

fireweed

poetry of Western Oregon

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fireweed

fireweed, poetry of Western Oregon is published four times a year, featuring 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. For faster communication with us, please include your email address. Inquiries about submission of reviews or essays are welcome. Send email submissions in body of message only to: fireweedmag@attbi.com. Please be sure to include a biographical note with your poems or your prose.

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Editors: Shelley Reece, Sydney J. Thompson, Pat Vivian
Design: Jackie Kramer
Cover art: Darryla Green-McGrath

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CARLOS REYES

Poem for Una

Los verdaderos tesoros
no tienen isla ni mapa
(True treasures have
neither island or map)

-José María Zonta

Among the wave rinsed
chips and bits of bivalves

Before the campfire
whose wind blown sparks
challenged the scattered stars

Today the sudden waves
made by the ferry

Make me think of placer mining
as I search the sand washing
for the tiny ring you lost
last night as the lighted ferry passed
one city moving to another
its people lining the rails, watching

When we stood before the burning logs
shades, shadows in the flames
calling to your cousins
who had retreated up on the high bank

Afraid of the sparks from the fire
the sudden waves

Afraid even in their innocence
of the adults who try

to convince them to return
that this beach, this world
we live in, is safe—

CARLOS REYES

In the Fall

I walk the dangerous edge
of damp graveled roads
the perimeter of the aging forests
the changing leaves
the gold instead of green
twirling in a colder wind

How I enjoy it
the smell of wild apples
beginning to turn to cider
a bitter frost and crabapples
like dim lanterns
a china pheasant popping
from beneath my feet
to wake me from my reverie

I enjoy the hope
for one more day
before the final rains arrive
to walk down the leafy lane
yet hoping for a break
in the clouds, to see bright
sun once more

before winter tightens
its jaws around the trees
before the grey pulling
clouds suffocate the wind
before the lake, rivers and sea
fall from the heavens
drowning every green thing
before the final fading

all green all gold
to dull to papery pale

CARLOS REYES

The Ambush of Sounds

In the womb of deafness music
So loud we couldn't talk over it
We danced wanting to discover
its rhythm, understand the songs
trying to be intimate out there
in an earthquake in the lights
on the dance floor crowded
with hundreds of people, later
you said I looked stern, distracted
asked what I was thinking of
besides you and me dancing

After the battle of lights, the thunder,
the earthquake, could it have been
the waiting for the rainy night sky to clear
for air raids to begin, my distraction-
outside the Crystal Ballroom the Balkan war?

JANE GLAZER

Pampas Grass in High Wind

Frenzied herds of palominos,
goaded by unseen quirts
 or razored by spurs,
 plunge and rear,
 stampede across the swept savanna,
driven by ghost vaqueros.

Heads down, ears flat,
the mustangs bolt,
 their manes, like tows of retted flax
 whip and frazzle,
 forelocks lash across their wide,
wild eyes, the nightmare wind pursuing.

Their tails, crimped
unravelling hanks of silver hemp,
 shine like cheat grass
 bleached by summer.
 They snap and bite each other's flanks
and muzzles, cruel as braided rawhide.

Then, winded together,
they wheel and stop,
 their ferine bodies quiver;
 they fling their heads into the air,
 flailed hides frothing,
their manes a toss of lather.

JANE GLAZER

Lunatic Fringe: Puget Sound

Fluted like a pewter cup,
the shore edge glistens where the lips
of moonrise drink the shine,
kiss the night to madness, drip
saliva on the polished stones.

The full moon, her hot tongue slaked
from licking water, floods the bay,
blanches the fir fringe white. I slip off
my skin and float out, my alter body
spangled with phosphorescence.

From the cloudless sky, the moon
distills a pool from which she steps,
her silver shoes still dripping.
Across the sunken masts, she tracks the paths
of fishermen in cedar-bark canoes,

sucked under by the tide.
I swim to meet her, keeper of the sky,
mother of this glow, this light.
Hungry for my mortal mouth, she lifts me up,
wipes the salty water from my eyes.

LOIS BAKER

The Illuminator

In my side it aches, that other world,
so much richer than this one, unfolding
unfolding its inner, delicious pain.
—"Appearances," William Stafford, 1914-1993

Fog outside the scriptorium cages a sound

he waits for. Inside, the slate floor cold.

He fixes a sheet of vellum, uncorrectable,

costly, to the slantboard. Grinds

pigment—crimson, viridian, indigo—

trims the reed pens.

By afternoon a wan sun burnishes

his page, margins crowded with triskele,

lozenge, spiral, human and serpent twining. And from

the great initial *O* a vine unfolds, then arches

between dark cliffs of text. Caught in tendrils

a sparrow song, falling.

For Dorothy Stafford

TIM BARNES

Census Report

The palaver begins in the trees,
the wind and its constituents,
the conversational creaking of firs,
the patter and flash of ailanthus.

This is the community of birds
and squirrels. Every thing agrees
without voting and the wind
tallies the results of the elections

that are never held. The polis
within the polis, the city in which
humans are not part of the population,
the wind in the branches, squirrels

and birds crossing the sky,
unelected and free.

TIM BARNES

Loving the Local, Stars or Not

The place where you love is always local.
It is where you park the car with the girl
whose father works at Weyerhaeuser.
He's missing a finger like any good logger.
You met her at church, probably Baptist
or Seventh Day Adventist, but now
you wish she would forget all that.
You're up on Terwilliger or maybe Mt. Tabor,
the city like a web of stars below, which
sounds a bit like poetry, something you don't
care for, most of the time. Either way, down
the street from almost anywhere, there's
a river called Willamette tonguing the dark.
You've gone fishing there and swimming
and flung some rocks into the wild
under the Ross Island Bridge.
It's probably raining, which is good
because it makes the car more private
though the windows fog up easy,
giving away what you're doing in there.
Brenda or Rhonda or Liz or Suzie
has lips that promise things when
they touch yours and local secrets
under her sweater that feel exciting
and a little wild like maybe a stream
surprising some rocks and finding
a pool where you can almost see
rainbow. If it's summer you get out
and walk under firs; if it's winter,
maybe there's snow. The sky's probably
grey and banked with cumulus. Sometimes
it's clear and certain stars seem
particularly bright. This is good for love
no matter where you are. Afterward
you look up and see an old story
burning down on just the two of you.

