

The paper,
 a wave-silenced
 drowner's call,
 a merest arm
 if arm at all,
 a speck in the sea.

—DEBORAH TANNEN
Georgetown University

Body Writing

Ideas dart into dark closets
 dash to ceiling corners
 call to me from above
 then fly away laughing.

My back presses the padded chair,
 my neck presses into my shoulders

til suddenly
 ideas drift down to the page
 and play there.
 Then
 this body
 is nowhere at all.

—DEBORAH TANNEN
Georgetown University

In the Arctic with Malaurie

BRUCE JACKSON
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I CAME HOME ONE SUNDAY in mid-September to a message on the answering machine from Jean Malaurie suggesting I meet him in Nome two weeks hence. He said I should not bother calling back because he was leaving in minutes "to go with Chirac for a meeting in Moscow with Boris Nicolaevitch," after which he would be going to St. Petersburg for work at the Polar Academy. He said he would call when he got back to Paris on September 30. For years he has been suggesting I come along on one of his trips to the Arctic. He says things like, "You'll love it. Everyone does. The people, the tundra, the Arctic night!"

Malaurie is best known for his magisterial *Les derniers rois de Thulé* (*The Last Kings of Thule*, ex-

panded several times since it was first published in 1956 and now translated into 22 languages) and for *Terre humaine*, his 80-volume series of translations and original works of humanistic anthropology and sociology. Now 74 and retired from the university, he remains vigorous and engaged: he recently completed *Hummocks*, a forthcoming 1,000-page ethnographic and autobiographical work about his years in the Arctic; he continues to expand *Terre humaine*; and he has been serving as president of the Polar Academy.

When he next called, he said the meeting with Yeltsin had been fruitful and the academy was doing well. Then, "So are you meeting me in Nome?"

"Of course," I said. "What are we going to be doing there?"

He said there was to be an international conference at the Polar Academy in 1999 focusing on a wide

range of social and economic problems and attempts to deal with them, and he hoped to find people who might join the conversations. "So we'll look and see what we can learn. You're the sociologist; I'm the anthropologist. Together we're Colombo: we ask questions, and maybe we can learn something useful."

I asked if his office was making hotel reservations for us. "Reservations? Bruce, we're adventurers. Adventurers don't need reservations. But there is one thing."

"What?"

"Bring gloves."

I found the Nome home page on the World Wide Web. There seemed to be two hotels: the Nome Nugget Inn, where each room had a phone and bathroom, and the Polaris, where the phone was in the lobby and bathrooms were in the corridor. I called the Nugget and made a reservation. The clerk, whose accent was distinctive and who I would later learn was an Eskimo from Anchorage who had moved to Nome as a boy, asked how long I'd be staying. "I'm not sure," I said. "Does it matter?"

"Not this time of year," he said.

On the Tundra

Every morning at first light, when I look out the window of my room at the Nome Nugget Hotel, I see Malaurie seated on the bench by the public deck atop the seawall. He is there whether the day is clear, rainy, or snowy. From a distance, he might be a carving of a man or a man frozen in place. If the wind is blowing that morning, the ear flaps of his fur hat are down; if the air is calm, the flaps are up (see Figure 1). Only his head and his right hand move. The head goes up a bit, then down again, up a bit, then down again; the hand makes small darting movements. After 20 minutes at most, he gathers up his things from the bench or the five-foot-diameter table made of a heavy-cable core, crosses the narrow, puddled road that parallels the seawall, and enters the building. A few minutes later I hear the door of his room down the corridor open and close. Sometimes he shows me the pastel he did of that morning's Arctic dawn, sometimes he doesn't.

After breakfast our workday begins: we meet with people, visit agencies, look at what is happening on the streets. Some places and people we visit together (such as the Kawerak Native corporation, the XYZ Senior Citizens Center, the house of the Little Sisters of Jesus, three churches); others we visit independently (Malaurie goes to the hospital and has conversations with the two Mormon missionaries working the town, I go to the court and the prison).



Figure 1

Jean Malaurie in Nome. Photo by Bruce Jackson, 1997.

