



F O O T H I L L

a journal of poetry

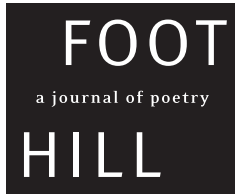
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FOOTHILL

a journal of poetry

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a journal of poetry
HILL





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EDITOR'S NOTE

Accepting rejecting

The other side of a rejection letter is a disorienting place for me to find myself. I know, all too well, that blaze of excitement and anxiety that strikes when you spot the submission-reply e-mail radiating in your inbox. No matter how unlikely your poem on bocce ball and theoretical physics is to make it into the *New Yorker*, the moment is so ripe with possibility you can't help already fantasize how dazzling the new line on your CV will look . . . only to find another spirit-crushingly terse rejection.

Foothill: a journal of poetry is a far cry from the *New Yorker*, I realize. But rejection is harder on the ego when it's a small journal that passes on your work. Knowing this—as I say, all too well—I sometimes feel paralyzed with guilt those Saturday nights when I'm staring down a list of rejections to send out, many of them for commendable and innovative work. My only consolation: single malt in a highball glass.

I trust this will change over time. My social life eagerly anticipates my transformation into a deft form-letter-responding submission assassin. I've already noticed that as my process becomes more efficient and the amount of replies I make grows, that urge I often indulge—eager sentence after sentence—to assure a submitter we found their work exciting and all the reasons why, proportionally wanes.

Still, I'm hesitant to fully jettison this nervous practice (or pass the job off to someone with a steadier trigger finger). The simple reason is that I usually hear back from these poets. And they are usually grateful for the encouragement. Sometimes we start up an e-mail exchange. Sometimes we make plans to grab a beer or a bite to eat.

This is even more likely to happen when I accept a poet's work. Indeed, a few of the poets in this issue—strangers to me four months ago—I now count as friends.

This is what makes the tedious, homework-neglecting, unpaid nights working on *Foothill* worth it: the sense that we are building a vital community of writers (made up of both those we've accepted *and* rejected) and that together we're learning to write better poetry. Someday, who knows, a few of us might write as well as Anne Carson or Robert Creeley or Emily Dickinson? Or, short of that, at least with the passion and determination of William McGonagall.

It's true, we won't be a part of this community forever. Graduate school is a transitional period, spanning somewhere between two to 20 years. It is also a formative and difficult period. If there is ever a good time to be an isolated poet like Dickinson, however well it worked for her, it's probably not this one.

Join us, and the conversation on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/foothilljournal or read more of our thoughts on related subjects on our blog at foothilljournalofpoetry.blogspot.com.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a stylized 'K' followed by a large, sweeping 'R'.

Kevin Riel
Editor-in-Chief

POEMS



Examiner

Index and pointer finger pressure spine begin at the scalp, course each vertebrae, each bead of sweat, slower now, slower, more pressure, less breathing, more whispers... *for you*, he pulls her hair.

Gently, her head tilts back.



Last Words of the Dying
III

Please don't leave me
please don't leave me.

Nothing soothes pain
like the human touch

I haven't drunk champagne
in a long time. I have tried

so hard to do right.
Only you have understood me

and you got it wrong.
Does nobody understand?

I sang of pastures,
fields and kings – I

have not told half
of what I saw.

...I am going away tonight
I am going over the valley.

Drink to me. Drink to my health.
You know I can't drink anymore.

*James Brown, Anton Chekhov, Grover Cleveland, Chris Farley,
Bobby Fischer, Georg Hegel, James Joyce, Pablo Picasso, Marco Polo,
Babe Ruth, Virgil*

V

Make sure you play “Precious Lord”
tonight – play it

real pretty. That’s good.
I hope the exit is joyful

and I hope never
to return.

Warren G. Harding, Frida Kahlo, Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Last Words of the Condemned:
On Innocence*

Something very wrong
is taking place tonight.

I am innocent,
innocent, innocent.

We are innocent. The state
has succeeded in its quest

for my life. The priceless
gift of life. Life purchased

in exchange for lies
could not live out in dignity.

Leonel Herrera, Ernest Martin, Julius Rosenberg

ERIC ATKINSON

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE
PHD ENGLISH

to get there

he grew his hair like roots to make connections
to peaces lost: to knot together fragments of then
as if understanding could be understood.
of rows that buck with bits
grow still, since that lack;
learning through before
forms the know and the -ing

seeing the budding shoots as mere affect
the distinctly deficient
ask him if they can buy some weed
if he's a musician—
can I do that?

pockmarked by cotton bush barbs and
sugarcane still smiles
his hands wash the legacy of filth
of curtseys ties body shame burning lye and process
heavy hands clean his roots
to remember
those who walked back to Africa.

