FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon

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FIREWEED: POETRY OF WESTERN OREGON is published quarterly in October, January, April and July. *FIREWEED* publishes poets living in the western half of Oregon, though poems need not be regional in subject. Manuscripts should include a return envelope with sufficient postage. We also need a biographical note. Inquiries about submission of reviews or essays are welcome. Subscriptions are $10 for four issues. Please notify us if your copy of the magazine arrives damaged, so we can replace it. 1330 E. 25th Ave., Eugene, OR 97403.

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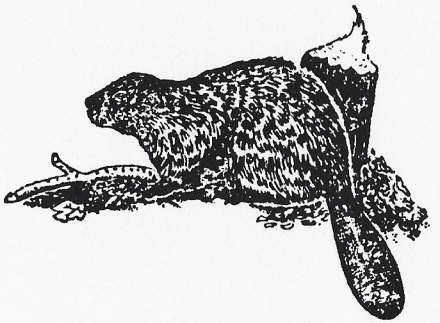
TABLE OF CONTENTS



Wilma M. Erwin

HAIKU

again and again
the wind carries off
the welcome sign

Sandy Diamond

"WISE IS THE POET WHO STAYS AT HOME
WHERE THE MUSE KNOWS HIS ADDRESS"
--Pete Morgan

Here she comes again
territorial as a wronged neighbor
all planets in Leo.
I happen to be sleeping
building a fire
feeding the chickens--
do you think I have something
to write on, something
to write with?
She flaunts her figure of speech--
oh tramp-- knowing I'll give up
sleep, warmth and livestock
lest she take her charms elsewhere.
Prissy and mincing, the chickens
have to come and get it themselves
from the spilled pail,
because I'm writing on the side of the barn
with gravel.

I hear a bawdy celestial laughter:
she's there on the roof
above my coarse scrawl.
Her hair is as tender as the hair
of a lover on your pillow when you wake.
Her hair is a new copper kettle boiling
and you do not know if you can pour it
without getting burnt. Her hair
has been so many colors
it could be anything
it could be anything.
Her legs swing above me
wide as a child's,
she opens her blouse
and shows me my heart.

WORKING AT THE TASTY SHOP

The Ohio summer I turned sixteen
I worked in my father's deli--
no longer one child out of four
I was the soda jerk, the fountain girl:
thrilling names of my new identity.
In between shakes and banana splits,
my specialty, I served coffee and quips
like the real waitresses, swayed
in a business-like manner like the real
waitresses so that the whole counter leaned
forward to watch and one day
when my back was turned the delivery boy
whacked my behind with a huge loaf of rye--
oh warm from the oven--
infusing me with steamy smells
piercing my heart with caraway seeds--
I felt like butter melting--
and famished for the first time
I thought as I grabbed for the whirling bread:
now now I am beginning to live.

Lois Rosen

DROPLEAF

Snow is spreading like that spidery lace tablecloth
my mother would bring out on Passover when we pretended
we had a dining room, our dropleaf table expanded
into that living room my parents slept in.

The movers shiver carrying the table into her retirement
apartment. Frozen fog clings to greenery stiffened white.
Mother whines *Where did that come from? I don't
want it.* She collapses on the couch sighing.

Do I sell belongings of a woman who is still breathing?
Her worldly goods in the nursing home come to
little drifts of clothes, costume jewelry
one nightstand, glass birds.

This year a blizzard storms behind her eyes. Forecasters
warn of more snow, freezing rain. Until recently
I would have said *She knows me,* but brakes won't grip.
The car ahead spins as if demented on the ice.

HOW TO SWALLOW GRIEF

Riding back from the home in my car
Aunt Henny and Aunt Nessy begin weeping.
They say I'm a good daughter, never that
I shouldn't have put their sister-in-law
away, and when we arrive at my house
Henny, seventy-six, with artificial knees
demonstrates dance routines she teaches
seniors. Let me inherit Henny's genes.

My mother has Alzheimer's. My father's
dead. I ask my aunts for stories. Nessy
says grandmother took bets, shoved
strips of paper in her brassiere
between her bosoms. Henny says,
*You didn't have to tell her that.
She didn't need to know that.*
My mother's parents rolled cigars, sold
The Daily News to men going home tired
after another shift at Otis Elevator.

In September, Henny phones from Yonkers
wishing Happy Rosh Hashonah. Each Jewish
New Year, my parents toasted with Mogen David,
To a sweet new year. Mother baked taglach,
small balls of dough piled in pyramids
the honey would drip down.

Was it only four years ago
Mother began taping up words:
phone, sofa, door? She could still
use the phone, could use money, could say
Lois.

Jenny Fowler

SUNDAY VOICES

They are all three Mrs. Williams.
Hair like glass-- short, sharp, and broken--
in their Sunday best, the podium pales brown.
We fill the pews with chorus
Gloria, gloria, gloria.

I envy their high notes.
So I sit like a choirgirl,
a golden rod moving up my spine,
and the music streaks full of yellow whistle
from my lips.
Glorla, glorla, glorla.

