

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 26 FEBRUARY 2021: "NORTH STAR"

Welcome to Issue 26 "North Star." A cultural and literal symbol for generations, the North Star is an ever-present guide to lead us to our destination, to lead us home.

This month's featured poet is Danielle P. Williams.

Issue 26 includes work by Ayesha Asad, Jane Ayres, Gillian Ebersole, Matthew Johnson, Jasmine Kapadia, Youngseo Lee, Stella Lei, Chikamobi Okoloeze Orjichukwu, Samia Saliba, Amy Wang, Danielle P. Williams, and Iris Yu. And Olákitán Aládésuyì is featured in "In My Image" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist—Martins Deep

Martins Deep (he/him) is a Nigerian poet, artist, & and currently a student of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. His works deeply explores the African experience of the boy/girl child. His creative works have appeared, or are forthcoming on *FIYAH*, *The Roadrunner Review*, *Barren Magazine*, *Cream City Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *Agbowó Magazine*, *Surburban Review*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, *FERAL*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Kalopsia Literary Journal*, *Whaleroad Review*, *Kalahari Review*, & elsewhere. He loves jazz, adores Bethel Music and fantasizes reincarnating as an owl. He tweets @martinsdeep1

"The Sun Never Pointed Out That Metal Piece" by Ayesha Asad

His beard was stained straw,
smoked by desert wind & lipped
by sand. His clothes, greased,
& his dog, pale & red-rimmed,
lion eyes steered by the North star.
I watched it kick up the dust
that settled around, drag its belly
across dried green undergrowth
where the neighbor's dog waited
with barks that echoed in ringlets
across the darkening canyon.

We were parched, & our tire was whittled
clean through by sharp silver metal.
I think the stars leapt by
that evening, pinking the edge of the sky—
& what was left of the horizon settled
around his thumbs, around the whirring drills
& unlit rooftops. What rain we needed
flashed in our limbs like cut wires
sparking in arcs. Freshwater surging
in our fingertips. How can I forget
how the birds hovered in silence,
as if waiting for the sun to set
so they could drink. How can I forget
his dog, lapping at the leftover sun
scattered on my jeans. A gorgeous
longing—& he slipped his balmy hand
into it, pulled out an answer
as if he lived it.

“childhood sweetheart/sender” by Jane Ayres

growing smaller i wanted to
i really wanted to cross over into the spiced abyss
 (you should see my bookshelves)
unvarnished factfictionfictionfact
this requires special attention &

these are the days these are the days
she died in his arms wearing a coded herringbone brooch
 (that hypnotic house in Connecticut)
in what way strange? dressed in lingering black
did she hear frayed voices
 (truefriends)
on the luminous staircase
before she was pushed? or jumped?

all is well & all is well &
all this violation will pass because we love each other
just add cold water a touch of colour & stir
 (maybe I could eat my way out of this)
tempting empty trashed symmetry
 (what's in the dressing-up box today?)

slow down
you work too hard but
leave a note & *do your very best* before the grieving book-

e
n
d
s

“there are no more special occasions” by Gillian Ebersole

and that’s a relief of sorts. I saved a rose-scented bar of soap for months – when I finally used it, I told myself by the time it was gone this would be over, we would be together, I’d have an apartment and a record player and zucchini bread in the oven. I have none of that. the soap has run out. my hands are dirty, and I have grown tired of saving things. I handed you my dreams like sacred but dirty pennies, and you stretched them to paint the sky. if god is arugula, do we make salad or save it for garnish? I told you I could never escape the crib and the crypt but you made me think about a future as soft as the crack of sunlight in a new york city studio, and I believed that even when my throat burned. now every second feels like an out-of-tune orchestra.

there is something to the ache. if you are barbed wire, make me a lamb. if you are a pomegranate, make me persephone. if you are a sculptor, make me david. we made something out of all the dust and sweat, chiseled away at ourselves until there was nothing left but a glimmer of light on the ceiling. I’ve been in love with scabs since I understood the cool grass in the early morning. take the bandages from your forearms. if you were the moment when time stopped, I am the clock that fell off the wall, second hand spinning out of control. you made me look away from the ticking. one day I’ll dance you back to life. only blind grins here in our corner of the room.

my stomach turned over the day I met you, awkward and yet invincible. please laugh again. roll your eyes at me. that’s when I knew you’d meet me between my ballet slipper and the blister. mary magdalene had jesus, and I have you. when is the resurrection?

