

# Fireweed

*Poetry of Western Oregon*

Volume Eleven, Number One

Fall 1999 - \$2.50



This issue of *Fireweed* is dedicated to friend and contributor Susan Spady, who passed away on November 1, 1999. Susan was the first winner of the William Stafford Award given by Literary Arts, Inc., in 1993. Her poems have most recently appeared in the anthology *Millennial Spring: Eight New Oregon Poets* from Cloudbank Books.

## FIREWEED

*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 that we can replace it. All contents are copyrighted 1999 by *Fireweed*, 2917 NE 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97212-3253.

Send *Fireweed* email to [jazzpo@iccom.com](mailto:jazzpo@iccom.com)  
*Fireweed's* Web site is [members.xoom.com/fireweedmag](http://members.xoom.com/fireweedmag)

Editors: Harold Johnson, Sydney J. Thompson  
Design: Anne Dosskey  
Cover art: Darryla Green-McGrath

*Recipient, Oregon Institute of Literary Arts Publishers Award*

ISSN 1095-9653

## FIREWEED

Fall 1999

SUSAN SPADY

Presente 7

DIANE AVERILL

For a Two-year-old Painter 8

TIM APPLIGATE

Cormorants 9

5-card Draw at Lake Billy Chinook 10

JEAN ESTEVE

Drunken Singing 11

ERAN WILLIAMS

Surveying 12

On Not Knowing Hungarian 13

NANCY NOWAK

Nothing to Scale 14-15

TONAYA CRAFT

At the Hydroplane Races 16-17

LEANNE GRABEL

Guest Poem 18-22

Anne Sexton Was a Sexpot 23-25

DOUGLAS BARRICKLOW

One Hundred Crows 26-27

CHRIS ANDERSON

What Things Are Worth 28

CAROL ELLIS

The Midnight Field 29

ISOBEL TOLLEFSON

The Way Some People See 30

MARILYN JOHNSTON

Tibetan Saying: It is better to travel well than to arrive. 31

DAN DILLON

Repairing 32-33

GEORGE STALEY

Four Years of Lap Swim 34-35

JAMES GRABILL

The End of March with Its Planetary Curve 36-39

Academic Disruption 40

LINDA ELEGANT

The Fiction of the Guest Embalmer 41

ADA MOLINOFF

New York Journal 42

SYDNEY THOMPSON

Review - *Studying Russian on Company Time*, by Clemens Starck 43-44

EDITORS' NOTES

45

CONTRIBUTORS

46-7

Susan Spady

PRESENTE

Beeswax candles saved  
since our wedding  
drip translucent angels' wings  
that drop to the dark grass  
still folded. Beyond the speaker's  
platform, seventh story  
fluorescent ceilings flicker.

We're here  
for Ben, who, two days ago, surveyed  
Nicaragua for hydroelectric sites.  
His beard glowed orange in sun.  
He made light with water. He was  
twenty-seven – in that place, closer  
to death than birth – when he knelt  
to check the flow of a stream. The rain

begins. An old, fragile woman  
in a wheelchair cups her  
candle stub, her sparse whiskers  
illuminated. Though wet,  
I'm warmed by the thousand lights,  
the child in my womb.

Fifteen thousand  
bullet-ridden-names – how many of them  
children's? – inscribed on one-room  
dwellings shout, *Presente*.  
We too shout, *Presente*. Ben Linder,  
you are here  
where candles burn in rain.

*Note: On April 28, 1987, near San Jose de Bocay,  
Ben Linder was shot by Contras at extremely close range.*



*Diane Averill*

#### FOR A TWO-YEAR-OLD PAINTER

Blue, slung in curves across the easel,  
returns to her mouth in a berry-grin.  
Naked turquoise belly. Hands,  
arms, thighs covered in sky.  
Paint dropping on the ground.  
And then my granddaughter  
flings into my arms,  
a seedling from the wind,  
settles on my hipbones  
like a young tree  
taking nutrients from a nurselog.  
And I am crumbling, reddish,  
spattered with beautiful blue beetles,  
blue-green leaf-lace, moss-light.  
My granddaughter grows from light  
falling down on us like teal rain,  
and I know the forest canopy  
will open for her into a sky  
so blue she can see up through.

*Tim Applegate*

#### CORMORANTS

What is left now  
but the light on the water  
the day the sun broke through the clouds  
a few minutes before dark  
to whiten the caps of the waves  
and shimmer in the wings of cormorants  
come down to the mud flats to feed,  
how it backlit the masts of the sailboats  
at anchor in the harbor  
and the little clapboard houses  
and the tavern on the river  
where we bought quarts of clam chowder  
and loaves of sourdough bread.

