

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 25 JANUARY 2021: "REFLECTION"

Join our poets in Issue 25 "Reflection" as they take us on journeys that ask us to pause and think.

This month's featured poet is Koss.

Issue 25 includes work by Samuel A. Adeyemi, Norah Brady, Caroliena Cabada, Rosa Canales, Aiden Heung, Tiffany Hsieh, Koss, Avalon Felice Lee, Amy Li, Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo, John C. Polles, and Evy Shen. And Saba Keramati is featured in "Prayer" to make it a baker's dozen.

### Featured Artist—Bill Wolak

Bill Wolak has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled *All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages and photographs have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Baldhip Magazine*, *Barfly Poetry Magazine*, *Ragazine*, and *Cardinal Sins*. His collages and photographs have appeared recently in the 2020 International Festival of Erotic Arts (Chile), 2020 Seattle Erotic Art Festival, the 2020 Dirty Show in Detroit, the 2020 Rochester Erotic Arts Festival, the 2018 Montreal Erotic Art Festival, and Naked in New Hope 2018.

### "Spectacle" by Samuel A. Adeyemi

*Perhaps grace is a tangible thing / only to the one  
who watches another bleed. —Pamilerin Jacob*

I watch her weep regret on the kitchen tile, her  
tears dropping like a sequence of loose beads.  
She ricochets between two tongues, cursing &  
supplicating—she rebukes the devil in English,  
begs the Lord in Yoruba; a kind of balance, I'd  
presume. On days like this, I swear hope is just  
torture euphemised, softened to keep the body  
from crumbling. But what really do I know?

Stupid boy. Stupid, passive boy. I cannot trim  
off the sadness threading my mother's eyes.

“carrion song” by Norah Brady

*against Turgenev*

*The tiny space I occupy is so infinitesimal  
in comparison with the rest of space, which  
I don't occupy and which has no relation to me.*

— Turgenev, Fathers and Sons

the ravens have made themselves useful  
covering me with their noise, which means: *I'm hungry, I'm lonely, come want me,*  
or: *here, here, here*  
I am becoming one of the deep mountain pools,  
the ones silent with secrecy, mud dripping from their toes like rosary beads  
the ones with one foot out of the grave, attempting to become woman again

oh, I'm sorry, can I not be looked at?  
has sound made a mirror of me?  
the world stretches out like a held breath, it shimmers  
like roadkill, of course, which is why the ravens are here

“I imagine turning to stare into the face” by Caroliena Cabada

of the future                      grasping  
air between fingers    holding

not hands    they're slipping  
wide eyes stinging    from staring

at a    distant              full    moon  
you exist    you're right

in front of me              what chest burst  
feeling              ripe pomegranate split skin

seeds inside              soft and sprouting  
germinating    in its own    dissolving

flesh              that's the feeling

of the future           dusting

right behind           me  
I'll gasp           and mourn    at the sight

“Birdsong for the Moon” by Rosa Canales

He says that I cannot love  
Like I cannot eat, that I am a bird

Picking at my food, stale crackers  
And musty cheese, and at our silence,

Scraping together pieces of lint  
And tired laughter. A nest to rest these bones.

But he knows nothing of what happens  
At night, an open window and how I open

My mouth when she comes.  
The moon at my lips, a scallop melting

In my mouth. Fried and buttered,  
Marinated for hours in a pot behind the sun.

She swirls her hips—skin stirred  
And steeped in the drizzle of a summer

Breeze, her flesh filling the lonely cavity  
Between my thighs. This, he thinks

He understands when I curl into the warmth  
His chest provides and peck his neck bloody,

But he cannot feel how I sink my teeth  
Into hers—sizzling and translucent, the flesh

Of glowing nightmares. Rock my bony hips,  
Hold her hand until she is peeled back

With the yellow skin of morning,  
And I am left to gather my nest,

To rise with his lips—the bitterness  
Of the day coating my mouth like fish oil.

“Every Map of the City” by Aiden Heung

I’m here, a dot on the map, moving somewhere,  
always moving, knowing not  
the south from the north, well it happens,  
the city goes in all directions but I  
tread on straight lines, five kilometers per hour  
and I thought I could at least know  
something about the city  
or myself  
surrounded by shops restaurants and parks.  
There are always boundaries, things unfathomable,  
and eating an ice cream  
feels like a revolution when the city dictates heat.  
Maybe I should walk in a circle to meet myself  
and say hello say I’m sorry  
but we can never escape to the sea  
(It’s there, blue on the map)  
Maybe I should fold the map to feel a bit  
dimensional or emotional  
for I’ve spent ten years webbed into the streets.  
Last night I dreamed  
I drove on octopus highways to the edge.  
I woke up remembering I couldn’t drive at all.

