

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 17 MAY 2020: "BLUR"

Welcome to Issue 17 "Blur." Many thanks to those who have reached out to members of the editorial team to check in on our well-being. As we continue to trudge through challenging times, please keep on taking good care of each other.

"Blur" takes us on a meditative journey through conflicting realms: grief and nostalgia, past and present, hauntings.

This month's featured poet is Greg Gose. Please read Greg's poem and commentary below.

Issue 17 includes work by Nicholas Alti, Elizabeth Bluth, Hannah Cajandig-Taylor, Robbie Gamble, Julia Gerhardt, Greg Gose, Ellen Higgins, Temidayo Jacob, emilie kneifel, Betsy Mars, Cliff Saunders, and Shloka Shankar. And Caitlin Miller is featured in "We Live On" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist

Melissa Paschall Scott is a writer and photographer just outside of Nashville, Tennessee. She writes when she feels like screaming and takes photos when she's happy. You can read her poetry in *The Soap Box Volume IV:Light Anthology* (The Soap Box Press) and *Nashville Poets Quarterly 2019 Q3*. Find her on Instagram @rambles.on (writing) and @joyfullifepotos (photography).

Featured Musician

Suchoon Mo lives in the semiarid part of Colorado. His music compositions appear in *Treehouse Arts*, *FishFood Magazine*, *Cerurove*, and *Forge*. He has been composing for many years, but he has no formal music education. Requests for sheet music may be sent to: suchoon@aol.com.

His recent poems appear in *Aji Magazine*, *Jonah Magazine*, *Modern Literature*, *Modern Poets Magazine*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Armarolla*, *Transnational*, *All The Sins*,

Bitterzoet Magazine, and *Nine Muses Poetry*. He obtained his Ph.D. in psychology from University of Pennsylvania.

“Flotsam” by Nicholas Alti

i.

the bones are in theory there to later break under kinder bodies

so want is less kinetic than previously thought / how a howl is a sacrifice you offer to an empty

but it isn't so massive / it's not to suggest a coldness between beloveds / a disregarding of
giving

the blood is in theory there to later seep out & make warm kinder bodies

ii.

the lake is a facedown god----- a wanting that blossoms from wave crests-----a severe need
to touch the small of a lying god's back----- & with your tongue-----once again-----to
keep it intact----- in orchestrating hope or in dissolving desire-----absolutes only

the placid lake lovely, we're wetter in water than heaven----- we've all been
there-----on the docks when we shouldn't of-----with who we should never of-----
doing what we knew only not to whisper----- an alchemy immensely tactile & still

I can't tell you when to sin-----or why----- I can only show you how to dwindle-----
you take this, my ache-----& this, my cloudy view of heaven----- you drop it & walk away-----
you kindly dismantle an acre of night----- an aperture in bleakness in which dwells the possible

iii.

so bones are in theory there to allow you something to hold onto

the body the sea you're cast out to & the debris you cling to in storms

but it storms again & this is waves beyond waves & to each you mouth *sorry*

the heart is in theory there to wish you farewell

iv.

& it is so massive, the going away

“Chemotherapy” by Elizabeth Bluth

It was time to tell them, the colleagues,
about how your skin
would peel and your hair was falling out,
how there were lumps
in the space over your heart.

You said, not to worry, this is the one to have
if you have to get it.

And you trudge along like everything is
the same, but some days the vomit sits at the back
of your throat and the world whorls around you with
every turn of your bare head.

The colleagues, they have amassed a list
to bring hot meals to your home,

and when they come, you thank them,
but you cannot eat the food this week
or the next. Everything tastes like metal because
today they filled you with poison.

It strikes you as funny that even as you are dying,
people want to bring you sustenance.
They want to give you a means of staying alive.

[“When the Sky Fell onto Us, Indicating the Proximity of End Times” by Hannah Cajandig-Taylor](#)

I got sad enough to buy a waffle maker online. Carved out hours
to watch batter spill from its sides, never actually eating. Tried
purchasing a tub of cat-eyed marbles on Ebay. Cursed the platform
when I couldn't find them in that sad shade of violet, cold enough
to keep the frost from thawing & there I was, standing in the panic
room, mouth against your starry mouth, smallness inside of more
smallness. Wanted to be your electric sky. Your rocket girl chasing
after a sonic moon. Can't you hear me naming constellations
after you. Can't you hear me comparing them to the coordinates
of every place we promised to fly away from. How many times
can the sun fall into the pit of our veins, rippling light through
our scar formations & yet I am still here, looking & looking
through pages of Google for a way out when there isn't one
doomsday, there's only every storm at once. Synchronized
drowning in a silent vacuum. Or maybe that was supposed to be

simultaneous floating, deathless end times & instead you & I

touching palms in flight suits, no desire for connection
to the earth or internet. No desire to go anywhere but up.

