

permafrost #5



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VALDEZ

In old Valdez houses wait along the street,
and in their windows curtains move. We walk
the right way to be saved--eyes down, hands folded, feet
straight every step. Afternoon follows us
filling the lots we pass and spilling on walls ahead.
"This is Valdez," it says in the square, "where
no one may live. Tides, earthquakes, disease
have all dictated the change." We stop and look back.
Above the town the world waits. In a near house
a curtain moves.

THE NORSE OUTPOST ON GREENLAND

Like the whales when their world feels already
gone--all the miles in the surge
riddled by the resounding sobs, till the song
stifles in the barrel throats where the song was--
we call from our gray island as the gulls
call: "Cloud, Mist, Air of Winter
Spread on the Sea, curl around us.
Come hide our village from the prowl kayaks
of the Eskimoes. We have become
small and weak. Our kin in Norway are far
and we are ending alone here, leaving fragile
bones to be found by the jeering gulls."

Then over the long gray rock under the wind,
only the whale song, and the centuries.

RATTLESNAKE BLUFF

That night the lack of rain brought them
Down off the bluff,
All we saw was the grass
Fluttering where we'd burned,
And occasionally in the hot flashes
Of light, a long body stretched out off the porch
Shimmering in the dew. And the next morning
When we found the hens dead
In the yard, the froth
On the cow's udder,
The skin wrapped like jewelry
Around the cold jars of preserves,
You loaded the gun and we climbed half-way up
The huge slope, leading each other around
Until we found one
As thick as our wrists,
So sluggish it could only dive once
And miss. And when you pulled
And its head flew off like a bottle cap,
What little water the earth had given up
Was only good for cooling
Our hands, for wiping
The long blade after the rattles were loose.

HERDS

On clear nights when I walk
The path back home,
I see animals glistening with frost
High in the grasslands.

Legends say they are small
Seas of breath
Stranded from an age lit by snow,
That when thaw comes

They stray through the foothills,
Leaving a strange language
Free in the streams,
Herds of lichen grazing on stones.

WAITING FOR TRAINS AT COL D'AUBISQUE

4 a.m. and the rain since dark, rain dropping
From the slate roofs onto the stone walkway,
And all of us here--
The middle-aged mother and the child,
The three privates smoking
As only those going off
For good can smoke--
All of us standing at these windows,
Except the young boy out under the archway
Who has brought his father's coffin
Down out of these bare hills,
A small shepherd's boy
Who doesn't care how old the night gets
Or how long this rain takes hold,
Only that his wool coat
Is folded neatly, and that his head rests
Over his father's shoulder,
For if this boy, this young dark-eyed Basque
From Col d'Aubisque
Whose skin will never again feel as wet
Or as wanted as it is
By all this rain,
If this small boy would talk
He would say we've stood all night
At these windows for nothing,
And that even if the morning comes
And we step out into the cold light,
Finding the world no better or worse
And ourselves still wanting
To be filled with its presence,
The words we've waited all night to say
We will have to turn into breath
And use to warm our hands.

TANAGERS

I went to wait
for a while
by the lake
and trees

a pair of them flew
from pines to the ground

and they came
after a while
I threw their way

many
berries

if I'd lie down birds
at my head

and it became
a while before
it came to me

scarlet

moving closer

all the time waiting
after all the tanagers
whiling away the time

only
one flew up
to a tree branch

waiting to go the whole way
alone all the long way home

FIGURES: PORT CHILKOOT

Tlingit blood broods here. On black
cottonwood carved into Raven and Eagle,
strokes fill with shadows, hollows
with feathers, eyes of totems with bones
cracked into oblivion by wind,
by many passages of the moon

Men old in vision, young
in dream, reach for facts
in books and photographs,
hands of artist/fathers stilled
and solid as the Wrangell Mountains

In the woods by Chilkat River
eagles wait in every tree, ravens
cry behind harp strings of rain

VIGNETTES

When I was eight I would lie awake
until I heard my father come back
from taking the sitter home.
By then Mother would be in bed
with a Pond's-fresh cold cream face,
and I would ask him

and we would bend together
over warm milk at the kitchen table.

Here, where this house is,
the steps and stoop are of cement:
I hear his footsteps
on the wooden porch.

Father, I stand alone
in the middle of a kitchen
drinking from a cup.

BLUE CLOUDS OVER CHINA

for William Stafford

The man from California is on the verge
of being wrong.
He pours a glass of sand.
Another, living inland, among all those borders
of being right, was only
nice--he seemed to love, exactly,
the backs of his hands, their hidden thoughts
of blood and spokes of bone;
or, perhaps, as he turned one hand, opened
to give us someone's name, he felt the knuckles
drown in his fingers,
then rise ten moons on an open sea.

Nice.
But other wrongs begin to lose their rights.
An ocean tastes the long cracked rib of California
where it may not rain for years--trout
will drown in straits of light--or fall
at once all week until these rainbows
swim the rafters.
I see what I'm about to say, I love
the truth of weather
exploding through the nicest day a wind
that's hard and mean
that clears the sky into a still blue passenger.

TO THE EAST

In my sister's flowery yard the sky
is going to seed.
The sun fills bottles with purple light:
turn-of-the-century elixors, vials
for opium the Chinese
inhaled away forever when they cleared
the rocks from fields
that rose into boundary walls.

And the mock orange tree
that charmed me with its splendid fruit:
thick skinned, hollowed out
unnecessary hearts, ornaments
to be spat out.
How my nephew's friend, the neighbor
in its sour shade
must dream of Viet Nam. We missed the wars,

my father and I: too young,
or too late. And then he is gone,
before the last,
wanting to see how things would happen.
Who knows, not even then--
like flying the ox-armed Sacramento
into wide Pacific fields
that touch another sky.

INTERNAL COMBUSTION

Yesterday at the R & S
Machine shop
I saw a crankshaft
Journals sheened with oil
Laid out on a dolly

The cylinder heads with four
Or six vestigial eyes
Were propped on the benches
In a torqueless stupor

And the engine blocks with six
Or eight deep thoughts going nowhere
Without their lovely pistons
Could only stare into the corrugated sky

Where metal dust
Drifted up
To glint in a perfect bar of sunlight

THE LATE FISHERMAN'S WIFE

treads through moonlight
Milky dust of stars
Opaques eyes that once
Melted her lover.

Her hand leans hard
Upon the cane
Her hand—
Extension of purple knots
Into the cane.

Ancient slippers shuffle sand
Barely a footprint marks the weight,
The essence of her experience
Washed by a wave

HARDY, ARKANSAS (POPULATION 532)

The man and woman
holding hands walk
down the plank
lined street to
the Baptist church
at the end.

They walk so slow
they stir the dogs
at the gas station.
Just about everybody
is at the church
and lately the
fields of Katydid
have been praying
that the young
who are left
will not leave home.

POEM FOR EMERY

I look out the window
on white fields toward the town.

Telephone poles glow moon.

My fingers tenderly
touch the pane. You shall hear
nothing but my silence
all the way through the years.

CUP

I hold my
cup before
the fire

because light
is polish
on plain things.

