

FOOTHILL: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

An abstract painting with a complex, layered composition. The color palette is dominated by bright reds, oranges, and yellows, interspersed with deep greens and dark blues. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. In the center, there is a prominent, circular, eye-like shape formed by concentric, swirling lines and colors, which draws the viewer's gaze. The overall effect is one of intense energy and emotional resonance.

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F O O T H I L L

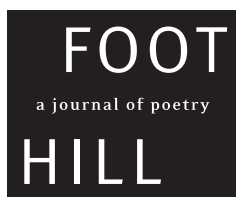
a journal of poetry

V.6, NO.1

F O O T H I L L

a journal of poetry

FOOT
a journal of poetry
HILL



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“Primal” Acrylic on canvas

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CONTENTS

viii EDITOR'S NOTE

- 13** LILY BLACKSELL Columbia University
The Stirrups
- 15** STEPHANIE COUEY University of Colorado-Boulder
i let it happen
- 16** JIM DAVIS Harvard University
There's a New Ram in the Paddock
How to Handle Powers with a Base of Zero or an Exponent of Zero
- 18** JENNIFER DICKSON University at Buffalo
SUBMISSIONS
How to Post
- 22** DEREK GRAF Oklahoma State University
Every Field
- 24** MARLIN M. JENKINS University of Michigan
whimpers
How I am like a car wreck
- 26** MICHAEL LAMBERT University of Alabama
from *Cease and Assist*
- 31** CAMERON LOUIE University of Washington
Right
Investment Lyric

- 34 ERIN LYNN University of Connecticut
Bacchanale
Mount Charles Residence Hall
Tenderness
- 37 JANICE MAJEWSKI George Mason University
from the space we are but cannot touch
- 38 LEE PATTERSON Florida State University
The Winter
One Likes to Practice the Thing
- 40 LUCAS SHEPARD University of New Mexico
Conscription
- 41 ELLIE WHITE Old Dominion University
Refuge
- 43 ADRIENNE DEVINE Claremont Graduate University
Art
- 63 TIMOTHY DONNELLY
Interview
- 73 CONTRIBUTORS

EDITOR'S NOTE

Back in 2010, when a handful of us CGU English students sat down at my kitchen table over bottles of cheap wine and expensive beer to figure out what this at-the-time unnamed journal was going to be, the benevolent shadow of the Kingsley and Kate Tufts POETRY Awards hung over us.

The Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award was endowed at Claremont Graduate University in 1993 (the Kate Tufts Discovery Award was established a year later) and immediately became one of the major national poetry awards. For a poet in “mid-career,” the Kingsley Tufts Award means \$100,000 worth of praise and encouragement (the Kate Tufts means \$10,000 for a first book).

For us English students, the awards mean that once a year we are urged to screw our courage to the sticking place and chat up the likes of Paul Muldoon, Robert Pinsky, Alice Quinn, Carl Phillips, or Linda Gregerson—all past judges who have descended on Claremont to inaugurate awardees. Sometimes we are called on to take judges or awardees to the airport, their hotel, or out to dinner or drinks.

(My humble 2006 Subaru Outback alone has chauffeured Jericho Brown, Chase Twichell, Tom Sleigh, D.A. Powell, Marianne Boruch, Yona Harvey, Timothy Donnelly [this issue's interviewee par excellence!], B.H. Fairchild, Afaa Michael Weaver, John Koethe, Don Share, Angie Estes, Elena Karina Byrne, and others. At this rate, the Smithsonian will be the next owner.)

The bounty of these interactions: so many incredible conversations, discoveries, surprises, kindnesses, so many signed books, so many stories, and no small amount of access. This is all to say that our relationship with the Tufts Awards—the judges, the awardees, the benefactors, the staff, and especially coordinator Genevieve Kaplan, past director Wendy Martin, current director Lori Anne Ferrell, and Dean Tammi Schneider—has us thanking our lucky stars at every nighttime parting of Los Angeles smog.

Though intoxicated with delirious fantasies for what this journal might become, those of us at my kitchen table had no idea what a fortunate situation we were stumbling into. This issue, and the seven before it, would not exist without the generosity of Kingsley and Kate Tufts and the dozens of people who dedicate time to the Tufts' living vision. We are immensely grateful to have become a small (though lively), unforeseen part of it.

Cheers,
Kevin Riel
Editor-in-Chief

Claremont Graduate University congratulates the winners of the 2016 Tufts Poetry Awards

KINGSLEY TUFTS AWARD

\$100,000 awarded for a book of poetry by a mid-career poet



Ross Gay
Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude

a man
sings by opening
his lungs by
turning himself into air

KATE TUFTS AWARD

\$10,000 awarded for a first book of poetry



Danez Smith
[insert] boy

boy in my arms blue flame racing sky
boy in my arms a star & the space around
a bone bright shutter, & blacker still

SAVE THE DATE
April 20, 2017

Please join us for a public reading and awards ceremony honoring the winners of the 2017 Kingsley and Kate Tufts Poetry Awards. 2017 marks the 25th Anniversary of the Awards, and the celebratory event will be held at the Los Angeles Public Library.

POEMS

LILY BLACKSELL
MFA WRITING
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The Stirrups

for Madeleine DeFrees

The confusion started years ago
with her mother's use of the same
gentle metaphor to describe
breakups and falls from horses.
Both were cases of 'coming adrift.'

Furthermore, her mother taught her
how to ride and not to reach her hand out
if she fell. It would break her wrist,
for certain. 'Try to wrap your arms
around yourself, darling, relax!'

Years later, upon getting pregnant
she had tried to do just that.
'Lie down,' they said, 'and we'll treat you.'
Her then-boyfriend got hot dogs, (comfort food)
for the long drive home from the clinic.

She didn't want them and choice was
her prerogative. He asked how she felt,
she said stirred and sore, nothing more.
To cheer her up he played 'Stir It Up'
and she took it lying down.

Years before, she and her horse came adrift
when he shied and bolted (what to expect
when you're not) and she broke her collarbone
when she fell (correctly), strait-jacketed
in her own embrace, dragged along because

her foot was caught in the iron,
spitting blood and dirt and half a tooth,
crying out the horse's human name,
saying *woah* saying *steady* saying *stop*.
Her foot came loose and she lay still.