“I Spy” by Tiffany Hsieh

I can eat six braised eggs in one day. They are prettier than strawberry ice cream. Sometimes I swallow watermelon seeds too and my friend says they’ll grow trees in my belly. I secretly wish she’s right. She lives with her ah-ma who makes her eat goji berries and sends her to Japan every summer. My ah-ma, the one who lives with us, has never been to Japan. She’s always in her room listening to old Taiwanese songs on the radio when really I know she’s spying on us. What’s for dinner. Did Ma use the right soy sauce. How many eggs I ate. After school I hide under the piano in our living room and spy on her from behind the cover. Where she puts her teeth. Is she hiding snacks under the bed. Why her underwear is so big. Everybody says I’m lucky to have double eyelids like hers but they don’t spy what I spy. She snores at night and farts during the day.

“A Dyke Cowgirl Takes Herself on a COVID Taco Bell Date” by Koss, January’s Featured Poet

All the single ones in the Taco Bell parking lot,  
cars strung in a line, like beach people, lonely  
in the COVID cluster. One guy sips a Coke through a crook  
straw, occasionally checking out the others, flings chips  
at the seagulls through an open window. They say  
Mexican pizza is on its way out. Another thing to feel  
sad about. I only occasionally indulged, once  
in five years, but attach my sadness to its demise—  
like flies on the week-old taco bits, curb-blown, missed  
by the gulls. The drive-thru is jammed from dawn to close,  
a not-quite-palpable girl voice calls me “honey bunny,”  
eager to take my order. Two bean burritos with sour cream,  
diet Coke, light-on-the-ice—less than five bucks.  
I was always a cheap date. Hand a five to a large hairy man  
in glittery bunny ears fixed to a plastic tiara, singing into his mask,  
hump dancing, and in-the-moment-happy. They work sixty hours  
with overtime that inches them just out of the poverty bracket  
if you discount health insurance. Essential American fast food  
to get us through the pandemic. Disposable workers. Yet here I sit  
in my car, and this meal is all I’ve got today.  
The honey-voiced girl passes me my Coke  
and sticker-sealed bag in a plastic, no-touch container.  
I feel a bit like a shit, as I, unlike them, am not essential,  
and am without song, without bunny ears shedding  
their glitter into the exhaust-filled air.

**Koss’s Commentary on “A Dyke Cowgirl Takes Herself on a COVID Taco Bell Date”:**

Loosely based on real events (a small-town queer’s small COVID adventure)—and a poetic expression of how capitalist values manifest in the pandemic, this Taco Bell poem touches on labor exploitation, pandemic isolation, consumerism, and the absurdity of these junctions, while simultaneously celebrating the power of the human spirit.

**Editor-in-Chief Christine Taylor’s Commentary on “A Dyke Cowgirl Takes Herself on a COVID Taco Bell Date”:**

The editorial team loved Koss's "slice of life" piece as soon as it came over the transom. And some of the big questions that Koss deals with in this poem are ones that I myself have been wrestling with since the start of the pandemic, namely what defines "essential" and what space

does that hold in our lives, both privately and publicly? Our essential workers are often ill-paid—how are we justifying the risks that they take on the frontline every day?

“Aubade to San José” by Avalon Felice Lee

& I must go now.

    But dusk reclaims the hours  
and you catch me  
    in your palms; rinse my ears  
with an ancestor fable  
    about a caped girl lost,  
how a wolf’s mandible clapped faster  
    than a bullet learned its wings.

& I am back in your palms.

    I cast an iris beyond the knuckle roof  
to watch the lone firefly flicker  
    out of your reach.  
In my months as your secret,  
    these hands kneaded avenue chalk  
through your belly, and if you must  
    know one thing, know this:  
they were not stretch marks  
    but a continent of elms.

“I Calculate Grief in Seconds” by Amy Li

I mouth a body, then an elegy. As if our hollow  
is enough to hold our limbs tangent as shorelines.

I run. I scrub my tongue until it bleeds and count seconds  
and throw glass out windows and kill butterflies simply

for existing. I paint layers of bitter mint atop your burnt  
sugar, submerged midnight, body-smothered-as-bird

could-have-been-except-we-couldn’t-part-the-tide-  
like-Moses-you-should’ve-been-Moses-but-instead-you-are-

a-woman taste. I have belonged to grief in this lifetime, watched  
the clocks until they peeled from the walls & intoxicated

me with their bare hands. I run not because I'm being chased but because I like the burn. All the corpses around me are kaleidoscopes of blue. Butterfly wings

now black butter soup for the birds to pick at. My fingers tap syllables sounding like celebration, but you know better. The world whirs,

whizzes, colors fractured at their lineages. Families and families of faces. I close my eyes and there's a kaleidoscope of light.

