long. And through the branches,
 stripes of sky—
 who can compete with such clarity? (Dodd 33)

The oak is seemingly the closest thing the reader gets to in this stanza, but really, the closest thing is the poet's psyche. The oak "seems permanent" to the first-person narrator, noting a personal response to the oak, rather than making a third-person declaration about the oak by saying the oak "is permanent." The voice loses its origin at this point, and, according to Roland Barthe, "as soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively ... writing begins" (875). Barthe asserts that the narrative of a poem is assumed by an enigmatic first-person point of view, the poem adopts narrative distance, and the poem becomes more about sharing the experience *with* the reader, as opposed to sharing the experience *for* the reader (875). The first-person point of view is sustained, but the poem breaks from the restriction of explicit confessional personal expression while still holding on to the basic confessional style by sharing personal observations with the reader. When this happens, Michel Foucault says the poem "is identified with its own unfolded exteriority," rather than "being restricted to the confines of its interiority" (904). Outward observation places the poem beyond the internal evaluation of the psyche and in a dynamic relationship with the environment (Simpson 408). Even if "I" is not used, implicit confessional poetry still delves into the psychological experience of the narrator while also bringing the reader into the poet's external environment.

The structure of "Journal Entries" also lends itself to the postmodern fragmentation of form. Fragmentation of form can be indicated as, but is not limited to, the reemergence of ideas throughout a larger collection and the abrupt shift of narrative. The stanzas of this poem are related in that they are complete thoughts in themselves, though they are fragmented both in form (by the asterisk separation) and in content (stanzas of unrelated thoughts). Journal entries

traditionally document active thoughts, and thoughts do not generally extend the span of a complete narrative. Thoughts are fragmented, and the poem displays that in its form.

Fragmentation also comes into play in regard to identity. When taking into consideration the effect of interconnectivity between the poem and the poet within a poem, the roles of the poet and the poem are discernable and multitudinous. The poem depends on the poet for its creation, but the poem can be released when its composition is complete. The “poet” is entitled to that identity when composing the poem, but the poet also exists outside of the poem, and the poem exists outside of the poet. Confessional poetry challenges the separation between poem and poet, especially in metapoetry. Confessional poetry has a strong connection between the poet and the poem, but for a confessional poem to be meaningful, it must be able to stand on its own beyond the poet, hence the emphasis on the confessional poem saying more than making petty observations. The confessional poet must take a distanced, critical approach to her poetry and craft the poem in a way that does the message justice while simultaneously looking inward with a magnifying glass at how she wants to represent who she is and how her experience is expressed. Hall shares a theory that the poem must stand on its own and detach itself from the “petty ego” of the poet (300). The poet should be able to take a critical approach to her poem and consider it a piece of art—wholly, individually.

Some poets explore the extreme and write metapoetry about discovering the poem, rather than creating it. Wyatt Townley’s poem “The Poem” is arguably confessional in its observation of the everyday experience expressed through the second-person point of view. Though not traditionally confessional in the sense that the poet is not expressing *her* personal experience, the personal experience of the universal “you” makes the poem confessional in the sense that the

poem expresses “your” personal experience. In this case, the personal experience is that of the reader. Townley opens “The Poem” with the title starting the sentence and continuing:

waits on your pillow
 and in your shoes each morning.
 Behind the drapes you draw,
 it’s on the empty swingset
 that flanks the frozen creek.
 It’s the towel that dries your face. (13)

These are relatable images in the everyday human experience. The second-person point of view accomplishes what the first-person cannot when actually bringing the reader into, or rather forcing the reader into, the experience the poem expresses. If Townley herself made the claim that she discovered “The Poem” in all of these places, it may be, as Philip Gerard says, “distracting, even annoying, diverting attention from the real ‘star’ of the piece,” because the author’s participation in the action “can actually confuse the reader about the literal action of the story” (50). Instead of assuming the role of discoverer herself, Townley projects that role onto “you,” and she fragments the reader’s identity by bestowing this position on her. The reader cannot escape the poem speaking directly to them and “about” them, in the loosest sense.

Utilizing “you” *makes* the poem universal.

The action of the universal “you” discovering the poem conveys the universality of poetry, and finding the poem in these everyday experiences reinforces the accessibility of poetry. Since the reader assumes the universal “you,” W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley claim the poem “belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge” (812). The poem does not

belong to anyone, even the discoverer, in this case. The poem equally belongs to everyone. “The Poem” is less about this actual poem and is more about the omnipresence of poetry.

The use of the title as the first part of the poem is an example of fragmentation, because the title and the body of the poem are generally separated on purpose, but this poem combines the title and the body to create a new effect. The poem calling itself “The Poem” can be interpreted as a sort of metapoetic duplicity, because “The Poem” is obviously a poem, but the essence of poetry is also the object of discovery for the reader. The poetic essence makes itself very visible and present, presenting itself on “your pillow” first thing in the morning and following “you” throughout the day. “The Poem” continues revealing where the poetic essence can be found, including “in the ink you arrange / on the page, in the wood / before the paper” (Townley 13). The singular poem presents the universal Poem fragmented in all of these places and takes the printed poem back to its origin within the paper’s tree. The Poem most obviously is found in the written poem, though not *this* particular written poem on this particular page, rather, on any page.

