

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 19 JULY 2020: "WHAT CHAOS"

Welcome to Issue 19 "What Chaos," in which you'll find poems that question the status quo, explore the murkiness of life, and challenge us to reclaim a stable foundation.

This month's featured poet is Olúwádáre Pópóola.

Issue 19 includes work by Odukoya Adeniyi, Steve Barichko, Charlotte Edwards, Ceinwen E. Cariad Haydon, Gabrielle Grace Hogan, Zebulon Huset, Aimée Keeble, Eric Lochridge, Bethany Mitchell, Olúwádáre Pópóola, Esteban Rodríguez, and John Short. And Maria S. Picone is featured in "Gaslighting" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist

Brett Stout is a 40-year-old artist and writer. He is a high school dropout and former construction worker turned college graduate and paramedic. He creates mostly controversial work usually while breathing toxic paint fumes from a small cramped apartment known as "The Nerd Lab" in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. His work has appeared in a vast range of diverse media, from international indie zines like *Litro Magazine*, UK to Brown University.

"His Desired Epitaph" by Odukoya Adeniyi

What I tell myself is a tale fashioned
after God's index command; I, a boy,
like a pope rolls a sermon around his lips
to the pews aligned before the altar's
confessional array of light, I roll the wind
around my heavy eyebrows

& leave the moon gasping for a night
with oxygen. life can go wrong along
the tributary lawn of gratitude & nothing
can seem right all again, like dense in the
fearsome hymnal of a thick forest, like

fire logs clasping their flames in the
serenade of darkness, I write like my
mother's pain when loss incisors plunge
through the panacea of my heart. at the
back of my skin, someone said: *your shadow*

*is hiding a knife, ready to stab light in
whatever manner, like country birds,
like an ambush of tigers, like a constellation
of starlight, like a synagogue of sunlight,
like a forest of dead-colored graves, like a*

pool of dead waters, like a sky of red-bodied
clouds, like sad songs of aching memories,
like a family of dead siblings, like a desert of
dehydrated throats, my body houses a nest
brewing unhatched dreams into a broken hope.

to leave isn't to say goodbye;
it's to align with the description of life &
let water shape your names into golden fishes
I leave my dream globes in the casket of God
& allow him burn them into his desired epitaph.

[“in the time of quarantine” by Steve Barichko](#)

tell everyone you know you'll be awake with them and thinking
of them while watching the pink moon but sleep soundly
through it and wake up before dawn to the haze
illuminated and the moon gone from anywhere
you can see and that's when you go out into the contagion
lit up and slithering in the woods

every morning in the dark make a stack of pancakes
after two weeks you won't spill anything and will crack
the eggs against the bowl in one strike
just when you're really getting good you'll see a missed text
an old love asking if you'd seen the pink moon
but make and eat your pancakes
no one is going anywhere

as you flip a lightswitch or pull on your fingers
ask *is it real* this is how you begin to take control
of your dream life and during the third nightmare
where you willingly enter a boobytrapped house
to rescue that old love from that missed text
you pull on your fingers before opening the door *is it real*
the light in the second floor bedroom goes out
you sit up in bed

your son finds a nest of baby garter snakes
at the pond's edge picks them up in two fistfuls
and squeezes and you have to pry them out
bugeyed and bleeding and your son
crying you carry him home down the street
move a caterpillar off the asphalt to a laurel leaf cry
when you get home you don't eat dinner
you talk to your grandfather's picture in your bedroom
you look at your wedding album

that married coworker the heat from her chest
surprises you after the trench coat scarf and tortoise shell
glasses come off and she lifts her sweater to you
in the back seat of her car we are all deep down
carnal and adolescent forever
her hands behind her back unclasping you look
for a lightswitch

garlic mustard garden violet creeping
charlie wild columbine your grandmother always said
never have two strange days in a row so the roses must go
and the peonies and marigolds pretty as they are
you dig up the landscaping telling your wife about cast-asides
the beautiful dandelion and mountain mint with hummingbirds
so besotted you can stroke their heads
while they hover in it