The night rode out to meet her. The horse
galloped all the way home, alone,
snorting, sweating, bewildering.
Her mother grabbed his reins, tugged his mane,
cried 'where is she, darling, what happened?'

These days, her dear mother long gone,
she thinks about the ghost of something
that mattered, and whether or not it did.
She reads about Republicans
who want to ban abortions.

She reads about Democrats
who want to ban the carriages
in Central Park: it's apparently
a question of quality of life.
There's an old grey mare on Broadway,

the first horse she has seen in so long.
David Foster Wallace says their heads
are shaped like coffins, somehow.
She has a look, he has a point, but
who could ever need a coffin that small?



STEPHANIE COUEY
MFA CREATIVE WRITING
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO-BOULDER

i let it happen

i let it happen the same way i would let a friend eat off my plate
it's easier
than saying
no and he seems
so sure

he tells me to kiss my own elbow

i try but it's covered
in sealskin

i try but i
vomit black
oil into pulpy snow

that might have been perfect, he says

i open my mouth ask
if he's ever tried to commit suicide
in a mall or in the presence
of an actual angel
he calls me
darling and says
if it makes you more comfortable
i have

now try again

from the part where you tried
to scream over the valley
and your voice became
a drain

JIM DAVIS

MA HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND PSYCHOLOGY
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

There's a New Ram in the Paddock

The pretty young girl was carried away by bandits. It's hard to account for dreams of the insane. The new ram struts. White lines for an electric fence drawn with police chalk in the shape of a packed suitcase, her cardigan sleeve trapped like a foxtail. Fairy rings are frequent in these parts, stumps carved with yellow, jagged, adolescent teeth. Kids bleat—no one ever asked to be born again—the brave new ram chases crows from the what's left of the stinking baby sheep, fairly bothered by wolves. The farmer rocks in a chair on the porch, his pipe glows warning, slowly stroking the old ram in his lap.

How to Handle Powers with a Base of Zero or an Exponent of Zero

Zeno drank Bud heavy until he was halfway
sober, tossed his wish in a hole & buried
the whole galaxy, alive on the sage leaf
sprouting from the terracotta pot he got
sick in. The blind man had a hard time sawing
himself in half. Mickey Mouse stuffed his pants
with balloons to be light on his feet, the fiddle
playing cat spit tobacco in a jar & it pinged.
The ladder leaned against the wall leads to a man-
hole where wishes echo. I draw cigarettes
on the back of horoscopes, roll them & smoke
a pork shoulder for the tailgate. Of course
you can come home—you never really left.
Paint your face the color of nothing. How's that.

JENNIFER DICKSON
PHD ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO

SUBMISSIONS

One Hundred Words.

A limit is a container is permission for imagining the container might have an outside and so the possibility of elsewhere outside the locked room is itself as infinite freedom as mathematically possible as an outside is necessary for defining the shape and consistency of the container the container operates within a space of containment and is itself contained within the limit, the limit is a container is permission for imagining the container might have an outside and this is ultimately a good thing, it is the project of desire to flow over and interrupt the container destroying its credibility.

Two Hundred Words.

I have been asked trick questions like do you like it and what do you like better and like—being like itself—is, like, an extraordinarily feminizing word, a shrink-ray word, and when it stuns you into submission you may find yourself on the trembling edge of a holy terror and there are bedroom consequences but more interesting than these is the insatiable joy of asking that question of others, of choking down empires of misery and trickling out two hundred word fragments of libidinal impulse mixed with structural critique mixed with rage with utopian longing with negation with negative \$200,000 and positive 7,000 hours of teach me please or teach me how to please or teach me how to resist pleasure or how to take pleasure in resisting pleasure or how to write a book about the end of the world at the end of the world. Maybe it's all bedroom consequences, it's difficult to tell. This is my morbid way of confessing that some days my closet is a horror show and my mirror is a trickster god and the only way to cover myself is by singing mad vibrating eulogies strung together with the corpses of strangers.



How to Post

When you post,

You cannot say, in November 2015:

Simultaneous hyper-formality and presumption

(delete presumption replace presumption with aggression

delete aggression because it's too aggressive and

return to presumption)

presumption baffles me, as in when some version/combination

(delete slash, insert or),

version or combination of "Dear Instructor-Ms.-Professor-Mrs.

Dickson" (consider witticism about why they marry

you off, but do not go there), Mrs. Dickson' is coupled

with (consider coupling consider irony) with the

long- (look at the dash, keep the dash, weep about

dashes) long -dash- form angry November e-mail

(consider whining consider power), e-mail about the

cruelty of homework. (Consider cruelty. Reconsider if

homework is cruel).

You can post three cats getting unexpectedly cuddly with an
ironic object.

You cannot say, in February 2015:

Imagine a tree ellipsis ellipsis ellipsis ellipsis I am a lesbian. Delete

lengthy metaphoric confession involving trees and water, fish and

a variety of birds.

You can wait eight months, then dress up like a wizard.

You cannot say, in July 2015:

There is a stone in my throat that I cannot dislodge.

Delete there

delete is

delete a
delete stone, et cetera. No replacement.

You cannot say, in September 2015:
The public confessional model of the facebook post + social anxiety =
not great. But I produce these things anyway, they
(delete they insert these things reflect on deletion)
these things are not for you.
(reflect on lying)

You cannot say, in March 2015:
I had a dream about electric grass, and in the dream I was sleeping, we
were (insert in the dream, think about repetition), in the dream we
were all sleeping, and in the grass I was running, behind (delete
behind insert encased) encased in (delete encased restore behind)
behind glass (cut whole line—it is impossible to convey the glass),
I was running while everything burned.

You cannot say, in July 2015:
Dearest friends,
It's too hot to digest food; the fats float while the rest sinks like lead
(delete line, think about prosaic think about syrup)
And it all ends
(express incredulity, consider all)
it all ends in a Manchester flat with a ten-year deficit in
renovation
(think about cutting the last three lines, because the next
bit is the good part)

.....
.....
.....

(delete the good part, there is no good part)

You cannot say, in November 2015:
You know he owns guns
(I know too, I know)

Do not confess.

In November 2015, say everything.
In November 2015, agonize about the impossible-to-convey glass.



DEREK GRAF
MFA CREATIVE WRITING
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Every Field

What found us wandering
through the public cemetery?

Not history or the wired jaws
of the newly dead. No.

