

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 10 OCTOBER 2019: "ON THE BRINK"

Here in New Jersey, summer is losing its battle with autumn, so we thought we'd signify this change in the seasons with fall- and Halloween-themed images. And that got us thinking about other situations in which things are "on the brink": relationships with lovers and families, mental health, climate change. Welcome to Issue 10!

This month's featured poet is Kunjana Parashar.

Issue 10 includes work by Jennifer Battisti, Jack B. Bedell, William Bortz, Chiara Di Lello, Paula Harris, Judith Kingston, Meg Mulcahy, Kunjana Parashar, Adithi Raghavan, Ankh Spice, Megan Wildhood, and Jeffrey Yamaguchi. And Othuke Umukoro is featured in "Hold Me, Open" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist

This month's featured artist is Jason Bates, who once fed Pudge a tuna fish sandwich and is now an abomination. He founded the defunct literary influencers PunksWritePoemsPress and *Spider Mirror Journal*. His writing has appeared in *Before I Leave...Lit Zine*, *Figroot Press*, *Bone & Ink*, and *Lingering In The Margins*, a river city poets anthology. Is this a bio or two truths and a lie?

"Paraphernalia" by Jennifer Battisti

When I was fifteen, it was the little metal grate
unhinged from each faucet until my father cursed,
Barbasol dripping from his angry jaw,
at the surge I'd created.

Soon, Bic pens were emptied
of their circulatory systems.
Naked ink and ball-point were laid out
like cadavers without the shell to house the words.

There was relief in the loyalty of chemistry
table-salt swirled in the lightbulb
dissolving fluorescence until alchemy

cleared a space for a small white stone to burn

and billow the 40 watts that was once alive to illuminate
measured bleach on weekends.

There was redemption in the now lonely socket
in the laundry room where my mother would stare— tsk, tsk

at another way she'd been ripped off.
She'd question the discrepancies, blackouts;
as if our home was the Hocus Focus cartoon
in the Funny section of the Sunday paper.

And then the house began to betray us on its own,
as if I'd crystalized a permission. Carpets plumped
without a known water source, the mailbox shook
with unnamed subscriptions to Popular Mechanics magazine.

The wallpaper unspooled, exposing patterns once hushed under
adhesive's authority, while I played aluminum foil origami;
poked holes with mother's sewing needle
into the toilet-paper-roll pipe I'd made—
the prize for ingenuity not fit for the science fair I missed that year.

["Tragic Heroes" by Jack B. Bedell](#)

—Photographic Print Triptych by Sam Davis,
Graphite Gallery, NOLA 2019

How soon will it be before
taking our helmets off to admire
the valley will seem luxurious,

before it's just a matter of minutes
until we have to breathe
from our air tanks again,

put our gloves back on before
the sun and wind peel our skin?
And when the sand blows

through the valley below us,
will we remember the sound
of water?

“October, and Everything Is Breathing” by William Bortz

God—

are you only a noise

tall, dry reeds battering

the wooden fence keeping

the leaping prairie

within its own riot

can one breath from

the eternity of your tongue

calm a country

if so, could you

recite my name

“footprint” by Chiara Di Lello

We circle our chairs for a class meeting and for the first time it's one of my students who says, *Mix it up! We're gender segregated.* They gesture and jabber and after a fifteen-second starling-like interlude, they do. Whenever they find my travel mug abandoned on a desk they lift it up and declare *Hmm, I wonder whose this is?* I am trying to be better about bringing the mug, about washing it so it does not develop a grease of old milky coffee between its watertight gears. I bring a different glass one to meetings, one that adults and children call *cute*. I don't know what makes a coffee cup cute. If it's size then unfortunately I may merit the same label. This confirms my conviction that being taller would keep me from being lumped in with such adjectives. I am trying