KRISTI CARTER
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
MFA CREATIVE WRITING

Meditation on Burning

I think the house is on fire, or maybe
we want it that way. Starting with the towel

floating over the floor vent, the swath of brick red
twists hopeless into combustion.

My life is ruled by paper walls
and the dark expectations that seep between them:

my mother will sell me to a couple with long fingernails
for slipping pesticide into Dad's Coke

the last time he came home.
After that, the house was too quiet, wide,

so I lapped the house ten times, traded dinner
for pitching rocks at a beehive—I guess

someone older needs to notice the smoke
scratching the walls with a long black tongue.

B/c I forgive myself 1000x

Sharp-shooters might coven here—
a world's end of cans sealed
and jars containing the opaque and sallow.

Somebody's diagram plastered
up between the shelves:
HOW TO SUTURE A HUMAN MOUTH
(indifferent 2D model included!).

Remember those plans we
sketched with straight-edge
and compass-slice?
I never meant to follow through.

The ritual was its own end
in me. Your first time
believing in someone else's whimsy.
A little jejune, you. A little
predatory, me.

The sun's coming in here
an honest grey. I'm akimbo
under the lightbulbs shattered
like the windows, to let in some company:
breeze, gale, aeolian shriek.

If you need me, I'll be in
this hole. On second thought,
leave a message at the cadaver.

Neurosis as a Coda of Crows Flapping

Even here and now—

making out with you in a field of daisies—

I am buried.

My sternum tightens into a diamond

I make lists:

thank you cards that might get lost in the mail,

expiration dates on refrigerator contents,

my childhood rapist commanding me to look at him.

The rest of me falls away.

The second set of symptoms

manifest in symphony:

ulcers that open like morning glories,

speech impediments, a nausea that clings to me

like a small child

who could fracture my hip coming out sideways.

I walk home alone

phone dead, keys laced between fingers.

I think of mother's romanticized alleymen.

Night unfolds its petals into a coda of crows,

whose flapping roars inside my skull.

I'm through the front door.

The shelves of food stare at me

with voiceless descriptions,

unacceptable offers.

My stomach and spine galvanized by guilt

What if I was killed on the way home—

a careless driver, an asylum escapee,

someone I offended, my childhood

rapist, myself.

I draft a will

I leave everything valuable to my

I look out the window over my parking lot
no veil of snow, no womb of rain.

Unfiled receipts cover the nightstand,
a dreck of unread books under the bed,
7 unheard voicemails

I feel too guilty to return,
what could I say?

*Sorry, I was taking a piss and got caught up
thinking of stabbing the back wall of my throat
with my toothbrush,*

or

*Hey, I was trying to fry eggs
but the oil licked my calling hand
and I couldn't hear your call
as I was at my loom of expletives.*

or, rather

*Forgive me,
I was touching myself
in the early Oklahoma nightfall
when your ring eddied his face
on the back of my eyelids
and I shrank inside, numb.
Then steeled myself at a knock on the door
as I cowered in my bed.*

In the morning,
it was a package for the former tenant.

MICHELLE KYOKO CROWSON
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
MA ASIAN STUDIES

Reminders

I

He splits you,
or you flare off him
into your separate
selves, muscles breaking clean
down the center of your back,
cleaving the organized urn
of your body as she emerges again,
hair black as whale-eye,
your stretched skin losing to her
older skeleton, your civilized bone
cracking. Beside you both,
his body sleeping.

II

Grass-wet and righteous,
you pick yourself up
from morning, spine
humming with yesterdays,
the bitter twigs filling
your mouth. His mouth
a question mark, an olive branch.
You turn your back, a blood
flower blooming as you slice
the careful bark. He leaves you
to yourself, to rub olive juice
on your lips, tonguing
the ripped green flesh.

III

Your crisp memory,
her certainty and your
doubled limbs, your shadow
quick and lean—even as
he cooks for you
the shapes you leave
grow smaller. Even
as he tips wine
into a clear bulb
you're honing finger bones
against the stem's fine
seam, your plate filling
with soft avocados,
bright, oblong tomatoes,
the region's tartest blue cheese.

IV

You find yourself
closing window shades,
avoiding walls and outlets.
He has stopped filling
the house with the bullhorn
of his remorse. He's stopped
trying humor and green
avocado flesh—his kitchen
still littered with the fruit's
coarse black hollows.
Your three shadows trail
the carpets, fibrous sighs
rising in your wake. At the sink
you brush your teeth
and tannin tongue, thrust
your finger in and find
a cheek-buried olive pit.