ALICIA BEALE

The Time to Fall

When you explain how to dance yourself
into love affairs, rotate the pelvis
with the moon, I'll forgive you for leaving
my arms at six am, dancing off
into day while crows shout, alarms ring.

Until then, my desires register
in eye-lids twitching. My only consolation
this body taking steps stiff with habit,
taking me past daffodils blooming
their heads off because it's spring, the time to fall

into love with something other than
yourself. Everything suggests it—March
mornings smelling of wet grass, peony
leaves unfurling. So why is it I'm afraid
that's all there is. In mid-afternoon,

burnt out porch lights orchestrate your return.
We speak words, we tilt our heads, we give
appearances of listening. Because after
loving for seven years there must be
a way to equate loneliness with the way

your hand follows the back of my neck to my
shoulder, how it finds me stiff, sullen
after pots of Chamomile tea,
how it dismisses my doubts until pensive
kisses on a broken-down sofa
are enough, after the day is through.

ALICIA BEALE

At Lunchtime

Clouds chug by overhead, searching for shore,
It's a cool afternoon in a month of dark dreams,
navy suits and gray dresses follow one another
like schools of fish along the river path,
already caught in the current's cold reality.
Even lovers walk slow, watch
for a pace to drown themselves out of serenity.

Ignoring the damp grass, I sit alone.
The wind dances with debris then takes up the feel
of an oncoming storm. With each gust,
my body rocks, tethered to the ground but
acknowledging the yield and pull of blue sky.
When did I become bored with
sailboats, cumulus clouds, spring days?

What world was it, that no longer exists?
As if it were a seagull waiting for dead fish
to rise up from the ocean like offerings,
I perch the book on my knees. Across white pages,
words form a net, only nothing swims
out from the spine. It's only me that's captured,
drowning, doing the dead man's float.

VERLENA ORR

**The Apparition Appears Again,
Independence Day, Four A.M.**

No cup to drink from in the all-night greasy spoon,
she follows the only rule:
Never sleep with your head on the table.
She sits erect, asleep with her eyes open
in trade for safety until light arrives.

I've seen her face before in a Renoir—
muted pastel glow on the cheeks,
no sharp corners. Sad, hopeful eyes
forever making a small inquiry
of no one in particular.

I have watched her check her reflection
to open her day, pat her upsweep to perfection.
Modest in soft blue and rose, she is 100% cotton,
somehow unwrinkled. Her white anklets betray her.
And her belongings folded in imaginary drawers
of her shopping cart. Bulging plastic bags
hanging on her home. Her cart is quiet,
no chimes of glass for redemption.

Serene as any rendering of The Madonna,
she disappears in beginning light,
leaves me caught in the literal—
too awake. I force the day open
with a double shot as if it is mine
to open. I can't appear from an old master's
brush as she does—Venus rising,
the first and last star visible.

VERLENA ORR

Elegy for David Without a Home

—For David Venti

Armed only with gin and remnants of wit
and charm, your manners sometimes impeccable,
sometimes stumbling efforts of grace,
you always asked first if I was in a good mood.
I never was.
You didn't ask the "spare change" question.

Once in summer's first light, we exchanged
first names. Five seconds of balance in
a universe. Neither of us more equal than the other.
We kept on going to our daily Goliath battle,
a soft touch waiting to do us in.

When Christmas moved in, you made me laugh
with your plight—living with two raccoons, a runaway
ferret, a confused gerbil. To our mutual amazement,
words flew from my mouth like a startled flock of crows.
"Oh, to hell with it, it's Christmas." I handed you
nine singles with a homily not found in the Bible.
Just so much noise that cold morning. "Try not
to kill yourself with these dollars."

Now, I spin bits of straw, try for gold.
Maybe, you might like my effort, and we could join
our true stories, our complicated plots encrypted
in a glance, but you sped through this old joke
of living, and beat me to the punchline.

VERLENA ORR

Forget Gods and Goddesses

My muse, nameless, illiterate,
smokes Camel straights, sometimes rolls
her own. I thought for sure she would show up
at Delphi as Erato's little sister
posing on the egg-shaped
rock there, once the navel of the universe.

It was raining. The view
fogged in. No written prepared
questions from me. I had my soggy
snapshot taken with the egg.

I skipped out on the group tour of a museum
looked for her. There she was at a taverna
in downtown Olympia, hanging with George,
the jeweler, swilling Greek coffee and making plans
for an evening of ouzo, George, and a cheap gold ring.

I thought I'd seen the last of her,
but last fall she showed up again in a stranger's living
room, glued to the TV, chain smoking and rooting
for both college football teams. Clearly driven
by the cut of their uniforms, she was shameless
about the tight ends and wide receivers, rolled
vulgarity around in her mouth, flicking them
off her tongue on every play.

Hopeless as a muse,
I've never seen her in a dress, let alone
a diaphanous gown. She doesn't float
in beauty, but tromps around sleazy
dives in beat-up penny loafers,
men's Levis that fit way too tight.
She can't read.

The selfish witch steals, lies, leaves me
with her refuse—dangling bits of participles,
modifiers gone wild, homeless adjectives,
phonetic spelling, an entire book of split infinitives.

