

FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon



Volume Six, Number Two
Winter 1995 \$2.50



FIREWEED: POETRY OF WESTERN OREGON is published quarterly featuring Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer issues each year. **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. Inquiries about submission of reviews or essays are welcome. Please be sure to include a biographical note with your poems or your prose. Subscriptions are \$10 for four issues. Please notify us if your copy of the magazine arrives damaged, so we can replace it. All contents are copyrighted 1995 by **FIREWEED**, 1330 E. 25th Ave., Eugene, OR 97403.

Recipient, Oregon Institute of
Literary Arts Publishers Award

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Charles Goodrich

THE INSECTS OF SOUTH CORVALLIS

1) *Two Mosquitoes in the Bathtub*

They've been here for weeks
living on leaky faucet drips.
When I draw a bath, they fly a little
but soon settle back among the soap stains.

It's December, freezing outside.
That's why they don't bite me, or mate.
Enormous desires encoded on their chromosomes
lie dormant. They dream of summer.

Relaxing in the hot water, I watch them
doing nothing. One, the male,
waves his feathery antennae. He's smaller
and has a broken foot. The female
is slightly swayback,
maybe just tired. Science
and Buddhism I call them,
orphan twins in search of lost family,
a couple of itinerant trapeze artists,
a secretly amorous pair of saints.

Whoever they are, they're my guests.
We're sharing our morsel of eternity.
We bathe together.

2) *Sowbugs*

Vagabonds, hobos, they trundle in
through a crack in the wall by the back door
and congregate under the washing machine
to drink soapy drainwater.

I'm not running a bug hotel. My home
is no flophouse for backyard dropouts.
But these folks are easy company.
They aren't evangelists
revelling all night in confessional raptures
or teenage sons of bankers
cranking stereos and snorting coke.
They aren't revolutionaries or reactionaries,
atheists, pagans or co-dependents.

They're just little bugs
who've seen the world some
and like to swap stories around the floor drain.

3) *Yellowjackets*

Cold as mummies
they come inside with the firewood
where an hour beside the stove revives them,
resurrects them to their ancient throne
of pure animosity.

They throb. They buzz.
Suddenly they blaze against windows,
whack lampshades, attack the light.

I understand. I suspect
that I, too, am of royal parentage
and I awaken sometimes
enraged at having been so cruelly deposed
from the heights of power and grace.

4) *Silverfish*

These shy bristletails
are quick
as calligraphy.

Squashed
they make a vague
Chinese ink-wash across the paper.

I know I seem
inscrutable to them:
an American

blue-collar male, married
but solitary
scratching poems in the night

while they busy themselves
being law-abiding insects
metamorphosing nymph to adult

without complaining
even though
it's a hell of a headache.

The millions of eggs
they lay in my walls
I can forgive.

What I hate is
(maybe somebody's
got to do it

but it fills me with loathing)
-- they eat
books.

5) *Ladybugs*

Every January they re-emerge,
anchorites from within our walls,
and cloister themselves on the upstairs windows
for a few weeks of fasting and travail.

By day they wander the glass
like desert mendicants, each bug
nothing but a robe and a begging bowl.

By night they huddle
in a corner of the casement,
a little heap of rosary beads,
a handful of prayers incarnate.

Winter being the season of doom,
I have my own austerities to attend to.
But, mornings, when I find
their eclipsed bodies on the windowsill
lovely and empty as little lacquered urns

I sweep them up with a feather duster
and return them to the garden.

6) *Fruitfly*

That miserable winter I drank so much
there was this fruitfly
who loved to land on my lips.

I called her Mabel
(not her real name)
and told her my life's story,
all the women I'd done wrong,
the generally rotten guy I'd been.

Not a smidgeon of sympathy.
All she wanted was to dance.
If I started into talking
she'd tickle my moustache.
If I'd blow her away
she'd flirt right back again.

Pity wasn't in her bag of tricks.
She loved me, she whispered once,
simply for the sweetness of my breath.

7) *Vacuuming Spiders*

I admire their geometrical patience,
the tidy way they wrap up leftovers,
their willingness to be the earth's
most diligent consumers of small bitternesses.

Sometimes at night I hear them
casting silk threads, clicking their spinnerettes,
plucking their webs like blind Irish harpists.
I can almost taste the fruit of the fly
like sucking the pulp from a grape.

But when their webs on the ceiling
begin to converge, and the floor
glitters with shards of insect wings
I drag out the vacuum
and poke its terrible snout under the sofa,
behind the radio-- everywhere,

for this is the home of a human being
and I must act like one
or the whole picture goes haywire.

