



# THE MANTLE

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# THE MANTLE

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Editor: James Croal Jackson  
Editorial Assistant: Sara Rosenblum

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Nina Sudhakar

## Planar Geometry

Say your first lesson is the inherent nature  
of things, the shapes that are defined by

their names, the names that define the shape  
of everything. As if we didn't summon this order

into existence, as if power weren't magicked into hands  
that claimed dominion over the supernatural, the natural,

the natural order of things. Were we born inclined  
toward the arc of justice & then loosed by society,

left hanging at both ends? I never counted the number  
of sides. I drew fervently while praying for the object

to show me a new face, the *hedron* that lived past  
solidity, the angled edges of walls that imprison

its very essence. So did we emerge with clenched fists,  
howling beyond any notion of sorrow? Hesitant eyes

opening onto the illusion of safety, ready to be named,  
ready to be taught, ready to learn our only grip is releasing.

**Nina Sudhakar** is a writer and lawyer currently based in Indianapolis. Her poems have appeared in *TRACK//FOUR* and *Rising Phoenix Review*; for more, please see [www.ninasudhakar.com](http://www.ninasudhakar.com).

Robert Okaji

## Overlooked

How immemorable, he thinks,  
drilling into the wall.  
Another hole, another day.  
Fill them, and still others  
beg creation.

Say *mouth*. Say *void*,  
followed by *tongue* and *burden*,  
by *orifice* and *bland*. Say  
*invisible*. *Empty*. Say *forget*.

That we plan is given.  
But who writes the manual  
to our lives? The hammer

does not shiver at the thought  
of itself. Take this board  
and remove only that portion  
the screw will occupy.

Level the hook. Admire  
the work. Adjust.  
Do this twice.

**Robert Okaji** lives in Texas. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Crannóg*, *Posit*, *Wildness*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Taos Journal of International Poetry & Art*, and elsewhere.

# The Water

I'm fixing the holes

cauterizing the wounds

pouring all my blood  
into empty milk cartons

and spilling very little of it

I promise  
this will all make sense

soon

it will be hard  
I know

but forget everything  
you know

about home furnishing

when prompted  
enter your login  
information

see  
it's going to be

okay

this is all part  
of our search  
for answers  
among the flowers

the easy part

the part  
where we're still  
laughing

in the old photographs

but we forgot  
our lantern

we forgot  
our tent

we're out  
here

unprotected

and the sky  
is unfazed

I think  
this is  
what they warned  
us about

that

every motion ends  
against the same  
unstoppable object

there seems  
to be  
an unspoken agreement

that everything is  
exactly  
what it claims to be

the snow

just snow

our bodies

just bodies

but I'll take  
the broken  
pieces  
of the night

I'll make them  
new

I'll set them out  
onto the water  
  
to float  
wherever  
  
they will  
  
because  
it seems like  
every story  
is just  
another story  
  
where something  
  
drifts  
  
away

**Nicholas Bon** lives in Georgia, where he edits *Epigraph Magazine*. You can find his recent poems in *Spy Kids Review*, *Sea Foam Mag*, *Ghost City Review*, and elsewhere. Visit him online at [www.nicholasbon.com](http://www.nicholasbon.com).

Louise Robertson

## Gossip

You know, half the time,  
people are skimming your  
poems for gossip – like it were a bell chiming.  
Old poems are tumbleweed  
for this kind of thing. But people look  
anyway, asking, is this a thistle,  
purple-headed and seeking  
more air? Is this a mirror? Is this a bat,  
awake at dusk, hung on  
his perch? Sometimes,  
the flowers soften  
and they are, famously, just soft flowers.

**Louise Robertson** is widely published (e.g., *Crack the Spine*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, *Pudding House*, and more) and has a full-length book of poetry, “The Naming Of” (2015, Brick Cave Media). She helps run the Writers' Block Poetry Night, gives writing workshops, and is co-founder and co-organizer of the Ohio MeatGrinder Poetry Slam. She's raising two kids who are better than she is already and codes for money. She has won awards – but they were a long time ago as were her degrees (BA Oberlin College, MFA George Mason University). Also, someone once said about her that, underneath it all, she is kind.

Kenneth Pobo

## Petunias

A visitor said, "Your petunias  
look nice." Nice? These furies  
can bite a leg off summer.

Rattlesnake petunias strike.  
I walk by talking to myself and  
WHAM- they go right for me.

With a petunia, everything is  
a close call, a plot.  
That bashful look, a ruse.  
Put twenty together  
and it looks like peace  
has laid down a picnic blanket.  
Back off. There's no cure.

Once they get you,  
you're done.

**Kenneth Pobo** has a new book of ekphrastic poems from Circling Rivers called *Loplop in a Red City*. In September, Grey Borders Press is bringing out his chapbook called *Dust and Chrysanthemums*.

Ace Boggess

## “Isn’t Today Worth Fighting For?”

—found scribbled in an old journal

I don’t know what I meant  
on a different today than today’s use of same  
back before the turn of the millennium,  
before drug problems, rehab, & jail,  
before divorce—a time before questions

mattered to me, or the answers  
I find inside me as if scrolls.

I can’t say if I intended to respond,  
if the words were someone else’s  
left too long in a notebook in a drawer.

It’s my handwriting, I’m sure:  
squiggles & stains of a black snake  
slaughtered on the road by an 18-wheeler.

Not my sort of sentiment. Not then.  
There’s too much hope. I wouldn’t  
promise myself the excitement  
I feel in today’s today as I watch  
chipmunks disappear down invisible holes,

a crimson woody climb an oak  
when it could fly more easily,

or on TV, TBS showing old movies  
that remind me of my childhood—  
a time when I still thought life  
would be all starships & laser beams.

