

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 20 AUGUST 2020: "IT'S BECOMING CLEAR"

Welcome to Issue 20 "It's Becoming Clear." As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to rage across the world, our collective anxiety grows. We're looking for clarity in this seemingly never-ending sense of uncertainty.

This month's featured poet is Paula Willie-Okafor.

Issue 20 includes work by Jean Bohuslav, Darren C. Demaree, Ebuka Evans, Sandra Fees, Catherine Fletcher, Ambika Gupta, J. I. Kleinberg, Okeke Onyedika, Ron Riecki, Iheoma Uzomba, D. S. Waldman, and Paula Willie-Okafor. And CD Eskilson is featured in "Inheritance" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist

Christine Owens is a self-taught poet and photographer and has been designing with words and pixels for over 40 years. Her photography has been published in *Cottage Life, Pennsylvania, From Whispers to Roars, Barren, and Re-Side*. She readily describes her style as eclectic. She can be found on Twitter as @PoetrySkep.

"Chicken Feet" by Jean Bohuslav

sucking on chicken feet as we left the table
she murmured "so sweet"
her eyes never leaving the pile of bones

blood gorging mites living under fowl's scaly legs
all swollen and knobby flooded my mind

the day after hospital she was hanging
washing out when christopher the pekin rooster
ran the length of lawn to attack her ankles

my ugg boot intercepted the blighter

sending him flying

i should have been the one with the pegs

next visit when collecting eggs
he attacked with full force
went through my gum boot
in behind the ankle bone with that long spur
had to stop all the flapping to twist it out

kama
just made the drive home after a tetanus shot
passed out crawling up the passage
maybe christopher had the boot a bit too often

weeks later
the seriousness of the phone call was not recognized
if it was
would it have changed anything?

those chicken feet specialities came to an end

many gifts presented themselves in shops
for her at christmas
she would have loved the blue dress

[“Emily as We Put Paintings on the Floor” by Darren C. Demaree](#)

Ungloved, a hand
can be our only art,
even if we blink

& even if we blink
if will still be art
if it's holding the slant

against another hand.
If we lean on
the world

& the world removes
itself, the physics

of our coupling

will be test only.
That doesn't mean
it won't be beautiful.

“Path of Thunder: A Continuation of a Long Trail of Stubborn Men” by Ebuka Evans

*“be gone apprentice,
i left my gong and stick
at the sacred grotto
of mother idoto
for you and your ilk
for generations of town criers”
-Chris Okigbo*

bodies swirl like birds caught in cardiac arrest on flight
ninety kilograms of camouflage and ammunition cause dust to go to god
like hot air balloons & in a mini space above oceans and sea gods
i invoke a little deity with cornstarch in his breath his words powdery, sugary
this bare I stand in a stony grotto crackling with old skulls and empty femur
remember when I fell at *Opi* as sacrifice at a crossroad to please the gods
of confusion. the spell calabash is clasped by an angel-ou in this grotto where a bird begins
to ascend

a body rises like splashes of water unity lies in the fall a ghost as black as tar
lays flat on the path carrying sojourners on its belly a water body feels good (immune to
grenades)
wet breath with a fear for suction pipes & deserts.

“Threshold” by Sandra Fees

Stumbling upon the smile
of fox eyes at the jagged

edges of dark
the agile limbs poised

at the threshold of seasons
breath held

our bodies mutually reticent

our muzzles full of light and dark

mouthed life and death.

The winter fur is rust

red as my sister's wavy hair

and I think of her winding

her way in the wild habitat

of each small injury:

loss of sight, loss of love—

each illuminating a mystery

curious as my hand

reaching across the clearing

as if to stroke

the lengthening silk of her.

