

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 33 SEPTEMBER 2021: “(RE)IMAGINING”

In Issue 33 “(Re)Imagining,” we explore the often blurry boundaries between the real and the surreal. From slice-of-life revelations to combing the contours of the mind, our poets in Issue 33 ask us to (re)imagine life and memory.

This month's featured poet is Keisha Cassel.

Issue 33 includes work by Christine Naprava, Semilore Kilaso, Robert Guzikowski, Ariyo Ahmad, Kevin Grauke, Erica Abbott, Nadine Klassen, Keisha Cassel, and Sarah A. Etlinger.

### Farewell

With this issue, we say farewell to Managing Editor **Jeni De La O**. Jeni first became part of the KD fam as the featured writer for Issue 4 “Revenant,” with her poem “**The Weight of Lemons**,” and a few months later, she joined the KD editorial team. As Managing Editor, Jeni has overseen the development of our new submission process. Jeni is the 2021 Literary Arts Fellow at Kresge Arts in Detroit and writes the monthly column “Brown Study” at *The Poetry Question*. We will miss her here, but will be in her corner always.

### Featured Artist—Mathew Yates

**Mathew Yates** (they/them/any) is a poet & artist from Paducah, Kentucky with roots in Mississippi & Appalachia. Their poetry can be found in *Barren Magazine*, *Screen Door Review*, *Malarkey Books*, *perhappened*, & more. (@m\_yates on twitter) (@mathew.yates on instagram) ([www.etsy.com/shop/mathewyatesart](http://www.etsy.com/shop/mathewyatesart))

### “Friday Morning” by Christine Naprava

But it’s not working,  
my plan for this morning:  
to wake,  
to wash and hang the darks,  
to write uninterruptedly,  
to enter work a better person,

renewed and redeemed.  
The cat will not allow my mother  
to inject it with insulin,  
so now we're all victims of feline diabetes  
with elevated glucose caking and corroding our blood.  
The coffee is to my liking,  
strong and Columbian,  
but does not stay hot for long enough,  
and for too long,  
I've associated microwaves with cancer.  
The words I beg at the feet of scramble up a tree,  
are immune to my goading.  
All of the firefighters are out extinguishing flames,  
too busy saving lives to help a girl out.  
I sneak downstairs to rinse the coffee pot  
and dreadfully, I no longer hear the washer machine churning.  
I toss the damp, knotted darks into my ancient laundry basket  
and trek down to the basement,  
snapping and hanging them on wooden Amish drying racks.  
I begin to write a poem in my head and dismiss it.  
The hours pass insignificantly.  
I cannot locate the shorts I wear to work.  
They're on a drying rack in the basement,  
I remember,  
no time to pop them in the dryer  
because I've wasted all my time.  
I slip into denim, feeling confined,  
another reason to curse the day.  
I am distracted at work.  
My morning did not go as planned,  
but I do not have cancer of the face,  
as one customer tells me her husband does.  
My family vacation does not need to be canceled  
because my son has to have emergency surgery  
on his nasal passages.  
My son did not smash out all four windows of my car  
with a crowbar  
and then attack my elderly father.  
My mother will not have hospice  
waiting for her when she gets home.  
My father will not threaten me with a metal pipe  
in the backyard of the house I grew up in.

It'll all be waiting for me tomorrow morning.  
The darks will dry.  
The coffee will go cold if I let it go cold.  
The cat will get its insulin if it takes all day.  
The words will come down on their own.

### "The Making of Soot" by Semilore Kilaso

Yesterday, I saw a boy burn in flames.  
His frail body, tattooed in scars became charred remains.  
I watched agony enter and leave his body  
in some sort of exchange —  
an entropy of tissues becoming soot.  
Like me, nameless strangers stood and watched as the mob  
exorcised the boy who stole a cup of staple to stay alive.  
The burial of his lineage and rebranding of his soul  
was a ritual of tyres, petrol, sweat, and burning flesh.  
Here we do not tolerate thieves, we expunge even the smallest  
The other day, we held placards,  
soliciting the revival of our nation caught in the inferno  
of its own flame.  
Like the boy, we sought for life in this country  
where everything is out to kill us.  
The government shut us down, fired bullets to silence  
our voices in the same way the mob lit the boy.  
We screamed in fear till our voices went with the wind  
and found the boy's sonic.  
Our brittle bodies gave into the war they waged against us.  
You should have seen how we ran, buried ourselves in fear,  
sought asylums in countries where we are made nothing.  
We ran across Atlantic. Atlantic got us.  
We ran knowing to be made nothing  
beats to be burnt to soot.