to use less plastic, even though it is as easy as breathing. I will probably never be able to forget Ben Kingsley duct-taping a plastic bag over his own head in *The House of Sand and Fog*, a last act of resistance. We say *gasping like a fish* but that hardly covers the brutal mute reflex of his body pulling against the plastic for air. Last year I helped a student write a report about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. He was working on adding details to strengthen his argument. Did you know it takes one plastic bottle four hundred and fifty years to break down in the ocean? I wonder how he is doing this year. He never wrote as quickly as when he chose that topic. I can tell my class has turned a corner because now they say *all genders* instead of *both genders* without prompting. It's a small thing, but the kind that maybe sticks. They are so good at coming up with ideas for how to save the planet. I need to make sure they know that recycling at home can't hurt, but we're going to have to crush a lot more than soda cans to stem the tide. If they remember one thing from this year, I think, holding my overpriced coffee that I bought on the way to school. That wouldn't be a bad impact to have. It's the kind of thing I won't be able to gauge for a long time. The cumulativeness of plastic in seawater. The things I do each day knowing they will outlast me.

["living with the dead boyfriends" by Paula Harris](#)

dead boyfriends don't steal away
the sheets during the cold nights,
they don't snore or breathe too loud,
although they can't warm your feet

dead boyfriends don't forget things:
to take out the rubbish bag,
to unclog the laundry sink,
to delete their exes' numbers

dead boyfriends will sit with you,
they always notice sadness

and happiness and crying
and they notice stuff, alright?

they notice your eyelash tint
and that you're out of chocolate
and that your eyes are bloodshot
and ask if you've been sleeping

dead boyfriends kiss you again
and again and again and
again and again and, damn,
you don't want them to stop ever

dead boyfriends fuck you real slow
or hard or on the lawn or
in the kitchen or in the
light or how you want them to

they will give the right answers
when you want to talk to them
and they'll ask the right questions
and their deep voices won't whine

they don't forget to call you,
they don't say the stupid things,
they don't fuck you over, again,
they're so much easier dead

dead boyfriends are easier
if you want to love someone
and be loved but you find that
live ones never love you quite right

the dead boyfriends must stay dead

“DIAGNOSIS” by Judith Kingston

in which we look ourselves up on the Internet and find nothing

One evening, over dinner,
my uncle casually told my Mum
she was autistic.

His psychologist, who had
spoken to her
once
on the phone,
had said so, which made it
gospel truth.

That night my Mum went
to bed full of emotions
that she was now
no longer supposed to
recognise
or feel.

The rest of us retreated
to the Internet to
Google our symptoms.

I had *Generalised Anxiety
Disorder*, my Dad
dementia (early onset).

My husband was a
depressive genius with
delusions of grandeur,
but that was no
surprise to him,
of course.

In the days that followed
we turned inward.

My dad would ask the same
questions and tell you
the same stories each
time he saw you.

I jumped at shadows,
avoided Black Spots
on familiar roads
and dissolved into
tears if anyone so much as
raised their voice.

My husband slept
less than normal,
avoided sunlight,
wrote a masterpiece,
would not speak.

When it turned out
that the psychologist
had been misquoted
we awoke to a new,
brighter light.

Getting up awkwardly,
lending each other a silent
hand, as if we were strangers
meeting for the first time.
We could not say what
each of us was thinking:

What, then,
is wrong with me?

[“Come and collect your ma, she’s gotten out again” by Meg Mulcahy](#)

When sunflowers droop
their tired tendrils reach out for something else to cling to
clutching balcony railings or each other like withered widows who know that life will march on
with or without their wailing.

When I get pissed
I sweat sap and melodic tendencies
melting into smiles of divine discontent
a heart clogged with honey and notions of traversing cities
you have never met me whole
but here I am, more entire a thing than our flickered neon alters.

Trace ink lines in my skin from the day I raised myself

nothing but growing pains now, skeletal vibrations
of tiny whisks beating folds of skin into smoothest
battered sting.