“When I Ran Away From Home and Only Took a Backpack of Rap” by Matthew Johnson

I’m fine here, watching the world pass on by in a window;
The seasons are lopped off through panels.
Flickering train-car lights shine like soft, distant stars.
The nights are ripped open, and the dawn is sewn with coffee.
Flames and fools flirt by shooting smiles at one another.
A million faces, with their darting, sleeping, and dark-circled eyes,

Overlook me.

I keep to myself. I'd rather not a group of strangers converge
On the boy who bothers no one. There's glory within the dirt floor.
After so many snows, the wheels on the railroad turn the white to black slush.
There's no other glee or satisfaction, I declare, than drowning out
To uninterrupted jazz samples from old nightclubs and cabarets.
I'm used to the shakes and swirls and sudden stops and sins of trains,
And of people; I listen to too much hip-hop.

["my piano teacher's halloween party" by Jasmine Kapadia](#)

they light my candle wax body on fire at the party and i do not wake up.

just five more minutes, i whisper to the tray of mini tacos at the buffet table. i shovel them in my mouth and pretend not to notice the already empty container beside it:

my mother's dumplings are shoved greedy into the white woman's mouth. they take them and squeeze, feigning surprise when the juice squirts out. she has leek between her two front teeth and i am obsessed with this glorious image.

someone passes me a cup of cranberry juice. i pour it over my dress. i will try to hide the stain from my mom when i get home. my skin is hot. i notice things. the white woman has pinned her bun up with chopsticks; just kidding, there is no white woman here. i have decided to stop noticing.

i catch my reflection in the mirror down the hall, pull out a few curls from my braid because i look lonely. at ten pm i have decided i will slap my left hand into the punch bowl and ruin the tablecloths because i am thirsty for something other than small talk.

sometimes when they are home i pretend i am not peeking with binoculars into their houses from the wrong side of the road. they tell me to speak english and i feed them more dumplings to shut them up.

the white woman has gotten wasted and is playing something on the piano. i catch my mom's eye across the room, "a mess." and i offer her more mini tacos. tonight i will help her take off her mascara. tonight she has forgotten about me. these days i hold my breath: the pinyin in the air is toxic.

i have swallowed the sun and now i am glowing.

["someday i'll love youngseo lee" by Youngseo Lee](#)

after frank o'hara / after roger reeves / after ocean vuong

(i)

i want a helicopter to release my ashes over gyeongbokgung, each flake hurtling like it couldn't believe it should belong in a palace. of course i am only joking. sort of. i am many things, among which i am nothing. i am two rocks posing as human. i am a motherfucking genius. i am updrift, cascade, fingers wriggling between sweaty bones. i will vomit myself into a contradiction. so read me. i have determined that nobody shall find peels loitering at my feet. afford me the decency of a trash can, a clothed one. lift my intestines out and give them a good shake, feed them back to me with a needle. i wish to be a soda can. there are things other than a heart that pulse. i imagine i'd never be found much of a lover. it depends, really – after all, i am ash, and toast at the same time, i am pulverized bone, glazed beach, quite honestly one tit. heat after a slap. saliva on a man's middle finger. not the redness in either. erotica draft. closed eyelids, holy. a theoretical whore told me we drank ethanol last night. i asked her if we tried to kill and she said no baby that's not a thing you do –