Inside the camera's eye  
a tiny flame appears, miming twilight,  
and the photograph  
remembers rain, deer on the open  
hillsides, fire rings of scotch broom  
and the light on the water that day.

It was the arc of love, really,  
especially when you're young: even  
when the shadows of evening fell  
an afterglow remained there, on  
the hillsides, burning long after dark.

Tim Applegate

### 5-CARD DRAW AT LAKE BILLY CHINOOK

the one on the left  
who's been losing all evening  
keeps raising the stakes anyway for

he's a true believer  
and hears, in his heart,  
the trumpets of chance

distant hum of jet fighters  
as the Buddhist

draws the fifth diamond  
under ancient Oregon  
moon

Jean Esteve

### DRUNKEN SINGING

Hear the song of a drunkard  
who reels through white trees at night  
to get a glimpse of the eclipse.  
Wrong night. Wrong moon. The forest itself  
a hallucination.

Expect his singing to raise your dead  
or lay their ghosts, and be as bewildered  
as he is, wilderness in a picture  
too abstract to map.

Best run back to your house of sanity,  
close the doors, light all the lamps.

Here is drunken lingering near a lighted window,  
some slipping from a tip-toed effort to see in.  
Those inside, surely, are the ones who make decisions,  
draft plans for our bridges, roads and cities,  
make lists of citizens.

A comfortable rumble of discourse,  
a snappy rattle of paper,  
a smoky sense of feeling well must fill the rooms,  
but when this house was built, they built them thick.  
Someone keeps the windows shut.  
No aura leaks between the bricks,  
and so his song goes trilling through the dark. Listen  
close. This short lyric spell of drunkenness  
will flatten, slide off key. After that,  
rueful tears, then vomit, then the jitters.  
He has ruined his liver and will be quiet soon.

Everyone knows when the sottish one sings  
heaven opens outward, the cap pops off hell.  
Angels and imps collide, trying to bribe him.  
It has been said  
Whoever hears his music understands him too well.

## SURVEYING

Working on a land use survey in Mali  
I ask a woman older than myself  
if she has noticed changes in the outlying forest.

She replies that she has never been outside her village.  
And later that day, in another village,  
in a meeting with the elders I ask a man his age.  
He shrugs and looks over at the village chief  
who tells me in French 70,  
then repeats the age in Dogon.  
The man who has just been given 70 years  
looks back down at his feet and I ask the rest of my questions.

In Africa they ask me, where is your family,  
and how many factories do you own, and  
what crime have you committed to be sent here?

## ON NOT KNOWING HUNGARIAN

I was there two whole years  
and I learned how to order a beer,  
say good day and ask if a movie was dubbed.

They say it's a difficult language  
with few relations and odd conjunction  
but I could have learned more.

I had planned to become fluent,  
to translate the poetry of Radnoti,  
to get the puns. Why else travel?

Abroad I picked up very little Tibetan  
and a tiny bit of Español.  
I've forgotten Fulfuldi

and the Bambara of Southern Mali  
where that first night the village stood at my door  
pointing me to their language.

I repeated the whole world of nouns  
– door, termite, shirt, papaya, woman, good-bye –  
and they left, satisfied I had joined them.

But of course nothing stuck.  
The words were gone with the breath they rode on  
and I slept in the place of nothing to say.

Why else travel? There is a saying in Hungarian.  
If only I knew the words I would put them here.

NOTHING TO SCALE

Before illness occupied her

and cell  
within each lung's candelabrum

upon cell  
along the intricate blood river

having felt her despair

began  
its ordered collapse  
as a tower can be made  
to fall in on itself, to its knees

a girl waited  
on a boardwalk as true  
as the ruled horizon

for the fact of love.

The perfect curve  
of her smile as she whispered

to her cousin, "I'll take  
the tall one" – wasn't there

a photograph the second soldier took  
of her and him, her cousin

having edged tactfully away –

After, her life was as sweet  
as silk to wear, the real thing, without

the mildest *How big*, though the world  
interrupted lunch downtown  
for an earthquake, or *How long*

*does it last*, until  
he went first. Then, she might have

believed blood's infinite coastline  
had been folded into her  
like a pocket handkerchief, and her lungs  
were a tennis court

because all the world needed  
to end was take-away one

because to find the path he took  
her body must translate that desire through  
to the narrowest  
corridor, hollow, and cell. So long

to leave, while the dead coaxed her  
through dates on a calendar. Too soon:

Someone took her hand, holding  
her back, yet she reached  
for pad and pen, forgave  
a debt, sent a granddaughter  
to France; what was undone could be

abandoned, paperbacks stacked  
on a nightstand for March, May, July

and, for all that remained, a photograph  
possessing no more  
than a story and the long surf  
behind them both.



