

FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon



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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.

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Editors: David Laing, Ann Staley, Erik Muller

Cover Art: Darryla Green-McGrath

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Wes Vollmer

FIRST LIGHT

Every morning at this time
nothing asks me anything.

Instead, I take my turn,
sit here and question

so soon the first light.
Then I, its first shadow,

again have not questioned
this first light for nothing.

SILENCES

I

I come here in the morning
for the silence
and to be reminded
that there is no such thing.
To be relieved
of that kind of hope.
That the closer I come to it,
the more I am able to hear.
Everything speaks my name
right before it is given.

II

Silence calls me
out of itself.

I had thought
to stay there.

Like the uninvited.
Like those who

have a choice
and do not take it.

III

One more silent
thing and we
will be alone.

FALLING SILENT

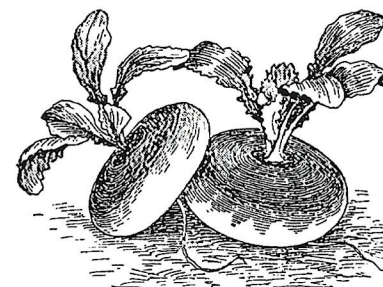
Sometimes I fall silent.
It seems like a falling,
although I never land.

Maybe this is where I land:
next to you.
Then you say that you
are falling too.

It must be somewhere else.
We could look around together.
We wouldn't need to hurry.
Falling is its own speed.

We could look around together.
Falling will let us do that
(unlike rising that needs
us so much to believe).

And if we put out a hand,
each of us, what then?
The arms come next
and then the wings.



TURNIP

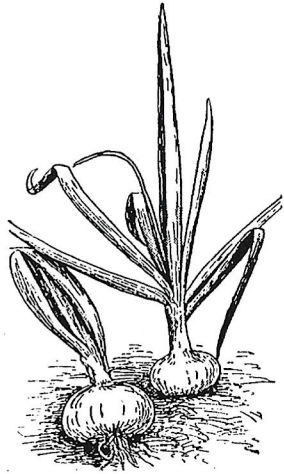
PROBLEM

It's fine to be silent.
Don't get me wrong.
Silence is not a problem
for me, never has been.

But this distance:
that's another matter.
It's when you speak
my name and it comes

to me like an echo
from an empty room.
Then I've got a problem.

Not knowing who's the room
and who's the echo
and who says so anyway.
Then I've got a problem.



WHITE PORTUGAL ONIONS

WHAT TO DO IN SOLITUDE

Nothing.
That's a good start.

And if you can't
do that, do something
worthless for awhile.

Until you catch on
or it does
and you finally

leave each other
alone.

Sherron Norlen

OECANTHUS

summer nights, I tracked
one, tracked one,

until I anchored in light
a fluttering song thrown

everywhere at once
from the plum tree

to circulate and return
for the ventriloquist

that raises and flattens
its loquacious comb and harp

of wing to lead
or deceive an audience--

soft, loud... far, near,
quiet, near, loud.

Idaho moon.
the spa-room guards

its heat against October,
and from the lintel a snowy

tree cricket shrills
confusion, ruffling

shadows of my childhood
among its ice-green wings.

Michael Gray

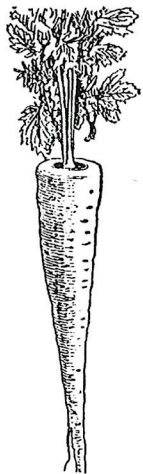
BLACK PHOEBE

Farther down the stream is girdled
in concrete. Here, where it flattens
into the valley, it has been gentled.
A green zone, they call it. With
bikepaths along either bank, but
set back a ways. And between asphalt
and water a dense buffer -- only
the sycamores I can name. The rest,
a tangle I always meant to unravel.
Sparrows I know, of course, and
robins, scrub jays, woodpeckers,
doves and towhees, by sight and sound.
Whose business I learnt as
a child. When this popular strip
was unmarked and unvisited. When
it sustained small boys. When
the print of a bobcat might be found
in the mud at water's edge. Which is
why, even now, I am drawn from
the flow to peer into the shadows.
To fix a small blackness that flits
strangely. A second's freeze in
sunlight and a winking back to
eclipse. I scan Peterson's for
illumination and find it,
waxing in delight.

Jeff Knorr

TURNING INTO A REED

The Great Blue Heron snapped
his hard beak, smacking
a sign
of nestmaking, of sticks, of mating.
The kind of noise
only animals get away with.
He beat deeply, those wide
steel-blue wings, shrieking
as he left the ground,
skidded into the shallows.
He eyed a shad
stuck in a shallow riffle,
raised one leg, turning into a reed.