One Friday we drive to the village of Teller, about 72 miles northwest of Nome. Just past the Sinuk River, Malaurie says, "Pull over. Let's walk on the tundra." The spongy surface deceives because not far below it is permafrost, a world that is forever frozen. There were some knee-high willow bushes a few miles back, but here nothing grows more than a few inches above the ground. (The nearest trees are 50 miles the other side of Nome.) "Look at this," Malaurie says. I see nothing other than beige and brown vegetation. His index finger traces a widening pattern in the surface. I see the pattern repeating itself in larger and larger forms, radiating beyond us. He tells me it is caused by action of the deep permafrost. "From the air" (he points at two ravens heading toward the Kiguaik Mountains to the east) "you can see it even better." He looks at the distant peaks covered in snow, ahead along the gravel road that we will follow to Teller, west toward the Bering Sea, and then back to the ground again. "I love the tundra," he says.

Later that day, as we are heading back, we pick up a hitchhiker. He tells us his name is Raymond and he is going to Nome, where he will spend the night with friends before catching the early morning plane to Anchorage. His sister is in the hospital there, dying of cancer, and he is anxious to see her. In the warmth of the car, Raymond exudes a sour whiskey odor. He asks if he can smoke. Neither of us responds, and so he says, "Just one?" Malaurie says, "Just one," and I ask Raymond to open his window. He lights up.

He and Malaurie try their Inupiak dialects on one another. Each understands some of what the other is saying, and both revert to English whenever neither dialect works. The two sing a song they both know, and they both laugh about it.

We pass a shack missing one wall. Earlier that day, Malaurie and I had explored the place. Not far away were some ugly holes where the land had been torn up by miners years ago. Around here, damaged surface can take a century to repair itself, and junk lingers forever. Abandoned goldmining dredges, which from a distance look like Mississippi River steamboats, rise eerily out of riverbeds off all three roads out of town. The countryside is littered with abandoned shacks, sheds, pieces of houses, large rusted iron objects of a hundred different shapes, and even, on the Council Road, a train partly nosed into a river where it has been stopped for 90 years.

Malaurie points and asks, "A miner's shack?"

"Yes," Raymond says.

"What happened to it?"

"Bear got him," Raymond says.

"A bear wrecked the cabin?"

"The miner. Bear got him."

For the next 20 minutes we see only one car heading toward Teller from Nome. I have to pay careful attention to the road because the surface has turned slick and treacherous in the afternoon sun.

When I next look in the rearview mirror, I don't see Raymond. I say, "Where are you?" He comes up from below the seatback, looking a little sheepish, a cigarette in his mouth. He grins and tosses it out the window.

As we approach the Tisuk River bridge, Malaurie says, "Let's get a drink of water." He turns to Raymond and says, "You want to get a drink of water?"

"Sure," Raymond says. "Why not?"

I stop the white Ford Bronco. Raymond goes down the steep embankment to the right of the bridge; Malaurie goes down a longer but less precipitous path on the left. Raymond is back soon. He stands with me, smoking. We talk about salmon. After a while, we cross the road and look for Malaurie. He is still down at the river, flat on his stomach, his hands in the water, his head just above the surface. He is splashing water on

himself. After a while he gets up, shakes the water out of his hair, puts his jacket back on, and climbs up to where we stand. "Arctic water is the best water in the world," he says. Raymond lights another cigarette, takes two quick drags, and flips it away as we get into the Bronco.

Front Street

About 10:00 the next morning I am taking photographs on Front Street and someone says hello over my shoulder. It's Raymond. I say, "What are you doing here?"

"I missed the plane. Somebody rolled me last night in the Polaris. Can you lend me ten dollars?"

"All right." I reach for my wallet.

"How about 20?"

"Ten."

"Okay. I'll pay you back sometime when I see you."

"Okay."

Not many people move along Front Street on foot during the day this time of year. The kids are in school. Trucks and vans (many with cracked windshields from the gravel roads) head out toward the villages. Three men spend the entire morning and much of the afternoon unloading cases of beer from a seaborne shipping container into the Bering Sea Saloon. (A day later, three men did the same thing at another bar a little further down the street.)

As afternoon progresses, more and more people are walking on the street, many with that peculiar walk drunks have: it's a wooden kind of motion, and if you watch it, you get a sensation in your own knees of too much pressure being applied with each step. Drunk walk lacks fluidity.

