

FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon



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Michael Robins

FORECAST

The calling is felt
By instinct. Three days
Of Spring in January.
The bee's wings
Patient,
Beneath the closed rhododendron.

Dianne Williams Stepp

POETRY TODAY

*Czeslaw Milosz and Robert Hass being interviewed
by Jim Lehrer on the death of Joseph Brodsky,
January 29, 1996.*

They said poetry is not dead.
Well, we knew it wasn't. It's
thriving. A cottage industry kept
alive by people like you and me.
Fields we till, seed, fertilize, even
leave fallow. A patchwork
of blazing yellows, cerise, crimson,
even browns so soft you want to brush
them with your lips. We are converting
parking lots, just like I always knew
we would, to pastures for the mind.
Crushing the cement to make paths
that in winter become silver threads.
Even men who carry cushions
to football games and sit in the cold
with mittened hands until their noses
turn blue can be pressed to hear poems
read by their wives.

Dianne Williams Stepp

THE ARC OF THE MORAL UNIVERSE

That tends toward justice is so long
it has bent over whole cities and towns
and villages, over gas chambers, lime pits,
mine fields, over isolated rooms in the sub-
basements of prisons emblazoned
by the interrogator's light, his serrated tools.
It has bent over the grocery sack of human ears
like "halves of dried peaches" the colonel
dumped on the table in front of the startled
eyes of the poet.* Over machetes, huts and hooches,
over betrayed hospitals, bombs, poison gas.
Children with bloated bellies whose faces
are jeweled with flies. Over the sniper who fires
at the woman who sells flowers, over
white-hooded men with scissored eyes. It has bent
over the woman in the dark who gathered
the sacred scrolls from where they hung in the rain
on the sacked walls of the temple, rolled them
in linen, hid them in her attic. It has bent over twelve
judges in black robes. It continues to bend
from its source in the shattered stars.

*The arc of the moral universe is long and it tends toward
justice. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*Carolyn Forché: *The Colonel*

Dan Raphael

I HEAR DUCKS

i hear ducks

long gone south
as rain never follows the same path but
seen in another scale is so many ounces per yard
soaking sweating converting
making gaps in the soil/skin
punching larvae's time clocks and survival systems

A holy man

can be in the rain
going nowhere
brimming with the information
all the tastes in one drop
good as it lasts
an instant & forever

where has this been

broken from the air
with a 93 million mile hammer
chlorophyll webs incant to decant

as if our blood

also clocking
to change with the seasons
each latitude its own blood mix

the dna grid reacting to geo-magnetic here
from loco to logo

crazy without a place as if names were where
maps distorted to have corners
human scale a hand over hand rendering

As a certain tilt of the earth

calls the birds back
wings just a way of making fire,
of putting space behind them

as these dance steps
defined by leg, gland, moonset, cellclocks,
energy gasming in eye walls

this complex choreography
simple as a 2-step, a 3-chord blues
makes all possible:

sprout of time
rout of death
welcoming the shed of
this skin-mind fraught with hurries

to get to that freedom
home tilting toward us
earth sprouting for our arrival



REVIEW: A WINTER'S HARVEST—WAYS OF BEING HERE

If, as Gary Snyder says, "Poetry helps us be where we are," then Dan Raphael's prodigious effort with the 26 books of 26 pages by 26 writers series is a testimony to our possible ways. *Fireweed* has previously reviewed from this series, but while the rains and dark days are upon us, we need the poems' situated help.

Diane Averill's *Turtle Sky* (26 Books, 1995) begins in celebration, a reading of the erotic landscape at Beacon Rock, Green Creek, Triple Falls, Monteverde, the Butterfly Garden. As the poet concludes in "Beautiful Obstacles,"

Most talk, after all,
is no more than waterfall sound
and other beautiful obstacles.

A series of poems from a Costa Rican tour focuses on several kinds of dreams, ways of speaking: "Sand and sadness move by color." Implicit in many of the poems is the notion of earth-as-woman, landscape-as-home:

Outside
clouds marble the evergreen
and the dark blue sky—
the shell that lets you be
at home wherever you go.

By contrast, Jim Shugrue's *Small Things Screaming* (26 Books, 1995) maps an unruly and surprising neighborhood where "the home we dream of is never the one we return to." Using "whatever liturgy is close to hand," the poet recounts blackbirds in the laurel hedge, a May Day hangover and robin, conversations with a contemplative ouzel, and a tourist wearing "Nueva York silk screened on a tee shirt." Shugrue also sits at a desk in an empty house, celebrates T. Monk's birthday, and lets us know that Here can also be the tame world which "breaks our spines like matchsticks" when "the night is an ache."

