

THE MANTLE POETRY

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THE MANTLE

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#23

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Payout

I am in your hand, the crook of it.
You drink in the light and ask stupid
questions and we pretend any of it
matters. I will die before I let this go.
This bar is beautiful because it knows
our names, because the kid behind
the counter was in our high school
history class and he remembers us
too. We overtip because you work
at a sex shop and the cash payouts
are crazy, and I want this forever, the
way I want to leave, all with a fervor,
and I take your face in my hands and
tell you that getting out is inevitable,
the way a hometown is, the way our
friend died and we just went on.

Hailing from Michigan, **Audrey Beaton** studied Korean and English with a focus in Creative Writing at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Their poetry and essays have been published in *The Broadkill Review*, *Cornell's Rainy Day Literary Magazine*, *The Garlic Press*, and more. They have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Susan Waters

“Oh Blue, My Good Dog, Blue”

2001-2005

I'd go anywhere
to find you
as you, if you could,
would find my scent
on railroad tracks,
travelling fast and low
through dark streams, over stones,
and even through thistle.

The pinons' dry roots
are barking for water,
the mesa's dark face
is all I see.

Wind, be as restless
as I am until you find her.

Susan Waters started out as a journalist and subsequently was a magazine editor and writer at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. Her publishing credits are extensive. She has won 10 prizes in poetry and has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize in Poetry. Her chapbook *Heat Lightning* was published in 2017 by Orchard Street Press. Currently, she is Professor Emeritus at New Mexico Junior College.

Red O

What developments happen
by the third album;

is it even recorded?
does a subject know

its own implication?
what signal is there

seeping into the contra-
space of the red O?

O dearest voice, pass -

Michael Begnal is author of the collections *Future Blues* (Salmon Poetry, 2012) and *Ancestor Worship* (Salmon Poetry, 2007), the chapbooks *Eight Memoranda* and *Tropospheric Clouds* (Adjunct Press, 2025/2020) and *The Muddy Banks* (Ghost City Press, 2016). He has published two books on the Stooges, *The Music and Noise of the Stooges, 1967-71: Lost in the Future* (Routledge, 2022) and *Death Trip: Iggy and the Stooges, 1972-74* (Reaktion Books, 2026).

A window at a time (disguised as the windows & gates after traditional Vietnamese architecture turned into a burning haibun)

A window at a time (disguised as the windows & gates after traditional Vietnamese architecture turned into a burning haibun)

After sex:

Do you want me to hold you?

Rhetorical:

Do you want me to hold you?

God, what is it you desire? God, what is it you desire?

God, what is it you desire?

God, what is it you desire? God, what is it you desire?

God, what is it you desire? God, what is it you desire?

God, what is it you desire? God, what is it you desire?

God, what is it you desire? God, what is it you desire?

in a dream i dreamt of clementines — one
time i asked god if they were lonely
a ghostly hum,
a symphony of cicadas,
an orchestra,
an assembly line
family curse,

I've watched the women in
My family love

[hypothesis]

God what is it you desire?

I want you to hold me.

A window at a time

After sex:

Do you want me to hold you?

what is it you desire?

in a dream i dreamt of – one

god

a ghostly hum,

of cicadas,

an orchestra,

an assembly line

family curse,

[observation]

A wasteland.

[hypothesis]

What is it you desire?

[after sex]

I want you to hold me.

A window at a
time. After sex: what is it
you dream of?— *hold me.*

Blue Đào Nguyễn (IG: @blue.ngu) is a Vietnamese-Teochew (潮州話) non-binary lesbian poet, artist, and organizer. Their work, inspired by cartography and Vietnamese architectural symbolism, explores grief, prayer, and livelihood through poetry, oral history, and traditional Viet woodworking & fiber art, using organic materials. Material as altar : Poetics as prayer. Author of *Hey Siri, What Time is it in Vietnam?* (GameOverBooks, 2025) and an Associate Editor at *Iron Horse Literary Review*. Their work is featured in *Foglifter*, *Palette Poetry*, & more. They're a fellowship/scholarship/residency recipient of Kundiman, LAMBDA Literary, Fine Arts Work Center. More of their work can be found at bluenguyen.com.

