

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 14 FEBRUARY 2020: "ILLUMINATE"

Welcome to Issue 14, "Illuminate," in which poets offer words of wisdom to guide us through troubled times.

This month's featured poet is Alan Chazaro!

Issue 14 includes work by Clayre Benzadón, Alan Chazaro, Samantha Duncan, Kerenn Irias, Michal "MJ" Jones, Erin Kirsh, Aimee Nicole, Ottavia Paluch, Lee Potts, Vismai, Rao, Martha Silano, and Ann E. Wallace. And Faye Turner-Johnson is featured in "To Keep You Safe" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist

Elle Danbury has had her photographs published multiple times in *Barren Magazine*, *Cauldron Anthology*, and has been a featured artist in *littledeathlit*. After leaving city life many years ago, she moved into her own little forest in northern British Columbia, Canada, to find out who she is and what her passions are. Starting with photographs of nature, she now seems to have found a niche taking photographs of the world that surrounds her, wherever she goes. Find her on Twitter @elleoftheforest

"Category Theory" by Clayre Benzadón

Identity is defined
with the purpose of serving
an object.

For every object X,
There exists
a morph-

ism id_x (now trans-
form it psychologically,

satisfy my id understated,
my unconscious purpose
to understand ideas).

An object is an idea.

I am the object.

*

Word Problem*: you're sitting outside the Starbucks on campus, by yourself, minding your own business, when a random dude (x) comes up to you and tells you you look like someone whose got the Vans and look of someone who works at Hot Topic.

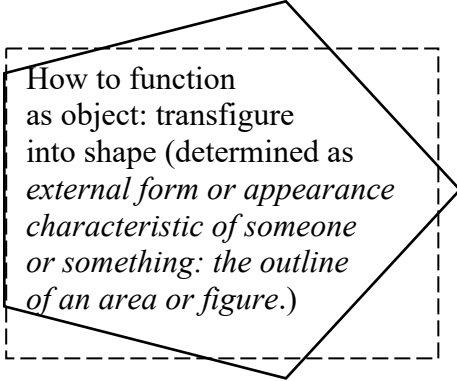
1. After this encounter, what would you **categorize** yourself as?
2. What was the **function** of this confrontation?

* (why "word" and not "math"?)

*

What does it mean to function?
to purpose, propose, prevail
intending towards a person,

thing, or relationship
involving one or more
variables?



How to function
as object: transfigure
into shape (determined as
external form or appearance
characteristic of someone
or something: the outline
of an area or figure.)

*

1. I'd categorize myself
as the carcass
of a concave triangle,
abject, an object of trauma.

2. There is no way
to function
in this state.

*

Let me go back
to origin-
ality:

the etymology of "define"
comes from "to specify; to fix
or establish authoritatively".

The mapping of patterns,
categories, attempts to
determine figures,

symmetry,
is natural.

*

So is correlating
disorder in psychological
terms. For instance,

triangulation can be mathematical
but can also occur when
an outside person intervenes

to manipulate
the shape
of an interaction.

*

Or, let's refer back to the object
of x, but this time,
a different man—

at work, I have the responsibility
of teaching x how to operate
language. He asks me:

“why do you have such short hair?
I mean, you're pretty,
but you'd be even more beautiful

if it was longer;
thought you'd cut it

because you got
gum in it or somethin' ”—

*

(questioning < intrusiveness
half angle identity $\neq bi$ [imagine number bi
is $-b^2$; assume hetero-
normativity])

*

To what extent has the supernatural
quality of this X-man savior complex
rescued me from myself?

He existed in a bounded function
of authority, delineates pure imaginary
numbers (i)

to assume the value 0
(i [me] = 0; [zero is considered to be
both real and imaginary])

until I proof the equation
wrong; rewrite the root of

of identity from “sameness”
to “entity”:

$i = \text{radical}$

multiplicity
surface of a revolution

“16 Reasons Why a DACA Dreamer Will Be the First Person to Build a Do-It-Yourself Spaceship from Simple Materials” by Alan Chazaro, February’s Featured Poet

1: Because they already know how to work under atmospheric pressure.