HOSPITAL

beneath the lawrence hospital, in a store
"The Thrift Space" where out of all compassion
departing patients leave a gift and stare
at used books, handled bags, and old portions
offered on stitched, seaming counters like four
catafalques along the white walls, one fashion-
able hat falls against a steel-rivet door
which does not open on the morgue. a prostrate
briefcase i saw
and bought for fifty cents and thought the shut
or open of its ancient commerce, once rubbed with
leather
oils, would be remembered, it would serve. but such
a dryness and narrowness, its lips tethered
tight, it hardly breathes. and in the mirror my hard
cheap face i see, a bag not serving god.

UNDERWORLD CONNECTIONS

I am taking Bible lessons at an early age in the basement of a synagogue. Not scheduled ones with teacher and text nor parables with little-boy sinners or custodial degenerates. No, I am exploring depravity of a serious order.

Sweat bubbles on Erwin Frankel's upper lip while he balances precariously atop a railing. It was designed to separate performers from audience when musicians make this all-purpose cavern throb. Now Erwin must carry out his boast that he can walk clear across it, six feet of oak challenge devilishly curved on the sides.

"Watch me, watch me." A manic light in his eyes as his twisted tie and hanging shirt-tail damage his mother's effort to turn her second-grader and my classmate into a symmetrical little gentleman.

I am in love with Erwin Frankel. I'd like to pull up the socks falling out of his too-big knickers so he can see his shoes more clearly and grow sure-footed as he advances toward me. I suspect our romance depends on his achievement. Already he is rocking too far to right and left.

"Outa the way, I'm coming through." Burly Harry Gross, hair hanging in his face, has followed Erwin onto the rail and uses one of his balancing hands to knock him off.

"No fair! No fair! No fair!" Betty and Marcia and I are shrieking with Erwin, united in our indignation. A three-foot drop is enough to bring humiliation to our hero and even more damage to his damp clothes.

"Shah! Be still!" A restrained fury precedes the pumps, stockings, skirt and rest of Mrs. Frankel. "Why can't you play quietly?" Angry cheeks. "How can people pray if they hear such nonsense from down here? Don't you know they're talking to God?" She is rearranging Erwin, pulling flaps out of his pockets as she complains. "I'm really surprised at *you*, Dolly."

That is the sort of day it will be. I might have known.

My brother Stanley is the attraction upstairs. The Bar Mitzvah boy. Everyone who should know better has been lecturing me for weeks about my responsibilities. As though the familiar, well-behaved Dolly of Friday night will wake up in the morning a disturber of the peace, a hardened criminal, even, God forbid, an anti-Semite. Today I get to prove them right or wrong. While the other Downstairs children can get normally feverish in the pursuit of pleasures forbidden on high. No fair.

Mrs. Sass has trundled down, too, and enlisted Mrs. Frankel to check out the two coffin-long tables for drinks and snacks which will be the center of attention the minute the services end. "You like the sponge cake kept under the damp napkin? It's only a half-hour at most, Belle."

"Leave it," says Mrs. Frankel. "These nudniks are raising dust with all their running around." And she adds virtuously, though she doesn't mean it, "Mine, too." Her hands betray her, gently smoothing Erwin's cowlick and anchoring his yarmulke with a bobby pin.

The two move on to the big square kitchen, their next inspection goal as stalwart representatives of the ladies' auxiliary. There three gentiles are leafing institutional dishes with lettuce on which will sit the wine herrings, smoked carp and baked salmon designed to increase thirst. The cooks would not have to encourage it at their own festivities but these Jews are notoriously poor drinkers who must be coddled into the vice.

Too close to the women for noisy games now, my group is straddling the rail and bragging. Hoarse whispered claims to distinction. "My sister's music teacher says she sounds like a bird, good enough for an opera." "My father spent a week at Lakewood at a client's expense. The sky's the limit."

I know what is required of me. "My mother's cousin saw the electric chair in the state Prison." This monolith exists a mere two blocks from the synagogue, tall unbroken cement walls so frightening one must beg to cross the street.

They are immediately stunned, slowly doubtful. "You made that up. Why would they let him in? Who told you?"

"It did so happen, I heard it myself. It wasn't a he, it was a she." My indignation is half-feigned. Although I am telling a kind of truth, it comes from a conversation in our kitchen one evening as I nodded at the table. My parents, too old to have me, often forget to put me to bed at a reasonable hour. So I listen, doze, interweave my dreams with the talk, and lose the ability to pull them apart.

"Was it burnt up anyplace?" Marcia believes me. I must not let her down.

"A little. Next to the straps. She works for the city and they took her office on a visit. She said it was horrible."

"Smelly?" Erwin grins and makes sizzling sounds with his tongue and teeth while Harry writhes, stiff-armed, on the rail as the electricity passes through him.

A beefy kitchen worker, apron string criss-crossing his no-waist, waddles out to the serving table with a huge punch bowl. We watch the tides in it lifting and sinking fruit chunks.

"When it gets cold will it be jello?" wonders Betty.

He doesn't bother answering, impervious to us inside his white skin and pale eyes. Harry snorts, "What a dummy. That's hooch."

Who among us can doubt him? Who even knows what he's said? "Is it like soda?" ventures Marcia. She is Harry's cousin and less fearful of his worldly disdain than the rest of us.

"Soda with a kick. Didn't you ever taste whiskey? I sneak some whenever the Pinochle Club plays at our house. It makes your mouth get tight and wrinkly."

It's annoying to have Harry such an expert since my family's the one in the malt-and-hops business. But I've never had any desire to try the home-brew and doubt that my parents have. They repeat the recipe for any customer who asks but lead perfectly abstemious lives in the kitchen behind the store. The only products that make their way back to our table are dried fruits and Indian nuts. Even then, one or the other is likely to say, "You'll never get rich eating up the stock."

Frugality isn't the explanation, however. Our customers come from the factory workers and small businessmen who dot the immigrant neighborhood. All Christians. Even the couple on the label of our private brand malt syrup—a solicitous wife with marcelled hair and white-collared housedress pouring for her shirt-sleeved husband—doesn't seem Jewish. I'm sure some evil-smelling pork must be cooking in the pot behind her.

"How can your father have whiskey? You're only allowed to make wine and beer at home. That's the law." That much I know.

Harry shakes his head in a Downstairs version of patience tried to the utmost. He lacks only his father's cigar and bald pate. "Boy, are you an idiot. What are bootleggers for, Dolly? Don't you know anything?"

I've heard that word at least. Usually preceded by a curse. The bootleggers hurt our business, take the clothes off our backs. Since they are my bogymen, how can a harmless Mr. Gross, at that moment beseeching God for blessings, have dealings with them? And why isn't his son ashamed of him if he does?

On this subject I know my own mind. If there is anything the Harrison School ladies have drilled into me it is respect for the law. In fact, this certainty is a source of great comfort. Hebrew though we are, vaguely cut off in our classrooms by Bible verses selected to offend us as little as possible, pacified by one Chanukah song amid the Christmas carols, we *are* among the law-abiding. Don't we despise the bootleggers and their whole crooked fellowship? Jews in general and my family in particular?

Today the Upstairs people, and now Stanley among them, are busy elevating the Law in the form of the Torah, carrying it around on their shoulders, kissing the hem of its embroidered cover. This moving sight I have witnessed repeatedly though I am still too young to be forced to sit through the whole ritual.