“Water Bearer” by Robbie Gamble

—Ajo, Arizona

Two degrees of separation from the spiculate
hardpan of desert scree: a wafer of sleeping pad
and the useless nylon sheer of tent floor, he splays naked
and counts his beaten muscles, those chronic friends,
their new excruciating neighbors, and wonders why
the hang of air, now the sun is down, wraps insolently
around his core. Does a heatwave ever fever-break?
He ponders his far-off birth on the Aquarian cusp. Is this
why he up and left temperate New England woodlands
to stagger blank and dusty Sonoran arroyos with gallons
and gallons of water on his back? Oh stars! So vaguely
viewed through mosquito mesh and ruffles of duskheat,
did you choose me, soft touch that I am, so I would
hold my leathered tongue as night comes down,
numerating the cholla spine stabs to calves and wrists,
even as I meditate through the clamp at my temples
that chides of salt loss, amazed at the desiccation
of all of my surfaces? Ha ha, such arrogance, you all
must twinkle, to think I might save a migrant life
with my puny juggled oblations, that my scratchings
into this vast borderscape could be a scant comfort
to one lost in the wilderness, that I might even
hydrate a passing body into a tolerable future.
And he drifts, taut and dustcaked, onto a dreampath
strewn with stately saguaro cacti, khaki elbows
raised high, until they morph into border agents
swarming a checkpoint he can never return through.

“A Poet You Might Like” by Julia Gerhardt

I read over old emails. I would call them exchanges, but I can't, the evidence won't let me. I sent
“miss you's” from the chapel balcony & links to poets I thought you might like. A boy below
played his cello & I wrote to you “...beautiful. Very intense.” Now, I'm sitting on my floor with a

space heater at my back while writing this. I added a candle to fool myself into feeling warmer. There is one light left while writing this. The closest you said to, "I miss you" was "I hate it here." It's still cold. I'm trying to embrace the lifestyle of a part-time artist, but it's hard to find the romance in holding a hot mug of water close to my chest. I wish I felt warmer. I wish you had been kinder. I wish the one light bulb left would go out so I would have to make a change.

"In This One, I'm the Dead Cosmonaut and the Multiverse Both Exists and Doesn't Exist"
by Greg Gose, May's Featured Poet

I spent a lot of time wondering what it would be like to die
before looking at the Milky Way split wide on the horizon
or the moonlit silhouette of an airplane over

wheat fields carving the blue-black skyline with all those souls
headed to Chicago Thanksgivings, or Detroit, or maybe a place not like this one:
where there are no ghosts of middle school gymnasiums

or a father's fists smearing holes in speckled drywall homes;
where there are no feral regrets nestled into the fibers of a suit and life
isn't where breathing becomes an exercise in slow asphyxiation—

no more drowning, or cracked skin swathed in capillary roots,
no dry-rot embraces in a hammock out back of a rented apartment:
this is a place where all the colors of the world are the deep cedar

of your irises reflecting the sunlight on an August afternoon—
a place where dreams don't bleed around the edges of miscarriage,
and the lung-stitched cough of waking slowly is only temporary;

I wonder if dying between these stars could cascade into that impossible
timeline where I'm not consumed by the remains of a damp sidewalk kiss,
where all the doorways of the world are condensed into one

moment: we're together and hoping for beach-dream futures, or love
under a lighthouse beacon, or the one where it's just us, laying together
in the sand, the dark of skin touched with perspiration,

caressed fabric and wind observing the stars and planes
overhead: I know there's a version of me alive with you there
the other side of Orion, one that never left Earth. That never lost a child

and could wake any Thursday afternoon to a face so familiar, and I want it so badly

but this is not that reality. This one is me orbiting the beautiful collapse
of neutron stars until there is no air left to breathe.

