

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 35 NOVEMBER 2021: "A HAUNTING"

In Issue 35 "A Haunting," our poets dive into the unsettling, that which is difficult to ignore.

This month's featured poet is Muiz Opeyemi Ajayi.

Issue 35 includes work by Muiz Opeyemi Ajayi, Chella Courington, Sam Frost, Elizabeth Gibson, Chinedu Gospel, Lily Greenberg, Andrea Krause, Nadia Patterson, and Sean Wang.

Featured Artist—Serena Piccoli

Serena Piccoli (she\her) is an Italian poet\playwright\photographer\charlatan\cyclist\performer\feminist\lesbian\human rights activist\traveller\swimmer\chocolate lover\
Her poems and photos are featured in anthologies and magazines in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, Ireland, Nigeria, India, Italy and Romania. She writes both in English and Italian about political and social contemporary issues with a touch of irony. She likes to take pictures of words and images that jump out at her from the streets. Find her on Twitter @piccoli_serena and online: <https://www.serenapiccoli.com/>

"Natation" by Muiz Opeyemi Ajayi, November's Featured Poet

in spite of translations,
satan was never christened

èsù. at the moderasat ustaz lectures arabic in english &
you no go fit grab the gist wella like that time i cracked

a joke—that transpired in yoruba
—in english. & no one laughed. & no one laughed. & no

one knows precisely what was lost in translation. & no
one knows where something drowned. where

omi was mistaken for fluidity in this

language where water shares a word with fluid

where thanks & do verb
into ẹṣé as if to say every trudge at action is a leap

towards gratitude. mother makes us lick pepper
mint & bitter cola. says it smoothens the throat's

texture and i pray it dissolves my mouth.
a gordian-knot on the border of being cut &

untied. here a single dọ deviates ẹṣẹ
from sin. & i wonder & i wonder if this means

every step is a kick against the dictum
of God. & in the absence of answers i am belly

up in the middle of the atlantic. well flush
with knowing when the time comes

the water which sails the mackerel
won't refuse to cook it soft.

Muiz's Commentary on "Natation":

In this poem, I explore the portals between words and worlds, the borders between languages, and the uncertainty borne in translation—the impact of not only colonisation, but its predecessor, still evident in 21st century post-colonial Africa. A boy in his early teens was captured by slave traders, 200 years ago, alongside his mother and siblings, in the present-day Oyo state of Western Nigeria. He was sold to a Portuguese slave ship before the subsequent rescue of his vessel by the British. This slave boy was Ajayi, (right, it's coincidental he shares a name with my forefathers and me) later baptized Samuel Ajayi Chrowther, the first African bishop there ever was, and one who translated the bible into Yoruba. As Adam had leave to name animals in Eden, so was Ajayi assigned the job of putting Yoruba names to English words in the scripture. And this man I adore so much translated Lucifer/Satan, the castaway angel in Christian theology to Èṣù, a divine Yoruba deity. Two centuries after, we grow up (wrongly) believing Èṣù is the devil.

There are few bodies to better witness the aftermath of such conflicted history than that of a 21st century Lagos-born Yoruba boy of Muslim background who attended an Anglican school during the day and Arabic at night, who was brought up to respond to his mother in English

even when her questions came in Yoruba. And it seems only right to take the odyssey of this poem through 'natation' in the body of water where it all began.

General Editor Shon Mapp's Commentary on "Natation":

"Natation" is a stunning reflection on language in translation. From the first couplet, Muiz engages us by sharing a culturally significant misnomer. Although quiet and dignified, the piece boldly illustrates the casualties of error and omission, how they can shape the understanding of a people. What I loved most about this piece is its dissection of consequence. What is to become of those details lost in translation? If language is to remain a cultural cornerstone, does translation undermine its natural evolution?

["Paper Covers Rock" by Chella Courington](#)

CW: cutters, cutting nipples, miscarriage

I

I can't stop buying scissors. I walk into Home Depot for geraniums & lilies, leave with gardening shears, green ergonomic handles. Gelson's for halibut. Shiny poultry shears. At a garage sale I find a pair of hedge clippers. By December paper cutters, pinking shears, hair trimmers—any blades you want are boxed in the kitchen pantry.