There is a woman of about 50 I see every afternoon and evening on Front Street. She always wears a green jacket, green cap, and black stretch pants. With one exception, she's been slightly, moderately, or very drunk every time I have seen her. The exception was election day afternoon when she crossed over from the other side of the street a few yards ahead of me, walking more steadily than usual. She was with a man about her age and a girl in her early teens. "Who's going to hold my hand?" the woman in green said. She looked at the man, but he ignored her. "Who's going to hold my hand?" she said again. The man continued to ignore her, but the young girl, without turning her head, extended her hand. With her left hand the woman in green held the young girl's hand, and she put her right hand in the back pocket of her stretch pants. Late that night, long after the polls had closed and the bars had opened, I saw her walking with two men I had not seen before,

their steps equally uneven and their balance equally tentative.

A Family Conversation

In the Board of Trade bar at 5:30 in the afternoon, a woman says to the man standing next to her, "You can't tell me what to do. You can't tell me what to do. Who do you think I am, your sister? You can't tell me what to do." Both of her elbows are on the bar. She lifts her bottle of beer from the bar and drinks from it without moving her elbows.

The man next to her, who also has both his elbows on the bar, is silent for a while and then says, looking straight ahead, "You *are* my sister."

She thinks for a moment and then says, "That's right, I'm your sister. I'm your fuckin' sister. I'm your sister. You can't tell me what to do."

The Christian Darts

A woman who works at the Battered Women's Shelter talked about the missionaries:

Right now what they're saying is, "We're sorry we did what we did to you. We shouldn't have done that to you. We were wrong to believe and to think that there were certain things you had to stop doing. We are sorry we did that to you. We acknowledge that. We will no longer try to take away from you your culture anymore. We will not determine what's evil or not anymore." That's the approach that they are taking now.

Which is a drastic change from the 1920s and the 1930s and the 1940s. What they are acknowledging within the Christian communities now is that what they did was an atrocity in itself: when they said certain things we were doing that were not Christian were evil. But who were they to determine what was evil or not? They haphazardly walked in and determined the faults. It was based on whichever church was in that community. Certain churches allowed certain traditions and certain activities to occur in a certain cluster of communities, whereas in other communities they weren't allowing it. It was determined by which church was there.

This is what people in the village like to say: there was a map of the Bering Strait region, and each church had a dart and they threw their darts and that is how they divided our region. There is a cluster of villages that are predominantly Lutheran, a cluster of villages that are predominantly Catholic, and a cluster of villages that are Protestant. Those are the three primary churches around here.

The Blonde Eskimo

"You ever hear about the blonde Eskimo?" a silver-haired woman who works in the senior citizens center

asks us. I think she's going to tell a dumb-blond joke, which were all the rage in the lower 48 seven or eight years ago. "No, I haven't," I say.

"It's me. My mother was half-Danish and half-Eskimo, my father was half-Norwegian and half-Eskimo. They're from the same village. That's how come I'm blonde. I'm the blonde Eskimo."

She grew up in a village down the coast. When she was a child and came into Nome for the movies in the 1940s, the Eskimos had to sit in the balcony, the half-Eskimos sat on the left side of the aisle, the whites on the right. Sometimes she came in with her sisters or cousins, and the ushers would tell her to sit on the right side of the aisle. "I'd say, 'No. I'm with them.' They'd say, 'But you have to sit over there.' I'd say, 'I'm an Eskimo.' They'd look at my hair and wouldn't believe me, but it was true. I spoke Eskimo, and I knew how to hunt roots."

Court

There are two courtrooms on the second floor of the New Federal Building on Front Street. The big courtroom is for federal trials and major state trials. To the left of the bench is a furled American flag, to the right a furled Alaskan flag. On the wall over and behind the judge is an object probably unique to Alaskan courtrooms, perhaps unique to this one: a bleached walrus skull with two long tusks curving down toward the top of the judge's head.

The smaller courtroom in the back corner of the building, the district court presided over by Judge Bradley M. Gator, is where you meet ordinary people having ordinary problems. Judge Gator's court handles arraignments, pleadings, hearings, and minor trials. Because the courtroom is so small, the judge's bench is at an angle in the corner to the right of the door as you come in.

Every weekday afternoon at 1:00 p.m., a state police van pulls up at the side of the building with prisoners from the Anvil Mountain Correctional Center (which everyone in town refers to as "AMCC") a few miles north of town. After the prisoners in their Day-Glo orange and mustard jumpsuits have been brought up, seated in the jury box, and had their handcuffs removed, the district attorney and the lawyers arrive. The accuseds' lawyers are almost always public defenders because most people handled by this court are poor, and poor people cannot afford to hire lawyers.

