

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 12 DECEMBER 2019: "CITYSCAPE"

Welcome to Issue 12, "Cityscape," the final issue of 2019. It's hard to believe we've made it this far, this fast. What started as a wild idea between two folks has grown into a team of dedicated editors, a family of talented contributors, and a supportive community of enthusiastic readers. For that, we thank you!

"Cityscape" delves into the heart of urban life: the toil of work, limited resources, discrimination, tension, violence. But there's also the cracking of sunflower seeds, throwin' down on chicken wings, and just maybe, falling in love. Venture with us. . .

This month's featured poet is Matt Mitchell.

Issue 12 includes work by Hasheemah Afaneh, Quintin Collins, mary cordisco, Bailey Grey, Matt Mitchell, Emily Nabnian, Holly Pelesky, Amy Poague, Rachel Small, Ellora Sutton, Tyson West, and Lucy Zhang. And Aerik Francis is featured in "'Let them eat cake!'" to make it a baker's dozen.

Finally, we're thrilled to announce our Pushcart Prize nominees for 2020! Join us down below for "The After Party" and revisit the stellar work of these six poets: Lannie Stabile, Danielle Hale, Danielle Rose, D. S. Waldman, Chi Sherman, and James O'Leary.

Featured Artist

Brian Michael Barbeito is a Canadian writer, poet, and photographer. He is the author of *Chalk Lines*, a book of prose poems (Fowl Pox Press, 2013).

"Military Occupations and Baton Rouge" by Hasheemah Afaneh

Over coffee and cigarette smoke,
she says, "We just want to breathe," so
take Jerusalem and give us
the beaches of Haifa
and open the gates
and let the fresh air of Acre
blow into Ramallah and let us breathe

the air that Eric Garner was denied.

Different air qualities. Same systems choking us.

I know of unspoken rules learned
under a military occupation across the Atlantic,
but a black man tells me in Baton Rouge,
“when the sun goes down, you go home”,
or the black man may find himself at the back of a police car,
or the black man may find himself in a prison cell,
or the black man may find himself not home.
“It happens more often than it doesn’t.”

Different rules. Same systems imprisoning us.

On the West Coast, I stand
at the edge near the water,
and I breathe in and I breathe out,
and I think *Take Jerusalem* and *Take Baton Rouge*,
but don’t take the lives that make Jerusalem,
the lives that make Baton Rouge.

“The Chicken Wing Speaks of Love” by Quintin Collins

Maybe you don't understand what it means to love
with hunger: to pull apart and gnaw goodness,
veins hooked in your teeth.

I'm tenderness you pick clean
from bone, massage from your molars
with your tongue.

How else can you peel back a lover's skin,
wade into the fat, consume
something whole? Nibble the gristle

in my love, wads of napkins translucent with grease.
Fry me hard. Split me,
drumette from wingette. Undress me,

breeding from tips. Devour, your palate
lemon-pepper purified, tongue mild sauce
blessed. Don't you know

love is messy? How can you not crave
this filth, a love that leaves
a pile of bones?

“sometime, summer 2002” by mary cordisco

i can't tell you the whole story.
i'd like to, but i'd have to find first how to tell it
to myself
what i can give are details,
the trees, not the forest

the summer i learned about herbal essence conditioner
and how to flat iron my hair
is the summer i first watched Maury, home with no parents, raiding
the change jar to clean out the ice cream man when his song
broke through the screams on the TV

i can tell you it was after lunch but not quite dinner time
when they broke in and broke up our game
of Spit, a midday ritual, after Jerry Springer and before Jeopardy
the local news muted on the screen

.....
a bright morning sun over the back of the lower
bucks county courthouse is the next part,
the ending, a story with no middle

sitting in the passenger seat of my mom's new black SUV
silent, staring into the light until my eyes were just spots
blinking, red, orange, yellow

i do not remember walking into the courthouse
i'm told i did, i said everything they needed me to say, i'm told
i was good.
i remember getting ice cream after, i remember not finishing it