This city rests in the shrapnel
of its birth. And here, I see

a father gather his children
though they are not breathing.

Do you remember how it hurt
to be anchored to a home?

It was like winter: photos
bent to fit the envelopes

our mothers sent every month,
the forced moon of taking

hands before dinner as kneeling,
unspoken, the year cleared.

Did we endure this? The day
is wordless and has no shame:

it has spent too much on human
lives, anxious spindles though

they are, alone on tension towers.
Anymore, nothing calls to us.

Our stories are our own—
but if I were the senator of how

music is brought into the world,
you would hear my voice

in every field I have ever been.

MARLIN M. JENKINS
MFA CREATIVE WRITING
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

whimpers

the quick whimpers from wet bed through cracked door: we cried
for the dog who fell off the porch with a chain around his neck—

but we cried more for the one hit by the car,
the one frozen in snow, the one who drowned in the backyard pool,
the one whose eyes never reflected headlights or flashlights
on the night we went looking.

i mark territory only where i smell my own fear.
i only stop running to lick the wounds clean.
i tell myself i serve no master: i lie.



How I am like a car wreck

I.

I am the dangling keys scratching the driver's knee, and the knee against the speaker's vibrations. The deer at the edge of the road—technically not suicidal but in the confusion of light we may run across the road where both our deaths will be spectacular.

II.

The car on its side, the divider propping up its bottom. The seatbelt-less teenager falling across the back seat at the impact, the droplet of blood from driver's seat to opposite window, the fist against glass, the back windshield kicked in from outside—the silence, the smoke, the shattered glass stumbled over to escape, the escape itself.



MICHAEL LAMBERT
MFA CREATIVE WRITING
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

from *Cease and Assist*

“Aye, aye! and I’ll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn,
and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition’s flames
before I give him up.”

–Melville (36,32)

Out they rode, ill fitted, into the endless tang of folly.
Mine eyes have seen the glory, Guy. I don’t *need* the money.
Roughage rib
Boned with sweet meats in the black walnut trees,

Retreating sky scraped over the yielding earth televangelically.
Or myself, perched in an office on the East coast, whispering
Sweet bestials as I
Contemplate this nubile young body.

These sweet golden teats.

Out the window, a chicken-ass nurdle
Crowned in laurel wreath. Catbriar and triage in the hard
Scrabble Foible-Reeds. Or this one: drinking my corn

From a cracked mash rattlecan. Thwarted, spoofed,
Stepping down my piecemeal placemat of doom.

Stepping down my piecemeal placemat of doom.
Guy takes a primo gulp of soda pop, sucks his moustache dry.
Slices Bundt cake with a shrill peal in the tall cotton.
“What a hokey yokel,” I say, before rifling out my

Tanto blade and performing ritual seppuku.
My viscera supplicating the juggalo body fat
Of your homegirl. And lo—the magistrate gerryman
Dering Kunta Kinte in the back pews and stained glass winder

Panes. If you’ve got nothing nice to say,
Say my name, say my name.
The townspeople rejoice, looking for Guy
Down by the river to pray.

The fly-tape sticky and still buzzing,
We generally spend this time of year sneezing // stacking hay.

We generally spend this time of year sneezing // stacking hay.
See the paternal pennyweight of pinewood condescension.
 Three fingers, scout. See Guy caterwauling
Atop a religiously lubricated 50cc motorbike, sucking tusks of twizzlers.

 Or myself, on the corner soap
Box, monologuing somersaults in my underpants.
 The rapt audience of tin can empties
File out unapologetic in the monolithic breeze.

“I will fistfight any man who attempts to catch this garter,” I says.
I says, “I simply do not know what that *means*,”
Before striking out at everything
 Within a fifty-mile blast radius then quietly falling asleep.

Lost in his clothes, Guy dismounts on the chalky hardpan,
Begins scarfing grimgrams behemoth goulash plate.

Begins scarfing grimgrams behemoth goulash plate.
Meat and potatoes amongst colorful cocks roosting. Licking the
Slate clean. Pregnant latch-keys running amuck
under thin
Nest paring of sickle moon.

Mirthless trollops. Early to ripe, early to
Plot points of carbuncular mathematics on my digi-scale.
Early to shot-put
My cavalcade of tax-deductible charity organizations.
Heave! *Ho!*

Santa slides down the litmus dolt. Let us now
Eat the headless bird of faith-shaking accidents
With farm machinery. Mother Nile pigeon-
Toes glasses the low hills raptured volcanic. 4.5 billion

Leadings up to this right here—my subwoofers approaching
Seismic decibels. I am mammy's panties. I am
motormouth.

Seismic decibels. I am mammy's panties. I am
motormouth.
Pawing the pages of a pseudo-autobiographical
 Thinly veiled future metric measurement—see Sisy
Phus looking starry eyed behind doped out dilation,

Rubbing all up on my chambered nautilus.
Frankincense and mirth in the South Dakota milo
 Observed in supremely coifed austerity.
Feral scrawning a miasma of eerie tableau.

Masticating carrot as political act. Firm, vigorous handshake.
As religious belief. Take my mother.
"No, really" (Guy 1). Guy is good.
Sootgrass in the barrial forming a curious architecture

Where we beat the long dead dray. Lookey here—
 I hit fat dabs and fuck all day.



CAMERON LOUIE
MFA CREATIVE WRITING
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Right

What you want cannot
be what you want, I
say, and mad, I must be
saying what I want
to say, but feel sure
I did not say something
you wanted. So

young and so
hard to tell, you
of all people, when
I need, you say,
the right words
to be paid to
the right places.

Please give it up
to me, the right
word, I say, is it *rent*,
gift, *rub*, *brunch*,
not? I don't want
to put words in your

way, I want
to watch badly, I
say, some gos TV
re-runs at night
while you sleep,
something for you
to fall asleep to, is it
working, is it
goodnight

Investment Lyric

The bank knows
I am a young man

in bank years. I know
things the bank lady

doesn't—we both know
life & metaphors

are grave business
on an empty stomach—

*in the end, are you
hamburger*, she says

with a tap to the
top of a bottle on

her lignum vitae desk
labeled KETCHUP,

or are you steak?
Steak comes

with a wink &
I think she might

kiss me, but
retirement is still

an occult symbol
& my money

still makes no sense
& I see now

she does not want
a kiss, she wants

to hold me
in her mouth forever

ERIN LYNN
PHD ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

Bacchanale

You followed the stripped down staircase,
the bald sun clenched your winter skin,
made a visor of your hands, thirsty
for dark; the thin trees of wine country.
Far behind now, the stacks of records yellowing,
questions of patrilineage, misplaced wills
receding like the hairlines on mildewed
portraits scowling in the sacked gallery.
Come with me. I can teach you to unstarch
pleats, to move the muscles in your cheeks.
We are more than rain watch and pruning.
Come. I will trace the fault lines of your palms,
measure your barefoot height, your severed
hair. Here your arms will olive gracefully,
scoop beyond the vulture's circling post.
Part your speechless mouth; blacken it with drink.



