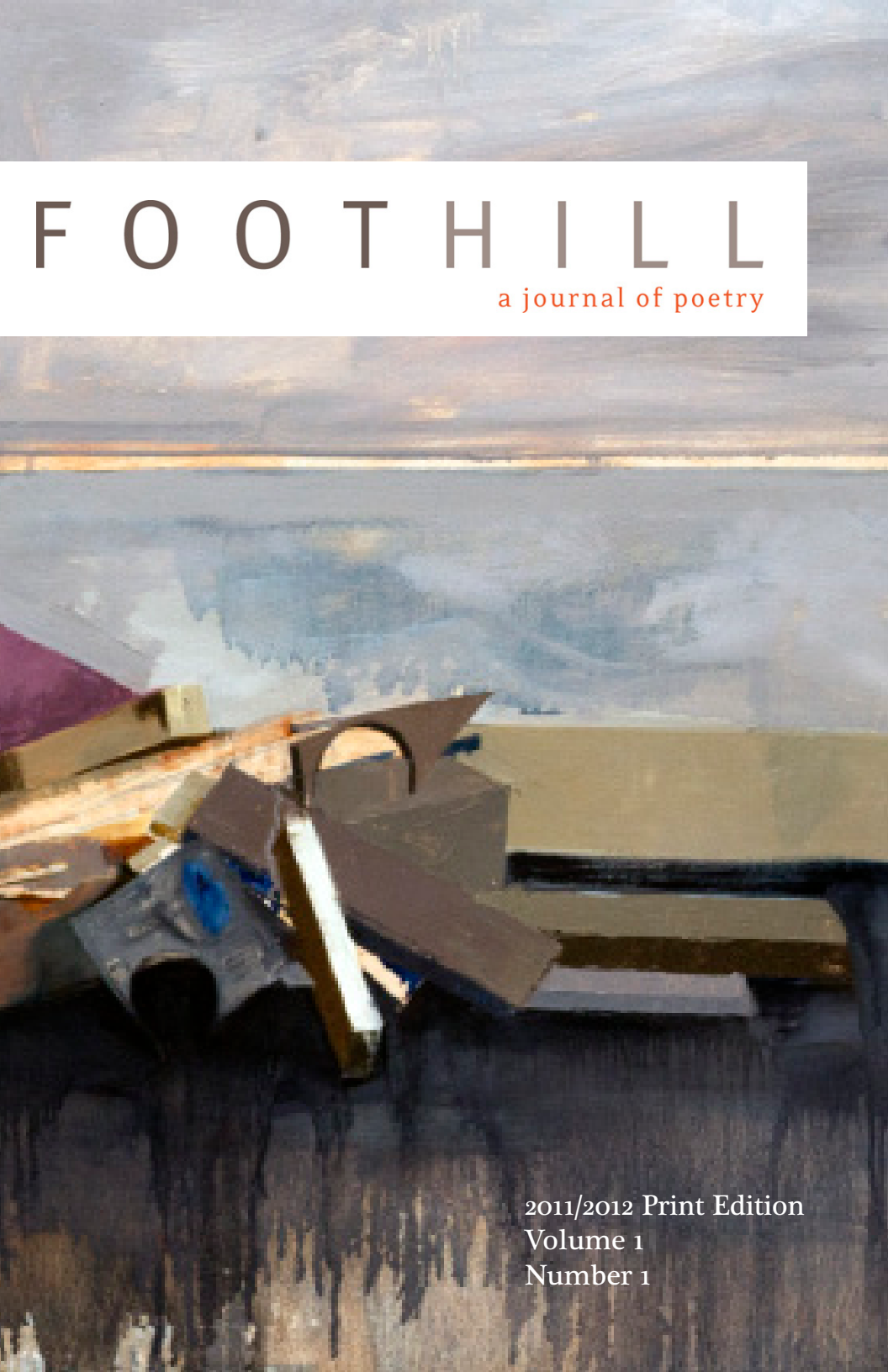
# FOOTHILL

a journal of poetry



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# FOOT HILL

a journal of poetry

Claremont

GRADUATE UNIVERSITY


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Though *Foothill* is produced with generous assistance from Claremont Graduate University, additional support is essential to fulfill our mission of publishing and promoting the country's best graduate-student poetry.

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## *FOOTHILL* PATRON LEVELS

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# CONTENTS

## ART



## INTERVIEW



## CONTRIBUTORS

# EDITOR'S NOTE

*Why a Graduate Student Journal?*

We often hear that poetry is in a state of crisis in America. Though even as Stanley Fish writes another disparaging article on the future of humanities education, as *Daisy Miller* supplants the poetry of Emily Dickinson on a few more syllabi to appease prose-gorged students who find its language distastefully inscrutable; and as the "POETRY" shelves shrink and are further relegated to the remotest back walls of university bookstores, poetry *thrives* in graduate schools.

Maybe nowhere else today is this necessary and demanding art engaged by more young readers (not always young in years) than graduate schools. Moreover, these young readers, more likely weaned in front of a television at night than read William Blake's "Songs of Innocence," are finally able to marshal the skill and intellectual courage to appreciate "The Four Zoas."

Graduate students – like all of us on the *Foothill* staff – are excited by our new, slender books; kept up at night by the thought of writing a few of our own.

This is why, if I were a betting man, I would double-or-nothing my student loans that a majority of the poetry submissions made to literary publications in the United States were borne from the word processors of graduate students. I'd also wager that – based partly on my own woeful experience – a majority of the rejections end up in our .edu in-boxes too.

I grant that graduate student poetry sometimes lacks the professional polish of our professors' and mentors'. We lack some of their wisdom and experience, too. But we are also usually without their name recognition, storied resumes, rolodexes, and literary agents.

*Foothill: a journal of poetry* was conceived to rescue the best work of graduate-student poets from a cold purgatory in forgotten Google Docs files and give it a public.

We are a graduate-student journal because graduate-student poetry is uniquely full of creative enthusiasm, has been produced by new experiences of the world, is composed with new ideas about what poetry might be in mind, and deserves to be read – if only just by other graduate students.

We hope the poets in this inaugural issue, and in many future issues, won't consider their publication merely the occasion for another line on their CV. We hope *Foothill* will comprise a vital space for cultural and artistic exchange among a community of people who need to stick up for each other; a place where we might catch glimpses of poetry's future; and where the hardest-working, unsung heroes of this future find – rather than discouragement – inspiration and support.

To join the conversation on graduate student poetry, comment on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/foothilljournal); or to hear more of our thoughts on poetry and running a journal, visit our blog (foothillajournalofpoetry.blogspot.com).

Kevin Riel
Editor-in-Chief

# POEMS

CHRISTOPHER BEARD
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
PHD ENGLISH

## *To a Friend*

Oh, the disorganized way you inhabit here.
"What is won by surviving?"
I dare not ask you,
who have nothing now
but time, propped up above you
like your dead knee.

I had never seen you
in a place named home, emptying
your pantry of biscuits and gravy
for a guest, drinking beer for breakfast.

I had only known your chosen haze,
full-blown in a lamplit small town, its row of bars
harder to drink down than your own,
only known that you have always wanted
only to carouse in the fractured streets, caress
the concrete walls that hold them there,
only to punt foodstuffs across grocery aisles,
to deck the city with all you have stolen,
to be ever forgiven—

you always wanted to confess
to that specter of a green-eyed girl
that every time you sense your place strange,
she is your first lonely thought.

You have always wanted to shatter glasses,
but every glass deserved it.

You have since retreated, here,
on the other side of your river

at your chalk white childhood house
petting dustbunnies—
rigid and unkempt in the quiet,
your relief sad against the sanctuary fields.
The wide flat space seemed to have a hinge
as if it would close.

Here it is safe to live your life of injury.
Fireworks lie rain-spoiled in the dawn,
the first light coloring the grass,
and shining through you.

Here you are greyer, emptied,
And not even hungover.
You cleaned out
like a closet.

ALYSE BENSEL
PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
MFA POETRY

## *The Radiolarian Atlas*

Symmetry in the smallest
of what we cannot see,
circles a careful hand draws,
the perfect microcosm
of our world. Remember a child
crouched low by the stream,
catching minnows in her bare hands,
feeling them wriggle between
her fingers. It's a hot Sunday,
and black snakes are basking
on the rocks, water pennies below
in cold spring water carried
to the ocean, where zooplankton turn
and turn in its current, radial
arms twirling like batons, pushing
them onward and out.

CHRIS BRUNT
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
PHD CREATIVE WRITING AND LITERATURE

## *Misdirective*

*"Drink and be whole again beyond confusion."*
*- Robert Frost*

Deep in the fear too much as never before,
I elected to fill the flask and sit in the empty chapel,
read the crazed scrawl of a bayou prophet, and listen
to this house withstand the barbarian wind.
*Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick,*
*and the whole heart faint.*

There are times when being drunk in church
is the first recourse of the ego under siege.
Times when the galloping intensities of dread
must be given their hearing under the high dome.

Yes, I am hiding. From authorities in black,
their proxies, fellow travelers, from you.
Especially from you.
This is the syntax of my faint-heart flight.
Here is my diction of arrested psychosis.
Please accept it. I'm all out of dimes.

*When ye spread forth your hands,*
*I will hide mine eyes from you:*
*When ye make many prayers*
*I will not hear you:*
*your hands are full of blood.*

Here are my waters and my watering place.
Here are my fingers trembling on the book of grace.
Were it not for the insanity of wind outside,
were it not for the pooling crimson in my palm,
this place would be an agony in white.

*Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust,*
*for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty.*

Admit we are late in the age of vandals.
We may fear we are being mocked.
The house of dread is the great spun world
and I am in its waiting room.

*I am sought of them that asked not for me;*
*I am found of them that sought me not.*

When I came outside there was no wind.
Something terrible was lit in the stillness,
a familiarity, a touching to the quick of the air.
I tried not to look at the little girl standing there
but she spoke to me, her voice like a cane reed.
My blood was shook, I lost my breath.
And I went past her down the steps.
There is mercy in our undoing.

LIZ CHERESKIN
COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO
MFA CREATIVE WRITING & POETRY

## *Cassadaga*

Back there/back then:

houses were elegant skulls
with their own life
love lines cracking asphalt

& I didn't have enough money to sit
in a room of tarot cards so
I ate a bad sandwich
in a Florida summer
scorched my
soles on sun-bleached cement and I don't
know if I wanted
to scare myself
into believing something/I didn't believe in anything/
I was looking
for glowing orbs in
graveyard snapshots

(you have to understand
it was always my fingers
slowly moving
the plastic
arrow of the Ouija board)

I can say for certain
there were hills and gardens
sand instead of soil
hand-carved signs and cheap
plaster statues
a store where I bought a laminated

piece of paper framed in smiling moons
and shooting stars
that told me
a Gemini loves to learn

then a herd of calico
cats shooed me
from a cement stoop
an old psychic's creaking screen door
voice called to me
from across the street
and I still don't know
what she said
but I left in a hurry
darted into my car
where I know I rumbled
away too fast
from whatever I found in Cassadaga

ERIK DELAPP
HAMLINE UNIVERSITY
MFA CREATIVE WRITING

## *Ghazal*

Speeding down County Road 6, the self-pity of Denny Hecker
blinds him from everything but the prosperity of Denny Hecker.

Sarah brings her feverish baby to the emergency room
to find her family's insurance cancelled – casualty of Denny Hecker.

Barbara's paycheck never comes – "an unfavorable cash situation"
she is told (the demonstrated clarity of Denny Hecker).

Jack and four hundred of his friends are now job-hunting
after a sudden good-bye letter filled with the sincerity of Denny Hecker.

Erik reads in the paper that a whole neighborhood lost electricity
after a car crashed into a utility pole, the dexterity of Denny Hecker.

NATE FISHER
SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY-EDWARDSVILLE
MA CREATIVE WRITING

## *Folklore, Fugue*

i keep the loose whisker in my pocket
until mother leads me to the garden
& helps me bury it. maybe a kik-ah-dee tree
grows & i stop mewling into her pleated skirt
about the kik-ah-dee that left me young, unfeathered.

*  *  *

22 years pass, now karishma laughing nude,
pursued across the miry backyard
beneath an amber cloudburst, swellwater
to ankles. then her caught & us twisting
our shivering flanks in the clay bedding
of the old garden.

& once that night, beneath where she passes through
my roaming hands, the cool touch of hair sprouting
in the loam, a blonde kelp in the flood wake rooted
in ridges of perennial fingerprints wrist deep.

*  *  *

my great-gran'pere scratching at a shade, waking
from the night chorus, buckshot in blue minor,
a repeat performance of trigger snagged on cow fence,
left arm hairpinned to his young neck, a taut stole, flannel and gristle.

granny mimes the tale:
the digging up of the arm
near the napping woodpile
& the kids closing the overripe fist
to smother spooks of the motor cortex.

later his granddaughter runs screaming
from the porch: an unseen hand
had played its turn on the checkers set.

*  *  *

in the cellar:
a satchel with anatomy books and hymnals
fragrant of mother 30 years alive.
also, here the decade-old cosmetics
I brush and smear until her face
hums into the vanity,
lullabies for the storm.

*  *  *

a dead mouse found in my crib
& the exorcist arrives after last call
mother restless & watching
the anointing of my forehead with olive oil
& whisky breath, father shouting panicked prayers
to the pockmarked green bottles lining the cellar window
that his son doesn't someday end up in a cot
of charcoal sooting, that the moon be the color
of his birthstone tonight,

& outside a plum drops to the ground,
a demand for the night to come forward.

KIT FRICK
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
PHD ENGLISH

## *Hidden Water*

We press our palms to the grass, then our faces—ear to blades and blades to ear—as if we might feel its rapid pulse, as if we could hear its babble. Who could translate? No one speaks the language anymore—ancient, a discourse that pre-dates history, locked. But we can't hear. Not one gurgle. Hidden water. Amphibian, it breathes beneath the ground. And inside its long, dark body, blind fish navigate the ceaseless night, forever ignorant to the cool and rushing bioluminescent swell—flagellate stars trapped beneath the earth, pinpricks of exquisite light. Within them? The answer to a question angled over and over against the swallowing, blacked-out sky. But who's to say? Who's to ever know? Hidden water. Teeming with its very self, this living burial ground, this never found.

STEPHANIE GLAZIER
ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY LOS ANGELES
MFA CREATIVE WRITING

## *What the Mouth Means* 

the big blues lady sings anohh ahhhhh into the mic—I am fixated on a line where her lipstick stops and the flesh begins, red and brown folds fading to the inside tongue mouth black cave of song. She's pressing that O down in me until the breeze of it, the sweet light of it hits the dark bell, ringing oh yes another breath.

ISHION HUTCHINSON
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
PHD CREATIVE WRITING

## *Her Paris*

Goodbye, pavement, good night, day
a strange woman tells the clock "quiet,"
and walks longing only for a black dress.

A dress to change her mood in the room
she hides from the wolves and the stations'
platform, gibbering she must leave her Paris.

The lamp and its little glow cannot hold
the city, and the wish to extinguish
her half world, poor *demimondaine,* sputters.

To sleep, in chloroform haze, to rise
with fire and wings out of herself, Jean Rhys
admires her mothfallen, marionette self.

She flies out to the Seine; a door creaks open
on the cold, dark water: a sea, some hills
flutter, then harden, keeping what is reflected.

## *Bicycle Eclogue*

That red bicycle left in an alley near the Ponte Vecchio,
I claim; I claim its elongated shadow ship crested on
stacked crates; I claim the sour-mouth Arno, too, and the stone
arch bending sunlight onto a vanished medieval fare;
but mostly I claim this two-wheel chariot vetching
on the wall, its sickle fenders reaping the dust and pollen
of the a heat-congested city when traffic coils to a halt.
And I, without enough for the great museums,
am struck by the red on the weathered brick, new tires
on cobble, the bronze tulip bell—smaller than Venus's nose—
turned up against the river, completely itself for itself.
The scar in my palm throbs, recalling a glass flint
once housed there after I fell off the district's iron mule,
welded by the local artisan, Barrel Mouth—no relation
of Botticelli—the summer of my first long pants.
The doctor's scissors probing the flesh didn't hurt,
nor the lifeline bust open when the flint was plucked out;
what I wailed for that afternoon was the anger in mother's
face when she found out I had disobeyed her simple wish
to remain in doors until she returned from kneeling
in harvested cane, tearing out the charred roots
from the earth after the cane-cutters slashed the burnt field.
It was her first day, and the last, bowing so low to pull
enough for my school fee; for, again, the promised money
didn't fall from my father's cold heaven in England.
As we walked to the clinic on rabbles of hogplums,
her mouth trembled in her soot frock, my palm reddened
in her grip, plum scent taking us through the lane.
By time we saw the hospital's rusty gate, her fist was stained
to my fingers' curl, and when I unfastened my eyes
from the ground to her face, gazing ahead, terribly calm
in the hail of sunlight, a yellow shawl around her head,

something of shame became clear, and if I had more
sense as my blood darkened to sorrel at the age
of twelve or thirteen, I would have forgot the sting
and wreathed tighter my hold before letting her go.
And now, raising my camera, bells charge the pigeon sky
braced by the Duomo that looks like a shell fallen off the sun.
I snap the cycle to make sure, this time, I have one of my own.

## *Essential*

to Philip Levine

Today, in a tile-grey envelope,
late November, the city smudged
in a spiteful cold without

the assurance of snow, your
*Essential Keats* arrived. Bearing
its ash weight upstairs

I remember I entered his death
room in hot July, a rabble
of tourists resting loudly

by the fountain at the Piazza
di Spagna; a crystal hush
fell as I stared into his glass-cased

memorabilia and imagined a hand
held towards me, his, but more
likely yours at those sessions

you offered advise and wine
with the same hand that lanced
our hopeful rubbish thrust

under your nose. Your hand
spoke masterly, "Don't fuck
with the Muse," then you twinkled

the way you used to through Dearborn,
a new Pheidippides, everything passed
named, every blessed rock and river—

the turned oak you rejoiced
the highways have not conquered
fully—everything delivered, brined

in a deadly tonic of laughter.
Those essential evenings I cast
a triumvirate: Levine, leaving, living

as I whistled underground,
resurfacing, Brooklyn side,
to the icy silence of my reading

room, ignited by an essential fever,
at twenty-five years old, an exhausted
magpie trapped in the window

overlooking a garden of priest-tall,
skeletal trees in frieze procession,
touched by streetlights stuttering on.

