



THE MANTLE POETRY

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THE MANTLE

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#20

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Skygaze Fantasy

I mistake a poet for a poem. I ache for the stars
and they shower asbestos upon my arms.
Inside, a ghost-shaped fist unclasps
against a pronoun. To walk asleep
and be felt only as fingertips. A brackish instance
in every tooth or sealed doorway.
Who are we without everything unproven?
Even the unnamed is named,
nothing lost on me. Evening clockwises
to the belly, day sighs the lack thereof.
Our sky is a bowl of foam and
we are the light. No
traces of old. I am only sure being
a painting: the spider pinprick
of a gravel bead and the most quiet heat.
This expanding eclipse lisps
upwards, perhaps perforating the curve
and leaking heaven down to earth.
A poet unwinds beneath
as a fist-shaped ghost.

Ava Chen is a student poet residing in Massachusetts. Her work has been recognized by Smith College and the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and appears or is forthcoming in *Scapegoat Review*, *Ghost City Review*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, among others. Her debut chapbook, *Snow Syndrome*, is forthcoming with dancing girl press.

Mary Simmons

Dispersion

Last night, a songbird slept through
a thunderstorm, and I,
weightless, dreamed of you,

of the scent of your shampoo,
of every tree in a wood responding
to your name.

In every step in every puddle
my reflection drowns from my feet,
shadow watered into light.
Watching myself watching, in passing
car windows, myself,
in each image I cast

into a swarming world, I reach
for you reaching back for me.
Fold my hands with your hands
and I will know what it is to be blessed.

Mary Simmons is a queer poet from Cleveland, Ohio. She is an MFA candidate at Bowling Green State University, where she serves as an assistant editor for *Mid-American Review*. She has work in or forthcoming from *The Santa Clara Review*, *The Shore*, *One Art*, *tiny wren lit*, *Phantom Kangaroo*, and others.

Walking Home

from a friend's house, late enough for night
to have smoothed its satin tablecloth over
the sky but not so late as to worry about specters,
or flying saucers, or whatever dangers the darkness
is supposedly known to offer. Even the emptiness
of storefronts seems benign—chiropractor,
liquor store, Christian Science Reading Room—
their unlit windows not dead
but resting their eyes, as my father says
whenever I accuse him of sleeping. And now
the street softens from business to residential:
brick houses, some with wreaths on their doors,
some still displaying stubborn pumpkins
on their porches. Just two months ago,
I passed by this house, right here, with the blue
shutters; the heart-shaped hydrangea bush was violet
and robust, a hummingbird moth teasing
its blooms as fireflies pressed their thumbprints of light
above the lawn. Now, it's mid-November, the blossoms
gone, but the darkness does something
to the fallen leaves that makes them appear
gracious and deserved. The house I pass next
has its lights off in every room
save one on the ground floor, whose walls,
I discern from quick glance, are lined with bookshelf
upon bookshelf. Lately I've been rereading books
from my past: *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*,
My Antonia, a few rogue Steinbecks; the experience
of reading each is like traveling down a familiar sidewalk,
towards home. I'm almost back now, my last strides scented
with a mix of a passing car's exhaust and the cologne
of a man walking his dog—molasses-cookie colored,
glossy eared—not far ahead of me. I haven't once
looked at the moon. I'm not feeling pensive, I guess.
There's no wind, just a gentle chill in the air, and
tomorrow is just another journey as short and simple
as tonight's. Listen, I don't know if it's okay to say this
but I'm glad to be here. I'm glad to keep going.

Annie Przepyszny is a poet from Washington, DC who will begin pursuing an MFA in Poetry at the University of Maryland this Fall. She is an Assistant Editor for *Grace and Gravity* and has poems published in *Jet Fuel Review*, *The Healing Muse*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *SWWIM*, and others.

Stan Sanvel Rubin

Singularity

I don't like it
when the guy in the corner
watches me as soon as I walk
into the crowded bar
trying to be anonymous.
I can feel him watching.
I don't think I'm nervous
but I feel nervous.
I think the moose head
on the wall is what makes
the glass of beer slip
from my fingers and break
on the hard floor
into a number of shards
each of which contains
a droplet of liquid light
like a promise before
it settles into being
just another broken thing
on a dirty floor.
The room is loud
so no one hears it.
When I look again
he's still watching
as if he expected me
to do that and expects
me to do it again
as if I have to.

