

FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon



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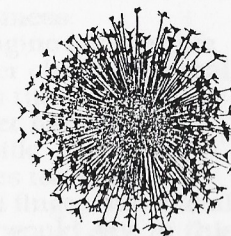
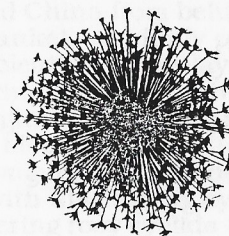
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Tom Crawford

TEAHOUSE IN CHONGQING

for Yang Xue

Fat carp nose the bank in Shi ba ti.
The Yangtse flows slow, shallow. Is this where Mao
swam across? She doesn't know, the lady
carrying the hot kettle with the long spout.
But she can hit our cups from two feet away,
and the two old men sharing the table
only insist that we smoke with them
while they tell us about the end of the Manchu
and cutting off their pigtails.
Here, opera, the only Mandate from Heaven
mimes old China from behind
a torn blanket, suddenly pots and pans bang
and the bleating erhu plays
announcing the end of civilization
or the beginning with the fool stepping out.
Through clouds of cigarette smoke
his red tongue wriggles and darts
in time with his arching eyebrows
and glittering rosy eyelids fluttering
like exotic birds, the plot everybody knows
by heart. Stamps their feet to. Vanity. Despair.
Now we forget the dirt floor under us
when the heroine in blue silk glides
in tiny steps across the makeshift stage,
turning her head, by slow degrees, toward us.
Black fish, embroidered on her six-foot sleeves
symbolize long life, happiness.
No one in China can imagine a better life
than a long one. Another chance to recall the past.
The intensity of her eyes that never blink
could be this country, her hands
hidden under so much silk.
The tall magistrate smiles too much,
stroking with thumb and finger his official beard.
"No blame," the I Ching would say, in this world
we need him too. So what's left to witness?
The props falling over. An ambush foiled.
The clash of rubber swords.

DHARMA

With the butt of his last one
the tired bus driver
lights a fresh cigarette,
sips some green tea
from his glass jar of old leaves
and, as if to save the best for last,
spits out the window
into Lieschimu, where I live.
It's a kind of offering
I think, to another day, lived,
to the old song inside
and to turning the dirty bus around

HISTORY

Up ahead the water buffalo
can imagine hay
under his black nose
and his warm stall in yellow light

What does he know about
how he looks from behind
or history
coming through the mud

it is all he can do every day
just to pull his great weight forward
ahead of the plow

In his soft eyes a small boy
makes faces in the water,
sticks out his tongue

and a wind from Hunan
carries a crow away

Sydney J. Thompson

FLIGHT

She could only see from
the knees down, and every
time she tried to look up,
all she saw were bedsprings.

She checks the feet
of those in front of her
in grocery lines, fearing
brown leather.

Her sister called last night;
she had the dream about
the workboots again.
She keeps asking,

*Where were you? Where
was everyone?* She listens,
searching for words to explain
that they came from a place

where uncles turned off hearing
aids, mothers hid in pantries,
and the only thing she heard
was wind in her hair.

Sharon Roso

FOR NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Every year his dad would hoe the berries
mow the grass clear from the house past the shed
across the creek to the ends of the rows so the pickers
would know where to park

A car from Wyoming
took twenty-five pounds
was Dad's news on our Sunday visit
a Slav from Seattle
picked on Thursday

And in August he would help, go through the field
cutting out the old canes and burning the trash
in the bottom by the creek

Dad died at eighty-four, two weeks before
the berries came ripe. The grass was mowed, the field
hoed, he took over

Three families from Hillsboro
came together, picked a hundred
pounds for jam. A fellow I grew up
with brought his new wife and baby

He cut the canes in August, burned and waited.
February, every weekend, back to the farm, twisting
new shoots around old wires. Spray, hoe, mow.
He moved wife and kids to the farmhouse for July

A Salem couple picked forty pounds
for wine. A lady from downtown
rode the bus with three coffee cans
in her bag, got seventeen pounds.
From up the hill a mom brought
two towheads and a bucket
in a wagon

His son is married now, but February still finds him
every weekend in the field. Grandchildren from the
remodeled farmhouse follow him down the rows
complaining of stickers, son mows the lawn with his
riding tractor, daughter-in-law runs the patch

Two men from Chicago
picked twelve pounds to carry
back on the plane, neighbors
came by for enough for a pie
a Slav from Montana said hello

And in August he cuts out the old canes
and burns.

Ginger Andrews

ROLLS-ROYCE DREAMS

Using salal leaves for money,
my youngest sister and I
paid an older sister
to taxi an abandoned car
in our back yard. Our sister
knew how to shift gears,
turn smoothly with a signal,
and make perfect screeching stop sounds.

We drove to the beach,
to the market, to Sunday School,
past our would-be boyfriends' houses,
to any town, anywhere.
We shopped for expensive clothes everywhere.
Our sister would open our doors
and say, "Meter's runnin' ladies,
but take your time."

In that ugly green Hudson
with broken front windshield,
springs poking through its back seat,
blackberry vines growing
through rusted floorboards,
no wheels, no tires, taillights busted,
headlights missing, gas gauge on empty.

