

# fireweed

*poetry of Western Oregon*

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## *fireweed*

*fireweed, poetry of Western Oregon* features 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](mailto:fireweedmag@attbi.com). Please be sure to include a biographical note with your poems or your prose.

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*September 2002*

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PAULANN PETERSEN

***Small Acts of Devotion***

A flower has vines green and blue  
to weave a blue-green shadow,  
backdrop to the moist blossom's  
extravagant call for attention.

Deep leaf hollow, twining niche,  
that temple of the flower  
is not unlike the thin-skinned spot  
to one side of an eye:

temple of a loved one,  
destination for my eyes  
when, our long gaze broken,  
he takes a sidelong glance.

His temple marbled with veins  
is destination for my lips, having faith  
I could weight his eyelids, stir  
what pulses there with my kiss.

Or if not with the touch of my lips,  
surely then with my tongue's tip –  
my mouth against his veined skin  
a damp flower open again.

PAULANN PETERSEN

*Making Do*

All I do, I do with  
fingers that carry  
at each nail's quick

the first bit  
of a moon rising  
on the horizon.

All I do, I do  
for the moon  
lit like a candle

and set to float  
down a wide,  
winding stream.

Moon's light  
turning every green  
life to pewter.

Moon caught and wavered  
along the surface  
of a cup of watery

lies. Moon's boat,  
moon tight in the  
bowl of my eye.

PAULANN PETERSEN

*Words Rise from Nowhere Else*

Despite the whisper of death,  
each day my heart pumps out  
its strange and lovely litany,  
marks out a notation of lurching blood  
whether I take note of its rhythm  
or not. I can make my lungs stop —  
for a while — their swell and collapse,  
hold them still for a blue  
and dizzying count, but cannot hold  
my heart from its stroking.  
What if, to keep its beat,  
I had to remember how my heart  
is a heart, had to recall the way  
of its work each second second?  
I would be speechless.  
Surely this poem that is  
my life would stop.

PAULANN PETERSEN

*A Reading from the Compass  
of the Erotic World*

Pleasure's arrow, you've swung  
in the direction of the one heaven.  
Pleasure's dart, you align  
with marrow of the world.

Little tongue of wild greed,  
you waggle toward the stars,  
the swollen moon, you shiver to seek  
their hunger-sprung light.

Let yourself wobble and ache.  
Dip, kowtow your tip,  
point at that deep, deepest well,  
its rim: thick rime of salt.

You are a brassy bud,  
honey's one sharp drop –  
jitter of pollen getting a fix on  
your own homemade sun.

JUDITH H. MONTGOMERY

*Smudge*

We're a thumb apart.  
A smudge on the map.

You could transplant  
me from ripe dirt

soaked deep in spring  
to plains that brown in June.

They say one can adapt  
as a kidney adapts

from its donor to a hole  
in another home.

There are drugs to suppress  
the violence of its longing

for the red rush  
of its former particular heart.

Say I were to trade  
this geography for that:

would my fern-nursed body  
flourish in a bed

of bitterbrush light?  
of scepless scarp?

Could I bear to be dug  
out of thunderwatered soils

so long as I were stitched  
hip and rib to you?

I want it to be so –  
my self – severed, sutured –

grafting readily in place.  
Just another organ –

my green heart.

JUDITH H. MONTGOMERY

*The Sailor's Mistress: Aubade for One*

I remember your name in the night –  
past owl, past moon, past heartstrike  
toll'd on the fourth tender rib, past  
sleep, past dream or appetite.

I summon your shape, telling the beads –  
the alpha and beta of vanished bones.  
Harbor my breath, as your silhouette blurs,  
sluicing under the dawn.

I have knotted your name as a calendar rope,  
my blue gown rucked under restless flesh,  
my legs splayed white on the sheets,  
scissored by moonlight and blinds –

recalled your eye blinding to mine.  
A deliberate eclipsing – shutters clapped  
on a lamp. Glass'd in black. Fluent tongue  
sealed to the notes of my name.

Still my flesh spells you, rehearsing the night  
when we tangled and locked, weaving a net  
of wolves and nails and wild sighs.  
Beyond the wall, the sea's pounding.

If I chant the syllables of your shoals,  
invoke the clauses of one and one coming  
(going) – if I haunt the black window,  
hexing the sun, turn my back to the sash

to bar sharp-eyed dawn, would you rudder  
my bed, where no wolves roam, no winds  
lift the sail of my bark? My lips  
pour your name through indifferent dark,  
letters of salt stung in a slash.

DOUG MARX

*Thinking of Pascal*

Some saint's steeple  
silhouettes a night  
cop blue behind its lunar shield

no bell  
no hunchback in the tower

just a red brick syringe  
shooting up space  
with a white powder  
stepped on so many times

it can't kill the headache  
of a man who sits alone  
in a room of his infinite city

fearing men  
more than the deep spaces  
between stars

DOUG MARX

*i:II:2001*

I was thinking about my soul  
that old ship in a bottle,  
as if all it really took were  
see smell touch taste and  
listen, when a wayward  
brown sparrow freaked out  
trapped in the house of my skull,  
battering the windows because it's  
right there for the taking, blue  
sky white clouds,  
a paper birch shivering  
orgasmic silvers and  
green leaves in a breeze.

I hear terror and the carnal  
force field's orbits of creation  
whirr in its feathers as it  
whips and flutters around the room,

recovering to see it all again not  
remembering, and then BAM and I  
blink into mystery weeping  
to see it peck and fantail, peck  
and fantail the glass, seeking  
a way out, a way in

to a world so brutally beautiful  
the little suction cups of love  
that live at the tip of  
every one of my hairs rise  
up and stick  
to the very air, pulling me  
every whichaway at once until  
my pores cry more more more,



harmonizing with the mouths  
of insatiable infants who sing  
I want I need I want I need  
love me love me love me

forever ravenous at the full breast  
of all there is.