Mount Charles Residence Hall

After Leontia Flynn

I once lived in a rented red-brick house
with 9 other students and Edwardian ghosts.
That winter, night came mid-afternoon.
I lit my room like a lamp shop and by morning
wine glasses stood at attention, waiting to be held.

We scattered like mice around each other's routines
and experimented with building our skeletons bridge-
thin. My sheets were fever damp with dream heat.
My rugs were cat-scratched from my ritual stretching.

So when the strange man from the tourism office
began to follow me home from the grocery,
it was a relief to feel observed, and later that year
when the helicopters began their nightly vigil above
our street, we prayed our thanks for their attention.



Tenderness

When I first learned
I was a body he said:

undress. My twin bed
a strip of seasick.

Sundays we drank
black coffee, sat

in a church siphoned
of meaning as my belly,

and scraped white.
Teeth set

for his quickest
displeasure and my own

sex, a fat gash
fresh in April dirt.



JANICE MAJEWSKI
MFA CREATIVE WRITING
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

from the space we are but cannot touch

I want to talk about the way - the light -
the image - screen on tv sets dissolved
into a single white - thin line - some space -
a dot - the gap I mean to say [I can't
be certain in a poem]. left behind
is nothing - stares - think into space - what noise
erupts from turning off the absolute-
ly regular. I steal your body heat
& do you mind. I find you'll touch - you'll drink
a liquid faster as the heat begins
to leave - parted lips - tongue - & breathe - each gulp
is more than last & unsustainable.
we wished across our space - blank space - silence -
as if this really were a history -
call it illusion - call it gorge - a bridge
imagined leading to grottos - so close
like one [imagined] [desire] - so close
we can't become. or were we. on the verge
of precipice, or in already: we -
the question: where. a gulf - engulfed - but there
are so many - too many - words for space
that isn't there - not - really - & is space
a space at all. [the article's place here]
I wanted breath [mine] - smells like yours - from me
to you to is there difference or should
there be. now I think space & there are lost
in meaning - me in mean - I mean to say
these may be only words. I can't won't tell
if looking - you - is looking - me - or one
another - viewer - versus - outside in -
a space remains - there always is - between.



LEE PATTERSON
PHD LITERATURE
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

The Winter

The winter evening settles down:
A thousand winters thrown behind your eyes.
I'm not describing your history.
Winter alights with fanfare or radio.
Absences over time accrue.
Over time you're digging seeds from the flood:
New shutters or earrings; marking the land with landmarks:

Drum for folderol, hauntings for punctures,
Luggage for double, measures for singular.

One Likes to Practice the Thing

One likes to practice the thing.
If you hold a stone for long enough,
it becomes light and darkness.
The same happens with people
who believe in a god.

It made the water appear black in the winter.
It was just as true
that the earth was like a floor.

We were two figures in a wood.
We stood and that was when
the silence was longest.

“It” wouldn’t snow.
It held shirts over its eyes,
it set a vaccine in a wrist,
then it phased like the sun and moon.

LUCAS SHEPARD
MFA CREATIVE WRITING
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

Conscription

People around my hometown said *warsh*, like they battled their laundry, their car, but most of all their hands. In 2003 Fred Dalrymple told me I'd likely be drafted. I knew two things: one, there would be no such thing. Two, I'd already been drafted. Had enough gravel roads, lightning bugs, and beagles braying in apple orchards to last me a lifetime. Yellow signs freckled with buckshot. Shotgun shell keychains. I watched three movies as a child: G, PG, and if my dad approved, rated R for violence, not s-e-x. Kids could fight in the church basement after each service, but we had to Christian cuss. Has anyone trembled at the notion of heck? On the bus, bloody knuckles, arm-wrestling, and thumb wars until Fritz Hammond bent his thumb the wrong way. To this day, it clicks, a pistol cocking. You should never dry fire a weapon, they say; you'll peen the barrel face. An unloaded gun harms, if only itself. My best friend and I shot robins and sparrows with an air rifle, the kind with tiny mushroom-looking pellets. The kind you have to pump again and again and again. You have to think about each shot before taking it. "No killing song birds," said my dad, and he went back into the garage without stopping to explain why, or perhaps he didn't know?

ELLIE WHITE
MFA CREATIVE WRITING
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

Refuge

Outside the screened porch, yellow flies
swarm. Though the temperature lingers
near 100°, they sense our heat.

I cling to him, my sweat soaking his
already damp shirt. He moves
one hand from my back, strokes my hair.

His other hand holds the leather strap.
Our embrace: so tight I can feel
the strap's shape, a loose coil circling

the small of my back. The wide,
scarlet stripes it left throb. The flies
fling their bodies against the screens,

bouncing off with tiny pops. I press
my face into his chest, feel the slow,
steady thump against my ear.

ART

ADRIENNE DEVINE
MFA STUDIO ART
CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

Art is a language that I use to spark the imagination of viewers, and to create visual dialogue within the body of work itself. I develop my work using standard commercial art supplies, found objects, and stuff that I fabricate from raw materials. I transform this matter into paintings, installations, and hybrid forms that are linked by recurring motifs, gestures, themes, and subjects. Luminosity, translucence, repetition, layering, tactility, and physicality are qualities and devices that emerge throughout most of my work. I explore the relationships between historical memories, social identities, and different forms of capital (social, cultural, and economic) as they are embodied, objectified, and institutionalized in contemporary environments. Through this lens, I interweave ideas and matter into various visual forms to create conceptual and physical space for viewers to engage with art.