Dianne Williams Stepp

POEM FOR THE OLD WOMAN I AM BECOMING

I wish for arms and legs
lean and bare as spruce limbs,
scoured by sea wind.
I wish for eyes dark
and cloudy as winter nights,
earrings that jangle
brass stars and silver moons,
cheeks that rise like distant ridges
I can gaze down from.
Gaze at the seam of my life,
at the ghost towns, shanties still standing
along bony riverbeds,
glazed lakes still shining
in the dark folds of distant hills.
I wish for gnarled fingers,
and skin thin as worn linen
to touch the lizardy watermelon rind,
and sinewy purple lips
to sip its sweet pink flesh.
I wish for ears large
and generous as the Buddha's
to hear the day's heat
hiss from the hot earth,
to hear the crickets chirrup
like frogs in the resiny night,
to hear the soft flutter
of moths batter themselves
against the yellow porchlight.

Dale Smith

KITCHEN POEMS

I

Blue walls, plates, pots, pans, teakettle, cups, saucers, gas-stove, sink, oven, pantry, refrigerator, garbage can, coffee-maker, bread, bananas, lemon-cream cookies, iodized salt, a can of green beans, empty pepsi bottles, honey, tabasco, peanut butter, garlic, even ice cream, vanilla, in the freezer.

III

Mother's feet treading the floor, the warm air rich with baking, frying, and simmering, peppers and onions, chocolate cake and candles, the table near a wall of windows into which a sparrow flew cracking a pane, kamikaze, dropped into dirt, while Father reads his paper, Brother talking on the phone until guests surround the supper table, and Mother, alone in a patch of blue light one cold November dawn.

Morning is dark, cereal, and milk, Saturday morning brighter, pancakes, french toast, eggs, as the sound of bones growing up, shade shifting on the cool tiled floor, where one summer late evening a girl took off her clothes and no one ever knew.

IV

A kitchen obscured by the Willamette, a full view of the red Broadway Bridge, opening wide when barges pass beneath, logs floating, tug-boats pushing and pulling, the sky clearing, cracked with light, birds bleeding through the broken clouds, coffee and the smell of coffee behind the glass.

VI

A koan by a monk in a kitchen, black beans meditating on the stove while carrots are sliced and lettuce torn for the hands that tear, for the bowls sitting empty in a quadrille of summer light, and the bare feet still damp from watering the grass, nudging the cat who lazes in a dream of mice and birds upon the soothing tile.

Steven Babcock

NOCTURNE

A funeral procession
of furniture
washed up by fog
and deposited in alleys
and vacant lots.

A worn out chair--
its cushions
sour and torn
drifts around town
and snags on corners.

A broken light fixture
hangs from a tree
and
a three legged table
squats in the ditch
like some pitifully afflicted creature.

The streets are slick
and greasy.
The outline of shops
and houses
is veiled
in a film of mist
and strangely shaped antiques
pass
wrapped in winding sheets.

Tim Hanlon

IN SUMMER, 1977

In the photograph it is August
and I am eight, leaning
against the front fender of my father's Dodge.
Sleepy grin, with one hand I offer
the string of brown trout,
with the other I am waving to my father.

To the right, far back
through boughs and tree trunks
glows the late afternoon sun,
light low and golden along the far ridge.
In a moment, I will stop waving
and will give up the string of fish to the camera.
Beyond, the sky opens wide
and the sun pulses on fields I will run in,
close now to the end of summer,
the wind a wild bird
and my father's voice the sunlight off the car.

WAKING FOR WORK

A door opens
and my father comes into the room,
already whispering my name. Wake up, he says.
His hands rough on my shoulder.
Wake up.
I rise and dress slowly,
so early it's almost dark out.
Jeans, faded blue and torn at one knee.
Boots that don't fit.
My father's shirt hangs loosely,
like a flag.
I put my arms through each sleeve,
smelling sawdust, machine oil,
a woodstove somewhere, burning.
The window begins to fill with cold
light, and I finish up, knowing
he's downstairs, waiting.
A door closes
and the truck motor
turns over slowly. Once.
Again. I don't have to listen.
I'm standing
at the top of the stairs
as if I had been put there
just at that moment.

Douglas Spangle

THE FIGHTING KITES OF KABUL

We stayed six months in Kabul
laying up from hepatitis
in the palmy days of King Mohammed
when corruption was still sweet and easy.

The local ragamuffins taught us
to build and fly fighting kites:
glue ground glass on the string,
wage war across the city's sky,

with swooping paper hawks
baiting and eluding,
aerial dervishes dancing
across the Hindu Kush.

The Afghans used to fly them
by the hour, trying to saw
through each other's lines.
We didn't stand a chance;

we were just innocent hippies
in those days before the Coup,
smoked hash, cared nothing
for international situations

as the crazy Afghan Air Force
sailed across the blue, returning
from maneuvers a plane or two fewer
than at takeoff.

Corroding swords,
the contrails twisted
and snaked
above our heads.

Severed
from its human mooring,
a single bright red kite
drifts down the valley,

slips behind wisps
of a strange yellow cloud,
and disappears in the distance,
unreachable now

except as I tell you this;
our brightly colored histories
flit briefly
across the dreams of the mountains.

Carlos Reyes

CANYON ECHOES

I.

That crack
is it avalanche?
Or stick of dynamite
detonated?
Echoes up the canyon.
Then silence
broken by the bugling
of Tundra swans overhead
Then at my feet
water piping
from melted snow
on rock's edges and points
to sandy ground
to ditches
to creeks
over broken rocks and stones
to lakes overflowing
to rivers reaching

to the sea

II.