AT THE HYDROPLANE RACES

From the log boom view  
Where supersonic hydroplanes  
Made high-speed tentative advances  
On their water,

To the deck where you came  
Down from Mount Olympus to slip  
A gin and tonic to your good friend's daughter  
(13 and insane for you),

In a boat made of sinew  
And machines to pump out the bilge  
And the truth,

Your thumbprint still lives on her forehead.

In a race toward a place,  
That blank space, the mistake  
We called home,

Your starboard toe kissed the bow,  
Your port foot waved wildly at the gulls.

To forget you  
Like the cheers and eyes  
Of your good friend's daughter  
(13 and insane like you),

To forget the way  
Your pendulous weight made  
A spark of sea-spray hang itself  
On the bow, then  
Fall.

They couldn't forget it at all:

The boat that the waves couldn't break,  
The boat that still rocks in your wake,

The boat where we flailed  
Like fish on the dry dock  
The gulls made a meal of  
That day.

CONSORTING WITH ANGELS

I was tired of being a woman,  
tired of the spoons and the pots,  
tired of my mouth and my breasts,  
tired of the cosmetics and the silks.  
There were still men who sat at my table,  
circled around the bowl I offered up.  
The bowl was filled with purple grapes  
and the flies hovered in for the scent  
and even my father came with his white bone.  
But I was tired of the gender of things.

Last night I had a dream  
and I said to it...  
"You are the answer.  
You will outlive my husband and my father."  
In that dream there was a city made of chains  
where Joan was put to death in man's clothes  
and the nature of the angels went unexplained,  
no two made in the same species,  
one with a nose, one with an ear in its hand,  
one chewing a star and recording its orbit,  
each one like a poem obeying itself,  
performing god's functions,  
a people apart.

"You are the answer,"  
I said, and entered,  
lying down on the gates of the city.  
Then the chains were fastened around me  
and I lost my common gender and my final aspect.  
Adam was on the left of me  
and Eve was on the right of me,  
both thoroughly inconsistent with the world of reason.  
We wove our arms together  
and rode under the sun.  
I was not a woman anymore,  
not one thing or the other.

O daughters of Jerusalem,  
the king has brought me into his chamber.  
I am black and I am beautiful.  
I've been opened and undressed.  
I have no arms or legs.  
I'm all one skin like a fish.  
I'm no more a woman  
than Christ was a man.

### Or Would You Rather Be a Fish

This poem I re-found handwritten in a shockingly even script in my gorgeous marbled-paper special book that I started in 1977. This special book contains a continually growing collection of poems I have come upon over the past 22 years that have shaken me loose, pinned me down, given me air like a whisper from an angel. I wrote Anne Sexton's poem down years before I knew anything about her and years before I myself became a wife and mother and truly understood her lament. I always knew, however, this poem as a song of desperation and revolution, flaming in its implore and its import.

Ms. Sexton was an East Coast beauty from a patrician family who eloped at 19 because she thought she was pregnant, and besides which, she was in love. Assuming this poem is autobiographical (of which I have no doubt), Ms. Sexton began her married life with the shiny spoon in the stewpot and ended up flying fatiguedly away under the sun through the cosmos playing link-arm with Adam and Eve (as a fish). I understand such an odd desire. While sweeping pubic hairs from the grouting in the bathroom, the poet/wife must crack wide her brain to stay amused. She must envision being taken by a king, living life as a Nubian, chewing stars. "Consorting with Angels" is the whine and the fantasy of the woman with the husband and the babies and the upper division credits and the cocktails: the obvious song of the wife with the whim and the whip.

Anne Sexton came from a family of old world wealth and numerous closets filled with beautiful well-creased, cashmere slacks, tarnished Americana and skeletons made of decadence. Everybody drank too much and got sloppy with each other, and unfortunately, with the children. If you've read the stunning biography of Anne Sexton by Diane Middlebrook or the heartwrenching memoir by Anne's daughter, Linda Sexton Gray, you well know how horrible the Sextons were at family life. Anne struggled as the victim of her family's sloppy thrusts and rages, and she became terribly sloppy herself. She traumatized her daughters. She drank.

She was paralyzingly depressed. She was lustful and uncontrolled. Her vast and starving poet's hungers were never satiated. She ate compulsively at the trough of innocence, wherever she could find it. And eventually, she just drowned in her upchuck.

