

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 2 FEBRUARY 2019: "FROSTBITTEN"

February in the Northern Hemisphere brings the bite of winter's chill. In our second issue "Frostbitten," poets explore the bitter brunt of expectations, heartbreak, the confines of the body, the cold moments we desperately try to make warm.

This month's featured poet is André N. Lepine.

Issue 2 includes work by Michael Akuchie, Kendall A. Bell, Kristine Brown, Lynne Burnett, Jason Harris, André N. Lepine, Rachel Nix, Juanita Rey, Robin Anna Smith, Tom Snarsky, Heather Sweeney, and Juliette van der Molen. Please visit "The Gallery" below! And Amy Kinsman is featured in "To the Bone" to make it a baker's dozen.

This month we also welcome aboard our editorial intern Fiyinfoluwa Olajesu (known to us dearly as Ola), who is an emerging poet from Nigeria.

### Featured Artist

This month's featured artist is Cory Funk, who lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. His photography and part of his record collection have been displayed at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. His written work has appeared in *The Summit Avenue Review*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, *Moonchild Magazine*, and the collection *Killing Malmon* published by Down & Out Books. He can be found online at [funkomatic.wordpress.com](http://funkomatic.wordpress.com)

"how i treat praise" by Fiyinfoluwa Olajesu

stale bread i chew  
but never swallow  
my wall is painted a coat of many colours.

i sieve the chaff from the wheat. the  
heat from cold & hold whatever  
remains even if it is only half---

as i sip my darling tea, i glance through  
with my eyes. looking but not seeing.

---not observing. rather  
i work on what is left in me---turn  
my virgin lands to  
plantation.

where nations come to fetch  
my raw  
for production

“Dear Self” by Michael Akuchie

"Tomorrow, I may find slight breath/ but I swear it's just to say goodbye" — Adedayo Agarau

The letter I write now is a room  
in this storm. The ballpoint pen is  
a key the door swallows before granting access.  
The grief I do not outline hangs  
on my shirt, body & spirit. It is a  
scab I feed growth by scratching. It is always  
in my mouth, thirsty for voice to imprison.  
I am first writing about a loved one gone through the flames.  
How dusk levelled the sunshine she carried in her eyes.  
How God walked away from her. Confused like the rest of us.  
I could open this door of hope filtered into a  
page length paper. Work out a seamless passage.  
Or I decide to bury this dream in my chest with a knife.  
The tip carving out a portion of skin for storage.  
Or maybe the storm is the quickest way to conclude.

“How to slip away from the body” by Kendall A. Bell

In between the smallest openings  
of counter tops. Under a deep  
cover of storm clouds. In the  
closet underneath the steps,  
under a blanket of wine bottles  
and paint swatches. Under the  
spell of the dryer, that slowly  
tosses each worn fiber of skin.  
Beside the outline of a barely  
breathing husk. Through every  
door, sliding or otherwise, in

a brief twinkle, already forgotten.

“Burn” by Kristine Brown

Metal kisses sheets,  
trees in bland bereavement.  
dyed in time,  
December's end.

In a way,  
I understand.  
when they speak of fatigued workers,  
factories sullied  
by melted need  
and desire in frost.

utility issues its final breath.  
fingers, limp with hangnails.  
their scorn that burns the note,  
evictions in starved scarlet.

Take the jar,  
a candle or two,  
and every glass bead, a charm of the past.  
somehow, you make it work,  
always, they say "well done."

But here, you hold the candle.  
a tremor and quiver, cuts alongside  
your spine barely taut,  
tired stitches.

Screaming,  
"Why acquiesce to massacres  
and sacrilege?"

And with a jump, a drop of wax,  
you shrug.

"Why not?"

The flight ignited.

“The Geography of Desire” by Lynne Burnett

Yes, there were nods of male approval when a friend at fifty  
(after twenty years of marriage) went under the knife  
to pump up her “girls”, thinking what she had was not enough,  
busting out of the buttons of a shirt now to say so.

But when another at fifty-three had to divide her pair,  
losing a breast so quietly only her husband knew  
for months, the same heads shook for him,  
hoping this never happened to them.

Take a breast from its pedestal like that and a frantic  
mind ties the faithful heart to a railroad track and  
doesn't look back. Like in those old silent movies  
we need a hero here and soon—one hand perhaps

doming the sudden plain, the other cupping the  
high rise of the breast that's left, mouth braving  
a startled nipple, the salt of saliva or sweat or tears  
busyng his tongue. Butterfly kiss to the missing one.

