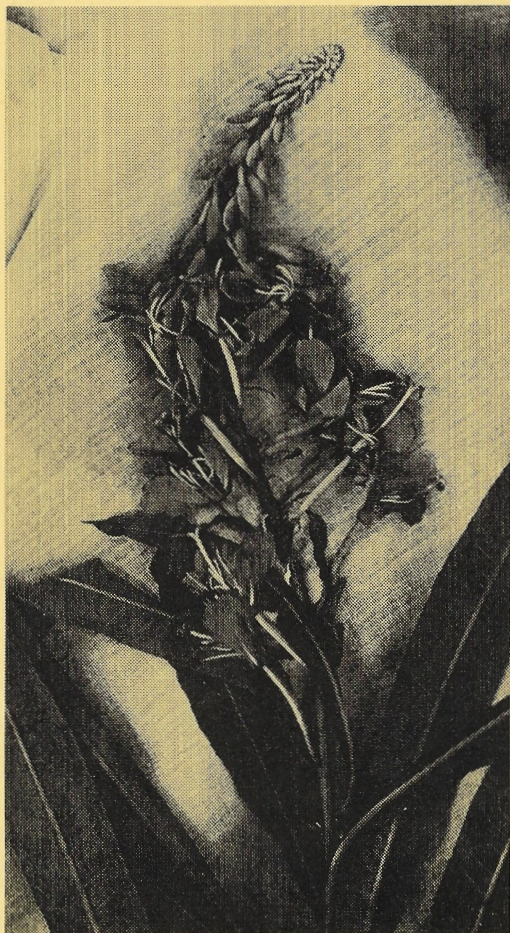


FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon



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John Addiego

THE BEE CAVE

was the place under the covers
where I told you stories. In the beginning
we were insects, but later you changed us
to seals, horses, as if every swimming,
flying and creeping thing could fit inside.
I never thought you meant to say *hive*
for that dark place, warm and full of stories.
When I lifted my arm the light of Sunday
mornings was soft in its quilted ceiling.
Hardly bigger than a loaf of bread,
you laughed and kicked my belly. And that spring

it seemed you took the bee cave to the world.
We crawled down a lava tube, hunched in a dark fold
like conspirators. We crept behind a waterfall
and let the snow teeth of the world glisten around us,
the black scavengers make their circles.
And when your mother and I staked
the yellow dome tent,
bright as a prayer flag, beneath Shasta,
you danced inside for an hour, buzzing.

C. A. Gilbert

COUNTRY

When I was a boy
the national cure for good
cooking started with Crisco.
Everybody back then came
from Oklahoma.
To this day, when you ask
my dad how he wants chicken
there is only one answer
"fry it."

I'm thinking of fried chicken
today, about family and you Grandma.
Your strong hands separating
a rooster's head from his body
for supper. Crispy chicken, okra,
black-eyes, mashed potatoes, and gravy.
Honest country gravy. Not that goopy
white tasteless trash restaurants
spoon out along with a waitress
assurance it's the real McCoy.
No sir, good gravy, smothering
home-made biscuits. Ones that later
stood hard and heavy as a rock;
tasty but able to endure a ride
in my blue jean's back pocket as
I roughhoused with all my cousins.

I recall the family's summer
gatherings at Mooney Grove Park.
You looking over your extended brood.
Us playing poker with Tom, horseshoes,
baseball, frisbee, barbecuing.
I can see your face clearly
especially before the stroke
that made it hard for you to know.

And now
my folks just went south
the Doc says things don't
look good you're not supposed
to make it and I'm up here
and it's been awhile since I've
seen you and I guess this is
goodbye Grandma.

Being inside is confining
so I went for a little drive.
I remember you didn't and even if
wouldn't have been able to move them
ole rusted hulks at your place
the chickens used to poke around.
My uncle's, your boy's experiments
fast going nowheres.

God ...
it's beautiful in the open.
How many times did you
look up into the sky?

I never have
learned all the constellations
but here in the country
away from all the lights
there are more stars
tonight
than I've ever seen.

Sydney J. Thompson

THE CALLING

my dad owned a tape
of a rabbit
caught in a snare.

trappers used it
to lure coyotes
and other predators.

dad played it
just to watch
our horrified faces;

the hideous screams
that sounded so much
like a baby crying.

CRY OF THE WILD

I know exactly
what an elk sounds like,
the gentle mewing
of the cows,
the throaty chortle
of the bulls.

My dad would practice,
experimenting
with reeds and tapes,
Elk-Made-Easy,
his body making jerky,
retching motions,
throwing up sounds
of the wild.

He would leave
in the morning with his gun.
I would hear his voice echoing
in the apple orchard
luring them in with
promises of a fight
and calls of love.

Ursula Irwin

THAT WAS THE BIAS OF THE WOMAN

In the morning she cuts the dark
roses,
moist blooms flung open,
heavy on bent stems.

