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## Review of *Cold Snap as Yearning* By Robert Vivian

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*Cold Snap as Yearning*. By Robert Vivian. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. ix + 150 pp. \$24.95.

In this collection of personal essays, Robert Vivian offers a series of vivid, intensely reflective, and soul-stirring renderings of the lives and landscapes of the Great Plains. He explores a broad range of topics, from the dynamics of grief to the existential ephemera of modern existence, with wonderful literary inventiveness, quilting together seemingly disparate anecdotes, images, and reflections into a more complex whole. Many of his subjects here are closely personal, though even in the essays that provide an intimate glimpse into his own life Vivian's gaze inevitably turns outward, to the places and people around him; the book's many character sketches demonstrate his journalistic eye for detail and poetic ability to pierce the heart.

In its most luminescent moments—and there are many in this book—*Cold Snap as Yearning* takes on the pitch and gravity of spiritual autobiography, bringing to mind the work of such writers as Simone Weil and Thomas Merton, though the spiritual realm Vivian evokes is characterized more by divine absence than presence. In the collection's title essay, a meditation crafted around a dilated moment from his childhood, he writes, "At eight I am looking for God, or what passes for divinity in blown snow and nothingness." At several points his inability to discern the sure contours of the transcendent is connected to his professed limitations in rendering the essence of an image or experience through language. While these moments might seem a kind of evasion from a lesser writer, Vivian uses them to evoke a sense of stricture that is authentic and hauntingly familiar to anyone who has tried to give the ineffable shape in words.

*Cold Snap as Yearning* will be a special pleasure to readers familiar with the locales in which many of these essays are set, including the urban and suburban environs of Omaha, and the slow scenic stretch of Interstate 80 that runs through eastern Nebraska. Speaking of the Platte River, Vivian writes, "I carry the memory of its rhythm and currents with me wherever I go, the quiet, cleansing knowledge of something greater than myself." The collection offers many such moments of lyrical wisdom.

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