Another crack
goosehunter's shotgun
or "the death tube"
as Chief Joseph
called the Sharps rifle
What echo?
The echo from empty oil drums
from death tubes
across sands of deserts
of scorpions
bigger than sparrows

winds of fire--
oceans of fire

What drips of oil
from broken tanks
and piping
whose death sound is so slick
and smooth
you can't hear it...

III.

Listen in the cool morning
when the sun rises
for the snow beginning to melt
for water to come in precious drops
and glisten
on the perfect diamond of a boulder
Hear it hit
pine needled, duffed ground, muted
Follow it to the creek
Go with it to the river
Carry it with you
to the Pacific--
remembering what that word means--

Pray for the right rain
of Peace

Anita T. Sullivan

I

Think of the stones
those mornings when the inside of you
has swelled during the night
to become so much larger
than the outside,
and clangs
like the bell-heart of a tiger.
Think of thousands of stones,
broken columns, pieces
of marble
lying in the grass
all over Greece and Turkey, detached,
each one forever
from its original temple.
Grow familiar with your terror
as if you were a stone
which resembles in weight and size
the ordinary and wild.
 But you-- if you are like
 one of these--
 are a lost shape of something made.

III

If you must, ask the butterflies
 about immortality
their answer will be as accurate
as you can bear. Meanwhile,
move back into the familiar
small stone house
high above the sun
with one black window, one
 black door.
Remember the harmony of irrelevance,
the dance that does not know
it is a dance.
Does the earth tilt sometimes
and crack like an egg
beneath someone's foot--
does a grasshopper's life change
after it has landed on your knee?

Whether you know it or not
you will find out
such things: *And the sea
flings light back like wedding rice.*

Mary Oliver

EGRETS

Where the path closed
 down and over,
 through the scumbled leaves,
 fallen branches,
 through the knotted catbrier,
 I kept going. Finally
 I could not
 save my arms
 from the thorns; soon
 the mosquitoes
 smelled me, hot
 and wounded, and came
 wheeling and whining.
 And that's how I came
 to the edge of the pond:
 black and empty
 except for a spindle
 of bleached reeds
 at the far shore
 which, as I looked,
 wrinkled suddenly
 into three egrets--
 a shower
 of white fire!
 Even half-asleep they had
 such faith in the world
 that had made them--
 tilting through the water,
 unruffled, sure,
 by the laws
 of their faith not logic,
 they opened their wings
 softly and stepped
 over every dark thing.

from *AMERICAN PRIMITIVE* (Little, Brown and Co., 1983); most recently published in *NEW AND SELECTED POEMS* (Beacon Press, 1992)



COMMENT

My friend Fran introduced me to the poetry of Mary Oliver about five years ago. I've been reading her ever since, finding in her poems affirmation that "everything lives, shifting from one bright vision to another." The first book I read with such pleasure that October weekend was *AMERICAN PRIMITIVE*, which had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1984. Though Oliver is now ten years and several books and awards past that, I often return to its pages. I could choose a favorite poem from several perhaps more famous: "Wild Geese" or "The Journey," both of which I use in my writing classes or any chance I get. And Oliver is equally eloquent on first snows, mornings, Blackwater Pond, deer, plum and honey trees, snakes and frogs and moles. For she is a walker on the land and in the landscape she writes about, and in her walks encounters the mundane and renders it mysterious, observes the tiniest detail and feels it transcendent. As I read, I join in the walking; as the words pile up, line upon line, I often feel myself transformed.

So it is with "Egrets." The walker, and narrator, goes beyond where the "path closed down," and I go after her, getting scratched by fallen branches, hearing the leaves scrunch, and finally noticing that the catbrier thorns are scratching my arms as well. I feel hot and sticky, the mosquitoes begin their blood-hunting buzz, "wheeling and whining," and we both come to the edge of the pond. "Black," "empty," the narrator says, though we can see a "spindle of bleached reeds" across the way. We stare as the reeds "wrinkle suddenly into three egrets." Our eyes, two pairs of them, deceived. We watch in silence, a hush at pondside. I raise my binoculars. But it is only on our walk outward that the narrator speaks to make the final observation: "faith in the world," "not logic," and those three have "stepped over every dark thing."

In every way this is an Oliver poem, from the lining which moves gracefully stanza by stanza like wings flapping, to the walk on familiar ground. Ms. Oliver seems always to be hanging around ponds, sleeping on the ground, encountering deer, noticing the milkweed, the plums, the sunrise. We know she is keenly observant and quiet out there, as attentive to the inner world as the outer. "Walking into the silence and the light under the trees," Oliver makes of her poem a blessing, and I suspect that she comes home to write it, letting experience call her back, "heart wanting more." What Mary Oliver sees is continually framed in the language of loss and salvation, and she is driven to write lines like: "Every year, everything I have ever learned in my lifetime leads me back to this." Her poems are both a consolation and a reminder of our union with the natural world. These egrets, then-- "bleached reeds" which take flight-- take me with them.

A. S.

Peter Jensen

THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA
for Roy and Patty Keene

1. The Opening

Four boys play with the surf as their pal
off the South Jetty watched by the silver face
of a harbor seal, who looks like the skull,
appearing and disappearing in the sea

beyond surf, of our human ancestor,
Homo Erectus with huge, black eye holes
deep as the past two million years. The surfers
are stuffed in rubber wet skins black as orcas.

Sometimes, they stand up and ride a curl
and cheer as it breaks away from breakwater rocks.
Mostly, they paddle to positions only to have waves
crumble like blue cheese on the sea's green salad.