*-for Katharine Salzmann*

ALAN CONTRERAS

*On Hearing Pink Martini's "Bolero"*

What is this pulsing sound,  
white gold in spiral frenzy,  
opalescent wings flash out  
from butterflies of silver

That know the long-lost dances:  
diamond-set cadenzas  
in fiery rings surge upward  
to a lapis sky that sings

Like orioles in April, they  
lift on thrumming wings,  
surf waves of auburn sound  
up the latitudes of love;

The trees of Chimborazo  
awake to sparkling tickles  
as emeralds filled with longing  
swirl skyward past the cirrus

Through the secret gates of Heaven  
where they find the one they came for  
at last to end his slumber  
with a coruscating light:

Ravel awakes, bolt upright;  
he knows the sound at once,  
no labored replication  
and the stars themselves take flight.

KAREN BRAUCHER

*Kept*

The eyelids  
a giant movie screen,  
falling slowly into  
the pleasure of  
brocade, taffeta,  
like Madame Bovary  
would have desired.  
It's been so long  
since I allowed  
myself the pleasure  
of touching fabric,  
staring at colors  
one wants to roll in.

Like the time  
the beautiful young  
Portuguese woman  
at work began to talk  
about loving to smell  
different perfumes,  
at the store counter —  
she listed fragrance  
after fragrance  
I'd never whiffed.  
Such longing.  
No one had ever  
lifted glass bottles to

my nose, whispered,  
"Smell this and this."  
Feminine pleasures,  
why should they be  
denied? Languor  
and silk in secluded  
boudoirs are

calling. Always  
there are foreign  
furnishings, pungent  
aromas, the plush  
of tassled pillows,  
a cat stretching.

KAREN BRAUCHER

*Ragamuffin Coats*

Ragtag scraps sewn together, she's showing me,  
says, "You can work here and in just a few hours  
a day you can make lotsa money!"  
It's an old ramshackle bungalow she's  
rummaging through.

Outside  
donkeys and dogs in the sunny dirt,  
I put my best foot forward  
in this rat-trap interview, trying to get the best damn  
job possible, till she says, "Oh, we all  
make the coats here. After you get the knack, you'll  
do it in a jiffy."

Strangely beautiful, each coat different,  
like something from the Andes  
or Kathmandu —  
but looking like they're put together  
by bag ladies who inexplicably achieved focus.  
How they're put together, these ragamuffin  
coats don't try to hide. Unpretentious.

Like Joseph, could I  
have a razzle dazzle coat? Not  
from my father, but something  
made by my own hands and eyes?  
Despite everything, I'll save  
odds and ends, making  
things ragged,  
with colors shining.

KAREN MCPHERSON

*Sunday Pantoum*

At five it's dark already  
I haven't made the soup  
I didn't do the laundry either  
and now Sunday's over.

I haven't made the soup  
no fragrant steam fogging the windows  
and now Sunday's over  
there are letters I should write.

No fragrant steam fogging the windows  
nothing in the oven  
there are letters I should write  
but what's the point?

Nothing in the oven.  
I didn't do the laundry either  
but what's the point?  
It's dark already at five.

KIRK ELLIS

*The Gift*

This is just a visit I say  
as my plane takes me out  
over the ocean, above the clouds,  
into the lipstick smile of the young  
and blooming flight attendant.  
I wish I could thank her.  
Everything is so clear now,  
she tells me over three Bloody Marys,  
our eyes fumbling with the Cascade peaks.  
I look down her blouse as she leans.  
Here I go again, eager  
to uncork and unwind  
from another day of doing nothing,  
an exhausting task, alone.

Tonight is Mom's birthday —  
the taking of her breast successful.  
Three long decades from milk to beer,  
I've stared glassy-eyed  
at her lack of faith and wondered  
how she will die.  
Will she own that her life  
is more than firing synapses,  
episodes of cell division,  
coincidence, and hard work?  
She tells me I drink too much,  
but I only hear the mumble of Mad River,  
night speech of plant and stone  
still loud from my last visit.  
Something in it whispers  
drink deep and sleep,  
no one knows we're here.

GREGG MOSSON

*Ice and Light*

Ice-sheathed streets catch the pre-dawn.  
It flickers through like schools of minnows,  
through the calculus of an industrial city,  
houses so empty as people puddle in dream.  
Nightwind had carved fresh snowdrifts into  
iced cradles, which cup to curbside cliffs  
that splinter off. A rising sun hits those tips,  
vivifying them to constellations.  
At the brink of doorsteps is a light-web  
tight as concentration, fine as guitar  
notes. Then the city yearns into a vast  
exhale of gold. Runners shoe-up. But  
for one last instant, streets are pierced by  
a god charioteering earth to the world.

JAMES GRABILL

*Resolution*

A morning we argued steamed into noon  
and the block-ringed purring of tiger lilies  
that slowly move down the street beneath  
rhododendrons dripping with certain spiders.

Then it showed up in how the woman spoke  
clearly to the little boy. Breath opened further,  
and the athletic spiders worked until dusk.

JAMES GRABILL

*Basement*

In the basement, the bent pipes,  
spigots snaked, ducts mapping out  
nearby intake linkage, breathing valves,  
parts of lungs, cables, brooms, steel  
reachers, padded wrench gloves, rubber  
mountings and shade of garters, strands  
of bootstraps, crystal jugs of solvents, smaller  
and larger compressors, clamping mineral  
face straps, cast-iron long-pull hooks,  
and joints in a Jackson Pollock painting  
dominated by shaded forest branchings,

how it feels to be alive,  
solid as hair on our arms,  
solid as crows.