Contemporary Kansas poets are inspired not only by the poem but by the poets and by the poetry community, too. Poems such as “Kansas Grasslands” by Denise Low explicitly address other poets or off-the-page poet experiences. Writing about these relationships with other poets, or the poet’s place in the poetic scheme of things, challenges the transcendence of the ego and arguably feeds the ego by introducing personal relationships into the poetry. On the other hand, poems written in these manners present quintessential fragmentation of identity and present the idea that contemporary Kansas poetry is no longer solely situated in the published word but is affected by the poet’s larger cultural role.

“Kansas Grasslands” is dedicated to William Stafford, a popular contemporary Kansas poet who actively published from the 1960s through 1990s. Many of Stafford’s poems focus on the Kansas landscape and the Kansan’s relationship to it. Low also adopts those subjects in her poetry and recognizes the connection between her and Stafford’s poetry. “Kansas Grasslands” opens:

Big bluestem around us quivers
 alive as horse manes seem alive in the wind.
 This is the grass Stafford wrote about
 as though it were “the sky” or “forever.” (13)

Not only is Low inspired by Stafford’s approach to writing about the natural landscape, but she addresses and quotes him specifically. The idea of comparing the grass to horse manes and the direct quotations come from Stafford’s poem “The Little Girl By the Fence at School.” This intertextuality fragments the identity of the poem by sharing Stafford’s poem among two poems. Low is familiar with Stafford’s work and is able to connect with it on a geographical level. Identity also comes into question in the way Low uses the first-person perspective to address “us” instead of “I.” The collective “us” welcomes the reader and Stafford into the poem. The poem continues with “us” scanning the landscape and returns to Stafford again in the last stanza. Everything observed amalgamates into “[t]his imperfect circle” that is

Stafford’s horizon,
 a curved line to keep the stars from spilling,
 a quill-stitched through air, a thatched edge—
 the path he traveled skyward and back. (Low 13)

Rather than Stafford's life cycling, Low interprets the landscape and the poem as a path on which Stafford traveled. The movement from the sky and back can be interpreted as Stafford's immortalization through the inspiration of others. His poems may immortalize him in some fashion, but the memory of him and his ability to continue living within poems gives him a new, posthumous identity. This poem would not have been written without his poetry and the inspiration his poetry radiates.

One argument Hall and Haines give against confessional poetry is that poets reading and writing about their contemporaries inhibits the potential growth for the poem, because poems like this "will please not the Muse but our contemporaries," and presents limitations on the possibility of growth (Hall 303 and Haines 137). Because of the social nature of poetry, incorporating relationships with other poets into the poetry is a pleasant addition. Coincidentally, Hall also praises writing poetry in reference to other poets. In the same essay, he writes, "Most poets need the conversation of other poets. They do not need mentors; they need friends, critics, people to argue with. ... The history of poetry is a history of friendships and rivalries, not only with the dead great ones but with the living young" (303). Rather than limiting the poem, writing intertextually reveals that contemporary Kansas poetry is not only about the printed word but about engaging in a poetic discourse both on and off the page.

ANALYSIS OF ORIGINAL POEMS

The original manuscript *Building a House of Joy* is post-confessional in its entirety, compared to the post-confessional poems analyzed earlier that occur only sporadically in their respective poetry collections. The manuscript is confessional in the ways the author expresses her personal experiences, though those personal experiences are mostly expressed through personas and a

third-person omniscient narrator, with the exception of the first and last poem that embrace the first-person point of view. The poems are inspired by Olivia's role as a poet and address interactions with other poets, the poetry writing process, and, overall, the lifestyle of a lower-class, blended Kansas family. The fictionalized elements of the manuscript function as an additional way to explore fragmentation and metapoetry in contemporary Kansas poetry.

The figurative experience of figuring out what it means to build a House of Joy is the underlying theme, but the manuscript also addresses the process of writing the book, of building the literal, physical House of Joy. The poems attached are extracted from the larger manuscript, which will later become a published book, and their purpose is to supply clear examples of the post-confessional modes. The manuscript introduces and quickly transcends the author's ego but sustains the confessional style through the layers of fragmentation and metapoetry.

While not negating the value of self-reflection and expression, confessional poetry ventures into a dangerous zone of what Kinnell describes as "self-absorption," which sometimes strikes the reader as an expression of the poet's own experience at the exclusion of another's experience (219). Because the word "I" is attached to the poet in confessional poetry, the personal experience can be more effectively shared through a persona—a character in which the reader and the poet "meet as one" (Kinnell 221). In addition to explicit and implicit confessional narrative styles, post-confessional poetry can also adopt the voice of a persona. When persona is used, rather than the poet narrator, the individual presented in the book is allowed to be more dynamic, more relatable, and the voice of more than one person, because the persona has the ability to present whichever personality traits the writer feels the character should present, rather than the writer limiting the character to her own self-understanding. Kinnell says persona separates the feelings from the poet and is "therefore able to make them move in one direction or

another,” creating a poem “to be read by others, not just getting a feeling out of your system” (410). Personal expression transcends into storytelling.