(ii)

you can't say you love me till you've been to landfill park do you
see the bus depot have you wanted to jump yes climb the jungle gym
rope structure however naming makes your sense your hands
unroped unbloomed unscraped cannot touch me go climb as high
as you can that park atop a hill was planted over a landfill meaning
you can build yourself over me and nobody will know i was here i was
joint strain where all ten fingers are stretched i was tongue caught
under permanent retainer i tried ventriloquism with my heart tried
throwing it to the bus depot but then came my entire body unraveled
to a single helix with ankle hooked on rope i wonder now if i can hang upside
down from those ropes my mother thought i grappled for god so
hard neck stone upward because i was desperate for belief bloody nose
swallowed down pharynx and she thinks i seek you god's son's son's son's
son's son's son's son's nephew's son's son's son's son's son's son's
son's son's neighbor's classmate's cousin thrice removed for the same
reason why should i believe in you what do i have to trust this park
is all i have faith in my fingers unbloodied undone my only witness to
crime if to let reconstruction bury is to kill i will have killed but not
until you've looked down at the bus depot try to find beauty where
there is a parking lot and a mountain where there is night and a blinking
light to sin is to be handcuffed to air what should i believe in it is dark
my mouth is warm and we are mortal do you see it do you see it do you
want to throw yourself just to see how far you land do you shake are

you sputtering out the woodchips in your gums no i find it hard to believe
anybody could love me without being me and i don't think anybody
loves themselves

(iii)

nevermind the boy. he drinks vanilla extract like alcohol. the water runs hot, the kitchen a farce,
and i imagine myself the lucid green of a sign off a highway in the silence churning against other
gear wheels. the boy broke the kitchen clock, and the oven clock, and the microwave clock
while i was gone to miami. he is a dog rampaging through the absent's. he is every reason i lock
my yearbooks. he is a lip on the back of my imaginary thigh. the boy is not here, and neither is
miami. he is only a child. so am i. so am i.

the day i turned eighteen i studied poisson pmfs and my mom made me eat my carrots. boy, all
your cups are stained. and i do not understand why i must crack or splinter when somewhere in
the world a cotton shirt is flapping on a clothesline after its first wash. seventy days of eighteen
have been so loud with the vacuum that kept crashing despite all the buttresses and never
minded boys. everybody was so noisy and i was not here. too busy filling with sound then
brimmed into a boy i could theoretically love. if i didn't know any better i'd think myself dead,
tomorrow if not now. but i am not. we all live alone, i think.

[“Inventory of an Empty Nest” by Stella Lei](#)

stifled sky / worn shoes seeped with cold / peeling soles / key fumbling against the rust of its
lock / serrated edge grinding metal against metal against skin / tin biting into palm / teeth
biting into tongue / bitter pennies / sour steel / empty glasses like toy soldiers, attentive to a
signal that never comes / crushed herbs / ground salt / ceiling fan slicing air into cubes that
float before they fall / creased letters / creased photos / faces fading into sepia grain / staticked
platitudes filtering through the phone, scattering to the ground like coins / moths tessellating
toward a porch light, singeing their wings on glass / a room, exhaling

[“say he died trapped in a body, in a room” by Chikamobi Okoloeze Orjichukwu](#)

in a room	where I'm everything else	except myself	where graying is smoke in motion
	it feels like light trapped between eyelids	within closed doors	as prayers said in the
heart	& as i watch my shadow mend wounds	i do not see	i begin fading
	like i was a digit in continuous division	nothing changes much	until darkness

begins its soft hug & for once i'm the beat between two heartbeats the unwholeness
child someday god will beg us or me when he the prodigal sculptor returns to meet bones
becoming dust maybe this amnesia or déjà vu maybe this clustering of eternal
fears will wade through time to whisper to the wind & the wind to seeds & the
trees to nestling birds & birds to trees or laughter to tombstone again child
it will ever be us forgotten shapes explaining the sculptor by his fingerprint & us
inordinate colourations blessed by god because the absence may only be a small hiatus

“i am no longer interested in writing poetry i am only here to dance” by Samia Saliba

we enter a room from two corners.

we enter a room from two corners

only to dance

i dance; you feed

you feed; i dance

a dark and dying stem,

we flower. ok,

it wasn't a word

i knew before. mirror,

you taught me

(it's ok i'm dying to credit;
dying to cradle a tongue)

mirror, you named me,

instead of heaven because you

wanted to see light in me, even

if only reflected

ok,

i wanted to see it too.

we enter a mouth

from two teeth,

you feed me

sound and letters, letter and sounds
mirror, mirror, mee-roar – a hair tracing my earlobe
has nothing but love

only mirrors, we dance –

only mirrors, we dance until the heart seems plausible
until a radio echo burns us a copy, ok

what is enough and where can i find it?
we enter a room only to music

to mimic a mirror
that feeds a story

a dance enough
to feed a body

a mirror enough
to feed a dance

a dance enough
to mirror what

feeds you,
to know
to be real
and choose
not to

(ok

the blushing sunstroke
and
the deep-white bite-
mark and

the space between us –

ok.)

ok.

