



THE MANTLE POETRY

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Each poem belongs to its respective author

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Julia Rosenbaum

Flow Cytometry

In this initial phase,
this simple injection,
trust is the way
your light scatters.

I probe your chest,
and can feel the firmness:
perhaps, the way you will
push me out.

Sometimes I wonder
if men are necrophilous,
if they want to reverse
the organic form of our moving bodies,

If they want to own me
as a static moment,
if that's why I've walked through
so many graveyards with them.

Julia Rosenbaum teaches English at a public school in Boston and uses writing as a way to process the hours in between. She has workshopped her writing in the summer youth program at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and served as the co-editor of her college's literary magazine, *Red Weather*, compiling voices and stories into little red books. She has also won the Frederick Reese Wagner Prize in English and the Thomas McNaughton Johnston Prize for her literature thesis.

Victoria Nordlund

Preservation

*There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray you, love,
remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts.*

-William Shakespeare

Memories of you bloom
in my synapses

and as I begin to pick them
from storage, I can't tell

if these flowers are real
or if they are even mine-

I think they used to be.
And you are gone, and here they are-

flattened and ironed
forget-me-nots,

rosemary, and pansies laminated
in a layer of my hippocampus.

I can make out our faded faces
in the pressed petals,

a withered tint of truth
in the violet's muted veins,

a fragment of failed conversation in
a sprig of baby's breath.

I turn the rue around and around now.
This bitterness can still blister skin.

Ophelia wore hers with difference
gave them water-

Victoria Nordlund's poetry collection *Binge Watching Winter on Mute* was published by *Main Street Rag* in June 2019. She is a Best of the Net and 2020 Pushcart Prize Nominee, whose work has appeared in *PANK Magazine*, *Rust+Moth*, *Pidgeonholes*, and elsewhere. Visit her at VictoriaNordlund.com

in response to the symptom of apathy

and still the world goes on.
the ossified tectonic plates, the grand
mute motions of their grief.
i go through every variable of
this universe and its machinery. the

unwilling gears, the
agonies of invariance. on the
spectrum of visible light,
the individual is endlessly iterated.

this version of myself blisters
quiet and stolen. and i

could not keep the war from coming
home and i could not sanctify a
city holy enough to stop the killing.
and i could not
remind their time-moored bodies
of the way roadkill putrefies when

nobody is left to make an altar of it.

in the space between those
things that did not happen, i sing,
tracheal and impermanent.

i break each of my
mouths against the landlock gyre of the
system: an elegy to the outline
of my lungs. an elegy for the
imperfect shapes they keep,
the oxygen riddling my veins
as proof of concept there is someone
left alive. and i will

aperture myself in this unyielding
world for as long as it takes.
i will take gentler hands and quantify
the things we sing for in the night.

Eunice Kim is a Korean-American writer living in Seoul. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *ANMLY*, *Sonora Review*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Young Poets Network* and more. She currently works as a staff reader for *The Adroit Journal* and a volunteer writer for *Her Culture*.

Eunice Kim

the body's grief is apocryphal

the sleeping animal of the city lets me go, anesthesia-cruel.
my tongue calcifies twice over, meat
to cellophaned bone, loss at the most cellular level. i collectivize
myself like it will chase the wanting. and
still i pray for rain to sing me to sleep. for homeland
to unstick the bullets damasked in my throat,
to tell me this landfill
history has not been for nothing. the
family portrait waterboards me nightly. our
confession room is brackish with
stories and i am rendered judge-jury-
executioner, carrying the weight of a tenderized and makeshift
muscle. off
with her head. off with her
tongue. i fishhook a confession from myself in the bitterest
language. i have never been
looking for absolution until now, but there is
another world riding slipstream to this one where the
skin on my teeth is only from the blacktop and i have not yet
learned how to turn, maddened,
on the city that no longer wants me.

Eunice Kim is a Korean-American writer living in Seoul. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *ANMLY*, *Sonora Review*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Young Poets Network* and more. She currently works as a staff reader for *The Adroit Journal* and a volunteer writer for *Her Culture*.

Ayesha Asad

Look, Mama

at the garden we grew, diseased
trees burnt down
to make room for new life.
The red-stained bricks
that blend our house,
refusing to crack
in dawn light. The ginger cat
that slunk around the backyard
before she was booted out.
Your belly, swelled like
a peach, unwrapped by
doctors & fathers. Before I sleep, I
think of how cold your
cheek feels, slippery
& wet like fish scales, with
sediment eyes. Warm
coffee & ice milk, I think,
as I touch your fingers
& find them stained with
the uncertainty we
dug out from rubble
after the tornado.
I am your daughter,
byproduct of a
byproduct of a byproduct,
the bay leaf pillowed
over rice, the job you
gave up for
certainty. I am your
certainty. The reason
you didn't run that
red light. And now, I am
second-generation
falling - a star bred & burst
in the yellow rain.