Lex Runciman

GREETING THE DARK

His job was feeding the games their dimes--
the game of shoot down the enemy,
the game of steering and not crashing,
the bowling game tilted with concentric rings,
and hoops over bottles, wooden hoops,
and darts at the shy balloons.

He didn't have much hair.
He stood round and tall and liked baseball, Dizzy Dean.
In sun, he'd wear a green-visored straw hat.
I have a watch of his, the one that's failed--
except for the engraved initials.

Out his window a mountain wore its trees
every summer, every dawn and sundown,
the trees that welcomed whatever wind
had come from so far, China or Japan,
so far over water.

The dimes are gone. The trees
have traveled whatever road they went on trucks.
The room with all those games is gone.

I used to sit on the counter
-- he'd put me there--
and watch him lather and strop
then stretch and maneuver his chin.
I don't know why I think of him exactly now,
except that it's Saturday. I remember him.
I remember his window, his spent dimes.
And here's the dark
coming down in the black trees
just like it did then.

DO TEXTS EXIST?

Now the possibility
of seeing his hat through branches and leaves,
the possibility of hearing her
whistling in the idle hall,
the possibility of sharing a quiet meal
of summer lamb and home wine,
the possibility
of greeting him at a noisy corner
and shaking his hand,
and the possibility
of opening a door to see her
standing in a wet coat,
and the possibility
of laughing at what his face does
as his voice mimics a crow or a howling cat,
how her eyes at sad movies
turn her head from our faces,
how her hands clench and relax,
how they string beans and accuse
and lift glasses of milk,
how he walked at that gait his eyes determined,
how she would not, would never discuss
politics, sex, her family, the earlier lives,
how he died elderly, in his sleep,
how she died early, flushed and bathed
in the rupture of arteries.

Do texts exist?

Are we body and possibility
written nowhere upon the earth?
The woman in the picture laughs.
And in this one, not yet thirty,
she has unlaced her tired shoes.
And this man sleeps in a hammock near a lake.
He is driving a station wagon and waving.
She has shoveled the porch free of snow.
She has cut her hair,
and he squints as he holds his sister's hand before school.
And her ring weighs in my palm like a dime.

Lex Runciman

BRIGADOON AT THE HIGH SCHOOL

An evening lost, though
pleasantly-- that's it, all
you figure on. Then you walk in,
breathe that nervous air and
God forbid you're fifteen, gawky,
healthy as a horse. No clothing
exactly fits. Hair wrong, clothes
wrong, face blotchy, you probably
look horrible, so shy you're mute
or garrulous, false as a senator.
And when the opening lights
dim and rise on *Our Town* or this
time *Brigadoon*, what you see
under the actor's veneer is terror--
the resolve of more than usual hope,
hope in rehearsal, in mindless
repetition, in sets and props and
other actors just as hopeful.
You notice how, because it's not
professional, that first kiss makes
the audience gasp. Fiona and Tommy
aren't playing at this because they don't
know how to yet, don't know how to not
feel it, which is their gracious, awkward
gift to themselves, to us-- this public
chance to kiss another human being who
may just be beautiful. Ragged
or smooth as this performance is with
set changes, a lengthy intermission, something
unplanned and vaguely ridiculous
happens-- something you recognize comes back
in bright faces and sings.

Dan Dillon

JOSEPHINE COUNTY

Supper dishes cleared,
our neighbors, mostly
Okies up the coast
from California,
gather in the cul-de-sac
beside wilting woods
the color of drought.
Their conversation
drifts over the houses,
smoke from bridges burned
running from dust;
brown leaves flicker
on the periphery,
brittle tongues.
Renters, they agree,
are the scouting party
for new refugees
prowling freeways
from tired neighborhoods.
"It's good America
learned how to drive.
Too bad it follows us here."
Sons pull from driveways,
radios caught
on their fathers' songs,
hand-me-down maps
measuring days
between unpacking
and packing again,
time between bridges,
the next run from dust;
dry woods quieting,
the embers of night
drift in.

William Jolliff

CHANTING VIRGINIA IN HARD WEATHER

They pitch their tents in mud, and drive stakes
against the thunder. No one speaks
of Toledo or Detroit, of Ford or GM.
No one speaks of anything but
why they've come.

White gas and kerosene light the grove.
Men in bleached denim talk and wave their beer,
and high-cheeked women in braids
open cans of bland stew they bought
for this one journey.

They gather beneath the clouds and wait.
Young men test the sound, fumble picks and capos.
Then from somewhere (no one saw him leave the bus
or climb the makeshift steps)
Ralph Stanley is there,

his hair shining blue, a golden banjo
strapped across one shoulder. Memories dead
beneath a factory floor quicken
and rise to the melody, the modals,
the fifth string drone:

he conjures the mountains with *Long Journey Home*.