“how to embody the face you track” by Bailey Grey

the seeds of the helianthus are used as human food

dear helianthus / i'm sure you've noticed
the heat rising / a bite in the air / i'm sorry
but it is just so human / to consume

a seed / the dense nutrition fortified
behind crunched shell spat / the viscosity
of our saliva lets it linger / on the dirt
but then it too is just a spot / of damp
earth / *helianthus* where should we
stare when the yolk sun drops / below
the horizon? / i stare at the ground
watch the frost climb / slowly up my
stem & coat my molten petals / i know
you are angry / lodged in my gum & a
pungent nasal burning / i overhear you:

in the dark / we are a mustard yellow

[“A Portrait of Another Night in Our Hometown”](#) by Matt Mitchell, December’s Featured Poet

in the car, on the bypass where we used to cruise on weekends in high school, we still blare ice cube’s “it was a good day” & only rap the part about fucking around & snagging a triple-double. & our eyes still glisten off oncoming headlights like newborn stars. & we talk shit on the new england patriots just like the old days, argue who the best receiver in the league is. & when we get bored, we sit in silence in the parking lot & let the song fade out just as we did when we were seventeen. & our kicks glisten in the blue moonlight like the snow. & i do not talk about how i’m afraid of the man packing a clip on his hip in this burger joint, or that i am still used to gargling hard Fs & two syllables in my mouth, beneath the taste of dick still lingering, without resisting. & i once looked a man in the eye after he called me what i am, for wanting to look pretty, & saw a clenched fist, but what was *gay as fuck* back then could easily be a bullet now.

Matt’s Commentary on “A Portrait of Another Night in Our Hometown”:

I think I’ve always been interested in the ways we can write a narrative in so few words. I’ve been working on a series of “portrait” prose poems, each detailing a specific memory in my life that has shaped my identity somehow. This piece, detailing an encounter with someone—whose appearance was quite similar to that of someone I went to high school with, but wasn’t him—who was open-carrying at a restaurant my friend and I love to go to.

I wrote this poem in one sitting immediately after it happened. That’s how I normally do my writing, the entire poem at once, and then I spend a few days editing. Some poems come out easily and everything you want to say is just there. This is one of those poems, for sure.

Lately, I’ve been invested in the different types of voltas that can be presented to the reader. What kind of turn can I take at the end of a poem? Hanif Abdurraqib once told me you have to fool the reader and complete the third act of a magic trick, “The Prestige,” and bring back the

thing you've made disappear. In this poem, I tried to achieve that by blending the prestige with a powerful turn, which, in magic, is when you can make something ordinary do something extraordinary.

Editor-in-Chief Christine Taylor's Commentary on "A Portrait of Another Night in Our Hometown":

What drew me most to Matt's work is the dance on the fine ice of safety that exists in the setting of this poem. The speaker recalls the "high school" days of comfort when there were a group of like-friends innocently jammin' in the car to lyrics that spoke to who they were. But those things change in ever so drastic—ever so mortal—ways when bigotry takes on the physical manifestation of the gun. That we threaten the identities and the very existence of other people is terrifying to me, and I see it happen. Often. It has happened to me. And every day, we need to renew our commitment to working against this bigotry.

"Red/Skater Boys" by Emily Nabnian

red likes speed jumps high til then
i'd never seen anybody move like that
so beautifully and so languidly with his grace
red rides and red defies gravity all at once
tattoos lace his left arm and like his feet too
they map out some tupa music just like
him yes the way he waits n the way he
skates and i stand there and listen to the whir
 the rich rush of boys in this city
landing tricks they cut through air
so cold for a night like this full moon looming
 bove barely august
baby life's bouta change they say n
 something's sticking to these feet
which are my feet which are their feet glued
to roughened boards like hands that have
 touched me before and in that way
this too was like jazz so blue n bound up

in discipline had me wondering
if all that matters bleeds from some typa matter
it looks and feels it escapes like this
boys who skate like this airborne n yet still
born from it's true i never saw nobody
suspended like this softness remaining
uspended like this both a prayer and a risk
sometimes the feeling like *amaze me baby*
it was a dance and so we danced
been waiting my whole life to ask you to dance
fell right back into myself like the way i glimpsed
dusk on a california highway one summer
n i *been* in america you see so words like
highway you see stood still
whilst they moved on around me they kept
throwin their weight round around me
but i loved their clothes their sway and their style
shirts flail baggy tunes blue n airpods hangin
they couldn't stop those boys
beautiful skater boys
from commanding n announcing vitality red
he never looks at me he moves so lithely
so desperately you see these boys
they always come back to me
returning's a typa gorgeous very specific
to girls like me loops round stone boulders
n *amaze me baby* circles like constellations
the skater boys are skating gliding high
in their great rotation sometimes the feeling like

job with benefits all those years ago. We don't
want anyone to own us. We'll let ties hang
from our neck, but never a lanyard.

