

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 31 JULY 2021: "CHANGING FACE"

Join our poets in Issue 31 "Changing Face" as they explore the complexities of dualities, splits, and veering off course.

This month's featured poet is Ọbáfẹ̀mi Thanni.

Issue 31 includes work by Adam Ai, Auden Eagerton, Rita Mookerjee, Maxwell Suzuki, Ọbáfẹ̀mi Thanni, and Jade Yeung.

Featured Artist—Michael Noonan

My name is Michael Noonan. I come from Halifax (which is famous for its Piece Hall), West Yorkshire. I have a background in retail, food production and office work. I enjoy movies, walking in the countryside and listening to BBC Radio 3. I have always been interested in the arts. I attended art class at Calderdale College. I've had artworks published in literary journals in the US and UK, I won a runners up prize for a black and white line drawing in a competition run by Arts and Illustrators Magazine in the UK, and had an acrylic painting hung in Leeds City Art Gallery, after entering a competition they organized. I have sold artworks - acrylic paintings, black and white and coloured drawings, and reproductions – on Ebay. Aside from the fine arts, literature is my other main interest. My own painting can be seen on the cover of a volume of my short stories entitled *SEVEN TALL TALES* that is available at Amazon. And one of my drawings is on the cover of a novella I've written called *Deadman's Treasure* that can be seen [HERE](#).

I have had stories entitled "The Stairway to Paradise" and "The Hold-up" published in the anthology volumes *Even More Tonto Tales* and *Shades of Sentience*, the latter an Australian publication. An article I wrote on the Kubrick movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* has been published by *Bridge Eight Magazine* in Florida, and a fairy-tale I've written entitled "The Guardian of the Wood" has been published in the *Fantasy Arts and Studies* journal in France.

I admire the great surrealist artists like Rene Magritte, Max Ernst, and Chirico; and my particular favourite is Yves Tanguy. I like the dreamlike quality of their work, and my own artworks have a tendency towards the offbeat and the unusual.

“I Wonder How You Pray” by Adam Ai

A woman speaking tongues leaps naked in front of a car on the 405.
No real words. The freeway so black it's red. Answer to a riddle.
It runs, a river – Los Angeles in psalms, white-sky, splitting palms.

Hard breath to cuffed-up silence, like church. Spatty, dust ruffle.
Echo dies in the stalled corridor. Horns flat. Empty cups of worship.
Chalices, red as words Jesus said in my childhood Bible. Remember.

The word pours from her chest like window stain in lightning, flesh.
Gurgled. Rhymes for anything dying the same. Serial oddness.
Fire but I'm not afraid. River of purpose. Anyone can be everyone.

I mean all rivers meet somewhere. Cop lights spin sun and moon.
Facing Sunset, near sunset. The universe is rhyme. The universe
is in love with itself. Speaks poem and flower everywhere, even here.

A million unmoving cars suck low the soft asphalt, like quicksand.
Beaches are closed. Was going alone. Believe me I never saw her.
I guess I've seen enough blood. Not looking now but I smell it.

High tide, low tide. Los Angeles pours into the shore, the end.
Manifest Destiny even dead observe. End of the world, and cops
are helpless, sirens for show. Where can they go? I forget to pray.

The sun dying. Sky pinks, mangoes. I hear a radio – the news is war.
I cough something broken. How would an ambulance get here?
All of us pray we make it home. Yet somehow we all pray different.

The radio says something else will have to save us from ourselves.
I get out of the car, press my face to the pavement. Northbound.
What's black even when it's red. A driver in a mirror mask watches.

I watch myself in their eyes. I keep wiping mine – I'm bloody-wet.
Everyone throbs, the city burns in blood. I swallow it hard. It is odd
I don't recognize my own reflection. As it runs, a river.

“Caroline” by Auden Eagerton

I can do this trick
where I imitate your smile.
We're identical, it's not hard.
It's something to pull out at parties, a joke.
*If you don't look like you're signaling for help
with your eyes, I say, you're doing it wrong.*

Mostly I do it to understand.

I read somewhere that we are all
trying to return to our mother's bodies.
Our mother is an axe
swathed in barbed wire,
and really, you were my first home.

Isn't that what I'm doing
when I steal your face?
I dig into my cheeks—
I once gave you a compass
so you could always find your way back to me—
try to exhume the last time
I was your dead reckoning.

There's an ending where we both got out, once.
The sac collapsing,
it was the first time we would suffocate
under our mother's unending sky.
We were ripped into light.

["Magnolia Striptease" by Rita Mookerjee](#)

Every year I catch that muted perfume but find
the blossoms too late the blush petals already tipped

with brown exhausted from their brush with fame
their spent days of notoriety littering the campus

in slivers of rose and cream like discarded satin slippers
or nipple pasties peeled from the softest peaks of breast.

Someday I will start early and catch them at their fullest, in their
most labial, obscene, and decadent state and though I love bees

they do not interrupt me under the magnolia with her crown of beetles
and so I get a private dance in a bowing maze of strength and softness.

To think that this tree persisted for 50 million years and now
owes a debt to beetles, not bees for its survival. To think that

a body could weather this world for that long and leave me with nothing but a striptease.

“Burn, Tan, Peel” by Maxwell Suzuki

A hot fluttering of crisp skin collects
at the cuticles of my keyboard. Fall
managing to slough all of its color
and none of its body. Limbs bleaching
themselves because they are terrified
of what happens to spoiled

honey. On a visit to my Aunt’s
in Orange County, I had proclaimed
not needing sunscreen before going
to the beach. Later, my torso

could recollect the violence
of the tangerine surf. Its Imperial
Red soon mended in Aloe and apple
juice. The lesson was quickly
shucked back into the Pacific. I forget

my sunscreen sometimes. Noting
the Rising Sun of a blistering
summer—and then its de-
colonization. A tan questioning
my hyphen. And blaming

myself when I can-
not pronounce nori. Now,
Spring is fading and I
do not know if

I am worthy of
containing a

sunset.