CAMERON KELSALL
OHIO UNIVERSITY
MA CREATIVE WRITING

## *Reflecting on a Picture of John Berryman*

I keep a picture of him above my desk.
He is descending a staircase—
one of those rickety airplane affairs
that put you on the tarmac.
Obviously drunk, he waves—
to the photographer, I assume.
The photo was in *Time*, a year
or so before he jumped.
I long for an era I never knew,
when a poet arriving somewhere
was national news. He seems ebullient.
I imagine crumbs of food
in his beard.

I also imagine him at my age—
clean-cut Columbia co-ed downing
bootleg scotch in his mother's flat.
His suits always fit;
his pomade-slicked hair
drove the Barnard girls wild.
An invitation to supper
at Mark Van Doren's
could make his week.
I can see them drinking
Dorothy's perfect martinis
and talking Shakespeare—
but probably really talking
Amy Lowell and baseball.

Mark Van Doren must have known, even then,
that he would outlive
his pupil by eleven months.

The gravity of a January river
makes me shiver.
I have never been able to grow a beard—
which means I'll never be a genius,
or commit suicide,
or know personally the man I love
and pity with a terrible longing
that burns like spirits going down,
like the coldest winter water,
colder than hell.

NATE LIEDERBACH
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
PHD CREATIVE WRITING

## *Charles Simic*

Charles Simic is night car, highway,
deer hoof cracking windshield. Charles Simic
is no said hard, is oily finger pushing
wild button glow, news home but left
unanswered because Charles Simic
is forever nightgowned in morning light,
always chewing into two books at once—
so thoughtful those Charles Simic thoughts,
how they purr saran wings, downy torsos &
six eyelash legs flexed, back-flipping
from polished spoon handles, splashing, wrecking
all our latte art. We call it Charles Simic

lost into Charles Simic, spit fainting
with a sigh on another coed's lap,
on my Lacanic lips, then once again
it's back to skeletal elbows nudging
you & me & Charles Simic to life
once more, until we're driving home even drunker,
floating Adriatic hairpins on short/hot
Balkan luck, all alone together, hands
on our cheeks & Charles Simic agape,
cackling, not wanting to steer, only gun
these bastard sentences, bleeding down
my new camisole. But how much Charles Simic

is too much Charles Simic, days & days
over too soon, & wars, too, carved down
in easy ironic bites of *ćevapčići*
memories (dipped in blank paste)? But the coed
giggles on & on. She says The Book of Verse
is nothing more than its final page

& Charles Simic can't be blamed, says, "C'mon
guys, asking where, at night, all the green flies go
is the only important task." Meaning,
are they lost? Any more than we? With the sun
gone is it simply back to black grass,
all their buzzing congealed to dew, motiveless

& waiting, the tiniest bait set
for meaning's errant weight?

SARAH B. MARSH-REBELO
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY
MFA CREATIVE WRITING

## *Raymond – 1962*

My brother walks with care upon the roof
the house moans, settles its bones.
We lived with a fever for life, nailed to the earth.

Now, the size of a child, he enters my room.
I kneel to live a while at the level of his eyes.
He smells of lanolin and soft blankets.

Plumb dimples between his knuckles
collect my whispers.
He pauses, slowly lifts them to his mouth.

I want to make things shift inside me,
take his hand, whisper,
*Follow me, all things can change in the night.*

I gather my brother's words, fill my mind with the dances
of their sounds. Are the gifts my brother gives me from the grave
more lasting, more profound, than when he walked the earth?

MELISSA QUEEN
OHIO UNIVERSITY
MA CREATIVE WRITING

## *At First Rain*

We were vultures there among the sage,
coyotes who hunted neighborhood pets in packs.
We made nests there among the broken glass
and groves of Russian Olives.

We smiled at the sun.
Our teeth were made of magnifying glass.
Under the moon, moths bounced in headlights,
the stereo howled, and empty bottles
scraped across truck beds.

I taste the film of him on my teeth.
His mouth was a rain barrel—
damp dust on his tongue,
dried salt in the corner of his mouth.

This late afternoon the wind whispers rumors
across wheat grass rumors the pack
runs just over the ridge,
their shadows cast down on the valley.

Far off across the scape, the clouds
stretch like grey hide
from the earth to the sky. I can smell him—
his hair brought down with the dust.

## *Girls Named for Flowers*

*Arum*

What could we daughters understand
of the corsages tied to our wrists?
Give us the names of these gardens,
of the flowers, the birds, and these simple ceremonies.

*Begonia*

No one can recall where it began, if we were named
we for their blossoms, or they
for our constitutions.

*Carnation*

No, not a rose,
but that other sort

*Caladium*

from grocery store cooler beside yesterday's muffins.
Give us the name of that which is tied to our wrists

*Dahlia*

Give us the names like vocabulary lessons,
spelling bees. We will sing them
like rope jumping songs. We wild things
will discipline our tongues with the names
of the flowers, the birds, and our bodies
—a running stitch; to baste; Eglantine;

*Ipomoea*

Give us the names of the gardens
we will keep on our tongues.
They will be there when you find need for them
and then you will come to us
for what you cannot recall by name,
by the name which you had given them.

*Larkspur*

Still there like honey, our tongues will know them
forever until our tongues
grow fat—with the remembrance of
that which you gave us to tend—
and swell and seal our throats.

*Oleander*

Our calcite teeth will still remain
to scrape for grains our mouths kept
crumbs of like bread baskets.

*Wisteria*

There will still be crystals of honey
on the tips of our finger bones,
But it will be centuries, again,
before they find the drawings we painted with our tongues
on the cavern walls of our cheekbones.

*Zephyranthes*

By then the names of those gardens,
the names of the flowers, the birds,
and what became of our bodies will be hieroglyphs
excavated from our fingernails.

*Zinnia*

By then their tongues will have to learn
their own sounds for these wild things.
And slowly, they will begin
with whispers to name them.

ELIZABETH WILCOX
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
PHD LITERATURE AND CREATIVE WRITING

## *The Deaths of Pythagoras*

When Pythagoras died by the bean field, the four hundred proofs
of his theorem rustled in the breath

just after. In the breath just before, a hardening: the spirit
resides in the brain & is immortal, the legume

is off-limits. If everything
is a number, what number

is the bean? When Pythagorus died
with the spears through him he was calculating

the number of right angles that have grown
weary with time, that have bent their backs over in the night,

convulsed with the daily anxiety
of where tomorrow's beginning will meet today's

end. He was calculating the exact location of the point
where his spirit would meet

its perfect perpendicular. Not
in the bean field, but in the breath. A

spirit. When Pythagoras was burned
out of his school, he ran the ashes

between his hands, thinking about the skin
of a bean, how it looked like the skin

of his lover's cheek after bathing. So much less defined
than the triangle, and thus an ugly

irresistible. How opposites
work: everything is golden under

a certain obtuse breath. When Pythagoras died
in the middle of a war, date & time

unknown, it was equilateral to the
morning star, he was one perfect solid

We are never more than a mean distance
from that bean field

## *Forty Five Minutes*

12:01 pm——The list is broken down by minutes.

12:02 pm——The minutes represent
an action, something *to be done*.
Something to achieve. A body
moving through space in relation to
a goal.

12:04 pm——If the list is not adhered to, it is not
the end of the
world. The creation of the list

12:05 pm——is more important than its
execution.

12:11 pm——On the periphery of
the digital world is a small girl
with an afghan pulled over
her eyes so as not to see

12:12 pm——the knife, the way it moved
around and inside of
the man. The knife could cross

12:13 pm——something off its list. The time it takes
between the inhalation of nitrous
oxide and the laughter. One time

12:21 pm——the girl tried to answer the question *What
do you do with your time?* but
the sensation it gave her was
unpleasant. Another winter's

12:23 pm——walk minding last milennium's
stars. In the bedroom, the baby on the
pillow, staring into the red
light of the digital

12:23 pm——clock. How could. Now
cloud. How could 2 become 3 in
legs of light and mean *you are now*
*one minute sadder*

12:24 pm——The baby lining its body up
with the colon that separates an hour
from its own frail minutes.

12:30 pm——How many lights can fall
across an eye.

12:45 pm——*What do you do with your time?*

12:46 pm——*I count it.*

## *Detection* 

There are things out there
you don't know.

There are things
out there that we can only see
by the way they tug
on the objects around them

(just as some distant planets
are too many light years away
to look at

but you can measure the
dogged orbits

of the stars that cling to them).

When you are in your coldest region,
you tell me I am beautiful when
I cry.

In crowded star clusters,
the roving masses
of gas
elbow into each others'
solar systems.

(The ultimate invasion
of personal space.)

One star liberates
its neighbor star's planets.

Now, they are no longer orbiting.

They are all down the galaxy
at the supernova's pre-baptism party.