the out and back trail is steep traprock
a glacial erratic with a prickly pear cactus at the base
wildflowers no one sees outside of these mountains
eight miles of hiking so hard there isn't anyone
at the end of the trail is a deer leg broken at the knee
hooked over a tree limb and suddenly you

worry about the sun setting

“Heart City” by Charlotte Edwards

I have my father’s stop signs
& my mother’s concrete foundations
Filling a city within me
I do not want to admit
they have made things in this city
broken things in this city
I’m selfish like that

I want to claim that my whole city
was built from my fingertips
that every shrapnel piece was by my design
I want to claim that when my city burned
It was by my own match
But it wasn't

A bakery with stained windows & hardwood tables
used to hum with song
but now stands in my city as cinder
I have not bothered rebuilding it

I have gardens of parsley and basil
Dotted with golden butterflies
& canaries singing wretched melodies
& I can’t claim that either
I believe my grandparents built that

But the libraries,
with their dusty books & half-awake conversations
breathing life into the city,
Those are mine for my heart is a city
& You are just living in it

“Blown Skywards” by Ceinwen E. Cariad Haydon

White sheets billow in welcome, sunshone winds.
Pegs strain under pressure, yet they grip firm,
mostly. Bedding twines around her line, pinned.

Crises push and pull, she explodes, thin-skinned.
Her lack of resilience makes her squirm.
White sheets billow in welcome, sunshone winds.

Ionised air fills her lungs, draughts rescind
blame. Hypnotised eyes, swing and sway and yearn
in flight. Bedding twines around her line, pinned.

April greens stark trees. Twigs snatch cloth, wild-winged
– dare doubts to stay at bay: she looks to learn.
White sheets billow in welcome, sunshone winds.

She strains, claims potential in hopes undimmed;
reaching out to others, her main concern.
Playful bedding twines around, line unpinned.

She baskets her laundry with clear-faced grins,
unrestricted at last, her dance steps turn.
White sheets billowed in welcome, sunshone winds.
Loose bedding twirls around her line, unpinned.

“As Night Draws Its Sad Face Across the Window” by Gabrielle Grace Hogan

hope is all
percussion & lace
it's garrulous
it runs its mouth
into the wall
the girl
descends on me
i search my mouth for a key
this room spacious
as a heart attack
the earth feels like a question mark curled under a nail
i have known desire
but it's been awhile
the heart is a hologram
i want to want touch
the simple sugar of its swell
the swell
of my ass
precedes itself

i would like to not waste me
would like to take two maybe three
fingers inside & feel anything
i've never been good at this i mean
entering i mean
exiting
the elevator is a space to breathe other breaths
the bedroom is a space to do the same with much less certainty
hips
a folding chair
a salt lick
sex
a gut in the knife
warm-bodied puppetry
O ephemeral guillotine
O wolfish entr'acte
the audience gasps its legs
around the stage the hero
does not need Prozac the hero
does not need biweekly therapy
the hero fucks
O pornographic pharmacy
i think of the dirt behind every nail
before it forks my flesh
i feel every absent gem
every pill that pulls my stomach up
into my eyeballs
the night is dressed in a suit of bodies
& i am
waiting
to feel clean enough again
to undress in front of it

[“The NRA Edits Justin Trudeau's Speech Announcing Federal Ban on Assault-Style Firearms in Canada” by Zebulon Huset](#)

(this is a visual poem, and the text reads as follows)

Good morning,
Before I get started, I want
to celebrate
a society such as ours.

