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# THE MANTLE



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#6

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## My Children Asleep on the Chest of September

It's an alluring feeling, the way their eyes sink low—  
touch to lids—the shutter,  
closed moments eternity, the way the child never ends.

Beds burn, long—I walk through where they sleep,  
endless curve of thigh, thinking  
of them in this home that is my womb.

I see their faces replaced by the shadow of a mother  
adjusting her wings. There's a volcano  
in my chest mimicking my own intensity.

I would call them storm, muse, on days my hands roam freely  
the hemline of their expanse.  
I'd take them back in again, raise their foreheads

to my lips, kiss the lingering memories of their infancy.  
In this home that is my womb the night calls  
me—I lay alone wedded to restlessness.

While they were sleeping I might've set the house on fire.  
I could've written a lullaby to change  
the world or maybe pinched an angel until she sang.

Instead, I told their birth stories to a complete stranger,  
set out across the desert to rebirth  
their innocence in pyramids, built wonders of my own,

sang songs softly. While they were sleeping, I slept  
beside them & dreamed in utero, as white as satin & as unsullied,  
too afraid to turn my back to the bedroom door.

**Ariana D. Den Bleyker** is a Pittsburgh native currently residing in New York's Hudson Valley where she is a wife and mother of two. When she's not writing, she's spending time with her family and every once in a while sleeps. She is the author of three collections, fifteen chapbooks, a novelette, an experimental memoir, and two crime novellas. She hopes you'll fall in love with her words.

## Switchbacks

Windmilling woodpecker wings  
and shimmering shadows  
coat moonrise over coastal scrub.

Odor rising as steam  
spices the fog  
in camphor, cedar, bay.

Water distant,  
always approaching,  
each second the sweep.

South of Arch Rock  
eel grass drawn to consonance  
lifting beyond White Gulch.

Patches of white,  
patches of mustard,  
how to say what's equal to what?

It's the unequal composition of California—  
proportions,  
arrangements, the form of things—

where everything's whispered,  
nothing promised:  
pockmarked rock, tide-pool lagoons,

white-faced cows  
held in a surround of auburn hills  
lowing from terraced golden grass.

Water close,  
always approaching,  
each second the sweep:

arrangement,  
proportion,  
the form of things.

**Howard Faerstein's** first book of poetry, Dreaming of the Rain in Brooklyn, was published in 2013 by Press 53. A second collection, Googootz and Other Poems, came out in September, 2018. His work can be found in numerous journals including *Great River Review*, *Nimrod*, *CutThroat*, *Off the Coast*, *Rattle, upstreet*, *Mudfish* and online in *Gris-Gris*, *Peacock Journal*, and *Connotation*. Considering himself an “adjunct emeritus,” he presently volunteers as a citizenship mentor at the Center for New Americans and is Associate Poetry Editor of *CutThroat*, *A Journal of the Arts*. After living in Brooklyn for fifty years, he now lives in Florence, Massachusetts.

Donora and Andrew Rihn

## Apocalypse

Once, thus far and no farther:  
separated from that faint cup,  
tiny martyr, from ship and sea,  
I threw myself out of life.  
Revelation, this new creature,  
petition this fragile path with muscle.  
These histories have taste,  
proud waves, a striking disclosure:  
Bitter. And spit.

**Donora A. Rihn** is the author of *Jeff Bridges* (Cobalt Press, 2016), *The Aphasia Poems* (S▲L, 2014), and several other works of poetry and theory. **Andrew Rihn** is a writer of essays and poems, including the collection *America Plops and Fizzes* (sunnyoutside press, 2011). Together, they authored the poetry chapbooks *The Day of Small Things* (Really Serious Literature, 2018) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: An Election Cycle* (Moria Books/Locofo Chaps, 2017). They share a tiny house in the Portage Lakes area of Ohio along with their two rescue dogs.