One young man asked the judge to let him remain free while awaiting trial. His sister asked the judge to make it a condition of his release that he not visit his parents' house. The judge asked why. "Because they're worse drunks than he is," the public defender said.

The next case concerned 27-year-old Jerry Bunhart, who was charged with second-degree murder because, while drunk, he killed 30-year-old Russel Apatiki with his green Ford Bronco on East Front Street late Saturday night. Bunhart has several character witnesses, one of whom is both the mayor and a high official of the Alaska Gold Company, one of Nome's major employers. They tell the judge that he is a reliable worker and never once showed up for work drunk. Bail is set at 10,000 dollars. Bunhart and a young woman grin at one another and hug. The lawyer tells the woman that Bunhart will go back to AMCC for processing; then he will be released, and she can pick him up there later that afternoon.

During all of this, the trooper who ferries the prisoners to and from AMCC sits without moving in a chair just to the right of the door. On her thick black leather belt is an enormous automatic pistol, two extra magazines of ammunition, a great ring of keys, and several closed leather cases. During one long colloquy between the judge and the attorneys, she opens an envelope that was on the chair next to her and takes out a group of 4-by-6-inch color photographs. She looks at them one by one, smiling from time to time.

After Bunhart and the other prisoners of the day are taken out, the public defender tells me that alcohol or other drugs are a factor in about 90 percent of his cases. He says the dead man had been picked up twice on the streets earlier Saturday evening for being drunk. "If they'd locked him up like they're supposed to, he'd be alive now."

He is referring to the law that allows police to put drunks in AMCC for 12 hours. After the 12 hours are up, they are released. If there is a car there going to town or if they have family with a car or money for a taxi, they get to ride; otherwise, they walk back to town. AMCC is the only American prison that I have ever seen that houses every category of prisoner: men, women, people doing long sentences for major felonies, people doing short sentences for minor offenses, people awaiting arraignment or awaiting or undergoing trial, and ordinary falling-down drunks.

The first case on Thursday, two days later, is a young man who wants to be furloughed from AMCC so he can go to the funeral of his cousin in the village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island. His lawyer tells the judge that the cousin was killed by a drunk driver on East Front Street Saturday night and the body is still in Anchorage where it was sent for autopsy. The judge asks if the body will be in Gambell in time for the funeral. The lawyer repeats the question to his client. The man says, "We don't know for sure when he's getting there." The judge looks at the dossier and says that because of the man's record he will not release him. The man looks puzzled through much of this. When every-

one is quiet for a moment, he asks the public defender whether or not he will be released. The lawyer says, "He says no."

"Why?"

"Because you've screwed up so much."

"Oh. Okay."

The Fire on the Beach

Early one morning I saw from my hotel room firelight flickering through spaces below the public deck built atop the seawall. I could hear nothing over the surf and wind, but I could see what seemed to be the silhouettes of people moving between the flame and the stone. Later, I asked the blonde woman who is the daytime desk clerk about it. She seemed disinterested; so I asked her a second time. "Probably people having a cookout," she said. "At 5:00 in the morning?" I asked. "Oh, they do that sometimes," she said and turned back to her papers.

Later that day, the state trooper in court said, "Have you met our homeless people yet?" I said I had not. "When the tide's out, go down behind the chainsaw sculptures in the park by the visitor's center, the other side of the seawall. You'll see them there. And further up the beach toward the roadhouse, past where the seawall ends."

I told her about the flames in the early morning. "That was them," she said. I told her what the concierge said. "Yeah, they'd say that," the state trooper said. "They don't like to think about the homeless people." I said that this must be a very difficult place to be without shelter in the winter. "It's worse that you could imagine," she said. She finished handcuffing her prisoners and led them down to the van with the state insignia on the door and drove them back to Anvil Mountain Correctional Center.

The Man Whose Father Could Fly

We went to a house where Nicky, a man whom Jean had known on Little Diomed Island in the Bering Strait 20 years ago, was living with one of his granddaughters (see Figure 2). The house was on the eastern end of town, near the school. Like many houses in Nome, it was built a few feet above the ground. If you build a house with heating right on the ground, the permafrost melts and the house sinks into it. This house had five steps up to the small porch by the front door. A woman in her twenties let us in. Four or five children and two other grownups were watching television. One of the women led us to a room in the back of the house.

