

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 16 APRIL 2020: "STEAMPUNK"

Welcome to Issue 16, "Steampunk," where our writers and artist show some sparkle and sass! And don't we need that right now?

Issue 16 includes work by Shannon Austin, Ashley Cline, Janet Dale, Gabriela Gonzales, Emily Lake Hansen, Paxton Knox, Juliet Lauren, Hege Jakobsen Lepri, Travis Stephens, Eden Julia Sugay, Julie Weiss, and Salam Wosu.

For this month, instead of selecting a featured poet, we have decided to feature you, our community of readers. We need each other.

### Featured Artist

Wendy Schmidt has been writing short stories, essays, poetry and producing collage art for the last ten years. Pieces have been published in *Verse Wisconsin*, *Chicago Literati*, *City Lake Poets*, *Literary Hatchet*, *Moon Magazine*, *Rebelle Society*, and a variety of anthologies. Art has been published in several online zines.

### To Our Readers

Dear reader,

We love you. We see you. We wish we could hug you. The *Kissing Dynamite* family decided to forgo a featured writer this month and instead take a moment to connect with you, our dear friends. The COVID-19 pandemic is often called "unprecedented." We'd like to meditate on that word, for just a moment. Unprecedented means never known or done before. Certainly this situation can feel like a giant unknown. But when we think about what we're experiencing: uncertainty, anxiety, fear, loneliness, isolation—these are not unfamiliar things. Loss, the hardest part of this pandemic, and its sister, grief, are not strangers to us. So why does this feel so different? Perhaps it is the loss of autonomy, the sudden hyper-focus on our interconnected vulnerability, or maybe its scale of disruption. Your guess is as good as ours.

What we do know, is that all of us are facing tough times. As members of the literary community, we have watched you step up, come together, organize, and care for each other, and we wanted to say: we see you, we honor you, we appreciate you. From sharing lesson plans, to hosting virtual poetry readings, the check-in's, the grocery store runs, the silly memes—we love it, and we are cheering you on from our individual couches.

“Self-Portrait as the Wonder Twins” by Shannon Austin

[form of: rain]

I wish I could do what water does best:  
recognize itself in all its guises.  
Igloo bricks, cloudbanks born as breath.

To change back into last summer's storm,  
its trickling end. Or the blizzard  
from the photographs.  
To cover everything with quiet.

How do you fill rain with marrow?

Pluck the minnows from your throat. Watch  
as they squirm between molecules.

//

[shape of: raptor]

Gills twin to lung / beak / talon.

To understand an ending,  
name it.

Your hand : my hand :: jay : raven.

Similar but not same. My hand holding  
a pinwheel; my hand in yours.

Hold this talon in your stream.  
With what body do you touch my cheek?

“...& other tricks to keep us warm” by Ashley Cline

*discovered by astronomers on Feb.15, 2020 using the Catalina Sky Survey (CSS) in Arizona, earth's new mini-moon—officially called 2020 CD3—has most likely been in her orbit since 2017. pulled between the gravity of the moon & the gravity of earth, this new mini-moon, with its chaotic orbit, will soon slip away from both, however, & join the other asteroids—the rubble from the birth of our solar system—hurtling around the sun. earth's new mini-moon, only the second ever recorded, is only temporary.*

you feel it in the jaw, first. the bone-saw fever of waking a  
sleeping mouth inside of a country at war with a country

at war with a country at war with a country at war with a  
country at war with / here, we chew our asteroids whole

& fill our bellies to burst with constellation orts & pleasure  
thaw. this fickle-fanged wilderness & how she blooms only

after we've left the room—oh, how we fill her cheeks with  
conifer gossip & honey-haloed little things / anyway. & it's

funny how we call this *worship*, & mean it. because we've  
heard the plum tree's poetry, before, & we know how the

story ends, eventually—we know how she'll turn her verb  
laced petals to the sun & name new planets after old loves.

