

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 29 MAY 2021: "DAISY CHAIN"

Welcome to Issue 29 "Daisy Chain." Join this month's contributing poets as they explore our longing for connection: to culture, to family, to body, to self.

This month's featured poet is J.E. Seuk.

Issue 29 includes work by Amy Bobeda, Zoe Cunniffe, Nolan Dannels, Paxton Grey, Meg Kerrigan, Kristin Lueke, Nicole Markert, Elly McCarthy, J.E. Seuk, Annette Sisson, Sher Ting, and Stephanie Tom. And Kara Knickerbocker is featured in "The Weight of a Name" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist—Jeremy Szuder

Jeremy Szuder lives in a tiny apartment with his wife, two children and two cats. He works in the evenings in a very busy restaurant, standing behind a stove, a grill, fryers and heating lamps, happily listening to hours of hand-selected music and conjuring ideas for new art and poetry in his head. When his working day ends and he enters his home in the wee hours, he likes to sit down with a glass of wine and record all the various words and images that bear fruit within his mind. Jeremy Szuder only sets the cage doors free when the work begins to pile up too high. In this life, Szuder makes no illusions of being a professional artist in any way, shape, or form.

"belly curves low spine" by Amy Bobeda

unrest digest protest acts of motion
the disc slips
casual dp

hp
rhythm's
the loss of l's

her spine cd be
a snake in grass
on the back of
Dionysous

grapes in hand
underfoot

the sqish of juce
fluid flshed pshd
through
the loss of U and I

garnet of
overthinking

rnd and cld
against the
loss of O's a
hole
between
skins boned sinew

she curves it around weeds
auric cleansing leaves

lies down
on jadestone
slowburns like
hot jumping coal
on new year's day
before tossing the
Persian lentils

necklace of her
spinous process
irregularity
in irregular
time

while reading *Loba*
the sound of teeth pulling flesh
strings
back reality
flint edges of rock

a warm cave
pelvic cage, caught swirls
misremembering what's
hers or *hers*—

what is borrowed
in chronology of
nerves.

“things that can’t be seen” by Zoe Cunniffe

one of these days,
i will walk out the front door, the grass sun-starched and yellowing,
sky pooling with a blood-soaked sunrise,
and with the town sleeping belly-up,
i will scrape my head across the clouds until they rust.
head pointed dead ahead, hills billowing like crashing waves,
a prehistoric dawn will emerge.
i will dip my toes into aching dirt, carving back the paths
where we walked—
hours like silt in our uncut palms, your body an hourglass,
sun slipping down your back like a cracked egg.
here i am again,
your reflection peering back at me from the rippled water—

you with the same callouses on your thumbs,
the same wilt in your walk.

i will lie in the grass at the crest of the hill,
where you always swore we were inches from the sun.

red-hot stillness, grass prickly on our necks,
and then nightfall,
brushing our hands across stars.

i will breathe in the echo of the valley, wildflowers bending their necks
as the wind feathers through the garden, the gentle calls
of birds and crickets a silent symphony.

they say your house burned down the night you left,
but it was always on fire,
invisible smoke fluttering from the crack beneath
your bedroom window.

you could always smell the soot baking in the kitchen,
the flames lingering between floorboards.

last time i saw you, we were seventeen at the movie theater,
and you were in the front row alone, salt and popcorn, sallow skin.
you had scorch marks across the backs of your hands,
fumes drifting from between your lips.

you closed your eyes all through the second half, and by morning,
you were gone.

the doctors said i was in perfect health,
but how i bled in all the places they couldn't see!
how your ache crawled through my organs,
untying every muscle and joint.

they'll say it was a tragedy, a fluke,
that i got lost in my own backyard,
stumbling in circles until the grass was matted.

they won't notice my car fleeing down the highway,
how i trace the horizon in my rearview mirror,
searching for you and all of the other things
that can't be seen with the naked eye.

