

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 34 OCTOBER 2021: "BARE"

In Issue 34 "Bare," our poets expose the self, lay it all on the line.

This month's featured poet is Ashley Cline.

Issue 34 includes work by Abdulkareem Abdulkareem, Ashley Cline, Zoë Fay-Stindt, Nicole Arocho Hernández, Daniel Liu, Kaleigh O'Keefe, Ami Patel, and Emma Younger.

And with this issue, we formally announce our Best of the Net Nominees for 2021!

### Artwork

**Brett Stout**—Issue 19, July 2020

**Martins Deep**—Issue 26, February 2021

**Suedabeh Ewing**—Issue 28, April 2021

### Poetry

**Koss**—A Dyke Cowgirl Takes Herself on a COVID Taco Bell Date

**Danielle P. Williams**—Bear in mind that death is a drum

**Victory O. Okoyomoh**—of intangible things

**Samantha Fain**—schrödinger's poetica

**Kristin Lueke**—The last of the five good emperors

**J.E. Seuk**—SPEAK ENGLISH LOUD

### Featured Artist—Pamela Yve Simon

**Pam Yve Simon** (she/her) believes in love and art. She earned her bachelor of arts in English and American literature from New York University. Her poetry has appeared in *perhappened mag* and *Fahmidan Journal*. Her photography has appeared in *Feral*. Say hi to her on Twitter @PamYve or visit <https://linktr.ee/pamyve>

“The threnody of a boy” by Abdulkareem Abdulkareem

Somewhere, a boy, splintered by loss,  
life stutters in his mouth, his words falls off  
his mouth like glass & it breaks into shards.  
somewhere, a flower is a symbol of love,  
that a heart pulls towards another like a  
magnet & in another, it grows after dirges  
falls like a dead man off the cliff of a mouth.  
This boy I'm becoming, who munches grief like  
a big belly burger, this boy, who sings an hymn  
of broken songs. On rainy days, I stretch my hands  
into the rain, collect its water to wet the Sahara of  
my throat & when I gulp, it tastes saline like my  
tears, the one I offer like a daily sacrifice to my  
face. Trace my footpaths & it will lead you into  
an oasis in the middle of a desert. This is the threnody  
of a boy who is an Ash tree in the Autumn of his griefs,  
this boy who nurses the crevice of his heart of stone.  
This boy whose grief is only punctuated with  
commas, so it can continue in the later lines of his body.

“yellow bruise, in F# Major (god bless Carly Rae Jepsen)” by Ashley Cline, October's  
Featured Poet

i think about the way Carly Rae Jepsen sings *run away with me* / three minutes & forty-nine  
seconds into the song / of the very same name / more often than i think / of more important  
things / like, i already know that the planet is dying, for example / know how she is burning herself  
alive / for a lover who calls her nothing / calls her maybe / calls her *venus, redux* / & only Carly  
Rae Jepsen understands, this / what it is to spin on an axis of want / knows that you can't fake  
passion / like pleading / like burning / like the way she sings *run away with me* / near the edge of  
that final chorus / the way she extends that one *me* in particular / until it hangs shimmering like  
caramel lovers / unspooling their legs from / the split lips of diner-booth vinyl / sticky & sweet  
from the flush of an august heat / knows that you can't pull it from yourself no matter how hard  
you try / the heat, i mean / & knows that to be in love is a culmination of the body, humid / the  
way it clings to your skin like a bramble, feral / like pressing a finger into a bruise on purpose &  
watching the sky drape herself in something softer than violence / knows that this is a love  
language, too / the body, i mean / & leans in, anyway.

**Ashley's Commentary on “yellow bruise, in F# Major (god bless Carly Rae Jepsen)”:**

There's something so unassuming about pop music. The way its thesis is laid bare by the first chorus. The way it so often asks for what it wants, so plainly. The way it believes in a world where love—and by nature, heartbreak; though that is a poem for another day—is a force as real and as pressing as gravity. And no one writes this kind of pop music—the one least afraid to be vulnerable—better than Carly Rae Jepsen.

It's this vulnerability—so sincere that it pushes at its own boundaries; pulsing like an ache or stretching like a note that knows the closing chorus will wait for it—that I most admire, not just in music or in poetry or in storytelling, but in general. I look for it in everything.

Poetry can be so many things—a long list I won't even try and tally up, here—but for me, my favorite poems—the ones that grab me gently, but urgently—read much like a good pop song plays. Which is not to say that they are simple or bombastic by any means, but rather that they capture honesty in a way that is remarkable: in both their tenderness, and their willingness to be tender.

When I write, all I'm ever really hoping to do is capture a crumb of that honesty; to unravel a thought, or an emotion, or a haphazard string-of-a-phrase back to a chorus that asks, so plainly: *run away with me?*

There are so many reasons to write: writing to make Carly Rae Jepsen proud might as well be one of them.