Greg's Commentary on "In This One, I'm the Dead Cosmonaut and the Multiverse Both Exists and Doesn't Exist":

When I can't sleep, I often find myself staring at the wall wondering about all the branching paths my life could have taken—how one different decision could have led me to a different state, a different city surrounded by different people. Maybe I chose to take comfort in numbers rather than words and tried to be a mathematician, or I got really into film and started directing. In this poem, I chose to pair this longing for a different reality with the childhood fantasy of becoming an astronaut, and imagined what that would look like. Would this version of me still be haunted by the same ghosts, still have the desire for another life? An astronaut floating alone in the void, wishing the memories of an abusive father or crowded high school assemblies could be traded in for a life with the person they've left behind. It is, at its core, a love poem to dead possibilities. Whenever anyone asks me what I write about, I tell them sad space things, and I hope this hits that mark.

Assistant Editor Jason Bate's Commentary on "In This One, I'm the Dead Cosmonaut and the Multiverse Both Exists and Doesn't Exist":

I feel the need to coin the term "Plinko Poem." You know, Plinko, that "Price Is Right" game where the contestant would drop a thin puck down a peg board and as it bounced and zig-zagged down the board—the possible paths, endless at first—the contestant would be jumping up and down. Fingers crossed, hoping for some big money. The structure of Gose's poem forces you to cascade through a fractured timeline, bouncing from stanza to stanza, unable to see the payoff at the end. . . until you do, and it's definitely not big money.

["I was, he was, we were" by Ellen Higgins](#)

One: Under the umbrella and the rain.

Two: At the kitchen table.

Three: Cold silk and suncream and a suburban Summer
(though you say you prefer the city).
Pressed against the wall,
feeling heat absorbed from a sunny day.

It is night now and I am not nearly warm enough.

We sit and list the things

We are afraid to forget.
'Only the good',
repeated again.

They are crying all around me.

But our hands are too small to hold each other's
and I cannot reach beyond myself.

"Fresh Water" by Temidayo Jacob

i am not meant to spit some stories out of my mouth, because like fresh water, they have a very low amount of sweetness. i have many stories with titles like grief, tears, fears, and some other things. there is a story about the first time i surrendered myself to a girl to be used. there are so many names for sacrifice, and crucifixion isn't even one of them. a curtain once danced to grief and it got torn apart from top to bottom because there are many stages of grief:

i

you hear about your father's death
and a sudden burst of electric energy
hits you running from your head to toe

ii

pain — the enemy of pleasure — sees
your body and soul and mind worthy
of providing shelter for its sojourn

iii

guilt doesn't make love to you only
when you make love to sin; it also kisses
its way into the depth of your sorrow

iv

you do not need fire to become enraged;
sometimes, a reminder that you just lost
your father is the only trigger you need

v

you'll plead — "death please, bring back
my father. i promise never to smoke again
if you just bring him back to me right now"

vi

every daylight is a replica of the night
every lullaby transforms into a dark dirge
every water starts tasting like insecticide

vii

at the river; you, the moon and the waves
— waving goodbye to your father's breath;
recalling memories and renaming them

viii

dawn comes; sunlight begins to break —
like a chick breaking out of its shell —
into the darkness in your bloodshot eyes

ix

sunrise like this is not for birds to sing —
it's for you to reconstruct your body and
fill the void your father created in you

x

like songbirds with mute voices flying;
you accept yourself and your emptiness
and your silence and your everything

xi

look beyond the horizon; make for yourself
a deep sigh of relief and hope one day your
lost voice will return and you will sing

“alternate timeline” by emilie kneifel

i bike to the metro, the wind from the cars, the sky, the train i just missed pushing and pulling,
telling me go. and also stay. saying, i know but you have to do both or you'll never hurt good. as
the sky makes every stillness a going. as three people slink their elbowless arms over chairs in
the midst, in the mist of a strip mall, tiny feet propped at the heel. airplane vapour shooting
straight through their missing / the day even as it is happening, even as it continues, as their
lungs bustle into their going, they're going, there, the sky a palm, pink and pressing
compressing, flexing it out of them.

my mom lets me go, not having finished her story, her thought, her lily pad hands at the water's
pecked surface. her white shirt turned gossamer. raw egg in soup. her hair melts black as she

clicks to the depths, hangs from the diving board, from all the dripping and going that ended her here, wading for me. me, an auxiliary, going myself, loving her straight through the hydrangea, the fence, the ground i go under, insisting they cluster between us.

“In the Aftermath of a Rat Invasion” by Betsy Mars

I rescue what I can from gnawed cardboard boxes:
old photos, clippings, ration tickets.

My estranged husband's estranged family
disintegrating in the garage; I try to salvage what I can:

damp embroidery, family recipes,
packets carefully labeled with a name

and *First haircut* – the names familiar,
but without faces.

Opening each, I stroke the fine hair,
nearly reeling –

even after all these decades,
it slips through my fingers, almost alive.

