

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 18 JUNE 2020: "LEGACY"

Welcome to Issue 18 "Legacy." In light of protests happening nationwide, know that the work of racial justice begins with you. Every time you fail to correct a family member at the dinner table who has made a racist remark, every time you look the other way when a black person at your workplace experiences discrimination, every time you make excuses for your own negligent behavior, the beast grows. Silence kills.

We have offered links to some organizations that are actively doing the work of racial justice. Read up on them, take part, make a donation.

Throughout "Legacy" you'll find poems that explore shared histories: stories of family, community, and the self.

This month's featured poet is Aaron Magloire.

Issue 18 includes work by Fatima Aamir, Hunter Blackwell, Schyler Butler, Esme DeVault, Aaron Magloire, Angelina Mazza, Echezonachuku Nduka, Jada Reyes, Shana Ross, Claire Taylor, Lucy Whitehead, and Mathew Yates. And Nadia Wolnisty is featured in "Shelter" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist

A native of Kentucky, Phil Rowan is a published artist and poet. He graduated from Western Kentucky University, a degree in Psychology. His paintings and poems have been featured in several magazines, literary journals and E-print. *My Kentucky Home*, his latest chapbook, will be public in June 2020.

"Ahora" by Fatima Aamir

Mexico City, 2020

Bouncing on our knees
purple and yellow hands on knees

hands in hair,
tentative,
But I demand it *loud*,
Pulling your thick neck
Fingers locked in sweat, smoke
hanging in the air.
Out of pockets, we pull cigarettes
Light and song speed time.
We are hot and living in light
everyone can understand
purple and yellow.

My fingers in your hair,
your lips in mine. Your shirt
You
move in time.
I'm pulling pulling your arms.

It wasn't just the tequila's brashness.
Curiosity has sovereign demands —
we were nothing but children
with nowhere else to be.

What do you remember the most?
Me, the security guards.
Gentle patriarchs
eyeing us while we smoked in the club
so we didn't set the room aflame,
stopping us on our way into the hostel dorm:
No puedes hacer eso aquí!
Witness!

Well, we conclude the night somehow.
You take me to another hostel. A man
lies drunk on the floor while you pay. Smiles at me.
Quiet conspiracy.

A large room:
wooden closet, queen bed,
an extra single, solemn in the corner.

We walk back, holding hands.

I've never kissed a Pakistani girl. I hadn't kissed a German either.
(I almost tell him)

We walk back.
Buildings pale and solemn against the dark.
All that quivers now is the wind.

"Foundations" by Hunter Blackwell

Sweat droplets slide down my forehead. Flies hone in on burgers and beans.
A couple tables down laughter roars. I fight off flies
and the urge to scratch. Mom huffs, not thinking it's too hot
for my eczema- she's always wrong.
And I say nothing, gently hitting the scaly patch of dry skin.
She fusses if she sees me scratching.

Park benches are cramped, spreads of warming sodas and waters,
with fried chicken and fish, the potato salad sits right next to greens.
Shoulder to shoulder we sit, our cheeks pinched,
ringlets of cotton pulled as they grow from young girls head
who dare defy the hot comb—
aunties are ruthless, quick to debate who has good or bad hair.

Tomorrow, the older ladies will be dressed to their nines:
lace detailed shapeless dresses with hats to match, the fat of their feet
squeezed into stubby black heels, stockings making their legs ashy.
They'll stomp and shout. "Preach on," the choir cries, waving flimsy paper fans,
half of them advertising the local funeral home.
I will stare out of old stained glass windows, wishing sand would leave my mouth.

After church, the drive will be quiet, while looking out at over greenish- brown water.
Mom made a comment about an ill-fitting pair of pants on Friday.
When Saturday rolled around there was no mention of JCPenney.
Dad will sigh when I walk in and say, "No luck with Mom."
He'll offer to toss the football. I won't be able to hold any extra weight.