JAMES GRABILL

*Whatever We Might Have*

Sometimes we wake afraid the future burns,  
that buildings coolly tinted soak up soul  
dissolving our art or ethics if they want,  
that no one is in charge, past a point.

Whatever we might have halfway seen,  
whatever we might have memorized by heart,  
a landing sparrow hardly bends the branch.  
The storm door almost does not close  
but does. Is it through will  
a person works for others,  
bread, and subtle sense?

Maybe we were waking underground  
those days, those months, when work  
or lack of work showed everything was more  
than what we thought, more than what was said,  
more than anyone remembered.

Say the earth is speaking this  
through crickets, pulsing the night  
currents and rocking us.

GUEST POEM

B.T. SHAW

632

*The Brain - is wider than the Sky -  
For - put them side by side -  
The one the other will contain  
With ease - and You - beside -*

*The Brain - is deeper than the sea -  
For - hold them - Blue to Blue -  
The one the other will absorb -  
As Sponges - Buckets - do -*

*The Brain is just the weight of God -  
For - Heft them - Pound for Pound -  
And they will differ - if they do -  
As Syllable from Sound -*

*Emily Dickinson  
c. 1862*

I'm just back from a trip to New York City that included an unplanned pilgrimage to Ground Zero. The clean-up efforts are all but over; where there were mountains of rubble, two of the failed steel beams have been erected in the shape of a cross. Handmade memorials, some accompanied by photographs, still line the surrounding blocks, shouting at passers-by to never forget. But their colors are fading, and people do not, in general, stop to read. Eventually, I suspect, the posters and teddy bears will be put into storage, the cross disassembled. The crime scene tape will come down, and people will argue earnestly over what's to become of the property. This much is certain: Something will come next. Nature abhors a vacuum; likewise, human beings avoid a void.

More than the crowds with their cameras, more than the tight-lipped police officers, it was absence that gripped the heart and throat on a rainy spring Sunday in the city. A half-year earlier, in an inferno of sound and suffering, Something became Nothing. A hole in a skyline. A gulf in innumerable lives. The absence was, even months later, palpable and terrifying.

In 1862, her nation at war with itself and her own emotional balance threatened by what we only know was a deep loss, Emily Dickinson wrote poem after poem that walked to the rim of human spiritual experience, then dared the reader to peer into the darkness beyond. "My Business," she wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson that year, "is Circumference." From a Latin root meaning "to carry around," the circumference isn't a safe sideline. It is the edge of the known world. It sees all sides of a story. There, you must have the courage to count yourself in – and out.

The edge is a particularly unsteady perch for anyone who struggles with questions of faith. Of her immediate family, Dickinson wrote (again in 1862), "They are religious – except me – and address an Eclipse, every morning – whom they call their 'Father.'" Was she a person of faith? I'd say yes – a faith that rejected the limits on spiritual inquiry often imposed by organized religions. It seems, judging by her poems, to have been a faith that provided little comfort, that asked more questions than it could answer. In matters of the soul, Dickinson kept her wits about her.

Even in a poem like #632, which seems nothing if not linear, Dickinson circles back to the juncture of Known and Unknown. The first two stanzas work like simple mathematical equations, with dashes in the first lines operating as greater-than signs, then as pointers to the beautiful proof: Our minds make us like gods, able to hold both sea and sky.

But on closer look, the poem's logic snaps back on itself. The sky and sea, of course, exist independently of us; they are there whether we think about them or not. And the human brain can consider – it can impose judgment upon – the natural world, but only in a very limited way. We understand the sky we stand under only on our own terms, be they mathematical or verbal. And we see the sea but from a single viewpoint. Ultimately, whatever direction we face, we stand in our own way.

The first line of the third stanza eliminates the midpoint dash: "The Brain is just the weight of God – / For – Heft them – Pound for Pound –/ And they will differ – if they do – / As Syllable from Sound –"

Is Dickinson saying that the brain equals God? That the mind, constantly making itself up, also makes up faith? I'm just a lapsed Roman Catholic burdened with the gift of skepticism, and I'm not qualified to address the myriad implications of this stanza, to place them in historical or theological context. But I will venture this: In light of the previous stanzas, Dickinson seems here, in the third, to be eyeing the limits of human knowledge, not the nature of God. Also, it seems to me, she is expressing an unwillingness to support a spiritual taxonomy that files the human in one drawer, the divine in another. Here, I don't find answers; but I find company in my terrors.

In #632 and others, Dickinson shows us not the center of things but the view from the perimeter. What goes around in her poems, comes around – refreshed, renewed, revised by the mind. And if it turns out in the end that faith is all in the head, well, tell me: What better place could there be for it?

JAMES DOTT

*7 Horses, 32 Blankets*

When he was still called "Curly"  
he went to the Black Hills  
and dreamed himself out of this, the shadow world,  
into the real world  
where his horse, a bay, seemed to float,  
dancing before an approaching storm,  
the bay became a paint, then a sorrel,  
then a spotted black on gray.  
He wore blue leggings,  
a shirt of white buckskin, no shirt,  
one feather braided in his loose hair,  
a small brown stone tied behind an ear.  
Enemies were coming,  
he rode on,  
arrows, bullets streaked around him.  
Some of his people tried to hold him back  
he shook them off.  
There was a zigzag of lightning painted on his cheek.  
There were spots like hail on his chest, belly, back.  
Flying above him a small red-tail hawk cried, "kill-ee, kill-ee."  
When Curly told his father this real world dream  
his father passed on his name  
Curly became *Tasunke Witko*, Crazy Horse,  
bison hunter, warrior.  
Before battle he went off alone  
dreamed himself again into that world.  
No bullet ever touched him.