“1H (Hydrogen)” by Catherine Fletcher

shake the globe

how many possible states

so abundant

atomic flood

of primordial combustibility

primary H

this

universe is no plane

it heaves

ripples

in invisible

concentric spheres

feeding

one

photon

one e

merging waves

jumping

orbit to orbit

numbering

one

in fire

this omega element is

luminous so luminous in fusion

creation's proving ground H ignites Shiva-like unbecoming
present visible becoming

origins dust clouding

fallout descending

["body when horizontal" by Ambika Gupta](#)

(cw: misogyny)

lately, i am understanding how the blooms are
never symmetrical, the filament above my head
is only a phallus i have been asked to pray
to. the water in the bathroom is lush with
presence, my feet sink into the floor.
mercury everywhere is just mercury
in my mouth, soaking my dreams dry.

the last time i met a man, he asked me to lie
on my back, i was only a crier then.
he joked, a lonely joke, a popular joke —
*you do know/ that the spine is only a vegetable/
god cold-pressed/ for too long/ and stuck up
your back/ to do away/ with all that space you were taking.*

bouts of incessant laughing, eyes rolled back,
the horizontal body is most vulnerable.
i do not look up at the fire signs, at the
traffic signs, at the signs telling me to stop.
at night, i stretch into the springs of sleep,
*why is my body refused space that does not
spell danger?*

["other" by J. I. Kleinberg](#)

*Note: this is a graphic poem. The text reads as follows:

other is

not different.
I'm me
As
I am us
all of us
in one
body
full of
heart

"The Secret Diary of a Man in Exile" by Okeke Onyedika

For a friend who desires missing

Boundaries have displaced us.
& diplomacy constantly robs us: I stand by the edge of the universe,
brief & abandoned, to lend the memories the world
took away from us a new room to breathe. Because not even death
is ordinary.
In another room, a man cries out for the
misfortune that has befallen his homeland. His brown skin,
stained by the cheap paints of the prison wall
is a sad proof of a miserable past. Of unpromising future.
I sit on his bare chest—a tripwire, to write tributes to those
who misunderstood our kiss for farewell.
How do I—a boy of yesterday, tell what secret thunder
hid in the strength of the rain? I crave for a home erected
with these scattered gravels that sky a father's grave;
so when the night creatures feed my room with elegy, when bombs and their
mournful screams approach my doorstep with pictures on my wall
posing with unfamiliar style & every echo in the radio
reminding me of what god has been awakened:
I will lay my body quietly under the soil & sing the dust to sleep.

"hot" Ron Riecki

The turkeys came again
when I was playing basketball
on a court where the rim was locked
with chains, the net enslaved, the town's hatred

of basketball players, near the marina,
where the bourgeoisie sit bored

on their floating porches, one yelling to me
after I made a shot, *Yaaaaaaay!*, sarcasm,
as if exercise is a waste, as if all that matters

is large middle-class windows and their saws
that constantly destroy the quiet, building
onto homes that do not need to be

built on, and the turkeys come again.
I thought they were ducks. I don't know birds.
I just know there were eight little ones. Were.

Now seven. I look for the one who last week
had the fishhook caught in his beak, how
a father and son stood staring down at it,

doing nothing, just staring, as if they just
wanted to enjoy the helplessness, leaving it
alone once they were bored with the blood.

I went over, basketball tucked in my bilingual
armpit, the heat like fangs. The other turkeys
had given up, had circled this little thing

and then quit, leaving it to struggle, the fishing
line wrapped around branches, the child-bird
kicking, then quitting, then kicking, trying

to escape the trash of the world, and so I took out
my keys and sawed silently at the line,
the bird silent too, then suddenly going mad

with desperation, then collapsing, silent again, so I quit
with the line, instead hacking at the stacked branches,
not caring if my car keys would be destroyed,

and I cut through and the tiny turkey ran off,
the line following behind it, worried it'd get caught
somewhere else, but it was gone, quick, violent,

brutal with escape, then silence, then saws, more saws,
saws saws saws. I turned and went back to the court,
shot around with my skeletal body, sunburned. A week later,

the turkeys came back. I watched them, the one bird
gone, all these other beaks clean with dirt. And then, as if
this court is haunted with strangeness, a flare shot straight

into the sky. I watched, a weak star falling back to this
hot earth, landing in the water. I saw a couple staring
at the shoreline on the other side, intense, one pulling out

a phone, holding it up, filming. I thought maybe someone
was drowning. Why film that? I walked towards them and saw
the fire, how the shoreline was bloody with flames, the bushes

like straw, California as kindling, how the smoke was crashing
into the nearby homeless tents. And my girlfriend had left me
two days ago, told me she couldn't handle any more of my broken

pieces. I thought of something a creative writing teacher of mine
had said: *I find it funny how after someone gets divorced, suddenly
they want to start getting involved in social justice. They're doing it*

