



FOOTHILL
poetry journal

VOLUME 8

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Presented by
Claremont Graduate University

2018 EDITION | VOLUME 8

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Special thanks to Friends of Foothill; Priscilla Fernandez, Mary Jo Gruca, Wendy Martin, Tammi Schneider; and Patron of Foothill, Peggy Phelps

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ISSN 2162-8173

Cover art by Aurora Berger
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This journal would not exist without the assistance, guidance, and support of Mandy Bennett, Lori Anne Ferrell, the Friedman Grant, Susan Hampson, Genevieve Kaplan, Madeleine Kiuttu, Rachel Lachowitz, Wendy Martin, Patrick Mason, Gina Pirtle, Tammi Schneider, Patricia Smith, Lynne Thompson, Aleta Wenger, Debbie Whisler, CGU Art, and CGU's School of Arts & Humanities.

Engage

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Contents

- 1** **EDITOR'S NOTE**
- 7** **ASHANTI ANDERSON**
University of California, Riverside
Cleaning Up Men's Messes
Mamie Till on Carolyn Bryant's Confession
- 11** **RACHEL PESAVENTO BROWNELL**
California State University, Long Beach
Unearth
- 13** **REILLY COX**
University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa
Sargon Inherits Tashlutum's Insomnia
Sargon Falls into a Deep Slumber
Even as Rubble, My Brother
- 17** **EMILY ELLISON**
Texas State University
at the airport I mistake a weeping woman for my mother
the sun and I, no nuns
you hold luna
- 22** **JILL MCELDOWNEY**
New Mexico State University
Hence
- 23** **NICHOLAS MOLBERT**
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Walmart, Hurricane Season
A Few Wishes for the One Who Has Me Last
- 25** **STACEY PARK**
California State University, Long Beach
Church-raised

- 26 INEZ TAN**
University of California, Irvine
Not Cute
I Am Trying to Care about You as a Person but You Keep
Turning Me into a Bear
Work and Idolatry
- 29 ALEXANDRA UMLAS**
California State University, Long Beach
Vista del Sol
- 31 KOREY WILLIAMS**
University of Chicago
Aftersong
- 32 MIA S. WILLIS**
Florida State University
hecatomb.
- 35 ANDREW WITTSTADT**
McNeese State University
Belly Aches
You and Mary Fold Laundry on the Piece-of-Shit Drop-
Down Ironing Board Her Father Installed Over the Kitchen
Door
- 37 AURORA BERGER**
Art
Claremont Graduate University
- 59 LYNNE THOMPSON**
Interview
- 69 CONTRIBUTORS**

Editors' Note

Newness

The core of *Foothill's* mission is to champion new voices. By new, we aren't beating for the millionth time the horse of Pound's old adage, but rather celebrating the voices of tenderfoot poets who are still developing their craft.

The decennial issue of *Foothill* marks the first change in leadership in the journal's history. In it, we strive to honor the legacy we have inherited as both an opportunity and a challenge. As *Foothill* continues, we humbly hope to enrich its tradition of discovering great graduate-student verse.

We are also pleased to introduce the *Foothill* Editors' Prize. This prize acts in the tradition of the Kingsley & Kate Tufts Poetry Awards, if on a smaller scale. We hope, to put it in Kate's words, to help new "poets and poetry flourish."

This year's winner, "hecatomb." by Mia S. Willis, captures the spirit of the work we sought out for this issue. In this poem, a sinuous voice is on full display that is at once adagio and battle cry. It, like the other works in this installment, tells a potent and urgent story.

We are immensely proud of this issue. It grapples with race, gender, sexuality, religion, mental and physical disability, and poverty from diverse and surprising vantage points. These poems seduce the reader into intimacy with these issues. The reverberations can run deep, especially when it is possible to recognize the strange echo on the page, inexplicably, as your own.

During these confounding times, we quixotically hope these collected poems will reaffirm and expand for you the poignancy of heterogeneity. It has for us. At the very least, we can rest certain in the joy that we have released a volume that encourages us all to engage anew in the conversation.



Emily Schuck and Brock Rustin
Editors-in-Chief

FOOTHILL

Winner of the 2018 Editors' Prize

hecatomb.

Mia S. Willis



and ain't that a metaphor?
that the bodies and
the barrel are both black
but only one is protected
by the law?

“‘hecatomb.’ stands out among the editors’ excellent selections for many brilliances: its rangy allusions, its language and specificity, its devastating progressions, its carefully timed repetitions and variations, its insistent awareness of climate and culture. Reading this poem becomes an impressive, immersive experience, and it’s an experience I definitely want others to have. I’m in awe of so much of what the author accomplishes through this poem—I can’t wait to read more of their work.”

—Genevieve Kaplan, Judge

Finalists

Even as Rubble, My Brother

Reilly Cox

I Am Trying to Care about You as a Person but You Keep Turning Me into a Bear

Inez Tan



**Congratulations to the winners of
Claremont Graduate University's
2018 Tufts Poetry Awards.**



2018 Winner
**Kingsley Tufts
Poetry Award**

Patricia Smith
Incendiary Art

Sarah, speak to them of
the black mouth.
Tell them how a scream
is tumult, rudely spilling
the borders
of body



2018 Winner
**Kate Tufts
Discovery Award**

Donika Kelly
Bestiary

Dark bark, and inside
a light that gathers
and curls
before the knife.

Save the Date, April 11, 2019

Please join us for a public reading honoring the winners of the 2019
Kingsley & Kate Tufts Poetry Awards.

KINGSLEY & KATE TUFTS
POETRY AWARDS



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Poems

ASHANTI ANDERSON

University of California, Riverside

MFA Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

Cleaning Up Men's Messes

What of this women's work? It pays unwell, the daily sweeping up
Of bread and glass-crumbs. My grandkids think I'm picky because

I'm always fussing them for even how they walk, sliding their feet,
Sliding the rug with them, curling up the corners with their toes.