A beautifully sustained sequence, "Floodplain" concludes this volume. In its six poems the writer explores a place he loves and needs to know, not about, but directly, "to ask this place to enter and contain me, to hold me closer to its turning." In the floodplain, every moment demands a rightness, every perfection uses itself up, and "the world needs every voice, all our cooperation."

A Whitmanesque version of Here is explored in *Salmon Song* (26 Books, 1995) by Walt Curtis. With his fishy stories and sex-crazed poems about the Northwest woods, revisions of the Bible, "Pheromones in the Front Seat" and "Horses in the Rain," Curtis lives and writes by the motto *Homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto*. From "Adam":

O electric Adam—
orgasmic—your first tenuous
affair founded the race.
To love was a revolutionary act
in the beginning!

Space Before A: (26 Books, 1996) by Barbara Drake and photographer Jane Esmonde is a dialectic of poems and photographs—poetics A to Zed on such themes as democracy, mercy and order. The Here of Drake's volume is meditation on the shadows and trails left by words and objects: Fortune's pale green envelope, rage's red flower, and frosted window's virginal light. Here's what the poet does with "Latitude":

Bamboo curtain slats flutter
like piano keys
as far out on the sand
a woman whirls and dances.

And "Unlikely":

Old dime turned up in the garden.
Remember the blimp? It sailed over
in summer 1943 at Cannon beach.
I was eating orange sherbet
with a wooden spoon
from a paper cup.

The *Wet Way Home* (26 Books, 1996) of David Lloyd Whited is bounded by Quartermaster Drive and the Tuesday after Labor Day, by the corner of "Stares and Whispers" and the certitude that "This darkness is a debt." Wherever your darkness may have taken you, Whited has been there, too, and his poems on rain, on bones and spirit graves, on living on unemployment with winter simmering on the back burner, remind you of towns and times passed-through, almost forgotten. They reveal the poet "Dancing in the Rags of an Old Remorse":

the phlegm coughed up from his heart
when the sad moon lays in the clam stranded bay.
trailing our hands in the wake. marking the sunsets
the new dawns on the glint of water's surface.
the heron frozen statue, grey blue, at the creek's
mouth as the tide is taken & the stone of sun
rolls on. The warm must of Chinook wind,
the whoop whoop whit of owls. some smoke; some
ash.

Whited's poems reveal what we need to know in the darkness
of Here, "awaiting the bone white angels."

Lisa Steinman's *Ordinary Songs* (26 Books, 1996) begins in
the recognition and tides of the everyday, in reading at home
or a student counting alpine plants, in listening to boardwalk
conversations, in the weather, old houses, or postcards from
an elderly uncle. The poems begin quietly, but continue with
shifts and surprises. As in "Touring the Red Zone":

We ride nightmares into the new
month; June
opens and opens. Our
maps don't tell us what's in store:
we don't expect disaster
here, where lakes cut into evergreens. We
ease into the
countryside against all the signs.

More examples of the fissured ordinary: "The feeder outside
your kitchen window has lost its guests," and "I have given
this day all my good will; it looks sullen and retires early," and
"It bothers me that we are so easily relocated." This poet
mines for the pause, the ambivalence, the unspoken
question, the answer unrehearsed ("We all need some
Esperanto we don't have"), and explores the Here in the there,
"Wild birds call in the first dawn light. Praise is in order."

A wise winter reader will enjoy these titles gathered in 26
Books, the distinctive voices of these poets saying, "Here.
Now."

A.S.

Jeff Knorr

IN THE REFLECTION OF A CLEAR-CUT

Standing at the edge of the river
we watch trees fall, wondering
as the sky spills out to the horizon
how we will find our way
out of the woods.

The doe knows, she has left.
The hawk, puffed against
the damp morning,
too has flown. They know.

We watch, scared for ourselves,
wondering what's next,
and sink into the sand
on the bank of the slow, smooth river.

Helen Ronan

this long desert road—
down into the dry lake bed's
receding shimmer

Stacie Smith

GRAY'S CREEK

I

Gray's Creek
still runs full
in late summer.

Sometimes my mind
is so full of thought,
I forget to hear.

Listen: cicadas
in high branches,
water flowing downhill
colliding gently with stone.

II

A poem writes itself
outside my door:
Grasses heavy with seed.

I cannot speak.
Mind's eye steals across the page,
seeking a single clue.

Who am I?
A bandit? A sleuth?
A victim of time in space?

I may never know.
Golden seed outside my door,
ripening, ready to fall.

