

# Breakaway Man: Glimpsing Dallas Wiebe

## by Timothy Riordan

*It may be . . . that the final redundancy is the poet.*

—*Skyblue's Memoirs*, Dallas Wiebe

His reputation preceded him—  
 he was Skyblue the Badass,  
 poet of the daft and the deft.  
 He was bad as they come—  
 censors up in arms,  
 book banners clearing shelves,  
 news racks refusing space.  
 He was the badass Menonnite from Kansas,  
 who rolled into Cincinnati only to  
 find *the Queen City is just*  
*another Newton—on a large scale.*

I first saw him at a poetry reading in the 70s  
 come in with friends, like Kerouac and his pals,  
 swinging six-pack and attitude, slouching into chairs,  
 irreverent feet on furniture—but ears attentive,  
 keen as claws, to catch metaphors spoken into air.  
 Later on, at the World's Longest Poetry Reading,

I got a closer look at him—  
 larger than life in his recitation of poems  
 straight from the heart, committed to memory.  
 There he was on the platform, towering,  
 as birds fluttered from his mouth, and envy ran  
 like rum through the veins of the crowd.

Some years later, he was on TV News at Arlin's  
 Bar in Clifton. Skyblue and a fellow poet bantering  
 like Badasses about comma placement in a poem.  
 And the reporter casting a puzzled look, not wanting  
 the joke to be on him. But this was no joke, no trope.  
 This tripe was a tribute to one of life's conditions—  
 how a poem can turn on a comma,  
 where the middle buckles and breaks this way or that,  
 winging east or west, or slipping into an abyss.

What beauty of paradox he carried within him,  
 the *doppelgänger* and the self. At yet another reading  
 in the early 90s (I still had not made his acquaintance),  
 standing against the back wall of the room,  
 Skyblue in trench coat—  
 alter ego and shadow—guffawing praise of a poem.

And across the room stood  
Dr. Wiebe applauding reassurance.

After that I came to know Dallas, not as Skyblue the Badass,  
but as one poet to another. It was at this time he said to me,  
*I'm not a religious person.* And I agreed with regards to myself  
(we both should have laughed at our claims).  
Soon after, he moved on to Nofziger,  
whose *Enchiridion for the Pious* was a stumper to me.  
What happened to Skyblue's Hemingway-like  
*built-in crap detector*? It took me a while to catch on

to this alchemist who seldom overlooked a chance for  
comedy, either high or low. I had to conclude  
his great sense of the absurd made him the master  
of the double entendre: Dallas the man poking fun  
at religious proclamations, Wiebe the poet attending  
to Nofziger. And finding with age a reassurance in his ancestors,  
his family, his fellow poets, and that elegiac love  
of Kansas—*I want to be / by Black Kettle Creek / Forever.*  
*That's heaven enough / for me.*