Hornell, Heilemann, Stroh took his name.  
They used it to brand Crazy Horse Malt Liquor:  
a quick ride into drunkenness, that tramples the liver, kicks in the skull.  
They took his name:  
Crazy Horse, who never drank whiskey,  
Crazy Horse who saw those spirits possess  
the bluecoat soldiers, his own people  
Crazy Horse who saw them go crazy, puking up their souls,  
His Oglala descendants, who have no bison to hunt,

who have seen so many lost to alcohol,  
sued for defamation of spirit.

After the great victory at Little Bighorn  
the Black Hills were still taken,  
the Sioux chiefs were murdered at Fort Keough,  
whole herds of bison were slaughtered by white hunters  
who took only the skins, left the flesh to rot,  
and always more and more whites arriving.  
His people were worn down,  
not enough blankets, not enough food,  
his own wife sick,  
he surrendered, went in  
to Fort Robinson on the White Earth River.

Hornell still brews Crazy Horse Malt Liquor,  
sees no reason to stop.  
Heilemann went bankrupt.  
The Strohs got out of brewing and settled.  
They came to Pine Ridge.  
They brought seven thoroughbred race horses  
one for each of the breweries they had owned.  
They brought thirty-two Pendleton blankets  
for the thirty-two states  
where they sold it.

When Crazy Horse saw the iron bars on the windows,  
he tried to back out of that cage  
but Little Big Man grabbed his arms,  
a soldier stuck a bayonet in his back, slicing a kidney.  
His father sat with him  
as his blood soaked into the earth.  
The Army put his body in a wooden box.  
His people took it to Spotted Tail Agency  
put up it on a death scaffold in the old Oglala way  
where the vultures and eagles and maggots  
could take it back to the earth and the sky.  
They kept his heart though  
and buried it out on the prairie  
somewhere along a creek  
called Wounded Knee.



JAMES DOTT

*Belly Up to the Bar*

So, you nearly lost it all this time  
when you crossed the bar  
in a heavy swell, in fog,  
she took on water, nearly foundered in the breakers,  
but the Coast Guard came and you got in,  
pumped her out, sold your catch,  
and headed to your favorite bar.  
You knock back two shots  
to calm your shaking hands,  
take two more to quench the "what ifs"  
and start toasting the old wrecks:  
the Iredale, the Isabella  
from before dredging, jetties, GPS.  
The loud voices, laughter ebb suddenly  
when you buy a round in memory  
of all the guys who never made it back.  
But your crew's all safe,  
home with their girlfriends, wives,  
your first-mate, a few stools down, telling his buddy  
how that s.o.b. of a skipper almost got him killed today.

Tonight you'll swear you'll never cross that bar again,  
try and sell the boat cheap,  
when no one makes an offer,  
you'll try to give it away,  
they all know you too well  
to take you up on it.  
Tomorrow you'll swear off booze.  
The day after that you'll be fueled up, on your way out  
at slack tide, the bar like glass,  
ready again to try your luck and skill against wind and tide,  
knowing it's always easier to leave  
than come back home.

DAN RAPHAEL

*Grazing the elements*

A bowl full of deep water that can't be lifted —  
i didn't know our house went so far down, with a walk-in china closet  
as each meal is comprehensive:

everything the greens & carrots  
read with their roots, the potatoes immersion theatre  
as if the local park's not an extinct volcano  
but a patient mound of tubers sharing news with the rainflow

feedlot cows have so little to say — quonset fryers even less —  
with no vistas to experience, eating what's mono-cropped pelletized  
and as edited & steam-cleaned by additives as the network news.  
yet to eat the chicken who'd patrolled your yard for months in all weathers  
eating last year's corn, now's grass and insects;  
or the cow who's tongued every corner of the back 40.

hunters think they enjoy the hunt but it's information they're after,  
the lore of the forest too compelling to resist, yet too foreign  
for a primitive to unscroll:

i don't drink through my mouth  
only by soaking in a river or fresh tub.  
Eat soil and sunshine, treasuring eggs and grubs,  
standing naked in a windy gully 'til i'm too full to dress

DAN RAPHAEL

*Untitled*

years of walking hatless in the rain  
leave the history of what the rain fell through  
leaving a pattern, a dye  
a slight shift in the posture of new facts

as our vision diminishes with age  
because the residue of what we've seen  
as our memories get spotty  
because we're trying to hold on to so much  
our catch basins less deep, less wide  
coz of what can't be flushed

so much information  
in every breath we take  
that even if you received no new talk  
your body would know what was going on —  
the water knows the news, food is history

like a 40 year old yam it takes a village to dig and haul:  
as we peel it  
our skins grow thinner  
so the full sun shows the stories wrapped round our bones like scrolls  
bones bent by the information, bones trading calcium for data storage

even abandoned houses  
can collapse on calm days  
after decades of rain, wind and light  
after decades of temptations to migrate,  
to go down the road, round the corner,  
the foundation wants to talk to the roof  
and the dried skin of long gone people  
drifting under the door, through the breathing slivers  
of windows and frames  
til the day the window  
so full of light  
becomes a blinding spoonful of sand

our bodies  
ending in the slow crumble  
or released by fire:  
all our information  
added to the earth and wind

as any rock dug from however deep  
is thick with forgotten languages  
no matter how we purify the silicon  
it adds a little to every bit it passes  
as the smallest blink of electricity  
squeeze from oil, atoms, water, sun or wind  
has something to say

DAN RAPHAEL

*the news from yesterday & tomorrow*  
*(for casey bush)*

tribes negotiating with icebergs; lost girls transformed into angels  
turning a new religion into a nation rediscovered in a tunic's seams.