"If you did that," I tell Harry solemnly, "drank bootlegger's whiskey, you better go back up and start praying. That's the one biggest sin there is." I am too considerate to

mention that his father may be beyond redemption.

Harry changes, ready to twist my arm into a scream, before realizing where he is. He is reduced to language. "I don't need no jerky, dumbbell girl to tell me what a sin is. Girls don't even count. God only cares about boys."

And, obviously, he may be right. That's one of my great difficulties. Only males tread the steps to the alter. In the synagogue the least promising boy, the one who gazes at me hopelessly over his arithmetic problem, is the king to my serving-maid. It's enough to make me wonder if even God makes mistakes. Betty and Marcia are not one bit interested in this injustice. For them whatever is is, and Shirley's new sandals or Iris's roller skates are matters of more promise. Their greatest imaginative leaps come when we make-believe Mae West movies.

I play, too, but somehow know it is all nonsense and am a little ashamed to be involved in it. While willing to be a nitwit among nitwits, I'm hotly embarrassed if an adult walks into the room. Store children know they can always be occupying their time productively--dusting shelves, replacing stock, removing cartons, watching for shoplifters in order to say, "Should I put that into a bag for you?"

Thunder from right and left announces that the congregation is clattering down the wooden steps. This timely invasion allows me to leave Harry and accept the hugs of assorted relatives. They have travelled here from Philadelphia in the early morning, a fact we skirt since mechanical transportation on the Sabbath is forbidden. Similar accommodation allows my mother to open the store each Saturday while my father sways under the prayer shawl. Today, Stanley's day, we have forsaken all commerce for once.

Already a crowd has collected around the appetizers, tooth-picked fingers fishing for yet another fillet to drop onto a pumpernickel triangle. I have formally shaken Stanley's hand in honor of his new status. He is wild-eyed with importance, kissed and twisted from one side to another, the silent center of clamorous women and men who pretend to punch him.

The last two figures down the stairwell are so surprising

I have no reaction ready . Policemen. In shiny-buttoned uniforms. Not remotely Jewish. What are they doing in this separate world?

My father hurries over. "How do you do, officers. Can I help you?" He appears calm.

"Mr. Cantor?" one of them asks. "Should we leave our caps on like you folks or take them off?"

"This part isn't the temple, strictly speaking, so you can do what you'd do in any house. You want to look over the kitchen?" They nod and head for it.

How does he know? "What does it mean, pop?"

"Nothing, Dolly. They go in a minute. You'll see."

The guests clear a path, grow quieter as I do when caught in Mae's white fur scarves and fake cigarette-holder. One turn around the room, nose poked into the coatroom, a cup of punch, and the cops are ready to leave. Their last words are for my father again, sheepishly. "Sorry for the interruption. Somebody reported you'd have liquor here. Being in the business, so to say. Have to do our job."

"Of course, of course," he answers grandly, pressing a cigar in each hand after he shakes it. They congratulate him and march upward.

The hubbub resumes a minute after they disappear. "Very neat, Cantor," says Dr. Garfein. "Who tipped you off?"

My father smiles. "Captian Stolchik, no less. He didn't want to do it but someone made a stink. Anyway, he kept his promise to have them here as soon as we started."

His brothers walk over. "Now, Adolf?"

Pop nods cheerfully and all three climb Upstairs to God's domain, through which they soon carry illicit scotch and gin and rye from Uncle Simon's car trunk. "Good stuff from Philly," the latter announces to the room generally as he

unloads an armful. "Straight off the boat." Someone else upends a pint into the punch.

The rest of the celebration is lost for me in my mystification at adult behavior. For clearly everyone at the party condones my father's acts. Look how they slap him on the back and joke about stealing away to turn him in to the police. "I'll let you cater all my raids, Cantor," says the notorious Mr. Gross. On a sacred occasion in a house of worship. Is there similar backroom laughter over the Pledge of Allegiance? I have no idea where the hypocrisy draws a line. Rabbis and uncles, police captains and bar mitzvah boys, doctors and sisterhood presidents. For all I know the President of the United States is sitting in the White House playing pinochle with *his* bootlegger and exchanging wisecracks about the Supreme Court. Even so, I am positive the Harrison School ladies have been kept in the dark. I beg to be taken home early and put to bed. My mother accuses me of making myself sick from excitement. I am very unexcited.

Almost a year later the events of that day remain an open question, one I explore only in my head. With whom would I discuss them, the corrupt conspirators themselves? My family is now charged up over a new venture. Repeal has replaced Prohibition and Pop has stayed in a line overnight at City Hall to get one of the first liquor licenses. He has read all the bulletins from the Alcoholic Beverage Commission and redone the shelving. Today at six he locked the door on a malt-and-hops store. Tomorrow he opens with packaged liquor.

Only there aren't any packages. Despite promises from the Pennsylvania wholesaler, no stock has reached us. By late afternoon the firm doesn't even respond to our frantic telephone calls. What will we use to appease the happy celebrants at eight in the morning?

My father presses into service my brother the dentist and my sister the bookkeeper, along with Mom and Stanley. He has bought alcoholic extracts from the druggist to add to yeast and other exotic ingredients. Bottles cover every surface in the kitchen, even window ledges. Long after I've been sent upstairs they are occupied with their home distillery. Finally, I hear them troop to bed. The house relaxes.

We are shot off our mattresses at dawn. Cannon-fire hits our floor from below, round after round. My mother shrieks, "Adolf, what is it? Call the police!"

He thumps down the hall in his union-suit, blindly stabbing at his eyes with his wire-framed spectacles. He stops at the head of the stairs. "It's the goddam bottles! They're all exploding! A sunavabitching Niagara Falls!" Followed by even richer obscenities as he stands there helplessly.

Alone in the middle bedroom, I smile. At last I have been given a sign. Right is might. God has spoken.

Tyler Henshaw

BOUILLIABAISSSE

A single cormorant
sits blackly
on a piling
waiting honorously
for the tide to divide
& offer supper--
shelled, seasoned & blessed.

SPHERES

No need traveling to the Encentadas
Where weary turtles lay their eggs
Nor to charming Antigua
With its deserted silver mines
Its cluster of stern cathedrals

A spider web is truly
Nature's one straight line

It is better now to vanish
Sucked up by a lurid sun
To where it is always noon
And no one casts a shadow.

from:

RAINY SEASON/SANTA CLARA VALLEY/CALIFORNIA

3

You have made all our windows
steamy canvases of wiry beasts.
Heat distills them; they evaporate
like beached invertebrates. Nothing left.
This has kept you busy all winter--
your hot breath on cold glass.
This is as much as the sun cares.
We have grown used to its fever--
the thumbprint moon it leaves.
There is comfort in its being there.

What would we do without such
music-less chime: the sun flushed
yellow, the moon blanched white?
Such drama has no recoil in us.
We muffle our house-noises
with woolen socks and whispers.
The heart thumps unnoticed.
We cannot imagine not-being.
What would our hearts do without us?
We listen with closed eyes.

The pelting rain reopens them.
You return to your life-studies
upon the superficial panes of glass.
One animal after another crawls
from under you alive with sweat.

