

FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon



Volume Three, Number Two January 1992 \$2.50



FIREWEED: POETRY OF WESTERN OREGON is published quarterly in October, January, April and July. ***FIREWEED*** publishes poets living in the western half of Oregon, though poems need not be regional in subject. Manuscripts should include a return envelope with sufficient postage. We also need a biographical note. Inquiries about submission of reviews or essays are welcome. Subscriptions are \$10 for four issues. All contents are copyrighted 1992 by ***FIREWEED***, 1330 E. 25th Ave., Eugene, OR 97403

Editors: Erik Muller, David Laing, Ann Staley

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Robert A. Davies	THE IMPORTANCE OF FLOWERS	/ 5
	DOWN THE STREET	/ 6
Harold Johnson	SMELL THEORY	/ 8
Jim Shugrue	STARING	/ 9
	DESTINATIONS	/ 10
Lisa M. Steinman	THE DESCENT	/ 11
Charles Goodrich	HER FIRST GARDEN	/ 13
Quinton Hallett	BEFORE THE ARGUMENT	/ 14
Cecelia Hagen	FAMILY LIFE	/ 15
Barbara La Morticella	FAULT	/ 16
Nancy Dahlberg	HEART LESSON	/ 17
Maria A. Wickwire	OPEN FIELD	/ 18
	JEALOUSY	/ 19
Peter Jensen	49. THE FIRE	/ 20
Christopher Howell	TWO VIEWS OF MORNING AT DEVIL'S LAKE	/ 21
Anita T. Sullivan	YOUR NAME	/ 22
J. Paul Baron	BACKYARD TALK	/ 23
Ingrid Wendt	YES, "THE RAINBOW BEGINS WITH YOU,"	/ 24
Jane Glazer	GOING UNDERGROUND	/ 25
Ger Killeen	FERNS IN SNOW	/ 26
	IN SNOW COUNTRY	/ 27
Joan Edwards	GHAZAL 1	/ 28
	GHAZAL 14	/ 29

Lee Crawley	SUNLIGHT COMES TO THE MUDFARM	/ 30
Lois Rosen	NOT AS A LAMB	/ 31
Libby A. Durbin	MOM ADDS SPICE TO MONOGAMY, MAKING BELIEVE HE'S A PHILANDERER	/ 32
Catherine McGuire	NORA	/ 34
Amy Schutzer	ON THE TRAIN BETWEEN SALT LAKE AND GRAND JUNCTION	/ 35
Scott Starbuck	SIGN AT GRACIE'S: THERE ARE BIGGER AND BETTER FISH CAUGHT HERE THAN IN THE SEA	/ 36
Susan Spady	THE WISHING POOL	/ 37
Charles Goodrich	THE FLU	/ 38
Elaine Weiss	REVIEW: TRACKS IN OREGON BY ROBERT A. DAVIES	/ 39
David Shevin	COMMENT	/ 40
	EDITORS' NOTES	/ 42
	CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES	/ 43

Robert A. Davies

THE IMPORTANCE OF FLOWERS

Sitting in this room
where I have come to help--
its cloths pink
and yellowed white
covering the windows
(sunlight coming thru
every once in a while),
its every surface cluttered
with gloves, bandages, needles
disinfectants, pills
pepsi cans, cartons of juice--
I gaze at the flowers
on top of the TV
in a sweet pickle jar,
flowers blue, green and red
scilla, false solomon's seal, tulip.

I have not wanted to look too much
at the man in the bed:
I am a stranger,
too much bother
for this skeleton
who closes his eyes,
jerks his head back and forth
with a low moan.

He removes the stained blanket
from his body
(the scilla tall
and faded blue)
this man who is 62,
perhaps exactly my age,
on his way out
he said a while ago.

He doesn't reply to my questions:
would he like a drink
is he in pain
would he like a pillow to prop him up.
He coughs, turns his finger in his ear
scratches with curled hand
his shoulder, chest, buttock
turns each foot round and round.

I gaze at the flowers.
The radio clock is 4 hours slow.
The jar is beautiful, too.
3 hours have passed.
The old man is still sleeping.

It does not seem a bad way to go.
The solomon's seal smells sweet.
I don't know what happened to my fears.

DOWN THE STREET

A woman plants
plants pansies for peace.
That seems a hopeless sort of thing
but it is more than we do
our futile posters coming down
like our hopes
one by one.

My hands on this boy's head--
this time it is not my son
whose hair I am washing

this boy ill
not with chickenpox

The alternative seems so hard
resistance to injustice
forever
and then what.

this boy a man
very thin
who a month ago
was chunky as me.

He has been told how ill he is
but it has not sunk in.
The language for such enormities...

their right faces
the men and women
I have seen since I was 18
worn down
always being watched
even when they aren't

always hoping
and who knows

And somehow he seems better
months stretching to years
and what then.