And from both ends the bench laughs
into my wide blue eyes.
I don't want to be so small.
I want to be all three skinny white ladies singing.
I want to be all three glorious notes
meeting in the air.

David Johnson

SUNDAY SERVICE IN MARCOLA

Here where the Mohawk Valley
doglegs north to the Linn County line,
where the longest log flume in the U.S. of A.
sluiced Doug Fir down from Parsons Creek,
where back in the 20's the only street in town
had a rowdy row of 19 saloons,
where nowadays, stove-up relics of the manly thrust
shuffle in and out of the Little 'R' Tavern,
where cornball Kalapooya wore spruce bonnets
and danced in the rain,
where the sweetest apples of the McKenzie River drainage
grow wild by cavernous, empty kilns,
Marcola boomed, bottomed, then hung on
to whisper chimney smoke
on a rain-christened Sunday.

As the godly muster in their Joy Busses,
as sinners scuff porch steps,
hold cigarettes, coffee cups,
I tilt my eyes to a ridge
rising south of the Mohawk River,
shaved of all merchandisable timber,
consecrated by the blood, sweat and piss
of fallers, setters, buckers, whistlepunks & logtruck jockeys.
Up there it is also Sunday
but I sense no communion between squat, black stumps,
no liturgy in a mist salving the gouge of cat trails,
no clearcut sermons up on Hell's Hill.
A solitary snag stands like the Christ
of Rio de Janeiro
raising its withered arms
with less than benedictory grace
above the slashpiles and choker coils

Barbara Drake

EXERCISES

Angel

Her face is old-fashioned, Victorian.
Her body is substantial, not like a model
but more like an old-fashioned diva
with silk rosebuds in her hair
and a large dimpled chin. How does she float there
so illogically? Perhaps a machine?
Her body is tilted and the folds
of her long gown hide her legs.
The children do not seem to notice her.

Blessed

The candles of her hands
fold and fold
until no light escapes them.

Comfort

The feathers I want for my bed
are walking around on a goose's legs.

Common

When the storm starts, the dust stirs, dimpling
like the surface of the moon, pock pock! Slowly
dust darkens and turns to mud, ecstatic other self.

Democracy

Eggs in a carton, the blue
background behind them
is the sky, eggs in the sky
float like a barcode
across the eye.

Ecstasy

China bells, China bells,
shattering the air with their ringing.
Silver bells, brass bells, iron bells.
Pig bells and cat bells, sheep bells and doorbells.
Hoarse wooden bonker bells.
All these bells arranged
like tiers in an opera house,
clapping, clapping, their own best audience.

Enough

Yellow wasp at the door.
The fig goes quickly from ripe to rotten,
falls and bursts on the kitchen floor.

Evil

The room is dark but not so dark you cannot see.
The chair is old and stained
and smells of the loss of control.
Grey, filthy cloths like dirty bandages
are draped over unseen objects.
The forms that suggest themselves
are sharp, heavy looking.
They smell like lead.
They wait for the heavy hand to unwrap them.

Robert E. Reynolds

SUNRISE

The cock should crow, but barking dogs
instead. I think the dogs devoured
the cock. I think the cock is dead.
I think the dogs will win. The dawn

has come at last; it's time for bed.
At last the drooling dogs are dumb.
They've won at last. The clock's deflowered.
The east is red; the west is dark.

The Morning Star is in the east.
The *Morning News* is on the porch.
I mark: the clock is out of reach.
The ducks are aging in the park.

DROWNING

You ask, my son, what drowning
means. I say being under water
too long, because we cannot breathe
water; that fish and other sea
creatures can use oxygen dissolved
in water, but we, whales, and dolphins
need air pure and simple; we
must come to the surface often,
some more than others, to breathe.

And sea lions. In summer you tried
to swim for the first time. Lessons
helped, but you were more fish
out of water than in.
I've read about how phobias begin.
I've no wish to focus on drowning;
I'm terrified to seem to duck
the issue. And walruses. I tell you
about gills, about water dissolved
in air as fog or cloud, vapor
trail or steam, so it can seem
more symmetrical to me.

How does it seem to you?
When we read about mermen,
you show special interest
in them. I don't know why
you ask now about drowning.
It's one of all the ways there are
to die. You'll learn others.
Ask about any of them, but don't
expect short answers.

And seals.

Verlena Orr

RIVER IN THE QUIET ROOM

In hard lead pencil I write a river,
the only way out of this room.
My river, the one comfort I remember,
lunges on willow-bound walls,
rests in eddies, magnifies the rock bed.

No bed here, only soft walls, a window
framing the outside pines. I chant
the river through Kooskia, Asahka, Orofino.
Swift current fills with rhythms of rock
and water. Rocks change places for a reason.
Fog moves in like a mask.

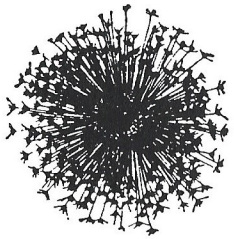
This year's spring breakup shoulders land
to the Pacific, and I pretend a pencil,
make lists of frozen tributaries.
Southfork of the Clearwater, my river, rises
in my vision to begin plans for a ship.