Our world view
These tragedies
make adults out of children.
are
normalized.
22 Canadians
their families deserve
thoughts and prayers.
thoughts and prayers.
We also
confided in
these weapons
There is no use
We can stick to thoughts and prayers alone

[“Détente” by Aimée Keeble](#)

As a child
Boldly did I pull down my granny’s skirts and how she loved me for my
Barbarity
And I wonder now, as I watch the world with hungry lynx lips-

Would it love me if I helped its unraveling
If all it needs (wants) is a final shuck
A tender yanking
And its bareness finally
Exhaustive and new,
Arms open ready to be dressed again

[“Jeff Bezos Shows Up on My Doorstep” by Eric Lochridge](#)

Jeff Bezos shows up on my doorstep
with the pressure washer I ordered.

Standing there, rocking on his heels, he is smaller
than I imagined him, and I imagined him as small.

He demonstrates the courtesy of wearing a mask,
customer satisfaction always top of mind.

His mask is a thousand-dollar bill and some string
tied through, a grotesque joker of a smile painted on in red.

He hands over the dented box under the shelter of my porch.
Nice place you've got here, he says, craning over my shoulder,

eyeing the spartan living room. He smacks his lips and turns to go. I tell him I had been streaming "The Wire" on Prime.

Season two, I got to episode eight and you want two ninety-nine an episode to continue? Like a pay phone operator demanding quarters?

Nine ninety-nine for the entire season, he answers, the smile crinkling.
No deal, I say, standing my ground.

He just stands there like a gargoyle
with that stupid money strapped to his face.

"Postcards for the End of the World" by Bethany Mitchell

1

Even then—moonlight tickles blue, skyline
humming silver with skyscrapers. Concrete vibrations
crawl through small hours,
glass black and resistant to sleep.
Voices in elevators echo
through steel. The cluttered noise of monotone
splinters—disco district discovered.
Do you remember punk? Can you recall neon?
Yes.—Yes.
There is an oil-slick loophole. A third room,
rainbow-toned rules. Press 1 to say hello,
2 for water, 3 to ask me if I'm alright.
Yes.—Yes.

2

The whistle in the undertow. Slow
tingle grows, pink sun on spine.
Melancholy and regret tomorrow.
That crisp, wooden ringing, fingers
on bone click to warm beat. Anticipation
rising, through waves now lilac, now blue, now

hazy pink of day's end. A sad god's window. Eyes
of love. Unrevealed. The quiet;
the busy silence, distant laughter and oars
caressing sea's sultry skin. Already forgotten
breakfast and cotton-covered dreams.
Were palm trees always purple? No one knows.

3

Pray
for those sandy crops I tumbled in, the rock-burnt corn
and something else
the skeletal cows had torn. The song
of the wind asked me why
it always felt like this. The soil in my shoes wondered
why the rain had lost its way. I asked:
what spell was cast today? And someone laughed
two miles away. The road was grey: charcoal dust
and paper-snow. No soul
but for those cows
and me. The sun offered no balmy kiss,
but bit my skin with hateful rays.

["Recolouring Grief in the Posture of Skin" by Olúwádáre Pópóola, July's Featured Poet](#)

earth / brown mottles looking like countries

woven inside wool / mother's cornrows / western red cedar / morphed into blood /

timbre longings plaguing whitewash walls / where bodies hang in continuation of life / in
continuation of the cotton-soft braze of desire / non-ferrous alloys / cooking pots / grieve like
brass raised past longings

boys seek blood / a slice of their mother / in the face of war / streams broken into stainless
steel / forced down pipes from the minefield / cluttered with earth so much / death rots and
homes rust

how do we walk a road of glass when our bodies reflect a city / trapped / spit / moisten /
passage /

limboed body fiddling clouds / tendering a heaviness collected in raspy sighs / unfinished unfin
song / famished body thumbed into a belly / pinch-skin / it's all the same thing

when we were born / we were our futures unbroken in ceramic plates / spread out to thin film

& if maybe we knew / we could have refused living

because our lives are our deaths /

tulips spring in spring in a place fairly called spring / two lips lush the sky with such roguery /
razor for fans / hush the wind that blows down a hallway flooded with fluorescent

our body /

smooth polythene / is afraid of breaking the line between a walk and a run so much our
shadows can haunt us

the way we should live is the way we now sing / all black yearnings in mottled stores /
simmering in its own tongue / we won't escape / blood pardons but skin breaks

Olúwádáre's Commentary on "Recolouring Grief in the Posture of Skin":

In a period of uproar and especially in longing for tranquility, I tried weighing the heaviness of the fear of having to love a force (by that skin) that quickens death, how the consciousness of this fear wants to drive one to treat one's self as a remotely distant thing.