She cuts the ones
at the edge of dying.
Their thick skins
curl back. In the center
lies a delicate transparency.

Each petal is a full mouth,
the texture of lips.

There is something about the way
they lie on the ground,
heavy, nothing held back.

She bites on the petals.
Saliva blackens the skin.
The bitterness is her surprise.

Stacie Smith-Rowe

MATRILINEAGE

I think when I die
I'll carry certain banners
signifying provenance:
Stacie daughter of Audrey Lucille
daughter of Nettie
daughter of Maude
born in Salem
into the hands of Dr. Stone.
Like the grass seed
raised in these broad fields
savvy in the ways of green and grey
born addicted to proximity to trees
alive to the beauty of rain
and rain and rain,
never far from a river
or the sea, addicted like seed
to the notion of what might be.

Lois Rosen

GROSBEAK

Apologize, mother, for my birth
red and female:
squeeze until I fit
into grandfather's name
shortened by one vowel.

Force-feed me
until I gag.
Say I eat like a bird:
magpie, cuckoo, grosbeak.

Make me kiss Mrs. Kaminetsky,
thank her for her honey cake.
*Whining ungrateful child,
your face will freeze like that.*

If I wave at cars
make me roll up the windows.
Point toward a policeman
ready to take me. Mama,

I won't stare at Mr. Ruben's fingers
made stubs from cutting windows.
I won't scream when cockroaches
race toward me.

A blanket tucked in
can protect me. I will hide
behind papa's armchair,
huddle under his prayer shawl,
white sail to catch the wind.

CABBAGE

So undeniable
Anyone in the house
Will smell it

Boiled to sweet wisdom
Each leaf loosens
To its own idea

Each head an Einstein
Tousle-haired old Jew
Stink the house up
All you want

Ray Burleigh

THE SUPERNATURAL

for Bud

If there had been a magician there
(the afternoon you ate turkey on rye)
he might have frightened us with his ability to float
or drawn from under his cape a terrible light
before he pressed our arms to remind us with friendship
that he would use his powers for entertainment.

But there was no magician,
and the room, cool and comfortable, was ordinary.
The table did not rise, the walls did not fall in upon us,
and no lights flashed.

So I was surprised when your fond memories revived
the god of my childhood:
he who spoke in the dark wood
when I was alone, hitchhiking at twenty:

hurting my eyes when I could not avoid the bright glare
or short of breath when the silence was sudden,

as if a beautiful bird
or a laughing uncle had leaped from a high tree to shout

loving is lonely

in such a clear voice
that I could only shake.

Virginia Corrie-Cozart

MOON

When the moon
came up like Jersey
cream, we drank directly
before retiring,
our elbows on window ledges,
empty bowls in our laps.

The thin hours
when I rose
to see why dogs barked,
there it was, still,
skimmed blue
midway to morning.

Killdeer startled up
from salt grass then,
crying,
dipped into the moon,
settled in pasture.

Light from high
above the spring house
poured through our screens.
I touched your eyelids,
your full mouth,
gave milk to the baby,
could almost see the mother cat
curled up now
with the hound.

John Addiego

JACK THE BEAR

My eleven-month-old baby girl
staggers across the rug and butts
my stomach. A book full of bears
in neckties and aprons
is thrust into my hands until
it flops open on my lap,
breakfast scene in the Schwarzwald,
mush bowls, blunt muzzles and lederhosen.

Meanwhile, Ellington toots from the radio,
elegant, swank and growling.
I remember my years solo
without mate or young in a studio,
floor mat and desk fashioned
from a beat-up vanity,

this and other seventy-eights sweet
as blackstrap molasses stacked
in a corner. I was holed-up
and calling women I barely knew,
eating with my hands and catching mice
in jars because I hated traps.
I was pawing my guitar and singing
love songs with a bottle.

But now it's my daughter's creaturely lopc
and loud-as-a-drunk scatbabble
to the thunk of a bass player
fifty years gone, dead as the tree
felled for his instrument, that makes me love
this music for its bitter black
sweetness, coffee with a bark of chicory,
that makes me feel for the first time
its papa-hug and chain dance,
its heavy mammal shamble.

Kelly Sievers

OTHER LIVES

I STORMY

Each New Year's visit
his mother would bump him
up our porch steps
in his wheel chair.

I told my mother
his face was a puzzle.
I didn't know
where to look.

My mother told me
there was a terrible storm
the January of '47
when we were born.
Stormy's mother
could not get
to the hospital.

II NEW WORDS

Wednesdays in the sixth grade
in a corner of our classroom
I helped Joey Schuster
read the books from Sister Rose's
first grade bookshelves.
Slipped in beside him,
I pointed to each word,
studied new blond hairs
along his chin; searched his face
when he said, I don't know.