we ask the penguins for forgiveness, rolling on beds as moist as ink pads  
reprinting the lumps of our bodies into a topographical celebration  
as i will my eyes to a better vantage  
where the fallen rain climbs uphill on newly evanescent treads

my body is a single drop from an airplane's maw  
refueling every 8 hours, never touching down,  
adding minutes to our lives & freeing our flesh from thinking  
we weren't born from wild naughas  
spun from the skin of giant bus exhaust —

whole villages on 16 wheels turning cornfields into parking lots  
for stores selling what must enhance our lives  
the way mites improve pigeons' intelligence  
so they know the difference between mirrors and windows  
and how flying inside the right mouth they can trade wings  
for upright bodies & unlimited credit  
while their magic bones continue to appease gravity  
the way a silver bullet every morning reinvents the alphabet within me

CHRIS ANDERSON

*Uncle Wally Reads Augustine*

Uncle Wally reads Augustine's *Confessions*  
but finds it too narrow and dark.  
Why was this man so tortured?  
Why spurn the lovely limbs we so long desire?

But then a door opens unto a sweetness,  
Uncle Wally reads,  
a state of sudden, pure delight,  
before our sad weight makes us fall again,  
we are swallowed up and weep.

And this Uncle Wally understands:  
the sad heaviness,  
the weight of the body.

But the sweetness, too.  
God opens a door: the birds, say,  
and the sun in the morning,  
or the pretty young girls who always take his orders,  
their blond hair so shiny and soft,  
and the light is falling on the table cloths and the plates,  
it's blinding and white,  
and the yokes of the eggs are running,  
the yokes of the eggs are so yellow and pure  
he could eat and eat and eat.

CHRIS ANDERSON

*Uncle Wally Is Tempted by Evil Spirits*

Uncle Wally tosses and turns on his narrow little bed.

His teeth are bubbling on the nightstand, in a glass.

During the day, when he puts them in,  
his mouth turns down like a clamp,  
like a puppet jaw,  
snapping and clacking when he talks.

But now his teeth are bubbling in a glass,  
and his mouth caves in, it is a hole,  
and the evil spirits are coming out from the walls  
and trying to enter into him.

You have no teeth, Uncle Wally, they say.  
You are empty. You are nothing.  
Let us fill you up.

And he tosses and turns,  
he tightens his lips and he shakes his head,  
tears streaming.

In the morning when he comes down to breakfast,  
he is clean and bright and smells of aftershave.  
His teeth clack once a minute, every time he smiles,  
broad and straight and white.

No one knows the battle he has fought that night,  
the battle he fights every night,  
tossing and turning on his narrow little bed.

CHRIS ANDERSON

*Uncle Wally Fades Away*

Uncle Wally fades into the landscape.

First a tree,  
then a line of trees,  
then a cloud,  
then a cloud settling over a hill,  
then dew on the grass.

Then animal again, singular:  
a varied thrush humming in the alder,  
a crouching lynx,  
a bounding doe.

Then Uncle Wally rises up  
and moves out over the water.  
He descends into the bay.

A sleek, black head breaks the surface,  
shiny and wet,  
then sinks back down again,  
drifting and drifting away.

MICHAEL JENKINS

*Answer*

A jay screeches from a pine.  
Shale shifts down the mountain.  
A trout lifts from the water,  
beaches its body atop a rock  
glistening as if its life were aimed  
at this wide-eyed moment,  
mouth open, gasping, unable  
to form a single word for it  
before slipping back  
into the stream.

MICHAEL JENKINS

*Barber Shop News*

Magazines at the Riverview Barber Shop  
with their newsworthy flames searing the covers  
seconds before the crash, hit the stands  
during the administration-before-last.  
Little else changes here. Same hair.  
Same Lucky Tiger bottle half full.  
Same rules: *You leave, you lose your place,*  
*And What's said here stays here.*  
Sam steps out to stretch his bum leg and slips  
back in ahead of Pete who's shouting  
over the clippers buzzing to earn their keep  
what the wives will hear tonight,  
how he's got the "prostrate" cancer,  
his mistake foreshadowing his end, Cliff  
commenting, "Is that right?" and combing on.

DENNIS MCBRIDE

*A General Theory of Hate*

Dear Gretel:  
You took our bread crumbs  
and left me in the forest.  
Finally I understand why  
you had to shit on me.  
Manure is necessary for growth.  
You had to shove another child out of your nest,  
get on with your new life of becoming a teacher  
filling the off time in your search for the sacred text  
by teaching me a lesson.

Now you won't fuck me any more  
and you don't give a damn about me.  
Helen's face didn't launch a thousand ships,  
Hell, they were just trying to get away from her.  
They'd learned their lesson,  
those weren't sour grapes, they were poison.  
It really works, doesn't it,  
this wisdom and growth thing.  
Best, Hansel.

JEAN ESTEVE

*Je Resente*

Sir, I resent your calling me a worm  
and only hope this new-found bravado I have shown  
by standing up to you (after years of persecution)  
will drum a storm of protest from my kin.

Mind you, I admit to being narrow and long,  
a tube ringed black and glossy golden brown,  
and I make little esses to get to where I'm going  
eating dirt along the way

but it hurts me when you say  
that word. Worm. I would certainly prefer  
something more like "butterfly" or "bird."

JEAN ESTEVE

*Gray Day*

On an ordinary, Oregon, overcast day,  
one detail, two, may happen to shine  
through the dark wet sand siding Alsea Bay.  
I claim what I find as mine,

a bent spoon left in a flattened fort,  
the give-away bubble from a hidden clam,  
neon winks from a Japanese port,  
a fallen star, Oz, I am

free to choose whatever I please  
from these lucky luminosities.