DRIVING THE SCIOTO HOME

The moon is July, and I'm driving home,
breathing green. Along the Scioto,
soybeans flush with nitrogen grow
rainforest deep, touch way above
my thighs. An ocean of corn
waves chest-high in bottom ground.
Farmers in river towns swing on porches,
watch the moon rise in China,
pulling tassels toward heaven. The wheat
is already gone, a golden stubble.

My old truck, drunk on miles, runs
like a child, thumping and strumming
three-chord tunes behind old-timey
songs of summer crickets,
black and brown. Factory men from Columbus
fish the river for carp. They fondle
two poles each. They're quiet.
They don't see each other or hear
the song of my passing.

Outside Magnetic Springs,
below the bridge that crosses Bokes Creek,
the water is high, high on moonlight
vaccine. The polio hotels sit vacant,
remember what summer used to mean
when people came for witching baths.
I pull down the roads of home.
My fathers, my grandfathers, smoke
in the yard swing. They talk about wheat.

Haley Marie Isleib

ONE AFTERNOON AT THE RIVER
WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN

He was hopelessly thirteen,
but I forgave him.
There was no one else around for company.
We shared a Coke
and went down to the river to terrorize the fish.
Fish just swam away though,
not much we could do there,
so we sat in the mud and hoped
the stains and dirt would never come out,
sat around arguing over whether being a fish
would be a good thing.
I thought so, just swim and swim,
but he said, too many fishermen.

We talked about how fossils are made,
how an animal dies in the mud and
time sinks slowly into its bones
till there's nothing but history left.
We tried to figure out how anyone
could claim to know anything
from looking at old stone bones
that never even had names when they were living.
We thought about looking for fossils,
but it was a slow day.
I'm not even sure the river was moving.

He sang me a song about death and fishes,
mud stains and mean teachers,
and some other things the river
would never wash away.
And he sounded awful,
his voice cracking almost violently,
but I liked him for it.

After a while, he had to go.
I watched him leave,
and sat in the mud,
thinking about how funny-looking he was.
I sat around so long that
the mud started caking up on me.
Soon, I thought, I'll be a fossil in the riverbank,
and the future will misinterpret my bones
like everything else.

GUEST POEM

Robert Francis

CATCH

Two boys uncoached are tossing a poem together,
Overhand, underhand, backhand, sleight of hand, every hand,
Teasing with attitudes, latitudes, interludes, altitudes,
High, make him fly off the ground for it, low, make him stoop,
Make him scoop it up, make him as-almost-as-possible miss it,
Fast, let him sting from it, now, now fool him slowly,
Anything, everything tricky, risky, nonchalant,
Anything under the sun to outwit the prosy,
Over the tree and the long sweet cadence down,
Over his head, make him scramble to pick up the meaning,
And now, like a posy, a pretty one plump in his hands.

from *COLLECTED POEMS, 1936-1976*
(The University of Massachusetts Press, 1976)



COMMENT

Many Northwest writers find a spiritual affinity with poets of the New England landscape such as our venerable grandfather Robert Frost. Another poet of the Northeast is the Massachusetts writer Robert Francis. Drawing on much of the same material as Frost--the ordinary people and objects of his rural New England life--he makes a unique, tightly controlled music, and manages to draw astonishing insights from the everyday world around him. He shows us how a man swimming is like love, how two boys playing catch are poets. He finds in a spider hovering over its kill an image of the evil in the heart of "nature and in man's nature," and in the sun he finds an argument for democracy, the "Arch-democrat of our enlightenment/ More Jeffersonian than Jefferson," making all this invention with a wry wit, a slightly tongue in cheek craftiness that moderates without diminishing the insight.

His little poem "Catch" is a kind of *ars poetica*, and reveals many of the qualities that I find most useful in his work. Balancing on a knife edge between the literal and metaphorical poles of the poem, leaning sometimes one way, sometimes the other, he gives us a lecture in craft discovered in this almost Norman Rockwell painting of two boys playing catch. The poem is filled with advice to poets: "Teasing with attitudes, latitudes, interludes, altitudes,/ ...make him as-almost-as-possible miss it,/ ... Anything under the sun to outwit the prosy...."

Like Alexander Pope in his "Essay on Man," Francis practices what he preaches, making the poem into a demonstration of the art it describes. The formal patterning of the poem is a kind of catch, trying everything to toss the meter and rhyme as-almost-as-possible out of the reader's reach. The lines are not end-rhymed, but sound repetitions dance in and out of the lines: the "hand" and "...tude" sounds in lines two and three, "stoop" and "scoop" in lines four and five, and "prosy" and "posy" at the end of the poem, a rhyme just as plump and pretty as the easy toss the line describes.