Sound it out, I would say,
and then I followed
the bob of Joey's head
as he tried to link the rhythms
in each a, e, or m.

III AT THE POOL

Side by side we peel
our suits off in the shower,
stealing glances:
women at forty.
I soap, rinse, dry.

Sandy always lingers, exact
as she lathers
left arm, right arm,
left breast, right breast.
Someone taught her carefully
and she learned.
Last week I watched her
master how to
blow dry her hair.

Each week she learns
new names, then calls
to each of us who
hurry off
to other lives,
as she slowly
ties her shoes.

IV WAITING AT THE STOPLIGHT

I watch her
climb down each step
from the bus.
She waves
to the bus driver.
Crossing the street,
with shoulders pulled
to the ground,
she turns her head,
catches my eye,
smiles.
But I look too long,
and she looks away.

V OBSTETRICS

Here we hurry.
Each time a baby's
heart beat sinks-90-80-70,
we turn the mother side to side,
then help her
to her hands and knees.
The womb swings free.
Breathe oxygen, for your baby,
we tell her, *slow even breaths*
as we rush her
to surgery:
instruments, betadine, gown,
gloves, pentothal, knife.
We rub the baby's back,
clear his lungs, pump oxygen,
listen for his heart,
count minutes,
see lifetimes.

VI PATTERNS

I walk the neighborhood.
Each autumn I steal clusters
of orange pyracantha berries
and rub to a sheen
a single horse chestnut.
On the day all the ginkgoes
signal to drop their leaves,
I stuff my pockets
with yellow fans.

I meet a neighbor
following the energy
of her autistic son.
He carries the spiraling cone
of a monkey puzzle tree
and one reddening oak leaf.
Without warning, he sinks
a hand into my pocket
spilling the ancient patterns
at our feet. He never speaks.
I give him all the ginkgoes.

In late winter I collect
branches broken and blown
into the streets:
dogwoods holding
constellations of buds,
stellar flowers of magnolias
wrapped in fur.
I clip their bases
plunge them into water,
and wait.

Renee Gionet

FULLERS COFFEE SHOP

Through paned glass windows
of a downtown diner
chrome rimmed stools
swirl in noon high sun.
A thick row of backs is turned.
A breathing wall
chinked with light,
striped, plaid, white,
sweat blotched blue,
one polished cotton dress.
All elbows on the counter,
serious newspaper reading,
cavcsdropping, joking,
Edward Hopper lunch hours
spent chewing and swallowing
in rhythm with the visible
kitchen clatter and splatter,,
the ritual oiling of disposition
with the dark stream of coffee.

Carlos Reyes

THE PASTIME

for Eric

A woman drinks alone,
sips a can of beer
through a straw

At her back
a watercolor
on the wall: Clint
Eastwood almost
twitches

Most of the poker
tables have been
moved up front
from the backroom

Most are empty

The pool tables
are kept
busy

The two owners
discuss
where to put
the band

on Saturday

Randall Payton

HOVERING

-- building demolition, Vancouver, B.C.,
Sunday morning, 1989

How long can you keep them up
above the bank like that? Frozen,
certainly, with questions.

I was told you'd be falling precisely
at seven. Why can't you just come down
and meet the earth, come home to dust?
Come in, my little holocaust, so
organized and in control.

Play dominoes. Resort to blocks,
a window on the bay to introduce
your Lion's Gate; we can watch Stanley
Park over breakfast. Like dragonflies. I've been
up all night. Because of you
and some bad fish.

But you're so brazen, knowing
history has a place for you: in backward reels
you'll suck in hard the town debris, and
climb the morning sky, with lungs and lobby
filled again; new windows, new machines;
each paperclip will find a home in reconstruction.
Bids will reconsider you. Rebuild! Rebuild!

I have one small request:
Keep your word and crumble. Make my day
begin with thunder. I'll plan my grave visitation
this sunny afternoon
along the cordon's yellow stripe:
Tell me truth, on common ground,
level, there, with me.

GUEST POEM



Charles Simic

FEBRUARY

The one who lights the wood stove
Gets up in the dark.

How cold the iron is to the hand
Groping to open the flue,
The hand that will draw back
At the roar of the wind outside.

The wood that no longer smells of the woods;
The wood that smells of rats and mice--
And the matches which are always so loud
in the glacial stillness.

By its flare you'll see her squat;
Gaunt, wide-eyed;
Her lips saying the stark headlines
Going up in flames.

from *AUSTERITIES* (George Braziller, 1982);
most recently published in *SELECTED POEMS*
1963-1983 (George Braziller, 1990).

COMMENT

Actually any one of Charles Simic's simpler, less crowded poems, focusing on a single image, would serve here. Simic is at his best as a minimalist, discarding commonplace reactions to images and granting the reader maximum opportunity-- freedom, really-- to react the way he or she pleases to content. The evocative quality of the central image is enhanced somehow by this freedom. We are not at all steered towards a particular reaction; we are free to associate as we wish.