I just don't want them to trip and fall over it, find the cold-blood
Stain on the carpet beneath, seeped in because I grieved long before

Pouring isopropyl alcohol as libation. When I wipe the counters clean
Of syrup, catsup, ice cream, I remember the glass bottles lobbed like

Molotov cocktails, hocked spit hitting its target, porcelain plateware
Broken 'cross the backs of skulls of better men & women. I built this

House with the bricks thrown through my window. When not
cleaning
Windows, or commodes, or open wounds, there is much to be sewn,

Always some busted knee that needs patching, a shirt gnawed by dogs
Or asphalt, one or two buttons running off in another man's fist. Once

I'm done with that, remember, I still gots to cook a meal we can all sit
Down for. I've been told a cold beer will move a man much as any fire

Hose. I was raised that a woman should be sensed, not heard. Reverse
Must be true for men. When it ain't the ring of a bomb so close it
heats

Your ear, it's his whisky-thick threats. At any given moment I might
hear
Teens throw slurs out car windows like eggs, the crunchy-leaf sound
of

Crosses burning, or somebody sliding his feet all along my neighbor's
Driveway. I guess they think being strong means throwing their
weight

Around or starting fires or coming home to hit women. But men ain't
Too much different from us, really. I know I too find myself trying
hard

Not to love a man. And look at how we all bend to the will of hard
water,
How hard it is to sleep with a sink full of broken dishes, windows,
skulls.

Mamie Till on Carolyn Bryant's Confession

That part's not true. I knew
As much, been saying such

For years. I know my child
Like a pair of hands know

When they're short-changing
Somebody. He was the type

That people asked, "Do you
Kiss yo mama with that mouth?"

And he'd respond something
Like "I don't kiss ass with it,

So why not?" I hoped I'd
Raised a more careful child

Than that. Lord knows I tried,
Like the Lord Himself tried

With Adam and Eve and Lot's
Wife. But if you've said a thing

Only once, not too stern, you
Don't be too surprised your child

Ain't listen. At least what I said
More than once, he remembered:

See he ain't run out that house
In them shoes with no socks on.

See he ain't touch no woman
That ain't wanna be. Soon as

I heard she said that, I said
That part's not true. I knew

He had a mouthpiece on him,
Trash-talked whites like

The world was just a huge box
-ing ring. I don't know where

He learned to jab like that. I
Guess his daddy. Trying to

Get under them men's skin and
Their women. Like the worst

That could happen is his face get
A little puffed up, nothing a finger

Full of Vaseline and a pack of
Frozen peas can't fix. I know

My son but I want to ask
Who taught him to throw

His body in like a towel,
Where he learned to whistle

Like a gloved fist missing
A man's temple. I said I wanted

The world to see what they did
To my baby, but I never said

Who they was.

RACHEL PESAVENTO BROWNELL

California State University, Long Beach

MFA Poetry

Unearth

Master arm of the excavator/
“track hoe”/big dirt-dipping
machine waves at me in daylight
and I fear it—

I start at the metal glint,
tight sudden sneer, of its companion—
the cement mixer’s bulging, rigid flank
stationed along the sidewalk.

Meanwhile thin green fence
sways in the wind like a paper joke
of separation, the sham edge of some whole
paper city made to look real

until the upper floors sop into holes
from the first raindrops and
the people who fell for it fall
right through.

Track hoe, cement mixer, and
friends—wheel loader and dozer—
I know they sleep at night,
and it is night when I must deal,

alone, with the world we have
constructed, while they stand like regal
hurt beasts in moonlight
until we return—

the workers, we who disappear
when we operate,
snapping angry yellow arms
to action, turning the machine

into some malicious force
which its own form, inanimate,
never questions. Great excavator,
one of many, I am afraid

in your wake only in forgetting my
arms, my biceps, triceps, flexors,
and their meaty replication
among the countless other humans,

all of us burning calorie after calorie,
burning in the harsh sun
days, nightly burning our paper cities down
in minds of quiet empty night

and waking, rising to swing the burning
metal arms once more from our own
muscles' inarticulate hope
for structures that remain—



REILLY COX

*University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa
MFA Creative Writing and Book Arts*

Sargon Inherits Tashlutum's Insomnia

Sargon was not sleeping or able to control his organs the way he once had—he had prided himself on how well behaved he kept his colon, his ring lung—and thus, after fourteen growing seasons without sleep or relief, he saw his jumble of doctors. They all hung their heads low and spoke gravely when giving him the news: *We regret to inform you, they started, that you have an acre of tomato vines growing in your belly.*

Sargon nodded the nod he had been taught to nod by his father's father and asked what was to be done.

Nothing, the grave doctors started. Your years as a gardener exposed you to too many seeds and your body is now riddled with fruit.

Sargon again nodded, this time gravely. *How long do I have?* Sargon asked.

The doctors huddled and whispered grave whispers. They parted and hung their heads low, almost touching the floor. *It is hard to say, they started, but you probably only have until the tomatoes ripen.*

And then? Sargon asked.

And then they turn red.

Sargon Falls into a Deep Slumber

In the six hundredth year of Sargon's life, in the third month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened. The rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights.

And he slept.

For the first time in four years, he sleeps, and those attending to him—the witching daughter, the son's widow, the grandsons named after grandsons—dare not wake him. Instead, they tend to the house, riddled with ants—drawn in by the sugar of mints, the wreck of cornmeal on the counters—and without the constant plumes of tobacco smoke from the Room of Many Pipes there is little else to be done but shake themselves with lime, to say another Our Father but in the Lutheran tongue, to bake Jeremiah stones and bury them.

