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On Tom Rea

Lee Bassett

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Bolden's inevitable destruction gives us the risks of the creative process.

**Coming Through Slaughter* is also available in America from the "Asphodel Book Shop," 17192 Ravenna Rd., Burton, Ohio, 44021.

Terry Nathan

Man In A Rowboat

Tom Rea

Copper Canyon Press

Port Townsend, Washington 1977

\$2.50, paper

Dear Rick: I'm in Browning, travelling light. The stars are closer here, nearer to all things, even my backpack. Rick, we don't need much: One raincoat, an extra shirt (L.L. Bean), a can of smoked salmon and Tom Rea's book. You should read it, friend, the poems are bright as a drum. Each one unfolds quiet and quickly, the great way of the photo album on Sunday evenings. But see, these snapshots aren't your regular fishing trips, these here poems catch a lost strange land. Take the opening *Poem*: "There were/ no words yet." Or *High Plains, Wyoming*: "But there was a time/ you could float to the ocean in a month,/ just drift, no portages, no falls." Or even *The Climber Takes A Breather*. There's the man in the strange awkward land, the one who (isn't) "bred for ledges." See, even the title poem starts "There was a lake once," and flows on to be a love poem to the joy of living in the awesomeness. Wordsworth, right? No. Not rightly. More Uncle Ezra and Mr. Kawabata: these poems are elegies to Wildtime, to pure and beautiful Mystery. Take the hard poem *The Wolf* or the sad sad *Bear*. These strong or subtle violences toward the very wildness within us must eventually cause our own imprisonment. "His cousin is dying in the Denver zoo/ one cage down from the pool where seals/ try anything for fun." See, we are capable,

friend, of the awful killing of a pure mystery. This book of poems knows it, and the poet is showing us. Rick: these poems reflect the hardship world, as when Conrad Aiken said: “. . . to be the ambassador of all you are to all that is not you.” Here is that tension and fear, behind Tom’s deceptive frivolity. Rick, here in Browning I have eaten the salmon and loved this book. It is raining now, snow later. I won’t pull the raincoat out just yet. Love, Lee.

Lee Bassett

Making It Simple

David McElroy

Ecco Press, 1975

New York, New York

\$2.95, paper

Snow Country

Robert Hedin

Copper Canyon Press, 1975

Port Townsend, Washington

\$3.00, paper

Let’s say it’s *weather* that connects these two poets, and in particular, the way weather — through its instruments of wind and snow — manages to confound what was formerly sure. Both men spent a great deal of time in Alaska, so it shouldn’t be surprising that the landscape, its changing face, forms such a central concern — even when the locations of some poems lie in a more temperate zone. Each writer’s response, however, is utterly individual: so much so, in fact, that leafing through the books, noting the differences in tone, manner of statement, you’d swear that if these two ever met they wouldn’t get along. Maybe start arguing, even. But don’t be too hasty. While McElroy seems to use the extremes of weather and circumstance toward an ongoing redefinition of self, and while Hedin uses the same, it seems, to arrive at a more proper stance with regard to *what’s out there*, you must remember that these two notions are not that far apart. Both concede — *surrender*, if that’s your word — to the fact