But I am still on a park bench, as our family flesh melts
in a thick wet heat, next to hips that bump me by accident,
hips that widened and birthed the possibility of me,
next to stripped stomachs that carried legacies,
next to worn hands that smoothed my cheeks and said
I was becoming a beautiful young lady,

next to hands lingering too long at my doughy waist.

“Where It May” by Schyler Butler

He plucks a flower outside the library.
He doesn't know what kind it is,
just that it's yellow like sunlight, a dark
middle like his iris, exuding the same
warmth. Where he's from no one taught
him the names of the plants that grow
natural on this terrain his ancestors probably
called home long before invaders came.
He doesn't know he, too, can claim this honeyed
dirt, that it flows in his gold-spun blood. Where
he's from, people lie. No one knows why
people fear skin like his or so they say. No one
knows anything but shame flowering where it may.

“Death Wish” by Esme DeVault

there was a time
back then,
you know-
way back then,
when I told myself
not with a whisper
or with a tear,
but quite out loud
(and I mean this in the kindest way)
that You would be better off dead.

no more torment,
no more suffering,
no more agonizing uncertainty.

once, when you asked my permission
to just slip away, into the ether
I told you that I could not give it.
but brother,
You know I wanted to,
as it surely seemed
like the pain of your life

cast a shadow long enough
to eclipse almost everything
and filled the hole on the horizon
that your absence would bring.

but I couldn't be that selfish—
so I hid that death wish away
in a bag, in a box, in a jar
sealed up, airtight
and tossed it into the sea.

Now,
now that You are back here
back among us
and we laugh
and we argue
and we cry
I'm just so glad
that I was too weak back then
to give you what you wanted.

but I do worry
just a little bit
at times
that Someone
on the other side of that ocean

will find that jar,
and unscrew its lid,
and open the box,
and unseal the bag,
and find what lies within.

[“Not a Poem About Ahmaud Arbery” by Aaron Magloire, June’s Featured Poet](#)

I am loading the dishwasher,
stacking china white
like bones
like flags
like teeth, bright
in a fleshy black head.
I am not thinking

about running.

I am watching the red-winged blackbirds
perched on edges of wheat
before ascending
synchronized, swift,
those red feathers from afar
like still-dripping wounds.
I am not thinking
about running.

I am done memorizing
names
faces
mothers.
School is out for the summer
and June is on the horizon,
quiet fire coming
to burn what has been lost.
I am not thinking
about running.

I am thinking
four days ago
my father drives two hours
to bring me my guitar.
I tell him leave it in the driveway
because virus still raging
because people still dying
I tell him leave it in the driveway,
watch him from a distance,
say, through wind,
that at least with everyone inside
we haven't seen any black men
dying on the television.
And we laugh,
guitar as our witness, breathing
in its beat black case.
I am thinking
if nothing else
like we always have
I will music.

I will sing.

Be safe I tell him
when he turns to his car.
From the porch I watch
his broad black shoulders
steady in that lifting wind.

Aaron's Commentary on "Not a Poem About Ahmaud Arbery":

When I wrote "Not a Poem About Ahmaud Arbery," the shooting death of 25-year-old Arbery, a black man, by two white men in southern Georgia was making national headlines. It's unspeakably sad, but not at all surprising, that in the three weeks since my writing the piece, yet another instance of black death in America—the murder of George Floyd by a white Minneapolis police officer—has occupied those same headlines.

"Not a Poem" is as much about Arbery as it is about Floyd, and as much about Floyd as it is about every black American killed by violent manifestations of the anti-black racism with which America has yet to grapple.

And yet, "Not a Poem" is not about Arbery or Floyd at all. When I wrote the poem, I wrote it because I didn't know what else to do. I could barely bring myself to read the basic details of Arbery's death, let alone watch the video of his killing that was circulating recklessly on the Internet. "Not a Poem" is about my own emotional exhaustion, a tiredness born of hearing the same story over and over again, each time with a different face and name. It's a tiredness I share with my black friends, peers, family, and the poem was an attempt to acknowledge the necessity of trying, for sanity's sake, to not think about death, even if we might fail.