I've fooled her now though, convinced her
"fricative" is a filthy word. I've given up
on her, leave the schizy bitch with that word hissing
through the few remaining teeth in her nasty mouth.

CHRISTINE DELEA

**At the Support Meeting of People Working Menial
Jobs that Have Sexual-Sounding Titles**

The donut holers and creamers
avoid the pastry table, stand around
in tired silence. The floorwalkers sit,

of course, across from the belly rollers
and blinds hookers, all in comfortable shoes,
rubbing their ankles encased in thick socks.

Here, there is no blushing or
awkward pauses—here, we affirm ourselves,
our solidarity, our personal inventories.

So an inserter flirts with a bagger.
A licker, a scratcher, and a nutter-upper
sip purple punch, burst into giggles

when a chicken sexer walks by,
looking lost and lonely, knowing
he is of a dying breed. Then a cereal popper

starts us off with a prayer, and a puffer
begins introductions. Everyone sits
except the seamen, so used to jokes

and sideways glances that they
never turn their backs in crowds—
they pace near the doors or lean on walls.

Every week we become stronger, and
we celebrate our glories: a stuffer's marriage
to a handler, a sex wax inspector beating cancer,

a rear ender making it to the finals
on Jeopardy. Tomorrow, back on
the wax ball knockout line,

at the bosom presser machine,
on breaks from pouncing crowns
and butting heads, we bed rubbers,

neck fellers, nibbler operators,
and plastic dollies will feel just a little more
able to make it through the month.

B.T. SHAW

Suburban Field Guide (censored)

Narrow your choice to three photos.

Rabbit brush, mint, alfalfa.

A pair of grasping organs called.

Frail looking with slender front wings.

Bright blue with dark narrow scallops.

Little known, seldom encountered.

The months given are those in which.

Separated from each other.

Erroneously considered.

The families comprise large groups of.

Indistinct darker margins.

In a variety of sites.

B.T. SHAW

To Avoid Unnecessary Death,

heed the rattler's warning.
Listen for its tightly coiled rasp,

the burr, the catch, the purr
emptied of its chance of cat.

A brindled sound. Rapid slap. Hunting
once my uncle's half-mutt appaloosa reared,

nostrils dilated, synapses flared, she struck
the gravel trail and, shrieking, thrashed

a gem-backed length of garden hose,
somebody's trash. Love may be blind,

but truth is in the ear. A click of teeth. Snap
of sheets. Kitchen door just before it's latched.

B.T. SHAW

Solo

--Campo de' Fiori

Arched against the murmurs of the crowd,
the saxophonist leans. A beat—he seems to hold

the moon, halved by argument, aloft.
Tempered slice. Cleanly cut.

(Do you remember what we fought about?)

The note bends, breaks like boughs or limbs or luck.
(I recollect: knick of moon, my teeth against your back.)

Like circuitry. Or dawn. The pause
the player straightens in. Silence.

Poppies of applause.

B.T. SHAW

Revisionary

A sudden blow. The great wings beating still—
till Leda balls her fist and splits
the motherfucker's bill.

GUEST POEM

LEANNE GRABEL

For the Love of Lew

"I am a Poet. My job is writing poems, reading them out loud, getting them printed, studying, learning how to become the kind of man who has something of worth to say. It's a great job.

Naturally I'm starving to death. Naturally? No, man, it just does not make sense.

("Look, baby, you want to pay your bills, go out and get a job.")

I've got a job. I'm a Poet. Why should I do somebody else's job, too? You want me to be a carpenter? I'm a lousy carpenter. Does anybody ask a carpenter to write my poems?

So I cracked up. My brain, literally, snapped under the weirdness of being a Poet, a successful one and being BECAUSE OF MY JOB (which all agree is noble and good and all that) an outcast.

PLEASE NOTE: I see the basic con as: Bread vs. Mozart's Watch (don't pay the guy, that would be too vulgar a return for work so priceless. Give him a watch. Make sure the watch is engraved with a message that prevents him from pawning it.)"

Lew Welch

IN TROUBLED TIMES I often read the works of tragic heroes. I'm not sure if it's because my troubles feel much more comfortable around their troubles—or because their troubles allow mine to finally exhale and relax, realizing their puniness...in comparison.

But, goddammit, troubled again, I find myself searching for yet another job, with nary a peep of reciprocal interest since November. After being sneezed out of cyberspace like so much space grunt, landing splat, on my well-calloused ass...After 52 applications...

As I grasp at the last threads of my self-esteem, the last greenback, a shredded memory of the promise and pride of my Stanford degree....

As I hang my head in the shame of being 50 and still scratching...

LO AND BEHOLD

Four shiny, brand-new Lew Welch books appear in my mailbox, wrapped beautifully. I had loaned ratty versions of two of them to an adorable local adman 5 years before. He was "returning them with interest." [He has a surprising streak of poetry, and an uncanny resemblance to Welch.]

Welch, you know, was once an ad man himself. He was touted as having written the tagline "Raid: Kills bugs dead." But Lew's advertising career didn't last long. Nothing lasts long for a tragic poet—except poems, tears, the beautiful aftertastes.

Welch had tragedy nailed, and alcohol, the bane, as it is often wont to be, pounded it shut.

AND YET

I find this Welch excerpt surprisingly comforting and amusing. I laugh every time I read it. The matter-of-factness—

I've got a job. I'm a Poet. Why should I do somebody else's job, too? You want me to be a carpenter? I'm a lousy carpenter. Does anybody ask a carpenter to write my poems?

and the insistence that a desire for cool has absolutely nothing to do with a poet's motivations are like balm on my worried muscles.

BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO WELCH?