we know how she'll plant lemon orchards & juniper moons  
& kiwi stars & apologies where the earth has the most to

grieve & oh—we know we know we know we know we  
know, but today / we'll take her hands like baskets,

carefully. & we'll think, quite happily: *oh, didn't we  
grow lean in the winter months, love, & sing*

*of how lovely it is to be full?*

“(it breaks)” by Janet Dale

I.

it’s been exactly 56 days since your body was

~~next to~~  
~~atop~~  
against

inside my body

II.

women know these things

we have been charting our bodies for as long as we have had bodies:

menstrual / follicular  
ovulation / luteal

III.

the moon passes through double the number of phases as a woman’s body:

new / waxing crescent  
first quarter / waxing gibbous

full / waning gibbous  
last quarter / waning crescent

IV.

that Friday night (which I didn’t know at the time would be the last time), we were so close we mimicked the sun & moon—together, above the horizon at the same time

New moon / 0% illumination  
Luteal phase / Day 26

an unfertilized egg cell disintegrated, uterine lining was preparing to be shed

V.

this Friday night (did you know back then the last time would be the last time), the moon is orbiting the earth counterclockwise, moving away from the sun

Waxing crescent / 10% illumination  
Follicular phase / Day 6

an egg cell has been stimulated to grow

VI.  
the moon & the body

recycle ✓  
continue ✓  
move on ✓

but what does the heart do

“On Making Hamburgers” by Gabriela Gonzales

maybe it's a little bit my fault  
because i didn't tell you or whatever  
but i grew up learning  
how to make hamburgers.

it was probably something like  
the way you learned to play guitar  
or memorize bible verses  
at your private christian school,

but i remember standing on a step ladder  
with my dad behind me,  
using gloved hands to push hunks of meat  
into the grinder,  
pressing it down with a stick  
when it would get stuck in the blades,  
so it would come out of the spout  
like raw red spaghetti.

my dad owned a meat market  
for most of my life.  
i was a meat snob,  
when i was little  
because sometimes my dad couldn't afford to pay himself—  
he just took home  
a few extra packages of chicken and steaks.

sometimes it was my job  
to take the fresh ground beef  
and fit it into little plastic circles  
and mold it into hamburger patties,  
weigh it out,  
package it  
in the white waxy paper  
that we took home for birthday signs,  
stamp the label on it  
with rubber and black ink.  
sometimes i put it in the white window trays,  
stabbed the tiny prongs  
of the price signs into it.  
sometimes i ran it over to the kitchen  
where my dad taught me  
how to make secret seasoning  
with garlic,  
and onion,  
and other secret things,  
sprinkle it on top of the patties  
and cook hamburgers for the customers  
waiting outside in the booths  
with the menus i made  
teaching myself design on the computer,  
my mom as the waitress  
serving drinks,  
my brother in the back, washing dishes.

so it was funny,  
the day i watched you rolling prepackaged meat  
into balls with your hands,  
standing over the george foreman grill  
in the kitchen.

i said  
    why are you making them like that?

when you set the balls on the black surface,  
sprinkled them with salt and pepper  
and turned the heat on.

my hand could still press them out into red discs,  
the memory of the perfect size  
of a quarter pound burger  
branded into my memory

and you said,  
    gabriela, this is how you make burgers, okay?

and you cooked them until they were black spheres,  
set them on a plate  
like pieces of charcoal  
that everyone used to bring on camping trips  
when they knew our family was coming  
because of course we'd be having perfectly cooked steaks.

i ate half of it  
because i like you  
and it was your birthday  
and threw the other half in the trash  
when you weren't looking.

so next time i get my hands  
on your guitar,  
you know,

the one you named after  
my favorite book character  
a couple weeks after you told me  
you didn't love me,

go ahead  
and correct me  
when i try to play a g-chord,  
fix my finger placement if you want to,

but don't ever  
tell me how to make a hamburger  
again.