Nicky was lying in bed. There were no lights on in the room and the shades were drawn. His wife, who sat

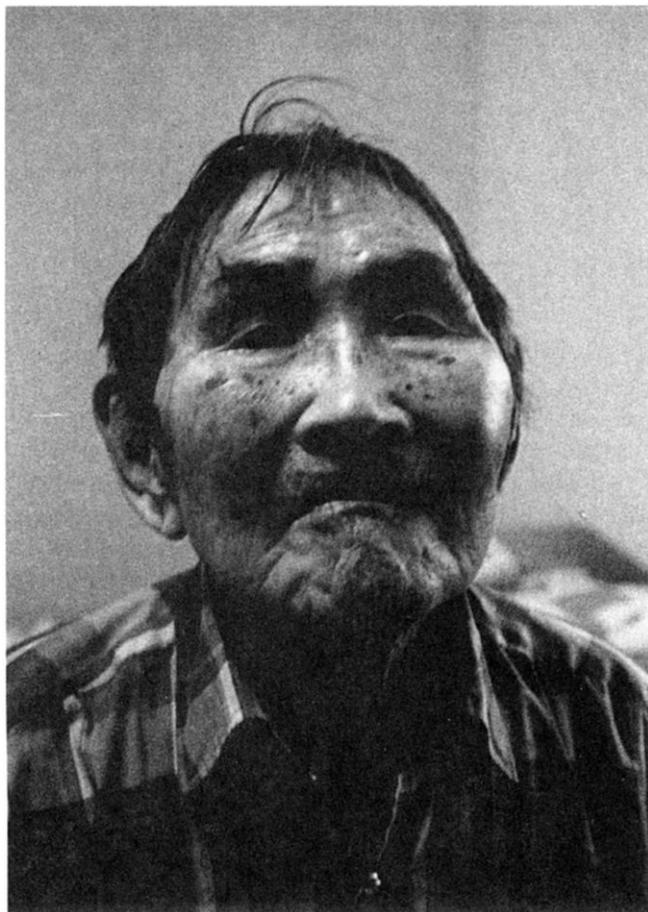


Figure 2

The man whose father could fly one time, Nome. Photo by Bruce Jackson, 1997.

in a chair at the foot of the bed, told us he was blind and deaf now. He said the same thing. Jean said hello and asked if Nicky remembered him; Nicky said of course he did. He sat up and turned toward us. Jean introduced me. I put out my hand, and Nicky shook it. I said I was pleased to meet him. He said it was nice to meet me, too.

Nicky and Jean talked about people in the village, who was alive and who was not, who was living in Nome and who was still on the island, what was still the same and what had changed. Nicky said, "They say there is one man could walk on water, but there were three." One of the three, he said, was his grandfather, who one time was returning with some other hunters on the ice and they got near the shore where the ice was soft and so his grandfather kept poking at it with his stick to make sure it was strong enough to support their weight. Then he got to a place (Nicky mimed the action with his hand) where the stick went deep into the water, which meant there was no ice there at all. "But my grandfather kept walking anyway. He did that."

I never learned who the third man who could walk on water was because Nicky remembered and told us about a time when his father and a friend were returning to their village. Nicky is 91 years old, and at the time of the story his father and the friend were young men; so this happened pretty long ago.

There was a river that had to be forded ten miles from the village. Ordinarily, if you knew where the stones and high places in the riverbed were, you could just walk across and the water in those places was never deeper than your boots. But that day, because of the spring rains and meltings, it was impossible to walk across even if you knew the location of every high place, every submerged boulder.

"My father," Nicky said, "he could fly, so it was okay."

"He what?" I said.

"My father, he could fly. That day he could. A wind came, and it lifted him and his friend and it put them down just like *that* ten miles the other side of the river. So he flew, my father did. On that wind. Other people, they had to walk those ten miles if they wanted to get from that place to the village, but my father, he flew it." He paused, then said, "That was before the white man came. Things are different now."

He opened his shirt and showed us a lump over his left breast. "It's a good thing you're here today. Next week, I have to go on the airplane to Anchorage to get a new pacemaker. I've had this one 14 years." He tapped it with vigorous confidence. I wanted to tell him that pointing would suffice.

His wife said, "They said it was only good for eight years, but he's had it in there for *fourteen*."

Nicky grinned. "Jesus is my pacemaker." He tapped his chest again. "Jesus is my pacemaker, right?"

"Right," I said.