One of us wants to be a writer, one a comedian, one
a musician. In the daytime we make art or don't, after
our hangovers subside, before ironing our uniforms.
Selling out is what we're afraid of.

Our feet throb as the place clears out. We are hungry and
irritable and we call each other *cunts* and *dicks*,
sometimes in Spanish. We bitch about
how long we've been there, meaning today but also
meaning longer. How long is the cycle of making art
and avoiding the man, how long
can we dodge him before our bodies give out.

["Kaleidoscope Repair, Since You're Awake" by Amy Poague](#)

You are feeling well today.

Kaleidoscope-clean-up speaks
to you soothingly,
the low, seething hum of the vacuum
removing colored plastic once and for all--

the sideways-now-sideways swirl
emptied out and tidied

as a warning to shape
and to color.

["Rideau Canal" by Rachel Small](#)

they say a hundred irish men linger beneath the surface of
the canal/ with their hands crossed in memory of red light/
some left green pastures with pockets
filled with seed/ and others with bellies
fed with rotten peel/ both waiting to
bridge the distance/ for water to pass
beneath their bodies/ with a dream of
gold coins pressed over their eyes/ as
they sink into the soft mud/ bodies

From our pastoral of box cars and deer hunting dreams
To the seedy Youngstown motel
Where the clerk must have figured
He was meeting someone else's wife.

At Mrs. Fair's Latin class
I had been trying to translate Lucy's deep blue eyes
I had fooled myself into thinking were violet
Behind her milk bottle glasses
Below the thick dark brows my imagination,
Like the boys at hair and makeup, morphed
Into a flash of Elizabeth Taylor.
As I struggled to conjugate her thinning waist line and swelling breasts
She glanced once at me then
Blushed to *divisa Gallia in partes tres*.
Even confronting the school year's end
We were both too nerdy shy to speak.
Our fathers' greying hair plotted to place us where we breathed and
To wrap our bones in fabrics our mothers selected –
Fifty's fathers whose Eisenhower jackets or sailor hats
Had become children's attic play things –
While they drudged in some obscure office, workshop, or store
Burgeoning the mortification of their hours into hifis
Oldsmobile station wagons, diapers and taffeta skirts.
Sure, they saved some of their silver
For Lucky Strikes and Duquesne long necks
Or, if the occasion hardened to a diamond point – Seagram's Seven.
My dad wore his dorky bowtie to read X-rays of lung cancers, broken bones and bad backs from
the foundry
Lucy's dad cut miracles in some ethereal OR where no one spoke of patients who died.
No block of sunlight was ever entirely their own.

As the bell ground out its buzz for our cake walk to our next class
I caught my last blush of Lucy's inner thigh when we shifted off our hard-wooden seats.
Ghosting that school year's last days
Lucy vanished as a mid-summer night dream.
Eventually I pieced my parents' whispers together
When they thought us kids had passed beyond ear shot –
Dr. Frank split with a steel syringe and lethal elixir
Laid himself out neatly on the shoddy motel bed
To leave his demons but no note to Lucy and her mom to figure.
At least he cared enough to let strangers find his cadaver
Still handsome as the world would have Lucy
Been beautiful with the right slices from a steady eye.

I rode *Lycidas* to the river that summer for the first time
To the grotto of never knowing
Why Dr. Frank dived so deep to desert our sacred oak grove
And ground hogs compelling Lucy's and her mother's suttee.
His passing birthed my passion to cradle his daughter
Lost to us both in the web of metered words that have flowed from me ever since
Words in matrices that will never mean as much to her as her father's last words
Or the epitaph written by his angry widow did to Dr. Frank.

“Break In” by Lucy Zhang

The dreamers wander
their hopes hidden behind a paper sign
“this car is unlocked” it reads
glass windows
unshattered.
You pry open the door
expecting a handful of quarters
maybe a crisp dollar bill
in the cup holder
only to find
spirits suffocating in mason jars.
You pick one up
unseal the lid,
release the vacuum;
the spirit seems to vibrate
and then shake
away its quarks and atoms
absconding to the coast
and then out of existence.
Now an empty jar in hand
you exhale a puff of a promise
condense breath into dew
and seal the lid.