Abiku
Woodburning drawing
with mixed media collage
2016



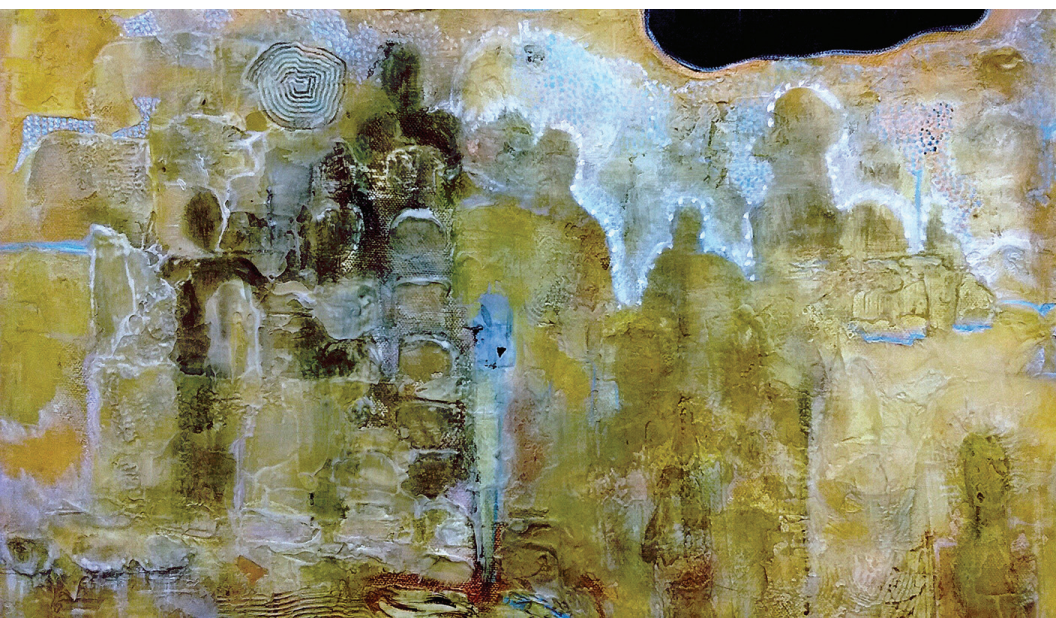
Beyond
Paper, acrylic,
wire, raffia
2016



Binu
Acrylic, paper,
raffia, canvas
2016



*Binu: Arrival of the
Honored Guests*
Acrylic on canvas
2016



Déjà vu
Mixed media collage
on canvas
2016



Prelude
Acrylic on canvas
2016



Interlude
Acrylic on canvas
2016



Primal
Acrylic on canvas
2016



INTERVIEW

TIMOTHY DONNELLY



Timothy Donnelly is the author of *Twenty-seven Props for a Production of Eine Lebenszeit* (Grove, 2003); *The Cloud Corporation* (Wave, 2010; Picador, 2011), and winner of the 2012 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. His chapbook, *Hymn to Life*, was recently published by Factory Hollow Press. He is a recipient of *The Paris Review*'s Bernard F. Connors Prize and the Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award, as well as fellowships from the New York State Writers Institute

and the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. He is the poetry editor of *Boston Review* and teaches in the Writing Program at Columbia University's School of the Arts.

Kevin Riel: It has become customary to begin these interviews with the first poem of our interviewee's first book; and yours, "Twenty-seven Props for a Production of *Eine Lebenszeit*" (also the book's title [*Eine Lebenszeit*, is German for "a lifetime"]), is a great place to start. The poem thrusts us into a colorful and messy theatre-of-the-absurd world where art and life collide: "Let there be *lamps* of whatever variety / presents itself on the trash heaps." There is a spirit of permissiveness, gregariousness, and whimsy initiated in these first lines that runs through just about all of your work. Because of this consistency of address, it is tempting to assume that the voice of the *I* character in a Timothy Donnelly poem is identical to the poet's own, but I am more curious about the distance you may feel, if any, towards your poetic avatar(s). Do you agree that there is a consistent personality in your poems? Do you feel indivisible with, or is there some degree of estrangement from, the *I*? What is that estrangement like? Would you avoid the *I* at a bar, loan it money, trust it to babysit your children?

Timothy Donnelly: This is a great line of inquiry, though I'm worried it will put me in touch with some hard truths right off the bat. But yes, I think it's fair to say that there's considerable consistency of personality or character throughout my poems, and that the way you describe it—permissive, gregarious, whimsical—probably comes close to how people would describe, at least on the surface,

my personality, at least in part, although I'm not very gregarious by nature so much as by circumstance. Garrulous maybe, but not gregarious. I've become more comfortable with other people, with practice, over time, but deep down I'm happiest and most relaxed—or most myself—at home alone or with my family or out with the people I'm closest with. Not because I'm misanthropic or fearful, but because larger groups or social settings with too many unknowns and variables tend to overwhelm me with input. I'm easily overstimulated; I don't filter out enough. But instead of calming or quiet art, I usually seek out writing and music and film or whatever it is with an intensity comparable to the kind I can't comfortably deal with in real life—a driving rhythm, spiky music, repetition, theatricality, extravagance. I also love chill or cold visuals or sounds, like the snowy video installations of Patrick Bernatchez or the record “The Greatest” by KING, but I seem less capable of creating them or less able to feel satisfied when I attempt to. I wrote what I would call my first real poem when I was a freshman in college, and from the start some version of this voice or sensibility or value system you're describing was pretty much already there. And it's all more or less an enhanced or otherwise modified analog to how I move through the world and have for as long as I can remember, what it feels like, with all the too-muchness and missteps included. But to answer the last part of your question, which is harder to admit to, I think if I were to encounter most of my poems' speakers, even those closest to myself, somewhere out in the world, I would probably find them exasperating.

KR: Another feature of your work that is introduced in this first poem is the array of “props,” “tchotchkes,” exotic objects that populate your poems. After rereading your work in one burst, I had the sense of having visited a massive curiosity shop, one full of items from both the distant past and present. The same voice that inspects or conjures an obelisk, a pocketbook on witchcraft, or quetzal feathers is equally engrossed by a bottle of Diet Mountain Dew. I am hesitant to grant the Internet credit for this eclecticism since the impulse is evident in *Twenty-Seven Props*, published back in 2003 and at the crude advent of online culture. Is this an outcome of your being variously interested by the object world, or a kind of invitation to the reader to enlarge their imaginative interests, become more capacious? Or is it both or something different?

