



THE MANTLE POETRY

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THE MANTLE

POETRY

#21

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

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Anniversary

And January resumes
as its first snow falls for you,

my nose rises to you. Are you there?
Do you see

the year's ashes shedding at
my feet? See me

and the days getting high
by myself in stranger ways

and the grief of work when I am tired
because I make a mistake

and if it were anyone else, I'd just
tell them, it's okay, it's okay

and how I break my own heart when I
talk to someone

and I'd talk to them again
but they can walk away

and suffer the lack of you who hesitated
to hear my wicked past

and to speak yours too. Though
now I need permission to continue

and trust in time it will get better.
Forget you. Love you

but leave you behind. And all this sorrow
swells in me like euphoria.

In the Femme Future

It's all becoming clear now. The ferns and airplants on the windowsill
are dying and returning

to the Gulf night sky now, like the spaceships
we wanted to believe in

are coming to spirit us away, any benevolent day now.
There's no rush. The storms

are not quieting
everywhere, there are more —

but not here, darling. I haven't seen you all year, now,
and yet I love everything

for you that you love, have loved lately.
If you were a cactus flower

of sorrow unblooming in the West, how fitting
the future only gives me signs of anchors floating

off with their tethers. Everything that can be reversed.
I dreamed of you again. This time

I saw you wearing a tiger lily crown
and talking on one of those plastic, seethrough cordless phones,

swooning around a teen movie bedroom, rehearsing something.
You were always the only one who could call me

back to my body, cradle my visions
and plant them in a place

back by the porch steps, by the unguarded cemetery.
My gift, if it is a gift —

is this dream world, back to you. Before
I had seen a bay of tears so full

the salt buoyed all the bodies up to the clouds. But
in the femme future, we all walk on the waters and wear

earth tones, which will be entirely new colors
by then. In the femme future

I know I can't be trusted to tell,
there is a girl. There is a train station, a chance meeting,

a scene you will think sounds just like a summer mystery novel
about to play out. There is a scarf and a faint flower,

a flush, a pulse, a quick chest you think
has never beat so immortally as it does right now.

CJ Scruton is a trans, nonbinary poet from the Lower Mississippi River Valley currently living on the Great Lakes, where they teach and research ghost stories. Their work has previously appeared in *Shenandoah*, *New South*, *Quarterly West*, and other journals. Their full-length manuscript has been a semifinalist for the YesYes Books Pamet River Prize and a finalist for the Willow Springs Books Emma Howell Rising Poet Prize.

R. Gerry Fabian

Hydrodynamic Layers

The rain pelts the pavement.
It's a raw cold rain -
the kind that sends shivers
into your teeth.
I am totally soaked
and still three blocks away.
This is the actual embodiment
of what true love entails.
The velocity of rain increases.

R. Gerry Fabian is a poet and novelist. He has published four books of his poems: *Parallels*, *Coming Out Of The Atlantic*, *Electronic Forecasts* and *Wildflower Women*, as well as his poetry baseball book, *Ball On The Mound*.

The Long Wait

I've been holding
my breath
in the stagnant air

of my mask, waiting
in line, outside,
inching six feet

at a time, toward
a sanitized passport
to home cooking.

Inside, I stand frozen
with the flowers.
Beauty cut,

dying. The collective
pain is palpable.
I'm still

with the flowers
when M video-calls
from the hospital.

Upbeat music blares
ridiculous and wrong
over her muffled voice.

I rush outside
so we can talk
without mask,

without song.
She's weeping.
Between tears

and gasping breaths
she says, I just wanted
to see your face.

And then she has to
hang up because
all the alarms are going off.

Laura Rockhold is a poet and visual artist. She is the inventor of the golden root poetic form and recipient of the Bring Back The Prairies Award, Southern MN Poets Society Award, and a Best of the Net nominee. She is published in numerous journals. Find her at: www.laurarockhold.com.

Places I'll Never See

earth

one of the teachers loves asking
questions he thinks are so difficult it's not clear whether they're

questions or lessons. is it dark in the earth's core? with all its density on
densities that refuse to absorb even the highest of frequencies of light and if

the earth's core is dark, is it light, too? all vibrant reds and oranges, the
cross-section images you find in textbooks, and how do we know the parts of
the earth that boil below don't boil purple or diamond or saliva?

but neither questions nor lessons are life and all that matters to me is that with
each new word I'm shaving another layer off the earth's crust, coming closer to all those

densest of densities I've been hearing about from childhood, those
places beneath my feet scientists are sure exist but which no-one's ever seen

language

on free afternoons I take to lying on rocks, rubbing my cheek against them as if
the flesh that contains your thoughts is the best medium for arriving in the mantle

sure, education hails the future but when, after the last student's left the room by
11am on a Sunday, and honesty rushes to occupy the still warm plastic chairs,
all I know is there's nothing more

absorbent than rocks, nothing truer than the way the earth hides its violent mess in
soil and outcrops and words that desperately try to sound out what they are

tongue-to-palate spits ear-thh

crisp openings and closings cr-u-st

Nadia Rhook is a poet, historian, and educator, passionate about embodied and imaginative ways of connecting with the past-present. A settler of Anglo-Celtic and German descent, she is the author of two poetry collections: *boots* (UWA Publishing, 2020), and *Second Fleet Baby* (Fremantle Press, 2022). Nadia is currently living in beautiful Naarm (Melbourne) and writing a prose novel about love and bluestone histories.