“Let them eat cake!”

From EIC Christine Taylor: Consider the discrimination that restricts access to basic human necessities such as food. Through their writing, **Aerik Francis** asks readers to confront the "food desert" that is very real for so many people.

“_Broken Bread_” by Aerik Francis

break the wonder bread
break that fast the hallowed hollow
hum of a hum of a hungry human
hunger’s humiliation
a burning fast
still breaking slow
still breaking wonder
bread for broken people
heating people eating hot
food breaking broken glass
theories raise cracked glasses
let them eat cake
box of cake mix for a buck
drops of canola for dimes
a family can survive on a box of cake
let’s eat grandma whole family
Uncle Ben Aunt Jemima Mammy jar of cookies
save the crusts save the cookies
a whole family survives on a box
of cake maximize calorie intake
eat the cake we let them
don’t save the cook
just desserts for unjustly deserted
errant nomads of food deserts
emerging scents and emergencies
alchemy cooking
in fire pit hearth kitchens
another supper of dried
split pea curry bubbling
stewing in a spit polished pot
crushed with black pepper

we used to crush lavender in blunts for burns
we used to simmer warm comfort food for burns
we used plastic bags of frozen peas for burns
we made a balm of pulsed lentils for burns

don’t let them eat the blood
begins to cake
constructed malnutrition
loss of vision body attrition
broken fast food broken plates
news feed the force
burn hearts

burn neighborhoods
force feed the fire

Aerik's Commentary on “_Broken Bread_”:

First, major shoutouts to my wonderful poet friends Jeni and Beca for their help with shaping earlier versions of this poem. *_Broken Bread_* was written after attending a symposium called "Edible Feminisms" in Los Angeles in early 2018. I was particularly moved by an activist named Tiny who spoke about the ways unhoused people are systemically disfranchised and made to survive on whatever means they can. She discussed ways to advocate for unhoused people and to humanize people away from the usual negative ways we treat and speak about "homeless/jobless" people. She talked about how cake mix in particular was a cost efficient way for people to achieve their daily caloric intake. I instantly thought of that disputed quotation commonly applied to Marie Antoinette: "Let them eat cake" ("Qu'ils mangent de la brioche"). An unfortunate unwitting prophecy that came to fruition. Since the times of the French Revolution, quality food access and issues of global hunger have gravely exaggerated into another gaping gap between the haves and have-nots.

Particularly in the United States of America, these issues of food access cross-cut issues of racial inequality, gender inequality, and income inequality. A panelist in the symposium, New York activist Mama Tanya addressed issues of food access / food deserts in Black neighborhoods and also about movements towards eating sustainably and with high nutritional value. There are severe consequences of prolonged fasting/hunger/famine and it is important to address our own complicity in "force feeding the fire". Inspired by the books *Racial Indigestion* by Kyla Wazana Tompkins and *The Delectable Negro* by Vincent Woodard, it was also important to color this image and to suggest that our social systems are ones that consume racialized peoples rather than letting them eat. I mention Uncle Ben, Aunt Jemima, and Mammy cookie jars as a gestures to the way racial capitalism consumes. These are Black people memorialized as brands, as food vehicles, as Sambo-like characters. So I wanted to drive at that strange tension of a family made to eat a whole other family who bears these brands.

We are what we consume. This is something even the ancients understood, that food is both a medicine or a poison - depending on what and how we eat. In fact, etymologically, "recipe" began as a term closer to "medical prescription". Even with quality food options limited, folks living in precarious conditions still find clever means to harness the healing potential of food: from a meal of comfort food, to a rustic soup to fight a cold, to makeshift ice packs from frozen foods. Just as Hippocrates wrote thousands of years ago about treating burns with a lentil balm perfumed with herbs, today we continue to use garlic, onions, turmeric, and other foods for home remedies.

So this poem is both an indictment of systems of oppression as well as a dedication to survivors. It is a celebration of those survivors finding ways to live in a society that would rather them starve. They survive through community, through the breaking of bread. They survive

through resourcefulness and ingenuity, eating cheap simple meals that can last. They survive through a particular kind of maintenance of dignity, remembering they are still worthy of hot food, luxurious food, sweet food, shared food, any food. The right to food is a fundamental human right.