The poem is metered, too, each line counted at five stresses, but delivered differently. The first line is almost perfectly iambic, but each line after varies the metrical pattern, until the fifth line, which is almost impossible to read as only five beats. This metrical control, the relation of rhythm to meaning, is in Pope's poem the height of poetic art, and what Pope could hear in Dryden, perhaps we can hear in lines like "over the tree and the long sweet cadence down,/ Over his head, make him scramble to pick up the meaning." The smooth flow of "long sweet cadence down," and the stutter-step rhythm of "make him scramble to pick up" demonstrate this merging of meter and meaning, as does the final line, its even anapestic beat dropping prettily into the reader's mind.

Ken Zimmerman

James Grabill

IN PRAISE OF THE TREES THIS FALL
(after the death of a friend's father at 80)

The yellow-gold leaves
were wild here for weeks
as if something magnificent were dying.

At the south edge of the city,
forests on each side of the freeway
were radiant, brilliant, as if the road
had meaning, wherever it was going.

And prayers that had no churches
broke out of the tigery bushes--
as if the dark days, too, will be lit,
combusting with root imperative
of words or no words and what is given
freely, without thought of return?

Some of the trees blaze in the fall
because there is nothing more to do.
There is no place other to go.
There is no other world
where we could be more whole
or wholly awake than this place
we were given our lives.

Perhaps that is some of the peace
in the body after a person dies,
that this was the world
we were waiting for, after all?

This is the world, the luminous
amber and yellow leaves say,
the edge of light turning and surging
less directly, still less directly--
until this is all there is to be?

Earth-energy burns inside all we are,
and when someone dies,
possibly after much suffering,
the peace is wild, golden,
magnificent, and then given
back to the source forever.

WHY ISN'T THE APPLE
LESS ATTRACTIVE?

Where does the apple learn
to have its flavor?
Why isn't it less attractive?
Why does the grain of wood
remind us of our lives,
and the lives inside our lives?
Is there intelligence, simply,
in the apple and how it tastes?
Was there a birth long ago
when mother cats suddenly knew
how to lick their babies
to help them survive,
or have they always known
how to do that?
And how did the forest
understand to do that
with its ferns and moss
and fir trees and sudden
maples and salmonberries?
Maybe these aren't real
questions, but I want to say
how worried I am.
If love requires space
as much as it thrives on regard,
with overpopulation and hungers
not imagined, are we in for it?
Still, where did bees learn
to work the ultraviolet flowers?
Where did the potato
understand that giving
itself away so freely
and helpfully would assist
in our return
to what matters?

James Grabill

SHOWER

I know there is so much working
into itself, becoming
what it was, moving on
and staying, heavy
with workweeks and gravity.
But then I saw the bar of soap
and thought of the love it gives.
First, rainwater is pumped
beneath people talking
or sleeping in rooms they paint
orange or blue in a dream,
where they find hummingbirds
by the window, say 2,
then 9, and then the backyard
has so many hummingbirds
hovering and diving down
into suddenly appearing
crimson blossoms. So the water
is piped beneath that, into
the house and tank where it waits,
loosening, heating up,
over astral blue flames
that also come from the ground.
When the shower is started,
the water falls and soon begins
steaming. A person steps in
and stands under the rain
from weeks ago, and under
steaming drops roots gave off
and trees shook out of the wind.

But then the soap radiates
and floats into a hand,
and swims around
on so much soft skin
like a lover who kisses
his lover everywhere
his lips go. Every touch
slides and loosens in the foam
and cream that is scented
a little gingery and musky,
but like rain falling
in a fine mist in summer,
after a swim in the ocean,
and there is nothing else
to do but feel the water
waking the water
deep in the body,
lifting it more
into energy.

REVIEW: POEM RISING OUT OF THE EARTH AND STANDING UP IN SOMEONE by James Grabill (Lynx House Press, 1994)

THE MISSISSIPPI OF A PERSON'S VOICE

I've been reading Thoreau, *A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS*. Like other great 19th century American writers-- Dickinson, Whitman, Melville-- Thoreau mixes the old with the new, the conventional with the trailblazing. In *WEEK*, Thoreau weaves poetry into the prose account of his river journey. They blend thematically, yet collide stylistically because Thoreau's prose is more daring than his poetry or the poetry he quotes. It is the difference between thoughts predictably measured and such prose as "our darkest grief has that bronze color of the moon eclipsed."