PARSNIP

FROM THE WEST HILLS

*I should be content
to look at a mountain
for what it is
and not as a comment
on my life.*

David Ignatow

Mt. Hood looms in the east
constant and magnificently calming,
snowcapped and huge.
Beyond it
I know there is more
world to the east,
but I am so struck by its beauty
that life out east is hard to imagine.

Kerry Paul May

END OF SUMMER I

I could swear it was cork smoke
Scouring each lingering cotton-
Wood leaf, the thick red-light
Perfume that pillaged the housing
District then further into the glass
And stone monument of Madrid...
Oh, royal caverns of baked bread,
Diesel, midnight-- where is the caped
Woman who tossed my adolescence
Aside with the fine blonde hair
Of her belly glowing in Burgos
Moonlight? Where are the crowded
Wine halls, discotheques of purple
Dawns, the taxis of La Moraleja?
Calm, the air here gray from grass-
Field ash, summer's lovers beg
Into October, a rebirth of lime
And composts, a brood of promise
And fashions. Blame the angels
for these cruel strokes at youth!
These temptations! The final stretch
Of asphalt is laid and cooled, the t-ball
Diamonds are picked clean and raked
Smooth. A fresh book bag! A package
Of pencils! New shoes! Heat is drawn
Inside to temper the bones. A chill
Cascades into fedoras and touring
Caps. Stadium blankets are mended
And aired... She's living in Ohio.
Her children have grown from her.
Her Spain is brushed aside like
Souvenir silks, the kind once sold
At Corte Ingles, adorned with fringe
And glossy prints of the Aquaduct,
A year before the General died.

END OF SUMMER II

Three weeks and two days into it
And just now autumn's
Glazed copper blackens the streets.
38 and I still can't get it right.
The hum of the gentle hygienist's
Engine strengthens my vision --
A red leaf glows in her brown,
Bobbed, blade-cut hair.
She clocks into her bright day
of bleached whites, files,
X-rays, mask and decay...
October 12th-- father's birthday,
The small calibre leaves tempt
My thatched, enriched grass--
A call for firewood, green-
Burn days, cool air-streams
And fine high-wire song.
Three weeks and this turning
Catches my Navajo blood loafing.
I might have been sleeping
In the dentist's dream chair!
I might have been fooled enough
To fall into false exchange.
And, somehow, his memory, again,
Lumbers me forward -- sly, crafty one.
What gifts can I bring him now?
A fallen leaf? A brunette?
God's hand is a machete,
An ice-flow above whales,
A tremor in Oregon's ocean.
Yet, a cleansing will come.
Skillfully I maneuver my machine,
Head east, ultimately happy
As morning traffic claims me,
Indistinguished one, native one,
And still this living heir.

David Johnson

THE NEWBERG POOL

In 1973, photographer Andy Whipple and I canoed down the Willamette from Eugene to Portland on a self-propelled assignment to find evidence of pollution. He would take pictures of discovered effluence and I would scathingly denounce the miscreants. It was also a rousing good time for two pals; a voyage of modest discovery; a brief reprieve from a life thunderstormed by a broken marriage, a lost son, and a spinning compass.

Two-thirds up the Willamette Valley, we left a gentle current with frothy filigrees to enter the Newberg Pool-- a widening of the river into a long lake spreading across French Prairie, a lush stretch of countryside where *couriers de bois* retired after trapping beaver in the Oregon Territory.

By this time, after four days without a smoke (I figured it was a good chance to kick the habit), Skyfather and Earthmother were foxtrotting in my light-headed mind and, stroke by paddle stroke, the Willamette was bringing me back to the dance of life, healing old wounds, new desperations.

A talisman of that healing appeared to be the Great Blue Heron-- my good-luck totem, scribbler's familiar, knock-kneed spirit guide who has always been there for me even when I had no idea I needed its tutelary alms, its lean, sacerdotal grace.

Each morning, gliding low through the chilly fog, a mock-regal, long-legged heron would announce its territory and intermittently navigate us through the day. The next morning, another heron would take over, escorting us through another stretch of the river. Their constancy was both mystical and hilarious.

After we shoved off one morning, I noticed that no heron was accompanying us through its terrain. But I soon forgot about the missing bird. The banks of the river turned decidedly deciduous with white birch, ash, poplars, willows, and broadleaf maples as we neared Newberg. Anxious to get downriver to Portland, a shower and a cold beer, we decided not to stop at this New England-style hamlet; its whitewashed clapboard reality could wait for another day, another mood.