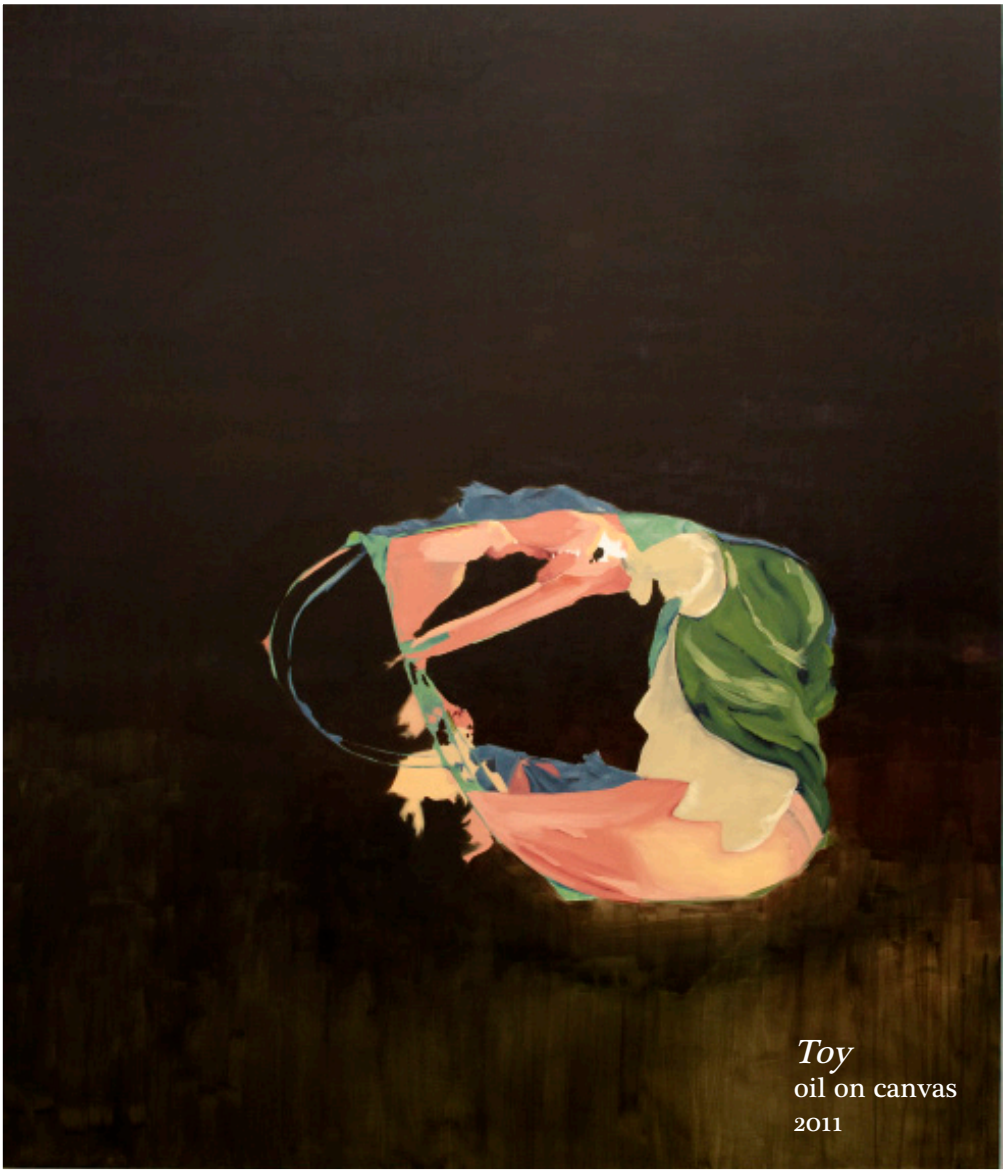
One pore on the astronomer's face shrinks

as though it has come close to a vat of dry
ice.

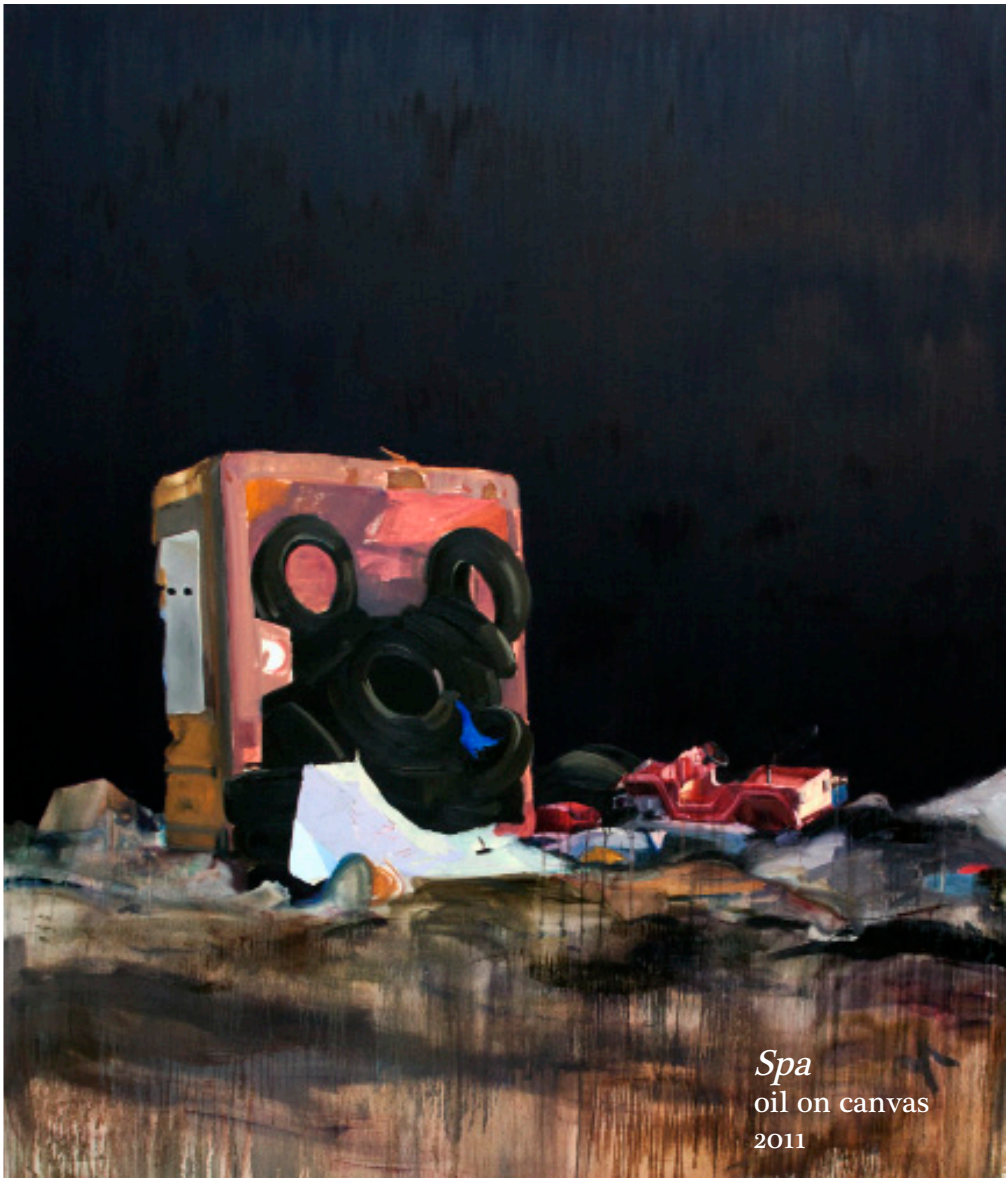
This is how we discover black holes.

# ART

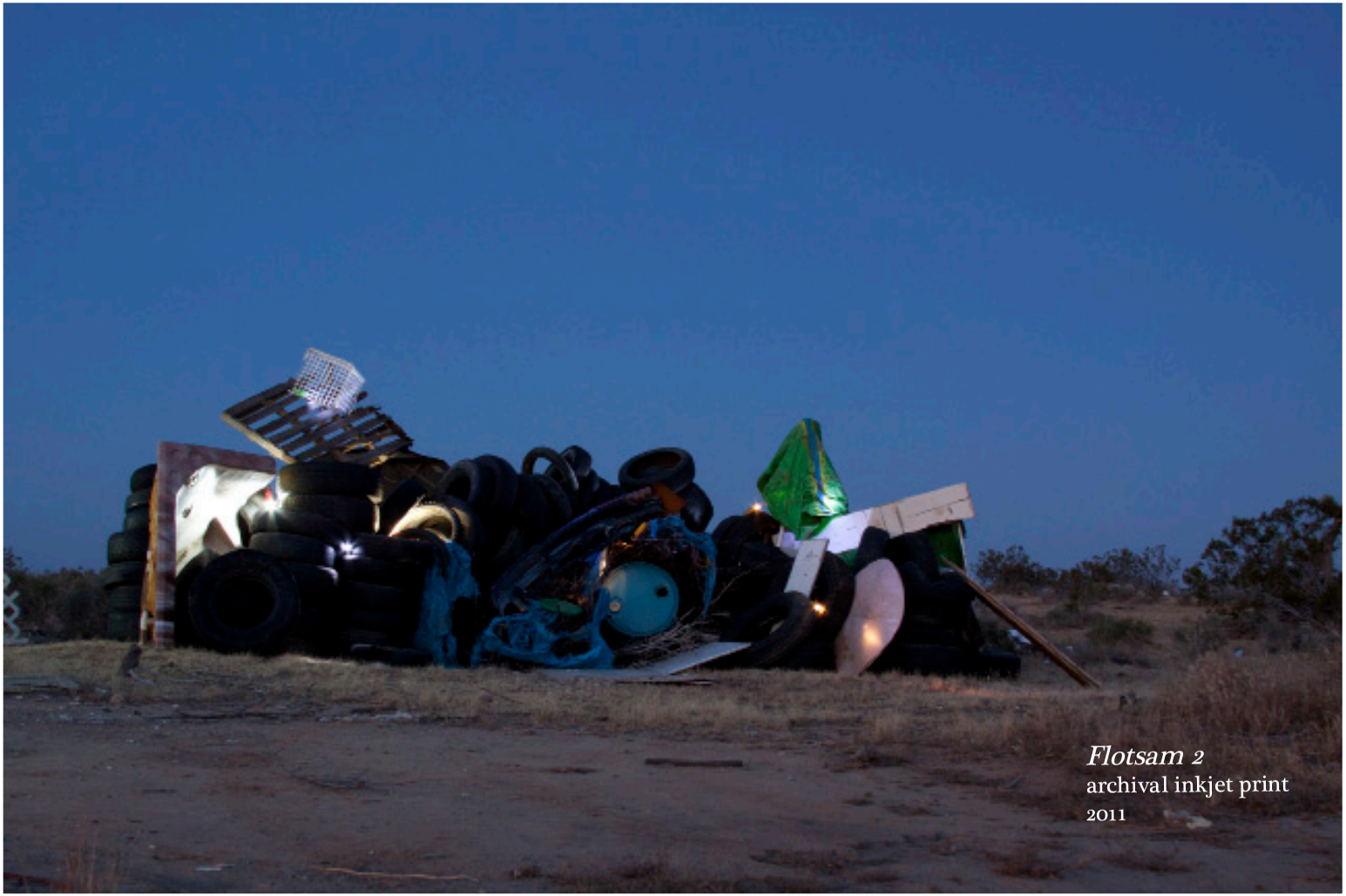
NICOLAS SHAKE
CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY
MFA ART