Does the water concern itself with the names we give to things?
there is a reason we don't recognise anyone until they open their eyes
reduced to a subject line, a concept to flesh out
fuckable. clickable.
I hope this mail finds you happy.

["Love in the Time of Climate Catastrophes" by Kunjana Parashar, October's Featured Poet](#)

We have some time before the permafrost all melts: *stay*.
I know the smog will make apparitions of our unborn child and

the lantana will try to take root from the cleave of our thighs.
But until the adjutants still have our bones to eat, won't you stay?

Forget how we couldn't help the electrocuted bodies of bustards
lying on dusty field roads, forget our loss of language for that

special grief reserved for bird-deaths. That dark night when the burnt
smells of brown plumages filled our dreams and we kept sweating.

So what if we can't hear birdsong again – look how the inky-blue
granadas sing from your collarbone still, how constant their wingspan

on the landscape of your neck – like the only music we need.
And look how from the pipes, the moray eels enter our kitchen like

swimming in a calm tidepool. We will go that way too – sea fans
escaping the palms of our cold, wet hands – us – ebbing and ebbing.

Kunjana's Commentary on "Love in the Time of Climate Catastrophes":

I think the first time this poem started taking shape in my mind was when I read about the state of Greater Adjutants in Assam, the bone-swallowers, or *hargila*, as they are locally called (Source: RoundGlass Sustain). These are large birds with impressively-sized bills that can often be found foraging at landfills and waste-dumping sites. They carry out the same kind of

ecological cleansing functions as vultures, but are actually storks. Greater adjutants are endangered due to loss of wetlands and more importantly, due to contaminated and toxic waste that makes its way to their insides. It astounds me how much wreckage we can cause to an entire species because of our negligent and anthropocentric practices. Besides my own tendency to catastrophize, *Love in the Time of Climate Catastrophes* was forged out of this pain of being so short-sighted about climate change, species extinction, and, of one day causing so much irreversible damage to everything around us that we'll be left with nothing but memories of birdsong.

That being said, my intention behind writing this poem was not only to report our current and possibly future ecological realities but also to jar our anaesthetic senses into action. Love is like a sweet, anodyne drug. It lulls and comforts us. I wanted to bring about the discomfiting effect of contrast between this ecstatic pull of love and the urgency of climate disasters staring in the face of two lovers. I imagine that when the world is falling apart, lovers will not share memories of romantic escapades in the mountains – instead they will recount the horrors of trying to protect all manifestations of life but being too small to effect any substantial change, might choose resignation over action. The bleakness of this perspective is perhaps made to seem lighter by the lyrical and lilting structure of a love song – but it is impossible for the lovers to not be aware of the tenuousness of everything – like the moray eels and sea fans now invading their home, the trauma of climate disaster just slips in.

Editor-in-Chief Christine Taylor's Commentary on "Love in the Time of Climate Catastrophes":

I was immediately drawn by the title's calling on Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* and wanted to see how the poem would potentially play off this reference. But after the first two stanzas, I pushed aside all thought of the novel because the poem begs the reader to consider our role in climate change. How can we continue loving when quite literally the physical world is falling apart around us? I love the immediate, sensory details in this poem like "the electrocuted bodies of bustards / lying on dusty field roads," and aesthetically the poem has a beautiful rhythm and musicality. The beauty of the poem is almost a slap in the face as the content reminds us that environmental collapse is now our reality.

["An Evening Meal with Mother's Paranoia" by Adithi Raghavan](#)

Mother curses each battered carcass,
mangled wires ripped from soggy drainpipes,
fermenting like radish on the oak bathroom tiles.
Child, she implores, look, I killed him.
This horned minotaur with dials for ears,
this government spy with crooked smile,
this now bloodied in vain.
Poor father mourns his radio,
tears chasing words into the sea.
His calloused knuckles knead

blueprints of graveyards
onto my spine while
brother drums boneless keys into the piano:
martyr song drenched in elegy for every
unhinged shingle weeping in mama's mind,
an abyss awaiting.
I feel her eyes unpacking death in a maze,
the slow burn of fire lapping at her feet,
smoke smothering fleeing memories.
I gather the crackling shards
of meat into a pot of November,
season it with shavings of jaggery.
The sweetness of which
melts my reality.