The major difference with the confessional style of other contemporary Kansas poets and *Building a House of Joy* is the use of persona. The characters Olivia, Andrew, and Jax are the personas of the author and her family. Olivia, the main character, is a poet who is primarily being observed from a third-person omniscient narrator’s perspective, but there are moments throughout the manuscript where the fourth wall is broken and Olivia and the author both wield the first-person perspective and write about the writing process, as well as the process of building a House of Joy, both literally and figuratively. Persona allows the poems to live beyond the author role and liberates the poem and the poet. When the poem is not a prescriptive documentation but is crafted as a story, the effect of the poem is expanded to connect with the reader on a personal level. Hall suggests that a “poet must develop, past the silliness, to the stage where the poem is altered for its own sake, to make it better art, not for the sake of its maker’s feelings but because decent art is the goal” (300). Philip Lopate writes that personas “tell a story in a certain way in order to convey a message about themselves/their family” (30). Creating narrative distance by building the writer into a character allows the character to better convey the “quirks, those small differences that seem to set us apart from others, and project them theatrically, the way actors work with singularities in their physical appearances or vocal textures,” which also help establish the commonalities between her and the universal audience (Lopate 39). Simply, whether overt or subtle, there are things real individuals do that characters (persons on the page) also do that share a sense of humanity with the reader.

Prior to settling into the personas, the author employs the first-person perspective to introduce herself in the larger story. The introductory poem (“Prelude”) in the original

manuscript, *House of Joy*, embraces the first-person perspective and exercises a confessional style. The poem begins, “When I walk into you, / my House of Joy,” and immediately establishes the perspective as well as the primary literal and figurative setting (Garcia 29). Using the word “when” suggests the narrator has walked into the House of Joy on multiple occasions and knows what to expect from the house. The poem continues, “your strength embraces me / from right earlobe / to left pinky toe” (Garcia 29). The narrator establishes she has a strong and intimate relationship with this particular house. The house is personified and holds the narrator closer than simply sheltering her. She knows this House of Joy is achievable through this relationship with the house and the other inhabitants. Throughout the second stanza, the poem's speaker walks through the house and experiences intimacy, communication, and partnership. She expresses:

I would stroke your hinges and frames
and say, “House, tell me of your day.”
And you would sing sweet verse
about how life is fuller
when we’re together. (Garcia 29)

In order to access the joy the house offers, the personification of the house can be applied to the individuals whom the narrator keeps as companions and with whom the narrator learns to build their home.

“Prelude” is the one of two poems in the collection written in the first-person perspective. “Prelude” provides insight into who the main character will be—a version of the author, this person who has chosen to build a House of Joy and is ready to settle into it. The other personas involved are extensions of real individuals and combinations of individuals, and their

confessional perspective is accomplished through exterior observation or internal imagination, due to the inability for the author to immerse herself into their actual psyche. Identity is obviously fragmented between the real persons and the personas, and instead of keeping the personas completely detached from the persons, the periodic return to the first-person perspective reveals the interpersonal connection between the author and her persona Olivia. Each poem is also based off of one nonfiction instance or a combination of instances. The nonfiction root keeps this collection confessional in that the poetry is largely, though not solely, writing autobiographically.

The first-person perspective used in “Prelude” is returned to in the last poem of the manuscript, “Top Shelf” (Garcia 48). This fragmentation of form caps the beginning and end of the manuscript with the reminder that the collection is confessional, similar to Soul’s overt reminder to her readers, with additional postmodern twists. The reader was initially welcomed into the House of Joy with the author and the characters, and throughout is reminded of the metanarrative. “Top Shelf” is another reminder of the metanarrative and pulls the reader out of Olivia’s world and back into the author’s. Just as the front door to the House of Joy opens and offers with the open space a new life, the door must also close and both hold within its walls one life while concurrently separating that life from life outside of the house. The front page of the manuscript functions as that door.

The author takes ownership of the writing and opens “Top Shelf” with the statement, “I write about us being” (Garcia 48). The poem begins with a subject—the author and/or Olivia—writing. The “I” of “Top Shelf” can be interpreted as either the author or Olivia, since the reader has gained familiarity with both at this point. The identity split reunifies with the word “I.” The metapoetry of this piece is comparable to Soul’s, but rather than describing the state of writing,

this poem presents the active writing being done at that moment. Fragmenting the use of metapoetry across multiple poems maintains thematic continuity while also reinforcing that building a House of Joy is about writing it into being, subsequent to approaching everyday life as already living in a House of Joy.