*Toy*
oil on canvas
2011



*Spa*
oil on canvas
2011



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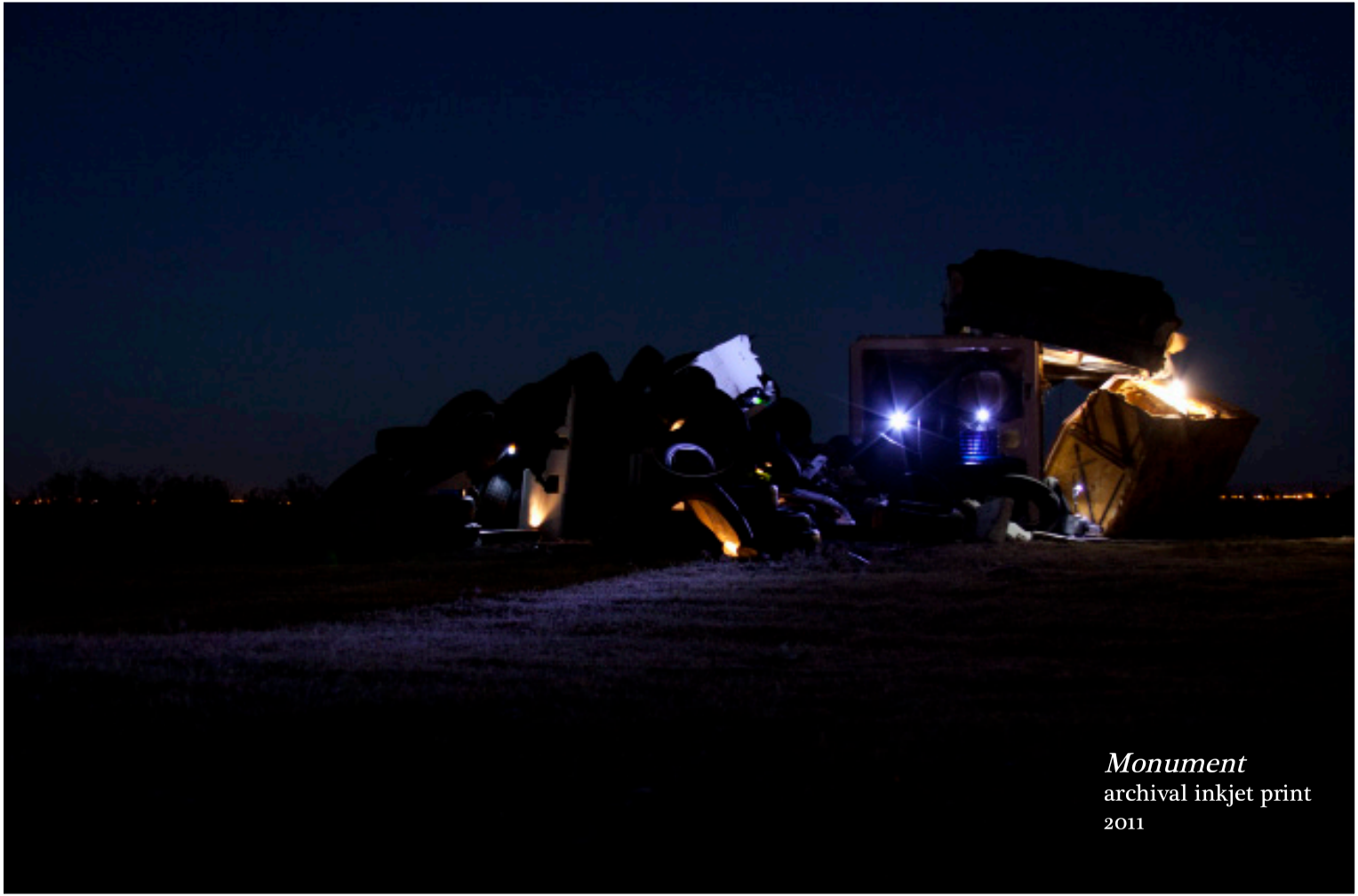
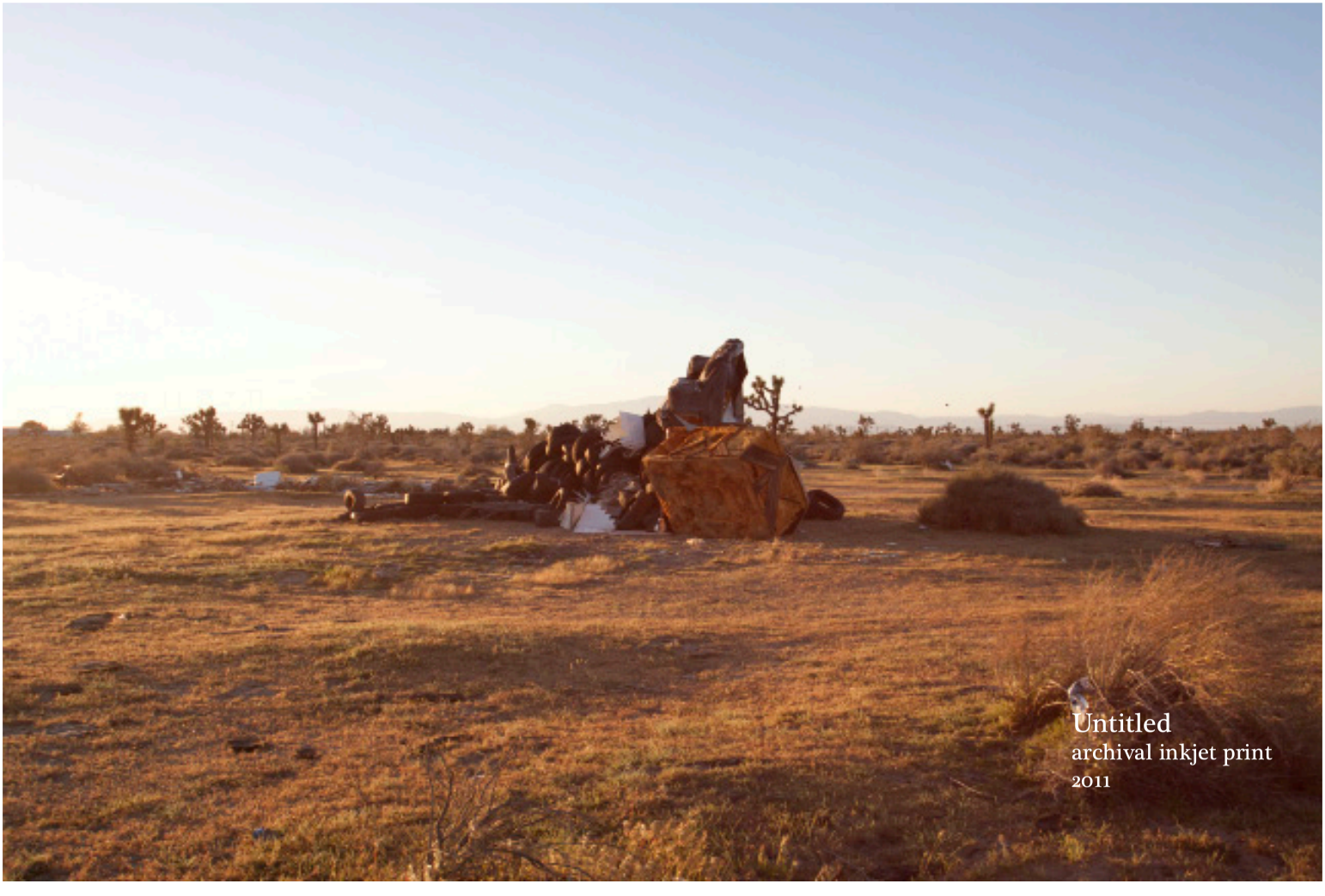
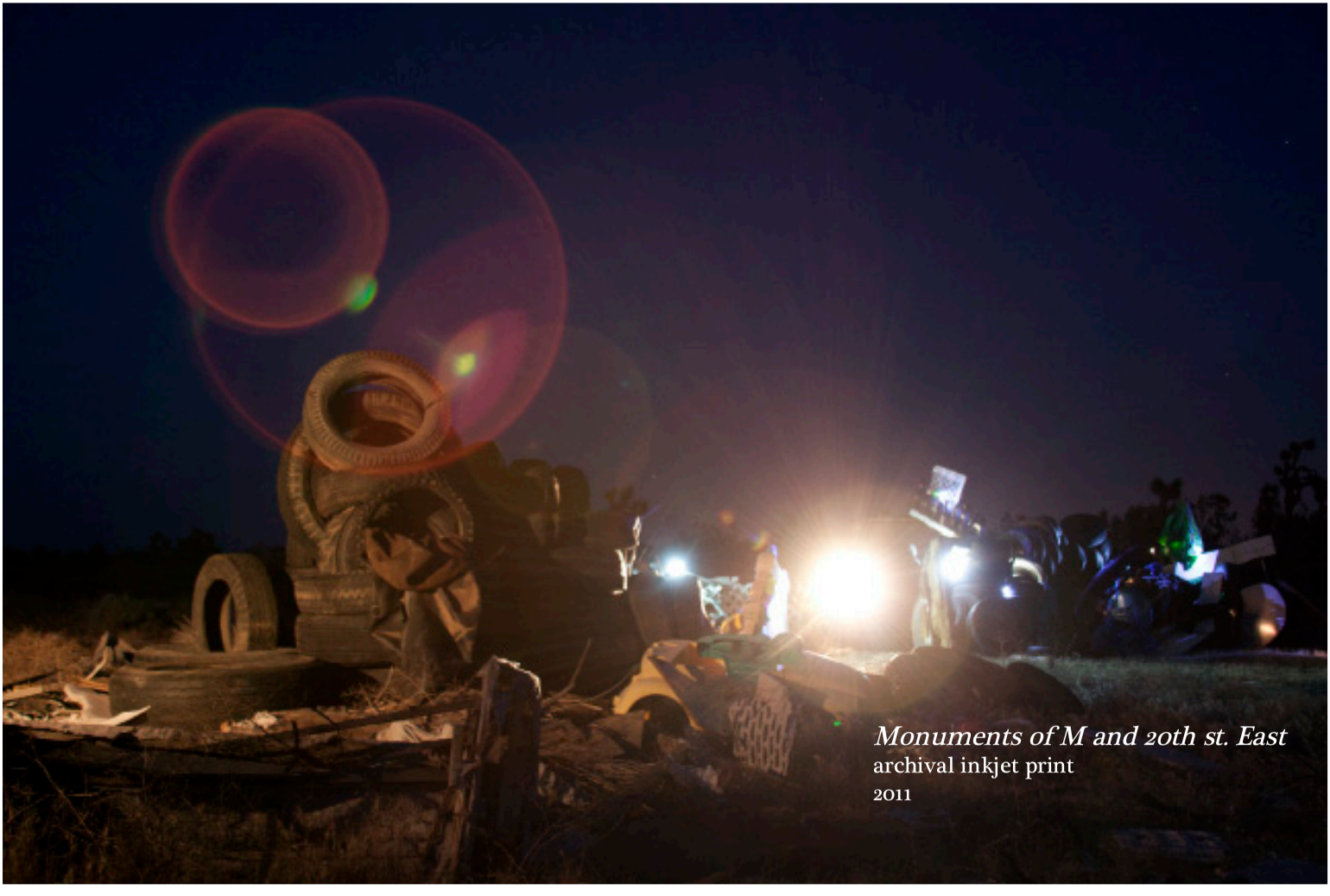
archival inkjet print
2011