TD: I think it's the former. I can get excited about almost anything—objects, words, facts, ideas, histories, legends, theories, nonsense. The Internet makes all of this more readily available, of course, but I've always been this way, drawn to amassing and collecting, but not always, or even most often, objects. As a kid I mostly read encyclopedias, the dictionary, cookbooks, Edith

Hamilton's Greek myths, herbals, D&D manuals, books on animals, trivia compendiums, astrology guides, books on the occult—a weird array of stuff, I guess. I don't actually collect anything now (books don't count), at least in part because there's just no room in our small Brooklyn apartment. But at present I'm dialing down a two-month Pokémon Go addiction, which I guess is like a virtual collection. Oh, yesterday someone in Manhattan showed me her collection of hundreds of antique typewriter ribbon tins that she had arranged throughout her home according to color. I was totally into it. But I don't have anything like that myself, and I don't have it in mind to expand the compass of my readers or anything like that. I'm just following my instincts. Although the more I think about it, the more I think you're probably onto something here—I do feel I'm trying to broaden, deepen, develop, and give dimension to something, but I always think of it as the poem I'm doing it to, and not some aspect of its readers, but right now the difference seems to me like it's just a matter of perspective.

KR: Since I mentioned the Internet, has it and/or social media made your work more capacious, more eclectic, or more information-dense? Do you find the Internet's ready availability of so much information enabling or enervating?

TD: Certainly my long poem "Hymn to Life" couldn't have been written without the internet, and that poem is very much aware of the Internet and the fact that it's a product of it. I've written a handful of other poems that make use of research I did online, but none as blatantly as that one. Like most people I think the Internet is a huge convenience, but obviously it's also scary, sublime, invasive, destructive, and in many ways it has taken over our lives. And ultimately it doesn't really matter what I think. As a writer, though, I want to engage with it, relate with it, and not act like this massive entity that has taken possession of us doesn't exist.

KR: In a similar vein to your poems' "props," your poetic speakers make use of a remarkable variety of vocabularies. There are words and phrases imported from other eras or countries, taken from professional jargons and slang, literary and pop sources, or from the most formal or casual of discourses. Some of the poems make use of extracted pieces of language, as in "The Last Dream of Light Released from Seaports," which is "composed of words selected from successive pages of the USA Patriot Act (2001) and from Bruce Springsteen's 'Born to Run' (1975)." This kind of multilingualism kept bringing to mind TS Eliot (not to mention many others), though I never got the sense that it suggested anything like his anxiety over the entropic collapse of some precious social order.

It felt more aligned with a kind of Whitmanian exuberance (“I contain multitudes”), an exhilarated eagerness to participate in the dynamism of pluralistic, democratic life. Is this a fair statement? Would you characterize the phenomenon differently?

TD: These are really amazing questions! Thank you for asking them. When I make use of citations or different lexical registers, I definitely do it for the texture and energy and sound of it. So I feel closer to Whitmanic exuberance. I am very susceptible to anxiety, but it has nothing to do with mournfulness at the wake of disintegrated culture. I’m pretty sure things have always been terrible and beautiful at the same time. And yet there’s something to Eliot’s despair, in a general sense, that I definitely identify with. Not that Whitman didn’t have a dark side. But in short, yeah, I do it for the dynamism.

KR: So many of your poems derive their dramatic energy from the activity of thinking in real time, from the propulsion of thoughts hatching at the moment of their poetic utterance in long sentences that spill over a series of enjambed lines. Do poems like this come quickly to you? Do you compose them into tercets, quatrains, etc. in first drafts, or structure them later? How do you revise poems in which the action of their original composition is their fuel?

TD: With the exception of shorter poems—which tend to come out all at once, but rarely—the first third of a poem usually takes some time for me to get what I’ll call “right,” sometimes as long as a couple of weeks, but then the rest usually comes with increasing speed after the poem’s personal momentum kicks in, or once I have a clearer sense of its trajectory. But even when the rate picks up, at no point do I feel that things are moving, like, rapidly, with the exception of certain passages whose looseness works for the poem, providing the tightness counterpoint, or a moment of prose clarity, or relief. Otherwise there’s a lot of deliberateness, recalculation, getting the rhythm right, and weighing every word, every syllable, especially in the beginning, and then sometimes I’ll go back and distress it a little to make it seem more spontaneous, less slick, less “produced.” Over time I’ve come to value the feeling of liberty implicit in imperfection. There’s a raw edge that isn’t sloppy. I think Ruskin’s “The Nature of the Gothic,” which I read first in graduate school, was the turning point for me. I wear away the paint a little, let my hand show, add dings, give it character. Sometimes it isn’t so manufactured as I’m making it seem, and those times are golden. Otherwise, it can feel like fifth-dimension cabinetry. And in truth, deliberateness isn’t exactly the right word—it’s more like attentiveness, a kind of bodily attentiveness. How does the word “leaping” feel here instead of “stepping”; what happens if I turn

“into” into “through”? And I almost always write from beginning to end, line by line, and in the structure the poems end up in. Revision tends to be minimal. Usually just a couple of word changes, or in some cases, if the pacing is off, I’ll add a few lines. A better title. Smudge it a little.

KR: Being a journal that publishes poems from graduate students, debt is possibly the most persistent theme (/villain) we see from their submissions. As has been pointed out in reviews, debt and the vampiric tendencies of capitalism are crucial themes in *The Cloud Corporation*, but one could add other political concerns like government surveillance, terrorism, climate change, and white privilege. The poems, however, are never preachy or doctrinaire, seeming instead to remain concerned with the mental experience of outrage. How do you negotiate writing potentially explosive political content into poems?

TD: I do it exactly as you suggest. I approach the material personally—emotionally, psychologically. Although, it doesn’t take much effort to approach it because it’s always right there, unmistakable, around and inside me. There are plenty of other places, other discourses for a determinedly logical or hortative approach. That’s not what I’m good for. Maybe something in a poem by me or someone else will turn a light on for readers, sensitize them to an issue. But that’s not my objective—if it were, I can think of more effective ways to go about it. When people tell me that a poem of mine has captured exactly how they have felt—that’s what matters to me. After the poem is done, at least. I really don’t think I think about readership while I’m writing; I couldn’t get it done if I had to walk the tightrope of it and wave to the audience at the same time. When I’m writing the poem, I’m primarily intent on making something out of what I feel, on giving the chaos of feeling a contour and a form, a local habitation and a name, like Shakespeare said, etc., and then when it’s done and the clay is dry, I hope it will matter to someone else. That’s probably the best way to put it. Because it isn’t merely about expressing what I feel, which could more efficiently happen elsewhere, in another form, like on the couch to my wife. It’s about making something out of what I feel. And if the content is explosive, the explosion is only figurative. At least for now.