"Bones" by Nolan Dannels

found my way out
set aside my knuckle bones
laughed until my ribs cracked

& watched an undead sunset
grinning ear to ear
knowing it will return

found my way back in
held my ankles back
'cause i didn't want to trip
head over heels in love
with a moonstruck mirage
too cold to care

lost the will to stay still
felt detached from my knees down
cried until my shoulders came off
& watched an untied sunrise
that cackled back at me
knowing i would hear it

lost the will to move
slept for years inside a heavy skull
'cause dreams are such a soft respite
from the life i've been given
& death's just another lost bone
another joint gone

as the body breaks down

found the skeleton i used to have
in a past life
watched it dance with the joy
that i must have felt back then somehow
& smiled with a tear or two
knowing these bones used to move

found a reason to care
lost control of logic
& watched an unwed sundearth
crawling towards a pile of my bones
knowing they won't be enough
for me to dance again

“The Drake Equation” by Paxton Grey

$$N = R_* \cdot f_p \cdot n_e \cdot f_l \cdot f_i \cdot f_c \cdot L \text{ where:}$$

N = the number of Milky Way galaxy civilizations already capable of communicating across interplanetary space

where is everybody

R = the average rate of star formation in our galaxy*

it all starts out with the big bang / god
spits us out / then her saliva coalesces.
is it a sign of disrespect? / is it a sign at all?
a never-ending chain / *who created that?*
until i brush against my smallness / looming

f_p = the fraction of those stars that have planets

when i learned i was stardust / i did not shimmer.
i roiled inside / black holes are collapsed stars.
i found something dark / i fell into something dark

n_e = the average number of planets that can potentially support life

i sunburn / i moonbathe / i stumble
drunk barefoot / under stars humming
then i pass out / i have nightmares:
the nights without dreams / the blankness.
i cannot hear the stars humming at me
beautiful nothing / *f_l = the fraction of planets that actually support life*

twice i discovered / i am an accident
animated / an accident personified.
i've been a would-be god / frightened
buying a pregnancy test / *who created that?*
some godling wringing / holy hands / then
coalescence stirs / into consciousness.
into being / so afraid / to live / to die

f_i = the fraction of planets with life that evolves to become intelligent life (civilizations)

some days i still feel / primordial.
i veil it / drive my car / type my code
but i am warm inside / sloshing adolescent,
a science experiment / gone right or wrong.
just gone / hypotheses forgotten

f_c = the fraction of civilizations that develop a technology to broadcast detectable signs of their existence into space

i watch documentaries / sagan first told me
i am stardust / spoke it from the tv
as if he was not dead / but he was
as dead as the afterimage / light waves
emitted eons ago / dotting the night sky

L = the length of time over which such civilizations broadcast detectable signals into space

the tv broke / when my cousin sprayed it
with windex / we've made clocks & better clocks
but none will tell me / how much time is mine

“equinox note” by Meg Kerrigan

warm light comes in
like the care of the body
approaching a wound
its shadows reveal familiar
smudges on the microwave
keypad and i worry
about everyone i love,
including myself somehow
my stomach drops
like flame on a wick
and out there are mercies
elephants finally meeting
after sharing voices in the forest
crocus bulbs welding
themselves to the earth,

surviving early spring's frost
your hand finding my back
each time i sit up
in the middle of the night
how the sky renders our hearts

“The last of the five good emperors” by Kristin Lueke

For Pablo

This morning you rose
to a world that is not yet done.
You are what you are—swaggering,
you-shaped lump of a boy,
reshaped by every song (it seems)
Oh brother, you're braided
the light comes and goes again.
you break your own heart,
you spend, you stutter,
how mountains fall into the sea.
learn to live without knowing,
what a strange lovely world,
we rise.