EIC Christine Taylor's Commentary on "Not a Poem About Ahmaud Arbery":

I am a teacher, and this year I made the decision mid-year to leave the school where I had worked for eight years, a wealthy, predominantly white suburban private school. After years of being harassed by colleagues, berated by parents, and unsupported by administration, I took back "me." How many of our institutions tout their supposed commitment to diversity and inclusion only to pay lip service to the reality of what diversity and inclusion actually mean? In December 2014 following the death of Eric Garner at the hands of the police and subsequent protests, I was asked to give a speech during assembly at school, not necessarily on this incident, but on anything having to do with "honor." Few wanted to hear about racial bias in our justice system; few wanted to hear about political disenfranchisement; few wanted to hear that our silence and inaction makes us complicit. Students complained, faculty complained, all behind my back. I was written off as just another angry black woman.

And I mention this to point out that we have been here before. I was in high school in 1992 when Rodney King was savagely beaten by police and the nation erupted in protests and riots. The fear that we will continue adding to the playbook of death and injustice lives in me every day. And as Aaron says above, it is absolutely exhausting. I have received so many messages via text, email, and social media from white people checking in to see if I'm okay. I really do appreciate that AND I also need you to be doing the work of racial just EVERY DAY, not just when headlines have taken over the conversation. In her collection *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Claudia Rankine talks about the little moments that build and build which eventually lead to the big moments. I suppose it's easier for us to see the big moments, but we need to do the work of identifying how we have been contributing to the little moments so that we can dismantle systemic racism. And we need to be honest. Some of those messages that I mentioned were from people who definitely "sold me down the river" at times when I needed them most.

"Be safe". . .for me, Aaron's poem speaks to a shared history and reality. We're just trying to live. And the best way I can do that right now is to shut down: I have stopped reading the news, I don't go on social media, and I rarely leave the three-block radius of my home. As I write this, I am sitting on my front porch listening to birdsong and having my elbow nibbled by the stray cat who has decided that I'm his momma. This is the best I can do right now.

["Poem for the Apocalypse" by Angelina Mazza](#)

We never asked for this
spring, didn't boil
our water twice. Burned
tea bags to cover our
bases, bit our nails
to spit them back
out. Began each
lay prayer with please,
last one, promise, peeled
our afternoon skin off
the bed sheets. Outside,
one blue glove
tied to a wet tree branch
hangs above our living
room window like a
rubber crucifix.

["Black Lives Matter"](#)

Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter **BLACK LIVES MATTER** Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter **NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND** Black Lives
Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives
Matter Black Lives Matter **BLACK VISIONS COLLECTIVE** Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
RECLAIM THE BLOCK Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter **COMMUNITIES UNITED AGAINST
POLICE BRUTALITY** Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter **EQUAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE** Black Lives
Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives
Matter **NATIONAL BAIL FUND NETWORK** Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter Black Lives Matter

“Stitching” by Echezonachukwu Nduka

The last time I fell while cycling,
I rose to the torment of loud heartbeats
& shortness of breath.

I have updated my list of cravings to include
standing aside to watch you interrogate my nightmares,
 passing each story like a thread through the eye of a needle.
I watch you stitch our affections together with steady hands,
 then tug at the string to measure its firmness.

I sit at the table you set as an invitation to choose life.
Your hands are soft & I wonder if stitching makes them so.
Perhaps that was what mother did: stitching lives & broken
families back in shape with songs & steady hands.

“Workdays” by Jada Reyes

It’s 4 in the morning
& the smells of dad’s breakfast:
buttery, over-easy eggs
& crispy bacon left in the oven for too long,
hang above my headboard.