## Dining at Shangri-La

*I'm already dead*, moans the man  
in his thirties at the next table.  
He wears thick eyeglasses. They are finishing  
the last slices of Turnip Cake & Scallion Pie.  
*I'm sorry, you're too young to be dead*,  
contradicts the mother-like woman.  
I unwrap the bamboo leaves of the Stuffed Sticky Rice,  
leaving the fragrance to linger.  
*I've never been to a funeral*, I tell my friend.  
She passes the pickled-ginger strips to me  
and swallows her Green-Dumpling.  
*I don't want to relive my life*, says she,  
who colored her hair blond to look young.  
Me neither, but I want to carry this life's lessons to the next.  
I wonder about mortality, a present  
from the horizon, invisible & clear.  
*Did you cry when you learned that*  
*everybody dies?* I look at her.  
*I did when I was nine.*  
One step to cross the uncrossable,  
not taking successive half-steps,  
we solve Zeno's paradox.  
Now we can savor the Green Bean Glass Noodles,  
transparent & spicy.

**Xiaoly Li** is a poet, photographer and former computer engineer who lives in Massachusetts. Prior to writing poetry, she published stories in a selection of Chinese newspapers. Her photography, which has been shown and sold in galleries in the Boston, often accompanies her poems. Her poetry is forthcoming or has recently appeared in *The Olive Press*, *Big Windows Review*, *Up the River*, *The Writers Next Door - An Anthology of Poetry and Prose*, *J Journal*, *Off The Coast*, and *Gravel*. She currently studies poetry with Barbara Helfgott Hyett. Xiaoly received her Ph.D. in electrical engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute and Masters in computer science and engineering from Tsinghua University in China.

Daniel Bailey

## Joy Your Heart Against Me

I screech against the windy parts of me  
I unsing little by little  
witness pays its own bills like a boyfriend  
without feelings I am a perfect person  
with feelings I am just another person  
my joy needs to be stamped  
on the heart of the nation it belongs to  
someone put me on a bus  
headed toward some central location  
I want to take the bus hostage  
like Dennis Hopper in Speed  
and joyride around doing 50+  
I pet dogs I pet dogs I pet dogs  
wear suns wear lakes wear dreams  
dream like I have dreamed of late  
of a church where everyone  
tries to kill me  
as a form of worship  
every part of me ready  
to be held underwater

**Daniel Bailey** is the author of several books of poetry, including *The Drunk Sonnets* (Magic Helicopter, 2009) and *Gather Me* (Scrambler Books, 2013). He lives in Athens, Georgia, where he continues to revise his bio.  
<http://ddnnlbbilly.tumblr.com/>



C.M. Donahue

## Nomad

You carry the earth in your hair:  
red dirt of Nevada in wind-  
blown dreads. I slowly trace where  
the ant tattoo crawls across your skin  
when you clench your fist.  
After thousands of miles between us,  
I feel lonelier now than ever, your kiss  
a shiny memory fading to rust.  
Through the open door to my room,  
I can hear your breath in dream  
from where you're curled up on the couch. Soon  
you'll be on the road to Aberdeen,  
Kyoto, or Montreal—somewhere far,  
a place somehow closer than where we are.

**C. M. Donahue** holds a BFA in Writing, Literature, and Publishing with a Poetry concentration from Emerson College and an MA in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Connecticut. Poetry by C. M. Donahue has recently been published or is forthcoming in *Jersey Devil Press*, *Amaryllis*, and *Sonic Boom*.

## Reflections of Weddings

In bad faith, to the chagrin of mothers  
that tend the unwatered patches of carrots  
that maintain and moor the immemorial,  
I withstood the crisp and wintery brush  
of pine needles that swept the bald eagles  
along Lake Pepin today and all of 1890  
as if the Sea Wing disaster were not  
like a wedding. I resolved the crunch  
underfoot, and muttered, “I want to say  
those things,” like when I wandered  
among the cenotes and Mayan ruins,  
iguanas and rivers with rowers, swimmers  
that were golfing yesterday, married  
today, reciting vows like Whitman before  
he drowned in the same possibilities,  
saying, “I want to say those things.”

**Jake Sheff** is a major and pediatrician in the US Air Force, married with a daughter and six pets. Currently home is the Mojave Desert. Poems of Jake’s are in or forthcoming from *Radius*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Cossack Review* and elsewhere. He won 1st place in the 2017 SFPA speculative poetry contest and was a finalist in the Rondeau Roundup’s 2017 triolet contest. Two of his poems have been nominated for the 2018 Best of the Net Anthology. His chapbook is “Looting Versailles” (Alabaster Leaves Publishing).