Ayesha Asad is from Dallas, Texas. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *PANK*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Menacing Hedge*, and elsewhere. Her writing has been recognized by *Creative Writing Ink Journal* and the Robert Bone Memorial Prize. She studies Literature and Biology at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Katherine Fallon

Virus Chaser

They wouldn't take my blood because I'd shared
a toothbrush with someone with HIV (okay, fine,
we had sex once, but she was stone and so the odds

she would give me anything were slim, and anyway,
later I stopped believing she was sick at all when
she introduced me to her parents, who she'd told me

months earlier were dead). That night, she passed out,
ready for me to go, and I used the toothbrush, needing
to violate her distance somehow, leave myself there,

take her with me, however that might look. That was all
so long ago the cheek swabs—compulsive and fearsome
as pregnancy tests—are mere breadcrumbs. Anymore,

my blood is good and I know my type, but even those
who are desperate have never wanted my eggs, costly
pearls of the lady gut. These days it's cloaked in *too old*,

dried up, but it used to be a brain thing: no market
for the brand of sick I am, complete with an acronym
and a spreadsheet of failed chemicals. I used to think

that being smart, being beautiful, having many talents
might make me worth something, but look at me then,
look at me now: I can't even give myself away.

Katherine Fallon is the author of *The Toothmaker's Daughters* (Finishing Line Press, 2018). Her poems have appeared in *AGNI*, *Colorado Review*, *Juked*, *Meridian*, *Foundry*, and *Best New Poets 2019*, among others. She shares domestic space with two cats and her favorite human, who helps her zip her dresses.

Esther Sun

A History of the United States of America

Los Gatos, CA

Several days ago I walked by vultures
on the neighbor's grass. One standing

sentry high above in the thin branches
of winter's skinned tree. One eating

a dead mouse on the lawn. A day later,
it was there again – this time having dragged

the corpse halfway into the neighbor's driveway.
I saw the mouse's spine:

red and curved against the ground, glowing
pale in blue December. I saw its head, still

intact. I had to look away.

Esther Sun is a Chinese-American writer from the Silicon Valley in Northern California. A 2020 American Voices nominee, she has been recognized for her writing by the National YoungArts Foundation, Bennington College, and the Alliance for Young Writers and Artists. Esther's poems are forthcoming from or have appeared in *Up North Lit*, *Vagabond City*, *Anthropocene*, and more.

Mohamed Elhassan

a letter to myself: dear,

snow piles when hums of earth ring out,
and from its core bellows the beast—
a lonesome tune reverberates in my ear.

i feed her wholly;

my mother runs a horticultural department,
we profit a lot.

legumes torn out their stocks and
wrapping each other in a basket.
they are now warped.

nihilistic-movers. i was like this once.
stains covered the tattered wear upon my chest,
and in taking it off i reveal an even uglier mess beneath—

they say the devil lives underneath uncut nails,
but they help me to tear open packages easily.
this one's from my mother:
be kind. do good. here are some fresh veggies. enjoy!

coveted did that place become;
i rake the leaves outside but some kids whisk 'em away
kicking and running,
but i do not get mad;

rarely do i ever escape the comforts of home,
craziness ran rampant on these streets
and my tomatoes still haven't grown.

the ground is tickled by my soft touch and i hope
that earth is receiving my gentleness as it comes—
kids across the street pull out the dandelions and blow 'em,
insemination of sky.

mother passes,
her duties become mine.
i wave bye to george, he is—was—my neighbor.

Mohamed Elhassan is a rising senior at Hammond High School in Columbia, Maryland. His work mainly focuses on personal experiences. He is forthcoming in *Eunoia Review* and *Lucky Jefferson*. He enjoys writing for himself, his peers, and those deemed outcasts.

Courtney LeBlanc

Voyeurs

We've become voyeurs
to her grief. In a sea of muted
colors we listen, tears sliding down pink cheeks
as she sings
the softest elegy
for her dead-too-young husband.

We wait
for her voice to break
to crack
to waiver
but it doesn't,
she holds
the notes strong till the end,
then walks away
from the mic.

I don't see her again, lose her
to the tsunami of the crowd,
swallowing her and her sons, their blond
heads disappearing before
I can push
my own condolences
into her hands. I can't sing—not
tone deaf but don't try
to stay on-key. Instead
I would read a poem and my voice
would probably break,
falter,
fail.

No one would find me the perfect widow.
I know she breaks
down:
sobs, screams, rages, swears, cries, begs
but none of this is witnessed.

I would not be
this contained.
I would be messy,
give the voyeurs the show they were
secretly craving.

Courtney LeBlanc is the author of *Beautiful & Full of Monsters* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), chapbooks *All in the Family* (Bottlecap Press) and *The Violence Within* (Flutter Press). She has her MBA from University of Baltimore and her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She loves nail polish, tattoos, and a soy latte each morning.

emilie kneifel

aaah

for [Nivretta Thatra](#)

our feet dangle loose, we let our names
answer, and when it's light and then lighter
i empty my mouth

the story maman recounts now about family:
this canyon used to be swimming
with legs, "the water, remember, do you,
the blue--"

when leaving us last time she dreamt of a cove, emerald turtles
born sticky-- my maman splits her joy so she dug her way back to--
where we'd found them already
with names

"they were so beautiful," she says, still seeing,
beauty still nothing if not for her grief, "and i kept forgetting
where did i see them," so she bought me a bronze figurine

at night, when it warms itself on my sternum, my own skin
forgets a good weight, but i whisper her old songs
to absence, i dream about something
kept safe

emilie kneifel is a poet/critic, editor at *The Puritan/Theta Wave*, creator of CATCH/PLAYD8s, and nivi's friend.
find 'em at emiliekneifel.com, [@emiliekneifel](https://twitter.com/emiliekneifel), and in Tiohtiáke, hopping and hoping.

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. Issue cut-off dates are as follows:

January 15 for the Winter issue.

April 15 for the Spring issue.

July 15 for the Summer issue.

October 15 for the Autumn issue.

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.

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 market.

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