



THE MANTLE

CONTEMPORARY POETRY
VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Autumn 2017

THE MANTLE

#2

VOLUME I, ISSUE II
November 1, 2017

Editor: James Croal Jackson
Each poem owned by its respective author

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Tallon Kennedy

Eclipse Hangover / A Month Later

Pittsburgh wasn't in the path of totality.
The eclipse slipped by us— the sun
a crescent moon through blacked-out glasses,
and that was it. A disappointment,
the feeling of missing something truly remarkable.

That's what loving him has been— partial.
His boyfriend in totality.
Is it something truly remarkable?
Breathtaking?

Have I slipped off the rooftop
where we felt the temperature drop
twenty degrees
only to be the same as before?

And yet, isn't this really something?
To be alive and adjacent
to miracle.

All these people, all watching an alignment,
constrained by time and place, like everything else—

like everything else, I am hungover
from a love that hit too hard.
I suppose we're all waiting for an alignment
that shatters the spirit-shattering
day to day.

For me, it is this: 2024— totality cuts
across our suburban Ohio hometown.
I imagine by then we'll be states, if not countries,
apart. But, here I am, stuck in a present

that needs a future to build towards:
something so complete
you can't help but live for it.

Tallon Kennedy is a poet from Columbus, Ohio. They are an undergraduate student of literature, writing, and gender studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Their previous works have been featured in *Rust + Moth*, *Lit.cat*, and *The NewPeople Newspaper*.

Anisa Gandevivala

Siren

the wail of a sea so silent,
it lets the sky sleep
a spangled, mirrored death
lighting a precipice

a point, a cliff

to

leap

from

my love,

we think the sea
will catch us
just like the sky has

Anisa is sitting on a mountain of poems, no, swimming in a sea of poems, no, scattering poems into the sky-stars or birds? A poet, writer, and artist in Columbus, Ohio, **Anisa Gandevivala** explores place/space through the medium of impermanence, that's why it's difficult to pin her work down. She hopes you'll grant her the certainty of connecting in the physical world via Instagram or Facebook or in real life.

Fish Love

“Too much of love is fish love.”

-Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski

1.

The first boy to touch me
threw me on a bed
and smothered my mouth
in his mouth.

I tasted the pizza we'd just shared,
garlic, tomatoes.

He didn't want to
give me this moment.

This moment was his.

It was so incredibly sad,
so I told myself

to become a fish—
quick, flexible, able
to push back

against this current.

Fish are powerful.

Fish are easily caught.

And this was what

I thought it meant to be
a woman in love,

which is to say I spent years
opening my throat for
man after man to gut.

2.

The story goes
that a rabbi finds a man
gutting fish by the river.

Why do you kill these fish?

the rabbi asks,

and the man replies,

Because I love fish.

How often is love nothing
more than fish love,
which is to say
people devour what it is
they love in you.

3.

We met online which meant
we were doomed, and yet
you kept calling and I kept
answering and you kept
asking what you could give to me
and I didn't understand,
so I kept talking about fish.

Fish moan and croak,
sometimes gnash their teeth
to communicate.
Did you know they hear
through reverberations
against their flesh?
Which is to say
their tiny bones shudder
when something's coming.

But you saw through
my choreographed sidetracks,
you persisted, deeply human in
your devotion... which is to say
I'm out of my depths here.

Your warm words wash over me,
wash away my scales, fins,
the operculum and lateral line.
You are warming up my blood,

again. My love.
This poem
is all just to say
I am finally listening.
And in hearing you,
I am resurrected,
fish no more.

Bryanna Licciardi has received her MFA in Poetry and is currently pursuing her PhD in Literacy Studies. Her debut chapbook *SKIN SPLITTING* is out from Finishing Line Press (2017). She is a Pushcart Prize nominee, and has had work appear in journals such as *Poetry Quarterly*, *BlazeVOX*, *491 Magazine*, *Adirondack Review*, and *Cleaver Magazine*. Visit www.bryannallicciardi.com for more about her.

Maureen Daniels

Valerie

Shaved her girlhood off in the temple.
Incense streaming

while candle wax covered
curious fingertips. Dove wild,

bare feet slapping, we were
young as fire

on the ridge of a match.
She tore off her satin

robe and ivory headdress, led me
into the shadow of the lion-

mouthed fountain. A bird drank
from the minuscule stream.

There was a silence
behind her red laughter.

Childhood broke in me
and I have never gone back.

Maureen Daniels teaches English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, where she is also a doctoral fellow in creative writing. She is an editorial assistant for *Prairie Schooner* and *Western American Literature*. Her work has recently been published in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Wilde Magazine*, *Gertrude Press*, *Third Wednesday*, and the *South Florida Poetry Review*.

Mourning Lights

My father visited me in a cramped
Atlanta hotel room five years
after he died. It was hours since
I took the ecstasy from a drag
queen's bra, long after I faltered
through the doors of a basement
club on the other side of the city. I couldn't recall
how I'd got there—let alone the miracle
of slurring the right address in a taxi. The dawn's
pink fingers were just reaching in, trailing
across my wailing head, clawing fierce
into bruised eye sockets. I knew him

by his force, the dramatic entrance, that sizzle
in the air. I was still coming down, but in his glory
he hovered like a poltergeist in the room, lighting
up those cheap nylon sheets and bad prints
bright as a firecracker. In a panic I stuck
my head under the threadbare covers, sure
the ghosts would lose interest, the demons
wonder at my own magic when my wan moon face
disappeared with a snap. Weeks later I found my comfort,
my two fingers of numbness, smooth and strong—my father
came to me as ball lightning, a phenomenon explained
by science and dismissed as nature's freak show. But I know,

in the deepest, secret chambers of my heart,
he gathered all his essence, all his power, all
his everything to fire up my world, and I—
I hid like a coward, a shaken toddler,
his crowning disappointment in the dark.