After the birth of Ms. Sexton's second child, she suffered a suicidal breakdown and was willingly committed to a psychiatric hospital, which over the next 20 years became her second home. Her psychiatrist suggested she write poetry as therapy. It was a brilliant suggestion. From the day Anne Sexton began writing poetry in 1956, it was a wildly productive and astonishingly successful ride that included the publication of 12 books of poetry, a Pulitzer Prize, many fellowships and professorships, as well as stardom in musical and theatrical performances. She joined a writing group in Boston made up of an amazingly illustrious group of poets, including Sylvia Plath (it was said she was desperately jealous of Sylvia for taking her life first), Maxine Kumin, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, et al. She had affairs with all the men: her flaming green eyes and her hunger were her seduction.... But...

*I was tired of being a woman,  
tired of the spoons and the pots,  
tired of my mouth and my breasts,  
tired of the cosmetics and the silks.  
There were still men who sat at my table,  
circled around the bowl I offered up.  
The bowl was filled with purple grapes  
and the flies hovered in for the scent  
and even my father came with his white bone.  
But I was tired of the gender of things.*

Whew. Anne was inching into the genderlessness of her long marriage and her middle age and she was fatigued. I figure she was also drunk. The social constraints of the '50s and early '60s had her bound, but the sog of the alcohol was shredding the knots, which for a moment or two, was a good thing. Her poems were revelations of discontent. They were an early erosion.

In "Consorting with Angels," Anne blasts into internal orbit by the thought of the chalky venom of the father. Anne dreams of



a surreal world where the angels are stooges, the people confused, and the wrong is as right as the right is wrong. When the poet finally enters the dream, she is chained up, flying, stripped down, and beautiful. And finally, the poet finds freedom and fulfillment as a splayed-open fish making genderless love to a king.

It is a bold revolutionary statement, this poem, made even more impressive when one remembers that this was before the women's movement. In fact, the women's movement was barely a molecule of lint on the head of the hatpin of Bella Abzug's hat. But I figure, if someone in the early days of the women's movement could have gotten ahold of Anne Sexton, they might have saved her. They could have talked to her about female liberation and alternative lifestyles. (I'm not being facetious.) They might have helped her to open up her definition of gender instead of allowing her anachronisms to imprison her, crunching her bones.

Anne lost touch with her timing. I blame it on alcohol. Like Dorothy Parker, Anne ended up drastically lost and ugly in the bog of her despair and disease. But nobody did a finer job of cracking open a heart for all to see, even though we all know there are no band-aids for that kind of wound. Anne Sexton deserves to be unchained and consorting with angels. I hope that's what's going on. And I hope Sylvia's there with her. They're trailblazers of the dark side of emotion. Hip. Hip.

*Leanne Gabel*

#### ANNE SEXTON WAS A SEXPOT

She was longlimbed and darkhaired and lanky and tan.  
She had eyes like the eyes in a minx made of jade atop the  
door of a  
castle in  
Prague.

She had wings that were caught in the strings of the aprons of  
East Coast housewifery.  
Legs to the sky.

In a closet she guzzled it down midst the boxes and boxes of  
rich christian velvetry.

(Dorothy being naughty was clicking and clapping in the bleachers.)

Booze made Anne lose sight of skin and whose skin it was.  
Sometimes she chose the wrong thighs for the labwork.  
Her daughters would scam but the  
screams would go backwards and  
rest in the pleats of their  
lush unscuffed hearts. They were  
red like the red of their shiny strapped shoes,  
like the red in the red in the fire in the eyes of the innocent,  
red like the red of the  
lips of a  
child.

The low point for Anne was that  
time she got trapped by that  
clan of cute poets  
in line for the stove.



She was screaming at Hubby that  
day at the bank when she  
spied those bohemians (in between trains)  
after Harry Head Teller wouldn't  
cash her large check from the  
grande French foundation.

Anne had holiday fever.  
Silver piping in her hair.  
She wore that cableknit sweater that  
Mother gave to Father.

"To Prague!" screamed the smallest bohemian  
flaring those nostrils they can't grow in Idaho.

Anne's trim nose swelled up and dripped  
dripping want  
oozing slowly like  
eggplants  
irises  
rust.

Annie cried out for the tonic.  
Then she lay down on the cot with her fingers on her labia.

Mrs. Sexton was a sexpot.  
Tried to fold her lap neatly  
like a napkin stiff and oilcloth  
in a pattern lacking flair  
not even a hair.

She saw a panther  
sick and vicious  
in the round eyes of her young.

ANNIE STOP THAT!

Tried to kill herself 38 times every year.  
Got admitted. Got released.  
Got admitted. Got released.  
Got admitted. Got released.

Then she went home and sunk her soul wetly  
in a three-story house with a four-car garage  
and a history thick with  
America  
alkies  
fog.

Annie was 12 years too early for the love beads.

ONE HUNDRED CROWS

I stay in the car while my wife  
sits in the dental chair.  
I think about my life: what I have  
written, and not written.