I am writing as fast as I can to keep this
river from flood. The room-- small,
the made-up pencil-- dull,
the clear water inescapable.

WHAT I KNEW OF WAR

was my own bleak Idaho farm
boundaries when Dickie Fargo
and I played endless games
of "Bombs Over Tokyo,"
Dickie making explosion noises
as I lined up target trucks
for dirt clods,
Sunday drives up Lochsa River
where relocated enemy spies
were rumored prisoners
in a box canyon,
Mom excited with fear and
fascination, Dad silent
slowing down to look while
I read GI Joe comics
in the backseat,
dogfaces triumphant on
each page, winning with thrusts
of fixed bayonets, split-second
pulls of grenade pins,
and the nights I walked my canyon
in the same dream, passed
Mom and Dad (prisoners of the Japanese)
standing in great ice blocks,
among the magpies screeching
from thornbush, their faces amazed,
and windless days, when stiff
with fear of kamikaze crop dusters
hung frozen for their dive,
I held my breath until they rose
from the lips of the hills,
black pea vines hanging
from their wheels.

GUEST POEM



Barbara Drake

WHEN A WOMAN IS SAD

When a woman is sad
because someone has treated her badly
or she has read of a painful thing in the newspaper
or she misses her mother
who is far away
or has died
or was not a good mother,
when she is sad for her children,
that they are lovely but mortal,
or sad for the children, not lovely,
who slipped from her like dishwater,
when she is sad for a man she did not make love with
when she was nineteen
and her belly was flat as a tight sheet,
or a man she made love with
when she was twenty
and her belly was curvy,
when she is sad for a friend's loss,
or the loss of one who was not a friend,
when she is sad,
then the temperature of her womb drops
like the air inside a meat locker
and her ovaries flow backward.
When I think of all the sad women, their nature offended,
I'm surprised the race hasn't ended.

from *WHAT WE SAY TO STRANGERS*
(Breitenbush Books, 1986)-- used with
permission of the author.

COMMENT: BARBARA DRAKE'S ESSAY ON WOMAN

Just as Alexander Pope assumed sense was inherent in his subjects, Barbara Drake works with a similar trust: What one can learn about woman inheres not merely in the poet-knower but in women themselves and in the language used to discuss them. Unlike many contemporaries, Drake places meaning beyond herself. She writes as if meaning were equally and evidently distributed among the world's objects and individuals, including the poet, but not exclusive to her. If meaning is this common, the poet can hold up anything of interest and in a playful, expectant manner find language forms filling and spilling over significantly. It is only common sense.

"When a Woman Is Sad" shows Drake's discursive skill, which can build longer poems such as "Plums" and "Lecture on the Heart." The persona seems reserved, even casual in the way many essayists are, accepting any observation for what it might reveal. Drake builds this poem with simple units. The listed alternatives signalled by "or" and grouped by the repeated "when she is sad" accumulate with emphasis. "Or" really works like "and" since the reasons given for a woman's sadness all seem plausible.

Drake uses just two sentences, both beginning with "when." While in the list the abundant alternatives seem equally weighted, the two sentences are not equal at all. The first sentence takes the whole poem except the last two lines, a rhymed couplet. The second sentence, in addition to being short and rhymed, introduces the "I" and generalizes on the poem's accumulation. The original "When a woman is sad" becomes "When I think of all these sad women." The first sentence had itself concluded with a restatement of the opening line and then with two extremely unsettling impacts: "...when she is sad,/then the temperature of her womb drops/like the air inside a meat locker/and her ovaries flow backward." The second sentence presents nothing this physical. It is a thoughtful sentence. It expresses surprise and seems motivated by the previous harsh imagery. The couplet works as a governor to the poem thus far, curbing a list that already is or could easily become overwhelming.

The final generalization may or may not help us exit the poem with understanding, but it forces us to consider the enormity of Drake's subject. For the words "nature" and "race" point beyond the poet to the existence of imperishables. Yet our experience of the poem leads us to fear that these imperishables cannot be guaranteed. In her conventional gesture to state the sense of what seems inherent in her own poem and even to reassure us perhaps, Barbara Drake actually drops the temperature on all of us.

E.M.

David Axelrod

ON FINDING A FRIEND DRUNK AT LOST LAKE

He must have lain here very still
on the forest road where he fell

among puddles and leaves stripped
by storms, and narcotic fog that swept

off the lake between hemlocks and alders
must have concealed him from the deer

who passed single file along this road
to the lakeshore, where they bowed

their faces to drink from the dark, now
graying water, for they pressed dew-claws

and the twin ovals of their hooves
right beside his face, which proves

even an unruly man can lie still enough
to forsake the troubled part of himself

that couldn't otherwise hold its tongue,
curl up in the duff, and be no one.