The After Party

We are honored to have the opportunity to nominate the following six poets for the 2020 Pushcart Prize! Revisit their incredible work from our 2019 issues.

“When Depression Talks Over Me” by Lannie Stabile

When I said I was just beginning to heal,
I meant pieces of my past have been breaking off
in painful, messy ways,
and I thought the cobbles and pebbles
would bind together to form neat stepping stones
so, I would know where the hell I'm going
But they've washed away in a flood of self-deprecation

I am honestly rubble at this point
A body pile that was once shelter,
was once woman
with a doorbell and hands and Imposter Syndrome
Don't waste your time rifling through this chaos
If you're looking for a way in,
just know, the door did not survive the storm

When I said I could breathe again,
I meant my body has unwedged itself from beneath a boulder
It is damaged and flatter than any tone I can dredge up
when I tell you, “I'm just taking it day by day”

I am salt and flour and sugar
I am built from three levels
of a special kind of perdition,
rolled into my own stubborn boulder
with a self-centered center
Then stretched from one end of the earth to the other,
my skin thinning every time I realize I'm not a perfect anything,
until you can finally see through me

When I said I recently learned how to cry,

I meant my emotions tried to drown me in my own fucking sea
I was not born a social animal,
and I've never learned to talk to boats or fish or sirens
Anything that might carry me to the gasping shore
So, here I am, choking on a petty memory,
as the tide rushes down my throat

I remember the first time I unhinged my jaw,
vomiting the swollen stories,
watching them gurgle in the open air
I wanted to swallow them down again, like eggs,
whole and white and weak
I thought, if I was lucky, maybe they would lodge there,
in that perfect space between mind and gut,
and I would finally have a physical reason to collapse

When I said I was starting to feel like myself again,
I meant in the night, I met a monster who looked so much like me
that when she offered up some rest,
it felt natural for her to slip into these dark, weary veins

I licked a shattered mirror once,
searching for the flavor of pieces
that could no longer recognize
their misanthropic edges
She, rather I, tasted like teeth and knees
I've tried washing my mouth out with carbonated therapy,
but her, rather my, desperation lingers

When I said the future looked brighter,
I meant I've been hurling toward an angry star, combusting all along

["Blood Anxiety" by Danielle Hale](#)

Me

anxious blood metallic like water from copper bowls
mathematically the least while still mixing
red in a sea of white foam cells

and traditions stuffed hungrily
down my throat remembering taste of sweet
grass and cedar remembering

smoke rising toward Kookum

reaching down to stroke tear-streaked
cour-age gathered in shaking hands that know
not everything or sometimes nothing

raised palms out to remember
to learn to earn to gather to know
more than mothers but always less less less;

dancing on roots through beaten
grass steps small but stronger stronger
stronger, traditions flow through like blood until

they become me which becomes

You

who travels metallic foamy sea
bursting: all traditions no blood

belonging to no one and everyone teaching me
as I learn you the taste of my blood in the cedar

[“On the Creation of New Language from the Readings Lists of the Dead”](#) by Danielle Rose

after a death / when i taste my own need like unpleasant iron bleeding behind a bad tooth /
this is when we become like blankets in winter / it is how loss reveals a new language / & why
at night i wonder why the sound of a running faucet brings panic / or why the sight of an owl in
flight / makes my heart race with joy / there is small magic in how suddenly my kitchen feels
like a different home / and where the rough edge of that chipped dinner plate becomes a
flowerbed & then blooms / there are even discarded bits of paper raining like poems / raining
like so many useless poems / because grandmother you read “ulysses” when you were sixteen
but you will never read my poems / so i can only believe that soil is just one way to cover a
grave / & that burial is ever-present

in the graveyard / three men in yellow reflective vests / heap dirt into an open wound