*for themselves, to brag, to feel good about themselves. It's all sub-
text. Read it.* He stood in front a chalkboard, no chalk anywhere in sight,
as if chalk was extinct, his jaw showing years of alcoholism. And I

almost didn't do anything, almost went back to shooting around, as if
he was right, but he's wrong. The vice of advice. All I know is:
there are a billion colors in the world. I ran towards the fire, a jogger

heading in the opposite direction, no mask, as if the pandemic is just
a short story; I yelled to him, asking if he had a phone, my nurse's mask
stuck to the sweat of my mouth. I told him to report the fire. *What fire?*

I pointed, ran away from him, got to it, the alarms in the far distance,
and just started stomping down, not knowing what I was doing, no fire
training, no fire guidance, no fire Bibles, no fire knowledge, no fire

tongue in my fireless head. I noticed my shoes getting hot. The smoke

entered into the cave of my mouth so that I struggled to breathe, ran
to the water, jumped in, my shoes soaked, ran back, figuring soaking wet

tennis shoes would be hard to burn, and I started kicking, stomping,
the flames swallowing my body, everything useless, this revelation
at how hell can't be stopped, not even paused, how hell just creates more

hell, how my feet were burning, even wet, boiling, how I gave up, looked up,
saw the engines, multiple, the sky an art gallery of clouds, the water cyanotic
behind me, and the way these machines came straight at me, furious, with

the heat,

now,

always increasing

“When your Body outruns a Country” by Iheoma Uzomba

this is love-making/ and you must not moan
percussively/ must not let your music

outplay the blues/ for this is how we beat
the world/ silently like chest-thumping

only I mistake your fingers/ for blades
in the dark/ and oh, hunny, this is how

you thrust the fear of every new Nigeria
out of your bones/ harder, harder

until you're all red with regrets/ until
this is no longer a blue film/ and you're

halfly whole on the porcelain floor/ gathering
what breaths remain from your blood pool.

“red delicious” by D. S. Waldman

the way a chill which had
before just been minor
dread descends in full
over and around them

naked in a spring pasture

choice falls away
until there is only
the closing of space between
two bodies a near twitch

of grass what brought

flesh to the lips what said *bite*
departs just as it came
slowly dissolving into dream
into the plain notion

that desire's engine

its wind and valves and tiny
mouth belongs has always
to them they kiss now afraid
though neither knows why

[“Before fire, her lips were not sunken” by Paula Willie-Okafor, August’s Featured Poet](#)

(An ode to Leah Sharibu)

Come girl residue
womaned out thing
woven into a night perforated
Girl who learned unstitched blood & tears
& rust & the promise of sudden stillness
blackness & rust
the crust of lostness
teethed gentle

Do you sometimes wonder if you had
said the words halved your tongue
tasted (unnamable)
learned to arrange the broken pretty
Or did you know it took too long
piecing and the body knew its
grafted bits anyway the heft of them

Come girl & gather
Your mother does not leave you unsung
she kneads you into odes mangled

Sing prayers in contralto
sing amen amen

Paula's Commentary on "Before fire, her lips were not sunken":

I remember first reading about Leah Sharibu in a newspaper. She stayed on my mind for several weeks after; I wanted to understand the weight of what she did, refusing to denounce her faith in the face of what must have been unspeakable terror. That sort of strength, I think, is otherworldly, past our humanity and our frailty, and yet resides in a place that could only be human, a place I believe God too resides. I constantly pictured myself in that position and every scenario had me succumbing, because what other choice is there? Leah's story resonated with me for two reasons, one being simply because she is incredible. The other is she helped me realize that because she, a girl like me, had that sort of courage, I had to have it too. It is an unsettling and beautiful discovery. For me, this poem is not centered on the Boko Haram threats or religious tensions in my country. It does not seek to outline the experience of being at the mercy of terrorists, the depth of which I will never understand and which I could therefore never express. It is also by no means undermining the experience of the 109 other girls, whose resilience I stand in awe of. I only wanted to honor an incredible girl's bravery in the little way I knew how.