### "Aphasia Poem 7" by Robert Guzikowski

among the jumble are  
odors false, abandoned arisings,  
unmediated cybernetic

mimesis, ideas  
lost, vocabularies uncoded,

remaining only as background noise.

dwelling-in-the-world-ness,  
becomingness, becomes first and last,  
all the way to the bottomlessness.

form is transduced ruin,  
the the, the that, each then mirroring  
the other. neurons lost, voidness found.

sequences when and where, old and new,  
here, there and all the ands, fade from view.

[“The Last Wish of the Soul Is Death” by Ariyo Ahmad](#)

*For my Late Grandmother*

Nights are scattered shadow; like a black blanket  
I see the eyes of my grandmother etched with a drowning desire  
Uncle death is in-charge of reading the body's end  
With his eyes waiting patiently for the soul to exile the body  
my grandmother knows she is stumbling on the wall of her end,  
The sweet taste of her soup is a memory hanging on my lips  
How she articulate into a boy's body, and emit his grief.  
Mention the herbs, my grandmother knows what they heal  
My grandmother keeps telling my mom not to cry,  
For she is to wait for her at heaven's gate  
& to wear another body like a snake; like a chameleon  
A time my mother stopped my grandmother from going to the market,  
Who knows she is purchasing her final sacrificial right?  
My mother's last born doesn't know the fever that befalls the house,  
He went about hovering like a butterfly across a garden  
But grandmother's soul is asking for her last rite,  
The last time I heard my grandmother talked

A bird flew out from her mouth and nothing in her could breathe again.

“Captain American & Billy the Kid, Much Too Deep in Louisiana” by Kevin Grauke

after *Easy Rider*

I didn't mean to do nothing but scare that one boy even though what I wanted more than anything after he shot the finger at us was to put a ragged hole through his long-haired head so I was just as surprised as he was when he fell over like a domino into the grass alongside the highway and my brother who was driving can say the same as me on this because that's what I told him myself that I didn't mean to do nothing but scare the boy for being fool enough to look as he did in a place such as this and being so goddamn peacock proud about it and so my brother he turned the truck around—maybe to help, maybe to not, it makes no difference now which way it was—and when I saw the other boy now heading back our direction on his fancy low-slung contraption I pushed the shotgun past my brother's face and on through his window and I did it again I pulled the trigger and just as soon as I did I knew it meant blood and fire because I hit his gas tank painted with the stars and stripes because they thought such disrespect was funny and even once we got back to the house I could see from the porch the black smoke still rising above the trees as I'm supposing the grass had caught fire and then kept on burning and no I don't regret it no sir and I'd do it again and nothing ever bothers me in my dreams when I sleep at night because why the hell would it since I never meant to do nothing but put the fear of Jesus into a couple of boys who were begging for nothing less than just that very thing but I do wonder sometimes when that fire's ever gonna go out because every night

its burning lights my bedroom a flickering orange even after I've screwed my eyes shut so tight  
my face quivers with aches

"King Hades Makes Orpheus a Magician This Time" by Erica Abbott

*(inspired by Hadestown)*

Proclaims *he'll write you a poem when the power is out*  
and I wonder what's so wrong about that?

Poetry is the song of the gods; each word  
a source of kindling when the timbre

of speech combusts. This hungry artist  
is not starved: his voice is heaven-

sent. The mighty king of the underworld  
and manipulator of the strings ought to hear this.

He is rich in romanticism, trying so hard  
to immortalize those he loves in his words—

I used to believe what they say about never dying  
if you love a person such as this. *Orpheus*

But then a deal is made. A sorrow of lyrebirds  
mimics the sound of our leaving

and my imagination becomes an escape artist—chains  
hope to the fact that there must be more than this:

*penniless*. You see, the willows still weep  
their songs of defeat, each branch a throbbing vein

hanging from its arterial root. What does the wind know  
of war— of failed tricks and truces? Hunger is a weapon

and his songs no longer feed my survival. I did  
not ask him to free me, never signaled distress. My mouth

hangs open wide ready to receive the shining apple and, again,  
I am halved at my core. Doesn't he see? He never looked

at our love as anything that needed saving—  
the world above ground needed far too much rescuing.

Look, I am a wilting flower still needing to be fed;  
yes, a fading flame seeking shelter from the cold, too—

and, yes, in this poem, I am Eurydice  
and all I am asking is for him to not disappear

me.