III

I live beside water now.
The creek roars downhill
all day, all night, in winter.
Maybe, after many years of listening,
I will have something to say.

IV

It's raining hard.
I sit with my candle
while rumors of flood
begin to rise
and I wonder—
what will I leave
if I have to go—
this bowl? Those books?
That golden chain?

It rains and rains.
The creek outside my door
is wild and high
and I wonder—
what will I take
when I have to go—
those boots, this drum,
this pen, that empty page?
These bare necessities,
this breath, this flame?



Todd McNamee

ADOPTION OF THE PRODIGAL

Paul howls all the way there. "I don't want to see a judge. I don't want to go to prison." "Hush," his mother tells him. "This is a good thing." But all he sees is Perry Mason reruns, knows he's going somewhere wrong. Alex punches him in the arm. "Stop it," he says. "Don't be a baby." In the front seat is Dad. The new Dad driving and smoking cigarettes. The other long gone to Oklahoma.

They meet in a small room, books cover every wall like insulation. The judge is a plump woman with dark hair and thick glasses. Paul senses something has crossed over. Years later he'll understand Dad adopted him. Know about the papers giving him family.

Todd McNamee

THE NEW BOYS

They cross the farmland where Daddy comes from. Paul spots the boys not seen before. There is

resemblance there to Daddy. A mark from his former life, the connections are not clear. These boys

with gangly hair seem different. The car pulls up in the drive. Paul stares out the

window, pokes at Alex. "Where are the neighbors?" Daddy laughs. There are none. The new boys

emerge. The old wife waits behind glass and Paul wonders if she'll come out and

speak. German shepherds bark at the sides of the car. They know a stranger

when they see one. There are horses out in the field watching. The boys climb in

the back, now they are four. Disconnected hearts joined in a way not explained.

There is emphasis on the word "brother" though they can't believe it. The car drives

away and heads for suburbs, leaving dogs and horses and the woman still standing behind glass.

Kelly Rudd

A ROOF READY

for Brian

There have been summers better spent
than ours cleaning that steep and filthy roof,
burnt and bare chests spattered
with shingle grime,
balancing one another
on different ends
of an old circus ladder.

Some days were nothing but clogged gutters,
others long bouts of mistrust—
the promise gravity
and a breakneck perch.

The day the ladder slipped I caught you,
but the story you tell
is how I nearly didn't.
Sliding down, you say
you saw me hesitate—
quick flailing,
the plea of desperate curses—
I caught you
in time.

Next day we were at it again,
knuckles swollen
from the rattling power washer,
eyes sunk from drinking,
the red sun at quitting time.

You spent evenings with the dumb printmaker,
her artistic statement read:
"My work stands for purity and persistence,
resisting decay, impermanence
and the erosion of context..."

Well,
there was a better artistic statement that summer:
a celebration of honesty,
a roof ready for doomsday
or sunshine, sealed,
with only a few blotches.
Frame your tool belt
and hang it on a big white wall.

In the story you should learn to love
I catch you.
We worry only that
the shingle sealant is poison,
and, if we're lucky,
the sun is still high to dry things
when we hose the muck off.



Ken Zimmerman

CARPENTER ANTS

This old house has already stood longer than it should:
second-hand at its start, built from old-growth fir felled
and milled for a barn in Goshen, then the barn torn down,
the wood salvaged and dragged here, re-cut
and hammered together again. And though I fend off
the rain with black tar and plastic, though
I tack back shifted roof shakes and replace
the rotted porch boards, I know it must someday fall.
Every night I see carpenter ants on the kitchen floor.
They come craving sweetness and salt, carrying off
the crumbs I've left to sweep up in the morning.
They take only what they need. That's not why
I kill them. But they tunnel into the floor,
boring through joists and beams. They work on wood
like rust does on metal. I can hear the steady grinding
all night long. There must be something like them
in our blood. Past forty the body starts to sag, timbers
shift and separate, earth piles up around the foundation.
Though I crush every one I see, there are more.
There is no going backward, no winning this war.
Finches nest in one hollowed-out wall. The chicks
chitter and beg, fluttering half-formed wings.
My cat caught their mother. I woke up to feathers
scattered across the floor. The male bird brings worms
through the knothole entry, working hard all day.
He scolds from a branch above the compost pile,
where worms are thickest, the cat skulking nearby.
Carpenter ants burrow into wood like worms
turning the soil. Everywhere I turn, decay
breeds abundance; life thrives on rotteness
and death. I'm telling you the truth.
This old house will fall, be bulldozed into a pile,
burned, plowed under, the ashes feeding new trees.
Life loves death. I must say it again. Life loves death!
For my old age, though, I will build with stone.