As we paddled by Newberg, a tall fellow with lank limbs, aquiline nose and longish grey hair stood on the town dock, nodding and smiling. We grinned back and waved as we went by.

The next morning as we were launching the canoe from a gravelly beach near Wilsonville, a blue heron flew above us, its long, stroking wings summoning a safe day's journey, its spear of a beak piercing the grey sky ahead.

SECOND SIGHTING

for Linda

My totem animals have been inconstant friends
They come and go
As if they had other work to do
Other shoulders to touch,
Frogs to eat,
Riverbottoms to graze upon
All but one...
Tawny shadow of the ridgetops
Sunglider padfooting across loose shale
You came to me once
Years ago in hills so distant
They seem like dark green myths.

My totems come and go
Like frog-sticker
Who lives by me by the river as we tend to do
Like mud-sucker
(I've felt the spiny jolt of his glance in my direction)
Like the old ones,
Buddha's little helicopters
Drinking daylight with their Tiffany wings
Blue Heron Catfish Dragonfly
Cougar...
It was your eyes that revealed you
That flash of Cascade mountain gold.

Sean Gillihan

FOR FRIENDS IN LARAMIE

Out here the rains just won't come,
skies go gray but refuse to yield.
They'll pay men, strong men, to climb peaks
and shake clouds loose.
Their women wait silent.
It's not like this everywhere. Farther south
they're voting to change holidays,
and the race is closer than you might expect.

The guy on Channel 3 finds snow
in the Rockies. (Three feet
and Denver's closed.)
He tells us what he has to. He'd rather
talk about traffic, how rivers move us,
this gray we call sky.
He wants to talk about mud, the way
it cakes our shoes, marks our tracks.
Each night he pores over maps,
begging the rains come,
to bring some change.

ON THE WAY TO THE LAKE

Madrone was your favorite,
muscles hard under smooth dark skin.

Dogwood,
white blossoms floating

I had to look them up,
their names,
to learn the trees and flowers.



Kerry Paul May

THE GOOD ONES

In her old souvenir photo book,
"Touring the Oregon Highway,"
She had circled, in red, a spot
Off the motorway, deep in the trees,
Because she had picnicked there once
With her one true love, a tall
Pennsylvania man, one afternoon in
The summer of nineteen twenty-seven.
Her bonnet was bunched to her stickpin,
Her elbow gloves were silky white,
And her skirts ruffled in the breeze.
It was when goggles were the fashion
And rumble seats opened and shut
Like small coffins. And after a lunch
Of chicken salad, rolls, lemonade,
And homemade gin, he took her,
Right there, on the gingham cloth,
A total of three times. She wanted
Him to. But, there was never such
Talk as marriage. Sport was in
The young woman's blood. What she
Conceded to, oh, much later in
Her life, was a sentiment, how
The good ones always got away.
She clipped his poems from the news
Until her hatbox was full.
And now the original highway is closed,
Sectioned off, unsafe for today's speed.
It looks ancient, something Roman
Or Greek. And on my way
To a hometown of truth and pain
I pass by the same spot she
Had circled and I think of her
Brief romance, deep in the trees,
And of her, the way she must have
Turned her head so the afternoon light
Caught the finest features of her hair,
The genuine bliss of her encouraging grin.



COMMENT

At least this poem didn't get away. "The Good Ones" hails from Kerry Paul May's first book of poetry, *TEST FLIGHTS*. In language at once caring and direct he explores a woman's past through her souvenir book. Kerry waltzes us cleanly into and out of a picnic held long ago, even describing fashion and period effects of the day. You've got to love the rumbleseat/coffin line. It's a great way to reference the time and strong enough to sum up, allowing the piece to move along.

After a summer lunch of chicken salad and gin, we learn how a gingham cloth served the couple's more intimate desires. The title of the poem is engaged, the woman's spirit profiled, how marriage was not a consideration. The poem could have taken more conventional turns. No lackluster, observational descriptions here. Kerry brings this woman and the nature of the picnic to life by what is not said, her affirmations, the momentos she treasured. These last few lines, offering behavioral images, create, then, more impact. Kerry has our interest, even piques it with a hatbox full of poems, before entering the poem himself. Quite a wind-up. But as always, there are questions, layering of meaning.

Who is the woman? The date and Kerry's handling of the material makes us think it's a relative, a grandmother, great aunt or friend. Who is the poet kept in her heart all those years? What are the more current mysterious truths and personal pains Kerry offers enroute? Human, we are prone to speculation.