Sunday, the enthused churchgoers spill
from service like shoals of fish.
Their bodies topple one another through
the narrow entrance between where
they have sat marined in pews,
and the larger space of outdoors.
We have slept beyond caring—
the rain has drowned ambition.
We ignore the flutter of engines
which start and stop all morning.

The silence, succeeding their wake,
has turned the atmosphere raw
with vegetative blues and greens.
Where have the churchgoers gone?
We imagine them plowing gravel-beds
with their gills sprouted red.
They have nothing but holes
to breathe in the flood of life.
The scales fit like handsome armor—
not one breaks the rank and file.

You roll off the edge of the bed
and step gingerly across the linoleum.
There is a pause, then I hear nothing.
I touch the warmth where you were
and draw the covers tight about me.

COSMIC CHOREOGRAPHY

I move down my sister's driveway at midnight.
The tip of the car toes the line of the highway,
when on impulse I cut the lights. Before me,
the Aurora Borealis, green scrolls spread
in the northeastern sky, opening and closing,
fading and brightening, and all the while
I can hear music from my sister's stereo,
spiny constructions on the harpsichord. Somehow
the heavens are declaring the glory of Bach,
one intuition predicated. I'm feeling sleepy,
so my lights dim the spectacle, the motor
quells the music. I drive west, knowing
that back in town I'll make every green light
with the surest of touches on the pedals.

POP MYSTICISM

I remember the first time
I heard Cohen's *Suzanne*
a roomful of reverent people
who sat hushed as the needle lifted
then someone spoke up
"That reminds me
of what my father
used to say:
Nothing can turn my stomach
except a woman's belly
against my back"

DONNA BY THE RIVER

She rides motorcycles
hunting for ex-Nazis in hiding--
red faced goosesteppers with blood on their hands
and acne on their faces
and sometimes she stops by my apartment
for tangerines or pot or to hold my hand
and have me read her Grass poems in German
with my terrible accent
though she prefers Wakoski
Today as we zigzagged our egg to
the livingroom carpet she looked into
my eyes as if she was going to comb her
hair in a ladies room mirror
licked her lip and chanted like
a Navajo trapped in North Dakota

You can tuna
hot fish pucker lip
lick lip publicals
You can
in the shitcan CANCAN

I love her black vinyl boots
the same color as a Gideon bible in
a Holiday Inn on the table near the ashtray
and I'd like to take her to the Holiday Inn
and read her from our bible
run my tongue over her naked toes
But she rides off into the sunset
to clean ovens and wait

THE RAFT

She sat at the kitchen table crying. It was making her coffee taste salty. She despised salty coffee. The table, which pretended to be wood, willingly held several plates of cold eggs in various stages of decay. She was angry at the table for its lack of self respect and at the eggs for their lack of heat. She swam to the cabinet above the stove and returned with the half full bottle of brandy. Salty brandy tasted even worse. She very deliberately tipped over the cup, the grey one with painted blue flowers on one side that they'd smilingly offered on Mother's Day. The brandy and coffee ran all over the table, found the cracks where leaves could be added (or removed someday?). It poured and then dripped onto the chairs and floor. It soaked the gold and orange chairs. The stains made interesting patterns, one looked exactly like a camel.

In some other lifetime she sat on a slatted bench. Behind her the zoo mated, cooed and blinked and before her the train and merry-go-round squealed and whined, sounding like children. Their flushed faces came and went, everyone mechanically waving. Their mother had said, "Take them to the park. Take them to the store. Take them." The sun melted her hair, the tar dripped on her shoulders. The grass, still cool from the night, felt dark and green. She thought she might be the moon. She felt watched, a presence, almost a unity. She turned to see who was offering this intimacy and found herself nostril to nostril with the camel. His eyes were brown and sad and he seemed to be asking something. He was chewing a very large clump of grass (without any regard to manners); some of it was in his mouth and some of it spiked out and some dripped juicily from his whiskered lower lip. Maybe he would like to be burped, she thought. They stared at each other for hours. Seasons passed and the skin all over her body sagged. He chewed endlessly and never blinked. She blinked a lot, although she tried not to (she didn't want to be insulting).

The children were off the train and its whistle was going on without them. They shrieked and tugged and pushed. Their mouths moved but she couldn't hear anything but groans

and cries. They understood each other and were in agreement about something. She guessed they wanted ice cream. She felt their eyes on her mouth and then the dollar was grabbed by a dirty brown hand. She watched the red and white tablecloth shirt flap off to melt into the Indian music of the tutti-frutti man. They brought back a grape popsicle and their chins which dripped orange, brown and white. She wanted to make a collage of their chins and perhaps in some art gallery they would eternally drip and smear. Their mother would object and demand that they be given back. Besides they were already throwing sand in each other's eyes and almost certainly some would filter down and ruin the effect.

She fed the popsicle to the camel. He drooled purple juice over her thumb and down her arm to her elbow. It made a lavender track through the dirt. I'll draw ties across it, she thought, and persuade a tiny train to run up and down all day and sing, I think I can, I think I can. The camel burped. He looked grateful. Then he threw up. She apologized but he wouldn't listen. His ears folded right down over themselves and he said, "I can't hear you." He didn't move his mouth though and she thought that was clever of him.

The camel magically turned into coffee on an orange chair. I wonder when I'll quit crying, she thought. Do camels ever miss anyone? I wish I couldn't remember anything. I want tomorrow gone and yesterday to not have happened yet. She dumped her purple velvet over the coffee puddles. Coffee is good for plants, she thought. And tea. She carefully slit all the little bags and added the contents to the pile of dirt. The plant shuddered and sleepily said thank you. "You're welcome," she replied and went to the kitchen and broke all the dishes.

The phone was ringing again or the TV or the doorbell. They were all timed devices and they rang when the internal mechanism said they should. Her neighbor, Barbara, was leaning against the kitchen door and laughing at the soap suds that poured out of the dishwasher. The clothes were locked inside and clawing to get out. Barbara said, "What are you going to do today?" She said, "I'm going to work on my raft. It's almost done. I'll need rollers for it and maybe tomorrow I will

push it into the sea and jump in after. Do you want to come?" Barbara said, "I'm signed up for accounting at night this semester. Did you see that ad for the receptionist at Foster & Marshall--you could do that." She said, "No, I'm going to go to college and be somebody. After that I'm going to Seattle to find myself." Barbara nodded understandingly. Barbara had let her stomach hang out and let her hair get too straight this year, she thought. So she put Barbara's head on the table and ironed it for an hour and after that it frizzed very satisfactorily. At the stroke of midnight Barbara left, taking the last unbroken cup. From the doorway she heard Barbara say that her house needed cleaning, that Bob said so. Chauvinist, Barbara said and laughed. Her teeth laughed but her cheeks wouldn't. "What's that on your table?" Barbara asked. "Camel turds," she said.

Barbara was gone or hadn't come yet when she went up and looked at herself in the mirror. She knew it was a mistake, but it had called to her so she went up to see what it wanted. It wanted to look at her it said. It looked. She guessed it saw long curly black hair and a mouth that was too wide. It saw something beautiful, that's what it said. She didn't believe it, of course. Her mother lied too, and so did the Polaroid. It would never allow her to have a shadow. She knew the shadow was the most important part, it gave meaning to the rest, so she never let any live beyond the wet stage. The nursery rhyme assured her that was right.