"The new world, the new times, the new people, the new vistas," Whitman cheers in *AN AMERICAN PRIMER*, "need a tongue according." In *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA*, Alexis de Tocqueville predicts:

On the whole the literature of a democracy will never demonstrate the order, regularity, skill and art characteristic of aristocratic literature; formal qualities will be ignored or despised. The style will often be bizarre, incorrect, overburdened, loose, and almost always strong and bold.... There will be rough untutored energy of thought with great variety and extraordinary fecundity.

Such contrasting tensions still wrench American writing, poetry included. I need not mention the conflicting schools or poets. Consider for yourself the opposing assumptions about the poem's author and purpose, its proper content and form, and its demands upon audience. And recognize, too, that since de Tocqueville the literature of democracy, no longer in its apprenticeship, has developed strong craft traditions of its own. For de Tocqueville's term "aristocracy," I substitute our own burghers and gentry, the writers of cottage poems. I place Grabill among the "democratic" poets in the tradition of Whitman and Williams. The former work within limits; the latter erase and redraw them. They are "riverous," a Grabill coinage. Listen to James Grabill on his new book:

The central theme . . . is perhaps how the earth, the environment, is making us-- with wide *varieties* of seed matter. A corollary is that we are each much more than we usually allow. A further corollary is that *literally*, in terms of the environment and psyche, juxtapositions of disparate realities are real.... I think this book has an argument with limits and limitations.

So Grabill's book can be read as a single piece in three movements,

its argument not a story but a thesis with premises and conclusions. While many of this volume's poems are challenging and difficult-- some even in de Tocqueville's terms-- they all fit into an intentional program. This contrasts with the cottage poet's garland of reflections, nicely crafted individual pieces lacking a unifying vision.

With the sweep of a major river, Grabill begins with "the source unfolding" and ends with "approaching form," as if the book's restless energy cuts a channel as it flows. With a broad and full agenda, Grabill must think and write his way to "the feel of a pattern." The first poems present conditions of being and knowing. For Grabill, as being is various, so knowing must cross limits. "Suddenly Tonight I Am Listening" is one of his chants:

Tonight amber from oats and rustling harbors of wind,
and clouds of more worlds about to form.
Tonight the bluejay back in her nest, and her nest
in our bones through which the night sky passes.

Here the inventory can never be completed: creation continues, perspectives and scales shift. Language itself is unstable, hence useless for definitive cataloguing: "As all words form again when any is said."

While the first movement names the main issues, the second denser movement offers less guidance. These longer pieces do not comment on Grabill's multiverse. Here the river of the book is choked with all the flood can carry. Here are breadth of tones, variety of textures, great risks taken on the rapids. Grabill likes turbulent diction:

or the hoyden blossom encircling
in skirts of peppery bulbous rootage, earthen
diggings, saxophonic sandstone engines locked
on a helix of leaves unfindling,
gyro-phoring

Even the calmer passages track energy exchanges:

The ferns become masts
Of the ships
Of the soil
Carrying our names
That have wandered off
And the splinters of lightning
That move in their veins
Are coming through
Our rooms tied
To the planets

Grabill anticipates (and caricatures) my reaction to these troubled

waters. In "Ode to Wendell's Letter" he comically exaggerates: "Your wild tales of awareness and congress totally assaulted my nervous system...telling me to dissolve into the wild, unthought universe."

The third movement, "Approaching Form," resolves the book's tensions. Not accidentally, the last two poems are love poems. Many of the poems are graspable, and the voice in them expresses pride in the accomplishment. Maybe I am hearing a more conventional poetic voice, the encourager, the instiller of confidence. Through the volume the conditions of being do not change, but the poet finally states them concisely: "Of what is born, so much/ is not contained!" and "How little/ we have been allowed to see!" The poet reaches a state of grace, which rises from seeds that multiverse has been sowing, as described in the book's first poem:

passion and calculus of stalks, burrowings and thermal
makeup, infrared history, dock labor, how this developed,
that we developed, how grace comes in, that vision
transcends power, observes it, feels for it, sees around
it, to the planet holding it,
the webbings and links

Grabill wonders if grace is "following a pattern" or "Does grace stand behind the pain and pleasure, with parts that fit together as if they were made for one another?" Or, in the closing poem, maybe grace is a coming in of what is "allowed to form" or what is "approaching form."

A stanza of "A Metal Valve," one of several thoroughly realized meditative lyrics of a length and tone developed by Wallace Stevens, gives adequate language to Grabill's dynamic complexity:

Our houses float each minute
down a river into an ocean
of that minute, and we go
with them, and we cannot go.
A bird's song does not work
without a source of light,
and the leaves around it.
The ocean's forest of sound
breaks farther than we can
know, passing through us.

