



# THE MANTLE POETRY

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# THE MANTLE

POETRY

#19

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Each poem belongs to its respective author

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## all I want is to be soft again

all I want is to be soft again.  
to have my mother's hands.

in a dream my hair is sacrificed to summer  
and does not spite the sun as each strand spins gold.

in a dream stainless steel is out-won by ivory  
and I am satin nightgown smooth, like a dance

between pockets of warm dough or  
a flirtation with piano keys.

in a dream I am the gentle rake  
of neatly trimmed nails against a scalp

or the lullaby touch of velvet,  
singing a child to sleep.

all I want is to be soft again.  
to shed a layer of skin.

in a dream my body is brushstrokes  
of an oil painting, like a renaissance

woman's flesh or a gossamer  
cloud blended into the sky.

in a dream I am swallowed by wide-eyed  
innocence, up-swept lashes that curtain care,

my lips the pearled kiss planted on a newborn's cheek.  
my arms cradle her effortlessly. please.

all I want is to be soft again.  
this time, I will be loved all by myself.

**Anna Gayle** is a poet still trying to decide where she is from. She is an MFA candidate at Oregon State University whose work has appeared in *Thimble Lit Magazine*, *Empty House Press*, *Identity Theory*, and *The Roadrunner Review*. Anna writes about black womanhood, collective femininity, and family. Most of her free time is spent baking, painting, and FaceTiming her niece.

## Reading the Signs

Having arrived at the punch line  
of the joke aging tells, I sit  
down with my wattle and warts  
in the chair that's taken my shape.  
I reach for the book I keep  
trying to read before falling asleep.  
Nothing seems worth holding,  
except what I can't remember.

**Ronald J. Pelias** spent most of his career writing books, e.g., *If the Truth Be Told* (Brill Publications), *The Creative Qualitative Researcher* (Routledge), and *Lessons on Aging and Dying* (Routledge), that call upon the literary as a research strategy. Now he just writes for the pleasures of lingering in bafflement.

## Unfinished

The cat curls into a crescent moon, gathers  
sunlight through the cracked-open blinds.  
A dark brown rim forms on the cold  
coffee cup sitting on the cluttered desk.  
The worn manuscript, pages cornered,  
collects corrections at the cost of another day.  
Nothing is finished, not even the old man  
whose body is falling away like sand  
in an open hand. He holds his short breath  
as he revises another line toward the end.

**Ronald J. Pelias** spent most of his career writing books, e.g., *If the Truth Be Told* (Brill Publications), *The Creative Qualitative Researcher* (Routledge), and *Lessons on Aging and Dying* (Routledge), that call upon the literary as a research strategy. Now he just writes for the pleasures of lingering in bafflement.

# About Owls, the Bones of Mice, and the Work of Assembly

*To Sonja Flancher*

My student, Sonja, wrote a poem, a good one,  
she and her father watching birds. They see  
an owl, she writes, at dusk, and the poem  
is about the wings, the silhouettes of wings,  
feathers and flying. It needs work, the poem,  
but much is there—the wonder, the delight in  
wild hearts beating—the owl's, Sonja's, her  
father's. So, honest, I told her, it was not  
on purpose, not by plan, that yesterday, I too  
saw an owl. Two owls. It was close to dark,  
and on the path by the Red—prairie scrub  
and craggy elms—and there they were,  
talking together, one low voice, one high,  
hooooooooo, hoo, hoo, and they were so close—  
grey-brown feathers, big round faces, tufts  
like ears or horns, and behind them, a dusky  
gray-glowing eastern sky. I imagined their  
big round eyes as they watched me as I  
walked, as I stopped to look, to listen—they'd  
probably heard me leave the house, their ears  
so fine. Oh yes—wonder, thrill, just like  
Sonja's, her Dad's. Just like our class too—  
wise young owls. And me. I read that  
you can poke amongst an owl's old pellets  
and find, and even assemble, the bones  
of mice, whole little skeletons there, like ghosts  
among the leaves and twigs. Though I prefer  
our kind of poking—what we do, students  
and I, sorting through our words and lines  
and stanza breaks—papery stuff—like bones,  
and yes, hard sometimes, even brittle,  
but rich in wonder, and rich with our own  
wild hearts, page after boney page.

**William Snyder** has published poems in many literary journals. He was the co-winner of the 2001 Grolier Poetry Prize; The CONSEQUENCE Prize in Poetry, 2013; the 2015 Claire Keyes Poetry Prize; Tulip Tree Publishing *Stories That Need To Be Told* 2019 Merit Prize for Humor; and Encircle Publications 2019 Chapbook Contest. He has retired from teaching writing and literature at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN.

Noa Saunders

## VALVE

*for Mack Sikora*

Who's killing Lillian Gish?

This is not to say I'd miss her. I don't need to.

We have her substantial shadow, her American yawp,  
her eyes that are two ripe flowers

effusing tears that are too much like tears.

If you die in the movies, you die in real life, and she has died many times,

following the footsteps of wide-eyed Griffith who rolls  
her paraflesh in his mouth, puts it on ice, saves it.