["Have mercy" by Ankh Spice](#)

This island opens the iris of her day, calm
curve of bay all visioning glass

deepsight clear to the seabed stones, each
a distinct sharp note, becalmed
in unstirring kelps

oh yes here
the huge animal of the world is all lull
but I turn where the trail ends in a groan
the road inhaled by her winter
heaving

and on your side
of her body that same skin murmuring wet nothings
down there where the road was
is tearing holes in itself right this
second

and if we are any kind of people
we know what to do with an animal struggling
just to breathe

when did we close our eyes so tightly we forgot
that desperate creatures fight hard and close
more eyes as they go down
gasping

So from me running caught between breaths
to you caught in her throat
I can't say anything except oh god you know
you know she never wanted this

"A/B Testing" by Megan Wildhood

"Push record."

My assistant,

DataHead 12-06.1,

complies

and the only camera

on the whole ship

that wasn't rolling

begins gobbling

atmospheric pressure,

A planet,
pushed into
the black blanket
like a button,

life roiling around
on its thinnest layer
amid smoke from
the nostrils of volcanoes

dense blasts of weather,
pressure to bloom
beyond simple survival,
now rolling full circle

back to questions

of survival.

Preservation:

is it about more than data?

The only ship

in the known darkness

to carry the bytes for life

is...sinking is not

soil density,
population spreads
per country -

an endless list
of measures -
bit by planetary bit.
The pictures take

approximately 12.072
minutes to complete.
The moment it does,
I count to ten.

My turn to push a button.
Smoke curls around Africa,
the Atlantic splits in two,
then five, then ten,

continents go ash, millions
of miles of skin go liquid
at a rate DataHead 12.06-1's
glass better be capturing
through the expanding rings

the word, for there truly
is no up or down.
No wonder the captains
do not know right or wrong.

An endless list
of things that could go wrong
absorb their time
like a hydrocarbon-flooded
atmosphere chugs sunlight.

It takes years,
but by the time
you notice,

you may not have time
to debate their origin.
Cape Town will be out
of water, Bangladesh

and San Francisco
will be under it.

But big brothers beat
up the bullies; technology

of red and scream and energy
transfer and all I felt is a tiny,
brief recoil under my thumb?

saves
(the way a good guy
with a gun saves).

“Horizon” by Jeffrey Yamaguchi

A mile out in ocean waters
a dead whale
drifts with the current
tomorrow the tide will beach it

Nearby there is a line around the block
for overpriced soft serve ice cream cones

A little boy from out of town
hunting for perfect sand dollars
comes upon the ghastly wonder
and stares into its bloated wounds

In this spot many years ago
a man proposed to his girlfriend
on bended knee at sunset

Oblivious to the surroundings
an older couple strolls by
arguing over how much money
they shouldn't be spending on lunch

A plastic bag lofts into the air
bolting upright a young mother grabs her phone
and logs an urgent reminder to order balloons
for her daughter's upcoming birthday party

There will be other stretches of sand
engulfed by the constancy of crashing waves
his planted legs cast ever longer shadows
as the waters rush by and return
the familiar bends all of us
to see what we have seen before

He dives into the sun soaked blue

pulls himself deeper and further with each stroke
swimming as one with the shrouded expanse
a thrum of echoing silence
the murky glow of shadow in flux
everything held still just for him
except a stream of air bubbles
rising to the surface

A gathering rages under the swelter
melting ice disappears into the sand
along with countless discarded bottles
the only message of longing
a whistling rasp, gusty winds
ensnared in uncorked emptiness

For the rest of his life
every time he visits a beach
getting even a hint of the ocean air
no matter where he is in the world
he will think of the majestic whale
that washed up dead on the shore

Overhead a seagull glides by
and not a moment later
disappears into the blue horizon

“Hold Me, Open”

From EIC Christine Taylor: **Othuke Umukoro** reminds us that in the tense moments of our lives, there can still be light. His poem "a brief guide to remembering" honors that vulnerability.