II

Saturday he takes his 14 clubs & disappears. In hot water, I clean scissors. Prop them on the counter before drying with muslin. Each blade I shine with baking soda. In high school I hung with cutters. They used whatever worked—broken glass, coat hangers, paper. Arms tracked with violet scars like stretch marks, hidden under long-sleeve shirts.

III

Reflections in a Golden Eye: Mrs. Langdon uses garden shears to clip her nipples when she loses her baby. Snip snip—easy as pinching off deadheads. Sunday in January, I hold my left nipple between the blades of barber shears. Warm steel triggers goose bumps. *Is a nipple like a finger? Can they sew it back on?*

IV

Recurrent dream: Blades down, scissors drop from the ceiling, rattling & hissing. Impale the cherry nightstand, down comforter, my Land's End bathrobe. I crouch in the tub, rocking to the sound of hail. Open my thigh—blood a rusty penny melting on my tongue.

V

I get an Alabama divorce. He signs the papers & hauls his Titleist clubs, La-Z-Boy, & mahogany desk back to Illinois. Parting words: *The cat stays with you.* I keep Moot, the crystal, & the condo. Start selling the scissors on E-Bay, box by box.

NOTE: This poem originally appeared in the now defunct *Mademoiselle's Fingertips* (Summer 2008)

["Points of Geological Interest" by Sam Frost](#)

You point to the road sign with your fist
half clenched around your McMuffin
and I'm thankful for the miles you latched
to car tires, and McDonald's breakfast
grease spread on my fingertips,
and the mountains beside us,
and the way bug guts squish as we pass
the middle-aged woman driving an RV
fit for a queen wearing white linens
or maybe a stained Old Navy 4th of July t-shirt.

I wonder if everyone knows
when they see us we are still learning
how to turn love into a verb,
and how to read different books
on the same couch, and lick lips,
and spread legs, and cry in the middle of sex.
I wonder where I stop and you begin
and if on days where my flesh turns hot
on your flesh, I will always think of how
I didn't know I was looking for this,
a chest that can deflate in a good way,
a kind of knot that's both undone and tied
to lungs that tingle with fresh air.

I've already forgotten which small town
was home to the point of geological interest
too vague for a real sign, something
that would say "I am here, I am here,"
because I am looking at you, sunglasses
turning the brim of your nose pink

and biscuit crumbs on your wrinkled shirt,
and I am thinking of all the people I never loved,
and the nights smoking weed on the balcony
with that guy who played drums
for a band I never checked out.

And I don't really smoke weed anymore,
but I'm still not sure how to touch myself
in a way that feels like I've come
home at 2 a.m. and found leftover pasta salad
in the bowl behind the chopped celery,
and I'm not sure I've learned how to feel
anything in the right way.

On this two-lane road with you smiling,
and my feet on the window leaving toe marks,
and you skipping songs I don't like,
I think love is easier than we make it.

["As we wait to find out why I am bleeding again" by Elizabeth Gibson](#)

The carpet in this place is like curls of fat cut from a chop,
or bloated white kelp – although it is really grey, or green,
it is impossible to see it clearly. It is so cold in here now
and I am so sleepy that my eyes are starting to go numb

to the subtleties of turquoise or teal. But the floor is full,
loud, swirling and flooding, fighting for ever more space.
It could be kale, piped icing, whipped cream, walnut innards,
brain, tripe, ferns or flame. Womb tissue, flecking upwards

towards ovaries. Parts of ears. Fungi gathered around a tree.
The golden scrolly decorations that burst from church pillars,
that I fixed on each night I sat in a wooden pew on the balcony
after I survived flu to sing in the choir for the Christmas play.

The cold is all you remember, and then pillars and carpets
dragged in like awkward kids, with curls and flabby edges
that from my own soft self, it would have been easy to reject.
But back then, I saw richness, gorgeous excess. Life, still going.