**Assistant Editor Dia Roth's Commentary on "yellow bruise, in F# Major (god bless Carly Rae Jepsen)":**

Before "yellow bruise, in F# Major (god bless Carly Rae Jepsen)" even begins, Ashley Cline drops us directly into a pool of both physical and emotional ache. We feel the lingering pain of an old bruise, the earth's longing "for a lover who calls her nothing / calls her maybe," and the loneliness wherein "only / Carly Rae Jepsen understands" how any of it feels.

Reading this poem threw me into a weeks-long re-listen of Carly Rae Jepsen's EMOTION; always in the car, always at night, and always with the windows down. Despite having listened to this album's opening track, "Run Away With Me," many times before, I couldn't hear in my mind the exact *run away with me* that she sings "three minutes & forty-nine / seconds into the song." Now, I realize that it doesn't actually matter if I can hear the song in my head or not; this poem shows us "the way she extends that one *me* in particular / until it hangs / shimmering like caramel lovers / unspooling their legs / from the split-lips of diner booth vinyl / sticky & sweet from the flush of an august heat." Cline delivers her speaker's experience of the song with stunning specificity, layering image, breath, and rhythm as richly as Jepsen layers harmonies.

“Painting in Bright Blues” by Zoë Fay-Stindt

In a few days, Mom will have left Connecticut  
and her baby brother behind in his new incarnation:  
seafoam brightening the shoreline. Across an ocean,

she'll harvest bay leaves from Laurence's garden  
heat soup twice a day, apply for forgiveness  
from the hospital, fifty-page proof of no money

of gone, baby, gone. She's been painting in bright blues,  
Mediterranean light, breaking herself out of the northeast.  
This time of the year in Texas, eastern phoebes migrate

south, small turquoise or olive-chested flycatchers  
flitting around the barren tree outside my window.  
This time of the year, the water's unbearably bright

and we toss everything in lemon, crown  
top-thick biscuits with sliced red fruit. No matter  
the season, the woodpecker drills her holes: alone,

clinging to the body she pummels. If you stand beneath her  
a soft, feathery rain. It smells like another wood room,  
cedar mist, where I buy propane tanks from the carpenter,

husband of the woman who raised me in that apartment  
across the street from the meat shop with its deathly pink glow,  
where she fed me ladyfingers despite my father's sweet ban,

sat me in front of a dubbed *Fox & Hound* where I cried,  
eating, and began the good work of rooting joy and misery  
in the same body, fingers studded with sugar.

“Bombardier” by Daniel Liu

The moon still smoldering. Coal-throats in the open arms  
of the guillotine. Here, a funeral. How careless the

steel-cut night was. Each bone crushed, each  
curved vowel rotten on my tongue. The headstones

still pregnant with my name. The embers still sputtering  
ghosts, still asking for prayers. My father folded over  
  
my open mouth. And like clockwork, I ask: isn't this charred earth  
just a graveyard? Aren't we all looking for our own  
  
names? The sound of bombs is just a lullaby  
for dead men. War-stained cochlea. Crimson scattered  
  
everywhere. This country was never ours. This wildfire  
was never this bright, never this frigid. How it swallows me whole.  
  
An ash-rimmed bullet lodged in my lungs, leaving cinders  
in my words. My father tells me a son is only a son if he  
  
can fight. Because birth is an act of violence. Because  
the space between the knife and its reflection is non-existent.  
  
Infested home. Slaughterhouse concerto. We will all be  
long dead when the world ends. We will all hold our fathers  
  
to their last words. The price of bloodthirst is two men  
with their blind eyes rolled back. The spine is just another  
  
place to hide. Another elegy. Another warm corpse. Cornered  
like animals, light escaping us both. This  
  
is salvation.

["My Greed, My Feed" by Nicole Arocho Hernández](#)

In this dream, I am  
by a spring, still on  
a mellow morning.  
My grandfathers  
gathered by revered  
water. In all my life  
I have never seen them  
like this. Together. Most  
likely never met each other.  
But truly what does family  
mean but blood going

back to the soil and  
the living feeding the  
offering, waiting for  
the fertile bloom of  
yearning. *There will be  
no talk about grief in this  
poem.* Yes, my male  
ancestors did terribles.

What I want is not  
sorrow. What I want  
is revenge. So I throw  
everything on sight.

Rocks, flowers, leaves,  
dirt, branches, spit, curses.

Out of breath, I may have  
whispered *I love you*. I may  
have exhaled *I forgive you*.