“a brief guide to remembering” by Othuke Umukoro

i remember the kindling night my sister came out.
the cicadas were on a hiatus.

i remember the day father brought home our
first dog. i was sucking a stalk of sugar cane.

i remember my first kiss. it was
terrible, according to lola's last minute
allegation—my least failure, evidently.

i remember the first time father sent mama crashing
down the creaky stairs with the thunderbolt from the
back of his hand. i saw everything in slow motion.
i was seven. he was wearing blue jeans.

i remember the only time i saw a ghost. i had just
finished masturbating & i thought he had come to
drag me down to his yellow-light purgatory.

i remember my first open, vulnerable conversation.
it was with the turkey, seventeen minutes before the
house help dragged the blade across
his throat for my birthday.

i remember my ninth grade social studies teacher.
he believed minimalism is the first computational
steps to being agnostic.

i remember when i wrote the first, crappy
draft of this poem. i had just put out the back
porch lights when mama's tremulous
voice told me on the phone that he
was dying of lung cancer.

Othuke's Commentary on "a brief guide to remembering":

In *a brief guide to remembering* I wanted to document the beauty & burden of the human experience & draw a picture around its connascence of *relevance* & *vulnerability*. I have always wanted to write a poem that can capture a feeling of exfoliation— something with a concrete chain of images; something capable of spilling both olives & ash. The bodies in this poem, although still searching for their way in translation, are very much alive with light.

Poet Biographies

Jennifer Battisti, a Las Vegas native, is the co-director and a participating Teaching Artist for the Alzheimer's Poetry Project in Clark County. She was voted best local poet or writer by the readers of the Desert Companion. Her chapbook *Echo Bay* was released in 2018 (Tolsun Books).

Jack B. Bedell is Professor of English and Coordinator of Creative Writing at Southeastern Louisiana University where he also edits *Louisiana Literature* and directs the Louisiana Literature Press. His latest collection is *No Brother, This Storm* (Mercer University Press, 2018). He served as Louisiana Poet Laureate 2017-2019.

William Bortz (he/him) is a husband, poet, and editor living in Des Moines, IA. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Okay Donkey*, *Oxidant Engine*, *Empty Mirror*, *honey & lime*, *Turnpike Magazine*, *Back Patio Press*, and others.

Chiara Di Lello (she/her/hers) is a writer and teacher. Her work has appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Noble / Gas Qtrly*, and *CT Review*. Her loyalties lie solidly with public transportation, public art, and public libraries. Her lessons are peppered with Star Wars references.

Find her on Twitter @thetinydynamo

Paula Harris (she/her) lives in New Zealand, where she writes poems and sleeps in a lot, because that's what depression makes you do. She won the 2018 Janet B. McCabe Poetry Prize and the 2017 Lilian Ida Smith Award, and is the author of the chapbook *i make men like you die sweetly* (dancing girl press, 2019). Her poetry has been published in various journals, including *Berfrois*, *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Barren*, *SWWIM*, *Glass*, *The Spinoff* and *Landfall*. She is extremely fond of dark chocolate, shoes and hoarding fabric.

Twitter: @paulaoffkilter
Facebook: @paulaharrispoet
Instagram: @paulaharris_poet
Website: paulaharris.co.nz

Judith Kingston is a Dutch writer living in the UK. Her poems have been published in various online magazines such as *Barren Magazine*, *Riggwelter*, *Poets Reading the News* and *Piccaroon*, as well as the Fly on the Wall Press print anthology *Persona Non Grata*. Besides writing, she translates, teaches and occasionally narrates audiobooks.