It is wrong to plant pansies
but those faces all along her fence
ninety-five of them
are looking up to my neighbor.
They are full of beauty
full of praise.
And if you don't see them
read the note she has nailed up.

Portland, 1991

Harold Johnson

SMELL THEORY

We hugged. Her thick black coat told
of fire, and the scent was in her hair
when she returned from the studio.
A tramp, to escape the cold snap, had no doubt
got into the lower part of the building
and built himself a little fire that prospered
too much, that alarmed the street before dawn,
smoked out the architects upstairs and
the mannikin shop and the artists above them.
One of the neighborhood homeless that roamed
below the lofts, perhaps a Nez Perce
from up the river, shivering here
ten thousand years later without trees
or family or animals under steel and concrete
that curb the river. Stiff, puffy guys with
cigarettes stuck to lips, trying to keep warm.
Maybe a woman with them. They've got coats
but this freeze feels big as the nation.

Jim Shugrue

STARING

Staring the hours down
staring down the days,
the sudden dream you're
suddenly awake from
years gone like teeth
from a derelict mouth.
Surprising gaps in
the narrative, the maps
all edited, the photographs
retouched. You walk
stunned and indifferent
through the refuse crusted
street, past the evicted
eyes of beggars, the lurid
enticement of storefronts
with nothing to sell.
Your I.D. crumpled
in your fist, to a line
you can stand in, to forms
you can fill out, for food,
for work, for housing.
But first you must wait.
You wait.

Jim Shugrue

DESTINATIONS

The home we dream of
is never the one we return to.
Cancelled faces scar
fields of impossible welcome.

It's like a movie, where a man
in a small boarding house
in a provincial town of the last
century watches a young girl

playing tag with the surf
while in the audience that same girl's
granddaughter remembers the voice
of a man who said "excuse me,"

as they squeezed past each
other on the subway. When the lights
go on her friends will wonder
where she's gone. Her phone

will ring unanswered. Someone
will think they saw her passing
on a bus, or in the background
of a snapshot from a vacation

on the coast. The man continues
to watch the girl and sea at play.
When anyone says welcome home
we touch our breast pockets

for the comfort of tickets.

Lisa M. Steinman

THE DESCENT

The department store is where she begins.
Then she tries for home, though she has always forgotten
her address, and moves on instinct,
of which she has little. The streets darken and narrow

like the bricks and bodies over which she steps.
At times she carries a child. More often, her shoes.
Usually she sees where she's going just as the streets
come alive, close in, and claim her.

This morning, waking from these familiar alleys,
she looks at the pictures on her wall into
her grandmother's eyes. She wonders
what this landscape has to do with age.

The rain lets up and somewhere a bird is singing its heart out.
As she walks, an old man with his dog tells her it's too early
to be up and about. She takes him as a sign of the world's care
and feels comforted. But this is going too far.

And she thinks of an old teacher, years in his bed, caretaker
of others. Does he lie thinking, "Too late"?
Of what does he repent as the world narrows
to the pictures on his wall: parasols and spring green?

Bad circulation is the sign of age. Her grandmother's feet
betrayed her,
carried her off at last. *Feet*. What does the world know of signs?
The dog walker, the birds, the old and bedridden, the dream
she inhabits,
ask: how do you think of growing only to find you're
growing old?

In the department store on the escalator she looks sideways
the mirrored walls look back.
There is an older woman, her mother, riding next to her.
She asks for the secrets women hand over to their young.

And the wise old woman in the mirror
hands the question back to her. She is the woman
she is watching. There are no elders.
The teacher in his bed who wanted once to be

what he urged his pupils to become, the grandmother
unable to face her limbs: they are still looking
for the way home. In the alleys
the threatening bodies begin to look like our own.

Charles Goodrich

HER FIRST GARDEN

When we quarrel, she goes
to water her garden. I hear
the pipes under the house
grumbling. Her snaps
aren't blooming, the asters
have aphids. In the summer's first heat
the lettuce bolted. She's learning
new pests every day.

The smell of wet manure
punches through my window.
This heavy clay
has never grown flowers before.
I watch her turn
clumps of tough grass under,
stab clods with her shovel.
She slicks her ripe-wheat hair
behind her ear and stares
hard at the ground.

What will she be planting
in those new furrows?

Quinton Hallett

BEFORE THE ARGUMENT

It's come up again,
that subject,
Jack-in-the-boxing me
with its leap to consciousness.
I wish I could say
it's *our* subject,
but it isn't. It's mine.
You know where you stand,
always have. I'm the one
with the hair trigger
trying to keep the lid on tight.