Born on August 16 (also Charles Bukowski's birthday), 1926, in Phoenix, Arizona, Welch told an interviewer he remembered being depressed by the time he was 14 months. When Welch was 3, his parents split up, and his mom moved him and his little sister around California. Welch graduated from high school in Palo Alto as a track star, and enrolled in the Engineering Program at UC Berkeley in 1944. He also signed up for the Army, but by the time Welch was called for duty, the war was over.

Welch then enrolled at Stockton Junior College in 1945. Coincidentally, the campus was blocks from the house where I grew up [although when Welch was there, I was barely a wiggle in the nucleus of a newt]. It was, however, in Stockton that Welch's artistic inclinations flourished [which is hard for me to believe, having grown up in that broiling flatland]. In Stockton, Welch studied music and writing, and developed a major interest in Gertrude Stein.

Welch transferred to Reed after a year, eventually becoming roommates with Gary Snyder and Phillip Whalen. Welch edited the school's literary magazine, and all three were published there and elsewhere. [Welch's Reed thesis was on Gertrude Stein, and his thoughts on the woman are available as *How I Read Gertrude Stein*, Grey Fox Press, SF, 1996.]

WHY IS HE SQUIRMING?

Lew left Reed and enrolled in the graduate school of philosophy at the University of Chicago in 1951. It was here that he suffered his first official nervous breakdown. To regain his bearings, Welch went to Snyder's cabin in the woods.

In 1958, Welch took a job as a junior executive in advertising for Montgomery Ward's, and then got married. Welch lost his job about a year later, his marriage broke up, he started driving cab, drank, stopped driving cab, got into zen meditation, drove Kerouac across the country, returned to his mom's house in Reno, published poems, and finally returned to San Francisco in 1960.

In San Francisco, Welch got involved with the infamous Lenore Kandel, drank, became a commercial salmon fisherman, stopped fishing, broke up with Kandel, suffered another breakdown, went to Big Sur, came back to San Francisco, drank, worked as a busboy, hooked up with Huey Lewis' mother, Magda Cregg, sloshed across the slick of his emotions, and drank.

AND YET

In the last few years of Welch's life, he was a successful poet. He gave many readings, published many poems and books, taught workshops at San Quentin, had a residency at Colorado State College, even signed with a New York publisher after the publication of *Ring of Bone*, his collected works. But he also had to work at the docks to survive financially.

In May of 1971, Welch disappeared into the mountains near Gary Snyder's cabin, toting a revolver. He left a note:

"I never could make anything work out right... I can't make anything out of it—never could. I had great visions but never could bring them together with reality. I used it all up. It's all gone...I don't owe Allen G. anything yet nor my Mother. I went Southwest. Goodbye. Lew Welch."

His body was never found.

I tell you, compared to that, I feel good.

JUDITH ARCANA

Over the Moon

In a frantic vision over the moon
I watched a mother go to bed
she whispered under her nightgown
some blood cries milk, not sleep

The moon smells rock red water
on the silver old woman at night
she opens, she snorts, she howls
her milk is salt, it's dark

Winter blood is black, she cries
you know that ice can rust
ice is like old iron, you know
wet and dark as your tongue

JUDITH ARCANA

Lullabye and Good Night

With all this attention to embryos, this flying to countries so poor they sell their children, this implantation of eggs – your own and others with sperm fresh or frozen from friends, relatives and perfect (if possible) strangers, have we come to the end of lullabies? Is anyone rocking slowly in a wooden chair, one foot pushing steadily against the floor, marking the rhythm of her pumping heart while an infant sucks her life out through roughening nipples? Or are there machines, props attached to the plastic buckets babies are kept in now? Tubes for sugared formula, dripping on schedule into their mouths, the sucking reflex pointless, the rosy budded lips like plastic flowers on a cake, just for show. We used to be born sucking; is that atavistic now? When the miniature nose and mouth shudder in their first airborne oxygen, do the small lips still tighten in a circlet, tongue working to pull the milk down, drawing out the mother? That must disappear quickly now. Few see eager babies open Mama's shirt, take a breast in practiced little hands to drink comfort while she sings them down to sleep, their mouths falling open off the nipple, falling into promises kept in dreams. Again and again the breast, rocking and singing and giving the breast so that anyone, everyone, sleeps like a baby: *Hush little baby, don't say a word, Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird....Hushabye, don't you cry, go to sleep, my little baby.* Lullabye promises come up empty now, false like the breast, plastic. There's only one we can count on from the cradle: the one with the wind, the tree, the one about breaking, the one about falling; that promise we know we can keep.

JUDITH BARRINGTON

Black Beauty

For two years at least
Shirley Kipps and I were horses—
you could tell by the way we walked
tossing our manes and jangling our bits.

We trotted with our chins pulled in
then galloped aggressively
stomping the leading leg
till the soles of our feet hurt.

I was Black Beauty of course,
whinnying softly when the boy
(whom no-one else could see)
came to me with a pocketful of sugar;

Shirley was Tiny—
sometimes a lowly carthorse,
sometimes even a donkey
kept as company for Black Beauty.

Sundays we would lope along the ridge,
clouds scudding, sea sparking,
and I would buck with joy
while Tiny trotted stiffly beside me

never arguing when I said
her red browband was tacky,
never threatening to kick or bite
until the day I made her pull a plough—

then she looked furious,
bared her yellow teeth
and galloped across the golf course
her shoes wreaking havoc with the tenth green...

Years later in Chinatown,
I thought I saw Shirley
pulling a cartload of vegetables,
a little lame on the near side.

Her long ears drooped liked Tiny's
but when I turned to greet her
she twitched away a fly
and cut me dead.

JUDITH BARRINGTON

What She Said

And then she told me everything she loved was dead
or lost.
The dog was important but not because it had been with
her for long;
a few weeks ago she'd handed it some fries and coke.
It had stayed.
And while she said it, she turned away her face to hide
her pleasure.