The central image here is the woman squatting in front of the woodstove. At first there is a superficial domestic quality to her, "the one who lights the wood stove," performing a daily chore. But we are invited to move down through the surface of the poem's ordinary bit of reality by means of the accumulation of specific details, the cold iron, a hand groping and drawing back, the wind roaring. We are being slowly led towards novelty, strangeness, a deeper meaning, by the suggestiveness of these details and especially by the tone they create.

The third stanza characterizes the scene in an increasingly disturbing manner: the normal pleasant associations to a specific detail, the smell of the fire wood, are abruptly discarded, and we are jolted by the substitution of the smell of rodents. By this time any ordinary responses to the figure of the woman are impossible, and we are certainly anticipating her next move. She strikes a match and the flash of light and sound contrasts strongly to the "glacial stillness" of the room, enhancing it dramatically. "Glacial" is a key word in the poem. It not only has the literal denotation of icy cold, but also, with support from the powerful tone of this poem, evokes for the reader a sense of timelessness: a female figure frozen in an ancient gesture or pose.

The final stanza, the gates having been thrown open, is free to develop the central image. The focus is again directly on the woman, the matchlight giving her a grim, even spectral, look. She is "wide-eyed" as though she is seeing something frightening. She speaks portentously, perhaps reading omens, though suddenly in a typical twist of irony by Simic, she is only describing the present as it goes up in flames. The central figure has become mythic, a prophetess, a soothsayer. The poem has carefully led us into a world of rich and mysterious possibilities.

D.L.



Sophie Crawford

EUGENE, FRIDAY AFTERNOON

I've walked off without my keys
again. I'm sitting
on the concrete steps

under the back door, like the first time,
last November. The photocopied poem
between my hands is a bright page

against a field of black
-- Levis's "In The City of Light."
A man's words to his dead father,

words of what's left:
emptiness and light.
Nora from upstairs

in her red crocheted sweater,
clutching a paper sack, asked
if I liked to sit here often,

if this step was my place.
No, I told her. But maybe
it wants to be. I locked myself out

fifteen times from one new moon
to the next. I still
don't have a duplicate key.

The white and grey cat,
Melinda, calls to be let in
from pale shadows across the alley.

Brian Ingram

MY CLOCK IS 5 MINUTES FAST

Fall from fortune
And customers turn brutal
You see it in the lines
You wait in
The same thing
Turning
Into different things
Ending in the same bed
Every night

I've got to get some nails
And I've got to buy some gloves
Then I'm going to hang the painting
As crooked as I see it
I will look at it
And it me
And we will not force ourselves
Into cheap frame moldings
Or two dimensional lines
If there is a beast in the painting
It will have a mind of its own
And if there is reason
It will have the light of day
Pushing from behind

I will buy the candles
And it can take the notes
And as they all burn up
We will both read the ashes

William Chamberlain

THE TEACHER

They were saying that Bartleby
should seek counseling, or *be given*
one more chance, then fired and I
dreamed a wild man in far canyons
yelling *river river* up a breakneck gorge.
Then looked out on the field of learning--

textbooks sprawled face-first,
their spines cracked like crabs--
the cars of my bored, preferring students
glistening in the parking lot, knowing,
nosing the road to careers, careers.
Bartleby and I, we were nuisances.

Outside the window, not a wall,
but a cold mountain quavering
like an arrow shot into a tree trunk--
the battering clarity of a February wind
so full of the names of dead Indians
you could hardly keep your footing.

Not a wall, but a kind of wall.
And this always entered my mind
as I took that last gallows-walk
to class: the roaring humor
of a river river man coming before them,
hired to be meticulous and replete.

Ellen E. Moore

THE EGG MAN

carries a basket of eggs on his head
like a woman, carefully
each step saves a child, saves
that shell that keeps out the wind,
the hurricane growing around him.
This weather could carve a design
of cities in his skull, send pieces
of his body spilling over the snow.

Nathan Douthit

NAIL EVIDENCE

There must have been two of them,
two carpenters or construction workers,
two men with hammers and nails.
One nailed down the two-by-fours of the deck
almost as evenly as a machine, his rows
of nails straight as an arrow, aligned
as precisely as lines on graph paper.
The other one may have been a talker,
his muscle tone thrown off by eye contact,
certainly his line of nails was erratic
as an ant. Then again, perhaps he was distracted
by the snowy mountain looming up in front of him,
the thought of its coolness, as he sweated
in summer desert heat, as overpowering
of hand and eye coordination as making love
on snow, on rock, on grass, the first time.