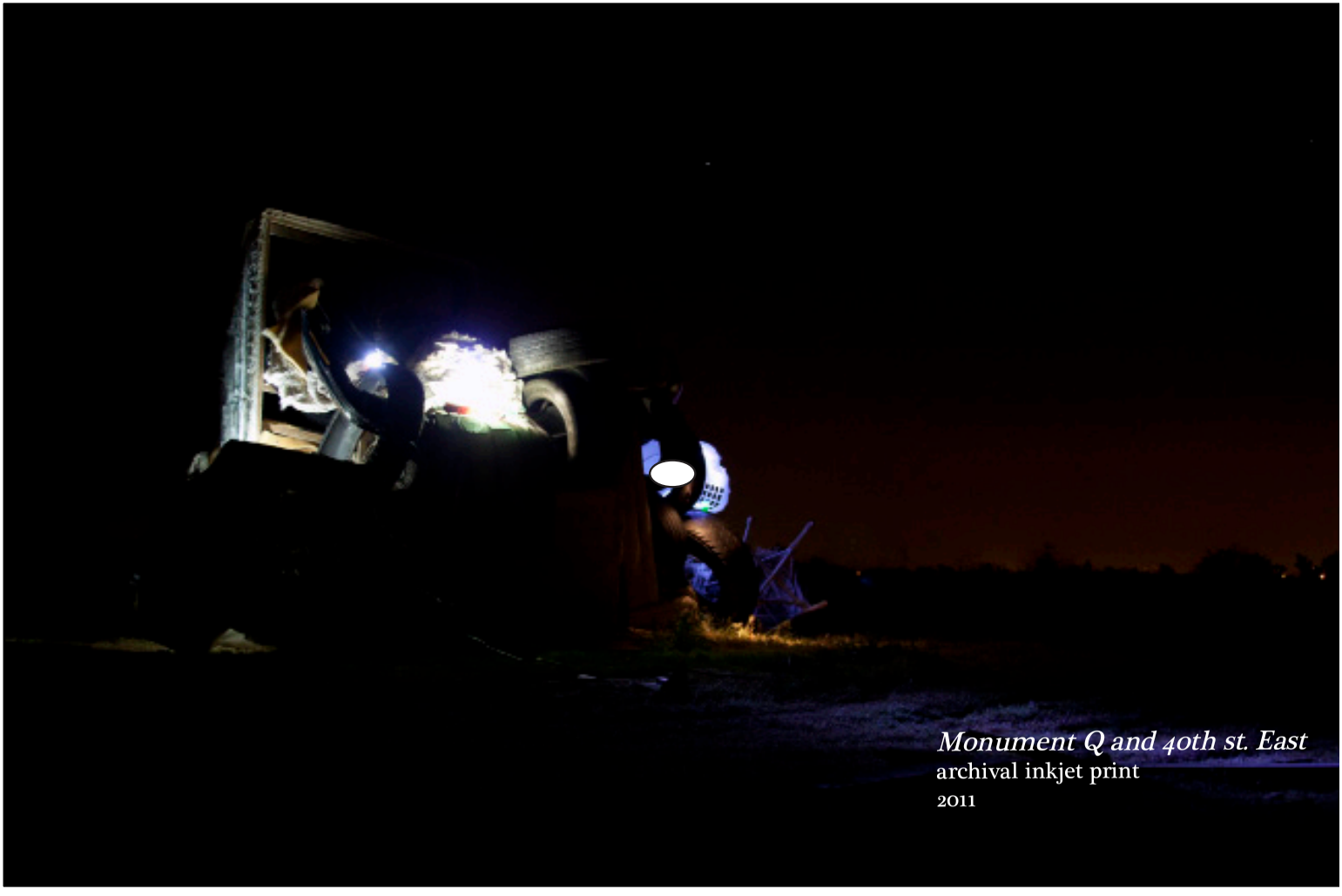
*Monument*
archival inkjet print
2011



Untitled
archival inkjet print
2011



*Monuments of M and 20th st. East*
archival inkjet print
2011



*Monument Q and 40th st. East*
archival inkjet print
2011

# INTERVIEW

# B.H. FAIRCHILD

B.H. Fairchild is the author of several acclaimed poetry collections, has been a finalist for the National Book Award, and winner of the William Carlos Williams Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. He also won Claremont Graduate University's Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award in 1999 for *The Art of the Lathe*. His most recent book is *Usher*.

Many of us on the *Foothill* staff have had the privilege of taking B.H. Fairchild's advanced poetry workshop at CGU, and his teachings continually inspire our editorial discussions. We wish him well at his new post at the University of North Texas.

FOOTHILL: As any CGU student of your advanced poetry workshop knows, you have a very clear theory on what distinguishes expository prose from poetry. You call one a language of "aboutness," the other of "isness." Can you explain the difference?

FAIRCHILD: Yes. These concepts derive both from my experience as a reader, writer, and teacher of poetry over many years and from this very important statement by Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Zettel*: "Do not forget that although a poem uses the language of information, it is not involved in the language-game of giving information." The language-game of information is referential; it informs about something; it explains. The language-game of poetry doesn't simply explain experience; it embodies it; it is it. The poet doesn't simply tell you about his feeling; he finds the image that made him feel that way and then places it in the poem so that you feel the same way he did. Isness rather than aboutness.

FOOTHILL: Many of your students also know that you tried to make it as a jazz musician before becoming a poet. How has a formative experience as a musician prepared you for a career as a poet?

FAIRCHILD: I would say that it didn't so much prepare me as influence

my preparation in minor ways. Learning to master a musical instrument involves the performance of exercises, and much of that performance is repetitive, usually done on a daily basis. I did not have the advantage of a poetry workshop or any other sort of instruction in poetry composition, so using musical training as a model, I would invent exercises for myself, mostly involving tropes, schemes, and metrical and syntactical patterns.

