

Writer's impressions press-ready after 22 years of work, worry (16 February 1982)

Donald Wetzel
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BISBEE —

The back of Michael Gregory's first volume of "Hunger Weather" calls him "poet, printer, essayist, environmental activist and street musician."

Gregory, 41, is now preparing to put on paper the second volume of "Hunger Weather," an achievement that will culminate 22 years of work and will, most likely, bear out the credits listed on volume one.

But that isn't really important to Gregory, who has a masters degree in English from Penn State, a minor in folklore and the bearded appearance of a 1960's prophet. He says names and titles don't matter.

What matters is the book. Will "Hunger Weather, 1959-1975" say what he has worked to have it say? Will it last?

"Lately I wonder about it. Ordinarily I don't think much about such things at all. Now, finishing 20 years of labor, I wonder," he said.

"Hunger Weather" is a poem, or a book of poems, depending on the interpretation. Gregory is the author, but also, with the Bisbee Press Collective, he is the printer and binder.

The book was written during seven seasons as a fire spotter for the U.S. Forest Service, three of which he spent alone after divorcing his wife. While the turbulent 1960's raged, Gregory watched the Western landscape of Apache National Forest in Arizona and El Dorado forest, on the edge of the Desolation Wilderness in California.

The revolution of the decade and the personal glimpses of the man who has described himself as a "nature poet" are, as near as Gregory can account, the subject matter of Volumes One and Two.

The forward to Volume One also describes it as "to some extent the history of a generation coming of age, and a story of man in general reaching for awareness, understanding and affirmation in the face of profound uncertainty, unconscious monstrosities and imminent death."

But Gregory doesn't in person go grabbing for profundity. He is, rather, almost no-nonsense. He prefers to work alone, is meticulous in what he does, and quickly takes off any mask of 'prophet' you might think he is wearing.

"The whole thing goes together," he said of the two volumes of the book. "We published it as

two volumes because it was too fat to go into one volume.”

The books, though paid for out of his pocket, are a project of the non-profit Collective. The Collective was formed to learn the art of printing and to publish creative writing. Volume Two of “Hunger Weather” will be the sixth accomplishment of the group. Other works include Doug McKittrich’s “Bisbee Anthology” and Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s “Mule Mountain Dreams.”

There is no roar of progress in the room at the Old Central School where the press is located. The machine is a foot-powered Chandler and Price letterpress, and it serves both the Collective and Gregory’s own business, Mother Duck Press. The books are hand-sewn.

“There’s no money to be made out of poetry,” he said Monday, while preparing the cover of the 216 page second volume. He accepts the venture, which he estimates cost him in excess of \$2,500, will represent a financial loss.

He is hoping of other gains.

The book is not “a work of nostalgia,” but “an attempt to write a long poem. . .in the spirit of a long poem.” It is also a song (portions are replete with musical score) with protests similar to those chanted in the 1960’s.

But it is something more than, or maybe separate from, a 60’s saga, he insists.

“I write because of the necessity. I have to write,” he said. “The message depends on who the reader is.”

Gregory said his work may be a backward’s progress of sorts. In the middle ages, poetry was sung, he points out of the musical portions of the work. And it may be modern in the sense that that those in “Hunger Weather” are country western ballads, even country rock.

Nobody listens to the same thing (now},” he said.

Portions of the book are an attempt to capture “religious experiences,” he said. But again Gregory us quick to dispel preconceptions about the scope or intention of his work.

“The experiences of the spirit happen to us in different ways. (The books) are an attempt to transform that essential non-verbal experience in words.”

Those words may or may not find meaning with anyone who has been part of what he calls a “revival” of sorts which has lasted more than 20 years.

“(Now) there is a reaffirmation of individual peoples faith, including the Christian movement,” he said of the world today.

“I’m of Whitman’s thinking,” he said of the poet Walt Whitman. “I believe the faith is always in the people.”

Gregory will give a reading from the book, followed by an autograph party at Cochise Fine Arts Feb. 26, beginning at 8 p.m.

“Hunger Weather” will sell for \$8.95.