(as the morning before)
What has happened has happened.
staggering, ancient stardust,
a trillion cells assembled just so,
these days and every sunset.
between these hours—
In the middle you breathe,
you mend, you murder a plant or two,
you see from the summit
You say to me, little,
I say to you *never* and still,
like you, like me, undone and yet

“I Am Not Haunted” by Nicole Markert

by monsters, or a fear of the

dark, when I walk
down
worn blue
carpeted steps
into the depths
of my basement

I am haunted by your microphone
the fortune-taped monitor
Happier days are definitely ahead for you.
Struggle has ended.

Fluorescent lights flicker; dim
shadows crawl into gaping holes
in brittle pink flowered wallpaper.
I can hear you scream
from the dark:

Do you remember what you told me?

As we swung on that dinky

blue

and

yellow swing

set

back in Waretown, our bare feet in the mud

that were shaped like quad tracks

my eyes closed as I swung

higher

and

higher

into the sky, wind in my hair, rays of sunlight on my face

I heard your tiny voice at the age of seven say

open your fucking eyes

they snapped open

I said

what the hell did you just say

you said

you heard me. Open your fucking eyes.

“theorizing without a sense of the ground” by Elly McCarthy

I have a theory that thirty-degree wind tastes different in March
Like having forgotten yourself, before the frigid wall of used-to-be winter
Has you heaving until you remember

I have a theory that every time my dad woke into a bruised dawn
And drove four hours north he forgot me because he had to

I have a theory that the more we intellectualize our happiness
The horizon grows sharper with untouched feelings and it becomes
Harder to familiarize ourselves with another day

I have a theory that whittles away at the vacant caverns of my fleshy heart:
That everyone is fifteen, everyone is so fifteen that the road no longer feels like gravel

I have a theory that I was the translucent wine and the plastic cup too
The oven left hot and my brother’s icy rage
Even though I was actually *it’s going to be alright*

I have a theory that guilt is never an act of love
Despite its softness, lies sticky as it awaits a balm of forgiveness

I have a theory that it doesn’t get better until it does— and then it doesn’t
All of this avalanching in slow motion like waves, like the slow winding hand
Spinning cotton candy around a paper cone

“SPEAK ENGLISH LOUD” by J.E. Seuk, May’s Featured Poet

Speak English loud
Okay?
You go outside you speak
English loud
Pretend you talking on phone
You make sure, okay?
You speak English very loud
Whole time

it's a good idea

Okay.

But,

(we both know that)

Umma

(she shouldn't speak)

what

(English loud)

about—

(outside)

Aiiigoo you too much worry

It's not your job

God taking care of me

Umma fine! Umma always fine

You have to listen to me

if baby okay

then mamma okay

Okay, my baby?

okay

J.E.'s Commentary on "SPEAK ENGLISH LOUD":

I've been thinking a lot about Asian immigrant women. About survival, protective measures. Motherhood. My sister and I tried to use our American accent as a shield around our parents, who lacked their own, so strong and vulnerable. I wrote this poem in late March, after yet another hate crime in my hometown of New York City. The victim was Filipina, but she could easily have been my Korean mother, walking to church. "You don't belong here," a man said, kicking her, kicking her, before another man closed the door on her crumpled body.

I write mostly prose. I was an uninhibited child poet, but Adult J.E. felt qualified to enjoy and even teach poetry—not write her own. (Though I did write a grief sonnet in a dream once, weeping myself awake.) Here in *Kissing Dynamite*, I now call myself a poet. I finally want to be; I've made a new friend in my new country, a wonderful 78 year-old British poet named H who urges me on. And I think I have to be: with the rise in anti-Asian hate, I've been dreaming in tears and poetry again.

Assistant Editor Morgan Ridgway's Commentary on "SPEAK ENGLISH LOUD":

The moment I read J.E.'s work I was immediately taken by the care with which it moves. It creates both a sense of intimacy and offers a commentary on the structures that threaten those whose voices are made to not fit in. It considers language as both pain and freedom; something that calls attention to the speaker and binds us together. This is a poem that is at once vulnerable, protective, critical, and loving. J.E. shares with us an intimate moment between mother and child and reminds us of the power of language—its ability to protect, to hold, and to love those closest to us. *You have to listen to me / if baby okay / then mamma okay / Okay, my baby? // okay*

“Instinct for Touch” by Annette Sisson

We wake. The owls
 convulse the woods below.
Stiff as possums,
we lie on a rummaged
 mattress, the screened
 porch our answer
 to April's early swelter.
Their bellows, hoots,
 call and response,
 their instinct for touch—
 like our bodies,
sleep's arrival, even
 in heat's ruthless press,
 sheathed in barest gauze,
brush of sheet on skin.