In the garden, the tomatoes need tending, they know, but none are turning ripe, instead turning greener and greener until birds begin mistaking them for emeralds and flying madly around them, hoping to at last bring them to their loves in the nests made of old bibles and to at last banish the lecherous Other, with the dark beard and wings made of lilac—

O salt—

but none of the tomatoes will tear from the vine until they turn ripe, which they will not turn, or until they rot, a blossom of beetles—

O salt—

and even then they only fall into the mud and spill more seeds, and more plants start to grow and craze and grow heavy with want, and even then the new fruits only turn greener and greener until even the birds go blind from looking too deeply into them, their hearts aflame—

O salt—

and it isn't until the forty-first day, when the clouds break and tumble
and smother all the strays of the neighborhood in soft velvet, that the
third of the grandsons named after grandsons hears a thump in the
backyard—and another—and another—and

Even as Rubble, My Brother

*This is my brother and I need a shovel
to love him.*

–Natalie Diaz

Behind my brother's burnt artist studio, I take a shovel to his remains. I try turning him over to let him breathe but he becomes a canvas, begins smoldering. From behind I hear my brother's voice: *You aren't digging hard enough.* I try again. This time, more portraits, enough for a locomotion of him sighing. I get excited when I find an arm but it leads me nowhere—he's already chewed it off at the shoulder. The arm grabs for a paintbrush, rubs itself in soot, dives back into the rubble. Even as rubble, my brother keeps sparking. I grow frustrated, begin stabbing into the pile. *That hurts,* his voice sighs. I ignore him, start hurling copies of my brother over my shoulder. Two land facing each other, embrace. I move aside the lovers and underneath I find his teeth. I hold each one between fingertips, see the cavities in them light up like windows, string them around my neck. Within the pile, I can hear my brother trying to rearrange himself, take canvas frames for bones, scrap away the burnt parts. Near the embers, I find his hand signing a study with his charcoal rib. I say, *Please, let me help you with that, say, I miss him, too, you know,* but the hand goes still, fades into a canvas.

EMILY ELLISON

*Texas State University
MFA Poetry*

at the airport I mistake a weeping woman for my mother

and as I strip off
my youth like a jacket

to comfort her,
I confuse the adjacent nothingness

for my father. already, I have forgotten
my origin, remembering

only the plane
swallowed by its own shadow,

sifting into cloud as any other cold
hard body. I mistake

engines for mothers.
the drone of parting,

my family.
I embrace and I embrace

the deafness of different temporalities,
bellowing my voice up as birds, as swallows

choking on love's thin atmosphere.

our last moment dissipated
as a smoke ring, as a daughter
becoming a woman, becoming fire.

and my mother nosedived as
if my eyes were bombs

boiling her breasts' last milk.
rain cascaded gray like hair.

perhaps we have become too old
to now know each other,

having scaled disparate mountains,
the sun of my arms,
 too misty-eyed

to raise you from an ocean.

the sun and I, no nuns

like the procession of dusk
bleeding memory into shades of crepe
delicate and flimsy in the wind,
we will not have back the cloud
of yesterday,
it is and it is
gone.

my mother proclaims I am no nun,
having rouged my skin
with the skin of another
and relishing it,
having lost myself
among mountains of insistence,

having risen
desire from the ground
 like a lover
swollen through the night.

but in this house of no mirrors
I am trying to forget
my face like a plastic
tossed into sea
 then regretted.

I fear
too many have seen
my eyes, no longer benign,
though quick
as years,
 one duck after another
 diving under and lost to the deep.

and my own slick body,

blossoming as I come
up gold,
 is a sun
ravishing the sky—
 can you hear
the river
moaning, her
longing for darkness to conceal

her soul in love
is my own dark mouth.

 (mother see, *see*, I have worn
black all this time.)

you hold luna

moths in your back as you lift
into sleep. and when
you roll over the bones
of your innermost fragility
crack in compensation
for the mind-soft
silk you exert. call it hope
as the green slips
its vibrant young powder
in sheets, a high thread
count of intricate bones
rupturing like the gut
in hunger.

the luna moth in
adulthood has no mouth,
does not feed, living only
to reproduce and love—
though never both at once.

poor white
abdomen in the snow
of waiting.
your eyes are
drawn into an internal light,
as you suspend and create
suspense for yourself, a womb-
anticipation, look
how you float—
not so much in the stratosphere,
but in the liminal
space three inches beyond
your own mind, lucid, peering
down. there is the spun body holding itself together.

JILL MCELDOWNEY

*New Mexico State University
MFA Poetry*

Hence

—white horse went through the windshield of a car.

I thought it was a doe—

the *what* that lurched on fire
from the wreck. And what
must be said for the way that body fills with light as if to say: *follow*
I think the path is this way—

Only a horse on fire understands
wanting something so badly and throwing your life away
to get it.

Because who else would expect a woman to fling herself
into harm's way?
Who else?
What kind of animal lights her own hands on fire?

I am talking to myself
in the voice I would use to calm that burning horse: "*You're okay Quiet.*
I will never leave you." Or I'm shouting *fire—*

my body is on fire.
I have been
changed

in my blood shouting *blood—*

are you calling to me white deer with no horns?

Must I die

to reach you—an ending that means
even if it only means
I have
confused violence for passion—
mistaken a horse for a deer?

NICHOLAS MOLBERT

*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
MFA Poetry*

Walmart, Hurricane Season

Tell me the Lord's no better a creator
than we are. I've taken things too &
moved them to what I thought were better places.
I'm not dead, but everywhere things can kill me—
not Gustav who moved us from 501 to 503 Oak
while our doublewide showed undersides
like raunchy Madonna, or Ike who turned frogs stiff
in our front yard's pool, not the guy who trades empties
for Marlboro money while his bag makes static
of scraped concrete, none.

I love what's ramshackle in my mud-bottom heart.
I'm thankful for the high-tide spank of good luck,
for fessing up for a stubbed toe with 10 *motherfucks*.
But here, in this Walmart, we're all woe-is-me.
I glance at the Missings and hold a gucked-up
quarter to each. I hold this million-muddled
Eucharist to the paper-dry mouths &
vow amidst this hurricane's pounds
that this place deserves a crown.