*(credit for referenced lyric in first stanza: "Hey, Little Songbird" from the musical Hadestown)*

["Sixteen Songs for the Catbird" by Nadine Klassen](#)

The night after your birthday, I dreamt I visited you in Colorado,  
which was a field in New York City, wet

as a mountain's top, after a storm had opened  
& ran across the crowds of seven

lives we had brought here -  
everyone we have been, everyone

we gave to a future. Everyone we are  
because of how our mothers have loved us.

& I forgot her face,  
I bit into my own voice - hungry for myself.

If you walked down all of the streets of New York,  
it would take a little over one hundred days,

& you'd arrive again & again at the little finger  
of time & ask for one more way

to know yourself. Cut Colorado's mountains with a swiss pocket  
knife into Switzerland six times one night & eat

their one thousand peaks by dawn.  
Back in your apartment, which was a Loft

in Midtown Manhattan,  
your love was lying in their jeans and t-shirt

in a puddle of Cepheus' light, pouring  
through the skylights in the middle of the kitchen,

*just feeling the light in my body being held by itself.*  
& even though I had prepared

for it until it had become aftercare,  
I still wore my mother's outfit, her rings & makeup.

& I know what I took that plane for, why I came to Colorado  
in midnight's baffle.

Why I tied my sheets in knots & hung them  
into your front door: to climb those high shelves

in your kitchen, a catbird in my hands, an olive branch  
of my own hair & jump into the flood.

"On Subjugation<sup>1</sup>" by Keisha Cassel, September's Featured Poet

The boy [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] black [REDACTED]

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<sup>1</sup> Booker, M., Olds, S., & Shire, W. (2017). On the Subway. In *Penguin modern POETS 3: Your family, your body* (pp. 44-44). poem, Penguin.



laced with [REDACTED] in a complex [REDACTED]  
set of intentional scars. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] stuck in a rod of light  
rapidly moving through darkness. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He is wearing  
[REDACTED] the inside of the body  
exposed. [REDACTED] the  
whole skin of an animal taken and  
used. [REDACTED] look at his [REDACTED] face,

[REDACTED]  
know [REDACTED]

he could take [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] life [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] power [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] And he is *still* black

[REDACTED] without meaning [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] from his darkness,

[REDACTED] he absorbs [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the heat of the sun and holds it. There is

no way to know how [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] life, this

life [REDACTED] could [REDACTED] so easily [REDACTED]

break [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] his soul [REDACTED]

████████████████████  
██████████ into ██████████ light.

**Keisha on “On Subjugation”:**

I wrote this poem after reading Sharon Old’s, “On the Subway,” and desperately wanting to change the perspective of the poem, which is initially told from the perspective of an affluent white woman as she observes a young black man and projects her guilt and fear onto his body. When initially reading Old’s poem, I couldn’t help but imagine the different voices that would have been present on the subway and those voices that were already in the original text waiting to be called forth.

“On Subjugation” can be observed as taking place “On the Subway,” but in this moment, the interior world of the young black man in question is placed at the center of the poem’s universe, changing both the perspective and the impact of the poem.

**Assistant Editor Belinda Munyeza’s Commentary on “On Subjugation”:**

“On Subjugation” is a great example of how the art of erasure and its use of elimination can actually be a tool for more precise illumination. The poem from which this erasure is crafted already makes some compelling commentary on the nature of race relations in the persona’s world. “On Subjugation” carries this commentary forward. But what makes it so uniquely gripping is the way in which Keisha redirects the light, the way in which they bring the reader’s attention away from the persona in the original poem and point it more intently towards the boy on the subway. By eliminating all the details that describe and center the persona and leaving only the details that focus on the boy, the poet forces us to look even closer. They make us more attentive, more present to witness precisely what it is like to exist in a world of violent oppression on the part of the oppressed.

[“Entering \(the world again\)” by Sarah A. Etlinger](#)

The Mexican food truck is a darker blue this year  
and festooned with icicle lights, because it’s festive,  
and this is a festive occasion. So far, three black dogs  
and two puppies, four kids screaming, and two red wagons.

The playground is an amoeba of children and motion.  
Parents pitch lawn tents and camping chairs  
and on the side of the hill, squares of heirloom quilts,  
old blankets, coolers, and more beer.

There are screams and cicadas, the skid of scooter tires,  
and the gulp-zap! of tennis balls on the courts across the street.