2. Deforestation

Out beyond the curved tip of the jetty,
the sinking sun scatters glitter on the sea,
and an immense gold plate floats
off the far end of the boom of rocks.

On this plate, a log ship from Astoria or Longview sails
away from us carrying neatly stacked, raw jobs.
I think back to the vast log ship named *OMI Columbia*
at the wharf at Astoria's terminal tied up beside

mountains of Cavenham, second growth logs
tagged with bar code indictments, and I joke to myself,
"Here must be spotted owl habitat since
it is taking away American jobs."

I look north across the mouth of the Columbia
at the cutover land called Willapa,
the Wintergreen of Bob Pyle, where blackberries replace
wildflowers and three thousand kinds of mushrooms,

and where bears disappear like old natives
taking with them their fur coats and that part
of our souls that once worshipped bears.
Willapa, land of second and third growth,

forests cut down to our size,
where deer and butterflies roam,
where conservationists and foresters
pick over slash piles of our home.

3. Asian Trade

The mouth of the Columbia was remade
in our image: instead of eagles, boys scream
over surf, and a ship named after this river,
that was named after a ship, copies history

and takes our forest overseas. In fact, six log ships,
the size of oil tankers in the Persian Gulf,
lie anchored in the Columbia waiting
to be stuffed with second growth, company logs.

What would Captain Robert Gray say to see
a log ship named *Columbia* sailing to sell
whole forests overseas? Would he compare
logs to otter and beaver furs sold to China?

I am jolted by old photos in the Maritime Museum
of an eighty-four pound Tchinook salmon and a sturgeon
large as a bear as it hung surrounded at a cannery
by fishermen, Rudyard Kipling, and Chinese with knives.

I asked a crewman on the cutter *Resolute*
if the Coast Guard would ever bust log exports
the way they bust fish thieves and drug imports.
He smiled and said, "Yes, it might come to that."

Later, at the beach, I watch Japanese sailors off log ships
play touch football and yell to each other in English,
and I admit that our debts link us to this world
with more certainty than our values ever did.

4. "What belongs to the river..."
-- The Wishram

I visit the last rusted whale ribs of the wreck
of the *Peter Iredale*, which leans like a marker
for all two thousand boats and ships
claimed by the bar of this monster river.

When the lightship *Columbia* ran her engines
against a storm to ease up on her anchors, waves
moved like mountains and rolled on the bar
like landslides of surf full of roaring sea lions.

Before it was dredged, how the bar broke when a storm
from the west battled the great tide of the river plus the ebb
of saltwater! How the bar undermined waves that broke
on ships like rows of albino buffalo falling over a cliff!

This mouth is really the mouth of the ocean
that the river feeds with a flow that plumes
out and to the south along Oregon like a fan
full of fish, logs, bodies, boats, wastes, minerals, and dreams.

5. Cloud Walker

I retreat to walk on clouds at the top of the Astoria Column
trying to take in the wingspan of this river
from Saddle Mountain in the south to the hills of Willapa out
to the speck of a ship that looks like a wagon on the sea.

Finally, I make some sense of the Tchinook funeral canoe
for Chief Concomly that floats higher than helicopters
over this river, a boat bearing aboriginal spirits looking down
with longing on the backs of eagles looking down

with full desire on the backs of Columbia River salmon.

Kathryn Steadman

from THE PURPLE SERIES

#1

TRAVELING TOWARDS PURPLE
for Hank

It snowed six inches.

The road was white.
We slid around an icy corner
on 52nd and Main.

You fixed the flat tire.

The wind picked up speed. The map
flew out the window, it was dangerous
out there.

I agreed to spend the night.

Your hands dipped into the fire,
became flares
warning the world away.

You sang my favorite song of praise.

That night you dreamt of the fruit of chayote vines,
and me. I dreamt the glass on a barometer
shattered as it fell.

The kiss was red and blue on our lips.

Cold can clarify, condense our bodies,
make room for another. I was the first
to sleep in this bed.

I am your third joy.

#2

REACHING PURPLE

I didn't know love
would smell like a yew tree
burning, and I never imagined
the green smoke
from the wet wood of our bodies
enough to fill a room.

And I didn't realize
that I was looking
for the right amount
of red and blue in a man,
that would make purple.
But I came to that last night
when you fell like a heavy door
over me.

Maybe you've towed fear
around behind you all your life,
or carried it in front of you
like a divining rod.
My dream told you that fear
couldn't cross this threshold,
it needed an open door.

In the morning
when we crossed over again,
I knew it was purple I craved,
purple I came to you for,
purple I smelled in you
a room away.

#12

THE GLEANING

Now, when purple
has come and ruined me
for any other color,
the reddest of roses fades
next to the beauty
of the volunteer iris.

And whatever I feel
that isn't purple
is lukewarm and stationary
against the movement of purple
with its breath like a hundred thorns
on my back, and its smell
of emerging roots.

The oven glares red, looks secure
in its place in the kitchen.
Evacuation is impossible:
how do you escape your life?
There is hope only for the colorblind.
I can't even say I'm needing
of anything.

I find irony in the constant
pouring into my body of this wine,
juxtaposed with the purple skin
under the cloth.

You, with your heavy stick of purple.
You, who must have spent years gleaning
cabbages, grapes, and wild violets.
You, who brought me to this field.
Come back, and burn the stalk.

#13

THERE WAS MORE

There was more
than what you expected.
Like the thirteenth bread
you find beneath the twelve
you paid for, counted on
this may be the sweetest
the one to make you
rise up again.