"*Fourteen years!*" his wife said.

We left a little while later and walked to the break-water near the chainsaw sculptures. The late afternoon sun danced on the waves, and we talked about how the world had changed in Nicky's father's lifetime, in Nicky's lifetime, in our fathers' lifetimes, in our lifetimes. I once read that in 1909 there were only 14 miles of paved road in all of the United States; my father was born that year. Jean was the first Frenchman to reach the magnetic North Pole. He got there on foot and dogsled, which was the only way to do it then. We sat there talking about Nicky while late afternoon contrails traced Great Circles 40,000 feet above us.

Job

Job is 80. He was born in Solomon, a fishing village on Norton Sound about 30 miles to the east. It is said

that his grandfather killed a bear with his hands. Job's father wanted him to be a seal hunter. When he was a boy, he learned those ways, but he knew those ways would not last and so he learned how to operate heavy machinery. In World War II he was a heavy equipment operator in the Air Force, stationed at an airbase in the Aleutians. "I'd watch the planes go out, and I'd count them; then I'd watch them come back, and I'd count them." His eyes filled with tears for the planes that did not come back more than a half-century ago. "There's a lot of dead men out there," he said, nodding toward the sea.

A young schoolteacher said of Job:

The amount of change that Job has seen from when he was a teenager to now is incredible. He is a respected elder in Nome. I know that, as an elder, he has seen through his eyes the transformation of a whole world. From dogsled to jets. From word of mouth to the cell phone to the Internet. The change from a subsistence lifestyle to depending on the Western lifestyle of living, a cash economy. To the changes in religion. And there's many more changes. You put those all together that have happened in the last 50 to 60 years, and what do you get? You get frustrated individuals, dysfunctional groups, because of all the change that's happened. And you're getting pressure from the religious side saying, "No you can't do this; it's wrong for you to speak in your native tongue."

Shamans

Malaurie is having a lot of conversations with people, and sometimes I wish he would stop. My idea of fieldwork is not having conversations, but only seeming to have them. In fieldwork we have to listen far more than we talk because we are there to learn rather than participate in or have an influence upon ordinary life. Participation and influence: those are other kinds of activity entirely.

One day the director of the senior citizens center says she has seen alcohol destroy people and that many people are in denial about it. She starts to describe the denial, whereupon Jean starts talking about something going on in Europe. She looks at him, puzzled.

Later we are walking on Front Street, and Jean says he is very bothered about what is happening in France now, that his conversations that day with several people had gotten him thinking about the long-term implications of the Euro negotiations. I say, "You come here to find what's wrong with the Eskimo and you find what's wrong with *you*?"

"That's what the work is all about," he says. "We look at the other, and we find ourselves." (He says it more elegantly in *Hummocks*: "L'étude d'un peuple est pour moi une aventure intérieure.")

That night, in the Mexican restaurant on Front Street run by a Vietnamese family from Saigon, he talks about the place of shamans in the world, about their place in this world, about how they have been displaced by things that do not replace them. "They need their shamans," he says, "they maybe don't know it, but they do. Shamans have a knowledge nothing has replaced."

At that moment it occurs to me that my friend Malaurie is no longer simply the scientist, the observer, but he is also a participant in the world of the polar Eskimo and that his impassioned talks at moments when I would be professionally silent represent his refusal or inability anymore simply to *observe*. He has spent his life observing. Now he is compelled to use what he has learned in his half-century in the Arctic to help, to participate in this boreal world about which he feels so passionately, on behalf of these people he truly loves.

So the next time he says, "They still need their shamans; they maybe don't know it, but they do," I say, "Perhaps. But the shamans cannot come from outside, nor can the context in which shamans work be introduced by outsiders." He tells me he knows that: of course he knows that. And for once he is silent, and I think the silence maybe says, "I wish you were wrong."

The Things I Wonder About

In the villages, the ones you can get to only by boat or small plane, people now use e-mail. They learn and share things on the World Wide Web. Jet planes take people like Nicky to distant cities where microelectronic devices are fitted inside their bodies, and they continue to live. The village life as it was is gone, and it will always be gone. There are subsistence villages still, but they will never again be whatever they were before the white man came with technology, alcohol, Christianity, and the economies of gold and oil.