Married at Parties

You all in and shoulder tilt, room full of swoons
awaits you—meanwhile me in sidecar, often
tonguing door jam moments. Why I keep silent?
Answer those eyes you already know about,
your tambourine and church-tongue childhood
taught you what. You cut the room as a preacher does,
soft hands grip your calves. A rock concert,
a rapture. You cocktail I wallflower
when bodies triangulate, human flock turning
into your shock of salt and pepper, your
sharp nose wit click mouth. Face it, Prehistoric You,
Burning Sky Above God Sent Flood Rise You, no escape
means every optical thread's in reach. Mostly
you cacophony, your underbelly (me) flat
against spackle, whiskey sipping watching you,
just like everyone. Charisma. Wet rag
of a word for what your people do, better to say
hellhound, snake hair, shape shift. Better
to see jelly of a Cyclops' eye slime your palms
as you sail body to body, beer-drunk and skinned
of boyish doubt. Occasionally you reel me in
for context—you say *mama likes when daddy dances*.
I straight-man, you swivel. As in red carpet classroom,
as in savior-pillage. At bill tally your rank-and-file
head-shake: *how do you put up with him?*² they ask,
but sweetly, even the men unfolding arms
for both your shoulders. You, steering home, need a hand
on your thigh, lifting to kiss it and tell me who
you're with, you *how grateful*, me *how serene*,
me, feet in passenger well thinking *deserve you me?*

GREGORY EMILIO
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE
MFA CREATIVE WRITING

Of Orange & Life

After Frank O'Hara

But if I was a painter it'd be so much easier
to riffle the feathers of that smoke-blue scrub jay
bobbing below the birds of paradise,
to tickle the rhythm of a passing widow's blood
or a neighbor's blue collar stubble —
less exhausting to render the buried light
inside every supposing thing.
Because a bona fide artist
can make an orange
drop
from the canvas,
ply into a palm:
rind like dimpled leather,
the intimate peeling.
A word is the sunset-
colored ember
of a cigarette;
yet the words,
lovely cinders,
signify so much less
than any sunset.
If I could paint,
then we'd actually see
the scrub jay & orange
instead of pretending. Look,
I just want
to redeem
the worker's, the widow's weariness —
that hidden inch of
light,
yes, and sometimes,
this terrible life.



Ars Romantica

Strap your father to your back
and set fire to your hometown.
Be certain the bowling alley burns
to the ground and smoke

a last cigarette under the overpass
where you had your first.
Feel the weight of the gods
you'll never touch, observe

as your shadow—always in front—
splays into fathoms you'll never reach.
Next comes your tryst as a beekeeper,
but after years the hive still hasn't let you in

on how it hoards the honey, so you abandon
them and throw in with a cavalcade
of hippocampi and hitchhike to Bari.
Do not displace yourself

for oncoming traffic. Ignore
the brush wolf's promise to be
your spirit guide; the vulture's
suggestive circuitry. Ignore all things

which move which do not move
the mind as if a heart.
Near the end of the Appian Way,
when your aglets have no hope

of outlasting the laces they bind,
you'll find a supermarket just south
of Lake Albano. Here, there is a girl
browsing the frozen foods aisle

for newfangled flavors of gelato.
You are taken first by the green
ruches of her skirt, next
by the subtle verve of her collarbone,

finally by the furrow of her glance
—the bagged peas in your hand
growing waterier and waterier.
A neuron fires, then another,

and another, until the inside
of your skull is a tiny
electric orchid,
and you have in mind

all the secrets of the hive,
and you begin to think that maybe
Heraclitus was right—maybe
one never does kiss the same girl twice.



Flawless Cowboy

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE RIGHT HAND
FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE RIGHT HAND OF
WILLIAM MCCARTY JR., AKA BILLY THE KID

Do you know where The Kid is now?

*No one does. I suppose he went
where all retired gunfighters go:
to Mexico or to the movies.*

How did it all begin?

*It began when they asked me to aim
small, to locate the nose somewhere
between the upper lip and the eyes,
to master the light switch, to wave
goodbye. Soon enough they had me
believing that I could be president
except that I wasn't really interested.
That's a feeling I've had to fight against.*

Who do you consider to be
your major influences?

*I've always identified with William
Tell—I've never been of the sort
that would bow to a hat. The sad thing
is that no one realizes how badly
he missed. If he really wanted to hit
his mark, he wouldn't have needed
to take out the second bolt "just in case."
He would have sent the first one straight
through Gessler's heart. Then there's
the Minute Man of Concord of course.
I'm a big fan of his proverbial first shot.*

What would you say to those who claim
it was another hand that did your work?

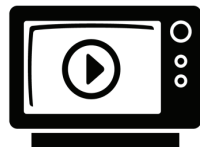
*I could make an argument about mirror
images and photographs, how a man
in his right gumption would never wear a vest
with the buttons on the left side
lest he be called a cross-dresser, catamite.
But what I really want to say is what
they likely imagine I want to say
which is: 'Fuck. You.'*

Why did you leave?

