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Approval of Expenditure from Georgia E. Whitney Memorial Fund

The will which established the Georgia E. Whitney Memorial Fund, named an advisory board consisting of the members of the Board of Selectmen, the Superintendent of Schools and the Principal of the High School. This board is to review and consider requests for expenditures from the fund for events of a cultural and educational nature for the benefit of the students of the Acton schools and the citizens of Acton.

The undersigned have reviewed such a request for \$1000 to be expended to support the 2012 Robert Creeley poetry reading and associated school activities to be held in Acton on March 28 and 29, 2012, and approve this request.

Michael Gowing, Chair
Town of Acton Board of Selectmen

Date

Stephen E. Mills, Superintendent
Acton Public School and
Acton-Boxborough High School

Date

Alix Callen, Principal
Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

Date

Thomas Lux



Acclaimed poet and teacher Thomas Lux began publishing haunted, ironic poems that owed much to the Neo-surrealist movement in the 1970s. Critically lauded from his first book *Memory's Handgrenade* (1972), Lux's poetry has gradually evolved towards a more direct treatment of immediately available, though no less strange, human experience. Often using ironic or sardonic speakers, startlingly apt imagery, careful rhythms, and reaching into history for subject matter, Lux has created a body of work that is at once simple and complex, wildly imaginative and totally relevant. Lux is vocal about the tendency in contemporary poetry to confuse "difficulty" with "originality." In an interview with *Cerise Press*, Lux stated: "There's plenty of room for strangeness, mystery, originality, wildness, etc. in poems that also invite the reader into the human and alive center about which the poem circles." Known for pairing humor with sharp existentialism, Lux commented in the *Los Angeles Times*, "I like to make the reader laugh—and then steal that laugh, right out of the throat. Because I think life is like that, tragedy right alongside humor."

Born in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1946 to working class parents, Lux attended Emerson College and the University of Iowa. Lux's first collections, including *Memory's Handgrenade* and *Sunday: Poems* (1979), were grounded in the Neo-Surrealist techniques of contemporaries like James Tate and Bill Knott.

Contemporary Poets contributor Richard Damashek wrote that Lux's early work

was "intensely personal...tormented and tortured, full of complex and disjointed images reflecting an insane and inhospitable world." Such early Lux's poems were often portraits of a "solo native...always strange to the world," observed Elizabeth Macklin in *Parnassus*, "always on the verge of extradition, always beset with allergies to the native element, 'like a simple vase not tolerating water.'" With *Half Promised Land* (1986), Lux began the turn that characterizes much of his later work. The book foregoes many of the surrealist techniques of *Sunday* and focuses instead on an increasingly careful and accurate depiction of the real world. In later books like *The Drowned River* (1990) and the Kingsley-Tufts award winning *Split Horizon* (1994), Lux utilizes a conversational tone to describe what one reviewer called the "invisible millions" populating the poems. Describing his own progress in an interview with the *Cortland Review*, he said: "I kind of drifted away from Surrealism and the arbitrariness of that. I got more interested in subjects, identifiable subjects other than my own angst or ennui or things like that. I got better and better, I believe, at the craft. I paid more and more attention to the craft. Making poems rhythmical and musical and believable as human speech and as distilled and tight as possible is very important to me. I started looking outside of myself a lot more for subjects. I read a great deal of history, turned more outward as opposed to inward."

Lux's other collections include *New and Selected Poems: 1975-1995* (1997), *The Street of Clocks* (2001), *The Cradle Place* (2004) and *God Particles* (2008), a collection Elizabeth Hoover described as "lucid and morally urgent" in the *Los Angeles Times*. Thomas Lux taught at Sarah Lawrence for over twenty years and is affiliated with the Warren Wilson MFA program; currently the Bourne chair in poetry at the Georgia Institute of Technology, he is a renowned teacher. In the *Cortland Review* interview, he described teaching's greatest rewards: "you see people get excited by poetry. You see their lives changed by poetry. You see someone beginning to learn how to articulate and express themselves in this very tight art form, in this very distilled manner. You see all sorts and hear all sorts of really human stuff, really human business." His many awards and honors include the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award, a Guggenheim fellowship, and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Lux has been praised for his poetry, but as he told Elizabeth Mehren in the *Los*

Angeles Times, "This is not something one chooses to do...It is something I was drawn to. I do it because I love to do it, and because I don't have any choice. If I don't write, I feel empty and lost." He added, "Poetry exists because there is no other way to say the things that get said in good poems except in poems. There is something about the right combination of metaphor or image connected to the business of being alive that only poems can do. To me, it makes me feel more alive, reading good poetry."

CAREER

Emerson College, Boston, MA, poet-in-residence, 1972-75; Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY, member of faculty, 1975—. Visiting professor, Columbia University, University of Houston, and Boston University, 1981, Cooper Union, 1987, and University of California, Irvine, 1995. Co-founder and editor, Born Dream Press.

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Acton Memorial Library Board of Trustees

486 Main St., Acton, MA 01720 * telephone (978) 929-6655 * www.actonmemoriallibrary.org

January 5, 2012

Board of Selectmen
Acton Town Hall
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

Members of the Board,

The AML Board of Trustees requests the approval of the Board of Selectmen to use some of the accumulated earnings in the Georgia Whitney Memorial Fund to help fund the 2012 Robert Creeley Award and associated Helen Creeley Student Poetry Prize competition. This fund was established to support cultural events that benefit the students and citizens of Acton. Specifically we are requesting approval to use \$1,000 of the current accumulated balance of expendable earnings of \$24,003.00.

The selection committee of the Robert Creeley Foundation has chosen the outstanding poet Thomas Lux as the 12th winner of the annual Robert Creeley Award. His many awards and honors include the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award, a Guggenheim fellowship, and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. He currently holds the Bourne chair in poetry at the Georgia Institute of Technology and runs their Poetry at Tech program. He will read in the ABRHS auditorium evening of March 28th and visit the school the next day to read to students and field questions about writing and the life of a writer.

The Creeley Award events continue to grow in scope. Last year, Bruce Weigl drew an enthusiastic evening audience and was so well received by ABRHS students the following day that he was invited back (from Ohio) to do student workshops in early 2012. The Helen Creeley Student Poetry Prize competition this year drew 38 responses from the 150 public and private high schools across the state that were invited to take part. The winners are Soubhik Barari of ABRHS, the first two-time winner of the Prize, and Alessandra Day-Falconi of BU Academy. They will read with Thomas Lux at both public and school readings.

We hope the Board of Selectmen will agree that this program is of great value to the community and the schools and will approve expending \$1,000 from the Georgia Whitney Fund. This funding, along with what we hope to receive from other supporters and what we have been and will be able to independently raise, will meet the cost of this year's events.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Dunn, Trustee
Acton Memorial Library

Attachments: 1. Biography of Thomas Lux
2. 2012 Georgia Whitney Fund Approval Form