Clint Frakes

6-WEEK CONTRACT

Explanations are thin
traffic drowsy
topography slower
Find me a machine
that will sleep for me
A machine that will worry for me
I can do the rest

The painter is all in white
painting the white building
whiter yet
Whose darkness do I tote
in my secret portfolio--
whose nudity do I hide
in these pathetic dress shoes?
Sores in my mouth
aching nuts
unable to breathe
devouring sleep
remembering India

Give me the dreams of the owl
or any small thing

Dan Raphael

WORM SKY

the sky has legs

but no heart

moved by things outside its skin
like traffic reports and the stock exchange
while one particular pepper in the jar
or a cell wall inside my sisters pancreas
reminiscent of tsaichovskys last sonata
drifting like a shower of soybean flakes
in a warehouse with a thousand lightbulbs
and a fan left over from wind tunnel testing
as if the ants were foreign legionnaires
using imperialism as a form of therapy,
mirrors flexible enough to use as masks
where the eyes are a vacuum the worlds compelled to fill

take gravity from the sky
& let my drink be tomorrows weather--
cat it or wear it, plow what into the ground
so condos hang like bats
bringing their privileged inhabitants
closer to the decay their pressure/mass propels

Douglas Spangle

SCENE FROM A FAMOUS BATTLE

I lie on my belly behind this rock
and the afternoon sun advances its shadow
cool across the backs of my legs.
Over yonder's the dust and distant thudding
from places I don't want to look for.
Someone's crying in a monotone-- but no,
he's stopped it now.

For the past half hour I've studied
the spindly thistle just in front of my face
coated with dust the tumult has stirred up.
A tiny white spider lives in its shelter.
Now and then she ventures forth a little;
mostly she remains motionless, and I maintain
the same stillness as spider and thistle.

Beyond these rocks and weeds, but still so close
I could clasp it if I wished to,
a man's hand lies motionless also,
fingers slightly flexed, palm facing upward,
from a sleeve with corporal's insignia
and carefully polished brass buttons.
The arm ends at the shoulder.

I wonder where the rest of him is
on the other side of this stillness.
I wonder who they'll say
won this famous battle.

Ray Melvin

HEARING VOICES

For two days I've fished
small trout at Bonney Crossing
content to balance
on streamlined stones and listen
to voices which cause me to look
over my shoulder
and into the brush sometimes
startled, sometimes expectant.
Stones in the stream's bed thock,
a solid sound
like the one I heard when the bite went off,
like the feeling you get
knowing what is about to occur
is inevitable. The voices
are somethin' else again
as people in my family used to say
when the world overwhelmed them
or the fishing was slow.
My reasonable mind insists
the voices are due to exposure,
too much white noise,
but I continue to look behind me
for a glimpse of who
or what is talking to me.
These voices must be poetry
too pure to get a line on
or the drift of,
but I know they are there,
and hope one day to understand
this language of creeks.

John R. Campbell

POEM AGAINST SCENERY

The epiphany in the woods
has been driven to its limits,
like the animal who forages
in the city dump. All our cities
breathe animals now, exhaling
their shapes on the remote taiga.
We wish for autonomous landscapes,
where the mountains stutter themselves,
where the creeks dotted with trout
rush away. We wish for landscapes
which deny our flatness,
deny their involvement in our schemes,
even as we implicate them over and over,
even as we use the sun and the moon
to pry into every crevice.
The cities keep producing:
this is what they were created to do.
But the kelp in the still ocean,
the grass colonizing the sand,
the communities of winds
that import and export each other:
these are cities, too. Let us not
gather at the river. Let the river
gather at our feet, and let it
wash us in its humility.

John R. Campbell

RIVER QUESTIONS

What does a river look like high in the mountains?

A river looks electric,
and the rocks ensconced there
look frantic. Greens
from deep in the slipping earth emerge,
and veins emerge, swelling.
It's possible to stand below the river,
to sense the recent ice,
and to know the river as passionless,
forgetting the crooked form,
and feeling only the pure
function: to cut.

What does a river look like low in the valleys?

Ordinary,
low in the valleys.
Curly, maybe,
lined with maples.
Secretive in the warm months,
scooping its mud and silt
into promising banks.
Revolving, at times,
and adorned with insects and seeds,
with ermine-colored foam.
The river, inevitable,
flows past our ordinary fields.
We think of its rich bottom,
we feed our bountiful crops,
but the river really only yields us
surface, the shield
it always carries. The rest
is mystery: the grotesque
sturgeon, primitive beyond belief.

And what happens when a river floods?

It would be easy to say that hope momentarily dissolves,
and is spread like silt,
generously, over acres of ground.
I've looked more closely, though,
and seen hope obliterated
by forces as simple as gravity and clouds.
There is a man clinging to a rooftop,
the apex becoming more and more abstract to him,
and a woman imagining herself as a hull,
her children carried safely away.
Homes and wombs: for humans,
hope is enclosed space. But the river opens,
and in the end, openness
is irresistible.