*The problem with being the right hand
of Billy the Kid is that every man wants
to be known as The Man Who Killed
Billy the Kid, but they don't want
to do the killing, not the right way,
so they try and dry gulch you instead.
I was tired of watching his back,
tired of shucking iron every time
some dim-lit alley shouted Draw!,
tired of seeing that divine expression
of pleasure on his face each time
he watched blood and tears weep
from a pee-wee boy barely strong
enough to pull back the hammer.*

And what now?

*I'm stiff and arthritic, and of a mind
that whenever you take aim you always
miss, even when you hit your mark.
Taking none, there's no chance I won't.
Spend my days loafing about the ranch,
no rings, no commitments, no quarrels
or cattle. Just me and my squishy toys.*



June 12th

She wears her broken like it'll grow wings and carry her off towards the waning moon; she's easily swept up into an extreme sort of happiness that makes people disbelieve her suicide every time it happens. She spent hours curled up in worthless like a baby bird starving in a nest, still waiting, after all these years for someone to return to feed it. She's got a fuck you the size of Texas; she's got a soft spot for the dysfunction that keeps her alive. There is nothing that she cannot survive but she's gotten sick of a life picking up speed for survival. Living is something more dormant and less abrasive. She's got false idols and a fake tooth to remind her, she still can't sleep because of what you did in the shower; she was so small, but grown enough to remember. No matter what happens, she will never believe anyone has really loved her. She's looking through the peephole in the back of this body, staring into the futureless hours of dawns that broke her back in two. She's got Morning Glories wrapped around her forearms to hide the access point. She dug through every body she carries on her back to find what used to live here; there's nothing left but mistakes and hyperboles, and even that's an exaggeration. She is life, exaggerated. Life under the glowing prick of a magnifying glass right before the flame; she is a coil of loose ends and nerves; she is still what you carried on your shoulder into the woods beyond the spit and shadow of a bon fire, she is no witnesses. She is the dark alley that roots keys in the crotch of a fist, she is building a place for women to breath. She can love you bigger then you were before, bigger than the first kiss you didn't want. She'll go brick by brick to architecture that cuts the sky in half, so beautiful, so fierce, she'll carve herself a love that isn't afraid of its own fist.

She is more pulp than juice, she refuses to go down easy. She will die a thousand times more and carry these bodies like they're broken, like she doesn't love them, like it isn't an honor to have been so much alive and so little restraint.



To Jangles the La Mancha Goat

I visit the zoo to locate the dollar I lost in the wash. A goat at the zoo wears a jacket numbered six on the back. He rubs against the metal grid of the fence where I press my hands and decide, "Yes, I would like a pet jumping goat. We could share a bag of Pop Secret and watch television." Maybe this is who I really am—a goat jumping on a bed, watching the mattress give beneath my hooves. The mattress fills the place in my pocket where the dollar used to be and the goat prefers being cradled in my arms, a pet goat. "This is who I am," says the goat in the jacket, sucking a bottle. Dear Don Quixote and Dulcinea and Jangles the La Mancha goat in the jacket, I think I like you. Let's go to La Mancha. I saw the cartoon, the claymated windmills and the claymated man with his mustache, also clay. That place was made of clay and not real. I want to get back to that place with my goat in a jacket. Don Quixote, you are a fool but I am a windmill. Nothing on television but myotonic goats, they faint at the hint of sound. My defense mechanisms fail me. My goat faints. Maybe. Yes, I am still thinking of the goat at the zoo. I am still thinking of Jimmy Durante. What was it he said? I say, "Good night Jangles La Mancha goat, wherever you are." Bad goat mom tendency number one: the tendency to think of zoo animals in terms of cartoons or else, how they are at night. Bad pet goat tendency number one: the tendency not to take anything that comes out of my mouth seriously, especially the jolts. Bad pet goat tendency number two: the inclination to eat dollars. My goat in its goat jacket gnaws the fence, bleats and kicks when I reach over the wire. It is not electric, the fence not the goat. An electric goat, I'll take ten. If I were a goat I would want a jacket and electric teeth. I would break every fence with an enamel jolt. I would travel often to the places dryer dollars travel to on official business, in other words, places that are not real. Places made of sand or snow.