Howard W. Robertson

WAITING FOR THE BATS

the mauve and salmon clouds have
faded and stars begin to show up
in the broad spaces between and Hope
has fallen asleep beside me on the
backyard deck with the book about
doing business in France and Germany
open face-down on her stomach and
her hand with the wedding ring on
it holding the book in place.

the day was very hot and the night
is warm and the full moon hasn't
quite cleared the hill to the east
but sends up a bright glow from behind
it as I lounge in the deck-chair
at the midpoint between the maple
tree and the cherry tree and directly
in front of the bird feeder and gaze
up at the stand of dark Douglas fir
on the western hill in amongst whose
towering tops the swallows were swooping
an hour ago but from whose obscure
recesses hopefully soon will flutter
the several bats who once again will
dart and swerve wildly just overhead.

Elizabeth McLagan

DISCOVERING THE LIGHTHOUSE AT BLUE BAY

Inside a maze of streets
there is only this house,
one correct address and occupant.

It rides the ridge like a ship
in full sail, windows open to alder
and fir. In wind they will sing
like water breaking on rock.

A dog shambles up for a hopeful lick.
The man writes down his number
to prove he is real, hands
me a list of what I will do.

Rooms open and close to show
how things are: the messages of floors,
spilled wine, the on-off smudges
of all those comings and goings.

I erase months of neglect, invent
their lives. His lover has left
with the furniture, and he has laid
carpets the white of his love.

A painting over the dining room
table is there because the sea
is utterly calm, a smooth blue sheet
from frame to horizon.

The sky is thick with clouds
that may converge or dissipate. Boats
in the harbor cast shadows
that smear the gap from shore to shore.

A lighthouse beams as if
this is the way. If you step
inside, you will be underwater.

Monica Matthews

GLOBED FRUIT

Once again, they harvest the
Sign posts.
And as in years past, it looks like a good yield.
They hire the blackberries
As hands, with their rigid teeth
They cut through the
Sign posts
Like no other vine fruit can, except for
Boysenberries, but they are gone.
A man cowers behind the bars of
His vending-machine truck.
He fears those who harvest
Sign posts.
They are just trying to get by, I tell him.
Nevada advertises one hundred twenty-five years of vision.
"Of what," I ask.
"Everything," it replies frankly.
I wish to be in Nevada, the state of snow fall.
I wish to be anywhere but here.

Paul Keller

FOR SARAH HUBBARD

I live inside the secrets of these mountains because of you,
The blood that moves here from my bones comes from you,

But this is a sad story, Sarah, you will never hear.

Just as I will never feel the wagon's maple-bottom box
Lift to August sun above those round wood wheels
Hooped and pinned with a thin promise of iron,
Strong enough to turn all day in wet and dust
And harness sounds.

Or see your eyes, young and calm and so surprisingly blue
Watch and hold every new change of land
As the worn pine boards crack and move
Through two thousand miles of so many hard
Uncertain hills. Yes. Two thousand miles.

Until that day when you and Joseph and the boys
Clicked your tongues in the rain to convince the oxen out
Into the black rocks of that last dangerous river.

I can hear it out there now from the room where I sleep.

On the farm, inside the barn in that last Missouri winter,
Joe had shaped that wagon with big quiet hands
And pounded in the sweet pine boxes
Where you packed the flour, the cornmeal, the salt,
And wrapped and knelt the dried buffalo
Down beside that single keg of vinegar, and then,
From up in the stale smells of brown cotton drilling,
You said goodbye to everyone you ever knew. Forever.

And now, after six long months of short terrified dreams,
Deep in this sudden dark, so steep and thick and green,
You realize you have never tasted air this heavy or wet
And wonder what it will mean,
As sword fern and willow and fir point up from new earth
Toward the tallest mountain you have ever seen,
As you watch the thin ribs of your animals turn
Sideways in their black harness, the sour smell of soft reins
There against your swollen womb, where your first daughter
Waits.

Sarah, when I try to explain this to my friends,

> Who, like me, would not know where to cross,
> Or how to keep an ox alive for six days on alder,
> Or where to drive the pine wedges crosswise
> To tighten the wheels after just one day on those
> Choices that somehow brought you here,

I know they do not understand.

Yes, everything you greeted on that long, tired year,

> The monotony of so many weeks looking west
> Across plains and poison water. The constant dust,
> The terrible stink of cholera, and the bloated dead
> Steers and cows, everywhere, filling your nose
> Near the simple rock graves, that, every time,
> Shouted you into sudden silence,

I try to understand.

And just knowing that you crossed this final river
And stayed here and delivered that girl by yourself
In this same moon that moves again from Mount Hood,

Makes me look up into these hills
That held your voice and all of your stories
And I listen hard, Great Great Grandmother,
And turn sideways in my harness.

Dorothy Mack

LAST WAGON WHEEL

Near Macksburg, Oregon

Last Christmas Aunt Gid gave me an heirloom,
grey calico dress worn by a boy child
buried in sod in 1852,
on a knoll by a stream somewhere along
the Oregon Trail. On Day Twelve the Mack
log book entry reads: "Cholera. Age 2."