And we long to touch
 the dead, loft words
to dormant ears,
voices to clouds
 beseeching rain,
 its graze, thunder,
 its burst, antiphonal
rumble from the other

side. We are owls
 coveting the dark
echo of our need,
naked slumberers
 reaching for cover.

“I Wage a Question Against the Night” by Sher Ting

Is it enough? Is it enough? The clouds ripple
with prayer, laughing

at the human who always asks for more. More
happiness, more passion, more time.

More mountain, more ocean, more
sky. Night teaches me the language of want —

libation spilling upwards into the sky, darkness
yolked and languishing in desire. Teach me

to crack two wishes into a bowl - the world cracking
open in fistfuls of light. The gold a riot against the

night, folding itself into exit wounds in the sky.
These hands, the curve of an alms jar, shelling out

the whites of the morning-moon. Everything begins
in desire - a pregnancy, an answer, a song. The fetus

curled into a question. The baby’s first cry and its desire
for human touch. The dying’s final breath and his desire

to live. Were we ever without, just singular bodies
adrift in space, spread shallow like mycelium and

unfettered by primal emotion? Yet, I’ve only lived with
desire, never without, and I’d choose it again. Today,

the moon fell to marry the horizon and I sat in its lilac plumage.
I cracked two wishes into a bowl and stirred them

till they rose like the sun.

“Self-Portrait as Bird in the Hand” by Stephanie Tom

As all redemption arcs do, this story begins
with a swallow tale. I keep a bird in my pocket
and can only fall asleep when I know it is safe.
We rise with the sun and wander across the
country searching for paths to chase to the
horizon. Spring beckons me to abandon
my hollow and search for higher ground in
a land far from here. The river whispers
that if no one else, the water will always
remember my name as it runs away from home.
My bird doesn't leave my pocket, scared of
drowning. We find ourselves at the riverbank
anyways. I let down my hair in the shade, and
find myself, as a fledgling does, hovering
at the threshold of the endless sky above.
I suppose that this is where we will all find
ourselves in the end, mourning memories that
we never had to begin with. Roads that we
only imagined cities at the end of. The names
of everyone I once knew only sounds learned
through practice, pitched in my empty mouth.
The water is cold around my feet when I step
in. I fist my hair and raise a knife to my hands.
My bird shudders at the sight of the silver tooth.
When I am ever brave enough, I will burn every
dead thing that has ever nested in my heart and
let their skins fall away. I want to cut off all the
split ends and let them fly away, like wishes in
the wind, like birds on a breeze. In another life
I baptize this dream with a new name, with new
wings. But for now, I stay still – I watch the river
run away with the pieces of me that I've clipped,
hold myself tighter when I hear my name run over
the rocks and disappear downstream. We are all
afraid of memories that betray our namesakes. For

example, my bird is too scared of falling into the earth to fly out of my pocket. My greatest fear is that someday the only thing I will be able to recognize in the mirror is my face and forget the voice that belonged to it. The split ends settle, and so does the sun on the horizon. My bird falls asleep in the hollow of my palm, its heart never closer to home.

The Weight of a Name

In her poem “Etymology of a Middle Name,” **Kara Knickerbocker** explores the connotations associated with her own name and the relationship between her name and identity.