It is February, the air,  
a message from the universe:  
"You die if the sun stays away too long,  
I planned it that way. Love, God."

Why, the sun, and not another name?  
Why not scrub jay?

"Because, scrub jay is a bird.  
I planned it that way."

I die  
if the scrub jay  
stays away too long?

"Maybe."

Sunset snips the western hills from  
black paper, pastes clouds like whales  
where one hundred crows spiral  
in the earth's breath.

Black wings carve slivers of night  
that five blue herons carry across the river  
absorbed by the hill's stomach,  
so there is nothing else to eat.

Riverbank trees' serrated teeth  
chew wounds in the clotted sky.  
God said,  
"I planned it that way.

And you. You get  
a wife with clean teeth.  
I planned it that way,  
too."

### WHAT THINGS ARE WORTH

When we laid out Grandma's waffle iron,  
her crock pot and her canner, littering the lawn  
with bric a brac, we didn't think to mark what each  
was worth. Spatulas lay in the patchy grass, untagged,  
sunflower ashtrays, Kansas coasters. When the buyers  
came all we did was guess, stammering and embarrassed.  
The Zenith went for ten; the snow tires five apiece;  
the folding trays I can't remember, the black ones  
with the golden vines. Sensing weakness, the gleaners  
quickened. Later, after the sale, I sat on the scattered  
ground, hands locked against my knees. Soon the light  
began to change. A frisbee banged against the neighbor's  
Nova, then the laughter of boys, a mother's call.  
From the alley, the scent of burning leaves.

### THE MIDNIGHT FIELD

They are cutting hay after midnight,  
bright lights in the field, hum  
of machinery, men shout softly  
under starlight. Sweet smell of alfalfa  
fills the night air.

Meadow birds, confused, rise from the nest  
to light, like the birds at sun's eclipse  
who sleep and rise again, bewildered.

Brightness of the midnight field, buried  
in light, mice run before the harvester,  
shrews and blind moles and the brown  
meadowlark.

THE WAY SOME PEOPLE SEE

At the Friday night poetry reading  
in the red Gourmet Coffee Shop,  
a woman reads an angry poem.  
Another reads a piece  
saying, "This is my dark side."

I shuffle through my poetry  
and say, "I'm looking for one  
about my dark side."

A man, a regular at the readings,  
says, "Your dark side is blank."

Sixteen-year-old Jane sits at the table.  
She tells her grandmother,  
"I don't think Isobel has a dark side."  
"There might be a few dark places,"  
says her grandmother.  
Jane brushes her fingers in the air.  
"Well, they'd only be smudges."

The compliments warm me.  
Then a woman steals my glory  
saying, "You don't tell the whole truth."

I keep a smile  
as I think of my dark side,  
which, in my mind, is a matter  
of only staying in the dark  
long enough to find the light.

TIBETAN SAYING:  
IT IS BETTER TO TRAVEL WELL THAN TO ARRIVE.

She left home in the fall  
when she turned eighteen

headed to the Middle East where she learned to  
climb date palms to cover the fruit for winter

learned Arabic and sailed down the Nile  
with a Nubian sea captain

lived for a time Down Under where she shaved her head  
and watched the sunrise with a transvestite named Arizona

Now postcards come from Southeast Asian towns  
with names that I cannot pronounce

and finally no one asks  
how I could have let her go



## REPAIRING

Everything twice:  
His way,  
the manual's,  
compromise breeding impatience.

He takes out  
the bathroom fan flywheel,  
buys a new one,  
tightens, loosens,  
tightens, loosens,  
tightens.  
And most of the clank's gone.

It's better than it was.

He breaks off the shower head and its neck  
rinsing the shower floor,  
and says good-bye to showers  
until the afternoon  
cursing calls down the hall:  
"Work in progress."

Nothing's fixed  
till the cursing softens,  
saying something's fixed.

He finds satisfaction in simple  
tasks:  
replacing a spent headlight  
(one lost screw –  
found in the grease stain  
where the repaired light now points  
pulling into the garage),  
changing lawnmower oil each spring  
(a sort of muscle memory –  
Oh, yes, this is it.)

They're better than they were.

But the woman,  
the daughter of a handyman,  
(a grease pit/shooting range  
beneath his garage;  
changing his own oil,  
reloading his own shells;  
speaking carburetor  
and carbine  
fluently)  
arrives  
without a manual.

Everything now three times:  
His way.  
Hers.  
And theirs.  
Compromise breeding patience.

It's better than it was.