Aunt Gid tells me, "Poor little Landry! He
was crushed in Kansas, but no one could bear
to record it. Great-grandma Mack told me
Landry would play on the buckboard; one day
he fell into the dusty track; wheels smashed
his head before they could stay the oxen."

Near Oglala, Nebraska

Once Aunt Shala told me while driving dirt
roads past a cattle ranch with U.S. flags
waving, its yard fence spoked with a hundred
wagon wheels each painted red, white and blue:
"All those wheels were once my dad's, Sam Blackcrow.
One year they fed our whole *tiyospaye*.

"Back in the 30's when we were starving,
this guy paid a dollar each, so my dad
gathered all those broken wheels lying deep
in trail ruts for years, fixed the spokes and rims,
loaded them on the last wagon we had,
harnessed the team, took the whole lot up here."

Camp Lakota, South Dakota

Back home we find a wagon wheel hidden
in mud by the creek, rusty and warped but
whole, waterlogged tight to rims. We paint it
white, hang it between sun-bleached buffalo
skulls above the Sundance gate with red flags
of sacred colors streaming in the wind.

REVIEW: *MISS COFFIN AND MRS. BLOOD* by Sandy Diamond
(Creative Arts Book Co, Berkeley, CA, 1994)

From every human being there rises a light
that reaches straight to heaven.

Ba'al Shem Tov, Hebrew mystic

Sandy Diamond's exquisite book of poems, *MISS COFFIN AND MRS. BLOOD*, is the telling of a lifetime's journey, aptly named in its subtitle, *Poems of Art & Madness*. To read it is to be haunted and astonished by a tale "as powerful as a long novel,"--just as May Sarton says on the book's back cover. It's a one-sitting sort of experience, and it's a tricky thing for me to review it well without telling you too much, for I found this book compelling to read and challenging to write about, a pilgrimage into kinds of darkness and light.

The opening sequence traces, with elegance and passion, the early life of the speaker, the young painter:

I like to think of myself as a born artist.
The ecstasy of vermilion next to pale blue,
the brimming kindness of the moon
watching me through bare-fingered branches:
the rapture of seeing was mine from day one.

from "The Story of My Life"

The details of the speaker's life accumulate, like layers of oil, like sketchbook versions of a still life, as the reader learns that painting was against parental wishes but that "stopping was out of the question." The speaker continued to paint, and she lived in some ways we may have come to expect: the ecstasy and depression, the Beat poet lovers, the pills, being "awakened by an angel's wing," painting until dawn. There is the inevitable clash with psychoanalytic understandings, the raw honesty of the painter, color after oiled color as "The Life of the Artist" is revealed.

A long sequence from this poem ends: "I am like other people/I am like other people/I am like other people," and so it is not surprising that on the very next page you feel the painter slip beyond the familiar world into some other:

I remember speaking to a bracelet
lying in the gutter in front of my door.

...At this point, my parents came.

Could you stop reading at this point? Neither could I, for by page 11 you have come upon the title poem, those surnames that have not been invented, and the mental institution where "It is always February." The speaker is allowed to draw with a pointed pencil and sees in a fellow inmate, a catatonic, "She is me if I give up." Most of all, the painter is aware of the fallible tactics of the staff: "They're trying to make me cry/without knowing how to make it stop." She doesn't "budge," and so, is moved on to Innsbruck:

> I remember the paper shoes
> I remember the hard table, the straps...
>
> What I can't remember is Innsbruck.

Much more follows what she can't remember: "The Rug When I Broke" and thorazine, and talking to your body, "Knit, knit dear bones," and a bus stop and true healers, a Libra child, "a boy whom stray cats followed home," and a burning house and thoughts on smoking, until that "New York Girl" is:

> Living in the country, now, my thoughts
> hold hands like fences, hemming in high grass.

"Is anyone left from the days we invented painting," the country woman asks. Does anyone "Remember the movies on Broadway," or "the fire at the Modern when the big *Waterlilies* burned"? She does-- and she also remembers:

> the girl that I was
> stands at her easel, painting the first good
> canvas of her life.
>
> If I went back, would I see her
> suddenly on a side street, paint
> on her thin black coat,
> battered portfolio under one arm,
> braids unwinding in the wind...

In the vermilion of memory and in the writing of this book, Sandy Diamond shapes and shares her life as an artist. Her story arrives unexpectedly-- vibrant, sorrowful, angry-- and as a light, a light reaching straight toward the pale blue heavens.

A.S.

REVIEW: *FROM HERE WE SPEAK/AN ANTHOLOGY OF OREGON POETRY*, Volume 4 of The Oregon Literature Series, edited by Ingrid Wendt and Primus St. John (Oregon State University Press, 1993)

Familiar poets, many of whom have appeared in the pages of *FIREWEED,* and less familiar ones, nearly 200 in all, fill a new, eagerly awaited and generally satisfying anthology of Oregon poetry called *FROM HERE WE SPEAK.*

The poems bid us listen, yet we do well to take a few minutes to read the introductions and brief biographical notes accompanying each poet because this anthology has a specific goal. As Volume 4 in the Oregon Literature Series (a project of the Oregon Council of Teachers of English), this collection is designed for use in public schools. As a text it shines; only the extensive bibliography and indexes reveal its academic nature. That the rest of us can glean immense enjoyment from this harvest is a fringe benefit.