“Bear in mind that death is a drum” by Danielle P. Williams, February’s Featured Poet

(after Langston Hughes)

Do you feel that violent
bumping in your body?

The rhythm of your
Life bolting from itself

The syncopation of your heartbeat
Drumming up death

And how are you not
Jumping out of your bones?

Stomping for God or
Second chances

When it comes for me
I'll be damned if i'm not dancing

They say if you dance good enough
The holy ghost can catch you

Carry you to a new home
Worth living for

Meantime we're still here
Still dancing

Awaiting death like altar call

Listening to life like a
Signal to start the song

And when the drums roll for me
And boom-cats a groove worth dancing for

Worth dying for

We'll be here
Waiting at Gods door

Danielle's Commentary on "Bear in mind that death is a drum":

When I write poems, I read the lines out loud, as if performing them while simultaneously figuring out all of the different ways in which I want the lines to sing. I am very intentional when it comes to how each poem sounds. With *Bear in mind that death is a drum*, I am of course paying homage to the great Langston Hughes, but also trying to understand how music itself is a life, a beat, a pause, a little life wanting to be acted out by the living. As a writer and musician, I am obsessed with how song and lyric informs life's traumas. And the longer I think about it, death *is* a drum; it is both loud and quiet, both hard and soft, both the beginning and the end of something. And so, this poem is evocative of the finality of a sound once it has left the hands of its musician. The air in one's lungs once it has left the body. It's about the joy in drumming and dancing and living, despite knowing what happens when the song ends. Despite knowing that death is inevitable.

Assistant Editor Zora Satchell's Commentary on "Bear in mind that death is a drum":

When this came across my desk as I was going through the submissions, I was immediately impressed by Williams' work. "Bear in mind that death is a drum" is after "Drum" by Langston Hughes. In the original piece, the drum music is a literal death march that is never ended. Whether we are aware of it or not, we all march forward to its beat answering its call. In Williams' piece, the music of death takes on joy. "Listening to life like a/Signal to start the song"—You cannot help but dance, dance as hard as you can so the holy ghost may catch you and "carry you to a new home/ worth living for."

"before the funeral" by Amy Wang

It is the kind of night that makes me want to strip bird bones
into hollow, the kind of night that makes me want to gouge

a river out of the cliffside and walk into it with rubbed
pockets. It is the kind of night that makes salt stream in silk

banners. The hospital tastes like goodbye. As if you could
swallow down mourning before it even lodges between tongue

and teeth. The two of us waiting, inevitable unfurled into the
orange-sweet of tomorrow. My last request; tie me down like a

song. Like bare skin and creased paper. As if the space
between throat and spine and breathing could be bent in two.

Hours cut through us like tangents, like paper petals folded over.
A hand has been dealt; aces, or maybe not. We peel queen

from tongue, jack from pinky, tracking obituaries signed into
existence. Before the funeral; you, shuffling the cards as if you

could wash them clean, as if there is anything as gentle as a
winning play. Me, eyes shut, as if there is anything as sweet as

reliving this final loss. Forget the cold. Bring a palm up to
clasp, flowers to scatter over a grave. between elegies and

mourning hymns, the two of us have had our pick of grief.
Together, we decorate housefires and melt the littlest

snowman; winter chill has nothing on coffin and a world whirring sideways.