Cecelia Hagen

FAMILY LIFE

Every family faces a frontier.
The parents practice the look of the undaunted
but things pile up, keep coming.

They may get a dog to distract the kids,
they may hunt for the very best schools,
books, toys. They may gather them in,
build or buy houses and insulate them
for all they're worth, garden just to feel
the heft of the hoe and so the kids
will know where cabbages come from
even if they won't eat them.

It's a difficult job, carving out a niche
when the only pattern they have
is the one they rejected so thoroughly.
They could lose face, or blunder through blindly,
or be like their parents, doing both.

All they can see of the enemy
are their fires, fires that burn like stars,
burn while everyone should be asleep.

The family trudges on, though progress is steep.

Barbara La Morticella

FAULT

Solemn as judges, and big enough
to shake the hills out of their robes,
the firs watch as we drift
in the sea of their shadows.

The stars too dim to navigate...

I don't know if it's your fate
or my fate, or simply
the star of 1962 we married by.
Or maybe it's the star of
'69 that's lounging,
the one that said it was a miracle,
and then scratched itself
and lay down.

A hundred years of sailing,
and we haven't gotten beyond the beards,
or landed in that wonderful country
where our living room is big enough
for the whole world.

Quick, hold me;
for once, let me hold you.

Our children's suitcases are packed,
and even the hills move in waves.

Nancy Dahlberg

HEART LESSON

Icicles drip in the sun, then drop
and silently pierce the snow.
Indoors the children bend over scissors,
red paper, their constructions-- fresh-cut
heart-shapes personalized with ragged edges--
lopsided presentations on white lace,
confections with designs on a friend,
affection to sweeten the day.
This year again the carpet's spilled with red,
evidence of the heart's excess
discarded in trying to get it right.
Now the oldest child shows how to form a heart
more perfectly with half the cutting,
as if at a certain age one knows
what will pass for love needs balance.
It's all in the fold, she says, and watching
where you start, remembering edges,
not forgetting the center.
Her small hands hold the stiff paper
just so, knowing that a heart given
such attention will open to you
doubled and whole.

Maria A. Wickwire

OPEN FIELD

1

A couple of old horses,
who haven't seen each other
in a long while, will nuzzle up
and stand tail to head

in an open field.
Head to tail,
heart to belly,
shoulder to flank.

They'll rest, silence
softly steaming the air.

2

You came to me
in a dream last night,
for what I'm sure will be
the last time.

You stood behind me,
arms around my arms, holding
my hands and laying
your cheek against my neck.

Two old pieces of a puzzle
the night put together.

JEALOUSY

A pond
where images of you
used to leap,

fish,
your silver bodies
bucking against each other,

back when your fingers
cast their lines
beneath my skin.

Peter Jensen

49. THE FIRE

for Susan

Look at these soldiers cleaning their guns,
oily rags and black metal rifle parts everywhere.
See how they've ignored their fire;
it's a gray circle of ash with wisps
of white smoke coiling up like whining ghosts.

Listen to them tell dirty stories and laugh
at obscene words. Sunlight gives them
such confidence! It's a different story at night!

Then, they huddle in a circle around the fire
and get nervous if flames fall too low.
Watch how all of them, each one in turn,
pretend to be calm as they walk to a pile
of logs and come back and throw
their log like a grenade
to make the fire explode.
I understand these soldiers.
Their fire is like my love for you.

O sure, during the day I have lots to do,
but nighttime is another story.

*ONE HUNDRED VIEWS OF HOKUSAI,
from Hokusai's ONE HUNDRED POETS
(a new Northwest version)*

Christopher Howell

TWO VIEWS OF MORNING AT DEVIL'S LAKE

I.

The small green heron
quick on an alder snag.
From lake's edge and hives of light
it has been flying the far peninsulas
and no certain star among the leaves
awaits it, just the everyday
kind of sky that asks a heron's wing
why it should lift bird up
to tilt and glide
while lakes recline forever
on their lily-quilted backs.
Both of us would see the bird,
if you were here, and the drowned alder
dancing
after the bird is gone.

II.

Here is my shadow
over the pond of another
beginning. Have I been ashamed
to know this day of me
beyond ripeness
stood, dreaming of gardens?
All my life
blindness must have been the perfect lover,
judgment and loss
exactitudes from which one limps away.
But I was wrong:
some wars have been over
a long time.
New trees leap above the clear-cut slopes
and new wind washes their arms
and today, with no sword or message, the plain
grey rocks open their amazing faces
without breaking.

Anita T. Sullivan

YOUR NAME

Years from now
when I read your name
I will feel the flowers of my body's memory
unbend. They will remember
more than your name.
Though my eyes will see but a single word,
whole gardens will be rising at the bidding
of an inner sun unknown to me
blooming from the letters
of your name.
And I will bask as a lily does
after the snow.