The upstairs hallway was an ingenuous assembly of angles. The walls stood still and didn't care. She heaved and sobbed as she pulled the children's furniture into different rooms. She put their names on the doors so they'd know (those that she could remember). She saw their faces in their shirt fronts and inside the blue jean pockets. The first one looked like her father. So did the next one. All of them looked like smaller versions of their own fathers. I wish I had some children, she thought. If they don't look like me they can't be mine, can they? She laughed but tears ran in the corners of her mouth so she stopped. I suspected all along they weren't really mine, she thought. I should have had an abortion. When Grandmother tried that she got Daddy right in the throat with the coat hanger and so he grunted his way through life. He always made more sense than anybody. No, he

didn't, said the dresser. You have the wrong clothes in you, she said. Shut up. So it did, but she could hear it humming quietly to itself as she slammed the door.

She dumped the dill pickles down the garbage disposal with the lids and ate the pieces of the bottle. They tasted shiny and honest and she was thankful. She was tempted to start on the pan handles but they usually gave her gas.

She wrapped up in all the curtains of the house--she was a rainbow--and she slept. She dreamt she rode a wild sable colored horse with her hands thrust deep into his mane. The children bouncing off the walls woke her. "Mom, can Cindy stay over?" they shouted. The walls hugged Cindy and she stayed.

When he came home she had chopped off all her hair and dyed the rest red. The children were lined up at her side, all obediently sucking their thumbs. Even the oldest, although he kept getting it tangled up in his beard. She said, "My raft is ready." He hugged her and said, "The chicken smells wonderful. I love it when you cook something just for me." When she tugged the raft through the door, it broke the door frame and the night lock dangled helplessly. The children followed with their blankets and hard tack. Anyway she was sure they did, although she didn't look back. Her face was crusty with sea water.

NEW WORLD

our eyes are turned toward the southwest
dark bilious clouds slowly advance to cover
the calm blue sky,
rumblings from the purple-black skies.
stillness.

quiet.

birds, animals, humans waiting
breath holding for the first raindrop.

then one,

then another. plop. plop. plop.

faster now.

then it comes.

we are soaked, stretching out hands
to the skies,

not wanting to go in.

mother calls, to get out of the rain.

why?

we have been waiting for this storm to break
for over an hour and now

it is over us and we are under it,

and soon it will be moving on to another yard full
of waiting kids with upturned faces.

the rain slackens now and the wind is kinder.

the thunder now rolls off the northern hills;

now the air is cooler. cleaner.

torn leaves cover the sidewalk out front.

rivers run down the driveway and the culvert
has become a creek with rushing muddy brown waters,
pushing sticks, cans, debris from up the hill.

we play in the rushing river,

throwing rocks, poking sticks, jumping over the
whole mess.

the grass is flattened down by the hard rains

and there are puddles in the lawn which make

placid lakes for floating beetles and new green leaves.

Nancy Thackray van Veenen

from: VILLAGE TRADING POST, ALASKA
A moment and a season...

A SUMMER DAY

Sunday
very still in the village
and hot
Only Nessa's footsteps and rummaging in boxes in the back
of the store,
dog's sighs and stretches,
hum of the freezer,
occasional abrasive interruption from the CB,
a dying fly buzzing on the window sill,
the sound of cantaloupe getting riper
and riper.

A breeze turns the windows inside out over there
Two kids with gaps in their teeth
stamp
on the porch steps.
"Open?" through the window they ask
Shake my head.
"Tomorrow?"

Nod
Nessa leans her head on my lap
pulls the edge on my pocket down
shakes her head.
The river moves continuously from left to right like the news
a pop can floats by
bought in this store 75¢
Brought from Fairbanks.
Kids are picnicking in the clean sand across the river.
Share a cantaloupe
Ness and I
dog eats the rind.

FISH

Two day's catch
cut
and hung to dry
over and over
and over
the rack.
All yesterday
three old women from dawn till rain

I went out in the pitch dark to sniff the river with dog.
Those women talk and giggle
in their circle
lit by a Coleman overhead
hung on a tripod
The light fastens the yellowed heads
to hands, fish, knives, tub rims
Everything smeared with moonless darkness

The men had added poles as necessary to the rack
kept the coffee hot
sent for cigarettes for themselves
finally hung the lantern
and were gone.
cut, cut, cut
cut, cut...

This morning a few uncut
left when heavy rain fell late
Last dozen for the flies
The circle is empty except for flies, guts, roe, scales in three
small piles
Flies in a blanket lifting ahead of my stare.

VILLAGE WOMAN

Once pretty
her braids are grey
her teeth gone.
She smiles quickly though
shyly—that was always her way
She doesn't ask for what we haven't got on the shelves.
She's waistless and comfortable
beneath her flowered summer parky
the back and shoulders faded
from hours under rain, sun
tending fish nets, picking berries close to the ground.
She spends her days with her husband
setting, checking, cleaning, drying, mending nets,
cleaning fish
dashing down river in the familysize boat
wolf rim to the wind
looking straight ahead as they go
to check their potato garden down there
or the caribou crossing by the graveyard.

She looks older than her man
aged by childbearing
and the beatings of weather and work
family rearing, too
until the daughters are old enough
(not long)
to drip coffee, roast moose, keep the homefire burning,
floors pinesolmopped
and a bit of wringerwasher wishing
to maintain the long lines of blue jeans, T-shirts, sheets
and one flowered parky.

She has one more baby
always one more
this one given to her by her sister.

ELEVEN DAYS LATER

The news has ground to a halt
Kids are out there jigging for grayling
before school
and throwing ice at the gulls
watching the fish flopping by each hole.
Women come later
turn winter-parkied backs to the sky
thoughts to the fish.

There's an abrupt change in preferences in the store.
Hot cereals and medium-sized daredevil lures are sold out
Coffee and cocoa and woolen socks and soups are going quickly
A woman asks for yarn and knitting needles
I stop sweeping up sand and begin to mop up melting snow.

I order ric rac for winter parkies
more swede saw blades
chain saw oil
cough syrup
light bulbs, candles, mantles
stove pipe
hand creme and lip balm.

Those kids who were skinny-dipping
dart by on sleds
behind ecstatic dogs.

Come in later to hang around the woodstove.

ON AN AFTERNOON OF A CAR WRECK,
AN ANNIVERSARY OF HIROSHIMA

I screamed. A visor slashed
my scalp. Muscles caught
my spine; its shape changed.

After radiation photographs
I rose from care and began to walk home.
One of the Saved stopped me, fondling a *Watchtower*:
“Would you read the Truth that gives Eternal Life?”
I looked away.

Another: “It’s stupid. It’s stupid
to go to hell when Heaven is Free. And Real.”

A flute recalled the birth
of peace. A crowd danced.
All but the Saved wore flowers and black
armbands. Balloons fled the earth.

I looked away. Snot hanging on
upper lip, his skin raw and swollen
around the eyes, a bum lifted his hands
in a ritual of grace above my wounds.

I looked away. Flute, dancers,
the Saved, tambourine and jugglers
were gone. Balloons hung in the distance, reminders
of the anniversary of fire.