2: Because according to the dictionary, *If you describe someone as a dreamer, you mean that they spend a lot of time thinking about and planning for things that they would like to happen but which are improbable or impractical* and what’s less practical than being 52,000 altitudes above sea level in a metal box?

3: Because sometimes *flying* means learning how to lift yourself off the slow-turning surface of a planet with nothing to keep you grounded.

4: Because when Adrian was deported in 2007, he told me he wanted to go far away; and I’m not convinced he meant Mexico City; and I’m not convinced he wanted to leave; and I’m not convinced that after 20 years in this country he wasn’t more American than my blue Levi’s; more American than Max’s all-white Mustang 5.0; more American than listening to the red noise of Jimmy Hendrix’s National Anthem in Guillermo’s bedroom on a school night; I’ve never been convinced.

5: Because how else can you transcend the borders of a burning world?

6: Because they’ve been called aliens since birth. And, well, aliens know how to build spaceships, right?

7: Because our government states, *Under this version of the DREAM Act, immigrants could qualify in part, by meeting the following requirements: Be[ing] between the ages of 12 and 35 at the time the Law is enacted [and] arriv[ing] in the United States before the age of 16* as if asking a child to keep dreaming into adulthood isn’t some form of psychological colonization, as if dreamers won’t eventually wake up.

8: Because when bloodlines are derived from Aztec, Mayan, Toltec, Olmec, Incan, and other indigenous civilizations, learning how to translate the universe's truth can happen while star gazing from a naked rooftop.

9: Because fuck Donald Trump x 3.6 million, one for each Dreamer.

10: Because when Kanye West rapped on his first album, *The College Dropout*, *I've been / workin' this grave shift / and I ain't made shit / I wish I could / buy me a spaceship and fly we'd rap along in the backseat of my brother's Jetta, blasting Highway 101 with windows open, nothing but Mexican kids learning how to embrace California's warmth as our own.*

11: Because everyone I know who's a Dreamer has worked 1, 2, or 3 jobs for half, quarter, or minimum pay, and they've never rested, and they've never complained, and they've given and they've given and they've given.

12: Because as a teenager I remember being at Sergio's house and seeing his father, uncle, and brothers rise for work like solar bodies determined to circulate a cold planet while the rest of us were falling asleep, drunk and useless. When the buses were too tired and empty to be running. When silence was the only music of the day. When the sky was a thick oil spill of the deepest purples you can imagine, and still, deeper than that.

13: Because in the blindness of space, no one can question the legality of your existence.

14: Because there is already a loss of air and gravity in the U.S.

15: Because Dreamers understand what it means to have an expiration on their humanity: *On September 5, 2017, President Trump ordered an end to the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. This program shields young undocumented immigrants —who often arrived at a very young age in circumstances beyond their control—from deportation.*

16: Because Dreamers can no longer breathe here; because future spaces are needed; because who else can build an empire in the air besides those who've learned to make pyramids from the earth's mud?

Alan’s Commentary on “16 Reasons Why a DACA Dreamer Will Be the First Person to Build a Do-It-Yourself Spaceship from Simple Materials”:

When I was the 10th-grade English teacher at Oakland School for the Arts, the Arts Director approached me to ask if I was interested in being commissioned to write a poem on the themes of home and migration for a school-wide fundraiser to be performed in front of the governor and other state donors. No biggie. Since I was already thinking a lot about outer space and science fiction for a personal creative writing project I was working on, and since there was news coverage about Trump trying to shut down the DACA program back then, I agreed to perform and went into drafting the poem with an open mind about what might alchemize from all those elements colliding. The idea of writing for an audience that included my students, their parents, and state legislators had me thinking about more than just my individual experience--I wanted to say something about the humanity and potential of first-generation youth in California, particularly Dreamers. Having grown up in California with Mexican immigrant parents myself, with many of my closest friends being undocumented and some--unfortunately--even deported, I wanted to get people thinking about those issues and experiences, about what home looks and feels like for me and countless others in our classrooms. I started by researching the government’s websites to more deeply inform myself about the DACA program, and I noticed that the age cut off for being considered a Dreamer is 16. So I took that as a structural concept and gave myself the challenge to think of 16 reasons or narratives about Dreamers, mixed with my upbringing around friends who were Dreamers, and I just started writing. Because I like variety, I tried to come up with different ways to approach the topic--from the macro to the micro, the angry to the joyful--and the format allowed me to do this. Tying in the spaceship element immediately began to feel organic since the hateful language of “illegal aliens” is already something the community has to deal with, but I tried to use these connotations to inform my voice and vision in a positive way instead. The last piece of the puzzle fell into place when I decided to recruit a group of youth from the Latinos Unidos club that met in my classroom once a week during lunch. I wanted them to share the stage with me and to represent the wide range of Latinx experiences I was hoping to convey, to be the faces and the voices of the beautifully diverse and powerful next generation of Latinx leaders that I wanted to the audience to imagine. It ended up being a hella special poem and experience for me, and I was so grateful to have been asked to participate.

EIC Christine Taylor’s Commentary on “16 Reasons Why a DACA Dreamer Will Be the First Person to Build a Do-It-Yourself Spaceship from Simple Materials”:

“Because sometimes *flying* means learning how to lift yourself off the slow-turning surface of a planet with nothing to keep you grounded.”—just wow! When Alan’s poem came over the transom, I quickly became ensnared in the “list” of figurative and literal expressions of the experience of Dreamers in the United States. And I think that poetry plays a crucial role in the work of social justice, and quite obviously this poem is in service to that mission. I’m struck by the way Alan handles a painful subject with a combination of surreal humor, hardline reality, and grace. This is a poem we all need.

“Tidal” by Samantha Duncan

In my body or my house,
you’re in a lonely

& in a lonely we jigsaw & I
 extend
hands & plum lips

 whatever radius –
builder, keeper, bloomer –
to spread the difficult paste of you.

The shapes of days change
& leave us wet, cold,
you make me

a meal, I’ll be the size
of something you can’t hold
in my body or my house.

Probably we could have
seven Neptunes
with room to spare,

 but our islands
 are violent,

& here I am wanting
the ground,

dwelling through morning’s
occupation, a cusp,

my lip’s blunt edge
an acrophobia. To have

& to halve, multitude
container. Again,
my disappearing work.

 Sometimes,
I slow down for others

to catch up, some-

times
a chorus of embrace
presses me empty, or
a procession of you,
like when

I try to locate myself
asleep in the dream,

but it's all you

falling, dwelling me
to embers, somehow.

Sometimes, the shape
of what matters changes,

& we orbit what is only
maybe the middle, centered

in synchronized whispers,

& I look at a sky
that feels less than

to calibrate me, us,
story. How to feel

a day as something other

than another day?
Always stretch first,
spend nothing

for worth. Be less
of a sound
frame-

work.

“In a Time of Estrangement” by Kerenn Irias

after Ilya Kaminsky

Papa who lived
through occupation
through *Space Jam*
and genocide
who slept
through sirens
calls me
halu
calls me his
monkey
so special
& fully limbed

Though I tell him I respond best to emails and google invites,
that no one talks to their fathers this often,

he calls again / last time / he swears / we / won't
/be / severed / by capitalism / or war

“Gone (A Golden Shovel)” by Michal “MJ” Jones

after Arisa White

We believe we are scarce. We believe
unknowing. I wake unafraid embracing – you
have seen the silver screen fall. We fight, are
star-gazing its might, race into dusk the
arid space. Gave it my best shot at most
disgruntled shrug at least. We were mighty beautiful
once, in golden dust. I rub this love a sacred thing,
penance for despair. I believe we are scarce, that
we sum up holes in the whole of what happened.

“Conversations with My Grandmother” by Erin Kirsh

In a bungalow in Toronto in the late 50s, a time
mostly significant
for its proximity to the end of the Holocaust
a lamp breaks

again.