ADAM P. SWEENEY

*Green Flash*

Flat horizon,  
clear: no smoke  
no haze. My friends  
at the beach tell me

they've seen it – the green  
lasts for just a second  
or two as the last leg  
of light bends around

the earth like a lid  
closing over your eyes.  
We watch for this last  
image before night,

its crescent burnt  
on our minds – sealed  
for dreams of sea water  
and saint-like fire.

For all the sailor stories  
sworn from this dock,  
lies mostly, fish tales  
spat out between lines

common as tobacco  
through grinning teeth,  
we wait to see it  
with our own eyes

crinkled from the squint.

VIRGINIA CORRIE-COZART

### *1. Deep in the Ozarks*

Near the river, a firefly's light  
flames and decays.  
Our headlights pick out a billboard,  
"Onyx Cave Campground.  
Tour limestone caves, \$2.00.  
See where slaves hid."  
We pull in.  
Locusts siren a crisis.  
Grasses at water's edge  
send up flares.

A peacock inside his coop  
drags the eyes of his tail  
like an Aubrey Beardsley sketch  
and screams to the night  
while dark in the woods,  
wattled pilgrim of moonshine,  
the wild turkey gobbles an answer.  
Tails quiver and fan.  
The campground seems to submerge,  
fireflies escaping like bubbles  
to the surface above the trees.

### *2. Onyx Cave Campground*

The new owners greet their guests,  
eager with stories:  
*This was part of the underground railroad,  
the stone house, pre-Civil War.  
Some boards pull up to show  
the stream, there, under the house,  
run-aways, inches from water,  
caged until the moon went down.*

*Last week a pack of hounds  
treed a raccoon in that cottonwood.*

*The previous owner kept girls  
down river in a floathouse.  
One night two men drove up in a motorhome,  
walked right into our stone house.  
Where's the action? said one.  
When the fellow opened the van,  
we saw a dozen kids inside,  
like they never saw the light of day.  
Now, what do you think?*

*They say the locusts have been buried  
for seventeen years.*



DEREK SHEFFIELD

*Illinois Away*

In lightless acres, she sleeps,  
stars and grasses tapping  
summer skin. All day  
she dug, a ground her wrist  
will not forget,  
                    and the wind.

In another state, a window  
left open, and his eyes  
searching the silt of near dream.  
Maybe climbing light  
will rush his long shadow  
down the windrows.

REVIEW

JOHN MORRISON

**Floyd Skloot, *Evening Light*  
(Story Line Press, 2001)**

Any time spent with *Evening Light* is time that returns to you as you move around your own world. Floyd Skloot sees into his moment, or those of an artist or family member with such precision, you can't help but see your own reflection in the poetry. As you would expect from Skloot's previous books and work published in magazines across the country, *Evening Light* is a mature work that resonates with the deep life.

The book moves in five sections. One explores the life of the artist, one the poet's persistent illness; one the passing away of loved ones at the right time or in "The Proper Season"; the fourth section explores the central metaphor, water; and in the last section, the poet gathers energy toward a gentle conclusion.

On successive readings, I couldn't help but be impressed by the rich artistry within the overall composition of the book, its formal and lyric elegance, and the poet's abiding generosity. The book begins with the section, "The Inner World," which plays with an imagined insight into the lives of artists as into the lives of the saints. As Monet's wife says of the obsessed painters, these are "men who would paint/their wives on death-beds if the light were right." In the conclusion to the same poem, "Argentueil, 1874," Skloot tells us how art — and the poet's vision — playfully wraps around itself:

In the closed circle of their art ... Manet  
paints the Monets in their garden as Monet  
paints a grinning Manet painting the Monets  
in their garden and Renoir paints the Monets  
in their garden in the summer in Argentueil.

In another poem the father of Russian music discovers the Zapateado, a dance that draws him closer to his soul. Each artist pursues “a science of art, perception exactly/re-enacted in all its perfect pleasure.” This theme and that of camaraderie, even in the fading light, run through the book.

So many of the poems roll forward on a marvelous music, rhymes and slants in couplets, quatrains, or sonnets. Even while watching, you’re well-seduced by poems before you ever notice the machinery of their meter and scheme. One graceful sonnet tricks us inside a “Change of Weather”:

Tonight I hear the rising autumn wind  
and whirling leaves, I hear the heavy rain  
arrive as if released from deep within  
the wind like rage, or a sudden insane  
blossoming of pain, the kind that woke me  
in time to hear this headlong rush of rain.

In the same poem Skloot employs a vision that threads through the book. Charles Baudelaire forwarded the idea that the perceived world is a metaphor for the self. Often Skloot takes us inside his illness, probably Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome, by taking us inside what he sees and hears. His motive? There’s no self-pity here, only another facet of a generous poet creating understanding. In the “blue stars” of his poem “Bitter Nightshade,” he tells us, “in this light the long shadows run like tears./ The wide yellow berries starting to run/toward red are the exact color of grief.”

Here is a poet not afraid to share what he has learned, in the poem “End Stage” as disease claims the brother of the speaker: “He enters a shaft of light and turns gold/for a moment, his skin glowing as though/radiant with warmth. Yet he is always cold, growing paler as the day wanes . . .” Or what he has learned of determination from his mother in “Hurricane Watch”:

I am  
back on the beach in the eye  
of a hurricane.  
I am  
ten years old and alone  
in the calm’s  
eerie light  
breathing in the charged air,  
waiting  
for the next inevitable  
furious blast to arrive.

There is so much in this book that bears mention. To its credit, each time I turn to pull one section from the next, lay it apart from the others to take a good hard look, the section snaps back into place like there’s an elastic sinew pulling the book back into a whole.