SOUTHERN MAINE SABBATH

1

**Any dawn this season a fog drifts over
abandoned lobsterpots, drifts over State
Cement on the Point. Workers mold stone liners
to hold fishers' widows within graves.**

2

**Eddie The Watchman warned
the janitor to read
only in closets or corners.
Eddie The Watchman said
"Plunge these rags into each bowl
up to your elbow, flush
and scrub. If you must, you may
use the johnny brush."**

**I dunk a donut with day,
punching my card in its clock.**

**At Lum's my darling's serving dogs
beersteamed, and overeasy eggs.
I wait for her under a birch away from arcades
with coffee and oranges in a sunny chair
(complacent in her peignoir, a madam
once called this cottage her home,
our springs then her success).**

Later we start for the races.
 By the gate, guns fire
 on a thief fleeing from a Mammoth
 Mart. After a month of trotters,
 before a season of runners, the track
 is closed except to sinners.
 He steals into the Seventh Day
 revival, cops at every gate.

With night he enters marshland.
 Mosquitoes drive him to a crossroad
 station, where light finds
 the thief enclosed in stone.

CEREMONY

At breakfast the priest had refused to helicopter in
 to wed Katrinka and Sigurd in their alpine meadow.

Still

with only a drizzle in the lowlands
 and a photographer already flown in,
 seven choppers rose
 toward the ceremony.

Though that priest forbad
 the photographer to focus
 before the kiss, Aunt Inga
 snapped and flashed

until
 relations gathered around the choppers
 to lunch.

Sigurd embraces Katrinka in mountain gentians.
 I open the shutter in stillness.

EXTRACTS FROM A JOURNAL,
SLIGHTLY REARRANGED

Wednesday, July 4, 1973. We weren't able to buy any firecrackers anywhere for Danny, but he had shells to fire from his .22 rifle that Charlie had given him for Christmas. Wilbur and Charlie have both at times believed that Danny was only wasting shells, shooting into the air without aiming at anything. He has shown, though, that he can hit a target, whether an inanimate object like one of the pop cans he lines up on the ground or a living thing like a squirrel. But on the fourth of July no one would or did object to his firing his .22 just to make noise.

Monday, July 23. Even in death the owl is a beautiful creature. The full span of its outspread wings is three, perhaps four, feet. But lying on its back on the floor of the wanagan, it folds its right wing against its side, and its left wing lies open with severed muscle. The upper part of the inner surface of the left wing—visible as the wing lies open and flat—is covered by a mass of soft little brown-and-white-striped feathers. The right wing hides those on its inner surface by smoothing them softly against the breast. The left wing reveals the inside of the long outer feathers: across each feather stripes of brown alternate with patches of white speckled with brown. The right wing presents the outside surfaces of the outer feathers: both stripes and patches are brown with each patch set in a background of white and containing speckles of white. Covering the owl's breast puffs a multitude of tiny feathers, all in horizontal stripes of brown and white but in varying intensities of color. In death, and lying on its back, the owl measures twenty-two inches from the top of its head to the points of its talons. In hardness, in crescent shape, and in steel-gray color, the four talons on each foot resemble the fine, still beak, which juts forward from the head like a nose and then curves down. The owl's left eye is closed, but its right eye is half open.

Saturday night, July 21. About eleven o'clock I stepped outside and, in the light blue sky to the east, saw the fat crescent of the half moon. Then I heard a strange screeching sound

and, trying to locate it, walked around behind the wanegan. On top of a stovepipe on the little white house in the clearing behind Wilbur's land sat something that appeared to be an owl. Koko and Toby walked with me to a certain point, but as soon as they associated the screeching with the object on the stovepipe, they took off after it, frightening it into opening its wings and flying up to the top of a spruce tree to the west. It was beautiful in flight, the span of its wings appearing to be at least a yard.

Sunday, July 22. In the morning I told Danny and Wilbur about the owl I had seen, and towards evening—I think at suppertime—Danny asked Wilbur, "What would you think if I shot an owl?" Wilbur answered, "Why, I'd be tickled pink. An owl is the most destructive creature there is. They kill rabbits, grouse, squirrels, and every other animal." He added that their killing of squirrels didn't matter, though, since squirrels were a nuisance.

In the evening, after Wilbur went to bed, Danny came over to the wanegan and asked me to tell him a story. The owl I had seen the night before was still on my mind, so I told the Koyukon story of "The Owl" which the Reverend Julius Jetté had recorded in the Nulato area and published in 1909. It has to do with conflicting points of view about the duties of the wife; the wife in the story and her brothers, who are humans, hold one point of view, but the husband, who is really an owl, holds another. He kills his wife but is killed by his brothers-in-law, becoming reincarnated, however, in his original form of an owl.

A little while after I had told Danny this story, we heard the shots of a .22 from the direction of Charlie's house. We decided to walk up to see who was there. Danny fired his .22, and we heard another shot by way of answer. I believe he did this twice, and each time we received an answer. Danny carried his .22 with him, and Koko and Toby went along with us. After we had crossed the highway, we heard the owl, from somewhere in the woods on Charlie's side. We took the side road towards Charlie's place until we saw the strange vehicle—a kind of oversized station wagon—parked on the last patch of dry road before the swamp. We wondered who was at Charlie's. I thought it must be someone who had given him a ride home from Fairbanks, or maybe Charlie had traded in his

Plymouth for another vehicle, as he has been threatening to do. About the same time that we saw the car, Danny spotted the owl perched on a bare limb jutting horizontally near the top of a distant spruce.

While the dogs plowed through the tundra-carpeted woods with him, I stayed by the car and watched. Danny and the dogs were soon lost from my sight in the brush, but I kept watching the owl on its branch. With Danny's first shot, the owl remained sitting and still. I turned my attention to the paperback book on the dashboard of the vehicle—Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*—and heard the second shot. I did not have time to find the owl's vacant branch, for Danny's excited voice called that he had got it and that I should come in. Following his voice, I crossed the spongy growth of moss, lichens, and small plants, and I soon came to the place where he stood looking up at the owl, which had fallen more than half the height of the tree but had been caught by a lower limb. The dogs prowled through the brush nearby, apparently unaware of the thing which Danny had shot. He at first wanted me to boost him up the trunk of the tree so that he could climb to where the owl was caught. I thought I saw the owl move and cautioned him against approaching it if it were still alive. He shot it two more times, and it moved no more. Then he found a long stick, a slender fallen branch, and threw it two or three times like a spear until it dislodged the dead owl, which fell to the ground as a heavy mass of feathers.

Danny wanted me to carry the owl while he carried his .22. I picked it up by the wings, and we crossed the tundra floor of the woods to Charlie's road and walked on up the hill to Charlie's house. As we approached it, we could make out people watching us from the window but could not see who they were. Then Danny's cousins Levi and Laurie ran out, exclaiming that Danny had killed the owl which Levi had been shooting at.

**ANA
(Mother)**

Seven years and the lilacs have not bloomed.
Each spring she asks the local nurseryman
if she should sweeten the soil; if so, with what.
Each spring he tells her. Each year she forgets.

Over in the garden, lettuce rows
are dense with half-grown plants. The radish bolts
from too much sun. She never thins the carrots.
Unstaked tomatoes vine across the ground.