“Home Remedies” by Iris Yu

after “seven” by Taylor Swift

This is what I didn't tell you last summer: I don't remember the sour of Midwestern rain. Sometimes, when I'm home alone, I squeeze lemons over my lips to replicate the sting of acid down throat. I miss you incessantly. I wish we'd kissed. I still make airplanes out of cardboard boxes and dream of leaving with you. When it rains city rain, I knot my fingers in sidewalk dandelions and twist them into braids. I bottle morning dew and drink it with apple cider vinegar. I run hot water until my bathroom bleeds fog; in the mirror, I fingerpaint your face and get something wrong every night—lips too thin, nose too broad. Eventually, the steam condenses and I'm left with my reflection instead of yours. I have no roommates but I knock on the apartment door as if you'll answer. On beaches, I spell out your name in the sand and gift it to the ocean. I don't remember your last words to me but I imagine they were about omnipresence. I think of you whenever I drink lemonade. Once, I took it with tequila to forget you and instead I hallucinated your hands holding back my hair as I puked. I woke up smelling like piss, vomit on my cheeks.

In My Image

In her poem "Sinner, lover, righteous," Olákitán Aládésuyì asks the question "What's stopping god from being in my image and likeness?"

"Sinner, lover, righteous" by Olákitán T. Aládésuyì

let us pray, a silent supplication to
gods we cannot have. let us wrap
legs around their waist in humble adoration
let them whistle in glee at this worship
our arms tucked behind their back
let us have a lemon to suckle for every time they answered our prayers
and one more to cleanse self
what it knows
of sin and death and leaving and breaking
let us have a climax so high we couldn't reach it if tried
a hill for the crucifix, an altar for the offering
let us have movement and brethren thumping brethren on the back
my god! washed up priest without a sacrifice
a moon to bless our brothers fallen by the wayside
if all else fails, then let us hold each other, gentle,
with hands tender as a monk in prayer
for this is love, that a hand be found
pressed upon your back in the middle of the night
and if the hand be found burdensome,
that you would draw up your breath and accept
this offering
for this is your life now, that you find yourself god
in the hallowed halls of memory—
your memory, our memory
for this is your life— that you leave god
there, in the dark stillness of the night
your feet finding the path to a beginning so old it ended already
and what if there is no end to this beginning?
no god in the dead of the night, no sacrifice, no offerings
then let us make god in our own likeness
round and soft and bristling with passion
let us find god in the rise and fall of our own voice
and forget that we once worshipped at another's feet.

Olákitán's Commentary on "Sinner, lover, righteous":

When I wrote “Sinner, lover, righteous,” I was thinking about how women navigate romantic relationships in a patriarchy, the things women have to sacrifice just to have love/companionship. Then it waxed religious for me and I started to think about how my former religion often juxtaposed the relationship between god and his followers with the relationship between a wife and husband, putting the man as god and the woman as his follower—or subject, in this case. Against the backdrop of that, I decided to write about women leaving all that systematic discrimination behind and finding a new way to be, one that involved having a god that was just like us because if there has to be a god, why not me?

What’s stopping god from being in my image and likeness?

Poet Biographies

Olákitán is a writer who works as a Software Developer/ Data Analyst by day and writes at odd hours. Her work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Watershed Review*, *Memento*, *Agbowó Art*, *Kalahari review*, *The Lit Quarterly*, *Newfound*, and others. She won the Lawrence Foundation Award for best story in *Prairie Schooner* in 2019.

Ayesha Asad (she/her) is from Dallas, Texas. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *PANK*, *DIAGRAM*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Sundog Lit*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Q/A Poetry*, *Qu Literary Magazine*, and elsewhere. Her writing has been recognized by Creative Writing Ink Journal and the Robert Bone Memorial Creative Writing Prize. She studies Literature and Biology at the University of Texas at Dallas. In her free time, she likes to dream. Find her on Twitter: @ayes_lion

Based in the UK, **Jane Ayres** re-discovered poetry studying for a part-time Creative Writing MA at the University of Kent, which she completed in 2019 at the age of 57. She enjoys Open Mic events, is fascinated by hybrid poetry/prose experimental forms and has work published or accepted in *Confluence*, *Postscript*, *Dissonance*, *The Agonist*, *Lighthouse*, *Viscaria*, *The Sock Drawer*, *Streetcake*, *The North*, *The Poetry Village*, *Scrittura*, *Door is a Jar*, *Marble*, *Agapanthus*, *Confingo*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, *Kissing Dynamite* and *The Forge*.