Poets Ingrid Wendt and Primus St. John, who edited this volume, were constrained in their search for the best Oregon poetry by guidelines set for the entire series. The poets are Oregonians by birth or by choice, with geographical and multicultural diversity emphasized. The poems, many about Oregon and most previously published, date from the Native American era of the 1800's and run to 1991, in a variety of styles. Serious issues score higher than simple scenery. Wendt's share of the book moves chronologically through Oregon's early years, and St. John's share, poets born after 1930, is presented in alphabetical order. There is some overlap but mostly this system works.

The first part includes Native American songs, stories and tribal lyrics, translated and versified, from before and after the coming of the white man. "A Kalapuya Prophecy" relates: "In the old time, .../a Kalapuya man lay down in an alder-grove/and dreamed his farthest dream..../ "This earth beneath us was all black in my dream!"/No man could say what it meant,/...But then the white men came,/...and we saw them plow up the ground, /...and we knew we would enter their dream/of the earth plowed black forever."

The nineteenth-century pioneers looked at the territory differently. Eulogies encouraged new arrivals and praised the fertile soil and grand scenery in verses often patterned on hymns. But already poets tackled injustice. Margaret Jewett Bailey's "We Call Them Savage" and Robert Starkey's "A Specimen" present the plight of the natives. Women struggled for their own equality, too. An anonymous poem from the *NEW NORTHWEST*, a literary journal of women's suffrage, points out the double standard: "...So 'drunk for a week' is a young man's joke,/And sick for a day is a sin;/The woman who faints is sent out to the dogs,/While the fellow who drinks is kept in."

Writing at the turn of the century, the poets in Part 3 make the transition to early modernists. Many, such as Frances Holmstrom, reflect an increasing awareness of the environment. From logging camps she saw sheared mountains huddled naked, and "The High Lead Tree," a fir rigged to winch the logs around it. "I am a Judas... My brothers' trunks upon the hillside lie,/And, I, who live, envy the ones who die,/For I am slave...." She describes a different sacrifice in "Values." "Within me somewhere, lies a poem, dead./I glimpsed it; it was lovely where it lay./Its soul of light, its flesh of words unsaid,/Were more than beauty, they were ecstacy...." Instead of writing, she sewed a gingham shirt for her little boy. "He is much more than merely words are, so/Because of him I let the poem go...."

Better-known poets from that period include Hazel Hall, John Reed, and Ethel Romig Fuller, who was Oregon's Poet Laureate before William Stafford, to whom this volume is dedicated. Stafford appears among the Early Modernists, with Ursula K. Le Guin, Gary Snyder, Madeline DeFrees, and Mary Barnard, who was recently honored at the Portland Poetry Festival. It's odd to encounter these lively spirits before the "contemporary" section, as if they came from another time.

World War II displaced Japanese-Americans to internment camps and conscientious objectors to public service. One of the latter, Glen Coffield, found beauty "Crossing Hawthorne Bridge:" "Even the gray battleship, that was moored along/The West dike, for the moment, seemed to belong;/And all things, good and bad, were mingled/In the idea of beauty...." Shizue Iwatsuki experienced the war differently "At Tule Lake Camp": "White dawn moonlight,/On the road a frozen rime of snow./Muffled footsteps/ Echo sadness."

The final section gives more than half the book to the last 30 years, St. John explains that he sought poems with feeling, "a spectrum of delight, anger, sadness, fear, confusion,...wit...wonder, and love...." The editors' tastes show in their own poems. Wendt in "Mushroom Picking, I Talk with a Bear" finds chanterelles and insights among the fir needles, and "behind me, a bear/too real to be a metaphor,/ somewhere ahead, letter/I didn't yet know I would write." In "Pearle's Poem," St. John draws on his African-American heritage. "In front of her/Is her biblical bondage/Of yams, bread-fruit,/ Mangoes and pears,/Each stacked like a separate prayer,/A redeeming angel,/...Women like her/Do not cry or laugh in public...."

These poet-editors have blazed a splendid trail through the history of Oregon poetry. In addition to the expected names there are some wonderful surprises and few disappointments (more of omission than commission). It's a rich sampling of Oregon's best.

Sara Jameson

TESTIMONY

"Any given word is a bundle, and meaning sticks out of it in various directions, not aspiring towards any single official point. In pronouncing the word 'sun,' we are, as it were, undertaking an enormous journey to which we are so accustomed that we travel in our sleep. What distinguishes poetry from automatic sleep is that it rouses us and shakes us into wakefulness in the middle of a word. Then it turns out that the word is much longer than we thought, and we remember that to speak means to be forever on the road."