In 1995, in Oregon, in winter, as I feel discontented with our defensive embrace of tax and term limits and mandatory sentencing, hemmed in as well by our knack for making cottage art, I appreciate this poet's argument with limits. It is an argument best supported by learning the poems themselves, tumbling, expansive, unsettling, and, by turns, serene and intensely clear with that deep blue of lakes and unbounded skies.

Virginia Corrie-Cozart

BETWEEN CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S

In that suspended time
I dump out a puzzle by the fireplace,
a desert landscape, says the lid.
It needs tidying, wants corners.
You know where you stand with a corner.
I complete the frame,
smaller than expected.
How will 750 pieces fit?

I construct the mountain-sky interface,
creating a bridge that halves the picture,
build up into the atmosphere until
I drowse with blue,
then down into arid land
until I'm parched,
maudlin with concentration,
begin to miss my mother,
think about the interlocking lives
of my scattered children, the new year.

What I took to be the rocky base of a butte
turns out to be a stick in the foreground.
I aim for a missing sandstone,
get distracted by something seen before.
Some colors match, the shapes yin and yang
so I force it, must later dig it out.
Minute observations become critical:
the degrees of turquoise within clear sky,
where the shadows lie on the mesas.
Toward the end
I wonder how I ever overlooked
the obvious flow of the juniper root,
the logic of ancient cliffs.

If the family were here, I'd call them
to view the scene, this jigsaw.
Another damn insight, I think.
Beyond the desert horizon
no children, no partner or parent
walk toward me out of Monument Valley.

Sheila Black

THE FIRST MAP OF YOU

The first time I saw you,
you were distant as heaven:
A picture full of snow
on a screen no larger
than the square of
my two hands

your image: Frost-white,
translucent, each vein
clearly visible as the
veins on a new leaf. I could
not imagine how I would
ever touch you

not even as softly
as a finger caresses a drop
of rain, or trace the
curl of your spine--
colorless shrimp floating in
your flush of grey stars.

You swam alone in my
hermetic sea, desiring
nothing. What was there
to love? Your mouth was
sealed shut, your eyes
two blank pits

prints of fingers
made in salt dough.
And your brain was the
smallest flower I have
ever seen-- all spiky petals,
no center.

I could see straight through
you into nothingness.
Yet each time
your image shone clear:
A ghost thrown by a
heartbeat

the small shiny hook
of you reached out
to snag me by the throat.
The clear blood line forever
reeling
unreeling.

There was no need
to talk of love.

REVIEW: *SUFFICIENCY* by Doug Marx (Twenty-Six Books, 1994)

Doug Marx's *SUFFICIENCY*, the second volume from 26 books of 26 pages by 26 writers, a series currently being published by Dan Raphael, has traveled with me for several months. I've read it upstairs and downstairs, in coffee shops and in a hallway moments before teaching a class, and finally in the barely blue light of my early morning writing time. That motion in my reading seemed reflected in his work, for I found myself following a voice which moved between the prosaic and the profound, shifting among several tones and several approaches to the image. Yet throughout the entire book, which Marx dedicates to his mother, Grace, "who made life sacred for me," I found myself easily and consistently drawn into an intimate acquaintance with the sufficiency that Marx explores.

My own fondness for a lyric voice and for poetry influenced by the Chinese drew me first and most strongly to the opening poems, first the title poem, then "Two Peaches on a Branch" and "What the Moon Means." "Two Peaches," a description of fruit, of breasts, of connections, is fresh in its own imagery, yet respectful of tradition. "Sufficiency" evokes a late September afternoon during which a life of observation and a life of reading seem interwoven in a landscape of finely chosen detail, "A white thistle floats by/ like an old Tai Chi master."

Reading these early poems acquainted me slowly with a consistent voice, Marx's use of direct comment on the human situation arising from recognizable, even prosaic settings. I began to call one group the "water" poems: "The View from the Hot Tub," "The View from the Sauna," and "The View from the Laundromat," poems in which the earlier lyric tone changes to the sardonic as Marx explores these commonplace cleansing worlds. In "The Sauna," Marx moves from "So much for sweating like a saint./ So much for losing weight" to

I think I could stay this way forever,
chaste and whitely irreducible

as ashes, as the taste of salt
that haunts these redwood planks.

And with that shift to directness and intimacy, Marx moves the ordinary into his mother's realm of the sacred.