Another one? Mr. Arthur, informal neighborhood electrician asks and my Grandmother laments how she didn't have daughters, not even sons,
she had tigers, twin tigers, rabid both, one worse than the other.

There are many bungalows off Bathurst Street they are sprouting from the fallow of farms, inside the bungalows are families young and bankrupt
and shellshocked.

All the yards have one proud tree, the street infested with kids, whooping, playing road hockey, or baseball, any number of games that break
lamps, bend mailboxes, smash windows.

The mothers in the kitchens make kidney beans, chopped liver, cow tongue, sweet bread, listen to radio programs, smoke whole packs on front porches
when the streetlights flicker on and the youth scurry back like rats after the piper.

The neighborhood women feed or chase away the stray cats, remainders of the farms. Minnie Etkin tries to trim their whiskers, my Grandmother dislikes her, says she's got no
sense at all, which is the worst thing to lack.

Grandma misses it all the time, even if TV is better now.

Things were simpler then, she says, wist an afghan over her sloped shoulders.

More racist. More sexist. I say. Judge Judy scolds

in the background, a jab of vocal fry
to make the defendant feel
small.

Why is this on, I say, don't look up
from my phone.

Because it's easy, Grandma says.

I was taught easy was a silverfish, common,
gross, prone to lurking in dark corners, but I did not raise
twin tigers, didn't cook liver
and the cheap meats, didn't try
to market it so children might eat it, I do not spend
nights awake, worrying
about family in Europe, though of course
I have none left.

Instead, the luxury of quiet, no
children shout on my street, no errant ball
breaks my window. I am young, (relatively.)
I do not have the perfect clarity of retrospect.
I never knew so many worlds.

She has two houses, my Grandma says
nodding towards the screen at Judge Judy.

Who needs two houses? I say.

We shake our heads identically.

"New Traditions" by Aimee Nicole

It's only August and so far in this three day heat wave
I can't stop thinking about Christmas.
Last year we dipped our toes in separation and spent
the holiday at that movie theater two towns over.
After the credits rolled, we shared vegan Pan-Asian cuisine in a mostly empty
place on Dorrance St. making small talk like we were strangers.
I went to the bathroom and cried after we ordered fried
ice cream and gave my face a bath in the sink.
This year will be different because this year is already worse.

You still have all my childhood ornaments with no intention
of giving them back. My still fragrant gingerbread and fingerprinted pasta wreath.
My Charlie Brown tree that's moved from college to car, to friend's,
to aunt's, to friend's, to Florida, to childhood home, to first apartment,
to second apartment, to missing (a.k.a. treenapped).
My New Yorker comic Christmas plates that were a vintage
flea find (you always hated them but keep them out of spite).
You keep all this and more. You promise you will
leave the state this Christmas and never return.
You don't tell me where you are going.
You do tell me you never want to see me again.

“Noah built an ark, but we still sank” by Ottavia Paluch

People made people made people
and yet I couldn't believe that I was a person;

sometimes I'd pinch myself, think, *did that just happen?*
Cypress pressed against my hands like a That

-Was-Easy button, even though nothing's easy anymore.
Case study: Imagine I kept all my old souls in an ark, two

of every kind. Everyone would argue over why
one of us was more mature than whoever came before.

There's no linear path to the death of my souls
—sure, they sin. But then they do it again.

It takes 40 days for me to know why it was so bad,
40 nights to know why I was the way I was. Or maybe

it's more than that. These are all just estimates, and I'm
just hidden inside of an ark I built when I was pride,

greed, lust, not perfect, envy, gluttony, wrath, sloth,
myself. A long, long time ago, God said he wanted

to destroy us. And splinters started raining down
onto forgotten covenants, drowning people.

“The Finding of Names” by Lee Potts

We continue to watch his landmarks shift
to an empire he can no longer cross into.
A garden far beyond the tree line dusk there
harbors all of creation he can no longer name.

Family photos now seem to him like penny postcards sent
by strangers, wordless, arriving without address,
depicting foreign places, the injuries time inflicts,
and room after room of people he does not know.