Indecent to touch somehow.
I fold the thin paper,

speak the name again, tuck it in,
ziplock for protection.

I leave them for my husband outside of his den,
wonder how we can ever discard them.

“Tripping the Switch” by Cliff Saunders

High up in the Andes, I escape
from one body to another.
I know the exact line where,
when I cross, I am somewhere
through a looking glass
in a little white house
with poinsettias out front.

In just eight seconds,
I discover water in a pin.
It's all orange and bubbly.
It's becoming dangerous.
I confess to picking a spirit
from the garden like a stone
that could catch fire and loving it
more than a quick charcoal sketch
of a swollen river. I pull waves
of lion's mane jellyfish
through my brother's shadow
and close the road to Armageddon
to defy time. I have nothing
to lose save blue coral
and jellybean jars. Looking down
to find the soul of a man
stained by rust in the dust,
I await the pain of estrangement.

"A Metonym for Life" by Shloka Shankar

"Wherever you go, you meet part of your story." — Eudora Welty

The hunt for words [transitory,
placating] begins, casting

around for what I think
I need to say and how much;

someone once said that
the way out is through sentences:
long, short, end-stopped, bro

ken, fraught with meaning—
the soft shadows of vowels

residing along the curve
of your mouth

suddenly become mine.
A wall of silence, brick by brick,

gets torn down by a metonym for life—
reality.

“We Live On”

From Assistant Editor Jason Bates: Family photos create the backdrop as **Caitlin Miller** explores a comforting connection through grief and nostalgia.

“A favourite dress” by Caitlin Miller

a pattern emerges amidst
the thumbed and faded photos
in more than one you are wearing the same dress
at birthdays christenings christmasses
after and before chemotherapy appointments
final visits
the pattern is purple and pink with a blink
of aquamarine
reflecting your iris stringing your pearls
the amethyst
is vital as organs and veins against
the roses red bricks *the curtains*
candle light I realise I've learnt something
I never knew
that this must have been
one of your favourite dresses
I imagine you touching it when it was brand new
holding its waist to the light in a north London
boutique blue rain smearing the window
you wore it until the end
your valiant heart warming the
soft shield of fabric
as it slipped to the floor
becoming nothing without you

Caitlin's Commentary on “A favourite dress”:

The inspiration behind the poem came from sifting through some old photographs. I noticed that my Grandmother (my late father's mother) was wearing the same dress in a few of the images. This discovery led to a visceral feeling of connection to her. Although essentially static and one dimensional, the photographs felt like they had become portals of recognition. Smells,

sounds, abstract and concrete images streamed into my mind. The purples and pinks of the dress felt symbolic of her defiant vitality, femininity and the resilience she exhibited throughout her battle with cancer. I was instantly moved to capture this in a poem.

Initially, I wrote the poem in the form of a much longer prose poem. However, almost immediately, I began the process of crafting it into something more delicate and nuanced. Spacing and line breaks were used to heighten lyricism and shape the poem into a visual structure, which reflects the fragmented nature of grief and nostalgic memories.

The ending seeks to evoke the rawness and heartbreak of losing a loved one who can never be replaced, but I wanted the poem to also capture the beauty of happy family occasions and of my Grandmother's 'valiant heart' and warmth. Ancestors and those we have lost live on in our hearts and minds: in the memories and images we cherish. Through writing this poem I discovered that sometimes we can draw strength and comfort from remembering the details of their everyday sensual existence. In noticing or remembering specificities, such as a favourite dress.

My Grandmother emigrated to England from Ireland to work as a nurse in the NHS. Her son (my deceased father) went on to work as a doctor, for the NHS also. In light of the global pandemic I would like to dedicate this poem to her, and to all NHS (and health workers globally) past and present.

Thank you so much to the *Kissing Dynamite* team for featuring my work.

Poet Biographies

From rural Michigan, **Nicholas Alti** is an optimistic depressive with trigeminal neuralgia, poor timing, an extensive criminal history, & a modest criminal record. Recent yowls have found homes at *Puerto del Sol*, *Really System*, *FRiGG*, *The /temz/ Review*, and *Always Crashing*. He currently resides in Alabama.

Elizabeth Bluth (she/her/hers) is a writer of fiction, poetry, and plays. Her work has appeared or is upcoming in *3 Moon Magazine*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Animal Heart Press*, and others. She has a BA in Theatre and Creative Writing and is currently finishing her MFA in Fiction from The New School in NYC.