And then she told me no one had talked to her since
New Year's Eve
and only then because people were out on the street,
singing and drunk.
They talked to her but it wasn't what she would call
conversation, she said.
They puked a lot and cried a bit and thought they had
it bad.

She didn't mind the solitude. It was better than living
at home
where her father couldn't be stopped and one of her
brothers tried it too.
The cold was bad though—cold like she'd never imagined
in her life:
last week she'd almost killed a man, just for his quilted
coat.

Her mom had done her best—she stated it loudly, several
times.
She didn't want me to think that her mother was
negligent, she said.
Yes, negligent's the word she used; I noticed it right
away.
She'd been in school a while and could've been a poet I
thought,

but first she skipped to get a job and later she worked
the streets,
and before she turned sixteen she quit and moved in
under the bridge.
At the weekend market she sat on the ground and
chalked mandala designs
with an upturned cap beside her and some water in a
mug.

Sunday nights, she ate fries and coke—it was a Sunday the
dog had come—
and dropped by her mom's with the change from the cap,
but rarely hung around.
She needed dogfood; I gave her some money and left,
and when I looked back
the dog was resting its chin on her thigh, one muddy ear
cocked high.

WILLA SCHNEBERG

Pol Pot's Wife Talks To Whoever Will Listen

*Khieu Ponnary is going mad in the service of her husband's
revolution*
—Elizabeth Becker

Before the corpses,
Sar kissed my fingertips
and clung to my every word
as if they had wings
and could fly him to a black pajama Utopia.

In Keng Vannsak's apartment
on St. Andres Des Arts
I flirted with Sar in French.
I knew everything:
Stalin's tract "On The National Question,"
Lenin's "On Imperialism."
Talking revolution was sexy.
I would brush against Sar's shoulder
and whisper "Destroy the bourgeoisie,
re-educate the masses."

II

Before, I pretended words were harmless,
but they have always been murderous,
not white lotus flowers in cloisonne vases,
declawed cats or impotent men,
but the impetus to
pummel and strangle.

Pol Pot locked me in this house.
Sar would never allow this.
He will come and stroke my hair and
tell me no one is dying,

but the corpses won't let me sleep.
They curse me, press into me—
inseminate me with their agony.

My words want to wear grey pinafores
as I did in the French Lycee,
but can only don black—
the color of the world.

LEANNE GRABEL

Wound

I told my new therapist
who was concerned I wasn't feeling
the tremendous storms of grief
I woke up early every morning
even making pancakes for the wolves of fear
and sat for hours on the couch
my legs folded under
staring at the pictures in the NY Times
all the pretty women with their messy ponytails
photos of their lovely men, now dust, like statues.
Tiny children sucking madly on the fingers.
Mothers clutching daughters' shaking shoulders.

Cried, just cried and cried
just shivering cold
knees absolutely screaming for release.
I can't release them. Plan to rush to yoga.

My new therapist smiled warmly with her ample mouth
when I told her that.
She adjusted her large stomach. It was hanging rather low.
She was glad I was crying.

Next time I'll have to tell her I've been crying now for years.
The tears apparently embedded in a sad and ancient code.

Still, God. My God. This time we've really done it.
Blasted fear, red hot, into every gut.
We've etched the membrane.
Set the branding.
You can see it on the noses of the darling toddlers.
Four-year-olds have mottled ankles sprouting out their
little shoes.
The babies jerk at every explosion.
Even men are crying.
Have you seen how men are crying?

Told her I have reached a point where
only seconds can I actually feel each day
or I might die like them
to dust, to dust
by the horrible weight of it.

I was feeling strong at first
and shouldered quite a bulk of it.
Then my scalp grew tight
and started screaming.

Oh,
Gandhi, can you hear me?
Gandhi, can you hear me?

EMILY ADDIEGO

Mental Exercises

When you sit in the chair
(brown with flakey fuzz),
your hands clasped,
on the edge of sleep,
and you get to that place
where you feel
like you're no longer you,
like you're not quite in your head anymore,
can you still feel your clothing rasp against your skin,
your stuffy nose
and the click of muscles
in your neck
as you shift your head?

Can you disconnect from this self,
the person you see in the mirror every day,
leave behind the scratches on your hands,
the smudges that refuse
to come off your glasses,
the headache that constantly lurks
in the back of your head and laughs at you?
Just leave it.
Go down

deep,

into dust,

sunlight,

and rainbows bouncing off the walls,
the dark space under the couch-
(bunny slippers alone)
the cobwebby books,
and the place where the cat
lolls in blissful purring laziness,
welcoming the sun with spread-out belly.
Can you stretch across the universe?
Float in air without gravity, where galaxies and stars
are born?

Or drift through scarlet curries and teas
with jasmine, cumin, black pepper,
where people's skin is the color of dusty roses
and deep earth
and powdered stones dust their eyelids?

Can you push off
from dew and potato bugs
in the lettuce garden,
(the one that always goes to seed)
and explode into earth and sky-
expand yourself
like the dusty smell of rain
or an endless field?

Wrap yourself in the world,
spread yourself,
become yourself
more than ever.
In light,
in the corners of the room,
in rainforests
with spotted leopard tails,
in hot days,
and the tangy bite of cold water-
until you are not a person,
not a body,
until you

are the world
are the life
are the light
and the love
and you fill
everything.

ROB SCHLEGEL

Erwin and Harriet

They tell each other small truths about themselves;
how one summer morning, in the pear orchard
above town, he startled a couple making love
in shadows of black branches; she told how she blushed
the first time she saw her father's genitals, when
he leaned from the door waving goodbye, towel falling
to the floor from his waist.