[“On Ego”](#) by D. S. Waldman

Instead, let the wind take your name

a tress of someone else's hair
and rush out the dusking window.
Welcome the swollen evening
clouds crawling up the river
the chill that finds you in bed.
Miles into a stolid city
breath muffled between brick and steam
a mirror waits for you to pass,
to look or not look at yourself,
to sharpen or soften your eyes
or to glide past like a shadow.
You'll find it's not about the light
but how much it conceals from you
depending on where you stand.
You'll find a mirror is a choice
a reality to consider
a truth it's your privilege to ignore.
Did you feel it? — your name
vanishing from the language
exiting through the last wink of sun,
the transfer of enormous weight
from your cracked and crumbling plinth
to the globed shoulders of twilight.
You realize you've been drowning
in air, white and odorless
lungs glutted with that familiar silk,

a name you've been answering to
quietly panicked, grasping

for the taut rim of your mouth,

a sky livid with purple clouds
humming in and around you —

Do it! Pluck the guitar string

let it overcome your soft skull
the way starlight spreads like oil

across a wrinkled river,

all of your folds and crevasses,
discovering the absences

that disguise themselves as bone,

Chorus of watery moans
stolen into the tissue

of your ravenous longing.

And as the night draws into you
drains you of your resistance

a stranger will present himself,

a shadow in the mirror
born from the delicate light

of an infant constellation.

He will have your square jaw
your broad chest, spacious posture

he will have nothing but time.

Patient and bituminous.
I wonder how long it will take

for your gaze to melt towards him,

for you to raise your hand to his
and see for the very first time

that your bones glow in the dark.

“we massive” by Chi Sherman

we massive
we so massive
that when you shout *were you there*
we say we aren't sure
but we must have been
we must have worn black wings
and feathered hats
and swooped over fields
looking for our next meal

we so grand
reverence is routine
our tongues don't fit behind our teeth
and when we laugh
candy falls from our forests of hair
we so bewitching
that friends who knew us in the shallow end
also know that jump ropes and silence
are the best gifts of all

we so massive we pillow the clouds
and indulge the idiosyncrasies of soil
we survey what we will consume
in our quest for reign and thunder
we strike the ground with armored fists
reveling in ripples that uproot maidenhair

we so diffuse that isolation has a houseguest
our language lives in roots and leaves
our history formed the mountains from hills
we graze on brush and sap
collect lightning bolts in a quiver
and roar farewell to kingdoms in denial
about our requisite departure

we so massive

our voices rattle the morning cage
dawn crests the horizon
and asks where we've been
in and around
through and in between
but never so far away
that we couldn't pull you close
and remind you
with fingerprints and heat
when this adventure began

“Fever Sestina” by James O’Leary

you tell me i am sick / wicker skin pale as firefly light
you tell me i am sick / boy-witch in ignorance tied to death-bliss
watch me wave alone to shadows made of smoke
alone on apple choke & self / too a kind of fire
flesh & memory / orange edge of what burns bright
tell me pain is paradise / not napalm pain / am i not sick

try again / naked & normalized / i am not sick
too long have i held each blue vein up to lamplight
as if to see inside of anxiety a working bright
as if to see inside of loathing gender / gentle bliss
binary taken made anew / oxygen’s gift of fire
i want fuel to bathe in that uncertain smoke

between / what’s hidden / all ripple steam & smoke
don’t pile wood on blackened wood / *please i’m not sick*
amnesia of childhood a kind of self-effigy / blank fire
memory / unaware of light except by lack of light
tell me bellows: have you ever honestly granted bliss
o silver lining / a lie can make even darkness bright

do not name me invention / don’t call me bright
a complex fuel makes for indecipherable smoke
signals / a flame for a boy / or lack of bliss
my bellows tried to hear / but to say i am sick
oversimplifies nonbinary dichotomy of james / aka light
trying to hide & flicker away from their own fire

inside & heat rises / regardless the heaviness of fire
whose desire to take to ash all previously bright

can be doused by even a flicker / shadows flee from light
like magic / a candle son's uses of eye-smoke
& blue burns brightest at the tip of red / red as cells sick
with bliss / with bliss / risen hundred-degree cinders of bliss

but is not death a scorching side-effect of that bliss
crumbled to cremation / final heat for final fire
what kills me is this: the doctor's diagnosis of sick
try again / notre dame's miracle flames made bright
history tells me what to do / not breathe in that grey smoke
or hold to strength away from dancing lights

but i am sick / of those who wish to extinguish this bright bliss
scared smothered by sweltering cold shrouds of dark smoke
i refuse / to freeze in fear of future burn / in wind / i light my fragile fire

Issue 12 Poet Biographies

Hasheemah Afaneh, MPH (she/her/hers) is a Palestinian-American writer and public health professional based in New Orleans. The themes her works center on are social justice, equity, identity, and day-to-day musings of the world. She has contributed to Sinking City Literary Magazine, Poets Reading the News, Shado Mag, This Week in Palestine, and others. Her poetry is forthcoming in December in Grlsquash Magazine and Caldera Magazine and in 580 Split Journal in spring 2020. Quality time for her is family time, laughs with friends, and reading. You can find more of her work on norestrictionsonwords.wordpress.com. She tweets @its_hashie.