J. Paul Baron

BACKYARD TALK

The man of me
and the woman of you
were here before;

we sat in the chairs
of these old chairs
and you said: This is the queen's.
And I said: This is the king's then

and I spoke as king
and you listened as queen.

The grass of this grass
grew under our feet
and the wind of this wind
blew against us;

the gulls of those gulls
circled and screamed
in the sky of that sky.

The man of me
and the woman of you
will be here
a hundred years from now
and we will sit
in the yard of this yard
under the sun of that sun

and mirror
the inevitable repetition
of time and talk,
as we do now.

Ingrid Wendt

YES, "THE RAINBOW BEGINS WITH YOU,"

sounds like something Judy Garland would say,
but look! it has to

start somewhere
and what if someday you

are there: nowhere
exotic as Kansas but simply where

you always sit to write poems/letters/grocery
lists; nothing

to set this day apart from any other except
maybe the smell of last night's fish.

Dishes undone in the sink
are just where they always are.

Pots on the stove do not, by any leap of the mind,
hold gold. And still

this deliberate Oregon rain that all day has trudged
from Coast Range to Cascade foothills, battered your roof,

stops
(as somewhere, of course, it must)

just
at the edge of your table.

Cornered by windows-- rain
to the left of you, sun to the right of you--

how can you not
take this as a sign? You,

who once-- driving the freeway
north at the close of another long day-- saw

just ahead of you, open as sentiment, earth
offering light again,

again, and again; that rainbow you followed
for miles, always just

out of your reach.

Jane Glazer

GOING UNDERGROUND

The way you can't see what's ahead,
or how the wind is blowing
in a car, the top down,
driving at top speed,
hair lashing across your eyes
like cobwebs, the memory
of my mother, ten years dead,
fuzzes out of sight.

The last time I was home,
I went with pussywillows
to her grave,
read the names on stones
I thought were close to hers,
found the tree lined up
with a mountain peak as snow fell
on her last flowers.

Circling that well-remembered place
for nearly an hour, hunting,
I could not find the marker.
A dimple in the lawn
dropped me to my knees,
brushing back her hair,
tearing away the grass
that hid her face.

Ger Killeen

FERNS IN SNOW

At the cracked mouth of the alder wood
the field has lain down like a lover,
stretched out under the snow's rumpled sheet.

The tented fern-clumps are erect,
breasting the numb air.
The wind moans its lack of a body,

"oh," it says, "oh," when it wants to say
"Bearsfoot, Hartstongue, I have known you
forever, Floating, Resurrection,

I am mad with your names."
The wood's bones rattle and grind.
Afterwards the silence is absolute.

IN SNOW COUNTRY (for K. McC.)

Friends of mine fled here
during the war against Vietnam
to escape the F.B.I., the C.I.A...
whoever it was wanted them
to kill coldly.

Lives later, snow is ghosting
out of a sky
the color of snow
and the cursive script
of pine and fir is blanked and tattered
by an overlay of white.

It is mid-winter's day
and I have walked
away from the house, from
the radio cackling its jingles
and acronyms through
a hush of static.

I brush snow from a tree stump,
sit, and try to think
what it means for words
to be nerved to the body
like the whole sense of touch,
to stretch the voice
out like a hand and fingers
and grasp "war," and "love," and "fear."

Everything is very quiet--
the snow makes no sound
piling on the earth.
Like a clown or a madman
I jump up and down
clapping my hands together
to set the blood moving
into my growing numbness.

Joan Edwards

GHAZAL 1

Is there a place to go, to know perfect retreat?
The squeaking pump drones on and on incessantly.

Sailboats pass on choppy seas.
Pelicans dive into massive waves.

Words flow quickly in a stream of consciousness.
Oh, pen, let the stain of you impress them kindly.

Wind, blow wildly, carry the noises of my soul
trapped in fog not yet evaporated.

The key turns, the engine turns over, the road turns round,
Joan, to take you back to where it all begins.

GHAZAL 14

A chestnut branch, exacted by wind, killed a man.
Kabir* says, Inside the seed are blossoms of the tree,
the chestnuts and the shade.

Deadly powders fixed with hate tear through the heart
when lesser gods rewrite the Fifth Commandment.

Flood waters howl at sinking prayers
yet inner storms recede, bathed in a constant river.

Jesus gave up his spirit, his body never found
like bodies when the earth shakes and the heavens, with wailing.

Continue the song of tree, river, earth and man, Joan,
while listening to the flute inside you.

*15th Century religious poet of Hindu
and Sufi traditions.

Lee Crawley

SUNLIGHT COMES TO THE MUDFARM

Sunlight comes to the mudfarm--
a mid-November surprise,
like finding the cracked vessel of oneself
all filled up with love
and life again.