Years ago, he said, "Harriet, believing
in God is useless." She looked away, lips pursed;
misplaced truths, ungainly delays in conversation
caused her to lean against the passenger side door
as they drove from the coast; a pair of restless birds
on a branch stared off in opposite directions
for the first time. Days later, naked in bed, they held
each other under quaking alder shadows.

Today, they move in ways more deliberate
at the Heather Glen Home.
Erwin stands against the dining room wall,
Harriet, against her walker, left wheel broken
the third time this month. She ignores it, prepares
Erwin's dinner, remembers the soup that caused
him to soil the sheets last night, a small truth
he would rather forget, like the time he lost his way
home from Jim's Market.

Tonight, Harriet slices pears, pulls pita
from the oven, scatters parsley and thyme
into soup. The pressed linens are out,
a candle on the table, the straps of her apron
rest below the curve of her back.
Together, leaning into night with caution,
Erwin and Harriet still think of small truths to whisper,
but mostly they watch how shadows move,
descending into themselves, sashaying across others.

ROB SCHLEGEL

While Moses Parts the Sea

Look inside the cap of a mushroom
to part the curtain of disbelief.

Harvest moon, cedar crackle in fire,
I always wanted someone to love in the fall.

I like to think of Eliot reciting Dryden
and Cowley to Frost.

In the far off cosmos, a constellation resembles
the profile of Gertrude Stein gazing at stars, as they gaze back.

Natal, Brazil and Beau, Camaroon are brother
and sister, pulling away, pulling away.

Prairie verbenas flash color
through perpetual loops of wonder.

When I heard nobody ever loved your elbows before,
I wanted to assemble a dozen violins.

JEAN ESTEVE

The Trick Is

As if to ape an ancient Dane,
the electric activity inside my p.c.
has simplified the catechism. On
or off.

The scent that means something
is done in the kitchen
is only a pattern of
single decisions.

But I'm hungry.
I worked all day
and now I am ready
for traces of sage, of rosemary,
for faintly husky red wine.

My nose fans my brain.
Time to lock up.
On my keyring hangs a little world,
a hefty maze of notched rods
hooked together, clasping each other,
a sex orgy in steel.
It is a trick, though, a toy.
One unit, if you know which one,
can slide out easily.
Then the whole thing falls apart,
or, as some might say, blooms.

Back when I lay curled inside my mother's womb,
all I had to play with were creation acids.
Alignment, disalignment, realignment.
I didn't know it then, but I longed for rubber balls,
tops, wooden building blocks, shiny Chinese puzzles.
What do you do
after you have everything you ever dreamed of?
You head for the kitchen
to see what's cookin'.

The sky is rotting in the west,
drizzling my vision,
slumming my tongue.
What if I *had* succeeded in raising
the ultimate summer afternoon?
Think of flowers oozing their perfumes forever,
like a faucet dripping, and no one a plumber.
Think of brown birds shrieking their rhapsodic glee
perpetually, like babies with colic.
Think of God behind every tapestry of daylight,
grinning. One thing I know about God is his promise,
for every day the sun comes up
the sun goes down.

REVIEW

ERIK MULLER

Ralph Salisbury, *Rainbows of Stone* (University of Arizona Press, 2000)

Here is a book with both the compactness of stone and the reach of rainbows. Ralph Salisbury does not intend "a verse autobiography" even though he "begins with poems of childhood, moves to increasing awareness of our world, and ends with my natural awareness that my long life must inevitably soon end." Stone rainbows, rainbow stones—what's remarkable here is rather than walk a straight line, Salisbury traces tensed arches, examines unlikely and unusual bends, identifies ironic sites. An "Irish-English-Cherokee survivor of nuclear war," the poet brings us "decades of words/from the tongue" and this wish:

may I have
enough to give
to deserve to be raised
from time to time, on someone's tongue
as air more nurturing, more enduring or
anyway lighter than stone.

We'd expect any elder's book to travel forward and back in time, but Salisbury tenses the short time of his own story against the long time of history and beyond. A time element underlies all human experience, its foods, its families, its cultures.

while hunting my family's food,
I thought what the hunted think,
so that I ate, not only meat
but the days of wild animals fed by the days
of seeds, themselves eating earth's
aeons of lives, fed by the sun,
rising and falling . . .

Salisbury finds this rich succession in a decaying fence,

unable to survive, forever,
persistent termite teeth
of the same rains
which turn the earth
to grain, to milk,
to flesh and bone, in brain . . .

Salisbury describes this long, curved time in human families:
"the children of children's children's children . . . hatching
tomorrow's tomorrow's tomorrow." Having heard, or thinking
he heard, his father's Cherokee prayer, the poet asks

and did I—
my ear-drum almost burst,
from centuries of pain
aeons of evil spirits inflicted on
untold numbers of listeners in human genes—did I hear
Grandmother's parents' parents' prayers,
to be shaped, warmed and sung in my own generation?

So cultures, too, are formed as circles, where events "repeat and
repeat" and present the same occasions for victimage or escape,
the same enemies, the lost Indian wars not unlike the wrecked
bomber that, in turn, was like the Enola Gay. Thinking of a
lost airman, a friend, the speaker can at once be "four again—
and seventy now" and calls himself a "non-historian."

Tension occurs in directing one's life because the state's or
soldier's way conflicts with the medicine way. One chooses
between being a killer and a lover, and though the two are not
absolutely separable, the medicine way requires that we pray
for our kind and live as well as we are able. The poet learns
from his own survival story: fever, lightning, war provide close
calls. He saves the crew of his bomber

and now I'm a poet
And try to save everything
I love.

Salisbury's poet is tensed, too, by the stated saving mission and
a proper modesty in the face of great forces and aeons:

Eighteen and feeling the roller-coaster lift,
a bomber lightened of load, I saw, and I see
what brothers and father saw touch me, and, friends
turned into smoke, I heard,
and I hear, only my own sounds,
failing at becoming understanding.