By that I saw how the world looks for a measure of kindness for itself, an essence it thoroughly lacks.

Assistant Editor Jeni De La O's Commentary on "Recolouring Grief in the Posture of Skin":

What Chaos—who among us hasn't uttered or thought these words in this moment of great reordering? As we do the important work of refashioning the world into a place that is a little bit less cruel, a little more loving, a little more equitable, this poem begs the reader to stop. What Olúwádáre has accomplished in this piece is a moment of reflection: how do we process the world around us that we are so eager to change? What place does our history have in our present—in our future? How do we make room for the many-layered personalities and identities that exist within a community? What place does restoration have in the tapestry of justice? These are the broader questions Olúwádáre asks us to consider using clear imagery and sharp language. I hope you'll enjoy this piece as much as the rest of us at *Kissing Dynamite* did. I

hope it stays with you, a little whisper in your ear as you return to the important work of rebuilding a society that works for all of us.

“10 El árbol” by Esteban Rodríguez

Before the river, a town,
and before the town, kilometers
of land filled with sagebrush,
carcasses, mirages scuttling
like rats. And though everything
looks a like prop, your father
trudges on, aware that the group
he entered this scene with
is no longer behind him,
that in the days to come
he will trek this stretch of earth
by himself, move from bush
to bush, rock to rock, until the sun,
having lashed a thousand fevers
on his skin, commands that his body
buckles, bends, moves beneath
the shade of the nearest tree,
where he will take off his backpack,
sit, sip water like it was the blood
of Christ, and wait till he can rise
again, till he doesn't feel,
every time he takes a step,
that some part of this world
is about to end.

“Playing Soldiers” by John Short

Our armies are lined up:
facing off across the carpet,
generals on fine horses
presiding from behind the ranks.
My uncle launches an attack:
sends his infantry forward

then scatters them dead
across no-man's land
for dramatic effect.
They die so easily, I think.
handfuls of cheap life
sacrificed in the war zone.
Later, watching TV
we get news from Vietnam.
I know Hai Phong sounds funny,
he says, but don't snigger.
Imagine those bombs
were falling on you
and me and Grandma?
Then he teaches me chess moves,
castles, kings and queens
the truth that mounted knights
were really not romantic.

"Gaslighting"

From EIC Christine Taylor: In her poem "How gaslighting is like a trip to the beach," **Maria S. Picone** reveals the complex ways in which institutions silence us.

"How gaslighting is like a trip to the beach" by Maria S. Picone

I was the only one who got burned. Blackened, my skin flaked off,
feeding the algae who exist in the cracks, flagrant speculation
about my mental state, which of course belonged to the Department,
the University. Of course—when you expect a woman's sensitive skin
but offer no sunblock, when you escort her from the sweet shade
of a beach umbrella, barely give her a chair to sit on, a towel to hulk on—
why feign surprise when she, barefoot, sobbing, threads along the rocks
before she drowns?

Maria's Commentary on "How gaslighting is like a trip to the beach":

I wrote this poem to speak about my experience as a woman in academia through a long vehicle. In general, I think metaphors that go on too long can become stale and unsuccessful, so I knew this would be a short poem, meant to grab attention with the explanatory title, hook readers with the first sentence within the first line, and finish with a cutting question. The beginning line plays on the dual meaning of "got burned." The word "blackened" also serves as a double entendre between tanning and destroying my reputation. "Expect a woman's sensitive

skin" evokes the way every action by me became interpreted as a feminine weakness, an intolerance to adversity even as it heaped more stress on me. The faceless Department and University in this poem controlled the power in our relationship; each time I reached out for help marked another loss of their regard for me and a corresponding withdrawal of resources.