Late-leaved trees are frenzied with birds,
and chickens dip in and out
of the long dry grass
like sailboats becalmed
in a yellow sea.

Long shadows lick the sides of the barn.
A slight wind blows waiting change;
something the body understands, although
not too readily. The roof ticks, drips;
ice in the blood warms so slowly;
the dog barks at irresistible images,
too old to chase his tail.

Lois Rosen

NOT AS A LAMB

Once there was a wicked man
the Bible called him Haman.
He lied and lied about the Jews
who he was always blamin'.
Oh, today we'll merry, merry be.
Oh, today we'll merry, merry be.
Oh, today we'll merry, merry be
and nosh on hamantashen.*

Here is a culture to consume:
Hamantashen, prune filled
three sealed corners of dough
our center exposed.
Groggers rattle all night
grating the tabernacle,

And we act the story: homely girls
play Vashti who forgot the man
rules and lost her head
literally.

Haman hanging ropes
for human laundry in his garden.
In the spring moon
his hateful face
enlarges evil.

The best-looking play Esther.
In Hebrew it's Hadassah,
patron saint of bake sales,
who lets the king discover
Haman's plot
although to approach unbidden
could mean her death.

But fear no longer.
We are safe enough
in Persia,
baking all night,
stewing every prune.

* (to be sung)

Libby A. Durbin

MOM ADDS SPICE TO MONOGAMY,
MAKING BELIEVE HE'S A PHILANDERER

1

Truth will always out.
A sentence at home
in my mother's mouth.

What is forty-five years to truth?

Just yesterday she said to me again,
"I would still like to know
how those two burn holes
got in my best sheet
the one time I left you two girls
with your father to bach it for a week.
Remember Lois Mae, the widow next door,
the only person who smoked?"

2

Yes, Mom, I remember Lois Mae,
the lilies-of-the-valley that held
damp concourse between our house
and hers, pretty and poisonous
in that narrow space.

I imagine I could have slipped
down the roof from my bedroom to lie
in the cool night-grass. I imagine
I could have looked up between
the houses as a plank stretched
from widow's windowsill to ours,
blocking out the moon.

Imagined her ungirdled, unpinned,
hefty on the board, crawling
inside her nightdress till it grew taut,
split like a chrysalis from neck to knee.

Imagined her stopping midway
like a circus star
when Frank Yoho's Ford
scattered the aisle with passing light.

Imagined her twisting her wet limbs out,
letting the gown fall like ectoplasm
to smother the lily bed below, then
pushing on to break the surface tension
of my father's dark frame.

I can imagine it, Mom.
Will you trade it for the truth?

Catherine McGuire

NORA

Dawn light flows over Abbey Hill,
gilding Cormoroe Abbey, turning meadow straw
to gold. Nora Burke is pedaling up the hill
to my house, her blue wool coat flapping
like a witch's cape (God forgive me).
It's death or sickness, sure, or she'd never
go the distance to my farm. Old biddy.
She'd put the bean sidhe out of work, she would,
spreading bad news faster than a March wind.
When Paddy Dugan (Lord 'a mercy) washed up
in Bell Harbor, who knew the story
before his very own wife? Herself, of course.
And didn't she tell it far and wide, letting
it be known he had a bottle in his hand
and another broken in his vest? Sour old woman.
Her hair's as gray as the limestone, though
she was born two years after me, and mine still dark.
Witch's wages, no doubt. Now she leans her bike
against our gate, lifts her basket off the back
and starts up our path. Chicks scatter, and even
the terrier scampers to the bushes. A sure sign,
it is, when the animals flee. I'll watch her
as she walks in, to see if she takes the water
and blesses herself. Yes, I'll watch careful.

Amy Schutzer

ON THE TRAIN BETWEEN SALT LAKE
AND GRAND JUNCTION

There were rivers of talk
about hunting,
of moose meat versus bear
and all the while
they lit their cigarettes
as if to smoke the hide
off of bones.
Eyeing each other
how could they be sure of anything;
the forest green nail polish
or the Def Leppard T-shirt
blonde bleached into the ends of her hair
his hand tattooed with a black heart.
Where had they seen moose,
tasted bear?
Did they ever handle a gun
as easily as they traded innuendo,
a wink and a smile?
Aim into a skull,
fire both barrels,
that would bring death
and with death
the skill
to mask it
into bear steaks, moose stew?
When the smoke cleared
the moon skipped over to dawn
and I heard them order breakfast;
cereal, hash browns, toast
but no meat
not a shred of muscle or skin
just some stories
full of fat and gristle
that they passed across the table,
like salt.

