



# THE MANTLE POETRY

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# THE MANTLE

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Each poem belongs to its respective author

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## Pietas

My mom broke up with my dad despite her kids, I broke up with my boyfriend for my kids, Zeus gave me renewed strength that day, the weather was uncharacteristically arid, the season being February, I had gained a new sense of the phrase “life is suffering” having read *Creative Knowledge and Poetic Intuition* by Jacques Maritain, which maintains the soul of the poet is one that “suffers things more than it learns them” (and more than other men), since it retracts its energy from civil life and keeps a reserve for experience, this did not help me, I blocked him on Facebook, heard no music, drove past the little house with the leprechaun printed window treatments, in another poem this image would bleed out notes of mischief and play, magic and the orbuculum.

**Elise Houcek** is a writer and artist pursuing an MFA in poetry at the University of Notre Dame. Her most recent project, *So Neon Was The Rope*, explores illness, gendered violence, and humor’s liberatory power. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Prelude*, *Afternoon Visitor*, *Always Crashing*, *Guesthouse*, and elsewhere.

Elise Houcek

## The Lime Tree

*after Trevor Hall*

I taught my children to always ask why not  
not why. Why not play the lime tree song, mommy?  
Why not let love take its turn? Apparently  
this was not like teaching your children to be polite,  
but it wouldn't have been fair to switch things  
at that point. Why not kick the bucket? Why not  
get a little grand? one of them asked their preschool  
teacher during a lesson on physics and her glasses  
nearly obliterated. It was not how I had imagined.  
Truth is, I'd pictured them on luxury cruise ships  
presenting at New Age conferences on the apophatic  
nature of reality. They'd have had a script that went  
like this: after seven million years of denying  
our proclivity for swearing we have unlocked  
the final way to freedom. An albatross would slice  
across the open-air terrace, and each guest would raise  
their glass to clink, shiny as a bird call. Anyway  
it was a dream like that which most parents  
have for their kids but mine had taken a much less  
glamorous route: now every time they asked me a question  
it was as if they were asking me to look at myself.

**Elise Houcek** is a writer and artist pursuing an MFA in poetry at the University of Notre Dame. Her most recent project, *So Neon Was The Rope*, explores illness, gendered violence, and humor's liberatory power. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Prelude*, *Afternoon Visitor*, *Always Crashing*, *Guesthouse*, and elsewhere.

## Nana's Teachings

You initiated me in the alchemy of laundering  
during my breaks from hopscotch on our Spanish patio tiles.

I learned how best to remove stains while you, bent over  
the oversized granite sink, told me about suds and how to break them.

Then you performed the intricate ceremony of unwrapping  
those brilliant blue softener cubes, enticing as bonbons in shop windows.

For the grand finale, you hung my dresses and dirtied sheets  
to dry and dance with the winds. I was too small to help you.

Too delighted by the smallest things.

\*

The green light in your eyes empowering me to tiptoe inside  
the wiry chicken house and collect newly laid eggs.

I cradled the bounty safely between cupped little hands.  
My cheeks burned with self-admiration, triumph.

Yolks extracted, beaten. Alcohol and sugar. Vermouth.  
Your next alchemy: a sweet orange foamy concoction

you let me sip, so slowly, as I would a latte today.

\*

A discarded bookcase converted into a garden. Offerings:  
balled-up roly polies, dirtied fingernails, divine strawberries grown overnight

that you let me pick. Such pride. Grown-upness.

I was the caretaker of those fragrant plants  
you called *sweet basil, thyme, rosemary*.

Under your vigilant eye, I learned to curb  
my temptation to touch those forbidden  
miniature green hot peppers that turned fiery red

in the spring. They grew upside down  
like candles on Christmas trees. So silky in my hands,

like the last time I touched your cheek.

**Beatriz Dujovne** is a licensed psychologist with a private psychotherapy practice. She is the author of *In Strangers' Arms: The Magic of the Tango* (McFarland, 2011) and *Don't Be Sad After I'm Gone* (McFarland, 2020) and has published numerous articles and poems in peer-reviewed and literary journals.

## All the Ways Love Can Leave

The sadness comes later, after the shriek  
of the wind is caught inside its throat

and anger sleeps inside its tightened fists.  
It was always the sadness, I think,

sitting around like dirt buried beneath  
uncut fingernails, jagged and brown.

So many have come and gone. If you look  
closely, you will see that the cycle of loss

is mirrored in the gasp of the candlelight,  
in the old widow's sallow face.

So many have left without saying goodbye,  
and yet it never becomes less painful

to watch someone slip into a place  
beyond the fog, never to glance backwards

again. The truth is that love, like death, only  
leaves in two ways: slowly, like an

uncomfortable quiet, or as quickly as  
a forgotten dream.