“Pharaoh’s Daughter Keeps a Diary” by Emily Lake Hansen

-  
Your brother emerged from my womb  
with his tongue caught to the low

palette of his mouth. For months  
when he cried, it hung there

below his bottom lip as if tethered  
by string, a fish’s cheek snagged

on the hook. You arrived freer -  
your mouth open wide as a bird’s

as I fed you bits of grape, spoonfuls  
of oil to aid in digestion. You

crawled late, but talked early -  
sung hymns, your tongue flirting

with each word in the song. At  
four, your brother still struggles

to separate sounds - his th’s  
and l’s and r’s muddled like stew

in his mouth. I picture you  
sometimes kneeled in front of him,

your hands on his cheeks to guide  
his lips to speaking. What words

I wish I could give you both?  
I’d pick *mother* if I could,

a name for you both to call me,  
a word tied in your brother’s tongue,

caught in your throat like a cold,  
like a frog’s croak upon asking.

-



“Ecdysis” by Paxton Knox

set the stage with flames illuminating my curls  
and the shine in your eyes, with red wine  
and baklava with 34 layers for 34 years

the stars and moon hide in your shadow,  
where you keep them until i agree to stay

pull the coat from my shoulders, catch a whiff of  
new aftershave scented by patchouli and indecision

i look into the fire and allow you to press a cicada  
into my mouth to help me in finding my own imago

your tender call of “run away with me”  
is an order to a firing squad

by the time the fire peters out  
my body will have transformed  
into something new (something final)

“Christmas lights to guide the LSD” by Juliet Lauren

I remember the beach.  
How the swollen waves clawed the rabid sea-foam mouth  
hungry for the shoreline and nothing else.  
The unfortunate consistency of the sand  
that perfectly matched  
my hospital birthday cake frosting.  
That was the thirteenth birthday.  
During the mistake of you.

I remember the beach.  
How the pristine water glimmered like broken glass.  
The kind on good night street side walks.  
I needed you to stay  
even though you were sexually immoral.  
I didn't get that at the time.  
Steadying my breathing  
because the brown eyed boy  
didn't love me anymore.  
I always liked to compare his eyes to mocha.  
That was before I was human.

My brain exposed to welts but not responsibility.  
A child girl that knew all about tremble.

I remember the beach.  
How the too hot heat enveloped.  
The aqua colored affliction.  
The shiny bottle green scene.  
The piercing blue sky sheet.  
The clouds like a heaven with cheap rent.  
It shushed me it hushed me.  
Rocked me to oblivion like a lullaby or a hookup.

And all before that I remember the diner.  
Playing with sugar packets to avoid his gaze.  
A suburban universe enclosed and sacred.  
I remember the heaped piles of whipped cream on waffles.  
The butter. The bread.  
The screaming in my head.

I remember being fixated on creamer packets.  
The ones you peel back.  
Pour in.  
Mixing the creamy abyss in my mug.  
Watching galaxies erupt.  
Chocolate beige milky swirls and sparkles.  
I remember the pure merriment of  
watching nothing become something.  
Then suddenly being left  
with nothing but a mediocre cup of coffee.

I remember the diner.  
The talks of pills and bills.  
The feeling of a suburban safe haven.  
A breath of fresh air from the ambulance rides and sticky fingers.  
From my self care routine of blood and vomit.  
The little Greek restaurant with it's  
closed walls against the cold world.  
Against the snow and the streets.

The little infinity  
of snowflakes melting into the shoulders of a coat.  
Dimmed lighting better than a big budget movie.

Blinking eyes.  
Brains adapting to perspective.  
How could I forget?

And I remember the art shows.  
The older men.  
The middle aged men  
eyeing me more than the paintings.  
Taking my scars as a conversation piece.

Nobody really talks about it.  
Probably cause girls try and repress it.  
Pretend.  
But if you're pretty at a young age  
you'll find out plenty of men have pedophilic tendencies.  
Curiosities.  
It's funny how it blurs and then it's your whole life.  
There's been almost no difference in stares and flirtations  
from the ages of thirteen to nineteen.