Beyond, the beer tent and beyond that the bandshell  
and beyond that the jagged tree tops crest the sky,  
holding vigil.

When the band starts its first chords, dusk does too,  
and the whole mess of everything we are seems to shimmer and stop,  
shimmer and stop—like old home movies with bright and blurry light.

We are here, now. We do not know what we want  
except to be here, but we are here and it is July  
and we are ready.

And when a plane flies overhead,  
it can probably see us too, all of us here, under this patch of the sun,  
before it lands, before its passengers pour out and enter the world again.

## Poet Biographies

**Erica Abbott** (she/her) is a Philadelphia-based poet and writer whose work has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *Midway Journal*, *Serotonin*, *FERAL*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, and other journals. She is the author of *Self-Portrait as a Sinking Ship* (Toho, 2020), her debut poetry chapbook. She volunteers for Button Poetry and Mad Poets Society. Follow her on Instagram [@poetry\\_erica](#) and on Twitter [@erica\\_abbott](#). Website: [ericaabbott.wordpress.com](http://ericaabbott.wordpress.com)

**Ariyo Ahmad** (He/ him) is a Nigerian poet from Ogun state. He has poems published in *Brittle Paper*, *Native Skin Lit Magazine*, *Icefloe Press*, *Art Lounge*, *Kalahari Review*, *Rigorous*, *African Writers*, and numerous others. He was an honorable mention in the *Fitrah Review* contest (2021), was shortlisted for Brigitte Poirson Poetry prize (June/July, 2021) and is also the Poetry Editor for *fieryscribereview*. Find him on Twitter [@ahmad\\_akanni](#)

**Keisha** (she/they) is a multidisciplinary artist currently based in Boston, MA. You can find their work in *Variety Pack*, *Call and Response Journal*, *Onley* (forthcoming), and their micro-chap *Constructs* (Ghost City Press.) They're also on the internet at [keishacassel.com](http://keishacassel.com) & [@laughsatdanger](#) on Twitter/Instagram.

**Sarah A. Etlinger** (she/her) is an English professor who lives in Milwaukee, WI, with her family. A Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, she is also the author of 3 books, the most recent of which—*The Weather Gods*—is forthcoming from Fernwood Press. Sarah's work has appeared in *Pank!*, *Spry Lit*, *Eunoia Review*, and many others. Her interests include baking, cooking, traveling, and spending time by Lake Michigan with her family. Find her at [www.sarahetlinger.com](http://www.sarahetlinger.com) or on Twitter at [@drsaephd](#).

**Kevin Grauke** is the author of *Shadows of Men* (Queen's Ferry Press), winner of the Steven Turner Award from the Texas Institute of Letters. His fiction, poetry, and essays have appeared (or are forthcoming) in journals such as *The Threepenny Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Quarterly West*, and *Columbia Journal*. He's a Contributing Editor at *Story* and a Texan who teaches at La Salle University in Philadelphia. Twitter: @kevingrauke

In the 1970's and 80's, **Robert Guzikowski** published work in several magazines and edited with two other poets *The Parlor City Review*, gave readings and multi-media performances, and conducted poetry workshops. In the 90's, he had encephalitis which caused brain damage. Aphasia was one of the sequelae. Following this, he resumed developing his art and wrote on a variety of subjects on his blog Atomic Geography ([atomicgeography.com](http://atomicgeography.com)). He resumed writing poetry recently, including *The Aphasia Poems* and has work forthcoming in *The Raw Art Review*.

**Semilore Kilaso** (she/her) is a poet and student Quantity Surveyor, who loves to collect photographs of humans, architecture, wildlife, and landscape. When she is not playing Scrabble or reading books, she is reading lines from architectural drawings. You can read her works here <https://linktr.ee/SemiloreKilaso> or reach her on Twitter @ooreola

**Nadine Klassen** (she/her) is a German poet, whose work focuses on mental health, identity and relationships. It has been published by *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Olney*, *Sky Island Journal* and others. She lives in her hometown with her boyfriend and their dog. Find her on Instagram: @nadineklassen.writer

**Christine Naprava** (she/her) is a writer from South Jersey. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Studio One*, *Soundings East*, *Punk Noir Magazine*, *Literary Yard*, *The Daily Drunk*, *Outcast Press*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, the *Lunch Break Zine*, and *Sledgehammer Lit*, among others. You can find her on Twitter @CNaprava and Instagram @cnaprava

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