Fortunately, we are left with an exquisite picture of this woman as Kerry drives by the very spot of the picnic. The mere thought of the romance, her hair in the light, and her smile, makes this poem a good one in a book full of good ones.

C.A. Gilbert

Gary L. Lark

from THE RIVER

ii

Quaking aspen in the wind.
Braids of moonlight through vine maple,
snow holding the light.

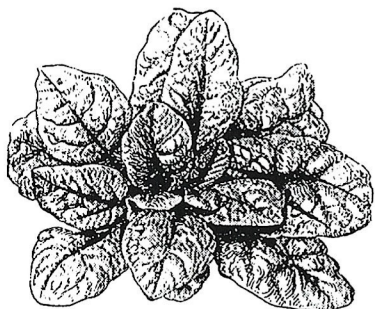
The night sky touches a mountain pool.

When everything was dark
on this face of the universe
star people came wondering.
They saw how empty it was
and sent word to the others.

They came with bags of planets
over their shoulders.
Each would stop and sow
the darkness with planets
and moons, tending them with light.

On the trail we call Milky Way
they are still filling the emptiness.

I sing around the tumble-down granite stones,
down the calling canyons
to the pine-footed benches
I sing.



iii

Roots of hazel and willow reach
to me as I descend,
spilling over shelf-rock
floating,
down into green, full of light
and air, alive.

Other streams come to me,
bringing their strength,
their history, their names;
one, in becoming.

vii

Swallows swim in patterns of wind
touching their bellies to water.

I have learned the way of mountains,
giving and resisting,
and cut through the last range of hills.

Waxwings flutter their hungry dance
in the evening light.

viii

The tide rises to meet me.
And lying in the marshes
we mingle crest and current
until the moon opens pale
on the endless sea.

Ila Suzanne

SOLITAIRE I

After reading the Sunday paper
and filling the crossword puzzle,
she walks her mile toward Mt. Tabor,
returns, attacks the weeds in the rockery,
piling them beyond the forsythia at the corner
of the porch.

She speaks to her Armenian neighbor
who has learned to say, "Good morning" and
"How are you?" She sees families,
combed and tidy, leaving the Rumanian church.

It is nearly two when, showered and dressed,
she grants herself permission for a snack
and a rest on the couch with a mystery,
guilt free, as earlier she read six poems
in the *Rain City Review*.

With almost half a day gone to tasks done
without introspection, perhaps she can let down
and the voices will not come.
She watches honey bees on the butterfly bush
and tries not to think of the hours ahead.

DREAM

Grandmother holds me close while I cry
and watch my daughter crying, giving birth
to a baby girl who does not cry. She smiles,
as if delighted to be in this world
filled with bluebells and yellow birds.

My son tramps across an Alpine ridge
with sky for company and echoes of sheep bells.
I cannot reach him but send a warm breeze
in his direction.

My mother is here or is it a reflection sitting
on a white chair, knitting blue wool,
talking to someone who is not there,
while I sweep the porch with a tired broom.

Old lovers carrying bells, yellow birds
and smiling babies dance on the lawn,
kiss my mouth, then they are gone.



SOLITAIRE II

She leaves the house early in the morning.
There are errands to run in several directions.
She finds the Guatemalan cloth she saved
and by eleven she is having coffee
with a new friend who sews for a living.
They plan a jacket cut from the bright,
cotton cloth and a trip to the country soon.

Sitting alone in her favorite Chinese restaurant,
she dines on cashew nut chicken,
scans her checkbook, decides there is enough,
for once, and goes to a shoe sale downtown.
Two pair, one practical and one pretty.
She smiles feeling the weight of the boxes
in her hands.

It is late afternoon when she returns home.
The day is still warm. She takes her potted plants,
the spiders, a schefflera and the passion flower
to the porch for water, letting the run-off fall
on the terra-cotta bowl holding petunias
grown from last summer's seeds.

For dinner she has curried shrimp.
It feels like an occasion.

DREAM

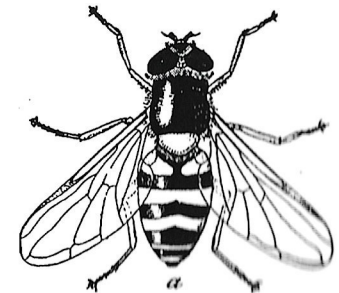
I lie naked on soft earth
near enough to a quiet stream
to see through clear water
to stones like bird's eggs
resting on the sand.