“Etymology of a Middle Name” by Kara Knickerbocker

after Airea D. Matthews

Rose— of Latin origin, *rosa*, meaning fragrant flower, meaning my mother bloomed with me until I came out, pink & right for the world, the last precious baby dangling on the branch of our family tree, because after my brother & before me there was a seed that only bled where it was planted, never grew into a face, or name, & they crowned me *Rosie*, because my cheeks flush redder than they should be from petaling my way back to the womb, drunk-blushed attempts to stay long-stemmed, always wild & because *a daughter is a beautiful thing*, my mother tells me though I know the letters sound more lovely in her mouth. O, Rose that grew from the concrete, rose into a woman— I wonder if she will ever accept there are thorns around my hips not by nature but by my own doing, if she fully knows I’ve buried bouquets from lovers because what other pretty hurt do you know that both stalks the living & adorns all the dead?

*Link to Airea D. Matthews’ poem: <https://poets.org/poem/etymology>

Kara’s Commentary on “Etymology of a Middle Name”:

I first heard the poem “etymology” by Aireya D. Matthews, which this poem is after, when she read it on the podcast *VS* with Franny Choi and Danez Smith last fall. Like some poems do, it unconsciously became buried in my brain. It’s no secret that this past year has been an intense one— the pandemic has forced us to reflect on everything, to really sit with ourselves and all that we are and are not. And, having just entered my third decade of life, I feel like I’m in this delicate space where I’m no longer a child, of course, but because I’m not blossoming into the expectations of my mother or of society (I’m not married, I don’t want children, I’m a wanderer, etc.) I’m not a woman— hence the lines, “petaling my way back to the womb, / drunk-blushed attempts to stay long-stemmed, always wild.” Though our poems are vastly different, I remembered Aireya’s poem: the weight a name holds, and what language can do. My middle name, Rose, carries with it so many connotations of beauty and love, and at the time, I couldn’t identify further from those things. It wasn’t until a couple months ago that something split open and this piece poured out, nearly already fully-formed. This is an autobiographical poem that is my way of grappling with this notion, and pushing back. It is growing against the idea of not only a name and what it means, but a daughter/woman and who she should be.

Poet Biographies

Amy Bobeda holds an MFA from the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics where she founded Wisdom Body Collective. She is an editor of *More Revolutionary Letters: A Tribute to Diane di Prima*. Her work can be read in *Entropy*, *Vol1 Brooklyn*, *Denver Quarterly* and elsewhere. Find her on Twitter @amybobeda and on the web at amyglenbobeda.com

Zoe Cunniffe is a poet and singer-songwriter from Washington, DC. She has previously been published in literary journals such as *Blue Marble Review*, *New Reader Magazine*, *Doghouse Press*, and *Velvet Fields Magazine*. Zoe can be found on Instagram at @there.are.stillbeautifulthings.

Nolan Dannels (he/him) is a Persian American poet and lyricist who graduated from the University of Edinburgh with a Master's in English Language and Literature, and he is currently a Literature PhD student, specializing in contemporary Anglophone poetry at the University of California, San Diego, in addition to serving as the Editor in Chief of *Alchemy*, *Journal of Translation* for its Summer 2020 issue. For the amusement of both himself and his friends, he often writes absurdist parodies of classic children's short stories and fairy tales, which he refers to as "Nolar Bear Tales" because they feature a talking polar bear who serves as a comical version of his own persona. Aside from translations of French poetry published elsewhere, this poem is his first publication in any journal.

Paxton Grey (he/they) is a non-binary software developer living in Virginia. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *Sundog Lit*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Empty*

Mirror, and elsewhere. Find Paxton on Twitter: @PaxWrites and on the web at <http://bailey-grey.com/index.html>

Meg Kerrigan (she/her) is a writer and researcher living near Boston with her dog, Sasha. Her poetry has appeared in *Ghost City Review*. You can find her on Instagram @meg_kerrigan_ and on Twitter @megrkerrigan.