In a nightmare, I open a valve and drain the river.  
Her bodies lie like bank brush: too wet to be handled, too light to be borne.

Loving someone you shouldn't is like loving someone you should—making of anything  
a precedent or an abject thing to forget,

like color when the wolf butchers.

I am composing a condition for love. Between me and the rest, pick the rest.

**Noa Saunders** is a poet and scholar living in Boston, where she teaches classes on poetry, film, and writing. Recent poems can be found in *Ninth Letter*, *Ghost City Review*, *Bitchin' Kitsch*, *The Shore*, *Leavings*, and others.

## Work and the Body

A week of hauling  
heavy trees and digging  
holes in ledge, a wheelbarrow  
full of gravel when I felt my back go

click, click, click,

some essential armor falling away.

The body is a mystery, it speaks  
a language of pain  
and pleasure. I treat it

like a container, a second thought.  
My body doesn't understand semiotics,  
moral philosophy, capitalism, socialism.

I ask my back to tell me  
how to fix it, I tell it that it has no choice  
but to work for me, to be strong for me  
in this economy right now,

but my back says  
it's in charge now  
and I better  
get used to it.

**Morgan English** is the winner of *The Florida Review's* 2021 Editors' Award in Poetry. Her work first appeared in *St. Petersburg Review*. She holds a BA in creative writing from Florida State University. She lives in southern Vermont, where she is currently an MFA candidate at Bennington College.



## i wasn't ready to be a garden for you

i look for god  
when the holes  
inside me  
yawn  
and convulse.  
when the ache  
meets  
the letting:  
parasitic  
love-lock  
its solidity,  
blood-let, milk-let.  
i break  
in two  
for it. i open  
my self  
willing  
to release it.  
i cup the bloodied  
embryo in a palm  
and weep  
for the color  
of it.  
i look for  
god's stare  
but only i  
have eyes  
here. he may  
condemn  
(my) body,  
its holes and  
spillage  
but i  
condemn his  
too. i pray  
in a language  
he cannot  
understand. i  
genuflect.  
on the floor  
(my) blood  
gathers itself  
for its blasted  
sacrament.  
i flush

this object, its  
tissue-sog  
body, go  
to my  
knees for it

**jessamyn duckwall** lives and works in Oregon. They are an MFA candidate at Portland State University and the author of the chapbook *Sylvia sings in the garden*. They serve as Co-Editor in Chief at *The Portland Review*. Their work has appeared in *Josephine Quarterly*, *Kithe Journal*, *Pithead Chapel*, and other publications.

Ryan Brennan

## August

The mountains in my morning window  
begin to look like headstones in  
this late August  
graveyard already full  
of too many  
summers.

**Ryan Brennan** is a poet living in the Catskill Mountains. He has recent or forthcoming work in *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *One Sentence Poems*, *Chronogram*, and *Third Wednesday Literary Magazine*.

## The Transience

I don't mind being stung  
but the day must be a gorgeous one.  
When you, world,  
drop that bullet in my chest,  
I'll choose to stain the lilacs  
and if they've passed,  
we'll wait another year.

Beauty is joy,  
joy the acceptance of horror  
in transience. The lilacs are transient.  
They crumple not to dust but paste.  
Don't we all do our duties.  
The lilac to the bee,  
each getting for what it gives.  
Lilac, come back.

I'll come back  
though the descent won't  
have been violent or fast.  
More slow erasure of affluence.  
Even at the end I'll leave too much.

**Elizabeth Sylvia** (she/her) lives with her family in Massachusetts, USA where she teaches English and coaches debate. She is the winner of the 2021 3 Mile Harbor Book Prize and her manuscript *None But Witches* will be published in 2022. Elizabeth's work is upcoming or has recently appeared in *Feral*, *SWWIM*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and *Mom Egg Review*, among others. @e\_sylviapoet

Philip Jason

## Lucinate

a star shouts across the universe  
for ten billion years and is extinguished.  
on the next day, the star appears in my sky  
for the first time. happy birthday star! it shines  
like something that will not know it has died  
for ten billion years. for ten billion years,  
death will be chasing it at the speed of light,  
it will only whisper in the sky.  
and just like this ignorant new light, i think i  
am an ancient star, alive and shouting.  
are we *both* wrong? i don't remember being  
born. one day, i appeared on this side of the universe.  
maybe i was extinguished long ago and  
what i am now is an echo being chased by death.  
maybe like that ancient star, i appear over and  
over again throughout the universe, living an existence  
that seems loud and fresh to me, always thinking  
i am like a star on fire with life,  
but always an echo, always a whisperer.

**Philip Jason** is a writer from NY. His poetry can be found in magazines such as *Spillway*, *Lake Effect*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *The Indianapolis Review*, *Summerset Review*, and *Canary*. His first collection of poetry, "I Don't Understand Why It's Crazy to Hear the Beautiful Songs of Nonexistent Birds", is forthcoming from Fernwood Press.

## 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 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.