-- Osip Mandelstam,
from "Conversations about Dante"

Ever since reading Mandelstam's "Conversations about Dante" a few years ago, I have taken this work as a wellspring of joyful understanding about the nature of poetry. The work, if viewed from a distance, would probably look like a Fourth of July fireworks display, so brimful it is with brilliant, poetic prose about poetry. I think it is extraordinarily important for us poets to have some sort of *view* about this stuff that we are diving around in like porpoises, burrowing through like gophers, or tossing up and letting it come back down and hit us on the head (to quote Scrooge McDuck). Thus I would like to share-- nay, to impose ruthlessly upon you-- a few of the ideas which came to me in the afterglow of another reading of Mandelstam's beautiful essay.

* * *

Is 'Poetry' a different language, like Greek or Spanish is to English? Do you have to learn it, or does it come naturally to everyone? Is making poetry sort of like making love-- or cooking, or singing, or bringing up kids-- everybody knows how to do it, but to do it *really well* might require a bit of education? In writing poetry, I don't just want to jump on top of a curlicue that the language is doing already; I want to make something new. So often one writes a neat line, even a beautiful one, and sits back on one's heels and says, "Oh, I did that!" No, you did not. You were in the right place when it happened. Push enough words into enough piles and they will keel over into houses. That's how language works, bless its heart.

No, I don't want just to ride avalanches-- even if I am the one precipitating them-- I'd rather sit in a flat field and dig with my bare hands. Rocks.

* * *

"The force of a Dantean simile, strange as it may seem, operates in direct proportion to our ability to do without it. It is never dictated by some beggarly logical necessity."

--Mandelstam

The difference between a simile and a metaphor is like the difference between looking at a film and having a dream. In a film

you always remain in your own world; in a dream you are connected to this other world which you are viewing, because it is part of who you are. When Plato wrote the allegory of the cave, he left the realm of simile and entered metaphor. The power of his story does not allow us simply to say, "Yes, our life is very like that of these folks living in the shadows made by the fire on the wall."

Instead something hits us between the eyes; a deeper recognition occurs, an archetypal memory perhaps. At any rate we are stunned to recognize ourselves in some way as *actually there*. Reality does a flip; the contingencies close in, and like particles in a cloud chamber, they ascend through the virtual and become, temporarily, as real as anything ever is.

Our eyes are forcibly drawn to that dimension, the crack between the worlds where possible becomes actual, and vice versa. We are privy to the terrifying and exalting realization that Being is a much larger place than we had ever imagined. We dissolve, blessedly, in this understanding, and return to our normal lives having been touched -- burned even-- by metaphor.

* * *

"The beginning of Canto X of the *Inferno*. Dante urges us into the inner blindness of the compositional clot. All our efforts are directed toward the struggle against the density and darkness of the place. Illuminated shapes cut through it like teeth."
--Mandelstam

Have we ever learned anything, we humans? The stars, every single night, send out messages about the nature of the universe. And surely through the ages many people have received-- from these stars, from the earth, from one another, from their own blood cells-- original insights about how things really are. Have these messages *accumulated* anywhere?

And, yes, they have. We, as humans, do learn and pass understanding along outside of history, outside of language even; yes, we do *know* something. We are not all, all just repeating endlessly the same pattern, learning small truths over and over. We pass The Knowledge along-- mostly silently. Something is building. And poetry is the closest we ever get to saying it. Read poetry and you will get a hint of what humans have found out about this mysterious universe somebody dumped us off into a few million years ago.

Anita T. Sullivan

EDITORS' NOTES

AUTUMNAL EQUINOX: On September 24, a beautiful early fall day, some 26 poets and friends gathered at Bellfountain Park south of Corvallis for our annual Potluck and Reading. People came from Salem, Corvallis, Eugene, and nearby communities to celebrate what has become a very pleasant fall harvest of poems. Thanks to all who came. Thanks to all who were there in spirit as well! The following poets read:

Howard Robertson
Gary Lark
Barbara Drake
Ken Zimmerman
Virginia Corrie-Cozart
Erik Muller
Stephanie Van Horn
Donna Henderson
C. A. Gilbert
Quinton Hallett
David Laing
Jane Bailey
Lois Rosen
Charles Goodrich
Martha Gatchell

APOLOGIES: To Tom Crawford for misprinting the title of his poem "GUAN YEN" in the Table of Contents. To David Johnson for misprinting the word "seep" in his poem in our last issue. This is how the poem should have read:

BAD NEWS IN LATE APRIL
Upon hearing that Sari
has taken a turn for the worse

The years grow heavier
saturated with the troubling seep
of anticipated tragedies.
Angels I have known
are making it official,
losing their breakfast
and then their breath.
The agreed-upon fantasy
that we will all live forever
sublimely, together
is attenuated
by this wearisome pace:
one gone
two gone
three gone
four

STRICTLY IMPORTANT BUSINESS: Your label this month is the product of a label-making program that should make updating subscriptions easier for us at *FIREWEED*.

Please resubscribe if the renewal date on the label is Oct. 1994 or earlier. If it's earlier, we have been carrying you until this issue. As we do not have staff or extra postage funds to send out renewal notices, we ask you to please send us a check soon.