A Few Wishes for the One Who Has Me Last

Slip me into the fluff of my mother's pillow.
Or else bury me an extinguished cretin
in a clothesline-clipped urn.
Bury me in a clawfoot tub
until I am black-mold haloed and raw.
Grind me coarse and straight
into a Café Du Monde coffee tin
so when my loved ones open me up
they'll smell a chicoried home.
If you want, hack off my fingers and toes
and slip them into fruit infusion pitchers
with crushed mint and lemon,
but if you must preserve me whole,
first give me sideburns of ash or a mustache
from the tangle of hair stuck in the sink drain.
Make no mention of what you do with the tongue.
And if there must be a headstone,
let it say, *He was alright*.
If you want me private,
set my front tooth to a locket or stitch a strand
of my beard into the inseam of your pants.
If not, fine. Sit me in an artisan armchair
where the morning comes laddered
through the blinds,
where there is a mélange of roses
and stiff horseflies on the windowsill.

STACEY PARK

California State University, Long Beach
MFA Poetry

Church-raised

In the lot, I picked up rocks
to skip across the gravel;
They didn't detonate like they do on water.
I threw one high
only to witness gravity's might
curate a mosaic of shattered glass
on a car window. Sought ripples,
got them where I least expected.

“For those who behave *as such* shall be stoned,”
it is the *as such* that remains a cavity
to be filled by those who do the stoning.
And it is not so much that they care for justice
but that they care for throwing.

I swallowed the other
one as a remedy for restlessness.
I stuck digits down my throat to purge
crumbs leftover
but I swear the stones
still *clack-clack* when I hiccup.

INEZ TAN

University of California, Irvine
MFA Poetry

Not Cute

when you say things like
hope that is seen is no hope at all—I say there's no more

euphemistic phrase than inner beauty, and Oscar Wilde
says he who does not judge a book by its cover

is a fool. I still wish you'd
show me your wounds so I could make

the face that gets me audience approval. You noticed
I'd rather be judged

than not judged: the
unsayable. You knew I hated you a little bit

as I watched you parallel park perfectly
instead of ripping off a mirror. Our problems:

I've never trusted anyone
I couldn't fool, never understood someone who

didn't want my pity. What you ask of me requires
muscles I didn't know I had. Half my life

I lived for romance; now I suspect
I keep living to be stripped

of romantic notions. I used to dream
about standing before a mirror watching

my teeth shrivel up and fall out
all at once. Insecurity, I decided,

fear of irreversible change. Meanwhile, it took
four years of dentists' threats

to start me flossing every night. Kiss me now
and you'll know the difference. Kiss me now, you fool.



I Am Trying to Care about You as a Person but You Keep Turning Me into a Bear

No matter what you do, the dress falls off
the hanger. The sprinklers whip themselves
into a frenzy but the grass
is crunchy by noon. Human hair can be used
in countless acts of malice and sabotage.
Telling everyone the movie was bad
doesn't make you feel good about yourself.
The dryer swallowed all my quarters.
The DJ never played my song request.
The headlines think they're so great
at pretending not to know what they think.
It's hard to contact anyone without the Internet
and self-loathing. Tenderness may result
from a volley of blows, so answers
may result from a difficult conversation.
Not everyone is ready to buy a bigger blanket.
In some cases you can quickly lower morale
by doing nothing whatsoever.
The neighbors' voices wake you up,
then put you back to sleep.
The living aren't equal
and neither are the dead. Transformation is
the bravest fantasy. Most of us who want to be changed
want to be changed back.
Anyone can draw sympathy
when they're being chased by a bear.
But look, the bear is wounded
from the scorching rays of your neglect.
If something's controlling your life,
you're supposed to give it to someone else.
If you're controlling your life, you're supposed to
give it to someone else.



Work and Idolatry

One has only the choice between work
and idolatry, I told myself, having promised myself to work.

Delicate or resilient—strange that either one
could be considered exceptional work.

We all chant our own little spells hoping
hope will make them work.

Time to move around in unpremeditatedly
is leisure. An execution is work.

Me: You never said anything before.
You: I never thought this would work.

Child to parent, victim to monster:
I have always been a fan of your work.

If you haven't been consumed, if
there isn't smoke, perhaps it isn't work.

Hercules his godhood, Jacob his love—
gifts have always been received through work.

I tried so hard to be gentle, but
you see, that didn't work.

Take off your shoes. You were born into pain. Let
the drugs begin to work.

Has anyone had a clearer image
than Midas of his work?

Dying is an art, like Sylvia said.
Living is only work.

To be pure is to be unsatisfied
with the restlessness you call work.



ALEXANDRA UMLAS

California State University, Long Beach
MFA Poetry

Vista del Sol

Yolanda points to the tree, asks for a lime
for fish. Yellow fissures between the clouds—
the neighborhood is suddenly raining sun.

I twist a toad-colored fruit. Yolanda's son
is in her yard, closing boxes with lime-
green masking tape. A shiver clouds

her thoughts. She'd like to fly like the clouds,
run in her maroon sweat-suit to her son,
feed him from her breast again. The lime

of the lime, the clouds in her eyes, receding sun.

She doesn't want my help. Her cane taps
from the tremble of her sun-flecked hand;
I carry the lime, set it on her window

sill, so she won't have to bend. This window
is where she fed her husband soup, while "Taps"
played in his head in twenty-four notes. Her hand

was steady then, her son was young, his hand
dug for dinosaur bones in the dirt by the window.
Clouds clot, rain arrives and taps

the lime, taps the hand-taped boxes, the window.

The cracked sidewalk turns from silver to slate.
This is Yolanda's 2,000th rain in this house.
The son holds a broom like a weapon, sweeps

the worms from the walk. The rain sweeps
the artwork lined in chalk from the slate-
slabbed driveway of a neighbor's house.