In another pair, "The Transcendentalist at Forty, #8" and "The Transcendentalist at Forty, #10," Marx swings similarly between the detachment of the openings and the intimacy of the endings, rambling through more varied, more startling images, "face first like an airsick fly," "jigsaw Buddha." And sometimes that deliberately less poetic tone returns to end a poem, as in "After Making Love with My Wife for Perhaps the 832nd Time," when Marx

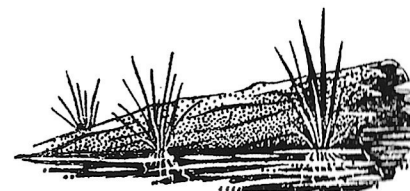
explores the intimate, the lyric, and the sacred, and then returns to the lines, "Good morning, Sweetie./ I love you." The passion of earlier lines, "I lie seamless beside her,/ this my only journey" is not undercut but enhanced by this use of an apparently banal phrase, which in its turn is enriched by the fresh and varied imagery Marx has earlier used.

Marx occasionally comments more directly and more self-consciously than seems needed, as in "February," in which the difficult subject of the political appears, or in "Homage to Mississippi John Hurt," a poem in which the narrator is more strongly a presence than the guitarist. And the overt humor of "When One Has Lived a Long Time in a Large Family" jars when placed against the more subtle, more sardonic humor of other poems. That unevenness is infrequent, however. I found myself consistently able to trust his intelligent connection of setting with choice of image and his ability to redeem and burnish the prosaic world.

I read and write on a Salvation Army couch which faces windows framing an everchanging fir ridge. Often the measure of a poet occurs when I can look up from the poem to the ridge and sense an expansion of the world, an enrichment of the daily life I will soon move into. The line from "Sufficiency," "blue sky pouring from a daymoon's mouth," the experience illuminated in "The View from the Sauna," and the *punk noir* pair of "Two Lovers" who cause Marx to say "My friends,/ the blossoms in love's wake/ shake down over our invisible bodies" have moved into my world, adding to its sufficiency. This book has been a welcome companion these past months.

Stephanie Van Horn

(To order past books or subscribe to future ones, write Dan Raphael, Twenty-Six Books, 6735 SE 78th, Portland, OR 97206.)



Ginger Andrews

PRAYER

God bless the chick in Alaska
who took in my sister's ex,
an abusive alcoholic hunk.
Bless all borderline brainless ex-cheerleaders
with long blonde hair, boobs,
and waists no bigger around than a coke bottle
who've broken up somebody else's home.
Forgive my thrill
should they put on seventy-five pounds,
develop stretch marks, spider veins,
and suffer through endless days of deep depression.

Bless those who remarry on the rebound.
Bless me and all my sisters;
the ball and chain baggage
we carried into our second marriages.
Bless my broken brother and his live-in.
Grant him SSI. Consider
how the deeper the wounds in my family,
the funnier we've become.
Bless those who've learned to laugh at what's longed for.
Keep us from becoming hilarious.
Bless our children. Please.
Bless all our ex's,
and bless the fat chick in Alaska.

OLD BAWLING HAGS

Lonely, horny, divorced,
a struggling, gross christian
recently prescribed antibiotic
and nerve pills, hooked on nicotine,
caffeine and non-dairy creamer,
my sister says she's willing
to lower her standards, date a man
ugly as a mud fence, or stupid
as a box of rocks, so long as
he has a kind heart.

Parked at a downtown 7-Eleven,
we share chili cheese nachos,
a Big Gulp, and a buy-two
get-one-free pack of Sno Balls
while counting each other's gray hairs and wrinkles.
We split a Moon Pie and cry.

Mary Beth Chenier

THE HOMECOMING

Last night I asked you
to roll over
so I could sleep
against your back.
Your skin was dry and cool
above the covers,
damp and hot below.
I nested my thighs and knees
behind yours.
I put my arm
around your chest.
You sighed, and then,
 as though you wanted
 to be sure I understood,
 you sighed again.

YOUR VISIT LIKE AN INDIAN SUMMER

I knew winter was coming,
the cold nights and
the sleeping alone,
but that didn't stop me
from wanting you,
just as the red and yellow leaves
welcome the hot sun
that burns off the frost
and warms them up
for a few days,
sometimes as late as October.

Jean Esteve

SUNDAY, SPRING

I've grown no lawn and so
 the Sunday hum of motor-
powered mowers doesn't rouse me
 to a sense of duty, nor infuse me
with the murkiness of guilt,
 just a drumroll, Sunday's agency
providing theme, a background tune
 for what I have to say to you.

What I have to say to you
 is something like the sermon that we're missing.
This. God barely sees his creatures.
 How could he when he chose to make us small?
What we choose to fulfill our day of rest
 is not his business. Thus grass gets cut,
cars gleam newly polished at the curb,
 and I try to put it all on record.