A Brief Love Poem For the Merrimack River [and Dinh]

the shape
is missing
and it has
been decided
this country
cannot
afford it,
the moon is
full and the

windshield
is one dog-eared page
older than metaphor,

sleeping on the futon we
found off of facebook
market place for free,

we drove for miles
to pick it up, deconstructing
it's shape to fit into our car,

and later our bedroom,

*[what does everyone
do with all of this waiting?]*

it started
raining,

*[briefly in the shape
of love]*

[]

it makes
a difference
when you cross
the street

[we always wind up here]

to meet me
at the train station,

or across the
market basket
parking lot, close

to the merrimack,

where we watched
a heron stepping
across the rocks

the pigeons & seagulls
an orchestra of shape

of what looks like
industry
forever chemicals,
oil and trash
debris, the birds

still land briefly
before taking off
again.

Blue Đào Nguyễn (IG: @blue.ngu) is a Vietnamese-Teochew (潮州話) non-binary lesbian poet, artist, and organizer. Their work, inspired by cartography and Vietnamese architectural symbolism, explores grief, prayer, and livelihood through poetry, oral history, and traditional Viet woodworking & fiber art, using organic materials. Material as altar: Poetics as prayer. Author of *Hey Siri, What Time is it in Vietnam?* (GameOverBooks, 2025) and an Associate Editor at *Iron Horse Literary Review*. Their work is featured in *Foglifter*, *Palette Poetry*, & more. They're a fellowship/scholarship/residency recipient of Kundiman, LAMBDA Literary, Fine Arts Work Center. More of their work can be found at bluenguyen.com.

Aisle

After the pandemic,
among people again,
with measured steps
I proceed
up the aisle.

Between masses
of fresh flowers,
honey scent
of beeswax candles

beyond the squeaking noises
of irritable children
held in place
by a parental gaze.

Tinny music sifts down
from overhead speakers.
It's a dream I've had
now finally I'm back,
here, breathless

pushing
the red grocery cart
with a wobbly wheel
toward the checkout line.

Ann Randlette is trying to maintain some sanity in insane times. Wherever she goes, she brings a rock back, not necessarily because it's pretty but because it endures. She writes poetry so some words will outlast her existence in the mind of someone, somewhere.

arachne, confidant

Police report no. 1999-05014

Date of incident: May 1, 1999

Call time: 10:57pm

The fifth time he puts his hands on her neck
 I tell her he means it
 and it's time to go, but I am sixteen

and while she's taught me to drive, she has not
 taught me how get the storm windows out, and while

I know how to crawl
 between the shrubs to the garage, I do not
 know how to start the car
 silently, or how to get the keys

from her pocket when
 her back's broken against the bookshelf
 and he hasn't finished yelling, and anyway
 it's never been

the end before, she always reminds me
 and he always makes amends
 (to her, not me)

so, really, how likely is it this time?

Reporting: Officer Ariadne Wilcox, Badge no. 4414 and Officer Theodore Hall, Badge no. 6486
Bureau: Homicide

I've pushed my bed
 against the window, the one
 with all the cobwebs, and he can't get in

to this room, not with the mess
 I've made on purpose
 and so far I haven't crossed
 his mind, which I figure

is about halfway through
 his litany of rage right now. I can tell

because the words never change, just move
farther back in his throat
congeal
into a roar

Incident location: State Game Lands 157, PA 18930

The weaver at the window hears it all,
braids it into her portrait. She has been here
three weeks, and already she's built
a more useful home than ours, one that does it all—

protects her, warns her of danger, catches her meals
asserts her presence and domain—I wonder
if, in the mornings, when my music vibrates
through its strands, it feels like dancing
to her little furred feet. How hard

my mother tries to make this home
feel like it, too, sprang from somewhere inside us
was not fabricated
on the cheap by some contractor
intent on cutting corners. You could cut

into these walls, years from now
and find initials, or bones, or notes
I've stuffed into the grate, but more likely
just a sheet of useless insulation
made of more timbrous strands, thickets
all the way down

If I too were a spider, would she guide me
picking my way through
her sideways labyrinth?