STRIKING

1

Arc striking
Against black steel
Arc ringing
With hiss
And spit
Arc striking
Making flow
Of red
Of yellow
Of gold
Searing atoms
Into rivers
Flowing volcano
Black red yellow steel
Bonding the whole
From two
Making them truly
One.

2

Worker striking
Trying to make
A living, statement
To the haves
In the big office chairs
Worker striking
Wanting quiet
Wanting respect
Wanting peace
Doing what it takes
Striking against
Striking out
Struck down
In an age
Of replaceable
Workers
Striking.

3

Fist striking
Striking an arc
Striking table
Fist striking
In frustration
Muscles tightening
Knuckles aching
Striking frustration
Striking back
Cold steel
Blows of anger
Slam wishes
Slam wanting
Slam steel.



David Johnson

A SECRET SERVICE

Outside on the front porch
of the Lutheran church
after altarlight and supplicant sopranos fade,
we men shake hands, smoke, talk
momentarily immune
from Hell, damnation and the county agent.
Later, when it's cool and dusky
we will roll up our Sunday sleeves,
drink beer & toss horseshoes.

Each ungainly arc will be a silent parable:
ascension, declension, the ultimate tumble.
Each near miss will be a thumping sermon
on the beaten path
taking back its own
& sing Hosannah!
Every ringing chime will be a carillon
petitioning the gods of likelihood.
We won't be keeping score-- who gets to go to Heaven.
Who is only close.

REVIEW: *LEGENDS FROM CAMP* by Lawson Fusao Inada
(Coffee House Press, 1993)

Lawson Inada, who teaches at Southern Oregon State College, has produced here a volume of collected poems-- or so it would seem! There is no way to determine when these poems were written, though they are arranged chronologically according to the period in his life on which they focus. It is not clear if the poems in this extraordinarily rich offering were composed fairly recently or if they represent a selection from the whole thirty-five years of his writing life.

But then, his interest may be not lie at all in presenting the conventional collection of poems, but rather in giving a new definition to the collecting of one's poems: why not focus on the *life* of the poet instead of focusing on the *writing* life of the poet? (This comes down to arranging poems by choice of subject matter, thematically, rather than by date of composition.) And in this case the poet has lived a life! This life, as the poet describes it, is the source of the richness of the work.

The tone of this poet's autobiography (also including prose introductions to each section) is mostly delight. If Inada is not working with the intention of showing the evolution of his craft, then he has a free hand to exult, to celebrate, to weave the brightest of colors (and some darker colors, especially blues) into this life tapestry. The way he chooses to do this is by interweaving voices. For this is a poet of many voices.

These include:

the Historian (for his people)
the Performer (including the Jazzman)
the Shaman (mainly a Healer)
the Traveler (really a Nomad)
the Teacher (the Zen Monk kind)
the Father (also a Husband)
the Brother (Blood)

This is a partial list. Sometimes a voice dominates a poem and sometimes several voices harmonize in one poem. The latter poems seem especially evocative. Lines from a favorite example, "Re/Collections":

When I play my music
I may be
whistling with the wind
accompanying me,

propped on a precipice
overseeing my flock
at dusk
in the desert--
when I play my music,
when I play my music.

When I play my music
I may be
blowing through
the sweet bamboo
of a rainswept forest,
responding to the sounds--
drop by drop by drop--
letting my presence
be known.

When I play my music
I may be ministering
to a congregation
raising our voices
in ceremony,
in celebration.

When I play my music.
When I play my music.

Clearly what you can hear in these lines is the Shaman (Healer) but also the Teacher (Monk) and certainly the Performer (Jazzman). And is even a touch of the Traveler (Nomad).

For this reviewer, however, it is the first section of the book (its lead poem gives the book its title) which is the most moving by far. Here the colors of the tapestry are muted, mostly blues. The voices are the Historian and the Shaman and the Traveler. The focus is on life in the "relocation" camps where the Inada family was "interned" or "detained"-- imprisoned really-- during World War II. These poems, it seems to me, are of recent composition and reflect a distinct maturity of style. Though the feeling of delight is here also, it is muted and instead the tone is often serious, solemn. The man continues to sing, but now he's singing the blues -- more Delta blues than Chicago or Memphis blues.

A case can be made for including this recent work under the general rubric of "the poetry of witness." In an introduction to her anthology *AGAINST FORGETTING* (W.W. Norton, 1993)-- see also the March/April APR this year-- Carolyn Forché sets forth her definition of the poetry of witness. It is poetry which deals with "the conditions of historical and social extremity" of this century. This kind of poetry may be "our only evidence that an event has occurred: it exists for us as the sole trace of an occurrence." Further, "if a poem is an event

and the trace of an event, it has, by definition, to belong to a different order of being from the trauma that marked its language in the first place."

What has been witnessed by Inada is the imprisonment of his family and his people. These poems in the first section of the book are among the few traces of the event. (For other "traces" see James Masao Matsui's poems in *THE OPEN BOAT*, Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1993.) So what structures has Inada erected "against forgetting," against the likelihood that the experiences of his boyhood in camp will sink into oblivion? What order of being, what language, has he devised by which memories of the traumatic event may be preserved-- forcefully?

In a word, fabulation. The telling of tales. These poems are little narratives, stories from the collective memory of the survivors, legends. Making legends of occurrences-- daily happenings in the camps-- this is what must have happened all the time in all the talking that went on in camp. This is how you hope and how you try to make some kind of sense of the situation, how you even make light of it. This is also what you do with your feelings of outrage and grief.