Despite what happened to me, I don't wish to target anyone specific or reveal more details. Thus, the extended metaphor offered the perfect chance to allude to some events and describe their overall unfair treatment leading to my eventual destabilization and exit from academia. It's easy for the reader to insert meaning between the lines while enjoying the images of a day at the beach. I tried to capture this alienation through sequencing natural actions—putting on sunblock, sitting on a chair or (especially if you take less priority) a beach towel. I chose the word "hulk" to reflect the deterioration of my self-esteem and my poise. The ending "threads along the rocks" demonstrates the uncertain mental territory and outcomes, while the last line provides a fitting yet tragic fate.

Towards the close of my time at this university, I could barely summon the courage to walk into the department building out of fear. 'Gaslighting' is the perfect term for what happened to me on the part of older, white men seeking to understand the behavior and struggles of a young woman of color. The first time I heard it, I didn't know what it meant or that it had happened to me; part of defeating trauma is to name it so that both perpetrators and victims can better understand their experiences. I'm sorry to say that when I had already quit and my personal relationships improved enough to give a postmortem on my time there, most of the faculty were puzzled as to why everything had happened the way it did (whereas most of my fellow graduate students were unsurprised). It is my hope that people will learn from and relate to my experience to come to a healthy understanding that not everything can be systematically explained as part of a single underlying hypothesis such as race, mental health, gender, etc.

Poet Biographies

Odukoya Adeniyi is an undergraduate studying English and Education at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. His poems have appeared/forthcoming in *Roadrunner Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Feral: Journal of Art and Poetry*, *Kalahari Review*, *Agbowo.org*, and others. His poem "Food is Peace" was the winning poem of the PIN Food Poetry Prize 2018. You can reach out to him on Twitter @adeniyi_odukoya.

"**Steve Barichko**" is a pattern the universe is currently maintaining that will one day either be flipped off like a light switch or recycled like a crashing wave back into the ocean, only to crash again as another wave in another time and place. His work has most recently appeared in *Cathexis Northwest Press* and *High Shelf Press*. He is working on a forthcoming chapbook. He can be found on Instagram and Twitter @stevebarichko.

Charlotte Edwards (she/her) is a poet based in Nashville, Tennessee, where she spends her time drinking too much hot chocolate. She loves to write about her experiences and observations from the world around her. She has work in/forthcoming at *The Weight Journal*, *The Literary Yard*, *Rebelle Society*, *Spill Words*, *Teen Belle Magazine*, and *The Magnolia Review*. She also was a finalist for Youth Poet Laureate for 2020. Currently, she is an intern at *Southern Word* where she hopes to grow her abilities as a writer in hopes of one day becoming a renowned poet. Find her on Instagram @Charlotte_The_Poet.

Ceinwen lives near Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, and writes poetry and short stories. She is widely published in online magazines and in print anthologies. Her first chapbook, *Cerddi Bach* [Little Poems], Hedgehog Press, was published in 2019. Her first pamphlet is due to be published in 2020. She is a Pushcart and Forward Prize nominee (2019) and holds an MA in Creative Writing from Newcastle University, UK (2017). She believes everyone's voices count.

Gabrielle Grace Hogan is a poet from St. Louis, Missouri. She resides in Austin, Texas while she pursues her MFA from the University of Texas at Austin as part of the New Writers Project. Her work has been published by the Academy of American Poets, *Sonora Review*, the Chicago Review of Books' *Arcturus*, and others. Her micro-chap *Sentimental Violence: Some Poems About Tonya Harding* is available in a free PDF from Ghost City Press. She is the Poetry Editor of *Bat City Review* and Co-Editor of *You Flower / You Feast*, an anthology of works inspired by Harry Styles. Her social media and projects can be found on her website gabriellegracehogan.com.