If toward evening you invite me for a spin
 down the westbound river road, I'll join you in your car.
We'll pass that stand of pale alder,
 eerie, but fringed yellow-green this time of year.

Steven Sher

LAW OF RETURN

Man, if wind didn't
exist, would spend
his life inventing it.

He throws his fists
of grass into the air,
but grass at wind's insistence
never seems to land.

Instead it blends with all
creation while a man
will mostly stand apart,

imagining he owns
the strength of wind
to blow beyond the world
and rush back in.

Wilma M. Erwin

HAIKU

missing wind chimes--
it took a breeze
to find them

EDITORS' NOTES

As of this issue, Donna Henderson leaves our editorial group. Since January 1994, Donna has worked hard for the magazine: screening poems and writing feature articles, doing layout and proofreading. Now she is called to spend more time on her own poetry writing. We thank her for her generous contribution to our work and wish her the very best in all her projects.

With this issue we will no longer designate issues according to the month in which they are to be published: January, April, July, and October. Instead we will be using the seasons as our designations: Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. We are still a quarterly magazine!

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

GINGER ANDREWS, North Bend, continues "writing, organizing, and occasionally submitting poems concerning my family." Her poems have appeared in *THE WRITER*, *THE BEACON*, and *THE NEW PRESS*.

*SHEILA BLACK, Eugene, writes fiction and non-fiction for children. Minnesota born, she has been a children's book editor in New York. Recently she has begun writing poetry.

*MARY BETH CHENIER, Coos Bay, teaches English at Southwestern Oregon Community College and the Shutters Creek Work Camp.

VIRGINIA CORRIE-COZART, Salem, continues to write and paint in her new studio behind the garage, and as a member of the Willamette Master Chorus she is preparing for a concert tour of Europe this summer.

DAN DILLON, Grants Pass, is a newspaper copy editor. He describes himself as a "tinkerer" when it comes to revising poems. His work has appeared previously in *FIREWEED* and *TAIPEI GRAPEVINE*, a magazine for expatriates in Taiwan.

WILMA M. ERWIN, Portland, has collaborated with Brad J. Wolthers in *NINE STEPS: A JAPANESE GARDEN IN THE FOG*, 82 haiku based on the authors' garden walks, from Mountain Gate Press.

JEAN ESTEVE, Waldport, has several contributions in *FIREWEED*. *ZONE 3* and *EXQUISITE CORPSE* have recently taken her work.

CHARLES GOODRICH, Corvallis, writes that he is filled with respect for those hard working writers who are parents of young children. His suite of poems in this issue attests to continuing production, as will his reading at the Maude Kerns Art Center in Eugene in April as part of the Lane Literary Guild's Windfall Reading Series.

*JAMES GRABILL, Portland, coordinates summer programs for the Oregon Writers' Workshop. With four poetry books already published, Grabill adds to the volume reviewed in this issue of *FIREWEED* a collection of personal essays and poems, *THROUGH THE GREEN FIRE*, Holy Cow Press.

*HALEY MARIE ISLEIB, Portland, has recently had poems in *PLAZM* and *RAIN CITY REVIEW*. She was a winner in the Portland Artquake Literary Read-off in 1993 and 1994.

*WILLIAM JOLLIFF, Newberg, began teaching writing and literature this year at George Fox College. His poetry has appeared in *SPOON RIVER QUARTERLY*, *QUARTERLY WEST*, *MIDWEST QUARTERLY*.

LEX RUNCIMAN and Debbie Runciman, Corvallis, run Arrowood Books, whose titles include *NORTHWEST VARIETY: Personal Essays by 14 Regional Authors* and poetry books by Lisa Steinman. Lex teaches English at Linfield College. *THE ADMIRATIONS*, Lynx House Press, 1989, won the Oregon Book Award in poetry.

*STEVEN SHER, Corvallis, teaches writing at Willamette University and was an editor with Lex Runciman of *NORTHWEST VARIETY*. His *TRAVELER'S ADVISORY*, from Trout Creek Press, was a finalist for this year's Oregon Book Award. He has published fiction and four poetry collections.

STEPHANIE VAN HORN, Coquille, teaches at Southwestern Oregon Community College. Her poetry has appeared in *FIREWEED* and *THE BEACON*.

KEN ZIMMERMAN, Creswell, writes poetry and fiction, teaching both forms, as well as the essay, at Lane Community College. Ken played baseball this summer with the Story Line Nine and learned how to hit a curve ball: shift your weight back and wait!

*first appearance in *FIREWEED*