*for K.M.G.*

FOUR YEARS OF LAP SWIM

Would it always seem the same for you:

3 days a week

6:00 AM shower

84° pool water

heavily chlorinated

25 yards up

29 seconds

25 yards back

29 seconds

50 counted laps

6:25 AM shower

to de-chlorinate

Don't let the lane lines and surface  
regularities deceive,

for each time I enter the pool

I plunge into uncharted waters:

Today, between the

stroke stroke stroke breath

stroke stroke stroke breath

I considered the dangers

of lap swim:

mouthfuls of once pissed-in pool water

leg cramp in the deep end

head-on collisions between cruise control swimmers

maybe an inattentive life guard

and a drowning

or an electrical short in the underwater lights

11 electrocuted lap swimmers

all floating face down

except the backstroke woman.

And every day on the surface of these uncharted waters

I'm carried along by

strokes and breaths

thankful for the chance to swim

and thankful for attentive lifeguards.

THE END OF MARCH  
WITH ITS PLANETARY CURVE

*i. The sun starts it all up.*

The daffodil trumpeted  
and leaned down. We looked out  
over the city and saw the sun  
draining. Münch caught  
the capture. Stieglitz steadied  
the contrast. We saw silver crosses  
hurtling mathematically  
over massive buildings  
of another century, landing  
in the cemetery of rebellion.  
Air Force jets and long  
arc-roofed huts by the runway  
were reminding us, the raw  
power over all these years,  
discing through thought, loosening  
ambient sadness, asking for, well,  
existential salvation, holding  
a new trumpet flower  
in the sun-flooded  
sky's mouth we stood in,  
behind the afternoon houses.

*ii. The sun fills the night.*

The sun fills the night  
with its creation.  
The night looms through the day.  
So we drove a car out of the past  
and climbed out. The slamming  
of doors was gravity  
or passage of time. We felt  
so we moved. A Miró  
and an Ernst dove  
in the stew with sturgeon  
swimming beneath the sky.  
Much of Byron tottered.  
Downtown, a brewery, lit up  
like a gothic church,  
worked into the night.  
Luminous peppers and apples  
glowed under carefully  
fastened lights. We sat  
with folks near the stone walls.

*iii. The sun goes under the horizon.*

So we sat with long-time  
folks near the stone walls.  
Some old stones were the size  
of people's heads. Moss  
and lichen had been slowly  
caressing the cheekbones of some.  
A rain started down from high above.  
Some of Chagall flew overhead.  
Copland held a few notes of noon  
circled by dusk. And what is it  
we came here to do and have done?  
Roethke launched far resonance.  
Matisse extended the reach.  
Schönberg said it all at once.  
The rock will bowl over the grass,  
says the air. The daffodil  
will lift its yellow horn  
into the sun and then let it down.  
The ocean rains will move the blood.  
The children still will arrive,  
with everything quickly passing.

*iv. The sun arrives from the future.*

Daffodils rake the warming air  
with their leaves of the fallen.  
The dead speak through them  
in the ambient city rumble.  
These skeleton keys burn  
in the hands of the new wind.  
Everything is a chance to unlock  
the massive vault. Yeats' gyres  
honor the martyrs. Flowers open  
and plant openness in our chests.  
And say we don't know where  
we're going – we must be asking.  
Can you feel the volcanic weight  
of evening light? Carr draws  
from the spirit fog. Could each person  
evolve? Is the sudden road offered  
the sound of rain? Are the rocks still  
our listening? Bernstein works  
for our weeping, and we stand  
in some of the birth wind,  
some of the night sky, some  
end of March, in the longing  
where we were given names  
before anyone knew.



## ACADEMIC DISRUPTION

On the way to class there was drumming, so the class met but then went over to watch. A half-naked man exhaled fire past his torches into the spring sky. He fire-danced, moving the torches from out of the past in circles. He kept marking lines of fire-seeing. Hoops of flames ringed his body. In distant places, rock was falling under this same spiralling sky.

The man fire-danced fire in the skull, fire in the hair that was glowing. We watched his tattoos. A plane passed over the books on tables. The drummers kept up in the clutter of the middle of the core plaza of the buildings, where the clock was fire hoops vanishing under the sky.

Then, two days later, drums and wild violin had belly dancers rolling their hips, shimmying their moveable bones in joy, it sure felt like, and skill. One woman in a sky-blue antique skirt that shook turned her hand, like a light switch in my warehouse. Rocking her hips to the root light, she gave her generous smile. She snapped her hips over and over as the workweek vanished in a bowl of breath in her rocking and stepping from the ancient world it had to be.

She was gardening a flash of hope. We were getting more old and more young. We were all a long wave back through the forgotten.