James Wood

ASTONISHED BY DEATH

Maybe I was crazy when my father died. I watched a bluejay
swoop, indelibly, originally. It laughed over his clipped grave.

And, for awhile, I thought a wryness bled back from
that grave:
the south wind snapped flagging my trouser leg; decaying,

Heaven was a rain-devoured log out in the yard. But none
could say
what I knew then. It made the long days bloom incredibly.

GUEST POEM

Madeline DeFrees

THE WAY TO THE PARKING LOT

leads past the sibyl of the tennis court.
They have managed to put her away with
the press and the racquet. Even so, her
double-edged breath
curls the remarkable air, and we know
who is burning the issues is more than
a crazy old woman.

The tennis court sibyl
is tired of keeping score, of backhand
strokes, intermediate doubles. Believes
the small truth in the loudest
voice to an oracle
lies in the system for amplification.
She wants a clean-air
act to protect her interests.

That takes
matching money. She thinks of teaming up
with the sibyl of the cage,
a regular geyser, the same whose claws
were lately removed by court
order, the day they de-fanged her. She
sits on her three-legged
stool spinning woolly

strands into a yarn
the gods are pleased to defend
when color persuades, knitting the dyed
balls into garments the world
puts on like air her breath engages. This
morning all over the lot
as in days gone by, she hangs in there
a cloudy medium.

from *Possible Sibyls*
(Lynx House Press, 1991)

COMMENT: A SPECIALTY OF MADELINE DEFREES

Ask any poet "What is the most common advice in writing workshops?" and the answer would probably be "Avoid clichés." Yet when I realized much of my delight in the poetry of Madeline DeFrees came from her ability to bring new life to stock phrases by recasting them (often in surprising contexts), my pleasure in reading her poetry deepened. "That's my specialty," she revealed when I mentioned my enjoyment of her reanimated clichés.

Here, from "The Way to the Parking Lot," are a handful: "burning the issues," "keeping score," "She wants a clean-air/act to protect her interests," "matching money," "puts on" (echoing "put-on"), and "hangs in there." These are commonplace phrases so stock I would doubt a poet could lift them into a line and make them interesting. Yet she manages it because of the context and the character it serves to reveal, here "the sibyl of the tennis court," who is "more than/a crazy old woman." This sibyl is a survivor, one who "hangs in there," and who has been "keeping score," but who is tired of it, and knows the treachery life can deal ("backhand strokes").

Yet she spins her wool "into a yarn/the gods are pleased to defend." In short this sibyl is an artist whose skill includes engaging ordinary speech so its multiple meanings reveal the richness and complexity of negotiating "The Way to the Parking Lot." That parking lot in the context of the book's themes is the grave, on one plane, so the pleasure partially derives from gallows humor, as well as the poet's skill in spinning poems that resonate on several levels.

Roger Weaver

Wilma Erwin

HAIKU

driving into dusk—
suddenly, the power line
black with birds

* *

look
all of the birds in the tree
are facing the sun

(reprinted from the January 1991 issue)

G.L. Morrison

DANDELION REQUIEM

Bury me in fields of dandelions
whose coward heads cry "nothing dies"
and prove perennially there are some things
you can neither kill or understand.
Lay me under the thick network of roots
whose brief yellow blots the solemn
grass. If convention or politeness slows you
when I can no longer hurry to stop them
from laying me between marble
neighbors in this final condominium,
then blow me one white wish
when the mourners have gone.
Dandelions will follow.



Robert Hill Long

SUN HAT

These clarifying days of June
after the slate of rain that was valley winter
has gone home into the deeper slates of the Pacific
and the sky from dawn
until dawn is one god-sized blue eye,
my job wakes me, puts on walking shoes
and reminds me to take along my sun hat.

I like a wide-brim, open-mesh raffia
good for working the garden all day
and not getting red necked,
although gardening's an evening luxury
not my job:

my job is walking up and down on the earth,
one of the fallen angels, charged
with reporting on a very small quadrant.
I like what the hat does on the ground
with my shadow,
the way it becomes a nimbus of shade
eaten through by moth bites of light
above my body
foreshortened like a della Francesca resurrection,
one of the barrel-chested soldiers
trawled up in the risen Christ's gathering gesture—
somewhat lazy and devilish,
somewhat of the wrong party.