“Alternate ending with bloodless dress” by Ọbáfẹ̀mi Thanni, July’s Featured Poet

after Safia Elhillo’s ‘Vocabulary’ and Tjawangwa Dema’s ‘Homonym’

The Yoruba word ọta means bullet
The Yoruba word ọtá means enemy

What should our memory hold of October

Our mothers prayed *may the bullet not stray towards my children*
or

Our mothers prayed *may the enemy not stray towards my children*

Our mothers prayed against the gun
or

Our mothers prayed against the state

To say body you say ara
To say thunder you say àrá

Teminikan recalls *that night, I ran my fingers over her body*
or

Teminikan recalls *that night, I ran my fingers over her thunder*

Teminikan recalls a memory
or

Teminikan recalls a myth

To cause a thing to fly you cast the spell fò
To cause a think to break you cast the spell fọ

The feather floating above the drowned boy sings *O you should have seen him fly*
or

The feather floating above the drowned boy sings *O you should have seen him break*

The feather wanted the boy to be free
or

The feather wanted the boy to be remembered

In my mother’s tongue meanings are breaths apart

Take a breath and say rí and it means saw
Take a breath and say rì and it means sank

A voice points to a wound and says *she was the only one who truly saw me*
or
A voice points to a wound and says *she was the only one who truly sank me*

The voice belongs to a boy
or
The voice belongs to a ghost

Ọbáfẹ̀mi on “Alternate ending with bloodless dress”:

I am—along with many African writers—of a bilingual heritage. Whether it is in the Yoruba language I share with Logan February or the Arabic or Setswana I eavesdrop on in the works of Safia Elhillo and Tjawangwa Dema, respectively, there are always implications to the recurring translations and migrations in meaning.

This poem experiments with the same intent as the ones it is written after, considering the implication of alternate meanings in the conception of longing, grief and state-inspired violence.

Editor-in-Chief Christine Taylor’s Commentary on “Alternate ending with bloodless dress”:

When this poem came our way, the editorial team was impressed by Thanni's clever, creative, and deft handling of the dualities that are present in language and how alternate interpretations impose meaning on our lives and circumstances. The form of the poem engages the reader from beginning to end, and overall, the poem continues to ask questions, prompting the reader to return to it again and again.

“Hippocampus Split” by Jade Yeung

**Note: Content warning—child sexual abuse*

in a ritual of trespasses I’ve forgotten
the first trespass before language there’s body
what it remembers when I don’t to survive
there’s willed forgetting what tendons
keep from brain like secrets

fingers all they did point claw
*can I ___? can you ___? why don't you
make any sounds?* brother cop asked
questions don't mean choices I see now
pleasure is loud
in the blood when welcomed
who was she this trammeled baby doll
its rosebud lips agape salt milk
its shunted brain wide plastic eyes
let's keep this between us
he controls what's not
his they say *protect* hide
many narratives

I want
what is mine

once before body split
we discovered a bird's nest
tucked deep inside he thrust
his hand in

Poet Biographies

Adam Ai is a poet from Los Angeles. His poems can be found in many print and online publications. Connect @adamaipoems or a Ouija Board for more. Hobbies include chasing a Ghost around the Veteran's Hospital and learning how to love.

twitter.com/AdamAiPoems
[instagram.com/adamaipoems](https://www.instagram.com/adamaipoems)
YouTube bit.ly/3eMEKrQ

Auden Eagerton (they/them & he/him) is a nonbinary poet located in middle Georgia. They received a Bachelor's degree in English at Kennesaw State University and currently pursue an MFA at Georgia College & State University. Their work has been published in *Across the Margin*, *Whale Road Review*, *Feral: A Journal of Art and Poetry*, and other journals.

Twitter: @AudenEagerton

Rita Mookerjee's (she/her) poetry has appeared in *Vassar Review*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *the New Orleans Review*, *Hobart Pulp*, and the *Offing*. In 2020, she was a Fulbright Research Fellow to Jamaica. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks: *Becoming the Bronze Idol* (Bone and Ink Press) and *Protection Rituals* (Drum Machine Editions). A co-founder of Honey Literary, Rita also serves as the Assistant Poetry Editor at *Split Lip Magazine*. Find her on Twitter:

@RitaMookerjee

Maxwell Suzuki (he/him) is a Japanese American writer who recently graduated from USC and lives in Los Angeles. Maxwell's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Woven Tale Press*, *Giving Room Mag*, *The Racket Journal*, *Abandon Journal*, and his personal website www.lindenandbuckskin.com. He is currently writing a novel on the generational disconnect of Japanese American immigrants and their children.

Twitter: @papasuzuki

Ọbáfẹmí Thanni is a genre-bending writer whose poetry was the third-place winner of the Nigerian Newsdirect Poetry Prize 2020. He is a reader at *The Masters Review* and is currently making attempts at beauty while applying for a citizenship in Lucille. You can find him on Twitter and Instagram @obafemithanni and read his previously published works at obafemithanni.com

Jade Yeung (she/they) is a Toishanese writer from Brooklyn, NY. They have received support from Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, Community of Writers, and Fine Arts Work Center. Their writing has appeared in *Lammergeier* and Indolent Book's *A River Sings* series. Currently Jade is pursuing an MFA at Rutgers University-Newark where they're a Trustees Fellow. Find them on Twitter and IG @jadedisk.

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