Gillian Ebersole (she/they) is a dancer and writer who explores the embodied experience of queerness in her poetry and choreography. She graduated from Loyola Marymount University Summa Cum Laude with a dual degree in English and Dance. Gillian currently works for Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival and writes for various dance publications. She believes in yellow bedrooms, sunset dances, and sitting in coffeeshops.

website: gillianebersole.com

instagram: @bygillianebersole

Matthew Johnson is a former sports journalist who wrote for *The Daily Star* (Oneonta, NY), *The USA Today College*, and *The Carolinian*. A Northern Transplant (upstate NY and southern CT), he has earned his MA in English at UNC-Greensboro. His poetry has appeared in *Maudlin House*, *The Roanoke Review*, *The New Southern Fugitives*, *The Sport Literate*, *The Maryland Literary Review*, and elsewhere. He is a one-time Best of the Net Nominee (2017) and his debut collection, *Shadow Folks and Soul Songs* (Kelsay Books), was released in 2019. Twitter: @Matt_Johnson_D

Jasmine Kapadia (she/her) has work in or forthcoming in *Superfroot Magazine*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, the *Eunoia Review*, Malala Fund's *Assembly*, *All Guts No Glory*, and elsewhere. When not writing, she can be found stanning Beyoncé or (re)-binge-watching *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Find her on Instagram: [@jazzymoos](https://www.instagram.com/jazzymoos)

Youngseo Lee (she/her) is eighteen, taking a gap year, and just vibing. She is newly based in Virginia, though she is from Seoul and Arizona. A 2020 National YoungArts Finalist in Creative Nonfiction and cat lady with no cats of her own, she is the founding editor-in-chief of *Pollux Journal*, a literary magazine dedicated to multilinguality. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *perhappened mag*, *Gone Lawn*, *Peach Mag*, and more that you can find on youngseolee.carrd.co.

Stella Lei is a teen writer from Pennsylvania whose work is published or forthcoming in *Gone Lawn*, *Milk Candy Review*, *Whale Road Review*, and elsewhere. She is an Editor in Chief for *The Augment Review*, she has two cats, and she tweets [@stellalei04](https://twitter.com/stellalei04). You can find more of her work at <https://stelleleiwrites.weebly.com/>.

Chikamobi Okoloeze Orjichukwu (he/him) is a Nigerian. He studies English and Literary studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. As Orjichukwu Chikamobi Golding too, his works have appeared in *Praxis Magazine*, *Stone of Madness Press*, *The Muse Journal*, *Young African Poets Anthology* in *Agbowo mag*, *Upwrite Mag*, and elsewhere. He was runner up for The Muse Poetry Prize (2019). You can reach out to him on Twitter [@chikamobi](https://twitter.com/chikamobi)

Samia Saliba (she/her) is an Arab-American writer and historian. She edited The Rachel Corrie Foundation's Shuruq 4.5 Writing Showcase for writers of Arab heritage (2020) and was a RAWI Wet Hot Arab-American Summer fellow (2019). Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Vagabond City Lit*, *Rusted Radishes*, *Mizna*, *Sumou Magazine*, and elsewhere. Find her on Twitter [@sa_miathrmoplis](https://twitter.com/sa_miathrmoplis) or in real life petting a cat.

Amy Wang (she/her) is a writer from California. She's a prose editor for the *Farside Review* and a poetry editor for *Augment*. In her free time, you can find her reading fanfiction. Reach out to her on Twitter at [@amyj_wang](https://twitter.com/amyj_wang).

Danielle P. Williams is a poet, essayist and spoken-word artist from Columbia, South Carolina. She is a third-year MFA candidate in poetry at George Mason University. She strives to give voice to unrepresented cultures, making it a point to expand on the narratives and experiences of her Black and Chamorro cultures. Her poems were selected for the 2020 Literary Award in Poetry from *Ninth Letter*. Her work appears in *Hobart*, *Barren Magazine*, *The Pinch*, *JMWW*, and elsewhere. For more, visit <https://www.daniellepwilliams.com>

Iris Yu (she/her) is a Chinese-American student from Ohio. Her work can be found or is forthcoming in *GASHER Journal*, *Vagabond City Lit*, and *Sine Theta Magazine*, among others. She is an alumna of the Iowa Young Writers Studio and a 2020 Pushcart Prize Nominee.

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