My report to Big Blue Eye
confirms the condition of the magenta clover heads,
accounts for the cooing emitted
from the specialized day care at this end of town—
which means the little syndromes and mistakes
of genetics are happy
on the monkey bars for now—
and sums up the local human cicada activity
of brushcutters, blowers,
emergent sounds we make mowing and tilling
what was left for months
to the gray moths of rain,
cleaning out a space to remember
we're not winged creatures.

Lord Blue, the blackberries
need no one's help to spread their exuberant
soon-to-be-sweet roadside trash everywhere,
and the self-heal's ruby candles
and the pea vines and the vetch vines
lift their flames perpetual as June
below the cherries—
advertising as loudly as their silence permits—
to flocks of grosbeaks and juncos.
Lord, you didn't even buy my hat
and the sun provides a halo as ordinary courtesy,
but I make my daily report anyway:
as your proxy I blessed the man loading
a rusted-out Corvair on a trailer
and the woman spraying ridiculous gold leaf
on her wicker lawn chairs,
I blessed cats asleep on car hoods in the shade
and cats sprawled in driveways,
treating their old spines to heat,
juniper berries, Lord, and squat Mugho pines,
I blessed their aroma, acrid and tonic,
as well as two masons singing in a trench
and one hatless carpenter banging nails home,
and now if you don't mind
I'm going in to get a very tall glass of mint water,
going to take off my sandals
and yes, my hat
and put my legs up
until afternoon, when I promise
to resume transmitting.

POSSESSIONS

- i.
The technician works quickly,
taps the elbow's inner crook,
waits for blue roads
to emerge. I turn my head
away from the needle.
Two vials are filled with
thick blood. A cotton ball
is taped across the point
of entry.
- ii.
*His finger slips in under the skin.
Blood is drawn, bright, red, and clean.
Small hands
ball up into fists.*
- iii.
My father is in my cells.
I feel him in my blood—
my skin merely holds part
of *me* and fragments of *him*
together, swirling like unwilling
dance partners.
- iv.
I was on the Pill so I knew I was safe
in the hands of lovers. They were all
of me, they were all I knew. I could make them
want me—thrill my mixed blood.
- v.
The test results will be back
in two weeks. I watch my present
lover move around the kitchen.
He pours a cup of coffee,
adds milk. The white billows
into the dark, spin into a single color
under a spoon.

- vi.
My blood isn't red, but deeper.
My red, his blue stirred together
with every beat. Sometimes
it is the color of pus, infection,
and some days it's as clear
as water, cool and full of nothing.

- vii.
The woman across the desk
tells me the test is negative,
but to come back in a year.
I leave the clinic, step
over puddles laced with oil,
the small lakes of rain
reflect the sky, interrupted
by the bluest veins.



Amy Klauke Minato

EROTICS

As I lay beside you, my arm brushing
your arm, I imagine
how the feathery tongue of the sapsucker curls
into a crevice in the grand fir.

And when my breasts pool
against your back, I remember,
how the soft toe pads of the tree frog
meld it to cedar bark.

And just when you roll toward me,
a wave at sea skids bottom and its tip
releases into foam. And as I surely melt, somewhere
a nictitating membrane slides
over a pond turtle's eye as it slips
underwater making the world now blurred and bluegreen,
merged and magnified, crawfish,
lily stalk, eel dart,
rippled, polished, wet.

Amy Klauke Minato

SPRING POEM

The rain
tumbles
on the roof.
The train
rumbles
on its hooves
the horse
moves
the wind
rustles
the trees
sway
in its wake
the earth soaks
in the rain.

REVIEW: A Table for Four

Some of us were sitting at a table, a round one, and the word "kitty-cornered" was spoken. Or is it "catty-cornered," we pondered. It seems the word derives from "quatre" and was used to denote four playing at dice. So there are players to your left and right, but the one opposite on the diagonal is "cater-cornered" from you. There is latitude in these matters!

In poetry writing or reading the choice is immense. There are poets to the right and left of us and those catty-cornered. So it is with these four poets whose new books place them around a table: three self-published, one published by a Portland-based series; two of them writing within a mainstream rhetoric, two of them working, respectively, with the traditions of formal verse and of the 1950's avant-garde. They make an interesting group, ranged elbow-to-elbow or opposed.

La Mancha (Paylow Press, 1996) is the title of John J. McDonald's 28-page chapbook. It is Spanish for stain or spot. The short poems fit one to a page, and as the book's title is oblique, so are most of the poem titles. Titles such as "documentary," "Brief," "Darkness," "Habit," "Distant" point toward the poems as titles point toward abstract sculptures or the briefest etudes. There's latitude in how readers might decide how title and poem fit. Since I love short poems, especially those that have the air of finality of welded steel, I like many of McDonald's. They are fresh the way Creeley's poems are fresh: light on everything, no scene, not much persona, little length. But they are wonderful in their ability to capture a tugging, a quandary. A catty-corneredness? To exemplify:

LIAR

all things to you
are true

somewhere

and this
is not to say

that I never
meant a word of it.