By 4:30, his coffee is lukewarm from the cold,
thick vanilla creamer, & the sweet clips
of brown sugar are melting into the frothy Bustelo.
His 36 years of steps on warehouse floors
& paint store floors & concrete sidewalks,
all mixed with shoes half a size too small,
wear him down to bone spurs & brittle ankles
like tiny vases. As tendons peel away like mango skins,
the corn chip scented leashes are waiting for familiar hands.
The dogs' tails whip the air like fly swatters in a slick
& sticky summer.

He doesn't take long walks
anymore. Everyone I know that's over 35
& works to eat, is in the same kind of pain.
Sometimes, he jokes about dozing off on the road,
getting a blink on that long highway to Merritt Island –
a faded black sheet safe for all kinds of dreams. When
he comes home from work – safe but sore,
sleepy but silly – we let out a collective breath
the size of a hurricane cloud.

[“Why I Should Be Allowed to Battle” by Shana Ross](#)

Title of my son's persuasive essay. Prelude to a thesis. Delights but does not persuade. Title for a poem. Acquired sneakily. Stolen. Them's fighting words. He means he wants to play video games but I mean something ill-conceived, amorphous, inarticulate. Feral. Barbaric as a swallowed and sublimated yell. Title of my yawp. The reasons: Because I have been really good and been a good listener. Because my inner peace has boiled over. Has vaporized and the pot is burning. Because I need something to do. Because of injustice. Because I cannot think of good reasons not to. Because some things you can only learn by swinging: a cat by the tail, a tiger, a terrible mistake, a mood. When I dream of the meadow it is always cold like spring, sliding over your skin like peppermint. The flesh and the blood stay warm; they steam. A change of state, agitation crosses a threshold and I need not move from where I stand.

[“Group Texts With Fellow Thirtysomethings” by Claire Taylor](#)

Found my first
 gray this morning
my chin is a garden
 impossible to
Embrace it!

Dye it
ignore it
Don't
pluck it
I'm tired
of pretending
to be
okay
my breasts droop
more than
I'd like to
have enough to
notice a difference
my nipples will never
be the same.
Like saucers!
wait until
the baby comes
any day now?
I think
You look beautiful.
I haven't
slept through the night!
First day back--
felt like myself
again, the same fight
over and over
I'm tired
of acting like
nothing's changed.

The truth is
I miss
my stomach
my freedom
the quiet
the old
me.

"Sun Dance" by Lucy Whitehead

My shadow feet are skilled
at scaling sun-baked walls; watch
how they spread their toes, climbing
the splintered panels one at a time, weightless,
unburdened as though they are still in the womb.
Nothing can hurt them in this light-caressed
shadow-puppet state. Not everyone knows how
to dance upside-down in silhouette.

“articulate your bones” by Mathew Yates

in the green of deep spring
i used to walk the railroad tracks
couched in steep woods
along the northern reaches

of the Tennessee River,
called the Cherokee
or Tanasi or Hogohegee,
called the Callamaco,

& i would lose count of the bones
of little creatures i'd encounter,
killed sometime last year,
or maybe a decade ago,

& cleaned of flesh
by the violent world,
& i would miss them terribly.

so i would attempt,
with eight-year-old fingers,
to reassemble the dead
& brittle little souls right

in the place that i found them.
being an initiate, i would crudely recreate
their skeletons: raccoons, red foxes,
opossums, rabbits, robins,
a little lost kitten –

& i would imagine their sinews

moving in my image,
shaking a fist at the trains
we heard coming & going,

& we'd wonder who could
run those things through this place
& how this place would look in real life
& i'd trick myself apart from fault
& wonder at my grace in
recognizing stolen beauty

"Shelter"

From EIC Christine Taylor: In their poem "Possums," **Nadia Wolnisty** explores the ways in which poetry can be a shelter from the hurt that life inflicts.

"Possums" by Nadia Wolnisty

This is a poem for the possum
who visited my porch the night
I tested positive on a pregnancy test.
You had put popcorn out on the porch,
hoping one would come.
I was doing dishes in the sink.