Scott Starbuck

SIGN AT GRACIE'S:
THERE ARE BIGGER AND BETTER FISH
CAUGHT HERE THAN IN THE SEA

A fisherman bellows
that when he uncorked it
music played through this bay
like a milky blue
saxophone ghost.
"Greens Tucker heard it for years.
Said it was his old man
come back to chew on his butt.
Never should've brought it aboard."

"Naw, it was only the sea
echoed," the local cafe philosopher
yawns.

A young college man says
"They didn't find it, they drank it--
there was no song in the bottle."
But the woman flipping hotcakes
on mica plates
slowly waves her finger.

Hushed and haunted
she claims "It was the voice
of a lost sailor returned."
She scolds us for joking
then touches a match to a red candle.
Says it's these bottles
no one's quite sure of
that should be remembered.

The far-away land rises up,
people smile,
mountains lean in
to listen.

Susan Spady

THE WISHING POOL

The two of you, grown lunky
as tennis shoes in a dryer, grip with your
toes and stretch. Your hands stalk coins,
make bridges of your bodies. With arms
like wipers clearing drizzle, you embezzle

wishes. I warn
of hypothermia, it's March,
your sweatshirts soaked.
Too late for warnings, anyway: your wills,
grown huge, unmotherable, sweep me
aside.

Yet when I'm wheeled from anesthesia,
sutures in my womb, your voices float
joyous down my torpid blood.
You hold my hands and feed me chips of ice
glittering like doubloons.

Charles Goodrich

THE FLU

A virus,
perhaps from a kiss
or a neighboring sneeze on the bus,
has come to live for a spell
in my sinuses and chest.

Lying on the couch
I try to imagine
the little blobs of life,
without brains
or malice,
dissolving a cell wall,
penetrating the nucleus,
re-arranging the DNA to its own purpose:
more virus.

Oh, I don't mind
being so mildly sick.
I blow my nose and lean back,
dreaming of other lives.

REVIEW: *TRACKS IN OREGON* by Robert A. Davies
(Meredith L. Bliss, Forest Grove, OR, 1990)

The experience of *Tracks in Oregon* is first a shift of pace. Davies guides us into a spacious, slow motion world where years and distances are important and nothing is rushed. In the opening poem, he travels into a flat landscape of sagebrush and tabletop buttes, commenting, "It takes me a full day to get used to it." Then, he introduces a girl who came to a town with a population of eleven and needed a year to get used to it. The girl, sketched lightly into the scene, presents a whimsical set of contrasts:

...her dress like a colonist's
earrings, two per ear, Farrah Fawcett hair--
in this neat cafe, its one flavor
of ice cream, its radio always on.

While landscape is the main character in "Malheur Notes," Part I, we meet assorted human characters with their own quirks and their own responses to scene-- a disgruntled cowboy looking forward to California in the spring; naked swimmers in the crater of a volcano; a fragile, old man alarmed by wildlife, as if an owl and a mouse evoked his own death. While humans assert themselves, nature tends to be unmoved. A ranchland fire stirs men to action, yet the fire burns itself out, leaving little long term change. A minister tackles large social questions, but his scope is dwarfed in the stunning context of the Steens mountains. Bathing at Bogue Hot Springs, entering Malheur Cave, the narrator finds that these places evoke strong, personal connections. Sensibility is transformed by place. Even in a small, five line poem called "Paiute House," the one who enters the house blends with nature there, becoming something other than himself.

"Rain Country," Part II, enters towns and cities as well as a more urban and politically alert state of mind. Most of the poems here take an unwavering look at a side of Oregon we'll never find in a Chamber of Commerce brochure. The impressions are grim and familiar-- poverty, echoes of the 1930's, pressure toward commercial development, the routine tragedy of the homeless scanning garbage cans and dumpsters to survive. The narrator does not merely accumulate evidence. He recalls his grandmother's compassion during the Depression, and involves himself in the same way.

Tracks in Oregon, so far, has been a perceptive and moving collection. But the amazing parts still lie ahead. Parts III and IV take us through all four seasons in a place called "Timber," where the poet discovers an intense connection of his inner and outer worlds. The site is forested with fir, and in places along the Nehalem River, nature remains as wild as it was before settlers came. Over and over, Davies explores his link to this setting both as myth and reality. In spring, he contemplates his discovery of Timber and his value there:

Sometimes I think Timber is my poem
my just leaving the trees here,
and when I am gone
the leaves, needles every fall
will whisper my name...

In another poem, called "Timber Riddle," Davies supplies an easy answer to his riddle after bringing a friend to the river bank:

We watched the river a long time
and listened to the woods,
to each other.
Maybe that's what Timber is about.

