



THE MANTLE

POETRY JOURNAL

Issue 4
Spring 2018

THE MANTLE

#4

VOLUME I, ISSUE IV
May 1, 2018

Editor: James Croal Jackson
Each poem belongs to its respective author

themantlepoetry.com

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Emily Ellison

My cat ate my cactus

as if he wanted his budded tongue
to similarly sprout and pickle
thorns from the papillae,

his succulent organ
transfuses affection
through needles, his love

needles, the result of our anemic
communication is the thick-furred
speech taking violent expression
in each lick, my arm is a board

to carve desperations of enforced silence—
so is expressed love in its more accurate ache,

a removal of oneself to soothe the swelling of another.

Emily Ellison is a first year MFA poet at Texas State University; she also works as an Instructional Assistant for their English faculty. She lives in San Marcos, Texas with two cats and an abundance of plants.

Tanner Lee

under my fingernails I write

what loves these bones—
skin that crisps like a warzone
my string dreams
crouch in heat
for what it's worth I'll reach under
the curtain to touch something new
a mouse dances in a sticky trap until
a boy approaches with a hammer
what kind of sound reaches ears full of blood?
I know what it's like to be instantly smashed
after the tremble do I remember
the slow burn of morning
orange peels and strawberry seed crunch
my hair swings wet with every step
inch by hammered inch
I beg the confession
of these poems
take my fingers and press them
dead.

Tanner Lee lives in Ogden, Utah. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Hobart*, *West Trade Review*, *Weber: The Contemporary West*, *The Comstock Review*, and *Entropy Mag*. He is an assistant blog manager at *The Blueshift Journal*. Find him on twitter @heytannerlee.

Amy Poague

The Time Inside Our Bodies Keeps Us Young

Does the second set of eyes mean
time is a second-order concern?
Remind me about life that returns
on a schedule.

Perennials. Yes, the predicament
of perennials.

Young love in old age can't be time erupting.

My DNA is a fan of your DNA, and life
is the reincarnation of heart rate, life an oscillating fan,
beats never more
than that or this oscillation.

Which brings me to the sun.

It isn't
farther
than whatever keeps time keeping.

I can wait. Oscillate.

I can't wait. The eyes that surface after.
We grow and must never remove.
It means solar oscillation and beats per body. I mean
per pair of eyes.

This isn't just lilies arriving on time. Second sight seconds
inside your chest.

I'll always.
I'll always

regenerate eyes.

Amy Poague lives in Iowa City and works at a junior high school. She has a M.A. in Creative Writing at Eastern Michigan University. Her work has appeared in *Fine Madness* and as part of the *Iowa City Poetry in Public Project*, and is forthcoming on the website *SWWIM Every Day*. She enjoys collaborating with community organizations and institutions that foster creativity in children and teens. These experiences have included stints at 826michigan (Ann Arbor), FLY Creativity Lab (Ypsilanti, MI), and the International Writing Program (University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA).

Crystalline Nixon

Xmas Body Horror

i think by now
i have enough
foodstuff stored inside
the cavities in which
my wisdom teeth used to hide
to feed you for a month,
birdlike,
pro bono.
likewise i'd appreciate
a little slice of pinky nail
in my christmas stocking,
signed by the artist
and sharpened to a
beautiful simmering edge
the stainless steel knives
on QVC and HSN would
shake their heads and quiver at.