Shirley Nelson's *Connections* (1995) is a ninety-page selection from a lifetime of writing poetry. Nelson's approach is traditional; her versifying with an eye on the wholesome and the general is familiar, even predictable. She has written since her childhood in rural Skagit County. For her, poetry seems come by naturally, through connections between nature and language. This is an interesting assumption, for often her poems are structured in rhymed stanzas and rely upon personification as a main device. Hers are every bit as artificial as McDonald's modernist poems. "All poems are artificial, aren't they?" queries a catty-cornered one. One commonplace has the poet-child growing up lisping numbers, that is, metrical verses, but surely this is because of the literary or song culture the child absorbs, an aesthetic, not a natural, tradition.

So in their reliance on description, on their presentation of the poet as beholder, many of these poems record seasons and sightings of animals and plants with the good humor and competency of magazine verse. Lately, I have been reading Ethel Romig Fuller, whose verse is in this tradition. Fuller was Oregon Poet Laureate until her death in 1967 and edited the poetry column of *The Oregonian* for twenty-five years. Some of Fuller's accomplished poems were very popular. Which raises the catty-cornered speculation that any aesthetic can tug a poet toward excellence or can drag her toward banality. Fortunately, Nelson's crisper poems have the pleasing structure and observation of "Encounter":

Water meets impassive rock,
Exploding into spray.
Slowly, as the waves recede,
Some sand grains fall away.

Once again, they clash, head on;
Sand falls and white foam flies.
Waves must break to smooth the rock:
Encounter modifies.

At the table, we might argue how poems need to be clear or, no, how they need to be obscure, or about how they need to fit the reader's expectations like cozy slippers or, no, how they ought to force the reader into walking with a novel, even awkward, gait! Believe me, I consider these themes when I

read traditional verse, wondering at its friendliness and its achieved naturalness.

G.L. Morrison selects poems from 1989-1995 for her chapbook *Leaping in the Dark* (Rainbow Communications, 1995), a thirteen-poem chart for an intense novella about the break-up of two women who have been lovers. While her poetry is biographical, as the dedication and poem titles indicate, Morrison crafts single scenes in a way that strips them of clouding detail and private memorializing. She arranges these scenes in an order that sketches a chronicle, never wasting energy with useless transitions or gratuitous events. The personal materials, in short, are made accessible, in the mode of many another first-person poet-narrator working her own experience.

So these poems simply add up as story and add together as mood and theme. Darkness is present in most poems, at least something like it broods over the event, a shadow, a ghost, a phantom. Morrison's story has to be read twice, maybe even three times, for the events are not complete in themselves. This shadowing tells of some inner significance, some intuition, some residue of memory. And the events, which occur inside the house, the apartment, the bedroom, depend for meaning, as well, upon their connections to the city and to other people, including men. So, there is a texturing throughout the collection, making it feel larger and weightier than its twenty-two pages. One theme, I sense, links the book title to the poems: the cycles of ending, beginning, leaving, entering. Here is a poem that represents the vigor and fancy of this collection:

PAPERHOUSE

There is not enough room here
in the paperhouse you've drawn
for us. The furniture we've assembled
couples chair over chair in an orgy
of fabric and oak. Things we've brought
together boxed lay unearthed under
the other's boxes, unremembered.
The walls are paper thin. Thin as leaves
autumn cut. The windows pencilled white
are shaken by the storm outside. A tree

beats the thin panes. The auburn skin
of these trees curls off like burning paper.

From a corner of our table, one hears, "Nice rhymes. Nice personifications." But very different from Nelson's use of these, as there is a question exactly how real this house is, or even this drawing. The speaker is not beholding; she is trying to make discoveries. Morrison's craft is her leaping.

"But it's been done a thousand times!"

"Maybe. You mean since 1959? Since *Life Studies*?"

"Whatever."

Whatever may be the operative word: whatever works, whatever a poet can make serviceable, choosing among the new models, restorations, and wrecks of poetry.

Douglas Spangle's first collection is *Initial* (Quiet Lion Press, 1996). There's irony in this, as Spangle had most of this collection ready ten years ago, but, like other poets, experienced difficulty finding a publisher. That's a pity, for Spangle is a mature writer whose poetry is broad in manner and in range. Of the four at the table, he has most obviously (from where I sit) turned his experience and his reading into arresting performances.