## a portrait: i learn how to forgive a bird

i saw heaven            three years ago  
almost / was  
                         it light? or the opposite of  
flight,  
                 the act of breath inward & out / is not dying / &  
                 is  
                 not quite living        either  
once, you asked me to cut  
                 your hair                    with a  
                 pair of broken                    scissors  
                 on your bedroom    floor  
                 this is not a metaphor  
                 (but this, this i think  
                 must have been love, too)  
on the days you could not  
afford love / i  
                 did your laundry and we ate  
                 wonderbread and peanut butter  
and jelly sandwiches / our stomachs  
were always            empty,  
somehow  
my heart was                    always  
full,  
                 was yours?

**Blue** (fka Jude) **Nguyen** is a queer Vietnamese poet based out of Boston, MA. They are an Aries/Taurus cusp in love with liminal spaces. They have been nominated for Best of the Net Anthology and Best New Poets Anthology. Their poetry can be found at *The Mantle Poetry* and *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*. You can find them on Instagram: [@blue.ngu](https://www.instagram.com/blue.ngu) and on Twitter: [@queerqhost](https://twitter.com/queerqhost).



## A PORTRAIT: I LEARN HOW TO FORGIVE A BIRD PART 2

the fever is out  
grown by the day

god  
is outgrown by your  
lover, the clock lights all  
the rooms love  
should not go, the  
afternoon told me this  
is my home,

i sit close to god or  
to love  
or to fever on your  
bedroom floor,  
half of our days are  
this: your hands  
pulling me into the  
sun,  
our eyes & our hands  
make shapes from the air  
around us  
we drink up / enough for  
our mouths to be full  
but what about love?

nothing for a minute  
but love.

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## Fugue

what is lost is found again  
and again  
in the blighted ravines of the midnight memory,  
headlights streaming over high desert horizons,  
two beams into the endless dark  
as you slide and scramble down  
into that pit by the highway subconscious,  
looking for those needles and pins in the dirt  
and the dark, begging for pain, fingers  
scrounging dry rock until they bleed, and in the most  
desperate epoch your fingers touch  
what you once cast away  
with such hate—a relief, your heart;  
but

no desert can evade the rains forever; you will hardscabble  
down that same darkness one day, one future;  
all that is found will be lost again  
and again  
in the blighted ravines of that midnight memory

## Uncertainty of Sadness

Who would need records if the memory were as bound as Boolean values- True or False / 0 or 1? You need a death-certificate to remind you of grandfather who died years ago, and you want to use this as a theme to write a poem for him, but you give up after a few attempts. You can't remember it clearly- fine, you were sad but how sad? Can you measure sadness? 0 for delight, and 1 for depression?

Most likely, it lies somewhere in between. Somewhere around 0.66? There is a fundamental limit to the precision of the value. Sadness is an obscure gray-skinned animal with millions of possible gradations- unnamed shades, unidentified traits, and unpredictable. Days later, with a change in conjugate variables of period & proximity, it seems impossible to predict the extent of sadness. All you remember is he died. Certainly, he died.

## Into Ornithology

asks me  
what color is a warbler like I

know like I'm not dying to knock  
this feeder upside-down scream

wildly burst toward  
the moon soar over its

face on the river keep  
migrating always north even when I

taste winter coming for me madly wail  
HOW IS IT THAT I SO PROFOUNDLY LOVE YOU

ask you  
    can you hear me now

**Bear Weaver**—writing, residing, and cancer-fighting in southern New England—was built by Florida's Gulf Coast. As were their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents. Bear's writing centers themes like identity, queer love, and the absurdity of being alive on Earth.

## We aren't supposed to know so much about so much

The phone rings, the mailbox fills, the school  
bus and garbage trucks block the side streets.  
Horns honk. Sprinklers pop up. Like you do,  
flashes, in my peripheral vision.

I believe in ghosts, never expected to  
but you died and life tilted to the wild side  
where fences and clocks stop, leave me  
wide open, squinting hard.

Where did you go?

I think you might be the chipmunk that  
eyes me through the screen door as I  
clean the house, the Sold sign out front.  
I explain aloud: *Dad, we're taking care of Mom.*

On its hind legs, the chipmunk stares.  
I keep talking. *Dad, we sold the house.*  
*Mom needs to move. I love you, Dad.*  
I am talking to a chipmunk. It skitters off.

I walk into the kitchen, through  
the living room out to the back porch.  
The chipmunk is there now. Staring  
at me, through the screen porch door.

*Is that you, Dad?*

My father loved the chipmunks. Watched  
them dart into drainpipes, into the open  
garage door. Our neighbor stops over.  
We chat in the backyard.

The chipmunk dashes by.

*Your father thought my cat was eating the  
chipmunks. Never let the topic drop.*

I know my Dad is listening in the drainpipe.  
Until I don't know anymore. So I write it down.

**Emily Scudder** is the author of "Feeding Time" (Pecan Grove Press) and the chapbooks "Natural Instincts" and "A Change of Pace" (Finishing Line Press). Her poems have appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Agni Online*, *Margie*, *New Letters*, *Harpur Palate*, *Salamander*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Ethel Zine*, and other places. Visit her online at [www.emilyscudder.com](http://www.emilyscudder.com)

## 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.