Crusher

The leaves dying off the trees burn the cornflower sky. The exposed roots on the path seem meant to trip us. We call it the ruins of a lost civilization. This makes us feel better. The catch is and always has been no one brings a flashlight. We look up at the structure, a necropolis adorned in graffiti and weeds. This is staring at a window looking for a ghost that turns out to be standing beside us. Or maybe that's the rumored hermit with his shotgun. At the Crusher, the living are the geese running over the graves. The ghosts wearing gooseflesh are already dead, burnt to death in picric acid, the ghosts of plant workers, green stung and bioluminescent with their soot-filled mouths. We climb to the top and press ears against the Crusher's cement skull to calculate the formula of fear that circulates so neatly through the behemoth's veins. Cautious footsteps. Teenagers pass bottles. A vortex loses trespassers for half an hour before leaving them where they started. Chants circle wall etchings. It's best if we don't confuse the engine of that distant car with the quarry reassembling itself, dusting its arms of ruined machinery and yawning awake again. In the tunnels, we don't mind voices just far enough away to be too close, or how the Crusher's disjointed hum crescendos as the ceilings slant lower. The unpredictably sloping catacombs take us underground on littered paths. Small animal bones. Rubble. Sticks of dynamite left by those who may return to find they aren't the first or last who want to know if the hermit has got any bullets left, who's got the vodka, which cult worships on Wednesday, insistent night without stars. This is less about what is inside, more about what follows us out. Let's light up and laugh at what we hear further down the tunnel. Let's pull our shirts over our heads and pretend we're not afraid of each other. Let's reach to that wall that may be a door and see if it gives. Sooner or later, we'll find ourselves in a place where there will be too much dark to divide evenly among us.

In Terms of Bad Television

You sawed the sofa in two, signed us up for cable television. We stopped speaking and started staying up later in separate corners of the den, spellbound by reruns of freak accidents. So I write you in terms of bad television. I fold the letters into paper airplanes and watch their graceful trajectories through the dark air.

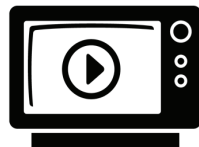
Two men snort fire ants in a park and die. Two men get drunk on mescal, run through a cactus farm, trip and fall, one impaled on agave, the other on saguaro. In a decompression chamber, a crewmember releases a pressure valve too soon and a deep-sea diver's blood explodes with nitrogen. A man with pica swallows tacks and nails, his stomach bleeds into his abdominal cavity. Let me write your name across my chest in radium. Thrilled to take a light-up lover to bed, you won't notice when my skin bleeds. Afterwards, out of resentment I will tell you, "Too much meringue, not enough pie."

We are too comfortable to reconnect the sofa. Our mouths move fishlike at the screen humming like artificial aquarium light. The glare reflects off our faces, knots a noose around the box that grins across the room. The satellite knows full well we are the man who roams the sidewalk of a strip mall, the unfortunate robber with a plan to stick up a jewelry store and such dark stockings stretched over his face that he opens the wrong door and holds up a gun shop instead.



Expecting Bill

Today
it might be any Thursday
except for an empty chair
and a room that holds its breath
hoping to catch one more Okie story.
The soap won't be washing
grit from your nails, and work
boots dark with sweat sit quiet
on the stoop. A rumble somewhere
outside the room, like
a man's laughter: or is it
just a tractor turning over
the clay? Out in the yard
Old Dog's high clear bark
won't greet you at the door and,
in the garage, the shortwave
speaks to no one. Your hat hangs
waiting for a bald head
and your boots still want feet.
This small house was always smaller
with you in it. Any minute now
you'll come through that back door,
shake off the dust, fill a tall glass
with cool water, then join us
watching the plaster
crack beneath our final
comprehension.



Act II
Orfeo Ed Euridice

I am weary.

Knocking on the gates
of hell. Ripped screen door.
Whisky fumes.

My beloved waits on linoleum
floor. Chipped paint. Stale smoke.
Broken toilet overflowing.

Knocking. I am knocking.

An angry dog, blood on his teeth,
bruised and beaten before, curls
his lips at me. Dripping rubies.

I panic for thought your veins
are open, limp and leaking
across tile.

My hands find hinges. Splintering
wood, I scratch and tear.
You are nowhere.

Pounding. Pounding.

Ghostly women hunched
from hate beat their gums
at me. Screaming.

They are boiling. Disease
marks every limb. Flaps
of skin unfolding.

They are terrifying, but
I am wild from this passage.
I feel you just beyond these walls.

My knees fall in puddles
of putrid water and I beg
for entry.

Pleading. I am pleading.

Full of aching love and bitter
from life without your body,
I am wailing.

They do not hear. They are
festering. Damp from fury
and the injustice of death.

Grief directs my voice
into a sudden, solid sound
as silence falls around me.

And I am singing. Singing.