## THE FICTION OF THE GUEST EMBALMER

ended in the mortuary  
at the back of the furniture store  
a busy time  
big special on Barcaloungers  
when Uncle Lloyd  
authority on all failures of the flesh  
ferried

Grandad there  
from Aunt Ardie's back bedroom.  
He showed us how  
the flesh goes rigid  
made Grandad  
grimace for us  
a Halloween thrill, a big trick  
demonstrated the casket  
brass inlay stainless  
steel corners.

No escape.  
Could the fourteen old hairs on Grandad  
grow to fill this fine coffin?

After, my cousin and I lay  
on the carpet in the back  
of the hearse  
in the place between questions and answers  
in the place between reckless pleasures  
and all the deaths to come  
whispering and rehearsing  
all the days  
when the gaze is held  
by flat sun shining  
on long grass in the graveyard  
amidst the fields  
of wheat and sugar beets.

NEW YORK JOURNAL

pickles:  
garlic-crunchy  
green enough  
a spear  
that fits right  
between tongue and teeth  
juicy just so  
New York feast  
(back home  
I don't want to not  
live in New York  
so I buy only the local paper,  
eat at small-town lunch counters,  
glad for the yeasty  
cinnamon roll,  
biting in, and  
briefly letting go)  
no time to write  
during the visit  
Mom needs a new doctor  
Morgan won't talk to me  
Lola thinks I don't return  
phone calls  
the house is almost empty  
memories crowd  
the space between us  
nothing new can happen  
crisis has me cooking:  
make the stew  
stir  
with a swing of the hips  
right arm raised in a fist  
and call it  
done

REVIEW – Sydney Thompson

*Studying Russian on Company Time*, by Clemens Starck  
(Silverfish Review Press, 1999)

*You can't grasp Russia with your mind,  
by ordinary means she can't be measured;  
her character is one-of-a-kind –  
to fathom Russia you must believe.*

With this quote by F.I. Tyuchev (1866), Clemens Starck introduces *Studying Russian on Company Time*, a short book of poems based on Starck's observations and travels in Russia before the dismantling of the Soviet Union. Despite the book's length, however, Starck presents a series of deep looks into a language and country whose culture and literature continue to tantalize and stir us.

It is a careful book in the sense that language is tight, the images and commentary chronological and thoughtful. The commentaries are relevant notes that do not diminish the poetry but lend valuable information without distracting from the pieces.

The translations and illustrations are visually appealing and interesting. Bold images from Soviet work posters and illustrations of northern Russian architecture punctuate themes of constructed barriers that Starck explores in reference to culture, language, landscape, metaphysical and physical borders.

In every sense, *Studying Russian on Company Time* is a study of barriers. Language initially lured Starck to Russia, but fluency in language did not grant access to all he wished to see. This is foreshadowed in the last stanza of the title poem, "Studying Russian on Company Time:"

*Don't ask stupid questions.  
Throw a quick glance over one shoulder, throw salt  
over the other. Soon  
you shall speak perfect Russian –  
so flawlessly,  
so fluently,  
not even your comrades  
will understand.*

The tension of silence is also reflected in "Making Do," a poem conceived by Starck's reflection on the writing process:

*...if words fail, silence will do. Silence  
will have to do, comrades,  
silence and darkness...  
It will not  
be as bad as you think. It will be worse  
than you can imagine.*

Silence, as a barrier, plays an integral role in this collection. It reflects the silence of an oppressed people, the silence of the poet's page, the silence of a Cold War, the silence of false pretenses and facades – the silence that can be broken with thick claps of a manual typewriter (the Underwood, for example, in "Lenin's Typewriter") or the soft vibration of a people under a totalitarian government.

The poems "Friendship of the Peoples" and "Protokol" are solid pieces that suggest Starck's barriers are penetrable, yet tension remains as poses are struck for a camera in "Friendship of the Peoples:"

*Now the cameraman is shooting us – Peter and me –  
standing on the dike, absorbed in conversation. Peter  
is explaining everything.  
I'm listening  
intently. I can hardly  
understand a word.*

The last poem, "Protokol," is an early reflection on a missed Russian submarine display in the 1950s but not before Starck leaves us with his impression of the journey of the poetical self – "And I set out, on foot, across the boundless distances of Russia./A metaphor, of course." Here, the poet creates a delicate link between himself and the fisherman in the Chinese myth of the peach blossom spring who stumbles onto an isolated village. In the village he undergoes significant experience. Once he leaves the village, however, he cannot repeat the journey there. Luckily for us, Starck's particular journey is preserved in *Studying Russian on Company Time*.

## EDITORS' NOTES

Nature smiled on this year's *Fireweed* Picnic at Bush Park in Salem on September 19. The day was spectacularly sunny, the park beautiful, conversation lively, and readings by the poets enjoyable. We thank Salem poet and friend Lois Rosen for suggesting the site and helping us get oriented there.