“Ode to Period” by Vismai Rao

Time, bookended. Time of the month when I’m
upended—
Blackhead. Mole.
Comma’s unyielding cousin, the inverse of a star
marking a stop longer than a pause. Or the
end.

In the beginning,
you exploded— A million yous fell
into our lives, interrupting
everything we had to say.
Little chia seed. Tiny hairlet peeking
out of a follicle. I wonder why

the makers of Morse chose two dots
to mean I. The only way I can contain two
of you—

Unlit cave, how you keep our world
safe— geometry’s Lego block, God of
no-dimensions, how you keep us
from running out of
breath—

“From the Car Stereo I Hear Weather and Traffic Reports” by Martha Silano

all across this great land. What is it about knowing FDR Drive
is experiencing delays, that the low tonight in Los Angeles

will be 54, scattered clouds and 61 by Sunday? The incongruity of knowing this, the newness of 24-hour access, of global positioning

systems, of Siri's voice, my daughter in the backseat messing with "her":
Siri, tell me the one about the past, present, and future walking into

a bar. That she is talking to a hand-held computer the size of a Wasa cracker, asking her to recite a tongue twister, that I'm supposed

to assimilate this, along with a 60% chance of thunderstorms in Houston. For thousands of years we knew as much or a little more than the summer

rains, then the thumb snails and beetles. Now we know there's construction on Flower Street, left turns restricted. And yet, despite all this access,

this knowing so much, we all have these moments that suck. Interconnectivity cannot take away our desiccated desire, our unmade beds,

our incessant anxiety. Knowing Longshore and Minor Roads are closed won't help us get it up, keep our wives out of the hospital or morgue,

won't refill our glass with port, won't answer the question *Was God a poacher, and if so, what did he poach?* We can set an alarm

on a fancy phone, remind ourselves we're playing tennis at 9 am with Frankie & Jo, but still there's the issue of the scorching heat,

the 3 am robocall from the police, of knowing our lives will cease.

"This Small Protection" by Ann E. Wallace

She said she could feel a spirit
in the middle room,
that she felt someone
had died right there,
in the room
with the wide plank floors.

I wanted to strangle her.
I gave a thin laugh instead, muttered
well, it's an old house.

He was not old,
and his life is not lore

to be whispered
in excitement.

He was born
and lived his full life
less than six months before
this woman's tongue
wagging fascination turned
my stomach with stifled rage.

His is not a story
of intrigue for her friends,
This was his room,
right here. I can feel him,
not a story for this
stranger in his room, stirred
to gross excitement.

"To Keep You Safe"

From EIC Christine Taylor: Faye Turner-Johnson explores the all-too-real struggle of raising black male children in an age of rampant police brutality.

"Mother. . .Crying Out in the Wilderness" by Faye Turner-Johnson

sirens blasting	moving fast	around the corner
trying to live	you come after my child	in this free world of ours
as he steps from the car		my child
early morning gym workout	really white people?	my child
		my child?
under spotlights		you harass
no other color	because I made him black	like me
	just black	like me
want to take my prince		
	wrap him	in swaddling clothes
hide this precious one		
	float him in a basket	amid the safety of tall reeds
		somewhere down the Nile

Alan Chazaro is the author of *This Is Not a Frank Ocean Cover Album* (Black Lawrence Press, 2019) and the forthcoming *Piñata Theory* (Black Lawrence Press, 2020). He is a former teacher at Oakland School for the Arts, the former Lawrence Ferlinghetti Fellow at the University of San Francisco, and a June Jordan Poetry for the People alum at UC Berkeley. Currently living in Mexico as a dual citizen, he writes a monthly column, "Pocho Boy Meets World," which explores literary voices throughout Latin America. His work has recently been featured in *Palette*, *Bold Italic*, and *Alien Magazine*. Find him on Twitter @alan_chazaro

Samantha Duncan (she/her) is the author of four poetry chapbooks, including *Playing One on TV* (Hyacinth Girl Press, 2018) and *The Birth Creatures* (Agape Editions, 2016), and her work has recently appeared in *BOAAT*, *decomp*, *Glass Poetry*, *Meridian*, and *The Pinch*. She is a prose editor for *Storyscape Journal* and lives in Houston.