I wonder what the cardboard boxes house;
if they can stand the rain. My gaze sweeps
their outer shells, the layers soaked, it's late.

It's late. In the house's window, the lime weeps—



KOREY WILLIAMS

*University of Chicago
PhD English*

Aftersong

I only see the touching—then the end, and I get it. *You can't expect anything.* I know that now. *I won't expect you to.* How close we came to the closeness you asked for. Half-light. Morning glories closing. I think of the undead: carrying on, though not by choice. The necessary order of things—no will beyond ritual—as if order were necessity, for the distance between what's true and what feels right is now impassive, and doing is neither distance nor answer—just what happens. *My therapist says we should talk.* Our shadows sway on the sand. See the feathered reaches between the night and our dark?

MIA S. WILLIS

*Florida State University
MA Classical Archaeology*

hecatomb.

i woke up this morning on fire.
which is to say that i woke up
in florida. in march.
which is to say that florida is always hot
because the devil always has business
here, that this house has been burning
since he fell from heaven and landed
on seminole shores.

i woke up this morning ablaze.
which is to say that i woke up
black in florida.
which is to say being black
in florida
is knowing that everyone can see
the ash cloud but that no one is coming
to help. that the first-responders see
your size and your color and decide to let
you burn yourself out. that whole city blocks
the color of our skin get reduced to the color
they call it.

i woke up this morning skin melting into bed sheets.
which is to say that i woke up
black and femme in florida.
which is to say that florida is the pile
of kindling where mothers are forced
to give birth to dead
babies. where the only thing black
and femme and welcome is a barrel
with a bullet that whispers death
to the bodies it pours itself into.

and ain't that a metaphor?
that the bodies and
the barrel are both black
but only one is protected
by the law?

i woke up this morning to a fire alarm,
which is to say that i woke up
black and femme and gay in florida
which is to say that a voice
i didn't recognize screamed at me
to get out while i still could.

that

*"dammit there's smoke coming from the pyres and it's only a matter of
time before they call you a faggot and then make you into one"*

that

every kiss is clandestine tinderbox every sigh fans the flames
every touch is grassland smoldering around us
simply because i love the way she glows.

and ain't that a metaphor?
that this body is a phosphorus tip so
full of light that the stick shrivels
underneath its holy?

i woke up this morning gasping for air.
i woke up this morning choking on the smoke.
i woke up crying for the firefighters and the water
in their hoses instead of running from it and

ain't that a metaphor?
that florida makes scorch marks of
my queer my femme my black
then calls itself 'the sunshine state' like that
shit is worth celebrating?

and ain't that a metaphor?

ain't this a metaphor?

and shouldn't i be thankful?
because after all—
i woke up this morning.

ANDREW WITTSTADT

McNeese State University

MFA Poetry

Belly Aches

The whole damn earth is an apostrophe
between the N and T of don't.

Exclamation point moon!

Sappy fools feel lousy-godawful. (me)

There are two types of people. Somewhere
fucking.

Everywhere
fucking.

I'm not fucking.

And I'm good god pissed off, god damn.

Exclamation point moon!

The fingers reach and fizzle.

No fucking. No moon. No good god damn. (you)

The whole damn parking lot froze.

Simple dusting of flake

on the pastures and barns and motel roofs
and someone,

somewhere,

fucking in them.

A little shake and the entire village

lost its Peter Pan marbles.

Bouncy. Tangled. Divorce.

Good enough for some,

but that's not good enough.

Fuck 'em. Cut 'em off—

Exclamation point moon!

You and Mary Fold Laundry on the Piece-of-Shit Drop-Down Ironing Board Her Father Installed Over the Kitchen Door

Mary has an issue
with the way you fold the towels. (wrong)
It's your fault that they don't fit in the closet.
It's because you fold them honey half full.
"The dog hair won't come out
unless you clean the lint trap," said Mary.
"I know," you said.

You looked at Mary.
The stock-white of the dryer
matched her face,
expressionless and pale.
The honey pot was empty. (wrong)
No honey pot jaw-drop. No honey.

The dogs sat still-silent in the yard
and stared through the glass at you.
"I don't think he's coming back," said Mary.
"They know," you said,
looking back through the dogs,
honey-crisp glaze in the eyes.

The end of the towel was frayed,
tooth-marked and wrangled.
It couldn't be folded the right way. (wrong)
You opened the door
and threw the towel at the honey-eyed dogs.
Apathetic, they yawned boredom through dumb snouts.

They barked together,
"clearance towels at Marshall's, \$6.99 for all bath sheets."
Behind you was the crash of honeypot porcelain.
"Damn it," said Mary, "we need new towels."