I wasn’t dreading it like the 1990s’ me,  
the one that must have written this line  
I find so surprising I had to  
prove it wrong to learn it’s right.

**Ace Boggess** is author of the novel “A Song Without a Melody” (Hyperborea Publishing, 2016) and two books of poetry, most recently, “The Prisoners” (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2014). Forthcoming is a third poetry collection: “Ultra-Deep Field” (Brick Road). His poems have appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Rattle*, *River Styx*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and many other journals. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

Nicholas Bon

## C-60

I disassembled the tape recorders  
so I could collect their secrets.

I have the motors and capstans  
and so many other little magnetic bits

in a small pile on my desk,  
but I can't seem to find what I need

anywhere in the mess. Outside  
it rains like cigarette smoke

trapped in a small car. The rain  
is why we have the roof. The shame

is why we have the clothes. Everything  
is just an escape from something else.

**Nicholas Bon** lives in Georgia, where he edits *Epigraph Magazine*. You can find his recent poems in *Spy Kids Review*, *Sea Foam Mag*, *Ghost City Review*, and elsewhere. Visit him online at [www.nicholasbon.com](http://www.nicholasbon.com).



the goal is to get as far away as  
there, from my self  
my imprinted, arbitrary glass self that goes on  
refracting reality helplessly  
it's following us even now, isn't it

surely we are more than just photographic films exposed without design in the early light  
of the day, predisposed now to certain patterns forever? it's a wonder we should get  
anything done and spoken at all when everyone's looking at blue when I say green and you  
say white when I say clean

am i my pattern of sight or the seeing  
the eye or the i behind it  
or the only constant that has been  
or the inconsistencies  
with my birth was born both a shape  
of me and of the world, cut anew  
at my seams

**Menkah Ahlawat** studies and teaches English Literature at Delhi University, India and is currently pursuing a M.Phil degree on the topic of Trans Poetics. Her work has appeared in *Vayavya*. She likes to pursue any writing, art, or school of thought that helps pass time while she figures out this thing.

Gray Clark

## to every city some man loves me in, pt. I

I show up at your house  
with a bundle of lavender  
trying to not be fragile  
a clothes line hang up  
in the town you last called me in

This is not Denver

We smoke what we dry  
let die slower what we don't  
sitting in the bay window  
you notice my legs  
sweaty palm leaf through  
a book you knew longer  
than the lover who lent it

This is not North Hampton

The bathroom light bulb is yellow film  
against dark night pushing in  
elongated triangles of shadow  
where I wash my face  
on the edge of your bath towel  
here is today's flushed cheek  
slipping into a nightgown

This is not Allentown

your mouth; a backyard  
you tell me to not talk  
risk our trust or falling in love  
kill the garden in my throat  
extinguish the lamp on the bedside table

I can't sleep  
I can't sleep  
I can't sleep  
I can't sleep.

**Gray Clark** is a poet from Columbus, Ohio. They have previously been published in *Heartbeat Literary Journal* and *Arcturus Magazine*. They currently are studying visual art and shifting into the hermit they always longed to be.

Nina Sudhakar

## Self-Portrait as Cathedral

I am hallowed ground. Sometimes I feel  
I have been shaped by the hands laid on me:

fingers conjuring the specter of beauty from  
swirling vapors. The sculptor coaxing the body

from hard marble. Existence following notice;  
existence following admiration. Existing after

existence. Hands tracing stippled flanks, the lone  
birthmark anchoring thumb to hand. A nose that

indicates provenance. Skin grown thick from pressure,  
every knot tied by a blunt instrument. For so long,

fighting against this form of protection. The choir of scars  
reaching its refrain in summer: full-faced, reckless in

bare air. Shoulder-blades slicing wind currents, buttressing  
carried burdens. A wingspan you could coast on for miles.

Showers like holy water, hands like a blessing. The hymn  
of praise lilting in the background, enough to sustain

blind faith. *I love your body*, he said, and I think  
he meant it. I like to think they all meant it.

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## Submission Guidelines

*The Mantle* welcomes poetry submissions from you, no matter who you are or where you live.

Send your odd, poignant, beautiful poems. Send poems you're proud of, whether raw, refined, or jagged.

You may submit anytime. Issue cut-off dates are as follows:

October 7 for the Autumn issue. (November 1st release)

January 7 for the Winter issue. (February 1st release)

April 7 for the Spring issue. (May 1st release)

July 7 for the Summer issue. (August 1st release)

Send up to 5 previously unpublished poems of any style or length in one .doc/.docx/.pdf/.rtf/.odt file to **themantle.poetry@gmail.com** with "submission" in the subject line.

Please withhold your name from the manuscript- for fairness, we assign a random number to each submission through [www.random.org](http://www.random.org). We prefer not to know who we are reading.

Include your name and an optional cover letter in the email. A 50-75 word third-person bio will be requested in the event we accept your work.

Wait for a response before submitting again. If your work is selected for publication, you may submit again the following reading period.

Simultaneous submissions are encouraged. If any of your poems get accepted elsewhere before you get a response from us, send a reply to the original submission email noting which poem(s) you need to withdraw (no worries, and congrats!).

Feel free to query if you haven't received a response after 60 days.

We ask for First Serial Rights. After a poem is published here, the contributor retains all rights. If the poem is published anywhere else after us, we kindly ask that you credit *The Mantle* as first publisher.

We are a non-paying market.

Thank you so much for reading our first issue! *The Mantle* can't exist without your support and writing, and we are thankful for both. Looking forward to hearing from you!