Sun warms my skin
and a harvest moon hangs
low and pale in the sky.

Cat sits on the porch
of my tidy house.
The white chair rocks.
No one is there,
just an idle broom
leaning against the rail.

Across the stream,
my family gathers
under a stand of willows.
Dead, living and unborn
wait under green branches
sweeping the ground.

I am cat and broom.
I am chair, stone and tree.
I am moon and stream.



SOLITAIRE III

Chopping sweet onion, mashing garlic,
tearing cilantro, pungent smells run together
with diced tomatoes and the smoky char
of the chile she holds over the flame.
Someone is coming for dinner.

She sets the table with white dishes,
red cloth napkins and Mexican glass.
It has been a long time
since she cooked for someone.

Listening to Vivaldi she combs her hair,
then lights candles. The house looks nice.
She dusted yesterday.
She can't remember how long it's been.

Perhaps after dinner, after wine and conversation
she will serve coffee on the porch
and her guest will stay, stay long enough
to watch the moon rise.



PARSLEY

Stephen R. Jones

LAST NIGHT, ANA AND THE TREES

We live on thirty acres purchased in the 70's.
Faced with the tired red clay of half-assed hay fields
we struck upon planting trees-- "We'll watch 'em grow!"
After planting over 10,000 seedlings,
our backs still twitch and those lime-green quills
tower thirty feet with trunks thick as my waist.

Recently, we talked long and hard
about bulldozing and building covered parking--
finally deciding to fell six second-growth fir,
trees that were snow-broke and passed over
during routine logging in the 50's.
On today's market, six thirty-inch butts pay the way.

First son, Orestes, says, "No way! Don't cut 'em!"
He helped plant, lugged buckets of seedlings
down long rows, feels connected to all trees.
Zebulon, younger, asks, "Can I earn wages bucking limbs?"
And Ana woke beside me this morning,
whispered in the half light of dawn,
"They know-- I dreamed the trees are weeping."

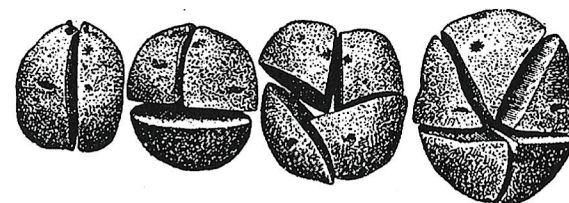


FIGURE 11.—PROPERLY CUT SEED POTATOES
Each piece has two eyes and is about the size of a hen's egg

Melissa Madenski

SWEETBRIAR

I put a few of your ashes
under the rose bush
we'd planted
on a spring evening
under a full moon,
as though your body
could be reborn
in the curve
of a vine or
the swollen suggestion
of a bud.

Six summers
now I've come
to the canes
to prune close
to sites
of sturdy new
growth.

A scent like sweet
memory hovers
over spent limbs.

I touch the bush
where you shine
in flat saucers of
pink on twining
branches winding
higher than I can reach.

Roger Weaver

THE SINGER

Wanting a poem that breathed
immense space with a god's breath,
he turned to the white paper
that scrolled up sound like fog,
and began to write only to record
silences he longed for,
their precise shades of solitude,
a joy impossible with lovers.

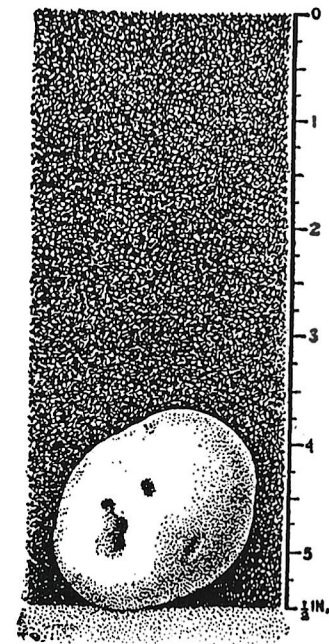


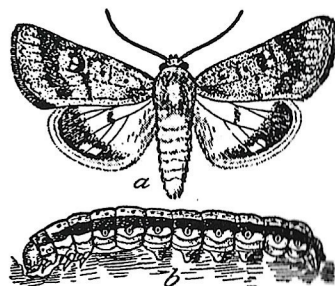
FIGURE 10.—A SMALL POTATO
PLANTED WHOLE

The depth of planting here shown is
approximately $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches to the cen-
ter of the potato. This is the depth
for late potatoes.