“Season (. . ./ . . .)” by Chinedu Gospel

Night scissors you into a colony of scars. You hold psalms under your tongue & they ferment into wine. Are these seasons gliding down your throat not summer skies sprinkling through the sun in your scorching heart. You hold your breath through the night & gather a plethora of hope at the feet of morning – a shimmering that undarkens you in the eyes of the sun. You, a nascent glow in your mother’s eyes. You, a sharp amen blading her tongue into halves. You, a softness in the soil. Say, a grass being grazed by grief. You, water vapourizing into an empty kettle. & in poems like this, nothing sounds louder than a bell clanging at a distant temple without echoes. A hijab babbling with salt water & you drowning in it. You mistake Adhan for rapture, confess your imperfections. Yet, you, a fleet of unforgiveness wading through holy waters. Your mother has a habit of bathing you at night when you sleep. The pool of tears she outpours with your name as the only inhabitant, gliding towards a tributary of redemption. Yet, you survive only in prayers. But in reality, it is one metaphor after another. How you mistake a knife for a mattress. A bathtub for a pool where you can devoid yourself, this heaviness. Every night, you think yourself a moth that can die instinctively. At sunrise, you’re a butterfly morphing into beauty. You are –

“Is not this male poet assuming a woman’s voice everything you ever wanted from a woman?” by Lily Greenberg

His woman talks
about her cunt, how it opens

like a valve, flaps like a wing,
how it doesn't say: *I want
a day in the sun. I am
overgrowing. I need no forgiveness.*
Her cunt is an everflowing river
of no mouth. Her river is fertile
in a sexy way. The blood of her
river is always bright
and does not clot. Her blood
is never sad for no reason.
Her breasts are faucets of milk.
Her legs could wrap around an oak
twice. Floral caves are her armpits.
The aura of womb is upon her.
The glory of womb is being
gardened by a man. Her roses
are pinker than a dead sky.
Her sky has always been a ceiling.

["Forage" by Andrea Krause](#)

After we exchange the sheets
for clean, she clings to me fresh
shook, acrid, vulnerable. How easily
the wind knocks it all out of us, trips us
up on invisible specks. Skittish
animals, we forage the wide open,
erupted burrowing against
ruptured, waiting for the radio
to play honey, humming sticky slow
breaths, singing us to safety. Maybe
I can only love things that fall apart
in my hands. Reckless, I greet
any refuge, devouring, one song
is no guarantee. These arms

I gather in a shawl reach long
to surrender. I've never found beauty
in durability anyway. So slight
her profile, I bend back
onto myself, holding the void
where I came from. We wear
perennial wild blankets, sweet
gold, keep us warm, keep us warm.

“dad, i don't remember” by Nadia Patterson

if ever i could remember dew drops
on the crack of dawn, with instant coffee drooling
down the backs of our throat
the air that shivers, the fog brimming with
mysteries then, dirt road afternoons
and dust and heavy things
into pitch black and stars strung up upon
the outdoor ceiling, placed so carefully
if i could
 drown
in the blissful unawareness and forget
 the throbbing on my skin
 the tightness of my throat
buuundaberg breath and how the small width
of my neck makes it kind of ..easy
 so i trickle down a path
in the blacked out parts where i accept my death
with your hands around my neck,
and i took it upon myself if i said yes
i'd take control of the debris

dad, i don't remember when you left,
it's hard to remember things in death
getting dragged through hell
and screeching, seething with scratches
of the devil's hands up every inch
of my back
you went missing and i was dead

someone else by the time you returned
god i tried to take the pain away

dad, i don't remember your pathetic text,
'sorry' is all i heard it read
if anything had stuck it was the way
you forgot how to look me in the eye
and steph couldn't say a word
and the pain never crept away

i was 23 last year, dad
and somewhere inside the dew drops came back
and the *sparra-fart* mornings even,
the fear you find when you face
a spider—and my laughter
yet, we still need beer to catch one another
in the eye

i often make peace with that

i take my instant coffee and the weed habit
and slowly kill off every last part of me
that you knew to be true
the ego i doused in petrol, the layers of ink
buried into my skin; my father, the stranger

in another timeline i took my last breath
there in that bedroom
and in this one
i'm not so afraid to anymore

["20 years later" by Sean Wang](#)

the black mouth is crackling again.
weird moons, a gargle of static.

crowds of zombies lurch
at tarzan swinging through
the banks, coins falling
like nuclear ash, sunset winter
the burning clear eye of the typhoon
curving like a wave, the shadow

of a wing flickering
as people flake off, black holes punctured into the sky
and grounded like an anchor.
sands shift themselves into new dunes.
a long, persistent wail billows in an old drought.
sparks flare like desert flowers,
petal limbs, a spray of vermillion— the deep red
pain of a cracked land blushing like a wound.

i've seen this before,
many many times.
these images leaking into my water,
filling my mouth with lead
and my brain melting into a marsh—
a dark, endless capacity for terror.