Also, improvisation as an essential technique in jazz is somewhat like improvisation in poetry, though the former is tonal and the latter rhythmic. Improvising variations on a jazz melody helped to teach me how to improvise variations on metrical and syntactical rhythms in poetry.

FOOTHILL: Similarly, sports – basketball and baseball especially – have often constituted the main action and ambiance of a number of your poems. How do you account for the vivid presence of sports in your work?

FAIRCHILD: Sport is very close to art, I believe. Not the same, but very close. Sport can be beautiful; it can contain aesthetic moments. I did not grow up in an intellectual or artistic home, and one of my first aesthetic moments occurred when I was playing second base in a perfectly executed double play from shortstop to second to first. I felt my body disappear inside a motion, and it was beautiful.

The aesthetics of shape and gesture can be witnessed frequently in all sports, though perhaps not as commonly as in dance. I think of Jerry West's perfectly efficient jump shot back in the day, some of Gayle Sayers' long runs as a halfback for the Chicago Bears, or that photo of Bill Russell and Wilt Chamberlain going up for a jump ball, every bit as symmetrical and graceful as a ballet movement. Of course, competitive sport is also naturally dramatic, the most basic of conflicts, always involving the agon of struggle.

FOOTHILL: Many of the graduate students published in this issue are unknown to the poetry world, and hoping to break through into recognizability. As you know, anonymity makes getting a book deal

or getting published in high-profile literary journals very difficult. Do you have any practical advice for getting noticed – other than writing excellent poems?

FAIRCHILD: I'm sorry to say that I don't have much to offer on this subject. In fact, I often worry these days that with the explosive expansion of MFA poetry programs over the last 30 years (I believe we have about 150 such programs now, 149 more than we had 50 years ago), poetry has become more often thought of as a career than an art form.

Also, graduate school is almost always now thought of as a requirement for becoming a poet. That's ridiculous. One becomes a poet by reading poems, especially the greatest ones, and devotedly writing poems, bad ones and good ones, and hoping that someday one will write the ultimate poem, whatever that is.

One can locate a mentor and a helpful community of fellow poets in an MFA program, but that's not the only place to find them. A poet is someone who is in love with the art of poetry, someone who sits alone in a room writing poems and occasionally sending them out to good journals (the ones that, regardless of status or prestige, publishes the kind of work the poet likes and believes in) in the hope of finding readers. He or she later puts them together as a book ms. and sends them to publishers, again in the hopes of finding readers, because as even a poet as eccentricWilliam Blake says, both the Prolific and the Devourer are essential parts of the process. And believe me, anonymity is pretty much the plight of any poet in America, regardless of how many books he's published or awards he's won. But as for getting noticed and getting book deals and putting together a career and such while writing excellent poems, the best I can do is suggest reading a good biography of Ezra Pound.

FOOTHILL: For those of us who are insecure about our productivity, knowing how many hours a week a successful poet writes is of constant interest. How often do you write? Do you follow a strict

regimen, or write when you feel called to it?

FAIRCHILD: I used to write at a regular time each day, but under personal and occupational pressures that soon fell apart, and I'm trying to restore it. I'm writing mostly essays now, and spend three or four days a week working on them. As with poems, I tend to write whenever I have a substantial block of uninterrupted time. I certainly don't wait to write until I "feel called to it." I would get very little done if that were the case.

FOOTHILL: In a recent article of *Poetry,* Tony Hoagland discusses a trend against narrative uniformity in contemporary poetics. "The mimesis of disorientation by non sequitur," is how he put it. You have often been associated with a narrative school of poetry. What are your thoughts on the present state of narrative in poetry?

FAIRCHILD: I haven't read Hoagland's article, don't know the context of "the mimesis of disorientation by non sequitur," and therefore have no idea what that means, though it certainly sounds impressive. I do seem to have been associated with something called the New Narrative Movement, although I've never attended any of their meetings. I believe that narrative is innate in the human brain rather than a product of cultural forces, and even that "narrative precedes grammar," as the brilliant cognitive literary theorist, Mark Turner, argues.

Most poems are to some degree lyric/narrative hybrids, and even Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," always considered one of the greatest lyric poems, contains narrative movement. It may be the fact that it is so difficult to resist the innate narrative impulse that makes the "pure" lyric poem so difficult to write. Narrative poetry is sometimes in some quarters regarded as unfashionable, although I have always believed that one of the writer's first obligations is to avoid literary fashion.

FOOTHILL: What current trends, schools, or movements in poetry do you find creatively exciting? For instance, are you intrigued at all by the possibilities of digital media?

FAIRCHILD: I generally seem to find myself most interested in poets who work alone and outside "trends, schools, or movements" – for example, the brilliantly original H.L. Hix, who is producing the kind of experimental poetry that I find creatively exciting. And I suppose anyone who is culturally alive is to some degree interested in the possibilities of digital media in relation to the arts in general, not just poetry.

FOOTHILL: Even though you have been a California resident for a while, the geography of Kansas is present in much of your work. Why do you think the milieu of your native soil continues to haunt your poetry?

FAIRCHILD: If the geography and weather of southwestern Kansas are present in my work, it's simply because that's where I spent my late childhood, adolescence, and young manhood, and it is typical for a poet for various psychological reasons to select much of his imagery from those years. It's not so much that such a milieu haunts my poetry as that I was haunted by it while I was there. That vast, empty, flat, wind-blown, and mostly treeless landscape threw me back on the resources of my imagination like nothing I've known since.

FOOTHILL: Much of your poetry is also deeply personal, directly addressing people in your family. As Czeslaw Milosz stated, "When a writer is born into a family, the family is finished." To what degree do you see family as fair game for literary content?

FAIRCHILD: If the family were not fair game for literary content, we would have very little significant American literature and not much more European literature. The family forms you in ways so profound and abundant that it creates the poetry as much as you do. Cf. Freud, Jung, Adler, etc.

FOOTHILL: What are the advantages of pursuing a creative writing degree versus learning the craft on your own or while pursuing a degree in a critical field?

FAIRCHILD: It depends entirely on the individual. Graduate creative writing programs work well for some, badly for others. And there are those who profit from a residential program where the curriculum consists mostly of workshops, and others who learn more from the kind of long-distance mentoring that is standard in non-residency programs.

I'm glad that I did a PhD in literature because I read much more, and more widely, than I would have in an MFA program. But we're giving way too much credit to institutional learning here. If one is devoted to writing either poetry or fiction, avoidance of universities altogether may be the best way. Living in low-rent, bohemian style apartments in large cities with easy access to large libraries, art museums, and concert halls and an interesting intellectual and artistic milieu may be the way to go. Of course, that presupposes a gift for minimalist home economics, hard work, self-discipline, and the analytical skills to learn from the work of other poets, both past and present.

FOOTHILL: Many have remarked on how poetry has become marginalized in English department curricula in favor of studying the novel. In your career as a professor have you found this to be true?

FAIRCHILD: Yes, most certainly I have found this to be true. At universities where I have taught as well as at those I've visited as a reader, lecturer, etc., I have found or been told that it's perfectly possible for an English major to graduate without taking any poetry classes, including, in many instances, Shakespeare.

Fifty years ago English departments were structured along two lines: genre and literary history. Along either line the English major would have encountered a great deal of poetry and acquired the analytical skills to read and understand it on a fairly deep level. English departments are generally structured now along theoretical and political lines. And whenever someone is teaching a theory course and wants to include imaginative literature in it, the choice will inevitably be fiction, usually the novel. I have seen this countless times. Therefore, a student entering an MFA poetry

program will need to have done the study of his art form, historically and analytically, mostly on his own.

FOOTHILL: Finally, do you have any general advice for a graduate student considering the financially perilous decision of dedicating themselves to a professional career in the creative arts?

FAIRCHILD: Well, you're right, it is financially perilous. And it is becoming increasingly so as advanced capitalism – given the debacle of the savings and loan industry decades ago and the recent bilking of the lower and middle classes by Wall Street banks and investment houses – reveals once again that the law of nature is also the bottom line of American economic life: the big ones eat the little ones. That's why I now counsel young aspiring poets or fiction writers (especially the former) to pursue a life in their chosen art form only if they are independently wealthy or have a secure day job with decent pay (e.g., T.S. Eliot, banker; Wallace Stevens, insurance executive; William Carlos Williams, doctor) or are absolutely, passionately, come-hell-or-high-water, driven to do it.

In the case of poets, if they just can't live without writing poems, then do it. If they can't even imagine a life as anything other than a poet, then do it. If they even have to stop and wonder whether it's a financially wise choice, then don't do it. It's much more difficult to live in poverty now than it was 50 years ago, so going to trade school and becoming a plumber might be the wiser choice. Can't you work at an academic job and also write poems or novels? Yes, but academic teaching jobs are, I believe, about to become much more financially perilous than they have been, and also you will have to be very shrewd about nailing down an academic position that also gives you time to write. The danger for a writer who teaches is that he will throw all his creative energies into teaching and have nothing left for the writing when he comes home that evening.

# CONTRIBUTORS

CHRISTOPHER BEARD grew up in the 'burbs of Dallas, then moved to northeast Kansas for a few years, where he received an undergraduate degree in poetry at the University of Kansas. He has since returned to Dallas, where he is a doctoral fellow at the University of North Texas. He is presently working towards his first book.

