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Review of *Breathing in the Fullness of Time* By  
William Kloefkorn

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*Breathing in the Fullness of Time.* By William Kloefkorn. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. 231 pp. \$22.95.

The central metaphor in this final installment of Nebraska State Poet Bill Kloefkorn's four-part celebration of life in the Great Plains is air. Whereas his three previous memoirs—water, fire, and earth—explored childhood and adolescent memories, Kloefkorn here focuses mainly on adult experiences in college and the Marine Corps, teaching English at Nebraska Wesleyan, classroom adventures as a poet-in-residence, and his celebrated victory in the North Platte, Nebraska, hog-calling contest. Time and tradition are central concerns in this book, as is desire—in football and marriage, in writing poetry and being a good Marine or hog caller, in overcoming adversities like alcoholism—not his own, but his brother's.

Like all prairie pastoralists, Kloefkorn knows the darker side of nature and human nature, which, to his credit, he willingly admits in everything from subject matter to language. Without being sensational or noir, Bill Kloefkorn does name the names, drink the whiskey, use the words which are the strength of

American English. Reading this book, one realizes just how much we attempt to purge harsh reality out of our education and our lives these days. The three college coeds who complained to the dean about words like “hell” and “damnation” used in the classroom (discussing Dante’s *Inferno*, no less) have carried the day; modern kids, Kloefkorn notes, are shielded from boxing and bullying, from dangerous texts and perfectly good jump rope poems which contain anything “an adult might call *baby abuse*.”

But Great Plains life prepares us to confront these issues . . . if we let it. We need to preserve and if necessary reclaim the experiences Kloefkorn describes, including football and boxing and “downhome” language, and the literary models which formed Kloefkorn’s consciousness, from Homer and Milton to James Dickey and James Wright.

We need to study out William Kloefkorn, too. Collectively the books in this series constitute a post-postmodernist model for creative writers in the way Kloefkorn transforms mundane personal experience into fascinating human interest material, finds a distinctive but familiar narrative voice, creates poetry that weds fact and imagination, and weaves multiple narrative lines around a single theme. Nobody is a better storyteller than Bill Kloefkorn—you wish these Mark Twain monologues would go on forever. Finishing *Breathing in the Fullness of Time*, you want to invent some fifth element beyond air, earth, fire, and water to occasion one more volume.

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