Poet Biographies

Muiz Opeyemi Ajayi, Frontier XVIII, a young poet and writer, is a Law undergraduate of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. He writes on diverse subjects including identity, contradictions, and uncertainties. He has works featuring/forthcoming on *Nigerian News Direct*, *Fiery Scribe Review*, *Brittle Paper*, *Ice Floe*, *Spillwords*, *Sledgehammer Lit* and elsewhere. He was second runner-up in the 2021 PROFWIC Poetry Contest. Besides Law and Literature, he's intrigued by sport and music. He's @muiz_ajayi on Instagram and @opendites on Twitter

Chella Courington (she/her) is a writer and teacher whose poetry and fiction appear or will appear in numerous anthologies and journals including *DMQ Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Scapegoat Review*, and *New World Writing*. Nominated for Pushcart, Best Small Fictions, Best of the Net, and Best New Poets, she was raised in the Appalachian south and now lives in California. Forthcoming are two micro chapbooks of poetry: *Good Trouble*, Origami Poems Project, and *Hell Hath*, Maverick Duck Press. Twitter: <@chellacouringto> Instagram: <chellacourington>

Sam Frost (she/her) is a writer who spends too much time and money drinking kombucha and is always craving fast food breakfast. Find more work at *C&P Quarterly*, *Ghost City Review*, *Floodlight Poetry*, and elsewhere. Find her on Twitter @sammfrostd

Elizabeth Gibson (she/her) is a poet in Manchester, UK, who writes about queerness, body image, and living with PCOS. She has been published in *404 Ink*, *Gigantic Sequins*, *Giving Room Mag*, *Lighthouse*, *Popshot*, *Sea Foam Mag*, and *Queerlings*, and has been commissioned by Manchester Literature Festival, Beatfreaks, and Dibby Theatre. Her poem 'Arrival' was selected to represent Manchester as a City of Literature in Tartu, Estonia, where it appears on bus

windows. She was awarded a grant from Arts Council England in 2021, to work on further exploring her queerness through poetry, and she has recently been collaborating with dancers and musicians. Find Elizabeth on her website: <https://elizabethgibsonwriter.blogspot.com> and @Grizonne on Twitter and Instagram.

Chinedu Gospel, Frontier IV, is a Nigerian poet who writes from Anambra. He's the moderator for spoken word poetry at Thresposs Poetry community. His works have appeared in *Afro Literary Magazine*, *Roughcut Press*, *The Rising Phoenix Review*, *Midway Journal*, *Agbowo Magazine*, *Feral Poetry*, & many others. When he's not writing, he's either playing chess or listening to Aurora's playlist. Meet him on Twitter @gospel79070806 and IG @gospelsofpoetry

Lily Greenberg (she/her) is a poet from Nashville, Tennessee living in Portland, Maine. Her work has appeared in *Hobart*, *storySouth*, *Third Coast Magazine*, and *About Place Journal*, among others, and her debut collection of poems *In the Shape of a Woman* is forthcoming with Broadstone Books in 2022. She is a 2021 Breadloaf Scholar and the 2021 recipient of the Dick Shea Memorial Award for Poetry judged by Jennifer Militello. Lily earned her MFA at the University of New Hampshire. Find more of her work at lily-greenberg.com and follow her on Twitter at @lily_greenberg.

Andrea Krause (she/her) lives in Portland, Oregon with her husband, daughter, and snoring greyhound. Her work is forthcoming in *Autofocus*, *Moist Poetry Journal*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, and elsewhere. She nods along on Twitter at @PNWPoetryFog.

Nadia Patterson (she/they) is a poet, visual artist, and musician living on unceded Kaurna Land, Adelaide, Australia. Nadia's poetry often comes from a deep longing to understand the self, exploring themes within childhood and adolescence, being an identical twin, love, longing, and barely coping. Some of this work has appeared in *Porridge Magazine*, *Tunnel Vision*, and was a winner of the *2020 Mindshare Awards*. You can find more of their poetry and art on Instagram: @fastwords223

Sean Wang (he/him) is currently based in Singapore where he edits for *Outlander Zine*, *Bitter Fruit Review*, and *Project Limitless*. He writes for the Singapore Film Society and his poetry has appeared in *Rattle*, *Capsule Stories*, and elsewhere. You can find him strolling through art galleries or cafe-hopping @wean_sang.

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