But I remember the artist  
who got drunk every show.  
The kind of drunk everyone wishes they were  
but hardly anyone is.  
Jovial and breezy.  
Kind eyed with a laugh that hugs.  
He knew colors better than  
whatever god that gets to paint sunsets.  
Better than the human anatomy  
that perfectly constructs a rich universe  
in a pair of mocha colored eyes.

I remember the smell of spilled beer  
and the sound of steps on cement.  
The art that envelopes your heart  
and the people who don't.

I remember all of these things.  
These things that slowly broke me  
into a girl gone wrong.  
Who only sleeps after she's pulled teeth  
and said her prayers to Hollywood.

“Knife” by Hege Jakobsen Lepri

Watching my Dad  
cleaning fish  
I want to hold  
a sharp knife before  
it is too late to learn  
his skills. Sever  
the gut, separate  
heads from the fish  
sacrifice skin  
and bone to the seagulls.

I want to sense  
if my hands can hear  
the lilting song of the blade  
the rhythm of certainty  
white flesh so perfectly clean  
exposed and ready for us  
my wrists finally proving  
they too know this  
ancient dance.

From a safe distance  
I count the years we have  
until all starts slipping  
and I must gut my own fish  
leaving half the skeleton  
jagged edges  
showing where  
I missed my moment.

“Name O Names” by Travis Stephens

I have thought some names don't fit and could use revision; other words  
are ill suited and as disappointing as your first anchovy.  
Why hippopotamus? That should be a flower.  
Who would ever eat an artichoke and not risk a Heimlich?  
Why not order, instead, a steaming bowl of Mesopotamia?  
Plutonium for two, a pot of lamb, fresh crop of harlequin.  
Look around at names ill-suited: cute little hand grenade.  
That bird? Rapier on the wing.

A flock of filibusters all in a row.  
 Bulbs for the rare euphonious infantile, planted in the spring.  
 Jigging for snoqualmie.  
 A brace of baptist hen.  
 Nice crop of harquebus among the rodent trees.  
 Hope for a return to Seaborgium, in the spring.  
 Other words are adequate and more:  
 a tank is best left alone; beware the Kalashnikov.  
 Suffer from pterodactyl or bad Sagittarius.  
 I lay awake at night with the dread of metastatic calculus.  
 Worse of all the I am afflicted with parting,  
 disenfranchisement and separation. Pale, unfit  
 words for you, lover, now  
 Gone.

“I promise you, Tomorrow” by Eden Julia Sugay

I give grace to gods and hum whispers to the winds:

*these years shattered me.*

From moon to moon I rose, though I remember  
 the pauses between suns where I fell and

lingered too long to admire my  
 glisten beneath the wreck

I bent my spine and twisted by thighs to relearn  
 what a body could be before it was taken

not once                      not twice

I bit my tongue and swallowed my fingers to block  
 my heart from slithering out of my throat

ache                              after ache

I buried dead skins of people I used to be so often  
 my bones are polished pearls

with no memory of the decade’s  
 dusty excess

I give grace to gods and shout a promise to the seas:

*I choose me.*

“This Morning” by Julie Weiss

A poem falls out of the sky veiled  
in the fiery reds and oranges of dawn

as though some fanciful creature of my dreams  
has set my mind aflame. Words have never

flashed so radiantly on a Sunday, in fact  
have never flickered at all, and more than breakfast

I crave the crackle and burn in my belly,  
the ashes pressed into my fingertips

as evidence of an idea shaved to its core.  
How splendid it would be to sit down

at my desk in front of the fireplace, describe  
the images hanging across tree branches,

lying between blades of grass, hovering atop  
a sparrow’s wings. The entire piece blazes

before my eyes. Behind me, the apocalypse  
that threatens to sweep across my imagination,

char every single word in its path:  
sheets and blankets piled haphazardly like

firewood, my bed roaring to be made.  
My children giggling in their bedroom,

voices luminous enough to melt away  
the darkness without resorting to the switch.