Malaurie writes in *Hummocks*, "La vie est mouvement et contact." There's no point mourning the new; it is as much a fact of life as the garnet gold-bearing sands on the Nome beaches, the huge rusted dredge buckets that now serve as ugly public flowerpots all over town, and the radiating patterns in the tundra caused by action of the permafrost. Human cultures are always in a condition of change, a state of flux, a mode of adaptation.

But what is the cost of losing a language that has worked perfectly well for thousands of years? How can you say in a new language the important things that must be said or tell the stories that must be told? What is the cost of getting more stories from television than from the voices of the storytellers? What happens when you move from cyclical time to chronological time, from the time of the stars and the seasons to the time of

airlines and governments? What happens when you move from a world in which you get what you need from hunting, fishing, and bartering to a world in which you get what you need by working for money or depending on a government agency? Where are shamans to do their work and the elders provide their wisdom if there are no communities in which their work has meaning or their words have a forum? What is to be done about alcoholism and children who have learned to sniff anything volatile, even gasoline fumes? We have laws for dealing with endangered species, but what about endangered cultures?

Curtains and Ribbons

The moon at midnight is near the horizon, southwest and below Aquarius, leaking white rinsings across a flat sea. The downtown part of Front Street is over in less than a mile, and the lighted houses and buildings are over not much beyond that. After the town bypass there are no more lights except the Fort Davis roadhouse and occasional oncoming cars rounding the headland at Cape Nome, 11 miles away. I turn left onto a dirt road, turn off the lights and engine, step out of the car and look to the north. Nome is a border town, a border-of-the-whole-world town.

The yellow-green and blue-white ribbon of light starts in the northwest at Draco, crosses over both Bears, and ends just under Orion on the far eastern rim of the sky. For a while the ribbon arcs north at both ends, as if it were trying to clasp the Pole in its arms, then the right end folds down toward me and undulates toward Cassiopeia in the middle. The left side dissolves entirely into the black sky and brilliant stars and then rebuilds itself, but this time it is diaphanous sheets rising to the top of the world.

We have early meetings in the morning; so after a while I drive slowly back to town, picking out constellations over the sea: Cygnus, Lyra, Pegasus, Pisces. The sky is as clear as a stellar map; it lacks only the lines connecting the stars and the labels. Like all the outsid-

ers who have come here looking for something, I see with designs formulated elsewhere. All the names I have for stars and constellations are Roman and Greek. The Eskimos have lived here at least 3,000 years, some say more than 10,000 years. Their names for the figures in the sky predate those of the Romans and the Homeric Greeks. The lines they imagine are older than any I know.

I go to bed, but sleep does not come. I keep thinking about the diaphanous sheets and ribbons draping themselves around those undrawn lines. At 3:00 a.m. I dress and go downstairs. In the hotel lobby, the night-clerk, an Eskimo from Anchorage who moved to Nome as a boy, tells me that he has looked at the aurora in the night sky for as long as he can remember anything and he still loves to look at it as much as ever, finds it as tranquilizing and mysterious as ever. "You look up there and you imagine things, you know?" he says.

Even before I am out of the sodium-vapor light of Front Street, I know it is not going to be any good. I drive to the dirt road again and once again kill the headlights and engine, but the aurora is done for this night: it is just the stars now, maybe even more brilliant and numerous than before, but it's not stars I am seeking in this dark hour.

As I drive back to town, I see that Pegasus and Aquarius and Pisces have all shifted south and the moon has disappeared into Siberia. On Front Street all the bars are dark save one. Four people spill from its door into the street, stumbling and shouting at one another. None of them looks to see if my car has slowed or swerved to avoid them. Further on, glowing in the headlights of an oncoming truck, I see Raymond walking unevenly toward the Polaris Hotel. The truck passes him, and for a moment he is enveloped in a swirl of dust. In the lobby of my hotel two drunks argue with the night clerk about something I cannot get the gist of.

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Violence in Peru: Performances and Dialogues

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GUADALUPE CCALLACUNTO WAS dragged from her parents' home in the city of Ayacucho about 2:30 a.m. on June 10, 1990, when she returned from Lima to vote; I dedicate this work to her. In 1983-84 her husband and brother-in-law were disappeared, along with

51 others, from the village of Quispillaqta, district of Chuschi, province of Cangallo, department of Ayacucho. As a young mother of two small children, Guadalupe had become active in the work of the Committee of the Families of the Disappeared in the Emergency Zone and in Serpaj International, a Catholic human rights organization. Her name appeared on Amnesty International's