

but whether we can come to a new understanding about what it means to be sustained in body and spirit, and whether we're willing to commit ourselves to life all the way around our one watery, interflowing globe" (201). Lord's passionate, unsentimental, and informative memoir explores the relationships we have with the natural world, spurring us to find a sense of personal expansiveness in the wild, and perhaps to demand policies that reflect and preserve that spiritual gift.

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***Between Fire and Water, Ice and Sky.* By Gretchen Diemer. Port Alsworth, AK: Northshore Press, 2008. 80 pp. Compact disc included.**

This collection, Diemer's first, brings a strong and mature poetic voice to greater prominence and, one hopes, a wider audience. Diemer combines a focus on rural life and natural phenomena with a repetition and juxtaposition of key images that sometimes verges on the surreal. The language of these poems is lyrical and taut. A slack spot or a false step distracts the reader here and there, but overall the power of the poems builds as one goes through the book and Diemer's repeated themes and images accrue more emotional and symbolic weight.

Many of the poems have an Alaskan setting, though there are also poems set elsewhere, and poems in which location is not specified. Diemer's background as a teacher in Noorvik, St. Paul Island, and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley is rarely if ever mentioned, but it makes her voice credible when she writes about uniquely Alaskan places and people.

The accompanying CD is in no way crucial to reading the book, but it does allow us to hear the poet's voice, and the interview with publisher and fellow poet Anne Coray provides some interesting background information. It might be especially useful as a conversation-starter for classes or book groups.

The poems are free verse, but with an obvious awareness of form. Perhaps the most characteristic poems are built of free verse tercets or couplets. Unlike many such poems, the stanzas here are usually units of thought, syntax, and rhythm, and where they are not, Diemer uses the enjambment to good effect. My only formal quibble with the poems is that they occasionally create confusion by using unclear pronouns and avoiding punctuation.

The best way to read the book is probably from front to back, because of the way images and themes are interwoven from poem to poem. Many, but not all, of the leitmotifs fit into the categories listed in the title: fire, water, ice, sky. Diemer repeats, among other things, references to birds (especially ones with broken wings), astronomical phenomena (the moon, light, aurora borealis, and stars--especially shattered stars), rivers, bones, ashes, fire, keys, butterflies, wounds, dead bodies (human and animal), dreams, and unseen things. This is as conventional an inventory of poetic vocabulary as one could hope to find, but as the images are reshaped and repositioned from poem to poem they begin to take on specific, local associations in addition to their more or less automatic literary associations. They deepen and resonate.

What is usually a strength can become a weakness, and anywhere the repeated images and ideas seem insufficiently motivated, Diemer risks knocking her reader out of the flow of the poem and into the "enough with the stars, already!" mode. For example, in the poem "Loss of Stars," by the time I got through leaves, ice, flame, flight, bird song, bones, wind, and more leaves, to the last section where "a sky haunted with stars / dreams of light years" with "the sky dark and starless, the answers obvious," I had run out of patience with the starless sky haunted by stars dreaming of astronomical distance units. But that was because I didn't find enough in the poem to flesh out the keywords. Such cases are, by far, the exception rather than the rule in this book.

This is a work with a social conscience. The poems are suffused with the author's engagement with the environment and with human issues of class, ethnicity, religion, and war. The sense that someone is sad and angry about the harshness of death and the cruelty people enact on each other is a large part of what lets us believe there is something at stake in these poems beyond the pretty language. There are, in particular, a number of poems about war, and some of these are quite moving--especially where the human element is felt close up, as in "Selective Service," where the speaker talks about her son, "pacifist, vegetarian, raised to love anything / with breath" being forced to register for the draft.

Only very occasionally, where the righteous outrage isn't sufficiently grounded in the substance of its poems, does the book strike a false note. Perhaps the most egregious example of this is in "Voices Scattered Across Water," in which the poet, looking at "a wooden bird chained to a wind chime," reflects, "I remember/ driftwood, tangled like the bones discovered at Auschwitz,/ on a beach at the Port of San Juan." This does, in a minor way, echo a mention of Dachau in an earlier poem, but it's still essentially

a gratuitous Holocaust reference and it weakens, rather than strengthens, the ominous but vague sense of violence the poem builds up to and the powerful last stanza's "storm of blackbirds assaulting the ripe fruit."

Ultimately, though, the best thing about this collection is not its subject matter, but its language. Its trimmed-down lines and generally dark tone make it all the more exhilarating when contained energy flashes out, whether in a single surprising phrase or in a sustained roller-coaster ride of free association, as in "The Flight of Eve," where the phrases simply cascade one upon the next in a seemingly free, but ultimately predestined, flow:

faithless father
of our father's father, what seeds you plant, you reap,
you sow, we live with the pitted rock of ages, the ice age

here at our feet, bare feet, cut on the oldest stones on the planet, first
day before rest, he constructed dirt, snow, hair of Eve, the blond witch of the
clerical fantasy who bows and lifts her black wings.

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***Wild Moments: Adventures with Animals of the North*. Edited by Michael Engelhard. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2009. xv + 221 pp.**

Michael Engelhard's *Wild Moments* is a beautiful anthology of contemporary nature writing concerning animal encounters in the North. Divided into three sections that describe terrestrial, avian, and aquatic wildlife encounters, the collection traverses different habitats as well as political boundaries, with essays focused on Alaska, western Canada and the Yukon, Washington, and Montana. Engelhard's editorial process is not that of a mere collector, but of a curator who knows that a book about animals is a book, too, about human self-perceptions and worldviews, as well as language, climate, localism, and culture; that it is a measure of our own relationships—mysterious, ancient, and threatened—with the animals whose various habitats we share. Engelhard believes that North Americans, the bulk of whom lead lives set in "designed environments," are in need of "wild animals and their stories more than ever" and must "remember that beneath the veneer of our language, our civilization, something feral still purrs" (3). This anthology, released in an era of melting ice and what could well be the Bering Sea's last generation of wild polar bears, is a canary in the coal mine of our self-awareness as a species among species.