Katherine Salzman

LAKE SLEEPING

How that blue wool glows
and its satin tips

How she rocks herself
with her constant tongue

How the tiny salmon hidden
in her ear is not
her best secret but

more the way the light falls
into the unfolding idea of her

How her new bones
surrender to every couch

and every breath is different
from the one before
so that

the sun is her bath
and the shadow of the cedar branch
her comb

for my daughter, Lake Thelen
b. 30 October 1991

Jenny Fowler

PICTUREFISH

Something about the pictures
that swam upon those walls
made me want
to be a fish
in that ocean
of faces,
to swim into
blue backgrounds
past fallen logs that frame
cheeks and lips and eyes
into mouths
and through the souls
of the people
you have known.

C. A. Gilbert

BLACK STAIN ON DEEP BREATH BLUE

We didn't climb aboard
little boats that morning
bobbing across Prince William Sound
to spend fifteen hours cleaning only
the worst of oil-stained shores.

No
we had an anxious
break from daily ritual.
Radio reports pinpointed
the earthquake off Kodiak
and of sufficient magnitude
that the coastline for a thousand
miles was paying attention.

The Norcon Crew of
Task Force V stood
on the bottom deck of
our floating barge hotel.

Hundreds of people
huddled in dozens of groups
talking nervously, joking badly,
laughing hardly and being
ominously quiet; lifejackets on
waiting for the tsunami.

Tim Barnes

LIVENGOOD AND LEAVES

Before I start to write
I assume

-- Richard Hugo, 1923-82

At Livengood the drugstore's going blind.
The druggist fills his blanks with booze.
There's no prescription for good luck.

Three bars down the barber has left
his lanolin and razors. He's gone
to groom success in Milpitas, California.

In what is left of houses, housewives
beat their husbands with the fists
of frigid and fugitive dreams. The

river ends the town in mud. Damn
is just a sound they say to stop
the current from always curving in.

The law sighs in the sheriff's lap.
Their affair's so tired they're going
to marry and move to a condo in Orlando.

The boards go first in splinters. Then
the windows shiver clear to wind. The wind
breaks down to Livengood and leaves.

Jane Thielsen

ON THE SHORTEST DAY

Near sundown I push wet stall bedding and manure from the barn. The dump pile 100 feet on through frozen ruts, the single tire on the barrow nearly flat. It's maybe ten degrees I gasp in, hard wind building from the sea skims ice lenses when I blink.

The steaming fill still cooks inside out. I could reach my hands to the old hot core, go under. Here and now, it could save me. Bouncing the barrow cold and hollow, my denim legs die numb, my feet stop again to draw up heat. On the facing slope, fifty acres of banked alder suddenly catch neon as coals, the damper wide for one minute more, the whole frozen woodland, roaring.

REVIEW: Primus St. John, *DREAMER* (1990) Carnegie-Mellon University Press. Oregon Institute of Literary Arts Co-winner, 1991.

A voice at the end of *THE WASTE LAND* (1922) defines the modernist project in poetry:

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?

These fragments I have shored against my ruin.

To write, then, is to attempt ordering fragments, with the acute sense that this is not the most one could do, but necessary in the face of ruin. Long poems by Eliot, Pound, Williams and H.D. developed huge appetites for personal and cultural experiences. As Louis Simpson says in "American Poetry" (1963):

Whatever it is, it must have
A stomach that can digest
Rubber, coal, uranium, moons, poems.

Like the shark, it contains a shoe.
It must swim for miles through the desert
Uttering cries that are almost human.

How amazing that thirty years after Simpson, seventy after Eliot, much American poetry is not modernist, but neo-Romantic, that is, poetry driven by the lyrical "I" whose personal illuminations and sure music hold together at least a portion of the world. Think, too, how many pop songs still cruise the lazy curves of Sinatra and Kate Smith, though electrified or peppered with Tex-Mex! The modern is behind us, as in Bartok and Kandinsky, seventy years!

Primus St. John's *DREAMER*, in this context, comes as a challenge, for it is unlike most recent poetry books, as Vern Rutsala observes in the introduction, which "bring together one or two-page lyrics written in a more or less common idiom about everyday life." *DREAMER*, Rutsala indicates, is "a book that doesn't fit the current stereotype. It is after bigger game."

Like other modernist poem suites, *DREAMER* challenges the reader by its fragmentation and opacity and by its breadth and vision. It's hard to grasp the bits and hard to trace the contours. The modernist, true to obscurity, crafts obscurity, as if to say, "It ain't easy," either in the seeing or the saying. Or the reading! Like the sculptor of the poem's first section

It will take three days
To sharpen my wits
and rough out the body.