Inada's genius lies in remembering the talk and then with the greatest care extricating poems from the talk, with no violation of the simplicity of language all around him. The resulting poems, spoken in the harmony of his voices, will surely last, defeating oblivion:

XII. THE LEGEND OF THE JEROME SMOKESTACK

There is no legend.
It just stands there
in a grassy field,
the brush of swampland,
soaring up to the sky.

It's just the tallest
thing around for miles.
Pilots fly by it.

Some might say it's
a tribute, a monument,
a memorial to something.
But no, not really.

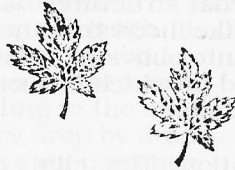
It's just a massive
stack of skills, labor,
a multitude of bricks.

And what it expressed
was exhaust, and waste.

It's just a pile of past.
Home of the wind, rain,
residence of bodies, nests.
I suppose it even sings.

But no, it's not legend.
It just stands, withstands.

D.L.



REVIEW: *OFF THE BEATEN TRACK: A Sampler of Individual Books in Development by Oregon Poets* (Quiet Lion Press, Portland, 1993)

There's adventure for readers opening and sampling this anthology of seventeen poets, most of them connected in some way to Portland, our big-small state's cultural capital. Editor Brian Christopher Hamilton is clearly dedicated to keeping "the words of poets flowing to the people from the page." What's more, this is a prospective collection, featuring poets whose work Quiet Lion Press will be publishing in seventeen individual books! And the year-old *RAIN CITY REVIEW* is also from Quiet Lion, edited by Hamilton and *OFF THE BEATEN TRACK* poets Douglas Spangle and Chelsey Minnis. The Spring '93 issue of this thrice-yearly literary magazine is a hefty, perfect-bound volume of 170 pages, including poetry, fiction, a play and two essays, combining strong local representation and well-known writers from across the country.

Recognizing that *OFF THE BEATEN TRACK* has already elicited "an entire spectrum of responses," Hamilton hopes to have justly represented each poet in a seven-page selection and to hint at things to come in each new book. The anthology succeeds. For this reader, there are certainly poets here whose books I look forward to; these are poets whose works are extremely satisfying and/or challenging. There are others, admittedly, whose works seem less forceful, more forced. Hopefully Brian Hamilton, as editor of this ambitious program, will encourage writers to continue the development of their books.

Reviewers have no fewer biases than any other readers but are called upon to declare them and risk argument about personal taste and about poetics-- the two shade together, don't they? My tastes, generally, favor the focused, the tightly crafted, the subtly voiced. Even as I tap out these preferences, I know I might stand accused by those who prefer the bardic, Whitmanian, Nerudan, the

gestures that are large and inclusive, and the poems that perhaps are leonine rather than shell-like. Many of the poets in *OFF THE BEATEN TRACK* write about city culture, about its profusion and fast pace, about its constant, nervous interruptions of the personal and contemplative. No wonder many of the resulting poems are jumpy, dense, groping for purpose and form.

John Dooley's "Racecourse Exit" captures the frenzy of Portland with its racy lists, yet calls for getting back to what "no city has ever seen." Most city poems in this collection are not set against a country alternative. Transcendence, or merely relief, must be struggled for in personal relations, in art, in bending the urban plane so it touches myth and ritual. Charles F. Theilman in "Painting" runs through the urban palette: black, brown, red, and dream: "O, fill your canvas!...Fill your canvas/ thick with color!" Carl Hanni acknowledges "our boss, big city life." Leanne Grabel in "Tales of Fragmentation" uses seven brief chapters and a recap all in verse to tell a story about a heroine whose "highpowered switch" separated "her essence at the soulline." It is a parable of overload, and the electrical utility analogy runs throughout.

Karynn Fish, Adriana Laurent, and Heidi Egusquiza-Chapman find release in magical transformations. Fish writes about leaving tributes-- abandoned body parts-- at the "swollen ankles" of Lady Oracle, "and wash your hands before you go." In "Let's Get a Tattoo," Laurent receives spirals, a cross, a panther with bloody claws: "I dreamed my design./ To walk alone through the thick air with symbols." Egusquiza-Chapman's speaker runs down the street: "With my clothes on fire/ I breathe like dragon/ leap like tongue."

A special bonus for me are the poems by Walt Curtis, who has mastered the big city sax sound, sustaining his prayers and love songs with a sure music and sure intent, avoiding flatness of phrase or perception. His sampler shows him fluent with homegrown culture and myths, comfortable as bard or intimate minnesinger. His "Spider Love" has spiders so involved in a human couple's lovemaking that:

At dawn, satiny slender thread entangled us
and the bed, and led straightway
out the cracked window
to the fading stars.

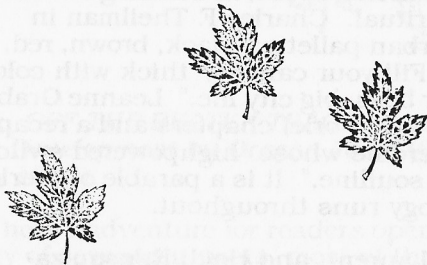
Curtis might be the best of godparents for these poets of the thick urban air. His ease and clarity do not cost him his tenderness orchutzpah.