Amy Schutzer

HARVEST

This year
my garden is nearly bare,
hardly a leaf of lettuce,
no roots at all.
The equinox comes.
What I am to harvest
is the thought of the next year,
another garden,
a different home.
It is awkward
this coming and going,
rising up,
settling in,
trying to decide how to root myself
when there is no soil
ready for me.
The equinox comes.
Light so graciously divided.
In my yard
blackberries have dried to dark, seedy stars.
They will not be defeated
even though
I have cut them to the quick
for six years.
Nightshade hangs out its berries like lanterns.
I press them
between my palms,
draw a line to divide my face;
color one half red
leave the other pale.
Welcome fall.
Harvest what I can.



TOMATO FRUIT-WORM
a = moth; b = fruit-worm

REVIEW: *MUSIC APPRECIATION* by Floyd Skloot (University Press of Florida, November 1994)

POPPIES by Floyd Skloot (Story Line Press, Silverfish Review Press, 1994)

Primarily a formalist, Floyd Skloot crafts poems that express inner harmonies and dissonance, pulling together the events, landscapes and memories of a personal history scored by the human heart. Born in 1947 in Brooklyn, he grew up there and on a barrier island off Long Island, "seven years/ on a strip of sand," a place "marked by slow/ losses."

The slender *POPPIES*, a finalist for the 1994 Oregon Book Award, introduces us to Skloot's musical voice through a look at his illness. Unable to fit together pieces of puzzles given him by his doctor, Skloot offers us his own jigsaw pieces: four poems focused on the illnesses of brilliant composers, a dozen poems focused on life's most brilliant offerings.

In *MUSIC APPRECIATION*, his first full-length collection, he presents the full four-movement symphony--sometimes jazzy, more often classical-- showing us the links between an emotionally tortured childhood and his adult struggle with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, the life-threatening illness that has scarred his brain and left him physically depleted. When Skloot is sent into the machine for a brain scan, he must, above all, "be still." We learn in the first section, "The Fury," that this is a lesson he brought with him from childhood, an unnatural ability to keep silent. To avoid his father's violent anger, he breathed in his mother's cigarette smoke, his father's cigar smoke, and kept his mouth shut tight. He knew that to sing along when his mother played Gershwin would invite his father's scorn.

But Skloot learned to sing through his pen, and the scenes Skloot describes from this childhood are presented with a simplicity that defies bitterness.

Move to the young man, who once "entered the wild light/ and named it love," who marries, is blessed with a son and a daughter. In section two, "A New Symmetry," Skloot features love poems to wife, daughter, son. These comprise the light, airy movement between darker sets.

Section three, "The Virus," is a compelling look at illness as an "other." In his poem, "The Virus," Skloot finds himself "occupied by an unseen/ enemy." He himself becomes that other as the virus replicates throughout his body. "Cells/ that once bore simple copies/ of themselves now bear virus/ instead. I have lost

control." This set is fascinating, a challenge, but not a downer. He gives us a whole look: complete with humor. "Home Remedies" makes us laugh at ourselves; our endless suggestions for a cure are presented not so much as a look at other people's idiocy as a sweet jive. In "Saying What Needs To Be Said," even the crosswiring caused by brain lesions produces an amusing exercise in duplication: "Sick three years, I have learned to look at the bright/ side. You can see the darkest trouble as bright./ For example, I don't say everything twice./ I'd hate to be one who said everything twice."

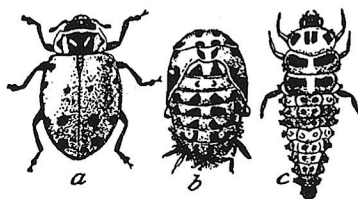
In the book's title poem, Skloot tells us, "I may never know/ what virus this is, what brilliant cell/ rewrites the entire score/ my body has followed for life." In "learning to appreciate/ this new tone," Skloot doesn't ask us to feel sorry for him, rather, he invites us to look at what he has learned to look at, head on. While Skloot's sweetness often makes him seem an innocent, he asks us to shed our own innocence-- of disease and death.

In the final section, "Search," Skloot takes another look back at the place from which he came, now ravaged by the sea, changed, shifted, just as he has been altered by disease and time. These poems I find less compelling than the set about illness and the early ones on family life, but looked at as a movement, as a more peaceful stretch of time, they make a quiet music worth listening to.

Both books offer memorable, life-affirming work.

Worth noting is Skloot's other writing. Story Line Press has published two novels, the 1992 *PILGRIM'S HARBOR* and the 1994 *SUMMER BLUE*. Additionally, Skloot is under contract with Story Line for two more books, one a novel, the other a nonfiction work about his illness.