The body of *DREAMER* has three parts. The first presents voices of Africa, contrasting the wholeness of brotherhood and art with many forms of separation between tribes, castes, mother and child, the village and the misfit. The central fact of slaves taken from their homes and chained for the ocean passage urges one speaker to caution:

And look carefully . . .

And learn to speak
With understanding of another
For in this world
It is too easy to be a slave . . .

The center of the poem chronicles the life of John Newton, a white trained in navigation, who becomes a British seaman, then a slaver, then a plantation slave himself in Sierra Leone, then a Christian convert and a minister-abolitionist, composer of "Amazing Grace." This plot from Defoe, it seems, St. John handles compactly and suggestively, using the signs of various of Newton's dreams to chart his redemption. Newton, himself pressed into the navy and into a mercantile system, exemplifies growth through what his love letters name "the three greatest blessings . . . religion, liberty and love." His section is composed of log entries, letters, dream commentary, author comments about "our hero" and snippets from wisdom literature of the Bible and the East. The effect is grand, set against the backdrop of the ocean:

You cannot blame
The sea on a woman.
Unlike the seasons
It has no ribs
Though
It has a crown,
Wears a sheaf,
Swings a sickle,
Adores the sun
And is known
As bare headed and leafless

The great dream of the dark, with
lonely extroverted lamp, the intuitive ship
and the wind tossing on the innovative sea
should moor somewhere.

That moorage in the third section is not a waste land, but really new, Barbados, a Babylon of exile, where blacks speak of creating an America, of searching for dancers and "the great strength of a healing music." The poem ends poised on the other side of the slave passage experience, ready to dream ahead. For there are still the sea with "its own religion" and the Rasta man and the imperturbable beauty of the fruit vendor Pearle. There are the pentecost, song and carnival of Barbados, transplants to new soil of

Newton's trinity of religion, liberty and love.

DREAMER is a book-length poem whose multiple voices and large vision challenge readers and writers to come out of the study of themselves as atomies and plunge into strong tides that tug on us all.



E.M.

BOOKFIND: Robert A. Davies *TIMBER* (1979) Mr. Cogito Press

At this summer's Portland Poetry Festival, Robert Davies read poems about Timber, that real Coast Range townsite that Davies has written about extensively, making Timber a crossroads of many themes. *TRACKS IN OREGON* (1990)* presented "Timber: 2nd Addition", twenty-two poems arranged by season, supplementing *TIMBER: 1st ADDITION* (1982) and *TIMBER* (1979).

I know of no other more coherently, more lovingly developed place in Oregon poetry. When I asked Robert Davies how I could get a copy of *TIMBER*, he paused, then remembered a few battered copies at home. But a minute afterwards, I found two mint copies at the festival book display of Looking Glass Bookstore, and at 1979 prices, \$2.50 each. I bought them both and got back to Robert Davies so he could sign them.

TIMBER includes 53 short, cleanly written observation/insights. The poems reveal a range of the Davies' concerns for privacy-community, origins-elegies, old growth and native animals-over cutting and upstart visitors. Their clarity gives me the sense of watercolors still wet, a droplet of color beaded on the deft brush:

Acres red
Timber Road
slash - - branches, brush
skinny trees - - piled up to burn,
bulldozed.
Roads going no -
where already slipping down the hills.

Or the sense of human exchanges whittled down to toothpicks:

Someone is in the deserted tower
I will go up and visit.
What will I say? Nothing
Will we embrace? No.
What will we do? Do?
But someone is there. Is there?
The time has come. Come.

E.M.

EDITORS' NOTES

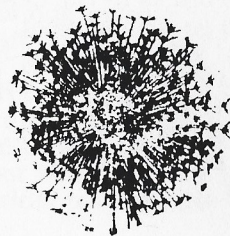
POTLUCK: Yellow jackets and poets turned out in equal numbers for the third annual *FIREWEED* potluck on Saturday, Sept. 26 at Mt. Pisgah Arboretum near Eugene, a place from which to view the promised land. Sixteen poets said poems to the warm amber afternoon. Next fall we may go farther afield-- either to the north, near Portland, or somewhere in Southern Oregon. Please let us know if you have any suggestions. Networking is very important to the staff of this magazine.

SOMETHING NEW: *FIREWEED* received an Oregon Institute of Literary Arts grant in 1992, and thanks to the grant, with this issue we are changing our appearance a bit. Most of our grant will go towards broadening our base of subscribers. One result of the grant was some discussion among the editors on the subject of enriching the prose content of the magazine. Our hope is to stimulate some experimenting with new forms and ideas in the writing of poetry among our contributors, to plant some seeds in the thinking of writers out there, perhaps to diversify content.

So in this issue you will find two new features. From now on we will feature a GUEST POEM followed by a COMMENT in the centerfold of the magazine. All of us have favorite poems hidden away in the closets of our memory. Here is an opportunity to exercise them! We are especially welcoming poems which made a difference in your writing or in your life.