## Burial

I dug a grave for my dog  
with my father when I ran  
the same hundred-degree  
fever as that Texas noon.

I had taken sips of ginger ale,  
just enough for cool drops to seep  
into my tongue when Clover's back arched

her shepherd body drawn taut  
like a bow, jaw locked, all open,  
teeth bared a sickened snarl, fangs  
snagging air, muscles convulsing

tighter and tighter until her back  
might crack. And then it did,  
a single snap of vertebrae

to end the seizure. We wrapped her  
in a blanket, her black fur tufting  
through threadbare holes, and carried  
her into the backyard, where

my father and I started to dig,  
shovel by shovel, my head  
thrumming dull like the sound

of each discarded spade of sand.  
He never offered to do this  
alone. It was expected for me

to work with my father, even  
when it meant clenching teeth  
through stomach pains, gripping  
a shovel tighter than my blisters

could handle to finish the raising  
and burying of a life. Even when  
I vomited ginger ale

he told me to bury that too.

**Troy Varvel** is from Nacogdoches, TX, where he earned a BFA and MA in creative writing and English from Stephen F. Austin State University. Currently, he is a MFA candidate Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, where he is an assistant editor at Crab Orchard Review. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Cape Rock: Poetry*, *Cigar City Poetry Journal*, *Constellations*, *Driftwood Press*, *Psaltery and Lyre*, and *That Literary Review*, among others.

## Boy in Repetition

That jut of your left hip flings a wobbly heretical arc as you click through your slides of official NASA photographs, their artificial yellows and daydream blues fooling you, because public domain feels good and true, because the infrared originals lack depth or discernable length of the time between you, me, the rest of the room's glowing faces and faraway Sagittarius A\*. It feels too pat for me, despite your assertions of research and citations, despite your obvious selections of gas formations personifying familiar animal species, hanging the universe like a drying print of an elephant or perhaps a dull office map or a president fat with Griselda tendencies instead of an endless tesseract, instead of gravity just wanting more, more, more. Do you believe that? You once told me doubt causes you to feel religious. To spend too much time on your knees. What is your habit? Mom taught us that faith unfolds grace and wonderment and requires devotion through repetition, through more Hail Marys than you could ever hope to mount even though prayer is just lobbed sounds of hope unable to escape our atmosphere, like the unknown roar of our sun somehow unseen in any of your slides. Perhaps you have lost faith in facts because they became as fake as a moon stranded beyond all light, left cold by a lack of exposure, off gassing good data in descent accelerated by gravity and its obsession with controlling then, now and next. What is your full capacity? Where do you fall on any spectrum? Maybe you are just electro pragmatic and spend too much time on your knees when you should remain upright and promise to repeat no mistakes, to be no bird in the dead walnut tree, tweeting notes of a song broken by the long night despite your poor singing voice, despite all color being a trick of visible light and not erasure of faith or fact from plain sight.

Hailing from the farm valleys of west Appalachia, **Ben Kline** lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, drinking more coffee than seems wise. His work is forthcoming or has recently appeared in *Riggwelter*, *apt*, *ImageOutWrite*, *The Offing*, *Impossible Archetype*, *Ink & Nebula*, *The Matador Review* and many more.



Gregory Kimbrell

## Utility [SA]

When we get out of prison  
our return is through the black

gate. The leopard does not move in  
the garden, frozen smiling.

In the lower domain the  
children live like the poorest

dogs. Their ugly sheep produce  
yellow sputum. Tanikos

smells death in the milk. Mikic  
and I eat a soup of cat's

meat and want to die. Meanwhile  
the blue light of the dog star

is not dead on the way to  
Sammet. I understand I

pay for knowledge using my  
body, that I may be killed

challenging the spiritual  
harvest of Onin. How do

I face the pyramid when  
in the end there is no door?

**Gregory Kimbrell** is the author of *The Primitive Observatory* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), winner of the 2014 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Phantom Drift*, *Infinite Rust*, *Otoliths*, *Manticore—Hybrid Writing from Hybrid Identities*, and elsewhere. He is the events and programs coordinator for Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries. More of his writing, including his sci-fi/horror magnetic poems, can be found at [gregorykimbrell.com](http://gregorykimbrell.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:

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" somewhere in the subject line.

Please withhold your name from the manuscript- we prefer to not 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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