Social media:
Twitter @judithkingston
Instagram @judith_kingston

Meg Mulcahy is a writer, poet and general gowl based in Dublin, Ireland. She copywrites for money and runs on iced coffee and hope. Her work lives in her blog *The Social Seagull* (socialseagull.com), *Crêpe & Penn*, *honey & lime*, *GCN* and empwr.ie

You can find her very much online on Twitter @TheGoldenMej and on Instagram @goldenmej

Kunjana Parashar (she/her) is a poet from Mumbai. She holds an MA in English Literature from Mumbai University. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Lammergeier*, *UCity Review*, *The Hellebore*, *Riggwelter*, *Camwood Literary Magazine*, *The Rumpus* (ENOUGH Section), and elsewhere.

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/wolfwasp>

Adithi Raghavan is a rising senior and Best of the Net nominee from Washington State whose poems have been published in online publications such as the *Apprentice Writer*, *honey & lime*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, and *Blue Marble Review*. Her writing has been recognized by the Poetry Matters foundation and the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Currently, she is working on her first chapbook. Adithi's pronouns are she/her/hers. You can find her either ranting on Twitter or deleting tweets at the speed of light @AdithiRaghavan

Ankh Spice is a sea-obsessed poet from Aotearoa (New Zealand). His poetry finds its heart in the deeply personal relationship between humans and our environment, and often explores mental and environmental health. His poems have recently been published in *Black Bough*, *Headline*, *The Failure Baler*, *Burning House*, and *Pixel Heart*. Upcoming work will appear in *Moonchild*, *Fevers of the Mind* and other publications. His first chapbook is currently out in the great submission ocean for consideration.

You can find him @SeaGoatScreams on Twitter, or at <https://facebook.com/AnkhSpiceSeaGoatScreamsPoetry/> on Facebook.

Megan Wildhood (she/her/hers, prefers identity-first language) is a Seattle-based creative writer, scuba diver and social-services worker known for her large, idiosyncratic earring collection. Her poetry chapbook, [Long Division](#) (Finishing Line Press, 2017), ruminates on sororal estrangement and volleying the challenges of growing up on the planet that's very nearly aflame. An excerpt of her novel manuscript was [published by AMP Hofstra's literary magazine](#) in May 2019. Her other work has appeared in [The Atlantic](#), [The Sun](#), and [Yes! Magazine](#). She regularly writes for [Real Change](#) and [Mad in America](#). She wants to connect with other weary humans around issues of mental and emotional distress, creating real community from the ashes of individualism and finding real hope if only as an act of defiance, in these tattered days.

Twitter: @MNRWildhood

Othuke Umukoro is a poet & playwright from Nigeria. His demons have appeared, or are forthcoming in *Sunlight Press*, *Spring Literary Movement*, *AfricanWriter*, *Brittle Paper*, *Echelon Review*, *Eunoia Review* & elsewhere. His debut stage play, **Mortuary Encounters**, is available here: https://publish.okadabooks.com/book/about/mortuary_encounters/27566 When bored, he watches "Everybody Hates Chris." He is on twitter @othukeumukoro19

Jeffrey Yamaguchi creates projects with words, photos, and video as art explorations, as well as through his work in the publishing industry. Recent publications include: *Okay Donkey*, *X-R-A-Y Literary Magazine*, *Vamp Cat Magazine*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, *Failed Haiku*, *Words for the Wild*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *Daily Haiga*, *formercactus*, *Black Bough Poetry*, and *Mojave Heart Review*. Jeffrey serves on the *Poets & Writers* Digital Committee, and he recently released the short film *Body of Water*.

Twitter: @jeffyamaguchi (<https://twitter.com/jeffyamaguchi>)

Instagram: @jeffreyyamaguchi (<https://www.instagram.com/jeffreyyamaguchi>)

Website: <http://jeffreyyamaguchi.com>

Find his short film here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZ2Jg5p7IAA>

©October 2019 *Kissing Dynamite: A Journal of Poetry*

All rights reserved.