One such sinew is how the speaker and the people moving around in his poems hold themselves up against adversity, with the intangible of determination or maybe a mundane cane. But another element is at work. In several poems, Skloot uses a natural “we.” Once inside a scene as a reader, you look around the poem and see it’s just you and the poet in that “we” as in the final poem, “Flight”: “This is/the moment we know pure flight/has little to do with lift/or drag and much to do with/dreams.”

As the poet helps you to an understanding, he offers not a cane or the arm of a chair, but his own shoulder to support you as you lift yourself up.

### THREE SHORT REVIEWS

ALAN CONTRERAS

David Laing, *Passage*  
(Traprock Books, Eugene, 2002)

Michael Spring, *Edge of Blue*  
(Siski Press, Corvallis, 2002)

Hannah Wilson, *The Habit of Digging*  
(Bella Publications, Eugene, 2002)

These reviews focus on three recent chapbooks by Willamette Valley poets. Microfibers in the great tapestry of poetry can sometimes prove the most lasting strands of all: I will mention only Dickinson and Cavafy. All three of these Oregon poets have been a presence in northwest writing for many years, and all three collections show that experience. Otherwise they represent three very different styles, in both presentation and of content.

It is easy to see David Laing's *Passage* as nature poetry, but even in recent decades the arms of that goddess have encompassed a vast flock of naturophiles from the brooding bone-tapper, Loren Eiseley, to the celebratory Linnaean, Pattiann Rogers. Laing's approach is delicate without losing strength, not the easiest task, and his themes are familiar without being tedious: the movements of geese, the rise and fall of waters, hawks on the hunt and herons on the watch.

Laing's poems and their subjects are clearly inhabitants of western Oregon; poems of place, not just symbols bolted onto a natural frame. Wendell Berry writes of the mind being "at home on its native ground"; that calm sense of belonging, the unfeigned connection with the nearby natural world, is the great strength of *Passage*.

The writing is measured and spare, more akin to Basho than

to any modern American who leaps to mind, Merwin at his least mystic and some of Gary Snyder perhaps excepted. These words flow so well that there seem to be more than are actually present; witness the concluding section from "Prey," in which a familiar hawk greets the poet:

I am not prepared  
when she decides  
drops from the sky

swoops  
comes closer each time  
aiming I realize

for the heart

A poet sensing the beauty of our surroundings can sometimes allow the flow of descriptive language to uproot lighter facts and carry them out of sight. The reference to "rosy finches" resting in a madrone in "Farmer Creek/Meditation" is an example. Rosy finches, birds of subalpine rocks such as Steens Mountain and the Three Sisters, wintering in open spaces, will rarely see a madrone, an ornithological quibble which detracts little from the overall enjoyment of this volume.



Michael Spring's *Edge of Blue* is a more varied collection and contains more people than finches. His collection doesn't offer a visit to a familiar place, rather a view of things familiar and unfamiliar from unusual angles. There is a lot that snaps and crackles in this collection, the work of a poet who has both an exceptional command of language and the ability to see ordinary events from points no one else would think of. This variance in viewpoint and tone of his collection makes for a swooping ride from the dark challenge of boxing gloves prepared (to settle a father-son argument?) but never used:

when he visits  
his father never talks about them  
but they are always in the room

to the startling "licking the corn field," which begins:

I know I shouldn't have  
done that – now I'm stuck  
pulling crows from my tongue  
like burrs from socks

This truly original voice generates a full spectrum of visions from a surprising variety of viewpoints. Many modern poets – even many good ones – work mainly within a given though unstated framework of experience, topics and issues. Few can see so much of what the world really contains (or might contain) as Michael Spring.

Sometimes his desire to work with a specific reality sails into shoal water: one poem contains the words "ootheca" and "blattarian" in less than three lines. I was not sure whether to reach for the dictionary or the eyedrops. Such pulsing objects dredged from the scientific abyss argue for a poetic catch-and-release program: they add veracity and color but at too great a cost to readability. Yet it is a tribute to Spring's ability that even this poem fought free of its lexical quicksand to reveal an unusual view of, yes, cockroaches, which emerge

like a gang of young teens  
having crawled out of their bedroom  
windows to meet in the park

an embryotic molt

Spring's collection contains such an exceptional variety of interesting, well-written poems that anyone who wants to read the best of Oregon poetry should get a copy before they disappear.



The preceding two collections are written by observers looking, for the most part, at others or at the natural world. Hannah Wilson's *The Habit of Digging* is more introspective, visiting pockets of personal and family history with a clear eye and the advantages that come from a lifetime of careful observation, self-awareness and attention to language.

Two of the best poems in this collection link a past and present event, e.g. remembrance of a girl riding her bicycle away from New York City is brought back by the sight of a more modern yet corroded bike on the beach, insufficient to carry the weight of time:

I want to ride this uncomplicated,  
back-road vehicle back  
into those still-lives. But the bike is rusted,  
the tires flat, and the sand softens,  
the later it gets.

Likewise, "The White Sweater" links the touch of a sweater found at a modern store to one she wore fifty years ago when her body was becoming that of a woman – a body that has changed once again:

I don't have room for this sweater I want  
to wear away the imposed shame,  
to atone to my severed breasts for my betrayal.

Knowing the poet as one of my English teachers from many years ago, I find most stirring "The Teacher," which begins with her comment on an ill-chosen obituary, presumably for a friend, and concludes with these words about a teacher known to be difficult:

But through every cold season, a few,  
boys and girls, hung upon her arms unshaken.  
They followed her home for seminars in Milton,  
and when she'd made the darkness visible,  
they carried in her firewood.

What more moving poem has ever been written of a teacher? This poem has a silverprint quality, an image clear and yet possessed of gradations that take additional looks before they can be seen. Many of the poems in this shortest collection of the three share these qualities, the richest in human experience and perhaps in wisdom.