“a body witnesses a body swallow itself” by Jason Harris

my heart is an iceberg  
dipping beneath the murky

waters of everything  
that hurts

i should tweet that see if  
the world feels the same

i text  
*i love you*

it texts back *new #*  
*who dis*

i am consumed with learning  
how to die

although it isn't death

that consumes me

but the silence  
when i die

i will no longer type out  
*i love you*

on a smudged iphone screen  
will no longer ask

*are you afraid too?*  
after the easter flood of 1913 after

the people left cities for farms after  
queen anne's lace usurped the railroads after

the inimitable earth shivered collapsed  
all of mankind's technology to the ground after

a 500-foot ship broke from its cuyahoga mooring  
knocking 3rd st. bridge off its mount it is believed

that cleveland is one of the safest places to live if dying  
by natural disaster is a concern

this morning rain knocked  
on the window

as i watched  
a video of an iceberg flipping

over in the middle of an ocean  
over 102,000 people viewed it

on twitter  
it is hard not to think

about the rain falling  
the waters rising the blue-white

glaciers in another part of the world quietly  
dipping below the surface of our machines

as the wealthiest of our nation decide dimming  
the sun will help

save our planet from its inevitable  
end

without thinking of my own inevitable  
end

perhaps by the hands  
of someone who

or  
something that

could love me  
is there a word for being both pained

and panicked  
have we surpassed our tipping

point  
as a species?

we're all fine  
the earth doesn't want us dead

more than  
we want ourselves dead

i am panicked  
pent-up

with anxiety  
in the dryness of my home

i read the u.n.'s landmark study  
about an impending climate-crisis

early as 2040  
i will be 49

by then  
that is

if an officer or social-media induced  
loneliness

or american nationalists  
or a great flood

doesn't kill me  
first

“Colonizer” by André N. Lepine, February’s Featured Poet

My children have white skin,  
Despite their mother,  
And know almost nothing  
Of grandmother's tongue.

At least my son can tan.  
And daughter's black hair  
Contains perhaps some hints.  
Still, they look like me.

We only speak English --  
Dora's words don't count.  
We act like New Yorkers.  
You would never know

That just five years ago,  
A hundred sixty,  
Or even five hundred,  
My kind invaded.

Mama invisible,  
Grandma forgotten,  
They're obscured behind white.  
It feels odd to me,

Who loves their mother not  
Because of her skin,  
To fixate on color.  
I hope that they change.

To me, they now appear  
Like half of themselves,  
Like my genes met her cells  
And just colonized.

If true, then it's deeper  
Than culture or race,  
Than birthplace and power.  
My code's defective,

Whiteness a parasite,  
My DNA wrong.  
How do I repair that,  
Or disinfect them?

Behavior doesn't change.  
Just now I've forgot  
To tell anything real  
About wife and mom.

I neglect their stories.  
My words eclipse them  
Behind my pale moon face  
And selfish worries.

Must the children wear, too,  
My limitations,  
My milky stigmata,  
Savage ignorance?

You see, I am too old  
To learn something new,  
And fear my shortcomings  
Will chain children's dreams.

I pray life's secret walls  
Will dissipate at  
Their touch, like their lips bear  
Wakandan tattoos.

Does this gift, I wonder,  
My pigment's privilege,  
Replace lost heritage,  
Or culture's pride denied?

### **André on "Colonizer":**

One night, probably around 2 AM, I walked around our first floor with our infant daughter. I had one job: Get the baby to sleep, before 3 AM, if possible. Down to just the nightlights, out of songs to soothe her, I simply cradled her and walked. As often happens when I'm up at night with one of our children, my mind went to the dark places – fear, doubt, self-hatred. I honestly don't remember why these particular fears bubbled up that night. But I began to worry about our daughter's future and identity, about whether she'd experience the full beauty of the world and the richness of her heritage, or whether I'd end up holding her back. So I started composing "Colonizer" in my head, typing the beginnings up later (after 3 AM, no doubt) once she rested soundly again.

Before I continue, I want to thank Christine Taylor and *Kissing Dynamite* for publishing this poem, and for giving me this opportunity to write some words about it. I must also confess that I have tried to write this blurb a dozen times in the past weeks. And, much as I would like to annotate the poem, or discuss its meaning, I really just want to tell you about my mother-in-law and wife, whose stories I left out.

My mother-in-law grew up in southeast Pakistan and still has family there. She had an arranged marriage as a teenager to a doctor she had never met and only saw one photo of before her wedding day. Soon after getting married, she and her husband moved to the United States, leaving her entire family half a world away. Her father died when she was young, and her mother passed while she lived in the U.S. None of her siblings have ever lived in the Western Hemisphere.