We are also adding a new column called BOOKFIND which features out-of-print Oregon books or periodicals that bear on our mission. In our networking we have often found ourselves discussing "finds" with our friends, comparing notes on what has turned up in our foraging on the poetry shelves in bookstores in the area. If you have made such a discovery, please share your pleasure with all of us (one page, please!).

SUBSCRIPTIONS: We sent out a letter recently reminding folks to subscribe when the time comes-- and in the meantime to sign up someone else if possible. Or sign up an institution! This particular letter, made possible by our OILA grant, went to the 260 writers who have submitted poems to us during our first 3 years. We need your active support.



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

JOHN ADDIEGO, Corvallis, teaches English at Philomath High School, a colleague of Ann Staley. His poems have been published in journals across the country.

TIM BARNES, Portland, teaches at Portland Community College and is a frequent workshop leader. His poems and essays are published widely.

RAY BURLEIGH, Wilderville, works with abused children and reads and rereads Zola, Yeats, Patchen, Frost and Dickens.

JOHN R. CAMPBELL, Eugene, teaches at OSU,. He has had numerous publications, including the chapbook *EARTHWORKS*, and poems in *SEATTLE REVIEW*, *NORTHWEST REVIEW*, *POETRY EAST* and *THREE RIVERS POETRY JOURNAL*.

*WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN, Portland, has previously published in *POETRY NORTHWEST* and *CUTBANK*.

VIRGINIA CORRIE-COZART, Salem, studies poetry with Tom Crawford. She teaches music. Poems have been in *CALYX* and *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE*.

SOPHIE CRAWFORD, Portland, aids Alzheimers patients. She is a Willamette Valley native with an MFA from U of O.

*NATHAN DOUTHIT, Coos Bay, has articles in *THE HISTORY TEACHER* and *OREGON HISTORICAL QUARTERLY*. He teaches at Southwestern Oregon Community College. His chapbook is *SOUTH COAST*.

*JENNY FOWLER, Philomath, is a high school student who spends "free time making cards, tending my greenery, inching through books, and being lazy with my best friend."

CLINT FRAKES, Sedona, Arizona, is a founding editor of *BIG RAIN*.

C. A. GILBERT, Springfield, administered the Lane Literary Awards this summer. He won an OSPA contest category this year and says he "is alive and well somewhere in Lane County, writing at this very moment."

RENEE GIONET, Portland, discovered Rimbaud and Edna St. Vincent Millay, among others, when a teenager. She published in *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE 16* and won an OSPA contest category.

*BRIAN INGRAM, Portland, PSU graduate and Multnomah County Library page: "I am not very happy with the poets I read right now. They seem self-absorbed and thus irrelevant, but there is hope: at the turn of every century comes a renaissance. . . ."

*URSULA IRWIN, Portland, teaches at Mt. Hood Community College. Poems have been published in *PERCEPTIONS* and *THE ARCHER*..

RAY MELVIN, Portland, is a life-long resident of Oregon. His poems have appeared in *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE*, *MISSISSIPPI MUD* and *STANZA*.

ELLEN E. MOORE, Eugene, has an MFA from Alaska. She teaches at Lane Community College.

RANDALL PAYTON, Portland, is a graphic designer and musician, whose poetry has appeared in *MISSISSIPPI MUD* and *THE FREE ASSOCIATION*.

DAN RAPHAEL, Portland, "prays for rain and trees." He edits *NRG* and has poems in *CENTRAL PARK*, *MISSISSIPPI MUD*, *EXQUISITE CORPSE* and *CALABAN*.

CARLOS REYES, Portland, published his collection *NIGHTMARKS* with Lynx House, 1990. He is widely published and anthologized.

LOIS ROSEN, Salem, teaches E.S.L. at Chemeketa Community College. A student of Tom Crawford, she has work in *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE 16*.

KATHERINE SALZMAN, Portland, makes her second appearance in *FIREWEED*.

KELLY SIEVERS, Portland, a Nurse Anesthetist, has poems in *THE SEATTLE REVIEW*, *THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE*, and the new *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE*. She is a student of Floyd Skloot.

STACIE SMITH-ROWE, Hugo, is a visual artist as well as a poet. Her work has appeared several times in *FIREWEED*.

DOUGLAS SPANGLE, Portland, read at ArtQuake and has work in recent numbers of *STANZA*, *RAIN CITY REVIEW*, *PAINTED HILLS REVIEW*, *GRASSLANDS REVIEW*.

JANE THIELSEN, Depoe Bay, teaches English at Western Oregon State College and Coast Community College.

SYDNEY J. THOMPSON, Portland, grew up in the Willamette Valley and majored in English at PSU.

*first appearance in *FIREWEED*