Through the glass door you saw
a mound bristling like pubic hair
after a haphazard trim. You said *It worked!*
Hello, wild stranger with little hands.
I will share my porch with you.

And the next day, after a few
mornings of nausea and achy breasts, I bought
an energy drink, a pack of smokes
to calm my nerves and a pink pregnancy test.
It was an either/or situation. I went to a stall
at work and waited. Of course,

it feels stupid to regard seeing possums
as miraculous when it is in fact mundane. They are
common enough in a suburb in Texas for all
their strangeness. Only

a minute later, the test knew, and
so did I. A little gasp and nervous laugh.
I knew then that I was pouched
animal, and I threw away the pack
of cigarettes in the bin made
for tampons and other things I would
no longer need. I guess I could
have given them to a friend, but I
felt I could only carry one. And then

the whole week of telling you, calling
doctor's offices, and eating lots
of food. Everything except for Gatorade
tasted strange—the skins of fried chicken
gone to insect wing, insides hearty grub.

But this is not a poem for what happened.
No one wants to hear about something so mundane.
This is a poem for possums,
because I don't know any poems for rodential snouts,
ground ghosts the shape of tubes,
whose existence is confirmed
by looking through a window.

This is a poem for possums.
This poem is lumpy
and not for the light of day.
But I made it.
This is something that I made.

Because only a week later,
it was much too cold for possums,
and I smoked the darkest cigarette.
I should be making popcorn, just in case,
but I had to give a reason
for why my chest feels full of teeth marks,
and why I shake so much.

Nadia's Commentary on "Possums":

This poem is vulnerable in a way I'm not used to being—which is saying something, considering my first chapbook was about rape. Perhaps this is because the loss is somewhat new (2020 is a heck of a year) but also because it is not something talked about. I lost something that wasn't quite there to begin with. That was the loneliest I've ever felt.

I am the editor in chief of *Thimble Lit Mag*—a poetry journal dedicated to the notion of shelter. Poetry can be a small shelter for hurts to go. Poetry can be a small home, and homes are meant to be shared. So, if you've gone through something like this, I hope this poem helps you feel less alone.

Confession: I have written collections of poems in prose then inserted line-breaks afterwards. Don't worry about it! It's fine! But for "Possums" I did not. I took care with enjambment. Before the possum's arrival, all the lines are end-stopped. During the pregnancy, the lines share a porch. And afterward, it's end-stopped again.

I do not know if this experience is end-stopped for me. Who can say what the body will do? But I've started to leave popcorn out again, just in case.

Poet Biographies

Fatima Aamir (she/her) is a poet and writer based in Vancouver—for now. She has edited and written for *The Talon*, the University of British Columbia's independent press, and was a former editorial intern at *The Capilano Review*. This fall, she will begin her MA in Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. She can be found musing over art and social justice on Twitter at @fatimaaamir.

Hunter Blackwell (she/her) is a poet and author. Her previous work as appeared in *The Write Launch*, *Barren Magazine*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, among others. She can be found at her website hunterblackwell.wordpress.com or @hun_blackwell on Twitter, where she's always looking for new recipes to try.

Schyler Butler (she/her) received her BA in English from the University of North Texas. A recipient of an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award for FY 2020 and a lead poetry editor for *Human/Kind Journal*, her work appears in *Duende*, *Superstition Review*, *Obsidian*, *Heavy Feather Review's* #NoMorePresidents, and elsewhere, sometimes under the pseudonym "Iyana Sky." Currently, she lives in Columbus, Ohio.
Instagram: @whistle_the_blues

Esme DeVault is an attorney and poet living in Rhode Island with her husband, son, and dog Charlie. She was previously an English teacher and an academic reference librarian. She has had poems published in *Motherscope*, *Jonah Magazine*, *The Big Windows Review*, and forthcoming in *Inkling Literary Magazine*.