They are famished and fidgety, my wife is ironing  
and the dishwasher needs to be emptied.

So many tasks to complete before we venture  
into the glow of Valdenazar Forest with friends.

Outside, the sky has turned a cool gray  
like rainwater or teardrops or irrevocable loss.

“ASYLUM IN YOUR BOSOM” by Salam Wosu

*What is a country but a drawing of a line – Safia Elhillo*

for every person I lose I carve a new country on  
my lip saying to Sorrow ‘from hence you shall not pass’  
there is joy like a river, pain like a sea and I, a little pebble searching  
the edge of land to call my own, a threshold without a tear over its doorway  
I awake most nights to your body bare beside me so much I forget  
what it means to own my own, what it means to guard a boundary like a loved one  
because my body is a house on fire a country racked up with so much discord  
it split itself into tiny parts  
Lover, the way I become whole when you hold me means the wound is but the beginning:  
let there be light upon this body, I’ve seen so much of it  
yours is the only sin I surrender to, the only border which is a cage  
I return to always. My hand on your bosom, patriotic pleasure, to serve  
my tongue shall utter no evil, rather trace its path along this land, water  
is the only way to make a bother. The tongue has no use but to divide and conquer.  
The line where our bodies meet is a border where flowers sprout  
not like my country where a line is a threat, a grave where little boys & girls hold  
the Earth firm, their corpses the product of a war that was meant to unite  
but separated sleep from night, separated moon from Sky  
& I know another country is a new way to be  
a prisoner. No one is free the same way no one is free from dying  
instead we get to choose our poison instead we get to choose  
what shackle our hands bow to, what rain are flower drinks from  
I walk to your body bare and beautiful and I place my hand  
on the plane of your hilled bosom, a sojourner  
Yours is the only sin I surrender to.  
*and for every country I lose I make another and I make another.*

### Poet Biographies

**Shannon Austin** is a writer from Baltimore, MD, with an MFA in poetry from UNLV. Her work has appeared in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Rust + Moth*, *After the Pause*, *American Chordata*, and elsewhere. Find her on Twitter @gogopoetranger.

An avid introvert and full-time carbon-based life-form, **Ashley Cline** crash landed in south Jersey twenty-eight years ago and still calls that strange land home. Most often found listening

to Carly Rae Jepsen, her essays on music and feelings have been published by *Sound Bites Media*, while her poetry has appeared in *404 Ink*, *Third Point Press*, and *Francis House*. She graduated from Rowan University in 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism, and her best at all-you-can-eat sushi is 5 rolls in 11 minutes. Find her on Twitter: @the\_Cline and Instagram: @clineclinecline.

Although she claims Memphis as home, **Janet Dale** lives in southeast Georgia where she teaches first year writing at Georgia Southern University. Her work has appeared in *The Boiler*, *Hobart*, *Zone 3*, *Really System*, *Pine Hills Review*, and others. You can find her @THEsisterjanet on Twitter.

**Gabriela Gonzales** is a Nashville-based writer who writes about the beautiful tragedy of human communication. She won first place for fiction in the Sandra Hutchins' Humanities Symposium Writing Awards in 2016, 2017, and 2018 and received the Ruby Treadway award for fiction in 2019. Her work has been featured in *Belmont Literary Journal*, *Awakened Voices Literary Magazine*, *formercactus*, *Synaesthesia Magazine*, *Waxing and Waning*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Lost Balloon* and *Wigleaf*. Read more of her work at [gabrielagonzales.com](http://gabrielagonzales.com) and follow her on Twitter at @gabrielag2597. Gabriela really appreciates giraffes, the Oxford comma, and babies dressed like hipsters.