Art

Aurora Berger



Treads

Digital Photograph,
20 x 30"
2017







Hold On

Cyanotype on
Watercolor Paper,
20 x 30"
2018



Bleeding Out

Digital Photograph
36 x 42"
2018

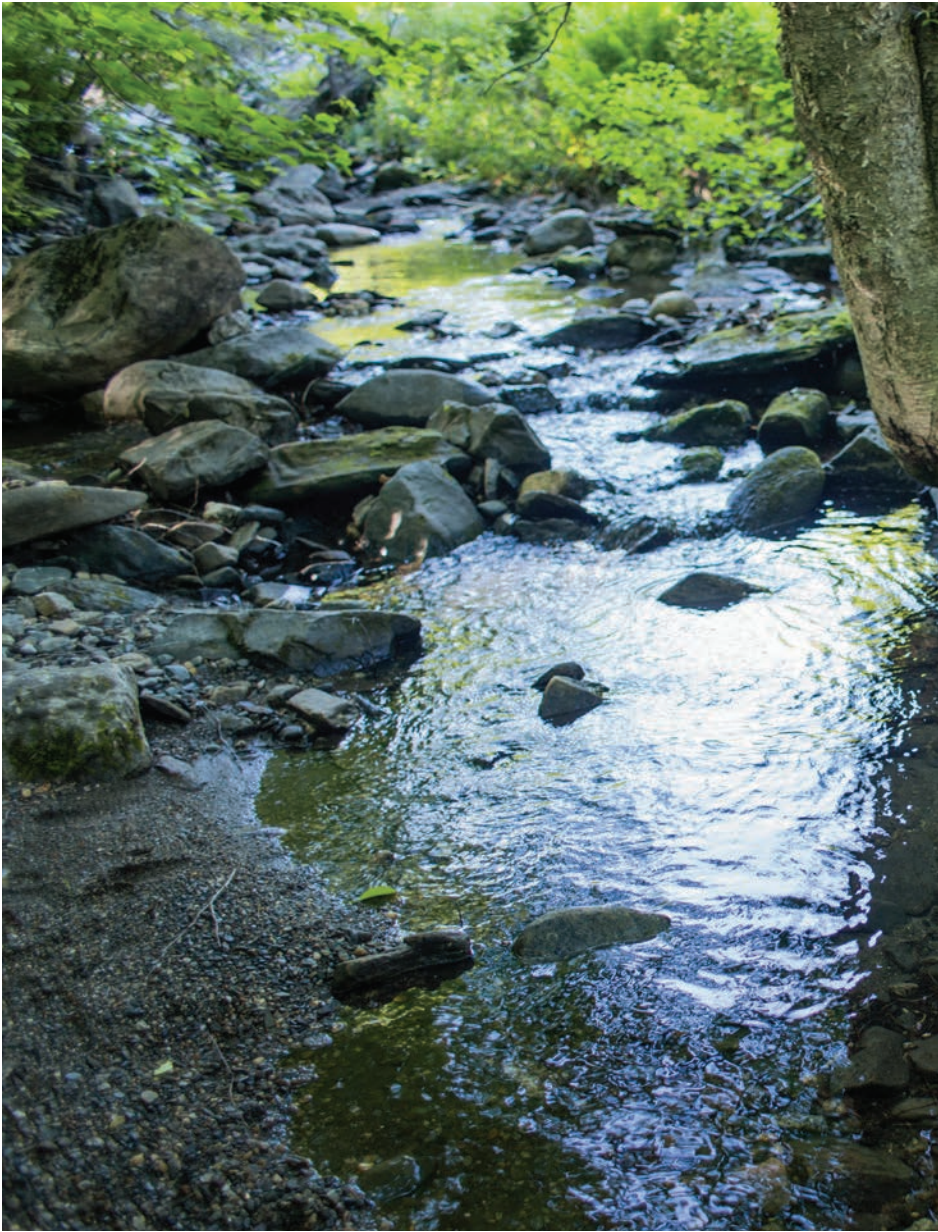






On Edge

Digital Photograph,
29 x 44"
2017



Submerged

Digital Photograph,
36 x 42"
2018





Tributaries

Digital Photograph,
36 x 42"
2018





Knotted

Digital Photograph

36 x 42"

2018





Cleft

Digital Photograph,
20 x 30"
2017





Vulnerable (duo)

Cyanotype on Watercolor Paper,
30 x 46"
2018







Wilderness

Digital Photograph,
36 x 42"
2018

Interview

Lynne Thompson



LYNNE THOMPSON is the author of the poetry collections *Beg No Pardon* (Perugia Press, 2007) and *Start With A Small Guitar* (What Books Press, 2013), and the winner of the 2018 Marsh Hawk Press Poetry Prize, selected by Jane Hirshfield. Her collection *Fretwork* (Marsh Hawk Press) will be published in 2019. Her recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Ecotone*, *Barrow Street*, and the anthology *Fire and Rain: California Ecopoetry*. In her spare time, Thompson serves as the Chair of the Board of Trustees of Scripps College and is the Reviews & Essays Editor of the journal *Spillway*.

FOOTHILL

Many of us at *Foothill* are both editors and poets, and you also work as both an editor for *Spillway*—a poetry magazine—and as a poet. Though both jobs are related to the poetic craft, they require different kinds of intellectual labor. Could you speak to the experiences of both and how or if they inform each other?

LYNNE THOMPSON

As an editor, I'm much more objective. What I want for the reader who has submitted an essay or poem for *Spillway* is for it to be an enjoyable read in the publication. The other benefit I personally receive from editing is an appreciation that I've ever had anything published. I'm often secretly envious and frequently inspired by others' writing and no less so than when I have to act as editor when I'm evaluating whether there are ways to make the piece as strong as it can be.

As a poet, and like almost every poet I know, I'm my harshest critic. This, I think, is as it should be. Nevertheless, what I can appreciate in others, I often can't see as a positive in my own scribbling. Also, it's difficult to let go of a word or phrase that I've allowed myself to fall in

love with even when I know it's not really serving the poem. I don't have this problem with others' work!

FOOTHILL

You have collaborated with artists working in other mediums like dance, sculpture, etc. How does the cross-pollination between these forms help us to think differently about traditional, page-bound iterations of poetry?

THOMPSON

Partnering with artists, whether in collaborating to make a new work or responding to an already-existing work, allows me to view my own work as a poet through a different lens, and hopefully the lens of the artist who has asked me to partner with him or her. If the partnership is in response to another's work of art, as with Alison Saar's statue of Harriet Tubman—a replica of which is installed at Scripps College—my goal is to create a work that respects and complements the artist's intention. If the partnership occurs after the fact, as with the selection of a cover for my first book of poems, *Beg No Pardon*, I ask how the artist's vision—clearly established without me or my work in mind—pulls the reader into the intentionality of my poems.

FOOTHILL

You said in an interview that you know a poem is finished when you've read it aloud several times, looking for music in the lines. How do you define this musicality? How do you decide if a poem's song is sweet enough?