I open them and there's a kaleidoscope on the processes of dying. All the bodies I know are always already buried when I get there, but I like to blame that

on traffic. I realize all the glass has already been thrown out the windows, so I sit criss-cross-apple-sauce & pop bubble wrap like bubble

gum & I am the power of the kind of indirection that doesn't bleed & such is the sum of daughter, and daughter.

["At Agadez" by Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo](#)

At Agadez, all I dreamt of was the blueness of the sea,  
Histories at the sea bed; the photographs already losing their faces,

The screams no one could hear, the earrings, baby shoes, bracelets  
Medium-sized undies, letters that couldn't get to their recipients, diaries.

I dreamt; my mouth full of salty fluid, bloody sink, death trying  
To give me mouth to mouth resuscitation, I dreamt seeing

Dunes with many heads waiting for me at the shore, maybe red flags,  
Telling me I am unwanted or a gutter grave or dry sticks

To send me back in ashes, I woke to a soaked pillow, watered bed  
And the song of the crickets warning against the sea.

["Boy" by John C. Polles](#)

For a year,  
I tried  
to write down everything  
I wanted to say to you.

They told me to do that—  
Write a letter, but  
don't send it.

It's *cathartic*.

Letter after poem—  
Poem after letter—

It never worked.

It wasn't enough.  
I wanted you to know  
what you did.

But I  
needed  
to know that you cared—

Did you?

I couldn't work out how to  
make the

everything

into something—

Anything  
that didn't make me feel as  
crazy  
as you told me I was.

I just didn't know how.

But, boy,  
I knew you.

I knew he fucked you up—  
You showed me the pictures  
on your phone.  
I wondered what it was like



to carry them around  
in your pocket  
every day.

I knew it wasn't easy—  
I knew.

I knew how you felt love—  
and how you felt it fast.

Boy, I knew you.

“Flight Instinct” by Evy Shen

The watermelon guy is back with the tongue  
of my clock. Underneath my window, he forces

his deformed fruits into ears of  
pedestrians with the glibness of a broken country.

The supermarket blares a pastel, a pale shade of nostalgia or  
maybe it's poison but mothers form mirror-long lines

to cash their disquietude, to see their faces not as a relic  
but as a foreigner. Leaden fog drapes across the city

a silken layer of film settled atop chilled congee over  
this machine. I swallow the sun: salted duck egg yolk

heathered in the creek, breaths of playground  
dreams slick against my neck. I submerge myself

and see the children's feet kicking as pickled plums.  
Next morning, I will kneel over the algae on

the bridge across my flat, pressed against the  
shrunken asphalt, stretching to heaven. Or maybe to

the basketball court and its lantanas on the sidewalk.  
The blistering cafeteria. I can profess to my fingers spilling

across the atlas, my heart shuttering at every stop.

But it's all the same. My uncle will drive his black hearse,  
smoking cigarettes and honking his horn at old ladies. I ride  
bus 353, show up to my grandmother's and play poker  
on a square table matted with sweat, devour her  
as metal and paper. Always stuck in this bubble, waiting  
to undress the outskirts, always hungry. I want to  
taste the cropped electricity and trace the cranes beyond  
the window. I want erasure of the knee-deep morass of home—  
everything uprooted and divested of their rest.

### Prayer

In her poem "American Sonnet for the New Democratic Administration, **Saba Keramati** asks:  
"Does one always need a reason to critique America? Does that reason always need to be a  
tragic one?"

["American Sonnet for the New Democratic Administration, or Everyone Celebrates and I  
Pray" by Saba Keramati](#)

*after Terrance Hayes*

Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
Please don't bomb my country.  
My father still lives there.

**Saba's Commentary on "American Sonnet for the New Democratic Administration, or  
Everyone Celebrates and I Pray":**

I wrote this poem as a response to the results of the 2020 presidential election. I watched as people reacted with joy to the news. Their joy was not necessarily misplaced after the past four years, but I personally felt a profound sense of loss. The truth is that I refuse to celebrate an American president. Although I was born here, America has never been anything but an oppressive force to me and my family abroad. In writing this sonnet, I was interested in what the first twelve lines mean on their own as a repeated prayer, versus when that line is contrasted with an explanation in the final couplet. Does one always need a reason to critique America? Does that reason always need to be a tragic one?

## Poet Biographies

**Samuel A. Adeyemi** (he/him) is a young writer from Nigeria. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Palette Poetry*, *Frontier Poetry*, *580 Split*, *Leavings Lit Mag*, *The Shore*, *The Rising Phoenix Review*, *African Writer*, *The African Writers Review*, *Jalada*, and elsewhere. When he is not writing, he enjoys watching anime and listening to a variety of music. You may reach him on Twitter and Instagram @samuelpoetry

Twitter: [twitter.com/samuelpoetry](https://twitter.com/samuelpoetry)

Instagram: [instagram.com/samuelpoetry](https://www.instagram.com/samuelpoetry)

**Norah Brady** is a moon enthusiast, haunted house, and mountain poet. They were a runner-up for Youth Poet Laureate of Boston in 2020. Their poetry and short fiction can be found in *Rookie* magazine, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and the *Blue Marble Review*, with work forthcoming in *COUNTERCLOCK* and *Body Without Organs*. Norah lives in Boston, MA.