“Top Shelf” continues the use of metapoetry by writing about writing this book, not just writing the poem. The author writes about her and her significant other “as snug as the books / in the center of our top shelf” and suggests that both of their future books, including this one, will be added to the center of the shelf (Garcia 48). Their future books will end up on the top shelf, including collaborations where their future shared surname gives a specific identity to the books, as a surname would give their “future children” a familial identity (Garcia 48). The books are documents of their life together, so they are personified and given life to watch “over [their] living / room,” while “new pages [are being] created off the shelf” (Garcia 48). The pages capture the life experiences, or, more specifically, the confessions of life experiences a posteriori. This is the final reminder for the reader that this book and other similar books are confessional in that experience must occur prior to the composition of the poems. Instead of sitting at the desk and producing Hall’s “McPoems,” the author is experiencing first and reflecting second.

Though “Prelude” and “Top Shelf” are the only poems that explicitly involve the first-person “I,” other confessional poems in the collection suggest the return to the first-person perspective, such as the to-do list and dream sequence poems, which were composed from the author’s actual to-do lists and dreams. They, too, are technically written in the first-person perspective, without directly using “I” and instead using an assumed first-person narrator—the same first-person narrator who is found in “Prelude” and “Top Shelf.” The return to the first

person offers fragmentation in both identity and form by reinserting the author into the narrative while concurrently letting the list and dream narratives speak on behalf of Olivia.

Some of the list items in the poem “To Do: Right Now” include “budget,” “put X-mas shit away,” and “finish thesis readings” (Garcia 44)—things that needed to be done amid the generation of this project. The poems break from the narrative distance to be re-immersed into the author and persona’s first-person perspective. Each list item could be rewritten, “I need to budget. I need to journal. I need to put Christmas shit away,” and so forth, but there are two issues with this: 1) to-do lists are not naturally composed that way and 2) the persona becomes “distracting, even annoying, diverting attention from” the action/objects and refocuses the action on her as the subject, which was similarly warned against in Townley’s “The Poem.” The actions on the objects are there to share more than who the narrator says she is or what the narrator needs to do; the action helps present the character’s overall disposition. From the lists, we glean insight into the narrator’s financial position, her academic position, and the time of year.

The poem “[something more poetic]” specifically explores fragmentation and metapoetry further. The character Olivia exists in the present tense, and in the present of the poem, she is writing poetry “by candlelight / in a lavender tea bath / in the middle of the night” (Garcia 42). Bringing the action of writing poetry into the poem establishes metapoetry. The fact that this poem exists, and with the identity knowledge that Olivia is the author’s persona, there is irony in reading a poem about the poem. The first stanza is not what Olivia is writing and is instead the observation of the action that Olivia is writing. The narrative distance is maintained until the second stanza. The second stanza, although the third-person perspective is maintained, gives the authority to Olivia, beginning, “She writes,” and moving into her third-person observation about her time in the bath (Garcia 42). Dick Higgins says metapoetry reinforces the idea that literature

is “about understanding, not about mere words. ... [It] is the art of thought,” and Olivia is thinking through which words would fit best (166 & 169). Olivia confesses that she is indeed in the bath and writing, though the confession is accomplished in the third-person. This poem exists both within the narrative and in the metanarrative.

Aside from the overtly fragmented identity of Olivia and the other personas/characters previously mentioned, the character and action in “[something more poetic]” also toy with fragmentation in the way Olivia dreams of what Andrew’s response to her might be. The poem states that Olivia writes:

*How is my pudding cup,
Andrew might ask
when he cracks the bathroom
door to steal a peek
of her in the bath. (Garcia 42)*

The second numbered stanza is primarily formatted in italics, representing that Olivia is writing, as opposed to the third-person narrator observing her from a narrative distance in the first stanza, formatted in regular text. Olivia writing this means Andrew is not present and active in checking on her, but her familiarity with him gives her reason to believe this is something he would do.

Olivia continues to write:

*She wouldn't say a word
but would smile,
her cheeks appearing fuller
in the candlelight. (Garcia 42)*

Olivia writes about her imagined self in response to her imagined Andrew, fragmenting her identity yet another layer.

Fragmentation is not only applied to identity but can include the fragmentation of ideas or themes that are dispersed and returned to throughout the work. “[something more poetic]” is fragmented in the way the content returns to the second and third stanza of “Prelude,” in which the narrator shares moments of intimacy with her House of Joy, which is both the house and the family. The narrator in “Prelude,” interpreted as both the author and the Olivia persona, bathes in lavender tea (Garcia 31). She also mentions that the House communicates “how life is fuller when we’re together,” connecting to the fullness of Olivia’s smile in the candlelight. Her smile is fuller because life is fuller with Andrew—*the* House of Joy bundled in a person.