KATE SWEENEY
BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY
PHD ENGLISH

Epithalamium

-for Hayden

Not this morning, but most mornings,
you would cut tomatoes for your breakfast,
the creases of the pillowcase still stretching
across your cheek while I watched from the counter,
sitting next to The Bowl
where I collected everything you shed
each day—keys and newspaper clippings
and earrings—and put them all
into The Bowl, for you
to add to, for you
to look at and say *I'll get to that*,
to stir through like a child picking the best
Halloween candy from the bounty,
muttering *Where the fuck is that?* while looking for the leash
for the dog about to lose it by the back door, the dog
which I still buy Christmas presents for, but not you,
although you once sent me a postcard
with a photograph on the front—a picture of a rock
spray-painted with the words
Chicken Farmer, I Still Love You—which I hung
beside my desk, the picture side against the wall
because on the back you wrote
I don't know why, but this reminds me of you
and you remind me of you
today, in your oversized pearls
which I wish I could find between the couch cushions
and put back into The Bowl as the soul collector
of all which is almost lost,

and just as the preacher begins the prayer
that blesses the rest of your life,
my husband leans into my ear and whispers *Remember*
when you two kissed? Isn't there a picture of that
somewhere? That would eat my heart out.
And sometimes, friend,
it still does.

Dreaming of Exes

My heart is a starfish.
I lay in bed, just short of awake,
caressed by the separate pulse
in each limb. How comfortable
I am curled into the canoe
of our marriage,
that when I dream of them
they always come as a surprise,
like turning over a shell
in which something shapeless
and prehistoric lives.
I tell you how they ask me questions
or for sex, or a pen, or their boxers back,
but do not say how they dip
their hands over the side of the boat,
testing the water
with their fingers, their oars.

DARA WEINBERG
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
PHD LITERATURE AND CREATIVE WRITING

To Maria

*"She's a beagle, true-bred, and one that adores me."
- Sir Toby Belch, Twelfth Night*

I first saw you on stage when I was eight.
You entered from up left in a blue apron
and served beer to a fat man in leather boots.
I already knew he wouldn't marry you
any more than his carriage-axe,
no matter how many stoops of wine you brought him.
I've sat through your scenes twelve times
twelve nights since then; I know your speeches
as well as you know Belch's breath,
and I haven't changed my opinion of your chances.

But when you contrive the yellow stockings,
Malvolio's shame, the public comeuppance
of your dear sot's foe, and sweet Sir Toby
is so taken with your wit he swears to wed you,
I lose my senses. I cheer, with the other
Cinderellastruck women in the audience,
and indulge the thought of what awaits you.
Think, Maria—the change in your station,
the seat at table opposite pretty Olivia,
the married woman's pride of place

at the wash-basin, wringing the vomit
out of your husband's waistcoat.
A man like that, a drunk, is tied to you
closer than a twin brother—safe
as the keys to the cellar, under the waist

of your skirt. I dream of your marriage—
till curtain, that is, when I catch you
glancing over at him, wanting to sponge
the sweat ring off his nice collar, while he
doesn't even know which side you'll exit.

After the show, if I should see the actress
lingering without her corset at the bar,
I will follow her back to her borrowed apartment
and watch from behind a parked car, until
she finds the key under the plastic rock
on the doorstep and stumbles in, alone.
The man who was her Toby sleeps off Illyria
in some other rented room. His snores are wet,
like the spluttering nozzle of a keg
when there is no more beer left to be drawn.

ART

BRYAN MILLER
CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY
MFA ART

Blue View
oil on canvas
2011







Chee, oil on canvas, 2011

Hung Loose
oil on canvas
2011







Mauna Wili, oil on canvas, 2011

Tangled Up
oil on canvas
2011







Stay Surrounded, oil on canvas, 2011

Cascade
oil on canvas
2011







YO, oil on canvas, 2011

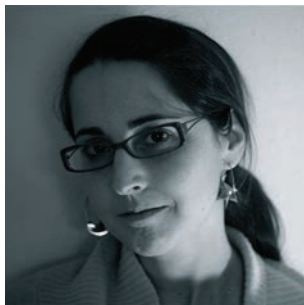
Impediment
oil on canvas
2011



INTERVIEW

HILLARY GRAVENDYK

Hillary Gravendyk is an assistant professor of English at Pomona College in Claremont, California. She received a BA from Tulane University, an MA from the University of Washington, and a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2009.



Her poetry has appeared in journals such as American Letters & Commentary, the Bellingham Review, the Colorado Review, the Eleventh Muse, Fourteen Hills, MARY, 1913: A Journal of Forms, Octopus Magazine, Tarpaulin Sky, and other venues. Her chapbook, The Naturalist, was published by Achiote Press in 2008. Her first book, Harm, came out last year from Omnidawn Press. She lives on the eastern edge of Los Angeles County in Claremont, California.