Since our last issue, two attractive anthologies of Oregon poetry have emerged. *Portland Lights: A Poetry Anthology*, edited by Barbara LaMorticella and Steve Nemirow, features an outstanding array of seventy-nine poems about the city of Portland. The book, from Nine Lights Press, was designed and produced by John Laursen at Press-22. *Millennial Spring: Eight New Oregon Poets*, by Corvallis editors and poets Michael Malan and Peter Sears, is a product of Cloudbank Books, an imprint of Blue Heron. *Fireweed* co-founding editor Ann Staley served as an associate editor and had a major hand in the selections comprising the anthology. Peter Sears' brief introduction to *Millennial Spring* sketches the creation of the project and reviews previous such projects in the Northwest. A great number of the poets in both anthologies have been contributors to *Fireweed*.

We would like to point out that the work of *Fireweed's* volunteer designer, Anne Dosskey, has been selected for inclusion in a show January 6–28 at Portland State University, honoring retired master calligrapher and teacher Bettye Lou Bennett. Anne is responsible for the look of our journal, about which we have received a good deal of favorable comment. Anne has an MA in painting and drawing from Central Washington University and an MFA in painting from Syracuse University. She presently works as a graphic designer for Metropolitan Group in Portland.

As always, we are interested in new subscribers and readers. Without them we have no existence. As we enter the season of giving, let us remind you that subscriptions to poetry journals make lovely gifts. Also, let us wish you a joyful holiday season and an uneventful Y2K.



## CONTRIBUTORS

CHRIS ANDERSON Corvallis, teaches English at Oregon State University and is the author or coauthor of nine books, including *Edge Effects* (Iowa, 1993), a finalist for the Oregon Book Award in creative nonfiction and *Forest Voices* (Mayfield, 1996), with Lex Runciman.

TIM APPLGATE lives in western Oregon with his wife and two children. Recently, he has published poems in *Sanskrit*, *Potpourri*, *Rhino*, *Fireweed*, *Parting Gifts* and other journals.

DIANE AVERILL Beavercreek, teaches writing and literature at Clackamas Community College. She is an associate director of the *Clackamas Literary Review*. Her poems have appeared in numerous venues, and she is the author of two collections.

DOUGLAS BARRICKLOW Salem, was published by *West Wind Review* during the spring. His poem, "Encounter," is scheduled for publication in *The Great Blue Heron and Other Poems*, by Adrienne Lee Press.

TONAYA CRAFT Portland, is pursuing a double major in English and Anthropology at Portland State University. She has previously had work in *Alchemy*, a literary publication at Portland Community College.

DAN DILLON Grants Pass, is a former Montanan who attended the University of Portland and the University of Oregon.

LINDA ELEGANT Portland, teaches at Portland Community College. Her work has been published in the *Oregonian*, *Fireweed*, *Willow Springs*, and other journals.

CAROL ELLIS lives in Forest Grove with her husband and two children. She has worked as a psychiatric nurse for twenty years. After many years of writing, she has recently attempted to publish her work.

JEAN ESTEVE Waldport, a past contributor to *Fireweed*, has had work in *Greensboro Review*, *South Carolina Review*, and *Xanadu*.

LEANNE GRABEL Portland, is active in performance and in the teaching of poetry in schools. Her latest appearance in print is her poem in the recently released anthology *Portland Lights*.

JAMES GRABILL Portland, is the widely published author of *Listening to the Leaves Form* (Lynx House Press) which was reviewed last year in *Fireweed*.

MARILYN JOHNSTON Salem, moved to Oregon in 1976 to pursue a doctorate at Oregon State University. She is currently director of a nonprofit educational program located at Willamette University.

ADA MOLINOFF Salem, came west from Long Island, New York. A practicing clinical psychologist, she says, "Writing feels as if it comes from the same inner place as doing therapy, and in both realms I aim to acknowledge what is."

NANCY NOWAK Oakland, has had poems in *Fireweed*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Sonora Review*, and *Rain City Review*, among other publications, as well as in the anthologies *The Led Zeppelin Reader* (University of Iowa Press) and *Windblown Sheets: Poems by Mothers and Daughters*.

GEORGE STALEY teaches writing and literature in Portland. His poems have appeared in *Four Quarters*, *Loonfeather*, *New Mexico Humanities Review*, *Oregon East*, and other journals.

ISOBEL TOLLEFSON lives and writes in Reedsport. She is a retired Coos County social worker who has had poems in *The Beacon* and *Voices in the Rain*, publications of Southwestern Oregon Community College.

ERAN WILLIAMS Portland, is an ESL specialist who recently returned from a stint in West Africa.



FIREWEED