There's no satisfactory summing up of seventeen poets, but I do want to mention four others, favorites, I confess. David Elsey's short, crisp, objective portraits of working people are set off against the subjectivity of the book. Two of the youngest poets are, for me, two of the strongest. Merrit Chelsey Minnis uses surprise and

compression, an Emily Dickinson pawed at by the fraternity boys, an image magician with a fast-paced show. Sydney J. Thompson writes poem after poem of strong subject matter and has the discipline to pare back and reveal difficult themes. And Douglas Spangle, whose varied language is energetic and exact, creates fictive places I believe in, whether it be the Near East or Crooked River Gorge, in history or this August in Portland.

The Quiet Lion bears watching and deserves a listening:
"where the written word roars." Thank you, Brian Hamilton!
Thank you, all!

E.M.



BOOKFIND: *A SCRIPTURE OF LEAVES* by William Stafford
(Brethren Press, 1990)

The ordinary miracles begin. Somewhere
a signal arrives: *Now*, and the rays
come down. A tomorrow has come. Open
your hands, lift them: morning rings
all the doorbells; porches are cells for prayer.
Religion has touched your throat. Not the same now,
you could close your eyes and go on full of light.
(from "Today")

"Cherish this book," William Stafford urges the reader in his Introduction (boldly titled "Why You Should Cherish This Book") to this exquisite volume of poems. Since receiving it as a gift in the year of its publication, I had cherished it-- one of Stafford's less widely-known collections. Eager to share my discovery of these richly spiritual poems, I recklessly made a gift of my copy to a friend, confident that I'd be able to quickly replace it. After all this was Stafford, and I was in Oregon.

I hit Powell's Books first: no luck. But I did pick up a copy of another collection I'd never seen: *HISTORY IS LOOSE AGAIN*, published and beautifully letterpress-printed on sand-colored, deckle-edge paper by Honeybook Press of Rexburg, Idaho, in 1991. Only 278 copies were issued, 26 signed by the author.

My delight at this find temporarily distracted me from my disappointment at being let down by Powell's. But as I continued to search in new and used bookstores for *A SCRIPTURE*...-- you guessed it-- I couldn't find another copy. Along the way, though, I did learn that even as the years brought increasing popularity to his work, resulting in publication by such major houses as Harper and Row, Stafford continued to submit poems regularly to little magazines and to have some collections published by very small presses. In doing so, he gave readers good reason to follow his counsel in the Introduction to *A SCRIPTURE*...:

If you haven't done so already, you may want to browse in the literary publications that give hospitality to such poems as these; and if so you must stay independent of the tide around you in commercial, glossy magazines that clamor for your attention.

I also learned that, in 1947, Brethren Press had in fact published *DOWN IN MY HEART*, Stafford's first book.

But still, no *SCRIPTURE*. Then, when William Stafford died suddenly this past August, I found myself turning to his own words for solace, having known Bill personally somewhat by way of the writing workshops I'd taken with him and through my friendship with some members of his family. I was especially sorry again not to have a copy of *A SCRIPTURE*..., and I began searching again with new vigor.

Not long after, during a theater weekend in Ashland, I was browsing between plays through the poetry section of Shakespeare Used Books, and there it was, its slim, cream-and-tan spine glowing-- I swear it was-- among the dark tomes. \$4.95 made it mine, and I wished only that I had a flashlight to take with it to the play that afternoon.

Among the stars one light shone below
the line of mountains, a campfire maybe. Steady.
All night I kept in mind that sun, my chosen
place, and let the earth gyrate. With dizzy
certainty I slept inside that reckoning.
(from "I Have a Witness")

As a whole this collection embodies and gives voice to a deep faith and a spirituality grounded in history, in deep encounters with nature, and in the Quaker values of simple living and a commitment to social justice. Several of the poems jab wryly at the inauthenticity and noise of twentieth-century American life, including its religiosity and false piety-- the "life lived in italics," as he calls it, in the poem "Living in the Spirit:"

This italics life is a great invention. It enhances
events daily into high drama
always leading toward *achievement of salvation--*

It's a state that creatures untouched by the light
either ignore or deny-- and in either event
have to forgo. Mere animal life is *lonely and tragic*.

Other poems challenge the reader beyond an "italics life,"
beyond a spirituality of dogma and platitudes, to one of authentic
encounter with creation itself.

If I said "religion" or "music" you might believe
a life could be guided and helped by something outside
itself. If I say "land" (clouds going over,
it lying there dark, one hill then another,
slowly under the sky) what would you think?"

So begins "Saying a Big Word." And it ends:

...slow
as those clouds in summer the fields descend around us
and our lives reach out for something
beyond where the sunset ends.

Such a wonderful book, I thought as I reread it, *too bad it's
out of print*. And as I thought this, I realized for the first time that
I'd been operating on the assumption that it *was* out of print. I had
never actually verified this. So today I called Powell's.

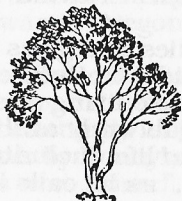
Oh yes, that book's still in print, I was told, *\$8.95, paper*.
Would you like me to order you one?

Oh, my.

So, dear reader, while one of the reasons "Why You Should
Cherish This Book" may not be after all because it is out of print, it
is nevertheless a rare collection. And so I urge you to take the poet
up on his invitation of the last line in the Introduction:

...come on in. Dip into these pages. Be kind.

