

In “Swan,” Sarkadi bravely investigates and reveals her own feelings and desires for other men, including the time she confessed her love for a guitar-playing friend to her husband. The conversation that follows this confession is surprising and heart-warming.

In all, this is a rich and complex work, a call to the wild places that exist both in the natural world and inside us all.

Daryl Farmer, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Ice Bear: The Cultural History of an Arctic Icon. By Michael Engelhard. University of Washington Press, 2016. 304 pages, 170 illustrations, 145 in color, 1 map.

Reviewed by Larry Gray

I was drawn into Michael Engelhard’s book almost immediately from the frontispiece photo—a heartbreaking image of a polar bear lying on their belly and gazing at a wall mural of the Arctic landscape and the drawing of another polar bear. The bear was in a zoo in Santiago, Chile. My reaction was visceral. I was instantly taken back to the time I saw a similar scene firsthand at the Stanley Park Zoo in Vancouver. At the time, I was regional biologist for the Keewatin Region (now part of Nunavut) based in Arviat. I had been working on the Foxe Basin Polar Bear project and had by then seen many polar bears in the wild—up close and personal as we were immobilizing them from helicopters and deploying radio collars. Having seen many healthy bears in their pristine, cold and snowy environment—the vast Canadian Arctic—I was forlorn to see a decrepit, yellow-furred polar bear lying in a warm and cramped enclosure just like the one in the Chilean zoo—clearly depressed and listless. Tears came to my eyes.

Engelhard’s excellent book is an unflinching and wide-ranging look at the polar bear through the eyes of a gifted cultural anthropologist. It goes both wide and deep. Wide in the sense that it is a thorough examination of the pan-cultural iconography of the polar bear. Deep in the sense that it is also a probing examination of human/nature relationships over time and geography. I found this book, although focused on the polar bear as Arctic icon, has as much to say about the state of our own species and its humanity and ethics (or lack thereof in some cases), as it does about the iconic white bear.

A cultural icon is not unlike an archetype (to borrow a term from Jungian psychology). The Icon/Archetype is a powerful symbol that represents a particular culture, and there is broad cultural agreement as to its meaning.

Each chapter of Engelhard's book provides both historical and cultural perspectives on a given culture's relationship with the iconic polar bear. These "cultures" include, of course, the circumpolar Inuit but also early European cultures and their Arctic explorers. But within Western European and Western culture generally, there exist many subcultures. And so, again drawing upon the particular viewpoint of a cultural anthropologist, Engelhard takes us on a journey through the multiple perceptions that people and groups have of the polar bear. It is a journey in which we see how we all project onto this magnificent animal our own pre-existing beliefs, fears, imagination, and desires. As I tell all my students, nature is what it is. It is we humans (also part of nature—a fact that is most often ignored) who give the natural world whatever meaning we want.

Engelhard explores the human–bear relationship from the perspective of the artist and myth-maker, the scientist, the eco-tourist, the subsistence hunter, the trophy hunter, the zoo manager (and the viewing public), the shaman, the consumer looking for sexual enhancements, the politician, the economist, the conservationist, and more.

Each culture or subculture perceives the bear in their own way depending on their beliefs and world view. The chapter titles say this explicitly: "The Bear as Early Commodity," "Object of Scientific Curiosity," "From White Terror to Trophy of Modernity," "Zoo Bear and Circus Bear," and so on.

Undoubtedly among the many strengths of this book are the photographs and drawings. I use images a lot in my teaching since humans are primarily visually oriented and we respond more emotionally to pictures and images. The photos and images Engelhard has chosen are both evocative and provocative. So much so, that I guarantee this book will touch you in some way at an emotional level. The written stories—historical and present day—are there and are well told. But for me, it is the visuals that have lasting impact. Both photos and written material are well-documented with sources. This book is very well-researched.

This could be a coffee table book, for sure. But it is a lot more than that. An initial flip through the pages will draw the reader to delve

into it and they will soon be captured by an unrelenting, compelling, and gripping account of the cultural history of this Arctic icon. That account includes a chronicle of both human arrogance and humility towards the polar bear. That initial frontispiece photo and my own memory of the Stanley Park Zoo are evocative of the arrogance. Engelhard's concluding sentences in the book are a plea for humility: "Across cultures and times, its whiteness invited projection and we eagerly saddled it with our fears, fantasies and ambitions. Like the blank spots on explorer's maps, it keeps us forever guessing its true nature. It is our chance to redeem ourselves or, at least, to face our shortcomings. Without it, the world would be less colorful, less complete."

This book is eminently readable for everyone. It is an important and vital contribution to our understanding of bears—and ourselves.

Larry Gray, Yukon College

Human Being Songs: Northern Stories. By Jean Anderson. University of Alaska Press, 2017. 136 pages. 1 line drawing.

Reviewed by Jamella Hagen

In Jean Anderson's new collection of short stories set in Alaska, the usual clichés of northern life do not appear. There are no glaciers or grizzly bears, no moose or mountaintops. Instead, the stories explore the lives of women living in Alaska's towns and cities, as they make art or make a living, fall in and out of love, commit acts of kindness or crash cars. Like Lorrie Moore's *Birds of America* and Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Human Being Songs* introduces characters who are varied and complex. Some are likeable, some are not. I appreciate that. Anderson doesn't shy away from difficult topics, cold weather, or the complex nature of human relationships.

In "Thaw," we meet Arlys, tangled in damp sheets and hungover, processing a one-night stand with a young man as she reflects back on a tumultuous relationship and searches for meaning through painting and stories. In "The Immediate Jewel," we meet Twila, a woman who worries her daughter's voice sounds "too sweet . . . like a wild rose newly opened, wafting its heart out into the dense smoke-thickened air." As the story goes on, she recognizes her daughter's tough core,