Today, my mother-in-law has celebrated 45 years of marriage to her husband, has raised four wonderful children, and gives generously of her time to help care for our son and daughter. She has tried to teach our son and me some words of Sindhi, her family's language, though we are poor students so far. She has also shared her Hindu faith and traditions, so that our son loves Diwali like Christmas, and our children celebrated Raksha Bandhan for the first time this past year. Now a U.S. citizen, my mother-in-law has family in such far-flung places as India, Pakistan, Texas, and Ohio.

And my wife, well, I don't have the space here to adequately describe how wonderful, brilliant, beautiful, patient, and loving she is. Here are a few biographical highlights instead.

Born and raised on Staten Island, the forgotten fifth borough of New York City, my wife has three siblings and a number of friends who count as sisters. With a few exceptions here in the U.S., most of her extended family live either in India or Pakistan. She has traveled to both several times in her life, though not recently, and not with me. She ventured up to New England for college and her early career, but has succumbed to NYC's gravity as an adult, bringing a spouse with her. She loves nature, science, and education, and has worked as an environmental consultant, teacher, and training specialist. Her classroom experience likely helps her manage

her troublesome boys (our son and me).

We have a five-year-old son and a six-month-old daughter. So far, they have enough of my wife's features and personality that we mainly just joke that "they're so white!" We agree that their stubbornness and spirit come from both sides of our family. And if they grow up half as good as either my mother-in-law or my wife, they will be good human beings, despite their father.

### **EIC Christine Taylor on "Colonizer":**

True confession: when André's poem came over the transom, and I read the title, I was immediately put off. The word *colonizer* holds so many negative connotations for me as a person of color, and I didn't want to read it. I skipped ahead to the next submission. Knowing I had to face my own bias, I went back to "Colonizer" the next day--I was moved and surprised by the honesty presented in the poem. I am from a multiracial family (my mother Polish and my father African American), and while I have most often considered the framework of my own racial and ethnic identity, I never really considered how my mother may have felt in her position as a white woman. My father died when my sister and I were still in elementary school, so my mother raised us alone in a predominantly black and Latino neighborhood. I remember the day she sat us down to tell us that because of our racial background the world may not be kind to us. We didn't understand that other white people might be prejudiced against us because she loved us so fiercely. Through tears, all she said was, "I'm sorry." My mother passed away ten years ago, so I can't ask her what she meant by this apology, but André's poem has invited me to revisit this moment. Now as an adult, I can consider the multifaceted ways in which racial prejudice affects families and identities. I wonder now if part of her experienced a sense of self-loathing, and I'm sorry that she, especially as a financially struggling, widowed, single mother, had this extra burden. We can't pretend prejudice doesn't exist: our attention, questioning, and honesty are the tools and weapons that pave the way for our loving. Thank you, André, so many times over. Kiss your babies, lots and often--you, your wife, and your mother-in-law are their gifts.

["Owed nothing," by Rachel Nix](#)

despite the habits held in its maintenance,  
hesitance is a path too circled; a direction

I abandon. Opting instead to close in on  
this distance, to mind the magic your city culls—

I grasp for the risk attached in losing place,  
pinching at the map until the skewed lines

speak fairly. Miles mean little in an argument  
instigated by safe notions; urgency, instead,

noses its way forward, obliged by its spryness  
wrestling past caution's plot. When nearness

is earned, I'll clutch for the quiet but only  
because uncareful attraction is handled best

as a secret: told only once, nervous lips  
to an eager ear; or better: in the length of a kiss

unthreatened by obligation.

"Man at the Door" by Juanita Rey

Doorbell rings.  
That's him.  
It's January,  
bitter cold out,  
sidewalks icy,  
but it's still him.  
No flowers,  
no chocolates,  
and more of a grunt  
than a loving greeting.  
He's not that  
kind of man.  
But he's strong  
and he braved  
the weather.  
He's tall  
and he showed up  
up on time.  
He's mine  
and he rings  
the doorbell.  
There's my name,  
the epithet 'poet',  
and this is  
the third thing  
I answer to.