Donna Henderson



EDITORS' NOTES

Most *FIREWEED* readers are subscribers: the month and
year of the last issue of your subscription are noted on the address
label. Please resubscribe, for more than a year if you wish. It costs
us time and postage to urge renewals. You may want to send gift
subscriptions this year. Some readers are sending gift subscriptions
to schools and libraries that otherwise would not receive *FIREWEED*.

We have added three new features in our fourth year of pub-
lication, including our centerpiece, the GUEST POEM/COMMENT, the
column called BOOKFIND, and TESTIMONY, an opportunity for you,
the reader (who may also be a poet), to submit a personal piece most
likely focusing on your experiences as a writer. We might hear about
fortuitous encounters with other poets, about special influences on
your writing, about why you need or want to write, about teachers
who were important to you in the past, etc.

These new features (and the ongoing REVIEWS) are our
formal efforts to open up the magazine to reader opinion and are a
key element in our wish to do some networking among poets at the
grassroots in Western Oregon. So at the beginning of our fifth year,
we ask you to consider submitting prose as well as poetry. Let us
hear from you.

Our annual *FIREWEED* Potluck and Reading took place on
a lovely Sunday afternoon on the banks of the Willamette south
of Corvallis with attendees from as far away as Portland. Reading
that day were Anita Sullivan, Randall Payton, Erik Muller, Peter
Jensen, David Laing, Bob Davies, Sydney Thompson, Joan Dobbie,
Michael James, Harold Johnson, C.A. Gilbert, Susan Spady and
Jackie Melvin. There were several tributes to someone we all loved,
and continue to love, William Stafford.

We would like to thank Jackie Melvin, poet and writer from
Eugene, for volunteering considerable time to proofread our July
issue and the present issue. Her experience with and love for work
on texts, including layout, is much appreciated.

On the following page please find an announcement con-
cerning a future issue of *FIREWEED*.



The April 1994 issue of
FIREWEED

will be dedicated to

WILLIAM STAFFORD

We invite our readers to
submit the following:

remiscences of William Stafford
including his teaching and public readings;

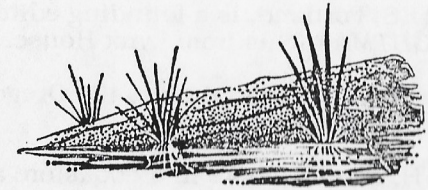
comments on single favorite
Stafford Poems in the format of
our Guest Poem feature;

poems paying tribute to
William Stafford.

Please send materials as soon as possible, no later than
February 15, 1994. Direct inquiries and suggestions to

David Laing (581-3517)
Ann Staley (757-0135)
Erik Muller (344-1053)

(please
clip and post or
circulate)



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

* GINGER ANDREWS, North Bend, is a homemaker and mother who "hopes to publish a book of poetry by the year 2000." Her poems have appeared in *THE WRITER* and SWOCC's *THE BEACON*.

STEVEN BABCOCK, Portland, has had poems in the last two issues of *RAIN CITY REVIEW*. His interview with Andrei Codrescu is coming out in an alternative weekly in Portland.

TOM CRAWFORD, Hebo, has a volume of poems, *LAUDS*, out this year from Cedar House Books in Seattle. He continues to teach English in Kwanju, Korea, and will visit the states in December. The poems in this issue are from a manuscript entitled *CHINA DANCING*.

* TIM HANLON, Eugene, is a university student. His poetry has appeared in LCC's *DENALI*.

* DONNA HENDERSON, Monmouth, works as a marriage and family therapist. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *WRITER'S FORUM*, *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*, *CALYX*, *CUTBANK*, *THE TAOS REVIEW*, *THE JESSAMYN WEST REVIEW*, and *THE FEMINIST BROADCAST QUARTERLY*.

PETER JENSEN, Eugene, has poetry in *OREGON POETRY*, published by OSU in the Oregon Literature Series. His book *CONFLUENCE*, with David Johnson and Erik Muller, is an OILA poetry award nominee.

DAVID JOHNSON, Portland, is a free-lance journalist, essayist, novelist and poet. The Oregon Literature Series will publish his poetry and his news articles. With Peter Jensen and Erik Muller, he is a collaborator in *CONFLUENCE*.

* MARY L. MISEL, Gaston, is a shipyard electrician whose poems have appeared in *UPPER LEFT EDGE*, *STANZA*, and *OREGON TRADESWOMAN*. *MOTES* and *RAIN CITY REVIEW* will publish her work.

CARLOS REYES, Portland, is a founding editor of *HUBBUB*. His collection *NIGHTMARKS* is from Lynx House.

* SHARON ROSO, Portland, attends the Oregon Writer's Workshop. Her second home is on Netarts Bay.

* DALE SMITH, Shedd, works in a bookstore and on a farm.

DOUGLAS SPANGLE, Portland, helps edit *RAIN CITY REVIEW* and has poems in *OFF THE BEATEN TRACK* (see review in this issue), both publications of Quiet Lion Press.

KATHRYN STEADMAN, Eugene, when not working on The Purple Series, is a mother, a Reiki practitioner, and a fiction writer. Her stories have appeared in *THE OTHER PAPER*.

* DIANNE WILLIAMS STEPP, Tigard, is in private practice as a psychotherapist.

ANITA T. SULLIVAN, Corvallis, recently returned from Greece with enough writing for a book combining essay and poetry.

SIDNEY J. THOMPSON, Portland, has new work in *MOTES*, *RAIN CITY REVIEW* and *OFF THE BEATEN TRACK* (reviewed in this issue). Her job as a waitperson leaves energy for writing poetry.

* first appearance in *FIREWEED*