Stan Sanvel Rubin's poems have appeared in numerous US journals including *Agni*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Georgia Review* among others, as well as in Canada, Ireland, and China. Four full-length collections include *There. Here.* (Lost Horse Press) and *Hidden Sequel* (Barrow Street Poetry Book Prize). Recent anthologies are *For Love of Orcas*; *Moving Images: Poems on Film*; and *Sharing This Delicate Bread*. Born in Philadelphia, he has lived on the north Olympic Peninsula of Washington for twenty years.

The Shadow of Her Piano

During my lesson years,
the only one at the keyboard
of our upright spinet was me.

I hated when my mother listened
with helpful suggestions at each mistake.
Mostly I practiced in the empty house, after

school, ignored etudes for The Fireside Book,
played *Annie Laurie*, sang along in Scots:
we did that one in sixth grade chorus.

Even now, I can't picture my mother
sitting on the piano bench.

Five-year-old me snuggled up,
Eden-touched, as she picks out
The Shadow of Your Smile

or some other old movie tune.
Mom said, *It never leaves you*,
meaning the piano.

Mary Christine Delea

Central Park Meditation

The autumn afternoon grows in shades
of red, darkening through buildings,

shadowing pigeons, people, trees.
The city slows for a second—no human

can feel the change, only sense
a sudden shift in their own balance.

I sit on the grass, watch as it darkens
as if night flows up from

the ground until it reaches the sky.
The afternoon is mine—birds quiet,

trees relaxed, lake still, squirrels waiting.
Every moment closer to evening

sinks me deeper, darker, as if the dirt—
growing cold—accepts me without question.

Mary Christine Delea is the author of one full-length poetry collection (Main Street Press: *The Skeleton Holding Up the Sky*) and three chapbooks. Delea's website (www.mchristinedelea.com) includes a blog, where she posts writing prompts each Sunday, and poems she loves on Sundays and Wednesdays. She lives in Oregon.

Coming Home from Work in December

Jolted in the bus,
I look up to see where we are,
almost dizzy because of gloom
and the dazzle of passing Christmas lights.

The bus windows mist,
streaked with bubbles, as if
we working folk dazed with fatigue ride
dunked
in a crooked flute of champagne.

In the half-melted snowy night,
I think a crowd of angels has stumbled
into a gigantic glass of fizzy stars.
Drunk wings stagger,
lost in mazy avenues of heaven.

We toss on our seats, leaning on thin metal, tinsel
and dingy glass,
wondering if we miss our stops in the dark.

Mary Elizabeth Birnbaum was born, raised, and educated in New York City. Mary's translations of the Haitian poet Felix Morisseau-Leroy has been published in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Into English* (Graywolf Press), and *in And There Will Be Singing, An Anthology of International Writing*. Her work has appeared in *Lake Effect*, *J Journal*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Soundings East*, *Barrow Street*, and other literary journals. In 2022 Mary received two nominations for a Pushcart Prize.

Melody Wilson

Criminal

Just as the water washes it
down the drain
I realize it doesn't matter what kind of
brain a spider has
whether it knows fear
or not. I could have carried it to the window
or waited to shower but this
was easier.
I was on time for the meeting
my afternoon nap then
the news. The way
the same day shatters some
coddles others. Even as it clung to the tile
the grace of its delicate
legs so beautiful.
I was relieved
when I couldn't see it
anymore, began
immediately
to forget.

Melody Wilson's work appears in *Nimrod* and *The Fiddlehead*. New poems will appear in *Crab Creek Review*, *Kestrel*, and *Briar Creek*. She received two Pushcart nominations in 2022 and was a semifinalist for the Pablo Neruda Award. Her chapbook *Spineless: Memoir in Invertebrates* comes out in August 2023. Find her at melodywilson.com.

“Oh, but Old Friend, Are We Ever Really Happy?”

question asked by Andrea Fekete

Not to look for it in a life;
in a laugh, we have our moments.
Singing on stage at Calamity Café
while drinkers chat &
drown us out, we never care—
transitive rock stars
ready to toss TVs into a pool.
Riding swings at Riverfront Park,
Ohio across the Ohio from us,
the midnight lights
reflect a second universe of peace.
We tell each other stories,
play improv games, compare notes
on a film we love
or the sex lives of the rich & not-
quite-us. Happiness
exists in slant like a snake
we witness & worry about;
it mostly ignores us &
will be gone by morning.

Ace Boggess is author of six books of poetry, most recently *Escape Envy* (Brick Road, 2021). His writing has appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Rattle*, *Harvard Review*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes and tries to stay out of trouble.

Submission Guidelines

The Mantle Poetry 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.

Submissions are read year-round. 3-4 issues will be published yearly.

Send up to 3 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.

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, we kindly ask that you credit *The Mantle* as first publisher. We are a non-paying journal, for the time being.

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