Aaron Magloire (he/him/his) hails from Queens, NYC and is a rising sophomore at Yale University, where he's had the indescribable privilege of studying poetry under Emily Skillings and Claudia Rankine. He's a big fan of nighttime car rides, cherry tomatoes, and overusing the word "maybe" in his poems.

Angelina Mazza is a writer and editor from Tio'tià:ke (Montreal). She is currently completing her BA in English Literature and Gender & Social Justice Studies at McGill University. She reads for *Frontier Poetry*, and edits for *Scrivener Creative Review* and *Yiara Magazine*. Her work has appeared in *Farrago* and *The McGill Daily*. She wants to talk to you about Carly Rae Jepsen & that final season of *She-Ra*. You can find her on Twitter @angejmazza.

Echezonachukwu Nduka is a poet, classical pianist, and musicologist. He holds academic degrees in Music from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Kingston University London, UK. Author of *Chrysanthemums for Wide-eyed Ghosts* (2018), his poems have appeared in *The Indianapolis Review*, *Jalada Africa*, *The Bombay Review*, *The Village Square Journal*, *River River*, *20.35 Africa: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry Vol. II*, among others. When he is not reading, practicing on the piano, or cooking, he is listening to music and singing the wrong lyrics with a straight face. He can be found online at www.artnduka.com
Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/thepoetpianist/>
Instagram: @thepoetpianist
Twitter: @echenduka

Jada A. Reyes (she/her) is a poet, abolitionist, and the daughter of Nuyoricans. She is currently based in Orlando, Florida where she is both melting and studying poetry at the University of Central Florida. Her poems can be found or are forthcoming in *ProLit Magazine*, *The Grief Peace Anthology*, and *The Cypress Dome Literary Magazine*.

Shana Ross bought her first computer working the graveyard shift in a windchime factory, then spent a good while authoring a stable life before returning her attention to the page. Since launching her writing career in 2018, her work has appeared in *Apeiron Review*, *Chautauqua Journal*, *Ruminate*, *Bowery Gothic*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Writers Resist* and more. She is the recipient of a 2019 Parent-Writer Fellowship to Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing, and serves as an editor for *Luna Station Quarterly*. She holds both a BA and MBA from Yale and rarely tweets @shanakatzross.

Claire Taylor (she/her/hers) writes primarily about motherhood and mental health. Her work has appeared or is upcoming in *Yellow Arrow Journal*, *Capsule Stories*, *American Writer's Review*, *Canary Literary Journal*, and more. She is the creator of Little Thoughts, a monthly newsletter of original stories and poetry for children. She lives in Baltimore, Maryland, and can be found online at clairemtaylor.com.
Twitter: @ClaireM_Taylor

IG: @todayweread

Lucy Whitehead's poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Amethyst Review*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Barren Magazine*, *Black Bough Poetry*, *Broken Spine Artist Collective*, *Burning House Press*, *Clover and White Literary Magazine*, *Collective Unrest*, *Electric Moon Magazine*, *Ghost City Review*, *Mookychick Magazine*, *3 Moon Magazine*, *Neon Mariposa Magazine*, *Parentheses Journal*, *Pink Plastic House*, *Pussy Magic*, *Re-side*, and *Twist in Time Magazine*. She lives by the sea with her husband and cat. You can find her on Twitter @blueirispoetry.

Nadia Wolnisty is the founder and editor in chief of *Thimble Literary Magazine*. Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Spry*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *Apogee*, *Penn Review*, *McNeese Review*, *Atlantis 2.0*, *SWWIM*, *Gyroscope*, *Bateau Press*, *SOFTBLOW*, and others. They have chapbooks from Cringe-Worthy Poetry Collective, Dancing Girl Press, and a full-length from Spartan.

Mathew Yates (they/them) is a poet & artist from Paducah, Kentucky. Their poetry can be found in *Barren Magazine*, *Epigraph Magazine*, *marlskarx*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, & more. Their illustrations can also be found in the recent full-length release, *Flutter*, by Kristin Garth, published by Twist in Time Press. (@m_yates)

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