“When the Street Poets Come to Town” serves as an example of the interconnectivity of the literary and social aspects of being an engaged literary citizen in the contemporary Kansas poetry community (Garcia 39). Instead of using intertextuality as Low’s poem does about Stafford’s poem, this poem uses other poets as the inspiration. “The street poets” are a generalized representation of poets that write and live in a particular style (Garcia 39). They provide a stark contrast to what the House of Joy is generally familiar with. The contrast exists as a way to show the communion of poets with different backgrounds, writing styles, and lifestyles. They “live in / residencies and on / the road,” and are compelled to share stories from those experiences at the dinner table (Garcia 39). Compared to other dinner conversations presented in the manuscript that focus on high and low points of the day, the House of Joy breaks its everyday rhythm when the street poets stay the night.

As a poem in itself, “When the Street Poets Come to Town” presents the way in which Olivia is immersed in the social aspect of contemporary Kansas poetry. The street poets’ arrival

at her house reveals a previously established relationship between her and them, speaking to the interconnectivity of the community. Olivia and Andrew are happy to provide them with food and a place to stay, cooking “biscuits, gravy, eggs and the way / each likes them” (Garcia 39). By cooking individually preferred eggs instead of making a large batch of scrambled eggs, Andrew conveys his care for these poets as friends. Communing over food and the street poets’ stories of other poets and their books brings the poetic life off of the pages and to the dinner table. To fragment the poem another layer, the poetic life off the page is once again captured on the page with this poem. The street poets are happy to receive hospitality, though they do not wish to overstay their welcome. They “refuse to sleep / in beds and insist their own blankets / and the wooden floor are good enough” (Garcia 39). They are temporary everywhere they travel and swiftly move on to their next calling, sometimes not even saying “goodbye before they leave” (Garcia 39).

Building a House of Joy ventures to unsettle the conventional confessional style by deeply exploring the postmodern modes of fragmentation and metapoetry. The author expresses her personal experiences both through first-person confessions and through omniscient third-person narrative distance in order to better exemplify the postmodern modes. Olivia’s role as a poet within the narrative addresses the interconnectivity of the poetic experience as a literary and social experience.

POETRY OFF THE PAGES

Why is post-confessional poetry being written and published in Kansas? What ensemble of voice does it give Kansas? Increasingly, small presses seem to be established every day. Kansas is not alone in increasing popularity of small presses, and the state has notably active poetry

communities shared among poets of diverse backgrounds and professions. Readings and performances are hosted across the state throughout the year and consist of venues ranging from cemeteries to public libraries, coffee shops to universities. The act of publication is founded in the production of the book, but in contemporary Kansas, publishing is only one facet of being an active part of the poetry community. While publishing is not required for someone to be active in the poetry community, having a background that includes published works helps establish credentials and allows authors to participate more fully in the poetic experience.

Before investigating the effect of publishing, something to keep in mind is that publication is not equivalent to success. Hall shares this sentiment and writes, “universities and grant-givers take publication as achievement—but to accept such a substitution is modest indeed, for publication is cheap and easy. In this country, we publish more poems (in books and magazines) and more poets read more poems aloud at more poetry readings than ever before; the increase in thirty years has been twofold” (298). Publication may be more accessible, and Hall’s McPoems show no sign of a decrease. Traditional publishers, such as Kansas City’s Andrews McMeel, tend to feed the publication of the McPoem, because the market responds favorably to the ease of reading what nowadays resemble lineated social media posts. Furthermore, these traditional publishers “exist to create or discover consumers’ desires and fulfill them with something that satisfies briefly and needs frequent repetition” (Hall 301). McPoems feed the short and shallow attention span. This is not to say all traditionally published poems are McPoems, and small presses are able to publish more exploratory poetry and work alongside the market, rather than simply feeding it.

Small, independent Kansas presses are not immune from publishing Hall’s McPoems, when so much poetry is being written and so many small presses need authors to publish.

However, contemporary Kansas small presses also release unique, high-quality poems, including the non-original poems analyzed in this essay. The way Kansas publishing functions, editors help make poetry more accessible to the public, and this increased publishing frequency helps dissociate the stigmas and tensions among academic, street, and performance poetry.

Because being a poet is rarely one's profession, most poets are occupied with school, work, or both, augmenting and informing the poet's subject matter. Traditional presses benefit writers who have more robust time and resources. Small presses recognize that the majority of working poets are truly hobbyists, so small press publications allow these writers to compete with traditionally professional poets. That means small press authors, including Kansas authors, range from young trans students to traditional farmers and doctors, to elderly polymaths and beyond. Spartan Press publisher Jason Ryberg, based in Salina, said in a personal interview that publishing a multifarious array of poets invites diverse poets into conversation. There are poets across the state of Kansas, and creating anthologies and poetry collections within the state extends the interior poetry community into the public, which draws new readers and writers together in the conversation surrounding contemporary Kansas poetry. Confessional poetry and metapoetry reveal the inner workings of contemporary poetry and commonize the artform and culture. Contemporary Kansas poetry reflects the diversity of its authors and the individual Kansas experience. Presses such as Spartan Press and Meadowlark Books publish an array of Kansas authors with diverse writing styles. Additionally, the increase of publication has the effect of welcoming in more readers, and more readers provide a more supportive community of the art form.