Graft

At risk of my becoming anodyne,
you will be my crow's feet and my laugh lines

Never mind the ugliness you see first
light, the surefooted at this pass will turn
to trench foot by nightfall. Just between you

and me, one of us will get the boot. By
the sweet by-and-by and all that creature

comfort, we sweat it out. We make like strays
and mange, mainstays as we are, holding tight
calling cards at the moment of impact,

at the soonest sign of glancing blows, at
the earliest whiff of what is inside

the kidgloved. Wring the blood out of this cloth.
Are you reading this right? Are you reading
me loud and clear with noise and all? Be there

a saving grace, let it for once add grace,
let alone the saving. Leave it stewing

Never mind the cooks and how many,
it's just the two of us now. Take it easy.

Harassment Training

We attended the mandatory harassment training
In increments so we could keep working
& supervising we recognized the signs of
harassment & felt them in our bodies where
their mention had worn a groove grateful
to take the instruction in bite size chews
We closed the doors to our offices and
draped curtains over our cubicles donned
headphones & identified patterns all too
familiar patterns we scored 100%

Melissa Eleftherion (she/they) is a writer, a librarian, & a visual artist. Born & raised in Brooklyn, she is the author of *field guide to autobiography*, & 12 chapbooks from various presses. Melissa currently lives in Northern California where she manages the Ukiah Branch Library, curates the LOBA Reading Series, & serves as Ukiah Poet Laureate Emeritus.

Melissa Eleftherion

Three of Wands & Citrine

Welcome to this healing moment
Enjoy it while it lasts
This is the center of an open heart
Before it closes its ventricles for doubt
This is the etheric crystal we built
From moments we wished on stars
We gaze out over the landscape
The rock and rubble we climbed
We lean on each other
& it holds for now

Melissa Eleftherion (she/they) is a writer, a librarian, & a visual artist. Born & raised in Brooklyn, she is the author of *field guide to autobiography*, & 12 chapbooks from various presses. Melissa currently lives in Northern California where she manages the Ukiah Branch Library, curates the LOBA Reading Series, & serves as Ukiah Poet Laureate Emeritus.

Erin L. McCoy

Galactic tide

Is there a way to say it. Blue tilt
across the cottage room. All my

nights collapse like this. A comet
spills milk in the yard & cries

& cries about it. Blue breeze
rattling the aluminum sculptures.

Gravel in strange heaps. Shifting
and shifted by whom. Why

this was built to last I'll never
understand. A monument to us,

I guess, how he took my hand &
never returned it. The comet mops,

exits. Cleanliness is godliness,
& space is almost vacant.

Erin L. McCoy's poetry collection, *Wrecks*, is forthcoming from Noemi Press. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in the *American Poetry Review*, *Pleiades*, *Conjunctions*, and other publications. Her work has appeared in the *Best New Poets* anthology twice, and she was a finalist for the *Missouri Review's* Miller Audio Prize.

Dream Thieves

The scar ran diagonal
from Doug's right eyebrow to the left corner
of his lips. *Work accident*
was all he'd say about it. Jen looked
like some comic book artist's idea of a superhero
wearing two wrist braces every day one year
& Ralph gained ten pounds
between when he interviewed me
& when he went crazy on the conference call

yet he's the one who says *suck it up, buttercup*
when I describe the nightmare project:
fourteen hour days seven days a week
& no end in sight.

When I was younger
& rode my bike or shelved books
or boiled pasta in five gallons of water
I knew I was selling my body,
understood the deal. I see the worn-out
men riding the subway home
from some construction site
posed as if they'd collapsed
into the seat, dusted in paint & dirt

& remember the week I got no sleep
& threw out my knee
thanks to Prateek insisting on deadlines
& there was no position that didn't hurt, little icicles
of pain lancing my leg with every tremor
along the subway tracks

& an unending
headache, even in my dreaming.
You were arguing with someone, very angry

in your sleep my wife told me. Migraines,
high blood pressure, pain
without ceasing. They don't tell
you office work will slowly
kill you, certain as cigarettes,

or that you'll dream of spreadsheets
& muffled voices interrupting
each other endlessly on speakerphone
or what sitting & sitting at conference
table after conference table will cost
you, the years you're signing

away. For a year after my first office
job I coughed without disease. *Stress-related*
the doctor said. Working late
& over the weekend is literally lethal
so after I say *I'm not available*
& my manager says *you're not a team*
player the image

of that football player
whose leg bent backwards
comes to mind. But he was a team player
with a million dollar salary

while all I have to show for this is a bum knee,
twitching dreams, & these bottles of amlodipine bamboozling
my heart into thinking everything's alright
which isn't to say I'm not grateful
for health insurance & a paycheck
but two bottles of ibuprofen a week
& a throbbing knee are telling me
something, the same thing my bloodwork
says in a language only my doctor
understands, the thing that makes her frown
& ask me how work is going.

The Zone

After biking fast enough to talk smack
to light down the west side path

feeling the vibration of the vernal world
& knowing the touch of the sun

that's when I feel the course
of it, my life, burning like everything is,

that's when the morning's rambling dog
runs with an eye on something fast-moving,

that's when I stride into the office,
the total season of rebirth in my eyes,

that's when I'm all charm & common
sense & make colleagues laugh in meetings,

that's when I punch through the punch
list & some of tomorrow's too,

that's when my wife surprises me for lunch
& we neck like teenagers in the park,

that's when I help Aarti & then Lenix then Maria
then Sylvia & their days get better,

that's when evening puts on his best pinks & purples,
the bike path offers a perfect tailwind all the way home,

that's when every traffic light greens
as I reach it as if to sanction the parade of me,

that's when no letters from the student loan sharks
snap & bark from the mailbox,

that's when no dumb conversations with a difficult
manager spin in my head as I flutter to sleep,

that's when I lie next to my wife in the heartbeat
of the darkness, breathing together without trying.

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.

Thank you so much for reading! *The Mantle Poetry* is grateful for your support.