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6-1998

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Hansen, Twyla, "Three Poems by Twyla Hansen" (1998). *Nebraska Bird Review*. 194.

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Three Poems by Twyla Hansen

Twyla Hansen was raised on a farm in northeast Nebraska on land her grandparents farmed as immigrants from Denmark in the late 1800's. And since 1982, she has worked as a horticulturist and arboretum curator at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Twyla Hansen, in the words of Bill Kloefkorn, Nebraska's State Poet, "connects": "Her truths are in those taproots without which poetry would surely expire for lack of nourishment."

She received her B.S from the University of Nebraska. Twyla and her husband Tom live in Lincoln where their yard is maintained as an urban wildlife habitat. In 1989, the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum awarded her the Johnny Appleseed Award for "sustained personal involvement in tree planting."

The recipient of the 1988 trophy buckle poetry prize from *Elkhorn Review*, Twyla Hansen has published two collections of verse, *How to Live in the Heartland* (1992) and *In Our Very Bones* (1997). Her poems--whether they feature her husband's snoring or the prairie's flowing--attest to her bountiful love of the environment and her joyful connections with the people of Nebraska. As Don Welch says of her work, "This poet's got it. By gosh, she's got it. Got this place down pat. Its genus is *Nebraskensis*, and its species is pure Hansen."

The following poems, "Blue Heron," "Warbler," and "Turkey Vultures" appear in Twyla Hansen's book, *In Our Very Bones* (available from Slow Tempo Press, P.O. Box 83686, Lincoln, NE 68501-3686).

Blue Herons

What does it mean— all day
rain coming straight down, slow,
a noticeable absence of wind,
leaves plush beneath canopies,
stilt-legs in the flooded fields?

All morning I have glimpsed them—
along this highway bottomland
the river tried hard to reclaim,
broken dikes and debris and backwater—
blue-gray sentinels nearly motionless,
patient for a meal.

And what can we do—
in these wide-open spaces
where mud creeks are capable
of churning out of their banks,
flattening brome and fence and farmland—

but to take inventory of threatened senses,
to pick ourselves up above the water,
to rise, to rise?

Warbler

I've heard them,
their sweet cantatas drifting
from a cathedral of oaks—
yet, straining, I'm unable
to sight them in their high loft
during migration,

until one fall day
against the door glass
an unlucky traveler,
a delicate marvel,
a revelation of bib and stripe
and wingbar,

and I carry it limp in my palm
to a honeylocust trunk,
returning it to a damp mulch of earth,
saying *thank you*,
saying *forgive me*,
saying what other exquisites
dwell in this shelter of canopy—

one song now lost,
yet infinitely, through a cloister
of leaves, echoing.

Turkey Vultures

Lofted silence. Terrible red baldness.
How we're at once repulsed and fascinated,
your return to this dense suburban woodlot.
Circling like so many slow wings caught
in a down draft, feathertips spread,
unflapping landing gear of the ancient.
A dozen or so on a long migration,
this stop-over and surrounding fields,
a day of fattening on the dead
and dying.

We shudder at your bad taste,
your naked unmistakable head
as if held too close to something evil,
of dark prince of the scavengers.
This neighborhood sleeps uneasy,
after sunset the roosting in high branches.
Deep down each of us welcoming
this ritual, this annual wildness in our midst,
each in our bones dreading that spiral
toward the inevitable.