Editor-in-Chief Christine Taylor's Commentary on "Before fire, her lips were not sunken":

Every time I read Paula's poem, I get chills, and yes, one cannot (and should not) divorce the work from its greater context of the violence that Boko Haram has inflicted on women in Nigeria. But the chilling part of this poem for me is the personal connection that Paula infuses into the poem, the reaching out to tie herself to Leah and to honor her courage in standing up for her faith. One of this poem's resonating questions for me is, "What does it mean to keep ourselves whole?" I don't know that this question has an answer, or maybe the answer shifts depending on the situation. But I do know that as a black woman, I find myself having to answer this question to greater and lesser extents practically every day. I often wonder if my voice saves or betrays me. So, this is where I have entered Paula's poem, yet there are so many entry points in this work, hence why we decided to feature it in this issue.

"Inheritance"

In their poem "Dystychipaphobia, or Fear of Accidents," **CD Eskilson** examines fear and anxiety and traces it through their family's past.

“Dystychipaphobia, or Fear of Accidents” by CD Eskilson

My father flies through windshield
as a baby, a bloody smear that
never speaks.

Rather, that’s the future
that his mother sees when rear-ended
at the grocery store. She grips him

like a pail and scoops beach sand
down his throat. Spades fear
to form his bones. He teaches me

to drive with fingers kinked across
a lap, fried nerves scrambling for release.

::

I crouch inside my mother and do nothing
as we tumble through the dune grass;

her back snakewrists to keep the car door
off me, arms tatter into ancient scrolls.

At birth I brace for impact,
splay legs into an axle.

::

In 2002 a morning fog engulfs
the freeway, 200 cars colliding
into fish kill. Passengers

stuck captive behind fanged glass
while metal shrieks, oil ribbons
out in streams.

Years later here my sibling
sits, a plum tossed on the roadside.

As children I would crawl inside

their bed, body rolling over theirs—

again they tense and shoulder weight,
try to keep themselves from tearing.

::

Dropped stone plummets through
the surf, the coastline sieged by sea. Dashboard

stops the plummet of my jaw, my wreckage scattered
through the ripples. I haven't found a proper way
to crash yet—

to plunge into a grinning wave,
to plunge like knife and pluck at thread

and feel lineage unravelling.

I linger like a closed mouth in the driveway,
will do anything to move.

CD's Commentary on "Dystychipaphobia, or Fear of Accidents":

This poem grew out of a prompt to discuss the circumstances of one's birth. The poem diverged over time to become more interested in the circumstances of my anxiety, and then the circumstances of my family's collective anxiety. In revision, I felt the rippling of events through generations and forms of inherited trauma emerge as the center of the poem. The inheritance of disaster found a home here.

The focus on car accidents feels specific to my family history. I am a third-generation resident of Los Angeles — the land known as Tovaangar by the Gabrieleño/Tongva people — and the area's traffic is infamous. LA is one of the most car-accident prone cities in America. Bad car wrecks are incredibly common to witness, let alone experience for oneself. The potential for violence is nearly constant when navigating the city. One must also acknowledge the violence of displacement communities of color faced when these freeways were constructed. Growing up, I developed my own anxiety about this reality of living here. I also absorbed the fears of family members. The freeways are a magnet for intrusive thoughts.

I hoped to replicate the legacy of anxiety and violence in the poem's form. The indents are jagged and jarring, injecting energy into the lines. The sections draw attention to the litany of accidents and fears. To break the poem into shards, too.

Poet Biographies

Jean Bohuslav enjoys being part of a poetry group living on the Surf Coast of Torquay, Victoria, Australia. She is surprised by what the written word uncovers at times. Jean paints, exhibiting in Regional Victoria and teaches mindfulness philosophy at U3A – (University of the Third Age), an interest which influences all areas of her life. She aims at bringing out her first book of poetry soon.

Darren C. Demaree is the author of fourteen poetry collections, most recently *Unfinished Murder Ballads* (October 2020, Backlash Press). He is the recipient of a 2018 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award, the Louis Bogan Award from Trio House Press, and the Nancy Dew Taylor Award from Emrys Journal. He is the Managing Editor of the Best of the Net Anthology and Ovenbird Poetry. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children. Find him on Twitter: @d_c_demaree

CD Eskilson (they/them) is a queer nonbinary poet, editor, and educator from Los Angeles. Their work appears or is forthcoming in *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Barren Magazine*, and *Redivider*, among others. CD is Poetry Editor for *Exposition Review* and reads for *Split Lip Magazine*. They are an MFA candidate at the University of Arkansas. Find them at cdeskilson.com and on Twitter at @CdEskilson.