KR: As whimsical and warm as your poems can be, I am not the first or only person to find *The Cloud Corporation* a bleak book. What is rarely credited about it, though, is how funny that bleakness can be. For instance, the short poem “His Excuse,” in which the speaker imagines his final resting place being “toppled by a bobolink” is—at

least to me—a riot. The same goes for the villanelle “Clair de Lune,” and its outrageously self-involved and self-destructive chorus:

We rent ourselves to what force will enjoy us
into oblivion: wind, drink, sleep. We pimp, we whore.
We become like those who seek to destroy us.

We cat-and-mouse, roughhouse, inflatable-toy us
in our heads’ red maze, in its den, on its shore.
We revolt ourselves; we disgust and annoy us.

Even the poem titles are hilarious provocations that mix dread with humor: “The Rumored Existence of Other People,” “Dream of Arabian Hillbillies,” “Antepenultimate Conflict with Self,” “Dream of a Poetry of Defense.” How do you manage humor and tragedy in your poems? Is your muse deliberately or helplessly funny?

TD: Despair and humor, anxiety and exuberance, emptiness and glitter—this is my worldview, and all the art that matters most to me finds a place for all of it. Albee, Beckett, Dickinson, Kafka, Kubrick, Lynch, Nietzsche, Shakespeare, the list is endless. Even Woolf. Although in life the combination can be pretty cruel, even repulsive. There are plenty of atrocities with no humor or even absurdity in them at all. But less so when they happen to John Stamos in an Elmo costume. I think I have a double response to things in general, finding them sad and hilarious at the same time, or diabolical and alluring. I wasn’t sure if that was an actual term, “double response,” so I just Googled it, and one of the first hits is an article in a medical journal called “Double response of the ventricle during transient entrainment in a common atrioventricular nodal reentrant tachycardia.” I mean, if that doesn’t say it all, what does.

KR: Before I ask a few questions about your long poem “Hymn to Life,” I want to ask more generally about writing long poems, which you do quite a bit of. One of the things that I love about your long poems—both in reading them, but especially in hearing them read—is that they allow space for an emotional complex to be fully constructed around me. Hearing you read “The Cloud Corporation” and “The Rumored Existence of Other People” were especially powerful experiences because I could follow the fluctuations in emotional tone and enter their speakers’ strange worlds and conflicts with them. I think it is near impossible for short poems to pull that off in a reading. Do you agree? What draws you to writing poems that exceed so far beyond the usual limits?

TD: It's such a relief to be asked this. Yes I definitely think that longer poems, read aloud or even just on the page, allow for a kind of complexity very hard to achieve in a shorter poem. Mostly because a longer poem's duration allows for change, deepening, departure, and return in a way that short poems just can't accommodate, or they can do it on a level we perceive more by way of intellect or upon reflection rather than unfolded in real time. I'll often set out to write a poem I hope will be relatively short, but end up feeling that the feeling I was going for can't be had in a brief space, or it can't mature or be brought to bear fruit, at least not by me. I thought "The Cloud Corporation" was going to fit on a single page when I started writing it. I expected "Hymn to Life" to be 108 lines (108 is a sacred number). It ended up more than three times that length. And it's true, too, that just as I like to get enveloped by or lost in my experience of big cinema or music or in front of a mammoth painting, like Erastus Salisbaury Field's amazing *Historical Monument of the American Republic*, I like to get lost in the making of a poem, and a longer one is like a darkened wood. My shorter poems are like little kitchens.

KR: There is a pronounced tension in "Hymn to Life" between the smallness of the speaker and the massiveness of his investigative project. Though motivated by a noble mission—to "enlarge my sympathy"—the speaker remains diminished by a cascade of information about the disappearance of dozens of animal species as part of the Holocene extinction we are presently living through and thoughtlessly precipitating. I kept thinking about Naturalist novels like Norris's *The Octopus*, Zola's *Germinale*, or Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*—or earlier novels like Daniel Defoe's horrifying *A Journal of the Plague Year*—works often obsessed with information and documentation, and in which characters become conscious that their destinies are governed by awesome, impersonal forces. First off, I am curious about what past works, if any, the poem is in argument, conversation, or cahoots with? Do you view the poem, as I am suggesting, as a David-and-Goliath standoff between an urgent subjectivity and the sublime behemoth of facts cataloging our impending demise, or is it less combative for you?

TD: I love your characterization of the poem. It's ingenious. A David-and-Goliath standoff is certainly how it felt when writing it. While writing the poems in *The Cloud Corporation*, I read Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* in preparation for a seminar I was putting together, and I became fascinated by the tensions between the Symbolist and Naturalist movements, which Wilson seems to exaggerate slightly in order to make his point. Mallarmé and Zola were friends and had great admiration for each other. It didn't have to be one or the other. That said, I'm Team Symbolist. I worship Mallarmé. But I am also interested in the use of documentation

in literature and own a copy of each of the books you mention, actually. I'll probably always find unmitigated facticity tedious after a certain point, except in the hands of an expert stylist, but the idea of folding research, data, material history, and arcana into the orchestration of a poem appeals to me, not simply because the material itself might be intrinsically interesting, and not simply because of the sonic or affective variation any such material might provide, but again because this is what it's like to be fully alive now, at least for me. I'm not just a feeling blob or a chatterbox or a citizen who needs to get his head around fracking or a human robot trying to laugh away the panic when the subway stops between stations on the way to work thinking about the *Infant of Prague* or distractedly looking up how to remove armpit stains while making dinner for my family—I am all of these. The poems I had in mind when writing “Hymn to Life” were Ashbery’s “Into the Dusk-Charged Air” and to a lesser extent Elizabeth Bishop’s “Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance,” which I also had in mind when I wrote “Between the Rivers” in *The Cloud Corporation*. Also the poem referenced in the poem, Lou Andreas-Salomé’s “Hymn to Life.” I didn’t know of James Schuyler’s long poem of the same name until after I was done with mine and read it for the first time and someone in the audience brought it up. Also, in a general way, Marianne Moore, *Paradise Lost*, and the History Channel’s *Ancient Aliens*. Beckett’s *Happy Days*. I also like the flow of the movie *Adaptation*, and I think maybe I have that in mind a lot when I write. It affected me very powerfully when I saw it in the cinema.