THOMPSON

Maybe musicality is like pornography: you can't define it but you know it when you hear it. Even as children, we intuitively understand that rhyme and rhythm are among the best routes to memorable verse. Lewis Carroll's "The Walrus and the Carpenter" comes immediately to my mind. On the other hand, everyone dances to a different trumpet, so rhythm may present more of a challenge. When I was getting editing suggestions for *Beg No Pardon* I realized that the editor was probably listening to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, while

I was listening to Miles Davis. I think the most important thing is to determine whether the musicality preferred by the poet aids in the best execution of the poem and, if so, to lean on those notes.

FOOTHILL

In your poem, “A Sorceress Strolls New Grass,” you write, “you are such young women, / such new potatoes, and there is much for me to tell you . . . you women are writing your own Book of Migration.” In this poem, the speaker seems to both give wisdom to and draw inspiration from a new generation of women. Do you have any advice for writers, especially women of color, in danger of being marginalized in today’s current political and social climate?

THOMPSON

This is my question to young writers who the talking heads claim are marginalized: do you remember how free you felt coloring outside the lines when you were a kid? (If anyone does that anymore!) Keep doing that. Just as the best cooks always add a little something to the established recipe. Or if you like to dance, dance as though no one is watching. This is the creative soul being herself. It may take a while for your work to be noticed and appreciated but it is worth the truth-seeking to be patient and remember that, at the end of the day, you’re not writing for them; you’re writing to satisfy a craving that can’t be satisfied any other way. Defy anyone who says you can’t be your best you and know others have been exactly where you are. Beyond that, it’s the old saying, write, then write some more, then write until your wrist—or computer—burns out.

FOOTHILL

Related, your poetry consistently and beautifully asserts the importance of black American voices. How can poetry engage in speaking out against structural racism and create concrete progress toward social justice?

THOMPSON

Although I used to say that I wasn’t a political poet, I’ve come to believe that everyone, one way or another, is a political poet. For

poets of color in particular, it's important to speak against racism. The question becomes how to accomplish that. I tend to—as many of the poets I admire do—approach the issues “slant,” paraphrasing Emily Dickinson. I'm thinking of two poems of mine in particular: “To Blackness” and “Raffia.” The former simply states, through the use of cultural references, my pride in being an African American and in tracing my roots to my father's Igbo roots in Africa. The poem isn't trying to convince the reader of a particular view, although it is in the nature of an *ars poetica* or manifesto. “Raffia” is written in the form of a glosa—a form that grows out of the use of another poet's lines, in this case of the Nigerian poet, Chris Abani—to insist that, in the end, we are all essentially of one family, no matter our race or color. Race is a man-made construct, which like any other man-made construct, can be bolstered or torn down through language.

FOOTHILL

We noticed silence as an important aspect of “The Poet, Applying for a Job, Cites Her Previous Experience,” and more broadly in your work. How do you think about silence as a theme in your work or in poetry writ large?

THOMPSON

I haven't thought about silence as a theme so much as a necessity—for the speaker's breath, the listener's contemplation, the reader's moment to pause. The weight and lightness of silence can be as compelling as all the letters that compete to replace it. The silences are an integral part of the music of any poem. Without it, I think, poems devolve into prose inexplicably accompanied by improbable line breaks.

FOOTHILL

In both *Beg No Pardon* and *Start with a Small Guitar*, you've written elegies to a memorable garment: a red dress. The later poem, “Last Elegy for the Red Dress,” asks, “Where've you been, Red Dress? / And why have you moved on without me?” We love that the red dress is recurring across several of your poems. Is there a real red dress? What draws you to it as an image?

THOMPSON

Thanks for citing these poems, as you give me the opportunity to give a tip of my beret to my friend and fellow poet, Cecilia Woloch. In one of her workshops, she asked participants to think of an inanimate object and write a poem of praise or despair about it. I immediately thought of the red dress hanging in my closet that I knew I'd never be able to fit into again, and that set me off to pen and paper. I'm always fascinated by any metaphor or image that allows me, as the poet, to contrast what was and what is.

The other reason this particular image recurs in my second book after appearing in the first is that in editing the first book, it was suggested that I shorten the poem and flip the stanzas. Being inexperienced and insecure, I agreed to do so, but that original version lingered in my head. After *Beg No Pardon* was published, I would read both versions at readings and ask the audience (without giving the backstory) which they preferred. They almost unanimously liked the original version. I have to say, I'm not sure I would do anything differently if I had to do it all over again, but the experience taught me to trust my instincts. Nevertheless, as a poet friend of mine has said, they are two different poems that accomplish different aims, so it works all the way around. Plus, I was thrilled to know that, since the poem is mine, I can do whatever I want with it!

FOOTHILL

Much of *Beg No Pardon*, published over ten years ago, seems to be centered around the exploration of a felt ancestry, an inheritance informed and confounded by distance. You were kind enough to give us a sneak peek of your upcoming collection, *Fretwork*, which recently won the Marsh Hawk Press Poetry Prize (congratulations!), and in these poems we saw a return to the theme of heritage. Has the approach to this topic shifted during the intervening years? What informed your decision to revisit it?

THOMPSON

Thanks for the congratulations on *Fretwork*! I couldn't be happier that the manuscript has found such a supportive home! I don't think my approach has changed, but I think my thoughts about the issue of

heritage and how to approach it has deepened. Also, I think one of the compelling life questions for me is “Where do we come from?” Not just geographically, but culturally, in the midst of family, no matter how that family comes to exist.

Certainly, I think—I hope—I’ve grown as a writer and have more tools in the toolkit to make the stories richer and more relevant for the reader. In addition, this is the first time I’ve written in a fuller way about my adoption. I think I was definitely hesitant for a variety of reasons to bring the issue into the light: concern about familial—both birth and adoptive—reactions; facing my own questions, joys, and disappointments; failure as both an adoptee and as a child born to a mother who was unable to keep me. As I continue to write about these issues, even as *Fretwork* goes to press, it’s increasingly clear to me that I will continue to revisit these topics in one way or another.