ALYSE BENSEL is currently pursuing her MFA in poetry at Pennsylvania State University, studying contemporary poetry and environmental literature. Her poetry has appeared in the *Meadowland Review* and is forthcoming in *Untitled Country Review.* She is a regular contributor for *Newpages*, and her book reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner, MAKE: A Chicago Literary Magazine, CALYX, Fiction Writers' Review, EOAGH, Rain Taxi*, and *Coldfront*, among others.

CHRIS BRUNT just finished an MFA in creative writing at Syracuse University, where he was the fiction editor of *Salt Hill Journal*. Starting this fall, he will be a doctoral candidate in creative writing and literature at the University of Southern Mississippi. His poems, stories, reviews, and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *MAKE: A Chicago Literary Magazine,* the *Comment Factory, Verbal Seduction,* and others. His research interests include twentieth-century Latin American esoterica, (US) Southern urbanism, and hip hop. He was born, raised, and schooled in Houston, Texas.

LIZ CHERESKIN's poems have been published or are forthcoming in the *Cypress Dome, Floorboard Review,* and the *Splinter Generation.* She is a student in the poetry MFA program at Columbia College Chicago, where she also serves as an editorial assistant for *Court Green.*

As far as poetry is concerned, ERIK DELAPP's studies have focused on poetic meter, phonetics, and a variety of forms, both contemporary and archaic. However, he likes to think of himself as a bachelor amongst genres, dabbling in everything from speculative-fiction novels to prose poems. If all goes according to plan, he will graduate from Hamline University's MFA program this fall with a focus on prose.

NATE FISHER is currently in his second year at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, working on his masters degree in creative writing. His concentration so far has been only poetry, but he is in the process of arranging a manuscript that is a collection of his essays on philosophy of mind. In the past year his research interests have been devoted to translating thirteenth-century Italian beggar songs in order to write a series of poems in their spirit.

KIT FRICK is currently enrolled in the MFA program in creative writing at Syracuse University. An associate editor at Black Lawrence Press and poetry editor for *Salt Hill Journal*, Frick's creative and academic interests include the prose poem, the lyric essay, and hybrid genres. Frick has poems recently published in or forthcoming from *CutBank; Georgetown Review; No, Dear; Stone Canoe*; and elsewhere.

STEPHANIE GLAZIER studies and writes poetry in Antioch University at Los Angeles' MFA program in creative writing. She is currently at work on a paper titled "Breeding a Desire for the Self: Mapping a Poetics of the Feminine Interior."

ISHION HUTCHINSON was born in Port Antonio, Jamaica. His work has appeared in several journals in the USA and abroad. Peepal Tree Press (UK) published his first book, *Far District*, in the spring of 2010. He is a Pirogue Fellow and has been nominated for the 2011 PEN/Joyce Osterweil award for poetry. He is enrolled in the English and creative writing/poetry PhD program at the University of Utah. His research interest is in the somatic function of landscape (including seascape, cityscape, and so on), on versification, and on

the content of the verse itself. The focus is not on the sublime or metaphysical experience of nature, but rather how the physical verse-making embodies the physiological field of the poem itself.

CAMERON KELSALL's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Octave Magazine, On the Issues,* the *Asbury Park Press,* and the *Marymount Manhattan Review*. He is currently an MA candidate in creative writing: poetry at Ohio University, where he also teaches writing and composition courses. He holds a BA in English (creative writing minor) from Marymount Manhattan College.

A candidate for the PhD in creative writing at the University of Utah, NATE LIEDERBACH is interested in genre slip-streaming, autobiographical intrusions, deeply interpolated narratives, and syntactic stylistics that complicate/collapse conventional POV structures. Also, he like monsters, Thai food, adventure stories, and, admittedly/respectfully, the occasional heaving bosom.

SARAH B. MARSH-REBELO was born in London, England. Believing in faeries and goblins, she has written since the age of five. Marsh-Rebelo moved to America as a Pan Am stewardess and lived in San Francisco for two years before marrying and settling in Hawaii, where she lived for seven years, raising her son Justin, surfing, and working in the world of exotic gems. She returned to California with her son, started her own importing company and attended university, earning her BA in anthropology and her MFA in creative writing. Marsh-Robelo resides in California with her family and an imaginary, red standard poodle named Rupert Bear.

MELISSA QUEEN will be a first-year student at Ohio University in the MA creative writing program for poetry, where she aims to focus on subtle narratives in poetry and short-form work.

NICOLAS SHAKE was born in the greater Los Angeles area in 1981. He received his BFA from Rhode Island School of Design in 2008 and is currently an MFA candidate at Claremont Graduate University. In his work he engages in the act of gleaning; arriving after the

initial act has already transpired and takes from that the fragments that have been left behind. There is no guarantee of permanence to his structures, which capture the history of impermanence, and emphasize the irrational concept of value, and always question who the primary viewer is.

ELIZABETH WILCOX is currently a PhD student in the literature & creative writing program at the University of Southern California. Her interests cover a wide range of subjects, but she is currently crafting a dissertation on the ways science and math became incorporated (formally and conceptually) into early-modern poetry, and how those strands of thought still resonate in the landscape of contemporary poetry. She is an editor for Gold Line Press, and her poems have recently appeared in such publications as the *Indiana Review, Hot Metal Bridge, RHINO,* and the *Cortland Review*.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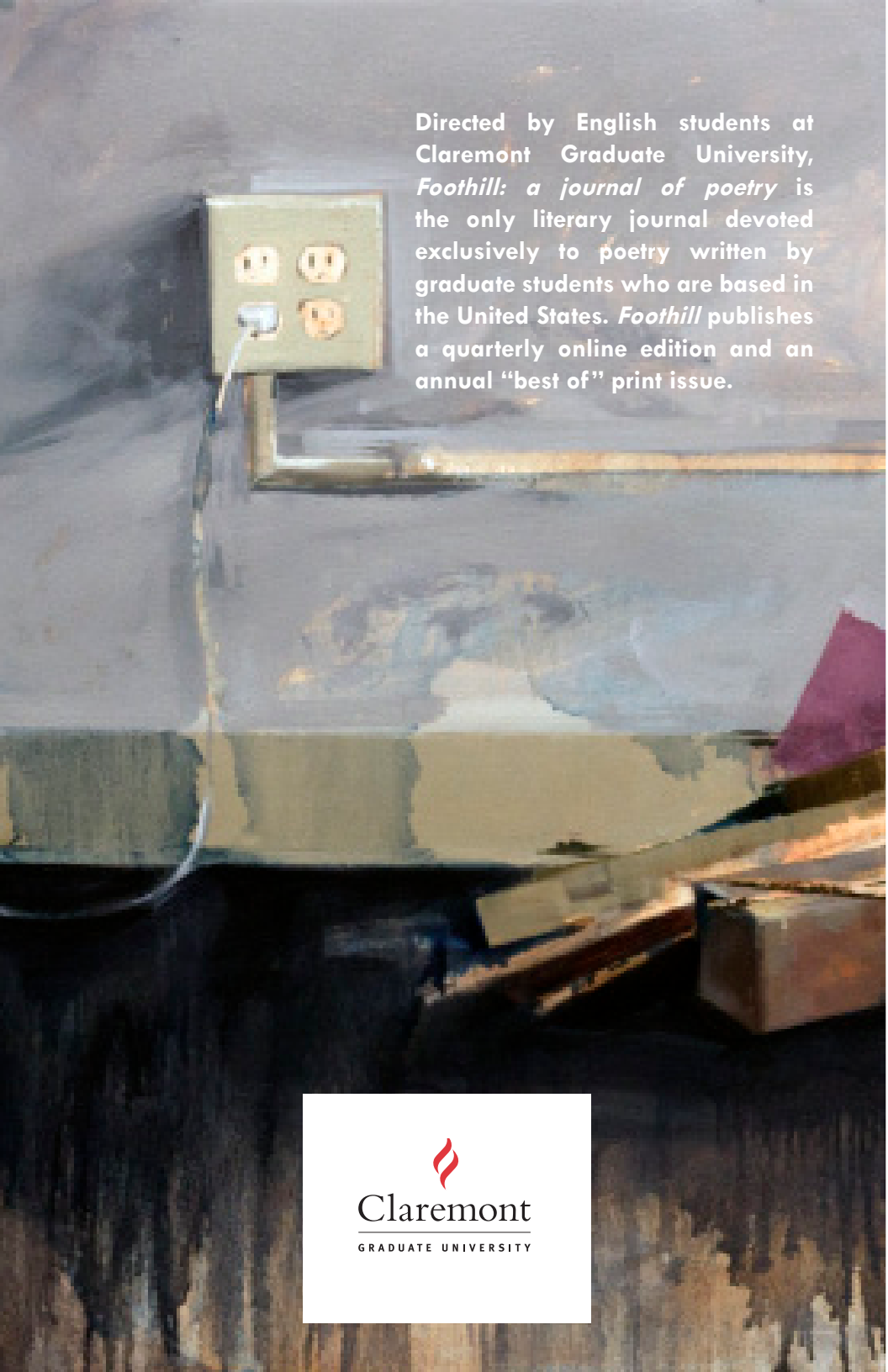

Directed by English students at Claremont Graduate University, *Foothill: a journal of poetry* is the only literary journal devoted exclusively to poetry written by graduate students who are based in the United States. *Foothill* publishes a quarterly online edition and an annual "best of" print issue.

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