**Emily Lake Hansen** (she/her) is the author of *Home and other Duty Stations* (Kelsay Books 2020) and the chapbook *The Way the Body Had to Travel* (dancing girl press 2014). Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Atticus Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Rust + Moth*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, and *SWWIM* among others. She is a PhD student at Georgia State University and serves as the poetry editor for Minerva Rising Press. For more information about her work, please visit [www.emilylakehansen.com](http://www.emilylakehansen.com).

**Paxton Knox** (they/he) is a queer poet and writer with work appearing in *detritus*, *Molecule: A Tiny Lit Mag*, and *Animal: A Beast of a Literary Magazine*. They can be found driving the backroads of Oklahoma, scouring the scenery for inspiration, and also on Twitter @paxtonknox.

**Juliet Lauren** is an emerging writer and published poet. Her work can be found in *Gold Wake Live*, *SkyIsland Journal*, *Ghost City Review*, *High Shelf Press*, and *Anti Heroin Chic*. When she isn't writing, she frequents open mic nights, concerts, and libraries and tries to find inspiration in boys that are bad decisions and too many shots of espresso. She currently resides in Florida on the wrong side of the tracks and you can follow her general antics on Instagram @jadore.mon.amour and view her reading poems a bit too licentious for Youtube under her name Juliet Lauren.

**Hege Jakobsen Lepri** is a Norwegian-Canadian translator and writer. She had her first story published in English in 2013 and that has since been her writing language. Though she's primarily a prose writer, her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *untethered*, *Prism*



International, Haiku journal, Under the Basho, Anti-Heroin Chic, Better than Starbucks, Watch your Head and Burning House Press. She has also been part of The Emerging Writers Reading Series in Toronto. You find her at [www.hegeajlepri.ca](http://www.hegeajlepri.ca)

**Travis Stephens** is a tugboat captain who resides with his family in California. A graduate of University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, recent credits include: *Dime Show Review*, *Gyroscope Review*, *2River*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *From the Depths*, *Miletus*, and *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*.

**Eden Julia Sugay** is a Poetry Editor for Apricity Press. She received her B.A. in Creative Writing from Mills College and is working up the nerve to pursue her MFA while working in Marketing at Chronicle Books in San Francisco, CA. Her writing highlights her voice as a queer woman of color and reflects on the constantly evolving navigation of identity and relationships. Eden is inspired by the sun and the pink-faced, glossy-eyed details of honesty (read: she is a Cancer sun-Cancer rising-Aries moon, and a huge advocate of crying). Her work *Bible Study* has appeared in *The Walrus*. Poets and writers whom Eden possesses profound admiration for include Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, Nayyirah Waheed, Alexander Chee, Roxanne Gay, Yrsa Daley-Ward, and Ada Limón. Find Eden on Twitter and Instagram @edensogay

**Julie Weiss** (she/her) found her way back to poetry in 2018 after slipping into a nearly two-decade creative void, and to her shock and delight, she began publishing her work almost immediately. In 2020, she was a finalist in Alexandria Quarterly's first line poetry contest series. Her work appears in *ArLiJo*, *Random Sample Review* (Best of the Net Nomination, 2019), *Sky Island Journal*, and *Sheila-Na-Gig* online, among others, and she has poems in a handful of anthologies, as well. She's a 45-year-old ex-pat from Foster City, California, who works as a telephone English teacher in Spain, where she lives with her wife, 5-year-old daughter, and 2-year-old son. You can find her in her studio, writing late at night by the light of the moon, and on Twitter @colourofpoetry or on her website at <https://julieweiss2001.wordpress.com/>.

**Salam Wosu**, a poet and aspiring novelist, is a Chemical Engineer from Nigeria. His works interrogate grief, depression, love, anti-chauvinism and sexuality. He was shortlisted for the Korean Nigerian Poetry Fiesta Award 2017 & 2019. His works are in or forthcoming in *Glass Poetry Press*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *The Mark Literary*, *Rhythm & Bones*, *Dream Noir*, *Brave Voices*, *RIC journal* and *Mounting the Moon* (anthology of queer Nigerian poems). He is @salam\_wosu on all platforms.

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