Indoors, a jungle in a window, plants
with names she never can recall. She waters
all of them identically—even cactus.
She never cuts back anything. The plants
grow scrawny, flowerless, unable to resist
the demands of her encouragement. She knows
no restraint in goodness. Even the children fail to bloom.

LAST PHOTOGRAPH

In the last photograph ever taken of her
she was standing with the Good Lord
dining in her eyes, that he would rise
beyond her white cheeks to walk the hills alone
and this is the way she was to follow,
in the glint of a little ice.

A smile turned, faint as leaf tips
taking sunlight which spoke to her sons
most of all "if grey is truly sweet,
my smile will be full next year."
Her skirt caught the wind just then
and a fabric of flowers upturned at the feet
where a little voice i must go i must go
ran past her ankles like a child.

And what of the cameraman, my brother,
stepping back to set the scene,
ruling out the lawnchair collecting leaves
or too much of the flower box?
Perhaps he was wondering,
perhaps we all imagined then,
waiting as we leaned out of view,
that this is it, this lightquick shutter
to gather things we need,
the things we lose, for the mantle at least
between the roses saved in alcohol
and my father in his Russian hat.
The sun came out. There was the click
and everything was settled after that.

THEN

we lay, the air-conditioner on
low to cover our ardent unfolding,
as I wandered through blouse and bra
down to the pink shore of your delicate
small breasts, and your strong concentual hands
played through my hair like the green and
frothy lap of the tide, while sun
filled all the pencil-thin gaps
in the blinds with its yellow stain.

In the cool half-light and on the bed
which had so often seen me work my sex
alone, I rose on my knees over you,
grasped the flimsy slip that covered
your thighs, crotch, and "No,"
you cried, "John, no!"—more than ten years ago.

The fear in your voice brought me still
and I thought, Now
she's no good to me at all:
the late summer evenings when nothing
happened between us but a single
kiss that went on and on, weeks wasted,
and I saw life slipping back from this
high passionate hour to the randomness
of other bedrooms gummed with shallow sex,
while the body I wanted most would lie
through afteryears, a blade at my back.

I want to explain honestly what happened then,
because you were so young and there was
nothing but your youth
I wanted. Not marriage—I had never

wanted that, but you. And teasing
at the edges of my thought,
this thought: that I might marry
and screw you and then
walk away. Believe me
nothing in that moment seemed final
but the youthful innocence of your body
beside me.

Beside me still.

THE REUNION

for Paul Rosenthal

Your fingers tease vibrato from the strings.
Amazingly this is Alaska. Brahms
and Debussy as the sun sets.
I hold a glass of wine and, shaken,
call back that other coast where we were born.
More than twenty years ago I heard you play,
had not spoken with you since
until today. All homes are temporary,
all prior places freeze
into a hollow statuary. Paul,
your notes are like a thousand angry words
muttered in Spanish to an absent love.

**GUIDE TO THE USES OF ALASKA TREES:
A HANDBOOK**

But suppose that the book
Fell out of the hand
Of the forester in the stand
Of Sitka spruce and was read.
And suppose that the trees rose
Up to shape their destiny—
That planes and boats flew
From the woods with chairs
And walls, oars, ladders,
And piano sounding boards,
With guitars and mandolins,
And that the crash of music
Was everywhere, a resonance
Beyond measure, and that
The forester ran from the trees,
Hands over his ears, bombarded
By symphonies and racing sculls,
A man who would fear wood forever.

WAITING FOR NEWS OF DEATH

She is dying in a tiny village
In England, one so small
It seldom appears on the maps.
Her garden is in riot,
The fields beyond reaching
For harvest. There is no
Message, no way to send
Remembrance, no telegram
To tell there is no death.
She must die, in her village
In England, and I must wait,
Across continents, to be told.
With the eight-hour difference
In time, she will already
Be well on her way,
Like a rocket shot into space.
In her village in England
The cows will have been milked
And will have refilled their udders,
Tables will have been set
And cleared, eggs collected,
Laundry dried, and the fields of rye
Will have inched closer to the scythe.

NEIGHBOR

Suppose that old woman--
I have seen her once--
Living in that small green house
Is related to raspberries.
They alone climb up her walk
Every spring and reach till
They can peek in the windows.
I have seen no one--
Not even dog or pigeon--
Go up that path
In any season. And suppose
That she dies in winter
And that is why her path
Is never cleared of snow
And that she rises in spring
With red sap, a vision,
To be met at the door
By her cousins coming for summer.
They carry small bags packed tight,
They gossip like mad.
Leaning against each other,
They dress up,
They whisper of red,
They dream of sleep that follows fruit.
And suppose that we
Opened her door in winter
And saw her there,
A tiny nest of roots.

SHORT REVIEWS

STANDING AROUND OUTSIDE, by Robert King, Bloodroot Press, P.O. Box 891, Grand Forks, ND 58201. 32 pp. \$1.50.

Those with long memories and/or a few years of seniority as Alaskans will remember Robert King as one of the "Flying Poets," a group of men who took live-action poetry to Alaska's bush villages in the middle 60's via light aircraft. They've since scattered across America, Ed Skellings to Florida, Ken Warfel to Washington—and Bob King to Grand Forks, North Dakota, where he teaches writing and poetry at the University of North Dakota and the Center for Teaching and Writing.

The first collection of his work, **STANDING AROUND OUTSIDE**, was issued this season by Bloodroot, a small press in his current home-state, as the second in their chapbook series. (I must digress from the subject of this review to praise their earlier chapbook, **POEMS FROM A RESIDENTIAL HOTEL**, by Grayce Ray, a fine series of poems that tell the stories of the denizens of the title establishment. The poems range from almost prosy narrative to the street-caller chant of a handyman, and are of consistent high quality in both vision and technique. But that is a digression.)

Bob King's chapbook is written in the plain voice of the Midwestern plains poets, but happily seems less contrived (end with an epiphany, anyone?) than most of that school's work. Situations are drawn from everyday life:

Marilyn signed her name, the last
I recognize in passing
as a boy's I knew in school.
Also, her unmarried name (in parentheses)
(“A Letter of Help”)

King's wit and honesty with himself saves these personal poems from being baldly confessional, and in the best of the poems that everyday landscape fuses with a dream-like inner one, no less a part of our ordinary terrain:

The air is full of invisible barbed wire.
The wind from behind old hills becomes
a tension through the trees. My fingers
chill. It is a strange country for us,
the sudden erosion of landmarks, darkness
clouding up from the ground like cold springs.
(“The West and Marriage”)

The magnificence of the ordinary: a good theme for a poet living under the changeful prairie skies of the Dakotas. The poet here is a magician who places that exterior landscape inside us to reveal its emotional resonance.

Good morning, I'm a rock.
The kind of metamorphic lump
you find in your bed, your breast,
the back of your mind. . .

A tightened fist if your fist
were knotted up in your heart. I am
that forgotten ball of pressure
curled around myself, waiting in you.
(“An Introduction”)

Such a thoughtful consideration of the connection between spirit and landscape seems the special province of the plains poets these days. They have much to teach those writing of, and in, Alaska.