Crystalline Nixon is a shard of broken glass at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. Ethernet cables run from his body all the way to the Mongolia's southern border by way of tunnels. Follow him on Twitter @toom_buck for updates on what he finds on the ocean floor.

my battle scars are pink

warning:
if you tear this temple to pieces
i will crawl out from under ruin
ascending beneath
smooth stone blocks of ashlar
to be cut by the stone of our history
is nothing new

i. a good girl's studio apartment, near union square
she pours me a glass of rose
in early morning
i'll throw up shades of pink
 same color of her lips
 after red lipstick rubs off where i've kissed her
wrenching myself of inhaling someone else's breath

how cold her body is
lying next to me
& there are several weeks until winter

ii. on a bench, south seaport
we talk about
"materialistic consumerism"
counting dogs that walk by
 sometimes you get lucky:
 the black labrador
 knows his way to the dog park
 as if that wasn't enough
 when he gets there, he plays nice
hiding cans of spiked iced tea
from the security guard
like high schoolers hiding underneath bleachers
 afraid to tell our preppy boyfriends
 that we like each other's bodies more
neon lights from the "open" sign
of the taco truck across the street
paint pink across her face
same color as my insides

ii. *in my room, trying not to be on top*
she bought me a glittery pink pen
because i said a month ago
that editing in black and white was “devastating”
now i cross out
everything that’s wrong
with the color of her lips

her thumbs have pin-sized holes
from sewing muslin dresses
she doesn’t know i only hold her hand
to find my way into someone’s bloodstream

“i just want to dance with you”
says whiskey, not tongue
underneath a disco ball
in the east village
as if she’s trying to be anything more than a poem

Shelby Curran is a 21-year-old writer working in publishing in New York City. She graduated from Florida State University, where she studied English: Editing, Writing, and Media. Her poetry has appeared in *South85 Journal*, *Snapdragon Journal*, *Pano Ply* (Editor's Choice), and elsewhere. Additionally, her personal essays have been featured in *The Miami Herald*, *Elite Daily*, *them.*, and more.

Ding-dong

If Miss Hooker says it it must be so,
that I'm going to Hell when I
die because I sin too much. Sunday School
is what she teaches us and knows a lot
about God and Jesus and the Holy
Ghost but the problem is that I like it,
sinning, I mean, probably too much
but if God's watching me swipe a packet
of Juicy Fruit from the five & dime then
He must have too much time on His hands, she
calls it eternity does Miss Hooker,
and what that is is time but not the time
we know down here, on earth I mean, with clocks
and watches and ding-dong bells. No, it's time
without present, past, and future up there
but I've got to be good to learn to tell
it for myself, if time can be told there.
And I wonder down in Hell how it is,
if it's eternity, too, and Heaven
and Hell are in the same time zone, the same
eternity zone, I guess you could call it.
From what Miss Hooker tells me I'll find out
if I don't change my ways-it will be too
late for me then and I should've asked her
what's being tardy to eternity
anyway? So sometimes I talk too much
even when my mouth is shut. Miss Hooker
says that God knows what I'm thinking, I don't
have to say a word for Him to hear me.
I wonder what time it will be when I'm
dead. Oh, I forgot: just eternity
and I'll live forever in Heaven or
Hell, my soul anyway, my body will
just be recycled into Nature and
that will take time. I wonder how much. Will
I find out in the afterlife? Will I
care that I don't have a body for time
to tick away? But if eternity's
forever I wonder how to measure
that. Sometimes I think that Miss Hooker's not

so smart. Or maybe she's just ignorant
like I am, but in a righteous way, like
God is. It takes Him an eternity.

Gale Acuff has had poetry published in *Ascent*, *McNeese Review*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Poem*, *Adirondack Review*, *Weber: The Contemporary West*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Florida Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Arkansas Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Orbis*, and many other journals. He has authored three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse Press, 2004), *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006), and *The Story of My Lives* (BrickHouse, 2008).

Lindsay Illich

Aletheia

Darkness takes separate things
and makes them indivisible.

The sky and horizon, body against
body, the smell of earth dredged,

the blade dug in, turning up
what was hidden. You've uncovered

me, our nudities grounding us
in the actual, our bodies' inevitable

darkness: I understand you.

Lindsay Illich is the author of *Rile & Heave* (Texas Review Press, 2017) and the chapbook *Heteroglossia* (Anchor & Plume, 2016). *Rile & Heave* won the Texas Review Press Breakthrough Prize in Poetry. She teaches at Curry College in Milton, Massachusetts.