Alice Evans



LADYBIRD

a = beetle; b = pupa; c = young

REVIEW: *TEST FLIGHTS* by Kerry Paul May (West End Press, 1995)

This particular *FIREWEED* editor has developed a habit, by now a tradition, of packing around a copy of the book of poetry he has chosen to review, delving into it at fortuitous moments. A book that accompanies you on your rounds ages nicely with you as you age (which is quickly), and soon you get to be old friends, and you can talk back and forth and learn a lot from each other. Some books of poetry don't lend themselves to this kind of experience, and they get left by the wayside, forgotten, left for compost, sold back to Powell's.

TEST FLIGHTS and this writer have become good friends, though this wasn't always the case. I think I'm hard on books of poetry at first. I say, "So you claim you're a book of poems from this poet. Well, what have you got to say for yourself?" I ask the poems to jump right up and declare themselves. Actually, if they do that, I probably won't like them anyway. I'm capable of laying traps for books in this manner.

May's poems took the bait. At first encounter and for several encounters afterwards, I felt defensive. What I said was, "You're trying to put one over on me." I felt I was being pushed around as I skimmed along through the book. The poems seemed tough and muscular; they seemed to be trying hard to impress me. I saw poems dealing with death and war and soldiers and Spain and hunting and drinking. I'm embarrassed to admit I thought of Hemingway.

But *TEST FLIGHTS* was persistent and kept coming at me, not letting go, gradually winning me over. The book taught me to be patient and to take the time to look deeper into its individual poems. I saw that it was in the nature of these poems to deal honestly and directly with life's most difficult and complicated possibilities, such as witnessing a long slow dying or having a relative go off suddenly to a war or knowing a woman greatly oppressed. Many of these poems are bold and determined. Here, for example, are the first lines of the first section of "Roses, 1964," dedicated to the poet's mother:

She's in the kitchen, where the men
Of that time thought all women
Should be, drying the supper
Dishes, alone in the house where

Her husband had grown into
A man...

Another example, the first half of the poem "A War":

One night, hearing noises
In the kitchen, going down,
I saw him, shirtless, before
The open refrigerator, light
Glowing on his boyish face.
He was lifting covers
From the plates and bowls,
Jabbing his thick fingers
Into applesauce, butter,
Gravy, rice, then carefully
Replacing the plastic wrap.
I saw it all. My brother-
In-law knew some things--
Soldiering, hand-to-hand,
And instinct. When he sensed
Me, he turned, his left
Forearm up and set to fly,
Then sat me down quick,
And paced the floor. "Do
You know where I'm going?"
He asked me. I did not.
Somewhere else. Away. A war.

So the poems in *TEST FLIGHTS* like to set matters out definitively for your consideration. They like to confront, and a bit of defensiveness on the reader's part is understandable. But soon it becomes clear that this is only a prefatory intent, and that these poems actually wish to share anguish and grief and love. It is almost as though you are dared to enter the sacred ground of the poems. Once past the guards, once on the other side of the definitive language, you are in a world deep with feeling. You are alone there to accept as much feeling as you may care to.

The seven sections of the book present themes including portrayals of members of the family, elegies for old friends dead in war, pictures of farm life in Eastern Oregon, glimpses into contemporary urban street scenes and, most movingly, scenes at the end of a father's life. It might be possible to juggle these poems and line up most of them end to end, and you would have a long narrative poem spanning a man's life, a son's life, not over yet.

TEST FLIGHTS definitely leans in the direction of a poet's "selected poems," drawn from a lifetime dedicated to writing.

The gruff tone of these poems, the spareness of the diction, and the short line (similar to a Philip Levine line) all would allow this connecting up. Without getting too dramatic here, I think the uniformity of tone and diction and line contribute to a sense of scale, a steady enlargement of perspective, a tendency towards the epic. The poems do not try to do this in a self-conscious fashion; they are actually modest, in that they like to focus on the small details of daily life. There is a paradox here, one I'm in love with, myself: significance can be built through the selection of details, if you've got an ear and an eye for what really resonates.

My favorite poem at the moment (and this will no doubt change) is one that presents the most emotional material the book contains, the death of the poet's father. "A Late Portrait of My Father" will serve to demonstrate, I hope, some of the claims I've made for *TEST FLIGHTS*.