"Father Figure" by Robin Anna Smith

“You need to cut your hair.”  
“Stop looking down all the time.”  
“Why do you have such a sour puss?”  
“You need to wear something other than black.”  
“What are you trying to hide under there?”  
“Get your bangs out of your face.”  
“Don’t you have any clothes that fit?”  
“Here’s a pretty outfit I bought you.”  
“I need to see your eyes.”  
“You should show off your figure.”  
“Why are your pants so huge?”  
“Who’s going to want to marry that face?”  
“Smile, do you know how lucky you are?”

a purple dress  
showing off my shame  
hair clippings  
stuck under his thumb

“Bitter Orange” by Tom Snarsky

When in the woven winter you find  
your loose necklace of hearts around

another’s neck, you panic / & see  
the scent of bodies coming off like

steam—the rigid rules you wrote about  
in your letters are suddenly so many

blisters, the skin pierced like a thick  
rind but O / so much thinner than that—

split the difference between behind  
your knees & fear, the slow lake

this constant rain / keeps elevating.  
If you were to sculpt an angel

from all / the scum at the bottom,  
who’s to say it wouldn’t look like you

“Silver” by Heather Sweeney

SILVER nothing is small pin these years of rot beneath  
my name becoming a swan call me underheard among the  
fauna patiently violet patiently silver how is this the world  
I am not the melody shredding lilies for a fog painted  
garment for a shoulder blade shadow in a deepening  
meadow unraveling

“i’m supposed to love you” by Juliette van der Molen

i’m supposed to love you,  
but my legs are thin under  
the white hospital sheet,  
and a belly i thought would  
magically suck navel to spine  
once more is a deflated sponge.  
there are no cheers for me,  
just quiet visits and hellos,  
everyone’s happy that you  
are well— ten fingers,  
all your toes. i still can’t  
make sense of you, outside  
of me. eyes so wide beneath  
a knitted cap they threaten  
to swallow me whole. i  
want to say i’m sorry now  
because i don’t know, how  
to be this thing— called  
mother. my girlhood left  
me, pushed it all out  
with you, struggled until  
my hands shook and molecules  
quaked. i’m supposed to love  
you, but i’m not sure how.  
why all these tears?  
does it happen like magic?  
is that how it goes?  
if so, i’m already  
failing, and this will be a surprise



it was so cold then,  
                  huddled together like sheep,  
your hands clutching for warmth,  
ice on every breath, bodies grown numb,  
and year on year that feeling returns:

                  i am frightened of who we are in winter.  
                  i am frightened of what we will burn.

### **Amy's Commentary on "immolations":**

There's a few important bits of personal information that went in to this poem. One, that I live not very far at all from Saddleworth Moor - for those not familiar with that kind of geography, it's a kind of wild, hill landscape that is bitterly cold, snowy and often impassable in winter, and, because of the peat in the soil, is prone to wildfires in the summer. There's something sublime and pagan and deeply entrenched in the cultural identity of the British North about that kind of moorland. Saddleworth Moor is also the burial place used by the Moors Murderers (with at least one missing body still up there). Two, I have a very complicated relationship with fire. My father was a firefighter, so I grew up incredibly frightened of it but also kind of mesmerised by it. Three, a guy really did self-immolate on my secondary school playing fields in 2009 and was found by one of the P.E. teachers when she went up ahead of a cross-country class. It's a thing that's haunted me for ten years. I suppose this poem is about morbid fascination and the limits of our individual understanding and control - the enormity of earth, the power of fire and the complexity of human emotion.

### Poet Biographies

Fiyinfoluwa Olajesu is an up and coming Nigerian poet and a trained educator. He writes about love, women, and life generally. He has a number of poems to his credit, and he wishes to create a strong voice through his poems in the nearest future. He has work up at *Tuck Magazine*.

Michael Akuchie is a Nigerian young adult writer and dreamer. He studies English and Literature at the University of Benin, Nigeria. His recent work appears in *Barren Magazine*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Ghost City Review*, *Burning House Press*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Peculiars Magazine*, *Honey & Lime Magazine* and elsewhere. He is @Michael\_Akuchie on Twitter. He is a Contributing Editor for *Barren Magazine*.

Kendall A. Bell's poetry has been most recently published in *Constellate Literary Journal* and *Paper Trains Literary Journal*. He was nominated for Sundress Publications' Best of the Net collection in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2018. His first full length collection, "The Roads Don't Love You", was published in August 2018, and he has released 24 chapbooks. He is the founder and co-editor of the online journal *Chantarelle's Notebook* and publisher/editor of

Maverick Duck Press. His chapbooks are available through Maverick Duck Press. He lives in Southern New Jersey. He can be found on the internet at [www.kendallabell.com](http://www.kendallabell.com)