Ethan Milner

Bodies in Parallax

At the bottom of the hill, a paved oasis—
the pool surrounded by a hedgerow
of hawthorn, dense yet diaphanous.

On approach I'd peer through the mesh of brush
to see figures and forms, outlines foreshadowed;
bodies revealed, in plain light, to be bodies.

I'd watch my cousin
form his arms
into an arrowhead

and pierce the water's skin,
emerging from below to wrap
himself in the quiver of his towel.

I remember once kneeling at the deep end's edge
to watch my pliant reflection, the negative space
of shade clouding my likeness.

I could see myself in flux, as I was
and could be: a boy poised to plummet
at the wind's whim. I looked up at my family,

who aimed to protect me from the water's
other side. But the magnetism of drowning
drew me down into that vision—

I fell into my reflection and felt my image shatter
as I plumbed the deep. I curled into myself
and careened like a galaxy in slow revolution.

On the water's current I heard the crash
of my rescue, felt my cousin's steel arm
hook around me, reel me to safety.

I knew I'd fall before I fell, but I stayed and saw it through.
I was not daring, but paralyzed, like a mirror
suspended facing nothing.

Someone said I was brave, others told me to say thank you.
I felt the wrong things, or rather, felt only a sense
of bodies in parallax, fluid, and flooding.

Ethan Milner is a clinical social worker in Oregon, providing therapy and crisis intervention at a school for youth with special needs. His work has most recently appeared in *The Ghost City Review*, and has been featured in *The Offing*, *decomP*, and other outlets. His writing on music is lost in the archives of ImpressionOfSound.com.

Shirley Jones-Luke

A Portrait of Michael Brown that Wasn't Michael Brown

after Ferguson & The White Card

Black outline on a white space dots indicate entry path
of bullets

The body is naked. The Black body is naked
except for the dark marks.

A caricature of a young man, of Michael Brown.

But it's not him. No outline can represent a black body.

White space cannot hold who Michael Brown was.

It looks like a target at a gun range a black body bullseye.

Not a boy. Not a man. A step above a stick figure.

Some might call it art.

Some might

Shirley Jones-Luke is a poet and a writer. Ms. Luke lives in Boston, Mass. She has an MA from UMass Boston and an MFA from Emerson College. Her work has appeared in *Adanna*, *BlazeVOX*, *Deluge* and *Willawaw*. Shirley was a 2017 Poetry Fellow at the Watering Hole Poetry Retreat. Ms. Luke will be a participant at VONA (Voices of Our Nation) in June 2018.

Or What Does a Tree Know About Aging?

You'd think me impervious
to my surroundings
 little do you know
of my inner struggles
 anchored deeply
 in strata swollen
roots protruding
 petrified pillows
 bearing traces
of endless processions
 insects' footprints
 antennae probing
every crevice
 the slightest orifice
 a witness to fallen
leaves transparent like lace
 skeletal nervures turned
 into butterfly's wings
decaying flesh
 too many skins shed
 layers and layers
of debris pelage encrusted
 inside fissures
 muffled voices
instants when time rests
 sounds of crackling
 pine needles under
footsteps resin sticking
 onto fingers, sighs
 in stark darkness
age is often equated
 with wisdom
 I equate it
with survival.

Hedy Habra has authored two poetry collections, *Under Brushstrokes*, finalist for the USA Best Book Award and the International Poetry Book Award, and *Tea in Heliopolis*, winner of the USA Best Book Award and finalist for the International Poetry Book Award. Her story collection, *Flying Carpets*, won the Arab American National Book Award's Honorable Mention and was finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. An eight-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, her work appears in *Cimarron Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Gargoyle*, *Nimrod*, *Poet Lore*, *World Literature Today* and *Verse Daily*. Her website is hedyhabra.com.

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:

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

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)

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" somewhere 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.

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