But Timber can't be summed up in easy answers. Davies' narrator enters the history of a town. He knows who has lived there-- past and present. One special person, Mrs. Wilcox, has become his muse. She dies of cancer in her late 80's, but while alive she was intelligent and kind. Unlike others with cameo appearances, Mrs. Wilcox is a steady and complete presence. She appears as narrator in her own voice, as a third person observed, as the object of attention of another character-narrator, and as the absent audience for the author's speech after her death. Davies credits her as inspiration for his first "straight-grained" poems.

Whether in his own voice or through characters, Davies speaks protectively for trees. One voice is outraged by corporate greed. Another establishes guardianship of the "schoolmarms," the old trees, growing together in pairs. In "I Dream of a Town Owl," the speaker laments, "Where was Timber's spotted owl to gather round?"

In final notes Davies remarks, "I find that I have written an elegy to the small logging town and the forests of Oregon, ancient and second-growth." Apparently comfortable in unassuming roles, the author may have surprised himself when he realized that he had created something so powerful. Black and white photo illustrations quietly confirm the physical realities in which the poems began.

E. W.

COMMENT: "What the Buckeyes were doing among the Douglas fir" by David Shevin (*THE TIFFIN, OHIO, ADVERTISER-TRIBUNE*, Op-Ed section, Sunday, July 7, 1991)

During the last four years there has been a wonderful symbiosis of creative energy nourishing the Midwest and the Northwest. The centers of these activities have been the college towns of Kent, Ohio, and Eugene, Ore.

On the May 4 weekend of 1990, Kent hosted a "Gathering of Poets." This was a dedication, a life-affirming poetry marathon to commemorate the students slain and injured 20 years before. The promise ran deep that lessons learned in the terrible moment when the state tried to gun its own children into submission not be forgotten.

Then, on a weekend of June 22-24, 1991, Eugene hosted a "Forest Gathering of Poets," a marathon in the sylvan setting of Spencer Butte, where writers spoke eloquently of their ecological concerns. Informed, activist and historical interpretations were offered, all in sharp commitment to protection of old growth woodland.

A substantive number of Pacific Northwest writers traveled to Kent, and a range of Ohio writers traveled to Eugene-- enough that a public radio station in Cleveland funded poet Daniel Thompson to record the Midwest poets at the Forest Gathering for broadcast.

The organizing committees of both gatherings are at work assembling anthologies of the work presented, targeted at both literary and activist audiences. What accounts for this Midwest/Northwest axis in a blossoming promotion of the literature of social concerns?

Part of the answer is the key players who bridge the communities. Maggie Anderson, a Kent State University professor who was recruited from Eugene, lent a hand in the organization of both the 1990 and 1991 events. "As the conventional channels of communication dry up for literature, we have to invent new modes," she said at the Forest Gathering.

Some organizers in Eugene, like Laurie Evans and Susan Carlsen, had attended Kent and saw the earlier gathering as their building model. Geographically, the first gathering generated a contacts list with a strong Ohio network.

The success of both events suggests that in Ohio's world of a ravaged industrial base and on Oregon's turf of threatened resource, artists feel instinctively bonded.

Oregon's largely successful timber and wildlife preservation campaigns, for example, have not been matched by cooperation from the farm industry-- the larger companies have taken logging to less restrictive areas, rather than seek investment in second growth forest. This results in a shrunken state economy. The victims? Workers, of course, and schools and entitlements. No wonder rust belt artists who have seen years of runaway industries find kindred spirits here!

"Nature lovers" found voice and spectacular beauty in the lush setting overlooking Oregon's coastal mountains. Among the

most moving presentations was filmmaker Ron Finne's recounting of the voices of loggers he'd interviewed for an oral documentary. There was reverence and awe of the woodlands here, and a surprising spirituality among those who harvest, but recognize that they don't own the timbers.

Cited and invited, too, were Native American renderings of the forest's power. An interesting footnote: the site, Spencer Butte, takes its name from a surveyor who was scalped for trespassing.

And still more explicit connections were drawn by participants. Writer Sharon Doubiago presented a poem honoring injured Earth First! leaders Judi Bari and Daryl Cherney, victims of the May 1990 car bombing assassination attempt. Poet Maxine Scates's concern drew specific connections between hoarding of precious resources in the Middle East and the Pacific Northwest, and warned of the impossible consequences accrued by waging wars for consumption.

Stacie Smith-Rowe, the artist whose design was used as the program and T-shirt design for the Forest Gathering, presented what could be the Forest Gathering's best summary poem. She imagines archaeologists reconstructing this moment in history,

...they rested from digging
and talked about fairness
and what to make of our demise.
One of them said "even a fish
should have a fighting chance
against the hook."