Jessica (Tyner) Mehta is a Cherokee poet, novelist, and storyteller. She's the author of five collections of poetry including the forthcoming *Constellations of My Body*, *Secret-Telling Bones*, *Orygun*, *What Makes an Always*, and *The Last Exotic Petting Zoo* as well as the novel *The Wrong Kind of Indian*. She's been awarded the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund Prize in Poetry and numerous poet-in-residencies posts around the world. Visit Jessica's author site at www.jessicamehta.com.

Keshia Mcclantoc

nature vs. nurture

it's easy to worship
chained to a whipping post
waiting for eager spectators

mother laid the foundation
built on bricks of disdain
layers of asphalt and neglect

then came the man
slipping fingers under childhood skirts
pouring concrete for the post

wood stained with words,
touch starvation, and
intersections of vulnerability and rage

and a boy who made the chains
bound them tight with
bruises and hard grips

skin breaking to cheering
celebration of fresh blood
someone always ready to step up

day in and day out
i practice in my temple
chanting till red drips down my spine

fear keeps me going
drives each whip's crack
too loud to ask

who brought me to my whipping post?

Keshia Mcclantoc is originally from Bayou La Batre, Alabama. Her work has previously appeared in *The Tower Literary Journal*. She currently studies English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she is pursuing a degree in Composition and Rhetoric. In her free time, she likes writing short fiction and poetry, starting queer feminist discussions, and having deep, emotional conversations with her cat.

R.W. Jagodnik

Camera

Come, gaze

lovingly at a fountain, at a mountain
more white than the rush that pleases God,
nothing like fleas. Trembling up on the

gentlest slope, sprinkled with poppies
and all that gear up seeds, dug in like
corporals, frame up that fir in its collapsing.

No red bark crumbling in the end, nothing
jolting enough dew off the vine to pulse
a test, you are that novice arrived at the

temple steps, knowing nothing, no more
than a finger's stretch for the Divine.

R.W. Jagodnik has placed poems in *Fireweed*, *Motes*, *The Cortland Review*, *M Review*, *The Poeming Pigeon*, and *Borrowed Solace*. Currently, R.W. works as a residential caregiver for developmentally-disabled people.

Stephen Mead

Not Painting II

palms itch-
hands having spasms
inward to clutch, work with
brushes as lovers, as tyrants

& the days,
a thousand years flash through
veins to call
 catch, catch

you in this sleepwalk of light
finding sky blue cloth on wall,

unprimed polyester
waiting to be stretched

Stephen Mead, a resident of NY, is a published outsider artist, writer, maker of short-collage films and sound-collage downloads. In 2014 he began a webpage to gather links of his poetry being published in such zines as *Great Works*, *Unlikely Stories*, *Quill & Parchment*, etc., in one place: [Poetry on the Line, Stephen Mead](#). For links to his other media and merchandise, please feel free to Google Stephen Mead Art.

Aden Thomas

Movie Night in Central Wyoming

The rain just north of Riverton
rolls deep into the August night
like a groggy and hibernating bear
looking for the comfort of its den.

There are stories somewhere in those clouds,
though I can't quite remember them,
songs I know I carry,
journeys of forgotten storms.
Tonight they gather around me.

Reels and reels of lighting
play against the sky
like silent films on silver screens.
I smell the camphor on the wind.
Even the crickets are listening.

It's a warm night to find myself
alone, to wish
for all these versions of myself,
sequels that could be true.

Aden Thomas grew up in the sagebrush country of central Wyoming. His work has appeared in *The Chiron Review*, *Rust + Moth*, and *The Inflectionist Review*. His first book of poems, *What Those Light Years Carry*, is available through Kelsay Books. More at: www.adenthomas.com.

Kenneth Pobo

On Facebook Wayne Posts Pictures

from Havana. My dresser drawer
holds pictures of us in Key West
25 years ago. Our lives climbed

the same tree to separate branches.
For a few years we shared music. Like me,
he loves Tommy James and the Shondells
singing "Mirage," #1 in Chicago, 1967.

Terrible year, Junior High,
for both of us, gay kids, scared.
We had our own mirages,

love a big one. It seems solid enough
to put your arms around. A snowman,
it melts. The mirage reforms and calls.

How easily to follow, knowing better,
knowing you will do it.

Kenneth Pobo has a new book out from Circling Rivers called *Loplop in a Red City*. The poems are ekphrastic. Forthcoming is a chapbook from Grey Borders called *Dust And Chrysanthemums*. Speaking of chrysanthemums, he has some gorgeous orange ones blooming right this very minute.

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:

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)

October 7 for the Autumn issue. (November 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- 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.

You may submit again after receiving a response. If your work is selected for publication, wait for the following issue to pass before submitting again.

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! *The Mantle* is so grateful for your support.