FOOTHILL

What are you reading right now that you would recommend to emerging poets or readers of poetry? What other types of art are also currently feeding your inspiration?

THOMPSON

I always love this question, and I’m about to give your readers an early Christmas gift. The following are (a few) of the books I’ve read or received in the last twelve months (in no particular order): *The Carrying* by Ada Limón, *Girldom* by Megan Peak, *Oceanic* by Aimee Nezhukumatathil, *Brown* by Kevin Young, *Wade in the Water* by Tracy K. Smith, *bury it* by Sam Sax, *Trophic Cascade* by Camille Dungy, *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* by Terrance Hayes, *Her Mouth As Souvenir* by Heather June Gibbons, *dying in the scarecrow’s arms* by Mitchell L.H. Douglas, and *semiautomatic* by Evie Shockley.

I must say, I’m completely blown away by what Evie has accomplished in *semiautomatic*, not the least of which is for the stylistic choices she makes with the layout of the poems; “fukushima blues” comes to mind and yes, that’s a teaser!

FOOTHILL

Almost every piece of advice about how to become a writer boils down to this: you are a writer because you write. Do you have any specific rituals that help you put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard?)

THOMPSON

The best ritual for me is reading and listening—if I engage in the deep practice of both of these, I never fail to be inspired to put the words on the page.

FOOTHILL

What can the ardent Lynne Thompson fan look forward to seeing from you in the future?

THOMPSON

My writer friends know that I have a play roiling around in my head and have had for some time. If I get accepted to Hedgebrook next year (are you listening, evaluators?), I hope to focus on bringing the play to life. And yes, the ideas revisit heritage, this time within the context of war and citizenship.

Contributors

ASHANTI ANDERSON is a queer, black, disabled poet and writer. She is an MFA candidate at University of California, Riverside and the 2018 winner of the Tennessee Williams Festival Poetry Contest. Her work has appeared in various print and online publications, including *Crab Fat Magazine*, *Really System*, and *Panoply*.

RACHEL PESAVENTO BROWNELL, originally from the Bay Area, is in the MFA program for poetry at California State University, Long Beach. She is the editor-in-chief of *RipRap*, CSULB's literary journal, and hopes to pursue publishing further after graduation. As a graduate of Pomona College ('15), she is especially proud to appear in a Claremont literary publication.

AURORA BERGER, originally from rural Vermont, is an MFA student at Claremont Graduate University. Using self-portraiture to subvert personal and public representations of disability, Berger elevates perceptions of the disabled body as being simultaneously fragile and powerful. Berger's work fights with the ideologies of cure and survival, visibility and invisibility, and personal and public awareness. She works with various photographic mediums (digital photographs torn, cyanotyped, and printed on fabrics and plastics) to explore these dichotomies. Her work has been previously published in *Gambling the Aisle* and the *Albion Review*, and has been exhibited in galleries internationally.

REILLY D. COX is a poet and book artist originally from Baltimore, Maryland. They attended Washington College and the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets and currently attend the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa for MFAs in Creative Writing and in Book Arts. They have work available or forthcoming from the Academy of American Poets, *Always Crashing*, *Cigar City Journal*, and *Iron Horse Literary Review*.

EMILY ELLISON is a second-year MFA student in poetry at Texas State University, where she also works as a teaching assistant for its English faculty. Her work has appeared in *Southword*, *After the Pause*, and *Haiku Journal*, and is forthcoming in several places. Ellison lives in San Marcos, Texas with two cats and an abundance of plants (which are withering at the moment).

JILL MCELDOWNEY is the author of the forthcoming chapbook *Airs Above Ground* (Finishing Line Press) as well as *Kisses Over Babylon* (dancing girl press). She is a cofounder and editor for Madhouse Press. Her previously published work can be found in journals such as *Muzzle*, *Vinyl*, *Fugue*, the *Sonora Review*, and other notable publications. She is additionally pursuing an MFA in poetry at the University of New Mexico.

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INEZ TAN is a poet and fiction writer based in Singapore and California. She is the author of the short story collection *This Is Where I Won't Be Alone* (Epigram Books, 2018). Her writing has appeared in *Rattle*, the *Collagist*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, and others. She holds an MFA in fiction from the University of Michigan and is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry at the University of California, Irvine. Find her online at ineztan.com.

ALEXANDRA UMLAS lives in Huntington Beach, California with her husband and two daughters. She has an MA in Education with an emphasis in cross-cultural teaching and is currently an MFA student at California State University, Long Beach. You can find her work in *Rattle*, the *Poet's Billow*, and *Mothers Always Write*, among others.

KOREY WILLIAMS grew up in suburban Chicago and studied at Illinois Wesleyan University, the University of Oxford, and Cornell University. He was a finalist in the 2017 National Poetry Series and his work appears in *Assaracus*, *Fogged Clarity*, *wildness*, the *Offing*, *Narrative Magazine*, and elsewhere. Williams is currently a doctoral student at the University of Chicago.

MIA S. WILLIS is a 22-year-old gender-fluid African American artist and adventurer. Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, they have been a spoken-word poet since their introduction to the art in 2013. Their work has been featured in print in the *Sugar Magazine* as well as online by the *Fem Lit Mag*, *Inter- Magazine*, *A Feminist Thread*, and *WORDPEACE*. A video performance of their poem, “hecatomb,” was captured by SlamFind at the 2018 Capturing Fire Slam. When Willis is not on stage, they are a full-time Master of Arts student in the Department of Classics at Florida State University.

ANDREW WITTSTADT was born and raised outside Baltimore, Maryland. He currently resides in Southwest Louisiana, where he is completing his MFA in poetry at McNeese State University.

FOOT
HILL
poetry

Directed by students at Claremont Graduate University, *Foothill Poetry Journal* is an annual print and online poetry journal that features the work of emerging poets enrolled in graduate programs around the globe. To listen to some of the poets performing their work, visit cgu.edu/foothill.



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