The stones of Montana
are crying out
loudly for sunlight
in their sleep
they are inventing the forms
of warm snakes. . .
Listen to them
waiting in the darkness, listening.
(“Listening”)

Bloodroot chapbooks cost a mere \$1.50 from P.O. Box 891, Grand Forks, ND 58201, and are worth every penny.

Patricia Monaghan

ALASKAN PHANTASMAGORIA by Steven C. Levi. Triton Press, Boulder Creek, California. 28pp.

Steven C. Levi's **ALASKAN PHANTASMAGORIA** is an unique example of the self-published chapbook. As the title suggests, this collection of eight poems and glossary is a magic-lantern show of Alaskan legends and events, many of which are recounted in a modern-day Robert Service style. Levi's most serious work, however, is found in his free verse, in poems such as "Athapaskaniana" and "Attu." In addition to compiling his own book, Levi is also co-editor of the literary magazine, **HARPOON**, P.O. Box 2581, Anchorage, AK 99510. Submissions of poetry and short fiction are welcome.

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UNEXPECTED MANNA by Gary Holthaus, with an introduction by Gary Snyder. Copper Canyon Press, Box 271, Port Townsend, WA 98368. 86pp. \$4.00.

The Copper Canyon Press is noted for publishing poets with a strong sense of place, poets who are rooted to the land. Gary Holthaus' **UNEXPECTED MANNA**, with a number of poems set in the Northern Rockies and Alaska, reflects this style and focuses not only on specific geographic locales but also on the people who live and work there. In the opening poem, "Starting a Hunt: Montana," Holthaus captures a fading past:

You can almost see them
Hunkered down in glistening slickers
Rain rolling from wide-brimmed hats
Into tin plates

Holthaus is a poet who explores various frontiers. He is often looking back at past civilizations and uncovering unknown ancestors. Poems such as "Dust" and "Wild Horses" are filled with images "unearthed from our own/ Dim jurassic past." The title poem, "Unexpected Manna," contrasts the ancient Greeks and Israelites, and renders an expression of the ineffable quality of spiritual awareness:

Some things too highly prized
Or close; those that skirt
The edge of pain
Will always be unnamed.

Holthaus achieves an appropriate balance between the secular and spiritual worlds. His vision is varied, and influenced by the co-existence of good and evil spirits. One example is "Cold Spell: Copper Center" and the haunting queries Holthaus poses:

Where are you now, Shaman,
With your masks and power;
Where are the true stories,
The dance sticks and the drums;
Where is your wisdom, Uncles and Elders
Lost in the echoes of our calling
Lost in our drifting
Before the moonlit face of Drum

Another, more in the earthly realm, is the poem "Early Morning Incident," in which the poet becomes playwright and sets the scene under the combine where man, "a pulp-faced animal," confronts "the snake/ Rattling in the shadow."

UNEXPECTED MANNA, designed and printed by Tree Swenson and Sam Hamill, is a sizable collection of more than fifty poems. Although the subject matter and locale may vary, Holthaus' voice is constant throughout. His poem, "Turnagain Arm" is set in a country of "pending events. . . / Where massive forces lie/ Waiting to be released." The poet warns against stillness and makes his personal statement with a vibrant voice:

I also move, no believer in stillness.
Though no one is near, it is not just me
Moving through this country
But this country moving about me

Greg Divers

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CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

BERT ALMON teaches at the University of Alberta. His latest book is **TAKING POSSESSION** (Solo Press, 1976).

GEORGE BAILIN, of Mt. Vernon, N.Y., has had poems published in the **BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL**, **PRAIRIE SCHOONER**, and **FOLIO**. "hospital" originally appeared in **MATRIX**, a magazine published in Canada at Champlain College.

JACK BERNET arrived in Alaska on the day before Labor Day in the year of Statehood. Since then much of his labor has been drudgery; far too little of it has been applied to writing.

DANIEL BRADY is a graduate student at Texas A & I University; he has published scantily in Texas fishing magazines, college anthologies, and in **BLIND ALLEY**.

BILL BRODY is Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

GERALD CABLE lives in Fairbanks, Alaska.

JOE ENZWEILER, poet, pool shooter, and physicist, lives outside of Fairbanks in a nine-sided log house which he built himself.

MARY ERICKSON recently served as Artist-in-Residence at the Anderson Village School on a grant from the Alaska State Council on the Arts.

FRANCES GOLDWATER writes and teaches in New York. Her fiction has appeared in **THE CAROLINA QUARTERLY** and **THE GEORGIA REVIEW**. Martha Foley selected one of her stories as "Distinctive" in the **BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES**, 1977.

ROBERT HEDIN, a graduate of the M.F.A. program at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, is presently living in Paris, France. The poems in this issue of **PERMAFROST** are included in his new book, **AT THE HOME-ALTER**, by Copper Canyon Press; "Herds" will also appear throughout the state of New York as part of their Poetry in Public Places program.

TYLER HENSHAW has lived and taught school in Petersburg for six years. **THROUGH THE RAIN GLASS**, his first book of poems, is due out before summer by Solo Press in California.

NANCY McCLEERY moved from Nebraska to Anchorage a year ago. Her poems have appeared in **NEW**, **BLUE MOON NEWS**, **PEBBLE**, **SILVER VAIN** and other "little" magazines.

PATRICIA MONAGHAN is packing to leave for the west of Ireland on a grant from the Alaska State Council for the Arts. She is working this year as a poet-in-the-schools in Fairbanks. The poem "Ana" is part of a series entitled "Sedna's Daughters" which won this year's Harold McCracken Award in Poetry.

JOHN MORGAN has a book, *THE BONE-DUSTER*, forthcoming in the Quarterly Review of Literature's new poetry series. Author of *BORDER WARS*, Morgan teaches in the Department of English at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

CHERYL MORSE, native midwesterner, now lives in Alaska, and is currently teaching creative writing classes for the University of Alaska at the extension center in Cordova.

SHEILA NICKERSON, Alaska's poet laureate, is serving as Writer-in-Residence for the Alaska State Library this year.

PATTI PATTON graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1976 where she studied under Ishmael Reed and Josephine Miles.

FRAN PELHAM of Wyncote, Pennsylvania, is editor of "The Riverview Citizen," a newspaper in a state home for the aged, and a teacher of Creative Writing in a nursing home.

GARY SMITH appears in *PERMAFROST* for the second time. He received the 1978 Academy of American Poets Award at Stanford University, where he is working on an advanced degree in American literature.

JAMES SNYDAL of Seattle, WA., has had work printed in various regional quarterlies: *INSCAPE*, *BIG MOON*, *PAWN REVIEW*, *PACIFIC*, and *UNIVERSITY OF WINSOR REVIEW*.

WILLIAM STAFFORD teaches at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. His most recent book is *STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE*, *NEW AND COLLECTED POEMS*, Harper and Row.

NANCY THACKRAY VAN VEENEN, poet and graphic artist, lives in Ester, Alaska. She is a graduate of the Department of Journalism at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

JUDY WHEELER has lived in Alaska for seven years. She works at the University of Alaska.

WILLIAM M. WHITE teaches creative writing at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. His book, *ALL NATURE IS MY BRIDE*, 1975, was a selection of the Quality Paperback Book Club and the Ecological Book Club.



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