I definitely did not inhale  
*I chose to love you* or *I will  
forget what you did*. I wish  
they both could've

given me something  
else than a predisposition  
to suffering. That way I  
wouldn't be writing this  
poem but instead mending

my relationship with  
old friends or making sure  
my beloved's not thinking  
about dying. Blood ties  
irretractable, incendiary. I wish

in my veins only ran water  
made holy by salt and  
dereliction. Instead of  
sloshing through frantic  
red-hot paths, why does

this burning happen  
in solitude, when no one  
picks up the phone,  
when my wrists are thick  
in aggression, glistening,  
livid, so maybe

I should just open  
the preternatural wound  
and look for the cure  
to this temper, their  
temper, God's temper  
in making me Sunday-  
morning-hangover  
useless. I know it is not  
possible to forget  
how they feel. I am  
their memory and mouth.

Grandfathers, you  
drowned. You left us  
a red drop in our tongues,  
barely sweetened moon  
drifting with time. I don't need  
to ripen and rot. I was  
born ruined, so please  
show me how to carve  
this fury into your  
enemies' flesh. To those  
who haunted you,  
you showed mercy by  
self-immolation. I,  
I will not forgive. I  
will never forget what  
you all condemned me  
to breathe.

"Golden Shovel for Desire" by Kaleigh O'Keefe

*after Terrance Hayes and Neil Gaiman (The Sandman: Endless Nights, pg 43.)*

The World asks me: *what are you?* I readjust my cap and respond: *well, that depends on who is asking. and if we plan on fucking. I admit, I am not the young clenched fist I used to be. but I'm not an open palm either. if you thought I was one thing you must misremember. call me Both, All, And/Or, Neither, It*

*doesn't matter — but do it with respect.* The World spits. I spit back: *why are you so angry? was it me who robbed you of the potential to be many? no. so, what am I, then? am I a tomboy or a sissy? a trainwreck or an abomination? a woman or a man? a daughter or a disappointment? a dyke. a traitor. a mirror. a faggot.* The World then

turns to go. I say *hey! wait! you don't get to just walk away. do you think I fought this long to just be dismissed? I already said it wasn't me who robbed you — but it was me who seduced you. so how do you explain that?* I ask The World: *how are you so sure*

*you are what you think you are?* The World turns back, sits next to me and leans in for a kiss. I shrug away, say *listen, World, I don't just hand out forgiveness. if there was something you wanted to confess, you should have just said it. if it was me in your dripping daydreams, that's okay. there's something*

*sexy about the unexplainable, I get it. something dainty about the promise of Death's caress. something sinister about the idea of happiness: like a tightrope walker over a lava pit, his shoes untied, yet so close to the finish. imagine my fingers*

*turning the page and touching the face of something — someone — like myself for the first time. it moved cat-like from frame to frame, reached out from the paper and lifted my eyes. in*

*school, I learned most from the other kids. I watched the boys: how his legs slouch open when he sits. the girls, their hips. I taught myself to walk.*

[“The multiverse collapses and I meet my selfish self” by Ami Patel](#)

*Look at you.* She starts to stroke my hair  
fingers catching in my split ends.  
I examine her soft hands, gold nails.  
She hasn't scraped at crusty dishes  
or cradled the rough of barbells  
to sculpt herself into a mountain of worthy.  
She seems amused at the clutter of mail,  
the half-filled notebooks, the faded rug.  
My reality heats my cheeks, my lungs.  
I tell her I don't need new things.  
But do I dare ask what I want to know?  
What frequency is our freedom, and  
how the fuck do I fix this broken nob?  
Night collapses around us. A train tumbles  
from one dreary shipyard to another.  
We sit on the floor, our knees touching.  
She orders pizza, picks off all the mushrooms



slides them straight into her mouth and sighs.  
I'm left with a pockmarked piece,  
and it's fine, no really, it is. It's familiar,  
the lack, the craving of wanting  
and never feeling full.

#### "4 AM Vitals" by Emma Younger

i haven't been honest with myself  
but i have been so  
sorry for myself  
this whole damn time, speeding  
up the mourning process, or slowing  
down the healing. sorry when at 4 am  
vitals are taken & the nurse is so  
generously gentle with her hands  
& sorry when the bright blue tourniquet  
pinches & when i don't flinch &  
when she has to try the other arm.  
i want a bedtime story  
& a forehead kiss.  
she checks my pulse,  
an ally in my hurtling  
comet of complete isolation.  
i tell her that it is not the first time  
i have felt so lithium bleached. she blinks,  
"is there anything you need from me?"  
& i want to ask her to tuck me back into my  
sheet thin plastic cocoon. i am a moth  
at a damp beach, wings covered with sand.  
so i ask for someone to know me.