Kara Knickerbocker (she/her) is the author of the chapbooks *The Shedding Before the Swell* (dancing girl press, 2018) and *Next to Everything that is Breakable* (Finishing Line Press, 2017). Her poetry and essays have appeared in or are forthcoming from: *Poet Lore*, *HOBART*, *Levee Magazine*, *Portland Review*, and the anthologies *Pennsylvania's Best Emerging Poets*, *Crack the Spine*, and more. She writes with the Madwomen in the Attic at Carlow University, and co-curates the MadFridays Reading Series. Find her online at www.karaknickerbocker.com or on Twitter @karaknick.

Kristin Lueke (she/her) is a Virgo, chingona, and author of the chapbook *(in)different math*, released by Dancing Girl Press. She has poems featured in *Hooligan*, *Witch Craft Magazine*, *Untoward*, *The Acentos Review*, and elsewhere. She holds an AB from Princeton and MA from the University of Chicago, and one time, she was nominated for a Pushcart for a poem about revenge. (It didn't win.) She runs a small design studio in Chicago, still dreams of California, tweets when she feels like it @klooky, and writes a weekly newsletter called The Animal Eats.

Nicole Markert (she/her/hers) is a bisexual poet who is a recipient of Eastern University's Thyra Ferre Bjorn Creative Writing Award. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Rust + Moth*, *Furrow*, *SWWIM Every Day*, and *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*. She is currently a poetry reader for *Split Lip Magazine* and is pursuing an MFA in Poetry as well as an M.A in Publishing at Rosemont College. You can find more of her work at nicolemarkert.com and she tweets at @nicolemarkert.

Elly McCarthy grew up in New Jersey and currently lives in Chicago, where she spends as much time near the lake as possible. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Hooligan Magazine*, *Moist Poetry Journal*, and *Raven's Perch*, among others. You can find her on Twitter at @naturallog_

J.E. Seuk (she/her) is a writer and freelance editor who has taught high school and university English in the U.S. and South Korea. She studied English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and is currently hustling for scholarships so she can enter Cambridge for her Creative Writing MSt. She's a member of West Hill Writers and has pieces published in *Ghost Heart Literary Journal* and *Ellipsis Zine*, with more imminent. A '1.75 generation' Korean American immigrant, she now resides in Brighton, England where she enjoys music-

making, sea air, and walking behind dogs on sidewalks. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram @SeukWrites.

Annette Sisson (she/her/hers) has published poems in *Nashville Review*, *Typishly*, *One*, *HeartWood*, *Cordella*, *Psaltery & Lyre*, *The West Review*, and others. She published a chapbook, *A Casting Off* (Finishing Line, 2019) and was named a 2020 BOAAT Writing Fellow, received honorable mention in *Passager's* 2019 poetry contest, and won The Porch Writers' Collective's 2019 poetry prize. Her recent book-length poetry manuscript, *Small Fish in High Branches*, has been a finalist with Glass Lyre Press and a semifinalist for the Brittingham & Felix Pollak Prize (U of Wisconsin Press).

Sher Ting (she/her) had lived in Singapore for most of her life before moving to Australia for medical school. She has work published/forthcoming in anthologies including *Byline Legacies* and *Pages Penned In Pandemic*, and literary magazines including *Eunoia Review*, *Opia Mag*, *Overheard* and *Interstellar Lit*. She is currently an editor of *The Aurora Journal* and a Poetry Reader for *Farside Review*. She tweets at @sherttt and writes at downintheholocene.wordpress.com

Stephanie Tom (she/her) is currently an undergraduate student at Cornell University. A Pushcart Prize nominee, her poetry has either appeared or is forthcoming in *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Sine Theta Magazine*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Hobart*, and *Honey Literary*, among other places. She has previously been recognized by the national Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, the International Torrance Legacy Creativity Awards, and the international Save the Earth Poetry Contest. She is an alumna of the Adroit Journal Summer Mentorship Program, a 2019 winner of the Poets & Writers Amy Award, and the author of *Travel Log at the End of the World* (Ghost City Press, 2019). When she's not writing she dabbles in dance, martial arts, and graphic design. You can read more of her work at tomstephanie.weebly.com.

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