Twitter: @SamSpitsHotFire

Kerenn Irias, a Latinx poet and former DACA recipient, hails from Newark, New Jersey. Much of her writing has to do with the intersection of multi-cultural ethnicity, feminism, and environmental justice. Her work has only been published once, in the Academy of American Poets college prize competition. She has a pending publication for the *What You Need to Know About Me* anthology by the Hawkin's Project.

Michal "MJ" Jones is a Black, queer non-binary poet and parent. Their poems are featured or forthcoming at *Foglifter Press*, *Rigorous Mag*, & *Borderlands Texas Poetry Review*. MJ has received fellowships from the Hurston/Wright Foundation, SF Writers Grotto, & VONA. They are currently the Community Engagement Graduate Fellow in the MFA program at Mills College.

Erin Kirsh is a writer, performer, and funnyman living in Vancouver. A Pushcart Prize nominee, her work has appeared in *The Malahat Review*, *EVENT*, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *CV2*, *QWERTY*, *subTerrain*, and *Geist*, where she took second place in their postcard short story contest. Her greatest accomplishment to date is the time she painted her nails without getting polish everywhere.

Website: www.erinkirsh.com

Twitter: @kirshwords

IG: @the.losing.game

Aimee Nicole is a queer poet currently residing in Rhode Island. She holds a BFA in Creative Writing from Roger Williams University and has been published by the *Red Booth Review*, *Psychic Meatloaf*, and *Dying Dahlia Review*, among others. For fun, she enjoys attending roller derby bouts and trying desperately to win at drag bingo.

Ottavia Paluch (she/her) is sixteen, disabled, and from Ontario, Canada. A featured *Gigantic Sequins* Teen Sequin in 2018, her work is published or forthcoming in *Ghost City Review*, *The*

Cerurove, Alexandria Quarterly, The Rising Phoenix Review, and Really System, among other places. She reads for *Pidgeonholes*.

Lee Potts is a poet with work in several journals including *Rust + Moth, Ghost City Review, 8 Poems, UCity Review, and Sugar House Review*. He is Associate Poetry Editor at *Barren Magazine*. He lives just outside of Philadelphia with his wife and their last kid still at home. You can find him on Twitter @LeePottsPoet and online at leepotts.net.

Vismai Rao's poems appear or are forthcoming in the *Indianapolis Review, RHINO, Salamander, Glass: A Journal of Poetry, Parentheses Journal, & The Shore*. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and the Orison Anthology. She lives in India.

Find her on Twitter @vismairao

Martha Silano (she/her/hers) is the author of five books of poetry, including *Gravity Assist, Reckless Lovely, and The Little Office of the Immaculate Conception*, all from Saturnalia Books. She is also co-author of *The Daily Poet: Day-By-Day Prompts for your Writing Practice*. Martha's poems have appeared in *Poetry, American Poetry Review, AGNI, and Paris Review*, among others. She teaches at Bellevue College, near her home in Seattle, WA. Her website can be found at marthasilano.net.

Faye Turner-Johnson is a graduate of UM-Flint with BA degrees in Theater and Elementary Education. Early on she wanted to be a singer, but never quite developed a voice that would take her beyond her bathroom shower. After her retirement from teaching, she has again turned to theater and writing to 'sing' her songs of protest and dismay. Her work has appeared in the *Five-Two, Sky Island Journal, Whirlwind Magazine, Lift Every Voice (An Anthology of Poetry)* and other publications. She has completed a chapbook, "A Voice Speaking Out," which she is currently submitting for publication.

Ann E. Wallace writes of motherhood, illness, loss, and the everyday realities of life in America. Her poetry collection *Counting by Sevens* is available from Main Street Rag, and her recent or forthcoming work is in journals such as *Crack the Spine, Mom Egg Review, Wordgathering, Snapdragon, Riggwelter, and Rogue Agent*. She lives in Jersey City, NJ and can be found online at AnnWallacePhD.com and on Twitter @annwlace409.

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