Despite the "pencil not moving right" and "words short of all I
think I intended," the poet affirms that "Dad speaks a wisdom
all of us have," including, especially, this son who heard "season
on season of English, Irish and Cherokee tunes." And the
poet's tunes range from satiric to prayerful.

When I attended Ralph Salisbury's writing workshop at the
University of Oregon in 1963, he, like most of us there, was an
unhyphenated, quite uniform(ed) American. Our text was
Donald Hall's *New Poets of England and America*, with how
many women or poets of color? *Rainbows of Stone* is a huge
achievement for this one poet. It is a measure, too, of how
inclusive "American" poetry has become in a rapid half
century.

REVIEW

ALAN CONTRERAS

Carl Phillips, *The Tether*
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001)

Carl Phillips has built his presence in American poetry with measured confidence. The appearance of *The Tether*, his fifth collection in ten years, provides an opportunity to examine a new body of work and gain insight into his themes and style.

What makes Phillips stand out from the pack? First, economy of diction, a restrained precision that displays the relative advantages of the scalpel as a poetic tool compared to, say, a shovel. This attention to the true utility of each word recalls W. S. Merwin, especially his earlier work and such recent collections as *The Vixen*, but Phillips is somewhat more rooted in urban experience.

Phillips has a more natural acquaintance with a broader span of language than many poets, but he does not use a hundred-watt word unless it is the right word and the best word in a given line. If it is the best word, then it fits perfectly and the reader does not stumble over an unnatural obstruction extruded athwart the poem's natural flow.

He provides enough handholds that a reasonably intelligent and well-read reader can generate a meaningful vision from almost all of his poems. A good poem contains enough points of reference that I can understand what is going on and navigate through any uncharted waters, emerging at the end with a reasonably clear vision generated by words and, in the hands of the best poets, the absence of words.

Finally, for a poem to be worth reading it must have something at least mildly interesting to say: vapid clarity serves no worthy master. Some poets seem to write about anything; in each poem Phillips clearly writes about something. He is a thinking

poet, not merely a writing poet. There is gold to be found in these poems, and emeralds, velvet, steel, oak and cinnamon, layered and exposed in carefully conceived chiarascuro, showing the reader enough that much more can be imagined.

I sometimes think of Cavafy when reading Phillips, partly because Phillips sometimes writes on historical themes or the ephemeral joys of men, but also because he finds and shows the reader links between our everyday lives and questions of spiritual and transcendent interest. Witness the beginning of "The Figure, The Boundary, The Light":

As he crosses the field, he is
easily all I mean by *the flesh*
is small, is occasional:

the grass he divides with
his body reuniting behind him
like too immediate a forgiveness;

even those birds that are least
remarkable do not notice, and
transcend him.

Even in this example of a field foray, there is little of the bucolic in Phillips: his outdoor settings usually relate to inward considerations. He is mainly a poet of indoor humanity and urban experience, but handled at viola pitch: even slightly aced aspects of human experience glide well above street level for the reader to examine at leisure.

Comparisons are said to be invidious, but I like them because it is natural to want points of reference, so if you have not read Phillips and are tempted, imagine a more serious James Merrill whose concern with the soul is not based on a Ouija board and whose style is filtered through Merwin, and you won't be far off.

Phillips is a younger American poet with the capacity to be one of the great voices of the century to come. If his themes and

diction are occasionally reminiscent of Cavafy, Merrill, Merwin, J. D. McClatchy or Thom Gunn, they are clearly his own in conception and situation—this is an original voice.

There are no crashing sounds in Phillips; the intense volcanic roiling characteristic of Reginald Shepherd (to name another African-American urban gay poet, if such a category means anything) is not to be found. Shepherd uses, if anything, an even broader palette of words than Phillips, but to read Shepherd (which I strongly recommend) is to be gloriously overwhelmed; to read Phillips is to be gently uplifted.

In this extract from "Spoils, Dividing," his delicate touch, concern with the relation of people to their spiritual universe and ability to hold a lot of meaning in a filamentous basket is clear:

How blame
the lantern whose limits

always are only the light of
itself, casting the light
out?

That the body enjoys
some moment
in that light, I regard

as privilege.

Say what
you will.

Perhaps this sense of uplift is the best way to describe Phillips. Even when he is describing loss, suffering, doubt or uncertainty (not his only themes, to be sure), I find myself glad that he chose to tell me what he has told me. There is a clear sense of having *gained* something

from having read Phillips, and that is an uncommon commodity among younger American poets today. Returning to his first book, *In the Blood*, consider these lines from "On Holy Ground":

there is only the one sky,
whiter than any saint,
than the fire
they say will refine us all,

and your empty hands
that scrape it.

Carl Phillips is always aware of that sky, reaches for it with hands that are never empty and, at his frequent best, leaves a gleaming platinum thread for readers to follow.

EDITORS' NOTES

We are proud to present a special double issue of *fireweed*. Our graphic designer, Jackie Kramer, had her first baby this November. Therefore, the production of *fireweed* needed to be stretched. In a time of collective grieving and anxiety, the *fireweed* editors would like to dedicate this issue to Jackie, her husband Stuart, and their brand new daughter, Lucy.

Look for our next *fireweed* reading at The Heathman Hotel in January. Consult your local listings for more information.

Thank you to Tracy Dillon, Nixie Stark, Shelley Reece, and The Center for Excellence in Writing at Portland State University for sponsoring this issue of *fireweed*.

Please continue to renew your subscriptions, and tell your friends about *fireweed*. For those wishing to purchase *fireweed* gift subscriptions, we will gladly send a notice of your gift to the recipient. Simply send us a check (\$12 for one year) and the name and mailing address of the person(s) to receive your gift. Let us know if you want your name included in the notice.