Zebulon Huset is a teacher, writer, and photographer living in San Diego. His writing has recently appeared in *Meridian*, *The Southern Review*, *Louisville Review*, *Fence*, *Rosebud*, *Atlanta Review*, *Texas Review*, and *Fjords Review* among others. He publishes a writing prompt blog Notebooking Daily and is the editor of the journal *Coastal Shelf*. He has recently posted an anthology of sorts of 90 poems published in the last couple years called "Poems to Quarantine With: National Poetry Month in a Time of Pandemic," which can be found at <https://notebookingdaily.blogspot.com/2020/05/poems-to-quarantine-with-national.html>. Check out more of Zebulon's projects at NotebookingDaily.com and Coastal Shelf.com.

Aimée has her Master of Letters in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow and is represented by Ayla Zuraw-Friedland at the David Black Agency. Aimée lives in North Carolina with her dog Cowboy and is working on her first novel. She is the grand-niece of Beat writer and poet Alexander Trocchi. Her previously published work can be found here: <https://neutralspaces.co/aimeekeeble/>

Eric Lochridge (he/him) is the author of three poetry chapbooks, most recently *Born-Again Death Wish*. His poems have appeared in *Okay Donkey*, *DIAGRAM*, *Slipstream*, *Seems* and many others. He lives in Bellingham, Washington. Find him on Twitter @ericredits and at ericredits.wordpress.com.

Bethany Mitchell has an interest in poetry which can be read ecologically. She recently reviewed Maria Sledmere's *nature sounds without nature sounds* for *amberflora*, co-edited the zine *VOICES* in association with Nottingham Poetry Exchange, and her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Crêpe & Penn*, *lower ground 18*, and *(w)hole*. She tweets @bethjmitch.

Maria S. Picone (she/her/hers) writes, paints, and teaches from her home in South Carolina. Her writing has been published in the *Able Muse*, *Vox Viola*, and *Mineral*, among others. A Korean adoptee, Maria often explores themes of identity, exile, and social issues facing Asian Americans. She received an MFA in fiction from Goddard College and holds degrees in philosophy and political science. You can find more on her website, mariaspicone.com, or Twitter @mspicone.

Olúwádáre Pópóḡla (he/him) is a 19-year old Nigerian poet, a student of Microbiology, and a Sports Writer for a media company. He writes from a city named by rocks and longs to see the world without discrimination of any form. Learning the art of imagery, his poems are up/forthcoming in *Mineral Lit. Magazine*, *Headline Poetry & Press*, *Feral: A Journal of Poetry & Art*, *Roadrunner Review*, *Lumiere Review*, *Radical Art Review*, *LUMIN Journal*, *Versification*, *Cypress Poetry Journal*, *ang(st)zine* and elsewhere. He can be reached on Twitter @Kunmi_sher.

Esteban Rodríguez (he/him) is the author of the poetry collections *Dusk & Dust*, *Crash Course*, *In Bloom*, *(Dis)placement*, and *The Valley*. His work has appeared in *Boulevard*, *Shenandoah*, *The Rumpus*, *TriQuarterly*, and elsewhere. He is the Interviews Editor for the *EcoTheo Review*, an Assistant Poetry Editor for *AGNI*, and a regular reviews contributor for *[PANK]* and *Heavy Feather Review*. He lives with his family in Austin, Texas.

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John Short spent years in southern Europe and now lives in Liverpool, UK. Widely published in magazines such as *South Bank Poetry*, *The High Window*, *Envoi*, *The Blue Nib*, *London Grip*, *Sarasvati* and *Poetry Salzburg*, he was a Pushcart nominee in 2018. His pamphlet *Unknown Territory* (Black Light Engine Room Press) is out this month, and his collection *Those Ghosts* (Beaten Track Publishing) will appear later this year. Check out his blog at johnshort.poetry.blog.

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