The interconnectivity of the publisher, poet, and audience is apparent in the metapoetry of contemporary Kansas poetry. However, what do those roles look like off of the page? Robert

Pinsky argues that the poet herself has a threefold responsibility. Her responsibility to poetry is to craft poetry; her responsibility to herself is to be emotionally truthful; and her civic responsibility is to better society (Pinsky 356). Pinsky discusses the dialectic “between the poet and culture” and writes that effective poetry revises “the received idea of what poetry is” (360). Furthermore, the blend of academic, street, and performance poetry being published deepens that discussion.

The responsibility of the publisher, therefore, is to help the poet share her experience through poetry. Meadowlark Books Publisher Tracy Simmons, based in Emporia, said during a public publishing panel that she was interested in publishing books that expressed the poet’s experience with Kansas and the larger Midwest, remarking that as a kid she was always “looking for that book [she] could really relate to.” The canon appears to privilege poetry from the coasts. However, there are fine and accomplished poets who capture the Midwestern experience, such as William Stafford and Denise Low. When reading poetry book manuscript submissions, Simmons said “there’s always something there that resonates with me. This is a total stranger. This is someone who is as different from me as they get ... but there’s always something there that makes me feel that connection, which makes the world feel softer, and warmer, and friendlier.” That element is the post-confessional. Small, independent Kansas presses publish poets who write in the contemporary confessional mode as a means of expressing regionally unique niches. The Kansas poetry community is active with readings, writing workshops, and social gatherings. Contemporary Kansas poetry is as much a social engagement as it is a literary engagement.

A salient example of Kansas post-confessional poetry is *Bards Against Hunger: Kansas*, coordinated by Poet Laureate of Kansas Kevin Rabas, and used to positively affect society. The

anthology, written by Kansas poets, focuses on the topic of food insecurity in Kansas. Many of the poets write confessionally about their experience with food insecurity, such as relying on food stamps and having poor harvest seasons. Book proceeds have been donated to Just Food and Harvesters, food banks in Lawrence and Topeka. Readings featured canned food drives, and nonperishables were also donated. *Bards Against Hunger: Kansas* is a prime example of how poets share and intensify the Kansas experience. The anthology serves as an example of how poetry helps feed Kansans.

The Kansas City FountainVerse festival is an example of Kansas poets being actively involved and included in the poetic community of neighboring areas. FountainVerse is a three-day small press poetry festival and art exhibition held in Kansas City, Missouri. At the 2018 festival, six small presses were formally represented (though other presses were represented casually), including only one Kansas press and five presses from other areas—including Louisiana (Six Foot Swells Press), Ohio (Outlandish Press), New York (Cringe-Worthy Poets Collective Press) and even one from Canada (Epic Rites Press). The local poets and presses were largely familiar with each other, so FountainVerse provided an opportunity to make new connections with outside presses. Small Kansas presses bring together different independent poets and poetic organizations, making the publication of poetry a social celebration in addition to the birthing of a book.

The process of publishing with a small Kansas press generally follows this pattern: write a poem → share the poem with a trustable individual or small community → gain feedback on the poem → revise the poem → attend an open mic or featured reading → share the poem with a larger audience → establish your place as an active literary citizen or establish and develop a poetic network → gain familiarity of other local poets and publishers → receive encouragement

to publish → find the publisher that fits the poem and the poet → get published → celebrate the publication (social media sharing, book release reading/signing).

What is the responsibility of the poet? Some poets choose not to publish. Some choose to publish, but not do readings. Some organize readings and performances. Others offer workshops and editing services. Contemporary Kansas poets are multifarious in their poetic roles and their writing styles, though Kansas poetry is distinctly confessional and plays with elaborate postmodernism as a means to add deeper meaning to the confessional style. The poems explored in this essay capture how Kansas poets are expressing their experiences of weaving through their multifaceted relationships with the land, other poetry, and one another for creative inspiration and professional direction. The recognition of the interconnectivity between poets and poetry makes contemporary Kansas poetry particularly potent and illustrates the foundation of the Kansas experience. Kansas poets with a diverse array of roles on and off the page lead to an overlap of responsibilities, presenting Kansas poetry as an art and as a social phenomenon. Former United States Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky describes poetry as “the very art of being interesting. The two most interesting things in the world, for our species, are ideas and the individual human body, two elements that poetry uniquely joins together” (357). Contemporary Kansas poetry exemplifies and deepens Pinsky’s definition by making poetry an interconnected community engagement. This shapes and defines contemporary Kansas poetry.

