

Norris, Kathleen
JOURNEY
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In addition to three collections of memoirs and essays on her life on the Great Plains of the upper Midwest, Norris has published three previous volumes of poetry. A recipient of numerous state and private grants, she divides her time between South Dakota and Honolulu. Subtitled "New and Selected Poems, 1969-1999," *Journey* chronicles the author's inner and outer travels through Minnesota and the Dakotas, and how her settling there inspired a realization that one frequently winds up where he ought to be. Yet even in the "vertical and bottomless" urban badlands where the "clouds roll over Manhattan the way the earth settles on the dead," there is suggested the bleak horizon-to-horizon panorama of the real Badlands, where "everything has been purified by loneliness." But these are neither abstract nor sere poems. They are rich in apt, concrete detail and prickling with bodily sensations. Everything throbs with the music of living. Ordinary objects become imbued with their owners' personae. It is people, stranded between past and future without ever experiencing a single moment in the present, Norris warns in her "Evaporation Poems," who "must be careful not to disappear." Espousing a Christianity shorn of its comforts and often stripped to its essentials, she pays homage to the wisdom of the body. She does so with humor that is more street-smart than sentimental, advising newcomers to earth, in "Excerpts from the Angel Handbook," that there are those "not content unless their teeth are full of feathers." One's passage through life involves negotiating one's way through the body. The simultaneously sensual and deeply spiritual qualities of Norris's verse bring to mind the once outdated notion of the body as a temple of the spirit.

Journey is about growth and striving for enlightenment, not about having attained it, meanwhile celebrating both the physicality of the body and the spiritual qualities inherent in a simplified life.