**Caroliena Cabada** is a writer currently based in Ames, Iowa. Her poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *As It Ought To Be Magazine*, *perhappened mag*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Lumiere x Elysian's* special Advocacy issue, and elsewhere. Find her on Twitter and Instagram @cecaroliena.

**Rosa Canales** is a recent graduate of Denison University. Her work has previously appeared in *Lammergeier*, *Capsule Stories*, *perhappened mag*, *Second Chance Lit* and others.

Twitter: @rosacan9

Instagram: @rosacan

**Aiden Heung** is a Chinese queer poet born and raised on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau. He writes about his personal past in a Tibetan Autonomous Town and the city of Shanghai where he currently lives. His words appeared or forthcoming in *The Australian Poetry Journal*, *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, *Poet Lore*, *Rust & Moth*, *Parentheses*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *The Brooklyn Review* among many other places. He is a reader of world literature. He can be found

on Twitter @AidenHeung. Visit his website for more information: <http://www.aidenheung.com/>

**Tiffany Hsieh** was born in Taiwan and moved to Canada at the age of fourteen with her parents. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Malahat Review*, *Passages North*, *Poet Lore*, *Room*, *Salamander*, *The Shanghai Literary Review*, *Sonora Review*, and others. She lives in southern Ontario with her husband and their dog.

**Saba Keramati** (she/hers) is a Chinese-Iranian poet from the San Francisco Bay Area. She holds degrees in English and Creative Writing from University of Michigan and UC Davis, where she was a Dean's Graduate Fellow in Creative Arts. During her MFA program, Saba was awarded the Elliot Gilbert Prize and an Honorable Mention in the Celeste Turner Wright Prize sponsored by the Academy of American Poets. Nominated for a Pushcart Prize, her work has appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Barren Magazine*, *Anomaly*, and elsewhere.

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/sabzi\\_k](https://twitter.com/sabzi_k)

**Koss** is a queer non-binary poet/writer/artist with she/they/them pronouns. Find their work in *Hobart*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Spillway*, *Diode Poetry*, *Five Points*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *The Lumiere Review* and many others. They also have work in or forthcoming in *Best Small Fictions 2020*, a Diode anthology, and *Kissing Dynamite's Punk Anthology*. Koss's hybrid book, *One for Sorrow*, is due out in early 2021 from Negative Capability Press. Find more Koss on Twitter @Koss51209969, Instagram @koss\_singular, and <http://koss-works.com>.

**Avalon Felice Lee** is an Asian American Californian. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Right Hand Pointing*, *American High School Poets National Poetry Quarterly*, *Plum Recruit Mag*, *The Aurora Review*, *The Foreedge Review*, and elsewhere. You can find her and her kitten, Esky, on Instagram at @avalonfelicelee.

**Amy Li** (she/her) is a young writer and artist from Georgia. She edits for *The Augment Review*, and her work appears in or is forthcoming in *Gone Lawn*, *Lumiere Review*, and *Biological Creatures*, among others. Though her favorite activity is probably procrastinating, she also adores winter walks, binging TV shows, and sweet tea.

**Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo** is a Nigerian poet & a Veterinary Medical Student, whose first love is art making. His works have been featured or are forthcoming in *Night Heron Barks Review*, *Poesis Literary Journal*, *Praxis Magazine*, *The Citron Review*, *433 Magazine*, *WriteNow Lit*, *Stand Magazine* (University of Leeds), *Louisiana Literature*, *Olongo Africa*, *Obsidian: Literature and Art of African Diaspora*, and *BBPC July 2019* anthology and elsewhere. Find him on Twitter @FasasiDiipo

**John C. Polles** (he/they) is a freelance editor from Northeast Ohio. He holds a B.A. in English from Kent State University at Stark, where he served as Editor-in-Chief of *Canto: A Magazine for Literature & Art*; John's fiction has appeared in *Luna Negra* and was excerpted in *Fusion Magazine*. You can follow him on Instagram @johnnypanick.

**Evy Shen** (she/her) is a high school junior from Georgia. Her writing has been published in or is forthcoming in *Penn Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Blue Marble Review*, and elsewhere. Her favorite places to travel to are Suzhou, China and SoHo, New York. When she is not writing, she is outside with her family enjoying God's beautiful nature. Find her on Twitter @helloevy2

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