EDITORS' NOTES

GRANT

FIREWEED is honored to be chosen with *SILVERFISH REVIEW* and Eighth Mountain Press for a Publishers Fellowship by Oregon Institute of Literary Arts. OILA is active in awards and grants to writers and publishers. To support OILA and learn of its programs, write:

Oregon Institute of Literary Arts
P.O. Box 10608
Portland, OR 97210

We plan to use the fellowship money to increase the number of subscriptions to *FIREWEED* and to improve our "look." Any suggestions would be welcomed.

NEWCOMERS

Our April 1992 issue will be devoted exclusively to presenting poets who have not yet appeared in *FIREWEED*. Pass the word! Poems should be received by March 1. Don't forget the SASE and a biographical note.

LITERUPTION 1992

FIREWEED will have a table as usual at this annual event on March 7 and 8 in Portland at the Masonic Temple. Please stop by and introduce yourself. Literuption offers many opportunities to taste Oregon writing. We enjoy meeting contributors and readers.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

J. PAUL BARON, Coos Bay, spends his retirement from journalism painting and writing.

LEE CRAWLEY, Eugene, has a poem in *STAFFORD'S ROAD* from Adrienne Lee Press. She writes full-time, in many genres, and hosts a weekly workshop at her home.

NANCY DAHLBERG, Eugene, works at the University of Oregon Library. She produces a writers newsletter for the Eugene area.

ROBERT A. DAVIES, Portland, has co-edited *MR. COGITO* since 1973. His *TRACKS IN OREGON*, reviewed in this issue, was a finalist for this year's poetry award by Oregon Institute of Literary Arts.

LIBBY A. DURBIN, Lincoln City, has written poetry since a 1984 workshop with Sandra McPherson.

JOAN EDWARDS, Eugene, collects sheet music related in any way to roses. She has been membership chairperson of the Lane Literary Guild.

JANE GLAZER, Portland, has poems in most Oregon poetry publications. Her book-in-manuscript is making the rounds.

CHARLES GOODRICH, Corvallis, read his poetry this winter at Willamette University. He is current president of the Willamette Writers Guild.

CECELIA HAGEN, Eugene, writes fiction, too, and serves as fiction editor for *NORTHWEST REVIEW*.

QUINTON HALLETT, Noti, writes poetry and fiction. She worked in poetry last summer with Sharon Olds and Galway Kinnell.

CHRISTOPHER HOWELL, Emporia, Kansas, summers in Oregon and teaches a poetry workshop at Newport. He has published five books of poetry.

PETER JENSEN, Eugene, teaches at Lane Community College. *CONFLUENCE* is a collection of poetry by Peter, David Johnson and Erik Muller from their Walking Bird Press.

HAROLD JOHNSON, Portland, works at Portland Night High School. His chapbook is *DRY BOATS*.

GER KILLEEN, Neskowin, was born and educated in Ireland. His work appears on both sides of the Atlantic. Blustem Press published his collection, *A WREN*, in 1989.

BARBARA LA MORTICELLA, Portland, has numerous magazine publications. She hosts the KBOO poetry show. Her chapbook--*EVEN THE HILLS MOVE IN WAVES*-- comes from Leaping Mountain Press.

CATHERINE MCGUIRE, Portland, writes children's books and works with children in a family shelter. Over 35 of her poems have been published by journals nationwide.

LOIS ROSEN, Salem, teaches ESL at Chemeketa Community College. *ROSES OF YONKERS* is her manuscript in search of a publisher.

AMY SCHUTZER, Portland, writes poetry and fiction. Her work has appeared in *NORTHWEST REVIEW*, *mud creek*, and *PORTLAND REVIEW*.

DAVID SHEVIN, Tiffin, Ohio, attended this summer's Forest Gathering of Poets. He is an English professor and a widely published poet and journalist.

JIM SHUGRUE, Portland, works in a bookstore. He read at the Forest Gathering of Poets in Eugene last summer.

SUSAN SPADY, Portland, has poetry in many regional magazines: *CALYX*, *POETRY NORTHWEST*, *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE*.

SCOTT STARBUCK, Depoe Bay, studies creative writing at Eastern Washington University. He is poetry editor of *WILLOW SPRINGS*.

LISA M. STEINMAN, Portland, teaches at Reed College. Her books of poetry include *ALL THAT COMES TO LIGHT* (Arrowood).

ANITA T. SULLIVAN, Corvallis, has been president of the Willamette Writers Guild. By trade she tunes pianos.

ELAINE WEISS, Eugene, teacher of English, studies journalism, lobbies for ancient forest causes. She was an organizer of the Forest Gathering of Poets.

INGRID WENDT, Eugene, won an OILA poetry award for *SINGING THE MOZART REQUIEM*. She is an active poet in the schools.

MARIA A WICKWIRE, Portland, worked with Marvin Bell and Naomi Shihab-Nye at Santa Fe last summer. *IOWA WOMAN* has published her work.