We are looking for a person or a team of grant writers willing to do some volunteer fundraising for *fireweed*. While the magazine has a small operating budget, subscriptions do not cover printing and mailing costs. Anyone interested in helping us fundraise should contact us at 5204 N Gay Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97217, or talk to any of the editors.

Got a fax machine that works, but it's collecting dust? Donate it to *fireweed* and get a tax write-off, as well as our gratitude.

Happy holidays. Be safe. Celebrate life.

CONTRIBUTORS

Emily Addiego is fourteen years old. She lives in Philomath and is a freshman at Corvallis High School. This is her first published work.

Judith Arcana's work has appeared recently in *Prairie Schooner* and *pms/poem memoir story*. More is forthcoming in *Aries*, *Red Cedar Review*, *13th Moon* and *The Oregon Review*. She has received a poetry award from the Deming Memorial Fund and a fellowship in poetry from Literary Arts.

Lois Baker won a National Endowment for the Arts grant to translate early poems of Fan Chengda (1126-1193), most of which have never been translated into a Western language. She was an Academy of American Poets translation award finalist for *Four Seasons of Field and Garden*, *Sixty Impromptu Poems* by Fan Chengda, Passeggiata Press. She has had work published in *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Calyx*, *Seattle Review*, *Colorado Quarterly* and others. Her published poetry collections are *Partial Clearing*, *Tracers*, and *Man Covered with Bees*.

Tim Barnes is the Chair of the Creative Writing Dept at PCC's Sylvania campus. His poems and essays have been published in *Nebraska Review*, *Oregon English*, *Fine Madness*, among others. He is the co-author of *Wood Works: The Life and Writings of Charles Erskine Scott Wood*.

Judith Barrington's most recent book, *Lifesaving: A Memoir*, was a finalist for the PEN/Martha Albrand Award for the Art of the Memoir this year, and won a Lambda Literary Foundation award. Her third collection of poetry, *Horses and the Human Soul*, will be published next year by Storyline Press.

Alicia Beale has been studying with poet David Beispiel at The Attic in Portland. Her work has been published in *Prairie Schooner* and the *Clackamas Literary Review*, and is forthcoming in the *Hawaii Pacific Review* and *The Seattle Review*. She earns a living as an information engineer and practices Tai Chi Chuan.

Alan Contreras, a resident of Eugene, has published several books and articles on birds and natural history, including *Northwest Birds in Winter*, Oregon State University Press, 1997. His poems have appeared in local publications and newsletters.

Christine Delea is originally from Long Island, New York and has lived all over the country. Now she lives in Portland with her husband and four cats. She has a Ph.D. in English from the University of North Dakota and teaches a community education class on Oregon authors for Portland Community College.

Jean Esteve lives in Waldport, Oregon. A frequent *fireweed* contributor, she has also had poems in *Greensboro Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Xanadu* and others.

Jane Glazer, an Oregon resident since age 12, has had work in *Americas Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Calapooya*, *Calyx*, *Five Fingers Review*, *Hubbub* and *Sojourner*, as well as several anthologies. She has won the William Stafford Award from the Washington State Poets Association. Her book *Some Trick of Light* was a finalist for the Oregon Book Awards in 1994. She lives in Portland.

Leanne Grabel is currently working on a comprehensive collection of poetry, monologues, and illustrations to be published by Cloudbank Books next spring, as well as a memoir. Grabel continues to teach poetry and spoken word performance all over Oregon in the public schools, and will be playing the alter-ego of several members of the Algonquin group in a Cygnet theatre production this spring. Grabel has two teenage daughters who, hopefully, will be getting jobs soon.

Erik Muller is a founding co-editor of *fireweed*. He received the Stewart H. Holbrook Special Award at this year's Oregon Book Awards, in recognition of his contributions to the advancement of Oregon's literary life. Traprock Books is his new imprint, with two titles coming out early next year: Bob Davies' *Timber* and David Laing's *Passage*.

Verlena Orr is the author of two chapbooks, *I Dance September Naked in a Dream* and *Woman Who Hears Voices*. She has received two Pushcart nominations and published work in numerous journals including *Poet & Critic*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Cream City Review*, *Slow Dancer (U.K.)*, *Cincinnati Poetry Review*, and *Flyway*.

Carlos Reyes is in Portland when not traveling to places like Spain, Panamá and Ecuador. His most recent collections of poetry are *Nightmarks* (1990) and *A Suitcase Full of Crows* (1995). Forthcoming from Salmon Press in Ireland is *Oilean Agus Oilean Lille*. His translations include *Puertas abiertas/Open Doors* by Edwin Madrid (Ecuador, 2001) and *Poemas de la Isla/Poems of the Island* (Eastern Washington University Press, 2000), reviewed in the fall 2001 issue of *fireweed*. Currently, he is translating the work of Jorge Carrera Andrade, Ecuador's preeminent poet.

Rob Schlegel is a 2001 graduate of Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon. His work has been published in *The Allegheny Review*. He lives in Portland.

Willa Schenberg received her second Oregon Literary Arts Fellowship in 1999, and a Deming Memorial Fund poetry grant. In 2000, she was Poetry Fellow at the Tyrone Guthrie Center, Annaghmakerrig, Ireland. Her poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review* as well as anthologies *Points of Contact: Disability, Art and Culture*, and *Knowing Stones: Poems of Exotic Places*. Her volume of poetry *In The Margins Of The World* was published this year by Plain View Press.

B.T. Shaw has been a journalist for more years than she cares to admit. Currently, she edits, among other things, the Poetry column in the Sunday *Oregonian*. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in a number of publications, including *Tin House*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Verse*.

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