Would she help me
uncover underworlds full
of hiding places, or would I simply know
how to survive
because, flesh of her flesh

I shared her instincts?

Victim: Helen Pasiphae Marsalis | Sex: F | Age: 44

Trichonephila clavipes

is a very good mother. She can make
seven kinds of silk, one to shield
her eggs until they're ready to hatch

and another to trap
her moths, immobilized
with a shot from her throat

I don't imagine she's ever confused
one for the other, wrapped her spiderling
in a shrinking shroud, or speared it
with her infecting paralysis

obstructed nature's law
to let it hatch, free, and disperse
his roar is louder now
but to a spider, is it louder

than the splattering rain that ricochets
off the windowsill, every drop a bomb?
On quieter nights, my mother sang

me stories about spiders and waterspouts
hopeless pursuits, dreams of escape
somewhere to the north, or just up

I guess what our homes have in common
is the way they both leak
both shake

in this animal thunder. Knowing the words
is no more use to me than to her, they are
only a tangle of threat
and the memories of threat, and anyway

I think she can see me through the glass.

Scene processed for evidence: Y

Photographs taken: Y

Items taken to crime lab: Y

She is smart enough
like I am, to build her refuge
in the corner, undetectable

I have pressed my nose against the window
lain here to whisper to her not to forget
to write the truth on the walls
of her home, so she'll know

how to survive, so that in these short weeks
of her life, she will understand
she will not forget me
and one of us
will find our way out

Additional victims: Tomasina Marsalis | Sex: F | Age: 16
Witnesses: None

particle accelerator

If by force I can wind time
back on its coil, steel will pluck
itself from your skin, reforge
itself from jagged pieces, disappear
into the sky

blood will tidy itself
in a hurry, apologize as it slinks
back into your veins. Dawn will spring
fresh into your irises, lashes dampen
pupils shrink as the light
of the world pours in.

If by skill I can press this barrel
against the nape of the universe, I will expose
its secrets, negotiate your release
you'll jump to your feet, take flight as air
strains to close behind you, as the whining drones
are swallowed by birds

smoke and dust will resolve
to brick and canister, contained
until they are safely disassembled
ships and trucks will roll
in reverse, stopping only to gather
their bales of warheads.

Here in this backwards place
the brightest in the world tilt their chins
over their deadly harvest
vying for the title: who
can best eradicate the bomb
plant the uranium deepest
trap the devil in his den

if by knowing you, I can chart
your coordinates against
this flimsy plane, I will find
the moment when
you last

felt

joy.

Caitlin Townsend (they/them) is a queer writer living in Lekwungen Territory (Victoria, BC). Their work seeks to dissolve imagined borders between the human and natural worlds, confront imposed hierarchies, and explore how land and other forms of life create meaning. They hold an MPhil from the University of Cambridge.

great chain of being

into the glitter-dark ceiling of stars
vaults his voice,

am I alone?

he
atop
the pile
of bones
asks, shifting
his feet against
her skull, crushed
against the child's ribs
crusted with ash and oil;
asks, while the feathers melt
and the smell of rot beneath him
leaps like porpoises whose skins slide
against the rubble of schools and homes;
asks a god he sees with his own face, a father;
asks an imagined race light years away from this
furnace, having sent probe after probe to explode or drift
or crash without sound where nothing breathes; he asks with
what is left of the atmosphere, sucks in its smoke and turns it to
wonder; he stoops, while the heap begins to shrink, as it folds him into
its decay, into the mass of dog atop monkey atop lion atop horse atop urchin
atop fern atop algae atop the millions of himself; at last, wrapped in their warmth
he fragments with the fraying throats and fronds that might have answered once; now
they embrace him as the microbes burst from his belly, join the feast; and the stars reel on,
as they always have; as the mountain cools to dust; as wind stirs ash to unconscious dance;
as thunder breaks on a fearless sea; as acid waves dash against rock, each clap unanswered.

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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