Quintin Collins (he/him) is a writer, editor, and Solstice MFA Program Assistant Director. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Homology Lit*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, and elsewhere. He also received a Pushcart Prize nomination in 2019. Quintin likes to post poems and writing memes on his Twitter (@qcollinswriter). He thinks the memes are funny sometimes, but that's debatable.

Find him on Linktree (<https://linktr.ee/qcollinswriter>) and Twitter (@qcollinswriter).

mary cordisco (she/her) is a current graduate student at Villanova University, where she is studying postmodernism and critical university studies. she has had her poetry published in *Manuscript*, the literary magazine of Wilkes University. you can find her tweeting about poetry, capitalism, and the philadelphia eagles @marykcordisco.

Aerik Francis (he/him/they/them) is Queer Black & Latinx poet based in Denver, Colorado. Recently, they were the 2019 Amiri Baraka Scholar for SWP at Naropa University. They have work published and/or forthcoming in *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, the *Santa Clara Review*, *Spit Poet Zine*, and *TSPJ*. Instagram: @phaentompoe

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Matt Mitchell (he/him/his) is a writer from Warren, Ohio. He is either currently listening to The Cars or drinking a Vanilla Coke or both. His work has appeared in journals like *BARNHOUSE*, *Homology Lit*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Gordon Square Review*, and *Drunk Monkeys*, among others. He'd love to talk to you about basketball.

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Holly Pelesky (she/her) is a lover of spreadsheets, giant sandwiches, and handwritten letters. Her essays have appeared in *The Nasiona* and *Jellyfish Review* among other places. Her poems are bound in *Quiver: A Sexploration*. She holds an MFA from the University of Nebraska. She cobbles together gigs to pay off loans and eke by, refusing to give up this writing life. She lives in Omaha with her two sons.

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Amy Poague (she/her/hers) is currently studying to become a junior high or high school English/Language Arts teacher. She holds an M.A. in Creative Writing from Eastern Michigan University. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has appeared in *The Cabinet of Heed*, *Juke Joint*, *The Mantle*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *Really System*, *Transom*, *where is the river :: a poetry experiment*, *Rockvale Review*, and *Ghost City Review*. She can be found online at amypoague.wordpress.com and on Twitter @PoagueAmy.

Rachel Small (she/her) writes in Ottawa. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in magazines, including *ottawater*, *many gendered mothers*, *The Hellbore*, *The Shore*, and other places. She was the recipient of honourable mention for the John Newlove Poetry Award for her poem "garbage moon and feminist day". You can find her on twitter @rahel_taller.

Ellora Sutton, 22, is a Creative Writing MA student from Hampshire, England. She has been published in *Poetry Birmingham Literary Journal*, *The Cardiff Review*, *The Hellebore*, *Re-side*, *Honey & Lime*, and *Poetry News*, among others, and won the 2019 Hampshire Prize, part

of the Winchester Poetry Prize. Her debut chapbook is forthcoming from Nightingale & Sparrow. She tweets @ellora_sutton. You can read some of her work at ellorasutton.com.

Tyson West has published a lot of poetry, including haiku, traditional western poetry, free verse and experimental poetry and form verse and had two of his poems were nominated for Pushcart Prizes. His Steampunk short story, "The Wulver", was published in *Voluted Tales* and "The Thirteenth Victim", a vampire short story was included in an anthology called "You Can't Kill Me I'm Already Dead". He received third place for the Second Annual Kalanithi award in 2018 for his rondel "Under the Bridge".

Lucy Zhang is a software engineer and holds a B.S. in electrical engineering and computer science. She watches anime, writes poetry and fiction (when patient enough), and sleeps in on weekends like a normal human being. She can be found at <https://kowitzasekai.wordpress.com/> or on Twitter (@Dango_Ramen).

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