Spangle finds his subjects in extremities, in the desert, in airplane flight, in the ash of a white wind that blasted our town into a white sleep, in his lament for a second-rate poet or for a Burnside drugstore lunch counter, in battle, in the intensities of a Yeats or a Rilke, in the ceaseless motion at 21st and Powell.

Spangle is a first-class Romantic. He acknowledges Whirl is King—adding to the 19th century equation everything he knows about modern physics and perspectivist literary theory, plus another century of brutal history—and still he wants Beauty! He yearns to write arresting poems, poems that crackle with change, but bind up loose energy in eloquent sheaves! "What a crazy task!" most at the table exclaim. "Yet, look! He can do it!"

Any subject *in extremis* is his meat. Spangle has a huge range of attacks, from formal to free verse, from prophetic to meditative, from bombastic to tender or sly. He invests in the symphony of the poem, the mixed sounds and meanings of words, syntax, line and stanza patterns. He tends to bore deep into the matter, like the Metaphysical poets he admires, curious like them and uninhibited, drawing upon the whole canon as resource. Spangle's individuality, as I sense it, stems from his very educated impulses, from an unflagging energy across the entire poem's surface that serves the poem's design. In true Romantic fashion, "The Tree Horse" presents a lovely childhood innocence called to adventure and to create. But it is clearly a Spangle original in its magical, seamless fusion of literary materials and materials from archaeology and popular movies:

I had a herd
of cicada shells
I called cows.

Amber animals
clustered on caliche kilned
in the Age of Arizona,

scrolled yellow suits of celluloid,
John Ford films in black and white storage
implying a sky blue and soil red.

The sycamore was swaybacked,
hid a horse in itself:
a limb twisted by hard

winter weather it had memorized,
the weight of western snows.
I rode bareback in summer breeze.

The queued quail
peered through the screens of piñon.
Shed of the weight of seventeen years

of sun-colored skins
being buried,
the cicadas sang
their single-note Midsummer hymns.

"I still think this picking and choosing have nothing to do with criticizing poems and everything to do with who's the critic. Let me tell you how I would construct this exercise you're supposing to call a review."

"There's no time to hear you through it!"

"Doggone it, that's what you always say! Then, when?"

E.M.

Note: Poetry by G.L. Morrison is in this issue, by John McDonald in Fall '96, and by Douglas Spangle in Spring '95, July '94, Oct '93, Oct '92, July '92, and Oct '90.



Brad Garber

GRATITUDE

In this long drought
How wondrous to see
Not one, but two
Weeds in the garden.

Robert Cohen

JUJU

The lamp that shorted out last week
lends an appropriate gloom
to the room where I sleep without windows,
painted police blue, with webs
in the corners where spiders can only wait
for other spiders to crawl.

And I lie in bed on my back
remembering Juju, the woman who once
tried to save me from myself.
But I was so cool—
I was the blue of this room;
and the last thing I recall
is the sight of her legs leaving,
my good luck going down the hall.

Michael Mandiberg

ORCHARD FLOOR

I slept last night
with the window open.
Glass of grape juice
on the desk.
Shades lifted high for the entry
you promised near the walnut trees;
your next step up my ladder.

But you did not climb up the steps,
did not sit cross-legged before me
near the purple stain
on the white carpet;
dresspockets full of walnuts,
and carrying a sprig of vine.



Carter McKenzie

THE END OF NURSING

Interminable nibbler, attached fish, when
does this end, our habitual greeting
formed when they first handed you
to me in the dark. I offer words, relief
of a new kind, cling
to each syllable, the thought
of a spoonful, the sturdy letter A
with its journey of mountains,
tunnels, the cheerful blue
face of the little train. Out of the water
we go, into fresh air,
strengthening our lungs.
The letter A. You draw it
again and again, in every color.
We learn to speak.
For the first time
you turn your face away.

Elizabeth McLagan

IN THE TILT AND WASH OF SPRING

Drifts of waterleaf green
the tangled bank, the creek
runs coffee, swollen with standing waves.

Even the ridge has let go,
scoured down to slick basalt
poured when the continent
split and rivers ran red.

And you come with your molten heart
among trees that sift the layered air,
their maze of roots string minerals,
hold fast as the earth shifts way.

You could lay down your heart
under rock, learn mud slides,
earth holds, take off the love
you wear like a choker of beads.

The trees have lives
that go on without you, earth
slides the reach of the river,

across the raw slope the waterleaf
opens and opens its green hands.