This is an anxious moment every year for the editors, since so many *FIREWEED* readers-- almost half-- renew in October (way back in October 1989 these folks originally subscribed to an infant magazine now five years old!). Will readers renew? Or not?

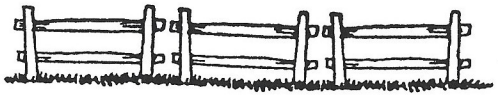
You may have noticed that *FIREWEED* is mailed bulk rate, saving us more than fifty cents postage on each copy. The hitch in this arrangement is that we need to keep subscriptions at a figure over 200, in order to qualify for the special rate.

So renewals are essential to the magazine. A measure of our success as a small mag is that we are still running in the black. This is due to the consistency of our readers' support through resubscription. We are definitely a grass roots effort. All labor is donated.

Please renew when your time comes! Also, please use the enclosed subscription form to sign up another reader who can enjoy with all of us the poetry being written in western Oregon. Thanks for your support thus far! And remember, *FIREWEED* is the perfect Christmas gift!

LATE NEWS: On October 11, Literary Arts, Inc. presented the 1994 Oregon Book Awards at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts. Nominees for the Hazel Hall Award for Poetry were Henry Carlile, *RAIN*; Tom Crawford, *LAUDS;* Jane Glazer, *SOME TRICK OF LIGHT;* Doug Marx, *SUFFICIENCY;* Steven Sher, *TRAVELER'S ADVISORY*; and Floyd Skloot, *POPPIES*. The award was given to Tom Crawford, whose *LAUDS* we reviewed in our last issue.

It is a tradition of this magazine to review as many of the nominated books each year as time and space allow. We have reviewed, to date, the Crawford and Glazer volumes and will present the other volumes in upcoming issues.



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

+* DAVID AXELROD, La Grande, has recent or forthcoming work in *CHIRON REVIEW, CRAB CREEK REVIEW, LEFT BANK, GREEN MOUNTAINS REVIEW*. His most recent book is *THE KINGDOM AT HAND.*

* SANDY DIAMOND, Grande Ronde, is a calligraphic artist as well as a poet. She has exhibited widely on the West Coast. Her first book of poems, *MISS COFFIN AND MRS. BLOOD,* which features her calligraphy also, was published earlier this year. Sandy is currently touring the Northwest, reading from her work.

+ BARBARA DRAKE, Yamhill, teaches writing and literature at Linfield College. Her poems in this issue are part of a set of meditations on a personal lexicon.

WILMA M. ERWIN, Portland, is a moving force in the Oregon State Poetry Association. Her special interest is in haiku, and she has been published abroad in this genre. She is featured writer in the 1994 *POINTED CIRCLE*, PCC-Cascades literary magazine.

JENNY FOWLER, Corvallis, is a sophomore at Oregon State University. In addition to writing, she travels, and she loves to quilt.

* SARA JAMESON, Grants Pass, is a free-lance critic whose book reviews have appeared in *THE BLOOMSBURY REVIEW, WRITERS' NORTHWEST,* and *SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE,* among others. Her poetry has appeared in *KSOR GUIDE TO THE ARTS* and *WEST WIND REVIEW.*

+ DAVID JOHNSON, Portland, recently read in the Lane Literary Guild's Windfall Reading Series in Eugene. A free-lancer, he pays the bills "hustling stuff around the region."

PAUL KELLER, Rhododendron, studied journalism and poetry at the University of Oregon in the early seventies.

* DOROTHY MACK, Corvallis, teaches Native American literature at Linn-Benton Community College and helps edit *CALYX*. Her publications include fiction, essays, and poetry in a range of journals, including *ZYZZYVA, WRITER'S EXCHANGE,* and *EUTERPE.*

* MONICA MATTHEWS, Salem, lives with her cats, chickens, ducks and lizard.

* ELIZABETH MCLAGAN, Portland, has a 1989 chapbook from Howlet Press, *THE RIVER SINGS LIKE ROCK*. Recently *ALASKA QUARTERLY REVIEW, MISSISSIPPI MUD,* and *PORTLAND REVIEW* have taken her work.

+* VERLENA ORR, Portland, is an Idaho farmer's daughter, who, though an urban dweller, is a steward of pasture and timber.

* ROBERT E. REYNOLDS, Portland, a physicist at Reed College, has been published by *WEST COAST REVIEW* and *KRISHANU*.

HOWARD W. ROBERTSON, Eugene, is past president of the Lane Literary Guild. He has a book of poems out from Asahta Press. Recently he read at Bumbershoot.

LOIS ROSEN, Salem, teaches ESL at Chemeketa Community College. Her poems in this issue are part of a series on Alzheimer's Disease. She worked this past summer with Chris Howell at the Linfield College week-long writing workshop.

ANITA T. SULLIVAN, Corvallis, is working on a lyrical travel book about Greece that mixes prose and poetry, philosophy and observation. She is a contributor of personal essays to National Public Radio.

* first appearance in *FIREWEED*
+ represented in *FROM HERE WE SPEAK*