WORKS CITED

- Barthe, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, edited by David Richter, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007, pp. 874-7.
- "Confessional Poetry." *Poetry Foundation*, www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/151109/an-introduction-to-confessional-poetry. Accessed 6 March 2020.
- Dodd, Elizabeth. *Like Memory, Caverns*. New York City, New York University Press, 1992.
- Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, edited by David Richter, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007, pp. 904-14.
- Garcia, Linzi. *Building a House of Joy*. Forthcoming.
- Gerard, Philip. "Taking Yourself Out of the Story: Narrative Stance and the Upright Pronoun." 50-6. *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, edited by Carolyn Forché and Philip Gerard, Story Press, 2001, pp. 50-6.
- Haines, John. "The Hole in the Bucket." *Claims for Poetry*, edited by Donald Hall, University of Michigan Press, 2000, pp. 131-40.
- Hall, Donald. "Poetry and Ambition." *Twentieth-Century American Poets: Poets on the Art of Poetry*, edited by Dana Gioia, David Mason, and Meg Shoerke, McGraw Hill, 2004, pp. 298-309.
- Higgins, Dick. "Seen, Heard, and Understood." *Claims for Poetry*, edited by Donald Hall, University of Michigan Press, 2000, pp. 165-9.
- Kinnel, Galway. "Poetry, Personality, and Death." *Claims for Poetry*, edited by Donald Hall, University of Michigan Press, 2000, pp. 219-35.
- Low, Denise. *New and Selected Poems*. Lawrence, Penthe Publishing, 2007.

- Lopate, Philip. "Writing Personal Essays: On the Necessity of Turning Oneself Into a Character." *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, edited by Carolyn Forché and Philip Gerard, Story Press, 2001, pp. 38-44.
- "Postmodernism." *Poetry Foundation*, www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/postmodernism. Accessed 6 March 2020.
- Ryberg, Jason. Personal interview. 25 Oct. 2019.
- Simmons, Tracy and Curtis Becker, panelists. Panel discussion. Ask a Publisher, 7 Oct. 2019, Memorial Union, Emporia State University, Emporia, KS.
- Simpson, Louis. "Reflections on Narrative Poetry." *Claims for Poetry*, edited by Donald Hall, University of Michigan Press, 2000, pp. 407-16
- Soul, F.D. *between you & these bones*. Kansas City, Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2019.
- Stafford, William. *The Way It Is*, Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 1999.
- Townley, Wyatt. *The Afterlives of Trees*, Topeka, Woodley Press, 2011.
- Wimsatt, W.K. and Monroe Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, edited by David Richter, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007, pp. 811-4.

BUILDING A HOUSE OF JOY: AN ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT OF POETRY

Prelude

When I walk
into you, my House
of Joy, your strength embraces me
from right earlobe to left pinky toe.

I stroke your hinges and
frames and say, "House,
tell me of your day," and you
sing sweet verse about
how you've missed me
and how life is fuller
when we're together.

I bake you blueberry pie,
the sweet scent held
in your walls. You recite
poetry to me while I bathe
in lavender tea.

You, my House
of Joy, cradle every bit
of our coexistence
and assure me I am
safe with you.

Welcome, Olivia Jones

For the second time in her life,
she is houseless,
but she is not homeless.

She makes lists upon lists
of names and phone numbers
and addresses and cost and
crime statistics and proximity
to the middle school for Jax and
proximity to the university
for Andrew and her and and and

anywhere
anywhere
her family
might be comfortable.

But...
no catches.
She will try again tomorrow.

She is always over-prepared
but never prepared for the right things.

Andrew Green Returns to The Heartland

Andrew says
everything is
as it should be.

He rubs Olivia's head
and reminds her
to breathe—
they're among
sunflowers and fireflies,
the land that loves
them deeply.

Together,
they thank God
under the Milky Way.

Jax Green Settles In

Jax tapes posters
to his bedroom walls.
Under superheroes,
he builds a nest
for his stuffed animals,
friends who follow him
move after move.

First Night

Andrew and Olivia speak with the House
as they camp in its shell.

“We are so full of love.”

“We laugh a lot.”

“We do not hold anger and will not harm you.”

“We are thankful for your strength.”

“We are here to make the best decisions possible.”

“We work hard to build a better life for our family.”

The house breathes deeply and is happy to provide—
gives them its warmth
gives them the power of protection
gives them its acceptance
gives them the opportunity to create a House of Joy.

Dream Sequence #1

Olivia, Andrew, and Jax live
in a large storage closet
at the university.

Olivia drops everything
she picks up,
breaking mugs,
bedframe pieces,
and picture frames.

The boys crouch
in dark corners,
away from her chaos,
leaving her
out in the open
among broken things.

Chicken Bones

By the end of the month
they're picking at chicken bones,
scraping the meat, fat,
and too-little marrow.

They plop the gizzards,
cartilage, whatever
they can't stomach,
into a pot
of tap water,

boil it down
into something
new—tomorrow's

soup base.

At the pub

Olivia washes dishes
across the bar from two
army vets, one meathead,
one mouse.

The beat before
she thanks them for their service,

the muscle boasts to the air in front of him
about being a man slut, how his recent divorce spit
him back into this town, into the greatest bar
in the world, he says, back into all the pussy he used
to smash. If the pussy is good,
he said, he might try talking
to the girl.