Twitter: @elizakbluth. Website: elizabethbluth.com

Hannah Cajandig-Taylor resides in the Upper Peninsula, where she is an editor for *Passages North*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gordon Square Review*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Coffin Bell*, and *Third Point Press*, among others. She has been nominated for a Best Small Fictions award and still plays Nancy Drew games on her computer. Find her on Twitter @hannahcajandigt, or on her website at www.hannahcajandigtaylor.weebly.com

Robbie Gamble (he/him/his) works as a nurse practitioner caring for homeless people in Boston, and is the assistant poetry editor at *Solstice* magazine. Over the past five summers he has spent time in the borderlands providing medical and material support for migrant passing through remote and dangerous stretches of the Sonoran desert.

Julia Gerhardt (she/her) is a writer living in Baltimore. She was nominated for the Best Microfiction Anthology 2020 and Best Small Fictions Anthology 2020. She has previously been published in *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Rogue Agent*, and others. Her poetry is forthcoming in Comstock Review. Visit her at <https://juliagerhardtwriter.wordpress.com/>

Greg Gose is a writer from Phoenix, Arizona. He is a McNair Scholar and was the Editor in Chief of *Eclipse Literary Journal* for three years, received a residency for the Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing in 2016, and is currently an MFA candidate at Northern Michigan University and an associate editor for *Passages North*. He loves space, sad things, and cats. Find him on Twitter @thedeadechoes

Ellen Higgins is a daughter, sister, friend, student and, maybe, a poet.

Temidayo Jacob is a Sociologist who writes from the North Central part of Nigeria. He is passionate about espousing the conflict between the individual and the society, especially through identity, sexuality and conformity. He is the CEO of foenix press. He is also the author of *Beauty Of Ashes*. Temidayo's work has appeared and is forthcoming in *Rattle*, *Outcast Magazine*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *The Temz Review*, *Peeking Cat Poetry*, *Page Adventure*, and others. He is also a contributor to leading anthologies. You can reach him on Twitter @BoyUntouched.

emilie kneifel is a sick fish, goo fish, they fish, blue fish (artist poet critic and editor at *The Puritan* and *Theta Wave*). find 'em at emiliekneifel.com, @emiliekneifel, and in Tiohtiáke, hopping and hoping.

Betsy Mars is a poet, photographer, and educator who recently took up publishing as well. She released her first anthology, *Unsheathed: 24 Contemporary Poets Take Up the Knife* (Kingly Street Press), in October 2019. She was educated at the University of Southern California, and occasionally puts what she learned to use. Her work has been published in *The Blue Nib*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *RATTLE* (photography), and numerous other online journals and print anthologies. In January 2019, her first chapbook, *Alinea*, was published by Picture Show Press. Her love of travel often conflicts with her love of her animals who prefer that she stay at home. Find her on Facebook@ <https://m.facebook.com/pg/marsbitsandpieces/posts/> and Twitter @BetsyMars1

Caitlin Miller (she/her) is a writer, editor and creative facilitator based in the UK, where she lives with her husband, dog and cat. She holds an MA in Creative Writing and is the co-editor/

founder of *Irisi* (irisi-magazine.org), a digital poetry, spoken word and art platform. She is currently a poetry tutor on an Arts Council England funded community arts project, which she co-founded. Previous publications include *Tears in the fence*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Under the Radar*, *Scriturra*, *Dust Poetry* and on two coffee cup recycling bins in Oxford as part of Oxford city council's 'cups of inspiration' creative project. Co-incidentally she loves both poetry and a good cup of coffee. Caitlin tweets at @_caitlinkat

Cliff Saunders is the author of several poetry chapbooks, including *Mapping the Asphalt Meadows* (Slipstream Publications) and *This Candescent World* (Runaway Spoon Press). His poems have appeared recently in *Atlanta Review*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *Lullwater Review*, *Inscape Journal*, *Vagabond City*, *The Main Street Rag*, and *Tipton Poetry Journal*. Originally from Massachusetts, he now lives in Myrtle Beach, SC.

Shloka Shankar is a writer and visual artist from Bangalore, India. A Best of the Net Nominee and award-winning haiku poet, her poems and artwork have recently appeared in Burning House Press, *Contemporary Haibun Online*, *talking about strawberries all of the time*, *Feral: A Journal of Poetry and Art*, and *Bones: journal for the short poem* among others. Shloka is the founding editor of *Sonic Boom*, its imprint *Yavanika Press*, and Senior Editor for *Human/Kind Journal*. Twitter: @shloks89.

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