FOOTHILL: Unlike Wallace Stevens or William Carlos Williams, many poets choose teaching poetry as their preferred way to pay the bills. Is teaching something you always wanted to do, or the most ideal job outside of living off book sales? Is your poetry improved by teaching?

GRAVENDYK: Well, a poet is never going to live off book sales, so that's right out. You know, when I was fresh out of undergrad I determined that I was going to be a poet and that I just needed a day job to pay the bills. I started working in technology and basically stopped writing poems altogether. When I realized what was happening, I went back to school and, subsequently, back to poetry. As it turns out, for me, scholarly research and teaching are the engines of creative thought.

Poetry doesn't really happen for me outside of my role as a scholar. I don't think this is true for everyone, but I do think a lot of poets choose teaching because it vivifies their poetic/creative lives in some important ways. I'm lucky in my chosen profession because I'm always learning new things, always challenged, and always in conversation with smart people.

FOOTHILL: As a young creative artist, why did you, like us and every poet in this journal, decide to go to graduate school rather than live the bohemian life or hole up in a cabin somewhere and read and write on your own? How valuable was your time in graduate school to your work?

GRAVENDYK: For one thing, I like nice clothes. For another, I'm a completely social animal—I need time alone, but really not as much time alone as you might think a poet needs. I like to be stimulated by other people's interests and ideas, I love to have long, open-ended, free-wheeling conversations—all of those interactions help me re-see the world in a way that makes space for a poem. So I wouldn't be too happy holed up in a cabin.

Even at writer's colonies (where one is given a cabin in which to hole up) I tend to find another lost soul with whom I can write companionably. At Vermont Studio Center I spent a few weeks trading prompts and poems with another poet, Cynthia Arrieu-King, the entire time I was in residence. The lonely-writer thing just doesn't work for me.

FOOTHILL: Along these lines, why did you decide to get an English PhD over a creative writing MFA? Are you as stimulated by the critical analysis of texts as producing them? What are your thoughts on the professional usefulness of an English PhD over a creative writing PhD or MFA?

GRAVENDYK: It wasn't really a decision between a PhD and an MFA, for me, it was a decision between University of California at Berkeley and anywhere else. UCB has no MFA program, but they

have an amazing poetry scene: despite the absence of an MFA program, fully half the members of my cohort were practicing poets. We all wanted to work with Robert Hass and Lyn Hejinian, who are two of the most important poets in the country and who are, to boot, amazing humans. So working with them was a big part of my development. But equally important were my relationships with the other emerging poets in the department.

I liked being surrounded by other poet-scholars, other people who were negotiating their own observations and ideas as both creative resources and critical ones. I think the most interesting poetic work emerges when one engages a problem or idea from a place where creativity and scholarship come together.

FOOTHILL: In the last issue's interview with B.H. Fairchild, we asked if he felt that poetry has become marginalized in English departments in favor of the novel, to which he responded with a direct: "Yes." Has this been your experience as well?

GRAVENDYK: No. But my experience is limited to three departments of English—the University of Washington, UC Berkeley, and Pomona College—all places where poetry is thriving as a scholarly and creative pursuit.

FOOTHILL: As with being a professor, the life of a graduate student is hectic. How do you make time for your poetry, and keep from getting burnt out by the demands of research and teaching?

GRAVENDYK: I hesitate to admit this, for fear my colleagues will think I'm not working hard enough, but I'll go ahead and say it: I don't work the weekends. The only way to keep my mind fresh and to stay excited about my work is to give myself time away from it. After a weekend of cooking, going to the beach, reading novels, and spending time with my family I can come back to my work energized and efficient. When I don't let myself recharge, I end up wasting a lot of work time staring at my blank computer screen—it's healthy to know that the workday ends at a certain point and

leisure time begins. Giving myself this time off is also giving myself time for what Hass calls “claro”: that open, receptive mind space that allows a poem to come into being. Somehow, blocking out time to write a poem never works, but giving myself downtime ensures that poems come.

FOOTHILL: The poems that make up *Harm* are remarkable in their economy, which suggests you must be a really disciplined editor of your work. As Paul Valery said, “A poem is never finished, only abandoned.” How do you know when it is time to stop editing and abandon a poem?

GRAVENDYK: I generally edit in a kind of frenzy—I like to keep the high of composition going so I write quickly and then just edit straight through for a couple of days. A poem is done when I start switching “a” for “the” and then switching it back. When I find myself undoing and redoing I know I’m just clinging to a thing that is finished. I know I could keep tinkering, but generally I just try to get it off my desk once I hit that level, either by sending it to a journal or by placing it in an ongoing manuscript and squirreling it away.

FOOTHILL: Who from your generation of poets are you most impressed by; whose work do you thumb straight to when you see them listed in the table of contents?