KR: Even though “Hymn to Life” is extremely depressing in its apocalyptic portents, there is a sentiment of hope that persists throughout, one that seems to suggest that through cataloging, naming, paying attention, through memory, there is hope for a human future in which meaningful action is possible. For example, at the end of the poem, the speaker attempts to retreat into domestic life, and yet because of his project of recognition, his home—his refuge, the place we all go to escape, avoid, or forget inconvenient truths—is invaded by a sense of “gone”-ness, that is, a sense that escape is impossible and the only way forward is some kind of activism beyond the poem. Did writing the poem enlarge your sympathy or further activate you in some way? Did it give you hope?

TD: Again, I love the way you put this. I feel the only way forward is through “some kind of activism beyond the poem,” exactly. Even if it just starts out as nothing more than cultivating a mindfulness regarding the interconnectedness of all life and the repercussions of our behaviors big and small. Cultivating and acting on it. I certainly make mistakes and love my air conditioning. I still eat meat on weekends. I don’t own a car, but I haven’t cut cabs out of my life as

much as I would like to, and I consume too much in general and it's not always the right stuff. I should cheat less with my recycling. Moreover, I'm complicit in so much just by virtue of living in, and benefitting from living in, America. But I do think about how to do better. For now, that's all I hope for. Doing better in a very local way and finding it meaningful. And trusting something good, or better, will follow.

KR: Finally, because so many of us on the staff are anxious about how much time we have for our own writing, we always ask: How often, how long, and when during the day do you write? Do you have a ritual or strategy that helps you stay productive? At what point do you feel like you have earned your beverage-of-choice?

TD: Since becoming chair of Columbia's Writing Program I've had very little time and mental space to write in. I think maybe there's something about the position that isn't particularly good for me on the neurological level—this having to be available to so many, so often, and the differences in scale and character of the tasks can be downright vertiginous. But it's important and meaningful—and thankfully temporary—work, and I'm aware of how fortunate I am to be able to make money in New York City and to be able to support my family. Also, I've learned more about how a university operates than I ever expected to know. Still, the upshot is: I write rarely, late at night, after my family is asleep, and maybe two or three times a week if I'm lucky. Sometimes I'll go weeks and then it's months without writing anything at all and that's when the sense of emptiness can't be ignored and I panic and become unbearable to those around me and to myself. But when I do write, it's usually between midnight and three or four o'clock in the morning. Sometimes I can sneak in a few hours during the day on Fridays and weekends. I have no rituals. Or, desperation is my ritual. I had a residency in Marfa, Texas this summer that was a godsend, and I got a lot done, so it's not an unremitting sob story. And plenty of other poets have it much worse. As for beverages, sometimes I'll have a glass of wine or two while I write but for the most part I'm laying off it for a while because I don't want to come to rely on it. What I tend to do when I'm done for the night is read over what I've written a few times, sweat the small stuff, listen to some music that makes sense that late, like Tame Impala's "The Moment," drink seltzer water or weird iced tea, brush my teeth, make sure I know what I have to do the next day, then go to bed feeling a little better about things. And grateful.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ADRIENNE DEVINE was born and raised in Southern California. She earned her Bachelor of Art degree in Art, with a minor in journalism, from California State University, Long Beach. She has worked as a graphic production artist and a production editor, in nonprofit administration and freelance grant writing. She has exhibited her work in Los Angeles-area group shows over the past seven years.

JENNIFER DICKSON studies utopian fiction and labor fiction at the University at Buffalo. Her creative and academic life is a long experiment in leveraging utopian demands against confining contexts. In this way, she plans to build a makeshift apparatus for the invention of inhabitable spaces. She is currently working on her dissertation, "Communities of Desire," which investigates the role of utopian collectivity in apocalyptic times.

DEREK GRAF's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Booth*, *Portland Review*, the *Boiler*, *Radar Poetry*, and elsewhere. His chapbook, *What the Dying Man Asked Me*, is available from ELJ Publications. He lives and works in Stillwater, Oklahoma, where he is finishing his MFA at Oklahoma State University.

MARLIN M. JENKINS was born and raised in Detroit and studies poetry in University of Michigan's MFA program. He has worked with the Inside Out Literary Arts project teaching poetry to middle-schoolers in Detroit Public Schools. His writings have been given homes by the *Collagist*, the *Journal*, *Word Riot*, the *Offing*, and others.

MICHAEL LAMBERT is the author of *Circumnavigation* (Red Bird Chapbooks, 2014), loosely based on self-propelled travel in North America. The recipient of a 2015 residency at the Port Townsend Writers' Conference, recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Bayou Magazine*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and *Timber Journal*. He lives in Tuscaloosa while pursuing an MFA in creative writing from the University of Alabama and serving as assistant editor for *Black Warrior Review*.

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LUCAS SHEPHERD is an MFA student at the University of New Mexico. His creative work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Atlantic*, *Aldous Huxley Annual*, and the *Writing Disorder*; these and more can be found on his website, lucas-shepherd.com. He is now completing a novel, *West by Midwest*, about demolition derby and redemption.

ELLIE WHITE has been trying to teach people how to hallucinate since 1986. She holds a BA in English from The Ohio State University, and is currently an MFA candidate at Old Dominion University. Ellie writes nonfiction and poetry. Her poems have been

published in *FreezeRay Poetry* and *Harpur Palate*, as well as other journals. Her chapbook, *Requiem for a Doll*, was released by ELJ Publications in June 2015. She is currently an editor at *Barely South Review*. Ellie also has a background in performance poetry. She has competed in the College Unions Poetry Slam Invitational, the Individual World Poetry Slam, the Rustbelt Regional Poetry Slam, the Women of the World Poetry Slam, and the Capturing Fire Queer Poetry Slam. Ellie currently lives among sailors and mermaids in Norfolk, Virginia.

FOOT

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