## EDITORS' NOTES

We are enjoying some good press and feedback from our last special double issue, which sold out almost immediately. A second run is being considered. The Heathman once again hosted an intimate reading featuring *fireweed* readers from the current issue. Carlos Reyes, B.T. Shaw, Judith Barrington, Leanne Grabel and Verlena Orr read their poems.

In March, *fireweed* editors Pat Vivian and Sydney Thompson were guests on Walt Curtis' "Talking Earth" show on KBOO radio. Editor Shelley Reece and former editor and founder Erik Muller called to participate. It was an opportunity to discuss *fireweed* and its role in the local writing community.

Speaking of small presses, we are happy to spotlight a new publisher of Oregon writers, Taprock Books, the brainchild of *fireweed* founding editor Erik Muller. Taprock offers two new titles, *Timber* by Robert A. Davies, a long meditative poem on life a small Oregon lumber town, and *Passage* by David Laing, reviewed in this issue. Davies is editor of *Mr. Cogito*, now available online. Laing is a *fireweed* founding editor.

Portlandia Press recently released *Pilgrims & Beggars*, a chapbook by Portland poet David Biespiel, who teaches at The Attic. Biespiel is one of two winners of Portlandia's annual chapbook contest (the other winner is John Burawieccki of Connecticut for *Five-hundred Widowers in a Fight of Chamomile*). The publisher of Portlandia Press is Karen Braucher, who has poems in this issue of *fireweed*.

We are always on the lookout for news of publishing in Oregon, as well as new books by Oregonians. If you know of something that's recently been released, or is about to be, please let us know so we can mention it here.

Thanks to faithful subscribers and generous contributors, *fireweed* continues to survive on a shoestring. Our biggest fiscal hurdle by far is printing. If anyone knows of a printer willing to donate all or part of its costs, we would gratefully acknowledge the gift in print. *fireweed* has nonprofit status, so any donations are tax-deductible.

In the meantime, please encourage fellow poetry lovers to subscribe – at \$12 a year, it's hardly spendy. So far, we've been surprised and touched by the generosity of our subscribers and supporters. You're the ones helping us keep the fires in *fireweed* lit.

Sydney, Shelley and Pat  
*fireweed* editors

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Chris Anderson's** book of poems, *My Problem with the Truth*, will be published this fall by Bedbug Press, a new small press in Canada. Peter Sears and Michael Malan, who published *Millennial Spring* under their "Cloudbank" imprint, are editing and designing the book in Corvallis.

**Karen Braucher** was an Oregon Book Award finalist in 2001. In addition to many prizes for her poetry, her poems have appeared in *Nimrod*, *Oregon Review*, and *The Spoon River Poetry Review*.

**Alan Conteras** lives in Eugene. He has published several books and articles on birds and natural history, including *Northwest Birds in Winter* (Oregon State University Press). His poems have appeared in many local publications and newsletters.

**Virginia Corrie-Cozart** lives and writes in Salem, Oregon. Her work has appeared in *fireweed*, *The Oregonian* and the *Prairie Star*.

**James Dott** lives in Astoria and teaches third grade in Clatskanie. He co-hosts Monday-Mike, a monthly poetry reading at the River Theater in Astoria, and his poems have appeared in *Hubbub*, *Manzanita Quarterly* and *PoetsWest*.

**Kirk Ellis** is a poet and teacher living in Portland. He has his Master's degree in writing and has been published in a variety of literary journals including, *The Spring Hill Review*, *Cyph*, and *The Loving Nowhere*. He is also a yoga instructor, gardener, and musician.

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

**James Grabill** is the author of *Listening to Leaves Form*. A Hazel Hall Poetry Award winner and frequent contributor to *fireweed*, James is currently finishing a manuscript of poetry entitled, *Rain from the Ocean*.

**Michael Jenkins** is a homemaker in Grants Pass. His poems appear in journals around the state of Oregon.

**Dennis McBride** won the 1996 Andres Berger Award for poetry. He lives as a free-lance writer in Portland, and he is the author of *Looking for Peoria* and *Killing the Mockingbird*, from Quiet Lion Press.

**John Morrison** lives in Portland. His poems have appeared in *Seattle Review*, *Cimarron Review* and *Poetry East*. He is a regular contributor to *fireweed*.

**Karen McPherson** teaches at the University of Oregon and has poetry published in several small journals.

**Judith Montgomery** lives in Bend and has received many prizes for her poetry, including nominations for the Pushcart Prize, National Writers Union and Red Rock poetry prize. She is currently finishing a full-length manuscript titled *Flight*.

**Gregg Mosson** is a frequent contributor to *fireweed*. He has also had poems published in the *Oregonian*, *Street Roots*, and *Benign Chaos*, among others.

**Paulann Petersen** has a forthcoming collection of poems titled, *The Wild Awake*, from Confluence Press. Her work has appeared in *fireweed*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Poetry* and elsewhere.

**Dan Raphael** currently has poems in *5 Tropes*, *Firebrush*, *Pavement Saw*, *Pemmican* and *Raven Chronicles*. His most recent book-length collection is

*Showing Light a Good Time*, published by Jazz Police Books. He is also the publisher of 26 Books and Unnum Press in Portland.

**B.T. Shaw** edits 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*.

**Derek Sheffield's** poems have recently appeared in *Crab Creek Review*, *The Bellingham Review* and *Clackamas Literary Review*. He has a book from Blue Begonia Press, *A Mouthpiece of Thumbs*. His interview with Kim, Dorothy and Barbara Stafford will appear in the Fall/Winter issue of *The Seattle Review*, as part of a special retrospective on William Stafford.

**Adam P. Sweeney** lives in Newberg. This is his first appearance in *fireweed*.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

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