The brain, mouth full of chicken
wings, sauce staining his "Meat
is Murder" shirt, says to the muscle
he's definitely gotta woo a lady
before he gives her two minutes
and his premature ejaculation.

They laugh about how drunk
they are, half a beer in.

Instead of thanking them
Olivia decides she'll
put the dishes aside
and write a poem.

While Olivia Is Away, Andrew

Miles Davis and Andrew
dance in their socks
on freshly swept hardwood floors.

He dreams of Olivia
coming home right
on time
to flip the record—
finger tips only—
to see what the b side
does to them,

because although
their house is
everything
to Andrew,
it is not home
without Olivia.

The Game

catch
back of the mouth,
the gum's smoothness
rolling over Jax's tongue,
gum he's chewed
and rechewed
picked up off
the floor
rechewed

lean back
breathe in
spit the
pink ball
as straight
up as
possible,
open wide
under
it

When the Street Poets Come to Town

The city poets arrive
unannounced,
read in Olivia's small
town rented house,
seek something

like rest for a night
before another long drive.

They live in
residencies and on
the road, and Olivia wonders

how long it's been since
their last home-cooked meal.

Andrew cooks for his
family and guests: coffee,
biscuits, gravy, eggs the way
each likes them.

The poets spin tales

of crossroads and devils,
candy mountains and
women, of all the books
written between gas stations.

The poets refuse to sleep

in beds and insist their own blankets
and the wooden floor are enough.

The poets don't turn the lights out
when they sleep

or say goodbye before they leave.

Framed

From the sidewalk of Main St., you can
spot frames of her in motion through
her living room window. She sways
like a cobra, her body charmed
by music that fills
only her box.

Burn

Olivia steals a taste of the words
that have yet to leave
Andrew' mouth.

She pushes the softest "you"
into his teeth;
he pulls her movement
closer with "Us"

and translates every word
thereafter into how he makes
love to her
on the couch
they always intended
to burn.

[something more poetic]

I.

Olivia writes
 by candlelight
 in a lavender tea bath
 in the middle of the night,
when she thinks
she needs

something

 more

 poetic.

II.

She writes,
*How is my pudding cup,
 Andrew might ask
when he cracks the bathroom
 door to steal a peek
of her in the bath.*

*She wouldn't say a word
 but would smile,
her cheeks appearing fuller
 in the candlelight.*

2:36 a.m.

Andrew ties the perfect
bow—Olivia's blue silk
robe pulled across his
hungry stomach, just
long enough to conceal
his manhood. He tip-
toes to the kitchen,
munches a bowl
of raisin bran,
listens to the house
that always runs,
never rests.

To Do: *Right Now*

Budget
Bass lessons
Pay rent
Pay bills
Call mom
Put X-mas shit away
Respond to letters
Journal
Finish thesis readings
Nails
Organize poems

*(Give son hug
right now.)*

Work Ethic

Sometimes it's not
about writing
the prettiest poem;

it's about
pinning that poem
 to her ass pocket
taking it out dancing
not letting anyone read it
ripping it off
tossing it
 to the floor
 at the end of the night
never wearing it again.

Chain Reaction

At dinner they reflect
on the highest and the lowest
parts of their day—

“My day was good. I didn’t get
to go to the dentist,” Jax says
with a mouthful of bean burrito, “but that made
my day better by having time to finish
my school work and see my friends.”

He gulps down milk and squinches
his eyebrows, keeping his parents’ gaze
locked on his still-baking thought.

“I forgot my bowling ball
on the bus, but I got a strike
with the house ball.”

Jax takes a big breath between
bites and stops for a moment to
collect his parents’ smiles and praise.

“Sometimes the bad things
make a chain reaction that turns
into good things.”

Parents Visit

Her father has two
silver hairs, hiding behind
his ear, reminds her
how to ride
her motor bike, how
to make a proper fist.

She brushes her
mother's hair,
a smaller and smaller
clip each visit
to hold
everything
in place.

Top Shelf

I writes about us being
as snug as the books
in the center of our top shelf,

your future books
and my future books—

like our future children
resting on the top bunk
between covers—

the books with our Name
coloring the spines,

pressed against each other,
watching over their living
room, straight and strong,
new pages created off the shelf.

PERMISSION TO COPY

With my typed signature below, I, Linzi Garcia, hereby submit this thesis/dissertation to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree that the Library of the University may make it available to use in accordance with its regulation governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, digitizing or other reproduction of this document is allowed with proper attribution for private study, scholarship (including teaching) and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without written permission of the author. I also agree to permit the Graduate School at Emporia State University to digitize and place this thesis in the ESU institutional repository, and ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis database and in ProQuest's Dissertation Abstracts International.

Linzi Garcia

Typed Signature of Author

1 May 2020

Date

“What’s Not the Matter with Kansas: the Kansas Experience

Expressed through Post-confessional Poetry”

Title of Thesis