A LATE PORTRAIT OF MY FATHER

At the kitchen counter
He carves a peach into
Small pieces then brings them,
One by one, to his mouth
And chews slowly, then waits
To see if it stays down.
If not, he leans over
The sink then wipes his lips
And tries another piece.
He's telling his body
That he's still in control,
That nothing can take this
Simple function away
From him, the cool sweetness
Of fruit from his shrinking
Tongue. Tomorrow he will
Attempt a pear, apple,
Or plums; and, like now, lose
Most of it, but still carve
And eat until he tires
Of standing. Embarrassed, he turns
His head to cough. He asks
Me the same questions as

This morning, nodding at
My replies. Good peaches,
He says when he turns in
Leaving all lights burning.

D.L.

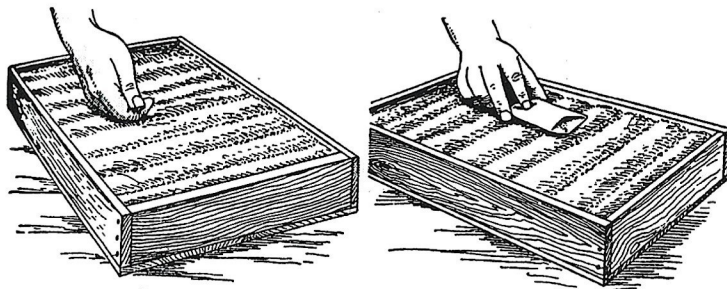
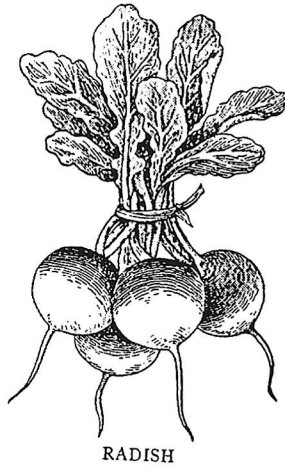


FIGURE 1
TWO METHODS OF SOWING SEEDS

FIGURE 2

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

ALICE EVANS, Eugene, organizes literary events at Marketplace Books. Her profiles and reviews of Oregon writers appear in POETS & WRITERS and EUGENE WEEKLY.

C.A.GILBERT, Eugene, is a poet and used book sleuth.

*SEAN GILLIHAN, Bonanza, lives on a cattle ranch. His poems have appeared in TRESTLE CREEK REVIEW, THE PANHANDLER, and PAINTED HILLS REVIEW.

*MICHAEL GRAY, Corvallis, works as a mailman.

DAVID JOHNSON, Portland, is, among other things, a free-lance journalist. He is compiling a collection in prose of his river adventures. His poetry is collected in CONFLUENCE.

STEPHEN R. JONES, Corvallis, teaches English at Sprague High School. His poetry has appeared in CALAPOOYA COLLAGE and ELOQUENT UMBRELLA.

JEFF KNORR, Portland, has two chapbooks, UP WE TRAVELLED and NOTES FROM THE RIVER. He has a poem in the new Adrienne Lee Press anthology of heron poems. He teaches at Clackamas Community College.

GARY LARK, Tigard, is a native of Oregon who works as a children's librarian. He was a collaborator on the Northwest poetry anthologies of the 1970's, LUCKIAMUTE.

MELISSA MADENSKI, Neskowin, a teacher at the Sitka Center and the Northwest Writing Institute, also runs a garden business, Perennial Farm. Her essays have had regional and national acceptance.

KERRY PAUL MAY, Eugene, has recently read his poems alongside his mentor John Haislip. Kerry is originally from Condon; his poems about family and Spain have appeared in FIREWEED.

SHERRON NORLEN, Portland, has just retired and travelled in France. Her poems have appeared in WILLAMETTE WEEK and CALAPOOYA COLLAGE. She is at work on a full collection of her poetry and three chapbooks including "entomologist's dreambook."

AMY SCHUTZER, Portland, lives with three calicos and writes with a focus on "internal landscape and ground." Her work has appeared in a variety of literary reviews.

*ILA SUZANNE, Portland, wrote the text for an oratorio composed by Kay Gardner, OUTDOORS--STAGES OF A WOMAN'S LIFE. Her chapbooks are THEY GATHERED IN GROVES and THERE WILL BE SIGNS.

*WES VOLLMER, Corvallis, is a valley native. He is a photographer and short fiction writer who has been a teacher, principal and consultant.

ROGER WEAVER, Corvallis, spends time in Greece when he's not teaching literature and poetry writing at Oregon State. TRAVELING THE GREAT WHEEL is his 1990 collection.

* first appearance in FIREWEED