GRAVENDYK: I don’t know who would be considered my generation, but I’ve certainly been excited by the recent work of Lisa Robertson, Lisa Fishman, Margaret Ronda, Cynthia Arrieu-King, Elizabeth Willis, Aaron Kunin, Saskia Hamilton, Claudia Rankine, and Doug Powell.

FOOTHILL: Why, unlike many poets today, have you opted not to use a website to engage your readership? Do you regard social media as a useful tool for poets?

GRAVENDYK: Oh, you know, I just haven't gotten around to building a website. I am networked with a ton of other poets on Facebook, so readings and publications get announced that way. I have a Twitter account but I don't use it. I just got a lecture from a friend about how I should become a much more savvy user of social media in order to promote my book so . . . the message is loud and clear!

FOOTHILL: *Harm* is a very personal book, addressing a series of serious health problems you have endured. Can you discuss your experience of opening up so intimately to readers, and how you are able to make an experience so personal have relevance to them?

GRAVENDYK: Well, I've cried a few times during readings—that's one pitfall of writing about something that is so scary and intimate. But it has also been a really good experience for me. My lung transplant was a major crisis in my life, but it isn't a secret, and it's been really exciting to be able to communicate some of that experience through poetry. When people ask me about my experience I have a certain version of the story I tell—but that version mostly narrates events. The poems give me a chance to try and lyricize affect. The lyric space lets me produce the strangeness that the transplant produced for me.

FOOTHILL: It seems that *Harm* takes its title as a thematic organizing principle, almost like a concept album would. Do you see it this way? Explain the challenges of writing a series of poems that relate to each other? Did it exhaust you, compel you to long for less weighty subject matter?

GRAVENDYK: I composed about 10 poems from *Harm* during a weeklong writers conference in Squaw Valley—they came out in a kind of burst of poetic energy. It had been about nine months since my surgery, and it was the first time I'd written about my experience. But something had been building because once I started to write it all came out in a flood.

I spent the next eight months writing the book and took a certain amount of pleasure in sitting down to my desk knowing something

about the hole into which I was writing. So no, it didn't exhaust me. Instead I felt like I had this constantly renewed source of inspiration on which to draw. It was exciting to feel like I was making something that made sense as a whole, rather than just writing poems collected by proximity.

FOOTHILL: You make use of technical language in *Harm* from other disciplines; in addition to medical terms there are ecological and botanical ones used to really intriguing effects. Are you inspired by the work of your colleagues in other disciplines? How does this language find its way into your work?

GRAVENDYK: Yes, of course. I'm very interested in ecology and environmental science; I was lucky enough to TA an environmental science and literature class with Bob Hass and Gary Sposito, during which I learned a lot about California ecosystems and the way poetics and science need each other for educational purposes, at least! Poets are observers, and there is interesting stuff to observe all over the place. Plus, I'm a poet, so I like to know the proper names of the things around me.

FOOTHILL: You have been on the West Coast for most or all of your life. Was this a deliberate choice or simply the way things worked out? Do you think of yourself as a West Coast poet? Do you find such self-identifications useful or limiting?

GRAVENDYK: I'm definitely a West Coast poet. I was born in Los Angeles, grew up in the Seattle area, spent 7 years in the bay area, and now live in Claremont. I did, however, spend some formative years (college) in New Orleans, LA, and that city remains dear to me—so I am a mix: northwest/Southern Californian. The first poem in my book suggests the strength of my identification with California; I actually label myself like a plant: Californicus. I have really cathected to the West Coast—I don't think I could easily leave it behind. I do think it is appropriate to talk about a West Coast poetic sensibility—I think of it as somewhat regionalist, experimental, and nature-oriented.

CONTRIBUTORS

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MURLEEN RAY grew up in Southern California, but moved to the San Joaquin Valley in 2001 after her career as a graphic designer was ended because of an injury to both hands. Today she is a graduate Teaching Associate, teaching beginning poetry to undergraduates, while she completes her MFA in creative writing and visual art at California State University, Fresno. Her areas of research and interest are broad, but she is particularly drawn to the hinterlands of meaning/expectation/infiltration/emergence where the known and unknown of human society and history begin to deconstruct. Through her creative writing, she is always engaging with the notion of narratives of self, particularly the narratives of women and their relationships with society through gender.

KELSEY SHIPMAN is a poet, performer, and educator. She is the author of three chapbooks of poetry and is a graduate student in the Masters of Fine Arts program at Texas State University. Born and raised in Texas, she has performed her work worldwide in

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FOOT

a journal of poetry

HILL

Directed by students at Claremont Graduate University, *Foothill: a journal of poetry* is a biannual print and online poetry journal that features the work of emerging poets enrolled in graduate programs across the United States.