Ebuka Evans is a Nigerian poet. He currently studies English and Literature at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Déraciné*, *Third Coast*, *Rigorous*, *20.35 Africa: An Anthology*, and elsewhere. Find him on Facebook @Chukwuebuka Evans

Sandra Fees (she/her) is the author of *The Temporary Vase of Hands* (Finishing Line Press, 2017). She served a term as Berks County Poet Laureate (2016-2018), and her work has appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *New Madrid*, *Poets Reading the News*, and *The Blue Nib*.

Catherine Fletcher is a Virginia-based writer. Recent work has appeared in journals such as *Hopkins Review*, *Entropy*, *New Contrast*, and *Burning House Press*, among others. She was a TWP Science and Religion fellow at Arizona State University from 2016-18 and has earned grants from Queens Council on the Arts, the Brooklyn Arts Council, and the AEV Foundation. She served for a decade as Director of Poetry Programs at the New York-based organization, City Lore, specializing in the grassroots poetry of immigrant communities. She also was Managing Director of the Los Angeles-based Ghost Road Company and served on the organizing committee of the Edge of the World Theater Festival, which highlighted the work of Los Angeles' small theatres.

Ambika Gupta (she/her) is a twenty year-old Indian poet currently pursuing her undergraduate study in Bengaluru, India. When she's not busy having existential crises, she makes a lot of pasta and reads feminist and queer literature. She has previously been published in *LAMAI*, the annual literary magazine by Ukiyo Bookstore, Manipur, India. Find her on Instagram: @silversawdust

Twice nominated for Pushcart and Best of the Net awards, **J.I. Kleinberg** is an artist, poet, and freelance writer. Her poems have been published in print and online journals worldwide, including *Kissing Dynamite*, Issue 4. She lives in Bellingham, Washington, where she tears words out of magazines and posts occasionally on Instagram @jikleinberg.

Okeke Onyedika writes from Ojoto, a small town in Nigeria. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Brittle Paper*, *The Blue Nib*, *Rockvale Review*, *Deluge Journal*, *African Writer*, *Praxis Mag*, *Tuck*, *1870* & others. Currently, he is a final year student of Sociology/Anthropology in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Ron Riecki's books include *I have been warned not to write about this* (Main Street Rag), *Nijji* (Cyberwit, co-written with Sally Brunk), *My Ancestors are Reindeer Herders and I Am Melting in Extinction* (Apprentice House Press), *Posttraumatic* (Hoot 'n' Waddle), and *U.P.* (Ghost Road Press). Riecki co-edited *Undocumented* (Michigan State University Press) and *The Many Lives of The Evil Dead* (McFarland), and edited *The Many Lives of It* (McFarland), *And Here* (MSU Press), *Here* (MSU Press, Independent Publisher Book Award), and *The Way North* (Wayne State University Press, Michigan Notable Book).

Iheoma Uzomba is currently a student of English and Literary Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Aside from losing herself to literary pieces and travelling from world to world in the books she reads, she takes writing to be lifestyle. Her works are featured or are forthcoming in *Lit break*, *Fact-Simile Editions*, *Dreich Magazine*, *The Muse (a creative and critical print journal)* and elsewhere.

D.S. Waldman (he/him) is a writer living on Kumeyaay land, in San Diego, California, where he teaches creative writing. His work has most recently appeared in *Poetry International*, *The Los Angeles Review*, and *Foothill*. In 2019, he received two Pushcart Prize nominations and was selected by Ishion Hutchinson as winner of the Foothill Editor's Prize. He holds a BA from Middlebury College and is currently enrolled in the MFA program at San Diego State University.

Paula Willie-Okafor (she/her) is a student of the University of Nigeria. Her work has appeared in *Praxis Magazine* and *The Muse (A Journal of Critical and Creative Writing)*, Nsukka. She enjoys photography, comics, social commentary and hanging out with her sisters. She hopes to be a teacher.

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