On the weekends, Kristine Brown frequently wanders through historic neighborhoods, saying "Hello" to most any cat she encounters. Some of these cats are found on her blog, Crumpled Paper Cranes (<https://crumpledpapercranes.com>). Her creative work can be found in *Hobart*, *OCCULUM*, *Burning House Press*, *The Pangolin Review*, *Sea Foam Mag*, *Philosophical Idiot*, among others, and a collection of flash prose and poetry, *Scraped Knees*, was released in 2017 by *Ugly Sapling*. Twitter: @dandyflight

Lynne Burnett lives in the Pacific Northwest. Recent publications include *Arc*, *Blue Heron Review*, *Comstock Review*, *IthacaLit*, *Mockingheart Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Ristau*, *River Styx*, *Tamsen*, *Taos Journal of Poetry & Art*, and a number of anthologies. She is the 2016 winner of the Lauren K. Alleyne Difficult Fruit Poetry Prize, has been nominated for Best of the Net and was shortlisted for *Arc's* 2018 Poem of the Year. Finishing Line Press published her chapbook, "Irresistible" in April, 2018. She maintains a blog/website at <https://lynneburnett.ca/>

Jason Harris is a poet and a NEOMFA candidate. Pronouns are he/him/his. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Winter Tangerine*, *TRACK//FOUR*, *OCCULUM*, *Longleaf Review*, *Wildness Journal*, *Peach Mag*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *The Gordon Square Review*, and others. He is the Co-Editor-in-Chief of *BARNHOUSE Journal*, a contributor for *Watermelon Magazine*, and lives in Cleveland, OH. He can be found on social media @j\_harriswrites

André N. Lepine (pronouns: he, him, his) lives on Staten Island, works in Manhattan, and writes on the bus in-between the two. He writes mostly flash fiction, and "Colonizer" is his first published poem. When not working as a husband, father, or office drone, he publishes *ElephantsNever.com*. Follow him on Twitter [@andre\\_n\\_lepine](https://twitter.com/andre_n_lepine).

Rachel Nix is an editor for *cahoodaloodaling*, *Hobo Camp Review* and *Screen Door Review*. Her own work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *L'Éphémère Review*, *Occulum*, and *Pidgeonholes*. She resides in Northwest Alabama, where pine trees outnumber people rather nicely, and can be followed at @rachelnix\_poet on Twitter.

Ms Juanita Rey is a Dominican poet who has been in this country five years. Her work has been published in *Pennsylvania English*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Petrichor Machine* and *Fire Poetry*.

Robin Anna Smith is a writer and visual artist whose work focuses on disability, gender, trauma, and loss. Her work is published internationally, in a number of online and print journals, including: *Modern Haiku*, *Into the Void*, *OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters*, and *Sonic Boom*. Robin is a regular contributor at *Rhythm & Bones Lit's* Necropolis Blog. More at [robinannasmith.com](http://robinannasmith.com) and Twitter @robinannasmith.

Tom Snarsky lives in Chelsea, Massachusetts among stacks of books and ungraded papers with his fiancée Kristi and their two cat children, Niles and Daphne. He is on Twitter @TomSnarsky and he is the author of *Threshold*, a chapbook of poems available from Another New Calligraphy.

Heather Sweeney, she/her/hers, lives in San Diego where she is a poet, painter, potter, and yogi. Last year, her chapbook, *Just Let Me Have This*, was published by Selcouth Station Press. Her second chapbook, *Same Bitch, Different Era*, is forthcoming this year by above/ground press. She is the Poetry Editor for *Last Exit*. Her work can also be found in recent issues of *A Velvet Giant*, *the tiny*, and *Pidgeonholes* and others.

Social Media:

Website: <https://heathersweeney.net>

Twitter: @HeatherCSweeney

Instagram: heathercsweeney

Juliette van der Molen is a writer and poet living in the Greater NYC area. She is an intersectional feminist and a member of the LGBTQIA community. She is a contributing editor for Mookychick Magazine and author of *Death Library: The Exquisite Corpse Collection* (*Moonchild Magazine*, August 2018). Her work has also appeared in *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Burning House Press*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, *Collective Unrest* and several other publications. Forthcoming books include: *Mother, May I?* (*Animal Heart Press*, May 2019) and *Anatomy of A Dress* (*Hedgehog Poetry Press*, 2019). You can connect with her on Twitter via @j\_vandermolen.

Amy Kinsman (they/them) is a genderfluid poet from Manchester, England. As well as being founding editor of *Riggwelter Press*, they are also associate editor of *Three Drops From A Cauldron*. Their debut pamphlet & was joint winner of the Indigo Dreams Pamphlet Prize 2017.

©February 2019 *Kissing Dynamite: A Journal of Poetry*  
All rights reserved.