EDITORS' NOTES

A poetry Renaissance? Who can say, but note that ten collections of poems (from Gk *poiema* 'something made, created.') are reviewed in this winter's issue. The following information will help you obtain them:

26 Books, 6735 SE 78th, Portland, OR 97206;

Paylow Press, 1619 SE 48th Ave., Portland, OR 97215;

Shirley Nelson, P.O. Box 1471, Port Orford, OR 97465;

Rainbow Communications, P.O. Box 23532, Eugene, OR
97402;

Quiet Lion Press, 7215 S.W. LaView Drive, Portland, OR
97219.

And please note this hurry-up Call for Poems:

The Willamette River Education Project is compiling a small anthology of poems relevant to the Willamette River, its tributaries and watershed, and our relationships to the waters of our bioregion. Chapbooks will be distributed at a literary reading and art show, entitled "River Visions," in Corvallis on Sunday, April 6, at 6 pm.

Send poems, previously published or new, and a SASE to: Charles Goodrich, 2340 SE Crystal Lake Drive, Corvallis, 97333. Deadline: March 1st

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

ROBERT COHEN, Portland, has reported that he "is currently going through a period of transition and does not know what he is doing at the present time," except that he does have a manuscript ready to publish.

WILMA ERWIN, Portland, died last year. Her contributions to the state of poetry in Oregon were many, including work with the Oregon State Poetry Association and with publications for Japanese poetry forms.

*BRAD GARBER, Portland, has had poems in university and college publications, *Cream City Review* (Univ. of Wisconsin, Milwaukee) and *Alchemy* (Portland Community College).

JEFF KNORR, Portland, teaches English at Chemeketa Community College. His new chapbook is *Up from the River*.

ROBERT HILL LONG, Eugene, teaches poetry writing at the University of Oregon. He is initiating a series of radio spots on KLCC for poets of different ages, ranging from children to old hands. For 1997 he has been awarded an Oregon Arts Commission Individual Artist Fellowship.

*MICHAEL MANDIBERG, Portland, is a first-year student at Brown University, planning to be an English major.

*CARTER MCKENZIE, Dexter, has published her poetry in the Lane Literary Guild's *Pacifica '96*, *Chain*, *Camellia*, and *Poets On*.

ELIZABETH McLAGAN, Portland, has poetry in the anthology *Windsock II* from Howlet Press, and in recent issues of *Willow Springs* and *Calyx*.

*TODD McNAMEE, Milwaukie, has had poetry in *Dog River Review*, *Portland Review*, and *Mr. Cogito*. He has worked as an English teacher abroad and as associate editor of *Calapooya Collage*.

*AMY KLAUKE MINATO, Eugene, has work in the Oregon poetry anthology *From Here We Speak*, as well as in *Seneca Review*, *Iris*, and *Wild Earth*. She held a 1996 Walden residency.

*G.L. MORRISON, Eugene, published the chapbook *Leaping in the Dark*. She is active in Eugene workshops, readings, and poetry slams.

DAN RAPHAEL, Portland, is a poet and a poet's friend, viz. the steady output from his series of Northwest poets: *26 Letters*, including some finalists for this year's Hazel Hall Award: Barbara LaMorticella and Jim Shugrue.

*MICHAEL ROBINS, Portland, is an undergraduate at the University of Oregon who began writing "a few years ago. I find myself forever returning to the poems of Lew Welch."

HELEN RONAN, Eugene, continues publishing award-winning haiku in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Haiku Moment* from Tuttle.

*KELLY RUDD, Portland, works in an office in downtown Portland. He reviews books for *Writers NW*.

STACIE SMITH, Murphy, lives in a yurt next to Gray's Creek, where she writes, sculpts, prints and paints.

DIANNE WILLIAMS STEPP, Portland, wants to be introduced as poet, psychotherapist, and grandmother.

SYDNEY J. THOMPSON, Portland, has a manuscript ready for publication, *Recesses*. Her poetry has appeared in many publications, including Quiet Lion's *Off the Beaten Track* and *Women and Death* from Ground Torpedo Press.

ROGER WEAVER, Corvallis, teaches at Oregon State University. *Traveling on the Great Wheel* (Domicile Books, 1990) is the latest of his several poetry books. His handbook for poets is *Standing on Earth, Throwing These Sequins at the Stars* (Joyce Publishing, 1989).

*JAMES WOOD, Philomath, has built a small house where "I live a life of contemplation."

KEN ZIMMERMAN, Creswell, edits poetry for *Northwest Review*. He read recently to celebrate the first birthday of Tsunami Books. Ken, with Joseph Bednarik, plans the Windfall Reading Series.

* First appearance in *Fireweed*.