#### Poet Biographies

**Abdulkareem Abdulkareem** (Panini) (he/him) is a Nigerian writer, who studies Linguistics at the University of Ilorin in Ilorin, Nigeria. His works have appeared/are forthcoming in *ARTmosterrific*, *Shallow Tales Review*, *Brittle Papers*, *Ice Floe*, *Rigorous*, *Second Chance Lit*, *Olney*, *Ninshar.art*, *Windows Facing Windows Review*, *Sledgehammer lit*, *Salamander Ink*, *Afro Literary Magazine*, *Lunaris Review*, *Kissing Dynamite* & elsewhere. He tweets @panini500bc and can be found on Instagram @panini\_500bc and Facebook @ <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100007303118317>

An avid introvert, full-time carbon-based life-form and aspiring himbo, **Ashley Cline** (she/her) crash-landed in south Jersey some time ago, and still calls that strange land home. A Best of the Net 2020 finalist, her poetry has appeared in *404 Ink*, *Okay Donkey*, *perhappened mag*, *Parentheses Journal*, and *HAD*—among others. Her debut chapbook, "& watch how easily the jaw sings of god," is available now (Glass Poetry Press, 2021), while her second and third, "should the earth reclaim you" (Bone & Ink Press) and "cowabungaly yours at the end of the world" (Gutslut Press), are forthcoming. Once, in the summer of 2019, she crowd-surfed an inflatable sword to Carly Rae Jepsen, and her best at all-you-can-eat sushi is 5 rolls in 11 minutes. She is much too Online for her own good. Twitter: @the\_Cline. Instagram: @clinecline. Linktree: @ashleycline.

**Zoë Fay-Stindt** (she/Z/they) is a queer, bicontinental poet with roots in both the French and American south. Their poetry has appeared in museum galleries, on the radio, on the streets of small towns, in community farm newsletters, and other strange and wonderful places. Z's work has also been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and has been featured or is forthcoming in *SWWIM*, *RHINO*, *Muzzle*, *VIDA*, *Ninth Letter*, and elsewhere. You can find her on the internet @ZoeFayStindt, or offline, somewhere, being a Real Live Human.

**Nicole Arocho Hernández** was born and raised in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. Her poems have been featured in *Variant Literature Journal*, *The Acentos Review*, *The Academy of American Poets*, and elsewhere. Her first chapbook (*I Have No Ocean*, Sundress Publications) was published earlier this year. Her second chapbook manuscript (*How can colonized see light—*) was a finalist for the Glass Poetry Chapbook Series. She is the recipient of the 2021 Katherine C. Turner Prize. She is a Tin House Summer Workshop alum, Translations Editor at the *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and an MFA candidate at Arizona State University. Find her on social media: @nimaarhe and on her website: <https://nicolearochohernan.wixsite.com/nimaarhe>

**Daniel Liu** (he/him) is a writer in Orlando, FL. His work appears in *Kissing Dynamite*, *Hobart After Dark*, *National Poetry Quarterly*, and elsewhere. He is the founder and Director of [inksounds.org](http://inksounds.org), an online interdisciplinary arts gallery. His debut chapbook, *COMRADE*, is forthcoming with *fifth wheel press*. Find him on Twitter @danielliu\_1 and at [daniel-liu.carrd.co](http://daniel-liu.carrd.co).

**Kaleigh O'Keefe** (they/them) is a gender outlaw and proud union member living in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Their poetry has appeared in *Breaking the Chains: a Socialist Perspective on Women's Liberation*, and *Slamfind*, has won the PRIDE Poetry Prize in *Passengers Journal*, and is featured on indie music legend Ceschi's album *Sans Soleil*. Kaleigh is a contributor and editor for *Liberation News*, a co-founder of *Game Over Books*, and hosts the First Fridays Youth Open Mic in Jamaica Plain. You can find them at [www.kaleighokeefe.com](http://www.kaleighokeefe.com) and on social media @KaleighOKeefeOK @FirstFridaysJP @GameOverBooks

**Ami Patel** (she/her) is a queer, diasporic South Asian poet and Young Adult fiction writer. She is a two-time VONA alum and a Tin House alum. Ami's poetry is published in *decomp journal*, *perhappened mag*, *The West Review*, and *They Rise Like A Wave: An Anthology of Asian American Women Poets*. You can find her online at [amipatelwrites.com](http://amipatelwrites.com) and @amiagogo on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

**Emma Younger** (she/her/hers) is originally from Portland, OR, now writing and reading in Chicago, IL. She is currently interested in cats, folk music, sparkling water, and the micro and the macro—where the individual meets the universal in her work. Past work at *Stone of Madness*, with upcoming work at *Hooligan Magazine*. @emmarain27 on insta. @emmaraincloud on twitter.

©October 2021 *Kissing Dynamite: A Journal of Poetry*

ISSN: 2639-426X

All rights reserved.